US taco shells found to contain unlicensed modified corn

Washington Kraft Foods announced the recall of 2.5 million boxes of 'Taco Bell' taco shells from US supermarket shelves last week after an environmental group established that the product contained a genetically modified strain of corn that has not been approved for human consumption.

The corn shells contained a protein from the bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis*, Cry9C, which does not occur in the human food chain. The Food and Drug Administration had therefore been unable to establish definitively whether the protein causes allergies, and has not approved it.

Corn containing the protein, which is marketed by Aventis under the brand name StarLink, is approved only for animal consumption. There have been no reports of illness resulting from consumption of the recalled taco shells.

UK farmers seek protection after protesters walk free

London **Britain's farmers have asked the government for greater protection for field trials of genetically modified (GM) crops after criminal charges were dropped last week against 28 people who had admitted destroying six acres of experimental GM maize at a site in Norfolk in April last year.**

Lord Peter Melchett, the executive director of Greenpeace and one of those arrested, said that, with several farmers who had volunteered to participate in the trials now dropping out, doubts were growing over whether the government would be able to gather enough data to make future tests valid.

Bush pledges more big budget rises for NIH

AP

Bush: plans to continue 15% annual increases.

Washington US presidential candidate George W. Bush promised last week that, if elected president in November, he will double the budget of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) from the $14 billion it was in 1998 to $27.3 billion in 2003. The NIH budget has been on course for such doubling over the past three years, and Bush, the Republican presidential nominee, proposes to keep it rising at the same rate — which would imply annual 15% increases — for a further five years.

"I will lead a medical moonshot to reach far beyond what seems possible today and discover new cures for age-old afflictions," said Bush in an address in Florida. Vice-president Al Gore, the Democrat presidential nominee, has promised to double the portion of the NIH budget that goes for research grants between 2000 and 2006 (see *Nature* **407,** 118; 2000).

US scientists wary of leaving industry for government

Washington **Top scientists from industry are being deterred from accepting key positions in the US government, according to the National Academy of Sciences. It says they fear lengthy delays in their confirmation process, and are worried by the growing array of restrictions on their activities during and after office.**

In a report published last week, an academy panel chaired by Mary Good, former under-secretary of commerce, called on the new administration to get the appointment process moving ahead of the November election, to make 80–90% of its appointments in the first four months of 2001, to streamline security checks, and to keep appointees better informed on the status of their nominations.

Spain prepares to send bushman home

Barcelona The stuffed body of a nineteenth-century bushman, whose display in a museum near Barcelona provoked international protests, will be sent home to Botswana for burial early next month. The body was moved to Madrid two weeks ago, where experts are preparing it for repatriation.

The body went on display in 1916 at the Darder Natural History Museum in Banyoles. In 1991, a Haitian doctor living in Catalonia denounced the exhibit as racist. The Spanish government and the town agreed in June to return the body to Africa, stating that it had been removed from the museum out of "respect to the African immigrants who live in this town".

Europe is neglecting basic biotech, says study

Munich **Although biotechnology enjoys generous public funding everywhere in Europe, its less commercial aspects are neglected, according to a study carried out at the Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research in Karlsruhe, Germany. European countries spend around US$1.8 billion per year on biotechnology, with medical and pharmaceutical research as the top priorities.**

The study predicts two future trends. Larger countries, including Germany, France and the United Kingdom, will increase their investment in basic research, it says, but the rest are likely to concentrate public funding on applied research. Also, it says, Britain is the only country in which support for environmental applications of biotechnology is likely to increase substantially.

Russia to create prize for industrial science

Moscow Russia's minister of industry, science and technology, Alexander Dondukov, has told the cabinet that his ministry intends to create a prestigious prize for achievement in industrial research. "It should be a Russian 'Oscar' for industrialists and scientists," he said, "and the money a laureate gets must be very impressive."

The first prize is expected to be awarded in December. The minister said that the prize has been made possible by economic growth. "In particular, the metallurgical industry alone now has an annual income of more than US$1 billion," he said. "Some enterprises in this industry have agreed to sponsor the new nationwide prize."

Europe gives money to map methylation of the genome

Brussels **The European Commission is to provide 1.2 million euros (US$1 million) to the Human Epigenomics Project, an initiative to map the DNA methylation patterns of the entire human genome. DNA methylation — the addition of a methyl group to an individual DNA base — acts as a switch by which specific genes can be turned off. The detection and interpretation of DNA methylation patterns, called epigenomics, is expected to increase understanding of complex diseases.**

The project was started in 1999 and includes a consortium of scientists from the Sanger Centre near Cambridge, the Centre National de Génotypage in Paris and the Berlin-based biotechnology company Epigenomics, as well as three additional German research institutes. It will make its data publicly available, and its first step will be a methylation map of the major histocompatibility complex, which is of key importance in immunology.

India plans reusable microgravity satellites

New Delhi The Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) is proposing to build a series of reusable satellites for conducting microgravity experiments. The satellites are the second phase of the national programme of microgravity research, for which ISRO earlier this month invited proposals from the Indian scientific community.

In the first phase, experiments will be conducted in modules dropped from balloons, launched by the National Balloon Facility in Hyderabad. ISRO says it can build the recoverable satellites in three years once it gets formal government approval.