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directly from colleagues.” Hsu and Lim won’t have picked this up, she says, because their analysis relied solely on the patent record to show how innovations were conceived.

Although Hsu acknowledges such limitations, he says there is currently no easy method for adding qualitative data. “We looked at 19 firms over 20 years and we looked at changes within each firm year-by-year,” he says. “How would each inventor remember whom they talked to 15 years ago, 14 years ago, and so on?”

Robert Langer, an MIT chemist with some 500 patents to his name and a long track record of interdisciplinary research, says that having lots of different disciplines in a biotechnology company’s research team is not always necessary for it to bear fruit. “Some research groups might be better off staying within a single discipline,” he says, adding that the most important thing is the mix of personalities in the lab. “It is important to encourage people to reach for their ideas, and create an environment where people can do so,” says Langer. “Having an interdisciplinary team might contribute to that.” ■

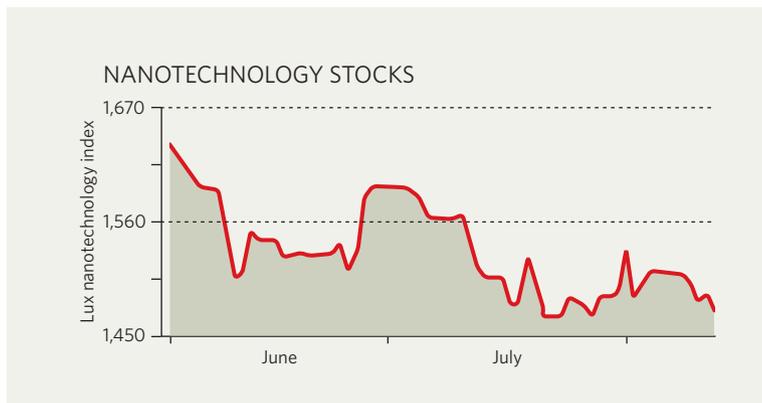
IN BRIEF

COTTON SWEEP Monsanto, the world’s leading supplier of genetically modified crop seed, has agreed to buy Delta Pine and Land, a Mississippi-based cotton-seed supplier, for \$1.5 billion. The purchase, announced on 15 August, should end fierce litigation between the two companies over previous efforts by Monsanto, based in St Louis, Minnesota, to take over the Mississippi company. If regulators and shareholders approve the deal, it will widen Monsanto’s commanding lead in the transgenic crop market, where Switzerland’s Syngenta is its main remaining rival.

SUMMER CLEAR-OUT Jeff Kindler, Pfizer’s freshly appointed chief executive, has moved swiftly to reshape top management at the world’s largest drug company (see *Nature* 442, 734; 2006). Karen Katen, one of his rivals for the highest position and head of the company’s pharmacological division, will leave the company altogether, whereas David Shedlarz, the other contender and Pfizer’s finance chief, gains wider responsibilities. Kindler also named a seven-strong taskforce, including research chief John LaMattina, which, he said, would streamline company operations and accelerate decision-making.

CHIP FLOAT German semiconductor-maker Infineon Technologies managed to float its memory-chip arm, Qimonda, on the New York Stock Exchange. The public offering raised just \$546 million — not bad by current standards, but less than half what analysts had predicted when the float was first announced. The offer was hurt by bad market sentiment towards such offerings in all technology sectors and by falling prices for Qimonda’s main product, the memory chips used in personal computers. Some market watchers expressed relief, however, that the float actually went ahead in current market conditions.

MARKET WATCH



Technology stocks are in the doldrums this summer after losses in the spring, and nanotechnology is no exception to the pattern. But within the basket of stocks that makes up the Lux Research index, individual company performance has been mixed.

One undoubted success has been NVE, a Minnesota-based spintronics company, whose stock soared from \$14 to almost \$22 in July on unconfirmed reports that its technology may be successfully incorporated in non-volatile memory chips made by Freescale Semiconductor.

Nucryst Pharmaceuticals, the Massachusetts-based company whose silver nanocrystals are now popular as wound treatments, was also on the up in July after declaring strong sales growth in the second quarter. And according to Peter Hebert, president of the New

York consultancy that runs the Lux index, investors are optimistic that the nanocrystals will eventually prove useful as drug treatments for infections and inflammation.

Less stellar performances were delivered by Cambridge Display Technology, the UK light-emitting diode (LED) display maker, whose shares sank from \$8 to \$5 in July in anticipation of weaker-than-expected sales in the third quarter. Similar concerns dragged down Oregon-based FEI, which makes scanning electron microscopes.

Hebert says an emerging feature of the nascent sector is the prevalence and importance of litigation over its intellectual property. Elan’s July decision to sue Abraxis Bioscience over its use of a nanoparticle formulation technique is, he says, “a sign of things to come”. ■

Colin Macilwain