

suicide to go after Stewart and Feder, whose public status as whistle-blowers has gained them the protection of powerful members of Congress—Representative Dingell in particular.

"It costs NIH perhaps a couple of hundred thousand dollars to keep Stewart and Feder," one source told *Science*. "The political costs of dumping them would be too high."

Eventually, NIH granted Stewart and Feder permission to submit their manuscript

†Reporters on the news staff of *Science* received copies of the Stewart and Feder manuscript from persons who were sent it by the authors prior to its formal submission to either *Cell* or *Science*. In fact, Stewart and Feder have circulated two draft manuscripts—one dated 1 May 1987 and the other 30 September 1987.

for publication. The editors of *Cell* and *Science* rejected it†. They have very recently submitted a revised version to *Nature*.

And Stewart and Feder continue their work as an unofficial fraud squad. The phones in their laboratory ring constantly with calls from people reportedly alerting them to cases of scientific error or misconduct. "About 100 allegations are brought a year that appear to be meritorious, or at least not delusional," Stewart told *Science*. He also said that he keeps no log of these calls. "I wouldn't want to keep records or have that minute an accounting," he said.

■ BARBARA J. CULLITON

Science will report further developments in subsequent issues.

USDA Grants Program Threatened

In 1977 Congress established a competitive research grant program at the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to bolster basic research and enable more investigators from outside land-grant agricultural schools to participate in the field. While the funding for this program has varied over the years, Congress has always supported its competitive thrust—that is, until this year.

In a break with tradition, the House and Senate Appropriations Committees have both directed USDA's Cooperative State Research Service (CSRS) to fund up to \$10.75 million in specific "research" projects in fiscal year 1989, which begins on 1 October. In the past, Congress appropriated funds for broad categories of research but never designated where the money was to be spent. Grants have only been distributed on the basis of competitive proposals that undergo peer review.

"We have had a fundamental breach of the program and its basic charter," says Pat Jordon, administrator of CSRS. "It will destroy the program. If they earmark 20% of the program this year, you can look for 75% of it to be earmarked next year."

Even without the pork-barrel projects, the competitive grants program could be savaged, depending on how a conference committee resolves differences between the bills passed by the House and Senate. The Reagan Administration recommended \$54.5 million for the competitive grant program in 1989, a \$12-million increase. The House, however, chopped the program to \$29.4 million, while the Senate trimmed the budget by \$1.5 million, to \$40.8 million. In either case, says Jordon, there will be substantially less research funded next year because congressional "earmarks," the legislators' term for pork-barrel projects, will

probably have to be funded.

Jamie Whitten (D-MS), chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, makes no apologies for the insertion of pet projects in the competitive grant program. He says the members were "performing a public service" by finding a way to go forward with these projects in the face of tight budget ceilings.

The biotechnology industry does not share Whitten's view. "ABC would be very concerned if Congress took on the responsibility of a granting agency in the absence of a peer review system," says Bruce Mackler, general council for the Association of Biotechnology Companies. "Those decisions are better made by the department."

One beneficiary of the House and Senate



Jamie Whitten says members of Congress are "providing a public service" by finding a way to fund their pet projects.

action is the Midwest Plant Biotechnology Consortium, which is composed of 16 universities and 37 companies, including the University of Chicago, University of Michigan, University of Iowa, Eli Lilly, General Mills, Quaker Oats, and Pioneer Hi-Bred International. The effort to organize the consortium first began in 1984 and has been led by Harvey Drucker, associate director for energy, environmental, and biological research at Argonne National Laboratory. The purpose of the consortium is to conduct basic research on key midwestern crops such as wheat, corn, oats, and soybeans. All research proposals would be subject to a peer review process.

"Basically I think projects should stand on their own merit," says Alan Schriesheim, director of Argonne National Laboratory, a consortium member. The Midwest consortium, he contends, will pass that test. Schriesheim said, however, that he was not prepared to comment on the merits of funding the consortium at the expense of USDA's competitive grants research program. Drucker is away on travel and could not be reached for comment.

Dorin Schumacher, executive director of the consortium, told *Science* that she was concerned about the decisions of the appropriations committees to tap USDA's competitive grant funds. She hopes the department and the appropriations committees can work something out. But Schumacher could not say whether the organization's members would refuse to accept the funds if they are to be extracted from the department's competitive grants program.

Robert Haselkorn, director of the center for photochemistry and photobiology at the University of Chicago, says the consortium should decline the money if USDA's competitive research grant budget is going to be adversely affected. Haselkorn contends that the USDA competitive grants program should be much larger than it is now. The program could use \$400 million, he says.

In addition to the Midwest consortium money, the House wants another \$2.5 million in grant funds for the Michigan Biotechnology Institute, which would be charged with developing "new products and chemicals from agricultural raw materials." The Senate also has earmarked \$2 million to create a national center for alternative pest control at the University of Arkansas. Still another \$2 million of animal science grant funds would go to a food safety consortium composed of the universities of Arkansas, Kansas State, and Iowa State. Finally, \$1.75 million more in biotechnology funds would go for waste treatment equipment to benefit Iowa State University and the city of Cedar Rapids.

■ MARK CRAWFORD