

eedlink

Preserving the Cultural and Genetic diversity

of Southern Agriculture

News from the Southern Seed Legacy

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Spring 2013

Our First Heirloom Seed Swap in Denton, Texas

By Steve Carlson

Since the Southern Seed Legacy's big move to Denton in the spring of 2011 we've been steadily catching North Texans' attention. Whether it's through UNT, our participation in the Texas Organic Farmers and Gardeners Conference, or our highlight in the May/June 2012 issue of Texas Gardener Magazine, North Texans are noticing the SSL and giving us a warm welcome. This kind of attention drives our membersupported nonprofit organization, and is why we were thrilled to join the Denton County Master Gardeners Association's Fall Garden Fest to coordinate a seed swap.

Though we've been quite busy over our short Continued on page 3

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Coonrod-Lackey Red Okra collected from Dodd City, TX

UNT Graduate Students Conduct Research with Local Seed Savers

By Lacey Vanderbilt, Lisa Quirk and Miranda Andrade-Gonzalez

With the onset of Autumn, the seasonal winds bring in a period of reflection and old timey memories. It was as harvesting season came around that Dr. Veteto introduced his incoming cohort of anthropology graduate students to the Southern Seed Legacy (SSL) and to the valuable practice of seed saving. As a semester long project for their Qualitative Ethnographic Methods class, the students learned ways to conduct professional anthropological research working on behalf of the SSL. Under Dr. Veteto's guidance, students expanded upon the body of research, seeds, and cultural memories that the Southern Seed Legacy currently strives to preserve.

Students, with their newly acquired skill sets in hand, set out to find local seed savers who were willing



The Appalachian Institute for Mountain Studies and Seed Legacy Farm

By Jim Veteto

This past fall an exciting event in the history of the Southern Seed Legacy took place. We were granted access by the newly formed non-profit organization, Appalachian Institute for Mountain Studies (AIMS), to grow out our extensive Appalachian seed collection during the growing season each year. SSL is partnering with AIMS to create and maintain Seed Legacy Farm, which will be a vital research component at AIMS. Biocultural conservation is extremely important in the Appalachian mountain environment, as central and southern Appalachia is recognized as the most diverse foodshed in the US, Canada, and northern Mexico with nearly 2000 recognized heirloom vegetable and apple varieties, more than twice as many as any foodshed that has been studied to date.

AIMS not only has several fertile fields for growing out vegetable seeds and medicinal herbs, but is home to the JR Dawkins heirloom apple orchard which contains nearly 100 heirloom varieties of Appalachian apples, along with other varieties of fruits and nuts such as pears, grapes, apricots, cherries, blueberries, blackberries, black raspberries, Asian persimmon, chinkapin, hazelnuts, black and Carpathian walnuts, and more. Time-honored and cherished heirloom Appalachian apples such as Crows Egg, Virginia Beauty, Lodi, Limbertwig, Winesap, Winter Banana, Celo, Yellow Horse, Summer Rambo and many others make up the bulk of the orchard, which has been in production for a century.

AIMS is located on one of the most biodiverse 25 acres tracts in the US. In addition to incredibly high levels of agricultural biodiversity, the institutue includes nearly 20 acres of Appalachian Cove Forest, the second most diverse temperate forest-type in the world. The woods abound with tulip poplar, chestnut oak, black locust, frasier magnolia, red oak, red maple, basswood,

Of Ciders and Seeds: North Texans Celebrate Diversity and Support the SSL

By Steve Carlson

As a nonprofit organization; the Southern Seed Legacy relies on its membership fees, generous donations, and fundraisers to continue its ever-increasingly important work. Many of you are aware that our organization's initiation was brought about by funds from a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) grant and the vision of UGA's Drs. Virginia Nazarea and Bob Rhoades. That initial funding and vision provided the foundation for this project, but years later our persistence is solely due to SSL members and the generosity of dedicated southern farmers and gardenersas well as a small group of passionate volunteers. With that being said, we owe a deep, heart-felt thank-you to these supporters- whether they've been with us from the beginning or are new to join our efforts at preserving Southern genetic and cultural heritage.

