The Main Components of Blood

Plasma: about 55 percent of the blood. It is 92 percent water; the rest is made up of complex proteins, such as globulins, fibrinogen, and albumin

Platelets: about 0.17 percent of the blood
White Cells: about 0.1 percent
Red Cells: about 45 percent

How Blood Remained Profitable

In the 1940s, scientists began to separate blood into its components. The process, now called fractionation, makes blood an even more lucrative business. How? Well, consider: When dismantled and its parts sold, a late-model car may be worth up to five times its value when intact. Similarly, blood is worth much more when it is divided up and its components are sold separately.

Plasma, which makes up about half of the blood's total volume, is an especially profitable blood component. Since plasma has none of the cellular blood parts—red cells, white cells, and platelets—it can be dried and stored. Furthermore, a donor is allowed to give whole blood only five times a year, but he can give plasma up to twice a week by undergoing plasmapheresis. In this process, whole blood is extracted, the plasma separated, and then the cellular components are reinfused into the donor.

The United States still allows donors to be paid for their plasma. Moreover, that country permits donors to give about four times more plasma annually than the World Health Organization recommends! Little wonder, then, that the United States collects over 60 percent of the world's plasma supply. All that plasma in itself is worth about $450 million, but it fetches much more on the market because plasma too can be separated into various ingredients. Worldwide, plasma is the basis for a $2,000,000,000-a-year industry!

Japan, according to the newspaper Mainichi Shimbun, consumes about a third of the world's plasma. That country imports 96 percent of this blood component, most of it from the United States. Critics within Japan have called that country's plasma policy a "disgrace to Japan and the world," and the government's Health and Welfare Ministry has already begun to look into introducing plasmapheresis as a type of trade, saying that the country currently imports $50 million worth of plasma yearly from blood. In the United States alone, the market for plasma is expected to reach $200,000,000 in a few years, with the average plasma donation bringing in $30 per one plasma component.

The Federal government, however, is not the only one which consumes more blood products in the United States. Europe combines to consume more than the United States, with the countries of the Nordic Blut (For Institution) about to be the world's major suppliers of blood products: "We have the market and there are no other markets," said an official from the United States. "We must move Europe to produce our own blood products."

The United States has already made the most of the market. Governments are expected to produce more of their own blood products, but they are not expected to produce enough for the United States to be completely self-sufficient. Some of these countries are expected to produce most of their blood products from their own blood banks.

Many countries, strategically located near the borders of the former Eastern bloc, are expected to make the most of the impoverishment of the region. They do not have ample resources, but they could have ample resources for the future, should or to our own needs. Such countries around the world are expected to produce more of their own blood products.

Bribing, however, is not unusual in the blood industry. A recent story in the New York Times reported that a lobbyist for the American Red Cross tried to bribe a state legislator to vote for a bill that would allow the American Red Cross to sell excess plasma. The legislator was offered a $10,000 bribe, but the lobbyist was arrested before he could make the payment. The lobbyist was later convicted of attempted bribery and sentenced to two years in prison.