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Title: Refugee Seed Systems in Vermont



Worldwide, decreasing crop diversity limits options to adapt to the increasingly prevalent challenges of climate change and food insecurity. Consolidation of seed and agrochemical companies have raised public concern and academic attention, as issues of seed access, control, and diversity greatly impact the food and agricultural system. Researchers and local communities have noted how small-scale farmers introduce seed diversity and cultural knowledge into locally adapted agriculture. However, there is a lack of research on the different seed systems that small scale farmers in the US use. A case study of New American farmers in Burlington, Vermont seeks to understand the values and priorities that promote a diverse and resilient seed system. We explore how small scale farmers from refugee and immigrant backgrounds create and maintain diverse seed systems. This study incorporates 30 semi-structured interviews with Nepali, Bhutanese, and Burundian gardeners who use New Farms for New Americans (NFNA) and Burlington Area Community Garden Network (BACGN). NFNA and BACGN are community organizations in Burlington, Vermont that offer education, resources, and land for refugee and immigrant farmers. Hour-long interviews with interpreters ask individuals about what they value in seeds and seed systems and how they access seeds. Our study finds that seed values and access differ across ethnic, regional, and gender subgroups. This qualitative research further informs an interdisciplinary project that includes network analysis of seed flows and social networks and genetic sequencing of different seed varieties in the refugee gardening community. In addition, this study partners with community organizations to better understand how these organizations help facilitate access to seeds of value for refugee farmers.