

# Almanac of the Future

A STORY OF SUCCESS

Motivational experience No. 26

A man wearing a dark fedora and a light-colored button-down shirt is smiling and working in a field. He is holding a tool, possibly a shovel or a hoe, and appears to be digging or planting. The background shows rolling green hills and trees, suggesting a rural or agricultural setting.

**A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FROM  
PRACTICE**



*Fifteen years ago the Red de Guardianes de Semillas (Seed Guardian Network), a collective with full horizontal relations, was born in Ecuador, dedicated to the rescue of native seeds. Each guardian, member of the network shares and applies their knowledge from their autonomous environment. There is a wealth of experiences and practices around production and food, housing and other areas of daily life. Its common denominator: to build the future in the present.*



The Seed Guardian Network (RGS) is a social platform that connects families that carry out activities in favor of native seeds, agroecology and the construction of sustainable life models.

## About us

Javier Carrera, one of the pioneers of the Seed Guardian Network, recalls: "In 1998 I decided to abandon an incipient career in journalism because I did not actually go to university and learned to cultivate. In October of the same year a community at Ilaló hill invited me to give a workshop on worming; the workshop generated some frustration, mainly because of my rudimentary knowledge, but people liked my facilitation. When I returned in two weeks, they had implemented the earthworm bed in the school garden and were very excited to start the garden. I think it was the moment when I convinced myself to know more about agro ecology and other forms of permaculture." Javier, like other people dedicated to agro-ecology, ran into the difficulty of not finding native, genetically diverse seeds. "The idea of a seed bank arose and I knocked on doors to get support from some institution to implement the idea." Not getting a positive response, Javier decided to start work without resources, and in November 2002 he summoned three friends in a small cafe in Tumbaco to give birth to the Seed Guardian Network. In 2003 they joined Rogelio Simbaña and Fernanda Meneses, with whom they would form the network's work team.

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in favor of natural seeds, agro ecology and the construction of sustainable models of life. Since 2002, they have been working on personal actions and family projects of community scope dedicated to promoting agro-biodiversity and practical ecology in Ecuador (RGS web site: [www.redsemillas.org](http://www.redsemillas.org) ).

## Instead of a seed bank

At present there are about 100 families who form the threshold of the guardian network; the innermost nucleus has approximately 40 families. All Ecuadorian bio-regions, between Ecuadorian Chocó, Pacific Coast, Sierra, Amazonia and Austral are represented by guardians and

make up regional nodes of the network. Instead of a seed bank, the stakes are on the dynamization of the flow of seeds between the guardians. "In fact, the seed bank of the network exists, but instead of a bank that centralizes seed lots, it is a Seed House that dynamizes and distributes the production of the farms of the guardian families that harbor enormous diversity and wealth. In 2010 we did an inventory in only 40 farms, and in them we found about 3000 varieties ", comments Fernanda Meneses; her companion Javier complements: "People usually know 3 or 4 varieties of a crop such as corn. We have managed to rescue seeds of up to 50 varieties of corn." The rescue of native seed varieties is one of the main dynamics of RGS: seeds of different







***“De hecho, el banco de semillas de la red existe, pero en lugar de un banco que centraliza lotes de semillas son las fincas de las familias guardianes que albergan una diversidad y riqueza enorme. En 2010 hicimos un inventario en solamente 40 fincas, y en ellas encontramos cerca de 3000 variedades”, comenta Fernanda Meneses***



genetic families such as cereals, aromatic and medicinal herbs, fruits, vegetables, trees and shrubs among others. The guardians give priority to the rescue of seeds of different species of vulnerable plants which may disappear: the pen-co, the canaro or bean tree, the miso, species of highland papaya, among others.

Each of the guardian families places particular emphasis on the recovery of certain seeds, some in vegetables, some in tropical fruits and others in cereals, according to the bio-region of their farm and their personal inclination. Since the network was born, about fifteen thousand seed lots have passed through the Seed House

alone, to which must be added an indefinite number of other direct exchanges of the partners.


