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Coalition Receives Grant to Promote Arid-Adapted Heritage Grains in Southern Arizona

A ground-breaking collaboration of farmers and organizations in southern Arizona has been awarded a two-year, $50,000 grant by the Western SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) program to revive the production, milling, distribution, and marketing of the oldest extant grain varieties adapted to the arid Southwest: White Sonora soft bread wheat and Chapalote flint corn.

Native Seeds/SEARCH, the Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona, Hayden Flour Mills, Santa Cruz Valley Heritage Alliance, Cultivate Santa Cruz, Tubac Historical Society, Amado Farms Joint Venture, and Avalon Organic Gardens and EcoVillage will work with small-scale beginning farmers as well as low-income tortilla makers and bakers in the proposed Santa Cruz Valley National Heritage Area to increase our region's food diversity and food security in the face of climate change and an evolving agricultural landscape.

Cereal grains are fundamental to the diets of most people in the Southwest, yet local production and processing of regionally-adapted grains is a missing element in efforts to increase our region's food security and to offer staples to low-income populations at risk of hunger. Through a diversity of complementary approaches, the funded project aims to address this gap by re-introducing Chapalote corn and White Sonora wheat into sustainable food production regimes in the arid Southwest; establishing fruitful exchanges of information among producers, millers, bakers, and other stakeholders; and ensuring that the use of these heritage grains reaches food-insecure families in our region and that they are enlisted in producing value-added products as new sources of income. Continue Reading

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Food and Seed Aid for the Tarahumara

Much of Mexico has been devastated by a combination of prolonged drought and cold snaps. A recent NY Times article discusses the crisis, as do many others. The Tarahumara have been hit particularly hard. Please consider donating to the Red Cross for immediate food aid to Mexico (there are instructions for designating that your donation goes toward relief for Mexico).

In addition to immediate food assistance, the Tarahumara need seeds. Native Seeds/SEARCH will be donating as much seed of Tarahumara corn, beans, and other crops as we can. We will also be doing seed increases of Tarahumara varieties this summer so that we can provide more extensive assistance next year. Please consider donating to the Red Cross for immediate assistance, and then please consider donating to Native Seeds/SEARCH to help support our seed growouts for the Tarahumara. If you are a farmer and would like to help, please email us.
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NS/S Seed Library Now Open

The NS/S Seed Library opened its drawers to the public on January 15th, to much excitement. Located inside the Native Seeds/SEARCH Retail Store, this community seed reserve is the first of its kind in Arizona. Come sign up for free and check out what all the buzz is about!

Seed libraries function similarly to book-lending libraries. People "check out" seeds, grow them in gardens, and keep a few plants in the ground to go to seed. The saved seed is then "returned" to the library, ideally in more abundance than what was borrowed. As this process continues year Jafter year, the seeds in the library become more productive and hardy by building up adaptations to local growing conditions. The concept is taking off across the country with more than 30 seed libraries currently underway.

Everybody's talking about this exciting innovation in community resilience and local biodiversity. Our own Deputy Director Belle Starr and NS/S board member Martha "Muffin" Burgess recently made an appearance on the KVOA morning news discussing the new seed library. Watch the video here.

The Native Seeds/SEARCH Seed Library is located inside the NS/S Retail Store at 3061 North Campbell Avenue in Tucson. Docents are on hand to help answer questions and assist with using the library. Membership is free, and all are welcome to join, grow, and save their seeds. Come check it out!
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Time to Get Crazy By Chris Hedges

Native Americans' resistance to the westward expansion of Europeans took two forms. One was violence. The other was accommodation. Neither worked. Their land was stolen, their communities were decimated, their women and children were gunned down and the environment was ravaged. There was no legal recourse. There was no justice. There never is for the oppressed. And as we face similar forces of predatory, unchecked corporate power intent on ruthless exploitation and stripping us of legal and physical protection, we must confront how we will respond.

The ideologues of rapacious capitalism, like members of a primitive cult, chant the false mantra that natural resources and expansion are infinite. They dismiss calls for equitable distribution as unnecessary. They say that all will soon share in the "expanding" wealth, which in fact is swiftly diminishing. And as the whole demented project unravels, the elites

flee like roaches to their sanctuaries. At the very end, it all will come down like a house of cards.

