

/CORRESPONDENCE

Comments and opinions on editorials, articles, and research in **BIO/TECHNOLOGY** are welcome. Letters to the editor may be addressed to:
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Just the Flax To the editor:

We would like to thank Bernard Dixon for his kind words about our work in his commentary in the April issue of *Bio/Technology* (13:308). After dealing with the noted frustrations for several years, it is good to have the supporting data.

We are still frustrated, however. Ironically, the source is not the usual critics. I've discussed our transgenic linseed flax with Jane Rissler (Union of Concerned Scientists; Washington, D.C.). Her major criticism is that it's too bad farmers in general have to continue to use chemical pesticides at all, a sentiment most of us share. Documentation of our flax has also been provided to official representatives of prominent Canadian organizations, the Canadian Environmental Network (Toronto, Ontario), and also to the Consumers Association of Canada (Edmonton, Alberta). None responded with criticism specific to the flax.

No, our frustration now emanates from dealings with our own bureaucrats.

The commercial line derived from line 12115 (now called FP967, "CDC Triffid") was recommended for registration by our national registration

committee in February 1994; CDC Triffid was grown by farmers as a commercial seed crop in that same year. However, the bureaucrats continue to delay the issuance of the certificate (thus preventing the commercial seed from entering the normal production, processing and marketing stream) by asking irrelevant or annoying questions. Although we have been supplying data and other information since 1989, they continue to ask questions such as this one, from February 1995: "...in a homozygous population of FP967, what is the percentage of plants that are herbicide tolerant and is there a difference in the percentage of herbicide tolerance between generations?"

While this question can at least be answered, others are, as you note, so hypothetical as to be beyond meaningful discussion (or scientific scrutiny). So we either have to argue with the bureaucrats to convince them of the scientific irrelevance of their questions, or we have to conduct pseudo-scientific assays to generate spurious data to "jump through the hoop." Unfortunately, as a public institution, we do not have the same

financial resources as the private sector to throw money at the questions and come up with numbers, scientifically questionable as they may be. We are also reluctant to conduct ersatz experiments, as we believe they will set a dangerous precedent. Our work is open to public and academic scrutiny, so eventually those "hoop-jumping" data would be revealed for what they are, thus bringing into disrepute all data concerning transgenic plants. So we continue to try to educate the bureaucrats. Farmers, the industry, and the environment are meanwhile denied a beneficial product.

Thank you again for your commentary. The dissemination of real and meaningful information will reach many people who would not otherwise be aware of our work. Your influence will advance the cause of truth regarding the real risks and benefits of transgenic plants.

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"As you know, I've decided to merge the jobs of court jester and court scientist."

Fatal Bovine Serum?

John Hodgson's article "To Treat or Not To Treat" (*Bio/Technology* 13:333-343) was just as excellent as its two predecessors, "Checking Sources: The Serum Supply Secret" (*Bio/Technology* 9:1320-1324, 1991) and "Fetal Bovine Serum Revisited" (*Bio/Technology* 11:49-53, 1993). Interestingly enough, but certainly not surprisingly, very little has changed in the meantime.

In keeping with Hodgson's literary penchant, let me paraphrase the fetal bovine serum (FBS) situation: There is something rotten in the state of affairs. As Hodgson pointed out in all his articles, there is not only honest business in this field. Owing to sluggish decision-making, especially in the European Commission, the disparities in legislation in different countries are being exploited up to the hilt by unscrupulous hunters and collectors whose very last concern is safety. There are delicately spun webs of collectors and sellers, of serum "baptizers" and "godfathers," and of dealers, "blenders," back-sellers, retailers, etc. Some of these individuals know a great deal more about global geography and local legal niches than serum or cell culture. Many "big deals" are made this way with raw serum, not with the end product—at the expense of safety and economic prices. How can anybody really be sure they are not dealing with *fatal* bovine serum?

In addition to potential diseases of animals, there