

Mushrooms May Be One Answer

As man takes up more of the earth's surface standing, sitting, driving and sleeping on it, there is naturally less and less land available for food production. Someday, according to present birth rates, there will not be enough food produced by conventional methods to meet the needs of the increased population.

One often mentioned food source is the sea, but another underrated method of concentrating food production can be found in the mushroom houses of Delaware and Pennsylvania.

The Toughkenamon Valley area around Kennett Square, west of Philadelphia, grows more mushrooms than the rest of the United States put together. The area produces more than 30 million dollars worth of mushrooms each year.

Because of the great poten-

tial of mushrooms and because the growing area is nearby, University of Delaware agricultural chemists and marketing specialists have been carrying on mushroom research and cooperating with growers and processors in the application of new methods based on research results.

How do mushrooms grow? The first step is spawn making. This goes on under sterile laboratory conditions as clean as a hospital operating room.

Mushroom growing has become a science akin to antibiotic production. The process is so similar that the world's first commercial penicillin came from a mushroom spawn laboratory in Kennett Square.

The spawn is scattered through a pasteurized compost of hay, chopped corn cobs, and fertilizer. Sterilized soil

is then spread about an inch deep over the compost and the first crop is ready in about two weeks.

The beds are picked by hand about eight or nine times and then the compost must be removed from the house and replaced with fresh materials. This cycle is repeated twice a year.

There are usually six layers of beds in a house and production averages about 4 pounds per square foot per year. This means that one square foot of standing room on the earth's surface, produces six layers of mushrooms totaling about 24 lbs of high protein food in a year. Increased production is sure to come within a few years and will boost this production by at least 50 percent.

This space aspect of mushroom production may be the most important factor in world food production for the next generation.

With the help of University research results, applied to processing and packaging,

the market for mushrooms has been greatly increased because of better quality control and longer shelf life. Fresh mushrooms can be shipped farther and will keep longer in the store without discoloring.

Fresh sales have taken a 30 percent jump without a price reduction to the producer or a price increase to the consumer because of the increase in consumer satisfaction and the opportunity that longer shelf life presents for reaching markets former-

ly too distant. More efficient marketing and merchandising of a higher quality mushroom has changed the attitude of retail stores and consumers. With today's better quality-control the mushroom is on the way up.

Already second only to corn as a cash crop in New Castle County, Delaware, mushrooms or perhaps a similar type of human food, may one day be the most important crop in the whole world.

SIGN WITH CAUTION

When the salesman at your door says, "You'll need to sign at once to get this special price," take time to check prices with local dealers who handle the same or similar items, advises Sanna Black, Penn State home management extension specialist. All special offers that come by phone, letter, and from door-to-door salesmen may not be gimmicks, but be wary of the "hurry up and sign" kind.

Clear cool water is often the best first aid for spots on clothing, reminds Thelma Baierl, Penn State extension clothing specialist. Applied as soon as possible after staining, water will frequently prevent the spot from setting. For stains on delicate fabrics or for unknown stains, it's advisable to let your drycleaner remove them.

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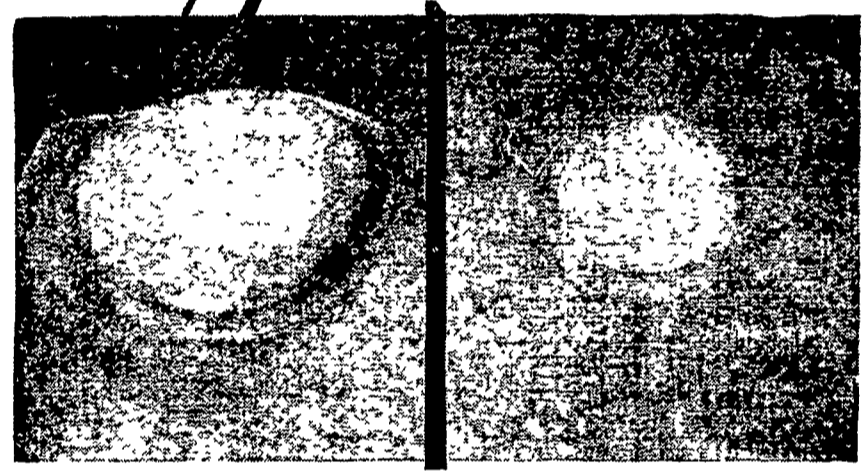
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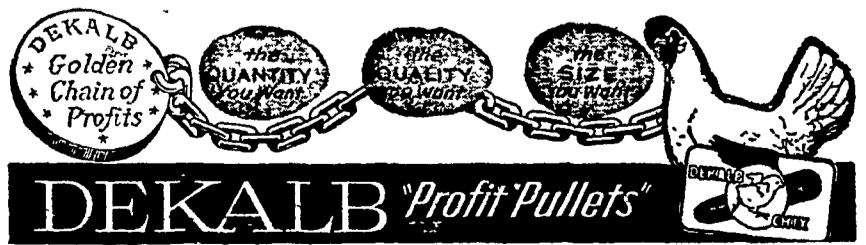
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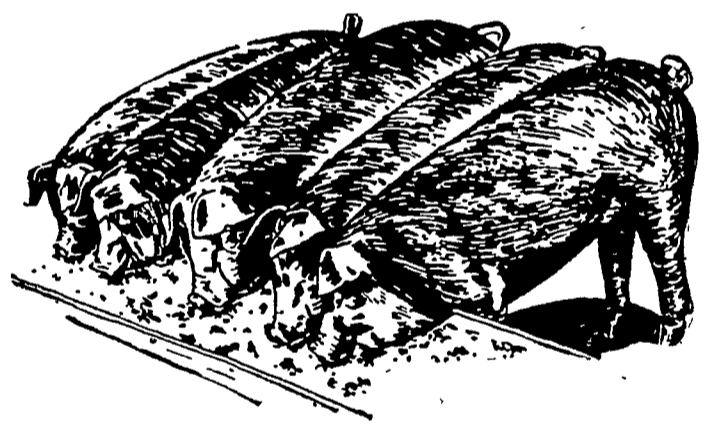
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