Civilizations in the final stages of decay are dominated by elites out of touch with reality. Societies strain harder and harder to sustain the decadent opulence of the ruling class, even as it destroys the foundations of productivity and wealth. Karl Marx was correct when he called unregulated capitalism "a machine for demolishing limits." This failure to impose limits cannibalizes natural resources and human communities. This time, the difference is that when we go the whole planet will go with us. Catastrophic climate change is inevitable. Arctic ice is in terminal decline. There will soon be so much heat trapped in the atmosphere that any attempt to scale back carbon emissions will make no difference. Droughts. Floods. Heat waves. Killer hurricanes and tornados. Power outages. Freak weather. Rising sea levels. Crop destruction. Food shortages. Plagues.

ExxonMobil, BP and the coal and natural gas companies—like the colonial buffalo hunters who left thousands of carcasses rotting in the sun after stripping away the hides, and in some cases carrying away only the tongues—will never impose rational limits on themselves. They will exploit, like the hustlers before them who eliminated the animals that sustained the native peoples of the Great Plains, until there is nothing left to exploit. Collective suicide is never factored into quarterly profit reports. Forget all those virtuous words they taught you in school about our system of government. The real words to describe American power are "plunder," "fraud," "criminality," "deceit," "murder" and "repression."

Those native communities that were most accommodating to the European colonists, such as the peaceful California tribes—the Chilulas, Chimarikos, Urebures, Nipewais and Alonas, along with a hundred other bands—were the first to be destroyed. And while I do not advocate violence, indeed will seek every way to avoid it, I have no intention of accommodating corporate power whether it hides behind the mask of Barack Obama or Mitt Romney. At the same time, I have to acknowledge that resistance may ultimately be in vain. Yet to resist is to say something about us as human beings. It keeps alive the possibility of hope, even as all empirical evidence points to inevitable destruction. It makes victory, however remote, possible. And it makes life a little more difficult for the ruling class, which satisfies the very human emotion of vengeance.

"Whenever the legislators endeavor to take away and destroy the property of the people, or to reduce them to slavery under arbitrary power," wrote the philosopher **John Locke**, "they put themselves into a state of war with the people who are thereupon absolved from any further obedience."

The European colonists signed, and ignored, some 400 treaties with native tribes. They enticed the native leaders into accords, always to seize land, and then repeated the betrayal again and again and again until there was nothing left to steal. Chiefs such as Black Kettle who believed the white men did not fare much better than those who did not. Black Kettle, who outside his lodge often flew a huge American flag given to him in Washington as a sign of friendship, was shot dead by soldiers of George Armstrong Custer in November 1868 along with his wife and more than 100 other Cheyenne in his encampment on the Washita River.

The white men "made us many promises, more than I can remember," Chief Red Cloud said in old age, "but they kept but one. They promised to take our land, and they took it."

Native societies, in which people redistributed wealth to gain respect, and in which those who hoarded were detested, upheld a communal ethic that had to be obliterated and replaced with the greed, ceaseless exploitation and cult of the self that fuel capitalist expansion. **Lewis Henry Morgan** in his book "League of the Iroquois," written in 1851 after he lived among them, noted that the Iroquois' "whole civil policy was averse to the concentration of power in the hands of any single individual, but inclined to the opposite principle of division among a number of equals. …" This was a way of relating to each other, as well as to the natural world, that was an anathema to the European colonizers.

Those who exploit do so through layers of deceit. They hire charming and eloquent interlocutors. How many more times do you want to be lied to by Barack Obama? What is this penchant for self-delusion that makes us unable to see that we are being sold into bondage? Why do we trust those who do not deserve our trust? Why are we repeatedly seduced? The promised closure of Guantanamo. The public option in health care. Reforming the Patriot Act. Environmental protection. Restoring habeas corpus. Regulating Wall Street. Ending the wars. Jobs. Defending labor rights. I could go on.

There are few resistance figures in American history as noble as Crazy Horse. He led, long after he knew that ultimate defeat was inevitable, the most effective revolt on the plains, wiping out Custer and his men on the Little BigHorn. "Even the most basic outline of his life shows how great he was," Ian Frazier writes in his book **"Great Plains,"** "because he remained himself from the moment of his birth to the moment he died; because he knew exactly where he wanted to live, and never left; because he may have surrendered, but he was never defeated in battle; because, although he was killed, even the Army admitted he was never captured; because he was so free that he didn't know what a jail looked like." His "dislike of the oncoming civilization was prophetic," Frazier writes. "He never met the President" and "never rode on a train, slept in a boarding house, ate at a table." And "unlike

many people all over the world, when he met white men he was not diminished by the encounter."

