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This Week

Research Notes

Articles

Cover: Low-altitude fighter aircraft spray Agent Orange over the South Vietnamese countryside. The health effects of a dioxin contaminant in the herbicide on Vietnam veterans and others accidentally exposed to it are being hotly debated; the mystery is far from being solved. (Photo: U.S. Air Force)

Departments

Letters

Old HAT

I read with pleasure your review on the Lesch-Nyhan Syndrome (SN: 8/6/83, p. 90). In an "ancient" article in 1962 we described the selective HAT medium, and the first DNA-mediated genetic transformation of human HPRT-defective cells, by applying our HAT selective system. It took over 20 years to translate our original work into the present clinical studies. However, I never had any doubt that DNA-mediated gene therapy would sometime become standard clinical practice.

Waclaw Szybalski
Professor of Oncology
Univ. of Wisconsin Medical School
Madison, Wis.

Cherry tree clarification

Your article "How the lab garden grows" (SN: 6/4/83, p. 367) said that it costs about $10 to produce a grafted black cherry tree, whereas the cost of producing the tree by tissue culture could be as low as 22 cents. This comparison is misleading, to put it mildly. Planting a seed and grafting the seedling may cost 50 cents per tree. The other $9.50 goes into growing the tree to orchard size, digging it, marketing it and paying overhead costs on the nursery operation. What kind of tree are you going to get from tissue culture for 22 cents? At best, it would be analogous to the 50 cents grafted tree. And did the 22 cents include overhead for the tissue culture lab? *In vitro* propagation of fruit trees has some legitimate practical possibilities. Exaggerations of what the techniques can do damage the credibility of those of us who work with *in vitro* propagation.

Paul Lyrene
Univ. of Florida
Gainesville, Fla.

The researchers reply:

We are working on *Prunus serotina,* a valuable forest tree species, not one of the domesticated fruit cherry species. We are discussing a hypothetical, but I feel realistic, large-scale propagation facility capable of producing in excess of 500,000 rooted plantlets per year. These plants would be in the 6 inch to 12 inch size range and would compete with containerized or bare-root seedlings. The $.22 per tree or $220/1,000, although very low by horticultural standards for orchard stock, is actually higher than most commercial forestry operations are currently paying for comparable seedling stock intended for forest plantings.

Our grafting costs are much higher for *Prunus serotina* than for domesticated cherries apparently because the clones we are working with were selected for timber qualities, not ease of grafting or fruit production.

In summary, we feel that our cost estimates are not optimistic but realistic when taken in a forestry context and we regret any misunderstanding.

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