

CHRONICLE

Genex Corp. suffered a major blow June 13, when it disclosed that its largest customer, G. D. Searle (Skokie, IL), would stop purchasing phenylalanine from Genex when current purchase orders run out October 31. Neither company gave a reason for the move. It is believed that Searle will have its own phenylalanine production plant—using technology licensed from Ajinomoto—onstream by then.

Phillips Petroleum's new methanol-regulated host-and-hardware fermentation system, combines the company's high-density fermentor and a newly discovered methanol-sensitive yeast promoter isolated from *Pichia pastoris*. The system lets producers regulate gene expression in a simple basic medium, according to Phillips's biotechnology licensing coordinator, David W. Stroman.

In research news, Biogen (Cambridge, MA) said it has produced lipocortin, a rare human protein that could be used to treat inflammatory diseases. Erbamont N.V. (New York, NY) and Unigene Laboratories (Fairfield, NJ) genetically engineered a bacterial strain to produce a precursor of calcitonin (a human hormone that stimulates the incorporation of calcium into bones) and converted it into active product.

New agreements involving biotechnology firms:

- Cetus Corp. (Emeryville, CA) announced licensing and marketing agreements with Schering Aktiengesellschaft (F.R.G.), Compaigne ORIS Industrie (France), and Sekisui Chemical (Japan) for its cancer diagnostics.
- Rockwell International Corp. (Downey, CA) will work with Battelle Memorial Institute (Columbus, OH) on using Rockwell's equipment to produce collagen in space.
- BioTechnica Diagnostics, the newly formed subsidiary of BioTechnica International (Cambridge, MA), will collaborate with the Forsyth Dental Center (Boston, MA) on tests to detect infectious diseases of the mouth.

The stability of recombinant plasmids in continuously cultured microorganisms is critical to many production-scale processes. Because plasmid-free cells grow more rapidly than

plasmid-containing ones, they can quickly take over a culture. Traditional selective pressures for maintaining plasmids—such as antibiotic resistance—are too expensive to be used on a large scale. Dewey Ryu (University of California, Davis) reported at Bio Expo 85 (Boston, MA) that he has developed a two-stage continuous culture bioreactor system

that ensures plasmid stability and high product yields. Bacterial cells containing a temperature-sensitive recombinant plasmid are grown to high density at a temperature low enough to restrict expression of the plasmid. A slight increase in temperature then induces gene expression, resulting in high yields of the recombinant protein.



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