



2017 Summer Conference and Seed Trials September 6-8, Canandaigua, New York

We arrived in Canandaigua, a beautiful town in the Finger Lakes region of New York, on Wednesday, September 6. Our hotel was situated right on Canandaigua Lake and within walking distance of town. The itinerary for the next several days would include a visit to an organic farm owned and operated by Wegmans Food Markets, a regional supermarket chain; a tour of Sonnenberg Gardens and Mansion, a 50-acre historic park; a trip to trial grounds where we would have the opportunity to view and compare flowers and vegetables grown from HGSA members' seeds; and many valuable networking opportunities.



We connected with new members and long-time colleagues and at a Wednesday evening Welcome Reception hosted by Hammer Packaging. Seed industry representatives from many regions of the United States as well as Canada, England, the Netherlands, Germany, and New Zealand had come together for the HGSA Conference.

The reception was held in a tent on the grounds of the Inn on the Lake, our conference hotel, overlooking the serene Canandaigua Lake.

On Thursday morning as we enjoyed breakfast at the hotel Don Wertman of Seed Programs International gave us a glimpse into how his organization's motto "Seeds Save Lives," is put into action. We then embarked on a full day of activities.



First stop was Wegmans Organic Farm, a showplace of sustainability. Our guide Alison introduced us to several team leaders, and showed how the company strives to partner with local growers and educate consumers at their 65 stores about organic products. We were impressed by the beauty of the property, and by the breadth of the company's activities. We toured the original certified organic farm of less than 10 acres, as well as the newly acquired 50-acre farm by the lake.



Then it was on to the trial gardens! Home Garden Seed Association (HGSA) and All America Selection (AAS) members met up in Geneva, NY, where Bejo Seeds treated us to a tasty lunch. HGSA members had sent seeds to the trial garden managers in early spring, and on this early September day zinnias and sunflowers were in bloom, and peppers, tomatoes, kale and many other vegetables were at their peak.



After a full day of touring and taking notes on the vegetables and flowers grown in Hardiness Zone 6 conditions, we were more than ready for our evening meal.

