

Legality of the Legacy: Cultivating Seed Lending Programs at Iowa Public Libraries



Seed Libraries

- **WHAT?** “Non-profit, governmental, or cooperative organization that donates and receives donations of seeds” – to promote seed saving, educate the public about seeds, & provide access to free seeds (*Revised Statutes of Nebraska*).

- **WHERE?** Public, academic, and tribal libraries; food banks and food shelves in the US.

Importance of Seed Saving

- 2015: “Big Four” (Monsanto, DuPont/Pioneer, Syngenta, Dow AgroSciences) own more than 50% of planet’s seed supply.
- 1984: 5,000 non-hybrid varieties of seeds – available in seed catalogs.
- 1998: 88% of seeds – no longer commercially available.
- Saving seeds → seed security; genetic diversity; seeds in the hands of growers and consumers.

Types of Seeds

- **Open pollinated** plants – pollinated by animals or wind. Genetically diverse; variation can occur season to season.
- **Heirloom seeds** = open pollinated seeds – “naturally emergent, historically cultivated, and developed in specific regions.” (*Encycl. of Organic, Sustainable, and Local Food*)
- **Genetically modified** (GM) seeds – bred with specific changes engineered into plant’s DNA; patented & protected by copyright law.
- **Hybrid** plants – bred with genetic material from two different plants → Hybrid seeds will not reproduce plants with hybrid traits.

Seed Library Timeline

- 2000: First US Seed Library launches in California
- 2012: Ely Public Library – first Seed Library in Iowa
- 2014: First legal challenge to seed collection
- 2015: First International Seed Library Forum
- 2015: Roughly 400 Seed Libraries in 46 states

Selected State’s Responses

2014: **Pennsylvania** Dept. of Agriculture: Joseph T. Simpson Library’s seed collection violates *2004 Pennsylvania Seed Act*.

2014: **Minnesota** Dept. of Agriculture: Duluth Public Library violates Seed Law. The Duluth City Council passes *Resolution 14-0630R: Resolution Supporting Seed Saving Within the City of Duluth*

2015: **Nebraska** Senator B. Harr (D-8) introduces *Legislative Bill 544* – revise Seed Law to exempt seed libraries from germination testing requirement.

2015: **Iowa** Rep. J. Klein (R-78) introduces *House File 389* – to exempt noncommercial seed libraries and seed swaps from Dept. of Agriculture’s regulatory responsibilities.

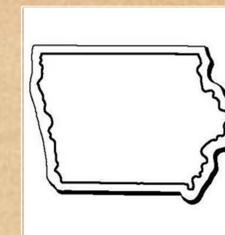
Seed Law Compliancy

- State Seed Law follows Federal Seed Act.
- Public libraries in several states – contacted by local Departments of Agriculture for violations of:

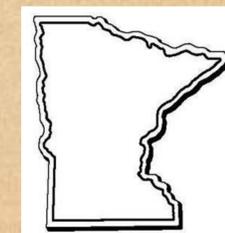
1. **Labelling**
Each packet of seeds must contain information about seed origin; variety; lot number; germination; & labeler.
2. **Germination Testing**
400 seeds from same cultivar – grown to see how many will sprout/germinate.
3. **Permitting Fee**
Registration fees: around \$50.

How Can Iowa Libraries Launch Seed Collections?

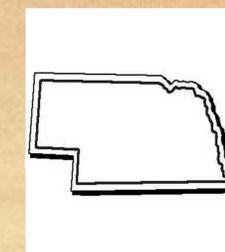
- Partner with community organizations to assess patrons’ prior knowledge and skills.
- Pair collection with related resources: print material and seed saving/gardening workshops.
- Educate patrons on importance of correctly labelling returned seeds.
- Seed companies (legally barred from selling seeds 12 months or older) can donate seeds to begin collection.
- Set guidelines to distinguish seed library from commercial seed ventures, ie: library must dispose of any commercially donated seed at the end of the season, refuse seeds treated with pesticides.



Iowa
7 Seed Libraries:
*6 Public Libraries
*1 Food Pantry



Minnesota
9 Seed Libraries:
*4 Public Libraries
*3 Tribal Libraries
* 1 Academic Library
*1 Farmers’ Market



Nebraska
3 Seed Libraries
*3 Public Libraries

Madeline Jarvis

Spring 2015

School of Library and Information Science

