

For more information, please contact:
Jeff Haskins at +254 729 871 422 or jhaskins@burnesscommunications.com
Shelly Han at +1 202 351 1929 or shelly.han@mail.house.gov
Sandy Miller Hays at ARS USDA +1 301 504 1636 or Sandy.MillerHays@ars.usda.gov

Hold for Release until 11.00 Oslo // 09.00 GMT on 11 July 2010

Red Hot Chili Peppers Arrive in Sub-zero Arctic Seed Vault

US Seed Collection Delivers Valuable Varieties of Chili Peppers and Hundreds of Sorghum Varieties, an Essential “Climate Ready” Crop

LONGYEARBYEN, NORWAY (11 July 2010)—A new collection of some of North America’s hottest foods—an eclectic range of New World chili peppers—were delivered to the cool Arctic Circle environs of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault this week, where their exotic tongue-scorching qualities can be kept safe for centuries.

The seeds were delivered to the vault by a seven-person bipartisan delegation from the U.S. Congress, led by Senator Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD), Chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission, and including Assistant Senate Majority Leader Dick Durbin (D-IL). The seeds were handed over to Dr. Cary Fowler, Executive Director of the Global Crop Diversity Trust, the institution that funds the operation and management of the seed vault, as well as the transport of unique seeds from collections around the world. The latest samples of seeds come from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Plant Germplasm System (NPGS) in Fort Collins, Colorado.

Other members of the bipartisan delegation are: Chris Smith (R-NJ), the Helsinki Commission’s Ranking Republican; Senator Tom Udall (D-NM); Representative Louise McIntosh Slaughter (D-NY); Representative Robert B. Aderholt (R-AL); and Representative Lloyd Doggett (D-TX).

The so-called “doomsday” seed vault now contains seeds of more than 525,000 crop varieties, making it the most diverse assemblage of crop diversity amassed anywhere in the world. Overall, this week’s deposit consists of a total of 537 varieties of 13 crops.

It includes Wenk’s Yellow Hots, a pepper that starts out yellow and hot and cools somewhat to red and medium-hot; Pico de Gallo or “Rooster’s beak,” a medium-hot salsa staple; and the unpredictable San Juan “Tsile,” a New Mexico chili still grown by elder farmers in a Native American pueblo that can be anything from mild to medium to hot.

“The world is interdependent when it comes to crop diversity, the essential raw material needed for a healthy and robust food supply,” said Senator Cardin. “As we manage the impact of climate change around the world, the seed vault in Svalbard will be the safety deposit box that ensures we can keep that food supply intact.”

“In New Mexico, our distinctive red and green chili peppers not only define our cuisine, they also symbolize our state’s unique cultural heritage and the livelihoods of generations who have called it home,” said Senator Tom Udall. “I’m very pleased that we are saving New Mexico’s most deliciously famous crop in the Svalbard Global Seed Vault.”

The USDA’s Agricultural Research Service (ARS) has sent tens of thousands of seeds from its National Plant Germplasm System to the Svalbard Global Seed Vault since January 2008. “Our

goal, over the next 10 to 15 years, is to have the majority of the system's 511,000 collections represented in the Svalbard vault," said Edward B. Knipping, ARS administrator.

He added, "While we've sent samples from some very familiar crop species, such as maize, soybeans, and peanuts, we're also sending more exotic germplasm, such as seeds of the wild strawberry *Fragaria iturupensis*, collected from the island of Iturup on the lower flank of the Atsunupuri Volcano in far eastern Russia. ARS has a strong commitment to sharing its crop diversity to ensure that Svalbard is well positioned to help protect the world's genetic diversity."

In addition to the assortment of chili peppers, the Fort Collins collection also deposited in the vault this week melons, peanuts, beans, sesame, hibiscus, squash, gourd, and 448 different varieties of sorghum. Sorghum is a crop that is grown around the world and is a dietary staple for 500 million people in over 30 countries. It is getting renewed attention as a "climate change ready" crop due to its ability to withstand hot and dry conditions.

"Sorghum is an amazingly versatile crop—it's used for flour, bread, animal feed, beer and, increasingly, biofuels—and it's likely to become ever more important to global food security given its drought tolerance," said Fowler. "But production in many areas is threatened by insect pest and plant disease," he continued. "This intensifies the need to conserve sorghum diversity so that plant breeders can find the genetic traits they need to equip this important crop for these challenges."

The seed vault was constructed deep in a mountain on a remote Norwegian archipelago near the North Pole as a fail-safe back-up to existing crop collections around the world. Collections are constantly under threat from wars and natural disasters but also small but important threats like lack of funding to pay for electricity to store seeds in refrigerators. The seeds in the vault are the property of the country or institution that sent them and are available in the public domain through these institutions. Crop collections around the world serve the daily needs of farmers and plant breeders in their work to find new traits that can boost yields or address problems posed by diseases, pests or shifting climate conditions.

###

Svalbard Global Seed Vault (www.seedvault.no)

The Svalbard Global Seed Vault is designed to store duplicates of seeds from seed collections from around the globe. If seeds are lost, e.g. as a result of natural disasters, war or simply a lack of resources, the seed collections may be reestablished using seeds from Svalbard. The seed vault is owned by the Norwegian government which has also financed the construction work, costing nearly NOK 50 million.

The Global Crop Diversity Trust (www.croptrust.org)

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. The Trust is providing support for the ongoing operations of the seed vault, as well as organizing and funding the preparation and shipment of seeds from developing countries to the facility.

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (www.csce.gov)

The CSCE, also known as the U.S. Helsinki Commission, is an independent agency of the Federal Government charged with monitoring compliance with the Helsinki Accords and advancing comprehensive security through promotion of human rights, democracy, and economic, environmental and military cooperation in 56 countries. The Commission consists of nine members from the U.S. Senate, nine from the House of Representatives, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense, and Commerce.

The Agricultural Research Service is the principal intramural scientific research agency of the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](http://www.usda.gov).