



For further information, please contact:
Megan Dold at +1 301 280 5720 or mdold@burnesscommunications.com
Jeff Haskins: +254 729 871 422 or jhaskins@burnesscommunications.com

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Global Seed Vault Marks One-Year Anniversary with Four-Ton Shipment of Critical Food Crops from Countries around the World

With New Evidence Warning Climate Change Threatens Food Production, Scientists Gather In Svalbard To Discuss Crop Diversity and the Vault's Role in Averting Agricultural Disaster

LONGYEARBYEN, NORWAY (26 February 2009)—Four tons of seeds - almost 90,000 samples of hundreds of crop species - from food crop collections maintained by Canada, Ireland, Switzerland, USA, and three international agricultural research centers in Syria, Mexico and Colombia, were delivered today to the Svalbard Global Seed Vault as it celebrated its one-year anniversary. The repository, located near the village of Longyearbyen on the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard, has in one year amassed a collection of more than 400,000 unique seed samples – some 200 million seeds.

“We are especially proud to see such a large number of countries work quickly to provide samples from their collections for safekeeping in the vault,” said Norwegian Agriculture Minister Lars Peder Brekk. “It shows that there are situations in the world today capable of transcending politics and inspiring a strong unity of purpose among a diverse community of nations.”

“The vault was opened last year to ensure that one day all of humanity’s existing food crop varieties would be safely protected from any threat to agricultural production, natural or manmade. It’s amazing how far we have come toward accomplishing that goal,” said Cary Fowler, Executive Director of the Global Crop Diversity Trust, which operates the seed vault in partnership with the Norwegian government and the Nordic Genetic Resource Center in Sweden.

For example, in its first year of operation, the vault at Svalbard has so far received duplicates of nearly half of the crop samples maintained by the genebanks of the international agricultural research centers of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).

These international genebanks are seen as the custodians of the crown jewels of crop diversity. This diversity has been instrumental in the breeding of new varieties responsible for the remarkable productivity gains made in global agriculture in recent decades, and in averting food crises when farm production has been threatened by natural disasters, plant diseases, and plant pests.

To mark the anniversary of the vault, experts on global warming and its effects on food production have gathered in Longyearbyen to discuss how climate change could pose a

major threat to food production, and to examine crop diversity's role in averting crisis. They include the authors of a study published last month in *Science* magazine warning that by the end of this century the *average* temperatures during growing seasons in many regions will probably be higher than the *most extreme* heat recorded over the last 100 years. Crop diversity will be required by scientists to breed new varieties able to flourish in such dramatically different conditions.

"This means that the vital importance of crop diversity to our food supply, which inspired the creation of the seed vault, is neither remote nor theoretical but immediate and real," said David Battisti, a climate change expert at the University of Washington and one of the lead authors of the paper.

"When we see research indicating that global warming could diminish maize production by 30 percent in southern Africa in only 20 years' time, it shows that crop diversity is needed to adapt agriculture to climate change right now," added Frank Loy, former Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs and an advisor to President Obama's transition team on environment and climate change, who is also attending.

With its new acquisitions, the vault is now providing a secure second home for a third of humanity's most important crop varieties, and a level of security for crop diversity conservation that was not available until a year ago. More genebanks and countries are in the process of signing agreements and preparing seeds collections to deposit in the vault.

Seeds arriving for the vault anniversary include samples of 32 varieties of potatoes in addition to oat, wheat, barley, and native grass species from two of Ireland's national gene banks. Ireland's participation and its inclusion of potato varieties is particularly appropriate for an occasion celebrating crop diversity. It was a lack of diversity that is believed to have made Ireland's potato crop particularly vulnerable to the devastating blight of the mid-1800s that led to the deaths of more than one million people.

In addition to Ireland's contribution, 3,800 samples of wheat and barley have come from Switzerland's national seed bank in Changins. The United States is sending 20,000 samples from the seed repository maintained by the federal Department of Agriculture that represents 361 crop species. They include samples of crop varieties that originally came from 151 countries and are now part of the U.S. collection.

Like all seeds coming to the vault, the samples arriving today are duplicates of seeds from other collections. The vault is intended to serve as a fail-safe backup should the original samples be lost or damaged or, more dramatically, to provide something of a Noah's ark for agriculture in the event of a global catastrophe.

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The Global Crop Diversity Trust

The mission of the Trust is to ensure the conservation and availability of crop diversity for food security worldwide. Although crop diversity is fundamental to fighting hunger and to the very future of agriculture, funding is unreliable and diversity is being lost. The Trust is the only organization working worldwide to solve this problem, and has already raised over \$140 million. For further information, please visit: www.croptrust.org.