Heritage Corn: Planting, Challenges and Educating from the Family Plot Perspective

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Rooting Through Corn, Planting Families

Harvest Celebration Day – Kalamazoo College

Kalamazoo, MI, USA - October 28, 2022

Project Background

2018

Michiana Heritage Corn Project = Seed bearer John Sherck, informal, 5 growers, every gardener in their own garden with common struggles/concerns

- Daylight sensitivity
- Pest Control
- Prevent cross pollination with GMO corn
- Explore and regain the cultural value of native corn

2020

SARE Grant proposal : US Department of Agriculture and the Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE) program, North Central Region

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https://projects.sare.org/sare_project/fnc21-1295/

2021–2023

Rooting Through Corn, Planting Families / Maíz y Raíz, Sembrando en Familia

- ~ 20 Planting Families
- Workshops / Classes / Field Sessions
- Ceremony

Photos by Elena Fischer, Merry Lea Environmental Center

Research Questions This Group Set Out to Answer:

Does planting corn late in the season sufficiently help avoid cross contamination of heritage corn and GMO corn?

Can we use time of planting to deal with the vast amount of GMO corn all around us and still harvest heritage corn free of GM traits?

Is it effective (and worth the time and resources) to hand pollinate one's corn (and bagging ears) to be extra sure our heritage corn will not be GMO contaminated?

Can natural and urban barriers help deter GMO pollen from our family plots?

Challenges

- Need for shared resources

- Need for more knowledge about corn for human consumption/corn culture

- Environmental/geographic challenges to grow heritage corn (GMO corn all around us); climate change, adapting late maturing corn to short season

-Need for more knowledge about earth-friendly practices

-Need for community building through planting (“rooting”)

Sharing Tools,Time, Supplies, and Knowledge

GMO testing procedures & results (2021)

- From three farms, a mixture of 600+ kernels from multiple ears were submitted for testing to FoodChain ID Testing (in Virginia)

- Qualitative test (detected/not detected), with a 0.5% detection threshold.

- 2021 Results:
- Prieto HP: none detected
- Prieto OP: none detected
- Bushelcraft HP: none detected
- Bushelcraft OP: none detected
- Stantz OP: none detected

Note: the Non-GMO Project uses 0.9% as its threshold. Our corn is CLEAN!

Bofo Corn – Adapting from Northwest Mexico

- 2019 = 175 days
  Yield: 8 cobs
- 2020 = 164 days
  Yield: 16 cobs
- 2021 = 132 days
  Yield: 50 cobs
- 2022 = 143 days
  Yield: + 100 cobs

Community Outcomes

- *Tekio (Nahuatl) Mink'a (Quechua)*: Collective, non-paid work that everyone in the community does for the good of the community
- Building relationships
- Celebration
- Each seed holds the knowledge, tradition and hope of generations of loving hands

THANK YOU!

Questions?

Visit the *Rooting Through Corn, Planting Families* page on Facebook, Instagram

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