

HGSA 2010 SUMMER CONFERENCE RECAP Geneva NY



After our opening HGSA meeting and hearty breakfast Thursday morning, attendees piled on the bus for the short trip to our HGSA member trials, beautifully and carefully grown out for us at Seneca Vegetable Research. Although the weather was somewhat damp and blustery, everyone in the group learned a great deal at these well-grown trials of 57 flower and 163 vegetable varieties contributed by individual members. It was a fine opportunity to see varieties in the field from seed producers (especially the European entries) that we

wouldn't normally have a chance to be familiar with, as well as see how varieties we already carry in our individual lines performed in New York conditions and, finally, see some great comparisons between varieties. These invaluable member trials are certainly a highlight of every summer conference and this year's trial was exemplary and extensive.

MEMBER TRIALS EVALUATIONS





A short distance away, we went through the beautifully laid out Bejo demonstration gardens, which showcased their varieties and also demonstrated how a formal trial field can be made both educational and beautiful as well as welcoming. Bejo staff was warm and attentive in explaining their trials. The folks at Bejo treated us to a fine hot lunch, especially appreciated as the weather continued to be drizzly and cool.

BEJO TRIALS AND LUNCH



SEED LAB TOUR



Since everyone in the home garden trade should be using seed labs for germination and purity testing, after lunch we visited the New York State Seed Lab to learn about how their work is done. The well-organized staff divided us up into four groups and took us through all the testing procedures the lab performs.



Then we went on to the USDA Plant Genetics Farm. We learned about the over 12,000 varieties they archive and preserve, growing out several hundred each year. Everyone in the group was impressed by the size and scope of the work the USDA does to preserve varieties and the expertise of the curators of the collection who gave an excellent introduction to their work. Although most of their crops were finished for the season, we were all interested in the grow out cages which they use to prevent cross-pollination.

USDA PLANT GENETICS



The last stop of the afternoon was to Dr. Paul Griffith's Cornell University research plots. Dr. Griffith, a fascinating and eloquent speaker, explained some of the improvement projects he is doing to increase disease resistance in major food crops for famine plagued countries in Africa, so that small farmers there can get better productivity and yields from their own familiar and important native vegetables crops. He also explained the criteria he uses when developing his domestic breeding projects to improve disease resistance and develop new varieties for American novelty crops like green beans and a wide array of different colored cocktail tomatoes in beautiful colors.

DR. PAUL GRIFFITH'S RESEARCH



After this full and very active day, the group relaxed with wine tasting and dinner at the Three Brothers Winery. This unique facility hosts three different wineries and a brewery, so we got to taste lots of different combinations and the beer drinkers interest were not neglected either!

WINE TASTING AND DINNER



Friday morning, after a breakfast buffet, the bus took us to a meeting with Lori Bushway of the Cornell Cooperative Extension Service, who explained and gave us a slideshow about her outreach website aimed at home gardeners throughout New York State that has blossomed into a substantial nationwide network offering home gardeners a platform to discuss their results with different varieties. Our members agreed that we definitely want to get involved, perhaps working on links to member companies' varieties being made available on this website. This will be a project for 2011.

USDA EXTENSION



Next, we went to tour the organic research plots of Cornell's Dr. Michael Mazourek. He explained the new breeding work he is doing for small organic farmers, which of course has particular relevance for home garden. Everyone in our group was very interested in finding out about these new breeding developments and particularly how they will become commercialized, so our home garden companies can carry these excellent new developments.

DR. MAZOUREK's ORGANIC RESEARCH



The morning's final stop was a very informative visit with Dr. Martha Mutschler, onion and tomato breeder at Cornell who explained her work in developing both early and late blight resistant tomatoes -- we got to sample these new varieties in the field. Of tremendous interest to all of us were the primitive tomato- like plants from South America that actually repel insect pests that not only damage crops but spread disease that Dr. Mutschler is crossing with standard tomatoes; really valuable work that will have significant benefits for all home gardeners when these varieties are released commercially in the future. We got to taste these as well.

DR. MUSCHLER'S RESISTANT TOMATOES



Lunch was at the nautically themed Boatyard Restaurant where everyone dug into their meals with great gusto. Afterward, returned to the hotel for our own sessions of open Roundtable Discussions in the afternoon.

As always, our Roundtable with local Master Gardeners was an eye opener. This particular group was quite critical of home garden seed packets and gave us a lot to think about. After a refreshment break at our final Round Table, Patty Buskirk from SeedsByDesign was the star of the discussion in our "Political Issues for Seedsmen" discussion as she gave us all a excellent and concise explanation of how genetic engineering really works and how it differs from genetic modification as we discussed the general public's understanding of these issues and the problems they raise for packet seed companies.

FINAL ROUNDTABLES



Finally, we closed our conference with an great reception hosted by Wild West Seeds, where everyone had a chance to kick back, relax with a beverage and enjoy the company of their fellow seedsman. All in all, this action-packed conference was a real success both in terms of our own "better than ever" extensive member trials, the varied and informative visits and innovative research we saw, and, as always, the opportunity to enjoy the company of a wide variety of old friends and new in the home garden trade from all over the country.

2010 SUMMER CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS



To see the entire photo album, [click here](#)