

IN BRIEF

Stan Fields wins award



Stanley Fields, Howard Hughes Medical Institute professor of genetics and medicine at University of Washington (Seattle), has received the 2000 Chiron Corporation Biotechnology Research Award.

The purpose of the award is to honor "outstanding contributions to the application of biotechnology through fundamental research, development research, or reduction to practice." Fields is being recognized for development of the two-hybrid system for detecting protein-protein interactions in vivo. Since publication of its description a decade ago, the two-hybrid system has proven a powerful tool to unravel the complex relationships between cellular components. The award will be presented at the American Society for Microbiology General Meeting, May 21-25 2000, Los Angeles, CA, where Fields will receive \$5000 and deliver the Chiron Award Lecture. Past award winners include Craig Venter (1999), Kary Mullis (1992), and Stanley Cohen and Herbert Boyer (1988).

Activists sue industry

The lawfirm of Cohen, Milstein, Hausfeld and Toll has filed a lawsuit in US federal court against Monsanto (St. Louis, MO) on behalf of farmers in the US and internationally. Longtime biotechnology critic Jeremy Rifkin, who directs the Foundation on Economic

Trends (Washington, DC), and members of the National Family Farm Coalition (Washington, DC), acted as advisors to the farmers, who are alleging that Monsanto's genetically engineered agricultural products are not adequately tested for safety concerns and also that its marketing and intellectual property practices are uncompetitive and thus violate federal antitrust statutes. Monsanto plans to fight the lawsuit and contends that its products are safe and these allegations are unfounded.

Gene therapy inquiry

During a three-day expanded session of the US National Institutes of Health (NIH; Bethesda, MD) Recombinant DNA Advisory Committee (NIHRAC) in December, committee members and officials of NIH and the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA; Rockville, MD) seemed unable to resolve differences in adverse event reporting requirements with which gene therapy researchers are being asked to comply. This seemingly minor impasse belies more fundamental and far-reaching disagreements between some gene therapy researchers and federal officials overseeing this field—an unease that intensified following the death last September of 18-year old Jesse Gelsinger (*Nature Biotechnol.* 17, 1153). He was participating in a phase I gene therapy clinical trial at the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, PA) to test an engineered version of an adenovirus vector carrying a gene intended to correct for the inherited disorder known as ornithine tran-

scarbamylase deficiency. James Wilson and other members of the University of Pennsylvania team attribute Gelsinger's death to an acute respiratory system collapse and subsequent multiorgan failure.

Blue Gene to study folding

Computer giant IBM has announced a \$100 million initiative to build the world's fastest supercomputer, developing an entirely new computer architecture that IBM says will be designed specifically to study three-dimensional protein folding. The new computer, dubbed "Blue Gene," will be 1,000 times faster than the company's previous cutting-edge supercomputer Deep Blue, a project that made headlines by becoming the first computer to defeat world chess champion Garri Kasparov in 1997 (*Nature Biotechnol.* 15, 489). Ambuj Goyal, vice president of computer science at IBM Research (Yorktown Heights, NY), said that "a tremendous gain in performance will be made possible by the first major revolution in how computers are built since the mid-1980s." Goyal is referring to Blue Gene's planned "self-healing" hardware and software that will facilitate progressive searches for better solutions to a problem, and automatically re-route data when a fault occurs in the system. Spin-off technologies from Blue Gene, which is expected to take about five years to build, are expected to help solve other problems in bioinformatics, such as interpreting gene expression profiles and mapping single-nucleotide polymorphisms.

Research collaborations

Company 1	Company 2	\$ Millions	Details
Abgenix (Fremont, CA)	Human Genome Science (Rockville, MD)	*	A genomics agreement whereby HGS will use Abgenix's XenoMouse technology to make fully humanized antibody drug candidates from protein target antigens in its genome database. Instead of upfront payments, the companies will pay milestones and royalties on products developed individually, and will share costs and any profits of products developed jointly.
Cellomics (Pittsburgh, PA)	Schenley Park Research (Pittsburgh, PA)	*	By applying data mining technologies (from SPR) to cell-based data (from Cellomics), the collaboration aims to develop new analytical software products for use in the life sciences.
GLYCODesign (Toronto, Canada)	Seikagaku Corp (Tokyo, Japan)	56	A three-year research agreement to identify orally active small molecule Core 2 transferase inhibitors to treat inflammatory diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis and asthma. SKK can develop up to three compounds, in which case GD could receive \$56 million in an \$8 million upfront payment and three milestone payments of \$16 million.
Genetronics (San Diego, CA)	Boehringer Ingelheim (Ingelheim, Germany)	*	An 18 month research agreement to develop Genetronic's electroporation technology for use in gene therapy. Boehringer will provide research funding.

*Financial details not disclosed