

ZOO NEWS**Penguins in boots**

Penguins at the International Antarctic Centre in Christchurch, New Zealand, were getting calluses and infections on their feet from spending too much time waddling on the land. So staff have begun a vigorous foot-treatment regime, including giving the birds rubber-soled shoes.

**Panda poo**

A Thai zoo has been turning bamboo pulp pooped out by its two pandas into paper. According to project manager Prasertsak Buntrakoonpoontawee, the zoo has been earning about US\$8,200 a year from selling fans, cards and bookmarks made from the excrement paper — all with panda faces on course.

NUMBER CRUNCH

String theory according to *Esquire* magazine:

20 years have passed since string theory became dominant.

10⁵⁰⁰ is the number of potential string-theory solutions.

0 is the number of testable solutions.

ON THE RECORD

“We don’t want to jeopardize the iconic nature of the French fry.”

McDonald’s chief executive Jim Skinner explains why the fast-food chain isn’t ready to switch to a healthier oil for its signature fries.

“I feel guilty about the huge hole in the ozone layer my haircuts created. It’s my responsibility to right the wrongs of the Eighties.”

Rocker Jon Bon Jovi (below) prepares to save the planet.

Sources: National Geographic, Reuters, AP, Radio Times



FOTOS INTERNACIONAL/REX FEATURES

Universities urged to do more for poor nations

This month sees the fifth anniversary of the Doha declaration, an international agreement signed by the world's trade ministers that was aimed at broadening poor countries' access to medicines. But in the intervening five years, the main provisions in the declaration have not been used and access to treatments remains dire. So activists are changing tactics. Instead of leaning on governments and corporations, as they have in the past, they are now pressuring universities to guarantee access to drugs and medical products invented on campus.

This idea — labelled socially responsible technology transfer — has already notched up some key victories. For instance, in 2001, after student protests, external pressure and heavy media coverage, Yale University and Bristol-Myers Squibb agreed to an unprecedented arrangement. The company said it would allow companies in developing nations to produce a generic version of a key AIDS drug, d4T (stavudine), which had been invented at Yale and licensed to the company.

And last year, the University of California, Berkeley, issued a royalty-free licence on a process invented by one of its scientists, Jay Keasling, in which engineered yeast churn out the malaria drug artemisinin (see *Nature* 440, 852–853; 2006). The deal was supported in part by grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and was one of 15 that has been handled

“Universities have to show that their mission statements are not just lip-service.”

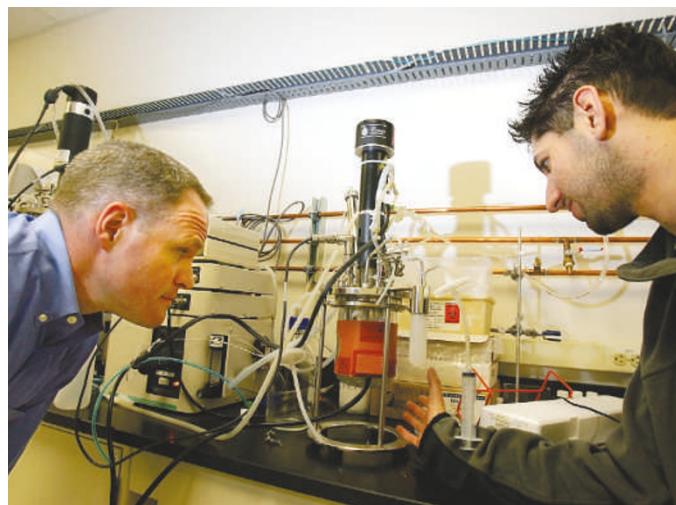
by a technology-transfer programme at Berkeley dedicated to socially responsible licensing.

The concept of socially responsible technology transfer has also found a potentially influential political backer in US Senator Patrick Leahy (Democrat, Vermont), who is expected to head the powerful Committee on the Judiciary in the next Senate. In September, Leahy introduced a bill that would require federally funded research institutions to ensure that their drugs and novel medical devices are supplied cheaply to the developing world.

But the movement now faces several difficult tests, and the next year could see the answer to a key question: can socially responsible technology transfer gain permanent traction?

Its proponents say yes — and they are backed by a host of prominent supporters. On 14 November, a group of students called Universities Allied for Essential Medicines (UAEM) released a manifesto that it calls the Philadelphia Consensus Statement. This has been signed by some 400 scientists, lawyers, public-health specialists and students. The list boasts four Nobel laureates, as well as Paul Farmer, founder of the medical justice group Partners in Health; and the Justice Edwin Cameron, the first high-ranking South African leader to disclose that he had HIV.

The consensus statement calls on universities to promote equal access to the fruits of their



Success story: the technique for generating an antimalaria drug from yeast, developed by Jay Keasling (left), has been given a royalty-free licence.

M. J. SANCHEZ/AP