

Europe prepares for drugs from GM plants

The first European guidelines on crop pharming — growing transgenic plants to produce drugs — were published on 7 August, clearing an obstacle to commercial development.

The guidance was drawn up by the European Food Safety Authority in Parma, Italy, which will assess applications from scientists hoping to grow drug-producing plants on a commercial scale. The European Commission and member states will have the final say on all such plans.

Developers must detail the differences between the modified plant and the conventional crop, assess the risks of genes being passed on to other plants, consider the potential dangers to humans and animals and specify monitoring procedures. This is consistent with rules set out by the US Food and Drug Administration and the US Department of Agriculture, says Jeffrey Wolt, an expert in plant biotechnology risk assessment at Iowa State University in Ames.

Internationally, only a handful of clinical trials of plant-pharmed drugs are under way (see *Nature* 458, 951; 2009), and there are none on the market.

For a longer version of this story, see <http://tinyurl.com/m8uvzg>

Presidential panel lays out options for NASA's future

The committee deliberating NASA's future has outlined seven possible scenarios to shape US space operations for the coming decade. The ten-person panel, chaired by Norman Augustine, retired head of aerospace giant Lockheed Martin, set out its choices in a public meeting in Washington DC on 5 August.

Five of the seven scenarios would extend the life of the International Space Station by five years to 2020; three could allow the space shuttle to continue past 2011; but only two spell out a future for Ares I, the rocket being built to replace the shuttle as the main way of getting astronauts into space.

The number of options presented to the



Norman Augustine: laying plans for NASA.

Novartis targeted by animal-rights extremists

Militant animal-rights activists were responsible for the torching of the Alpine holiday home (pictured) of Daniel Vasella, head of the Swiss pharmaceutical company Novartis, in the early hours of 3 August, Swiss authorities assume. The chalet was destroyed but no one was hurt.

Novartis has reported at least ten other recent attacks on its employees. These include the desecration of graves of Vasella's family and the theft of his mother's ashes at the end of last month, as well as the placing of incendiary devices under the cars of Novartis's administrative chief, Ulrich Lehner, in May.

Swiss police say they expect further attacks. The Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) group has called an Action Week for 24–30 August against major customers of Huntingdon Life Sciences, a contract animal-testing company near Cambridge, UK, that has faced a sustained campaign of attacks. Novartis denies being a Huntingdon Life Sciences customer, as the SHAC website claims.



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president — whose administration has called for a reduced NASA budget — may change between now and 31 August, when the panel will deliver its final report.

For a longer version of this story, see <http://tinyurl.com/mrtrf5>

Batteries feel the benefit of green car money

The US Department of Energy rolled out \$2.4 billion in stimulus grants on 5 August to develop next-generation technologies for electric cars.

The bulk of the awards, made to 48 projects in more than 20 states, will fund factories to make battery components. Smaller pots of money go to producing electric motors and other drive components, and to fund road-testing of plug-in hybrids and all-electric cars.

Established car makers and battery manufacturers took most of the money. Mark Platshon, a clean-technology analyst with VantagePoint Venture Partners in San Bruno, California, says he had hoped to see more handed to smaller, more innovative companies. "It's scaling up the existing guys with the existing technology in the existing way," he says.

For a longer version of this story, see <http://tinyurl.com/nhuy7v>

Stalled science buildings restart in California

The University of California (UC) last week came up with US\$200 million to finance research and medical facilities despite a state-wide budget catastrophe (see *Nature* 460, 441; 2009).

Of the ten UC campuses, eight will receive funds. Santa Cruz tops the list of research allotments, receiving \$64 million for a biomedical science facility, Irvine wins \$5 million for biological, engineering and computer sciences, and Riverside gets \$4.6 million for equipment to stock newly completed materials-science and engineering buildings.

Slashing \$813 million last month from its \$3.2-billion annual budget, the UC system has forced staff to take unpaid leave and had halted building work. The \$200 million was made available on 4 August after the UC system secured a commercial bank loan to buy bonds from the state of California — which used the financing to restart stalled infrastructure projects.

German scientists found guilty of negligence

An independent investigation committee has found four scientists at the elite University of Göttingen, Germany, guilty of gross negligence because they included three unfinished manuscripts in publication lists supporting an application for research funding. But the researchers did not invent or falsify data, the committee says.

The application was for the continuation of a collaborative research centre (SFB): a highly prized award funded by the DFG, Germany's major national research agency. The collaboration was set up to study the stability of the Indonesian rainforest and had received €16.6 million (US\$22.3 million) from 2000 to June 2009 (see *Nature* 459, 23; 2009).

Investigations by the university and local public prosecutors into possible financial irregularities continue.