

*from*  
**Collection to  
Cultivation**



## Project Updates / Winter 2023

As the new year begins, we're excited to share the latest work of the From Collection to Cultivation team members. As you'll see, it's been an active publication season! We hope this update will tempt you into exploring some of our recent publications in depth. Remember, too, that you can keep track of the project's activities, past and present, by visiting our website at [www.cultivation.hps.cam.ac.uk](http://www.cultivation.hps.cam.ac.uk).



A meeting of the Taiwanese Joint Commission on Rural Reconstruction, 1950s. You can learn more about the JCRR and its work in agricultural development in a new Agricultural History article by Leo Chu. See below for details.

## Our recent publications

The past six months have seen a number of innovative publications from the project team on topics spanning the broad range of our interests in crop diversity and food security.

What's in a (crop) name? Postdoctoral associate [Tad Brown](#) asks and answers that question with respect to [the history of varieties of peppers grown in the southern United States](#) in the July issue of *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences*. Situating the history of crop naming in the larger histories of botany and taxonomy, Brown's analysis is a reminder that expertise in agricultural biology has long bounced between market and experiment station, with consequences for the composition of fields and dinner plates alike.

The August 2023 issue of *Agricultural History* featured new research by two members of the From Collection to Cultivation collective. In his article, doctoral candidate [Leo Chu](#) takes readers on a tour of Taiwanese politics and agriculture through his [history of the Asian Vegetable Research and Development Center](#) and its relationship to the Green Revolution. Meanwhile PI [Helen Anne Curry](#) explores [the technical and cultural work of describing sweet potatoes](#) and the lessons its history holds for appreciating the challenges of creating inclusive agricultural science.

The September issue of *The Journal of Ethnobotany* includes a contribution by doctoral candidate [Daniela Sclavo](#), in which [she reveals the gendered assumptions built into pioneering ethnobotanical research in Mexico](#). As she argues, the first generation of Mexican ethnobotanists "placed women as part of the family unit and, therefore, as passive actors, while men were presented as the main agents and knowledge carriers. That is, within their celebratory and politically charged discourse, ethnobotanists also defined who had a place—or not—in traditional agricultural knowledge."

We have several more works up online in Early View, including several discussed below. You can also visit our [Resources](#) pages to see what lies ahead.



## Update on special issue, "The History of Crop Science and the Future of Food"

You can now access in Early View many contributions to the special issue of *Plants, People, Planet* edited by PI Helen Anne Curry and former postdoctoral associate Ryan Nehring (now based at the International Food Policy Research Institute).

Team member contributions include:

- Tad Brown's [analysis of the career of groundnut breeder Venkata Rao Krishnaji Badami](#) and the experiences of Indian researchers who tried to navigate the competing demands of imperial research centers and colonial settings.
- Daniela Sclavo's study of the elements of crop diversity—[in this case the spicy flavor of chile](#)—often missed in state-led conservation and food provisioning programs.
- Helen Anne Curry's take on [the role of agricultural extension programs in the spread of monoculture](#) and diminishment of crop diversity and local participation, illustrated through a history of hybrid corn.
- Ryan Nehring's [account of pasture grass research and its contributions to the transformation of cattle ranching](#)—and with it, ecologies and economies—in Brazil.

But that's not all to see in this still-in-progress issue! Other contributions already available include a [history of UK bread wheat](#) development, reflections on [maize in Iberia](#) and its relation to the arrival of modernity and preservation of heritage, an [analysis of maize conservation](#) in Mexico, new perspectives on [rice development and production by maroon communities](#) in Suriname, and (announced in our last newsletter), a [political history of Italian wheat science](#).

Stay tuned for more contributions and an announcement of the complete special issue later this year.

## Latest Publications and Press

### Project-Sponsored Research Publications

- Helen Anne Curry, '[Diversifying Description: Sweet Potato Science and International Agricultural Research after the Green Revolution](#)', *Agricultural History* 97, no. 3 (2023): 414–447.
- Tad Brown, '[Cropping Synonymy: Varietal Standardization in the United States, 1900–1970](#)', *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* 45, no. 3 (2023): 33.

### Other Publications by Project Affiliates

- Daniela Sclavo, '[Framing the Traditional: Counterrevolution and Gender in Mexican Ethnobotanical Research Through the 1970s and 1980s](#)', *Journal of Ethnobotany* 43,

no. 3 (2023): 262-273.

- Leo Chu, '[With and against the Grain: The Asian Vegetable Research and Development Center and Modest Narratives of Green Revolution in Taiwan, 1963-2002](#)', *Agricultural History* 97, no. 3 (2023): 448-477.

### **Outreach and Press**

- Daniela Sclavo, 'Pluralizando el canon: la agroecología y la etnobotánica en México desde una perspectiva de género', [La Jornada del Campo](#), December 2023.
- Helen Anne Curry, 'La diversidad de cultivos: repensar la narrativa de la extinción', [La Jornada del Campo](#), December 2023.

## **Recent Conference and Workshop Presentations**

### **Erinn Campbell**

- "The Anthrax of Orchards? Anticipating the Impacts of Invasive Plant Pests, 1990-2010," Society for the History of Technology annual meeting, 26-29 October.
- "'Frank and honest"? The politics of international plant pest reporting, 1952-1994', History of Knowledge Conference, University of Porto, 22-24 November.

### **João Joaquim**

- "The early days of insect virus research and their tentative use in pest biocontrol", International Society for the History, Philosophy and Social Studies of Biology Biennial Meeting, University of Toronto, 14 July.
- 'Insect viruses as biocontrol agents in mid-twentieth century Britain,' Insect Humanities Workshop, Consortium for History of Science, Technology and Medicine, Philadelphia, 25 September.

### **Daniela Sclavo**

- 'Beyond Crops as Genetic Resources: Interlacing stories, memories, and flavours of chile peppers in Santo Domingo Tomaltepec, Oaxaca', Society for the Social Studies of Science annual meeting, Honolulu, 8-11 November.

### **Tad Brown**

- 'Chemurgy, Peanuts, & The New Deal', The New Deal & Its Legacies, College of William & Mary, 21-22 October.
- 'ADCO & the Case of a Patented Artificial Manure', Merde Alors! Conference, SOAS, London, 26-28 October.

### **Helen Anne Curry**

- 'The Seed Gospel and the Software of the Green Revolution: Agricultural Extension from Iowa to India in the Twentieth Century', Inter-Institutional Seminar "The Green Revolution: A Global Perspective on its 80th Anniversary," 13 September.
- 'The History of Science and the Future of Food: Two 'Lessons' from the Conservation of Crop Diversity', Cain conference on Science in Humanities, Humanities in Science: Embedded Connections, Science History Institute, Philadelphia, 4-6 October.
- 'Data, Duplication, and Decentralisation: Gene Bank Management in the 1980s and 1990s', Long Term Storage Infrastructures and Practices workshop, LATTs, Paris, 24 October.

- 'Imperial Potatoes in a Transnational Frame', Society for the History of Technology Annual Meeting, Los Angeles, 25-29 October.

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