



SEEDHEADS TRANSCRIPT

Episode 6: KEELEY NIXON English

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Steph Benoit // Keeley Nixon

Steph Benoit

Hey, welcome to SeedHeads, the cross-pollinating podcast where our Canadian seed heroes, tell their stories, share their how-to tips, and talk about the seeds they love. I'm your host, Steph Benoit, coming to you from Vancouver, BC, on the unceded and ancestral territories of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Selílwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

For today's episode I sat down with Keeley Nixon. Keeley is the fearless coordinator of the BC Eco Seed Co-op, the leader of her own one-woman studio Keeley Nixon Creative and Consulting, and farmer on hiatus. She joined our conversation today from the unceded Coast Salish territories of the Lekwungen speaking people - the Songhees, Esquimalt, and W̱SÁNEĆ (say-nich) First Nations. Keeley has such a wealth of knowledge about seeds in British Columbia and it was a pleasure to chat with her. Together, we scratched the surface of a couple huge questions like, "Where does your seed come from and why does it matter?" We talked about the stories behind our seeds, the co-op model for seed companies, seed security in a pandemic, and so much more. I hope you enjoy.

SeedHeads is produced by The Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security, a program of SeedChange

Steph Benoit

Well, Keeley is so great to have you with us today. We've had the pleasure over the past year of connecting virtually a bunch of times. And you actually used to be in my role at FarmFolk and then went on to other great opportunities, but I've yet to meet you in person. One of these days the pandemic is going to allow us to finally meet when things settle down. But thinking about this episode of "where does your seed come from and why does it matter?," you were someone that I immediately thought of as a great person to speak to this, just because of all the different hats that you wear around seed, and all of the different perspectives that you can bring. And I'm so excited to be able to chat with you today about that.

Keeley Nixon

Well, thanks for having me, Steph. I'm thrilled to be able to talk about this topic, also, because I am somebody for whom seed wasn't always in the forefront of what I was thinking about gardening too. So I, like many listeners, am at the same point where growing beautiful food is one thing and then looking behind to be like, oh, right, where's the seed coming from and why it matters is a topic close at heart for me, too.

Steph Benoit:

Yeah, absolutely. So we've seen a lot of really exciting trends in the past year amidst all of the chaos of the pandemic. There's been a huge uptick in gardening, a huge, renewed interest in growing food. And some of these seed companies, well most seed companies, small and large have seen incredible jumps and demand for their seeds. So this feels like a really poignant moment to talk about: where does your seed come from and why does it matter? If you're someone who is just getting into gardening, this is your first sort of foray, and you're going to whatever Big Box store or whatnot or at the supermarket and you're just picking up a packet of seed, maybe you've never thought about who actually gets it to that point or the process of growing and collecting and cleaning and all of those things that get that packet of seeds to your grocery store, to your big box store, whatever else so I was hoping we could start with this first question of just, what are we growing around here? What are we not? When you're buying from a seed company, where is that, where is that seed coming from?

Keeley Nixon

Yeah, absolutely, and I also agree. I'm so, so thrilled to see all the gardening that's been happening and the growing at small and large scales in the last year, and I always love this opportunity to get at the root of growing, which is the seed itself. Small aside that when I'm talking about seed in this conversation, I'm talking about, you know, open-pollinated, not first hybrid seed, I'm talking about vegetable and herb seed and, you know, primarily certified organic and/or ecologically-grown seed.

And that is a lot of the seed that we're seeing. I'm here based on the south Island and we have lots of small-scale seed growers, so that is a lot of what folks are growing. And when we're thinking about the sort of story behind the seed, like there is most of us who don't actually really think about where seed comes from. I think my in-laws, each of them are really great examples of this.

They both love growing. They love me. They know I run a seed company and they still buy their seeds from the hardware store or the rack at the large grocery store without a second thought. And I think, again, that's a really common thread of the like: you're somewhere, you're getting other supplies [and think] "Oh, right. I need lettuce seed," when you see a rack and you grab it and you grow, you know, beautiful food, but what is the story that you're not knowing from, not really answering that question?