On a beautiful evening in early November just such a group of dedicated North Texans got together to help continue our legacy - admittedly wooed by the promise of fine food and cider. There's no better way to support an organization like the Southern Seed Legacy than to simultaneously support a local restaurant serving excellent food! And better yet, attendees participated in a biocultural cider diversity research project headed by Dr. Will McClatchey from the Botanical Research Institute of Texas. Supporters were treated to an array of diverse hard ciders (fermented apple juice) collected from all over the world. It's no surprise that little convincing was needed for attendees to become "research participants" in this project!



A fun table of Southern Seed Legacy supporters

time here in Denton, it goes without saying that we have been looking forward to hosting a seed swap in our new home-base. This year's annual DCMGA Fall Festival was held on October 6 near the Shiloh Community Garden on the Denton Bible Church campus. The festival's theme was "Do-it-yourself" (or DIY) - which was, of course, a very fitting theme for seed saving and seed swapping.

Our seed swap was right at home among the festival's other events which included workshops on topics like vermiculture and composting as well as exhibits and demos on bees, firewise landscaping, garden design, and rainwater harvesting to name a few. Festival-goers browsed through a range of vendors on site selling items like crafts, foods, plants, and gardening materials while enjoying a number of other fun activities such as a petting zoo, an antique tractor display, and tours through Denton's largest community garden. The fun-filled experience was enlivened by the local Celtic/bluegrass band Flashpoint, who kept festival-goers warm with their toe-tapping tunes.

Though festival day turned out to be cold and gloomy, we're thankful it never rained and that North Texans weren't deterred by the weather. The attendance and participation we experienced for the seed swap was great, dozens of people came out with seeds to swap! We started out the morning with a handful of heirloom seed varieties from our collection, packaged and labeled by SSL volunteers, as well as a number of seed varieties donated at our spring swaps. By early afternoon we had more than tripled the diversity on our table! Swappers seeds from double-flowered brought zinnias, moonflowers, marigolds, iris bulbs and other flowers in addition to vegetables like the Rams Horn Cowpea, India Golden Dry Soup Pea, cabbage seeds, and various types of beans. Denton's Ryan Crocker brought in what was probably the most exciting and rare seed of the day-Pink Hopi Corn he collected while living in New Mexico from a neighbor. We gathered a lot of other fun stuff such as red and coral yucca, pink vitex, and both luffa and birdhouse gourds.

The first swap in SSL's new home base of Denton, Texas was not only a way to share and promote agricultural diversity but to further increase our presence in the area and expand local membership. It was a great opportunity to pass out our Seedlink newsletters and talk to folks about our focus on preserving agricultural and cultural diversity. It's a great feeling when people tell us they love what we are doing - and an even better feeling when they become SSL members!



The Beautiful Pink Hopi Corn

In the end we not only swapped loads of seeds and promoted our mission, but we gained members and strengthened ties to our Denton community. Remember to keep the Denton County Master Gardeners Association's Fall Garden Fest on your radar so you can join us next year! All upcoming SSL events will be posted to our new facebook page and our website.

Thanks to everyone at DCMGA for organizing the festival and for having us be a part of it! Also thanks to everyone who helped the SSL prepare for and run the swap!

Spring 2012 Seed Swaps in Arkansas & Texas

By Steve Carlson

Although we never really had a 2011-12 winter season here in North Texas, spring-time always brings with it an air of excitement as people dust off the cobwebs and anticipate the coming growing season. A special part of the planning and preparation process for farmers and gardeners is the gathering for annual seed swaps, and here at the Southern Seed Legacy we had a busy few weeks doing just that. Over the "winter season" this year we hunkered down in our lab, beefed up our swappin display setup, crafted a new issue of Seedlink, and then were ready to hit the swaps. The swaps started for us on February 17th and 18th, 2012, in Mesquite, Texas, then took us to Hot Springs, Arkansas on March 3rd, and finally up to Eureka Springs, Arkansas on March 10th. We'd like to thank everyone who came out to participate in these events, as well as Dr. Brian Campbell and his students involved with CAAH! (Conserving Arkansas' Agricultural Heritage) who did a great job coorganizing both Arkansas swaps, and TOFGA for

Southern Appalachian Apple Diversity: Research Findings

By Steve Carlson

As promised in last year's *Seedlink*, I'm happy to update you on the research I've been doing for the past year. I spent last summer in the western North Carolina Appalachian mountains talking to apple growers about their apple varieties and any changes they've noticed in weather, pests, or diseases. The goal of this project is to contribute to the sustainability of Appalachian agricultural systems by documenting diversity and learning from the observations made by farmers of long-term crops. Below are some of my major findings.

