



## NATIONAL COALITION FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

Media Advisory

### SAFEGUARDING THE SEEDS OF FOOD SECURITY

*“The U.S. National Plant Germplasm System”*

**Washington, DC** – June 20, 2012, For Immediate Release – The critical role of the USDA’s plant germplasm system in food security is the subject of National C-FAR’s eighth Research Hill Seminar in 2012 on Monday, June 25 at 10 AM in 337 Russell Senate Office Building and again at a ‘Lunch~N~Learn’ at noon in 1300 Longworth House Office Building. The featured speaker is Dr. Peter Bretting, Senior National Program Leader for Plant Germplasm and Genomes, USDA/ARS-Office of National Programs.

“The world’s crops constitute the thin green line that stands between humanity and starvation,” says Bretting. “USDA’s National Plant Germplasm System safeguards the plant genetic diversity that is critical to meeting multiple challenges that could threaten our food security.”

“This presentation provides an excellent example of the value of federally funded food and agricultural research in producing the scientific outcomes and outreach needed to meet 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges and opportunities,” says Chuck Conner, President of the National Coalition for Food & Agricultural Research (National C-FAR).

**Abstract:** Genetic diversity enables crops to maintain productivity through time, and to adapt to the challenges of emerging and evolving diseases and pests, environmental deterioration, expanding human populations, scarce and expensive inputs, and rapidly changing agricultural conditions. But irreplaceable crop diversity is threatened by extinction in nature, in traditional farmers’ fields, and even in developed nations. The diversity must be collected and safeguarded in genebanks in the form of seeds, bulbs, tubers, etc., which are collectively termed “plant germplasm” or “plant genetic resources” (PGR). Genebanks support global food security by ensuring global access to these plant genetic resources in the face of those daunting challenges. Researchers and plant breeders turn to genebanks for sources of resistance to diseases and pests, tolerance to environmental extremes, materials for key experiments, or for new valuable products. The USDA’s National Plant Germplasm System (NPGS) of 20 genebanks, some now more than 100 years old, comprises one of the largest and most diverse genebank systems in the world, safeguarding more than ½ million living samples from more than 14,000 different plant species. The U. S.’s vibrant crop genebanks are more relevant today than ever before, playing key roles in national and global agricultural progress. Scientific interest in these genetic materials has increased tangibly during the last five years, with the NPGS distributing more than 1 million plant samples to researchers and breeders world-wide. These materials are keys for continued progress in crop genetics and breeding which underpins current and future food security.

Seminar presentations are available at [http://www.ncfar.org/Hill\\_Seminar\\_Series.asp](http://www.ncfar.org/Hill_Seminar_Series.asp). The seminar is open to the public and the media.

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**NATIONAL C-FAR** is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, consensus-based, and *customer-led* coalition that brings food, agriculture, nutrition, conservation, and natural resource stakeholders together with the food and agriculture research and extension community, serving as a forum and a unified voice in support of sustaining and increasing public investment at the national level in food and agricultural research, extension, and education. National C-FAR’s Hill Seminar Series, now in its sixth year, regularly presents leading-edge researchers working to provide answers to pressing issues confronting the public and Congress. The Hill Seminar Series helps demonstrate the value of public investment in food and agricultural research—investment that returns 45 percent per year on average, and \$20 in economic benefit from every \$1 investment in food and ag research.

Go to [http://www.ncfar.org/Hill\\_Seminar\\_Series.asp](http://www.ncfar.org/Hill_Seminar_Series.asp) for more information about the seminar series and past topics. Interviews with National C-FAR President Chuck Conner are available by request. For additional information, go to [www.ncfar.org](http://www.ncfar.org); or contact Tom Van Arsdall, Executive Director, at [tom@vanarsdall.com](mailto:tom@vanarsdall.com) or (703) 509-4746.