

# THURSDAY: SCIENCE FAIR

In this roundup: Google's Science Fair, keeping one eye peeled, and odd news.

Featured video here profiles the grand prize winner of Google's sixth annual science fair. The caliber of work this program yields every year is pretty amazing. I hope Google or its parent Alphabet helps these contestants protect their work from corporate poaching while encouraging them to continue their research. This soil moistener, for example, is something a few companies would like to get their hands on, as orange peels and avocados are surely less expensive than existing superabsorbent polymers (SAPs) currently used as soil moisteners.

What this youngster may not have thought about as she focused on drought-stricken farms, is that SAPs are used in other non-farming products. Diapers in particular use SAPs – and that's a massive market dwarfing the demand for soil moisteners. Let's hope this teen's work does what she wants it to do rather than getting snapped up by mega-corps with other uses for her research.

## What I'm watching

- Matthew's track as the storm regains strength (GCaptain) – Link here to a list of the best sites for tracking the hurricane – these are used by commercial shipping. Hope my family isn't being stubborn about leaving their Florida east coast home.
- Association of Internet Researchers 2016 Conference underway (AoIR) – The annual

multi-disciplinary gathering of internet researchers is underway now. Follow along at Twitter hashtag #AoIR2016.

- Trailer: Great Lakes, Bad Lines (Alliance for Great Lakes) – Advance peek at a travel documentary about a fossil fuel-free trip around the Great Lakes with a focus on the risks to them from Enbridge's 60-year-old oil pipeline running beneath the Straits of Mackinaw.
- TBTF DeutscheBank's meltdown = Lehmann replay? (euronews) – Nine minute Businessline video reviews DeutscheBank's crisis as it faces a \$14 billion settlement with the U.S. Department of Justice over its handling of mortgage securities.

#### Strange/odd news

- FCC wants search history under your control (Bloomberg) – Big social media firms' use of your search history is regulated by the FTC. As more telecom/ISPs provide broadband internet services, their access to your search history has not been safe from predatory resale. The

FCC wants to protect search history, ensuring it cannot be used by telecom/ISPs and third parties without subscribers' permission. A vote on this rule is scheduled October 27th. Keep in mind the data from Yahoo's subscribers is what made it such an appealing buy-out target for telecom Verizon.

- 'Fusion' RNA may not indicate cancer but chimeric tissue (ScienceDaily) – In spite of the way we rely on what we do know, we still don't know a lot about genetics. This particular study suggests cancer tests relying on detection of 'fusion' RNA may not find cancer but chimeric tissue. (This is why I worry about CRISPR technology, but that's another story.)
- New study says Tabby's Star even stranger (Carnegie) – Two researchers from Carnegie Institution and Caltech analyzed data on star KIC 8462852, also known as Tabby's Star, named for Yale University researcher Tabetha Boyajian. They found the star had indeed dimmed by 14 percent between 1890

and 1989, confirming work by another Louisiana State researcher. The pattern of dimming – slow at first and now rapidly increasing – doesn't match theories the star has been obstructed by orbiting planets or by a comet swarm. The pattern may support the theory that an advanced life form has built a Dyson sphere to harvest the star's energy.

**Longread: Surprisingly, Max Boot**

Boot's not on my usual list of reads, but this article spells out one of the biggest problems with this election: America is turning into a confederacy of dunces. Having just finished putting my oldest through college and launched my youngest in his freshman year at university, I can agree wholeheartedly that our education system is utterly jacked up. I can tell you from experience that my kids visited state and/or U.S. government three times during their K-12 public schooling, but I know the majority of their cohort did not retain what they learned in a way which will encourage civic understanding and participation. Add a complete lack of statewide and nationwide computer education and our youth are not prepared to make informed decisions about governance using technology to aid their choices. And the GOP, having undermined education for decades with its whining about taxes and spending and teaching to standards, is reaping the harvest of its refusal to do more than the minimum. They've insured indoctrination instead of real knowledge. Enjoy your party's death at Trump's hands.

iYa basta! Hope you are all someplace snug and safe this evening.