Apple growers in the Southern Appalachians had a tough year. The mild winter and early spring caused the apples to bloom early which allowed a hard freeze to come in and wipe them out when they're most susceptible. Less than 1/5th of the orchardists I talked to had anything close to a full crop of apples. The lucky ones were spared mostly because of the specific elevation or microclimate their orchard sits in. A majority of the growers I talked to mentioned a warming trend they've been noticing, and many told me this sort of crop-killing freeze is becoming more common. Different apple varieties bloom at different times, though, and certain elevations on sloped orchard hills freeze worse than others, so this allows some mitigation by planting early-bloomers in low-risk freeze areas. Learning this sort of knowledge from experienced farmers allows for a better idea of what varieties are at risk and how to preserve them.

I documented 450 distinct apple varieties last summer. I talked to orchardists who had 13 commercial varieties on 100 acres, and I talked to orchardists who had 100 heirloom varieties on 2 ½ acres. Sadly, to make a living you have to grow what people want to buy, and people increasingly want commercial varieties like Honeycrisp and Pink Lady, and not heirlooms such as Summer Rambo or the Roxbury Russet. Unfortunately we can't save heirloom apple seeds in our seedbank here at SSL. To maintain the genetics of the apple it needs to be grafted, therefore *in-situ* and *in-vivo* conservation is the only way to ensure old-timey varieties survive for future generations. So, for those who live in Appalachia, go see your local apple orchardist and ask for Wolf River if you want a good cooking apple, or ask for Virginia Beauty if you'd like a good eating-apple. Consumer demand is the name of the game, so do your part and buy old-timey apples!

providing a fantastic setting for our first Texas swap. For those of you who weren't able to make it to any of our swaps, we hope you found a local swap to participate in and we would like to remind you that you can join our PASS (Pass Along Southern Seeds) program and choose seeds from our available seed list on our website anytime.

As we settle in here at our new home at the University of North Texas in Denton we are quickly establishing ourselves in the surrounding communities of farmers and gardeners. Our first swap ever held in Texas was successful at getting our name out to the right folks and beginning our quest for heirloom varieties from the Texas region. We held it at the Texas Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (TOFGA) annual conference in Mesquite, Texas just east of Dallas. TOFGA invited Dr. Veteto to give a talk on seed saving and the SSL, which turned out to be a very popular talk, filling up every seat in the room and spilling out into the hallway. As you can imagine, a gathering of organic farmers and gardeners was a great opportunity for us to network with people who share the same concern for the preservation of traditional agriculture. We hope these new relationships prove to be fruitful for everyone and we look forward to a bright future here in Texas.

In addition to gaining new Texas relationships we were thankful to collect some exciting seeds and their stories brought in by local seed savers. One of the highlights was the brown and cream crowder pea varieties brought in by Mel Iones. Mel was able to tell us the seeds were originally from Comanche County, Texas, and had been saved and continually grown out by Claude Jones, a great example of the type of *in-vivo* conservation needed for these seeds. In addition to these crowder peas, Carol Moss brought in hyacinth beans from Salina, Texas- a beautiful ornamental vine with purple flowers. We also picked up a purple hull pea and red yucca root, among others. It seemed our participation in the conference was very well received, with a large number of the approximately 300 attendees stopping by our booth to pick up a newsletter and ask about our organization.

