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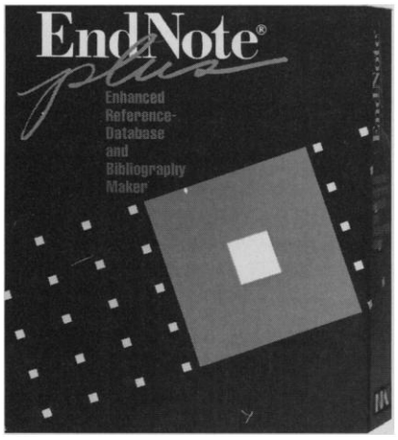

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Eggs-actly

The News briefing entitled "Eggs-aggeration" (13 Mar., p. 1359) was unfair in its criticism of media reporting on the salmonella detection research by Los Alamos National Laboratory scientists. Almost without exception the newspapers that reported on the work indicated the studies were preliminary and needed to be tested on naturally contaminated eggs. It is not correct that "newspapers failed to report . . . that the eggs . . . were artificially infected." To quote from the *Wall Street Journal* (*1*), "the researchers . . . must still prove the system in the field to make sure it can detect eggs naturally contaminated with salmonella."

It is true that the press release and most newspapers did not discuss the quantities of salmonella bacteria in the study eggs and in naturally contaminated ones, but the *San Francisco Chronicle*, whose article (*2*) is also faulted in the briefing, stated that the Los Alamos work might lead to a system that can check eggs "for high levels of contamination."

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REFERENCES

1. J. Bishop, *Wall Street Journal*, 27 Feb. 1992, p. B2.
2. C. Petit, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 27 Feb. 1992, p. A3.

Response: The clear point of the briefing was that newspapers did not report the millionfold or more discrepancy between the huge number of salmonella in the artificially infected eggs at Los Alamos and the small number in naturally infected eggs. For example, the sentence from the briefing which Gustafson quotes in part actually reads, "[W]hat the newspapers failed to report is that the eggs tested at Los Alamos were artificially infected and contained billions of bacteria—a whopping number compared to the numbers of bacteria found in studies of naturally contaminated eggs."

The *San Francisco Chronicle* stated that Los Alamos scientist Dipen Sinha "now forsees a system that can check hundreds of eggs at a time for high levels of contamination." Since the scientific literature on naturally contaminated eggs shows that such eggs contain at the most several thousand salmonella bacteria, that reference to "high levels," which seems to imply natural levels approaching those tested at Los Alamos, is misleading.

—Eds.

Clarifications and Corrections

In Daniel E. Koshland, Jr.'s editorial "Methodology and theory at the frontier" (27 Mar., p. 1621), the name of the Thomson atom was spelled incorrectly.