

Did You Know?

Everybody loves a comeback story, and ARS has been responsible for many over the years. But did you know that ARS could play a central role in a new comeback-in-the-making—involving a tree that was wiped out by a hurricane in the late 1960s?

The tree is called the tung tree, and its seeds are the source of environmentally friendly, inedible oil used in wood finishing. The trees flourished along the Gulf Coast until a series of events—culminating in Hurricane Camille in 1969—led to the demise of the region's tung oil industry. In response, ARS stepped in to develop blueberry varieties that would thrive in the hotter, humid southern climate. Thus, ARS played a key role in establishing the region's now-thriving blueberry industry to replace tung oil production.

Despite the tung oil industry's decline, ARS and Mississippi State University partners began a tung oil breeding program in the early 1970s at the agency's research station at Poplarville, MS. After 40 years, these trees are still maintained there today, representing the largest and most diverse selection of tung tree germplasm in North America.

When the trees were planted, the thinking was that they would provide a source of germplasm for future efforts to revive the tung oil industry. And sure enough, that day may have arrived. In March, a representative of a tung oil company in Florida visited ARS scientists at Poplarville. The company is interested in re-establishing the profitable production of tung oil in the United States. This may be the first request in 40 years to obtain tung tree seed for possible commercialization. ARS is working with the company to make seed available as a first step toward ramping up production of tung oil, most of which is now imported from China, the tung tree's center of origin.

ARS assistance in efforts to bring back tung oil production in the United States is one of many examples of how ARS research provides crucial research support for U.S. agriculture. If this latest effort is successful, tung trees may make a comeback and be planted near blueberries developed to replace them.

Did you know that...

- The first tung tree seed reportedly was brought to America from Hankow, China in 1905 by David Fairchild, then senior agricultural explorer for USDA?

Written by **Sean Adams**, ARS Information Staff.



Tung tree fruit—about 3 inches in diameter—seeds, and oil.

Contributors to this issue:

We thank the following individuals for contributing stories, ideas, photographs, and their time to this issue:

Sean Adams	Sandy Miller Hays
Lisa Ainsworth	Steven E. Naranjo
Mina Chung	Carol Nathan
Kathy Clough	Linda Neuenhahn
Gerald F. Combs, Jr.	Jack Okamuro
Gale Dunn	Cristina Paul
Carol Durflinger	Jody Stuart
Jay Green	Fernando Vega
Tracy Havermann	Tara T. Weaver-Missick
Ed Knipling	