Pennspanish Scotch pine developed at Penn State

UNIVERSITY PARK — Forest scientists at Penn State have developed a new variety of Scotch pine named Pennspanish. Production and distribution of seed of this new variety will be handled by the Pennsylvania Tree Improvement Program (Penn-TIP) of State College.

The arrangement is a novel way of working together in Christmas tree improvement, according to Henry D. Gerhold, forest geneticist in charge of Christmas tree breeding research at Penn State. He said the plan bridges a gap in getting improved varieties into production.

Development of Pennspanish Scotch pine is the most advanced phase of tree improvement in the School of Forest Resources at Penn State. A Scotch pine seed orchard at University Park was developed from a progeny tree planted in 1972. It contains 46 Spanish families of Scotch pine produced by controlled pollination of selected trees. In addition, there are 14 hybrid families having Spanish female parents, with male parents from Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Poland, Sweden, Turkey, and Yugoslavia.

The better trees within these families were selected in 1976 for superior height, crown form, color, and stem form. Inferior trees were removed. The best of the remaining trees were selected in 1983 for the same traits plus seed yields. Then the seed orchard was thinned to promote genetic quality, good health, and maximum seed production.

Seed crops from this orchard will be released as Pennspanish Scotch pine. This variety is mainly Spanish, with a small amount of hybrid backcrosses. Gerhold said Pennspanish Scotch pine should require less shearing than typical Spanish Scotch pine and should reach harvest size one to two years earlier.

Pennspanish has crowns that are denser, more symmetrical, and more uniform than varieties of Spanish Scotch pine now available through the seed trade, Gerhold reported. The winter color is also darker green than present varieties.

He estimated that Pennspanish trees should be 20 percent improved over other Spanish varieties in crown form and density. Color should be improved by 15 percent and growth rate by 7 percent.

"We suggest that a grower adjust shearing practices by leaving longer leaders and by delaying shearing until two or three years before harvest. This will permit faster growth so that Pennspanish trees can be harvested one to two years earlier than usual," Gerhold commented.

The Penn State seed orchard produced about 16 pounds of seed in 1982, containing some 39,000 seeds per pound. Penn Staters claim about 400,000 seedlings could be grown from this quantity under ordinary nursery practices. In 1983, about 28 pounds of seed was harvested. Future seed supplies are expected to increase as the trees grow.

Pennspanish seed has been released by the College of Agriculture to Penn-TIP for distribution to tree nurseries in 1984. Future crops will be harvested by Penn-TIP and sold to nurseries. Pennspanish seedlings will be available from commercial nurseries.

"Penn-TIP is currently growing offspring from 270 trees in the seed orchard, plus several commercial varieties, for comparison in performance tests to be planted in 1985," Dr. Gerhold stated. "Test results from several locations will show how much genetic gain actually has been achieved," he added.

Equally important, Christmas tree growers will have an opportunity to evaluate the improved variety under their own conditions.

Penn-TIP was chartered in 1982 as a non-profit corporation under the Pennsylvania Agriculture Association Act. Edgar H. Palpant of State College was appointed program director. Membership is open to any member of the Pennsylvania Christmas Tree Growers' Association or to members of any other state association that agrees to participate.

Purposes of Penn-TIP are to provide genetic information to help members use the best tree varieties available–and to furnish genetically improved seed and trees. Penn-TIP makes available trees of several species for progeny tests as well as for seed orchards to be planted.

Md. strawberries are due

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — George Roche, the Maryland Department of Agriculture's "strawberry man", reports that the famed Lower Eastern Shore 1984 strawberry crop is "running late, but the berries are looking great.

Pick-your-own strawberries in most regions of the state were expected to start coming in this weekend. Northern Maryland PYO farms probably won't have berries until about June 1st.

"The good news is that we are seeing an excellent set of blooms," he added.

Maryland's commercial strawberry business for decades has been centered in Somerset County on the Lower Eastern Shore. At one time, that area was known as the "Strawberry capital of the world," but in recent decades the industry almost disappeared.

Roche says a new growers organization, "Somerset Produce Growers Association", has been established and is conducting a coordinated program of growing, harvest, grading and shipment of the berries to Baltimore-Washington area markets.

"This is the best news we have seen since the Princess Anne strawberry auction block closed two years ago. That was the low point of our strawberry industry in Maryland. We expect shipments to double in volume this year over 1983 and may double again in 1985.

"However, it's important for retailers and customers to bear in mind the sensitivity of Maryland berries and that is that they are picked so fresh they must be shipped, sold and used quickly. Their superb flavor comes from a short season berry variety.

Buying groups, retailers or groups planning a strawberry festival should contact Roche at (301) 841-5770 for market information on berries or they can contact the growers' organization directly in Somerset County by calling (301) 651-2113, 651-0661 (day or 651-0965 (night).

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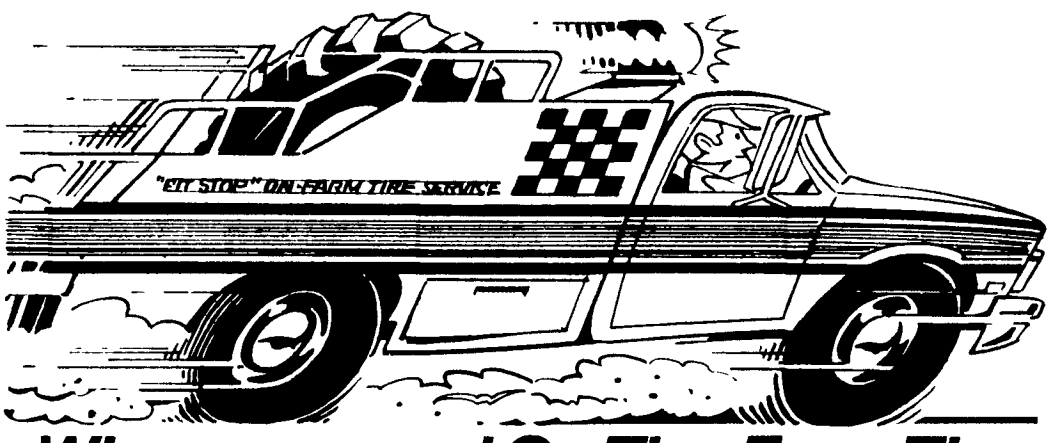

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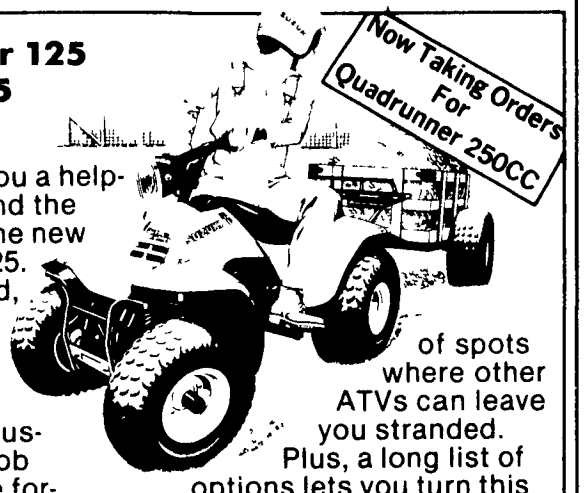

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