

Seedy Saturday....20 years later. The Focus of Seedy Saturday.

By Sharon Rempel, founder of Seedy Saturday

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One seed can produce a plant that seeds itself if we are working with non hybrid open pollinated seed. The hand that holds the seed controls the food supply. May it always be the hand of the farmer and gardener who loves the plant for what it is-itself. Sharon Rempel

In 1989 I was managing a provincial historic site, *The Grist Mill at Keremeos*. I had read a book 'Seeds of the Earth' by Pat Mooney and was aware of the serious politics behind the purchasing of small seed companies by companies focused on high input agriculture methods and hybridization of varieties. I also worked in the organic food movement where we were seeking varieties that grew well without high inputs.

Heritage seed was something I used in my period gardens at the Mill and it was impossible to find Canadian sources for heritage varieties. I believe in the power of people to find solutions in their communities so I called a gathering. No cds in the 1980s so I called it 'Seedy Saturday'.

I was a volunteer director of Heritage Seed Program (now Seeds of Diversity www.seeds.ca) and wanted to promote our organization's work in the west.

The idea behind the Seedy Saturday gathering was to provide a melting and meeting opportunity for people to identify their 'seed community' resources by the processes to:

- identify the agricultural resource people at the university interested in seed and growing organic local food and invite those people to come to a one day event to meet local organic gardeners and farmers (WHY: the focus of this was to get the Ivory Tower folks at the grassroots level with people and allow people to find experts in various aspects of agriculture. If people knew local people who could help them when their plants were diseased or could help them identify a pest then ideally both the academic and the grower would figure out new ways to work, organically together with the land, the plant and themselves)
- identify who in the community was interested in saving seed. I started looking for seed companies that sold heritage seeds and invited them to the event. That included Abundant Life seeds, the only west coast company offering heritage varieties of plants THAT CAME WITH A LINEAGE AND STORY. We also had Dan Jason and his small seed company and he knew other folks with collections of seed. (WHY: I wanted the seed companies to adopt varieties that people brought with them to the event and try and re-commercialize the old varieties. Ideally the stories behind the varieties would be shared and conserved, too)

- set up a SWAP TABLE where people could share their seeds, sit down with a coffee and talk to the people who they were sharing their seeds with, ideally growing community. (WHY: Swap Table staff were trained in helping people properly record the 'name' of the variety, the type of plant, the grower's name and contact information and ideally develop a local resource list of varieties being grown in the community)
- identify organizations that were involved in promoting 'on farm' conservation to the event to share their conservation expertise with the people at the event. The organizations included USC Canada who hosted in Africa the 'Seeds of Survival' program. Also The Grist Mill at Keremeos where I was growing a 'living museum of wheat' and conserving biodiversity in researched heritage gardens. Also the Burnaby Heritage Museum who were just getting interested in documenting heritage gardens for their site.
- Promote the fledgling Heritage Seed Program (Now Seeds of Diversity Canada) where people could share seed through the mail and read stories about heritage crops in the magazine
- Identify organizations involved in seed saving and who had experience in keeping varieties pure and strains documented. This included the Friends of the Garden, the seed savers from the VanDuseun Garden where we hosted the event.
- Identify organizations involved in local and organic food growing and production.
- Identify resource groups who could identify heritage varieties of fruit (eg. NAFEX, B.C. Fruit Testers) and invite them to the event so people would know how to find them and also buy heritage scion wood at the event
- Identify resources in the community who could provide agronomy and soil testing services (there were none in Vancouver 20 years ago except the university)
- Identify eating places that supported agriculture links to their homeland folklore and agriculture like the Ethiopian place that was run by an agronomist.
- Provide educational talks about seeds (not how to cook root vegetables or make a root cellar or design a pond liner). We had Plant Breeders Rights looming in 1989. People needed to understand the 'big picture' of corporate control over seed. They needed to have people to provide informal education about seed politics globally and locally. These resource people were the contacts for local seed political activities and action against corporate control of seed.

Sharon's 'Seedy Saturday today' concerns:

Many events now are trade shows run by organizers who have never been to a seed focused Seedy Saturday. The organizers want to bring many people through the doors, make some money and the original focus is not known. Local food is 'hot' so they invite

chefs to cook, talk about recipes and in some ways this would be good IF there were stories about local varieties that were documented and shared as part of the process of cooking. Ideally the heritage variety of local crop would be cooked and the stories shared as part of local culinary tourism opportunities and agritourism.

Other shows bring ornamental horticulture to the event. It's fine to encourage the conservation of bees as pollinators but another to bring a talk on pond liners to the event.

Organizers say people don't want to hear the same talks each year. I dispute that and say the stories of the corporate control of seed, the European Common Catalogue and the Farmers' Rights issues are huge complicated issues and the rights of people to save their seeds being taken away year after year. This is serious and must be talked about each year. I think that the organizers need to find people who can talk about seed politics and how to save seed and offer the same workshops each year. There's always something new to learn and the newcomers to 'seed' need to hear these important messages.

By writing this summary I hope organizers will think about the 'heart' of the event and try and bring 'seed' back to Seedy Saturday and the need to have local agriculture include 'seed' banks and conservation as the heart of their local food systems.

Dr. Vandana Shiva has kept seed visible to the eyes of the world but we have resource people throughout all our communities who are as well versed and trained as Vandana. We need to pay these local seed resource people to share their experiences in seed in community. Stop paying for overseas and out of community 'expertise'. Nurture and support financially people who know the science of seed saving and conservation in communities local and regional.

Seeds of Diversity Canada (www.seeds.ca) is one organization that does network nationally. But there are others, like www.tgibc.org and GRAIN that provide can provide education and resource people at a local level. These groups are attempting to network the resources available for seed.

What I would like to see happen now (11 points to survive):

- 1. Communities build physical seed storage facilities in every community.**
- 2. Communities identify the agriculture resource people in their community – retired or still active and get them helping with growing local food and seed stocks**

- 3. Communities bring the 'local food', 'organic food', 'heritage seed' movements to the process of seed saving and speak seed at every meeting.**
- 4. Communities bulk up and store large quantities of open pollinated food crops including grain and pulses, not just vegetables.**
- 5. Communities trade seed with other communities when they loose their seed stocks through disaster like flood, hurricane, etc.**
- 6. We realize the grassroots conservation provides the safety net for society and we learn to work together as a community of communities.**
- 7. Communities pay farmers to bulk up stocks of heritage varieties of crops and not expect farmers to do the years of work on their own resources.**
- 8. Communities design small scale to large scale equipment for food production. They might have to visit machinery museums to understand what the equipment of the past did so they can adopt it to non fossil fuel dependent equipment design.**
- 9. Communities become politically active in the issues of seed in Canada and globally because there are Farmers Rights at UN levels that are not practiced in Canada.**
- 10. Communities recognize they are linked to peasant, small scale food producers around the world and that seed is the common language of all people, plants and place on this planet.**
- 11. Communities document the folklore and stories behind their varieties. They create songs to celebrate each old variety and they have spring and fall festivals to honor the cycle of the seed.**