

# Seed Commons conceptual framework

*"We do not own the seeds, we borrow them from our Children"*  
-Mohawk Proverb

*"What if we called the Big Bang the Big Seeding when stardust became seeds for the Universe"* -Jim Embry [\(1\)](#)

*"Seeds are not just seeds, they're like ancestors. They have a history. Seeds have stories."* -Winona LaDuke

*"The rapid loss of the world's biological diversity is increasingly recognized as one of the most pressing issues of our time sitting alongside and interlinked with climate change. This crisis needs addressing."* -Dan Saladino

*Regenerating the world's biodiversity and fostering higher levels of diversity in our food system is essential for security and resilience – and ultimately for our survival.*

## **Cosmic Seeding**

What if we called the Big Bang the BIG SEEDING when stardust became seeds for the Universe? We would then regard Stardust flowing out as cosmic sparkles of seeds germinating all over...all around and through..and beyond the Universe. Some of those cosmic seeds then congealed in the form of our Terra Madre..Mother Earth. Then our Mother...our Sky Woman... seeded all her children.

Land, water, and sky all connect as one space, and the stories of ancestral figures and the creation of features on the land, in the water, and in the sky are all connected.

And now we, humans, who are still maturing into wise beings...homo sapiens....are bundles of Stardust congealed in human form and also serve as vessels of seeds.

## **Earth Seeding**

We recognize that when we touch, plant, save, honor seeds, we are touching stories, energy, spirit that goes back 200 million years to the rise of flowering trees and plants that produce seeds. As hu-womans arose 2-3 millions years ago these seeded plants were there to nourish and sustain us in-right relationship. Then 12,000 thousand years ago, women as the sacred vessels of germinated seeds learned from these plant mammas and began a deep-time and sacred relationship with seeds.

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## **Our Great Work**

In this 21st Century we find ourselves with a need for a paradigm shift, a Great Work, a Great Turning towards an Earth-centric human presence guided by individual and collective mental and spiritual transformation. ***We are the seeds of our ancestors dreams.*** We are inspired by seeds to germinate ideas and practices that help us become good ancestors. We believe that ***a new world is possible... on a quiet morning we can hear her breathing!***

## **How to Become a Good Ancestor**

In honor of the grand lineage of Seedkeepers who have faithfully passed down seeds for our nourishment, we make a restored commitment to care for these precious seeds for those yet to come. We become good ancestors by honoring relational foodways that restore seed security, seed sovereignty and honor the pathway of seed rematriation.

## **Seed Commons, Cosmos and Questions**

In the age of the increasing industrialization of our food and the erosion of biodiversity within cultural contexts, the Indigenous Seed Keeper Network asks the questions that assist communities of diverse cultures and backgrounds. Can we envision the Seed

Commons, and coordinate collaborative efforts to care for and protect our seeds that is in right-relationship to a diverse understanding of cultural values and cosmology?

How can we use the process of reclaiming our traditional seeds and food as a powerful means of cultural restoration? Integral in this seed movement is the cultural memories and stories, and how we regain a sense of who we are as a culture through our foods and seeds.

## **Seed Saving Organizations**

There are many organizations around the USA and Turtle Island that are doing this important work of seed farming, seed saving, seed sharing, seed breeding and have a collective desire and determination to care for seeds in a way that generates justice for land, water, flora, fauna, seeds, and people. We recognize that we are part of the Earth family and we are not separate entities; in order for any one family member to be well, the rest must also be well.

With the seeds at the center of our work, we are helping nurture the global seed movement which is fundamental to working towards a just and sustainable future. Our work is to support the development of Seed Commons around the USA-Turtle Island and to connect with seed communities around the world. We see the Seed Commons as a community of kindred spirits grounded in their bioregion with sacred regard for the watershed, soil, flora, fauna, and seeds!

## **Our Guiding Principles:**

### Biodiversity

We support and celebrate seed diversity. Seed diversity is the biological foundation of agriculture and agricultural crops have to evolve if we want them to survive. Because agricultural crops are domesticated their evolution is in our hands.