## **We went to where we were called**

Instead of asking development project technicians, Rogelio, Fernanda and Javier went to the different bio-regions of Ecuador where there was interest from peasant, indigenous and farm families to learn the ideas of the network. In this way it was possible to articulate people who, in a genuine way were rescuing seeds and developing agro ecological practices to cultivate and sustainable alternative forms of life. There has been

no shortage of financing offers in the form of projects. But finding guardians does not respond to the linear logic of projects and many agencies. "A guardian is not formed," Javier explains, "he is found. We have often asked older people in the communities to find seed guardians."

In the RGS, there are young people and adults, women and men, peasants and indigenous people, families with farm and urban people with their garden; it is an intercultural space that little by little became an engine of agro ecological processes. "Guardians are radical multipliers who do not respond to project logics," explains Javier. Examples of guardians such as Rogelio





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Simbaña, who lives in the Tola Chica community and managed to reforest and plant two hundred thousand native trees or, Darío and Nicola Proaño in Rio Muchacho, who set up a small school that has transformed throughout 20 years the social and ecological environment of the area, evidence the broadcasting of ideas and convictions that spread, since one of the guardians' principles is to share their knowledge.

"Our process as RGS is more like a river with its meanders than a straight channel; this is why the projects do not fit easily with our dynamics: a channel requires planning, a river finds its own way to reach the sea," says Javier. Guardians are leaders within their social environments, they are not directors. This particularity reflects

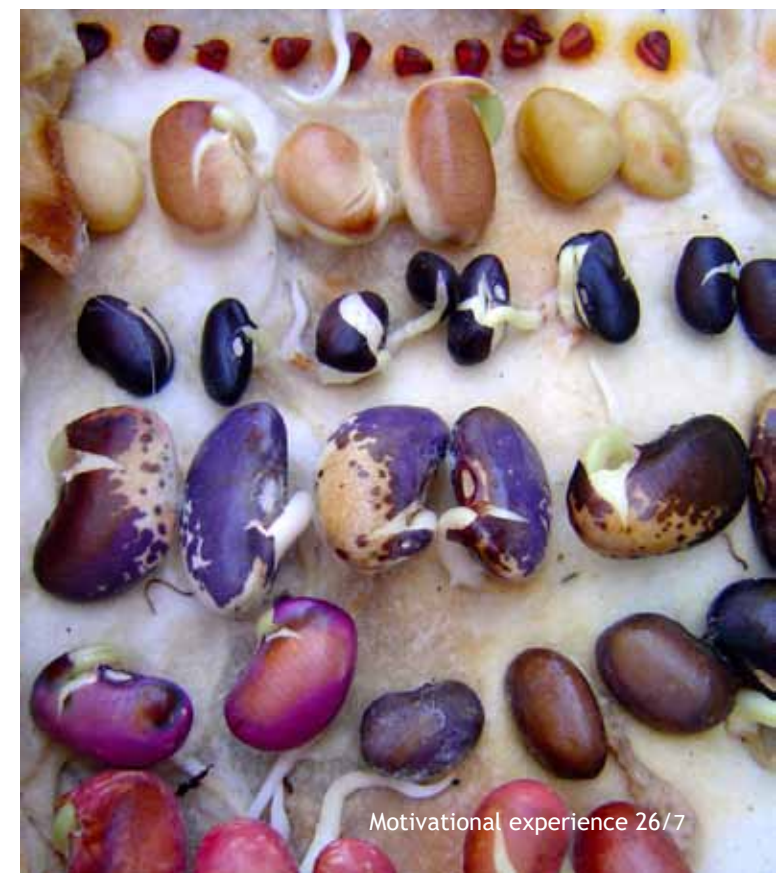
the structure of the RGS: it is a horizontal process, not institutionalized but through assemblage, monitored by four guardians as advisers, coordinating the axes of seeds, social management with training and dissemination in addition to technical assistance. Cross visits between guardians of different bio-regions and annual national meetings are crucial moments for the lives of the guardians.

