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Letters

What gain from eating grain?

Reader Bill Sturgeon suggests that "If we, collectively, were to choose to eat grain . . . we could, in theory, feed many times our current world population with today's harvests" (Letters, SN: 10/11/97, p. 227).

Consider the wildlife now rare or endangered and what its plight would be with 30 billion people on Earth. Or imagine trying to find a campsite in Yosemite National Park and multiply the number of people by five. Or look at the air over your favorite city and ask yourself how clean it will be with several times today's population.

Ted Toal
Nevada City, Calif.

Sturgeon's statement that the process of turning grain crops into meat is grossly inefficient may be true. However, the fact is that beef cattle and sheep are not raised on grains.

The cattle in West Texas, for instance, are grass-fed on marginal land that would not

support a grain crop if the lives of everyone in the world depended on it. Sheep are raised in Scotland primarily because the land isn't good for anything else. So I would say to people who argue that we could produce a lot more food if we ate grain exclusively, perhaps they would care to try farming in West Texas or Scotland. Good luck!

The point is, the problem of feeding an ever-growing population is not as simple as some people would like us to believe.

Rosemary Killen
San Antonio, Texas

Fewer natural filters to stem tides

Why "The Rise in Toxic Tides" (SN: 9/27/97, p. 202)? As a former commercial fisherman, I have a theory. Before trawling became widespread, filter feeders, massive in variety and number, probably kept organisms like *Pfiesteria* in check. In addition, the natural nutrient-processing system gave us water of high quality. Trawling has destroyed both!

Boone Mora
Camarillo, Calif.

You attribute the name of the Red Sea to the appearance of cyanobacteria in its waters. While this is an interesting hypothesis, the more likely origin of the name is a medieval or Renaissance mistranslation of the biblical Hebrew name Yam Suf, or Sea of Reeds.

Adam Rubinstein
Ann Arbor, Mich.

Keeping a sharp eye on Io

"C'est la Vie" (SN: 11/1/97, p. 284) was a concise overview of the subject of extraterrestrial life. However, I believe the picture labeled Europa is actually Io.

Jim McKenzie
Waite Hill, Ohio

You are correct.

—The editors

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