

THE BAUTA FAMILY INITIATIVE ON CANADIAN SEED SECURITY

2023 FARMER SURVEY RESULTS

About the Survey

In November 2023, The Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security worked with Good Roots Consulting to conduct a survey with farmers and seed growers who have taken part in our research and training programs. The purpose of this survey was to learn about the experience of participants, the difference that participating has made for them, and to gather their suggestions for how the program can be improved.

In total, 146 people responded to the survey. The survey revealed the following themes:

- Respondents had been engaged in programs led by the Bauta Initiative for an average of almost 6 years, including seed grow-outs, training and networking events, on-farm variety trials, and participatory plant breeding (PPB).
- The majority of participants surveyed found programming by the Bauta Initiative relevant, high quality, supportive and engaging.
- The strongest outcomes resulting from participating in the Bauta Initiative included connections and knowledge sharing with other farmers and experts related to seed production and plant breeding; improved abilities related to variety trials, plant selection, variety improvement and on-farm plant breeding; and higher quality and more diverse seed being saved.
- Participants want more opportunities to learn and connect with others in their region, shared access to equipment, individual check-ins by program staff, a list of varieties that perform well in their region or microclimate and direct funding where possible.

More detailed results are shared below. Results are presented according to the number of people who responded to each particular question. Some respondents chose not to answer every question or indicated “not applicable” for questions that did not relate to the particular way that they had engaged in the program.

Demographics

Participants provided background information on their age, gender, and racial identity. In some cases, people selected more than one category (e.g. gender, racial identity).

- **Age:** The average age of respondents was 47, with 24 being the youngest and 75 the oldest.
- **Gender identity:** 57.5% of respondents identified as women, 37.3% as men, 5.2% as cisgender, 2.2% as non-binary, 0.7% as non-conforming, and 0.7% as transgender.
- **Racial identity:** 82.0% of respondents identified as white, 3.0% as South Asian, 2.3% as Latin American, 1.5% as First Nations, 1.5% as Black, 0.8% as Chinese, 0.8% as Métis, and 0.8% as Southeast Asian.

Location and Farm Size

Participants provided information on their location and farm size.

- **Location:** 75.3% of respondents described their location as rural, 9.6% as urban, and 8.9% as suburban.
- **Farm size:**
 - o The average number of acres farmed among respondents who were farmers was 167 acres. The largest number of acres farmed was 8,500 acres and the smallest was 0.05 acres.
 - o The average number of acres farmed by those who grew vegetables for commercial sale was 10 acres. Average acres farmed by those who grew field crops for commercial sale was 1,933 acres. The average number of acres farmed by those who grew both vegetables and field crops for sale was 413.

Seed and Growing Operations

Participants described their seed production practices:

- **Growing activities:**
 - o I grow seed for my own use: 63.7%
 - o I grow vegetables for commercial sale: 55.5%
 - o I grow seed for sharing with my community: 44.5%
 - o I grow/raise other agricultural products: 36.3%
 - o I grow seed for commercial sale: 34.9%
 - o I grow field crops for commercial sale: 11.0%
- **Production practices:**
 - o Ecological: 58.2%
 - o Certified organic: 44.0%
 - o Regenerative: 33.6%
 - o Biodynamic: 3.7%

Bauta Initiative Program Participation

Respondents had participated in a variety of programs and activities offered through the Bauta Initiative and our regional partners:

- Attended a training event: 54.8%
- On-farm variety trials: 50.0%
- Seed grow-outs: 33.6%
- Participatory plant breeding: 25.3%
- Hosted or provided seed to a seed demonstration site: 21.9%
- Was a mentor or mentee in a seed mentorship program: 19.9%
- Participated in the Community Seed Network: 16.4%
- Received financial support to attend a training event: 14.4%

Program Experience

Respondents provided feedback on their experience participating in the Bauta Initiative in various areas:

- **Relevance:** 94.5% of respondents felt that the activities they participated in had been relevant to their needs and interests.
- **Quality:** 89.7% of respondents reported that the activities they participated in had been high quality.
- **Support:** 89.7% of respondents felt well supported by their Regional Coordinator and/or their team during their participation in The Bauta Initiative.
- **Input:** 78.6% of respondents shared that they had been provided with adequate opportunities to share their ideas about The Bauta Initiative.

