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## Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> in Activated Sewage Sludge<sup>1</sup>

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During studies of the biological oxidation of dairy wastes, it occurred to us that the mixed microflora might contain significant quantities of vitamin B<sub>12</sub>. Further investigation confirmed this idea, and led us to test the vitamin B<sub>12</sub> content of aerator sludge from a municipal sewage treatment plant. The apparent vitamin B<sub>12</sub> content shown by direct assay with *Lactobacillus leichmannii* ATCC 4797 was determined essentially by the method of Skeggs, *et al.* (1). Since such activated sludge could be expected to contain almost any product of plant or animal metabolism, it was tested further by alkaline destruction of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> (2) and chromatographic separation on paper from other materials which stimulate the growth of the test organism (3).

The amount of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> indicated by the alkaline destruction procedure (Table 1, col. 4) was about that shown by chromatographic separation (not tabulated). Materials stimulating the growth of *L. leichmannii* which had *R<sub>F</sub>* values of about 0.4, presumably thymidine, and 0.8 made up the major part of the components which move more rapidly than vitamin

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B<sub>12</sub> complex. Essentially the total activity shown by the direct assay was given by the sum of the various components separated chromatographically. These data indicate that the alkaline destruction method is a satisfactory measure of the vitamin B<sub>12</sub> activity of these preparations for *L. leichmannii*.

TABLE 1  
VITAMIN B<sub>12</sub> CONTENT OF ACTIVATED SLUDGE  
(All Data Calculated on Moisture-Free Basis)

Sample	1	2	3	4
		Apparent B <sub>12</sub> (μg/g)	Alkali- stable growth factors (as B <sub>12</sub> ) (μg/g)	Vitamin B <sub>12</sub> (by diff) (μg/g)
Dairy waste sludge				
Wet		8.8	1.5	7.3
Municipal sewage sludge				
Wet		9.7	0.4	9.3
Lyophilized		6.7	.4	6.3
Dried for 24 hr at 105° C		4.0	.4	3.6
Dried for 24 hr at 70° C in circulated air		7.0	.4	6.6
Dried, under vacuum, on steam drum		2.7	.3	2.4
Commercial product				
Sample A		3.2	0.4	2.8
Sample B		6.4	2.0	4.4

A vitamin B<sub>12</sub> content of 1.5 mg/lb (3.3 μg/g) has been proposed by the Association of American Feed Control Officials as a required level for a commercial feed supplement. If the minimum values are considered (Table 1, col. 4), the amount of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> in the samples dried under mild conditions was well above that required. A commercially available dried sludge contains similar significant amounts of vitamin B<sub>12</sub>.

The existence of such a large potential supply of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> in activated sludge is important, for dried sludge has heretofore been of value only as a fertilizer. Chick feeding tests are now being conducted at Beltsville, Maryland, by Herbert R. Bird, Bureau of Animal Industry, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Gordon E. McCallum has succeeded Robert H. Flinn as chief of Health Emergency Planning, USPHS. Mr. Flinn is on assignment to the Civil Defense Administration. Mr. McCallum holds the rank of sanitary engineer director in the Public Health Service.

Austin Smith, editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, has accepted appointment as a member of the surgeon general's committee of consultants for the study of the indexes to medical literature, published by the Army Medical Library.