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## ► Strengthening the Foundation

Communication between the partners has been described as the foundation for the success of the Alberta Agriculture Funding Consortium. It's not hard to understand why that might be, given the highly collaborative way the members approach their funding decisions. But now that the policies and procedures that anchor decision making are established, attention is turning to broader communications issues.

**A**lan Hall, Managing Director of the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute (AARI), describes some of Alberta's research as a "best kept secret" – to both industry and the public. He believes that it's time to put some energy and resources into creating awareness of the positive impact on daily life that's resulting from this research.

With agriculture's ability to supply a diverse range of human needs in mind, the Alberta Agriculture Funding Consortium has developed a plan to share the excitement about agricultural research and development (R&D). Freda Molenkamp, Leader, Programs and Partnerships for AARI, has been working with other Consortium partners to plan a broad range of communication activities. She says that letting Albertans know about the success of Alberta R&D is a new focus for all the consortium members. Working together, the group will foster respect for the value of agriculture and encourage investment from the private, public, and non-government organization sectors.

The partners will be issuing joint media releases to tell the R&D story. There has also been discussion of media events to generate more interest in the benefits of research and the positive outcomes. According to Darcy Fitzgerald, General Manager of the Alberta Livestock Industry Development Fund (ALIDF), it makes sense to coordinate activities. "Dollars go further that way," he says.

Fitzgerald is excited about the new approach. He understands that it will take a few months for the plan to come together, but recognizes ultimately such initiatives will build confidence among the general public and garner greater understanding for the industry.

**"It's a great idea for reaching a broader audience. I think the magazine has real potential."**

**Darcy Fitzgerald  
General Manager, ALIDF**

The group has been careful to focus their plan on the right audience and the right initiatives, according to Doug Walkey, Executive Director of the Alberta Crop Industry Development Fund (ACDIF). Walkey says there are numerous communications vehicles available to them and, as well, "It's important not to overlook the value of one-on-one communication." He notes that researchers are good at sharing the results of their work through scientific journals and networks, and that they also keep their funders informed. Broadening this circle to include more stakeholders is the challenge.

One new tool is already underway: *Reach & Discover*, a 32-page maga-

zine highlighting Alberta R&D success stories, which will be launched in fall 2003. Fitzgerald, for one, is excited about the format of the new publication. "It's a great idea for reaching a broader audience. I think the magazine has real potential," he says.

With foundations of shared content and messages, the Consortium hopes to raise the profile of the important role agricultural R&D plays in the daily life of all Albertans – and people the world over.



**A new magazine called *Reach & Discover* will help to create awareness of the positive impact agricultural research and development has on daily life.**

# ▶ Mapping Alberta's Future



A Memorandum of Understanding between AAFRD, the ARC, and the U of A, signed in May this year, is a major stepping stone in uniting Alberta's agricultural research efforts. The unique new Institute for Food, Agri-Industrial, and Agricultural Science Alberta that is created as a result of the MOU is poised to further push Alberta to the leading edge of research and development.

A first-of-its-kind collaboration promises to unite Alberta's agricultural research and development industry, laying the groundwork for a research and development powerhouse that will benefit all Albertans. The innovative and revolutionary partnership was formed when the Alberta Research Council (ARC), Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (AAFRD), and the University of Alberta (U of A) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on May 26, 2003, creating a unique new world-class institute.

These three research and development performing organizations have banded together under the MOU to create the Institute for Food, Agri-Industrial, and Agricultural Science Alberta, or the IFAASA. Perhaps one of the most important goals of this collaboration is to decrease the fragmentation of the research community and create a critical mass in one entity, striving toward clearly defined research and development goals. "This is a unique coming together of research and development to pool resources and staff, and to set down definite goals for the future, drawing on the strengths of each involved organization," says Stan Blade, Director of the Crop Diversification Division of Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

This collaboration holds incredible promise for the further growth of research and development in Alberta, as well as economic benefits for the entire province. According to Gary Kachanoski, Vice-President of Research at the U of A, the fruits of this collaboration "will mean a more focused approach to research and development topics and more efficient use of resources by eliminating duplicated efforts, and raise the profile of Alberta's research and development community." This enhanced profile will mean attracting brilliant, new minds from all over the world

to add to the critical mass, not to mention more research and development dollars flowing into the province from public and private sectors.

"The feeling is that the newly formed Institute will be able to offer a combination of world-class research with product or system development. The expectation is that this will attract and create more wealth for the province and its citizens," says Alan Hall, Acting Managing Director of AARI. Not only will Alberta's professional community grow, Hall believes that more efficient research and development will mean more timely public benefits as well. "For example, a water quality improvement system or a food safety advancement would reach the consumer level much more quickly, resulting in increased quality of life for Albertans."

The Institute has a working group already hard at work outlining the size and scope of its activities. "The working group is now trying to get a clear understanding of the resource capacity of the three organizations. By November 1, we will have created a document that outlines the scope of the new Institute to deliver on the Alberta Agricultural Strategic Research and Innovation Framework (ASRIF)," explains John Kennelly, professor and Chair of U of A's Agriculture, Food and Nutritional Science Department.

