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### Up Coming Events :-

- **South African Society of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Conference,** UKZN Pietermaritzburg Campus. 2-5 July 2006. [www.sasbmb.org.za](http://www.sasbmb.org.za)
- **Bio2Biz SA 2006,** at the International Conference Centre, Durban 27–29 September 2006 [www.bio2biz.org](http://www.bio2biz.org)



### Bio2Biz SA 2006

International Conference Centre, Durban

27, 28 & 29 September 2006

The **Bio2Biz SA 2006** Conference will be hosted by South Africa's Biotechnology Innovation Centres (BICs), i.e. BioPAD, Cape Biotech, LIFE/lab, PlantBio and the National Bioinformatics Network, in conjunction with The Innovation Fund, eGoli BIO and Acorn Technologies.

This will be the third year that this prestigious event is being held, with the venue being the International Conference Centre in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, on the 27<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> September.

The **Bio2Biz SA 2006** conference will host a range of international and local speakers who will share their knowledge and expertise in the Biotech sectors. We had over 300 delegates in attendance last year, and the 2006 event promises to be as successful in promoting and developing our Biotech Industry.

**Further information and on-line registration forms will be available on the Bio2Biz website. Visit: [www.bio2biz.org](http://www.bio2biz.org) towards the end of May.**



Ben Durham, Director, Biotechnology Unit, DST opening Bio2Biz SA 2005



Drs. Mark Fyvie (Cape Biotech) & Antonio Llobell (PlantBio) welcoming delegates to Bio2Biz SA 2005



## What has the PlantBio Team has been up to?

### USAID-African Partnership in Biotechnology Conference

Masego Mokgoro attended the 4<sup>th</sup> USAID conference on behalf of PlantBio, on the 15<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> of November 2005 at Centurion Lake Hotel in Pretoria, South Africa. It was hosted by Michigan State University (MSU), the International centre for tropical agriculture (CIAT) and the Agricultural Research Council (ARC-LNR). The delegates were largely from many parts of Africa. One of the key objectives of the conference was to promote a common understanding of the role of Biotechnology and to discuss emerging issues on the use of this new technology for the development and possible deployment of genetically modified organisms (GMO's) which is accompanied by potential risks impacting on biosafety.

### South Africa-United Kingdom Open Day

PlantBio was invited by DST to join the South African delegation during the South Africa Day in the UK from the 30<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> of January at the Royal Society in London. Antonio Llobell represented PlantBio at this event. The first day consisted on parallel workshops where collaboration between researchers from both countries was discussed. The second day focused on a series of seminars with different speakers from both countries. An exhibition on the South African Science and Technology System was also held during the workshops and seminars. PlantBio attended the Biotechnology workshop which was mostly directed to human health and was focussed on collaborative research already in place and future prospects for joint projects. The business incubation and other

commercial aspects related to Biotech research, that are quite developed in the UK, were almost absent in the discussions and this was noted by PlantBio and eGoli BIO representatives. PlantBio exhibited its banners and promotional material and got a reasonable exposure during the event. The networking outputs of the meeting were excellent, especially the connections established with members of DST that are not normally in direct contact with PlantBio.

### Food Safety Workshop

The Consumer Goods Council of South Africa (CGCSA), an industry-driven advisory resource hosted a food safety initiative in Pretoria on the 16<sup>th</sup> of February 2006. The event was well attended with close to 200 delegates from government departments, retailers, wholesalers, the manufacturing industry, academic institutions as well as from private laboratories. Ms Kelebohile Lekoape, PlantBio consultant who is working in the Biosafety Initiative and Ms Masego Mokgoro attended this workshop.

### Proteomics Conference in Cape Town

Sagadevan Mundree was invited to give a presentation on PlantBio's activities at the Proteomics Conference which took place in Cape Town (6-7 March). The conference, which was well attended was an excellent opportunity to highlight PlantBio's current activities and talk about the areas of strategic interest to PlantBio.

### Public Understanding for Biotechnology (PUB)

Congratulations to PUB for wining 3rd place in the "Best Interactive Exhibit" category at Sasol SciFest 2006. This was for the PUB career and the cloning exhibits. Last year they won the "Best First Time Exhibit" at Sasol SciFest 2005 for the PUB GM & Forensics exhibit.

