

ANNE FAWCETT

Scare Tactics Cloud Biotech Crops' Benefits

Just imagine: Using biotechnology, scientists can produce crops that will grow in drought conditions and therefore help alleviate the world's food shortages. Labs are developing plants that contain essential vitamins to prevent childhood blindness in underdeveloped countries.

Yet a minority is trying to scare consumers into boycotting these fruits of our technology.

"The fear comes from overexaggerating the risks and eliminating the benefits from the discussion," said Ralph Dewey, a molecular biologist at N.C. State University.

Two recent victims of activist fear-mongering are StarLink corn, which produces its own natural pesticides, and Vector's nicotine-free tobacco, which contains reduced levels of nicotine to help people stop smoking.

N.C. State University sociology Professor Tom Hoban, who has spent more than a decade studying the subject, said two-thirds of U.S. consumers claim they're comfortable eating food produced using biotechnology. He said the foods' few opponents in this country have lost faith in the system altogether.

Their main scare tactics are the modified plants' potential allergenicity and their ecological effects.

Some biotech opponents fear that by switching genes in a plant, scientists might introduce an unknown substance that causes allergies into a species that didn't have it before.

Dewey said this risk shouldn't be ignored, but that scientists model and test the new plant's molecules to make sure they won't cause allergies.

Allergenicity fears brought down StarLink corn. The corn contains the bacterium Bt gene, which Dewey said has been added to all sorts of pest-resistant crops already on the market. Yet because of a small modification in StarLink's gene, regulatory agencies only approved it for animal feed until further tests could be completed.

Then the StarLink strain ended up in Kraft Taco Shells. Kraft pulled them off the market amid international hysteria after about 40 people ate the shells and reported various physical symptoms.

Yet allergen experts say there's virtually no risk associated with the ingestion of StarLink corn in this situation. To turn this problem on its head, scientists also can use gene technology to "silence" or remove genes that naturally produce allergens and therefore make the food safe for people who could not eat the unmodified strain.

Activists' other main concern is the environmental impact of crops produced using biotechnology. The basic fear is that wind or insects could transfer the pollen from modified plants to wild or unmodified strains to create unintended hybrids.

Possible cross-pollination and the difficulty of keeping the strains separate have prompted N.C. farmers to pass up growing Vector's genetically altered tobacco. The growers say their overseas customers could refuse to buy normal tobacco from North Carolina if there is a chance it could be contaminated with the genetically altered crop.

"Because there is so much (anti-biotechnology) sentiment, especially in Europe, they fear that someone would find a trace of Vector tobacco because someone was careless in the warehouse," Dewey said. "Then they'll be stuck with a warehouse full of tobacco no one wants to buy. They're not going to take that risk."

But why are overseas consumers concerned about genetically modified tobacco? It'll be grown here, so it can't disrupt their ecology, and they'll be smoking it instead of eating it. The two major concerns should be eliminated.

Yet N.C. farmers can't forfeit those sales, so Pennsylvania farmers are thrilled to be growing the new tobacco at nearly twice the going rate for the standard crop while farmers here are held hostage to the continuing ignorance of the international community regarding biotechnology.

Americans lead the world in our acceptance of foods produced through biotechnology. In future controversies of this nature, it is our responsibility to set a mature, rational example for the rest of the world to follow.

Columnist Anne Fawcett can be reached at fawcetta@hotmail.com.

Freshmen Can Now Get the Scoop Online

By ELIZABETH PARROTT
Staff Writer

A Web site aimed at aiding freshmen in the transition to Chapel Hill culture and University life was launched Monday by the Freshman Focus Council.

Freshman Central provides first-year students with academic tips, dates for campus events, transportation information, links to other Web sites, entertainment news and more.

Freshmen Matt Tepper and Rebekah Burford were co-chairmen of the FFC's development of the Web site, which served as the group's first major project.

The FFC is a diverse group of 10 first-year students chosen through an intensive application and interview process in the fall semester to represent the inter-

ests of first-year students, Tepper said.

The Web site is run by freshmen to share experiences and address questions asked by other freshmen.

"The reason why we did it is that a lot of information can be gotten from the University, but a lot of it is dispersed," Burford said.

Through the Web site information is easily available to students, she said.

"It is one place where students can know what is going on from a freshman perspective," Tepper said.

Tepper said the Web site will be updated frequently to provide up-to-date information about area happenings, club dates, restaurant reviews and other events.

Everything from course drop and add deadlines to news about nightlife to information on Triangle-area activities is

posted on the site.

The Web site also features a forum where students can write back and forth and share helpful tips with their peers.

To promote the new site, an e-mail will be sent to all freshmen later this week with a link to the Web site, Tepper said. A link to Freshman Central also can be found on the UNC Web site.

Sue Kitchen, vice chancellor for student affairs, said she worked with the FFC to help them receive funding and support for the Web site.

