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THE PRESENT STATUS OF THE TOBACCO BLUE-MOLD (PERONOSPORA) DISEASE IN THE GEORGIA-FLORIDA DISTRICT

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Statements reported to have been circulated in the press and in the tobacco trade to the effect that the Florida-Georgia shade-tobacco industry has been destroyed by the tobacco blue-mold disease, which recently appeared in that region, have not been authorized by the United States Department of Agriculture, and are entirely without foundation. The disease, which, so far as known, was first observed on commercial plantings in this country early this season in the Gadsden-Decatur district, and aroused much apprehension among the growers there at that time, has been under investigation by us since late in March. The infection in the seed beds was distinctly threatening and the same condition existed in a very considerable number of the fields for several weeks. Since about the middle of April growing conditions in the region have been favorable for the development of the crop and adverse to the spread of the disease, so that its attacks have been substantially confined to the lower leaves, and are estimated at not to exceed 5 per cent of the crop in the infected areas; that is, on the average only about one leaf per plant. Advices to the end of May indicate that the crop is making a rapid, luxuriant growth, showing little insect injury, with little probability of spread of blue mold later in the season.

The hot dry period during the first 10 days of May appears to have had much to do with checking the further development of the disease. This was followed by nine days of light rains which were very favorable to the growth of the tobacco and did not cause any noteworthy spore production of the fungus. Since then the weather has been dry and very few new spots have developed.

We are informed that statements have been made to the effect that this disease will spread on tobacco in storage and that even leaves which may mature without visible infection would be unsuitable for use. There is no foundation for such statements, as the disease does not spread on harvested and cured tobacco. Clean leaves are in all respects normal and suitable for wrapper use.

In some ways the common names "mildew" and "mold" that through long usage have become attached to fungi of this group
(the Peronosporas) are unfortunate, since if they are used without qualification they mean one thing to one man and another thing to another man. We qualified them properly in our usage, but all have not done so. The fungus here in question has nothing in common with the ubiquitous white and green mildew, common on a great variety of objects in damp weather—foods, leather, decaying vegetation, etc.—nor has it anything in common with the white mold that troubled cigar makers in various sections of the country some years ago and for which the Department of Agriculture devised a remedy.

Press reports that the tobacco blue-mold disease has appeared in Connecticut, North Carolina, or other districts are without foundation so far as the Department of Agriculture has information, nor has the disease appeared in the Madison or Dade City districts of Florida or in southern Alabama.