

AGRICULTURE

Super-Normal Granary Is Urged at Science Meeting

Store of Food, of Value Comparable to Gold Reserve, Could Be Preserved for Time of Drought or War

AN IMMENSE store of food, rivaling the nation's buried gold reserves in value, is advocated for America as a super-normal granary for use in emergencies of drought, war or other disaster.

Going Secretary of Agriculture Wallace's ever-normal granary one better, this gigantic national food reserve is declared to be perfectly practical from a scientific standpoint.

Prof. R. B. Harvey of the University of Minnesota is the proponent of a food hoard to be held in long-time storage. He suggests that it would be more logical to have a food reserve that could feed the nation in an emergency than it is to have a gold reserve that has very little practical value.

The government could well spend as much as twelve billion dollars for plant and animal products that could be held in reserve for decades, not mere years, Prof. Harvey argues. Since he is one of the leading plant physiologists of the nation and the originator of chemical methods of blanching and ripening fruits and vegetables, his technical knowledge gives the long-time storage suggestion support.

"It is best not to plow under cotton or corn, not to decrease farm production by allowing weeds to grow on arable land and pay for it, but to get the best

production of the crop best adapted to the soil and store the excess as a national reserve," Prof. Harvey declared.

"We do not know how soon we may be in need of such reserves to release man power. We need to learn how to distribute and conserve maximum production, rather than how to restrict production to a minimum."

Prof. Harvey is confident that physiologists, chemists, pathologists, entomologists and other specialists can work out large-scale methods of storage so that food can be kept fresh and edible over long periods. Wheat, for instance, is known to be good to eat after fifty years. Meats, fats and carbohydrates when properly prepared can be stored almost indefinitely.

Champion long-time storage record was the storing by nature of the flesh of mastodons in Siberian ice for tens of thousands of years. Steaks of this ancient meat were actually served to the Russian Academy of Sciences as a demonstration of its edibility after storage since the glacial epoch.

Such extremes in the holding of food stores are not contemplated by Prof. Harvey but he does suggest investigating whether the Antarctic and other natural ice refrigerator regions may not be well adapted as places of storage. The use

of great storage vaults underground where the temperature could be kept uniform is another possibility.

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GEOLOGY

Runaway Glacier Caused By Friction and Skidding

FRICITION and skidding, not excessive local snowfall, cause Alaska's Black Rapids Glacier to go on periodic rampages, according to evidence recently brought from the northland by Fred H. Moffit, of the U. S. Geological Survey.

Suddenly increased snowfall in the Black Rapids region, formerly believed to be the cause of the mile-a-month extension of the ice field last year, is now ruled out. If the snowfall increased, every glacier in the area should run away. Only Black Rapids Glacier advanced rapidly.

Friction, Mr. Moffit indicated, allows the accumulated snow in the gathering basin of the glacier to accumulate for a long time behind the narrow outlet, until it reaches a great thickness. Then,

RUNAWAY GLACIER

Alaska's Black Rapids, the ice mass at center of the picture, advances as much as 115 feet a day. Since first seen thirty years ago, when it was out of sight in the narrow valley to the left, the grinding ice has crept forward, now threatening to invade the river valley in the foreground. Friction in the narrow outlet allows ice to pile up in the wide valley above. Then the weight of ice forces the accumulation out, causing a very rapid advance. This photograph was taken by United States Geological Survey engineers during a study of the mysterious ice field.



the pressure of the ice becomes great, and the ice rushes out, flowing at a measured rate of more than 115 feet a day. This continues until the accumulated excess of ice has run out of the basin.

After an "escape" of excess ice, the glacier behaves normally for some years until another great accumulation occurs.

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PHYSICS

Thermal Microscope Shows Crystal Formation at 3632° F.

SEARCH for synthetic abrasives rivaling the diamond in hardness has led to the development of a new "thermal microscope" which makes possible the observation of crystal formation and change even at high temperatures of as much as 3,632 degrees Fahrenheit.

This new tool of science was disclosed in an address by Dr. Frank J. Tone, president of the Carborundum Company, Niagara Falls, N. Y., as he accepted the prized Perkin Medal for 1938. The Perkin Medal is awarded annually by the American Section of the Society of Chemical Industry, an international chemical organization.

