HOW IS THE HUMAN population distributed with respect to altitude on Earth? A seemingly simple curiosity that has proven profoundly important. On the merit of the proposed research and researchers Joel E. Cohen, a mathematical population biologist, and Christopher Small, a geophysicist, the National Science Foundation provided crucial support as the pair pursued their shared curiosity and produced the first global study of how human populations are distributed with respect to altitude.

While Cohen and Small were particularly concerned with populations at low elevations subject to flooding, storms and other natural disasters, they quickly came to realize myriad other applications. Their own findings on populations at low elevations have important implications for disaster preparedness, but applications abound. Their global population study today informs cooling standards of microchips and the sales strategies of major corporations, not to mention the work of biomedical researchers and public health professionals concerned with altitude-related health impacts. You don’t have to search high and low to understand the major impacts of this curiosity-driven research!
THE BRAINCHILD OF CONGRESSMAN JIM COOPER, the Golden Goose Award recognizes the enormous and often unanticipated impacts that obscure or odd-sounding federally funded research has had on society—from life-saving medical treatments to game-changing social and behavioral insights to major technological advances.

Awardees are announced throughout the year, followed by an award ceremony each fall in Washington, D.C.

The Golden Goose Award is supported by generous donations from professional societies, colleges, universities, and corporations; and enjoys bipartisan support from Members of Congress in the House and Senate.

“Few things are as important as scientific research to building a better future.”
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