



Project updates / Spring 2021

As we reach the start of Easter term, we wanted to update you on the project's progress: from new post-docs to publications and podcasts. You can find out more about From Collection to Cultivation by visiting our website at www.cultivation.hps.cam.ac.uk.



Welcoming Post-Doctoral Research Fellow Ryan Nehring

Ryan came to the project once he completed his PhD in Development Sociology at Cornell University. At Cornell, his research analysed the history and politics of Brazil's public agricultural research agency, Embrapa, and its role in the transformation of Brazilian agriculture in the 20th century. Prior to Cornell, Ryan worked as a researcher on sustainable rural development for the United Nations Development Programme—International Policy Centre in Brasilia, Brazil.

His research at Cambridge will focus on two interrelated projects. The first is in collaboration with agronomists at Brazil's Embrapa who have developed a 'living seed bank'. This 'living seed bank' serves as a hub to collect historically marginalised crops native to the tropics from small farmers in Brazil and distribute them to other farmers throughout the country. In essence, the participatory nature of the project places innovation in the hands of farmers by serving both as the physical location of in situ crop conservation and as an expanding network of farmers interested in growing marginalised food crops. Ryan will work with the scientists to understand the ways in which farmers and tropical ecologies shape crop diversity (and its conservation) in Brazil.

The second project looks at the role of Brazil in the global exchange of plant genetic material for food and agriculture. Over the last decade, the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture has been under intense negotiations between countries. This Treaty governs the exchange and use of plant genetic resources, as well as the benefits thereof. However, the amount of crops included under the treaty is limited and the sharing of benefits from the use of crops is voluntary. Brazil is one of the few countries that is both a major contributor of genetic material and a major user. Ryan will draw on interviews with scientists and diplomats in Brazil as well as policymakers involved with the Treaty to understand how global governance frameworks are shaping the exchange of plant genetic resources and the future of public agricultural research in Brazil and beyond.

You can read more about Ryan's work [here](#).



Outreach, Events, & Publications

Potatoes and Ale at the Cambridge Festival:

As part of the [Cambridge Festival](#)—which merged the annual Festivals of Science and Ideas into one online programme—our very own Helen Anne Curry and Jessica J. Lee gave a talk entitled 'Potatoes and Ale: An Environmental History of a British Plate', examining the histories and contexts of two Cambridge Plant Breeding Institute crops, the Maris Piper potato and Maris Otter barley. The talk was well-attended by the public and marked our first foray into sharing the research of the project with a wider audience.

Recent publications:

Helen Anne Curry. 'Taxonomy, Race Science, and Mexican Maize.' *Isis* 112, no. 1 (2021). <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/71381>

Andrew Ofstehage and Ryan Nehring. 'No-till agriculture and the deception of sustainability in Brazil.' *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability*, (2021). <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14735903.2021.1910419>

Podcasts and Media:

Helen Curry also recently spoke to the [Field Lab, Earth podcast about seed banks](#), to the CSaP [Science and Policy podcast about genetic technologies](#), and to [Mind Over Chatter about food and climate change](#).

CGIAR Histories Workshop:

21–22 June and 28–29 June

Organised by Helen Anne Curry (University of Cambridge) and Timothy Lorek (University of Michigan)

This workshop will bring together leading scholars on the histories of international development and agricultural research to share their most recent scholarship on the history of CGIAR and its influential network of research institutions, which turns 50 this year.

The full line-up of papers is here: <https://www.cultivation.hps.cam.ac.uk/CGIAR-histories>

From Collection to Cultivation

hps-cultivation@lists.cam.ac.uk

www.cultivation.hps.cam.ac.uk

Department of History and Philosophy of Science
University of Cambridge
Free School Lane
Cambridge CB2 3RH
United Kingdom



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