

Media Release
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Biotechnology Key to Developing Sustainable Industries

Despite recent controversies over crop-based biofuels, biotechnology offers some of the best opportunities to create a more sustainable world, with applications as diverse as new sources of energy, new materials for industrial and consumer uses, and high quality agricultural products with better production economics, according to Chris Boalch, Director, Investment New Zealand.

“But, for new products and technologies to be truly sustainable, they must be not only be good for society and the environment, but have real economic value as well,” says Chris Boalch.

Chris Boalch was speaking as part of an international panel of industry, governmental, and venture capital representatives at the 2008 BIO International Convention being held in San Diego this week.

“Excitement about biofuels has served to bring growing interest to the concept of creating industries that are more sustainable over the long term and respond to environmental concerns. Investors are increasingly recognizing the much larger business opportunities and enormous synergies that lie in applying biotechnology to other areas in the service of sustainability,” says Chris Boalch.

“New Zealand has a long history of life science research applied to agriculture that is now being leveraged across a wide range of applications not only in food production, but far beyond,” he says.

“These include the development of new biomaterials to replace older petroleum-based products and more economic, environmentally sound agricultural methods, as well as technologies and products that deliver prospects for better health, in more sustainable, integrated ways.” He noted that as part of the country’s goal of becoming the first truly sustainable nation, New Zealand had recently announced a major government-industry partnership to jointly fund innovative R&D aimed at making the country’s pastoral and food industries environmentally and economically sustainable.

Equally important as “green” materials to the mission of sustainability is the development of more sustainable production methods, said Paul Kinnon, President and CEO of ZyGEM which has operations in both New Zealand and the United States. He noted that many enzymes sourced from micro-organisms living in extreme environments around the globe, such as the volcanic vents bio-prospected by ZyGEM, offer unique characteristics that can be exceptionally valuable in developing new technologies for clinical, industrial and laboratory purposes, including the efficient production of biofuels from a variety of sources.

Bruce Campbell, General Manager of Science Operations and Acting CEO at HortResearch says biotechnology will also improve the sustainability of horticultural production systems, as well as generating new plant-derived biomaterials. “Unlocking the genome of economically important fruit species enables us to breed cultivars adapted to climate change and with reduced need for agricultural inputs and irrigation. It also allows fruit genes to be used in industrial applications, such as the biofermentation of nature-identical fruit flavours and fragrances.”

Further more information:

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