SCIENCESCOPE

edited by CONSTANCE HOLDEN

Sequence, Sequence, Sequence

Expect no slackening of the pace when the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Department of Energy (DOE) come out with their third 5-year plan for the U.S. Human Genome Project this fall.

Since last month when J. Craig Venter announced plans, using private funding, to complete sequencing most of the human genome in just 3 years (see p. 1540), government-funded researchers have been rethinking their priorities and wondering if they should concentrate on getting a "rough draft" of the genome out as soon as possible.

But last week, at a meeting held in Warrenton, Virginia, to review the draft plan, about 120 researchers decided to stick with the original scheme. "There was unanimous support that we should not abandon that goal of full and highly accurate sequence," says geneticist Raju Kucherlapati from Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York City.

There is growing interest, however, in also completing a rough draft several years ahead of the final sequence, which is due out in 2005. That would require Congress to give NIH and DOE $50 million to $100 million more than is already expected for the next 7 years. Francis Collins, director of the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI), says this sum would enable the United States to sequence two to three times as much DNA per year as it is doing now. Increasing sequencing capacity "eclipses all other priorities," says Collins.

NHGRI will come up with a final draft over the summer, which its advisory council will approve or revise in September.

Molecular Bio Lab for Asia?

An organization to foster collaboration among biomedical researchers in the Asia-Pacific may be getting its own lab far sooner than founders had envisioned.

The International Molecular Biology Network (IMBN) of Asia's Pacific Rim is modeled on the European Molecular Biology Organization, founded in 1962. Its core facility, the Heidelberg, Germany–based European Molecular Biology Laboratory, wasn't set up until 1974.

But even as IMBN, proposed at a Tokyo meeting a year ago (*Science*, 27 June 1997, p. 1964), is being set up, one of its instigators, Ken-ichi Arai, director of the University of Tokyo's Institute of Medical Science, is leading efforts by a group of Japanese researchers to found an International Molecular Biology Laboratory (IMBL). Preliminary plans envision two cutting-edge research facilities, one in the Tokyo area and one elsewhere in Asia, possibly Shanghai, each housing up to 200 researchers, all funded to the tune of some $50 million to $100 million a year. Arai is radiating confidence about the venture: He says the relevant Japanese ministries are interested in the plans, and he anticipates that a Tokyo-area municipality will want to donate a site.

Still needed is the endorsement of the IMBN and financial support from other governments. "My position is that [IMBL] is a good thing," says molecular biologist Jeongbin Yim of Seoul National University, another IMBN driving force. But he adds that because Japan is likely to be the dominant country in the new organization, it might be wise to put the core research facility somewhere else. Others are concerned that planning a lab at this point might divert efforts to get the network up and running. Arai hopes to explain away such fears at the first IMBN conference to be held later this month in Seoul.

Science Shops in Canadian Universities

In a bid to put social science research to work where it matters, Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) voted last weekend to invest US$2.25 million over 2 years to create 15 to 20 university-based "innovation centres." Modeled after the highly successful "science shops" in the Netherlands that the Dutch government has funded for more than 20 years, the new program, called Community Research & Information Crossroads until it was decided a better name is needed, will be established on a 3-year pilot basis, says SSHRC President Marc Renaud. They'll link faculty and student teams with community organizations, local governments, and companies in research programs to address issues such as poverty, literacy, and health, including studies on services that should be provided at battered women's shelters or on a city's need for home-care services.

Half the centers will be funded next spring; the rest will be funded in fiscal year 2000. Although the final details will be ironed out this month, it's expected that SSHRC will contribute up to 75% of the projected $270,000 cost of establishing a center, each of which will be run by a senior researcher.

Renaud says the initiative should help demonstrate the value of social sciences research by giving academics a mechanism for responding to public concerns. Gregory Kealey, dean of graduate studies at Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland, says the centers will give social scientists a chance to develop innovative research protocols that "will really be driven by the community, as opposed to simply the researcher's own objectives."

Finding a Home for Kennewick Bones

An Oregon judge has ordered the bones of Kennewick Man to be removed from the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL) in Richland, Washington, their storage site since being excavated 2 years ago. The judge on 29 May told scientists and the government to forge a new plan for safeguarding the 9000-year-old bones, which were found on the banks of Washington's Columbia River.

Scientists want to examine the bones for rare clues about early Americans. In the fall of 1996 a group sued to be allowed to study the bones after the Army Corps of Engineers seized them on behalf of a Native American tribe that wants to rebury them. Last month, government lawyers were planning to retrieve some finger bone fragments from the University of California, Davis, where they had been sent for study.

Now Judge John Jelderks of the federal district court has told the Corps to wait until the contesting parties find a proper place for all the remains. PNNL does not have adequate facilities for future studies that may be needed, he said. Indeed, according to court documents, Native Americans there in April to retrieve some unrelated remains for reburial apparently departed with a box of odd bones that may have included one from Kennewick Man. Corps spokesperson Dutch Meier of Walla Walla, Washington, says in the government's defense that "the material was never identified definitively" as part of Kennewick Man.

Jelderks instructed the parties to find other accommodations by 1 July; if they can't, he'll decide for them. According to Tom Stafford, a Boulder, CO, radiocarbon-dating expert allied with the plaintiffs, the government has proposed sending the remains to Burke Museum in Seattle, while the scientists want them to go to San Diego's Museum of Man.