"The working group has narrowed the

focus to four key areas of research: livestock, crops, the bioproducts industry, and value-added food and health," says Peter Matthewman with the ARC. These are the four key areas identified in the ASRIF.

All members of the Institute for Food, Agri-Industrial, and Agricultural Science Alberta want to make one thing clear: this is only the beginning. Each entity stresses that this is not an exclusive venture, and that as the industry, goals, and governance progress, more partners will be asked to join. "Right now, we need to prioritize the focus of the Institute. We need to align monetary, structural, and human resources. Once the agreed-upon governance is in place, the Institute will source other institutions and their individual strengths to create an efficient, collaborative research and development world leader," adds Blade.

This collaboration, and the resulting new Institute, is set to change how research and development is done in Alberta. The pooling of resources and commitment to collaborative goals is unique, and is sure to garner much positive attention to Alberta's strong research and development community. It has become the "institutional glue" that will better enable Alberta to achieve the goal of reaching \$20 billion in value-added production and \$10 billion in primary production by the year 2010.



# ▶ Bioproducts

Bioproducts can create new markets for agricultural crops beyond traditional food uses. The results could mean more environmentally friendly products on store shelves and a booming rural economy.

Alberta's agri-food growth strategy, which has been embraced by the industry, sets aggressive targets: \$10 billion in sales for primary agriculture and \$20 billion in sales for value-added processing, to be achieved by the start of the next decade. A number of key sectors are expected to contribute, and agri-industrial products is one of them, specifically the non-food/fibre sector, commonly known as bioproducts. In essence, bioproducts use plant material to create sustainable products for use in everyday life.

There are a number of categories which include:

- bio-fuels, such as ethanol from cereals or residues;
- bio-lubricants, which use oilseeds for industrial lubricants;
- bio-materials, which use agricultural fibres to make such things as specialty paper and strawboard;
- bio-plastics, which show promise for the auto industry, food packaging and bio-medical industries; and
- bio-chemicals, which use cereals and special crop ingredients to develop 'green chemicals'.

The idea of developing the bioproducts industry is a growing trend, and exciting things are happening around the world. In fact, one major international agro-chemical company has stated that by 2010 fully 20 per cent of its sales will be bioproducts. That only serves to convince leaders in Alberta that they are on the right track, but that success will involve coordination and collaboration. Hence BioProducts Alberta was born.

BioProducts Alberta is a joint initiative between Alberta Innovation and Science and BioAlberta. The group will assist in providing strategic direction of research

and development (R&D) in bioproducts and will also become an advocate for Alberta's growing bioproducts industry, an important component of the life sciences sector.

John Christensen has been hired as the Manager for BioProducts Alberta, and has been involved in both the industry and the research aspects of bioproducts for more than 10 years. He describes his new role as one of a facilitator, and intends to ensure that the industry perspective on priorities for bioproduct R&D is considered. Christensen says much of the focus of the program will be to identify barriers interfering with the advancement of the bioproduct industry and develop strategies to overcome them. Two of the examples he cites are access to capital and access to markets.

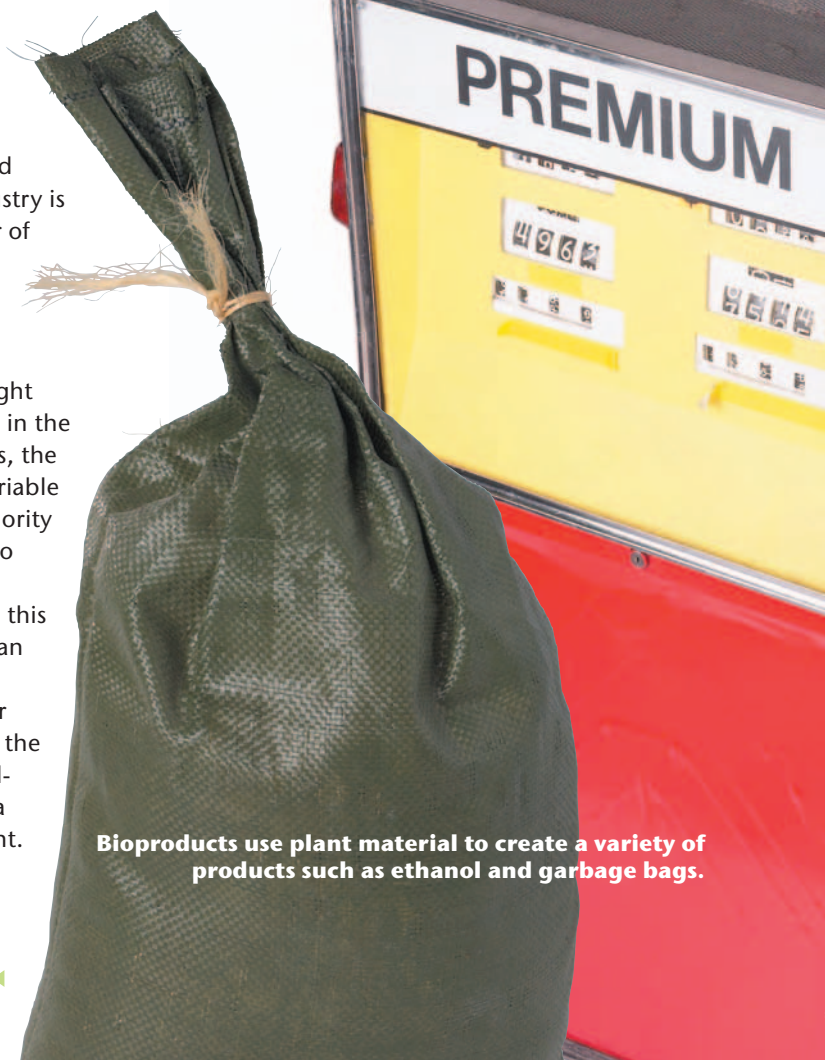
One of the reasons to believe in the future of bioproducts development in Alberta is the key role that industry plays. According to Ed Phillipchuk, Unit Leader for Alberta Agriculture, Food & Rural Development's Agri-Industrial Development Unit, industry was consulted in the development of the bioproducts initiative, as were universities and research facilities. Industry is also a financial partner of the funding agencies.

