

Debate heats up over food from cloned animals

The stakes were raised last month in the battle to determine whether food from cloned animals and their progeny should be allowed on the shelves of US grocery stores.

In December, Congress urged the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to keep in place a request that companies voluntarily refrain from selling such foods. It also said that the US Department of Agriculture should study the economic implications of allowing meat and milk from cloned animals into the food supply.

The FDA had been expected to finalize in 2008 a preliminary assessment it made just over a year ago, which concluded that foods from cloned animals and their progeny are not different from products from conventional animals and could probably be sold without special labelling.

On 19 December, the two leading US animal-cloning companies (ViaGen in Austin, Texas, and TransOva Genetics in Sioux Center, Iowa), announced a radio-tracking programme that will use ear tags to follow cloned animals from birth to death. The firms said that the voluntary programme will come into effect as soon as the FDA allows food from clones on the market.

Sociologist to head Turkey's university board

Turkey's president, Abdullah Gül, late last month appointed a little-known sociologist as president of the country's powerful higher-education board, YÖK.

Yusuf Ziya Özcan is considered a moderate in a country where tensions between secularists and Islamists, particularly at universities, have been increasing. His research has included studies on the



The much-debated headscarf ban at Turkish universities may soon be overturned.

role of Islam in society. But his surprise appointment — he has little experience of university administration — has not pleased everyone. YÖK's deputy head, engineer Aybar Ertepinar, immediately resigned.

Özcan, from the Middle East Technical University in Ankara, says he wants to lift 'all bans' in universities, implicitly referring to the highly politicized ban on headscarves. He adds that he wants all universities to become autonomous institutions and to "attach a greater importance to being scientific".

California petition to limit vehicle emissions rejected

Arguing that global warming merits a national solution and not "a confusing patchwork of state rules", the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) last month rejected a request by California to impose state limits on greenhouse-gas emissions from motor vehicles.

The California regulations would have imposed a reduction of 30% in greenhouse-gas emissions in vehicle exhausts by 2016. Seventeen other states were expected to adopt the standards, which would then have covered around 45% of annual car

sales, advocates of the proposal say.

The EPA decision followed federal legislation on 19 December requiring motor-vehicle manufacturers to increase fuel efficiency by 40%, to 35 miles per gallon, by 2020.

Calling the EPA decision "completely absurd", California attorney-general Edmund Brown promised to challenge it in the courts.

Disgraced cloner seeks licence in comeback bid

Korean researcher Woo Suk Hwang, whose 2006 work on human embryonic stem cells turned out to be fabricated, is trying to make a comeback.

Hwang has applied for a new licence to work with human embryonic stem cells, to replace his revoked one. The Korean science ministry is expected to make a decision on the application by April.

His name has also appeared on at least three papers resulting from work done after he was fired from Seoul National University. The privately funded group works at the SooAm Biotech Research Foundation on the outskirts of Seoul. The articles all discuss improvements in pig cloning from new methods of cultivating porcine eggs (Y. W. Jeong *et al. Anim. Reprod. Sci.* doi:10.1016/j.anireprosci.2007.03.021, 2007; E. Lee *et al. Reproduction* 134, 405–414, 2007 and S. L. McElroy *et al. Theriogenology* doi:10.1016/j.theriogenology.2007.10.010, 2007).

Hwang is still on trial on charges of fraud, embezzlement and violation of Korean bioethics laws.

Physicist takes the helm of Italy's research council

Theoretical physicist Luciano Maiani has been nominated president of Italy's national research council, the CNR.

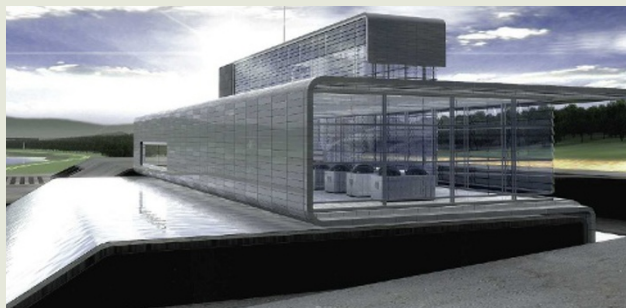
Maiani headed Italy's national institute for nuclear physics from 1993 before taking over at CERN, Europe's particle-physics lab near Geneva, in 1997. But the CNR, which runs 100 or so institutes across the country, may be the toughest challenge so far.

The council has been subject to a stream of ineffectual reforms for the past decade or more, demoralizing the staff and making long-term planning difficult. Maiani, who will take up office in spring, says that his priorities will be to restore the confidence of the scientific staff and get the production of science rolling again.

Maiani was selected by an independent search committee — a new procedure introduced last year by research minister Fabio Mussi to break with the notorious political spoils system.

Illinois picked as site for carbon-capture plant

Mattoon, Illinois, is poised to host the first commercial-scale coal-gasification power plant to capture carbon dioxide and pump it underground rather than into the atmosphere. The site sits above a sandstone formation suitable for sequestering carbon dioxide.



The project, called FutureGen (pictured), is supposed to be a showcase for the US Department of Energy, which has promoted technological innovation as a solution to global warming. The department will cover three-quarters of the project's cost, now estimated at \$1.8 billion. The rest will come from an alliance of more than a dozen energy companies based in the United States and abroad. Mattoon beat competition from another site in Illinois, and two in Texas. Final approval must still come from the energy department.