

Food lab offers new experiences to media reps

STATE COLLEGE — Remember the television commercial with the tuna who had good taste but didn't taste good?

He'd never have made it past the taste test panel at the Penn State food science laboratory.

Research on food quality, texture, and taste ac-

ceptance is carried on constantly in the Borland Lab kitchens at the University's College of Agriculture. Dr. Joseph H. MacNeil is administrator of the 26-member food sensory evaluations panel. Under his direction, media representatives taking part in a recent News Day



Mary Keith, right, master's degree candidate in home canning, enlists the help of media

representatives in a canning-jar-lid tightening experiment.

became temporary taste testers.

Assistants offer each taster comparative samples of food to be evaluated.

Panelists are simply asked to taste the sample and mark a questionnaire sheet. It's not as easy as it sounds.

Each taster is seated in a

separate cubicle and may not discuss nor compare opinions with other panelists. Samples come in identical small containers, with no identification other than a number or letter.

A variety of colored lights are wired into the cubicles, and can be controlled by a main switch operated by the testing supervisor. Bathing a brown food in red light gives it a rather alien appearance. A white food under a blue light becomes less than taste-tempting. Subjected to foods of strange colors and eerie appearances, the novice tester realizes how important eye appeal and attractive food color are to eating satisfaction.

One test commonly given to new food science students consists of three samples of popular brands of cola drinks. Two of the samples are from one brand and the third is from a popular competitor.

Another test given the

media guests involved four different colored gelatin samples. The gelatin flavors, however, did not correspond with the colors. It's hard to detect orange flavor in a red gelatin mix. And strawberry flavoring that comes masked in a lovely shade of purple becomes a real challenge.

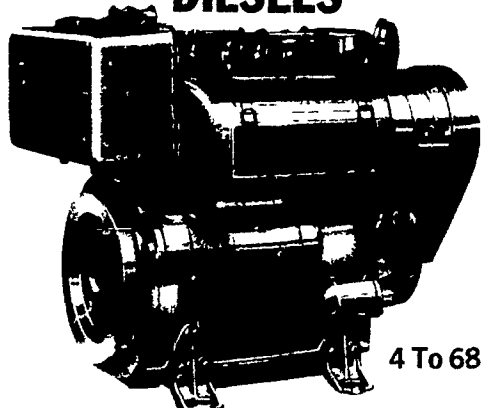
The taste test panel serves a variety of purposes. University researchers can utilize it in determining acceptance of college-researched products and, for a fee, commercial companies in the food industry can gather information for new food introductions.

Recent experiments conducted with the expert tasters include the comparison of kosher to regular food processing, deterioration of milk, meat taste from various combinations of beef crossbreeding, mushroom processing, ice cream formulations, and the comparison of potato varieties.

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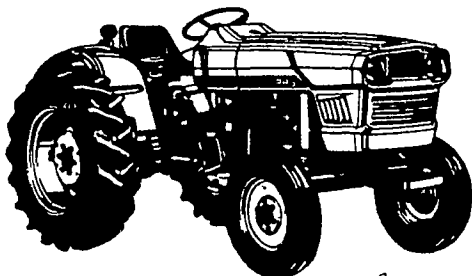
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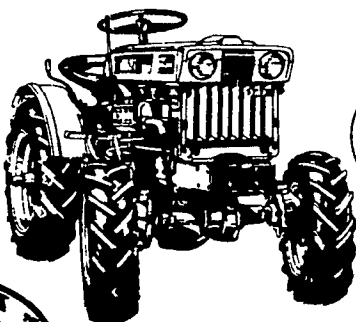
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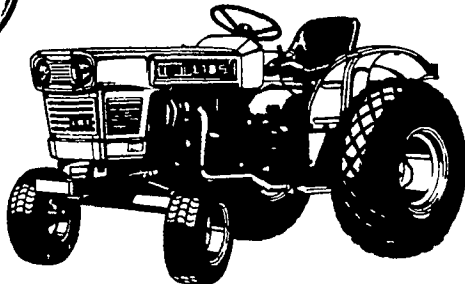
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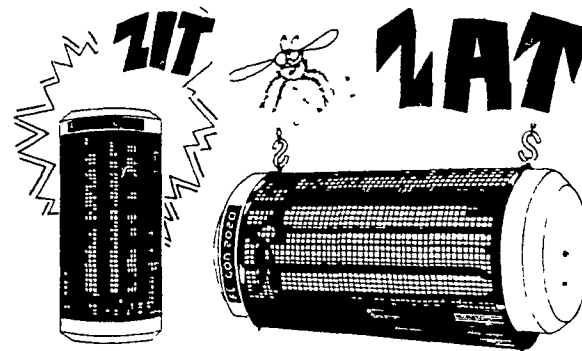
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