

should perhaps reflect what happens to Japan's trade surplus; until the recession began to bite hard, it was mostly returned (as investment) to the United States, where it helped to finance the federal budget deficit. □

Dust settles on SSC

High-energy physics in the United States did not come to an end with the cancellation of the SSC last year.

THE cancellation last November of the Superconducting Super Collider has been traumatic for the US high-energy physics community. Nobody should be surprised that there is as yet no plan for what will happen next. Hopes that the US administration would apply a poultice to the hurt by promptly opening negotiations for US membership of the European Laboratory for Particle Physics (CERN) at Geneva were always wishful thinking, while the US Congress, at least in the present climate, is not in the business of offering consolation prizes to disappointed supplicants. The cancellation of SSC was, in any case, something of a trauma for the Congress, as the opinions of Texan congressmen will show.

None of that implies that high-energy physics in the United States is dead. For one thing, the US community is probably better supplied with sources of energetic particles, what with Fermilab, SLAC and Cornell, than the rest of the world put together. Then the United States remains the principal source of theoretical work in high-energy physics. It would evidently be a great waste of talent and momentum if these skills were dissipated. The influential High-Energy Physics Advisory Panel (HEPAP) is due in April to produce a strategy for the years ahead. What should it say?

The trick must be to combine a distant objective with the more immediate need to keep the community alive. That means attempting to answer the question of what is likely to be the need for equipment if CERN's Large Hadron Collider (LHC) is actually built, and if it generates the data expected of it — the Higgs boson, the top quark and the like. Then there are several new kinds of particle accelerators that could usefully be built. A machine consisting of opposing electron and positron linear accelerators devised to yield collisions at greater energy than can be had from circular accelerators is just one possibility. But HEPAP should bite the bullet now, and advocate that such a machine should, from the outset, be conceived and built as an international enterprise governed (as CERN is) by an international treaty, preferably open to all who wish to join.

That would not be the equivalent of joining CERN, but of becoming a founder-member of its successor. The US community would be surprised to find that such a decision would readily win invitations to work with the LHC. In the process, it might ruefully reflect that even the SSC might not have been cancelled if its international components had been included from the beginning and not added as afterthoughts. □

Scared of milk

The US Food and Drug Administration warns milk producers that the label "hormone-free" may be illegal.

THE best of intentions notwithstanding, those who in the 1970s did their public duty by calling widespread attention to the powers of recombinant-DNA technology have left a legacy of deep public distrust of anything that smacks of genetic engineering. So it is that the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has taken the extraordinary step of warning dairy farmers not to label milk as 'hormone-free' if they cannot certify that it comes from cows that have not been fed bovine somatotropin (BST) to stimulate milk production (see page 585). By adding BST to feed, farmers can increase a cow's milk output by as much as 10 per cent and gain an economic advantage either because they have more milk to sell or they can sell the same amount from a smaller herd.

Taking up what is, for FDA, a combative position, Commissioner David A. Kessler is evidently trying to head off threats of boycotts of milk from BST-treated herds, arguing that there is no known risk from the treatment which FDA approved in November (see *Nature* 366, 192; 1993). FDA offers three arguments against labelling that would imply that BST-free milk is somehow purer or safer than other milk. First, there is no reliable chemical test to distinguish milk from BST-treated and BST-free cows. Second, even ordinary milk contains some natural BST. And third, FDA says it will require anyone labelling milk as hormone-free to keep track of every cow in every dairy herd to verify claims that BST has not been used. Such a requirement would be nearly impossible to meet because of the large numbers of dairy farms that would have to be monitored.

Nevertheless, several large supermarket chains have vowed that they will not sell BST-treated milk for fear of public reaction against a genetically engineered product that anti-biotechnology activists claim is dangerous. But this may soon be a lost cause. The product has been on the US market for only a couple of weeks, but already 10 per cent of dairy farmers along the East coast from Delaware to Virginia have purchased it. In addition, large food processors such as Kraft, which has huge sales of cheese products, and Gerber, which sells baby food, have said they will make no effort to purchase BST-free milk because there is no scientific reason to do so. Products made with milk from BST-treated cows will therefore soon permeate the supermarkets.

The latter-day Luddites now protesting at the prospect of cheaper milk know more about fear-mongering than chemistry. They alone would profit from public hysteria over the use of BST for improving the productivity of US cattle herds. It is to be hoped that FDA's ruling on false advertising will rob them of that prize. Prudently, the European Union has yet to deal with this politically hot issue; its decision on the use of BST has been postponed. □