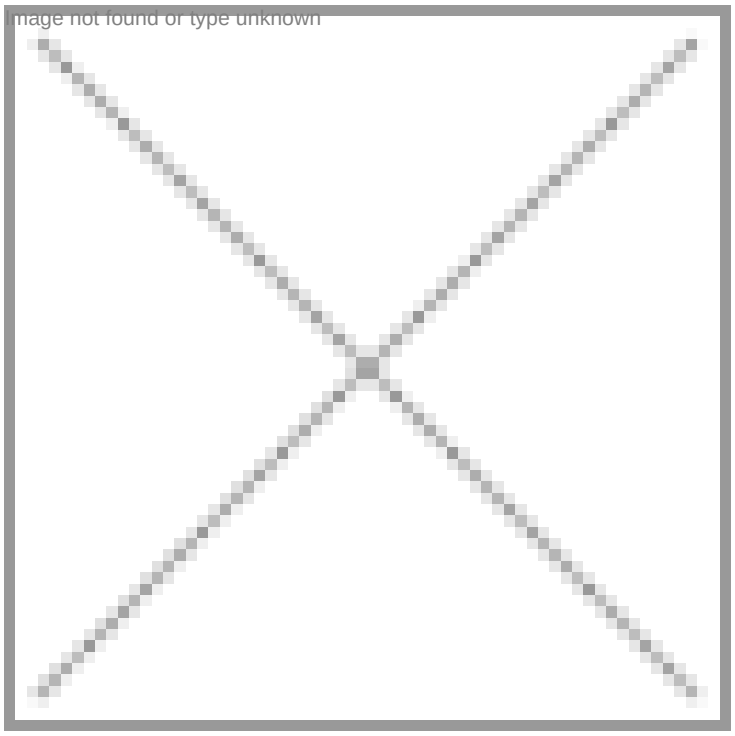
BioSpectrum the business of Bio & Health Sciences

Australia launches 'Biotechnology Online'

23 August 2005 | News



Australia launches 'Biotechnology Online'

A major national education resource, 'Biotechnology Online,' aimed at making high-school students more aware of the ethics and scientific principles of biotechnology was launched in Australia by ABC Broadcaster Robyn Williams.

Speaking at the national science teachers conference, CONASTA, in Melbourne, Williams said that it was becoming increasingly important to understand both the science and societal issues of contentious emerging biotechnology applications, such as genetically modified foods, or stem cells, and that the schools' resource, Biotechnology Online, can play a significant role in achieving this understanding.

"Our high school students are the decision-makers of tomorrow, and it is important that they make their decisions from an informed point of view," he said.

Produced and maintained by the Australian Government agency Biotechnology Australia, Biotechnology Online is a curriculum-based, national school resource first developed in 2001. The latest version represents a comprehensive update, with a new interface, much more information, new interactive games, more ethics materials, improved search functions and a module on careers. Biotechnology Online enables schools to supplement their current educational resources with a wide range of case studies, hands-on activities and experiments, games and student worksheets and teacher notes.

Source: www.biotechnology.gov.au

"Mexico is a major region for clinical trials"

"Mexico is a major region for clinical trials and there is no doubt that its importance in this field will grow," said Dr Faiz Kermani of Clinical Research Organization Chiltern International.

Dr Faiz Kermani further said that the reputation that Mexico can prove a cost effective location for clinical trials has attracted a host of companies to the country. However, commercial advantages can only be gained through a good knowledge of the market, through building a rapport with potential investigators and understanding the society from which patients may be drawn. Furthermore, any cost advantages for clinical trials must be linked to maintaining quality.

The country's growing population and the occurrence of major diseases presents a potentially large pool of patients to participate in clinical trials. At present major healthcare problems include cancer, heart disease, cancer, diabetes and diseases of the liver. According to the industry, in 2003, around 26,000 Mexican patients participated in clinical trials and this increased to more than 37,000 patients in 2004. More than 1,800 investigators were involved in carrying out these clinical studies in 20 different therapeutic areas.

