NordGen’s response to COVID-19

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About NordGen

— The Nordic countries’ genebank and knowledge center for genetic resources

— Safeguarding 33 000 accessions. 536 species and some 80 potato varieties (*in vitro*)

— Responsible for the seed operations and genebank contacts at Svalbard Global Seed Vault, in close cooperation with Norwegian Ministry of Food and Agriculture and the Crop Trust.
COVID-19

— First case reached the Nordic countries in the end of January 2020

— Five countries, five political strategies, five health authorities' regulations and advices for limiting the spread of the virus.

— In March, Sweden (where our head office is situated) changed the rules regarding sick leave and sick pay to help employees practice self-quarantine if needed
Challenges

- Staff in different countries, following different rules are unable to cross borders.
- Small organisation = vulnerable
- Dissemination of information affected
- Less visible
- Projects delayed
- Challenge to maintain social cohesion and encourage high working spirits

NordGen
Our response

— Risk analysis and emergency contingency plan

— Very high focus on the staff working with regeneration in greenhouse and garden.

— In-house training of staff to substitute critical functions in the labs

— Germination tests paused during critical months

— Seed orders handled as usual but recipient addresses checked carefully
Our response

— Home offices for those able
— All work travels cancelled
— All visits cancelled
— Social distancing
— Improved cleaning procedures
— Visibility and information dissemination increased via website and social media as visits and travels are cancelled
Shift of focus

— Cancelled travels and seminars has led to more time for quality assurance

— Transferring our database from SESTO to GENBIS (www.nordic-baltic-genebanks.org) powered by GRIN Global

— Digital solutions further explored
  - better for the environment
  - less time consuming

— Better cleaning, disinfection and more handwashing has reduced the occurrence of flu and colds.
Svalbard Global Seed Vault

— Seed Summit in February, gathering the International Advisory Panel

— June deposit cancelled

— August: John Innes centre deposited peas and 100-years experiment started

— October: five genbanks planning to deposit seed duplicates
Thank you for listening!

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