Crazy Horse was bayoneted to death on Sept. 5, 1877, after being tricked into walking toward the jail at Fort Robinson in Nebraska. The moment he understood the trap he pulled out a knife and fought back. Gen. Phil Sheridan had intended to ship Crazy Horse to the Dry Tortugas, a group of small islands in the Gulf of Mexico, where a U.S. Army garrison ran a prison with cells dug out of the coral. Crazy Horse, even when dying, refused to lie on the white man's cot. He insisted on being placed on the floor. Armed soldiers stood by until he died. And when he breathed his last, Touch the Clouds, Crazy Horse's seven-foot-tall Miniconjou friend, pointed to the blanket that covered the chief's body and said, "This is the lodge of Crazy Horse." His grieving parents buried Crazy Horse in an undisclosed location. Legend says that his bones turned to rocks and his joints to flint. His ferocity of spirit remains a guiding light for all who seek lives of defiance.

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Chasing a Prairie Tale
The Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve in Kansas. More Photos »
By TONY PERROTTET | Published: June 22, 2012

One of the most adrenaline-fueled vacations in American history took place in August 1872, when a young New Yorker named George Bird Grinnell boarded a train at Grand Central Depot for the era's hot new travel destination — Nebraska.

The writer Roger Welsch. He and his wife donated their property to the Pawnee. More Photos »

While most Gilded Age travelers preferred to immerse themselves in the Old World pleasures of Paris and Venice, the 22-year-old Grinnell was one of a new breed of nature-lovers who chose to take rugged, and often dangerous, excursions into the Western wilderness, usually for the purpose of hunting and fishing. Now Grinnell was taking America's first "adventure travel" trend to a new cultural level: In order to experience firsthand the most romantic image of the Western frontier, he intended to join the Pawnee Nation of Plains Indians on their summer buffalo hunt through the prairies.

Thanks to the new Union Pacific rail line, Grinnell and a fellow Yale graduate, Jim Russell, were able to nip away from the cultured parlors in Manhattan to the raucous saloons of Plum Creek (now Lexington, Neb.) in a matter of days. From there, guided by a man named Luther North

who had led teams of Pawnee scouts for the Union Army during the Civil War, they rode south to join a small army of Pawnee as they traveled into Kansas. While the Pawnee have been portrayed as Mad Max-style villains in Hollywood movies like “Dances With Wolves” and “Little Big Man,” they were consistently allied with the United States, and when North arrived with his group, he was greeted as an old friend.

For the next week, the travelers took part in rituals unchanged since the Plains Indians had first acquired horses, around 1700, joining Pawnee warriors as they attacked enormous buffalo herds in the traditional style, dining afterward on roasted buffalo tongue and liver. They observed ancient religious ceremonies. And for a dramatic finale on their way back to Plum Creek, they were chased by the Pawnees’ enemies, the Cheyenne.

I first stumbled across this alluring story at the New York Public Library while leafing through a yellowed 1873 volume of “Forest and Stream,” a pioneer outdoor magazine in which Grinnell published a vivid account of his adventures. Further research unearthed other reports from Eastern travelers enjoying similar trips with friendly American Indians in Nebraska and Kansas — enough to show that the practice was not uncommon in the early 1870s.

Grinnell’s trip, however, was more than a youthful jaunt. His name is largely forgotten today, but during his lifetime he became one of the first campaigners for Western wildlife and national parks, and a pioneer ethnographer. On his death at age 88, in 1938, The New York Times described him as “the father of American conservation.”

With all the changes in the West over the last 140 years, I wondered if following Grinnell’s route would offer any glimpses of the 1872 frontier. I had one thing in common with Birdie, as he was called by fellow Yalies: I too was a New Yorker longing for empty horizons and open skies. (And most of my city friends still belong to the Europhile camp, the prospect of a trip to Nebraska or Kansas being on a par with an exile to Pago Pago). In the past I’d always been drawn to the marquee national parks. But while the impact of the prairies is more subtle than mega-spectacles like the Grand Canyon or Yosemite, as Walt Whitman himself wrote, they “fill the esthetic sense fuller” and haunt the memory longer. What’s more, I’ve often found, it’s in America’s neglected corners that the past most endures.

Even the modern metropolis of Omaha took me back in time more quickly than I could have hoped. After waking to the lonely whistle of a freight train at dawn, I strolled through the 19th-century warehouses of the Old Market district a stone’s throw from the muddy Missouri River to an appointment in, of all places, the public library.

