

RESEARCH

Crop catalogue

A global search to gather the wild relatives of essential food crops such as wheat, barley and rice has been launched by the Global Crop Diversity Trust, based in Rome. The ten-year initiative, announced on 10 December, aims to increase food security by finding genetic traits that might be suited to future climates. Samples of wild plants will now be conserved alongside existing stores of domesticated seeds (such as the Svalbard Global Seed Vault on the Norwegian island of Spitsbergen). See go.nature.com/l8mgn2 for more.

Higgs hunt extended

A 15-month shutdown to upgrade the Large Hadron Collider is set to be delayed by a year to the end of 2012. The extended run will be used by scientists at the particle-physics laboratory CERN near Geneva, Switzerland, to hunt for the elusive Higgs particle at the collider's current collision energies. The plan is likely to be agreed by CERN's management and council in January. See page 876 for more.

African innovation

Africa is struggling to turn local discoveries into drugs and other health-care inventions, according to papers produced by the McLaughlin-Rotman Center for Global Health in Toronto, Canada. The reports, published by BioMed Central on 13 December, identify 25 'stagnant technologies' languishing in African health-care institutions, including several drug candidates and a dipstick test for schistosomiasis. Scientists have no incentive to commercialize results, there is scant institutional support for knowledge transfer, and



C. THOMPSON/SPACE X

Private spaceflight success

SpaceX (Space Exploration Technologies Corporation) has become the first private firm to launch a spacecraft into orbit and return it to Earth. On 8 December, its reusable 'Dragon' capsule was launched on a Falcon 9 rocket from Cape Canaveral, Florida. Completing two orbits, it splashed down in the Pacific Ocean

roughly 800 kilometres west of Mexico. NASA expects the craft to ferry astronauts, supplies and research materials to the International Space Station when its shuttle fleet retires next year. SpaceX, based in Hawthorne, California, hopes to dock Dragon with the station during its next demonstration launch, scheduled for 2011.

existing regulatory frameworks inhibit innovation, the papers say. See go.nature.com/py46rh for more.

Venus probe flop

In a bitter disappointment for Japan's space agency, its Akatsuki spacecraft failed to enter orbit around Venus on 6 December. The probe was intended to monitor the hot planet's atmosphere, but must now wait six years for another chance to reach orbit. See page 882 for more.

POLICY

NIH access

A key panel of advisers to the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) voted last week to open the Clinical Center — the agency's huge research hospital in Bethesda, Maryland

— to outside investigators. The Scientific Management Review Board on 7 December recommended extramural scientists be given access to the facility, where roughly 1,500 patient studies are in progress at any given time (see *Nature* 466, 172; 2010). The same board voted to establish a translational-medicine centre at the NIH (see page 877 for more).

European patent

Countries in the European Union (EU) have broken through a decade-long impasse over establishing a low-cost single European patent system. At a meeting of the EU competitiveness council on 13 December, 11 countries agreed on a plan to translate EU patents into English and one of French or German;

12 others suggested that they would join the proposal. Italy and Spain voted against the scheme, but countries invoked an 'enhanced cooperation' provision, which allows them to progress without attaining unanimous agreement. A common European patent could be in place by the end of next year; a formal decision is expected in March.

Anthrax report

The US National Academy of Sciences has delayed releasing a long-awaited report on the investigation into the 2001 anthrax attacks, after a request by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The report examines the scientific evidence used by the FBI to accuse microbiologist Bruce Ivins of the attacks, which killed five people.

S. ZAKLIN/GETTY IMAGES

Ivins committed suicide in 2008. After seeing a draft copy, the FBI said hundreds more pages of previously undisclosed documents should be considered by the investigation, which will now continue until February 2011.

Cancún climate deal

United Nations climate talks in Cancún, Mexico, ended with an agreement by developed and developing countries to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions — largely approving commitments made in last year's Copenhagen Accord. See page 875 for more.

PEOPLE



Committee chairs

Ralph Hall (Republican, Texas) was on 8 December confirmed as the new chairman of the US House Committee on Science and Technology. Hall (pictured) has made it clear that he will take a hard line against attempts to regulate greenhouse gases. Fred Upton (Republican, Michigan)

S. J. FERRELL/CONGRESSIONAL QUARTERLY/GETTY IMAGES

— who has frequently supported environmental legislation — will chair the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.

