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Letters

Land of milk and honey?

I was somewhat disappointed by your lengthy article ("Barnyard biotech: Dissent on the farm," SN: 4/5/86, p. 213) describing possible impacts of the widespread introduction of bovine growth hormone on the dairy industry and the environment. You failed to point out that present milk surpluses are a direct result of government intervention in the marketplace in the form of price supports. When these price supports are removed, dairy cows are reduced in number to bring milk production into balance with consumer demand; feed consumption drops and environmental impacts lessen accordingly. The introduction of bovine growth factor, if it increases each cow's milk production 10 to 40 percent with only a modest increase in feed, brings more of the same benefits. Also, with more money invested in each cow for feed and hormones, the dairy farmer has added incentive to protect his investment with good veterinary care.

Ronald L. Blewitt
Cupertino, Calif.

The arguments against bovine growth hormone would be just as well used against im-

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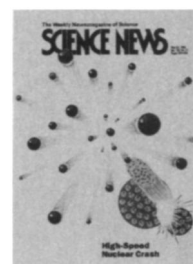
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Cover: Physicists hope to make a new state of matter called a quark-gluon plasma by smashing together very energetic atomic nuclei. The fleeting existence of the quark-gluon plasma will give rise to a multiplicity of subatomic particles flying in a multiplicity of directions, as this artist's impression shows. (Drawing: Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory)



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proved nutrition or improved health care or any other practice that increases production. The only hope this world has is for science to figure out some way to produce the food and energy we must have without using up and polluting the land and waters that produce the food.

As for worry about the health of the dairy cow, she receives much better health care than her owner or his family. It is very simple: Sick or poorly tended cows lose money. The concern for the dairy cow becoming "more of a milk machine" is somewhat ridiculous in that a milk machine is all a dairy cow is or ever can be. All she does is produce milk, calves and, when she ceases to be profitable, meat. The calves either become milk cows or go to slaughter and become the meat we eat. If she didn't produce milk or meat she wouldn't exist because no one could afford to keep her.

I have been a farmer and rancher for nearly 30 years, as was my father before me and his father before him. I have tended my cattle and crops the best I could. I deeply resent the Jeremy Rifkins of this world who eat the cheap food I produce and then think they are wise enough to dictate how I produce it. Let them take their turn at the plow and go feed in a blizzard when the wind is 50 mph and it's

-20°F. At 3:00 a.m. let them wrestle with the welfare of the land, the welfare of the stock and the note at the bank. Let them decide what to do when it's 30 days till harvest and the government hasn't settled on a farm program, and if it had it couldn't write the checks because its program is out of money. Then I'll listen to what they say.

I can't do what is best. I can only do what I can afford.

Gordon Couger
Frederick, Okla.

Why do you quote Jeremy Rifkin as though he were a credible authority? Rifkin is to biotechnology what Falwell is to evolution: a non-scientist who for ideological reasons tries to discredit an entire branch of science, using arguments more noteworthy for their shrillness than their soundness.

What inversion of logic could lead Rifkin to conclude, for example, that an increase in milk production per cow, leading to fewer cows per unit of milk, would cause "accelerating soil erosion and nutrient depletion"? This emperor has no clothes. Please don't let him get away with it any longer.

Spencer Young
Terre Haute, Ind.

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