

/CORRESPONDENCE

A PURLOINED PILFERING STORY?

To the editor:

Some of Bernard Dixon's stories about microbial purloining in his *May Commentary* may be apocryphal, but his "favorite," reported in *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* (25:263, 1982) may well have earlier roots.

For the record, I first heard the suggestion of obtaining microbial strains by culturing a letter made in 1961 by Sydney Brenner. He was responding to a complaint from Bill Hayes that he needed a stock of f2 bacteriophage (to facilitate discrimination of F⁺ and Hfr strains of *Escherichia coli* from F⁻ strains), but had recently received a polite refusal from one of the authors of the publication in which this type of phage had been reported for the first time. Brenner, who was visiting Hayes's laboratory at that time, suggested culturing a small segment of the letter, because he knew it would have been written in the laboratory where the experiments had been carried out. Although it seemed a marvelous idea, I'm afraid I can't complete the story by reporting that the f2 was recovered in this way—similar isolates that were later made available were soon identified in many other parts of the world. Incidentally, I assume the refusal to distribute f1 and f2 was general, and it probably accounts for the large number of f1 and f2 homologs or near homologs that have been made available since that time.

I enjoy very much reading Dr. Dixon's *Commentary* in *Bio/Technology*—it's the first thing I look at.

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ASPARTIC ACID PRECURSOR

To the editor:

I would like to compliment Arthur Klausner on his article on phenylalanine (April, 1985). At the same time I would like to point out an error in Table II which is referenced to Scott King at Montgomery Securities and to *Bio/Technology*.

As published by our group in *Bio/Technology* (3:301-307, 1985), aspartic acid is made from fumaric acid rather than succinic. It should also be

noted that although aspartic acid can be made via fermentation, the starting material is not sugar but once again fumaric acid. The fermentation is used only to grow *Escherichia coli* prior to addition of fumaric acid which is converted to aspartic acid by the same enzyme reaction used in immobilized cell reactors.

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MIDWEST BIOTECH

To the editor:

We at Midwest Research Institute were quite interested in your article entitled "How About Contract Research?" published in December. We felt that it presented well the concept of contract research and its advantages as we see them in our work with clients. We were disappointed, however, that we didn't show up on your map (p. 1029).

Midwest Research Institute was 40 years old last year, and our staff of about 1,000 conducted about \$86 million in research and development for government and private sector clients. In addition to our original facilities in Kansas City, MO, we manage the Solar Energy Research Institute for the U.S. Department of Energy in Golden, CO, and have several major programs in Saudi Arabia.

That large white area in the middle of your first illustration isn't really as empty as you portrayed it.

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When Midwest Research Institute was contacted last October, its corporate commerce department reported that while the Institute had looked at biotechnology, it had no capabilities in this field and no plans to develop any. Hence it was not mentioned in the article. —AK

RESPONSE FROM NEW DELHI

To the editor:

This is a response to the letter from MIT's Arnold Demain (Sept. 1984) concerning inability on the part of some bioscientists from

Israel to participate in the VIIth International Biotechnology Symposium held in New Delhi in February 1984. A key point seems to be missing from Dr. Demain's letter, namely that the National Organising Committee (formed by the Indian National Science Academy to convene the Symposium) had neither the responsibility nor any authority to issue visas to participants coming from abroad (excepting processing all such cases expeditiously for clearance by the appropriate authorities). The NOC expended a great deal of effort, money and time to enable every interested scientist/engineer to participate in the Symposium—irrespective of nationality. We have several times publicly expressed our sincere regret in not having all the Israeli scientists participate at the Symposium.

As far as Dr. Demain's plenary lecture was concerned, we were not aware that his participation at the Symposium was subject to certain conditions; this was revealed per telex on the first day of the conference. Many participants sincerely regretted his absence due to this last minute decision.

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CLARIFICATION

While the cover photograph on the January issue of *Bio/Technology* depicting red sponges of the genus *Agelas* was supplied by Tom Smoyer of Harbor Branch Foundation (Fort Pierce, FL), the picture was actually taken by Christopher Chulamanis of the Foundation.

The photos for the article "Genetically Engineered Plants: Environmental Issues," which appeared on pages 437 and 442 of the May 1985 issue, were taken by Tom Heaton.