Steph Benoit

Mmm-hmm. Yeah, I was going to say, I was recently just popping into one of these garden stores to buy some potting soil and I was looking at the seeds they have, being a seed nerd, because I wanted to see what the selection was and, you know, who they're buying from all these sorts of things. And it blew my mind to see, like, all of these seeds had this special coating on them, I guess. Some sort of, like, fertilizer coating or fungicide, I didn't really look into what it was, but they were all like bright and candy colored. They were like, orange or blue, or whatever and they look so far from the original seed and I thought my goodness, like, that's another step removed from knowing where your seeds come from is not even knowing what they actually look like because they're covered in a layer of what looks like an M&M coating but probably far more toxic. But yeah, it was really a moment for me after doing so much seed cleaning recently to be like, wow, you could not even know what your carrot seed looks like, let alone what part of the carrot it comes from. So yeah, that was my moment of realization.

Keeley Nixon

Yeah, and you're at, that's a good point too. Is thinking of like that question of the like "the where," "the what" are complex, but just asking that question is a really great starting point. And I think it's one of those things like, if you've got seeds that are stashed aside or say, you know, you bought that packet from the store and you were drawn to it because the photo looked nice or there was some sort of brand recognition happening then like, taking a look on the package or the company's website. What's it say about how, where it's grown? You know, you might see see the words like "it's sourced" or "they supply" and then describe the seed, so "high quality" or "gmo-free," or "organic," but see if there's actually a mention that they're growing it themselves because, you know, looking at that can be really telling in terms of what's the part of the story that you'll know.

I think there's a lot of companies out there, many who are fantastic, but they may be based locally, but they aren't growing what they sell, but they source seeds that are grown. So that might be from contract growers, who are either close by or far afield, or they might be using a broker and sourcing seeds from anywhere. And that's, you know, they're just getting the seeds from other places in Canada, or the continent, or international or wherever they can get seeds, so they can meet demand. So it's not about lauding any judgment about that but it's about that transparency matters, right? So that you as a gardener grabbing those seeds, when you're out getting potting soil, you know who grew the seed or where it came from, and there's you know, multiple reasons that's important, but transparency matters.

I think it's also like, to sort of pull this back for a sec to is it's this really interesting moment, right? Because we're talking here about seeds is like a product or an input because we're illustrating it as such an integral part of our gardening, and food and farm systems, but it's also like a living seed of living resource, right? It carries genetic and ecological and cultural stories and all these things that are tied to people in place. So I always return to the wise words of Rowan White who talks that, you know, the more that we can continue to advocate for seeds in the multitude of the varieties that make up our food system, the healthier and more durable the food system will be.

So if we're talking about seeds, in the context of people and place, it's like, yes, who's growing it and what are their stories behind it in terms of being able to figure out what is the system or where it's coming from that matters? So I think like my

broad arc when I talk about why seed matters is one of the things is, you know, the story of the seed makes it magic not mystery. So, you know where the people are, you know the conditions it was grown in, you know the histories that might be tied to a variety, which without that sort of transparency, you missed that story.

Steph Benoit

Mhmm, mhmm. Could you take us through the process of a seed being grown on a farm, being ready to go, and it actually being sold under a certain label or under a certain company?

Keeley Nixon

So I think if you're talking about the like the structure of say a seed company and how they source seed, which I think is a way to frame that is, you know, is its questions about the like, what is the story of the seed from it being grown to like you buying it in that package? So, so that could be like, there's many wonderful small-scale seed companies that are across the country, which, you know, you can find through the Ecological Seed Finder or the Canadian Seed Index, but that will also be like often one grower and they are growing as much as they can and then they might be doing that packaging, the marketing, the selling through different distribution. Or there's contract growing, like I mentioned, where you have, you know, look, grower is making a commitment to provide X amount of a certain kind of seed at a certain quality and will in exchange be paid a price.

