

# Ag and Food NEWSLETTER

## Antibiotics and Plants

ANTIBIOTICS, ALREADY big in animal feed supplements may be headed for a big splash in the plant world. It is still too early to tell, but there was some interesting discussion of the topic at the recent meeting of the AAAS in Santa Barbara, Calif. (see page 495). One experimenter at the University of California told us he gets growth increases as high as 75% with bean seedlings grown in garden soil containing a few parts per million of terramycin. Tomatoes grown on crystal silica sand, subirrigated with mineral nutrients, showed growth increases of about 25% when penicillin was added and 55% increase with aureomycin. USDA experiments at Beltsville, under greenhouse conditions, with potted plants of several varieties, particularly corn, found no growth response to antibiotics.

## Smog Protection

SMOG DAMAGE, a plague of growers near industrial areas, can perhaps be markedly reduced by spraying with certain dithiocarbamates. According to laboratory tests at the University of California, some of those compounds protect plants against damage from the peroxides derived from olefins, principal smog components. It is not yet known whether field tests will show the protection to be economically practical and also what the protection mechanism is. Big potential advantage of the method: Products are sprayed at the same concentration as that used for fungus control.

## Nationalized British Sugar?

THE BRITISH LABOUR party says it will nationalize the British Sugar Corp. if returned to power. British Sugar controls the United Kingdom's beet sugar industry. Although sugar has been rationed in Britain since 1940, there are indications that the rationing will end this fall. Present British consumption is about 2 million tons a year; if controls are discontinued it is estimated that the consumption will increase to more than 2.5 million tons.

## Casein Dropped

ANOTHER CASUALTY to the high cost of dairy products is the production and sale of acid and rennet casein. Hercules Powder plans to cease production as of Aug. 1. According to Hercules, domestic milk prices have made it economically impossible to manufacture casein at costs which allow it to be sold in competition with imported casein.

## Bread Softeners

TWO POTENTIAL BREAD softeners derived from soybean flour have been announced by the USDA. The USDA claims that 1% by weight added to the dry bread mix will increase the softness and handling resilience of bread. The question of whether the soybean fractions are natural or synthetic bread additives has not yet been formally considered by the FDA, but unofficially they will probably have to be considered chemical softeners.

## Mass Defense Of Forests

WHAT MAY BE one of the largest single operations employing organic insecticides is under way in northern New Brunswick. The campaign to save a million acres of softwoods threatened with a budworm invasion will use over a million gallons of insecticide. The Canadian government is supplying 77 single-engined biplanes to apply the material.

## Bargain Butter

ACCORDING TO OUR information, USDA is not seriously considering unloading butter at 10 cents a pound. Recent reports from Washington have discussed a scheme which involved selling first pound of butter for regular price of about 90 cents and the second for 10 cents. Story started after recent dairy industry conference in Washington, where such a scheme and several others were discussed. USDA is waiting for next meeting of the committee, at the end of this summer, to assess the surplus problem. Perhaps at that time a scheme like 10-cent butter may be seriously proposed.

## Food Costs Analyzed

THE AVERAGE FAMILY of three pays about \$740 per year for farm food products, according to the Grocery Manufacturers Association of America. In 1939, the same commodities were purchased for about \$318. Of the \$412 increase, \$232 goes to the farmers, \$115 for labor costs, \$73 for transportation, taxes, and other costs, and \$2.00 for the higher net profit of the distributor.