

## Pressure groups seek labelling of genetically engineered foods

**Washington.** EuroCommerce, an umbrella group representing a number of European food wholesalers and retailers, this week demanded the labelling of exports of a genetically engineered soybean produced by the US company Monsanto Co., and due to reach the world market this month, to indicate they have been genetically altered. Simultaneously, Jeremy Rifkin, president of the pressure group Foundation on Economic Trends, announced a worldwide boycott of foods not guaranteed free of Monsanto's soybeans, and of a genetically engineered corn produced in the United States by CIBA-Geigy Corporation. The ten targeted foods include Coca Cola and McDonald's french fries. Rifkin says that the engineered plants pose unacceptable environmental and health risks.

The governments of the United States, Canada, Japan, Mexico, Argentina and the European Union (EU) have approved the soybeans as safe, although in the EU approval is restricted to import and processing. The United States, Canada and Japan have approved the corn. The EU failed earlier this year to approve it, referring the issue to several standing scientific committees. □

## Gulf veterans' health review

**Washington.** The Pentagon has asked the National Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Medicine for yet another study into its handling of health problems afflicting Gulf War veterans. John White, the deputy defence secretary, said last week that the new study will look at how the Department of Defense (DoD) could improve plans to help troops cope with "unfamiliar environments".

Meanwhile a separate panel of the Institute of Medicine has called on the DoD to establish a uniform electronic medical record sys-

tem for Gulf War veterans. The panel's report, which was requested by Congress, says that the approach of research by the DoD and the Department of Veterans' Affairs into the problem had improved over the last two years, but that their capability to do medical and population-based research still needs further strengthening. □

## 'Ig Nobel' research highlighted

**Boston.** Three tobacco company scientists last week shared the spoof 'Ig Nobel' prize for medicine for discovering that "nicotine is not addictive". The biology prize, awarded during a ceremony at Harvard University, went to a group of Norwegian researchers for a study of the effect of "ale, garlic and soured cream" on the appetite of leeches, and the physics prize to a British scientist for a paper on why dropped toast always lands "butter-side down". The awards, which attracted criticism from Britain's chief scientist for ridiculing serious scientific effort (see *Nature* 383, 291; 1996), are made to mark achievements that "cannot or should not be reproduced". □

## Official arrested in HIV scandal

**Tokyo.** Akihito Matsumura, a former official of the Ministry of Health and Welfare, last week became the first government official to be arrested in Japan's HIV-contaminated blood scandal. This follows a series of arrests, including those of the president and two former presidents of Green Cross Corporation, a leading Japanese blood-product manufacturer (see *Nature* 383, 291; 1996) and Takeshi Abe, one of the scientists at the centre of the scandal that led to the infection of almost half of Japan's 5,000 haemophiliacs with HIV through the use of non-heat-treated blood products in the 1980s.

Matsumura was in charge of the ministry's Biologics and Antibiotics Division between July 1984 and June 1986, and was arrested on suspicion of professional negligence resulting in death, for failing to order the withdrawal of non-heat-treated blood products despite

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