



2014 Summer Conference and Seed Trials  
September 10-12, La Conner, Washington

This year's 2014 Trials and Summer Conference were blessed by near-perfect weather, with long sunny bright days and crisp nights, and with visits in and around the heart of the beautiful Skagit Valley, Washington's world renowned cool season seed production area.



Our conference hotel, the LA Conner Country Inn, was right downtown in the charming small tourist town of La Conner, Washington, which overlooks the Swinomish Canal. It was just past high season, so after arriving at the hotel, many of us strolled around town enjoying the shops and the view during the afternoon. Our opening evening kickoff reception, sponsored by Sakata seeds and JBM gave everyone a chance to shake any out any leftover travel kinks, relax, have a drink and chat with friends, both old and new.



Wednesday morning began with breakfast at the hotel and our Annual Membership Meeting, which reviewed the year's activities, particularly our ongoing social media outreach and press release program. Our 2014 press releases "[Seed Buying 201](#)" and "[Growing Dinner](#)" have been well received by gardening media. Our meeting gave members the

opportunity of discussing further what HGSA, which is a member driven organization, should be doing in the future to sustain and promote gardening from seed.

Then we boarded the bus and drove just a short distance away to the Sakata Vegetable Research Station in Mount Vernon, Washington, the location for our HGSA vegetable and flower trials.

Seeing these extensive plantings of dozens of varieties sent in by HGSA packet companies and seed production companies is always a highlight of our conference and the opportunity to see how varieties grew in this Northwest location was a major focus of this season's conference. The Martin and his team at Sakata did a an exceptionally fine job of planting, tending and growing our trials, so there was a lot to be seen, photographed, discussed and enjoyed! We also had the opportunity to see Sakata's commercial dealer and home garden trials.



Our Sakata Hosts

A few happy hours at the trial worked up everybody's appetite, which was satisfied by lunch sponsored by Sakata at Azusa Farm and Gardens, a Japanese style nursery. After lunch we held our annual panel with local Master Gardeners, who shared their experiences with the public and made suggestions to us about seed packets in general and growing from seed in particular.



Just five minutes down the road, we went on to have a comprehensive tour of Sakata's big new 115,000 square foot conditioning facility which processes and maintains a large portion of the cool season commercial seed production for many Sakata companies. This look into how the seed is received, cleaned, processed, enhanced and finished was especially informative, particularly to those of us who normally do not get a chance to see these processes in action, especially in such a state-of-the-art facility.



Back at the hotel, Wild West Seed sponsored our evening reception, featuring wine and beer from the area's excellent local wineries. Then SeedsByDesign and Renee's Garden sponsored a special and very delicious dinner, created especially for us by two talented local chefs who did an outstanding job featured local regional specialties.

Thursday morning after breakfast, we piled in the bus for another day of tours. Our first stop was one that everyone particularly enjoyed at Bellewood Acres Farm in Lynden, Washington, one of the Northwest's largest apple orchards. We got to see firsthand how their hard cider distillery operates and then toured the orchards laden with ripening fruit in a tractor drawn tram, seeing the extensive operation and learning a lot about the realities of apple production. After the tour, we enjoyed sampling both the hard cider and different varieties of freshly harvested apples.



Next, In Bellewood Farm’s comfortable conference hall, our guest speaker Robert Wacker from Floramedia showed us a fascinating and innovative interactive slideshow on “Seed Packaging: Home Garden Trendsetting for European Consumers.” We were pleased that Robert made this long trek especially give this great talk for our conference. Robert also gave us a good update on the activities of our sister Garden Seed Association organization in Europe.



We ended the afternoon at the Cloud Mountain Farm Center in Everson, Washington, a fascinating farm co-op dedicated to researching, propagating and growing the best varieties for the Pacific Northwest. This nonprofit has all manner of plantings of ornamentals, tree fruits, vine fruits and vegetables. We learned a lot about their various experiences in developing apprentice programs and teaching gardening and small-scale farming.



After the short drive back to our hotel in time for a bit of relaxation, we ended with a convivial closing reception hosted by High Mowing and American Meadows.

Saturday, almost everybody joined the optional trip to the Ed Hume Seed Company, about an hour away in Puyallup, Washington. Ed is certainly one of American packet seeds elder statesmen, so it was a pleasure to enjoy the kind hospitality of Ed, Jeff, and Ann Hume and their employees who graciously opened their facility and grounds to us. Everyone enjoyed learning about the history of the company, seeing the historic building and how the business operates, especially their extensive inventory of Ballard seed packaging machines. We also enjoyed touring the Hume families' quirky and extensive theme gardens which have lots of horticultural "jokes". After the tour we gathered together for a truly

delicious homemade BBQ, featuring Pacific salmon, local wines and homemade desserts. This visit was a special treat, and a wonderful way to wind up a memorable conference.

