OMAFRA – University of Guelph: Partnering to Maximize Success

OMAFRA – UofG Partnership

The agreement between the University of Guelph and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) attracts a critical mass of research expertise to the University and the city. The ministry’s direct contribution has been increased in 2008/2009 to $59.1 million with additional one-time funding bringing the total annual ministry contribution to $76.1 million.

OMAFRA participates in the commercialization of research that is developed through OMAFRA funding. Moving a research concept to product development and commercialization requires resources, both financial and intellectual. OMAFRA participates through helping to pay for patent costs, co-chairing a joint intellectual property management committee, sharing staff and the availability of a ‘proof of principal’ fund that is managed by the University of Guelph Business Development Office (BDO), which can be used to do experiments to make new inventions more attractive to company partners.

OMAFRA Proof of Principle awards are made from funds provided to the university from OMAFRA’s share of commercialization revenues. They are intended to support the cost of research that will advance a previously disclosed invention towards commercialization. To be eligible, projects must meet the following criteria:

- Research must fit within one of OMAFRA’s strategic research themes
- Expected outcomes must increase the likelihood of commercial success
- Project must relate to a previously disclosed invention, assigned to U of G
- Project should be of short duration (6-12 months)
- Maximum project value is $50,000, but most will be smaller
- BDO staff are available for consultation to qualify your project

Examples of some funded projects include development of a combined soy/dairy cheese, examination of a tomato trait useful for producing tomato paste, and animal trials to prove the anti-inflammatory properties of a variety of mint.

“OMAFRA funding for a technology transfer Manager allows me to connect more with the University and the innovations produced through OMAFRA funding.”

- Tyler Whale, TechTransfer Manager

Proximity Works

OMAFRA helps, since it makes it easier to arrange meetings. As well, Tyler works within the BDO, which helps both groups because expertise is shared throughout the BDO, not just specific to OMAFRA projects. Locating someone focused on OMAFRA funded research programs at the U of G has created much needed focus on driving the commercialization efforts and generating more successes from OMAFRA’s investment in the U of G.

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Proximity Works

OMAFRA funds one Technology Transfer Manager (Tyler Whale) through the partnership, whose role is to manage new inventions that arise from the funding.

The secondment of a technology transfer manager to work specifically with technologies coming from OMAFRA allows the university to work closely with OMAFRA’s research and innovation branch and keep them informed of new development. Other ways the partners communicate include:

- holding quarterly meetings where new disclosures & updates on marketing progress are shared
- participation in intellectual property management committee

On-going communication allows new inventions to be supported through start up stages, and prevent researchers from falling off the track to success, due to lack of support.

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Research Leading to Products

The OMAFRA poster could include information on some active projects that have emerged from OMAFRA funding.

Examples:

1. Creation of milk and eggs that contain DHA, a healthy fatty acid that promotes development of the brain
2. Genetic tests for cattle that can determine the tenderness of their meat
3. Plants that can more cheaply produce cancer-fighting pharmaceutical products
4. Vaccines to improve animal health
5. Specialized soybeans suitable for the Japanese market
6. ‘Green’ consumer products made from a combination of non-food biomaterials (such switchgrass) and recycled plastic
7. Dietary additives to reduce boar taint in pigs and increase animal welfare

For more information contact:
Erin Skimson 519.824.4120 Ext.58878
Or BDO@uoguelph.ca

www.csahs.uoguelph.ca/pps