

BIO urges Congress to fund Biomass R&D program

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The Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO) has urged Congressional appropriators to fully fund the Department of Energy Biomass and Biorefinery Systems R&D program in the President's 2007 budget request.

"The biotechnology industry can play a vital role in meeting the President's stated goal of increasing America's energy security by replacing imported oil with domestically produced alternative fuels. Bringing cellulosic ethanol to the pump will require government support in biotech research and development, biorefinery construction, and market expansion," said Jim Greenwood, president and CEO, BIO.

Biotech enzymes have been the key to enabling the use of crop wastes and other cellulosic matter in the production of ethanol. These advances have served to drive down the cost of this alternative fuel and increase its availability.

He further said, "We need huge volumes of ethanol to enhance our energy picture. Once we add crop wastes as the new 'renewable crude oil' we can begin to significantly ramp up ethanol production above current levels. The technology is ready today and sustainable agricultural feedstocks such as corn stover and wheat straw are abundantly available in most states."

"The President's biofuels initiative can help bring cellulosic ethanol to filling stations throughout the country within a few short years, if we start now to build the biorefineries needed to produce large volumes of this domestically grown fuel," Greenwood added.

"Even with the demonstration of cellulosic ethanol technology, federal policy is needed to ensure market pull for alternative transportation fuels in a market dominated by petroleum. The Energy Policy Act of 2005 established several programs to create and expand the market for cellulosic ethanol. These programs should be fully implemented," Greenwood concluded.

Source: www.bio.org

EuropaBio hails EU commission initiatives on biofuels

Welcoming the EU Commission's initiatives on biofuels, EuropaBio, the European Association for Bioindustries said, "This initiative would boost not only the use and consumption of biofuels in Europe, but also the use of biotechnologies to produce such biofuels, especially biodiesel and bioethanol. The strategy sets out to promote research and innovation in developing bioenergy, with the focus on second-generation biofuels."

"The European biotechnology industry can and will play an important role in the development of second generation biofuels. Biotechnology will mean that Europe can move progressively towards the bio-based economy, also in the energy sector," said Johan Vanhemelrijck, secretary general of EuropaBio.

EuropaBio believes that in Europe it will be necessary to create and develop wide ranging partnerships between on the one hand different industrial sectors and companies from the energy, biotechnology, agro-food, engineering sectors and on the other hand farmers and the agricultural sector, authorities and public research institutes. European Technology Platforms like the Industrial Biotechnology section of the Sustainable Chemistry Technology Platform and the Plants for the Future Technology Platform which are fostering private / public partnerships and are being coordinated by EuropaBio, will play an important role.

EuropaBio is also member of the Advisory Council of the European Biofuels Technology Platform, and supports the development of the initiatives announced by the EU Commission.

Source: www.europabio.org

VISTECH - Victoria-Israel S&T R&D fund launched in Melbourne

The Victorian Minister for Innovation, John Brumby, officially launched VISTECH, the \$6-million Victoria-Israel Science and Technology R&D Fund, in Melbourne. VISTECH would initially operate as a three-year program with Israel and Victoria each providing \$1-million each year "with grants of up to \$500,000 available for approved projects.

VISTECH is the first such initiative that Israel has formed with Australian partners, and they have chosen Victoria as the innovation state to partner with. VISTECH will fund up to 50 percent of the joint R&D costs of Israeli-Victorian market-oriented projects in areas like biotechnology environmental technologies, healthcare and advanced manufacturing. Brumby said, "The establishment of VISTECH had been driven by Israel and Victoria's common focus on building innovative, knowledge-driven economies. It is vital that we harness innovation to meet the health, environmental, energy and manufacturing demands of the future and deliver more sustainable high-skilled jobs for Victoria."

He further said, "However the increasing complexity and scale of leading-edge research today means that few governments, research bodies or regional economies can afford to go it alone. Victoria and Israel both face similar challenges in areas such as environmental and water sustainability; and are both positioning ourselves as knowledge-driven economies for the 21st century."

