ASB: MAGIC BONDS

To the editor:

Biotechnology has no society of its own. By this I mean that biotech scientists—most of whom have their home in other scientific societies (ASM, ACS, ASBC, etc.)—find that their current societies only partially fulfill their scientific needs because biotechnology is multidisciplinary. Unquestionably, these other societies run useful conferences designed to partially address this vacuum. There are also those “something for everybody in biotechnology” meetings at which one is likely to run into venture capitalists, investment bankers, management consultants, patent attorneys, industrialists, government officials, and other participants in the biotech boom. These meetings serve a purpose, too.

Notwithstanding these fragmented activities, what is needed is a new biotech society with the sole purpose of addressing the scientific interests and needs of the people who do the experiments and propose the theories—a society that holds meetings and publishes a journal where scientists would present their original and most important work.

Taxonomists are considered either “lumpers” or “splitters.” Most proposals for a new scientific society are dismissed with a groan because those who suggest their formation are usually considered splitters; indeed, several societies have been formed by dissidents from larger organizations. Anyone familiar with biotechnology, however, will recognize that this proposal will be supported by lumpers.

In industry, particularly, we see the magic that results when people from widely different scientific disciplines work on a project. Biologists, microbiologists, immunologists, plant biologists, chemical engineers, and others find that the developments of the last 15 years create a bond and an unprecedented level of creativity among researchers. This bonding of scientists from diverse backgrounds happens far less frequently in universities and other non-industry situations. People tend to go to their own meetings and read their own journals. A new society could contribute to the scientific satisfaction of all participants.

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ASB: VERTICAL INTEGRATION

To the editor:

I feel strongly that the membership and *modus operandi* of an American

Society for Biotechnology should be sufficiently generic so as to encompass individuals and aspects of biotechnology from concept to commercialization. Thus, rather than model this new society on a basic science format, we should consider using a vertically integrated form akin to that of the American Society for Parenteral & Enteric Nutrition (ASPEN).

The biotech society could provide a venue for discussing regulatory affairs, quality control, scale-up considerations, and management of R&D personnel, as well as the latest and best of basic science. The meetings

could also allow for venture capitalists and nascent entrepreneurs to confer. To determine the viability of this format, it might be advisable to hold the initial meetings in conjunction with ongoing scientific societies, such as the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB). This would ensure attendance of a reasonable number of scientists, who often have limited travel budgets.

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