

# Correspondence

## Heat and soil vie for waste

The Renewable Heat Incentive scheme in the United Kingdom has led some industries to turn much of their organic waste into feedstocks for energy production. Previously, this material — such as biosolids from water processing — was used to replenish soil carbon. This switch might inadvertently undermine the global initiative to increase soil carbon to mitigate climate change, which was ratified in 2015.

This potential conflict needs to be part of the policy discourse and research agenda for energy and the environment. Reductions in organic carbon hamper soil functions, such as water-holding capacity, and reduce crop productivity. But knowledge gaps remain about the necessary level, composition and quality of carbon required to maintain and improve soil health and fertility.

The products of anaerobic digestion of organic wastes for heat production are widely used as soil conditioners. But they have a lower ratio of carbon to nitrogen than do conventional composted vegetation and food waste. It is not known just how low the ratio of such wastes can go before it becomes worthless to return them to the soil.

**Karen L. Johnson\*** *Durham University, UK.* \*On behalf of 4 correspondents (see [go.nature.com/2dxkpus](http://go.nature.com/2dxkpus) for full list). [karen.johnson@durham.ac.uk](mailto:karen.johnson@durham.ac.uk)

## Educate public about gene-edited crops

Crop varieties created by gene editing could benefit farmers in developing countries by providing bigger yields with better nutrition and greater tolerance to stress. But the public's suspicion and fear impede the application of plant biotechnology in regions

where it would be most useful. International outreach efforts are gearing up to increase public understanding of the scientific principles behind the technology. This will help governments to make informed decisions about gene-edited crops.

For example, secondary-school programmes run by universities in Malaysia and Ghana are educating the farmers, researchers and leaders of the future. Uganda's Biosciences Information Centre targets smallholders. And in the United States, Iowa State University's Plant Breeding Education in Africa Programme provides free e-learning courses to universities in sub-Saharan Africa on the application of biotechnology and genomics in plant breeding.

To increase this type of outreach, governments and development organizations need to invest in universities and secondary-school teachers, and provide them with the necessary resources.

**Walter P. Suza\*** *Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, USA.* \*On behalf of 5 correspondents (see [go.nature.com/2qhy2cb](http://go.nature.com/2qhy2cb) for full list) [wpsuza@iastate.edu](mailto:wpsuza@iastate.edu)

## Rat and bat hunt helps heal old rift

In the British Solomon Islands Protectorate in 1927, a warrior named Basiana led the Kwaio resistance against colonial rule of the island of Malaita, in which 15 people — including an Australian and a Briton — were killed with spears and a few rifles. The London Colonial Office asked Australia to quell the 'uprising'. In the months that followed, Australians and Solomon Islanders killed at least 60 Kwaio, desecrating shrines and violating cultural taboos. Eventually, Basiana surrendered and was hanged with six conspirators. For almost a century, these events

have held back the Kwaio people, shaping their relations with 'Europeans'.

In 2015, however, the Kwainaa'isi Cultural Centre and the Australian Museum began a collaboration in East Kwaio to search for two undescribed mammals — a giant rat called *kwete* (probably *Uromys* or *Solomys*), and a monkey-faced bat (*Pteralopex*). When unresolved tensions were threatening the safety of the personnel involved, Kwaio leadership saw the relationship developed with the Australian Museum as an opportunity for reconciliation.

In July, we and other representatives and descendants of tribes and Australians affected in 1927 met in the mountains of Malaita for traditional ceremonies, exchanging pigs and shell money to resolve the dispute. The watershed event has established us as genuine partners and is a beginning to peace among Kwaio tribes, Malaita, the Solomon Islands and ultimately with Britain.

Our experience shows that all parties can benefit from biodiversity surveys if they respect local cultural processes and are built on mutual collaboration.

**Esau Kekeubata\*** *Kwainaa'isi Cultural Centre, Kwainaa'isi, East Kwaio, Malaita, Solomon Islands.* **Tyrone Lavery\*** *Biodiversity Institute, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, USA.* \*On behalf of 6 correspondents (see [go.nature.com/2zsd2x4](http://go.nature.com/2zsd2x4) for full list). [tlavery@fieldmuseum.org](mailto:tlavery@fieldmuseum.org)

## Reproducibility in public and private

The reproducibility crisis in biomedical science seems to have alarmed industry more than the academic community (see C. G. Begley and L. M. Ellis *Nature* **483**, 531–533; 2012). In our view, this is because they have different

yardsticks for success in research.

Despite the advent of important new therapeutics, the number of innovative treatments reaching the patient is disappointingly low. To help rectify this, industry is investing in drug-discovery alliances with peers and academic groups, and in precision medicine. It sees high standards of research quality as the route to the most promising drug candidates and to maximum return on investment.

By contrast, academic scientists may be reluctant to devote extra time and effort to confirming research results in case they fail. That would put paid to publication in high-impact journals, damage career opportunities and curtail further funding. Evidence of questionable practices such as selective publishing and cherry-picking of data indicates that rigour is not always a high priority.

Paradoxically, the impact of high standards on research objectives is different in industry and in academia. If ignored, this paradox could endanger future collaborations between scientists in the private and public sectors.

**Anton Bepalov\*** *Heidelberg, Germany.*

**Adrian G. Barnett** *Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia.*

**C. Glenn Begley\*** *BioCurate, Melbourne, Australia.*

\*Competing interests declared (see [go.nature.com/2retftw](http://go.nature.com/2retftw) for details). [anton.bepalov@paasp.net](mailto:anton.bepalov@paasp.net)

### CONTRIBUTIONS

Correspondence may be submitted to [correspondence@nature.com](mailto:correspondence@nature.com) after consulting the author guidelines and section policies at <http://go.nature.com/cmchno>.