RANDOM SAMPLES

edited by CONSTANCE HOLDEN

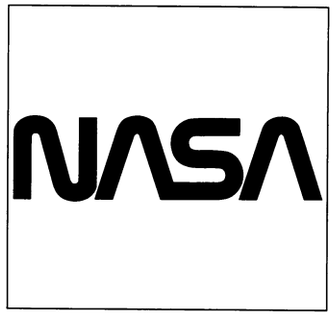
Less Laissez-Faire in French Gene-Splicing?

The French have long been known as having a more relaxed attitude than their neighbors about the regulation of genetic engineering. But that laissez-faire approach is in for a sharp reverse if an amendment introduced into the French national assembly late last month becomes law. The action would require a full-blown public inquiry before any new lab could begin work on genetic engineering—something that is not required even under Germany's highly restrictive gene technology laws. The prospect has caused a furor in French biology—in an unprecedented gesture, 25 heavyweights of the field last week fired off an open letter of protest to leading French newspapers.

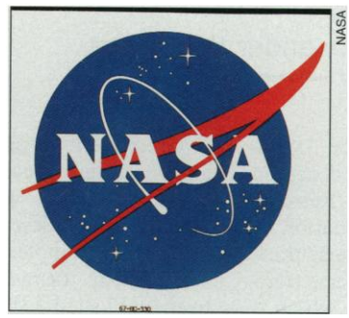
The law now making its way through the legislature is designed to implement recent European Community (EC) directives on the use of genetically engineered organisms. French geneticists don't have a problem with the EC rules, which state that academic labs working with engineered organisms must get approval from national regulatory authorities before using potential pathogens.

But researchers say the proposed amendment, introduced by socialist member Daniel Chevallier, equates biology labs with hazardous facilities like nuclear power plants. "It could be 3 months of paperwork and trouble just to set up a teaching lab," says Philippe Kourilsky, a molecular biologist at the Pasteur Institute in Paris.

The signatures of Nobelists Jean Dausset, François Jacob, André Lwoff, and Jean-Marie Lehn on the protest letter ensured high-profile coverage in the French press, and the researchers are now lobbying French lawmakers, who will give a second reading to the proposed law in the next few weeks. Kourilsky is hoping for a compromise: There are ways short of formal inquiries for keeping the public informed, he says.



The worm



The meatball

The Worm Turned Out

In a gesture of solidarity with NASA's old-timers and as a reminder of its old-time glory, NASA chief Dan Goldin has hauled a 1960s logo out of the closet to replace the agency's familiar "worm" logo. The old symbol—retired in 1975 and fondly known as "the meatball"—shows a star-flecked sky encircled by a comet trail and straddled by a V-shaped wedge. The exact meaning of the V has never been clear, although Johnson Space Center spokesman Brian Welch asserts, "It's a vector; it denotes a powerful effort, upward and outward." Welch, for one, is thrilled to have it back.

Goldin made the switch in May while visiting NASA's Langley Research Center in Hampton, Virginia. Langley director Paul Holloway never could swallow the worm, and when he asked Goldin to scrap it, the NASA chief agreed on the spot.

In resurrecting the meatball, Goldin won plaudits from NASA folk but elicited a scolding from an expert on logos—Mina Wright Berryman, director of the design arts program at the National Endowment for the Arts. She pointed out in a letter to Goldin (leaked to *The Washington Post*) that NASA had had a confused approach to logo design before adopting the tubular look, and that it was in danger of "jeopardizing its entire visual communication program" by dumping the worm. Berryman declined to elaborate for *Science*, saying it was a "private" matter.

Awards in Biomedicine...

Among the fattest research awards in medicine are the annual prizes by the General Motors Cancer Research Foundation. This year, three winners are collecting a total of $390,000. They are Lawrence H. Einhorn of Indiana University Medical Center, for pioneering use of the drug cisplatin; Brian MacMahon of the Harvard School of Public Health, for his discoveries on breast cancer risk factors, and Christiane Nüsslein-Volhard of the Max Planck Institute in Tübingen, for her discovery of genes involved in fruit fly development.

...Pats on the Back for *Science*

David P. Hamilton, a staff writer for *Science*, recently took home two honors from the New York Business Press Editors annual journalism awards. For his coverage of the David Baltimore saga, Hamilton placed first in the "Reporting on Controversy" category, and he received a "Newcomer's Award" for journalists with less than 2 years of experience. And *MagazineWeek*, which tracks the magazine publishing industry, has given *Science* its annual Editorial Excellence Award for science and technology trade magazines.

Scientific Minority- and Womanpower

Want to know how many white female college juniors were enrolled in geophysics last year? (28). Or the number of physically disabled scientists holding tenure at the average research university? (1.4). Or how many Hispanics earned doctorates in math? (9). All this and much, much more, including data on foreign nationals, can be found in "Professional Women and Minorities," a "total human resource data compendium" put together by the Commission on Professionals in Science and Technology (CPST). The chart below suggests that while "diversity" is making some inroads in science, it's slow going. And CPST hints that it's not just women and minorities who are steering clear of science—natural science and engineering accounted for 20.9% of all bachelor's degrees in 1985 but only 16.4% in 1990.*

U.S. Citizen Ph.D.s in Natural Science and Engineering

		White		Asian		Hispanic		Black		Am. Ind.	
Year	Total*	Men	Wom.	Men	Wom.	Men	Wom.	Men	Wom.	Men	Wom.
1985	8161	5797	1587	224	80	83	34	69	29	13	9
1986	8090	5675	1654	240	83	96	41	53	33	20	11
1987	8216	5652	1709	279	83	109	43	60	33	23	7
1988	8685	5960	1862	290	72	141	46	63	33	21	6
1989	8811	5824	2060	324	93	127	48	72	38	25	9
1990	9249	6205	2134	310	86	143	67	68	35	15	2
1991	9281	6150	2110	353	128	152	61	87	46	25	9

Total includes minority groups not listed.

*The compendium is available for $75 to CPST members ($100 for non-members) plus $5 postage from CPST, 1500 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Suite 831, Washington, D.C. 20005.