

**PSI On-Farm Seed Production Pre-Conference**  
**Crowne Royal Hotel**

Albany, NY  
January 24, 2003

**Introduction:**

Farmers need seed stocks that work for their climate, soils and markets. Northeast growers are now dependent on a much narrower range of seeds produced for large farms and average national growing conditions. Organic farmers in particular need varieties that do well in organic farming systems. PSI is working to help the Northeast growers and seed companies help our regional seed supply blossom.

**Welcome and Description of the Public Seed Initiative:**



Mark Henning of Cornell University's Department of Plant Breeding welcomed over 50 supporters of the PSI program to the Crowne Royal Hotel. He gave a short presentation concerning the history, progress and future goals of the PSI program. He also discussed the accomplishments of the PSI's participatory plant breeding component, which was able to get a Cornell bred disease resistant acorn squash licensed to a small biodynamic seed company.

**Overview and Introduction to On-farm Seed Production:**

Teri Ferrin from USDA-ARS, Plant Genetic Resources Unit in Geneva, NY gave an hour long presentation discussing on-farm seed production. Her talk began with an overview of the Plant Genetic Resources Unit and its role in the National Plant Germplasm System. She also talked about basic seed saving protocol including topics like: plant reproduction, minimum isolation distances and minimum population sizes, harvesting, seed cleaning, seed storage and quality control of seed.

**Building a Regional Seed Supply: A panel discussion of regional seed companies:**

Mark Hutton, an extension vegetable specialist and assistant professor of vegetable crops at the University of Maine served as mediator for Nathan Corymb



*Left to right: Mark Hutton, Nathan Corymb, Matt Rulevich and CR Lawn.*

(Turtle Tree Seed Company), CR Lawn (Fedco Seeds) and Matt Rulevich (White Oak Farm). Each panelist discussed their organization and their needs from regional growers. Nathan Corymb is a grower specializing in biodynamic seed. He and his wife, Beth, run a small biodynamic seed company from Camphill Village in Copake, NY. CR Lawn, president of Fedco Seeds in Waterville, ME talked about the reasons surrounding the shortage in seed adapted to the harsh climate of the northeast and New England states. Matt Rulevich is a grain grower and supplier for many small regional seed companies and runs his farm from Belchertown, Massachusetts.

### **Producing High-Quality Seed with Special Attention to Germination, Purity, and Diseases:**

Dr. Robert Wick has been an Associate Professor of Plant Pathology at the University of Massachusetts' Department of Microbiology in Amherst, MA for more than 10 years. His main areas of interest include diseases of vegetables, floriculture crops, and turfgrass nematology. Dr. Wick gave an in-depth presentation on seed borne diseases prevalent in the Northeast.



Dr. Robert Wick. Photo from UMass.edu

Nathan Corymb (pictured on previous page) also discussed some of the issues surrounding what quality of seed his company looks for when dealing with his producers.

### **The Economics of Seed Production:**

CR Lawn and Matt Rulevich lectured on the economics of seed production. They discussed crops that are profitable for Northeast growers and handed out cost analysis for seed production. CR distributed his inventory of Small Farm Crop Purchases for 2002 - 2003 growing season. Fedco purchases over \$13,000 from Northeast and New York growers (more than 1/2 his total seed purchases). CR also distributed a worksheet listing examples of variable yields for different vegetable varieties. Matt Rulevich supplies the audience with cost analysis based on row feet for many grains and market vegetables grown at White Oak Farm.

### **Regulations Affecting Seed Production:**

Alan Westra from the New York State Seed Improvement Project spoke in great detail concerning issues surrounding patents, plant variety protection, state seed laws, germination standards, and labeling. He also discussed his role in the New York State Seed Improvement Project.

