

September 3, 1975

Mr. Thomas F. Williams
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U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Tom,

I am grateful that, despite my being such a bad correspondent, you have been able to keep my name on the mailing list for distribution of technical material out of OSWMP.

I believed I had a general but not so specific interest in this particular area; but with your own greater wisdom you knew that some other focus would emerge and indeed it has!

I have been starting to put in some substantial effort with WHO, and particularly with the Director, Dr. Mahlar, trying to formulate better strategies for what might simply be called technology transfer for the health needs of developing countries. An extremely important issue in world rural health seems to be the hygienic disposal of human wastes, so I have been looking into the scientific basis for schemes like composting, particularly when such wastes are used as manure fertilizers. As you know, the Chinese have been systematically promulgating such techniques, many agricultural communities being unable to afford to discard the fertilizer potential, but at the same time facing very serious health risks.

This issue, of course, intersects quite critically with problems of sewage sludge disposal in sanitary land-fills. I gather you have some fairly sophisticated information retrieval systems in your office and I would be really very grateful to you if you could put them to work to get out the most critical reports bearing on the mechanisms of destruction of parasitic organisms (bacteria, viruses, and parasites) in the sewage treatment and composting process. I realize that some of the projects intended to seek more efficient utilization of sludges will involve heat treatment which is probably economically prohibitive in the developing country context. Needless to say, if you know of someone who has already thought through these very problems, he is likely to be already way ahead of me and it would certainly be efficient for you simply to point me to him.

Mr. Thomas F. Williams

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I have scanned some of the material that I have been collecting from the mail, much of which was already of very great interest, and I do have attached a request form for some of the office's publications whose titles seemed to me also quite apropos of my quest.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL/r
Enclosure