

## **AGRICULTURAL BIODIVERSITY**

Agricultural biodiversity is the genetic variety of plants and animals used in farming. It developed over thousands of years as farmers bred varieties to suit their particular local settings of soil and climate. Because this happened all over the world, the result was an incredible range of foods that could be grown or raised anywhere farming was possible. Traditional varieties prospered even on poor soils with no artificial inputs. Unfortunately, modern agriculture has displaced most of these varieties. It uses a few highly productive cultivars and breeds, with high inputs of chemicals for soils, crops, and animals. As a result, agriculture is highly concentrated and expensive.

With modern agriculture, 75% of the world's agricultural variety has been lost and much or the rest is threatened. We must protect the remaining traditional varieties. Reliance on a few varieties makes the world highly vulnerable to change. Agricultural biodiversity – the huge inventory of varieties that possess natural disease resistance and adaptability to different farming conditions – is our best insurance against soil loss, climate change and the increasing cost of agricultural inputs (gasoline, fertilizer etc). It is our defence against starvation. Agricultural biodiversity is a major element of world food security.

The Ottawa Biosphere Reserve (OBEC) Council developed a demonstration project on agricultural biodiversity to test the potential for conservation of this valuable resource in Ottawa. Its short term goal was to find the elements of an agricultural biodiversity strategy for Ottawa and to explore public interest. Its long term goal was to develop a practical approach to the conservation of agricultural biodiversity and share it with other cities.

An April 2011 public workshop on a agricultural biodiversity in Ottawa was a great success. Fifty-two people attended, to hear local and national organizations, farmers, and gardeners describe what is and can be done. The workshop suggested a number of projects and a twenty five member working group formed to follow up. This group met twice in 2011 and further refined its approach.

At present, the OBEC working group on agricultural biodiversity needs one or two individuals to coordinate. While members of the working group are talented and knowledgeable, none have enough time to coordinate the group. This task requires organization and networking to develop the suggested projects. If you are interested, please click [Contact Us](#) (link).