### Education

We are committed to offering access to seed education which is fundamental to the seed movement, essential to the health and preservation of cultural identity, and is a key element in climate change preparedness.

### Inclusion

We embrace diversity, equity, inclusion, social justice, and the rights of Nature alongside our partners and collaborators.

### Local community engagement

We dedicate our work in local communities to cultivate seed diversity and seed sovereignty.

### Seed justice

We believe all people should have fair and equitable access to local seeds, healthy food, financial support and knowledge to grow food and save seeds. Seeds are gifts from nature, care taken with great attention by the ancestors for thousands of years and should not be owned or patented, but freely planted and shared as a community resource. We support the work around seed repatriation as an important pathway to seed justice.

### Honoring seed stories

We honor the origins and stories of seeds and believe they need to be preserved. Stories have spirit, language, history, and lessons, heal us and teach us how to care for seeds, one another, and the natural world. We are committed to safeguarding, caring for and preserving seed heritage and cultural knowledge.

### Land acknowledgment

We acknowledge that the history of North America was based upon **stolen land** from Indigenous peoples and **stolen labor** from African peoples to do agriculture. This foundational contradiction has not been fully resolved and still presents the need to address justice, reconciliation and reparations.

We celebrate the culture of Indigenous peoples who were stewards of land and seeds long before European settlement. We recognize the Africans and other non-native communities for their contributions to our relational food and agriculture ways. We honor the Indigenous women who spent generations adapting and developing crops through sacred regard and relationship with seeds. We honor the African women who were forced from their homelands in Africa but carried various seeds hidden in their

braided hair across the Atlantic to new homes. We honor women as the Sky Women of seeds...the midwives of seeds.

### **A Seed Commons:**

- \*is a network of individuals, organizations, institutions, and government agencies that connect and collaborate around the distribution, education, planting, harvesting, cleaning, storing, research, seed forecasting, preserving, cultural exchange, rematriation, ritualizing, and honoring of seeds***
- \* seeks to utilize a storage facility which would include a freezer and refrigeration units for the storage and preservation of seeds as well as facilities for the cleaning, packaging and distribution of seeds***
- \* as a local or regional community Seed Commons groups can affiliate with seed companies and other seed hubs nationally and internationally***
- \* is a local network that offers educational workshops on planting and harvesting, cleaning, cultural history of seeds***
- \* will make seeds available in their local communities***
- \* will seek to receive seeds as needed from places such as the USDA Seed bank and other vaults around the country and world***
- \* will build capacity in order to give presentations and create greater awareness in the local and national community***
- \* has an interest in not only seeds of edible foods, flowers, trees and other seed bearing plants***
- \* works to advance knowledge about seed breeding and seed systems for resilient agricultural practices***
- \* strives to respect seeds as living beings,***
- \* organizes to increase seed literacy in our region,***
- \*prepares to question conventional seed relationships,***
- \*supports community partners,***
- \* endeavors to diversify the genetic, agricultural, and cultural presence of seeds in our region.***

### **Rationale**

Seeds are living beings that form the foundation of agriculture. Knowing where seeds come from and how they are grown is the root of seed literacy. This can lead to a deeper understanding of our global seed “system” and its impacts on local agriculture. Through seed awareness, infrastructure, growing, and sharing, we can engage in plant relationships that help create a diverse and truly local food system. An aspect of Seed Commons work is to nurture plants through their full lifecycles from seed to seed. The heartbeat of our seed work lives in our seed garden. This hand-scale growing space is a place of biodiversity. The soils host many species of plants all with their own specific seed cycles and connections to community partners. Throughout the season we seek to respect seeds as living beings, increase seed literacy in our region, question conventional seed relationships, support our community partners, and diversify the genetic, agricultural, and cultural presence of seeds in our region.