"Mexico's research environment is evolving rapidly against a backdrop of healthcare and social reforms and these must be understood and appreciated in order to succeed in pharmaceutical R&D, particularly when running clinical trials. It is also important for companies wishing to carry out clinical trials in Mexico that they adhere to high quality standards in order to conform to official regulations and to enhance future prospects for research in Mexico by encouraging the participation of patients and investigators," said Dr Faiz Kermani.

BIA welcomes new law to crack down on animal rights extremism

The BioIndustry Association (BIA) has welcomed the new legislation to combat animal rights extremism (the Serious Organized Crime and Police Act) which became effective on July 1, 2005. This is the strongest ever protection for thousands of individuals, businesses, and academic institutions across the UK, including over 455 bioscience companies employing over 22,400 people, many of whom have been subjected to concerted campaigns of harassment and intimidation in recent years at the hands

of animal rights extremists.
Aisling Burnand, chief executive, BIA said, "The BIA has campaigned for this change for several years and we are now delighted that this has become law. This legislation eliminates the grey area in which animal rights extremists have previously operated, and will protect companies and individuals engaged in legitimate, groundbreaking bioscience research in this country and, crucially, all those

connected with the research.
The use of animals in medical research is vital if we are to find treatments for the 50 percent of the world's diseases forwhich there is currently no cure. Without animal research many widely used drugs and the development of effective new therapies for diseases such as Parkinsons, cancer and diabetes would not be possible."

"We congratulate the government on this important legislation, as well as lead campaigners across the political parties. The challenge now is to ensure that the police and the judiciary have the resources they need to implement these new laws," he said.

Source: www.bioindustry.org

Indian student awarded $5,000 for developing saline-tolerant crops

Born in rural India, educated in Indore, and now studying in Canada, Sanjeeva Srivastava's life story is an example of how Canadian innovation and effort are part of a global race to feed the world. Using the complex tools of modern biotechnology, Sanjeeva Srivastava is developing plants that may one day be resistant to conditions as diverse as salinity, drought and cold.

The University of Alberta graduate student, Sanjeeva Srivastava, is the latest winner of the Young Scientist Footsteps Award sponsored by the Council for Biotechnology Information. Adjudicated by Genome Prairie, the Footsteps Award recognizes graduate research achievement in the field of plant biotechnology by students under the age of 30.

Nominated by his professor Dr Nat Kav of the Department of Agricultural, Food and Nutritional Science, Srivastava is

providing new insight into how plants respond to salinity in the soil. His observations of the specific proteins that appear to protect the pea plant from withering under saline conditions led to the transfer of special 'saline-proofing' genes to canola. These new transgenic canola cultivars germinated and demonstrated better seedling growth in saline conditions than their wild-type cousins.

"Salinity is one of the most severe environmental factors that impose stresses on plants," explains Srivastava. "This is a worldwide problem which decreases agricultural productivity. It is a real problem in Asia where the tsunami flooded agricultural areas with seawater." Although Canadian farmers may not have to worry about saline stress, his research has the potential to help address issues faced by Canadian agriculture every year - drought and early frost.

Source: www.biotech.ca

'Plants for the Future' program sets a European agenda

A wide group of stakeholders jointly publish the strategic research agenda 'Plants for the future' on how Europe can improve the safe exploitation of the genetic diversity in plants using plant genomics and biotechnology. Input has been collected from research institutions, industry, farmers, politics, financial world, regulatory authorities, as well as consumer and environmental organizations.

"Plants for the Future" is an impressive demonstration of how
working together can build competitiveness. This joint effort of all those involved in the agricultural production chain toidentify and take into account scientific and technological potential, market drivers and consumer demand can only be positive for the future of the agricultural sector," said Janez PotoÃ¨nik, EU Commissioner for
Science and Research.