

**“Saving Appalachian Gardens and Stories (SAGAS): Banking the Memories
of those Contributing the Seeds”**

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August 1, 2010 – May 30, 2011

May 15, 2011

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Final Report Narrative

Name of Project: Saving Appalachian Gardens and Stories (SAGAS): Banking the Memories of those Contributing the Seeds

Grant Period: August 1, 2010 – May 30, 2011

Grantee Name: North Georgia College & State University

Project Director: Drs. Michele Hill & Chuck Robertson

Description of Project:

For the 2010-2011 Appalachian Teaching Project, Saving Appalachian Gardens and Stories (SAGAS), is project that connected with our past efforts in expanding our knowledge of green oriented spaces in Dahlonega City and Lumpkin County by interviewing and creating a video of heirloom seeds and gardens. Students in PSYC 4950, the Appalachian Teaching Project taught by Dr. Michele Hill met at the Vickery House to plan and implement the SAGAS project. This project involved students directly communicating with the Appalachian Studies Center faculty and community volunteers that maintained the heirloom garden and seeds at the Dahlonega historic Vickery House.

Activities:

Students conducted undergraduate research. They developed interview protocols, conducted interviews and videotaped the local community members regarding the stories of heirloom seeds and their importance to sustainability. Students collected photos and other archival data. They created four video segments to include a 90-second trailer followed by three, three-minute videos. These videos have been donated to the Appalachian Studies Center and will be placed online. Students were responsible for editing the video, audio, music selection, and overall production. Additionally, students updated the 2009-2010 “North Georgia Goes Green” map with a dozen new local businesses that use sustainable practices. They identified additional local heirloom gardens and farmers markets that sell heirloom produce.

Students have presented their work at the Annual Appalachian Teaching Conference in Washington, DC (December, 2010) and at the North Georgia 16th Annual Research Conference (April, 2011). The poster exhibit was presented at the ATP Conference in Washington DC on December 4 and 5, 2010. In their poster presentation students provided information including:

1. What is SAGAS (Saving Appalachian Gardens and Stories)?
2. What criteria must a seed meet to be an heirloom seed?

3. How are stories of the heirloom seeds passed on through generations?
4. Samples of stories provided by heirloom gardeners?
5. How are heirloom seeds banked to preserve them year after year?
6. Who was involved in the project and an overview of the video production?

The exhibit contained four kinds of heirloom seeds from the Historic Vickery House garden. Pictures of the garden and preservation techniques were included. The students presented the unedited video to the Dahlonega Chamber of Commerce on Friday, February 4, 2011. They will present a final edited version when they are invited back to the Chamber meeting this fall term 2011.

Project Outcomes:

Aside from the conference presentation in Washington, D.C. and additional presentation, the students have fulfilled the following project outcomes. They have created a video to educate the community and tourists visiting North Georgia, specifically Dahlonega and Lumpkin County. In order to do this they met with community members to identify the existing and other potential heirloom gardens and seed donors. Students learned and implemented undergraduate research related to the Appalachian Teaching Project: created and used an interview protocol, learned and utilized the video and editing equipment, interviewed and videotaped individuals who have donated seeds and to capture their stories of the age, propagation, and lineage of each seed. The students have since provided the Appalachian Studies Center at the Vickery House with four edited videos for its "Saving Appalachian Gardens and Stories" (SAGAS) project. Finally, they updated and maintained the "North Georgia Goes Green" map by adding additional sites to the map.

Problems Encountered:

The biggest obstacle to completing the project was in arranging the interviews. This simply took time and some community members did not wish to speak on videotape. Therefore, alternative means of capturing those stories had to be devised. When the SAGAS project began in 2004-5 there were six to seven heirloom seed donors. Today, only three of those individuals are still alive. The age of participants and attrition are of serious concern to the project founders. Other problems encountered were technical issues related to video and audiotaping to get the best quality product. Students had to reshoot some interviews more than once.

Program Continuation and Sustainability:

In an effort to move the SAGAS project beyond the original seed donors, the students interviewed other local heirloom seed users as part of the research. This has begun to move the project to include a broader spectrum of the population that is sustaining the heirloom seed tradition. The third video in the series created for the ASC related to the new generation of young Appalachian gardeners working to sustain the heirloom heritage. Thus, the SAGAS project will grow to include the regional Appalachian heirloom gardens and seeds still in operation.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

That the program will continue into the foreseeable future to gather data and support those Appalachian gardeners maintaining the heirloom seed tradition especially in light of the enormous genetically engineered farming that has proliferated our country. That the project will assist in maintaining a sense of pride and urgency around the need for such seeds to remain in tact.

It is our recommendation that a seed bank be in operation in each region of Appalachia. This will maintain the local seed population for distinct areas. This may stall or prevent the possible extinction of many vegetables and fruits still viable.