So often that's larger seed companies [that] might use contract growing to be able to get their seed from multiple places if they're not growing it themselves. What's interesting about the BC Eco Seed Co-op is, you know, the idea is being able to have multiple members who are farmers and growing seeds. So the co-op currently is at 20 farmers, who are working together, who basically, they can access seeds together. So the idea is that they are growing it, they are sending it to our co-op base and that's where we are doing the packaging, we're doing the marketing for it, we're fulfilling orders, we're getting it to our stockists so that takes that pressure off of the members to do, you know, have 20 different small seed companies trying to offer everything, but instead can focus on the varieties that do well for them and their region. So that would be very different than somewhere such as, say, William Dam seeds in Ontario. That is a much larger presence and are likely using multiple modes to be able to pull together seeds, to be able to offer such a robust call catalog year after year.

So, for talking about, you know, what does that look like from that structure of like a seed being grown to see being packaged? One example would be ALM Farm and Full Circle seeds, which does have its own seed company. They're also a member of the co-op. So that might be something where MaryAlice is doing her cannellini beans, and is able to grow it in her field for the season. She lets us know how much she's growing. I can let her know how much has sold in the past year from the best of our sales data. And what she'll do is when she's harvested it, she'll let us know a final weight that she's sending. She pops it in the mail, sends it to our base. We can run the germination test. Meanwhile, we've got the quality information from her: What was the population size? What was the isolation distance? Did she notice anything in growing? And then after it's passed germination testing we are able to package it up at packet and bulk amounts. It gets listed on our website. It goes to our retailers. We fulfill the orders. And then at the end of the year, she's getting her share of what had sold at that point.

Steph Benoit

Nice. I mean also, I think, maybe the reason that we see so many of these companies that are larger or this consolidation of the seed industry, like so many other Industries, is that there's a lot of like upfront costs or a lot of yeah, potentially, a lot of risks for small seed growers, or a lot of hesitation from farms to make that a major part of their business, so I think what's really cool about the co-op as well, is that as you said, it takes some of that pressure of all of the logistics beyond just growing the seeds off the farmers that there's someone else, a little mastermind, like yourself, who's doing some of those projections, making sure it gets to stockists, sharing the cost of labeling, all that sort of stuff, the brand and the identity, instead of every farm having to make that for themselves. So, I think that's a really cool way to sort of lower the barrier to these different small-scale farms of getting into the seed industry.

Keeley Nixon

Absolutely. And from my experience, when I was market farming too, it was that line where so many of my farmer cohorts in my age group were just interested in farming. They weren't interested in having to stand behind the farmers market table and really like pitch the, "Buy these carrots, buy these carrots!" So, the same for seed growing too, right? If your goal and your passion is growing like one kind of arugula and you want to grow a lot of it and you want everyone to buy this arugula,

do it! Do it well. Tell us your story and then let us like, you know, market it and get it to the people so that you can spend your energy on your farm, doing that.

And for some crops, it's really easy to add into your already vegetable production. If you want to do a lot of seeds, there's lots of complications that can be, you know, worked in or that you should be aware of but there's wonderful resources out there in terms of that. And, you know, folks have been doing that. Particularly, the last two decades have sort of seen an interesting renaissance for seed growing and integrating seed into vegetable crop production, too. So to know that there's a community of growers, just whatever province you're in to be able to tap into to connect and support that and it's a great avenue to explore as well.

Steph Benoit

Nice. Could you give a couple examples of things that are growing really well in our region and a lot of seeds that are produced here versus things that tend to grow not so well in BC that we end up importing a lot of?

Keeley Nixon

Yeah, well, I think it's always interesting and I don't want to take us too offside, but I think it's really interesting to look back in the history, particularly in BC, because I think when we talk about why seed matters, it's what seed are we talking about? And you know, what is the possibility it gives us? Which a lot of that is that security and independence that you can get the seeds, you want that you need in your region. So, you know, there's the lines when we're talking here again, about open-pollinated, not hybrid. There might be great producing hybrids that are crucial to your farm operation. You know companies like Johnny's [Selected Seeds] out of the states. That is a workers co-op. They have great, you know, lots of transparency. Lots of breeding. That's wonderful. Those are great resources to have, but when we're talking about the open-pollinated varieties that do well here, you know, we're looking at, you know, we want tomatoes that are more blight resistant. We want peas that are less prone for any of the wilts. It's trying to look at what does well here. But we have a great history, in particular like 1915 to 1960, you know with the outset of war happening in Europe, there was a whole panic that folks wouldn't be able to access vegetable seeds, which although Canada was, you know, establish for grain growing, [it] really wasn't for vegetable seeds and they are being imported. And after sort of focusing and pivoting with ranges of community and government support, there were multiple regions in BC that focused on doing biennial crops. Carrots,

