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Editor's note: For updates on Pavlovsk Station and other news, follow us on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/croptrust>. Photos of Pavlovsk Station can be found at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/croptrust>.

50,000 Petitioners Worldwide Declare Support for Campaign To Save Pavlovsk Experimental Station

*Biodiversity Advocates From around the World Flood Russian Officials with
Petition Messages, Letters, and Tweets to Voice their Opposition to the
Destruction of Russian Plant Collection*

ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA (21 September 2010)—A global social media campaign to save Europe's most important collection of fruits and berries has collected over 50,000 petition signatures worldwide. The campaign is part of a massive online movement to persuade Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to overturn a court decision allowing the Russian Housing Development Foundation (RZhS) to auction off the land on which the Pavlovsk Experimental Station stands.

Campaigners in support of Pavlovsk Station learned that the auction to sell the first of two portions of Pavlovsk site for the construction of luxury apartments had been put on hold while an international commission was being formed to evaluate the land. However, campaign leaders were quick to caution that the decision affects only the smaller part of the land that today contains a forage crop collection, rather than the portion containing the more important and historic fruit and berry collection. Moreover, the outcome of the Commission is uncertain.

"50,000 signatures from around the world is a remarkable feat, and last week's postponement only confirms that the Kremlin is listening and this fight isn't over," said Cary Fowler, Executive Director of the Global Crop Diversity Trust, the organization leading the campaign.

The Trust organized a Twitter campaign and a Change.org online petition to save Pavlovsk Station, which led to other major online petition efforts by Food Democracy Now, Care2, and Cyber Acteurs. The various petitions automatically direct individual letters of support for Pavlovsk to specified officials in the Russian government. For example, each time an online user signs the Change.org petition, the Russian Ministers of Agriculture and Economic Development receive an email appeal—more than 18,000 emails so far.

"Based on recent responses from Medvedev, scientists, and the Russian Housing Development Foundation, it's clear that these petition signatures and comments are making an impact," said Sarah Parsons, Editor of the Sustainable Food page at Change.org. "These developments are not only encouraging, they're a testimony to the power of online activism."

Food Democracy Now, a grassroots community dedicated to building a sustainable food system, has collected over 21,000 signatures since mid-August.

The Global Crop Diversity Trust is working on compiling all of the signatures in order to deliver them personally to Russian diplomats. “We are optimistic about this recent news. But with these signatures, we’re sending the message that we won’t give up until the collection at Pavlovsk Station is safe,” said Fowler. (For a sample of comments written by some of the petition-signers, click [here](#).)

Timeline of Campaign to Save Pavlovsk

The social media campaign began in mid-July with an opinion piece on the Huffington Post by Fowler, entitled “Tweet Medvedev: Stop the Destruction of the Future of Food!” The piece encouraged supporters to send Twitter messages to President Medvedev about the Pavlovsk site in both Russian and English.

The online campaign quickly gained momentum following an August 11 ruling that real estate developers could go ahead with their plans to destroy the station. Propelled by an international coalition of grassroots groups, biodiversity advocates and concerned citizens, a set of online petitions grew from just 1,000 signatures to over 36,000 in two weeks. The President’s official response came via Twitter on August 13, indicating that he had ordered the issue “to be scrutinized”.

The buzz online was compounded by international media coverage of the station; for example, a single story on Pavlovsk on the *Guardian* website was tweeted over 500 times and shared on Facebook over 900 times.

On August 19, the Change.org petition was at nearly a 2000-signature-per-day pace, and nearly half of Medvedev’s incoming Tweets appeals were about Pavlovsk Station. Since then, continued media and blogger interest has ensured a steady growth in Tweets and petition signatures.

On September 9, a group of world-renowned scientists joined the campaign, writing personal letters to President Medvedev in support of Pavlovsk Station. Participants included Sir Peter Crane of Yale University, Cristian Samper, Director of the Smithsonian Museum of National History, and Thomas Lovejoy of the Heinz Center for Science, Economics and the Environment. (For a full list, click [here](#).)

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The mission of the **Global Crop Diversity Trust** is to ensure the conservation and availability of crop diversity for food security worldwide. Although crop diversity is fundamental to fighting hunger and to the very future of agriculture, funding is unreliable and diversity is being lost. The Trust is the only organization working worldwide to solve this problem. For further information, please visit: www.croptrust.org.