

New crop varieties: What's in a name?

ITHACA, NY — Naming new crop varieties created through years of research and testing poses a challenge to scientists. Coming up with names that farmers can easily remember isn't always a cinch.

Cornell University plant breeder Mark E. Sorrells found himself in a similar predicament last year when he announced a winter barley, a product of 18 years of work by Sorrells and Neal F. Jensen, who initiated the project in 1966.

When Jensen, the creator of many small grain varieties for the farmers in the Northeast, retired from Cornell seven years ago, Sorrells took over the work and put the finishing touches to it. Sorrells is an associate professor of plant breeding in the New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell.

As a result, Sorrells had the honor of naming the new barley, a highly productive variety with strong resistance to destructive powdery mildew disease. The barley was known to the Cornell scientists only by its code: MS22F1S61.

Hard put to come up with a catchy, yet dignified name for the barley, Sorrells decided to ask for help from farmers. The occasion was a field day staged at Cornell last summer for members of the seed industry in the Northeast. He handed out cards to the participants to suggest a name. Meanwhile, he made a similar appeal through the news media.

Response was almost instantaneous. All told, more than 70 suggestions came in from farmers throughout the Northeast. Some even came from Canada.

The suggested names ranged from those honoring the two Cornell scientists involved in the work to poetic descriptions to exotic gods and goddesses.

Some of the names proposed in tribute to the scientists and Cornell were JS (after Jensen and Sorrells), Nealjen, Neal, Jensen, Jensor, Jensorl, Cornell One, Barnell (a contraction of Cornell and barley), and Corbarnel. Some farmers wanted to name the barley after other people such as Sherman, Morgan, Xavier, Fred, Maccabee, Spry, Judy, Caldwell, and Everly.

Since this new barley is planted in the fall, it is winter hardy. Hence, names like Blizzard, Burley, Hardibar, Frosty, Brutus, Winbar (a contraction of winter and barley) were suggested.

Geographic locations were cited as possibilities, too: Monroe, Tully, Caledonia, Cambria, Seneca, Ovid, Frontenac, Oneida, Lockport, Cayuga, Romulus, and Keuka. One person came up with Novia, a shortening of Cazenovia. Another person proposed Sherpa, a hamlet previously inhabited by a small tribe in the soaring Himalaya mountains in South Asia.

Other proposals included Daga (a Babylonian god symbolizing earth), Vishnu (a Hindu god representing supreme), Ceres (the goddess of grain), and Hercules (a mythical Greek hero fabled for his great strength). Because the United States hosted the 1984 Olympics, names such as Olympus, Olympiad, and Olympian were proposed.

Still other suggestions were romantic, poetic, descriptive, or catchy: Dawn, Splendor, Success, Advance, Bumper, Tempo, Bountiful, Encore, Topper, and Limitup. Some others were imaginative as well as hilarious: Buster (bin buster), Bottomsup, Bgood, and Beerbelly. One farmer came up with "Murder" because he saw the barley growing in a muddy field during the Cornell field day. Another farmer offered "Wunterkind," a play on the

German word "Wunderbar" meaning wonderful.

The list included some puzzlers, too, such as Bi, Modular, Locust, and Lotto.

One of the suggested names that caught Sorrells' attention was Willis. After months of deliberation and consultation with the members of the College's seed committee, Sorrells decided to christen his barley in honor of the late George Willis, who was a technician for small grain projects

at Cornell from 1943 to 1971. Willis died several years ago.

Scientists usually follow certain guidelines in naming new varieties, according to Sorrells. For one thing, living persons are honored only under rare circumstances; those deceased are considered first.

"Willis is an appropriate name, because it honors a Cornell technician who had dedicated his life to our breeding programs," Sorrells remarks.

In Sorrells' view, names of crop varieties should project the image of quality research work involved in plant breeding, should not infringe upon existing trade marks, should be one word, must not contain numbers, and, above all, should not be profane or discriminatory.

"In addition, names must be easily recognized by farmers," Sorrells notes. "They also should carry significance to New York State or Cornell."

After weighing these and other factors, Cornell's Sorrells recently named his winter barley "Willis." He says this projects a good image of Cornell.

Willis the barley is ready for commercial use starting this fall.

Meanwhile, Sorrells sends thanks to all the farmers who used their creativity and imagination in coming up with all the names.