The diamond, said Dr. Tone, still stands as the peer of all abrasives despite various reports from time to time that some synthetic material is "just as hard." Silicon carbide—familiar carborundum—and fused alumina are the next ranking abrasive materials, said Dr. Tone, which are available and widely used in commercial quantities. But there are other new abrasives which appear to be superior to silicon carbide. Boron carbide is one which can be bonded with silicon carbide to form a superior cutting stone.

A basic handicap to the development of the very hard cutting materials has been the inability of scientists to study their structure effectively.

The new thermal microscope, which Dr. Tone described, is one new tool which makes possible more knowledge about these hardest of synthetic man-made materials. Motion picture attachments are now used with the thermal microscope so that a continuous, permanent record can be made of the formation of such material as crystalline silicon carbide at temperatures over 3,632 degrees Fahrenheit, or 2,000 degrees Centigrade.

Dr. Tone is the father of Franchot Tone, well-known motion picture actor.

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PHYSICS

Mass of New X-Particles May Have a Wide Range

THE MASS of the new-found "X" particle which scientists have been discovering in cosmic ray research may not have a fixed value, says Dr. Seth H. Neddermeyer of the California Institute of Technology. (*Physical Review*, Jan. 1).

Dr. Neddermeyer is a colleague of Dr. Carl Anderson and worked with him when the latter made the discovery of the positron for which he received the Nobel Prize award. The team of Anderson and Neddermeyer, too, made the initial discoveries of the "X" particle, whose mass appears to be intermediate between that of the electron and the proton.

"There are . . . reasons for believing that the mass (of the X particle) may not be unique and that many masses, ranging from a few times the electron mass up to very large values, may exist," says Dr. Neddermeyer's report, in part.

By theory, explains Dr. Neddermeyer, photons of radiant energy create pairs of particles—positive and negative in electrical sign—in their rush through the atmosphere on their way to earth. The energy and mass possessed by these new particles, that are the offspring of dying photons, are variable, postulates Dr. Neddermeyer. Thus many different masses might be observed, depending on the energy possessed by the original photon that creates them.

The point is that particles can have two kinds of mass; the so-called rest mass and a mass due to motion. Theoretically, at least, a particle moving with the speed of light should have an infinitely large mass.

The second kind of mass, which varies with the speed of the particle, was observed in the present experiments.

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BOTANY

Marihuana Weed Grows Where Rope Factory Failed

GOOD seed can sometimes bring forth evil fruit.

Years ago, enterprising business men in Omaha promoted an American rope-making industry based on hemp grown at home, by American farmers. The rich bottom lands of the Missouri promised to be ideal for the hemp fields, and Omaha is a good railroad shipping point. A praiseworthy project, surely, to put cash in the pockets of many people in the community.

Seed was imported, factories built, and the work started. But as it sometimes goes in the economic world, the industry failed to thrive. Hard times, unexpected factors interfering with either growth of the hemp or its processing—it's all past history now. The businessmen pocketed their losses, the farmers went back to raising corn.

Yet all was not as it had been. The hemp plant liked the soil and the climate all right, and hemp still grows in great masses in the neighborhood of Omaha as a wild weed. It is a tall, rank-growing

plant, able to compete even with giant ragweed for its place in the sun.

And in the Omaha neighborhood at least, it competes with ragweed in another even eviller way. C. C. Durham, chief botanist of the Abbott Laboratories, North Chicago, in his annual survey of the distribution of hayfever pollens, states that hemp pollen is at least twenty times as abundant in air samples taken over Omaha as in any of the other hundred-odd cities where such studies are carried on.

Even worse: hemp is the raw material for the narcotic drug all too widely used by American young people as marihuana, known also by the nickname "reefers." Mr. Durham expresses wonder and some indignation that the federal government, for all its high-pressure drive against marihuana traffic, has done nothing to eliminate the weed that is its ultimate source.

Marihuana, to be sure, is not made exclusively from chance-sown wild hemp, which grows as a weed in many other