

Science[®] News

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Incorporating Science News Letter

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COVER: Although the lives of some immunodeficient patients—such as this youngster, David Z.—have been saved by pioneering immunological efforts, immunologists still have many problems to overcome before they can consistently help these patients. See p. 42. (Photo: March of Dimes)

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To the Editor

Natural energy sources

Alvin Weinberg and the FEA report (SN: 12/14/74, p. 374) is typical of many of our Government's "energy reports." It is obviously authored by either those so well indoctrinated by the vested nuclear and fossil fuel industries or those who themselves have vested financial or research interests in such, that they are blind to the most logical and ultimately most economical and environmentally sound alternatives. The people of this country are beginning to realize that we are not deficient in energy resources. We are literally surrounded by unlimited, safe, environmentally sound and easily utilized energy.

An energy economy based on electricity, heat and hydrogen fuel produced through the utilization of direct solar energy, wind, ocean currents, and ocean thermal gradients can be ours within the next couple decades. Why must we relegate it to the distant future and deplete our coal, oil and uranium resources which may have presently unimaginable and extremely beneficial uses in the future. Are these resources not more valuable utilized in ways other than the production of energy?

If our country is truly committed to energy independence (not just for our country, and others, but for individual homes, businesses and industries), to a high quality environment, and to insuring public health, safety and security, then it must immediately begin changing its energy policies. A "war-time-like" effort would certainly be justified.

Darrel E. Snyder
Venetia, Pa.

Eating wild plants

When Volney Wallace (SN: 11/16/74, p. 307) says that "edible wild plants is a sick information field," I wonder what "local publication" is being referred to. Maybe one finds "some incredibly incompetent recommendations on edible wild plants" when one is incredibly incompetent in choosing one's sources of information. I have consulted some 20 books dealing with wild edibles and poisonous plants, among them authoritative works by Fernald and Kinsey, Kirk, Kingsbury, Gibbons and Angier to name a few, and all of them emphasize the fact that false hellebore is extremely toxic, while none of them says that chokecherry leaves and apple seeds can be eaten. Furthermore, these books even mention possible ill effects, look-alike poisonous plants and parts to be avoided in wild plants, whereas food markets do not warn people that apricot,

peach and cherry pits or apple seeds are dangerous, nor do they tell buyers how many pesticide sprayings these fruits have been subjected to.

One must not forget that Amerindians have depended on the so-called wild foods for a longer period than that over which our western civilization has been cultivating its garden vegetables, which, incidentally, were all wild plants at one point. . . . If it is true that some parts of "classical" edible wild plants will cause "subacute poisoning," what about the effects of trying a diet of garden peas and rhubarb for a few weeks? As for calling wild foods "poverty foods," I can confidently state that I would much rather entrust my survival to lamb's-quarters than to celery, as is borne out not only by the Federal City College study (SN: 10/19/74, p. 252) which prompted Volney Wallace's remarks, but also by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Handbook No. 8 on the composition of foods.

(Mr.) Jean Piuze
Post-doctorate fellow
Environment Canada
Victoria, B.C.

A different slant

Biased reporting of the national news, like crime in the streets, seems to have become a way of life. And now we find that SCIENCE NEWS has even printed a picture on the bias!

Reference is to a photograph in the Dec. 7 issue, showing the main ring at FermiLab lying sidewise and extending (presumably) in a graceful loop 1.27 miles into the northeastern Illinois sky.

It goes without saying, of course, that a publication in its 107th volume must also be doing something right. A case in point would be those magnificent double-issue publications appearing from time to time and usually featuring astronomy. With the flimsy excuse that energy is in short supply and that one can't derive much energy from the stars beyond the sun, I suggest that the next expanded issue be devoted to gravity. An issue bringing together various theories and available data on this subject might generate the spark needed to move a study off dead center and thereby possibly open up vast energy sources.

Glenn D. Reyner
Norris, Tenn.

(The accelerator ring in our photo was obviously operating under entirely new laws of gravity!—Ed.)

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