imperative to ensure that such crops are grown only outside the range of their wild progenitors. Otherwise, the most valuable gene pools for future food supplies will be at risk.

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References

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Electricity Supply

Philip H. Abelson in his Editorial "Future supplies of electricity" (*Science*'s Compass, 11 Feb., p. 971) makes important points about next-generation sources of electricity, but a few points about the current state of affairs should be made. There are substantial electricity resources in the forms of nuclear power and hydroelectric generation that produce no carbon dioxide (CO_2) or air pollution. In fact, nuclear power plants in the United States have increased their output over the last several years such that this increase alone constitutes the largest industrial contribution to reduced CO_2 emissions.

The non–fossil fuel power sources are, however, in jeopardy. The demands for electric utilities to increase short-term profits in a deregulated electricity market and the failure of the federal government to make progress on accepting spent nuclear fuel from commercial reactors are pressuring nuclear plant owners to sell or shut down their facilities. There are even plans to dismantle some hydroelectric dams in the name of environmental restoration. Today, the fuel of choice for replacing the electricity supplies that would be lost is natural gas. Although better than coal or oil, it is still a fossil fuel that generates CO_2.

It will be of little use to develop new energy sources for the long-term when we cannot maintain existing sources that generate no CO_2 or pollutants. Any successful energy policy needs to preserve current resources that meet environmental goals as well as plan for future technologies.

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Clinical Research

Alan M. Sugar raises a number of important issues in his letter (3 Mar., p. 1593) in which he comments on our Policy Forum "Oversight mechanisms for clinical research" (*Science*'s Compass, 28 Jan., p. 595). He discusses the undue emphasis on documentation rather than on protection of participants in clinical studies, citing the attention paid to the informed consent form rather than the education of the study participant. He also points out the unique roles institutional review boards have in protecting the public rather than representing the institution, and the potential conflicts faced by clinical investigators who also practice medicine. We agree with Sugar's concerns and reiterate a key point of our Policy Forum that there is a need for a national debate among representatives of all relevant constituencies concerning human subject protection regulations and the development of an understandable and relatively simple set of regulations that work and are focused on the rights of the participant while recognizing the importance of clinical research to our nation's health. Such regulations must be flexible in responding to changing environments. The continued concerns of the public, the press, and political leaders on clinical trials further emphasize the need for human subject protection regulations to be revisited soon in a comprehensive fashion.

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