BioSpectrum the business of Bio & Health Sciences

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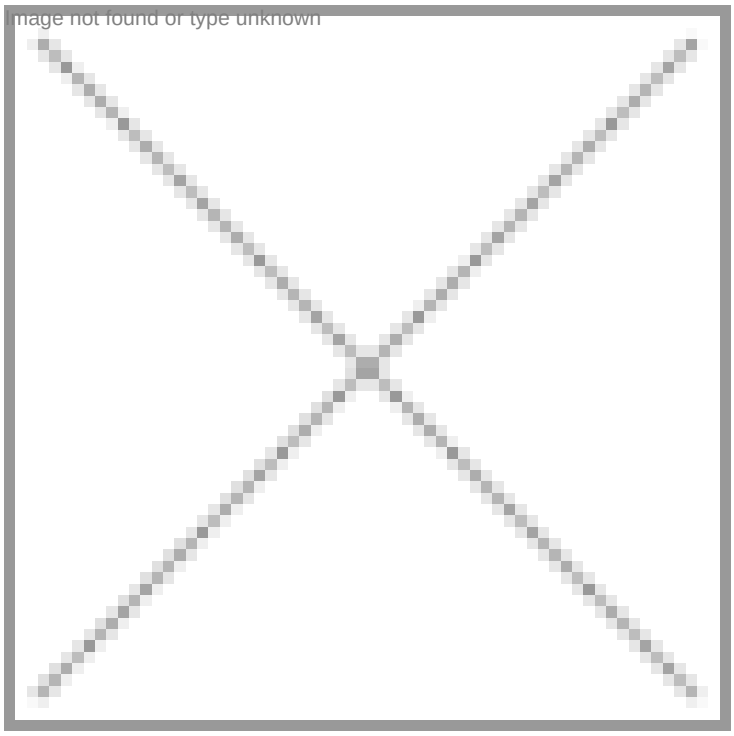

UNITED KINGDOM

Dr Simon Best is BIA chairman

The BioIndustry Association (BIA) has elected Dr Simon Best as its new chairman, with effect from 1 January, 2006. Dr Best will succeed Dr David Chiswell, who steps down as BIA Chairman after three years. Dr Best is chairman of Ardana plc, an emerging pharmaceutical company focused on the development and marketing of innovative products to improve human reproductive health. Based in Edinburgh, Scotland, Ardana was founded in 2000 and listed on the London Stock Exchange in March 2005. Dr Best has served on the Board of the BIA from 2000 to 2002, and since July this year. He was also chairman of BIA Scotland from December 2002 to January 2005.

Dr Best's previous commercial experience includes roles at the leading edge of cloning and stem cells at the Roslin Institute and Geron Corporation, and genetically modified foods at Zeneca Plant Science. Dr Best has also served as governor of the food and agriculture section of the World Economic Forum and as a member of Special Advisory Groups on Intellectual Property and Biotechnology for the World Bank. Dr Best was vice-chairman of BIO from 1994 to 1996 and until recently a member of its Board and chair of its Bioethics Committee.

Source: www.bioindustry.org

BIA hails EU Advanced Therapies Regulation

BIA has welcomed the publication of the European Commission's proposal for an Advanced Therapies Regulation covering tissue engineered products. These biotechnology-based therapies hold great promise for improved treatment opportunities and enhanced quality of life for patients across Europe. Possible applications include areas of significant unmet medical need such as cancer, Alzheimer's and heart disease.

A number of biotechnology companies have tissue-engineered products in clinical development for the EU market. The new regulation will establish a specific European Community regulatory framework for such products, which is essential to enable patients to have access to these potentially groundbreaking therapies. The proposed regulation will now go through the legislative process for adoption by the co-decision procedure by the European Parliament and the Council.

Aisling Burnand, chief executive, BIA, said, "A clear regulatory framework is important for stimulating development of this new class of biotech products. This regulation will also ensure that patient safety is not compromised."

"Researchers and companies developing these new treatments need to know what is required of them by the regulators, and should be properly incentivised through the granting of data or market exclusivity. It is important, however, to acknowledge that this is an emerging technology area, and as such, the regulatory measures should be balanced to ensure that innovation is not stifled," Dr Lincoln Tsang, chairman of the BIA's Regulatory Affairs Advisory Committee, said.

Source: www.bioindustry.org

CANADA

BHRC, CTHRB sign MoU for skills development

The Biotechnology Human Resource Council (BHRC) and the Canadian Technology Human Resource Board (CTHRB) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to spur initiatives in training, HR management, strategic immigration and career development. In addition, the CTHRB will leverage its expertise to work with the BHRC to create job standards that deliver the right people to the right occupations.

Both organizations have agreed to cooperate closely on joint HR-related activities. CTHRB will serve as an HR platform for BHRC. It will also provide communication resources, government relations' interface and events management to support BHRC's mandate, and enhance BHRC's presence through mutually agreed programs.

AMERICA

Groups urge US Congress to end SBA bureaucratic hurdles

Sixty patients, health and biotech groups have urged the US Congress to pass legislation that reverses a Small Business Administration (SBA) decision that has discouraged and halted new medical research.

In a letter delivered to the leaders of Congress, the groups call for passage of (S.1263 and H.R. 2943) "Save America's Biotechnology Innovative Research (SABIR) Act," introduced by Sen. Kit Bond (R-MO) and Rep. Sam Graves (R-MO), which restores the eligibility for Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) funding grants to biotechnology companies.

