

Alberta project to analyze genomes of 1,000 plants

Province hopes to attract researchers by investing \$1.5-million

-  Article
-  Comments ()
- 

KATHERINE O'NEILL
FROM FRIDAY'S GLOBE AND MAIL
NOVEMBER 14, 2008 AT 4:42 AM EST

EDMONTON — The Alberta government is investing in a new international plant-genome project to help build its growing stable of world-class researchers and academics.

"This is an exceptional example of the types of things we can do, and it's an exceptional example of the type of quality people we can bring to our province," Doug Horner, Alberta's Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, said yesterday at the launch of the Alberta 1,000 Plants Initiative.

The \$2-million project, which will analyze the genetic blueprint of 1,000 plants, will be led by Gane Ka-Shu Wong, a superstar in the genomics world.

Born in Hong Kong and raised in Kelowna, B.C., he was recently recruited to the University of Alberta after working in the United States and China.

Dr. Wong said a major pull back to Canada was "the spirit of entrepreneurship" in Alberta.

The plant-genome project is supported by international partners, including China's Beijing Genomics Institute, of which Dr. Wong is a founding member. The institute, which was a key contributor to the Human Genome Project, is planning to donate services such as computer power and advanced equipment for gene sequencing.

"Incredibly, only about 100 plant species' DNA sequences have been analyzed in the proposed manner, so this project has real potential for new discoveries that can make nature work for us," Dr. Wong said.

He said selection is under way for the plants that will be studied, and that talented scientists attracted to the project will help fine-tune the list.

Despite the economic crisis gripping the United States and other countries, Dr. Wong said debt-free Alberta still has a "huge opportunity" to hire more top researchers from around the world by financing ambitious projects such as the plant initiative.

His research will be conducted in a new state-of-the-art building on the University of Alberta's campus. The province contributed about \$300-million to the construction.

Dr. Wong and others hope that mapping the gene sequence of plants can lead to everything from new medicines to high-tech biofuels to crop improvements.

He said the decision to study 1,000 plants was made because it was more "impressive" than 100.

The plan is eventually to make sequence data uncovered by the project available to the public via the Internet.

Mr. Horner said the research, to which the provincial government is contributing \$1.5-million, is a "big deal for the people of Alberta, and it's a big deal for Canada and the globe."

He also said it "lays the foundation for a new bioproducts industry" in the oil- and gas-rich province.

-  Article
-  Comments ()
- 

Recommend this article? 0 votes

View the most recommended

Real Estate Market



'If everyone waits... we'll be back in multiple offers'

My Car



Style and substance, in the kitchen and on the road

Small Business



Fairytale ending for tiny Ottawa firm

Globe Campus



Which university got top marks in campus technology?

Personal Technology



Learning from mistakes with Windows 7

© Copyright 2008 CTVglobemedia Publishing Inc. All Rights Reserved.

CTVglobemedia

globeandmail.com and The Globe and Mail are divisions of CTVglobemedia Publishing Inc., 444 Front St. W., Toronto, ON Canada M5V 2S9
Phillip Crawley, Publisher