***“Sacred or Divine Sovereignty- Food is a gift from the Creator; in this respect***

***the right to food is sacred and cannot be constrained or recalled by colonial laws, policies and institutions. Indigenous food sovereignty is fundamentally achieved by upholding our sacred responsibility to nurture healthy, interdependent relationships with the land, plants and animals that provide us with our food.***” –Indigenous Food Sovereignty Network

### **Seed Rematriation**

Seed rematriation means the seeds are returning home. It's a process of growing, saving and sharing seeds that have been separated from their home communities. Seeds are relatives with cultural resonance that can heal pieces of the historical traumas of separation from home and erasure of Indigenous presence. The word “rematriation”, instead of “repatriation”, acknowledges that in many Native cultures, it is the women who hold the seeds. Seed rematriation represents a diversity of pathways that can lead to reunions between seeds and the hands and lands that held them. Creating seed abundance supports Indigenous organizations growing towards seed sovereignty.

### **Organic Seed Alliance**

[seedalliance.org/publications/a-policy-platform-for-seed/#climatecrisis](https://seedalliance.org/publications/a-policy-platform-for-seed/#climatecrisis)

*Together we can shape the future of food and farming with each seed we steward and plant. Together we can shape the future of seed policy with each advocacy action we take.*

*Policy work is essential to building and protecting seed systems in the US. As the foundation of our food and fiber supply, a comprehensive policy platform that centers diversity, equity, health, and the public interest is long overdue. Federal laws and regulations impact many aspects of seed systems, from how much public funding is directed toward managing our national germplasm collections to the scope of intellectual property protections on our seed supply. It is imperative that seed advocates and stewards engage in advocacy to advance shared policy priorities to ensure that this living, natural resource is managed respectfully, shared appropriately, and protected for future generations.*

## **Seed Network**

Seeds are fundamental to restoring relational food and agriculture ways because they produce the diverse, adaptable crops needed for healthy environments and communities. Since the beginning of agriculture, communities have engaged in saving and selecting seeds, resulting in thousands of unique varieties of crops adapted to different environments and cultural uses. This gives seeds deep cultural significance, as the means to produce and reproduce crop varieties that have played important roles in human sustenance and cuisines around the world. Modern plant breeding carried out by both public universities and private companies builds on a long history of variety selection by farmers and gardeners around the world.

Seed systems include all of the practices, infrastructure, and institutions involved in plant breeding and seed cultivation. Agricultural sustainability can be enhanced by seed systems that provide communities with diverse crop varieties that are well-adapted to the regions where they grow and are resilient to a wide array of stresses and disruption such as pests and diseases, droughts, weed pressure, and climate change. Seed systems are crucial in building community food systems that provide nutritious and culturally important foods through sustainable means.

Networks of farmers, gardeners, seed companies, and scientists throughout North America are building community seed systems that help to diversify the seeds available to local agriculture through regional seed cultivation, seed swaps and exchanges, and farmer-engaged plant breeding. Community seed systems include regional seed businesses, farmers who grow seed, farmer-plant breeders, university scientists, cooks and eaters, and many other stakeholders.

## **VISION: Seeding Our Future**

In the United States today, seed is mostly managed as a privatized commodity, not a living resource that requires careful stewardship. Economic, ethical, and social issues loom large, including consolidation of market and political power; egregious utility patents on naturally occurring genetic traits; cultural appropriation of plants; underfunded public seed collections and plant breeding programs; and the failed co-existence between genetically engineered (GE) and organic (and other non-GE) crops.

We envision a future where seed is not only managed as a commodity but as a collective commitment to our future. This work is informed by the decades of collective action carried out by major peasants and farmers movements across the globe that have fought to protect food security and steward seed for the common good. As part of this vision, growers would have adequate choice in seed free of restrictive forms of intellectual property rights (IPR) and GE traits; Indigenous seed keepers would control if, how, and when culturally significant plants are shared outside their communities; the seed industry would no longer be one of the most concentrated industries that ever existed; and public seed collections would serve the public good first, growing in capacity and diversity each year to secure a healthy and resilient food supply for future

generations.

