*Briefing:*

## Genentech Sets Up Research Foundation

Genentech, one of the few biotechnology companies turning a substantial profit, has established a new foundation to support basic biotechnology research at universities and nonprofit research institutions, the company announced recently.

Genentech has pledged a minimum of $1 million for the first 4 years. The money will come from royalties from three broad patents issued here and in Europe that cover polypeptide production in recombinant microbes. An independent board of trustees will govern the foundation and choose projects to be funded.

Genentech brought in $74 million in revenues in its first quarter this year, up 93% from the same period last year, and turned a net income of $15 million. Among its best selling products are human growth hormone and tissue plasminogen activator, a clot-dissolving drug. ■ **M.S.**

## Chernobyl Area to Be Ecological Reserve

The Soviet government has decided to designate the area in a 10-kilometer radius from the Chernobyl nuclear power plant as an ecological reserve that will be used to carry out scientific studies of the impact of radiation on the natural environment.

Following the accident at the nuclear power plant just over 2 years ago, Soviet scientists argue that this information, which will be gathered by a number of special laboratories in the reserve and will involve, for example, tracking the behavior of animals and the growth of plants, could eventually be useful in helping to increase the yield of crops and their resistance to disease.

"It would not be possible to reproduce the ecological situation which has been created in the Chernobyl area by experiment," Boris Prister, chairman of the radiology coordinating council of the southern branch of the Lenin Academy of the Agricultural Sciences, told the Soviet news agency TASS last month.

"Regardless of the tragic nature of the event, scientists have gained a unique laboratory which makes it possible to study the effects of radiation on living nature," Prister said, although adding that "so far no real influence on the genetic apparatus of organisms has been observed."

The government's decision to create the reserve was made public shortly before the death was announced last week of Valeri A. Legasov, the head of the commission responsible for investigating the accident. Legasov was also the leader of the Soviet delegation to the subsequent meeting organized to discuss the accident by the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna.

No information was released by the Soviet authorities on whether Legasov, who was 52, died as a result of exposure to radiation during his investigations into the causes of the accident, which has already caused the death of 32 plant employees and fire fighters. ■ **D.D.**

## Science at Duke in Black and White

A Duke University professor who has worked for 15 years to get more blacks into science fears a new Duke initiative to hire black faculty may prove a hollow victory.

Duke, where Bertram Fraser-Reid is James B. Duke Professor of Chemistry, recently required all department and program heads to add at least one black faculty member by fall of 1993. Currently, only 31 of the 1399 faculty members are black, and 28 of the 56 departments and programs have no full-time black faculty member.

In science, only the chemistry, physics, anthropology, and political science departments have a black faculty member. The 14 black faculty in the school of medicine are the largest concentration of blacks in science at Duke.

"I wish I felt a sense of vindication, but I'm not sure I do," said Fraser-Reid, who is the sole black in his department. "If all this does is inspire department heads into beating the bush for black professors, it will have been a colossal waste of time and effort. There have to be black professors out there first."

In Fraser-Reid's view, no amount of policy changes will ease the shortage of blacks in science and engineering. "It [the new policy] will be valuable only if it alerts the young black men and women at Duke to the shortage of blacks in science and engineering and leads them to consider those careers. There simply isn't a lot of [professorial] talent out there in science and engineering."

He noted that some of his students were very involved in lobbying for the new policy until they found out that only 40 blacks in the United States received Ph.D.'s in chemistry last year. "And most of those 40 are going into industry. Why the hell should they go into academia when their white counterparts are going after big bucks in industry?" he asks.

Duke President H. Keith H. Brodie, a prominent psychiatrist, has talked of raiding minority colleges for new faculty members. "Well, I've got something to tell him," says Fraser-Reid. "Many of those colleges are staffed by whites and Indians." Two minority colleges have organic chemistry departments composed solely of whites, Indians, and Asians, he said.

"But it is foolish to try to remove the problems of blacks in science from the larger American problem," Fraser-Reid says. "The black students in my classes are first and foremost Americans, and over the past 15 to 20 years Americans have not been going into science and engineering."

Fraser-Reid's own daughter, who has an organic chemistry degree, is going into law. "Why should blacks be different from the rest of American kids?" he asks. ■ **G.B.**

## Wistar Proposes U.S. Test of Rabies Vaccine

The Wistar Institute of Philadelphia is planning to conduct field trials in the United States this year of a genetically engineered vaccine to combat rabies. Developed cooperatively with Transgene, S.A., of France, the vaccine can be administered orally with bait and is expected to prove effective in controlling rabies in animals in the wild.

Limited tests of the vaccine began in October in Belgium on the grounds of the Roi Albert Marche-en-Femenne military base. France also has approved a limited field trial that is slated to begin in late spring.

In the United States, raccoons and skunks are two of the prime transmitters of rabies in the wild. The Department of Agriculture is now reviewing Wistar's 22 March proposal to distribute bait containing the vaccine on isolated islands off the coasts of South Carolina or Virginia. Wistar already has conducted tests in Pennsylvania of animal baits containing a tetracycline marker, which will be used to identify animals that receive the vaccine.

The recombinant vaccine consists of smallpox vaccinia containing a single rabies gene, which will cause an animal's immune system to produce antibodies to the rabies virus without conveying the disease, Wistar officials say.

The vaccine is the same as that tested in Argentina beginning in July 1986. That experiment involving cattle was halted in November 1986 by the Argentine government because the sponsor of the test, the Pan American Health Organization, failed to obtain official approval for the trial (*Science*, 16 January 1987, p. 276). ■ **M.C.**