Program Suggestions

Participants provided suggestions for how the program can better support them in their efforts to use, save, exchange, and breed seed. The suggestions were very diverse and related to training, funding, building connection, sector support/advocacy, on-farm research, and individual farmer support. Here are a few common suggestions made by participants across Canada:

- Offer more regional and local program opportunities
- Provide financial support for participating farmers
- Strengthen marketing about the program overall and improve communication about what supports and activities are available through the Bauta Initiative
- Offer more free virtual learning opportunities
- Provide a list of varieties that perform well in each region or microclimate
- Continue to facilitate opportunities for connection between seed growers
- Check in individually with participants
- Facilitate shared access to equipment (e.g. sorting, harvesting)

Program Outcomes

Respondents reported the degree to which they have experienced changes in their seed saving skills, access to seed, and participation in the seed movement.

Capacity Building

- **Sharing or receiving knowledge:** 85.3% had shared or received knowledge and ideas related to seed production and plant breeding with other farmers. (n=129)
- **Community connection:** 84.3% felt more connected with other farmers and seed growers who are part of the seed movement in Canada. (n=134)
- **Variety trial abilities:** 83.7% improved their abilities related to organizing and implementing variety trials (e.g. variety observation, comparing varieties, linking the value of variety trials to seed production, etc.). (n=135)
- **Seed quality:** 75.9% were saving better quality vegetable/field crop seed. (n=116)

- **Connecting with experts:** 75.4% were able to connect with experts to answer their questions related to seed production and plant breeding. (n=130)
- **Plant selection, variety improvement and plant breeding abilities:** 74.4% improved their abilities related to plant selection, variety improvement and/or on-farm plant breeding. (n=125)

Changes in Farmer Seed-Saving Activities

- **Accessing diverse seed:** 71.2% were able to access a greater diversity of regionally adapted, ecologically-grown seed. (n=125)
- **Saving diverse seed:** 66.4% were saving a greater diversity of vegetable/field crop seed. (n=113)
- **Purchasing regionally-produced/adapted, ecologically-grown seed:** 60.2% were purchasing more regionally-produced/adapted, ecologically-grown vegetable/field crop seed. (n=123)
- **Interest in producing seed under contract:** 59.2% had a greater interest in producing vegetable and/or field crop seed under contract. (n=113)
- **Selling seed:** 41.0% of respondents had started to sell vegetable seed commercially. (n=78)

Individual Impacts

Participants shared the most important difference that their engagement with the Bauta Initiative has made for them and their farm.

The top five areas of impact were:

1. A stronger network of seed growers
 2. New knowledge
 3. Greater experience around seed work such as conducting variety trials
 4. Feeling part of a bigger movement
 5. Increased confidence and motivation to engage in seed work
- “Far more market/vegetable farmers in Atlantic Canada are growing seed now than they were 10 years ago. I think a lot of that is from knowledge and confidence gained from Bauta events.” -Atlantic Canada
 - “I doubt I would have my own small seed company now without the knowledge gained through Bauta. I wouldn't have had the hands-on experience gained through the farmer seed network, or the help to access good seed from our Maritime Seed Bank and Seeds of Diversity.” -Atlantic Canada
 - “I have an interest in saving seed and a community in which to share my successes and failures. It has enriched my farm and farming, and I hope it will continue.” -Atlantic

- “Through its work promoting regionally adapted seed in BC, the Bauta Initiative has definitely given me the confidence to support more local seed growers, with the confidence that I will receive high quality seed.” -BC
- “Before I joined I was always interested in ecologically grown fruits and veg coming from Sri Lanka, but I felt like I was alone learning what I could. Now I feel connected and have a group that I can rely on for information and support.” -Ontario
- “It was the Bauta Initiative that encouraged and supported me in saving seed for the first time. Since then they have been there every step of the way to support, train, and connect me with other seed savers, new opportunities, and resources. I now grow 75% of the seed I use on my farm, supply seed to my community, sell seed on contract to other regional seed companies, sell my own retail seed packets, and have begun dabbling in breeding.” -Ontario
- “It gave me hope and motivation to keep going.” -Ontario
- “Connecting to other farms and bringing some scientific rigour to what is otherwise very independent work.” -Prairies
- « L’initiative Bauta est venue confirmer chez nous l’importance des variétés non hybrides performantes dans notre climat. » -Québec
- « L'initiative Bauta a joué un rôle central dans la solidification des liens entre les différents acteurs du milieu. J'ai le réel sentiment de faire partie d'un réseau de semenciers au Québec. » -Québec