

# B.C. researchers focus on vegetable seeds

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The British Columbia Seed Trials project is working to assist the province's vegetable seed business.

Variety trials and other seed-related research is underway to help farmers identify crops and varieties that have a strong potential for the seed industry in B.C., according to Alexandra Lyon, a postdoctoral fellow with the University of British Columbia.

"The reason we want to get involved with supporting the vegetable seed industry here is to create opportunities in local agriculture because we have a really good climate for growing a lot of vegetable seed crops."

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In 2016, trials included spinach, golden beets and a variety of kale.

This year, researchers expect to have carrots and leeks again. As well, they may be adding new crops, either peppers or cabbage.

“The reasoning that goes into selecting these crops for the most part is looking for crops that are good for seed production in B.C. So, Washington state, right across the border, is one of the centres for spinach production and the reason for that is in this part of the world where we have mild winters, it’s very good for growing seed crops where the crop has to stay in the ground for two years,” she said.

“Within those crops, we’re looking at a range of varieties and we’re looking at varieties that perform well and have characteristics that mainly direct-market growers are looking for in this region.”

According to Lyon, university researchers have had input from the public and farmers about the taste and appearance of the varieties that are being grown.

“Another outcome of this that I’m very happy about is we’ve had a core group of farmers who have been involved. We’re working with about 20 farms in the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island. We’ve, over a couple of years, built up a nice network of farmers who are interested in going forward with on farm research,” she said.

The project is a collaboration between several different groups including the Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security, the University of B.C. farm and FarmFolk-CityFolk.