“Are you ready for the scalping party?” Lynn Sullivan, a librarian, asked cheerily as she handed me a pair of archival cotton gloves. In a neon-illuminated room, she unwrapped layers of protective foam to reveal a thick mat of golden brown hair. The glossy locks were attached to an oval of human hide, cured like old leather.

I carefully picked up the grisly relic, weighing it in my hands. I wasn't prepared for such lustrous healthy hair on a Wild West character, let alone one nearly a century and a half old.

The scalp once belonged to William Thompson, an English-born railway worker who was surprised in Nebraska in 1867 by Cheyenne raiders. Wounded by a tomahawk, Thompson feigned death while a warrior took his scalp, a sensation he later described as having the whole top of his head torn off. After the Cheyenne rode off, he retrieved his scalp, which had fallen from a warrior's belt, put it in a pale of water and took it to a doctor in Omaha in hopes that it might be sewn back on. (Astonished locals compared the item to "a drowned rat.") Surgery proved impossible, but Thompson recovered. He even took the scalp with him back to England, where he showed it off as a carnival attraction. At the end of his life, for reasons unknown, Thompson sent the hairpiece to the Omaha Public Library, where for many years it was displayed, thrilling generations of Nebraskan schoolchildren. These days it is kept more discreetly in storage.

Inspired, I cruised out of Omaha the next day, tracing Grinnell's route along the old Highway 30, which follows the Platte River. As I was fresh from the East Village of Manhattan, the profligate sense of space had a hypnotic effect. I wound down the window, smelling "the wild lyrical drizzling air of Nebraska," as Kerouac rhapsodized in "On the Road." Under the midday sun the landscape can seem bleached and monotonous, but when the golden dusk catches the sunflowers, the setting is as sublime as Provence.

Admittedly, it was an effort to visualize the landscape of 1872, amid the spider web of roads and patchwork of farms. But things improved when I visited the Platte River Preserve south of Grand Island. It's one of a half-dozen pieces of Nebraska now owned by the Nature Conservancy, mostly former cattle ranches that ecologists are returning to a semblance of their state before European settlement.

"We can't quite get the prairie back to its original condition here," said Nannette Whitten, a project manager I met at the conservancy's small office. "It's really impossible today. There's no regular burning of the grass. The rivers are dammed, so there is no natural flooding. But we can get the prairie back to a healthy condition by managing the seasonal plants and removing invasive species."

The conversation turned, as it often would, to the addictive beauty of the grasslands. It wasn't quite the landscape of 1872, but I was already hooked.

When Grinnell, Russell and North caught up with the Pawnee near the Kansas border, they were awe-struck by the spectacle of 4,000 men, women and children camped with their horses and ponies. After greeting the elderly chief, Peta-la-shar, they were invited to join the tribe the next day on their buffalo hunt. It began as a brilliant parade, led by eight warriors, "their saddles glittering with silver ornaments," Grinnell wrote, "and their bridles tinkling with little bells." Grinnell described a "surround" he participated in that same afternoon in which Pawnee

warriors, still riding bareback and using traditional bows and arrows, silently encircled a herd then charged to the shrill cry of Loo'ah! "What had been only a wild gallop became a mad race."

Grinnell noted that the Indians — unlike Western hunters — used every fragment of the buffalo, even recycling their sinews as bowstrings and bladders for water bags. "We feasted on roast ribs, ka'wis (chopped pieces cooked in intestine) and dried meat, and really had a delightful time ... smoking and chatting in after-dinner fashion."

Today such scenes are preserved, in two dimensions at least, in the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha where the meticulous paintings of George Catlin and Karl Bodmer are the pride of the newly renovated Western Gallery. Unknown to the breathless Grinnell, he was witnessing the last successful buffalo hunt of the Pawnee Indians. The next year, the tribe would be attacked in midhunt by the Sioux in a place aptly called Massacre Canyon. White settlers were already flooding Nebraska, wiping out the buffalo herds and eyeing the fertile native lands. By 1875, the Pawnee would be forced to leave for a dismal reservation in Oklahoma.

Still, the Pawnee, like other Indian nations, are culturally resilient. In the old lush and verdant Pawnee homeland I called at Dannebrog, a riverside hamlet where an Indian campsite used to be, to visit the Pawnee Arts Center. Here I met the Nebraskan writer Roger Welsch, a Falstaffian figure who became involved with the Pawnee in the late 1980s, when the tribe wanted bones from the Smithsonian reburied in the local cemetery. In 2006, he and his wife, Linda, donated their 57-acre property to the Pawnee — the first land the nation has owned in Nebraska since it left in 1875. Since then, another 22-acre property just south has been donated, along with the commercial building for the arts center.

