

page 5

Fizzy pesticide

Things grow better with Coke

Indian farmers have come up with what they think is the real thing to keep crops free of bugs. Instead of paying hefty fees to international chemical companies for patented pesticides, they are reportedly spraying their cotton and chilli fields with Coca-Cola.

In the past month there have been reports of hundreds of farmers turning to Coke in Andhra Pradesh and Chattisgarh states. But as word gets out that soft drinks may be bad for bugs and are a lot cheaper than the products that Monsanto, Shell and Dow can offer, thousands of others are expected to switch.

Gotu Laxmaiah, a farmer from Ramakrishnapuram in Andhra Pradesh, said he was delighted with his new cola spray, which he applied this year to several hectares of cotton. "I observed that the pests began to die after the soft drink was sprayed on my cotton," he told the Deccan Herald newspaper.

Coca-Cola has had a bad year in India. Other farmers in Andhra Pradesh state accused the company of over-extracting underground water for its bottling plants and a government committee upheld findings that drinks made in India by the company and PepsiCo contained unacceptable amounts of pesticide residue.

page 8

Tap water proves it can sparkle

A less intoxicating tale of drinking habits came from across the Pennines, where the utility supplier Yorkshire Water has trademarked its eponymous product as Icytonic, a pun on the huge range of "isotonic" sports drinks.

The company's network of reservoirs and pipes carry water to the cold taps of 4.7m homes. It is keen to prevent that water being passed off as expensive mineral water by unscrupulous bottlers, although it has no plans to get into the bottling market itself. Instead, it is encouraging con-

page 11

Hot investment

Bjorn Lomborg, the controversial environmentalist, recently brought 38 top economists to Copenhagen to discuss the best ways of helping the world's poor. Most of their conclusions were commendable. Asked about the most cost-effective way to spend \$50bn, the economists put control of HIV/Aids at the top of their priorities, reckoning that \$27bn could prevent 28 million cases of HIV by 2010. Second, they allocated \$12bn on micronutrients for the diets of 850 million people in chronically malnourished sub-Saharan countries. Third, more controversially, they decided to promote free trade — but since that would mean the end of agriculture subsidies it could free \$250bn a year to spend on other things.

The sting was in the tail. Bottom of their priorities for the human race came climate change, which they dismissed as a problem for the future. Would it were so. Yet global warming is like a slow-heating kettle taking ages to come to the boil. The signs of warming we see today are the results of actions taken, or not taken, 30 years ago. Climate change that causes floods in some places and drought in others hurts the poor most, by depriving them of food and drinking water. Even if there were not a threat of global warming it makes sense to implement the Kyoto protocols. It is essential we use finite sources of energy more economically.

In any case it is economic nonsense to suggest that there is just one pot of money from which all these things must be funded. There is no reason why the world cannot help the poor and fund a solution for global warming at the same time. What is stopping us doing more to help the world's poor is not lack of money — it is lack of will.