

Accessions Policy to Guide the Acquisition and Management of Plant Material in Seed Savers Exchange's Preservation Collection (Seed Bank and Vegetative/Clonal Plant Repository)

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Report prepared by the SSE Collection Committee, which is comprised of: Tim Johnson, Seed Bank Manager; Jenna Sicuranza, Collection Curator; Shanyn Siegel, former Collection Curator; John Torgrimson, President and Executive Director; Laura Merrick, Advisor; and David Cavagnaro, Board Member.

I. SEED SAVERS EXCHANGE MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to conserve and promote America's culturally diverse but endangered garden and food crop heritage for future generations by collecting, growing, and sharing heirloom seeds and plants.

II. DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

Definitions of key terms can be found in the Appendix at the end of this document.

III. POLICY OBJECTIVES

This document (herein referred to as the *Accessions Policy*) is intended to set a clear trajectory for the focus and evolution of the Collection. The criteria and guidelines set forth in the *Accessions Policy* will be used to assess material that is already in the Collection (and guide the deaccessioning of such material when appropriate), as well as guide new acquisitions. The Collection is being maintained as one facet of a larger organizational mission to conserve and promote the garden and food crop heritage of the United States. As articulated in *Seed Savers Exchange Strategic Long-Range Plan 2012-2016*, SSE's Board of Directors, Executive Director, and Collection management staff anticipate that the Collection will become the most comprehensive single source for United States heritage varieties in the world. In order to achieve this goal, it is expected that the policies outlined in the *Accessions Policy* will be reviewed periodically and adjusted to maintain a close fit to SSE's mission, priorities, and available resources.

IV. SCOPE OF THE COLLECTION

The primary goal of the *Accessions Policy* is to set accessioning criteria and priorities that are congruent with SSE's mission. Types of plant material prioritized for inclusion and active management within the Collection are described in the following subsections.

A. Geographic range

The Collection will be limited to varieties with a history of use in the United States, as per the mission and intentions of the SSE Board of Directors.

B. Plant materials

Accessions of seed-propagated crops must be open-pollinated for inclusion in the Collection. Vegetative material (tubers, bulbs, scion wood, rhizomes, corms) of crops that are typically vegetatively propagated is also eligible for inclusion in the Collection.

All crop types or species are eligible for inclusion in the Collection, granted the accession can be effectively maintained by Seed Savers Exchange. High priority accessions that cannot be effectively maintained at Heritage Farm may be archived in anticipation of future off-site regenerations.

Accessions that are being held by other genebanks or are currently available commercially are eligible for inclusion in the Collection, granted there are resources available to maintain such accessions.

C. Accession classes

The Collection will be limited to the following classes of accessions, listed in order of priority:

- 1. *U.S. Heirlooms*** are the highest priority for the Collection. This class includes *Exchange Heirlooms, Historic Heirlooms, Likely Heirlooms, and Modern Heirlooms*.

- 2. *Historic Commercial Varieties*** are a secondary collection priority.

- 3. *Exchange Heirlooms*** – U.S. Heirlooms of special importance to the organization because of their extensive history of being listed and shared in the *Seed Savers Exchange Yearbook* and/or Online Seed Exchange – are a third collection priority. These will be maintained as resources allow, taking into consideration whether or not they are also *Historic Heirlooms, Likely Heirlooms, and/or Historic Commercial Varieties*.

- 4. *Modern Commercial Varieties*** are the lowest priority within the Collection. These will be maintained as resources allow and based on additional criteria of perceived usefulness to members and need for conservation (e.g. availability to members from other sources).

V. DONATION CRITERIA

- **SSE will not curate plant material if donors restrict distribution** to members or restrict other uses including, but not limited to, commercial sales, educational activities, preservation promotions, or seed swaps.
- **Donations should be stable, exhibit a uniform phenotype, and grow true-to-type.** If there is variability in a prospective acquisition, this variability should be well documented and accounted for during the accessioning process.¹
- **Original donations and acquisitions should be of sufficient quantity and quality to ensure the genetic integrity of the accession can be maintained** in future regenerations. Smaller donations or acquisitions will be considered under some circumstances.
- **Original donations and acquisitions should be sufficiently free of seed-borne disease** that a disease-free increase can be obtained for distribution to Members. When possible, SSE will attempt to reduce disease loads in the plant material after accepting it for accessioning. When not possible, the accession may be archived in hopes that an efficient system for effective regeneration will be identified and applied in the near future. Accessions with known seed-borne diseases will not be distributed to Members.
- **Donors should share information and documentation about the history of the variety when known.** This includes information about the chain of stewardship, original source, description of the variety, traditional uses, and photographs, letters, or articles that help document the variety's history. Such information may be used by SSE for educational, conservational, or commercial purposes.
- **SSE will accept donations that meet the *Accessions Policy*, regardless of crop type or species,** granted the variety can be effectively maintained by Seed Savers Exchange. At present, there are crops and varieties that cannot be regenerated or maintained at Heritage Farm due to lack of adaptation, difficulties inherent in their propagation, or other circumstances. In most cases, such varieties will not be accessioned. However, some high priority varieties may be accessioned and archived in anticipation of future off-site regenerations while donors are simultaneously encouraged to find additional means to protect their varieties.
- **SSE will accept donations that meet the *Accessions Policy* regardless of whether they are being held by other genebanks** or are currently available commercially, granted there are resources available to maintain such varieties.

