

Plant Pathologist Warns of Blight Danger to C and S Corn

The nation faces another epidemic of Southern Leaf Blight of corn if the country's seed corn industry continues its shift to presumably resistant male-sterile cytoplasm, according to a plant pathologist at Pennsylvania State University.

Dr. Richard R. Nelson said Penn State tests show that corn inbred lines with C and S male-sterile cytoplasm — soon to be used widely in producing hybrids — have no resistance to strains of the leaf blight fungus currently existing in the U.S. and throughout the world.

The shift to C and S male-sterile hybrids has started, he said, because of the extreme susceptibility of corn hybrids to Texas (T) male-sterile cyto-

plasm. Seed producers are aware of the susceptibility of T male-sterile cytoplasm to Southern Leaf Blight. However, the Penn State tests are the first to reveal the lack of blight resistance in C and S male-sterile inbreds.

Seed corn producers develop hybrids with male-sterile cytoplasm — the germ plasm in living cells — to avoid the need to detassel male plants by hand. Such a procedure saves the seed producer about \$60 an acre in labor costs.

"Until further research identifies the resistance of certain inbred lines of corn with C male sterile cytoplasm, the seed industry should not rush headlong into converting the

nation's corn hybrids into C male-sterile cytoplasm," he cautioned. "The time to fight an epidemic is before it occurs"

While not a new plant disease, Southern Leaf Blight of corn never has posed a serious threat to corn hybrids produced with normal cytoplasm. The Penn State scientist believes that normally produced hybrid corn, using non-male sterile inbreds, has sufficient blight resistance to keep the disease under reasonable control.

"Thus far, none of the fungus strains that blight all of the male-sterile cytoplasm produce a similar blighting on corn lines containing normal cytoplasm," Dr. Nelson stated.

He indicated the seed industry is increasing production of C-male sterile inbred corn all over the world. He claimed the seed industry should be alerted to the fact that such inbred corn lines are not resistant to certain races of Southern Leaf Blight fungus.

"If the use of hybrid seed with normal inbreds prevents

another blight like the one of this past season, it would be well worth the extra cost of producing it," he affirmed.

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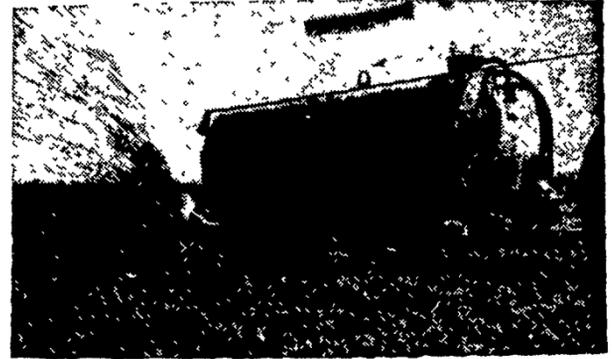
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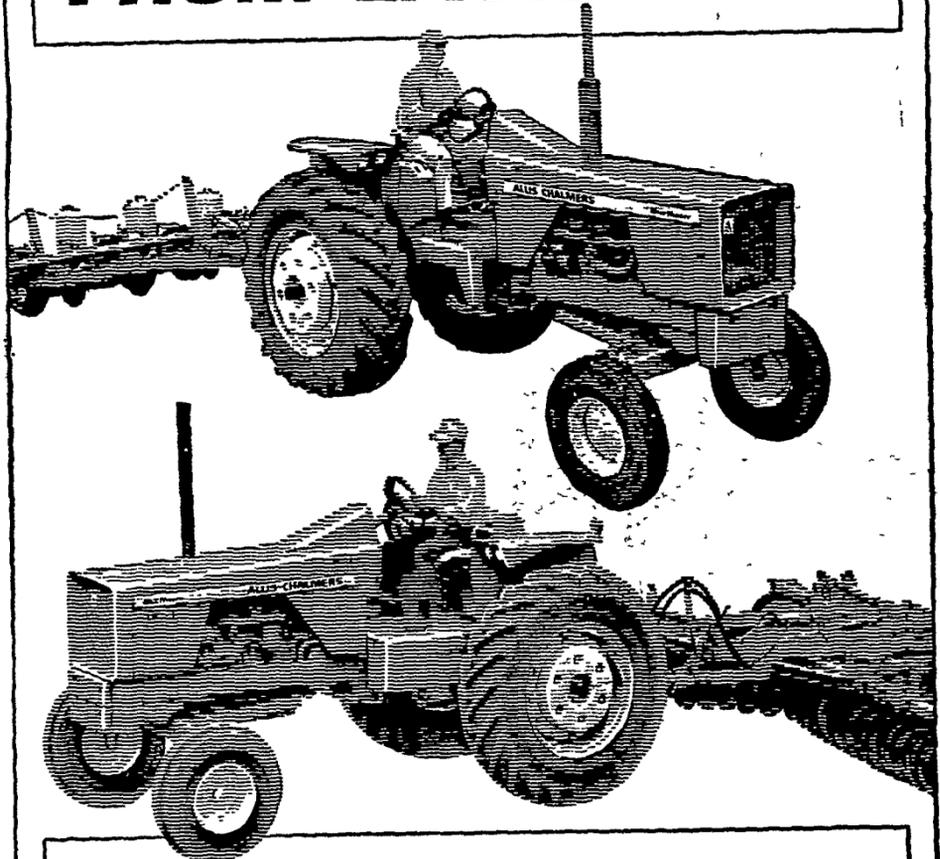
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