



Remembering and Thanking John Navazio, Our Friend and Coworker

Johnny's lost a dear friend and member of our Breeding Team with the passing of Dr. John Navazio on June 1, 2024. As we cope with the sadness of John's passing, we find some comfort in reflecting on John's life of accomplishment and his contribution to local, organic, and sustainable agriculture.

John first worked for Johnny's some forty years ago, in July of 1984, as a member of our summer Research Farm crew. Thirty years later, and after obtaining a doctorate in Plant Breeding and Plant Genetics from the University of Wisconsin, he found his way back to Maine and Johnny's, returning as our Plant Breeding Manager in 2014. Throughout his career, he left what will be a legacy to plant breeding, agricultural education, and the organic agriculture movement.

Dr. Navazio worked as an Educator/Professor at the College of the Atlantic, Evergreen State College, and at Prescott College. Within and beyond these professional positions, he was incredibly generous with his time and knowledge; he was a dedicated mentor to many aspiring young farmers and breeders across the country and here at Johnny's. John also authored *The Organic Seed Grower*, which has provided a blueprint for countless young farmers in their pursuit of building sustainable food systems through plant selection and seed saving.

He was an inveterate plant breeder, working at Garden City Seeds, Alf Christianson Seed Co., Seed Movement (a company he founded), The Organic Seed Alliance (an organization he co-founded), and Johnny's Selected Seeds. Many of John's varieties have become staples for organic growers around the country like 'Shiraz' and 'Touchstone Gold' beets, 'Dark Star' zucchini, and 'Peppermint' Swiss chard.

While at Johnny's, John displayed his versatility as a breeder and released numerous varieties including 'Cool Customer' cucumber, 'Equinox' spinach, and most recently 'Heart of Gold' Swiss chard. Along with developing new varieties, John was also a strong advocate for the restoration and stewardship of well-known adaptable open-pollinated varieties such as 'Rossa di Milano' onion and 'Hungarian Hot Wax' pepper. He was happiest working in his breeding nursery, roguing plant populations, and evaluating his onions, Swiss chard, and carrots.

Most of all John will be remembered as a bright spirit with an infectious enthusiasm for life—a man with a heart as big as his booming voice. He was a colleague, teacher, husband, father, and friend who served as an inspiration to many.

We appreciate all the kind, heartfelt condolences that friends and colleagues have shared online and with Johnny's and John's family. These words of remembrance reflect for us the true sense of closeness that John loved so much about our community of local agriculture.

John's breeding work included new varieties he had hoped to bring to market over the next few years. We will work to finish those varieties, in his stead, and honor the opportunity that he has left us.

Thank you, Dr. John Navazio.



Three plant breeders at Johnny's Research Farm in Albion, Maine, summer 2019. Left to right: Frank Morton (Wild Garden Seeds), Rob Johnston, Jr. (Johnny's Selected Seeds), Dr. John Navazio.



Dr. John Navazio with 'Heart of Gold' Swiss chard (left) and 'Rossa di Milano' onion (right)