Book reviews


This book is a modestly revised edition of the original volume published in 1985. The original is really one of only two substantive texts covering the general principles and specific practices for a wide range of vegetable species. The other, published in 1984 by Shinohara, is more specific to Japanese practice, but nonetheless very detailed and valuable. I mention this because inexplicably it is not mentioned in the extensive list of references.

Overall the book is sound and comprehensive although the revisions are relatively cosmetic with little new information – probably a reflection that most of the development work in this area is undertaken in the private sector and hence less accessible – this makes the continuing availability of the book more valuable. There has been an attempt to include a general discussion on the application of molecular biology to cultivar purity and identification but it is rather brief.

Two areas I thought deserved more attention, perhaps of more parochial importance within the EC, but with potential impact on a world scale: the role of NGOs in preserving and promoting genetic diversity and the whole area of restrictive seed legislation and its consequences. Whilst proponents and opponents may argue about their merits they are a real issue. The discussions on the merits or otherwise of systems like the EC National listing system gets a rather one-sided, in favour, treatment. Equally organic seed production is becoming an issue especially as all seed for organic production within the EC will have to be produced organically to EC standards no matter where it is contracted.

The reviewer is not familiar enough with every single crop to check the facts on practical seed production, which in many ways is the real value of the book, but the approach is clear and logical. I would question the wholesale inclusion of UPOV cultivar descriptors for almost every crop. They are easily available and not exactly riveting reading. In Chapter 14 on Alliaceae, Chinese chives are propagated from seed which is formed apomictically not from bulbils as stated.

All of these points do not detract from the usefulness of the book as being an essential starting point for information on vegetable seed.

B. SMITH


This dictionary will be a useful reference source for people familiar with German, French or Russian who are reading articles or books written in English, and for people familiar with English who are reading material written in German, French or Russian.

The largest part of the dictionary (519 pages) comprises a list of 9389 English words or terms which may be found in the agricultural literature, together with their equivalent in German, French and Russian. In some cases the Latin is also given. In this part of the dictionary there is also much cross-referencing to lead the reader to one or more related terms. There is no explanation of the meaning of words and terms.

There follows a list of German words and terms, each followed by a number which indicates where the term appears in the earlier part of the dictionary. After that are equivalent lists of French, Russian and Latin words and terms.

The authors, who are from Bulgaria, have tried to cover ‘all fields related to agriculture – agronomy, zootechnics, veterinary medicine, phytobiology, microbiology, botany, soil chemistry, forestry, mechanization, agricultural hydrotechnics, melioration, organization and economics of agricultural production, mathematical statistics, meteorology etc.’

D. WILMAN

ISBN 0 632 05297 X.

David Alford’s A Textbook of Agricultural Entomology is a comprehensive manual, which will be of practical use to applied entomologists studying pests that occur in both agriculture and horticulture. Prior knowledge is not assumed, and the text is often interspersed with line drawings and black and white pictures illustrating salient points. A small section of colour plates clearly shows a range of selected pests and examples of damaged plants.

The author presents facts concisely and logically, which allows less experienced readers to quickly find relevant information on their subject of interest. Part
This CD-ROM from CABI carries over 60000 records on organic farming extracted from the CAB ABSTRACTS database, but because of funding from the UK Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, it is available at well below commercial rate. It contains abstracts compiled from journals, reports, conference papers and books, from the 1970s onwards. Although the publicity material says that it contains ‘abstracts on organic farming in temperate regions’ there are many references to topics that overlap with conventional farming, such as biological pest control, soil conservation, composting and mechanical weeding, and only a proportion of the research was actually carried out in organic systems.

The information on this CD comes from all over the world; only two-thirds of the abstracts are from English-language sources, with strong representation from German, Russian, Chinese and French. The coverage ranges beyond temperate agriculture also, with such items as the use of organic wastes in urban agriculture in Africa, and 6700 records from India alone.

The simplest way to search is on a ‘free text’ basis which means that the whole of every record is searched. Thus ‘cattle’ produces 2078 hits, ‘homoeopathy’ produces 12 and ‘cattle and homoeopathy’ gives three records, one of which is a book on homoeopathy for cows. The searches may be widened by truncating key words, so that ‘parasit*' finds ‘parasite’, ‘parasitic’, ‘parasitize’ and so on. All the terms used for such searches are listed with their frequencies in an index, which tells you, for instance, that ‘biocontrol’ (2400 occurrences) is a much better bet than ‘biological control’ (one occurrence) as a search term.