"It's like refounding the state of Israel," Mr. Welsch said with a smile. "The Pawnee are coming back! It's a homecoming."

Later, I spoke to the president of the Pawnee Nation, Marshall Gover, about his people's reaction to the move. "It's hard to put into words," he said, his voice cracking. "We were ecstatic. We were overwhelmed. We adopted Roger into the tribe, and held a dance in his honor." Plans are now evolving to create a Pawnee cultural center there.

AS I drove south into Kansas, even the remotest towns revealed their passion for history. In the one-horse town of Oberlin, the old bank had been turned into a hotel for the few passing tourists, and the locals all seem to be in the same business: antiques. In Lacrosse, I was the only visitor in the Kansas Barbed Wire Museum, where the attendant enthused that "we have over 2,400 types of barbed wire on display!" Like the best of America's quirky museums, it had a serious message: the proliferation of barbed wire in the 1880s guaranteed the end of the Old West, spelling doom for the romanticized era of cowboys and wandering herds of cattle.

In northwestern Kansas, Grinnell, Russell and North said farewell to the Pawnee and rode back to the railway line, pursued part of the way by 15 armed Cheyenne, who forced the travelers to use their horses for cover when fired upon. ("The song of each bullet created an extraordinary

commotion in my mind," Grinnell wrote, "and I experienced the sensation commonly described as 'having your heart in your throat.' ")

Today, the most vivid glimpse of 1872 lies farther south. Of the 170 million acres of prairie that once covered the West, only 4 percent survives — most it in the Flint Hills of Kansas, where the limestone bedrock has ensured that no plow has ever turned the soil.

Here, oceans of undulating grass extend to the horizon, and strange little townships sit decaying on lonely crossroads. Now, instead of outlaws and cowboys, motorbike enthusiasts roar up and down the roads. Their gleaming machines were lined up neatly outside the Hays House in Council Grove, an 1857 trading post that says it is the oldest continually operating restaurant west of the Mississippi, and where enormous steaks are still the most popular item on the menu.

Nearby, the town of Cottonwood Falls is like a classic Western film set. The 1871 courthouse, which looms in surreal French Renaissance style, still contains the original dark lockup. I took a room in the town's only hotel, the Grand Central, which has operated since 1884.

Early the next morning I arrived at the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, nearly 11,000 acres of grassland owned by the Nature Conservancy and managed by the National Park Service. The area is large enough to allow regular controlled burning of the land every April, which renews the vegetation as it did in presettlement days. The headquarters are in a stately 19th-century mansion and stone barn, beautifully designed for the cattle baron who once owned the land with every modern convenience for the family. Not many visitors come out here — rangers say around 23,000 a year, which is about 1 percent of Yellowstone's throngs — and I was entirely alone as soon as I headed along a hiking trail.

For me, there was a compelling symmetry to the visit. Thirteen buffalo were reintroduced to the preserve in 2009, which have now bred to 21 — the first born in the area for 140 years. And it would probably never have happened without the efforts of the young adventurer, George Bird Grinnell.

After his 1872 trip, Grinnell became one of the most vocal conservationists of the Gilded Age. Living in a town house on East 15th Street in New York, he took over as editor of Forest and Stream for 35 years, founded the first Audubon Society, authored 29 books, befriended John Muir and Teddy Roosevelt and campaigned for the expansion of the national park system. Traveling with the Pawnee, he had his first glimpse that the buffalo were already in danger. In 1894, his magazine exposed the poaching of the last wild herd of buffalo in Yellowstone — numbers had been reduced to less than 200 — and he took the lead in pushing for the first federal law to properly protect the species. The National Park Protective Act pulled the animals back from the brink of extinction.

Today, in the Tallgrass Preserve, the buffalo gather in the backcountry, which has been open to the public for two years — and, improbably, you can simply set out to see them on foot. When I did, there wasn't a cloud in the sky, and the stroll was eerily idyllic, with butterflies flittering

among the bluestem that line the trail. I had a moment of doubt about the safe viewing distance when I reached the gate to the bisons' pasture. "DO NOT APPROACH BISON," read a yellow sign. "Bison are wild animals and best viewed from afar." A drawing showed an angry buffalo chasing a hapless human. I cautiously pushed the gate open and scanned the hills. There, about 300 yards away, a string of dark, shaggy forms were visible, half-hidden in the folds of the land. Still, after traveling for so long with the ghost of Birdie Grinnell, I wanted a closer look.