beets, rutabaga, onion, and lots of annuals, probably about a dozen like peas and beans, and tomatoes and, you know, through Southwest BC, the Lower Mainland, the Bulkley Valley, Okanagan, Vancouver Island. It peaked, actually, in 1945 with the equivalent of, in 2020 dollars, it would have been about 21 million dollars of 2,000 acres in vegetable seed production that we were cranking out and you know, stop being mentioned in about 1950 and really, you know, after the outset of war and changing economics. But it's a really interesting moment to say, you know, climate and soils do well here for lots of ranges of seed and we have a proven history to it which really came up in the forefront through the pandemic times when again, people were like, where do we get our seed? Exports are not coming in, you know. At the co-op we were able to have- we had farmers contact us saying, oh my order is tied up at the border, do you still have a bulk amount of spinach or of carrots? And that we could prioritize farmer orders to get them, which, there's nothing like knowing a farmer to call up to be able to have that independence and security.

Steph Benoit

Totally. Yeah, and I think you touched on a few different points there of the question of, why does it matter where your seeds are coming from? I mean, a huge one, as you mentioned, is the security of it. We live in a very globalized world, and sometimes that's to our distinct advantage, and sometimes, like we've seen in the past year, it can make things really complicated. So there is that huge benefit of being able to know the person that's producing your product, whatever it is, in this case seeds, and having that reliable access to them.

Keeley Nixon

Yeah, I think really being able to produce locally means independence of reliance on that external market and that security of having that seed at hand. We're also, you know, for growing locally we can keep varieties in our community. I think of how many countless times I've heard from gardeners about, like, a particular variety that they love for years. They couldn't get it and they couldn't get it anywhere, it just disappeared. So, you know, even though it may have been important to them, maybe that company didn't see it as a big seller, or there was a crop failure, or something else that resulted in it being dropped. And you know, there's a risk that once it's dropped, it can be gone. So if we're having again- knowing who's growing things, finding local varieties, each having a role to play and seed saving that in passing that on that keeps those varieties also close at heart and limits more of that external reliance, too.

Steph Benoit

Yeah, and the longer something spends in a certain region, the longer it has to become adapted to that. I think that's also one of the big arguments with these sort of living seed banks, if you will, that every season that it's exposed to the conditions that are prevalent in that region or the changing conditions with climate change or whatever else, it has another opportunity to adapt and for certain individuals from that that population to really thrive under those conditions. So in light of climate change and regional adaptation, there's a huge opportunity there for local seeds.

Keeley Nixon

Yeah. I think it's a good [point]- like local grows better locally, right? Like we know the stats are pretty bleak that we've lost 75% of agricultural biodiversity in 100 years and diversity is narrowing at this moment where we need it more now than ever to have that resilience in food systems, particularly because of what climate change is looking like and how it's accelerating.

So when we talk about seeds and the potential that they have, there's you know, the beauty of them and the flavor and nutrition, but it is that regional adaptation. It's that, you know, it's how that plant will take up nutrients, how it will respond to disease, or pests, or stress. So, you know, really it having those seeds grown here in the region or close at home, whether it's the bioregion of BC or, you know, similar soils from Ontario to BC, having regional areas where they're grown and collected helps to build it up in the plant. So if we're adapting seeds to changing climates and environmental conditions, it's one way we can actually mitigate risk for farmers in the food systems.

Steph Benoit

Mhmm, Yeah, and that's more important than perhaps ever before. I mean, with the level of uncertainty that we're facing around climate and how it could affect global food systems, it's yeah, you just like can't overstate the importance of trying to sort of have all of our eggs in different baskets when it comes to climate mitigation opportunities in agriculture and across across the board have.

