

Blue mold strikes Md. tobacco fields

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Blue mold, a dreaded tobacco fungus disease of recent vintage in the United States, has hit the tobacco crop in extreme southern Maryland. The outbreak may be the largest of its kind in the nation so far this year.

It was identified during the third week in June by Claude G. McKee, Extension tobacco specialist and professor of agronomy on the University of Maryland faculty. McKee is also farm superintendent for the University's tobacco research farm near Upper Marlboro (Prince Georges County).

He reports the outbreaks appear to be only in fields where the new systemic fungicide, Ridomil, was not used in the tobacco plant beds or at transplanting time.

Approximately 40 percent of the tobacco fields in southern Maryland have been treated this year with Ridomil, McKee commented. So they would appear to be safe from blue mold infestation during the current growing season.

In those fields where blue mold is suspected, the Maryland Extension specialist advocates immediate spraying with maneb or zineb fungicides at rates recommended by the dealer or county Extension tobacco agent.

McKee notes Ridomil is labeled only for soil application—not as a contact fungicide—and it is

relatively expensive. But with blue mold continuing to cause concern, it will be a necessity in future years to treat all tobacco plant beds with Ridomil.

Meanwhile, tobacco farmers still involved with transplanting are cautioned not to use plants which show any indication of disease. And the Maryland agronomist admonishes farmers to destroy tobacco plant beds as soon as transplanting is finished.

At mid-June, when the blue mold outbreak was noted in southern Maryland, only two small infestations of the disease had been reported in U.S. tobacco-growing areas so far this year. They were in Dixie County, Fla., and Lancaster County.

Blue mold outbreaks are generally brought on by too much cool, damp weather during the tobacco-growing season. The malady has been a problem in plant beds for some time. But it was first observed actively infesting Maryland tobacco fields in 1979.

Information on identification and control procedures for blue mold, along with wildfire and anthracnose, will be included in one of the six wagon tour stops during the Thirty-First Annual Field Day on July 29 at the University of Maryland's tobacco research farm near Upper Marlboro.

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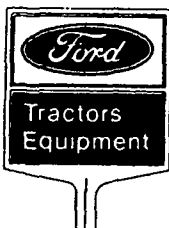
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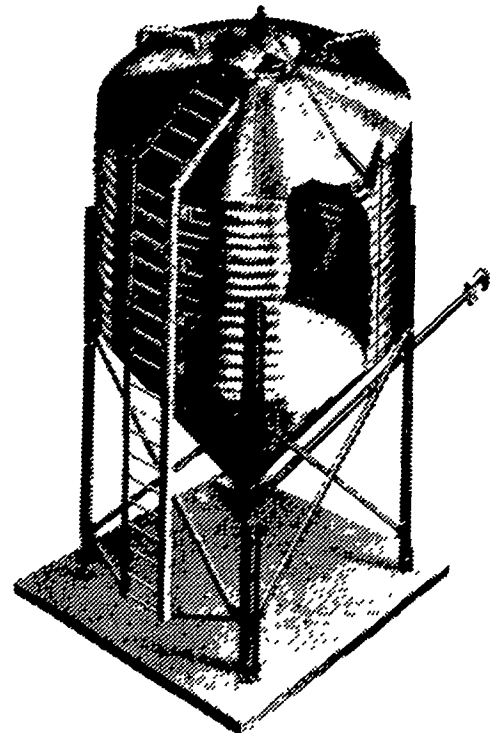
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