

# National Plant Germplasm System: Critical Role of Customer Service



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## Summary

The National Plant Germplasm System (NPGS) conserves plant genetic resources, not only for use by future generations, but for immediate use by scientists and educators around the world. With a great deal of interaction between genebank curators and users of plant genetic resources, customer service should be a critical component of effective genebank operations. In the world of private industry, keeping the customer satisfied is critical. Companies train employees continually and record measures of customer satisfaction to achieve desired results. The NPGS is similar to a private company with products (plant genetic resources) and information about those products that are provided upon request to customers (scientists and educators). When the customer cannot find the right product or information, or receives a poor quality product, dissatisfaction arises. NPGS personnel need to realize that, like a private company, customer satisfaction is integral to their operation.

## NPGS is like a Private Company in many ways

	NPGS	Company
Products	Seeds, vegetative clones, cuttings	Items for sale
Price	Free	Cost
Placement (i.e. ordering)	GRIN, email, phone	In a store or online website
Promotion	GRIN, NPGS websites, publications	Advertising
People	Scientists, Educators	Public customers

## Customer Service Training - Curators -

A Customer Service Workshop was held during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Curators Workshop in Feb. 2010. Curators in attendance learned about internal and external customers; who are their clients, consumers, and constituents and what do they want from NPGS; and the roles of service, attitude, consistency, and teamwork in customer service. The highlight of the training was a customer service video "Give 'em the Pickle" which highlighted the importance of customer service with interesting and memorable stories. "Give 'em the Pickle" is now a common term to curators as they make that extra effort to provide excellent customer service.

## Defining NPGS Customers

*(adapted from Russell Linden, 1992-3)*

- 1. Client – Those who pay.**  
*Those who fund NPGS including Congress and taxpayers want efficiency, fiscal responsibility, and no improper use of funds.*
- 2. Consumer – Those who use.**  
*Scientists and educators who use NPGS seeds, cuttings, and vegetative clones want quality, multiple choices, genetic diversity, responsiveness, timeliness, and useful information.*
- 3. Constituent – Those who care.**  
*Commodity groups, MultiState Technical committees, and Crop Germplasm Committees have a vested interest and want predictability, accurate information, and access to leaders.*

## References

Farrell, Bob. 2010. [www.giveemthepickle.com](http://www.giveemthepickle.com). Media Partners Corp.  
Linden, Russell. Winter 1992-1993. Meeting which customers' needs? *New Bureaucrat*. p. 49-52.

## Customer Service Training - NPGS Germplasm Locations -

Following the 3<sup>rd</sup> Curators Workshop, the "Give 'em the Pickle" video was distributed from PGRCU, Griffin, GA and shown to curators, scientists, administrative, and technical staff at eight different NPGS and germplasm locations, National Program Staff CPP, and ARS Human Resources SSB in 2010.