Yeah, and intuitively. It makes sense. That if you think about this lovely-ish climate that we have in BC-- I say "ish" because I'm still really not adapted to BC winters, but I am so into BC summers-- the lovely-ish, very wet climate that we have here in a lot of places on the west coast. And then you think of sunny Southern California, where

drought is a huge issue or wherever else, and where they're growing a lot of seeds.. or if you think of the fact that some of your tomato seeds could be coming from China in a totally different sort of ecosystem and under different climate conditions, when you think about all of those things, you're like, okay, yeah, it would make sense that a tomato that was sort of “born and raised” in BC would do way better than a tomato that's coming from somewhere that has almost no climatic similarities to BC. So I think on that very intuitive level, when you start learning about how far afield your seeds are coming from you're like, oh, yeah, that makes sense. That, you know, maybe if I had grown up in BC, I wouldn't find these winters so dreadful, but instead I'm used to snow and freezing cold, and for me, that's comfortable, and for other people, this is comfortable. And I think in the same way seeds are-- the longer that you've spent there, the more adapted you are to it.

Keeley Nixon

Absolutely, and I think seed is like local food, right? From buying it from someone local means you can find out that whole story. So, you know, you can find out what is it, what were their growing conditions? You can actually ask that versus the imported tomato seed from China. Who would you ask about, you know, were they using a lower-til system or what was their irrigation system or what was their fertilizers? You can ask about that when you know who's growing it, specifically. You can find out about their germination rates. We're really proud that we meet and exceed Canadian standards and we always will list our germination rates and that's a really important thing because people want to rely on high quality seeds. It doesn't, you know-- there's something about having seed, there's a different thing about having high quality seed out there. Also, the people can tell you about their labor practices, their systems. It can tell you about, you know, if there's a reason they're growing it-- there's some of those that are tied to such places and people that have been passed on. You can be part of the story by doing that. Which again, if we're externalizing, we're not seeing that true cost, you won't, you won't know the story.

So whether it's you're buying your Costco carrots versus your farmers market carrots, or your seeds from a little local company versus a large importer. It's being able to also have that traceability and accountability back.

Steph Benoit

Mhmm. I think so often about that Michael Pollan quote about being able to shake the hand that feeds you. And I think it could totally come back to seeds as well, of

being able to, maybe not in pandemic times, physically shaking the hand that feeds you-- at least, not without a hearty dose of hand sanitizer before and after-- but this idea of having so close to connection that you can reach out and, and be in contact with the people who are putting the food on your table if you're not doing it yourself, is a really, really cool way to feel more connected to your food, to have this positive environmental impact, and then also just to feel the sense of community and connectedness to all stages of the food that you're consuming.

Keeley Nixon

Absolutely, and that's why like this surge in the demand for seeds has given me a lot of hope. You know, the hope that people start seeing seed as part of the food system. And you know behind that variety that you might notice in your community garden, that lettuce that's gorgeous, is you know, what's that variety? Where does the seed come from? Being able to track that down and see that that is a starting point for our food systems as well.

There's also hope that people will start saving and sharing more seeds from either in their garden or with their friends, or through many of the countless community seed libraries that exist across the province and the country. Hope for all these family farms and businesses that are specializing in their region, that there's further connections there, there's interest so that we can have more, say, funding opportunities for variety improvement and breeding and we can have more engagement with that. And I think that like having that access to people is also really hopeful to be able to build community in a moment that we really need that. It's almost like building a decentralized, resilient community seed bank as there's more people growing and talking about seed, and being really proud of the varieties that they're growing and like that, gorgeous lettuce in their garden. That's a win for all of us, too.

