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Texas farm grows flowers to combat effects of cancer

McALLEN (AP) — On 900 acres of McAllen farmland, Dick Wiesehan grows onions, cantaloupes and lots of greens.

It's what he grows on his other 100 acres, however, that makes Wiesehan Farms unique.

Along with his son Roger, Wiesehan grows lots of purple — Madagascar periwinkle, a slender, star-like flower used in the manufacture of cancer-combating drugs.

Of the medicinal properties of the periwinkle, Dr. Ian Scott, Texas A&M distinguished professor of chemistry, said, "It's an old discovery."

Folk medicinists have used periwinkles as remedies for various diseases for centuries.

In the 1950s, Scott said, scientists discovered that the extract of the tropical periwinkle has some "very good properties for reducing tumors in mice."

After initial experiments, drugs from the plant were purified for human use.

When given to patients, the extracts caused the disappearance of certain forms of leukemia and "were quite useful in treating human solid tumors," Scott explained.

Periwinkles, or Vinca rosea, are grown throughout the Rio Grande Valley.

Wiesehan, a Valley farmer since 1943, says he's always had a reputation for "specialty items," and was asked 15 years ago by a pharmaceutical company about growing the plants.

The first year, he took a chance and planted about five acres to see if Valley soil would be favorable to the production of the chemical compounds valued in treating certain forms of cancer.

The plants are valued for the chemical compounds vincristine sulfate and vinblastine sulfate.

Vincristine, which is marketed as

the drug Oncovin, is used primarily in combination with other drugs. It has been used in the treatment of several forms of cancer, particularly leukemia.

Vinblastine, marketed as Velban, is primarily used in the treatment of Hodgkin's disease.

The biochemistry of the drugs still is being investigated.

Vincristine sulfate and vinblastine sulfate arrest cell division at a crucial stage, although scientists still don't know how or why this happens.

Dr. John Laszlo, vice president of research with the American Cancer Society in New York, referred to vincristine as a "landmark drug."

"Vincristine made it possible to obtain complete remission for children with acute leukemia for the first time," he said.

Scott said despite the plant's usefulness, periwinkle cultivation and production currently is relatively unsteady.

"Unfortunately, the tropical periwinkle makes very small amounts of this drug," Scott said.

His research is directed at making the production of cancer-combating substances "a more efficient process," he said.

"It's a very slow business and very complicated," he said.

For the past 20 years, Scott has been researching the genetic structure of the plants, trying to understand the biochemistry "that will turn on these good genes for making these drugs."

He says his research, which is sponsored by the National Institute of Health and the American Cancer Society, won't put Wiesehan out of business, but some day will possibly provide him with a genetically altered strain of the periwinkle.

Meanwhile, Wiesehan continues to corner a unique niche in a unique market.

Weather Watch

Valid: Noon today
Sunset Today: 7:10 p.m.
Sunrise Friday: 7:18 a.m.

Map Discussion: The Great Lakes area will have cloudy, cool and rainy weather, while the rest of the nation enjoys fair and mild conditions of the high pressure system, with an exception in southern Florida where showers will persist.

Forecast:
Today: Fair and mild with a high temperature of 82 degrees and northeasterly winds of 7 to 12 mph.
Tonight: Fair and cool. Light northeasterly winds and a low temperature of 52 degrees.
Friday: Continued fair and mild with the high temperature in the low to mid 80s and east-northeasterly winds near 10 mph.

Weather Fact: Heat balance: The equilibrium that exists on the average between the radiation received by the earth and atmosphere from the sun, and that emitted by the earth and atmosphere.

Equatorial regions receive more energy from the sun than they are able to radiate, while higher latitudes receive less. The excess of heat is carried from low latitudes to higher latitudes by atmospheric and oceanic circulations and is radiated there.

Prepared by: Charlie Brenton
 Staff Meteorologist
 A&M Department of Meteorology

Representatives contrast beliefs of religions for MSC Great Issues

By Doug Driskell
 Staff Writer
 It is unfortunate the conflict in the Middle East is labeled a holy war, a representative for the Islamic faith said Wednesday night in Rudder Theater.

"Literally the Jihad means struggle for central justice," said Dr. Steve A. Johnson, executive vice president of American Islamic College in Chicago, at a comparative religions program offered by MSC Great Issues and the Muslim Student Association.

"Whenever there are people being oppressed they will have to struggle to overcome that kind of oppression," he said. "If you take a look at Jihad, the conditions for the use of force are very close to the traditional Roman Catholic doctrine of the just war theory where there are severe limitations on the just interment of war and equally severe limitations on the actual use of force within the war."

