

# The Natural Farmer

## Restoring Our Seed - Summer 2002

By CR Lawn, Project Coordinator

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Did you ever wonder how generations of farmers without advanced degrees not only produced their own seed, but developed the food-crops that we eat today? Until a few hundred years ago seed production was an integral part of farming. Although we have created a vital organic movement, we have almost forgotten an essential aspect. Seeds are too important to be left in the hands of the giant trans-national corporations.

A group of New England farmers and small seed companies has come together to reclaim our seed heritage. We are pleased to announce that SARE has funded Restoring Our Seed to strengthen our local seed network and to provide farmers and gardeners with knowledge for skilled organic seed production.

Our Seed School will cover the basic seasonal aspects of organic seed crop production: a winter seminar on whole farm seed cropping systems, summer field days at demonstration farms on selecting for local adaptability and disease resistance, and a fall seed harvesting and cleaning workshop. The Seed School will address new marketing opportunities for farm-produced certified organic seed stimulated by the new organic rule. Learn ways that growing seed can diversify your farm and increase your profits.

The Seed School will be conducted in Maine, 2002-3, Vermont, 2003-4, and Massachusetts, 2004-5.

Join us in fascinating workshops that cover:

- how to integrate growing seed into your existing farm production,
- how to restore native habitats to bring in beneficial insects and pollinators,
- proper spacing, isolation distances, and populations for robust seed crops,
- how to detect off-types and diseased plants,
- how to rogue and select to improve varieties for local adaptation,
- when to harvest, and how efficiently to clean and store your seeds,
- farmer-research projects to select for increasing plant yield, cold-hardiness and disease resistance, and the role of native habitats,
- community education and youth projects on the power of saving and growing seed.

Our website [www.growseed.net](http://www.growseed.net) will post details and dates of activities and Seed School workshops with contributions of New England's master seed growers. We invite your contributions, articles, stories, photos, and ideas how Restoring Our Seed can work for you. Internship opportunities and needs will be posted. This project is supported in part by the funds of the USDA Cooperative Agreement 2002-38640-11740.

## **Winter Seminar**

### *Seed Production and Crop Improvement in Whole Farm Systems*

John Navazio and Frank Morton

This seminar will incorporate aspects of John's "Fundamentals of Crop Improvement in Organic Agriculture" and Frank's presentations on "Whole Farm Systems for Crop Production" - to provide seed growers with basic knowledge and skills for:

- organic seed production, and
- selection and breeding to adapt crops for sustainable farming in New England.

A key aspect of a truly sustainable, bioregional agriculture is to identify and improve suitable crop varieties through farmer selection of seed stocks. These farmer-bred varieties will then excel under the environmental conditions and cultural techniques used by the farmers of that bioregion. This is in sharp contrast to our current reliance on crop varieties bred under chemically intensive conventional farm operations.

## **Summer**

### *Field Days in Selection and Disease Prevention*

The art and science of field selection for local adaptability and disease resistance: roguing, population genetics, disease identification and biocontrols and general management to harvest.

## **Fall**

### *Seed Harvest, Cleaning and Conditioning*

Seed harvesting, cleaning, conditioning, processing and storage techniques, germination and seedling testing, organic treatments for seed-borne disease, strategies to combine use of vegetables with sale of their seed.

## **Seed Stewards Education Program**

*Eli Kaufman*

Seed-saving, once an essential skill passed from generation to generation by farmers and gardeners, is almost a lost art, as is the farming heritage out of which it arose. By growing and saving seeds, each person can become a link to restore food and farming traditions in their own community. Seed Stewards involves young people in action-projects to restore wild habitats, grow seed, and breed vegetable varieties to nourish a sustainable food system.

This project is supported in part by the funds of the USDA cooperative agreement 2002-38640-11740. If you have any questions or thoughts, feel free to contact me by email: [crlawn@fedcoseeds.com](mailto:crlawn@fedcoseeds.com)