

The BC Seed Trials

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Growing local: the BC Seed Trials

You might know where the veggies on your table come from, but do you know where the seeds are grown? It's a question even most farmers can't answer, but the BC Seed Trials aim to show the impact of using local seeds.

"Knowing where your seeds come from is really important," says lead researcher Dr. Alexandra Lyon. "Because farmers are losing access to varieties that work really well for them, particularly in organic agriculture."

The BC Seed Trials were launched in 2016 by the Centre for Sustainable Food Systems at UBC Farm and FarmFolk CityFolk, with support from the University of Fraser Valley, to see how diverse seeds perform on working farms, including the UBC Farm and partner farms across the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island.



Building a region-specific seed system

The BC Seed Trials want to identify which seeds do best in our region, so farmers will want to plant BC-grown seeds.

"The seed industry is increasingly geared toward large-scale farming," says Dr. Lyon. "Small-scale and diversified farmers are less able to access varieties that work well for their regions and markets."

Dr. Lyon and her colleagues seek to create a region-specific seed system, where farmers can access seeds that do well in their soil and climate, since a kale seed from a major catalogue may thrive in the Okanagan, but fares poorly on the south coast.

In the trials they grow and compare vegetable varieties to see which ones are the hardiest, best producing, most attractive, and tastiest. These results inform both academics and farmers.

First trial results and next steps

The BC Seed Trials recently published results from 2016 – their first growing season – which focused on several varieties of spinach, beets and kale. Feedback from farmers informed what's growing in 2017: they will be trialing carrots, leeks, and golden beets, including some varieties that are new to the area.

Seed and crop diversity can be protective. "The more agrobiodiversity we have in our landscapes, the fewer problems we have from diseases, and the more ability we will have to adjust to issues like climate change," adds Dr. Lyon.

www.bcseedtrials.ca

The BC Seed Trials is a collaboration between the Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security and Centre for Sustainable Food Systems at UBC Farm with support from University of Fraser Valley.