

Exploring the future of taste

[Entertainment](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Dan Barber, executive chef of Blue Hill Restaurant in New York City, is on a mission to reinvent the taste of your favorite vegetables. Through his new seed company, Row7 seeds, Barber is introducing new varieties of vegetables that are bred for flavor through a collaboration between breeders and chefs around the country - the first of its kind. As a supporter of the 'farm to table trend,' Barber initially aimed to broaden this practice, in his words, 'seed to table,' almost a decade ago during a conversation with a University of Cornell breeder. His understanding that seeds were being bred for efficiency (resistance to disease, shelf life, abundance), made him question why breeders were writing the original recipes for food, not chefs. Chefs, farmers, and home gardeners would not be given a voice in what vegetables they would like to see. When best ingredients start before they are grown, this community now has an opportunity to think about them long before they reach the plate. Through Barber's work with Cornell University and the University of Wisconsin, the exceptional flavors of these ingredients can now be purchased through Row7 Seeds. Each of their seven offerings are equally dedicated to deliciousness, soil health, and nutritional profile.

As an avid gardener, the idea that a company like Row7 is working to improve taste and change the food system is a powerful one, especially as a research topic. Dan's mission and the science behind it, is limitless and boundless; new traits can be introduced as environmental factors change, and flavor is never "finished". A culinary experience where vegetables used in kitchens did not need copious amounts of butter or salt to extract flavor, or where the entire plant, leaf and fruit, were used in a recipe, is within reach. This is not only an opportunity, but an obligation that I would love to

share with a wider audience. Reducing food waste, creating healthier soil and nutritious vegetables has the potential to disrupt an American culture of overly processed, sugar packed diets. When we have the choice to select vegetables that meet Barber's qualifications, we should take it. With work, reimagining the standard of seeds will no longer be a trend, but an impactor of American's tables.

This is the future I want to be a part of and the story I would like to tell. While not only a gardener, I am also a skeptic. Although Barber aims to work in collaboration with breeders, are they messing with nature, or are they giving face to the flavors nature intended to showcase? Through my research, I hope that exploring the intricate work that goes into breeding vegetables will give myself, and others, a way to reflect on if these practices are ethical. Also, if there are standards for taste, additional standards will need to be put into place to support modifications of seeds. Their regulation by a governing body, and organic and domestic production will need to be considered as well. I believe that these standards bare the same importance as levels of sweetness or colors when selecting physical characteristics and will need to be thoroughly vetted by my research to fully understand breeding practices.

To fully immerse myself in this topic, I also have a unique opportunity to explore the ways Dan Barber's food movement is impacting our local landscape. The Farm, a family farm near my hometown, currently grows Row7's full catalog, supplied exclusively to Chicago restaurant Smyth and The Loyalist, and is nearing the height of their growing season. Using Barber's core growing practices, they now have a seat to assist in pushing

the conversation of taste for everyone at the table - a topic I am excited to share.