John Foxx

Businesses will gain from a united EU patent.

of the details that needs to be agreed upon before the new system kicks in next year.

The single patent will provide a substantial boost to biotechs that rely on IP rights—rather than products—as the basis for licensing, and merger and acquisitions, according to Wallin, "Provided it all works out, Europe will end up with a federal system covering 500 million people. Biotechs need broad protection and they will save a lot on costs and bureaucracy," Wallin suggests.

Testimony from UK biotech management supports this. Malcolm Weir, CEO of UK biotech Heptares Therapeutics of Welwyn Garden City, says protecting IP is "an increasing burden, without a doubt." Heptares' G protein–coupled receptor platform technology has generated 20 patent families and according to Weir, "We can't afford to support every [patent] in every country."

And the overheads continue to multiply. Once a company registers a patent it faces increasing costs going forward to maintain it. "As a result, we spend time poring over matrices of 20 patents and 40 territories, deciding on a case-by-case basis," Weir adds. "The reason for all the strategizing is because it's costly and complex, so there's no doubt about it: if the single European system is brought in and runs successfully, it will make things much easier."

Although limiting the system to three languages is a substantial streamlining, it has also caused controversy. Italy and Spain chose not to join the single patent because their languages are not represented. A legal challenge by these two countries to the three-languages regime has come to nothing.

After decades of wrangling, the political will to push the single patent across the finishing line came from focusing on the benefits it will bring to Europe's startup technology companies. To ensure they all get the same benefit, small companies and publicly funded research institutes that write the original version of a patent in a fourth language will be reimbursed by the EU for the cost of translating into English, French or German.

Nuala Moran *London*

IN their words

"It's an amazing place to be. The intellectual firepower that is in Cambridge, between Harvard and MIT and the number of companies, is quite remarkable." George Scangos, CEO of Biogen Idec on his decision to close his corporate headquarters in a suburb and relocate them to the company's Cambridge R&D site. (*The New York Times,* 1 January 2013)

"I sound like such a curmudgeon. But shouldn't there be some level of press coverage in between total silence and Dawn Of A Glorious New Era? I suppose that 'Progress Being Made On Tough Drug Target' isn't the sort of [headline] that makes Page One." Derek Lowe comments on the *New York Times'* Gina Kolata's latest overhyping a new cancer therapy. (*In the Pipeline*, 3 January 2013)

"[T]he GM debate is over. It is finished. We no longer need to discuss whether or not it is safe.... You are more likely to get hit by an asteroid than to get hurt by GM food." British environmentalist Mark Lynas' declared *volte-face* on transgenic food to an audience at an Oxford [UK] Farming Conference. (*Slate*, 3 January 2013)

"If drug manufacturers were allowed to promote FDA-approved drugs for nonapproved uses, they would have little incentive to seek FDA approval for those uses." US Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit judge Debra Ann Livingston makes clear in her dissenting opinion why the decision to favor free speech over off-label marketing is a bad idea. (*US Court of Appeals*, 3 December 2012)

IN brief

Egg-free flu vaccines

The first seasonal influenza vaccine grown in cultured mammalian cells instead of fertilized chicken eggs was approved last November by the US Food and Drug Administration. Flucelvax, manufactured by Novartis Vaccines and Diagnostics of Marburg, Germany, will use a cell culture technology, already employed for other vaccines. The advantages include the ability to satisfy demand during egg shortages or when particular viral strains prove difficult to grow. Additionally, making this vaccine in mammalian cells has the potential for faster startups when producers need to shift vaccine formulation to tackle abrupt changes in circulating flu strains, particularly at the onset of a pandemic. During the 2009 pandemic when a new H1N1 version of the influenza virus began circulating, for example, vaccine producers had difficulty maintaining supplies because the adapted H1N1 seed strain grew so slowly in eggs. Novartis will be ramping up its manufacturing capacity with a facility in Holly Springs, North Carolina. This plant was built with support from the federal Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority to expand vaccine production, including in the event of a public health emergency. *Jeffrey L Fox*

UK science's Christmas gift

UK researchers were in a festive mood in December when Chancellor George Osborne announced in his annual autumn statement that the government would spend an extra £600 ($962) million on science by 2015. The additional money will go towards research facilities and advancing new technologies in areas where Britain can take a leading role. But it is still unclear what this will mean for the biotech industry, or for synthetic biology, one of the priorities of the package. The cash will probably be handed out "program by program," says Sir John Bell, regius professor of medicine at Oxford University, and consultant to government. The additional cash will come on top of the £180 ($280) million Biomedical Catalyst Fund, aimed at stimulating university spin offs and biotech small and medium-sized enterprises, and £130 ($201) million for stratified medicines research, both part of the year-old Strategy for UK Life Sciences (*Nat. Biotechnol.* **30**, 125, 2012). "I think everyone would agree that the Biomedical Catalyst program is highly successful," adds Sir John. The first £49 ($78) million went to "a terrific list of (64) small companies for financing important pivotal early-stage studies." The government also recently earmarked £100 million to sequence and analyze the genomes of 100,000 National Health Service patients, with an initial focus on cancer, rare diseases and infectious diseases. Sir John says the government "is making a pretty good stab at improving" the funding environment, but regrets it has not yet made a long-term commitment to finance the Catalyst program beyond 2014 when the cash is due to run out. *Barbara Casassus*