

Witchweed casts parasitic 'spell' on Carolina farmers

WASHINGTON, D.C. — "It's hard to believe, but in many parts of the world crop pests can mean the difference between starvation and survival," said U.S. Department of Agriculture weed scientist Robert Eplee.

Eplee, back from a three-week trip to the drought-plagued Sahel region of Africa, directs some of the development activities of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

"Take witchweed," he said. "Here in the United States, in a small area in the Carolinas, this parasitic weed has caused damage to corn crops, as well as personal hardship to farmers."

But in the Sahel, Eplee said, witchweed can mean life or death.

"The poor subsistence farmers in countries like Upper Volta move to an area and grow millet, one of the few crops to survive on only a few inches of rain a year," he said. "Even the first season, witchweed parasitizes the plants, cutting the meager yields."

Each succeeding year crops become poorer until, in five to seven years, the farmer and his family must pick up and move,

causing social disruption and increased soil erosion.

The poor peasants believe their crops are "bewitched," Eplee said.

No wonder witchweed seems like a magic force. When it first cropped up in the Carolinas in the 1950's, farmers there saw their corn mysteriously wither and die and crops dwindle — until a visiting student from India saw and recognized a witchweed plant with its bright-red flowers and properly identified it.

"Witchweed does most of its damage before it appears above ground," said Eplee. "A chemical given out by roots of host plants such as corn, millet, sorghum, and sugarcane causes witchweed seed to germinate. Soon the witchweed attaches itself to the plant's roots, robbing it of water and nutrients."

"Before they knew what it was," Eplee said, "Carolina farmers tried to pull up witchweed to get rid of it. Doing this actually does harm since it can scatter hundreds of tiny witchweed seeds."

"In the Sahel, farmers still try to get rid of witchweed by pulling it up," said Eplee.

What's happening in our own witchweed infestation, and how can we help the suffering peasant farmers in Africa and other infested areas?

"Witchweed still causes some damage here," said Eplee, "but state and federal survey, quarantine and control measures have kept it confined. Still, we'd

rather be rid of it altogether, because if it ever escaped our quarantine net and spread to the Corn Belt and elsewhere, it could cost farmers — and consumers — up to a billion dollars a year.

China organizes U.S. ag exhibit

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The China Council for the Promotion of International Trade will organize and sponsor a traveling exhibit in China of literature and audio-visual presentations on U.S. agricultural equipment and instruments.

Joan Wallace, administrator of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Office of International Cooperation and Development, said the exhibit—officially called Agro Lit Expo '82—will help introduce Chinese purchasers to American agricultural products.

The exhibit will feature technical literature, catalogues, brochures and other publications, films and slide shows describing U.S., instrumentation and agricultural equipment available for purchase by the Chinese. Wallace said to

save money the exhibitors will use publications and audio-visual presentations rather than bringing the actual equipment.

The traveling exhibit will be in the Chinese capital of Beijing June 15-19, in Xian—one of China's ancient imperial capitals—June 19-23 and in Shanghai June 23-27.

Chinese agricultural authorities requested the exhibit to provide the Chinese with information needed to make well-informed purchases. China is eligible this year to receive World Bank loans for acquisition of agriculture-related equipment and technology, Wallace said.

Types of goods for sale include analytical and laboratory instruments, machinery and equipment for experimental farms, audio-visual teaching facilities and computers with

application in agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry and aquatic products production.

Other areas include farm machinery, irrigation systems, veterinary supplies, feeds, insecticides and pesticides, Wallace said.

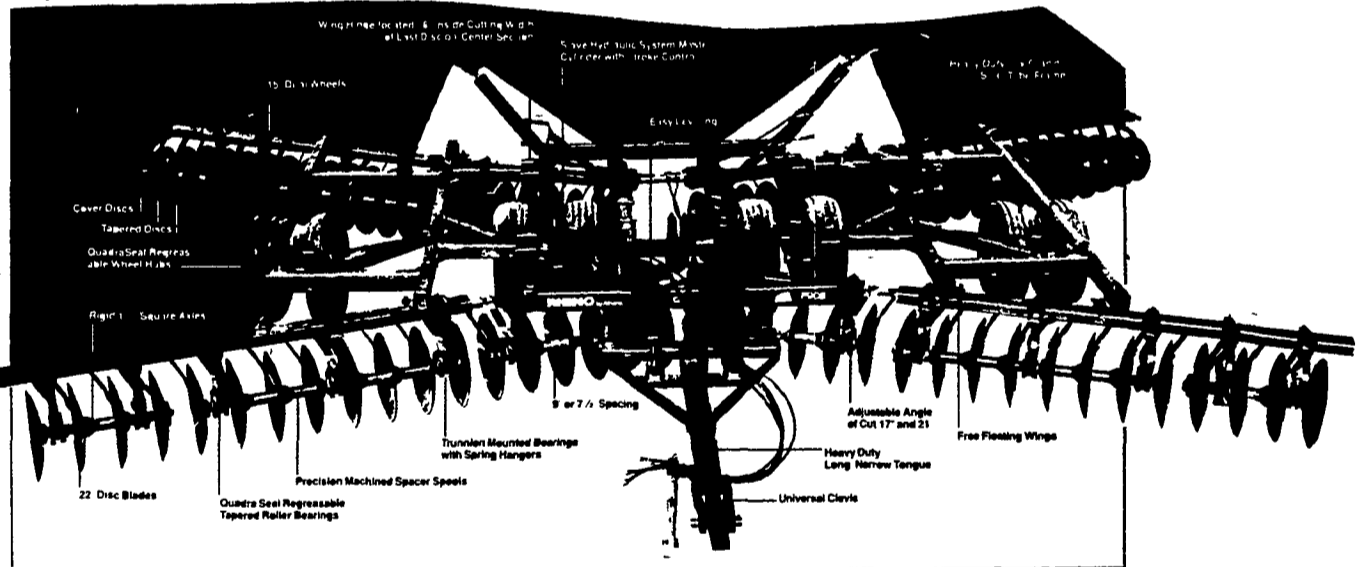
The Chinese Agricultural Scientific and Educational Instrumentation Corporation is co-sponsor for the exhibition.

In the United States, the China Translation & Printing Services—USA, San Francisco, will coordinate arrangements for participating U.S. companies.

Information about the exhibit is available from the China Translation and Printing Services—USA in San Francisco, or from the China program at USDA.



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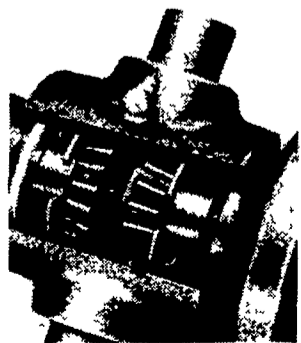
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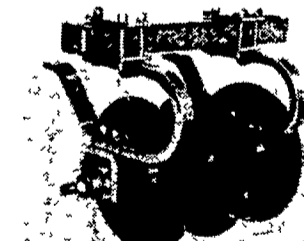


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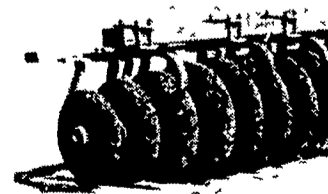
Wing Flotation Rhino Flex 90B wings are hinged so that they provide uniform weight distribution and flex freely to follow the ground contour for uniform plowing. For better side to side leveling, the wing hinges are mounted 16" inside the center section to give a more parallel flexing action between center section and wing disc blades.



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