



Seeds by Design

**Patty Buskirk grows 1,000 acres of seed crops.**

## California seed company runs gamut from arugula to zucchini

By **JULIA HOLLISTER**  
For the Capital Press

The seeds of inspiration that farmer Patty Buskirk picked up and nurtured have grown into a global business three decades later.

“In 1981, I took a summer job as an intern at a local Northern California vegetable seed company and I was hooked. I knew that watching those seeds take root and cultivating them was what I wanted to do,” she said. “I founded Seeds by Design and today I manage about 1,000 acres of row crop production and oversee another 1,200 acres.”

Seeds by Design markets worldwide, mainly in the home and garden market.

The row crop farm she manages is in Maxwell, Calif. She also contracts with 8 to 10 growers each year for seed production.

Buskirk produces the stock seed. Her customers also send stock seed. Stock seed is an industry term for seed that will be used for planting a seed crop. Some customers want to use their seed lots for establishing a seed production crop. A seed crop is different from a fresh market crop. On average, the growing season is two to three times longer.

“The most popular seeds we produce are summer squash and cucumbers, and the easiest growers are open pollinated watermelon and

pumpkin,” she said. “Most home garden varieties are open pollinated and not hybrid seed lots.”

They package their seeds in foil bags and large tri-wall boxes.

Pests are a constant problem — from powdery and downy mildew to noxious weeds, she said, adding that rising labor costs and state and local work regulations are further challenges.

There are not many “beauty contestants” in the fields, she notes. Some of the gourds have smelly, hairy leaves, 15-foot vines and weird-shaped hard fruit, and others show off with brightly colored soft fruits. Their white and bright yellow flowers only pollinate in the early morning.

Asparagus beans are also unique with the 3-foot long pods that look like bowls of spaghetti in the fields.

While Buskirk said she often thinks about farming methods of the past, she is a fierce advocate of modern agricultural technology.

“Seed production and decreasing biodiversity are sadly becoming lost arts,” she said. “I long for days past when I was not a slave to technology. But do not get me wrong — I embrace technology and new agricultural breakthroughs.

“We will never be able to feed the masses without new farming methods and continued mechanization,” she said.



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