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Science Service, which publishes SCIENCE NEWS, is a nonprofit corporation founded in 1921. It gratefully accepts tax-deductible contributions and bequests to assist its efforts to increase the public understanding of science, with special emphasis on young people. More recently, it has included in its mission increasing scientific literacy among members of underrepresented groups. Through its Youth Programs it administers the International Science and Engineering Fair, the Science Talent Search for the Westinghouse Science Scholarships, and publishes and distributes the *Directory of Student Science Training Programs for Precollege Students*.

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Letters

Giving ear to corny queries

With reference to "Corn's Slow Path to Stardom" (SN: 4/17/93, p.248), it is easy to understand that silica phytoliths from corn plant cells might endure in the soil for 6,000 or 7,000 years, but how would pollen grains accomplish it?

Roger M. Wernicke
Pensacola, Fla.

The sites where such apparently old pollen is found are very dry.
— J.A. Raloff

Though I appreciated the archaeological history of maize, I could not help wondering about the quotation from Frances B. King that "no other cereal species has so completely lost its natural ability to disperse its seeds or to propagate itself without human intervention."

How can this be? No one raised in farm country can fail to observe the "volunteer" corn coming up the next year from fields where it was harvested the prior year. King might

stipulate that such corn would not necessarily replicate its hybrid parent, and this is so, but many other cereals have also been hybridized to a high degree. King's distinction needs further clarification.

Joy Batchelder
Salisbury, N.C.

"Maize differs," King says, "from other cereal crops in that the ear consists of several hundred kernels firmly attached to a hard and well-developed cob and protected by several layers of modified leaves (husk). If an ear reaches the ground and is buried, the kernels germinate simultaneously and quickly die. Viable maize plants are produced only by individual kernels that have been stripped from the cob. . . . 'Volunteer corn' results from loose kernels that have been harvested and lost; it does not appear in fields that were not harvested." — J.A. Raloff

DDT use persists worldwide

Your article "DDT may foster breast cancer, study finds" (SN: 4/24/93, p.262) was misleading in its suggestion that current adult levels

should be attributed to pre-1972 exposure.

The use of DDT may have been banned in this country, but its production for export continues. DDT applied abroad, and its breakdown product DDE, are carried worldwide in the atmosphere and accumulate in the food chain. Even with the ban, DDT is available for use in this country. I have a bottle of Ortho ISOTOX purchased in 1988 that prominently lists DDT as an active ingredient.

Measures of DDT in human tissue in the United States probably include a significant component resulting from current foreign and domestic applications. Since the chemical accumulates in fat, even children born today may eventually be at risk.

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