

University planning a new bioenergy lab

RESearchers from several disciplines at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign have begun to plan a new \$20 million research facility dedicated to interdisciplinary bioenergy research.

The U of I has released \$3.2 million for planning the 50,000-square-foot Integrated Bioprocessing and Research Laboratory. The facility should be complete in spring 2009. Some 25 faculty researchers representing multiple disci-

Key Points

- U of I researchers have begun to plan a new \$20 million bioenergy lab.
- The interdisciplinary research facility should be complete in spring 2009.
- It will provide an environment for the discovery of new food bioprocesses.

plines will have office space and related pilot space in the facility. Additional

office space also will be available to industrial partners.

Research at the new lab will focus on using advanced bioprocessing technology to economically produce biomass-based fuels, such as cellulosic ethanol and other biofuels, according to Hans Blaschek, professor and assistant dean of the U of I College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences Office of Research. It also will include an interdisciplinary educational com-

ponent to train scientists and workers for tomorrow's biotech industry, as well as to educate consumers, producers and others.

The lab also will provide a flexible processing environment for the discovery of new food and industrial bioprocesses and products.

"Specifically, the Integrated Bioprocessing Research Laboratory is a translational facility for scale-up and testing of biofuels and other bioproducts," says Blaschek. "It is a multidisciplinary research facility with capabilities focused on the chemical, physical and biological conversion of renewal feedstocks to biofuels and other value-added products."

Cellulosic biofuel focus

Scientists working at the lab will employ multi-stage processes by which soybeans, corn and other grains, and cellulosic crops such as *Miscanthus giganteus* and switchgrass, are converted to new and improved animal feeds, human foods, nutraceuticals (functional foods), energy sources, industrial feedstocks and chemicals.

Staffing for the facility will include the administration associated with the newly created Center for Advanced BioEnergy Research, led by Blaschek.

The new facility is part of a \$125 million grant proposal now being considered by the U.S. Department of Energy. In addition to the U of I, collaborators on the proposal include Argonne National Laboratory, Northwestern University, the University of Chicago, Archer Daniels Midland Co. and Chromatin Inc.

The Department of Energy Genomes-to-Life grant proposal also calls for the creation of a BioEnergy Research Institute that will focus on four central themes: sustainability, feedstock development, plant cell wall deconstruction, and fermentative conversion of sugars to fuels. Each theme will involve a team of leading investigators from a variety of disciplines with distinguished research records, according to Blaschek.

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