



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

For Immediate Release  
January 11, 2008

**Contact:**

Vann Rogerson  
Phone: (252) 482-4333

**North Carolina's  
Northeast Commission**  
119 West Water Street  
Edenton, North Carolina 27932

### **Plant-Made Biotechnology a Growing Future for North Carolina's Northeast** *Interest in plant-made biotechnology provides educational and job opportunities*

Edenton, NC – Economic Development officials announced plans to have ongoing meetings with educators and business representatives to bring together biotechnology resources throughout North Carolina's northeast region and to develop a plan for future development of a viable industry in plant-made biotechnology. Organized by North Carolina's Northeast Commission and the Eastern Office of the North Carolina Biotechnology Center, the mission of the Northeast Biotechnology Task Force is to build on the strengths of the research work conducted by scientists at NC State University's Vernon James Research and Extension Center in Roper as well as East Carolina University and Elizabeth City State University. At a recent meeting, the group developed plans for moving plant-made biotech research from the universities to farms and businesses in North Carolina's northeast region.

“Our region has tremendous assets in agriculture, manufacturing, land, and workforce,” said Vann Rogerson, President/CEO of North Carolina's Northeast Commission. “By working collaboratively and bringing together all of the resources in the region, we can build our biotech niche, diversify our economy, and expand the capacity for good-paying jobs.” Plant-made biotechnology includes biomass for biofuels; plant extracts for nutraceuticals, cosmetics, or functional foods; and ag-biotech for medicinal or therapeutic applications. North Carolina's northeastern region is unique in that the resources of land and farming expertise already exist, and since manufacturing companies prefer to locate near the source of raw materials, the region is perfectly situated for production facilities to locate here.

“Great ideas can move forward with teamwork and strong leadership,” stated John Chaffee, Director of the Eastern Office of the NC Biotechnology Center located in Greenville. Chaffee forms the link between the NC Biotechnology Center in Research Triangle Park and the resources of the northeast region that include North Carolina's Northeast Commission, county economic developers, universities, colleges, and businesses.

According to Dr. Cynthia Sollod of the NC Biotechnology Center, over one billion acres of genetically modified crops have been planted worldwide in the past 10 years. Over 250 million acres of biotech crops were planted worldwide in 2006 alone. The farmers understand that these crops allow them to use fewer herbicides and pesticides, making our US food sources safer than ever before. In addition, there are 5.6 billion gallons of fuel used each year in North Carolina. If 10% of that usage is going to come from biofuels, then the time is right for this industry to develop.

The future of the industry in the region is being studied by RTI International, a Raleigh-based world renowned independent research organization with a distinguished history in scientific research and technology development. RTI is expected to make recommendations for biotech development specific to North Carolina's northeast region. RTI will identify the assets of the region, match the strengths of North Carolina's Northeast to potential projects in the industry, and assist with the creation of an ‘action agenda’ to guide future development.

“Our farmers in the region are knowledgeable and they are open to change. They are not set in their ways, but are willing to try new technology and different crops if it brings higher efficiency and lower cost to their business,” stated Joe Landino, Past President of the Blackland Farm Managers Association and Co-Chair of the Northeast Biotechnology Task Force. The task force is also co-chaired by David Peele, president of AVOCA, Inc., a plant extraction company located in Bertie County near Edenton.

“This is a great opportunity to provide jobs for our local residents,” said Gene Rogers, Chairman of the North Carolina’s Northeast Commission. “These jobs in the biotech industry, such as lab technicians and quality control technicians, usually pay above average wages.” Many of the local community colleges prepare students for careers in biotechnology by offering two-year degrees in biotechnology-related fields. There is also a coordinated effort among the local community colleges to provide various classes at different schools so that a quality program is offered within a reasonable distance for students. Graduates from these Associate of Applied Sciences (AAS) degrees can often transfer credit hours to area universities.

The biotechnology task force is bringing research and economic development ideas together to form a viable industry niche in North Carolina’s northeast region. Agriculture has been important throughout the history of North Carolina’s Northeast, and the future of agriculture is growing brighter.

#### **About plant-made biotechnology:**

Plant-made biotechnology has existed formally since the early part the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but was known primarily to scientists and farmers. Now with advances in technology and genetics research, ideas created in a laboratory can be mass-produced at a fraction of the cost in fertile fields. The future of plant-made biotechnology includes cellulosic biomass, biofuels production, and transgenic plants with pharmaceutical (medical) and nutraceutical (nutritional) implications.

#### **About North Carolina’s Northeast Commission:**

North Carolina’s Northeast Commission is dedicated to increasing the standard of living for citizens in its sixteen-county region through tourism, industrial, and business development. The 16 counties that comprise the regional Commission are: Beaufort, Bertie, Camden, Chowan, Currituck, Dare, Gates, Halifax, Hertford, Hyde, Martin, Northampton, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Tyrrell, and Washington. For more information about the North Carolina’s Northeast Commission, contact us at [www.ncnortheast.com](http://www.ncnortheast.com) and [www.visitncne.com](http://www.visitncne.com).

#### **About the Blackland Farm Manager’s Association**

The Blackland Farm Manager’s Association was established by farmers in Beaufort, Hyde, Tyrrell, and Washington Counties in 1970. The association works with researchers and political figures to bring the most highly developed farming techniques to the organic soils of this region and to bring the soils to their full production potential.