The Network maintains an annual course of ecological family gardens that this year (2017) is in its fifteenth edition. In addition, every year there are other workshops and courses. "In total, we have generated more than 600 educational events where several thousand people have been formed. Education is one of our most important missions and we have developed methodologies and practices of high quality in active education" explains Javier. The International Mother Earth Festival was the largest agro ecological event to date in Ecuador. It counted with the participation of more than 1500 people who attended 47 theoretical and practical workshops, an ecological fair and cultural events at night. (<https://youtu.be/Gttq1PBWw4U>).

## Diversity and alliances

Sandra Moreira and Antonio Pico from Manabí are guardians of oral tradition and verses and

organize festivals of tradition and seeds; José Paucar from Tungurahua is guardian of quinoa and Karina in Pifo is guardian of vegetables and flowers. Each guardian works from his farm or orchard, inserting himself in his socio-geographic environment. Paulina Lasso devised a system of participatory guarantee in the form of a flower that has eight petals, which was refined collectively. Each petal represents a dimension of sustainability (native seed, rejection of nanotechnology and genetic manipulation, clean production with zero chemicals, product packaging, product transportation, working conditions and others).







In 2010 the idea of selling food and other clean production items was born. The ecological market La Elvirita, located in the garage of the house of the grandmother of Paulina Lasso in Tumbaco was well accepted. "Servio Pachard's rice was sold there, Karina's vegetables and Fernanda's soaps; there were about 25 producers in total. The initiative motivated other groups and institutions to impel this idea by initiating larger ecological fairs. After four years La Elvirita completed its cycle, having been for all a training school in ecological commerce", explains Javier. At present the store, **Wayruro -organic as it should be**, works as an initiative of two guardians.

Servio Pachard, rice guardian, rescued creole varieties of rice seeds. Along with Servio, a whole group of peasant families chose to produce this creole rice, with very good acceptance in the market. In order to offer this rice as brown rice, the RGS sought money and with this, Servio and his group enabled a rice peeler that allows peeling brown rice. Servio and the other families succeeded in eliminating the use of herbicides and fungicides thanks to adaptations of their cultural activities. For rice growth, however, it was essential to use a chemical fertilizer. Together with Javier they investigated the matter and found a rice producer in Japan, Takao Furuno, who had succeeded in replacing the chemical fertilizer by raising ducks in their rice fields. The





japanese worked with modern hybrid varieties of rice, of low size, reason why he had to remove the ducks when the grain began to form. Servio did not have this problem since the variety of creole rice has a high growth in such a way that the ducks do not reach the grains. This case shows something characteristic of a seed guardian: he does not resign but looks for ways to achieve a totally healthy and friendly production. Servio's rice now reaches seven of eight petals in the participatory guarantee system of Flower of Trust; it is still pending to transport the product to markets without petroleum use. When Servio started with everything, it was a problem to get ducks; today ducks are seen where there are fields flooded with rice - people have assimilated: it is produced healthy, without chemicals, with less costs and a good yield (80 quintals per hectare, very good for an ancestral variety).

Ernesto Landázuri, another partner of La Elvira, produces homemade yogurt. Ernesto has eliminated all types of chemicals both in production and in cleaning which is done only based on vinegar. His bottleneck is the plastic container. Half of his clientele have become accustomed to bring their recyclable glass jars, properly cleaned. Ernesto, with this reaches half a petal in the category "Reduce and Recycle".

## Influence in laws and regulations

In July 2016, a new Seed Law was introduced in the National Assembly of Ecuador. The RGS worked together with other social actors to inform the population and influence the assembly members. Thanks to this, three changes of fundamental importance were achieved: a) The Ecuadorian State recognizes that seeds are the patrimony of the people; b) The State guarantees the free flow of seeds within the national territory and c) there is no need for certification of non-industrial seeds, and the population can freely buy, sell or exchange their seeds.

The Network, to guarantee the agro ecological quality of native seeds, works with a participatory guarantee system for seeds. For Fernanda, who coordinates the seed dynamics of the RGS, "the seed is like a person who needs his document, indicating the common name of the variety and seed, date of harvest, place and height. We seek to rescue the seeds with their history and their cultural spaces".

