

SEED SAVERS EXCHANGE
founded 1975



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 25, 2008

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AMERICAN FOOD SUPPLY SAFEGUARDED BY SEED SAVERS EXCHANGE CONTRIBUTION TO SVALBARD GLOBAL SEED VAULT

New York, NY. Seed Savers Exchange, the leading grassroots organization preserving the best of American heirloom vegetable seeds in the U.S., contributed its inaugural deposit of 500 varieties to the Svalbard Global Seed Vault which opened on February 26, 2008. The Svalbard Vault is the world's "safety deposit box" of biodiversity and global food supply preservation. In the event of natural and man-made disasters, countries and organizations that deposit seeds will be able to retrieve them to regenerate their region's crops and reinstate its biodiversity or donate them to other countries in need. The Vault, constructed near Longyearbyen was underwritten by the Norwegian government and will be administered by the Global Crop Diversity Trust. Its official opening is expected to receive intensive media coverage and be attended by world leaders, Nobel Peace Prize winners and renowned scientists.

The American story angle however, emanates from Seed Savers Exchange. "We are honored to make our first deposit to the Global Seed Vault in Svalbard," said Dr. Amy Goldman, Board Chair of Seed Savers Exchange.

"Our contribution recognizes the importance of citizen-led initiatives to preserve our vegetable genetic heritage," added Neil Hamilton, Vice Chair of the Board.

Goldman further explains, "Not only is the vault a failsafe way to ensure our ability to grow crops in the United States in the event of a crisis, but it is also a critical way to map our cultural heritage. Seeds are the first link in the food chain. They enable us to trace our roots because so many of our heirloom seeds were brought to the U.S. by our ancestors, sewn in the seams of dresses and hats as our family members crossed oceans to begin a new life. These seeds not only represented the insurance of sustenance, they also germinated the sprouts of prosperity in the new world."

"America was a melting pot not just of people, but also of crop varieties brought by immigrants from around the world," explains Dr. Cary Fowler, Executive Director of Global Crop Diversity Trust and a board member of Seed Savers Exchange. "Yet much of it has been lost. Almost 95% of the garden bean varieties and more than 80% of the 400 tomato varieties grown in the U.S. in the early 1900s are now extinct. Varieties placed in the Global Seed Vault represent a botanical and cultural history of America, and are a future resource for plant breeders in support of our agricultural system and its farmers. Now, at long last, we can be assured of their future conservation." The vault, built beneath permafrost to withstand the test of time, maintains a

constant arctic temperature to preserve and secure the seeds for what experts estimate will be hundreds of years.

Typhoons, hurricanes and tsunamis as well as man-made catastrophes like civil war, funding failures, equipment and human errors can destroy crops and food supply. And while the world is beginning to experience the effects of climate change on species and environment, seeds give us the ability to adapt to these climate changes and safeguard our agricultural future. Fowler continues, "This is the diversity that contains all the traits and characteristics that plant breeders will need to adapt agricultural crops to climate change and to produce more food for growing populations."

The Seed Savers Exchange works to preserve our collective heritage, housing more than 25,000 varieties of seed at Heritage Farm in Decorah, Iowa, the organization's headquarters, and promotes the exchange of heirloom seeds between members. For more information about Seed Savers, visit www.seedsavers.org. To learn more about what the Global Seed Vault means to America and America's donation, Dr. Amy Goldman, Dr. Cary Fowler and Neil Hamilton are available for interviews. They will be able to speak to the Vault's impact on the American food supply, farming and agricultural communities, gardeners, and our cultural history.

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Seed Savers Exchange is saving the world's diverse, but endangered, garden heritage for the future generations by building a network of people committed to collecting, conserving, and sharing heirloom seeds and plants while educating people