

Henderson's Dictionary of Biological Terms. 10th Edn. By Eleanor Lawrence. Longman, Harlow, UK, 1989. ISBN 0-582-46362-9. 637 pp. Price: £17.95.

This useful little volume has been prepared to accommodate many new words originating in the rapid progress of molecular genetics, especially recombinant DNA technology, advances in electron microscopy and experimental cell biology in general. The abbreviations *bot.*, *zool.*, *mycol.*, etc., to clarify meanings are a useful inclusion. There are about 10 000 entries altogether, and, for chemists, the useful appendix (which also includes outlines of the plant and animal kingdoms) contains some structural (non-conformational) formulae of important biological molecules. It is a pity that ribose has been confused with ribulose in these.

As a whole, this dictionary is very useful and easily handleable and readable. Its very modest price makes it highly recommended.

Gordon Birch

A Guide to Food Additives and Contaminants. By K. T. H. Farrer. Parthenon, Preston, UK, 1987. ISBN 1-85070-127-X. 157 pp. Price: £14.95.

This book (with a preface by John Hawthorn) is unique in being factual as well as historically fascinating. Dr Farrer's distinguished career has allowed him to view the subject of additives and contaminants from both a nutritional and industrial perspective. His historical understanding of the field of food additives and contaminants has a strong Australian element and it is good to see the UK approach to food law enforcement, via Local Authorities, put in its place.

Dr Farrer's book is historically and anecdotally entertaining as well as being informed and balanced. It concludes with a glossary of terms, list of references and general index. I thoroughly recommend it.

Gordon Birch

Food Additives Tables. 2nd Revised Edn. Part IV: Classes XIII–XV. Edited by M. Fondu, H. Zegers de Beyl, G. Bronkers, A. Stein, N. Verbiessé & M. Monnoye. Elsevier Science Publishers, Amsterdam, 1988. ISBN 0-444-42867-4. 124 pp. Price: US\$197.25/Dfl. 375.00.

The publication of this volume now completes the set of four volumes which comprise this set of comprehensive tables. Therefore, it is now possible to take a look at the complete set and consider their overall value.

Foods have been classified by the authors into 15 classes ranging from 'Class I—Cereal Products' through 'Class V—Vegetables, Legumes, Mushrooms' to the final three classes contained in the latest volume: 'Class XIII—Confectioneries, Including Chocolate and Related Products', 'Class XIV—Seasonings, Condiments and Spices' and 'Class XV—Broths, Soups and Mixed Products such as Ready Prepared Dishes'. Within each class, different functional categories (e.g. anticaking agents, colouring matter, solvents) are considered and data given for each of the 19 countries surveyed by the editors.

It is obvious from the lengths of the books and the amount of detail which is contained within them that the legislative control of additives is a complex process. It is apparent that different countries have assessed the need and safety of additives in different ways and hence the legal controls imposed vary considerably. It is the aim of these books to provide 'an easily accessible reference to legislators, food importers and exporters, toxicologists and food technologists'.

However, anyone directly involved in the use of food additives will be aware of many potential problems posed by the use of published books. It is vital for importers and exporters to have knowledge of the current status of any country's legislation prior to the dispatch of the food. Given that the first volume in the series was published in 1980 and based on even earlier data and that even the final volume now published is based on data available in the middle of 1987, one questions whether the books will be as useful as the publishers claim.

Turning next to the content, and, considering the information given, it is natural to look in detail at the information given for one's own country. It is immediately apparent that the authors undertook a considerable task. For the most part they seem to have been successful. However, doubts creep into one's mind when mistakes are found. Thus, certain references in an Appendix on authorised food colourings list which indicate that a number of colours are 'not currently permitted in UK' are wrong and are probably based on a misinterpretation of data in another book rather than a study of the regulations concerned. Finding one such error causes one to pause before going further.

Given the complex nature of the topic and the possible consequences which would arise if a mistake were made it is unlikely that anyone will depend upon the books as a reliable record of legislation. What value then are they? The structure of the books makes it difficult to look at the overall use of a given additive. The only use then is to evaluate potential problems which may arise when trying to sell a product in a new market. Thus, if a manufacturer in one country is making a product containing a particular additive, a quick look at the relevant section would give an indication as to

whether it could be sold in the same form in another country. Otherwise an assessment could be made of alternative additives which would enable access to more countries. It would, though, be important to check a more recent source before proceeding with the work.

The foregoing discussion may have created a rather negative impression of the books. It is certainly important that potential purchasers consider very carefully whether the cost of the four volumes is actually justified. For some, it may be. Perhaps the most interesting point is that made in the Foreword. The editors state that a computerised system is now used which will facilitate future updating. Regular updating of the books is essential—indeed it is surprising that no updates have apparently been issued of the earlier volumes. It will be interesting to see what use the publishers make of this computerisation. It is likely that only with on-line access to the data will the editors' work be fully appreciated.

D. J. Jukes