

# Genetic Vulnerability Committee Urged

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Dr. James F. Tammen and Dr. George E. Brandow, faculty members at The Pennsylvania State University, were among 16 prominent scientists and educators making a study entitled "Genetic Vulnerability of Major Crops," published recently by the National Academy of Sciences, Washington, D.C.

The study was spurred by the nation's most recent case of genetic vulnerability—the 1970 southern corn leaf blight epidemic that destroyed 15 per cent of the hybrid corn crop nationwide and as much as 50 per cent of the crop in some southern states.

Dr. Tammen is head of the Department of Plant Pathology at Penn State and Dr. Brandow is professor of agricultural economics. They indicate that the plant science division of the College of Agriculture at Penn State conducts a major research program pointed toward avoiding genetic vulnerability of crop plants.

The national study group recommended a "complete watchdog system" to safeguard the nation against epidemics posing a potential hazard to genetically vulnerable crops. The

report suggests establishment of a national monitoring committee "to keep a watchful eye on the development and production of major crops and to remain alert to potential hazards associated with new or widespread agricultural practices."

The corn crop of 1970 fell victim to southern corn leaf blight because of a quirk in technology that redesigned the corn plants of America until, in one sense, they became as alike as identical twins, the report says.

A single source of cytoplasm, known as Texas male-sterile cytoplasm, has been used in developing the majority of the corn hybrids planted in 1970. Southern corn blight was very damaging to varieties bearing the Texas cytoplasm.

The epidemic decreased in 1971, due largely to prompt action by commercial seed producers in reintroducing normal cytoplasm into seed.

Copies of the report, "Genetic Vulnerability of Major Crops," are available from Printing and Publishing Office, National Academy of Sciences, 2101 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C., 20418. The price is \$7.50 per copy.

It is likely, Drs. Tammen and Brandow point out, that genetic vulnerability was also a factor in serious epidemics such as the potato blight that caused the Irish famine of the 1840's. In 1917, a wheat rust epidemic left the United States with two wheatless days per week.

## Legume Heals Wounded Earth

A new lespedeza variety that thrives on poor soils, and holds great promise as ground cover for road banks and strip mining sites, has been released by the USDA.

New variety, named Caricea, was developed in cooperative research between the Department's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and the North Carolina Agricultural Experiment Station, Raleigh. Like common lespedeza, Caricea is a perennial forage and soil conservation legume adapted to the Southeastern U.S. The new variety owes its extra ground cover potential to its characteristic spreading branch growth habit with angular, rather than typical upright, growth of main stems.

In thick stands, growth of Caricea is similar to that of common sericea until branches are two to three feet high. Then the branches tend to droop, forming an extremely dense, overlapping canopy which provides tough competition for weeds due to complete shading.

According to ARS plant breeder William A. Cope, Caricea should be at least equal to common sericea as a forage crop in terms of forage yield, seed production and digestibility. Some certified seed for planting should be available in the summer of 1973. USDA has no seed for distribution.

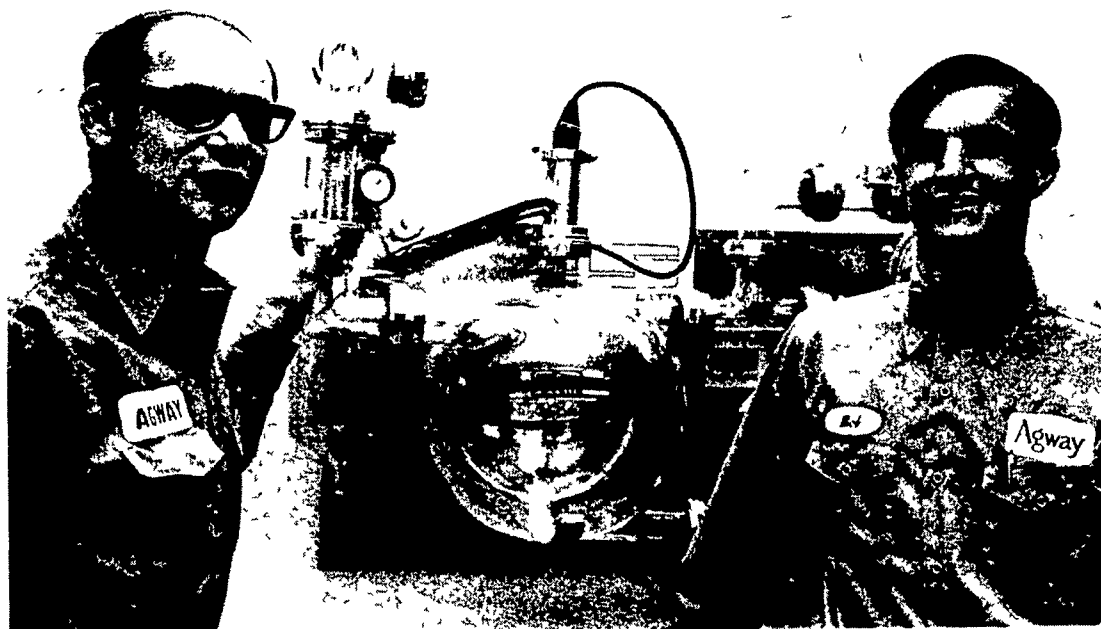
This variety is the result of over 20 years of research to develop a crop superior to that now grown. Healing wounds inflicted on the earth by man and nature is emphasized in continuing cooperative efforts by ARS and State agricultural experiment stations.

Cancer is most curable when it's caught early and treated promptly. The American Cancer Society urges you to have a health checkup once a year even if you feel great.

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