Speaking of annual swaps, our next one was the second annual swap held at the Art Church in Hot Springs, Arkansas. This was co-hosted by long time SSL friend Dr. Brian Campbell's organization 'CAAH!' The abundant amount of seeds this year made it apparent that holding a seed swap at the same location on the same weekend each year is a good idea and one that we will continue. The Art Church was host to a number of activities throughout the day, including a children's birdhouse-building workshop and a potluck, and the seed swap was already in full swing by the time of the scheduled start at 3 pm. There were eight folding tables

to share their cherished stories and seeds. Twenty-two interviews were conducted with North Texan seed savers, and more than half of these interviewees were females. Considering most of SSL's research participants in the past were men from traditional families, it was fascinating to note that Texas growers are not as traditional as some might expect. Other interesting results from the students research showed that 72% of local savers held a degree in higher education. Few participants grew their seeds as a sole means of livelihood. 61% had less than an acre under production with 27% utilizing 1-5 acres. This means that the majority of the participants were growing mostly for themselves, either for pleasure or to supplement their dinner table, but a few were also sharing with local community markets.

Of particular interest to the students was where the seeds came from and reasons why they are grown. The results showed seed saver motivations vary as far and wide as the wind will take them. Seeds came from far off places such as China, Cambodia and Slovakia, though most were deeply rooted in the southern or eastern United States. Many seed savers carried seeds from within the same region and a few traveled across state lines. Interestingly, most people collected seeds as a way to nurture their cultural heritage and personal or family memories. However, many also stood by their plant's overall resilience and production value, simply liking the ease of maintenance and product of a given plant. Students also noticed a few emerging themes in environmental concerns revolving around organic and sustainable methods of production; seed saving appears to be gaining appeal among people who are actively attempting to change harmful environmental practices. A few participants even showed a sincere interest in propagating regional natives for ecological and sustainable reasons. Considering most participants had personal gardens, it was refreshing to see that some were growing with their local and global communities in mind.

Students completed the semester having gained research experience that will better prepare them in their educational and professional anthropological endeavors. They also gained a deeper understanding and better appreciation of the value of seed saving. Having realized the importance of such a practice, many have begun to seed save themselves as means to enrich the environment and support biodiversity, maintain a personal or cultural connection to a cherished plant, or simply to grow their own food!

set up in the room and every single one was covered in seeds and seed packets and surrounded by enthusiastic swappers. I estimated about 40 people, 2 cats and a dog participating, and they all seemed to have come prepared.

Highlights of the swap started with a cameo appearance from Dr. Joshua Lockyer, another longtime friend of the SSL and graduate of University of Georgia with Veteto and Campbell. As far as seeds go, a number of really good ones turned up. Local farmer Nick McCue brought in a rare Kaiser pole bean that came from WWII era Germany. He also provided some Blue Hopi corn and an Arabic watermelon with orange flesh, among other things. We were also lucky to receive the famous Bradley pink tomato, a colored upright sorghum, and a black broom sorghum as well as a number of other fine seeds from David James.



Hot Springs, AR seed swap

To celebrate the successful swap we decided to pay a visit to the legendary local barbecue joint, McClards. Not only is it known as Bill Clinton and Willie Nelson's favorite barbecue place, but it produces the only bbq sauce Jim Veteto will admit is competitive with his own family's secret sauce. To learn more about McClards you can swing through Hot Springs or you can read about it in Dr. Veteto's recent book entitled The Slaw and the Slow Cooked: Culture and Barbecue in the Mid-South (Vanderbilt University Press, 2011). After lapping up a few tasty sandwiches and tamales, we made our way over to the bluegrass benefit show put on by CAAH! and the Art Church. Arkansas string band Mountain Sprout headlined the event and they went on pickin and grinnin late into the night, providing a great ending to a great day. To cap off our Hot Springs expedition we awoke bright-eyed and bushy-tailed not-so-early the next morning and did a quick hike to Balance Rock in the surrounding Ouachita Mountains, followed by filling up on the crisp clear spring water that has helped make Hot Springs famous.

The following weekend found us once again teaming up with CAAH! for a swap in Arkansas, this

black birch, American beech, and dozens of other hardwood trees. The herbaceous layer of plant life is extremely diverse, containing hundreds of Appalachian food and medicinal plants and wildflowers. Some noteworthy members of the plant community at AIMs include blue and black cohosh, indian cucumber, solomon's seal, pinkster flower wild azalea, woods nettles, blood root, dutchman's pipe, turk's cap lily, chinese mandarin, jack-in-the-pulpit and wild ginger. The property includes 5 springs and 3 branches (creeks) and is swimming in salamanders in the world center for salamander diversity.