Christensen observes that some of the priorities for research are very straight forward. For example, in the case of bio-composites, the ag fibres are highly variable in quality, so a first priority is to find better ways to sort the fibres to get a better end product. In this case, the challenge is an engineering one.

Another obstacle for bioproducts has been the inability to bring products to the market at a competitive price point. Alan Hall, Managing

Director of AARI, says that the research community now has the synergy and other tools it needs to develop technologies that will address this critical problem. As well, Hall believes consumers have enough awareness of environmental issues that they will pay slightly more for a bioproduct. Christensen agrees. "People will pay a little more if they believe in the product. For example, they will understand a higher cost if they understand a compostable garbage bag allows for conversion of garbage to energy and 'soil'," he says.

How will all this help rural communities? According to Hall, when the processing facilities begin to spring up around the province, there will be new markets for producers and jobs for rural Albertans, stimulating growth in rural communities. It's not hard to see how everyone benefits from bioproduct R&D.



**Bioproducts use plant material to create a variety of products such as ethanol and garbage bags.**

# ▶ Pinning Down Priorities

Alan Hall, Managing Director of AARI, highlights the focus of the Strategic Framework and outlines upcoming priority areas for research and development in anticipation of the fall Call for Proposals.



With the next research & development funding cycle just around the corner, I would like to take this opportunity to talk about some of the significant changes we are starting to see in the Ag R&D System. For years, we as funders simply reacted to the volumes of proposals we received from the R&D performing community. We applied due diligence and selected those that best fit with the priorities for the industry. Many times we noted that we did not have strategic proposals in specific areas, but we never pursued anything to fill those gaps.

Over the past months, AARI and other members of the Funding Consortium have been working with researchers, funders, and industry to determine strategic research and development priorities that will enable our agricultural industry to achieve the goal of reaching \$20 billion in value-added production and \$10 billion in primary production by the year 2010. This has spurred the development of the Alberta Agricultural Research and Innovation Strategic Framework and the creation of strategic networks in four key areas: Sustainable Production – Crops, Sustainable Production – Livestock, BioProducts, and Agri-Health and Food Products.

Within each of these four areas, specific priorities of focus for R&D have been identified. These include: bio-materials, food ingredients, bio-lubricants, market-driven traits in crop and livestock, microbes, functional genomics, and food safety. The Strategic Framework is available on AARI's web site and provides access to a more complete listing of priority areas of focus.

We also encourage applicants to collaborate with other researchers throughout the province who are working in similar or

complementary areas, and to span the research continuum in the programs and projects that are being developed.

There is also recognition that there is still room for discovery and exploratory research, and that is why our Call for Proposals will not just be limited to the areas identified in the Framework. However, the majority of our focus will be directed toward the priority areas. For more information about the Call for Proposals, please visit the AARI web site at [www.aari.ab.ca](http://www.aari.ab.ca). Please note that the Call for Proposals went out on September 1st and will close on October 1st.

I am also pleased to note that the work that is being done on the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the University of Alberta, Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, and the Alberta Research Council is progressing well. The implementation of the MOU will be a critical component toward building greater collaboration and efficiencies. Currently, the Working Group is busy assessing and documenting each party's resource capacity. It is anticipated that we will have some significant accomplishments to announce by fall.

During harvest, I hope that you take the opportunity to salute all those who continue to be so dedicated to the agricultural industry in Alberta.

Alan Hall  
Managing Director, AARI

## Deadline October 1<sup>st</sup>

For more information on the Call for Proposals, please check out the AARI web site at [www.aari.ab.ca](http://www.aari.ab.ca).

To learn more about the Memorandum of Understanding between AAFRD, U of A, and ARC, turn to page two.



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