Greenhouse selection improvements made in *Taraxacum kok-saghyz* persist in field trials
Brandon Wheeler, Ben Robinson, Debbie Zaborski, Nikita Amstutz, Katrina Cornish

**INTRODUCTION**
Natural Rubber (NR) is a critical natural resource in the global economy. Today, all commercially available NR derives from the tropics, and production of NR is out of reach for U.S. growers. TK is a dandelion species native to Central Asia, which is under development as a source of NR in the United States and other temperate regions. Rubber yield and plant vigor must be improved in order for TK to become a commercially viable domestic rubber crop. Ideally, breeding selections for TK germplasm improvement should occur in the field. However, in order to accelerate domestication and yield performance, the ability to confidently make selections in a greenhouse environment becomes critical.

In 2018, four generations of greenhouse improved seeds were compared in a field trial to determine whether germplasm improvement selections made in a greenhouse environment translate to improved performance in the field.

**METHODS**
1. The selection criteria for the C, D, and E generations were quick emergence, plant size and vigor.
2. Approximately 2000 B seeds were sown into flats. Plants that took greater than seven days to germinate were discarded.
3. The plants that germinated in less than eight days were transplanted to greenhouse beds for grow-out and observation.
4. Before flowering, individual plants smaller in size or less vigorous in relation to neighboring plants were culled.
5. The remaining plants were hand-pollinated, and C seed was harvested.
6. The D and E generations were created in the same manner using C and D as source material respectively.
7. The four generations (B-E) were direct-seeded in field plots in May 2018 for a side-by-side comparison (Figure 1).
8. Plants were harvested in December, 2018. Roots were weighed and rubber concentration determined by NIR spectroscopy using an established model ($r^2 = 0.91$).

**RESULTS**
Each successive generation outperformed the previous generation in the field with respect to plant fresh weight, crown diameter, and root dry weight (Figure 2).

Rubber concentration analysis indicated that rubber levels remained the same even as the successive generations increased in size (Figure 3).

Rubber yield (rubber per plant) increased by 12, 38 and 47% in the C, D and E generations, respectively, when compared to source material B (Figure 4).

**CONCLUSIONS**
Although field selections are still preferable in TK germplasm development, improvements in early emergence and plant size gained through greenhouse selections did persist in the field.

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