Jim Greenwood, president and CEO, Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO) in a release noted, "This letter is the voice of millions of individuals facing devastating and chronic diseases whose best chances for new therapies are associated with the type of research that the SBA bureaucracy has blocked. This legislation is needed to eliminate the regulatory interpretation that is stifling promising research that could improve the health and lives of people living with many diseases including HIV, lupus, diabetes, leukemia, Alzheimer's and West Nile virus."

The NIH awards and administers SBIR grants, while the SBA maintains general oversight of the SBIR program. Under the SBA's interpretation of eligibility requirements for SBIR grants, companies that are 51 percent owned by a group of private investors no longer qualify. This interpretation is a departure from the eligibility assessment used in the first 21 years of the program. One-third of biotech companies that have brought drugs to market had received SBIR funding at some point. Most small and emerging biotechnology companies, which are years away from owning revenue-generating drugs or biologics, must look to private equity firms for investments to fund the very high-cost pre clinical and clinical research. These small companies are the ones that take risks and develop breakthrough research that leads to revolutionary treatments and therapies.

"The current SBIR rules hit hardest at small companies that are developing treatments for disease. The American public is best served by letting the experts decide the most innovative new technologies," said Dr Gerard McGarrity, president and CEO, Intronn.

Source: www.bio.org

BIO launches portal on clone safety

The Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO) has launched a new website called CloneSafety.org to provide information on the safety of food products from cloned animals. The site features fact sheets, peer reviewed research and the latest consumer opinion research on cloning. The website is sponsored by Cyagra, stART Licensing, and ViaGen, Inc., the world's premier animal cloning and livestock genetics companies and leading scientists.

Cyagra and ViaGen scientists have cloned more species and a greater total number of animals than any other company or academic institution. Their staff scientists include the global leaders in animal cloning and work with the top researchers worldwide. stART Licensing, a joint venture of Exeter Life Sciences and Geron, owns the rights to the intellectual property used to clone Dolly, the world's first cloned mammal, and subsequent improvements.

The portal says it is committed to provide the public and the press with timely and accurate information about animal cloning that is backed by rigorous scientific research.

Source: www.bio.org

AUSTRALIA

Economic Modeling makes case for commercialization of GM crop

AusBiotech, Australia's Biotechnology Organisation has called on Australian food and feed crop producers and marketers to work with industry to convince state governments that GM moratoria were not in the national economic interest.

This call follows the publication of a modeling study in the ABARE journal, Australian Commodities that found Australia's GM-free stance on canola would result in significant losses for Australian farmers. The article, "Transgenic crops: welfare implications for Australia", found that failure to commercialize GM canola and other GM crops such as barley, wheat and maize had the potential to cost Australians $3 billion.

AusBiotech CEO, Dr Anna Lavelle said that this article was a good example of evidence-based argument that could be used to make the case for lifting the various state moratoria on GM canola.

"This article also reveals that there is currently no financial benefit to producing non-GM vs GM canola, with Canadian producers of GM canola maintaining their market share of the Chinese market (68 percent) where Australia's non-GM canola has a 24 percent share. The Canadians also have the added benefit of lower production costs for their GM crop as a result of having lower costs in their weed suppression regimes," Dr Lavelle said.

Dr Lavelle said that this economic modeling together with regulatory approval from the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator now showed that GM canola was safe for human use, safe for the environment and good for the economy.

Source: www.ausbiotech.org

NEW ZEALAND

"Financing young firms can be risky business"

"Innovation is vital to economic growth, yet financing young, high-growth firms can be a risky business," said Trevor Mallard, economic development minister, government of New Zealand.

He was speaking after releasing a report on a study of "New Zealand's Venture Capital Market and Implications for Public Policy". The study shows that venture capital is an increasingly important part of New Zealand's innovation system.

The minister pointed out that in other economies such as the United Kingdom, venture capital plays an important role in the commercialization of innovation and the development of young and emerging firms. While the venture capital sector is still at an early stage of development in New Zealand, this report shows that the New Zealand Venture Investment Fund (NZVIF) established by the government in 2002, has been a catalyst for developing the venture capital market in New Zealand.

Trevor Mallard further said, "As a result New Zealand venture capital investments are growing in size and number and the report concludes that the fund's design has meant New Zealand has avoided pitfalls encountered elsewhere. In addition it shows that the NZVIF has contributed to the development of a pool of people with skills and expertise in seed and start-up investment."

Source: www.nzbio.org.nz

Biofuels to solve energy shortage in China

China hopes to develop biofuels to address the increasing energy shortage domestically as well as worldwide, as global crude oil prices keep surging.

Prof. Wang Hongguang, director general of the China National Center of Biotechnology, outlined the current state of play at a forum on China's first Green Expo in Nanjing recently.

He said that China now has a practical technique for converting grains, sugarcane and sweet potato into ethanol and the country also has made significant strides in developing technology to convert various biologic products into diesel oil. Prof. Hongguang noted that reserves of biofuels stand at nearly 1800 billion tons worldwide, which is equal to about 64 billion tons of crude oil.

In China, reserves of biofuels are equal to seven times the projected crude oil output capacity of Daqing, China's major oil field. Further, developing biofuels will not only be good news in terms of China's energy shortage, but also will increase farmers' incomes and improve the environment.

Source: http://service.china.org.cn