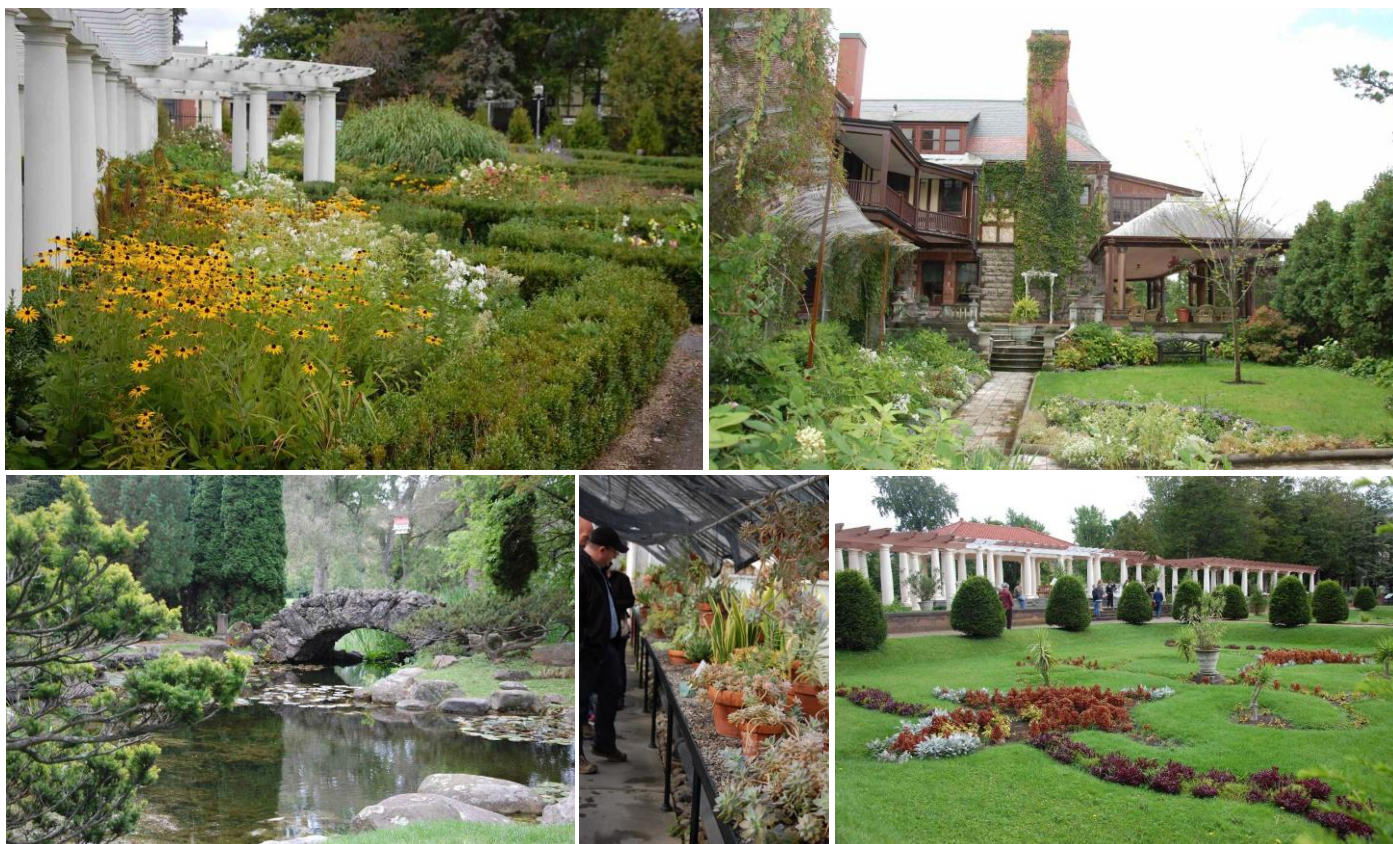
Pat Miller from the American Seed Trade Association (ASTA) spoke briefly about issues of interest to the seed industry, including the Federal Seed Act, Recommended Uniform State Seed Law, and pollinator awareness, ending with a few words about the Tomatosphere project, an initiative that encourages school classrooms to register to grow seeds that have flown in space. Wine, dinner, and conversation—sponsored by Wild West Seed and Seeds by Design—followed at the NY Wine and Culinary Center, a venue just steps away from our hotel.



The next morning we were ready to travel to new locations and see new sights. But first, breakfast at the hotel sponsored by Sakata Home Grown, and a lively discussion about bees. Millie Davenport from Clemson University and Natalie Towne from Greene Heron Apiary shared fascinating facts about beekeeping, and about bees in the wild. Among many other things we learned why honey produced in the early summer tastes different from that made in late summer, and sampled four very different types of honey.



Sonnenberg Gardens and Mansion was definitely one of the highlights of the conference. The 19th century estate was bought by a non-profit organization in 1972, which then began the long process of restoring the extensive gardens. Now owned by NY State, it is one of only two gardens in the Parks System.



From Sonnenberg Gardens, we traveled to the NY State Ag. Experiment Station. Over a lunch sponsored by Mountain Valley Seed we heard a presentation about the past and future of hops in the US. The Prohibition era of the 1920s and 30s dealt hops growers a blow, but the Northeast Hop Alliance, organized in 2001, marked the beginning of a comeback.

Following that, we learned about High Pressure Pasteurization, a no-heat type of pasteurization being pioneered by the Department of Food Science at the Cornell University Geneva Facility.



We moved on to Cornell Gates Farm, also in Geneva, where Dr. Phil Griffiths shared the details of his breeding work on tomatoes, brassicas, and other food crops. We tasted and rated tomatoes in his breeding program, and enjoyed some delicious melons.



From there we traveled directly to a closing reception at Young Lion Brewing, which was within walking distance of our hotel. Sponsored by American Meadows, the gathering was a perfect end to a very satisfying conference.

To see more photos of the 2017 HGSA Canandaigua Conference, access Brian Markham's complete album here: [Canandaigua Conference photos](#)

