



Where have all our seeds gone?

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In good times, people have a tendency to forget about the bad times; and in bad times, people have a tendency to forget about the good times ? paraphrased from Rev. Robert Alden, Little House on the Prairie television series. Last summer National Geographic magazine ran a story called ?Food Ark? ? all about the impending food crisis. Climate change, growing population, concerns about water and soil quality all contribute to what may become a shortage of food in the not?to-distant future. Of course, in this fast-food nation of \$1 menu items, many folks just don?t give a care to what they are eating and where it comes from. Somehow we stopped thinking about our food. As America?s waistlines have increased, the variety and diversity of our food has decreased. In particular, many garden seed varieties have been lost in lieu of hybrids and now genetically modified organisms or GMOS. (Well, almost lost, read on.) In the past 30 or so years, diversified family farms have been converted to mono-crops ? large areas of a single plant easily subject to being completely wiped out from disease. (Does potato famine ring a bell?) A March 2 article about the Doomsday Vault found on MSNBC.com states, ?Commercial farming has reduced the overall crop diversity in the world, so specific diseases could potentially wipe out a large chunk of production.? The National Geographic article brings up Ug99 ? a fungus discovered in Uruguay in 1999 that could completely wipe out our wheat crop if introduced in the U.S. Of course, as the MSNBC article states, ?In that instance, the Doomsday Vault holds seeds to older strains that could be reintroduced, or that might be more resistant to pests, disease and drought.? But who is holding the key to the vault? In addition to our farm mono-crops being more subject to causing a famine due to vulnerability to disease, modern production has also wiped out 90 percent of the seed varieties we once grew and saved. Think of the flavors we are missing out on in our daily diet. The authors of the National Geographic article compared ?USDA listings of seed varieties sold by commercial U.S. seed houses in 1903 with those in the U.S. National Seed Storage Laboratory in 1983. The survey, which included 66 crops, found that about 93 percent of the varieties had gone extinct. More up-to-date studies are needed.? For instance, of the 7,000 apple varieties that were grown in the 1800s, fewer than a hundred remain. How sad is that? Why would we as free citizens of this country, or the world for that matter, allow the government and Monsanto (yes, Monsanto has a monetary hold on the seed vault) to control what was left of the world?s heirloom seed varieties in a vault in Norway? It has taken some 10,000 years according to National Geographic to create the biodiversity of our food supply and we are witness to that rapidly disappearing. To our salvation, there are people actively working to save seed varieties. In North Dakota, the Farm Breeder Club, Lamoure, met recently to discuss its work. You can find them on Facebook. And, Seed Savers Exchange, <http://www.seedsavers.org/> [1], is a nonprofit established in 1975 organizing seed savers around the country in an effort to maintain some of the vegetable varieties that may have otherwise been lost in the past 30 years. I?m hoping there are more people and organizations working to save those heirloom variety seeds. Just wanted to plant a little food for thought this week as we prepare our gardens for spring.

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[1] <http://www.seedsavers.org/>