Contacts

Publisher: Fabien Savenay Editor: Paul Smaglik Sales Director: Ben Crowe

European Head Office,

The Macmillan Building 4 Crinan Street London N1 9XW, UK Tel +44 (0) 20 7843 4961 Fax +44 (0) 20 7843 4996 e-mail: natureiohs@nature con

Group European Manager

Leonie Welss (4954)

European Manager

Nevin Bayoumi (4978)

UK/ RoW/ Ireland:

Matt Powell (4953), Ben Corp (4974), Andy Douglas (4975) Holland/ Italy: Nevin Bayoumi (4978) Scandinavia: Sille Opstrup (4994) Spain/ Portugal: Leonie Welss (4954)

Production Manager: Billie Franklin

To send films and materials use London address above. Tel +44 (0) 20 7843 4814 Fax +44 (0) 20 7843 4996 e-mail: naturejobs@nature.com

International

Advertising Coordinator:

Laura Pearson (4977)

Naturejobs web development:

Tom Hancock

Naturejobs online production:

Ben Lund

European Satellite Offices

France/ Belgium:

Christine Niox-Chateau
Tel + 33 (0) 1 43 20 16 51
Fax + 33 (0) 1 43 20 51 52
e-mail: c.nioxchateau@nature.com

Germany/ Austria/ Switzerland:

Patrick Phelan/ Kate Turner
Tel + 49 89 54 90 57 11/-2
Fax + 49 89 54 90 57 20
e-mails: p.phelan@nature.com

US Head Office, New York

345 Park Avenue South, 10th Floor, New York, NY 10010-1707 Tel +1 800 989 7718 Fax +1 800 989 7103 e-mail: naturejobs@natureny.com

US Sales Director: Ben Crowe
US Sales Manager: Peyton Mason

US Advertising Coordinator:

Corrisa Salzmar

Japan Head Office, Tokyo

MG Ichigaya Building (5F), 19–1 Haraikatamachi, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 162-0841 Tel +81 3 3267 8751 Fax +81 3 3267 8746 e-mali: k.cowan@naturejpn.com Japan Manager: Kate Cowan

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A shift to the centre

ears ago, *The New Yorker* magazine published an illustrated map of the United States that soon became a classic. It showed the East and West coasts dominated by tall buildings, with the centre of the country represented as a disproportionately tiny wasteland. This misconception persists. Recently, New York mayor-elect Michael Bloomberg quipped that any business that moved from New York City "might as well be in Iowa in the cornfields".

In fact, the former fields of Iowa and other midwestern states are providing fertile ground for science and technology. Michigan is pouring millions of dollars into a 'life sciences corridor' (see Spotlight, inside). Washington University in St Louis, Missouri, continues to be a major contributor to the human genome project. And the Stowers Institute in Kansas City, Missouri, is recruiting internationally to fill its new campus (see Movers, back page).

Midwestern research institutions, like their coastal cousins, also create synergistic relationships with industry. For example, in 1925 a group of alumni from the University of Wisconsin-Madison established a licensing body to commercialize vitamin D, discoveries made by Professor Harry Steenbock. It has since obtained over 1,000 patents, including one for immortalized human embryonic stem-cell lines. As well as aiding the creation of spin-off companies, such arrangements mean money gets ploughed back into the university. Both outcomes result in an abundance of jobs. Madison, like other biotech hotspots around the world, tends to have a much lower unemployment rate and a higher per capita income level.

And scientists who relocate from Cambridge or Palo Alto to Madison, Missouri or Michigan will find housing prices and traffic congestion are both far more favourable — proving that the open spaces mocked by coastal defenders can actually be an advantage.

Paul SmaglikNaturejobs editor





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