NASA chief scientist

Waleed Abdalati will be NASA's chief scientist from 3 January, the agency's administrator Charles Bolden announced on 13 December. A researcher on polar ice who worked at NASA for a decade until 2008, Abdalati is currently director of the Earth Science and Observation Center at the University of Colorado at Boulder. He is NASA's first chief scientist since James Garvin, who served in the post during 2004–05.

Nobel chemist dies

John Fenn (pictured), who shared the 2002 Nobel Prize in Chemistry, died on 10 December aged 93. In the late 1980s, he developed electrospray ionization, a way to gently separate clumped proteins into a fine spray of individual molecules. This method, when combined with mass spectrometry, gave scientists a tool to quickly identify proteins via their mass and helped to launch the field of proteomics. In 2005, Fenn lost a legal battle over the patent rights to Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, where he developed the technique.



He had moved to Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond in 1994.

BUSINESS

Biotech bid

On 8 December, US pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson issued a long-awaited public offer to buy Crucell, a biotechnology firm headquartered in Leiden, the Netherlands. Johnson & Johnson, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, offered to pay €1.75 billion (US\$2.3 billion) for Crucell, which specializes in vaccines and antibody therapies. Crucell's board of directors unanimously supports the deal, and shareholders will vote on the matter on 8 February.

Cheap sequencing

Research-services giant Life Technologies of Carlsbad, California, announced on 14 December that it is now selling benchtop DNA sequencers to labs for less than US\$50,000. The

sequencers, the first of a new wave of affordable machines to reach the market, were developed by start-up firm Ion Torrent in Guilford, Connecticut, which was bought by Life Technologies in August. Current sequencing technologies label nucleotides with dyes, but the new machine uses semiconducting chips to detect hydrogen ions released as nucleotides are added to a DNA strand. Life Technologies also announced three out of seven \$1-million prizes that it will award for solving key challenges in low-cost DNA sequencing. See go.nature.com/mbhs6a for more.

TB diagnosis

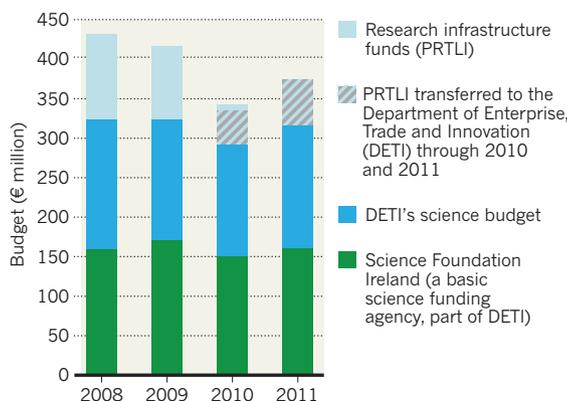
The World Health Organization (WHO) said on 8 December that a test that can rapidly diagnose tuberculosis (TB) was a 'major milestone' for disease control. The DNA-based 'Xpert MTB/RIF' test, developed by the non-profit Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics in Geneva, Switzerland, and the company Cepheid, based in Sunnyvale, California, can detect TB in around 100 minutes. Traditional tests, based on sputum-smear microscopy, can take up to three months to yield results, the WHO said. The new test is costlier, so will need donor funding, although Cepheid will cut prices by 75% for poorer nations.

TREND WATCH

After last year's drop in research-grant funding, the Irish government kept a promise to spare researchers further pain in its austerity budget for 2011–14, announced on 7 December. Total funding for basic science has flatlined, not including inflation, since 2008. But the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation announced a 12.5% increase in its science and technology budget compared with 2010. The basic-science funding body Science Foundation Ireland saw a 7% increase in its share.

IRELAND'S SCIENCE BUDGET

Despite cutting €6 billion (US\$8.1 billion) from its budget, Ireland maintained its science funding.



CORRECTION

The story 'Synchrotron cuts' (Nature **468**, 736; 2010) incorrectly gave the three-year budget of the European Synchrotron Radiation Facility as €86.8 million. That number is the facility's annual budget. The brief also said that cuts to "operating time" would be made. To clarify, two existing beam lines will be closed, but the accelerator will continue to run on its normal schedule.

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