

NEWS BRIEFING

● POLICY

Animal rules passed: After more than a decade of wrangling, the European Union (EU) has adopted new rules on the use of animals in research. Deemed a compromise between researchers and animal-rights advocates, the law aims to reduce the number of animals used in experiments without hampering research. The most recent figures, collected in 2005, suggest that around 12 million vertebrate animals are used in research annually in the EU. The regulations do ban some types of experiment, including those performed on great apes, such as chimpanzees. But no EU researchers have experimented on great apes for the past eight years. See go.nature.com/U1LZaK for more.

Vaccination in court:

According to documents publicized in the media last week, a US vaccination-claims court awarded more than US\$1.5 million in damages to the family of a child who acquired autism-like symptoms after routine vaccination in 2000. The court acknowledges that vaccination may have aggravated a pre-existing encephalopathy and mitochondrial condition but not that it caused autism. On the same day as the payment decision, a court of appeal upheld the vaccine court's ruling that there is no compelling evidence for such a link. See go.nature.com/QrNi1X for more.

Food-safety fears: A poll of more than 1,700 inspectors and scientists from the US Food and Drug Administration and the US Department of Agriculture reveals concerns that business interests influence food-safety decisions. Of those polled, 38% agreed or strongly agreed that public health has been harmed by agency practices that defer to special interests. A further 23% said that they had been asked at least once in the past year to inappropriately alter or exclude information in



J. SCHMALTZ, MODIS RAPID RESPONSE TEAM, NASA/GSFC

WILDFIRE CAUSES HAVOC IN COLORADO

Firefighters last week raced to put out a 2,600-hectare wildfire originating from Fourmile Canyon near the city of Boulder in Colorado. Some 3,000 people were evacuated, and more than 150 homes were destroyed. This image, obtained by the Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer on NASA's Aqua satellite, captures the fire on 6 September, a few hours after it started. The red border highlights high surface temperatures associated with an active fire.

scientific documents. The web-based survey was conducted by the Union of Concerned Scientists, an advocacy group based in Washington DC.

Fracking debate: The US Environmental Protection Agency held the last of four public meetings on how it should study a controversial method of extracting natural gas known as hydraulic fracturing, or 'fracking'. The hearing, held on 13 and 15 September in Binghamton, New York, drew protesters on both sides of the debate; fracking supporters say it will bring jobs, but opponents are concerned that it may contaminate drinking water. The agency will continue to receive public comments about the study until 28 September.

Stem-cell funding ban lifted: The Court of Appeals for the US District of Columbia last week reversed a 23 August injunction restricting the use of federal funds for research on embryonic

stem cells. The reprieve is only temporary, however. See page 258 for more.

● PEOPLE

Top of the Rock: Marc Tessier-Lavigne will succeed Nobel laureate Paul Nurse as president of Rockefeller University in New York, the university announced last week. Tessier-Lavigne is currently executive vice-president and chief scientific officer at biotechnology company Genentech, based in San Francisco, California. He is to take up the role in March 2011, and will be the first president of Rockefeller to come from industry. Nurse has held the post since 2003, but is leaving to become head of the Royal Society in London. See go.nature.com/LeG1rk for more.

ERC secretary resigns: Andreu Mas-Colell, an economist at Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona, Spain, stepped down from his post as secretary general

NUMBER CRUNCH

1 in 4

Proportion of Americans polled in 2010 who said they were aware of synthetic biology, up from 1 in 10 in 2008.

Source: *The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.*

L. MACGREGOR/REUTERS/CORBIS

of the European Research Council (ERC), a €7.5-billion (\$11-billion) science-funding initiative. Although his term was not due to end until December 2011, Mas-Colell announced his departure on 7 September. He will return to his university post and chair a panel to help the European Commission to develop innovation indicators. See go.nature.com/XwgPSq for more.

CV embellishment: Steven Wilce, New Zealand's chief defence scientist and director of the Defence Technology Agency in Auckland, resigned his post amid allegations that he had exaggerated his credentials. An investigation by New Zealand's *60 Minutes* news programme revealed questionable claims including that he had been a reservist in the British special forces, worked for the intelligence agencies MI5 and MI6, and competed with the British Olympic bobsleigh team. See go.nature.com/EzIX8r for more.

