



## 2016 Summer Conference and Seed Trials September 7-10, Denver, Colorado

We were greeted in Denver by a brilliant blue sky, and perfect September weather. The itinerary for the next several days would include visits to two member facilities—Applewood Seed Company and Renee’s Garden fulfillment center—as well as a state-of-the-art seed laboratory, the National Center for Genetic Resources Preservation, Colorado State University seed trials, the Denver Botanical Gardens, and more.



The first order of business was catching up. Old friends and new enjoyed an opening reception hosted by Hammer Packaging on the patio of the Westin Westminster, our conference hotel. Centrally located, the Westin offered a backdrop of the Rocky Mountain front range.



Thursday morning began with breakfast at the hotel, followed by a full day of tours. First stop was the Eurofins STA state-of-the-art independent seed laboratory facility in Longmont.



Seed analysis lab manager Richard Agnew, mycologist Lorena Dean, and DNA lab supervisor Elizabeth Blotevogel demonstrated a range of testing methods to our group. Seed health analysis, DNA testing, and GMO testing are all done according to internationally recognized protocols in order to ensure the highest quality of our products.



We always look forward to seeing our vegetables and flowers featured in trial gardens, and Colorado State University did not disappoint. HGSA sent packets to the trial garden manager in early spring, and the staff and



students grew them to maturity. It was gratifying to learn that our California Giant zinnias were an overall favorite of Sean Markovic, the student in charge of the garden! CSU also hosts an All-America Selections trial ground, and an extensive display area that allows gardeners and researchers to evaluate plants for their suitability for growing in the high plains. Needless to say, nothing short of a very tasty food spread would drag HGSA members away from the gardens. Lunch was hosted by Syngenta Seeds.



Duane Sinning of the Colorado Department of Agriculture entertained us over our meal with interesting facts and figures about the Colorado hemp industry. For example, did you know that 25,000 uses for hemp have been identified? We were fascinated.

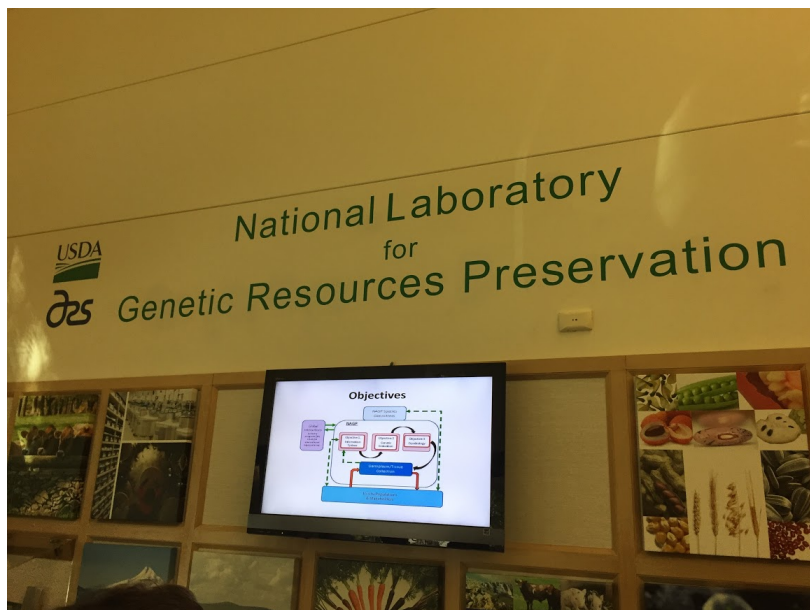
We moved on to other parts of the university to see CSU's very impressive recently erected greenhouses, where Greenhouse Crops Extension Specialist Dr. Steven Newman showed us around the 21,000 square foot greenhouses, and the 9,000 additional square feet of classroom space. The growing operation is as energy efficient as it is possible to be on a commercial scale. Students grow lettuce in as little as 40 days, and it is then used to fill the university's salad bars.



A most interesting tour followed: a rare opportunity to tour the National Center for Genetic Resources Preservation. Previously known as the USDA germplasm repository, this state-of-the-art facility receives seed and plant materials from all parts of the United States, and the world!

The Center's mission is the preservation of genetic diversity, and the staff of about 50 manages this mission by maintaining tanks of seeds kept at sub-zero temperatures with liquid nitrogen. Other seeds are preserved in tornado and flood-proof vaults. A seed quality lab, and several walk-in germinators are also part of their high-tech setup.





Lab Technician Annette Miller gave us a comprehensive tour of the National Laboratory.



Our next stop was Oskar Blues Foodery, where we enjoyed a craft beer tasting hosted by Sakata Home Grown, followed by a Colorado BBQ-themed buffet hosted by American Meadows. Our spirits were not dampened in the least by an unscheduled stop at the Oskar Blue in Lyons. In fact, our appetites were whetted all the more!





Friday morning, following the annual HGSA Membership Meeting, and a breakfast discussion of social media trends led by Mike Lizotte of American Meadows and John Fendley of Sustainable Seeds, we traveled to Applewood Seed's trial gardens and seed lab.





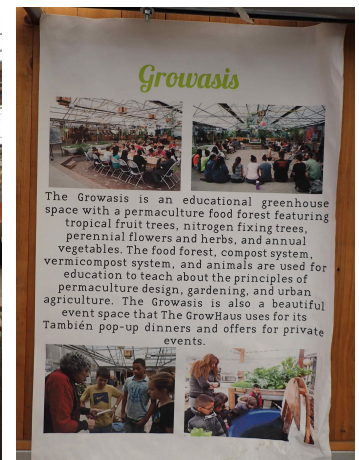
The garden was at its colorful peak, and the photographers in our group took full advantage. Owner Gene Millstein introduced us to the entire staff, from the general manager Norm to trial garden managers Riley and Diane, to the seed technologist Mary. We toured the warehouse, and the lab where Mary tests all incoming seeds for purity and viability.



Red Rocks, the park and gigantic amphitheater where performers have entertained thousands of music lovers for decades, was our next stop. We enjoyed a lunch sponsored by Applewood Seed, and drank in the amazing views.



From there we traveled to the GrowHaus facility, an organization that is growing fresh food in an urban “food desert” and educating local residents. Miranda, an educator with Colorado Vincentian, a faith-based volunteer organization, showed us the Growasis (educational greenhouse), mushroom-growing room, and aquaponics facility — an impressive operation!







Denver Botanical Gardens was our final stop of the day. The gardens were beautiful; the weather outstanding! Following our tour of the gardens, we convened in the beautiful Gates Hall and Terrace Garden Court, in the Botanical Gardens. The evening reception hosted by Wild West Seed gave us a chance to talk about the events of the day. Dinner was sponsored by Seeds by Design.

Afterwards Jim Waltrip, an engrossing speaker with many years of experience in the home garden seed trade, regaled us with a presentation peppered with many great anecdotes. Brian Markham of Hammer Packaging presented Waltrip with an award for his many years of service to the home garden seed industry—the perfect close to the official conference itinerary.





But there was more to come. On Saturday many people took part in the optional trip to Renee's Garden packaging and fulfillment operations in Boulder, followed by a visit to the Boulder Farmers Market, and, finally, a tour of the nearby Celestial Seasonings facility. Everyone left for home with renewed appreciation for their colleagues in the home garden seed industry, and great memories of Colorado.

