

# CORRESPONDENCE

## DATING PCR

To the editor:

I thought the editorial "Genome Know-How" (*Bio/Technology* 8:5, Jan. '90) was quite appropriate. One minor historical correction, however; the first public presentation by Cetus of the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) was at the annual meeting of the American Society of Human Genetics in October 1985. The first paper, of course, appeared later that year in the December issue of *Science*.

Norman Arnheim  
Professor of Molecular Biology  
University of Southern California  
Stauffer Hall of Science  
Los Angeles, CA 90089

## KIRISHI CONTROVERSY, CONTINUED

To the editor:

We read with interest "Biotechnology Falls Foul of the Environment in the USSR" (*Bio/Technology* 7:783, Aug. '89). Unfortunately, the article does not reflect the true ecological situation in the town of Kirishi. Three large-scale enterprises are situated there: an oil refinery, a thermoelectric power station, and a biochemical factory. The first two discharge more than 160,000 tonnes of harmful substances into the atmosphere each year. These include polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, oxides of heavy metals, and others. *Many harmful substances in the town's atmospheric air remain to be defined.* If we then consider the biochemical factory, we find that its contribution to atmospheric pollution is less than one percent of the total, and that discharges of the specific product (single cell protein [SCP]) amount to less than 1.5 kg per year.

The data quoted in the article about the deaths of children, without indicating the causes, allow the suggestion that the biochemical factory is responsible; however, judicial-medical opinion does not support this assertion. It has been proven that morbidity in the Kirishi biochemical factory is not higher than in other enterprises in the town; further, the data on the immune system are an invention. The same can be said as well about the information on the deaths of thousands of domestic animals: The chairman of the Leningrad *oblast'* *Agroprom* has declared that there are no data concerning the

deaths of agricultural animals as a result of feeding them SCP.

The Kirishi biochemical factory is one of the most ecologically pure enterprises in the USSR. Currently, it is experiencing a rebirth. The factory has spare capacity, a developed infrastructure, and a qualified workforce, and is actively seeking foreign partners with the aim of creating joint production and furthering the development of biotechnology in the region.

V.M. Gellis  
V.V. Bovykin  
Kirishi Chemical Factory  
187110 Kirishi  
Leningrad *oblast'*  
U.S.S.R.

*Recent events in the USSR do seem to support points made in my original article. The USSR Supreme Soviet has issued a decree (27 November 1989) under which all SCP production from n-paraffins is to be halted by 1991 because of environmen-*

*tal pollution. If there is no evidence of this pollution at the Kirishi biochemical plant, why has the government not excluded it from the decree? Further, the series "Soviet Spring," broadcast on 5 February 1990, featured a Soviet documentary on the mass demonstrations against the SCP plant in Kirishi. One was left with little doubt that the local population, at least until recently, considered the factory to be a major health hazard.*

*Having said all this, I do believe workers at Kirishi are absolutely sincere in their efforts to set up pollution-free production of socially useful products at their enterprise.*

—A. Rimmington

## BY ANOTHER NAME

The article "Prophetic Patents in Biotechnology" (*Bio/Technology* 8:24, Jan. '90) described a patent obtained under the pen name "Chet Fleming." That patent was filed by the author of the article, Patrick Kelly.

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