Steph Benoit

Yeah, I think as you kind of already alluded to her, but Rowan White, who's such an incredible Mohawk seed keeper and advocate, speaks a lot to having that connection to the history of your seeds and those stories and how it's so powerful. Beyond, just the productivity in your garden, or the taste or whatever, being able to connect with all of the different generations that have come before us in tending these seeds, and getting them to where they are today is really, really beautiful. And it doesn't have to be-- I mean, it's cool if it can be someone that you directly know or

whatever else-- but it's also cool to connect with stories that you might not have known about. For example, this year in the Citizen Seed Trial through FarmFolk CityFolk we're growing a variety of snow pea that comes from the Slocan Valley and it was, it's a little kind of unclear, the exact origins of it, but it's believed to have been bred by interred Japanese people during the Second World War who were being kept in the Slocan Valley and I mean it's not necessarily a beautiful story but it is really interesting to think about that is a huge part of BC's history and maybe one that we don't talk about so much, but here it is living through our food! Which is kind of a way that we wouldn't even necessarily think that that history would continue to live on, so, I think it's so cool to be able to go back and connect to all of the different people who have, yeah, who have gotten the seeds to where you are today.

Keeley Nixon

Absolutely, and I think that's a really beautiful example because even though that's not a good history, seed is a conversation point to open up the dialogue that is uncomfortable, particularly for a lot of white folks who are gardening and growing. So, you know, how is seed helping us to be able to tell the stories? And I think for myself, that's an integral question in running a seed company, is how do we do good seed work in terms of it. It's not just getting all of the varieties out to all the people and having a vibrant traditional business model. It's recognizing all those colonial systems and frameworks and oppression and corporatization on our land and our seeds. And I'm a real behind-the-scenes, quietly working kind of person, but wanting to really build those relationships, have difficult conversations, and show up to listen and amplify, particularly from Indigenous Seed Keepers and look at, you know, how do we lift up the work that's being done from initiatives like Sovereign Seeds or also, where's our roles? So, you know, we're internally, we're also asking like where the histories behind our varieties in terms of how we describe them and can we look at varieties that have Indigenous histories? Can we look at what seed repatriation would look like in terms of being able to either have seed go back to community or that we can still offer it for sale through the shop, but those proceeds are going somewhere to benefit community. So we don't have answers and there's lots of discussion, but part of it is being able to use seeds as a conversation to talk about those, those systems and the frameworks of oppression.

Steph Benoit

Mhmm. Yeah, and I think coming back to-- I mean maybe this is also sort of tangential but there's so many wonderful thinkers and activists who have talked

about how all of the seeds that we have today are the result of-- or the vast majority of them-- are the result of basically 10,000 years of coevolution since humans really dug into agriculture and got where we are today. And so if you think about 10,000 years of people --and maybe longer in some circumstances-- 10,000 years of people, tending to these seeds and selecting for what they want and yeah, carrying them on in passing that wisdom down to their youth and the next generation, it's almost crazy to think about a company coming in and in the last 50 years deciding they want to patent something and call it their own when it's like, well, what about all these people who came before you who have been working for truly generations to get you that product that you then tweaked one gene on and then called your own? So that's my little hot take on sort of intellectual property rights. You can't really go back and trace the intellectual property rights of 10,000 years of peasant farmers, but...

Keeley Nixon

I think you bring up a good point because I think it's like, you know, when we're, especially when we're touting something like, you know, where's your seed come from? Why does it matter? Why is local the way to go? It's also, there's a whole plethora of challenges around that too, right? So it's also trying to then say, like, you know, even, you know, trying to get small seed growers into larger locations, accessibility really matters for getting to seed, right? So, I think it's the difference if you know, if I think of like, how do we make changes for accessing where regional growing is that we need our customers to demand to be seeing it. So when you are at that larger store and you're only seeing some sort of generic seeds that are supplied by somewhere, but you know where there's no story there, is asking and making those requests about seeing it. But we also need the retailers to be able to have systems that help get smaller seeds and smaller producers into the market. So I think, for example, it's one of the challenges for us is that there's often a really high product required to be able to access a location, which is similar to, you know, having produced in to say, chain grocery stores, for example. So it can really keep us out, because if we have to be supplying racks of 500 packets, at all times, to 15 and locations that volume, and you know, we're expected to take a half cut of what the price would be otherwise if we're selling it, that makes it really hard for seed growers to get into those places.