● **RESEARCH**

Berry-bank reprieve: A stay of execution has been ordered for Europe's largest repository of rare berries and fruits. The Pavlovsk Experimental Station outside St Petersburg in Russia was facing auction and probable residential redevelopment until last week, when the government-owned Russian Housing Development Foundation postponed its plans in response to international outcry. The foundation will now commission an independent panel of specialists to evaluate

**NEWS
MAKER**



Vince Cable
The UK business secretary sparked more discontent among scientists last week. His speech on science and funding priorities did little to assuage concerns that deep cuts lie ahead.

just how valuable the plants on site are. See go.nature.com/seIvph for more.

Rank out: British and US institutions occupy the top 17 places of the 2010 university rankings, issued by the London-based higher-education company QS last week. The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich is the highest-ranked university in the rest of the world. Moscow

State University (93) brings a Russian institution into the top 100 for the first time since 2006. Times Higher Education (THE) ended its partnership with QS last year in response to criticisms of QS's survey-based methods, and signed a new agreement with Thomson Reuters. The THE's 2010 rankings are expected this week.

Epigenetic partnership: Scientists in the United Kingdom and China announced a £20-million (US\$30-million) project to study in identical twins the chemical changes that accumulate on DNA and can affect gene expression. TwinsUK, a research group at King's College London, has access to DNA and medical information for more than 5,000 twins and will partner with BGI, the sequencing powerhouse in Shenzhen, China, to detect DNA-methylation differences that could explain why some people develop conditions such as diabetes and osteoporosis whereas their twins do not. See go.nature.com/6PNsjH for more.

● **BUSINESS**

Drugs decision: The long-running custody battle over multibillion-dollar anti-inflammatory drugs may be nearing an end. On 7 September, Merck, based in Whitehouse Station, New Jersey, announced that an arbitration hearing will be held later this month to determine who has rights to sell the rheumatoid arthritis drug Remicade and its successor Simponi. Those rights have been under contention since Merck

**THE WEEK
AHEAD**

19 SEPTEMBER
Sweden holds its parliamentary elections. Academics in the country are calling for universities to have broader freedom in choosing research agendas.

▶ go.nature.com/O9ZH08

20-22 SEPTEMBER
United Nations secretary-general Ban Ki-moon convenes a summit in New York to mark ten years since world leaders set the Millennium Development Goals for 2015. They promised reductions in poverty, hunger, disease, pollution and gender inequality.

▶ go.nature.com/QcchNx

20-24 SEPTEMBER
The International Atomic Energy Agency holds its 54th annual General Conference in Vienna. It includes a two-day scientific forum on new radiation-medicine technology for cancer.

▶ go.nature.com/w4fOMA

acquired fellow drug maker Schering-Plough in November 2009, because of a previous agreement authorizing Johnson & Johnson, headquartered in New Brunswick, New Jersey, to distribute the drugs if Schering-Plough underwent a change of control.

BUSINESS WATCH

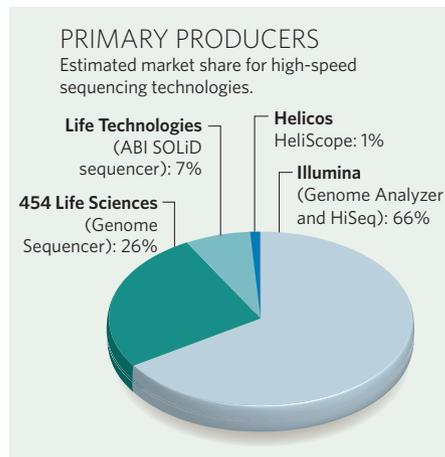
Gene sequencing brought in US\$600 million worldwide in 2009 and the market is set to grow to \$1.5 billion in the next five years as single-molecule sequencing technology replaces current machines. But uncertainty about future regulation of the field could curtail expansion.

Four companies sell sequencers: Illumina of San Diego, California; 454 Life Sciences of Branford, Connecticut; Life Technologies of Carlsbad, California; and Helicos of Cambridge, Massachusetts. They have sold 1,500 devices worldwide, say Cowen and Company investment bankers, based in New York (see graphic).

Machines by two new players — Pacific Biosciences of Menlo Park, California, and Ion

Torrent of Guilford, Connecticut (bought by Life Technologies in August) — will be commercially launched by the end of 2010. And even newer technologies by companies such as Oxford Nanopore of Oxford, UK, are in the works.

But for the field to grow, sequencing must “develop into a market beyond research”, says Doug Schenkel of Cowen and Company. Ion Torrent's machine will be much cheaper than others at less than \$100,000; it could be embraced by clinical-diagnostics or alternative-energy companies, but so far these markets are small. And with the US Food and Drug Administration unsure how to regulate genomic tests, “there are still issues to be worked out”.



SOURCE: COWEN & CO.