

Certificate of Recognition

In recognition of his remarkable contributions to the fields of agricultural biodiversity preservation and regeneration and Appalachian Studies, Sierra Club Kentucky Chapter honors

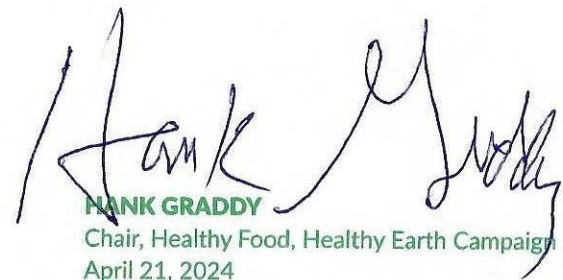
Bill Best

In his diligence and creativity, Best has shown that heirloom seeds confer ecological resilience in the face of climate change, as well as cultural resilience in the face of agro-corporate homogeneity. His life and work demonstrate how something as seemingly simple as heirloom seedkeeping has world-changing power for social, health, aesthetic, and environmental well-being. With his research, teaching, writing, speaking—and most important, with his fifty-year practice of daily, yearly seedsaving—Best has shown the region and the world the planet-saving power of agricultural biodiversity.



JULIA FINCH

Director, Kentucky Chapter
April 21, 2024



HANK GRADDY

Chair, Healthy Food, Healthy Earth Campaign
April 21, 2024



Sierra Club Kentucky Chapter recognizes Bill Best for fifty years of agricultural biodiversity preservation and regeneration.

Long before heirloom seeds made a resurgence, Bill Best had recognized their power—for flavor, cultural memory, ecological sustainability, nutrition, and agrarian livelihood.

A renowned in situ agrobiodiversity farmer, and seedkeeper, Best is also an author, scholar, philosopher, educator, advocate, community leader, mentor, and visionary. From rural, mountainous North Carolina, Best grew up on a subsistence farm shortly after the Depression. His earliest memories were of his grandfather explaining to him—at two, with hoe in hand—which plants to weed (cockleburs) and which to keep (sweet potatoes). A recruiter from tuition-free Berea College came through their community when Best was in high school; Best applied, was accepted, and left to attend college in Kentucky, obtaining a bachelor's in Biology and Physical Education. He completed his doctorate in Appalachian Studies at University of Massachusetts—the first person ever to earn a PhD in the then-unprecedented field. His dissertation moves from autobiographical "Some Personal Considerations: Pedagogy of a Hillbilly" to the philosophical "Historical and Cultural Considerations," about how Appalachia is framed as a colony. Best returned to Berea in 1962, teaching there until his retirement in 2002, when he founded the Center to save heirloom seeds. Bill Best is one of the recognized founders of modern Appalachian Studies. He is a pioneer in such programs as Torchlight and Upward Bound. He also co-founded the Berea and Lexington farmers markets, and has been a leader in agricultural biodiversity preservation and regeneration for generations now, generously mentoring hundreds of seedkeepers in the region and the many that come from afar to learn and savor the myriad benefits of heirloom foods. He has won many local and regional awards, and inspired a generation of seedkeepers in his famous seed swaps and numerous presentations on Appalachian agrobiodiversity, and the agroecology and political economy of seeds. In his short story *A Return Visit With Jack & The Giant Beanstalk*—a satire of agribusiness corporate consolidation, Jack defeats the giants San Monto, Agra Con, and Gill Car, to declare: "I'm keeping my beans and will see to it that they're spread as far and as wide as possible" (Best 2010).

The Center now grows 700+ varieties of heirloom beans on its hilly fields, overlooking rolling forested mountains. Best has been crucial in documenting how Central and Southern Appalachia are considered a North American agrobiodiversity “hotspot,” and encompass thousands of locally adapted heirloom vegetable and grain varieties as well as numerous heritage fruit varieties. He is the author of *From Existence to Essence* (1990); *One Hundred Years of Appalachian Visions, 1897–1996* (2000); *Saving Seeds, Preserving Taste: Heirloom Seed Savers in Appalachia* (2013); and *Kentucky Heirloom Seeds: Growing, Eating, Saving* (2017). In his diligence and creativity, Best has shown that heirloom seeds confer ecological resilience in the face of climate change, as well as cultural resilience in the face of agro-corporate homogeneity. His life and work have demonstrated how something as seemingly simple as heirloom seedkeeping actually has world-changing power for social, health, aesthetic, and environmental well-being. How it once comprised the heart of agriculture, and will need to again as climate crises abound. With his research, teaching, writing, speaking—and most important, with his fifty-year practice of daily, yearly seedsaving—Best has shown the region and the world the planet-saving power of agricultural biodiversity and the agrarian skills needed to upkeep it for (agro)ecological and (agri)cultural recovery.

CUMBERLAND SEED COMMONS CONFERENCE

Berea College

April 21, 2024

