'Noah's Ark' seed vault opens

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

A vault designed to proÂ-tect vaÂ-nishÂ-ing seed vaÂ-rieÂ-ties for fuÂ-ture generÂ-aÂ-tÂ-ions opened Feb. 26 on a reÂ-mote ArcÂ-tic isÂ-land.The SvalÂ-bard GlobÂ-al Seed Vault, a proÂ-ject of the NorÂ-weÂ-gian goÂ-vernÂ-ment, reÂ-ceived inÂ-auÂ-guÂ-ral shipÂ-ments of 100 milÂ-lion seeds that origÂ-iÂ-natÂ-ed in over 100 counÂ-tries.

The seed vault's entrance juts out from a mountainside. (Credit: Mari Tefre/Global Crop Diversity Trust)

With deÂ-posits rangÂ-ing from unÂ-ique vaÂ-riÂ-eties of AfÂ-riÂ-can and Asian food staÂ-ples such as maize, rice, wheat, cowÂ-pea, and sorÂ-ghum to EuÂ-roÂ-peÂ-an and South AmerÂ-iÂ-can vaÂ-riÂ-eties of eggÂ-plant, letÂ-tuce, barÂ-ley, and poÂ-taÂ-to, the first deÂ-posits repÂ-reÂ-sent what ofÂ-fiÂ-cials called the most comÂ-preÂ-henÂ-sive and diÂ-verse colÂ-lecÂ-tion of food crop seeds held anyÂ-where.At the openÂ-ing cerÂ-eÂ-moÂ-ny, NorÂ-weÂ-gian Prime MinÂ-isÂ-ter Jens Stoltenberg unÂ-locked the chamÂ-ber and, with AfÂ-riÂ-can NoÂ-bel Peace Prize-winning enÂ-viÂ-ronÂ-menÂ-talÂ-ist WanÂ-gari Maathai, placed the first seeds inÂ-side. EuÂ-roÂ-peÂ-an ComÂ-misÂ-sion PresÂ-ident José ManÂ-uÂ-el BarÂ-roso along with digÂ-niÂ-tarÂ-ies and agÂ-riÂ-culÂ-ture exÂ-perts from around the globe deÂ-posited adÂ-diÂ-tionÂ-al seeds. NorÂ-weÂ-gian muÂ-siÂ-cians alÂ-so perÂ-formed at the openÂ-ing cerÂ-eÂ-moÂ-ny, held 130 meters deep in a froÂ-zen mounÂ-tain.Built near the vilÂ-lage of LongÂ-yearÂ-byen on the isÂ-land of SpitsÂ-berÂ-gen, NorÂ-way, the vault at its inÂ-cepÂ-tion conÂ-tains 268,000 disÂ-tinct seed samÂ-plesâ€"each from a difÂ-ferÂ-ent farm or field. Each samÂ-ple may conÂ-tain hunÂ-dreds of seeds or more. In all, the day's shipÂ-ments weighed some 10 tons. The vault is part of what its proÂ-poÂ-nents call an unÂ-precÂ-eÂ-dentÂ-ed efÂ-fort to proÂ-tect the planÂ-et's rapÂ-idly diÂ-minÂ-ishÂ-ing bioÂ-diÂ-versÂ-itv. The geÂ-netÂ-ic diÂ-versÂ-ity of crops is esÂ-senÂ-tial for food proÂ-ducÂ-tion, yet sciÂ-enÂ-tists say it's beÂ-ing lost. The vault, dug deep inÂ-to the froÂ-zen rock of an ArcÂ-tic mounÂ-tain, is meant to seÂ-cure for cenÂ-turies, or longÂ-er, hunÂ-dreds of milÂ-lions of seeds repâ-reâ-senting eveâ-ry imâ-porâ-tant crop vaâ-riâ-eâ-ty availâ-aâ-ble in the world toâ-day. As well as proÂ-tecting against the daiÂ-ly loss of diÂ-versÂ-ity, the vault is alÂ-so seen as a last-resort bulÂ-wark for restartÂ-ing agÂ-riÂ-culÂ-turÂ-al proÂ-ducÂ-tion at the reÂ-gionÂ-al or globÂ-al levÂ-el in the wake of a natÂ-uÂ-ral or man-made disÂ-asÂ-ter. ConÂ-tinÂ-genÂ-cies for cliÂ-mate change have been worked inÂ-to the plan. Even in the worst-case sceÂ-narÂ-iÂ-os of globÂ-al warmÂ-ing, the vault rooms will reÂ-main natÂ-uÂ-ralÂ-ly froÂ-zen for up to 200 years, its deÂ-signÂ-ers say."With cliÂ-mate change and othÂ-er forcÂ-es threatÂ-enÂ-ing the diÂ-versÂ-ity of life that susÂ-tains our planÂ-et, NorÂ-way is proud to be playÂ-ing a cenÂ-tral role in creÂ-atÂ-ing a facilÂ-ity caÂ-paÂ-ble of proÂ-tecting what are not just seeds, but the funÂ-daÂ-menÂ-tal buildÂ-ing blocks of huÂ-man civÂ-ilÂ-izÂ-aÂ-tion,― said NorÂ-way's Prime MinÂ-isÂ-ter Jens Stoltenberg.

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