

SPRING 2026

 SeedChange

# Jottings

## WHEN FARMERS LEAD, INNOVATION GROWS

**Farmers are innovators.** They test seeds, observe what thrives, and make decisions based on their land, climate, and community needs. Through hands-on research and participatory seed selection, they discover varieties that are resilient, productive, and perfectly suited to their environment.

SeedChange partners with farmers across Africa, Latin America, and Canada to strengthen seed diversity, build climate-resilient food systems, and help local solutions thrive. **The result is innovation that is practical, transformative, and grounded in the ingenuity and insight of farmers.**



*Jottings is the name our founder, Dr. Lotta Hitschmanova, gave to the stories she captured in her leather-bound notebook while visiting programs around the world. Sharing these jottings with supporters has been a tradition since 1945.*



*Victoria Aguirre,  
Honduras*



Pueblo Viejo, Honduras



Toribia Herrera and her mother share pigeon pea cookies

## Seeds of Innovation: How Toribia Herrera bred a better bean

Toribia Herrera was born in the community of Pueblo Viejo, Yoro, Honduras, a place surrounded by mountains where agriculture shapes daily life. From an early age, she inherited a deep desire to learn from her mother and grandmother. “From the moment I could walk in the fields, I wanted to understand how different seeds could grow better or worse depending on how we cared for them,” she remembers.

Together with her mother, Cayetana, Toribia helped found the local agricultural committee, or CIAL (Comité de Investigación Agrícola Local), a farmer research team introduced to the region by FIPAH (Fundación para la Investigación Participativa con Agricultores Hondureños) with support from SeedChange. They named their CIAL Nueva Vida, or New Life. **Made up entirely of women, the group set out to solve one pressing challenge: the lack of bean varieties that could thrive in their highland community.**

“We learned by experimenting ourselves — planting, observing, and selecting what worked best for our land.” –Toribia Herrera

They established a series of research trials, testing a wide variety of beans from earlier generations while incorporating their own cultural practices. After several years of careful

trials, the women selected a suitable bean variety they called Cayetana 85, honouring Toribia’s mother, who participated throughout the process, contributing decades of knowledge and experience to the project.

**“Innovation does not always come from outside experts,” Toribia says. “It comes from watching, testing, and learning from what we already know about our community and climate.”**

**The CIAL has transformed Toribia into a recognized community leader.** Together with FIPAH, she helped organize workshops to teach other farmers about sustainable practices and the importance of crop diversification. In her role as a seed guardian, she ensures that rural families have access to quality seeds.

One of the main benefits of their work has been adopting agroecology — using natural fertilizers, biological pest control, and avoiding imported inputs. This approach has not only improved the quality of their produce but also protected the biodiversity of their land.

Toribia’s dedication has not gone unnoticed. She is recognized for promoting sustainable agriculture at both the community and municipal levels. **Yet for her, the greatest reward is seeing her community thrive and knowing that the next generation will continue the work she and her fellow farmers began.**



# CARROTS WITH CHARACTER:

## Patrice Fortier brings Fantasia to life

“This participatory breeding program, where the work is collective and the varieties we develop stay in the public domain as a common good, is a way that I can put my values into practice.” –Patrice Fortier

Deep in Quebec’s Kamouraska region, Patrice Fortier tends gardens that have become living laboratories of biodiversity. A visual artist turned farmer, Patrice left Montreal in 1998 to study market gardening. In 2001, he founded La Société des plantes — a farming project devoted to conserving rare seeds and breeding vegetables adapted to his region’s cool, windy climate.

For more than 25 years, Patrice has combined creativity, close observation, and rigorous on-farm selection to steward vegetable, ornamental, and medicinal plants. In a micro-climate where seed crops like carrots and beets can thrive without the humidity and disease pressure of southern Quebec, he has patiently selected varieties for flavour, resilience, and cultural significance. His work has introduced unfamiliar heirlooms to Quebec kitchens and highlighted how regions shape taste — with recipes and stories that connect growers and cooks.

That spirit of farmer-led innovation is at the heart of his collaboration with SeedChange and CANOVI (Canadian Organic Vegetable Improvement). CANOVI is a participatory vegetable breeding and variety trialling network with farmers across Canada. One of the goals of this project is to help farmers adapt and create new varieties of organic carrots for Canada’s diverse growing regions. Patrice participated in this project by trialling a diverse carrot population called Fantasia.

**Patrice saw something special in Fantasia: its unique floral, perfumed flavour and its vibrant diversity of colours and shapes — qualities often overlooked in a market that prizes uniformity.** Soon, he became one of the first farmers to introduce the variety to Canadian markets. In

a CANOVI-led evaluation of carrot varieties, Fantasia earned the highest average score and was the variety most growers said they would plant again.

When farmers are involved in the process of selecting and creating new varieties, they develop crops that are best suited to their own growing and market conditions. This is research rooted in farmers’ realities.

**The Fantasia carrot demonstrates what’s possible when farmers and researchers collaborate — creating resilient varieties that protect plant heritage and ensure that the future of seed innovation remains in farmers’ hands.**



*Patrice Fortier on his farm in Kamouraska, Quebec*

SeedChange donors  
Rebecca Ivanoff and  
Asher Segel-Brown



## SLOW WORK, BIG IMPACT: REBECCA IVANOFF AND THE POWER OF SEED

Rebecca Ivanoff's inspiration to donate to SeedChange began with an introduction.

More than 15 years ago, while in graduate school, she began working with farmer-researchers in rural Honduras thanks to an introduction from Dr. Sally Humphries, an academic and current SeedChange board member with deep ties to the region. That first introduction set her on a path she continues to follow today.

"I remember sitting in a kitchen with a farmer while she made tortillas. As we talked about maize, she explained how colour carried meaning, and how tortillas were valued not just for taste, but for how they looked, felt, and represented in the household. I realized that farmers were growing multiple varieties not only for yield, but for flavour, texture, cooking qualities, and cultural significance."

**She came to understand that seed was not just an input. It was knowledge, culture, and care.**

Today, Rebecca works for the EFAO (Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario) Seed Program

and SeedChange's Canadian program, helping farmers build the capacity to save, select, and adapt seed for their own regions.

**"I still grow a small red bean called *macuzalito*, a variety selected by farmers in Honduras. The seeds were shared with me as a gift, and each time I grow and share them, I am reminded of those relationships."**

In time, donating to SeedChange became a way to carry that generosity forward.

**"I give to SeedChange because it supports long-term, trust-based partnerships with farmers as researchers and decision-makers.** In a world that often prioritizes quick results, this work is different. It is steady, relational, and led by farmers themselves. It is exactly what is needed to build resilient food and seed systems for the future."

At home, this work is part of Rebecca's everyday life. Her husband Asher sees that clearly—he's also an enthusiastic supporter of SeedChange, recognizing how much it means to her and to their communities.

"Seed work is slow, hopeful work. It connects generations, carries culture, and creates possibilities for the future. Supporting SeedChange is one way we can all be part of that work."



◀ Rebecca with *macuzalito* beans in Honduras. "My stories of the thoughtful, creative farmers I've learned from in Honduras and Ontario come alive when Asher and I sit down together to eat a bowl of red beans grown from those relationships."

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 **SeedChange**

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