

US bioindustry calls for government bailout

The Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO), a trade body based in Washington DC, is asking members of the US Congress to consider giving financial aid to small technology companies struggling in the present financial crisis.

Small biotech firms, many of which are not profitable, have been hard hit by the downturn. BIO says that nearly a third of the 370 publicly traded US biotech companies have less than six months of cash left.

Now BIO is proposing a temporary US tax reform that would allow the firms to cash in early on a tax break normally allotted to them when they become profitable. The proposal would also apply to other investor-backed small companies, such as those developing alternative-energy technologies.

Vatican formalizes rules on human stem-cell research

The Roman Catholic Church has reaffirmed its opposition to human embryonic stem-cell research in a document that updates its 20-year-old position on biomedical research and reproductive medicine.



The Vatican has clarified its position on stem cells.

The instruction *Dignitas Personae* formalizes many previous positions, including a ban on stem cells derived from human cloning and aborted fetuses. Work using adult stem cells, umbilical-cord cells or stem cells from fetuses that died naturally is morally acceptable.

“The Vatican is entitled to its theological position,” says Insoo Hyun, chair of the Ethics and Public Policy Committee at the International Society for Stem Cell Research. But, he adds, “many other world

religions have a permissive view on human embryonic stem-cell research”.

For a longer version of this story, see <http://tinyurl.com/6codqu>

Michigan State wins battle to host isotope accelerator

The US Department of Energy has approved a \$550-million facility that will generate rare isotopes for the study of fundamental nuclear physics, astrophysics and medical diagnostics.

Michigan State University in East Lansing beat the Argonne National Laboratory in Illinois to host the Facility for Rare Isotope Beams (FRIB). FRIB's centrepiece will be a linear accelerator that will smash ions into fixed targets to generate exotic isotopes. Construction is planned from 2013 until 2017.

FRIB is a scaled-down version of the Rare Isotope Accelerator (RIA), a doubly expensive design advanced by nuclear physicists since 1999. If RIA was to have been the “absolute Cadillac”, then FRIB is more of a “souped-up Chevrolet”, says Konrad Gelbke, who directs the National Superconducting Cyclotron Laboratory at Michigan State University. Still, he adds, “I would say the community is delighted”.