Located approximately 45 minutes northeast of Asheville, NC, AIMS is in the South Toe Valley in Yancey County, at the foot of the Black Mountains and Mt. Mitchell—the highest mountain peak between the Pyrenees of Europe and the Rockies at nearly 7000 feet. The institute will provide many educational opportunities for the general public and students. This summer AIMS will begin hosting an Appalachian Biocultural Diversity and Sustainable Living field school for college students and will offer a wild plant identification and fermentation weekend with ethnobotanist Marc Williams in July. In the field school, students will have the opportunity to learn about the cultural and agricultural history of Appalachian heirloom seeds, participate in seed saving workshops, create heirloom gardens; identify, taste, and tend heirloom apple trees, and engage in permaculture design and natural building projects.

AIMS and SSL will also host an annual summer seed swap and maintain the mountain field station collection of SSL seeds on-site. We plan to develop programs that reach out to traditional Appalachian farmers and gardeners as well as alternative and sustainable farmers to partner in stewarding Appalachian agricultural diversity. We are well situated in the heart of an older, established Appalachian community as well as a few miles down the road from Celo Community, the oldest non-denominational intentional community in the US (formed in the 1930s). We will continue the SSL's tradition of memory and seed banking through extensive oral history interviews with local farmers and gardeners and engage in outreach activities such as seed swaps, seed saving workshops, donations of heirloom seeds for field trials, and research on global climate change.

The intention of AIMS is to not only be a haven for the conservation of biodiversity and a site for agricultural experimentation, but to be a living laboratory for sustainability. We recognize that both Appalachian traditional environmental knowledge (TEK) and appropriate sustainable technologies and alternative lifeways hold important lessons for living sustainably in mountain ecosystems. We welcome everyone to AIMS to see how we develop over the coming years.

time further north in Eureka Springs in the Ozarks. This beautiful little mountain town was a perfect setting for a seed swap, and the bright sunny spring day was the icing on the cake. We started off at 10 am and the following few hours brought a steady stream of seed swappers through an old gallery at the public library where it was held. I'd say there was roughly the same size turnout as the previous weekend in Hot Springs. Once again, local swappers brought in a large variety of great seeds to share. Some of the highlights included an heirloom Waltham butternut squash that originally came from Utah but has been doing well in the area and fares well in the heat. We also picked up a yellow watermelon from Vela Giri and an ornamental Indian corn from Diana Henry that she has been calling "halo fire red sky." Of course, in addition to adding to our collection we were able to connect a number of folks with seeds they had been seeking. In fact, one local gardener came to the swap and asked for a pretty ornamental vine that she could grow up a fence in her yard, and we quickly provided her with the hyacinth bean vine seeds we had just collected from Carol Moss in Texas. Helping make these sorts of connections that aid in the preservation of agricultural diversity is why we do what we do.

The swap eventually ended that afternoon but the fun sure didn't. After a short break to stroll around town, we reconvened at a local bar and restaurant in the heart of Eureka Springs for a couple of film screenings and another Mountain Sprout show! Seed Swappers and community members packed the venue for viewings of Brian Campbell's 'Seed Swap' documentary followed by his new film entitled 'The Natural State of America.' The filmmakers and actors were present for a Q and A session after the screenings. Both films are now on sale in DVD format, and if you're interested in seed swaps or learning about the environmental injustice currently happening in Arkansas that involves the spraying of herbicides on Arkansan's land, I recommend you visit the website www.naturalstateofamerica.com. Mountain Sprout's song "Into The Sun" has become an anthem for the cause, and the closing of our seed swap festivities this spring was to the witty drawl, "All I want in this old world is water I can drink. Is it too much to ask for air that doesn't stink?"

We met a lot of good folks over these few weeks and we've collected and shared a lot of good seeds and stories. We hope your gardens prosper this year and that next year we see you again! Tell your friends!

