



COMMUNITY SEED BANKS

For greater food security



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The Board of Directors of the seed bank "Hope for the future" from the El Morcillo community, Municipality of San Juan de Limay, headed by president **Florencio Pérez Matute**, clearly recognise the benefit of this special bank, where the currency is native seeds and the profit is food security.

"Failure is when we worry just about planting and then lose the seed, because it doesn't germinate due to some disease or plague in the soil. If the

first crop fails and we have to get more seeds to sow again, many times we don't have any more.

That happened 7 years ago, it was a big problem, you couldn't get seeds in the community. The FEDICAMP technician told us: 'Why don't you try to make a little seed collection bank?' He got us a quintal (46kg) of maize, a quintal of bean and a quintal of sorghum and that's how we started.



Then, since we didn't like those beans, we got a little bunch of native beans from the community and we saved up seeds for the next year, but we barely got any for the bank.

The traditional local varieties that are being lost are the olotillo maize and beans such as the Santa Elena, white-pod, revolcado and Honduras H44, as well as a type of chili that we called 'Maravilla' (marvellous).

Then we got the idea of sowing a plot together to solve the problem. We all worked together on that plot and everything we harvested went towards the bank.

Now there are 24 families benefiting from the seeds. The seed bank is always open for whoever wants in, for whoever needs seeds."

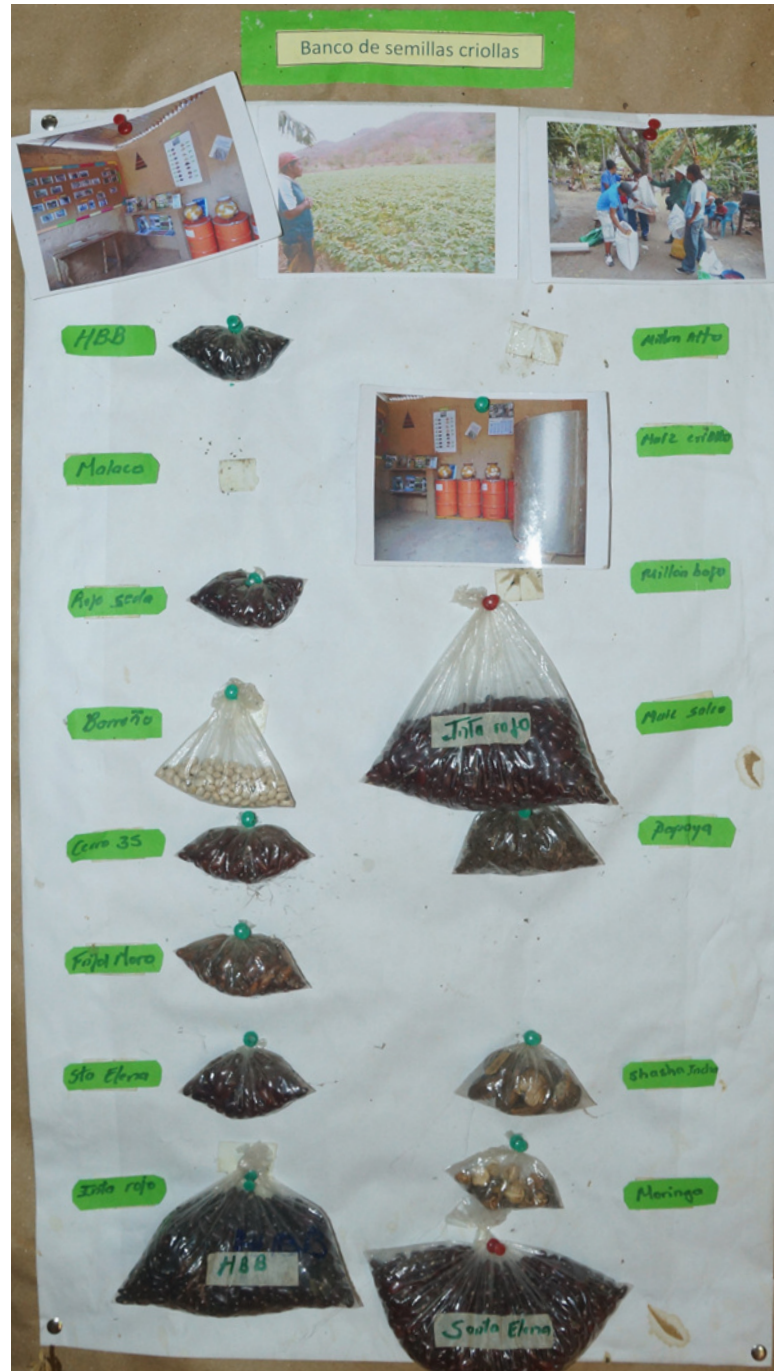
Purpose of a seed bank

- ✓ For the last several years, because of climate change and the El Niño and La Niña phenomena, it's been hard to predict the start of the rainy season and rainfall behaviour. With two subsequent years of drought, the native varieties in an area can be lost. In fact, many farmers lost all their reserves of native seeds after they planted and lost their harvests up to 3 times in a row, due to a lack or excess of water.
- ✓ On the other hand, many farmers don't have the resources to buy barrels or metal silos.
- ✓ A community seed bank limits these risks, safeguarding quality seed supplies for several sowing cycles.

