

**“All of us can work to support
positive changes in our world
by choosing to
vote with our dollars”**

Guaranteeing the Rights of Gardeners and Farmers to Save and Replant Seeds

By Mike Dunton

An important characteristic of every great society is the free and open exchange of ideas and knowledge. In recent decades, corporations have worked to change patent and copyright law, effectively hijacking the original intent and purpose of the protections that our Founding Father’s envisioned.

In some business sectors, such as high technology and agriculture, this has led to a litigious atmosphere creating an environment hostile to creativity and innovation. The exact opposite of what these laws were established to protect. Thankfully, Newton’s Third Law applies and we are experiencing an opposite reaction to these forces in the form of a burgeoning public domain / open-source movement.

New discoveries or inventions require access to knowledge but when this is locked away as the intellectual property of fiscally motivated entities, innovation suffers. In such an oppressive environment, the amazing technological advancements of the twentieth-century cannot be sustained.

In an effort to encourage innovation and progress, and

applying the same laws used to keep information proprietary, the open-source movement began in the latter part of the twentieth-century. Its goal ensured that original work remained accessible, thus establishing an ethos of sharing, collaboration, and community.

In our present era, a new threat has emerged. Consolidation within the seed and chemical industries has resulted in a very small number of profit-driven, multinational corporations controlling nearly all of the world’s seed supply. Not only has this caused a great loss in our planet’s biodiversity (a subject for a different article), but by using patents, these corporations have increased their control over what farmers plant to feed

and clothe the world. When corporations decide what gets planted, based on what is most profitable for them, the result is a vast amount of acreage being planted with the same variety.

The resulting monoculture crop system of modern agriculture, coupled with issues such as climate change and the threat of new disease, provides the optimal conditions for an agricultural catastrophe much more devastating than the

“Irish Potato Famine” of the 1840s. The ability to quickly respond to new threats requires the ability to quickly develop new varieties that are resistant to the threat.



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Plant breeding cannot be entrusted or limited to these multi-national corporations. But since more and more varieties are being patented (and therefore cannot be saved, replanted, or shared) plant breeders at small seed companies, universities, or even local gardeners and farmers, are restricted from using these genetics as a foundation for developing new varieties.

To address this issue, the open source movement, which began as an effort to counter the restrictive and propriety nature of the computer software industry, has now formed the basis of a new organization working to protect access to plants; the Open Source Seed Initiative (OSSI).

"OSSI was created to free the seed – to make sure that the genes in at least some seeds can never be locked away from use by intellectual property rights." Through collaboration with gardeners, farmers, seed companies, plant breeders and other sustainability advocates, plant varieties are "pledged" to the initiative in such a way that they are legally protected and remain available for anyone to grow, save, regrow, or even to use in developing new varieties.

All of us can work to support positive changes in our world by choosing to "vote with our dollars" – that is, by consciously making decisions on where we spend our money and who benefits from the revenue. We do not have to make big government or big corporations bend to our will with words. These actions are often frustrating and nearly always futile. But as this article illustrates, we all can initiate and support change through the grass-roots efforts of like-minded people.

The Open Source Seed Initiative Pledge

"You have the freedom to use these OSSI-Pledged seeds in any way you choose. In return, you pledge not to restrict others' use of these seeds or their derivatives by patents or other means, and to include this Pledge with any transfer of these seeds or their derivatives."

Mike Dunton is the founder of the Victory Seed Company, which is an OSSI partner seed company. Your purchases at the Victory Seed Company support their work to preserve rare, threatened, heirloom seed varieties and to keep them available to breeders and gardeners around the world.

More info: www.VictorySeeds.com/ossi.html.



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