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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 trans-
late 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

This Week

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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)



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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 cul-
ture 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 legiti-
mate practical possibilities. Exaggerations of
what the techniques can do damage the credi-
bility 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 valu-
able forest tree species, not one of the domesti-
cated fruit cherry species. We are discussing a
hypothetical, but I feel realistic, large-scale
propagation facility capable of producing in ex-
cess 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 stand-
ards for orchard stock, is actually higher than
most commercial forestry operations are cur-
rently paying for comparable seedling stock in-
tended 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 misun-
derstanding.

Dr. Charles A. Maynard
State Univ. of New York
Syracuse, N.Y.

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Please limit letters to 250 words.

SEPTEMBER 3, 1983

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