How does a seed bank work?

- ✓ The community must organise itself, naming the 5 members of the seed bank Board of Directors and mutually agreeing on the regulations of the bank.
- ✓ A seed bank is just like any other bank: it needs people who deposit money and clients to lend the money to, except that in this case, instead of money it's seeds. Some seed banks require twice the amount of return for every pound, arroba (11.5 kg) or quintal (46kg) of seeds that is lent, so that the bank can accumulate more seeds to lend or sell to more people.
- ✓ In the case of the El Morcillo seed bank, they have an interesting method: the Board of Directors plant beans in one of their member's plots, rotating each cycle. They all care for it together, and the harvest is destined to increase the bank supply. This way they can guarantee the quality of the seed and don't have to depend on whether the partners return the borrowed seeds on time.
- ✓ They have a policy that regulates the seed bank:

"The policy says that each month we have to get together to see what we're going to do and come to an agreement. On the 18th of every month, the 5 of us in the board of directors get together, and we meet with the 24 partners when we have to work on a garden or provide some sort of training.



We split up the work and write down everybody's work contributions because when it comes time to distribute, each person's share is according to the work they've done.



That's why we keep a record of who works what days on soil conservation or plot sowing.

If for whatever reason someone doesn't go to work on the plot, it's written down that that person owes a day and he has to make up for it the next time around or do some other work that needs to be done on the plot.

For example, if he doesn't go on sowing day, he has to go work on weeding day to make up for it, so that we're all even.

So that's how we all have equal rights, if we go hand in hand. If someone owes a lot of days, we have to reduce his share from the fund we've got.

If a partner leaves the community, he can claim his share in seeds or cash.

If a partner dies, his heirs can keep working on the bank or withdraw his share, because the bank isn't going to fall apart because someone dies. The tools always stay, though, because they're for the group to work."

What do you need to start a seed bank?

- ✓ A safe warehouse, with no humidity.
- ✓ One or several silos if you're going to keep large quantities of the same seed.
- ✓ Barrels (plastic is best) with airtight sealing.
- ✓ Earthenware jugs with lids.
- ✓ Tools.

How to cure the seeds in an environmentally friendly way?

There are several natural products to cure seeds, especially bean seeds:

- ✓ Cow manure ashes
 - ✓ Lime
 - ✓ Beanstalks
 - ✓ Mashed garlic (one head of garlic per quintal)
 - ✓ Chilli
 - ✓ Neem leaves
 - ✓ Lemongrass leaves
- According to farmers' opinion, the best results for bean seeds are achieved with garlic, chilli, and beanstalks.
- If you're going to cure the seed with ash, the grain must be very dry. You can't do this if you want to sell it for human consumption, because the ash makes it harden.
- If you're going to cure with ground chilli, you must protect your hands and eyes.
- If you want to cure with lemongrass leaves, you must let the cut leaves dry for 2 or 3 days before use.

Humidity test:

1. Dry coarse salt in a skillet.
2. Place in a glass container.
3. Add the seeds and mix with the salt, shaking the glass.
4. If the salt sticks to the grains or the glass, the seeds are still too damp and must continue to dry.



Photos courtesy of Frank Tondeur

Recommendations

- ✓ Before handing over the seeds, you need to do a germination test. Randomly choose 100 grains from the sack, barrel or silo. Place them in a row on a wet newspaper and cover them with another newspaper. You can also place them between 2 damp towels. 2-3 days later, check how many seeds have germinated. In order to give the seeds to the other farmers, at least 80 seeds or more must have germinated.
- ✓ Select native variety seeds that are adapted to the area, the soil and the climate.
- ✓ Always keep a reserve of the native local varieties, as Don Florencio recommends:

“In previous years we lost the seeds and had no backup supply. We had to buy seeds all over again, and perhaps since we were in a rush to solve the problem we ended up buying a seed that people didn’t like. So that we don’t have that same problem again, we leave a small reserve supply in case we lose that variety.”

- ✓ Do not keep seeds for longer than a year. It’s better to sell them, even if it’s for consumption: “If we have seeds left over, we can’t let it just sit there for two years so we give it to farmers in need who don’t have maize or bean grains to provide for his family, under the same condition: for every arroba we give you, you give us two back.”



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Credits

Production: Roberto Vallecillo • **Revision:** Lutgarda Barahona, Louise Joyce, Mark Camburn
Translation: Juliana Marín, Mark Camburn • **Photography:** Pascal Chaput • **Design:** Enmente •
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www.sciaf.org.uk

Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund
 19 Park Circus
 Glasgow G3 6BE
 T: 0141 354 5555
 E: sciaf@sciaf.org.uk

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