New Small Fruit Research Station

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A new small fruit research program was activated at Carbondale, Illinois in March, 1959. The program is a cooperative endeavor between the Agricultural Research Service, U.S.D.A. and Southern Illinois University. This new station extends to the South Central area of the United States, the U.S.D.A. small fruit research program which previously has been centered at Corvallis, Oregon, and Beltsville, Maryland.

The main objective of this program is the breeding and development of new varieties of small fruits for the South Central area of the United States. Some time will be spent on cultural problems, but the main emphasis will be on breeding new disease resistant or tolerant varieties of small fruit.

Development of the research station is progressing very rapidly. A large tract of land was purchased by Southern Illinois University for the small fruit station, which will utilize 50 acres of it for plot land. A combination field laboratory and machine shed and an earthen dam, engineered by Milton Shute, an S.I.U. agricultural engineer, have been completed. The major farm machinery has been leased by Southern Illinois University, and the U.S.D.A. has furnished the specialty equipment such as sprayers, dusters, and irrigation equipment.

The contribution of Southern Illinois University to this small fruit research program should be emphasized. Only through the help of President D. W. Morris and Dean W. E. Keepper, of the School of Agriculture, has the rapid development of the station facilities been possible.

A start was made in the spring of 1959 toward the development of the strawberry breeding and testing program. Sixty-six varieties and numbered selections of strawberries were planted in 50 foot rows for preliminary screening. Twenty varieties or selections were planted in a replicated advanced variety trial. Approximately 2500 seedling strawberries obtained from Dr. D. H. Scott, Beltsville, Maryland, were planted, making it possible to start the selection program in 1960.

About 10,000 strawberry seedlings are now growing in the greenhouse for transplanting into the field in 1960. Also, some 5000 blackberry seedlings are being grown for transplanting into the field. As additional greenhouse facilities become available, artificial inoculation of seedling populations with leaf diseases should make it possible to screen many thousands of seedlings for resistance.

It is hoped that as this Cooperative Small Fruit Research Station develops, and as new selections are made, the state experiment stations in the south-central United States will find it to their advantage to enter into a fully cooperative program for the improvement of small fruits through breeding, cultural work and disease control. It is through a careful breeding program and thorough, widespread testing, that new and better small fruit varieties for given areas may be found and developed most advantageously.

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