



## **Biotech Center Grants, Loans Help N.C. Start-Ups**

*North Carolina's Business-Friendly Life-Science Environment Succeeds*

RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK, N.C. June 22, 2011 –North Carolina is among the nation's top-three life-science growth areas not only because of its recruitment appeal, but also because of its three-decade commitment to home-grown technology.

The North Carolina Biotechnology Center has orchestrated much of the partnering that has been a hallmark of the state's success, helped by funding from the General Assembly and support from the state's civic, academic and business leaders.

Recognizing that biotech growth requires funding support to universities for commercialization and to companies struggling to survive their lean early years, the Biotech Center has developed a series of efficient grant and loan programs. Here are some examples of these programs at work:

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**Piedmont Pharmaceuticals:** A decade ago Piedmont Pharmaceuticals started on a path to commercialize a product that kills head lice.

Now, while the Greensboro firm is working toward U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval, it is licensing its unique, patented parasite-killing system to companies that are selling it around the world.

Its R&D has also made it a hit with big-name animal-health collaborators, including Pfizer and Bayer.

Piedmont's path to success included a well-timed \$150,000 Small Business Research Loan from the Biotech Center.

Eric Barnett, M.D., executive vice president of business development, says Piedmont is excited to be entering a critical growth phase. But he says it might not have survived its start-up years without that early loan.

"It's sometimes not so much the dollar amount of these Biotech Center loans that makes them so important," he noted. "It's their timing. They buy a young company time to get to the next level. And the vetting involved helps recipients demonstrate their investment worthiness to others."

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**Agile Sciences:** Agile Sciences, headquartered on the North Carolina State University Centennial Campus in Raleigh, was founded in 2007 by

N.C. State Professors Christian Melander and John Cavanagh to provide commercial solutions to those industries plagued by the effects of toxic biofilms.

The company's proprietary compound was derived from the *Agelas conifera* sea sponge and has been shown to be effective in dispersing the nasty bacterial growths. The company is investigating multiple applications in medicine, agriculture, and industry.

The Biotechnology Center helped the company with a \$50,000 Company Inception Loan and Melander also got a \$100,000 Collaborative Funding Grant from the Center.

The grant program, cosponsored by the Kenan Institute for Engineering, Technology and Science at NC State, enables public-private teams to hire a research support person to work at a university lab on a commercially interesting project.

The Biotechnology Center has also provided Cavanagh's N.C. State research lab more than \$350,000 in grants to help purchase necessary equipment.

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**Undergraduate Research Fellowships:** It's the old Catch-22 — you need experience to get a job, but you can't get experience without a job.

Young scientists can build that experience through the Biotech Center's Undergraduate Research Fellowships — \$5,000 awards to support research experiences for science and engineering majors.

Each summer these awards give university students an opportunity to try bench science, and their academic or company mentors gain new ideas.

Joanna Cooper, a University of North Carolina at Pembroke student, earned one of the fellowships in 2010. She studied with internationally respected molecular biologist Ben Bahr, Ph.D. Her project explored the underlying cause of a group of inherited metabolic diseases.

The next year, Rebecca Howell, who left the real estate industry to become a UNCP student, won the award, and is also studying in Bahr's lab.

Prof. Bahr is himself a Biotech Center success story; he's one of the 50-plus world-class experts the Biotech Center grants have helped recruit to North Carolina universities.

The grant program is now named for one of the first recruits, Oliver Smithies, D. Phil., who joined the research faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill more than two decades ago. Smithies won a Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 2007.

The Biotechnology Center is a private, non-profit corporation supported by the N.C. General Assembly. Its mission is to provide long-term economic and societal benefits to North Carolina by supporting biotechnology research, business, education and strategic policy statewide.

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