A NEW AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

GLASSHOUSE CROPS, MUSHROOMS AND OUTDOOR FLOWERS AND SHRUBS

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ON the advice of the Agricultural Research Council, the Minister of Agriculture is founding an independent Agricultural Research Institute to promote research on the cultivation of glasshouse crops and mushrooms and of bulbs, flowers and shrubs grown commercially in the open. The announcement marks another step in the evolution of the Agricultural Research Service, and there is interesting history behind it (see also *Nature* of July 18, p. 89).

Forty years ago a group of nursery growers in the Lea Valley north of London were alarmed by the losses caused by pests and diseases on glasshouse crops and realized the need for research to be directed upon means of control. They formed the Nursery and Market Garden Industries' Development Society, Ltd., and, assisted by grants from the Ministry of Agriculture and from three local county councils, started a small experimental centre at Cheshunt.

The venture quickly proved its value, and acquired a reputation more than local. In 1923 the Ministry of Agriculture increased its grant to allow for increase of staff and more laboratory accommodation, on condition that the centre should extend its services beyond the Lea Valley to the glasshouse industry of the whole of Britain. The Experimental and Research Station, Cheshunt, then began to take the form it has to-day. The field of investigation widened to include studies of glasshouse soils with particular reference to the effects of partial sterilization by steaming or other methods, the physiology of glasshouse crops, and new techniques in glasshouse practice generally. The contributions of the Station, under the direction of Dr. W. F. Bewley, to increased production under glass have been set out in a series of annual reports, of which thirty-seven have been published.

When, after the Second World War, the National Agricultural Advisory Service was established, the Station, like other research institutes of similar origins, found itself relieved of direct advisory responsibilities to growers and freer to concentrate on the fundamental scientific questions that underlie the day-to-day practical problems of the industry. It was, however, not equipped to take full advantage of the change in emphasis.

By this time the facilities at Cheshunt had become inadequate for a national glasshouse research station. The Lea Valley had changed in character; the site was hemmed in by urban development and critical work was handicapped by the atmospheric pollution associated with the growth of Greater London. A move that would have been inevitable in any event was made more urgent by damage sustained by the Station during the War, which left the experimental glasshouses in bad condition.

A group appointed jointly by the Agricultural Research Council and the Agricultural Improvement Council to survey the post-war needs of research in the various branches of horticulture recommended that a new site should be found for glasshouse research, and that the opportunity should be taken

to couple with it research into other commercial nursery crops for which no central facilities have hitherto existed, especially flowers grown out of doors.

A long search began for a site combining all the necessary features, one of which is proximity to an important local glasshouse industry. It ended recently with the acquisition of a hundred acres of land at Toddington, near Littlehampton, Sussex. Here the new Institute will begin its work with staff and apparatus transferred from Cheshunt and will have room to extend the Cheshunt programme in several directions.

The better light conditions for which the Worthing district is famous will make possible many studies of plant growth under glass on a scale hitherto impracticable. There is, for example, a promising field in the exact definition of the light and temperature requirements of glasshouse crops, which are known to vary between different varieties and at different stages of development for each variety. With facilities for critical experiments, the new Institute will be able to collaborate more effectively with the National Institute of Agricultural Engineering, which is working on glasshouse design and the control of glasshouse climate and so seeking to find the means of meeting the requirements of plants economically.

In developing new lines of inquiry, the Institute will not abandon the old, for the war against pests and diseases under glass still remains of major importance, and the study of new weapons and tactics deserves the better facilities that will be provided.

OBITUARY

Mr. C. D. le Maistre, C.B.E.

SOME men achieve fame for the number of important jobs they have held; others, like Charles Delacour le Maistre, achieve their ambition by sticking to the same job throughout their working life, building up an organization or a movement from practically nothing to a mature and steadfast entity. The cause built up by le Maistre is that generally referred to as 'industrial standardization'; it has world-wide ramifications, and the national standards bodies set up in more than thirty different countries are directly or indirectly modelled on the British Standards Institution, which, in its earlier years, was built up under le Maistre's supervision. Born in Jersey in 1872, trained as an electrical engineer in South Kensington, he joined the small staff of the Engineering Standards Committee in 1902 and became its secretary in 1916, a post he retained until 1929. In that year the British Engineering Standards Association (the successor to the Engineering Standards Committee) received its Royal Charter, and le Maistre was appointed director. He was thus at the helm when the Association again changed its name, this time to the British Standards Institution, in 1931, and he finally retired from the Institution in 1943, having served as chairman of the Executive Committee during the year 1942-43.

Le Maistre's work in the international sphere, and still in the field of standardization, covered an even longer period, for he was appointed general secretary of the International Electrotechnical Commission on its formation in 1904 and still held that post at the time of his death, on July 5. He became seriously ill, for the first and last time in his energetic life, a few months ago, thus having to cancel his plans