

## **Plant Genetic Resources Unit – Open House**

Geneva, NY

September 18, 2004

### **Open House:**

The Plant Genetic Resources Unit (PGRU) was the site of a public open house on Saturday, September 18, 2004 in honor of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the USDA's Agricultural Research Service. The Unit is one of the 33 components of the National Plant Germplasm System, a nationwide cooperative effort by federal, state and private organizations to preserve the genetic diversity of plants, and as such, houses approximately 12,000 vegetable varieties and 5,000 grape, apple and tart cherry varieties. Most of PGRU's 38 employees were there to lend a hand or answer questions, with help also coming from Josh Tennies and Anna Dellefave (leaf printing), Jan Forsline (Apple Videos) and Mary Jean Welser (liquid nitrogen demonstration). Tours of the orchards, vineyards, rootstock nurseries, apple core collection (a sample of 200 very diverse apples), and the vegetable plantings were experienced by approximately 350 people. In a separate tent, a demonstration of small-scale seed production was on-going throughout the day from the Public Seed Initiative. 65 people stopped by the PSI tent to take advantage of the distribution of the five varieties offered in free heirloom tomato seed packets. Over 250 samples of tomato seeds were distributed. The only "live" attraction was also under this tent with the famous honey bee observation hive. Children and adults alike are mesmerized by the workings of the honey bee and an unobstructed view of the inside of a hive.



Under the larger tent, there were also: 1) demonstrations of how apple buds are stored in liquid nitrogen as well as the process for propagating trees from these buds by grafting; 2) demonstrations of various ways to propagate and graft apple trees; 3) displays of fruit and vegetable diversity; 4) videos describing PGRU's work on apple; 5) hands-on DNA extraction; 6) microscopes for looking at grapes with downy-mildew and botrytis fungus; and 7) state-of-the-art research posters in vegetable diversity and fruit breeding and genomics. Connie Rodriguez and Dan Fessenden (Executive Director) of the Ag-Tech Park also joined us with their display and answered many questions regarding the upcoming park.

There were four tours that were on-going on an hourly basis: 1) the clonal crops tour given by Phil Forsline show-cased the apple, grape and tart cherry material maintained by the PGRU with emphasis on the wild apple trees with origin in Kazakhstan that are now fruiting; 2) the vegetable crops tour with Dave Sharman, Paul Kisly and Dr. Larry Robertson show-cased the cabbage, onions and tomatoes regenerated this year; 3) the rootstock breeding tour given by Todd Holleran explained the apple rootstock breeding program of Dr. Gennaro Fazio; and 4) Bill Srmack gave the apple core collection tour with the “blue apple” question coming up the most! (This relates to the many people in attendance that had read “The Botany of Desire” by M. Pollan where the blue apple, which is actually has reddish-purple flesh, is mentioned).

