

HGSA, AAS, NGB Summer Summit and Trials
Urban Ag Opportunities
October 5-8, 2015 • Dallas, Texas



The 2015 HGSA conference in Dallas/Fort Worth, a combined summit of HGSA, AAS (All America Selections) and NGB (National Garden Bureau) members, was larger than usual, with 116 attendees. The group spent three stimulating days touring botanical gardens and seed trials in Dallas and Fort Worth, visiting Texas A&M and BRIT botanical research facilities, and enjoying each other's company over delicious meals. We also engaged in productive discussions about issues facing seed producers, including the decline of pollinators, and the changing future of urban agriculture.

We came together at an evening reception on Monday, held at the conference hotel. Representatives of the three organizations, NGB, AAS, and HGSA, welcomed the group and gave an outline of activities on the conference roster.

First stop Tuesday morning: Texas A&M, where Dotty Woodsen, the Extension Water Resources Specialist, gave an address on water-wise gardening.

Afterwards we admired the Growtainer™, a mobile hydroponic plant production system housed in a modified 40-foot shipping container. This innovative venture is finding ways to grow plants with less water and efficient LED lighting in order to solve food security problems around the world.





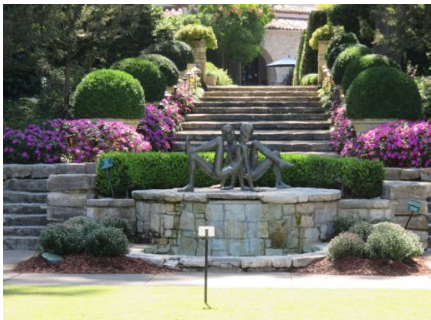
Also at Texas A&M, we spent time examining model homes and landscapes, built using green building methods and utilizing the latest water-wise landscaping techniques.



Next stop was North Haven Garden Center in Dallas, where Rusty Allen talked to us about the company's role in Urban Ag. We enjoyed a Texas-style lunch in the on-site classroom, sponsored by American Takii and Seminis Home Garden.



We enjoyed a beautiful afternoon at the pumpkin-festooned Dallas Arboretum, where we were treated to a general guided tour, and additional tours of the AAS trial gardens and the Rory Meyers Children's Adventure Garden.





Bejo, Sakata, and Terra Organics sponsored the evening activities: cocktails on the terrace, and the AAS Awards banquet at the Arboretum's Rosine Hall. Dr. Randy Gardner was honored with the 2015 AAS Breeders' Cup Award, and Dr. Elisabeth Sahin-Georgiadou received the AAS Medallion of Honor. Experiencing the arboretum in the evening was a treat!



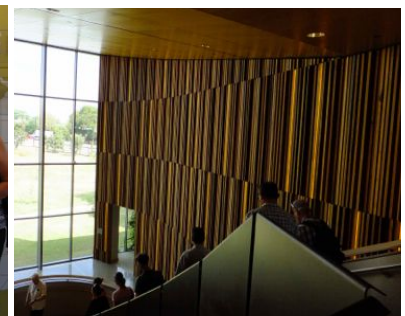
Wednesday brought another full round of activities, starting with HGSA, AAS, and NGB business meetings at the hotel, after which we departed for the Forth Worth Botanic Garden.



Herons, koi, and wood ducks in the Japanese Garden charmed us, and we got another chance to see AAS plants on display.



Just across the parking lot we were treated to a Food Truck lunch arranged by Clearfork Food Park in Fort Worth, and sponsored by HEM Genetics and JBM Packaging.



We then visited the forward-thinking BRIT, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, adjacent to Fort Worth Botanic Garden, where we were shown the herbarium, the extensive botanical library, and the platinum-rated LEED building and grounds. The late afternoon programs included a presentation by BRIT, and roundtable discussions on issues pertinent to the seed industry: seed library legislation, neonicotinoids and their use in garden seed production, and the Million Pollinator Garden Challenge launched by the National Pollinator Garden Network.



The evening activities included a choice of chocolate, tequila, or wine and cheese tastings—something for everyone—followed by small-group “Dinner with Peers” in downtown Fort Worth restaurants. Tastings were sponsored by Syngenta, Sustainable Seed Company, and Seeds by Design, and the restaurant dinners were generously hosted by HGSA members American Meadows, High Mowing Seeds, Hammer Packaging, Burpee, and Hart’s Seeds.



Day three began with an extended visit to our annual HGSA Members Summer Variety Trials, carefully grown out for us this year at Ruibal's production facility. It is always fascinating to see how HGSA members' varieties perform in different US zones, and the Dallas area environment provided insight into the conditions home garden consumers experience in this Texas climate of extremes.



When we finished up at the trials, we toured Ruibal's remarkable garden center.



We departed for Eat the Yard, an urban farming business that supports returning war veterans, just before lunchtime. Co-owners Steve and James gave us a tour of the grounds, and an overview of F.A.R.M. (Farmers Assisting Returning Military), and their peer-to-peer work with veterans. Lunch was provided for us by Seminis Home Garden.



The final stop of the summit was Iron Cactus in downtown Dallas. A panel discussion, energized by three distinct viewpoints on The Future of Urban Ag, was presented by nursery owner Mike Ruibal, Gardenuity co-founder Donna Leiter, and HortAmericas general manager Chris Higgins. This was followed by cocktails and dinner at the Iron Cactus, sponsored by Renee's Garden, Seeds by Design, and Wild West Seed.



All in all, the combined summit was a superb experience, thanks to the organizational skills of Patty Buskirk and Diane Blazek, and the many helping hands and sponsors!

Next year, we'll be in Fort Collins, Colorado! Save the dates: September 7 to 10, 2016.

Conference Sponsors:

Tuesday lunch at North Haven Gardens: American Takii and Seminis Home Garden

Tuesday's banquet: Bejo, Sakata, and Terra Organics

Wednesday's Food Trucks: HEM Genetics and JBM Packaging

Chocolate Tasting: Syngenta

Tequila and Sangria Tasting: Sustainable Seed Company

Wine and Cheese Tasting: Seeds by Design

Wednesday Dinners: American Meadows, High Mowing Seeds, Hammer Packaging, Burpee, Hart's Seeds

Thursday's lunch at Eat the Yard: Seminis

Thursday evening at Iron Cactus: Renee's Garden, Seeds by Design, and Wild West Seed