

# Correspondence

## US farmers can teach scientists advocacy

As a senior adviser in the US Senate for the past decade, I find that scientists should be stronger advocates for science. They could learn from farmers, who last December persuaded a partisan Congress to pass a bipartisan Farm Bill.

Farmers regularly visit their lawmakers in Washington DC and in district offices. They keep track of policies that affect their operations, organize themselves into powerful entities and work with coalition partners to advance their agenda. By contrast, scientists rarely visit their congressional offices, and, when they do, they frequently fail to put their case convincingly or to engage on a personal level. As a result, Congress often ignores the science community's advice, without fear of political backlash. That is not an option in the face of the smaller but more effectively organized agricultural community.

Like the farmers, selected scientists should act as ambassadors on behalf of their fellow workers. They must engage with their elected officials on important issues such as federal research funding, science, technology, engineering and mathematics education, basing public policies on scientific evidence and holding the Executive Branch accountable when it dismisses scientific advice. They could end up with powerful allies on both sides of the aisle.

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## Speed up hunt for new rhino home

The last known population of the critically endangered Javan rhino (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*) in Ujung Kulon National Park, West Java, fortunately escaped extinction when the tsunami caused by

December's eruption of the Anak Krakatau volcano hit the park ([go.nature.com/rhinohome](http://go.nature.com/rhinohome)). This is a wake-up call that adds a new urgency to the long-delayed creation of a second Javan-rhino population, at a site that is beyond the volcano's reach (C. Santiapillai and H. Suprahman *Biol. Conserv.* **38**, 11–19; 1986).

The volcano is not the only threat — the remaining rhinos could succumb to other disasters, such as disease, drought and poaching. The decades-long prevarication in setting up more populations has been attributed to the need to research the suitability of potential release sites.

In our view, enough is already known about the requirements of this species. We call on policymakers, donors and conservation experts to create a safe site for another population of Javan rhinos as a matter of the utmost urgency.

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## Social boost for the uncertain scientist

As a neuroscience postdoc, I have been lucky enough to work alongside inspirational colleagues who have advised and provided me with an important support network over the course of my career. Realizing that such dedicated professionals could help other researchers to navigate their scientific field, I set up a non-profit outreach and networking initiative last year — The Social Scientist (see <https://www.thesocialscientist.org>).

Our team of volunteers around the world answers questions from scientists and science enthusiasts looking for guidance. They advise on issues relating to academia, industry, writing and editing, government policy and on alternative careers.

We find that the best advice

comes from those with a real passion for their work. We all have different backgrounds and experiences that have influenced our career path. Others can learn from our struggles and achievements.

Our mentors also benefit. They are able to network in an informal and engaging environment, improve communication in their widely segregated fields and give back to the scientific community, irrespective of the stage of their own careers.

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## MSCs: they work, so use them

I agree with Douglas Sipp and colleagues that clinics should stop using 'mesenchymal stem cell' nomenclature to market stem-cell and regenerative-medicine therapies (*Nature* **561**, 455–457; 2018). But we should not discard 25 years of data and clinical experience simply because I misguidedly coined that term for perivascular cells in 1991. A rigorous consensus document now describes the proper nomenclature for these cells (see I. R. Murray *et al. J. Bone Joint Surg. Am.*; in the press).

In 2010, I asked the cell-therapy industry to change the term mesenchymal stem cells to medicinal signalling cells (MSCs). This was because, although the MSCs can be induced to differentiate in culture, they do not do this *in vivo*. However, even such heterogenous MSC preparations show therapeutic functionality when introduced into the body, suggesting that they have paracrine (that is, medicinal) capacity (see [go.nature.com/2hwezck](http://go.nature.com/2hwezck)). They show promise against graft-versus-host disease (in the Mesoblast phase III clinical trial) and lower-back pain (Mesoblast phase II clinical trial). They also offset heart-attack damage (L. Bagno *et al.*

*Mol. Ther.* **26**, 1610–1623; 2018).

Scientists will eventually work out how MSC preparations achieve their therapeutic effect, and companies can then make them more effective and less expensive. It will also enable us to design better isolation, cultivation and patient-presentation protocols.

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## Zooming in on aviation history

The Wright brothers flew 260 metres in 1903, but theirs was not the first powered, controlled, sustained flight, as is commonly claimed (see *Nature* **563**, 443; 2018). That accolade goes to French engineer Henri Giffard, who flew 27,000 metres in 1852 in a dirigible fitted with a steam engine (see also J. Schmidhuber *Nature* **421**, 689; 2003).

In fact, New Zealand's Richard Pearse and Germany's Karl Jatho had each made shorter flights than did the Wrights earlier in the same year — but it was the Wright brothers who went down in history, because theirs was the first powered flight to be recorded on camera.

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### CORRECTION

The legend for the graphic in the Nature Index article 'Citations strength begins at home' (*Nature* **564**, S70–S71; 2018) incorrectly stated that many countries cite research produced at home more than half the time. It should have said that for many countries, research produced at home ranks highly as a proportion of all research cited (50th percentile or above).