

supply facility, the National Center for Laboratory Animal Sciences in Hyderabad, fell afoul of another new requirement for labs working with animals that involves submitting registration papers and passing an on-site inspection. Officials at the national center, which each year ships some 40,000 animals to nearly 200 research facilities around the country, believed that paperwork filed last summer was sufficient to meet the new rules. But the Animal Welfare Board said that the center missed a 15 February deadline for compliance, and last week the board notified the center that it would have to close unless officials could demonstrate why it should remain open.

Negotiations have begun to resolve the situation, and scientists are hopeful that the problem will be cleared up. "We will not let this happen," says Nirmal Kumar Ganguly, director-general of the Indian Council of Medical Research. "A national facility just cannot be shut down."

For their part, animal welfare officials say they want to make sure that researchers are taking the new law seriously. They note that some 152 labs, including most major public and private facilities, have complied with the new registration requirements. "The rules are applicable equally to everybody," says one CPCSEA official who requested anonymity. "And if some can comply, why can't the others?"

—PALLAVA BAGLA

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

Report Tells USDA to Narrow Its Focus

The research program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) needs a major overhaul, building stronger ties to the outside research community and focusing more sharply on fewer research priorities, according to a federally appointed task force that laid out a blueprint for such reforms. In a draft report obtained by *Science*, the panel urges that USDA build fewer new labs, shut down many existing research stations, and increase partnerships with academic and corporate labs. "We need to spend the money on science and not facilities," says the panel's chair, Bruce Andrews, until recently the director of agriculture for the state of Oregon. USDA's in-house labs, the report says, should concentrate on work that can best—or only—be done by the federal government.

This sort of advice has been offered before, but it may pack an additional wallop this time, because the report was done at the request of Congress, which approved much of the overbuilt research enterprise that the report decries. The 14 members of the task force include cattle and soybean producers, farmers, and a state agricultural official as



Rock-solid research. The National Seed Storage Laboratory in Fort Collins, Colorado, freezes seeds to preserve germplasm, work seen as a "uniquely federal" role.

well as university scientists. "I think they're on target," says Lou Sherman, chair of biology at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, who has seen the report's conclusions. But task force members haven't yet signed off on the final report, which is due out in a few weeks.

The task force was created by the 1996 Farm Bill, which calls for a 10-year strategic plan for federally funded agricultural research facilities "to ensure that a comprehensive research capacity is maintained." Congress and other observers want to make the most of a \$1.6 billion USDA research budget that hasn't risen in recent years. The task force notes that this money must be stretched across some 370 labs—the bulk of them within the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) but also the Forest Service and land grant university labs—leaving many badly in need of repair and short of money for doing science. A big problem is the steady flow of new facilities, such as cranberry research in New Jersey and a swine center in Iowa, "dictated by politics" and stuffed into USDA's budget as a favor to individual legislators.

Andrews, who is now head of marketing for the Port of Portland, says the panel considered options from the status quo to a system looking outward—"the NIH [National Institutes of Health] model." It chose "a middle road," he says. Under its plan, USDA would classify programs as "uniquely federal," "appropriately federal," or neither. Uniquely federal projects, such

as storing genetic materials, studying highly infectious foreign animal diseases, and work relating to national security issues (such as bioterrorism), represent, perhaps, one-fourth of what USDA does, Andrews says. Only this work should continue in federal facilities. Labs for "appropriately federal" work, such as climate change and biodiversity, should be done by universities or the private sector whenever possible. Andrews anticipates that USDA will do "less and less [of this research]" over the next decade.

While the task force asked USDA to finish this classification by July 2000, it went ahead and identified about 23 labs that should be closed or consolidated. It even suggests that USDA's flagship facility in Beltsville, Maryland, should consider relocating, because its once-rural setting is now valuable suburban real estate.

Andrews says he knows the report will ruffle feathers. "Any system that's been in lock step for the last 10 or 20 years I'm sure will view this as an attack." Already, he adds, the task force's ideas have "created some hostility" from the ARS and Congress. ARS associate administrator Ed Knipling declined to comment until the report is officially released, but noted that "the department does recognize it as somewhat controversial." Sherman agrees. "It's going to take a lot of political will on the part of the executive branch and Congress" to turn its recommendations into reality, he says.

—JOCELYN KAISER

SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

Tragedy Devastates Radio Astronomers

PARIS—Scientists and staff at the Institute of Millimetric Radioastronomy (IRAM), one of the world's leading radioastronomy research centers, were in shock last week after a cable-car accident on 1 July killed 20 people, all workers employed by IRAM and its subcontractors. The cable car, which was ferrying the workers to IRAM's facility 2552 meters atop the Bure plateau in the



Cut off. The millimeter-wave array on the Bure plateau, scene of last week's cable-car disaster.

CREDITS: (TOP) USDA; (BOTTOM) IRAM