Thank you to the great team at PUB who contribute so much to our Biotech Industry.



## UPDATE ON CAPELANDS NURSERIES

The construction of the tissue culture laboratory and greenhouse at Capelands is nearing completion and the staff are getting excited at the prospect of their new laboratory which will soon be operational.



Miss Nolene Haricharan, a MSc graduate has joined PlantBio on a one year Professional Development Fellowship which is run by the Department of Science and Technology. Nolene will be working with the Capelands Team in George, where she will be given the opportunity to join the permanent staff of Capelands Nurseries should she meet her KPIs.



Above is a photograph showing the new greenhouse which has been built next to the laboratory. This will allow for the easy flow of the new plants out of the laboratory and into the greenhouse when they are ready to be moved.

Below is the greenhouse nearing completion.



### **The First African Structural Biology Conference**

**Macromolecular Structure, Health and Biotechnology in Developing Countries**

*The Wilderness, South Africa - 24-27 October 2006*

The First African Structural Biology (FASB) conference will be held in The Wilderness, South Africa. The conference will focus on the contributions and potential contributions of Structural Biology to the development of science and the creation of wealth in Africa with some emphasis on biotechnology and the alleviation of the disease burden of Africa.

The early registration deadline is 1 May 2006. Abstracts are due on 31 August 2006.

Expression of interest and registration forms can be submitted online by visiting our website:

<http://sbio.uct.ac.za/conference>

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## LIFESPARKS BIOBASICS "The Untapped Potential in Plant Biotechnology"

On 10 March, entrepreneurs, researchers, industry and investors came together at the LIFEsparks BioBasics event to better understand business opportunities within the plant biotechnology sector.

Sponsored by PlantBio Trust, CEO Sagadevan Mundree gave an overview of the investment vehicle's role in capacity building, in supporting job creation, improving food security in impoverished communities, and funding of new start-ups in the agricultural sector.



Mundree's presentation highlighted the significant role plant biotechnology plays in the South African agricultural and pharmaceutical markets, with some 52 plant-derived biotechnology products in development in comparison to the 34 commercial products currently in use, which includes internationally licensed technologies.

Of the more than 100 biotechnology companies within our borders, some 39 enterprises are focused in plant biotechnology, with bioprospecting and plant breeding areas of significant R&D interest, followed by genetically modified organisms and in vitro propagation.

In building local excellence in the field of plant biotechnology, PlantBio's activities are concentrating on improving the understanding among researchers as to the value of the intellectual property they generate; instilling an entrepreneurial culture; broadening management skills; establishing technology platforms, and getting more previously disadvantaged individuals involved in the sector.

PlantBio's presentation was augmented by Dr Kobi Inbar of Southgro Life Sciences who illuminated the entrepreneurial process in accelerating a discovery to proof of concept stage. He elucidated the fact that turning a great idea into a growth business takes more than a leading edge technology. When recognizing the commercial potential of a discovery, it is crucial that the market potential and competitive landscape are thoroughly investigated prior to strategizing on how to protect the intellectual property rights. To transform a scientific discovery into a viable business opportunity, it

is important that a professional and experienced management team, board of directors, and scientific advisory board are constituted to oversee a broad market analysis, the construction of an R&D plan, followed by a comprehensive business and financial plan.

Noah Greenhill, the manager of the AltX exchange, continued the educational program and explained to participants how to utilise the local stock exchange to raise funds for new biotechnology ventures. He explained the business requirements, listing process, and talked about what their ongoing obligations as listed entities would be with regards to listing fees, the cost of advisors, as well as reporting requirements in keeping shareholders abreast of developments.

Professor and chair of plant pathology from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Mark Laing concluded the program, talking about the competitive advantages that South Africa holds in the domain of plant biotechnology. The country boasts an exceptional diversity of plants and microbes, which combined with excellent science infrastructure, competitively priced screening facilities, and a growing interest in natural products worldwide, presents a opportunity and viable market to our biotechnologists and product development. Laing pointed out that dozens of potential products are waiting to be unlocked at universities and research institutions. Finally, he gave corporate financiers and investors who were in attendance an idea of the projects that he has been working on in collaboration with local and foreign partners and the potential for their commercialization.