### **Policy Work**

Policy work is essential to building and protecting seed relationships in the US. As the foundation of our food and fiber supply, a comprehensive policy platform that centers diversity, equity, health, and the public interest is long overdue. It is imperative that seed advocates and stewards engage in advocacy to advance shared policy priorities to ensure that this living, natural resource is managed respectfully, shared appropriately, and protected for future generations.

Together we can shape the future of food and farming with each seed we steward and plant. Together we can shape the future of seed policy with each advocacy action we take.

### **Seed advocacy**

Advocacy includes a wide range of activities to influence policy makers. It requires building capacity, relationships, and networks to leverage coordinated messaging and efforts to achieve a shared policy goal. Grassroots organizing and direct lobbying at all levels of government is the foundation of successful policy change. This work includes educating the public about issues that impact our seed supply and the growers who steward it, inspiring an activation of their voices. This work also includes public education, legislative advocacy, meetings with regulatory agencies, and at times the judicial system is required for achieving much-needed change.

### **Participatory policy**

Working toward this vision requires close engagement with as many seed advocates and stewards as possible, including recognizing the ancestral Indigenous and peasant seed keepers, plant breeders, and communities that originally domesticated and diversified seed and food production. It also requires a diversity of strategies for demonstrating both solidarity and resistance.

Participatory policymaking facilitates the inclusion of individuals and groups in the design of policy recommendations to achieve accountability, transparency, and engagement to influence specific needs. This approach also results in better informed policy that matches the needs of communities.

This policy platform builds on visionary policies that center the common good. We invite you to adopt this platform, or pieces of it, as an organization, business – and, most importantly, as an individual – who understands that to advocate for transformative seed policy is to advocate for a stronger foundation of relational food ways that can transform our food and agriculture system..

### **Key objectives and guiding principles of Seed Commons**

#### **Key Objectives:**

\*Level the playing field for seed growers and independent seed companies  
\*Advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in policies and

polycymaking \*Resist the privatization of seeds and genetic traits  
\*Increase investments in public plant breeding as a climate change solution \*Support ecological seed production by expanding organic seed acreage \*Protect the genetic integrity of organic and other non-GMO seed  
\*Increase the diversity and quantity of organic seed available in the marketplace.

### Guiding Principles

\*Seeds are a vital yet vulnerable natural resource that must be respected and managed in a manner that enhances their long-term viability and integrity.  
\*The maintenance and improvement of genetic and biological diversity are essential for the success of sustainable, healthy food systems and the greater global food supply.  
\*The equitable exchange of plant genetics, with appropriate acknowledgement, consent, and compensation, enhances innovation and curtails the negative impacts of concentrated ownership and consolidated power in decision making. \*We support grassroots policy action that empowers local and Indigenous communities to advocate for autonomy and protections in determining the usage and sharing of culturally important seeds to avoid biopiracy and inequitable appropriation. \*Sharing information enhances research and leads to better adaptation of best practices.

### Grower participation

\*Grower participation in decision-making—in the field and in policy—results in the co creation of knowledge and shared solutions.  
\*Action must be taken to remove structural barriers to a just and equitable seed and food system.  
\*Agricultural research should have goals beyond extraction and consumption that increase the value of agroecosystems, including beneficial health outcomes for soil, plants, animals, and humans.  
Public institutions and public employees should serve the country's agricultural needs, particularly the diverse and alternative systems less supported by the current economic system.  
\*Growers have inherent rights as agricultural stewards, including the ability to save, own, and sell seeds, and are key leaders in developing best practices, applicable research, and agricultural regulations and policy that affect them and the future of seed. \*Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) should be recognized as the foundation of organic farming and agroecology and uplifted in partnerships and leadership.  
\*The precautionary principle of protecting food systems from harm when scientific investigation has found potential risk helps safeguard food security in the future. \*Organic food should begin with organic seed.

### Seed policy platform

SEED, NOT GREED: Promote fair policies that manage seed as a living natural resource, not a consolidated corporate commodity

#### 1. Break Up Big Seed–

Stop seed industry consolidation by corporate giants to protect the rights of



independent seed growers, plant breeders, and farmers.

