

To TACF Members,

Twenty seven years ago, the American Chestnut Foundation began implementing a breeding strategy laid out by Dr. Charles Burnham. Our mission has been unwavering—to breed a blight resistant American chestnut and restore it to its original range. Dr. Burnham envisioned that the B3F3 tree, our “Restoration Chestnut,” would be suitable for reintroduction with blight resistance and American chestnut growth characteristics. Our Meadowview farm is beginning to produce significant numbers of these seed, and our Pennsylvania chapter is close behind. Most of our other chapters are a decade or more behind.

There are several valid questions being asked by our members:

1. Why “shotgun” our restoration chestnuts across 200 million acres using the grid concept?
Mechanically distributing our seminal plantings across the range, using USGS 7.5 minute quads gives us a logical systematic way to spatially track and monitor our plantings over a wide array of environmental conditions. Also, given the infeasibility of planting 200 million acres, much of the habitat will be reoccupied through the movement of chestnut into disturbed forest areas through natural vectors, such as squirrels and blue jays. It’s important to remember that these seminal plantings are seed sources and may represent the only hope that some adjacent areas will be restored. We need to grow them to the main canopy level as rapidly as we can.
2. Why begin restoration now?
There are several reasons, the most compelling being that restoration will profoundly change us as an organization. The task is huge, and for some states almost overwhelming. We must spend the next decade or so, Phase I of restoration, determining what we must do—how we must change—to be successful. We can’t really determine this until we begin the process. It will take considerable time to grow our infrastructure.

Many of our early plantings will be an expansion of the progeny testing process, or silvicultural test plantings, enabling us to learn more about chestnut. If successful, these plantings will become restoration plantings.

The eminent availability of B₃F₃ seed, the first material believed to be suitable for restoration, argues for an immediate beginning.

3. If you plant 2,000-3,000 cells with Meadowview or Pennsylvania seed, why are chapters conducting breeding programs?
There is a concern that early, heavy dependence on seed from Meadowview or possibly Pennsylvania for seminal plantings will lead to the opinion that chapter breeding programs are unnecessary. Not so.

Even, if all 5400 cells within the range were planted with seed from Meadowview or possibly Pennsylvania, this represents far less than one percent of the acres in the total range. In most cases, chapter seed will be used to “fill in the gaps” after it comes online. If better products come from the continuation of the breeding program, such as enhanced blight resistance, this material will be incorporated into the seminal plantings.

Restoration Chestnuts are not invasive. They will do no harm.

Rex Mann, Chairperson
Restoration Taskforce