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### Highlights of the 2013 Summer Meeting and Trials - Stowe, VT

We gathered at our conference hotel, the beautiful and historic Green Mountain Inn in the picturesque town of Stowe, Vermont, Thursday evening for our opening reception and cocktail hour.



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After everyone had a chance to enjoy a drink and relax, our genial and enthusiastic host, Tom Stearns of High Mowing seeds, welcomed us and gave us a preview of activities ahead.



The next morning after a quick breakfast buffet, we piled in the bus for the short trip to High Mowing's office and warehouse where Tom and partner Meredith and crew gave us a fine tour through their fast-growing and very innovative company's seed cleaning, warehousing, packet filling, and order fulfillment areas. Everyone was fascinated by High Mowing's seed packaging machine technology and techniques, and benefited greatly by getting an overview of their testing procedures and quality control methods. Later when we're out in the fields, also Tom was able to show us some of their seed growing grounds.







Next we went to the High Mowing fields where our own HGSA Summer Trials have been beautifully grown out from samples contributed by a wide range of HGSA members. High Mowing's very capable Koi Boynton did an exceptional job of growing and labeling everything so varieties were easy to identify and compare. Despite some really challenging Vermont summer weather, just about all the different crops made a good showing.

These trials are one of our main HGSA member benefits and are always a focal point of our summer conference – and this season was no exception! We saw many varieties in the field from seed new producers, as well as observing all the different seed packet company varieties produced in the challenging New England climate.







High Mowing also provided us with a tasting station so we could check out flavor differences and everyone took full advantage of that opportunity to try different melons and tomatoes.

Most of us had to be lured away from the trials, but then we had delicious catered lunch of local specialties which we enjoyed alfresco right in the adjacent fields.





After lunch, we boarded the bus for short trip to the Vermont Food Venture Center, a really unique state-sponsored “food incubator”. This well-outfitted facility serves Vermonters starting up food related businesses, giving them advice and support in creating, manufacturing, warehousing and marketing their products created from local produce. We saw small businesses developing products such as jams and jellies, relishes, candy, hot sauces etc., and understanding of the process of ramping up home-based businesses to the next level.



Our next stop was the large, well-established Pete’s Greens farm where Pete Johnson and his large experienced crew operate a well-integrated farm store, large and diverse CSA operation and organic produce growing business. Pete is an experienced farmer who has been developing his business for many years and we were all fascinated as he walked us through the process of how he grows, harvests, prepares warehouses and markets a wide range of vegetables in a very short season climate.







As the day wound down into evening, we arrived for our wine and beer reception and dinner at the lovely Lakeview Inn where we all had a chance to chat, trade stories and enjoy each other's company and good local food to complete the evening.







The next morning, after breakfast we had our annual Roundtable Discussions. This year we focused on organic and conventional best practices for dealing with seed storage pests. Since this is a common concern amongst everyone who handles seed, it proved to be a lively and useful discussion of the different experiences and coping techniques.



Then our host Tom Stearns moderated an fine panel of local experts from different Vermont state departments and nonprofit ventures that connect growers and consumers and promote healthy food habits and agri-tourism. We all came away impressed with their enthusiasm, intelligence and high level of motivation. Vermont is clearly a “can-do” state!

Next we traveled to Vermont’s “big” city, Burlington, where we had lunch and the opportunity to tour the Innervale Center, a unique “Food Hub” with a variety of food production enterprises: a farm “incubator” program where new farmers are offered mentoring and training on how to start up and run small farms, a large CSA operation , and many smaller ventures that encourage and develop local food production and local food independence.







Next door to the Intervale, we visited the large retail facility of the Gardener’s Supply Company. This well-known online and catalog company is the largest national retailer of home gardening supplies and we all enjoyed hearing about the company and seeing what their flagship store had to offer.



Finally, we boarded the bus for a tour and tasting at an original American icon: Ben & Jerry’s Ice Cream Factory! It was a treat literally and figuratively – we even got to see their “final resting place” for flavors that didn’t quite make the cut. Then it was back to the inn for our final reception and windup.





The next morning, the optional tour took us back to Burlington for their historic Farmers Market where every product is required to be produced, grown, or crafted in the state of Vermont. There were a lot of really unusual and delicious offerings including homemade vodka, hard cider, great Vermont cheeses, and local beer as well as with colorful produce, fresh poultry and meat and wonderful fruit. It was a festive, happy market experience that everyone very much enjoyed before heading back to the airport for flights out.

