

DELEP Seeds will go to the Arctic

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The DELEP seed collection has increased steadily over the 22 years that DELEP has existed. Today there are over 3500 accessions representing 221 genera and 1356 species. Several years ago the importance of duplicating this unique collection was recognized and arrangements were made to establish a back-up collection at the National Plant Germplasm System (USDA) seed bank in Fort Collins, Colorado.

Now another opportunity has come about for the DELEP collection. A list of 76 species of crop and potential crop legumes was submitted to the administrators of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault and has been accepted for deposit in this seed bank. The deposit will contain 200 to 500 seeds of each of the 76 species. The seeds are first stored in sealed bags which are placed in sealed boxes on high shelves in one chamber of the seed vault.

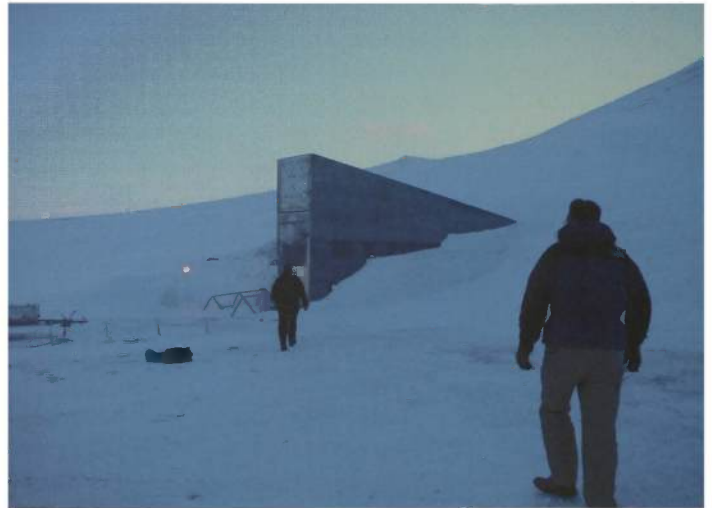
The Svalbard Global Seed Vault opened in February 2008. The concept of the vault is to ensure genetic diversity of the world's food crops. The facility is entirely underground except for the entrance. The vault was blasted out of the permafrost (-3 to -4 degrees C) and is located very deep in the mountain. The vault consists of three chambers each with the capacity to store 1.5 million different seed samples at a constant temperature of -18 degrees C. The chambers can be reached from an access tunnel 100 m long. An entrance of brushed steel is the sole above ground portion of the vault.

The seed vault was constructed by Norway at a cost of 45 million NOK. Svalbard is a Norwegian territory located at 74-81 degrees N, only 1000 km from the North Pole. Three partners manage the seed vault:

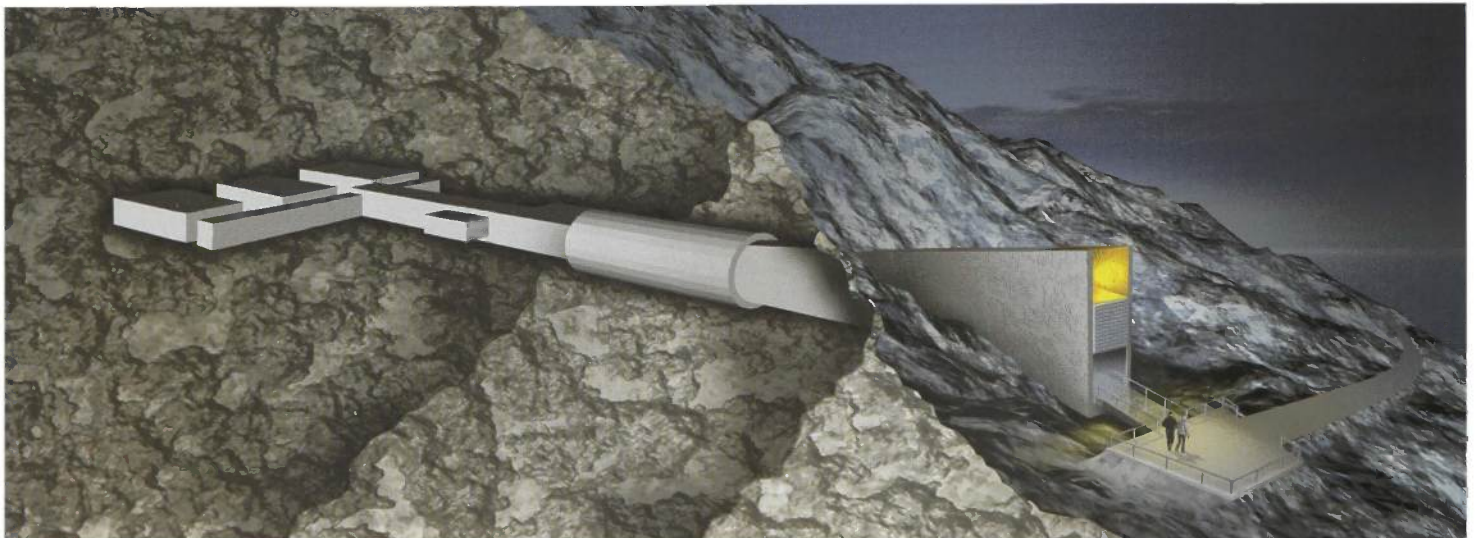
Royal Norwegian Ministry of Agriculture and Food
 Global Crop Diversity Trust
 Nordic Genetic Resource Center (NordGen)

The objective of the seed vault is to store duplicates of seeds from seed collections around the world. Many of these seeds are from developing countries. In the case of natural disasters or war, seeds from a particular area of the earth could be lost. The collection could be re-established using seeds from Svalbard.

To date 25 national and international institutions have deposited more than 400,000 unique seed samples from 198 countries at Svalbard. Two organizations from the U.S., National Plant Germplasm System (USDA) and Seed Savers Exchange have made deposits at Svalbard. DELEP is the third U.S. organization to deposit at Svalbard. This opportunity allows DELEP to back up part of its collection in a facility that is secure from agricultural disaster. This opportunity significantly raises the profile of DELEP nationally and internationally. The DELEP seed will be delivered to Svalbard early in 2011. Stay tuned for more on this topic.



Entry to vault on opening day, February, 2008. (Dave Ellis)



Drawing: Global Crop Diversity Trust