

# Ireland Goes Back to Its Roots

BY EVELYN PEREGRIN

**IRELAND has gone back to its roots – literally.**

The Irish Seed Savers Association, a nonprofit organization located in Scarriff, Co. Clare, wants to get its hands dirty to replenish a sense of Irish heritage. The work they do promotes biodiversity and the importance of preserving what natural Irish heritage they can find through soil.

Since 1991 Irish Seed Savers has prioritized biodiversity by collecting and preserving different Irish varieties of heritage vegetables, fruits, flowers, herbs and Irish apple trees. Although many Irish and European varieties of vegetable have been lost, Irish Seed Savers hopes to cultivate many of the remaining types to save them from extinction.

The founder of Irish Seed Savers, Anita Hayes, started to collect and grow Irish heritage crops that seemed to be fast disappearing. Now the organization is Ireland's only seed bank, boasting 800 heritage varieties of seeds, at a time when 80 percent of Irish and European heritage fruit and vegetable varieties have already been lost.

Modern farming practices have contributed to the decline in cultural variety. The

hope is that the public's rising interest in growing their own foods will lead to awareness of the threat to heritage varieties. Seeds that have been saved from extinction and preserved are made available for customers to purchase online so that the country can grow rich in heritage varieties again.

The organization has expanded past Irish-only heritage vegetables and is now striving to preserve heritage varieties from all over the world that are best suited to Ireland's climate. Their focus is to cultivate and foster biodiversity.

All of Irish Seed Savers' income comes from sponsors who donate funds by subscribing to a membership or attend fundraising events. It is a charity that relies on the generosity of others, and the hope that passion for their cause is contagious. Every year one percent of the organization's income goes to help other organizations with similar environmental goals in Ireland and around the world.

Their facility currently preserves, stores and distributes seeds of 800 heritage vegetable varieties, 48 heritage grain varieties, a heritage potato collection of over 50 varieties, and maintains over 140 different varieties of native apple in their orchards. On the Scarriff site alone, they house the largest



The Irish Seed Savers land in Scarriff, Co. Clare.

collection of self-rooting varieties of apple tree in the world.

All of their varieties are grown organically on site. The ethos of the Irish Seed Savers project is sustainability and working with nature to preserve. In this sense, keeping the heritage vegetables all natural and chemical free is extremely important.

Visitors are welcome to explore 20 acres of working seed gardens, walk through heritage orchards and experience native woodlands.

Environmental education

is a top priority in the organization. Tours and community groups are given the opportunity to learn about the rich history found in the fruit of Irish soil by visiting the facilities and exploring the grounds.

Teams from the Irish Seed Savers go to schools and give demonstrations to children on the importance of biodiversity and the preservation of the earth. A new seed bank facility opened in 2012 allows visitors to view the processing of 800 varieties of seeds.

Through supporters and

subscribers a new educational facility was built which houses various workshops focused on environmental education. The classes may vary from lessons in organic farming, the dos and don'ts of bee keeping, cheese making and how to start your own orchard.

The goal of Irish Seed Savers is to preserve a part of Irish culture. Americans looking to connect can visit [www.irishseedsavers.ie](http://www.irishseedsavers.ie) and become involved by subscribing to a unique experience of contributing to a living legacy.

## Firm Faith in Catholic Schools

BY SARAH KIMBALL

FOR a little over three years, the organization Faith in the Future has been helping families send their children to Catholic schools in the Philadelphia area.

Responsible for 17 high schools and four schools of special education, the foundation currently aids nearly 14,000 students who would not be able to gain a Catholic education if it were not for the funding Faith in the Future has provided them.

Faith in the Future was established as a response to the decline in high school enrollment in Philadelphia's Catholic schools. In 2010, the economic pressures proved to be too much for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia to manage, and consequently, two of its high schools were forced to close. In 2012, when a Blue Ribbon Commission suggested that 44 schools across the archdiocese also close, Faith in the Future was created.

Today, Faith in the Future supports Catholic schools as a whole by raising

money to improve enrollment, subsequently putting the schools on stronger financial footing.

Faith in the Future's commitment to providing students with a first-rate education has been deemed so important by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia that the foundation's management contract with the archdiocese has been extended to the year 2022.

The extension speaks to the success of the establishment, especially considering the Archdiocese of Philadelphia is the only one in the country that has partnered with an independent foundation like Faith in the Future.

The support Faith in the Future provides for Catholic schools continues what has been a Philadelphia tradition for decades. The first Catholic schools in America were established in Philadelphia by St. John Neumann, and in the 1950s and '60s these schools grew to be the largest Catholic schools in the country, serving many Irish immigrants as well as immigrants of other descents.

"Our Catholic education is not just about acquiring skills, but also about acquiring strong moral character, discipline and goodness that makes someone a really valuable and productive member of society," said Faith in the Future CEO Samuel Casey Carter.

Carter, like the chairman of Faith in the Future, Edward Hanway, and many others at the organization, has



Samuel Casey Carter.

deep Irish American roots which are a source of pride.

His father's family came from Birr, Co. Offaly. Carter is a descendent of Daniel Carroll who signed the U.S. Constitution and Charles Carroll, the only Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence. He is also related to John Carroll, the first archbishop of the U.S. and the founder of Georgetown University.

Carter's mother comes from more modest roots, and takes pride in being a ditch digger's daughter. Her father's family came from Co. Cork and founded the John F. Casey Company which is associated with the expansion of Pennsylvania railroads and responsible for building 900 of the 1,200 bridges in the Pittsburgh area.

Carter's rich Irish Catholic roots have inspired his work at Faith in the

Future. Despite the notion of Catholic schools being frail and susceptible to closing, he has prevailed with the best interests of students in mind.

"More students are coming to our schools. These were schools that were previously losing 1,300 students a year, and we're now projecting growth in our schools," said Carter.

With the 21st century education provided by Faith in the Future, each student receives individual attention. The schools ensure that the students are not only college-ready, but also work force-ready and able to solve problems that they may face in the future.

The foundation strives to make Philadelphia a leader in Catholic schooling and encourages people to look at its schools if young people are interested in the future of learning.

"Particularly in the inner-city, even among non-Catholics, Catholic schools have proven to be good at providing a high level of education to underserved children. We do this because we're Catholic, not because they are," said Carter.

Carter hopes that the success of the foundation in Philadelphia can create a national model for cities across America, "so the heritage and legacy of Catholic schooling can be reborn anew for another generation."

For information, visit [www.faithinthefuture.com](http://www.faithinthefuture.com)