So, you know coupling that with consolidation of the seed industry, increasing in private over public breeding programs, utility patents, plant variety protection. None

of that is helping. So it's that (*indistinguishable*) be able to have, you know, customers demand to see it, to find out where they can, ask retail to do it, have you know, retailers who are interested in local to be able to hear from the actual suppliers. Like how, how can that happen for them? And then, yeah, just purchasing when you can. The success of local requires the market support, so keeping making those choices and voting with your dollars to support local businesses.

Steph Benoit

Yeah, and you know, at first, it can seem sort of like a daunting thing to take on, like, "Oh, I have to do all of this," when really, I just wanted that convenience of being able to go to the store and, you know, just when I remember it to pick up that one package of something, but I think there really is so much to be gained on a personal level of, like... I don't know, maybe I'm just a seed nerd, but that connection that excitement to the stories and to thinking about, oh, maybe I'm going to start saving this and then passing it on to someone else like a friend or, I don't know-- hopefully, a few more years for me, but a kid or whoever else...

I don't know. I get excited about that. I think that's a bonus. That is something that is hard to quantify. You know, it's hard to say, "Oh for a dollar more," or whatever else this is. For the dollar that I save it's going to be worth it to forgo those stories and those connections, or it is worth it for me for X number of dollars. But at the end of the day, I think that's a really amazing opportunity to get involved and connected and not to feel like you're just living in this little concrete jungle, so, so separated from all of the people who are feeding you and taking care of you and everything else.

Keeley Nixon

Absolutely. So last two comments on that point is I think there's two things. I'd love to see that, you know in the show notes we can include for listeners places to find local seed. So like the Ecological Seed Finder and Canadians Seed Index. However, also like if you went out and you bought your seeds at the hardware store, no judgment, but send us an email to the BC Eco Seed Co-op, tell us where you buy your seeds. Tell us where you're buying in your communities, particularly in BC, so that we can explore how to talk to those retailers together. So I won't, can't change everyone's buying habits at once, but I can definitely ask for feedback to hear where you want to be seeing us, too, and that helps us make the case for how we want to explore in different regions too.

Steph Benoit

Yeah. That's a great point. Yeah, it's interesting to hear about why people got into seeds because it seems like a lot of people that I've talked to didn't, they didn't set out and they were like, "Ahh, yes, this is what I will do with my life. I will dedicate it to the seeds." And still, when I tell people what I do, they're like, "Hmm, okay, so seeds, tell me more...."

Keeley Nixon

Yeah, I just think like and I'll be anecdotal, completely like to look at myself in this like that seed has not always been central for me. I remember my mom planting a backyard garden in the first childhood home we had, and I admire people's gardens, but I never had any idea about what seed was like, I would more think like, "Oh that's beautiful!" or, "What is that?"

But it was actually when I started gardening with my now husband That I remember watching my sister-- his sister, my now sister-in-law-- have like packages of seeds out in the yard and it was Mojave Kaplan from Planting Seeds Project. I remember distinctly seeing her package and thinking like that looks different than everywhere else. And it's definitely, I think her package still looks the same. It's a very homespun look but it was something that grabbed me because I felt like there must be a story and it made me look twice. And then you Keeley Nixon, by 2004 I started farming with ALM Farm, which is the home of Full Circle Seeds here on the west coast of Vancouver Island and a whole new world opened up for me to look at who grows our food and our seed and why it matters. And I think again like the story of the seed behind all those gardens and the range and knowledge is so interesting to see in this current moment. So again, it's if there's any "aha" moments out there for anyone, it's just even to think about when you're grabbing that seed next where to look up that company. Learn a little bit more or yeah, Google who's growing local seed in your province and dig a little bit deeper and see who's out there. There's probably some really cool stories behind those packages, too.

