

Sweet success shows you can count on the public

WDR

Are the masses stupid? A hundred years ago Francis Galton, a half-cousin of Charles Darwin, analysed the results of a guess-the-weight-of-an-ox competition at a country fair. The average of the guesses from 787 participants was virtually spot-on to the real weight of the ox, Galton reported (see *Nature* **75**, 450; 1907). The findings shook his belief in eugenics, a term he himself had coined.

Last month, Ranga Yogeshwar, host of Germany's popular *Quarks & Co* science television show, repeated the experiment — but with a laboratory beaker filled with sweets. The average guess of the 16,000 viewers was again astonishingly close to the correct number of 5,780; the average was 5,714, and nearly one in 200 hit the right number exactly. "The masses are intelligent," says Yogeshwar. "We can use them for all sorts of science TV-Internet experiments."



are just two of the messages emerging from an independent survey commissioned by the NIH and released on 26 October, to assess the impact of the regulations.

In August 2005, after scandals over conflicts of interest, the NIH announced more stringent rules, including a ban on outside consulting. The Internet survey, carried out this summer, received responses from some 8,000 agency employees (a 48% response), including around 3,300 scientists.

Nearly three-quarters of employees thought the rules would improve the NIH's credibility with the public, but more than half thought they would harm the agency's ability to retain or recruit employees. Among tenure and tenure-track researchers, 18% said they were looking to leave the agency, or considering doing so. Yet nearly 90% of all agency scientists said they planned to still be at the agency in a year's time.

The NIH will next survey employees who left the agency, along with potential new employees, to see the effect of the ethics rules on their decisions.

South Korea finds time and cash for stem cells

There's hope — and money — in South Korea for stem-cell researchers wanting to move on from the Woo Suk Hwang fraud scandal (see page 12). To get the word out, scientists are hosting a handful of one-day international symposia, including one on 3 November in Seoul on mesenchymal stem cells, which are found in bone marrow.

The goal is to stimulate plans for the 430 billion won (US\$450 million) that the South Korean government promised in May for research over the next 10 years; 30% of the money will be put towards research on embryonic stem cells, with the

rest going on adult stem-cell research.

Most of the embryo work will be led by the Stem Cell Research Center based in Seoul, which gets some \$15 million a year until 2012. Another initiative, launched by the science ministry in August, will provide \$4.5 million a year in grants for groups working on stem-cell differentiation and other related studies.

DNA catalogue opens up new era of mouse research

Mouse researchers, rejoice: scientists have completed a two-year, \$13-million project that should catapult mouse studies into a new era.

The project identified 8.3 million differences in DNA sequences — single nucleotide polymorphisms, or SNPs — from 15 mouse strains. This SNP catalogue should enable studies among several different strains of mice, rather than single inbred strains. And it will allow researchers to examine the combinations of environmental and genetic factors that influence the risk of diseases and the ill effects of toxins and chemicals.

The study, which was funded by the US National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, was conducted by Perlegen Sciences of Mountain View, California. All the resulting data have been made freely available.

▶ www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/SNP



Correction

The story 'Funding agencies toughen stance on open access' (*Nature* **443**, 894-895; 2006) incorrectly stated that the American Physiological Society (APS) refused to comply with Wellcome Trust guidelines for making publications openly accessible. In fact, the APS is still in negotiations with the trust, and has not reached a final decision.