

FOIA MARKER

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Agricultural Biodiversity

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May 13, 1993

MEMORANDUM FOR THE VICE PRESIDENT

FROM: KATIE

SUBJECT: AGRICULTURAL BIODIVERSITY

I understand you will be having an interview Monday with Oregon Public Broadcasting regarding their special PBS documentary called "The Seed Savers". This program will look at the loss of biodiversity in agriculture throughout the world. Your role will be to emphasize the importance of agricultural biodiversity in protecting the global food supply. The interviewers are particularly interested in discussing the points you raise in EITB regarding this issue. I have summarized relevant quotes, as well as provided background on USDA's current efforts in this Administration.

QUOTES FROM EITB:

"The single most serious strategic threat to the global food system is the threat of genetic erosion: the loss of germplasm and the increased vulnerability of food crops to their natural enemies."

"The current system is in scandalous condition with insufficient government attention and money, little coordination between different repositories, grossly inadequate protection and maintenance of national collections, and is missing a sense of urgency where such a precious resource is concerned."

"Our inability to provide adequate protection for the world's food supply is simply another manifestation of the same philosophical error that has led to the global environmental crisis as a whole:... because we feel no connection to the physical world, we trivialize the consequences of our actions. And because this linkage seems abstract, we are slow to understand what it means to destroy those parts of the environment that are crucial to our survival. We are, in effect, bulldozing the gardens of eden."

"The perceived inequity of the current arrangements in the global food system has led to the Third World's distrust of efforts on the part of multinational corporations to continue retrieving wild crop relatives from their centers of genetic diversity."

WHAT THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION IS DOING:

o Signing the Biodiversity treaty to protect the miraculous diversity of life around the globe. The treaty as interpreted by the US will also provide important economic gains to companies and countries alike. By preserving biodiversity, we stand a better chance of discovering new sources of food, fiber and medicines in the great unknown areas of the world. We also provide a mechanism and incentive for developing countries to voluntarily preserve their biodiversity.

o Creating a National Biological Survey within Interior to map out OUR nation's biological resources. Secretary Babbitt's initiative to consolidate scientific research within Interior so that we can centralize science and build a blueprint of the country's ecosystems will help us to head off emerging endangered species controversies. Although we hear the most about spotted owls and bald eagles, approximately XX % (will get tomorrow) of endangered species in America are plants. We can't even imagine the possibilities for food production and pest resistance that could be encapsulated in just one of these species. Both economically and environmentally, the NBS will be a useful tool for sound resources management decisions.

o National Research Initiative at USDA. The USDA budget as proposed by the Clinton Administration would provide \$30 million above the baseline for additional competitively awarded research grants in 1994 that would support approximately 500 additional research projects in areas such as food safety, sustainable agricultural production, forestry research and biotechnology. We plan to spend \$480 million by 1997 at improving research in these crucial areas. As the nation continues to face major challenges to ensure the food supply's safety and quality, sustaining natural resources, and continuing the competitiveness of US agricultural products in global trade, these additional funds will help us meet and conquer these challenges.

Attachment: The Seed Savers transcript.

Biological diversity underpins USDA programs in food, production agriculture, forest trees, soil conservation and protection. The many successes of U.S. production agriculture lie in many acquired genetic resources brought by new settlers, collected by plant explorers and exchanged between governments and then developed and improved by agricultural scientists. Today, the USDA maintains one of the worlds most important plant genebanks which provides agricultural genetic resources to support scientists all over the world. The central genebank is the National Seed Storage Laboratory located at Fort Collins, Colorado, and it has been alluded to as having more intrinsic value than the gold in Fort Knox. USDA programs provide seed and vegetative breeding stocks which enable breeders to produce varieties with natural disease and insect resistance. The consequent reduced use of chemical pesticides provides a more friendly environment with less soil and water pollution and human exposure to the chemicals.

The USDA also protects its agricultural and natural biodiversity by exercising quarantine restrictions on incoming organisms. These preventive measures protect plant and animal agriculture from invasive pathogens, insects and weeds. Taxonomists from USDA are involved in studying the organisms to carefully identify and classify those organisms intercepted in various ports of entry. At the same time, the USDA introduces biological control organisms to selectively attack predators which have been accidentally introduced.

Water and wind erosion of our Nation's soils is of concern to agriculture. Not only are these losses combatted through cultural practices but by selection of ground cover and tree wind breaks.

The USDA maintains considerable microbial diversity of industrially important organisms, fungi used in biological control of insects and nitrogen-fixing bacteria of legume crops.

USDA timber forest tree programs protect and study native stands which enable more effective land management and total biodiversity resource conservation.

The genes contained in this broad array of biological diversity carefully preserved for the future, provide a bountiful base for new biotechnological advancements. Unique mutant genetic stock collections have helped unravel genetic codes for important life sustaining and controlling processes. Databases being developed for plant and animal genomes enable scientists to associate genetic markers with economically valuable traits which can be selectively introduced into commercial products to the benefit of producers and consumers.

The USDA has been a leader in supporting the exchange and utilization of genetic resources throughout the world. Scientists from many agencies provide national expert leadership but also serve to advise international organizations such as FAO, UNDP, and MNEP on their relevant programs.

Biological diversity is nowhere as apparent as in the food store with the array of hundreds of choices of food products. The United States provides this array to its citizens through the effective conservation and utilization programs of the Federal, State, and private sectors working together. It is imperative that we regard and manage this diversity as a precious and almost irreplaceable resource.

USDA AGENCIES MAKING USE OF BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

- ARS** - Manages the Nation's agricultural genebanks, develops plants and animals for commercial agriculture, selects microbes for agricultural and industrial uses, selects insects for biological control and agricultural uses such as honey production, pollination of fruit, nut and field crops. Manages agricultural genetic resources database.
- CSRS** - Works with State Agricultural Experiment Stations in plant and animal improvement, preservation.
- NAL** - Developing database for genomes of plants and animals.
- FS** - Manages forest-tree biological diversity.
- APHIS-** Operates database of dangerous pests of agriculture, operates quarantine facilities in cooperation with ARS for introductions of plants and animals.
- SCS** - Operates plant material centers developing plants to reduce water and wind erosion of soils.

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DIVERSITY

A News Journal for the International Plant Genetic Resources Community

Vol.8, No.4, 1992

World Bank Establishes
Fund To Save Eastern
European Genebanks

UNEP Convenes Expert
Panels on Bioconvention

Carlos Ochoa
Honored by OAS

IARCs and NGOs Meet
To Discuss Differences

Farmers and Scientists
Work To Save African
Crop Germplasm

Cartagena Meeting
Strengthens Cassava
Biotechnology Network

UK Coordinates Plant
Conservation Efforts

Madigan Appoints U.S.
National Genetic
Resources Council

Merck-INBio Model
Influences New
Legislation

Nonpartisan Leaders
Urge U.S. To Ratify
Bioconvention

Corvallis Houses
Mint Collection

Consortium Plans
Chinese-North American
Plant Explorations

VIEWPOINTS:
*Reprise of Rio:
Survival's Sharp Edge*

IN REVIEW:
*Climatic Change and
Plant Genetic Resources*



"The single most strategic threat to the global food system is the threat of genetic erosion."

U.S. Vice-President Albert Gore