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The Future of Agricultural Research

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Proposed Constitutional Amendment

A proposed amendment to the AAAS Constitution will be considered by the AAAS Council at its 15 February 1993 meeting. The Council now has the authority and responsibility to elect Fellows but no matching authority to revoke Fellow status. At its meeting on 4 December 1992, the Committee on Council Affairs endorsed the following amendment proposal:

To consider, on a proposal by the Committee on Council Affairs, the revocation of Fellow status of an individual who has been so elected from among the members of the Association.

This provision would amend Article VII, Section 1, of the Constitution enumerating the duties of the Council. It would be added as a new provision (i); current provision (i) would be relettered (j); and current provision (j) would be relettered (k).

This information about the proposed amendment is published in accordance with the Association's Constitution. Article IX calls for publication of any proposed amendment at least 30 days prior to the Council meeting at which it will be considered. If the Council approves the amendment, it will be submitted to the AAAS membership for mail ratification during the 1993 general election.

Mark S. Frankel
AAAS Scientific Freedom,
Responsibility and Law Program

The Future of Agricultural Research

We enthusiastically support Philip H. Abelson's call for substantially increased funding for basic agricultural research (Editorial, 28 Aug., p. 1187). However, he neglects the government's critical role as gatekeeper; some federal regulatory policies are serious impediments to progress in the agricultural sciences. A subsequent editorial by Charles Arntzen, "Regulation of transgenic plants" (4 Sept., p. 1327), points out that research on genetically engineered plants is now subject to delays and extensive assessments that result from perceptions of public concern and not from scientific evidence of risk. When government's research and regulatory policies conflict, the public loses twice—their investment in the U.S. research enterprise is thwarted, and they pick up the tab for unnecessary regulatory reviews (1).

Twenty years after publicly funded research gave us the tools for recombinant DNA research, the time has come for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency to write regulations about products rather than the research methods used to create them (2). Governmental oversight is essential to protect human and environmental health, but agencies should follow the lead of the Food and Drug Administration in crafting reasonable, unambiguous policies (3) that focus on identifiable product risks and not on the researcher's bench. A recent USDA proposal (4) is a positive step.

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2. National Research Council, *Field Testing Genetically Modified Organisms* (National Academy Press, Washington, DC, 1989); H. I. Miller, R. H. Burris, A. K. Vidaver, N. A. Wivel, *Science* 250, 490 (1990); S. Huttner *et al.*, *Bio/Technology* 10, 967 (1992).
3. D. A. Kessler, M. R. Taylor, J. H. Maryanski, E. L. Flamm, L. S. Kahl, *Science* 256, 1747 (1992).
4. *Fed. Regist.* 57 (no. 216), 53036 (6 November 1992).

In his editorial of 28 August, Abelson argues that the United States must devote a