The setting and cuisine were provided by local Highland Village, Texas restaurant, The Grotto, where the evening began early for our 8 volunteers. Graduate students and faculty members from the UNT Anthropology department as well as a few supportive SSL enthusiasts gathered to arrange displays and prepare materials for the evening. When the setting was completed, Dr. McClatchey explained the process of the research project for those of us who had yet to experience one of his (now locally popular) cider tasting events. He prepared each of us for our particular role that evening, with some of us coordinating a table of guests and others focusing on behind-the-scenes activities. It took some serious coordination to pull off this portion of the event, but everything went smoothly with Dr. McClatchey at the reigns and a solid group of competent volunteers.

Dr. McClatchey brought with him between 6 and 11 different bottles of cider from 7 different regions across the globe, totaling around 48 different ciders for the evening. He personally collected the ciders from regions which included North American West and East Coasts, Mexico, Spain, France, Germany, and England. The ciders varied dramatically from one another, not only in taste and appearance, but in alcohol content and ingredients. For instance, an Ice cider (or *Apertif*) from Quebec contained the highest alcohol content at 18%, compared to the Sidra Ambar from Puebla, Mexico, registering in at just 3%.



Various ciders arranged by region, ready for tasting

The tasting began after all attendees arrived and The Grotto's beautiful banquet room was filled to capacity. The research aspect of the event required participants to taste each cider presented to them and complete a short assessment form, rating qualities such as primary taste, aftertaste, mouth feel, and overall opinions of the cider. Every table tasted one cider from each of the 7 regions. The ciders were presented to them in a predetermined order - much like any wine tasting would, being careful not to disrupt the palate of the

participants. As each round of cider was presented to the tables, Dr. McClatchey delivered a presentation that globetrotted attendees to the various regions their ciders had come from.

It became clear that every region's ciders had some defining and common characteristics to them, even though at any given time throughout the night there were no two tables tasting the same cider. This could traditionally be explained by each region's different growing conditions and its locally available apple varieties in addition to the area's cultural preferences. Therefore as every table in the room concurrently tasted a cider from a different producer, the fact that they were each from the same geographic region oftentimes led adjacent tables to have a similar reaction to their ciders. Different tables simultaneously responded with delight or groaned with disapproval on several occasions. Of course each participant came with differing palates, much like some people prefer white wine over red wine. Still, some cider styles were so different from what participants were accustomed to that at one point a table seemed to humurously agree the best description for a particular cider was the term "barnyard."

After their formal research duties were complete, participants were able to seek out a cider recommended from a neighboring table or one of their own favorites to accompany dinner. The fantastic four-course meal prepared by Chef Morris Salerno began with a cream of potato soup and caesar salad before the entrée options of roasted salmon, prime pork chop, or the house filet. To cap off our meal the Chef served an elegant and delicious chocolate gondola filled with white mousse and garnished with berries.

During this final portion of the evening, Southern Seed Legacy director Dr. James Veteto addressed the audience with some words about the history and importance of our organization and its mission. He talked about a few of the seeds in our bank and the stories that have been collected with them, preserved for future generations. Dr. Veteto then thanked everyone for their participation and reiterated the importance of their contributions to our member-supported organization.

As the evening grew late, attendees slowly dispersed into the night with a unique experience that imparted a greater appreciation for the rich biocultural diversity this world has to offer. The evening could not have gone any smoother, and we have many people to thank for that. Without the coordination of UNT's Tena Burley, the kindness of our Grotto hosts Charles and Debbie Stafford, Dr. Will McClatchey's support from BRIT, and our many helpful SSL volunteers, this night would not have been possible. Nearly \$1000 of much needed support was raised for the SSL throughout the course of the evening. Thank you to everyone who participated!

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Date

3-9-13

4-20-13

Fall, TBA

LocationTimesContactHot Springs, AR3-5 pmThe Art Church

Southern Seed Legacy 2013 Seed Swaps:

The Art Church, Studio 301
Whittington Ave.

Denton Redbud Festival
Denton Civic Center
321 E. McKinney St.
Denton, TX 76201

Denton County Master Gardeners Assoc. TBA
Fall Garden Festival

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