"I had a lot of fun going over the suggested names," Sorrells notes.

USDA Plans Back-to-Basics Approach to Management

WASHINGTON — A back-to-basics management plan to deliver U.S. Department of Agriculture programs and services more efficiently was announced by Secretary John R. Block.

"Just as we need to reshape the programs and services USDA delivers, we must also reevaluate the support system that delivers those programs, some of which are 30 years old or more. We do not intend to reduce services, only to set standards for delivering them in the most efficient and business-like manner possible," Block said.

The plan addresses five principal management areas for the 109,000-person department. It includes innovations in:

—Dollar Management: managing cash, debt, travel and cross-servicing with other agencies;

—Information Management: enhancing computer compatibility, oversight, communications and acquisition;

—Structure Management: streamlining management structure and systems, and

cooperative processing;

—People Management: improving work environment, position management, employee participation and training; and

—Managing Management: encouraging shifts to the private sector, innovation and management practices and

reviews.

Block said workplans for each principal area are in the final stages of development. "We are meeting with our agency managers to gain their commitment and resources to follow through," he said.

"We have asked agencies to

develop initial strategies by May to implement the plan," said Block. "Certain management areas will be targeted, as will certain agencies. We want to work with our agencies in areas where there is the greatest payoff in efficiency and in return on taxpayer dollars."

Delaware corn, soybean results in

Results of 1984 Delaware corn hybrid and soybean variety field trials are now available.

According to University of Delaware extension agricultural agent Derby Walker, the corn hybrid results are contained in a 17-page report which should be of value to dealers and farmers "who are interested in more details than just yields." This report contains information on diseases, early stand vigor, stalk lodging, stay-green, ear height, percent ear drop and percent bearing stalks.

Soybean variety trial results are

contained in a separate 17-page report which shows, says Walker, that last year was very difficult for Group Five varieties. Earlier varieties received enough rainfall to produce a respectable crop, whereas drought adversely affected late maturing beans. This is the reverse of 1983, when late soybean plantings outyielded early beans because of the long fall.

"When you're selecting bean varieties," advises Walker, "look at the history of that particular bean over time and compare its performance during years of drought. If you plant only

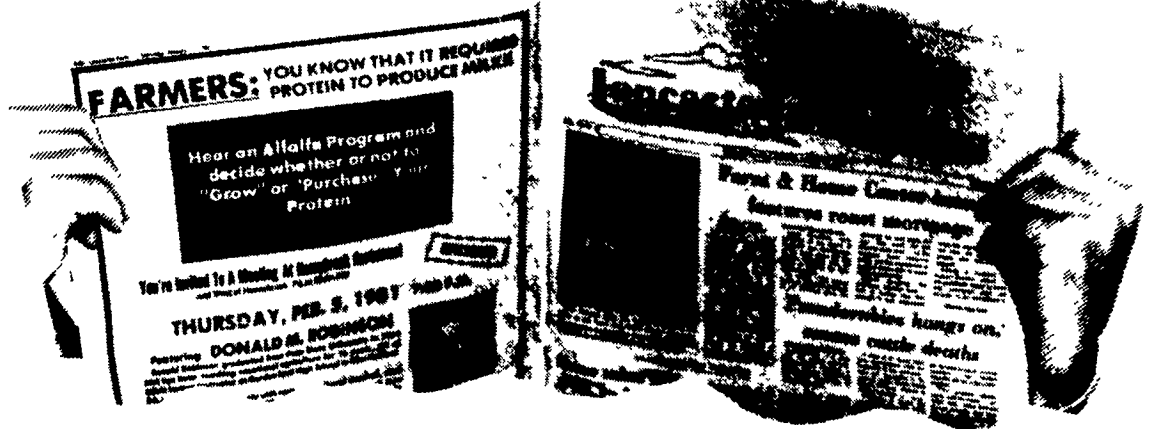
soybeans, be sure to select varieties that mature at different times, or plant them at different times to avoid feast or famine conditions. If all your beans are flowering or maturing at the same time and you don't get rain, then it'll be famine. To spread out your risk, plant several different maturing beans."

Copies of both the 1984 Delaware corn hybrid and soybean variety test reports are available from county extension offices in Newark (451-2506), Dover (736-1448) and Georgetown (856-5250).

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