Steph Benoit

Yeah. I can't like, I can't stress enough the joy that it brings me to be able to show someone how like, "Oh, this is actually the part of the plant where the seed comes from." They're like, "I've never thought about that." You know, a lot of my friends who are like me and in their late 20s are just now for the first time, starting to think about, "Hmm. Wow. I didn't know that that's like the part where you would get, I don't know,

where you would get seeds from this plant or that plant” or whatever else and there's that real joy of discovery that sometimes I think, especially as we get older and we kind of feel, maybe, a little bit more, like, not world-weary, that's not the word I'm looking for...but as we, I don't know, as we kind of get into our habits, we sometimes lose a little bit of that sense of curiosity, or the joy of discovery. It can be harder to connect with that. And so, that's so cool as well to me, to be able to provide a bit of that joy of discovery or that moment of connection or whatever else is really, really powerful.

Keeley Nixon

And then it's still like you know, seed security is different than even food security. Where does it fit? Where does seed fit with food systems? Which is still, been has been a real gap, which is funny because it is this line of where is, you know, seed something that we all have access to and versus like, how does that become a product or an input? And I think it's different because I think we're trying to have things to be able to co-exist and have them and hold them in different spaces in different places and different times. It's super interesting and seeds have so much potential. There was a New York Times story on April 21st about this long-standing research project of seeds that were buried and are dug up every 20 years and are tested for germination to see, like, are they still lasting? What does that mean? And of course, you know, there are seed banks and there are seed vaults and these other things, but just again, like, there's an interest there, because there's this feeling of the magic that they can hold. In terms of, you know, they can crank out great lettuce for the year and we eat the lettuce and whatever is left of the plant, we compost, and that's fine. But it's you know, if you had a little bit of that seed left and nobody else was selling it, the next year, you know, is that seed, how much more valuable is that? Is that to you too?

Steph Benoit

Totally. Yeah, I mean, coming back to this idea of knowing where our food comes from. I think once you even get to the point where you're firmly like, okay, this is how a zucchini grows or whatever else or this is it grows on this plant and this way, it's vining, it's not, it's determinate or indeterminate, once you get to that level then there's still that other level of, okay, you get that food doesn't just come from the grocery store. There's a step before that. But then there's a whole step before you just get the seed from that packet and sometimes it feels like it's as mysterious to

people as like what comes before were born. You know, it just who knows? It's just there one day you just wake up and that's as far as you remember.

So I think that's a kind of next step in perhaps, the natural evolution for a lot of people who get into into vegetable gardening or any sort of planting to think, "Okay, like now I know how you get it from seed to plant. How do you get it from plant back to seed?"

Keeley Nixon

Absolutely, and there's so many great resources out there, too. Like, we're always trying to lift up what already exists, but in our new section, our blog, for the BC Eco Seed Co-op, for example, we have some roundups of reading lists on terms of vegetable growing but also of seed production, some links to resources.

We also keep a bunch of books that are talking about children and seeds, which I think is also really great in terms of that even if we don't know what it is, you know, as parents or as aunties or uncles, that like talk to our kids about the magic of seeds, is always a great, great tool and there's fantastic seed podcasts. There's all these ways out there to be learning about the growing and doing. And even if you do, I myself I am a landless recovering farmer. I have access to a very small patio and a shared community garden plot, mainly because I'm volunteering behind the scenes to help strengthen our community garden, I'm well waitlisted, but it's trying to like, you know, make decisions and support information sharing, even if I can't do it myself. So we can't do it all, but if we can, you know, forward that Facebook article about why seed matters you're doing something that is being part of building resilient seeds systems too, and really showing the stories behind the local folks, as well.

Steph Benoit

Hmm. Awesome. Alright, thank you so much Keeley, so much great information that you have and that you shared, and hopefully this piques a few peoples' curiosity about what's in that packet and how it got there. And, yeah, we'll put a bunch of links in our show notes about different resources that people can tap into places that can connect with local seeds, places they can find them, all those sorts of things. And yeah, I just wanted to thank you so much for taking the time to do this and have this conversation and hopefully this is just the first of many more conversations both amongst us and amongst other people who get into this.

Keeley Nixon

Absolutely. Thanks so much for having me and I really shout out the seed mentors out there and all the folks who have helped guide my journey, and also I hope if there's even one person who listens to this, who starts thinking about seeing a different way than I feel like I'm also contributing back to the community that's helped to my raise my profile in my experience and knowledge as well.

Steph Benoit

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