

Scientists Study Selective Feeding Habits Of Insects

The cabbage butterfly seeks out the cabbage patch in the garden to deposit its eggs. The caterpillars that hatch from the eggs eat and grow to maturity on the plants selected by the parent butterfly.

If the caterpillars are

placed on other plants to which they are not accustomed, they go on a hunger strike, doggedly refusing to eat, and finally perish miserably in the midst of plenty.

How selective are such feeding habits of insects? And, could insects be tricked into feeding on substitute diets — perhaps containing an insecticide?

These are penetrating questions, and ARS entomologists J. C. Keller and T. B. Davich

have begun to obtain the answers. They induced five insects to feed on agar containing a water soluble substance extracted from the host plant of each insect.

They experimented with the monarch butterfly on milkweed, the elm leaf beetle on American elm, a species of Gastrophysa on dock, the squash bug on pumpkin, and the boll weevil on cotton squares.

The researchers obtained water extracts from each of the plants and mixed the ex-

mixture had cooled in petri dishes, half of the jelled extract. The scientists then extract was removed from each (Continued on Page 14)

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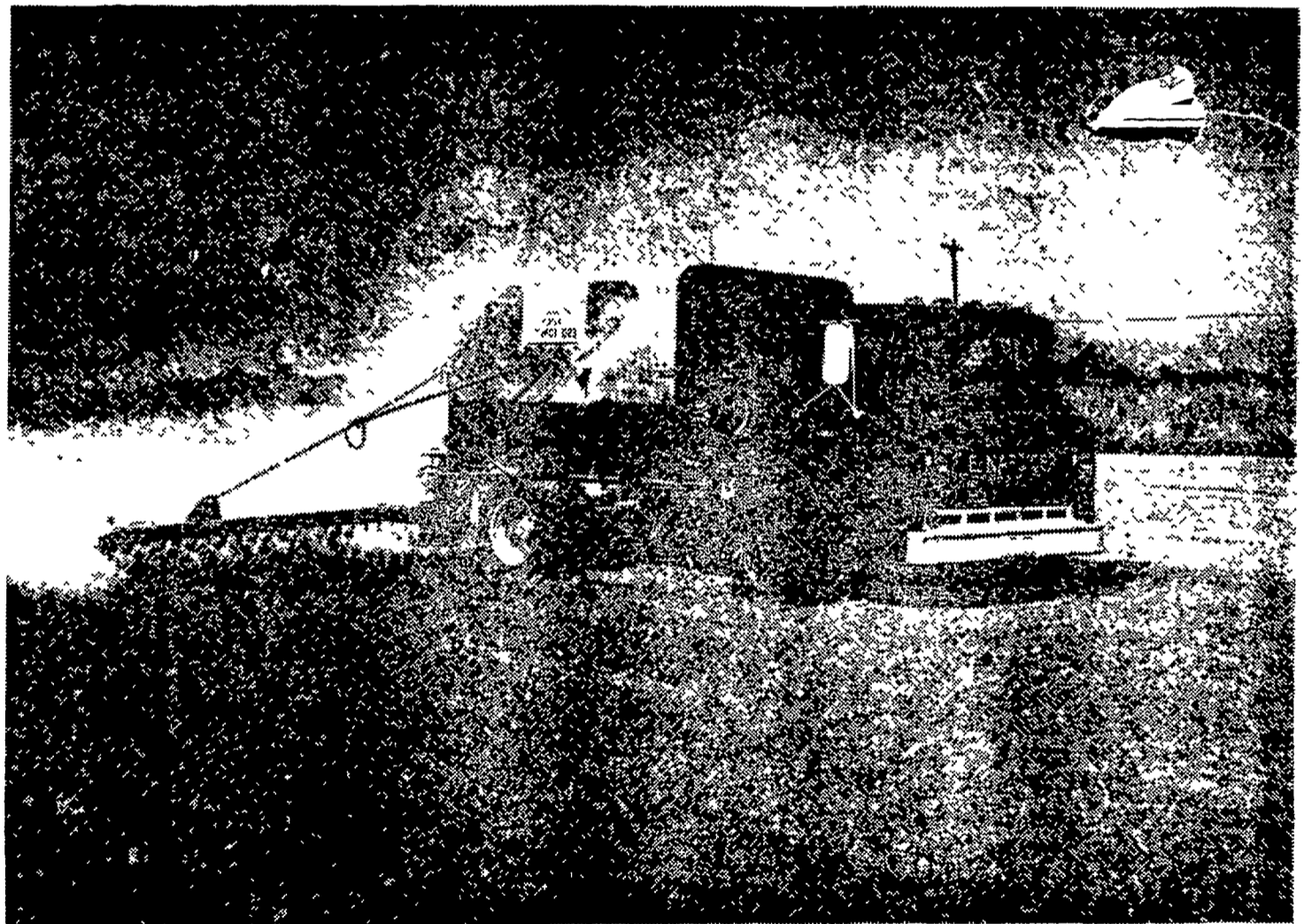
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