First Twin Cities Metro Growers Network Sows (and Swaps) Seeds for Success
1st Twin Cities Metro Growers Network a Success. Thirty growers attend our first get together on March 13th at the Good Acre!

Kitt Healy works for the Organic Seed Alliance, a non-profit that works with plant breeders and seed companies to ensure organic growers have the seeds they need through research, education and policy work. She spoke about gardeners and farmers as keepers of our cultural heritage. She discussed what it means for a crop to reflect the needs of growers, and their communities. Particular traits make crop varieties better suited to particular environments and the needs of particular communities, traits related to yield, pest resistance, flavor, storage and many others. Healy has “culturally important” varieties are the result of many, many generations of human selection. Yet they are not static. When we save seed from the biggest, most vibrantly colored tomato, for example, we are shifting that variety towards largeness and color. Healy reminded us that we owe the great diversity of crops that sustain us to ancient gardeners and farmers across time.

Andrea Eger, from the Tiny Diner in south Minneapolis, spoke about her work with Seed Sages, an educational endeavor based in the Twin Cities. They provide seed consultations, designs, trainings, and research for seed production. Eger explained how their work involves “re-skilling” growers in the art of seed saving and breeding to strengthen the foundation of local food systems. She said that as long as we keep the seeds in our hands, we can dramatically counteract the dramatic loss of the genetic diversity available to growers, and thus strengthen agricultural resiliency. With a little effort in local seed saving, we can reverse this loss of genetic diversity, and create delicious, nutritious, colorful and useful abundance for our communities. It’s easy to start saving seed, and has never been more important!

Annie Klodd, is our new Extension Educator in fruit and vegetable production for the UMN Extension. She provides education and applied research on the most effective ways to successfully grow high-quality produce in our climate. Klodd explained the various pest resistant traits available to especially organic growers when reviewing seed catalogs. In addition to information about days to maturity and climate zone, the better seed houses will display symbols or letters associated with each variety that correlate to different pest resistant traits. These traits can really make a big difference in the success and productivity of your crops. It is definitely worth it for growers to do their research and make sure they are planting well adapted, pest resistant varieties whenever possible.

Jason Walker, Communications Director for the Sustainable Farming Association of MN, discussed SFA’s recent Midwest Soil Health Summit and how all growers, from large row crop farmers to home gardeners, are realizing the benefits of soil health. Walker provided copies of SFA’s document, Soil Health Tools & Techniques for Fruit & Vegetable Producers. He said the first Growers Network meeting exceeded his expectations, “the room was packed with energetic attendees and the presenters were engaging, relevant and accessible. I couldn’t believe how many hundreds of varieties of seeds were available at the seed swap. Plus, you can always tell a good event when people don’t want to leave, and that was the case at this inaugural Growers Network gathering. Clearly, this group is meeting a need for a network of producers in the Twin Cities.”

Tom McKusick, from Northern Gardener, shared information about Minnesota Green, a program of the Minnesota State Horticultural Society. It promotes community gardening as a means to strengthen neighborhoods by connecting people and plants and growing food. Minnesota Green provide seeds, plants, gardening tools and supplies to community and public space gardens.

…and we had a great time swapping all kids of garden seeds and getting to know one another! Thanks to all who attended and to The Good Acre crew. The next meeting will be at Urban Ventures, April 10th, 1:00 to 3:00, where we will be delving into hoop houses and season extension. Hats off to a great 2019 growing season! --Karl Hakanson, Network Coordinator and U of MN Extension Ag. & Natural Resource Educator, Hennepin County … and we have a web site: www.sfa-mn.org/twin-cities-growers-network