## 2. Remove Barriers to Seed Saving and Research

Challenge restrictive forms of intellectual property rights (IPR) on seed and promote fair laws and policies through advocacy to Congress, the US Patent and Trademark Office, Federal Trade Commission, and US Department of Agriculture.

## 3. Build capacity, increase resilience

Demand inclusive policies that remove barriers, increase participation, and support regional adaptability to build more resilient seed systems.

## 4. Confront the Climate Crisis

Promote public plant breeding, decentralized seed systems, Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), and organic practices as solutions to mitigating the effects of climate change and helping society adapt to these changes and their consequences.

## 5. Achieve Equitable Participation in Seed Systems

Advocate for policy initiatives that decentralize power in agriculture and advance equity and justice, including increasing access to seed, land, financial resources, information, political standing, and educational and professional trajectories for BIPOC and underfunded, underrepresented, or historically excluded communities.

## 6. Promote the public good

Support transparent policies that ensure accountability that public research dollars are spent addressing the needs of farmers, growers, and their communities.

## 7. Ensure Public Research Supports the Common Good

Advocate for increased, targeted, and diversified public research investments in organic plant breeding and seed initiatives that hold agencies accountable in prioritizing challenges faced by seed producers and establishing community-university partnerships that strengthen the links between public research and grassroots seed movements.

## 8. Expand Public Seed Collections

Advocate for adequate funding and management of the National Plant Germplasm System to address the backlog of seed regeneration, protect genetic diversity, and ensure equitable access by growers, breeders, and those working on rematriation as

well as prioritizing community of origin seed keepers requesting access to culturally appropriate seeds.

## 9. Support organic seed growers

Advance organic policies that help protect and grow the organic seed supply including enhancing the integrity of the organic label.

## 10. Enhance the Integrity of the Organic Label

Strengthen the organic seed requirement, help organic producers meet the organic

seed regulation, clarify which plant-breeding methods should be excluded or allowed in organic production, and support the organic seed market and the seed growers who fill this supply.

#### 11. Address GMO Contamination

Address GMO concerns in the organic and non-GMO seed sector and advocate for strong federal policy reform to level the playing field, promote true “coexistence” between GE and non-GE farming systems, and establish fair compensation for economic and other harms associated with GE contamination.

#### 12. Support State-Level Seed Initiatives

State-level seed policy can fill gaps at the federal level to strengthen protections for organic and non-GE seed and seed growers.

### **How to Become a Good Ancestor**

In honor of the grand lineage of Seedkeepers who have faithfully passed down seeds for our nourishment, we make a restored commitment to care for these precious seeds for those yet to come.

"All things will outlast us, the land will change, and survive ... Yes, the land will be different. But new things will come of it."

#### Resources

\*<https://www.pbs.org/independentlens/documentaries/seed-the-untold-story/>

\*Indigenous Seedkeepers Network.

[www.nativefoodalliance.org](http://www.nativefoodalliance.org)

\*<https://sierraseeds.org/indigenous-seedkeepers-network/>

\*<https://emergencemagazine.org/interview/reseeding-the-food-system>

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\*<https://seedalliance.org/>

\*<https://seedalliance.org/directory/>

\*[https://seedalliance.org/all-publications/?fwp\\_publication\\_category=how-to-guides](https://seedalliance.org/all-publications/?fwp_publication_category=how-to-guides)

\*<https://www.organicseedcommons.org>

\*Seed Mother: Coming Home

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVqmM\\_DUZtk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVqmM_DUZtk)

\*<https://thecommontable.eu/sky-womans-daughters/>

\*<https://medium.com/dppa-politically-speaking/seeds-of-change-how-indigenous-womens-ancestral-knowledge-can-bolster-climate-security-4a2ffdf84b3d>

\*<https://www.google.com/amp/s/slideplayer.com/amp/7861365/>

\*<https://footnote.wordpress.ncsu.edu/2021/11/04/the-role-of-native-american-women-in-agriculture-11-5-2012/>

<https://humansandnature.org/seeding-stardust/>

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