

Arctic seed vault hits half-million mark

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Barely two years after it opened, a unique Arctic "doomsday" stockpile of all the world's crop seeds has reached the half-million species mark, the foundation that oversees it said Thursday.

A mold-resistant wild bean from Costa Rica, a vulnerable strawberry from a bear-infested part of Russia's Kuril [islands](#) and a host of American soybeans are among the latest additions to the Svalbard Global Seed Vault.

"Reaching the half-million mark brings mixed emotions," said Cary Fowler, executive director of the Global Crop Diversity Trust, which coordinates the collection of seeds for the vault and helps pay for its upkeep.

"While it shows that the vault at Svalbard is now the gold standard for diversity, it comes at a time when our agriculture [systems](#) are really sitting on a knife's edge," he said.

Built by the Norwegian government in a remote mountainside about 1,000 kilometres (600 miles) from the North Pole, the seed vault opened in February 2006 to bring together the seeds of all the world's food crops.

Should a natural or manmade disaster wipe out a particular species, its sponsors say, scientists could go into the vault - it has a capacity of 4.5 million samples - and try to bring it back into production.

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