

SD ag research enjoys corporate interest
By Alan Van Ormer, Prairie Business Magazine
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For many years agricultural research revolved around production. Over the last 5-10 years that research emphasis has switched to more of a push to produce energy in a renewable, sustainable way.

"Ag production is still important," states Bill Gibbons, professor of Industrial Microbiology in the College of Agriculture and Biological Sciences at South Dakota State University in Brookings, SD. "Along with it, there is an additional demand for energy and other products. How can agriculture meet all the needs in an environmental, sustained manner?"

To help with this challenge, organizations like Monsanto Company, located in the Harrisburg (SD) Industrial Park, have opened new research and development facilities. On the SDSU campus, a 125-acre research park is being developed.

Gibbons believes this is important to South Dakota. "Companies like Monsanto have the resources. We don't," he says.

Monsanto opened a 23,000-square-foot building in June, 2006 to do research and development of corn hybrids, including a plant breeding and testing program. A soybean research facility is also under construction nearby.

In Brookings, the Innovation Campus at SDSU will offer facilities for university, government, and private companies to create new technologies and conduct research in areas such as software and hardware development, engineering, pharmaceutical, biosciences, and agriculture. A 70,000-square-foot seed technology building will be constructed to do seed testing in a lab setting. Small testing plots may also be included in the research park.

Phase 1 is underway and will consist of 20-25 acres that includes the seed technology lab building and a 30,000-square-foot, multi-tenant incubator. A master plan is being developed for the infrastructure and construction will begin this spring.

"When I think of agricultural research, I think of what researchers are doing with plant varieties, not only in the lab, but outside in the field," she explains. "Research is important for agronomists to understand soil, climate and water conditions, and how these elements impact crops, which ultimately becomes our food supply in one way or another."

Monsanto is working to develop corn hybrids that will work in South Dakota and other states in the Midwest.

"South Dakota has a unique environment to be testing," agrees Brian Ternus, testing and operations manager at the Harrisburg facility. "We are hoping to develop better yielding hybrids, as well as improve the health of the plant during the growing season."

A challenge in research is finding ways to increase corn yields and to find ways to get rid of insects and other pests.

"Any additional research for agriculture you can get in a state is a good thing because it helps to provide a more precise picture of what you're looking for in that area," Ternus states.

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