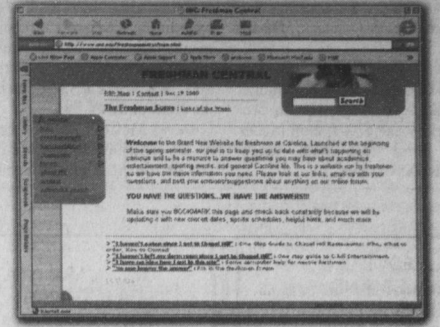
"The Freshman Focus committee has been great," Kitchen said. "It is a good way for freshmen to be involved."

She said the Web site seemed like the next step after members of the FFC presented many creative ideas.

See WEB SITE, Page 5

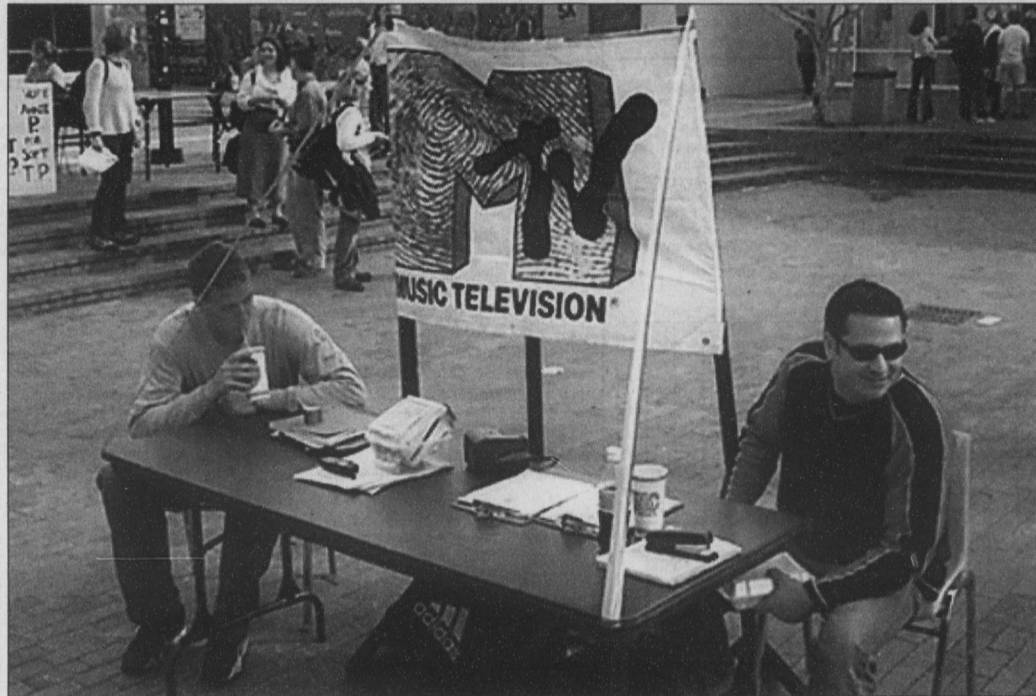
For the New Kids on the Block

The Freshman Focus Council unveiled a new Web site for freshmen Monday in hopes that common first-year questions can be answered by students who have been around the block.



SOURCE: WWW.UNC.EDU/FRESHMANCENTRAL

I DON'T WANT MY MTV



DTH/KIMBERLY CRAVEN

MTV employees Shadow Holden and Brendon Blincoe try unsuccessfully to recruit cast members for Spring Break shows in Acapulco and Cancun. Blincoe, who recruited at UNC last year, said UNC students have shown little interest in possible fame. After an hour and a half in the Pit, no one had visited the table. N.C. State and Duke universities are the next stops.

BOG Uncertain On System School Tuition Increases

The tuition hikes would fund faculty salary increases that, due to the budget deficit, the state legislature will not support.

By BEN DESANTIS
Staff Writer

More than a month before the Board of Governors votes on more tuition increase proposals, board members have split opinions on the issue.

Several schools, including UNC-Greensboro and UNC-Pembroke, have petitioned the board for tuition increases - some to fund faculty salary increases and student financial aid.

BOG member John Sanders said the proposals are beginning to come in, but the board will not begin to review them until next month.

"I have no impression as to how the board is leaning," he said.

Sanders added that he had briefly reviewed several proposals from the schools but would not comment on the content.

Sanders, who voted against last year's



ASG President Andrew Payne said he opposes the proposed increases but that he thinks they will pass.

See TUITION, Page 5

Bush's Faith-Based Plan Draws Local Objections

By MICHAEL HANDY
Staff Writer

President Bush's newly proposed faith-based initiative is raising questions among some local organizations.

The proposal, announced on Monday, calls for the establishment of a White House office to distribute federal funds to charities and religious groups during the next 10 years.

But the proposal has left some local leaders with serious reservations regarding the separation of church and state.

The aim of the program is to let such groups compete for taxpayer money to provide services such as after-school programs, prison ministries and drug treatment.

Bush stated in a press release that religious groups must be part of the solution for society's ills.

"A compassionate society is one which recognizes the great power of faith," the statement read. "We in government must not fear faith-based programs. We must welcome faith-based programs."

Bush will meet with leaders of religious and charitable organizations later this week to discuss his next move on the proposal, which is receiving lukewarm reviews from local religious leaders.

Becky Egan, associate campus minister at UNC's Newman Catholic Student Center, said she would support the program as long as it met the needs of the people it served without pushing religion.

