

A New Way To Release Plant Varieties To The Public

The Open Source Seed Initiative (OSSI) is unlocking access to new plant varieties. Most private companies and public university plant breeders restrict seed saving and resale of new, improved varieties. The OSSI is doing the opposite. Its new and improved varieties are available to everyone.

"Our only restriction is that these varieties can't be patented or restricted by anyone," says Irwin Goldman, Horticulture department chair at the University of Wisconsin. "Anyone can select and develop a new variety from them, but the new variety can't be patented or restricted, either."

Goldman explains that OSSI seeds are both like and unlike "heritage" seed varieties. Both can be planted, harvested and the seed saved for replanting without restriction. However,

if a breeder selects a new variety from a heritage variety, they may be able to patent it and restrict access to it. The OSSI uses what is called the "protected commons" to ensure that future generations of released varieties are kept free.

Long-time plant breeder Goldman is one of 20 members of the OSSI that has already released 36 varieties of 14 species, including 2 carrots developed by him. They include a malting barley from Oregon State University, two emmer (an early type of wheat) from Washington State University, and a sampling of other crops from other public and private breeders.

"More than 20 of them are courtesy of Frank Morton and his Wild Garden Seed Co.," says Goldman. "Eventually we hope

to have a full catalog of seed, a collection of as many different crops as possible."

Goldman explains that readers can buy OSSI varieties through seed companies like Wild Garden Seed (ph 541 929-4068; www.wildgardenseed.com) and High Mowing Organic Seeds (ph 802 472-6174; www.highmowingseeds.com). An introductory collection of 15 seed packets was available for sale this past spring from the OSSI's online store.

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Open Source Seed Initiative makes new and improved varieties available to everyone, such as these carrots from the University of Wisconsin.

"No Gluten" Grain Catching On Fast

Gluten free, mineral rich and high in protein, teff is a traditional Ethiopian cooking grain that is growing in popularity. Described as having a nutty flavor, it can be cooked like porridge, added to stews, ground into flour and used in all types of baked goods. However, conditions have to be just right to grow it, according to a spokesperson for The Teff Company.

"If it is rained on at harvest, that can ruin the crop as it sprouts very quickly," said a spokesperson for The Teff Company. "We contract with producers to grow it here in Idaho in a very arid environment, and even here it can be difficult. However, teff can be grown for hay in many parts of the country."

Company founder Wayne Carlson has been growing and supplying teff to Ethiopian and Eritrean communities in the U.S. for nearly 30 years. He says a pound of teff seed, which compares in size to poppy seed, can produce up to a ton of grain in only 12 weeks.

He recommends a very firm seedbed. Seeding is most effective when seed is spread

on the ground surface and cultpacked or rolled.

The company sells its grain and flour in 5-lb. (\$25) and 25-lb. (\$65) bags. The Teff Company also sells a patent-protected variety, Dessie Summer Lovegrass Seed, suggested for hay production, for \$75 for 25 lbs., shipping included. Carlson reports that a single Dessie plant can form as many as 3,500 tillers at maturity. He recommends it as a nutrient rich hay with health benefits for horses as well as a top yielding grain.

Hunton Family Farms produces teff, marketing it through their Camas Country Mill store (ph 541 357-5448; www.camascountrymill.com). A spokesman says they're hard pressed to meet demand. While they sell it as grain (\$6 for 1.5 lbs. or 25 lbs. for \$40) and as flour (1 lb. for \$4 or \$14.50 for 4 lbs.), they don't have enough to sell for seed. By mid June, they were nearly out of flour and grain.

Jay Davison, area forage and alternative crop specialist, University of Nevada

Cooperative Extension, has worked with 15 different varieties in his trials. He reports there are more than 4,000 varieties identified in Ethiopia. The USDA Agriculture Research Service Plant Germplasm Introduction and Testing Research Station, Prosser, Wash., has nearly 400 numbered cultivars in its collection, though most have not been evaluated for either grain or grass production.

Davison seeded his 20-sq. ft. plots at a 3 lbs./acre rate. The top variety produced more than 1,500 lbs./acre. The bottom 5 produced less than 500 lbs./acre. Lodging was common with all the top yielding varieties.

Davison advises producers considering growing teff to conduct small-scale trials of unknown varieties, or only plant commercial varieties with proven yields.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, The Teff Co., 2520 Sundance Rd., Nampa, Idaho 83651 (ph 208 461-5634 or 888 822-2221; questions@teffco.com; www.teffco.com).



Teff is a traditional Ethiopian cooking grain that's growing in popularity.

Cover Crops Becoming Key Part Of Seed Business

When Bob Fairclough took on a forage seed dealership in corn and soybean country, he had no idea cover crops were going to blossom. Cover crops have gone from being a niche idea to a nationally recommended practice practically overnight. Farmers who had forgotten what oats were and had never heard of tillage radishes are planting them in their corn and soybean fields. The good news for Fairclough was that most retailers weren't interested, and some still aren't.

"It started really small with a couple guys doing 100 acres or less," says Fairclough. "We're in year 5 now, and last year we hooked up with an aerial applicator to do a couple thousand acres that way. That was in addition to drill and broadcast seeding. We have customers doing entire 1,500-acre farms, and larger customers doing a third of their acres."

Fairclough's business has come a long way since the early days. Customers progressed quickly to clover and then cereal rye and triticale, which require spring burndown or rolling (see articles in FARM SHOW'S Vol. 28, No. 3; Vol. 34, No. 5; Vol. 36, No. 3; Vol. 37, No. 2.)

"As guys got more comfortable with the concept, and began to see results, they've graduated to more involved mixes," explains Fairclough.

The success of some and the resulting media coverage brought more business to Fairclough and his son Garrett. It also brought

unreal expectations from some customers.

"The thing I battle is that cover crops are some kind of miracle; that if you plant this, you'll get 6 bu. more per acre or have no weed pressure," says Fairclough. "Cover crops require their own management. You don't just throw the seed out there and forget about it."

The same media excitement has also created opportunities for shady dealers, warns Fairclough. Beware of guys offering 1,000 bushels of bin-run cereal rye.

"Is it contaminated with other seeds?" asks Fairclough. "You may pay \$1 less per bushel, but it could cost you more in the long run. In general, it is a matter of working with a dependable supplier to be sure the seed is clean and certified, and that you know where it's coming from. I know what to look for and who to deal with."

Fairclough notes that not all triticale, radish, oats or even rye grass are the same. He had to learn the differences and where they fit so he could advise his customers.

"As a dealer, while I can't be an expert on everything, I know where to get an answer," says Fairclough. "I try to offer services others don't."

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Tillage radishes and oats were planted with a drill in this field in late August.



Photo shows the size of tillage radishes after 3 months.