The database can also be searched on particular fields, such as the country in which the research was performed and the author. Thus ‘sheep’ yields 607 records, and ‘sheep and parasit*' 110, but if UK is specified in the geographical field the result is three records on parasites of sheep in the UK. Once found, the records can be printed out, either as brief citations or with all fields including the abstract, or downloaded to disk.

This CD provides an invaluable overview of organics research and should be useful to all those working in organic farming or related fields. Updates are planned for 2001 and 2002.

J. Powell


ISSN 1470 9635.

This book takes us into the maze and minefield of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) associated with biotechnology in agriculture. I guess it is a sign of the times that, as pointed out in Chapter 8 ('International


ISBN 0 85199 457 1.

J. E. Ashby
Crop Breeding in a World of Proprietary Technology’), the Chief Executives of several of the top crop breeding biotechnology companies in the US are not biologists or agronomists by training but lawyers.

Four of the five editors and 12 of the 16 contributors are based in the USA, so it is not surprising that the book generally looks at IPR issues from the viewpoint of a US culture which is strongly concerned with patent protection. Contentious issues are raised such as the role of IPR in developing countries and farmers’ rights; the Rio Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and access to natural genetic resources; the merit of private versus public multinational agricultural research. However the general approach to these is that IPR is a necessary and unavoidable part of modern agricultural development.

The book arose from a conference, held at the University of Rome in 1999, on ‘The Shape of the coming Agricultural Biotechnology Transformation: Strategic Investment and Policy Approaches from an Economic Perspective’ which was convened by the International Consortium on Agricultural Biotechnology Research (ICABR). It is structured into four sections. The first part contains five chapters which address the present state of implementation of various legal systems involved with IPR. It covers the situation in the US and Europe and relationships with the CBD, the GATT-TRIPs agreement and the CGIAR system of International research centres. The second part addresses economic issues and includes chapters on ‘The Market Value of Farmers’ Rights’ and ‘Comparing Allocation of Resources in Public and Private Research’. In the third part there are two chapters which deal with the current state of biotechnology invention. Finally there are two chapters concerned with IPR case studies in North America and specifically the development of canola in Canada.

The book is generally clearly written and contains a wealth of interesting information for those who want to begin to try and fathom out the complexities of this difficult subject. However it is a rapidly developing area (particularly in Europe) and the information in the book should only be regarded as a baseline from which specific issues will continue to evolve. There is very little in the book on interactions with regulatory authorities which are a major feature in determining the uptake of new agricultural biotechnologies, particularly in European countries with a high level of ecological consciousness. Clearly IPR has little value if what is protected has little significance in terms of agricultural practice and economics.

M. O. HUMPHREYS


This book, the first in a proposed 3 volume series, contains 17 chapters, a mixture of reviews and research papers broken down into sections dealing with disease, pathogens, pathology and control. In the section on Diseases, Pachymetra root rot, Dry top rot and Common rust are dealt with in some detail but while Pachymetra root rot and dry top rot are both limited in their geographical distribution, common rust, a widespread disease, is discussed in terms of its impact in Mauritius. In Section II: Pathogen the focus ranges from a classical taxonomic approach of the Cercosporoids of sugarcane to studies of the biochemistry and physiology of the rust–sugarcane relationship taking in immunological detection of red rot and smut diseases. Section III deals with the pathology of the pathogens. Chapters include molecular aspects of sugarcane smut, biotechnology studies on the pathogenesis of eyespot disease and the effects of red rot on cane yields in Nigeria. Section IV deals with aspects of disease control through traditional breeding approaches to the evaluation of botanicals as fungicides. From the contents it is difficult to see to which potential audience the book is addressed, pathologists in general or those in the industry. The book is well produced, with both monochrome and colour illustrations, the review chapters would provide those with a fringe interest a good overview of the topic, but there is a lack of overall consistency. At this price it is difficult to see it competing successfully with other books on the subject.

P. JONES

Letters

Readers are invited to write letters which will be considered for publication in the Journal. These letters may comment on a paper, book review or letter which has been published in the Journal or they may raise other issues of interest to an agricultural science readership. In the case of letters commenting on previously published items, the author of the previously published item will normally be invited to respond and this response will normally be published in the same issue as the letter.

DAVID WILMAN
JULIAN WISEMAN