

Nutrient-Enriched Crops Could Save Millions Of Poor

WASHINGTON, D.C. - New mineral-enriched varieties of the world's most common food crops could prevent malnutrition and disease in millions of the world's poorest people, international scientists announced.

In a newly launched program, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), Waite Agricultural Research Institute at the University of Adelaide, Australia, the U.S.

Department of Agriculture's Plant, Soil, and Nutrition Laboratory at Cornell University, and other research institutes in 12 countries are developing new varieties of crops such as corn, rice, and wheat that will be better at absorbing critical minerals directly from the soil. These crops will perform particularly well on mineral-deficient soils, which are widespread in the developing world.

"This is a low-cost approach to

fighting malnutrition that could improve farm productivity and benefit the environment at the same time," said Howarth E. Bouis, director of the CGIAR Micronutrients Project and research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

Washington, D.C.-based IFPRI coordinates human nutrition research for the 17 centers of the CGIAR.

"Crops such as corn, rice, wheat, beans, and cassava, which

are the primary sources of food for the vast majority of the world's poor, lack sufficient amounts of essential vitamins and minerals that prevent disease. The CGIAR Micronutrients Project could have nutrient-enriched crops ready for commercial production within six to ten years."

Such mineral-enriched crops also have been shown to outyield present crop varieties and to require fewer chemical inputs and less irrigation, thus reducing the

costs of growing them and better protecting the environment. These agronomic advantages enhance the chances that they would be adopted by farmers in the developing world. But mineral-enriched crops would also enhance commercial agriculture in the United States and other developed-world countries where mineral-deficient soils are also widespread.

"The research costs for developing mineral-dense varieties can be justified on the basis of the benefits to agricultural productivity alone," said Bouis.

Diets low in essential vitamins and minerals such as iron, iodine, zinc, and vitamin A are prevalent in poor countries. An estimated 2.1 billion people lack sufficient amounts of iron, contributing to anemia in an estimated 1.2 billion people. Anemia affects pregnant women particularly hard and accounts for up to 40 percent of the half-million deaths that occur each year to women giving birth.

The World Health Organization estimates that 125 million preschool children worldwide suffer severe vitamin A deficiency, which can cause permanent blindness. Less severe vitamin A deficiency is associated with high rates of child mortality due to an inability of the immune system to fight off killer diseases such as diarrhea and measles.

Center Accepts Testing Applications

STATE COLLEGE (Centre Co.) — The Pennsylvania Dept. of Agriculture's Meat Animal Evaluation Center wishes to announce that applications for Pennsylvania's performance ram testing program are currently being accepted.

Rams eligible for this centralized testing program are purebred rams of any breed born from Sept. 1, 1994, through Feb. 28, 1995. Rams accepted for the performance testing programs will be delivered to the Meat Animal Evaluation Center, State College, April 11.

The rams will be given a one-week adjustment period and then will be weighed on test April 18. This marks the start of an 84-Day testing period. While on test, the

rams are weighed every 14 days and reports are generated and distributed at least every other weigh date.

At the conclusion of the testing period, the rams are scanned ultrasonically to determine fat-thickness and loin-eye area. The rams are all examined for breeding, soundness, or structural problems and must meet certain minimum requirements.

After all of the evaluations are completed, approximately the top 75 percent of the rams completing the test will be selected to be offered in Pennsylvania's 17th annual Performance Tested Ram Sale scheduled for Saturday, August 5. The sale is slated for the Ag Arena on the campus of Penn

State University.

In conjunction with the ram sale, the center will conduct an Invitational Ewe Sale and The Pennsylvania Sheep and Wool Growers Association is planning a sheep producer's annual field day.

These testing programs and the sales are designed to serve both the producers who participate in the testing programs as well as the livestock producers who purchase seedstock at our sales. These animals are objectively evaluated for economically important traits.

This aids producers in making genetic selections of animals that will most closely fill the needs that they have determined to be most important to the genetic improvement of their herds or flocks.

For more information on Pennsylvania's performance testing programs, performance-tested sales or to nominate animals to the central testing programs, contact Glenn Eberly, Director, Meat Animal Evaluation Center, 651 Fox Hollow Road, State College, PA 16803, (814) 238-2527.

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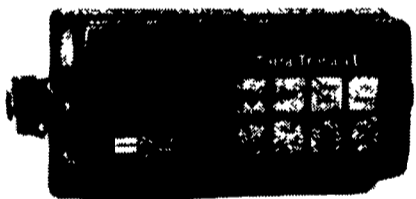
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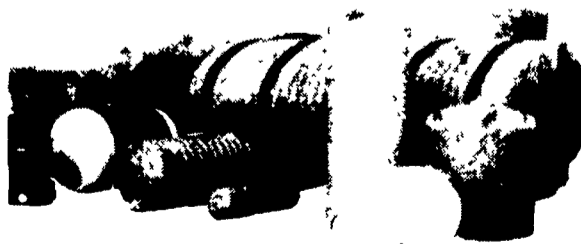
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