Correspondence

WHO plan for gene-edited embryos

The turmoil around plans from Russia for gene editing of human embryos (see *Nature* **574**, 465–466; 2019) underscores the importance and urgency of the global governance framework now being developed by the World Health Organization's expert advisory committee on human genome editing (go.nature.com/33j6q1s). Before the end of 2020, we aim to identify the key issues and to make solutions scalable, sustainable and appropriate for use at international, regional, national and local levels.

Our efforts are grounded in transparency, inclusivity, fairness, responsible scientific stewardship and social justice. To meet these criteria, we aim to share information on the committee's own processes and outcomes, on what is happening and on how and why it is necessary; we will draw on contributions from all parts of global society to provide diverse viewpoints; we will adhere to good practice in scientific and clinical conduct, maximizing benefits and minimizing harm; and our dealings will allow everyone equal access to opportunities and potential benefits.

We reject all forms of discrimination based on personal or group characteristics, including gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age and disability. We are exploring how we can expand the views and perspectives that feed into our work, aiming for effective public and community engagement in developing governance mechanisms for human-genome editing.

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Ditch emissions from intensive farming

The Netherlands last month witnessed the largest protests by farmers in decades. They were sparked by a court ruling and subsequent government plans to reduce nitrogen oxide emissions. Because agriculture accounts for 70% of domestic nitrogen oxide emissions, measures aimed at reducing livestock populations seem inevitable.

The Netherlands' highest court, the Council of State, ruled that the Dutch system for granting building and agricultural permits violated the European Union Habitats Directive by failing to mitigate damage from nitrogen oxide deposition. The ruling put all permit applications on hold. The government therefore declared that livestock farms near vulnerable nature reserves should be relocated, bought out on a voluntary basis, or rendered more sustainable after repair of damaged conservation areas.

It is rare for farmers' protests in Europe to arise from nature-conservation issues rather than socio-economic concerns. They are indicative of bigger questions about the compatibility of modern intensive agricultural systems with environmental and climate ambitions. Other EU member states with nitrogen surpluses could soon face similar policy dilemmas.

The Dutch government is committed to a gradual transition from intensive farming to 'circular agriculture', in which nutrient cycles would be closed. Such major structural changes have suddenly become a real possibility for agriculture across Europe too.

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Homogenize kind research culture

As one who has benefited from Wellcome support and is keen to see a real improvement in working environments for the next generation of academics, I applaud efforts to achieve kinder research cultures (see *Nature* **574**, 5–6; 2019). However, the drive for excellence is not the main problem.

Noxious research environments develop when bad conduct, such as bias, discrimination and controlling behaviour, goes unchecked. Some senior scientists might find that conceding a tendency to 'overvalue' excellence is easier than admitting to, say, turning a blind eye to poorly conducted investigations, or closing ranks around prominent scientists.

Researchers who are undermined at work are often reluctant to speak up for fear of rocking the team boat, or of losing out on resources and future references. Moreover, academia's complaints system is stacked against them (see, for example, S. Nik-Zainal and I. Barroso *Nature* **565**, 429; 2019). Their unhappy silence has nothing to do with excellence, and everything to do with the system's partiality towards the upper echelons of the research establishment. If there are no ramifications for bad behaviour, toxic cultures will be perpetuated.

The worst possible outcome would be for kindness in research to be applied differentially: biased towards scientific royalty at the top of the power gradient, with no change for the rest of us. That would pose a serious threat to UK scientific excellence.

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S.N-Z. declares competing interests; see go.nature.com/fj1sr.

150-year-old idea to limit Suez invasions

Your collection marking 150 years of *Nature* (go.nature.com/3481arj) makes no mention of a contribution to your first issue concerning the Suez Canal, which also celebrates its 150th anniversary this month. A letter to the editor suggested that the canal developers could have flooded Egypt's Lake Timsah, through which the canal passes, with fresh water from the Nile to render the desert fertile (see T. Login *Nature* **1**, 24; 1869).

The Suez Canal is one of the world's greatest vectors for invasive marine species, conveying them from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea in a process known as Lessepsian migration (named after the canal's chief developer, Ferdinand de Lesseps). This damage to the Mediterranean's ecology has affected human health and economy (see B. S. Galil *et al. Biol. Invasions* **17**, 973–976; 2015).

Login's idea, which preceded the concept of biological invasion, has since been largely forgotten. In our view, it would be worth revisiting and adapting to prevent further introductions as the canal expands, for example by forming freshwater and/or hypersaline barriers. The latter could be recreated using brine from Egypt's new desalination plants to increase the salinity of the Bitter Lakes that lie farther south along the canal.

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