

# Current State of Public Plant Breeding in the United States

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## Abstract

Public plant breeders at land grant universities and USDA play a critical role as collaborators in the development of improved varieties for organic farmers. Over the past 20 years public breeding programs, public breeding faculty positions, and government financial support have all declined. One result of this trend is that fewer and fewer public breeders are releasing finished varieties. An important, unanswered question is how to effectively re-invigorate public plant breeding programs to develop the cultivars necessary for a sustainable agricultural system in the 21st century? A survey was conducted in the summer of 2015 to assess the current state of public plant breeding programs that are releasing finished cultivars. Survey questions included funding sources, access and exchange of germplasm, size and scope of breeding programs, engagement with the private seed industry, and intellectual property rights. Results from the survey were presented, with recommendations for future action to support this critical component of organic seed systems.

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