

Tassel Corn Has Big Potential

Tassel corn is not new. It's probably been around for thousands of years. A few reports on the mutants have been sparsely scattered in the scientific literature

over the years, but the idea of considering it seriously as a domestic crop is fairly recent

Dr. John Eastin, DeKalb, Ag Research, Inc., plant physiologist who began a study of tassel corn in cooperation with Dr. Jerry Keimle in 1964 while on the staff at the University of Wisconsin says it has an exciting potential

A major objective in breeding corn is to develop a plant with a high grain to leaf ratio. In his attempts to evolve such a plant the breeder has the genes to put an ear in any leaf axil or — in the case of tassel corn — to put the grain on top. And with tassel corn he can enclose it in either husks or glumes

At Wisconsin, John had tassel corn at a 20,000 population and some of the tassels produced 2,000 seeds. This seed number contrasts markedly with a typical commercial ear which has 800 — 900 kernels

There are a series of potential advantages to tassel corn when compared to present hybrids

It could lead to significantly higher yields

It tassels and silks earlier. It dries down faster, probably because of no cob

It is believed that it will stand stress better. As an example, when corn is stressed by lack of light or moisture, nature normally compensates by setting an ear at the tassel in an effort to survive.

It harvests early without a picker head and probably with less harvest loss

This potentially adds up to a higher yielding crop which matures earlier, dries faster and harvests easier

An interesting consideration for northern latitudes (where temperatures are now suboptimal for corn growth) is that the seed in tassel corn is exposed to a higher radiation environment than normal corn where the seed is shaded by leaves and husks

This affords the opportunity to influence radiant energy absorption by the seed and consequent-

ly increase seed temperature above an optimum.

Hopefully, a rise in seed temperature will increase metabolic activity and seed development rates. Additionally, seed pigmentation can be easily altered to enhance radiant energy absorption.

There are, however, a number of problems to be solved before tassel corn is ready for farmer use and they should not be minimized. They include kernel smut, insect and bird damage, plant height (it should be lower than its present 6-7 feet), timing of pollen shed (the period between silking and pollen shed must be shortened) and some yet unknowns

After considering both the positives and negatives of tassel corn the company has decided that there is enough promise involved that it is conducting a significant breeding effort

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Garden Spot YF Meet

The Garden Spot Young Farmers Association will hold their monthly meeting at 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 14 in the room of Garden Spot High School, New Holland.

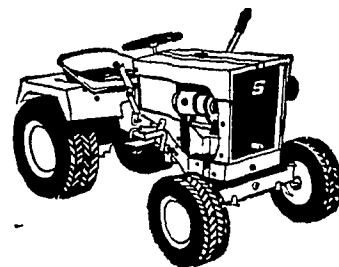
The program will be on Forage. Willis McLellan, extension agronomist, Penn State University, will be the guest speaker. The topic will be "Forage Establishment and Weed Control."

This will be the final meeting of the 1969-70 season. Plans will be made for meetings of the 1970-71 season. This will also be the last opportunity to bring the membership up to date.

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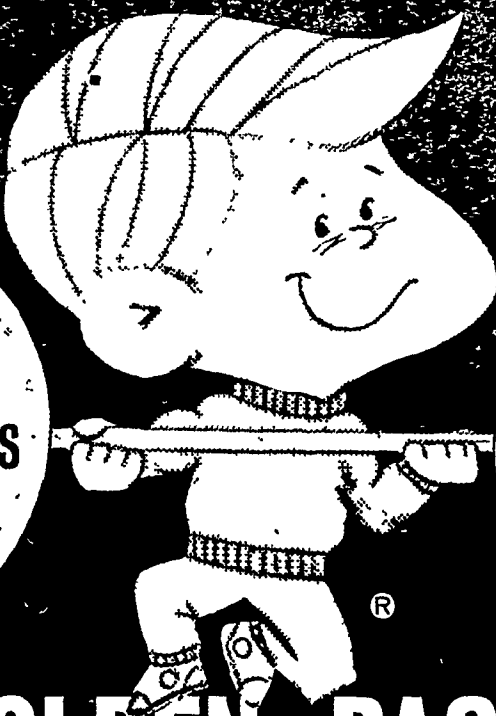


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