"And we are both major R&D hubs with high skilled workforces and comparable innovation strengths in areas such as biomedical and agricultural biotechnology."

"VISTECH has been developed to build on our mutual strengths, common challenges and existing relationships and we are very proud that Victoria is the first Australian State to sign such an agreement. VISTECH is now open for business and I

invite Victorian and Israeli companies to submit new joint R&D project proposals for funding approval in 2006," Brumby said.

Source: www.ausbiotech.org

BMS industry in Singapore keeps growth momentum

The Biomedical Sciences (BMS) industry's manufacturing output grew to S\$18 billion in 2005, a 9.8 percent increase over 2004, according to the Economic Development Board (EDB) of Singapore. The EDB's study of the BMS industry said the pharmaceuticals industry accounted for 88 percent of the total while Medical Technology enjoyed a strong 10.6 percent growth to reach S\$2.1 billion in output. Employment also expanded by a healthy 8.6 percent to cross the 10,000 mark. Of the 10,200 jobs in the BMS manufacturing sector, 62 percent are in Medical Technology.

Since the BMS initiative was launched in 2000, the manufacturing output, value-added and employment for the industry have grown strongly over the past five years with compounded annual growth rates (CAGR) of 23 percent, 19 percent and 12 percent respectively.

The level of BMS manufacturing fixed asset investment (FAI) commitments was maintained in 2005. It reached S\$859 million, up from S\$849 million in the previous year. This constitutes 10.1 percent of EDB's total FAI commitments. On the other hand, BMS investment commitments in Services activities grew by over a third to reach S\$149 million in total business spending (TBS) or 6 percent of EDB's total TBS commitments. The strong growth in TBS reflects the rapidly expanding base of BMS R&D activities in Singapore. BMS projects committed in 2005 contributed S\$3.08 billion of expected Value Added (VA) per annum, accounting for 28.5 percent of the Total expected VA per annum in the 2005 commitments. Over 1,200 new jobs will be created when these BMS projects are fully realized.

Source: www.biomed-singapore.com

China gives more thrust on GM crop studies

The importance of biotech development to the country's overall economy will see China work towards finding wider applications for agricultural biotechnology in the next five years as the sector's growth is significantly important to the overall economy.

"A biotech development strategy for the 11th Five-Year Guidelines (2006-10) has already been identified. Within that strategy efforts will be made to develop the biotechnological seeding of major crops - commonly known as genetically modified (GM) crops," said Qi Chengyuan, director of the High and New Technology Department under the National Development and Reform Committee.

The government of China has approved commercialization of GM cotton, tomatoes, pimientos (Spanish pepper) and a species of Morning Glory (*Ipomoea cairica*) in the late 1990s. Commercialized planting of Bt cotton was introduced in 1997. At present China has more than 66 percent of its fields growing Bt cotton.

Source: www.china.org.cn

EMA adopts positive opinion for biosimilars

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) has adopted the first positive opinion for a similar biological medicinal product. The product, Omnitrope, is manufactured by Sandoz GmbH and contains somatropin, a recombinant-DNA growth hormone. It is intended for the treatment of growth disturbance and growth hormone deficiency in children and adults.

The Agency's scientific committee, the Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP) adopted the opinion at its meeting of 23-26 January 2006. The Committee considered that, in accordance with European Union requirements, Omnitrope has been shown by studies demonstrating comparable quality, safety and efficacy to be similar to a reference medicinal product already authorized in the EU, namely Genotropin.

The European Commission and European Medicines Agency have worked actively over a number of years to put in place a legal and regulatory framework for similar biological medicinal products. The first guidelines on quality, non-clinical and

clinical issues were adopted by the CHMP in December 2003. A general regulatory guideline on similar biological medicinal products was adopted in September 2005.

Further guidelines, including guidance on specific classes of products, are planned for adoption during the first quarter of 2006.

Source: www.emea.eu.int