



Building Seed Sovereignty in the UK: 'International Seed Network exchanges'

About the program

Recognising the value of sharing experiences and knowledge with organisations that are on a similar journey to us, we are coordinating a series of virtual exchanges with projects in Europe and the USA to support the re-emergence of seed and grain sovereignty in the UK.

Funded by Farming the Future, the three organisations collaborating on this project - the Seed Sovereignty UK & Ireland Programme, the Landworkers Alliance, and the UK Grain Lab - have been working in partnership to raise awareness of and support training in open-pollinated seed, seed saving, and seed production which in turn increases the genetic diversity in our seedstock, cultivates diversity of flavour and taste in what we produce and eat, builds resilience in our food system, and facilitates a fair, accessible food system.

Our European and USA counterparts have developed inspiring and resilient movements, communities of practice and seed exchange networks, and we are creating this opportunity to exchange and learn from some of the leading examples of food and seed sovereignty in practice.

Seed exchanges

The Landworkers' Alliance and Gaia Foundation Seed Sovereignty Programme are working together to deliver specific components of this project. We will work with a collective of 10 - 15 UK based commercial and community market gardeners and seed growers with the following three aims:

(1) Cultivating celebration and culture:

How are other networks connecting their wider communities with the work they're doing? What ways do they come together to celebrate the stories and cultures behind their seeds? By connecting with organisations leading the way on innovative seed events, we can develop methods of embedding the importance of seed wider and deeper into our networks, community and culture.

(2) Growing diversity:

Loss of seed diversity is a huge issue in our seed and food system. Not only do we lose genetic diversity, we lose taste, colour, smell, crop diversity and culinary culture. By identifying particular

weak points in our seed stock - which crops are lacking diversity in our available local seed supply, which varieties are missing or disappearing - and collaborating with organisations and networks specialising in those varieties, we can work to diversify the crops we grow and learn about the incredible range of seed that is available and grown all around the world.

(3) Building resilience and adaptability: As our climate changes, so too must our crops. On this exchange, we will focus on ways in which other communities are trialling seed that is more resilient and more adaptable to extreme weather conditions. Focusing on a key food crop, we will then look to replicate in our networks as a next step.'

Each of the exchanges will be designed to include the following:

- 1) A focus on creating spaces for experiential learning between visitor and host communities of practice
- 2) A focus on exchanging strategies for building food and seed sovereignty
- 3) Documentation that is accessible, interactive and evocative and that allows others to be inspired by the work.
- 4) Growing some of the vegetable seed varieties learned about during the exchanges

Timeline and outline of the program

The first phase of the project will run between the 2021 and 2022 growing seasons.

Between October 2021 and February 2022 the ten participants will attend an online group meet up and three virtual tours and exchanges with inspiring seed initiatives in Europe and the USA. Together we will learn about the different approaches and designs of the projects and take these learnings to explore and vision how we want to apply them here in the UK.

As part of the project we will also receive seed varieties from the three projects we 'visit' and the participants will have the opportunity to trial and grow these seeds in 2022.

Applying to the program

To apply to the project please fill out this google form [here](#).

If you would like to apply to participate in this programme please apply by midnight on **Monday 30th August**. We will select participants in the first week of September.

Application criteria for participants

- Committed to the principles of agroecological production and food sovereignty
- Either a commercial grower (i.e. market gardener) or a community grower with access to land
- An experienced grower who is interested in producing a wide variety and diversity of crops

- An experienced grower who is in producing seed either for their own project, for other projects or for sale to seed companies *OR*
- Previously attended (or currently attending) the intermediate Gaia Foundation's Seed Sovereignty Programme Seed Production training or a similar equivalent course.
- Committed to participating in the entire project and attending all of the virtual exchanges
- Able to grow a test crop during the 2022 growing season to put learnings into practice and keeping in touch with their fellow participants to continue learning from and supporting each other. Whilst next year's activities will be dictated by the learnings of the exchanges, we are hoping to be able to provide ongoing support throughout the 2022 growing season.
- Confident in presenting/facilitating/working as a group and willingness to collaborate with fellow participants during and after the course
- Comfortable with learning online, language barriers, working through translation and new situations
- Flexible and engaged in achieving a valuable learning experience from the exchange
- Well-connected to other growers and wider networks

Any questions?

If you have any questions please get in touch with Dee from the Landworkers' Alliance at dee.butterly@landworkersalliance.org.uk or Sinead from the Gaia Foundation Seed Sovereignty Program at sinead@gaiagnet.org