I stepped warily forward through the rustling, thigh-high grass. The largest bull stood up and watched me approach. Two of the young were rolling around playing. It was strange to think that after the slaughter of untold millions of buffalo that once roamed this country, these chosen few would live out their days here without a care in the world.

When I got to within about 50 yards, the bull started stepping slowly toward me. I slowly backed away.

That was as close to 1872 as I was prepared to get.

(edited....motels/cafes.....sdc)
TONY PERROTTET, a contributing writer for Smithsonian Magazine, is the author, most recently, of " The Sinner's Grand Tour: A Journey Through the Historical Underbelly of Europe."
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NATIVE AMERICAN CASINO LAWSUIT ALLOWED TO PROCEED
The U.S. Supreme Court won't stop a lawsuit that aims to shut down an operating Native American casino, which was built and is now operating in Michigan under a seven-year contract with Las Vegas-based Station Casinos LLC.
http://erj.reviewjournal.com/ct/uz3688753Biz13675740
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***Small Farmers Creating a New Business Model as Agriculture Goes Local**
By KIRK JOHNSON
With an aging farm population and a looming shortage of migrant workers, local growers band together for collective organic clout.
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One More Benefit of Local Food
Shannon Hayes, Op-Ed: "We talk about the benefits of a local food system because the farmer gets a fair return for their labor; because non-farmers are able to get fresh, local, more nutritious food; because our local biodiversity is improving. But one of the best parts is that, as we localize our food, everyone grows closer to the land. Everyone becomes keenly aware of the dramatic events that play out in the course of growing supper for the table. Not everyone may put their hands in soil or inside the birthing canal of a sheep." READ | DISCUSS | SHARE
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Reflections on Seed Keepers by Robert Stone

I had the opportunity to attend the Seed Keepers workshop presented by Native Seeds/SERCH this past April at the Huhugam Heritage Center on the Gila River Indian Community (GRIC). As a former employee of NS/S, it was good to see the organization still thriving with some new people on board.

I am still a member of the organization and continually read their newsletters and order seeds for my home garden, so I have kept abreast of their good work to support of the indigenous crops and wild relatives of the Southwest US and Mexico. Much has changed since my time there including moving the offices and Seed Bank to an expanded location. The old Sylvester House office and its grow-out plots that I once cared for are no longer. But the growth of the organization shows the rising public interest in the work they are doing. Seed Keepers -- a free seed saving educational course for Native American communities -- is the latest program to come out of this evolution.

The Seed Keepers event brought back memories of the days when I worked at the organization. We were guided through many of the same processes I used years ago for germination testing, seed cleaning, record keeping and so on. But I was happy to learn some new techniques, as were the others in attendance. Most of the workshop participants were gardeners of one sort or another: working on their won, with local schools, or involved with GRIC organizations that support traditional crops and farming.

Throughout the week of classes, we were totally engaged with hands-on activities, lectures and presentations given by invited guests including a Pinal County Master Gardener and community members. Especially powerful were the discussions that took place, with people not only offering their experiences with the crops, but also sharing cultural and family stories. This raised the entire event to a new level of meaning and positivity.

The week also included field trips that provided real highlights to the experience. We took a tour of District 6 and 7 or the Gila River Indian Community looking at the irrigation delivery system currently being developed by the Pima Maricopa Irrigation Project. We also explored the wetlands restoration project underway in District 7 and ended the week with a visit to Maricopa Agricultural Center. To follow up on the memorable week and all we learned, GRIC members had a meeting in District 6 to continue the collaboration, sharing of knowledge and support of our traditional crops. Some ideas were drafted to guide us for the future and gain a clea vision of our “community gardeners” group. Upcoming meetings are planned at Sacaton Middle School, which features a student school garden cared for by Cultural Education and Gardener, Janelle Blaine.

Our group is excited about our shared passion in our Akimel O’otham/Pi Posh herietage, and in our traditional crops and culture. My vision is to share ideas on opportunities in garden cooperatives, markets, seed banking, and an expansion to large-scale production. Seed Keepers helped to bring us together, knowing we have each other’s support. With luck, we will draw more Community members to our cause and see these visions to fruition.

Robert Stone was raised on the GRIC speaking the Akimel O’otham language and practising subsistence farming with traditional crops. He holds a degree in Agriculture from Central Arizona College and has been involved in farming for 40 years.