

## THE EXCHANGE OF AGRICULTURAL PLANTS AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

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Beginning about 1850 many types of cooperation were pursued by various groups united by interests transcending national boundaries. These activities, such as the international meetings of scientists, scholars, and businessmen, sought to enlarge their knowledge by the exchange of ideas and by cooperation in pursuit of common goals. In the catalogues of these activities no mention is made of the international exchange of agricultural seeds and plants, an informal activity in which the United States took quiet but active leadership. Since 1851 a number of international expositions met in the world's larger cities, beginning at the Crystal Palace in London. At the Agricultural Exhibition in Paris in 1856 Alexander Vattemare collected over a thousand varieties of field and garden seeds for the United States Patent Office, the official depository for such materials. Vattemare later proposed an international organization for the exchange of plants but the project was never formally realized.

The participation of the United States Department of Agriculture in this informal interchange was begun in 1862 by Isaac Newton, the first Secretary of Agriculture. Horace Capron, Newton's successor, announced in 1868 that the "system of international agricultural exchanges" had been established with many governments and with botanical gardens in Europe, Australia, and South America. It was Capron's intention to extend further this system of exchange, which promised valuable results to both agriculture and industry. It was reported in 1869 by the Secretary that the exchanges had been continued with gratifying success to all concerned. The system included nearly three hundred agricultural societies, "chiefly European, but some of them in Asia, Africa, and South America."

Frederick Watts, appointed Secretary of Agriculture by President Grant, continued the system and reported that foreign sources which made the most valuable contributions included the Kew Gardens of London, the Royal Gardens of Melbourne, and the Ministers of Agricultural Affairs of Austria-Hungary. The exchange of plant materials was often arranged through our ministers and consuls in foreign countries. Wheat from Peru was transmitted through the American minister there. South American correspondents of the Department of Agriculture were located in Brazil, Ecuador, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Mexico, Guatemala, and the United States of Colombia. Seed exchanged with foreign countries by the Department totalled 3,450 packages in 1871. Exchange was effective in securing plants rarely for sale by commercial establishments. In 1877 the Department revealed that the interchange had become an established custom.

The Secretary of Agriculture in 1887 pointed out that the interchange of plant materials had greatly promoted friendly relations and that no expense had paid such high dividends as this in promoting amicable relations. The introductions of numerous varieties of products from Japan, Korea, and from the islands of the Pacific also resulted from the custom of exchange. The informal exchange of seeds and plants is one means used at present by the Division of Foreign Plant Introduction of the United States Department of Agriculture.