Within the framework of its process of incidence in accordance with the Seed Law, the guardians made contact with the state Superintendence of Control of Market Power. In order to defend life and healthy production, the RGS





has had to set up a business because as a collective of people, which is the RGS, the Superintendence cannot take their ideas into account. Madre Semilla (Mother Seed) is the name of the company and has been invited to establish itself as an Agri-food Observatory, a consultation space for civil society, established by law. Agri-food observatories generally attend research centers. From the figure of Madre Semilla, the RGS is currently enlisting advocacy strategies. It wants to achieve a phytosanitary standard for non-conventional seeds, different from that used for conventional or industrial seeds.

Juan Bohórquez produces homemade sausages, in total eight varieties according to their condiments. The cost to request and obtain the seal of agricultural health by Agrocalidad (state entity), is approximately one thousand dollars per variety. At his consultation, Agrocalidad indicated that the easiest thing would be to produce with synthetic flavorings and thus pay only a single variety. Faced with this paradox of denaturalizing and chemically contaminating the production and homemade transformation of food in exchange for obtaining the seal of sanity, the RGS plans to build areas of incidence to achieve the creation of a regulation of agricultural and food health that favors small and ecological producers. In other words: to make Juan Bohórquez's sausages have the seal without

The eight petals of the participatory RGS guarantee for seeds	
Inheritance	Seed native or creole, comes from inherited material and is capable of multiplying life.
Agroecology	Exclusively agroecological process.
Germination	Percentage of adequate germination, according to the species.
Protocols	Cultivation according to specific protocols and traditional techniques, to ensure quality and genetic diversity.
Selection	Selected seeds, of appropriate size and shape according to the species, free from litter and pests
Storage	Use of ecological inputs and adequate storage conditions. Free of chemicals.
Defined variety	It responds to the defined characteristics of the variety.
Social Equity	Fair treatment of workers, fair prices for the producer

(Source: Seed Guardian Network - Mother Seed Participatory Guarantee RGS)





chemical additives and also that lojanos cheeses and manabas can be produced in the future with natural milk and not, as required by the current law, with pasteurized milk.

## Involved in permaculture

The guardian's dream is to self-supply Ecuador with its own seeds of vegetables and other crops, rescuing, reproducing and distributing the seeds. For the collective of the guardians, seeds are information, partly genetic and partly cultural (e.g., how to sow); seeds that reproduce life. Javier and Fernanda, with their little son Gael, being guardians has transformed their lives. Encounters between the guardians have encouraged several families to organize their lives around permaculture: from food and feeding practices, to healthy production and processing, to housing and (self) bio-construction, use of renewable energy and simple and friendly technology such as the rocket stove, clothing, education of children and coherent toys, health and natural medicine, humanized childbirth, family and social coexistence. Javier says that except for the cell phone, computer and internet, the other variables in his life have changed. The couple has built their own home, with scarce resources, Javier cooks at home.

Not all guardians are involved in permaculture and there is no orthodoxy in this sense within

the network. The cohesion between those who make the network is explained by the self-definition of the RGS in its website: "We are building a sustainable future from practice". Literature is shared, and Allpa magazine is published ([www.allpachaski.com](http://www.allpachaski.com)). The network as a space lives and is governed by the dynamics of its members and the connection between them as well as similar movements in southern Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico; a continental network is under construction with representations of 10 countries of the Americas ([www.semillasdelibertad.net](http://www.semillasdelibertad.net)).





# Messages to the future

- Incidence and social transformation can be generated from the bases and horizontally - the example is evident.
- The recovery of native seeds opens the way to friendly production, healthy food and reasonable marketing, progressively eliminating false commitments regarding the use of agrochemicals, loss of agro-biodiversity, food sovereignty, packaging and transport with an unsustainable ecological footprint.
- Seed is information, partly genetic and partly cultural; information that, brought to earth and practice, reproduces life and builds future, overcoming the mental barriers, raised by paradigms of the model.
- Broadcasting of ideas and bets, which disobey preconceptions or logics of obsolete paradigms. The guardians, individually and in community, rescue and develop, apply and multiply practices of building the future in the present.

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# Almanac to the Future

STORIES OF SUCCES

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