New Biotechnology Research Program in Britain

The British government is drawing up plans with several large food manufacturers for a long-term program of jointly funded research into key areas of biotechnology, using a strategy of linking the activities of scientists in industrial companies, government laboratories, and university departments that have already been successfully adopted for microelectronics research.

Details of the new program are currently being finalized by study groups that have been set up in three areas, covering food, plant, and animal sciences, and are expected to be announced later in the summer. Total expenditure is expected to be around $100 million over a 5-year period, with half the money being provided by the government and half by private industry.

Government officials in London say that they are pleased with results obtained so far from a series of collaborative research projects in microelectronics launched 2 years ago on a similar basis, the so-called Alvey Program (*Science*, 20 May 1983, p. 799).

In the light of this experience, Geoffrey Pattie, the Minister of State responsible for technology policy in Britain's Department of Trade and Industry, told a conference in London recently that there was "scope for collaboration" other technological fields, in particular in what he called the "agri-food business area."

"Currently discussions are going on with companies and research institutes to identify longer term research requirements which will eventually lead to improved efficiency in food production and processing," Pattie said.

Those currently involved in these discussions are said to include representatives of three of Britain's five research councils, five major food and chemical-products companies (Unilever, ICI, Shell, RHM, and Cadburys Schweppes), and the Agricultural Genetics Company, set up last year to find and stimulate the commercial exploitation of agricultural research being carried out in government laboratories.

The new British program will parallel a similar scheme currently being developed by the Commission of the European Economic Community, based in Brussels, which has recently been approved by the research ministers of the ten EEC member states.

—DAVID DICKSON

House Opens Broad Science Policy Hearings

The House science committee's Task Force on Science Policy kicked off an extensive series of hearings on 17 April, beginning with testimony from the nation's major research museums. The museums, which got on the docket at their own request, are attempting to establish a political presence as their research requirements are increasingly outstripping their revenues.

In response to the problem, museums in Philadelphia, New York, San Francisco, and Chicago last fall formed a group called the Associated Natural Science Institutions. According to John W. Fitzpatrick of Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History, museums are devoting a growing portion of their resources to graduate education as collections are becoming more and more centralized. [Recent evidence of the centralization trend is Princeton University's decision to donate its large vertebrate paleontology collection to Yale University (*Science*, 5 April, p. 38)].

The congressional hearing was mainly devoted to describing the crucial role of natural collections in furnishing primary data for research on everything from evolution to environmental toxins. Describing their public exhibits as only the "tip of the iceberg," speakers stressed the need for more fieldwork, particularly in the face of the accelerating rate of species extinction, and for more laboratory and computer facilities.

Although witnesses refrained from asking for new legislation, they expressed special concern about the future of systematics. Robert McCormick Adams, director of the Smithsonian Institution, noted that "people who would have been trained in systematics are now moving into biology at cellular, molecular and genetic levels." Museums are increasingly carrying the burden of graduate student training but, said Fitzpatrick of Chicago, they cannot get money for that purpose from existing federal fellowship programs. The manpower situation promises to deteriorate, according to the witnesses, who said there are only 2000 trained systematists at the nation's 4000 major collections, which are growing by 3 percent a year.

The House task force study is a comprehensive undertaking that has been picking up new areas of interest as it rolls along. The 2-year study was launched in January. Hearings for the rest of this year are scheduled as follows:

23–24 April: Industry's view of federal science policy

25 April: Big science: High-energy physics

2 May: The future of U.S. science

14 May: The Nobel Prizes and science policy

21–22 May: Government and the research infrastructure

18–20 June: International cooperation in science

25–26 June: Science in the political process

9–11 and 23–25 July: Science and engineering education and manpower

10–12 September: Impact on science of the information age

17–19 September: The role of the social sciences

2–4 October: Science in the mission agencies

22–24 October: Science in government laboratories.

—CONSTANCE HOLDEN

Baby Doe Regs Set

The Department of Health and Human Services has published final "Baby Doe" regulations which are scheduled to go into effect 15 May.

They are designed to implement the newly reauthorized Child Abuse and Protection Act, which broadens the definition of child abuse to include the withholding of "medically indicated treatment." Treatment may be withheld when it is judged to be ineffective in "ameliorating or correcting" an infant's "life-threatening conditions," when it only prolongs dying, or when the infant is irreversibly comatose. The rules specify state and local procedures for Baby Doe cases and are