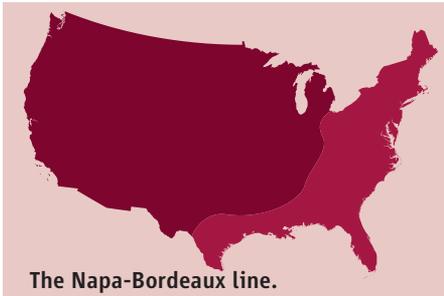


The Wine Divide

Environmentally conscious enophiles in the eastern third of the United States may be in for a surprise. A recent analysis of carbon emissions suggests that they will contribute less to global warming if they drink French rather than California wines.

Tyler Colman, a wine blogger (www.drvin.com) and instructor at New York University, teamed up with Pablo Páster, a sustainability engineer at URS Corp. in Oakland, California, to do a carbon life-cycle analysis. Their conclusion: Transportation outweighs all aspects of production. Shipping a 750-milliliter bottle from Bordeaux to New York City emits 1.8 kilograms of carbon, whereas trucking one from the Napa Valley emits 2.6 kg.



The Napa-Bordeaux line.

Other wine tips the authors report in a working paper posted at www.wine-economics.org: Because most of the weight is in the glass, bigger bottles are better. Boxed wine is a good alternative, but local wine is the greenest of all.

Genes R Us

Personal genomics revved into high gear last year thanks to DNA chips that make it possible to cheaply scan the entire genome (*Science*, 21 December 2007, p. 1842). You can track the flood of new discoveries at SNPedia (www.snpedia.com), a Web site run by two biotech veterans in Bethesda, Maryland, that catalogs SNPs culled from the literature.

SNPs are single-nucleotide polymorphisms: single-base variations in DNA that researchers are tying to traits and disease risks. Browse by medical conditions (77 so far) and discover, for example, that carrying two copies of the T version of a SNP called rs2273535 raises your risk of colon cancer by 50%; another SNP, rs6152, is associated with baldness. Visitors can also search by genetically influenced drug reactions (48) and genes (128). There are links to relevant papers and sites (including James Watson's and J. Craig Venter's respective genomes) and to blogs by people who are sending their DNA to a lab to be "SNP chipped." The site is also a wiki, which means anyone can contribute.

The site "could be a very valuable research tool," says computational biologist Mark Daly of the Broad Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts. "It will be great to see how this develops."

Man With a One-Wheel Mind

A retired unicycling dermatologist has gotten press, and a few laughs, by claiming a link between testosterone and humor.

Sam Shuster of Newcastle upon Tyne, U.K., rode around town on his unicycle for a year, recording the reactions of 400 passersby. Reporting in the 22 December 2007 issue of the *British Medical Journal*, Shuster relates that about 75% of male reactions were "attempts at comedy," whereas 95% of the females "praised, encouraged, or expressed concern." The most aggressive reactions came from youthful males, who shouted things such as "Fall off, granddad"



and kicked soccer balls at him. Responses melted with time, Shuster observed, with older men joking about his having lost a wheel or his handlebars.

Elderly men tended to comment on the difficulty, saying things such as "It's quicker to walk." Shuster's interpretation is that as men age, "aggression is concealed by wit." He speculates that humor eventually takes on a life of its own, persisting beyond high testosterone levels.

Sociologist Alan Booth of Pennsylvania State University in State College is skeptical of a testosterone-humor connection—except "to the extent humor means demeaning someone." Aggression is "probably just one aspect" of humor, suggests psychologist Roy Baumeister of Florida State University in Tallahassee. He says that in his experience, men are often more likely than women to use self-deprecating humor, hardly an expression of aggression.

Hang Up and Get Moving

Research has shown that talking on a cell phone makes a driver about five times as likely to have an accident. Now it turns out that cell phones also cause traffic congestion and delays.

Researchers led by David Strayer, a psychologist at the University of Utah, Salt Lake City, put 36 undergraduates into a driving simulator and had each drive about 15 kilometers of freeway with various amounts of traffic. If they were talking on a hands-free cell phone, they drove 3.2 kilometers per hour more slowly and were 21% less likely to pass a slow-moving vehicle on a crowded freeway.

That means for a typical commuter, talking could lengthen the drive time by 5% to 10%, the group estimates in a paper prepared for this month's meeting of the National Academies' Transportation Research Board in Washington, D.C. "As you increase traffic density, the impact of distracted drivers becomes more pronounced," says Strayer. The team is now using traffic models to figure out the exact toll on other drivers. It could be big: In 2005, the U.S. Department of Transportation found that 6% of drivers were using cell phones at any given daytime moment.

