

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Chief Scientist at MAFF

DR H. C. PEREIRA, Director of East Malling Research Station, has been appointed Chief Scientist to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. His appointment completes the triumvirate at the head of the ministry's chief scientist organization which is to run MAFF's research and handle the programmes that the Agricultural Research Council will hand over to the ministry in April 1973. Mr W. F. Raymond and Dr G. A. H. Elton have already been appointed as Dr Pereira's deputies (see *Nature*, 239, 300; 1972).

According to the ministry, Dr Pereira will be responsible both for providing the department with scientific advice on all its policies and for "framing, commissioning, and reviewing the ministry's research and development programmes", which will be considerably more extensive following the government's recent white paper on research and development which ruled that £5 million should be transferred this year from the ARC's budget to the ministry's; by 1975, £10 million a year will have been transferred.

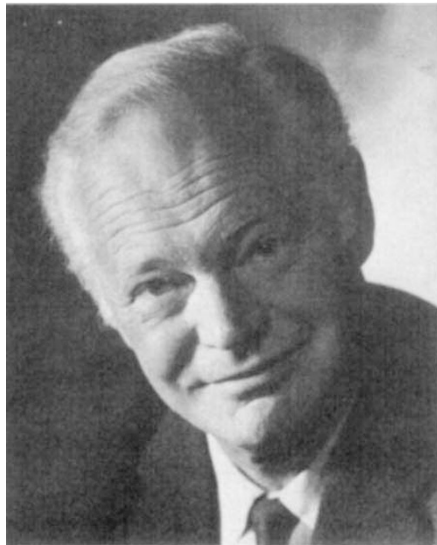
Dr Pereira, who is 59, has been Director of the East Malling Research Station since 1969, and is a member of the Natural Environment Research Council. Educated at the University of London, he worked at Rothamsted Experimental Station before moving to Africa where he worked in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rhodesia and Nyasaland, becoming founder director of what is now the Agricultural Research Council of Central Africa. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1969.

Dr Pereira will be succeeded as Director at East Malling by Dr A. F. Posnette, currently the station's deputy director and head of its plant pathology section. Dr Posnette, who is 58, is a



Dr H. C. Pereira.

graduate of the University of Cambridge and also spent some years in Africa. He moved to East Malling in 1949, and has been its deputy director since 1969. He became a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1971.



Dr. A. F. Posnette

MEDICINE

Clean Bill for the Pill

THERE is no evidence to date that the contraceptive pill is carcinogenic. Following studies that lasted up to two years on 13,000 rats and mice, the Committee on the Safety of Medicines concluded last week that the evidence resulting from prolonged administration of both oestrogen and progestogen "cannot be interpreted as constituting a carcinogenic hazard to women when these preparations are used as oral contraceptives".

The committee's report discounts previous suggestions that the pill may cause liver damage and concludes "that no persistent disturbance of liver function occurs in women from the prolonged use of oral contraceptives".

The tests were run on mice for 80 weeks and on rats for two years, with three dose levels administered, equivalent to 2 to 5 times the human contraceptive dose, 50 to 150 times and 200 to 400 times. The only evidence for increased incidence of breast tumours came from the high dose administered over a large part of the animals' life span, and then the incidence was largely related to oestrogen. Progestogen is the dominant element in current oral contraceptives.

The committee recommends, however, that careful monitoring of women using oral contraceptives should continue, and says that it will consider the evidence of current American studies on primates and beagle bitches as and when it becomes available

METEOROLOGY

Global Collaboration

from a Correspondent

THE first global weather experiment will be held in 1977. At a conference in Geneva last month the forty-one members of GARP, the Global Atmospheric Research Programme, agreed on the date for the first global experiment which will attempt to define the physical state of the atmosphere up to a height of 30 kilometres, and test mathematical models of the world's atmospheric circulation, in order to improve weather forecasting worldwide.

The conference agreed that its first task is to establish the best possible observing system for the experiment which is due to last for a year. Conventional observing networks will be improved, but extra coverage will be provided by nine geostationary and polar orbiting satellites that will be in orbit in 1977. The conference finally settled on 1977 because the USA and the Soviet Union are both planning by then to have two satellites in polar orbit equipped with cloud-imaging devices and sounding equipment for obtaining vertical temperature profiles.

Continuous pictures of cloud cover and information on winds from cloud displacements should be provided by two further satellites from the United States, and one each from ESRO, Japan and the Soviet Union. The only conspicuous gap that remains in the observing system is the information on winds in the tropics and on pressures at reference level in the southern hemisphere. Constant level balloons and ocean buoys may provide the solution.

The first global experiment will follow hard on the heels of the tropical experiment in 1974 (see *Nature*, 233, 382; 1972) which will explore the primary energy source for the world's atmospheric circulation, knowledge of which, when tied in with the results of the 1977 programme, should provide a much better basis for understanding the world's circulation and predicting its behaviour.

The conference also agreed that a detailed study of the relationship between the atmosphere and ocean's currents and temperatures is needed.

The British contribution to the first global experiment, or FGGE as it has become known, will be to provide radiometers to sound mesospheric and stratospheric temperatures, to build three upper-air sounding stations at Mahe in the Seychelles, and Tawara and Funafuti in the south-west Pacific, and to prepare worldwide analyses and data sets for stratospheric levels based on the data received from the satellites.