

CHRONICLE

Rifkin rebuffed... or was he? The U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia has dismissed the suits Jeremy Rifkin brought against the White House and six federal agencies over biotechnology definitions, as well as his action against the Environmental Protection Agency over "financial responsibility" in deliberate release field tests. Analyzing the ruling, Richard D. Godown, president of the Industrial Biotechnology Association (Washington, D.C.), says "the biotech industry interprets the federal court's decisions to mean it agrees Jeremy Rifkin's claims are without merit and groundless." Jeffrey N. Gibbs, associate general council of the Association of Biotechnology Companies (Washington, D.C.), believes the decisions show that "a generalized complaint is not enough. It will make it harder for Rifkin to attack general policy."

The anti-biotech activist, however, is far from conceding defeat. Rifkin notes that the federal definitions, in fact, were rejected by the various agencies before the ruling. "The whole idea of a coordinated framework is now kaput," he says. And if agency definitions exempt categories like gene deletions, intra- and intergeneric gene transfer, and regulatory coding genes, he plans to sue each offending agency. All this may come to a head this spring in California, where Advanced Genetic Sciences (Oakland, CA) announced that it plans—again—to test its recombinant "ice-minus" frost-protection bacteria in either San Benito or Contra Costa county.

Genex resignation. J. Leslie Glick resigned his posts as president and director of troubled Genex Corp. (Gaithersburg, MD). Chairman Robert F. Johnston says the new president has been chosen, and that the name will be released after completion of the company's current private funding. Until that time, venture capitalist Johnston, who founded the firm with Glick in 1977, assumes the duties of president and chief executive.

Biotech acquisitions. Biotechnology companies are taking some of the initiative in the acquisition game.

Newly public Calgene (Davis, CA) has paid an undisclosed amount to purchase Stoneville Pedigreed Seed Co. (Stoneville, MI), a specialist in cotton seeds. Also, Quest Biotechnology (Detroit, MI), which earlier agreed to purchase American Monitor Corp. (Indianapolis, IN), merged Hunt Research Corp. (San Francisco, CA) into its Quest Blood Substitute unit.

In other moves, Pharmacia AB (Uppsala, Sweden) sold its U.S. diagnostics business to Electro-Nucleonics (Fairfield, NJ) and raised its stake in the medical diagnostic and instrument maker from 15.8 percent to 20 percent. Also, Millipore Corp. (Bedford, MA) acquired Biosyntech GmbH (Hamburg, F.R.G.) and folded the German firm into its Milligen division.

New corporate investments in biotech concerns came from Celanese Corp. (New York, NY), which bought a \$12-million equity interest in Codon

(Brisbane, CA), and Bristol-Myers (New York, NY), which paid \$17 million for a 10.6-percent stake in Praxis Biologics (Rochester, NY).

New agreements:

- T Cell Sciences (Cambridge, MA) signed a three-year, \$3.7 million product development deal with Yamanouchi Pharmaceutical (Tokyo) for autoimmune and cancer diagnostic products based on the use of T-cell antigen receptor proteins as direct detection elements.

- Pfizer (New York, NY) intends to participate in the development and commercialization of the monoclonal antibody-based products for the treatment of septic shock made by Xoma Corp. (Berkeley, CA).

- Ingene (Santa Monica, CA) signed a \$1.3 million extension of its contract with Beatrice Foods (Chicago, IL) for the development of thaumatin, a low-calorie sweetener.

SPACE SCIENCE

NASA'S BIO-FUNDING SQUEEZE

NEW YORK—The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has serious funding difficulties, according to its administrator, James C. Fletcher. And this could squeeze some of NASA's programs, including those which support basic research. As Thomas M. Donahue, chairman of the National Academy of Sciences' space science board, puts it, "If the government goes ahead and replaces the Challenger but pays for it out of existing programs like space science, then entering space science would be a stupid thing [for students] to do."

For the present, anyway, NASA continues to support university research in space science—both basic and applied—at many levels. On the grand end of the scale, the Agency recently awarded a \$5 million grant to Clarkson University (Potsdam, NY) to establish a center for the development of commercial crystal growth in space. Members of the center will include corporations as well as educational institutions. On the small end of the scale, NASA offers research

associate awards in space biology through its life sciences division. Thora Halstead, the division's chief of space biology, says this program has been going for the last 4–5 years; with an annual budget of \$150,000, however, there are only enough funds for six awards per year. This year, Halstead says, five of the first-year recipients are renewing, leaving funds for only one new award. She adds that the research does not have to be done in a NASA-funded lab, but it must be relevant to space biology.

One of these labs belongs to Michael L. Evans, a professor of botany at Ohio State University (Columbus), and himself a recipient of a NASA research grant. Although Donahue and other officials have voiced concern that students may lose interest in the field unless there is increased support for space research, Evans sees no trend in this direction. He believes that, although the Challenger disaster discouraged students in the short-run, they are still as enthusiastic as ever about space-related research. —Jennifer Van Brunt