¹ Crops that are normally cross-pollinated are expected to show higher degrees of variability than crops that are normally self-pollinated. Landraces and Native American varieties generally have greater variability than other types of crop varieties. These characteristics will be taken into consideration when assessing accessions.

VI. DEACCESSIONING

From time to time, and with guidance from collection management staff and/or advisors, it may be necessary to remove an accession or accessions from the collection because 1) they do not conform to accessioning criteria, 2) they are not viable, 3) they are severely diseased, crossed, or phenotypically unstable, 4) they are known duplicates of other accessions in the Collection, 5) their distribution is limited by a PVP or other legal protection, 6) they cannot be effectively maintained by Seed Savers Exchange, or 7) resource limitations require the prioritization of management of higher priority accessions over lower priority accessions as outlined in Section IV.

When non-commercially-sourced accessions are scheduled for deaccessioning, Heritage Farm will attempt to repatriate or return the plant material to the donor, provided the material is phenotypically stable and relatively free of seed-borne diseases. Accessions originally obtained from foreign genebanks or from foreign collecting trips will be offered to the donor genebank or other appropriate genebank. Accessions donated by individuals will be offered to the original donor or, when possible, a living relative of the donor. Plant material scheduled for deaccessioning that cannot be repatriated or distributed to a donor will be made available to members for one year in the Yearbook on a first-come-first-served base, provided that the material is phenotypically stable, relatively free of seed-borne disease, and not restricted by a PVP or other legal protection. Standard Yearbook distribution rules will apply.

Accessions for which there is not enough information to determine whether they should be included in the Collection will be archived – provided that the plant material is phenotypically stable and relatively free from seed-borne disease – to account for the possibility that information may surface that will allow for a definitive decision about the continued management or deaccessioning of the accession.

Accessions that are deaccessioned because plant material is dead, severely diseased, or phenotypically unstable may be re-acquired if they otherwise meet accessioning criteria and are deemed to be high priority accessions.

APPENDIX. DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

1950: This date approximates the rapid increase of available hybrid varieties and their utilization in American agricultural systems as farmers transitioned towards increasingly mechanized methods.

Accession (verb): the act of recording information about and accepting a new addition to a collection, thereby committing to its management

An **Accession (noun)** is the basic unit of a collection. In regards to the SSE Collection, an accession is a lineage of plant material (seeds, scion wood, tubers, bulbs, or other plant parts that can be used for propagation) with a common genetic background, material source, and cultural history that is held in the Collection.

Active management: the collective term representing the process of performing all preservation activities needed to sustain an accession including storing, regenerating, evaluating, documenting, promoting, and distributing plant material.

Archive: the formal process of removing an accession in the Collection from active management while continuing to hold a sample of the plant material. When an accession is archived, the most original, viable plant material will be held in ideal storage conditions (or in as ideal conditions as possible) for up to 20 years. At that time, the material will either be deaccessioned or moved back into active management.

The Collection is the term used to describe the entirety of SSE's Preservation Collection consisting of a seed bank, orchards, in vitro tissue cultures, and a vegetative plant repository located at Heritage Farm in Decorah, IA.

Deaccession: the process of ending management of an accession in the Collection.

Exchange Heirlooms: a class of *U.S. Heirlooms* with at least a 20 year history of being listed and shared by members in the *Seed Savers Exchange Yearbook* and/or Online Seed Exchange.

Historic Heirlooms: a class of *U.S. Heirlooms* with well-documented histories that predate 1950. "Well-documented" means that there is documentation of who grew a variety, when it was grown, and where it was grown. This information may be obtained from primary (donation letters and personal communications) or secondary (catalogues, books or other sources) references. This accession class accommodates varieties with heirloom histories that predate 1950, even if they were not brought to the U.S. until after 1950.

Historic Apple Varieties: a class of *Historic Commercial Varieties* of apples bred or commercially released before 1950 and with a history of being maintained on U.S. soil. The SSE apple collection also prioritizes varieties with a history of use in the Midwest over varieties from other regions of the United States.

Historic Commercial Varieties: commercial varieties with a history of use in the U.S. beginning before 1950.

Likely Heirlooms: a class of *U.S. Heirlooms* without well-documented histories, but for which it can be deduced or for which there is anecdotal evidence that they were in cultivation prior to 1950.

Midwest: the region of the U.S. occupied by the states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

Modern Heirlooms: a class of *U.S. Heirlooms* that are not known to have originated before 1950, but that have a history of being grown and shared in the U.S. for at least 20 years.

Modern Commercial Varieties: commercial varieties not known to have been available in the U.S. before 1950 with at least a 35 year history of continuous (or nearly continuous) commerce in the U.S., regardless of their country of origin or history outside of the U.S.

Repatriate: the process of contacting original donor institutions in foreign countries to determine if they would like to receive a sample of plant material that is scheduled for deaccessioning.

U.S. Heirlooms: varieties that have a history of being grown and shared within a family or community in the U.S. U.S. Heirlooms may have either a foreign or domestic origin and may have originated as commercial varieties, emerged non-commercially, been bred or selected on farms or in home gardens, or been maintained as landraces. This includes varieties that were originally brought to the U.S. by immigrants who then maintained them on U.S. soil, and those that were obtained from foreign sources and subsequently maintained in U.S. farms and gardens. It does not include foreign heirlooms for which there is not an heirloom history in the U.S. This general definition applies to Historic Heirlooms, Likely Heirlooms, and Modern Heirlooms.