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Cover: The fruit of a crawling cactus, *S. megalanthus*. Researchers are finding new uses for exotic crops and new locales for growing familiar ones. While some scientists are cultivating cacti in the Israeli desert, others are figuring out how astronauts could grow black-eyed peas, among other vegetables, on their space missions. (Photo: Yosef Mizrah/Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Beersheba, Israel)

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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

More on the search for water

"Dowsing Expectations" (SN: 8/5/95, p.90) gives a fair account of our work but leaves open the question of whether the counterarguments of skeptics really devalue our conclusions. They don't.

Take Farvolden's claim that a dry well is hardly possible. This is totally absurd. In arid areas, dry holes are the rule, and Schröter has achieved two- to fourfold success compared to conventional drilling.

Experience and surface clues help indeed, but they are just not enough. The puzzle remains open.

Hans D. Betz
Professor of Physics
University of Munich
Garching, Germany

Lehr says the idea "that [Schröter's] skill comes from a force field that his body can

intercept and interpret is patently absurd."

History is replete with examples of discoveries that were considered "patently absurd" at the time and yet are taken for granted today. Science requires a mind open to the existence of as-yet-undiscovered or unproven phenomena. Just as Nature abhors a vacuum, truth abhors a know-it-all.

As for dowsing, no one has proved anything yet. That's all.

Michael Mode
New Haven, Vt.

Leaky source of smog confirmed

If leaking propane and butane can contribute to smog, then the University of California, Irvine, researchers are probably right that the ubiquitous household gas canisters contribute to Mexico City's air pollution ("New source identified for Mexico City smog," SN: 8/19/95, p.117).

In the 1950s, at least, the gas company employees who delivered the canisters were

notorious for leaving the coupling loose so gas would escape, thereby hastening the next delivery. We kept a wrench hanging inside our back door and used it after every delivery.

Over the succeeding years, various stays in Mexican apartments have confirmed the same casual hookups. Meanwhile, the population has risen astronomically.

The Mexican Petroleum Institute's spokesmen may derogate the role of household gas in the horrible smog of Mexico City, but that stuff leaking out of those omnipresent canisters has got to go someplace.

Mr. & Mrs. Don E. Dumond
Eugene, Ore.

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