The BioBasics session stimulated a significant debate around IP protection and the pathway from academic output to commercialization. Participants felt strongly that there is a pressing need for a broker or institute to assist local researchers to bridge the chasm from discovery to business formation - entrepreneurship.

*Article supplied by LifeSparks*

BioBasics is an initiative of Southgro Investment Conferences, which launched the first biopartnering event in South Africa in late 2005 with the aim of defragmenting the sector, in linking up researchers with industry as well as investors.

More information on plant biotechnology projects seeking investment is available at [www.lifesparks.co.za](http://www.lifesparks.co.za), click BioBasics link.



## PlantBio & CapeBiotech Sponsor Science Week

PlantBio and CapeBiotech will co-sponsor a Science Week to be held at the University of Cape Town in June 2006. The objectives include:

- To encourage learners to keep maths and science on the higher grade to keep their options open to study in the various programmes offered in the Science Faculty.
- To expose learners to the different fields in Science to enable them to make an informed education and career decision.
- To excite and motivate learners to enter the various Science fields.
- To work towards national transformation imperatives by assisting the faculty in the ongoing transformation of their student body.

Grade 11 and Grade 12 black learners with maths and science on the higher grade will be invited to apply to attend Science Week. They will fill in an application form and write a motivating paragraph on why they would like to attend. The school

principal will be asked to endorse the learner's application. Learners who show a keen interest in the fields of Science and have the ability to enter the university will be given the opportunity of attending.

The programme is to consist of lectures and workshops on campus to educate the learners on the different degree programmes available and what they entail. Tours to local industry will be arranged, to expose the learners to the different environments in which they will work, and to the problems and people that are part of the daily work routine. In the evenings role models would be invited to speak to the learners and they could work on challenging projects. This will encourage team work and is devised to nurture a love of science, maths and technology.



## Publicly Financed Research IPR Framework Workshop

By Department of Science and Technology

Held on 24 March 2006, At Sica's Guest House, Durban

The Department of Science and Technology in partnership with the Innovation Fund hosted a workshop in three different cities around South Africa including Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town. The objective of the workshop was to consult and engage stakeholders on the "framework for Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) arising through publicly financed research", to prioritize the actions needed for appropriate regulations and legislations to be drafted. Dr Sagadevan Mundree and Dr Antonio Llobell with two interns, Ms Masego Mokgoro and Ms Grace Baloyi, represented the PlantBio Team. Dr Adi Patterson, the Deputy Director General of the Department of Science and Technology (DST) gave a presentation highlighting the importance of protecting intellectual property developed with public financing. He also stressed the need to address and engage the public and private sectors in

drafting legislation in terms of the framework that will be submitted to the cabinet for review following consultation from other relevant departments.

The introduction was followed by the break away sessions in which groups of participants evaluated different aspects of the draft and recommended a number of actions for implementation. Ideas around promoting the development of valuable IP resources in public research institutions and its exploitation and transfer to the private sector were considered. Mechanisms to motivate and offer support to researchers, contractors and students in disclosing potential IP and ultimately creating revenue for relevant institutions were also discussed. It was clear that the key objectives of the workshop were achieved given the zealous debates and reports emerging from all the presentations that took place.



## BIO 2006 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

The Bio 2006 International Conference was held recently in Chicago, USA. This extraordinary event, which was held over four days, is hosted by the world's largest biotechnology association. Over the past two years they have built up a world class advocacy team, attracting executives from Congress and federal regulatory agencies to work on the issues that matter most to the future of the biotechnology industry.

The 2006 Convention brought together over 19000 biotechnology industry leaders who were able to attend 180 educational sessions, visit the exhibition hall with 1600 displays from over 30 countries, and join in a partnering forum that was host to more than 10 000 one-on-one meetings between executives. the biggest of its kind.



**Above & Below: Photographs taken inside the Exhibition Hall**



**Below left to right: Prof Sagadevan Mundree (PlantBio), Prof Diran Makinda (AfricaBio) and Prof Hamidou Boly (Burkira Faso) at a press conference**



Prof. Sagadevan Mundree presented an invited talk on "Agricultural Biotechnology in South Africa" in the session titled "Agricultural Biotechnology: Is it working in Africa?"



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