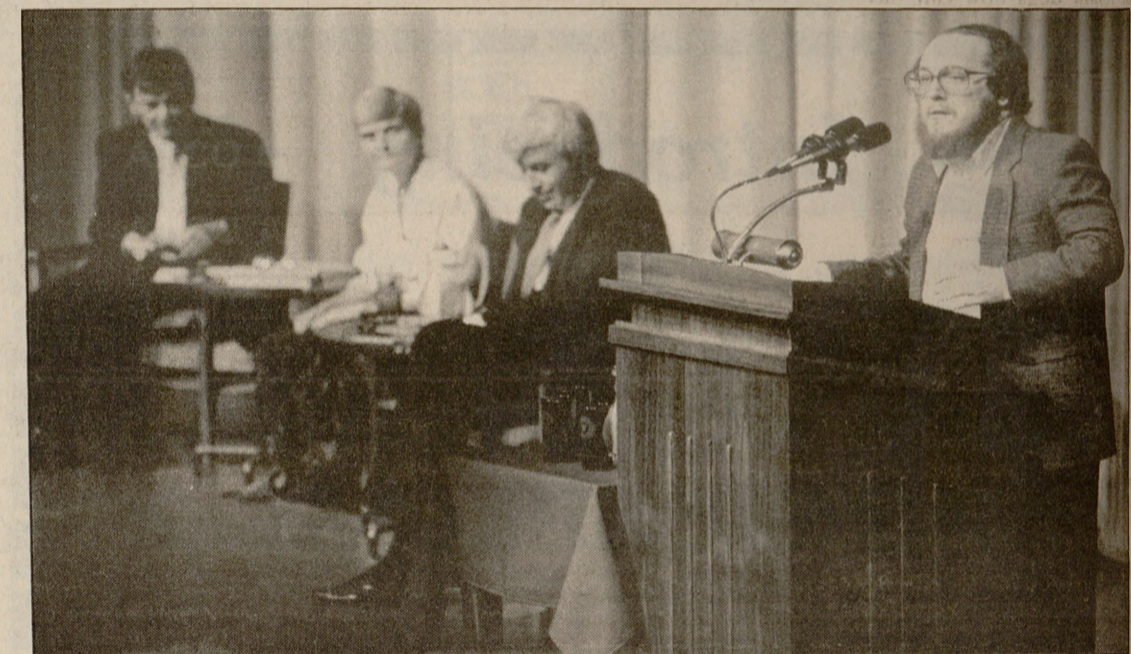
The Islamic faith opposes the intervention of outside forces, he said.

"The situation today is not to establish peace in that region, but to force people to accept one ideology over another ideology," Johnson said.

Another speaker, Dr. Carrin Dunne, said sometimes Christianity has ignored the beliefs of others in the period of intense missionary work. She believes people should be offered the Christian faith and should choose for themselves.

Dunne, a lecturer in religious studies at Rice University, commented on the role of religion in science and technology.

"As science and technology increase, our ethical responsibility in-



Dr. Steve A. Johnson speaks on Islamic thoughts and beliefs at the comparative religions program presented in Rudder Theater Wednesday night by MSC Great Issues. Other religions that were

represented at the program were Christianity and Judaism. The program was moderated by Dr. Richard W. Stadelmann, assistant professor of humanities at Texas A&M.

creases, too," she said. "What the growth of science and technology does is it expands the realm of religion, because it offers new challenges, questions and responsibilities."

Rabbi Lawrence Jackofsky, regional director for the Union of

American Hebrew Congregations, said scientific knowledge for human benefit is important.

"In Judaism, things are open to scrutiny," he said. "The Sabbath laws can be broken to save a life. That takes precedence over anything else."

There are limits to this technological gain, he said.

"As technology progresses there must be a moral voice to speak out when technology goes too far," he said. "Science and religion from the Jewish point of view do not conflict at all, but go hand in hand."

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Supreme grant executive

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. (AP) — A federal judge ruled Wednesday that a federal grant program for the San Antonio area was unconstitutional. The court's decision was a setback for the program, which had provided a reprieve on scheduled to be paid to the area's residents. The court's decision was a setback for the program, which had provided a reprieve on scheduled to be paid to the area's residents.

A&M department

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Technology could oil pro

DALLAS (AP) — A potential exist tion in U.S. said overw main top p industry puts logical adva During one neede Frank Schu ling Techni annual meeti troleum En "The pr cent of all world have country," "We've fou If the ino ive on thes eral new m have to be vances in d said. Robert C of Mobil E ducing Ser dustry's ree gony is just consolidati