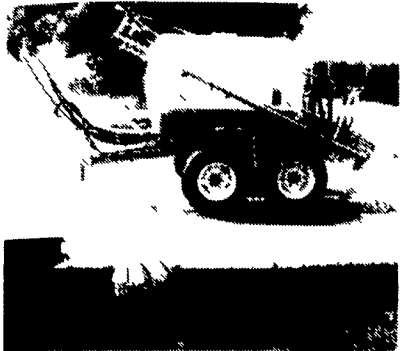




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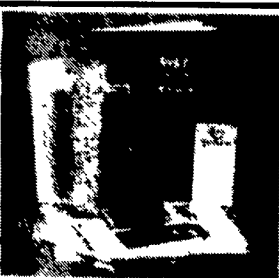


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What Happens When Plants, Computers Speak?

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — In the 1960s, some gardeners suggested we talk to our plants to help them grow. Thirty years later, scientists in Penn State's College of Agriculture have discovered that plants grow better when computers do the talking.

Researchers in the department of horticulture have set up a high-tech dialogue between plants and computers in a newly renovated greenhouse. Through the use of electronic sensors and automated systems, the computer monitors the needs of the plants and delivers precise amounts of light, water, fertilizer, or heat.

The computer-controlled greenhouse is more than just an experiment in space-age horticulture. "We're evaluating new technologies that will benefit the fastest growing segment of Pennsylvania agriculture, the state's \$500 million floriculture and nursery industries," said Dr. John W. White, professor of floriculture.

"Pennsylvania ranks sixth nationally in the production of floriculture crops and eighth in nursery crops," he said. "But to stay competitive with out-of-state and foreign producers, growers will need to adopt new technolo-

gies that help them cut labor and energy costs."

"Growers want to adopt production systems that require less manual work, but many can't afford to invest in these systems until they've been proven cost-effective," said greenhouse technician Mark Rose. "Our work should benefit all levels of the industry, from mom-and-pop operations up to the largest corporations."

Some of the Penn State research looks at ways to make greenhouses environmentally safe. The researchers are experimenting with new technology to contain and recycle water and pesticides to avoid groundwater runoff.

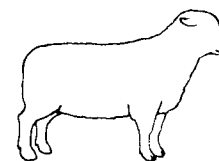
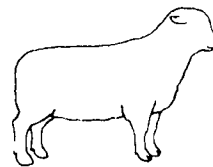
"In traditional greenhouses, 80 percent of the water and fertilizers applied to plants never even hits the soil media in the pots," said Rose. "The water and nutrients run off into the surrounding area, polluting groundwater supplies."

"In many states, greenhouse operators have been brought to court for allegedly polluting groundwater," said White. "It's clear that the greenhouse industry needs more information on water quality and management."

"We want to help growers adopt corrective measures before regulatory pressures become a real threat to the profitability and survival of their businesses."

Other research in the greenhouse evaluates the effectiveness of automatic fertilization and irrigation systems, electronic sensors for temperature and humidity, and sliding benches that provide more room for plant production.

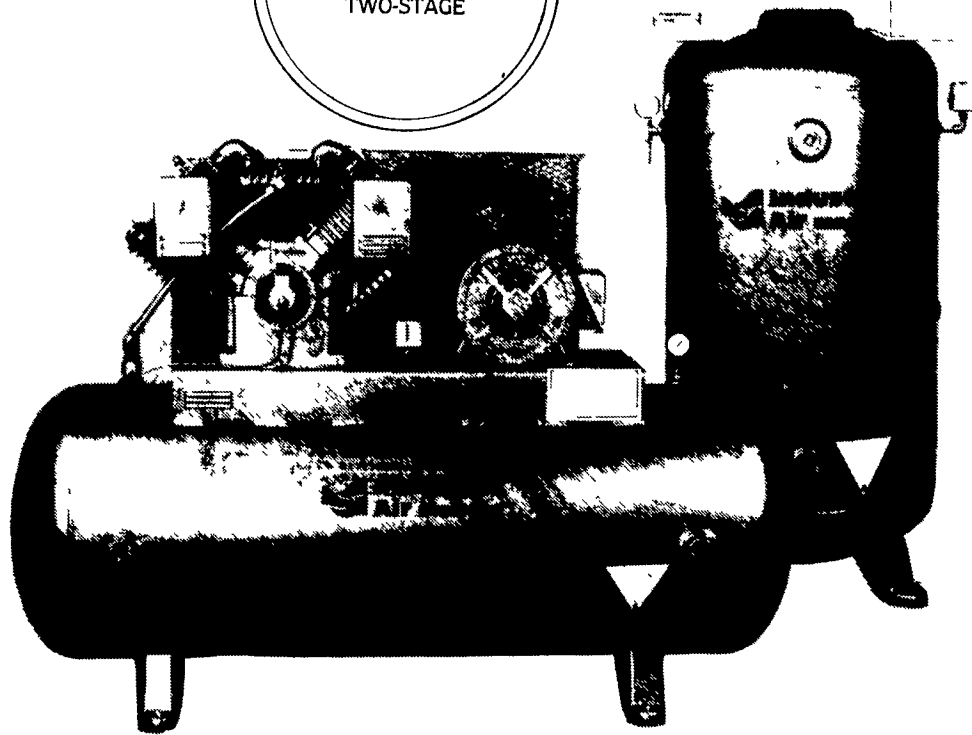
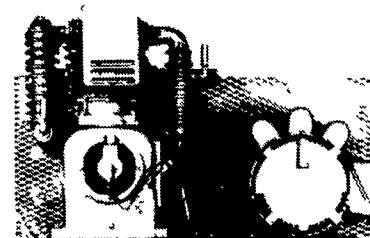
Researchers also are investigating the use of new bench heating systems and double-layer plastic coverings that could result in significant energy savings if adopted throughout the industry.



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