

gasohol policy was one designed to avoid any entanglement with the food supply. "Through the mid-1980's there appear to be sufficient surplus and waste raw materials to meet any realistic projected level of alcohol production. . . . There does not now appear to be a need to grow additional crops for alcohol production," concluded a Department of Energy review published in June 1979. Cheese whey, citrus wastes, and distressed crops would supply feedstock to distill 660 million gallons of ethanol a year.

In the wake of the January 1980 embargo on Russian grain sales, however, Administration spokesmen talked explicitly of converting the grain to ethanol, and announced plans to increase distillery capacity. These plans had been in preparation before the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, presumably in response to pressure from the gasohol lobby.

What will the distilleries use for feedstock? The embargoed Russian grain is not sitting in a big heap in Kansas: apart from one Administration purchase, the grain is still in private hands, and may yet be sold on world markets. The DOE calculation that 660 million gallons of ethanol could be obtained from wastes and spoiled crops is regarded as a gross overestimate in the Department of Agriculture. It seems likely that the new distilleries will use corn, and world food supply will be the less.

## UC-San Diego May Hire Hand That Feeds It

The directorship of the National Science Foundation may soon fall vacant if the present incumbent, Richard Atkinson, accepts the chancellorship of the University of California-San Diego, a post for which he is rumored to be the leader among two contenders.

Atkinson's acceptance would mark the triumph of hope over experience in that he would once again be succeeding William McElroy, his predecessor as director of the NSF. As chancellor of the San Diego campus, McElroy suffered a vote of no confidence from the academic senate for failing to consult with the faculty as much as the faculty would have liked. A few months after the episode he an-

nounced he would step down as chancellor and join the faculty.

The search committee is reported to have named two finalists, Atkinson and anthropologist Robert M. Adams of the University of Chicago. The winner will be announced on 21 March after a meeting of the University of California's board of regents. Atkinson is favored because of his bureaucratic experience and Washington ties.

Why does UC-San Diego have so insatiable an appetite for NSF directors as chancellor-fodder? The university is among the top five recipients of federal research grants, taking in some \$120 million this year. "It would be wrong to say we get this because of McElroy, but it is to our advantage to have someone who can maintain an open line to Washington and who is knowledgeable about the workings of the federal granting agencies," says a campus official.

## The RAC of Judgment

Is it permitted to clone the exotoxin of *Pseudomonas* in *Escherichia coli* K12? The NIH guidelines on recombinant DNA exempt from their purview experiments with the genes of bacteria which exchange genes naturally, as *Pseudomonas* and *E. coli* do. On the other hand the guidelines prohibit altogether the cloning of genes specifying a potent toxin. So is the experiment in question exempt or prohibited?

Such is the nature of the judgments now demanded of the group that wrote the guidelines, the NIH's Recombinant DNA Advisory Committee. Dealing at one moment with the jots and titles of the law, at another with concepts of philosophical foggiess, the RAC struggles to produce decisions that keep abreast of the rapidly evolving world of genetic manipulation. At its meeting this month, much of the RAC's agenda was created by impending commercialization of recombinant DNA activities. Should the Occupational Safety and Health Administration be asked to set regulations for factory workers handling gene spliced organisms? Or should RAC do it? Or should such activities be considered as no more than a minor part of the fermentation industry?

RAC discussed further the guidelines for large-scale activities which it

has in preparation. It also considered a voluntary application from the San Francisco firm Genentech to conduct commercial-scale production of human proinsulin, the hormone thymosin alpha-1, somatostatin, and the human insulin A and B chains, each in quantities of up to 750 liters.

As for cloning *Pseudomonas* exotoxin in *E. coli*, the committee decided that since the toxin is not potent, the experiment should be considered exempt from the guidelines.

## Sakharov Expulsion Averted

The March meeting in Moscow of the Soviet Academy of Sciences has come and gone without the question of expelling Andrei D. Sakharov even being raised. Sakharov, exiled to Gorki in the wake of the Afghanistan invasion, had not been invited to the meeting, an omission which raised fears that an attempt would be made by the Soviet authorities to contrive his expulsion.

According to the rumor in Moscow, the president of the Academy was asked by political authorities if Sakharov could be expelled but replied that there was no hope of obtaining the necessary two-thirds majority of members voting in secret ballot, the *New York Times's* Moscow correspondent reported.

The Academy has often shown a degree of independence from authority where its most vital interests are concerned; it refused to expel Nicolai Vavilov after his unsuccessful struggle with Lysenko. Appeals by Sakharov's wife Yelena Bonner and by groups in the West may perhaps have also been noted by Academy members.

Sakharov was not expelled from the Academy as feared, but his situation is still a matter of active concern to scientists in Western countries. A request to scientists in the United States and abroad to observe a 6-month boycott of official scientific interchange with the Soviet Union is being launched by Scientists for Orlov and Shcharansky. Unless Sakharov is released, the proposed boycott would last from May until November this year. Nearly 2000 members of the American Physical Society recently signed a statement expressing concern over Sakharov's situation.

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