

# Up North

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## Living legacy

Like many gardeners, I have developed an interest in heirloom varieties



**Molly Miron**  
When our youngest, Joel, was a student at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, I always took the opportunity to visit the Seed Savers Exchange. The exchange was founded in 1975 by Diane and Kent Whealy after her grandfather gave them the seeds of two garden plants, Grandpa Ott's Morning Glory and German Pink Tomato, his parents had brought from Bavaria when they immigrated to Iowa in the 1870s.

Now, the Heritage Farm is an 800-plus acre spread dedicated to maintaining genetic diversity of crops. Seed catalogs now offer a variety of heirloom species. I try something from those selections each year, and because these plants are not hybrids, I save seed from my favorites to propagate for the next year.

Beans are fun that way. Among varieties I plant are scarlet and pink runners, cranberry soldier and Jacob's cattle for soup and purple, green- and yellow-pod bush beans for fresh and frozen side dishes. The name of the brown-speckled Jacob's cattle bean comes from the story in the Bible about Jacob working years and years for his miserly father-in-law, Laban. The deal was that Jacob tended Laban's flocks, but could keep the spotty young to build his own herd. So, because God favored Jacob, he made the speckled animals reproduce faster than Laban's plain-colored beasts, and Jacob got rich.

Squash varieties are also colorful and happy plants. About three years ago, I attended the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Health Fair. Some of the give-aways at the event were seeds for Anishnaabe squash. It's a beautiful winter squash, bright orange inside and streaked with pink, orange green and buff outside. It's such a good keeper that we ate the last one from the 2005 harvest last month.

This year, I'll add another ancient squash to the list. Elaine and Evan Hazard gave me some seeds for squash originally grown by indigenous Dakota people. Besides beans and squash, heirloom tomatoes are so much in current favor that specimens with stripes, bulges and colors other than red show up, not just at farmers markets, but in produce sections of supermarkets.

When we moved to this area, I was introduced to an heirloom tomato that has a special place in my garden because I know its provenance. Every spring, Harold Fretzel sets up his grom-lams and plants seeds for a yellow tomato that he has saved from the previous year's harvest. He gives his extra plants to friends and family. I call the variety the Carlson Gold because Harold obtained the seeds for his first planting about 60 years ago from his mother-in-law, Ellen Dahlgen Carlson of Wildwood Township near Northome, where his late wife, Erma Carlson Fretzel, was born. Harold said no one knows where Ellen first obtained the seeds, but the descendants of this tasty and beautiful variety have marched in a true line through the generations.

The connection with the original farmers in this country — the Anishnaabe and Dakota peoples — is satisfying and somehow spiritual, as well as agricultural. And growing Ellen Carlson's tomato gives me a personal contact reaching back to the early days of North Country European settlement. As a gardener, I am grateful to be an inheritor from both these legacies.



Members of the Eagle-Condor Exchange Program organized, in part, by Bemidji's Indigenous Environmental Network, receive a welcome in English, Spanish and the local Shipibo-Konibo language of the Ucayali River area of Peru. Michael Skladany, Bemidji State University assistant sociology professor, back row, second from right, was the representative from this area.

# Native outreach

North American Indians send delegation to Peruvian Amerind fish farmers

By Molly Miron

**I**ndigenous people worldwide rely on fish as a food staple. While walleye is the important fishery to this area, for the Shipibo-Konibo people of Amazonian Peru, the sacred fish and important food source is the arapaima. This is the largest scaled freshwater fish in the world. The fish grow to be 10 feet long and more than 400 pounds.

However, arapaima populations have declined greatly over the last 30 years due to over fishing. In response, a group of North American Indians from around the United States were sponsored by Heifer Project International and the Oregon State University Aquaculture Collaborative Research Support Program to work with Peru's Institute of Environmental Investigations of the Pacific in the Eagle-Condor Exchange Program. The effort was facilitated, in part, by Tom Goldtooth, executive director of the Indigenous Environmental Network of Bemidji. The North American delegates were from the Seneca, Puyallup, Lummi, Snohomish, Wampanoag, Oneida and Choctaw nations, people with experience in fish farming and fisheries management and connected to the Indigenous Aquaculture Network.

Goldtooth said the focus was how to link aquaculture, which nationally and globally is a highly commercial industry, with native communities and traditional cultures. He said the concept is an environmental justice issue.

"It was really exciting to us to



Members of the indigenous Shipibo-Konibo group in South America perform a dance for visitors in the Eagle-Condor Exchange Program.

be able to find out how the native peoples of the south are using their traditional knowledge and fish farming," Goldtooth said.

He said the Eagle-Condor Aquaculture Exchange Program creates an initial organizational framework to evaluate aquaculture in terms of indigenous culture and development and help envision aquaculture practices in a manner that can benefit indigenous peoples, provide models for sustainability development and respect the biological dynamics of the water world.

This exchange will continue with a Mexico trip this winter to study Mayan fish farming methods.

"The Eagle-Condor Aquaculture Exchange Program is an exciting project within our Sustainable Communities Initiative," Goldtooth said.

Included in the April delegation to the Ucayali River area to examine the Shipibo-Konibo people's arapaima fish farming techniques was Michael Skladany, an assistant professor of sociology at Bemidji State University.

"I provided technical support," he said. "Our focus was on aquaculture, the controlled cultivation of aquatic organisms," Skladany said. But, he added, the mission named for the sacred birds of North America and South America also took in all aspects of the water world. These included forests and fields adjacent to the river and the challenge of industrialization over traditional ways of living. The next step, Skladany said, is creating partnerships for education and empowering communities to solve their own problems.

"The big issue, as we



Shipibo-Konibo fish farmers raise arapaima in cages in the Ucayali River, a tributary of the Amazon.

perceived it, is the Peruvian government gives concessions to foreign Japanese and Korean companies to come in and cut high-value hardwoods," Skladany said. "Mahogany was a real big one."

Cutting the Amazon forests interrupts the traditional way of life for the indigenous people, as well as damaging the ecosystem. Fish farming is a way for the Shipibo-Konibo people to improve their living standards.

"They collect the fingerlings from the wild and they put them in a cage and feed them," Skladany said of the Shipibo-Konibo people's fish farming. "They grow very, very fast. They go from fingerlings to 25-30 pounds in one year."

Fish farming in the Ucayali River, a tributary of the Amazon, is supported by the Peruvian government, Skladany said. He noted some differences

between the South American indigenous people and American Indian nations. The concept of sovereignty, so important in this country, is strange to the Shipibo-Konibo people. Skladany explained that they have traditional rights, but no recognized sovereign rights.

"They live in raised thatch houses and make their living fishing and harvesting wild foods from the jungle. However, he added that some people have solar power panels on their houses.

"The villages are so isolated, and they're accessible only by river," he said. Skladany said the planning for the Eagles' visit to the Condors took two years. For a next step, he said he hopes to invite the Condors to this country.

EM miron@bemidjipioneer.com



Travel by river is the usual way people along the Amazon River tributaries get around.



Arapaima fish grow to large sizes quickly in the Shipibo-Konibo people's fish farms in the Ucayali River in the Amazon River basin.