"I can see people's issues with (the program) because it could cross the line of church and state."

But other campus religious leaders are not in favor of Bush's proposal. Bob



President George W. Bush wants to give federal money to charities and religious groups to aid society.

See FAITH, Page 5

Retired Teachers May Return

Local public schools can now rehire teachers already in retirement if hit by a lack of qualified instructors.

By BEN GULLETT
Staff Writer

Teacher shortages have plagued North Carolina school districts and prompted concern from Orange County school officials, though the area has yet to feel the effects of the crunch.

The Chapel Hill-Carrboro and Orange County school systems will utilize their ability to rehire retired teachers in the case of such a shortage.

The threat of shortages prompted the N.C. General Assembly to allow local districts to hire teachers out of retirement, paying their salaries in addition to existing retirement benefits.

The policy states that teachers who return to work must be retired for at least 12 months.

With this clause, teachers would not be induced into early retirement or retire prematurely simply to collect ben-

efits and salary concurrently.

N.C. Superintendent of Public Instruction Mike Ward said some of the legislative conflict was based on the possibility that the system could be abused.

"(The policy was created) to avoid abuses and protect the integrity of the retirement system, which thus far has been stellar," Ward said.

Raymond Cooke, associate superintendent for human resources, said Orange County Schools officials fear the potential threat of a teacher shortage.

"We're all facing a growing teacher shortage, particularly in math, science and special education," he said.

"The state universities just aren't producing."

Cooke also said the policy was needed to maintain the high educational standards of Orange County and the state as a whole.

Cooke cited the rising teacher salaries in North Carolina, 7.5 percent for the past four years, as an additional incen-

tive to bring and retain high-caliber teachers in the state. "About half of the teachers in North Carolina come from out of state," he said.

Cooke said the state draws from the saturated teacher pools in states such as Pennsylvania and New York. He also said this fact is evidence that the state needs to provide incentives for qualified teachers.

But Ward said the Orange County and the Chapel Hill-Carrboro schools have had fewer problems acquiring qualified teachers.

Orange County Schools have yet to hire any formerly retired teachers.

Mary Gunderson, coordinator of teacher recruitment and support for Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, said she applauded the legislature for creating a flexible system. "It certainly gives us options," she said.

See SHORTAGE, Page 5

Pool Requests Extend Beyond Town Budget

By JENNIFER BAILEY AND LEAH COLE
Staff Writers

The Chapel Hill Town Council members are diving into a project that doesn't yet hold water for the area.

Residents voiced their desire for a community pool at Monday's public forum, but an architect hired by the town said a facility that meets their requests could cost more than \$8 million, which is \$6 million over budget.

Town leaders responded by agreeing to solicit financial support from other local governments.

At the forum, residents made pleas for the specific form that the Homestead Park Aquatic/Community Center would take.

The two most popular requests were for the creation of either an indoor heated therapeutic pool or a 50-meter lap pool.

Those requesting a lap pool were accompanied by a petition that the Town Council had misplaced since October 2000. The petition contained 469 signatures in favor of a lap pool.

Rich Miller, swimming coach at East Chapel Hill High School, spoke of the overcrowded pools in which his students train. "In each lane it is common, not rare, to find 10 or more swimmers," Miller said.

But a warm-water therapeutic pool appeals to other residents for various reasons. One of the only available fac-



Chapel Hill Town Council member Kevin Foy suggests that local governments share the pool costs.

ilities is the warm-water pool at Duke University. But it is open only to the patients receiving therapy.

Poonam Pande's son, of 303 Perry Creek Drive, has cerebral palsy and utilizes this pool.

"(The lack of a public heated pool) has not only excluded my son from his friends and family, but his siblings," Pande said.

Thomas Young, of 111 Silo Drive, used an aide to vocalize his thoughts because he is wheelchair bound and unable to directly address the council.

"I think Chapel Hill needs some place for people who have pain like me," Young said.

But the council is now looking for alternative funding sources to build a pool that satisfies at least one group.

"Obviously to build a pool that meets even a substantial part of the needs (of the community), we need significantly more money," Mayor Rosemary

Off the Deep End

The Chapel Hill Town Council must solicit contributions from Carrboro, Orange County and the school boards to help pay for a proposed \$8 million aquatic facility.

Potential Features

- **Aquatic Space:** Leisure/family pool with play features, competitive 25-meter-by-25-yard lap pool, competitive 50-meter lap pool, venue competitive 50-meter lap pool and diving well.
- **Multi-Purpose Area:** Community meeting space, area for arts, dance and cultural instruction, gymnasium and fitness room.
- **Cost Estimates:** \$2,656,000 for core facility (includes multipurpose area and all staff/support space) \$2,191,000 for leisure/family pool \$4,450,000 for 25-meter-by-25-yard pool component.

SOURCE: CHAPEL HILL TOWN COUNCIL

DTH/ EVANN STRATHORN

Waldorf said.

The Town Council responded to its fiscal problem by passing a motion to ask for assistance from the Carrboro Board of Aldermen, the Orange County

Board of Commissioners and the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Board of Education.

See TOWN COUNCIL, Page 5