

BASF investing in plant biotechnology

German group BASF is to invest EUR 700 M over 10 years in plant biotechnology research. It will create a holding company to run its businesses in this sector (seeds, research and development). The group is also planning to buy or acquire shares in seeds producers. BASF wants to become a market leader in biotechnology. It will integrate its researchers working on plants into BASF Plant Science GmbH which will have 300 highly qualified employees. At start 1999 BASF acquired a 40% stake in Swedish seeds producer Svaloef Weibull and the 2 companies restructured their plant biotechnology operations as BASF Plant Science GmbH. As well as businesses in Germany (Metanomics and SunGene), BASF Plant Science has 3 research laboratories in Sweden, 1 in Canada and a research centre in the US. The company is particularly interested in enhancing plants' resistance to cold and heat so that they can be grown outside temperate zones. It also wants to increase oil, protein and carbohydrate yield as well as vitamin content.

Mergers

Creation of Syngenta being investigated by EU Commission

The European Commission is to carry out a thorough 4-month investigation of the proposed merger of the agrochemical activities of Zeneca and Novartis to form Syngenta. There are concerns that the venture will have an excess share of the market for fungicides for cereals, sugar beet and maize. Sales of Syngenta are estimated at \$7.9 bn/y, with the new company being a market leader for both herbicides and fungicides. Additional information regarding the merger was requested by the US Federal Trade Commission in February 2000. The partners still anticipate completing the deal by the second half of 2000.

European Commission clears merger of Monsanto and Pharmacia & Upjohn

Monsanto Co and Pharmacia & Upjohn announced that the European Commission has cleared the planned merger of the two companies. Based on the European approval, the companies closed the merger on 31 March 2000 and began trading as Pharmacia Corp on 3 April 2000. In

relation to the European Commission ruling, the two companies have agreed to divest a few immediate-release analgesic products marketed by Pharmacia & Upjohn in Sweden. Pharmacia Corp's corporate and pharmaceutical business headquarters will be in Peapack, NJ. The agricultural business headquarters will be in St Louis and will retain the Monsanto name (<http://www.pnu.com>).

Merger of Spiess and Urania Chemicals

German companies CF Spiess & Sohn GmbH & Co in Kleinkarlbach and Urania Chemicals GmbH in Hamburg plan to merge into Spiess-Urania Chemicals GmbH that will be based in Hamburg. The new company is expected to become the fifth largest pesticides company in Germany with a turnover of DM 150 M in 2000. Both companies will contribute around DM 75 M to this figure. Total turnover of Spiess-Urania Chemicals is estimated at DM 190 M/y and will include other activities. Turnover is forecast to rise to above DM 200 M in coming years. Subject to approval by the cartel authorities the merger will be backdated to 1 October 1999. Spiess and Urania Chemicals have been active in the German pesticides market for more than 50 years and the companies operate the joint venture Spiess-Urania Pflanzenschutz GmbH in Ochsenfurt.

Incinerator available commercially

Horstine Farmery have introduced THE inCINerator BIN for on-farm disposal of plastic pesticide containers and their outer packaging in the UK. THE CIN BIN, as it is to be known, uses the design developed by the Silsoe Research Institute and the British Agrochemicals Association (BAA). It follows the circular construction of the pilot BAA unit and has a robust grid to withstand the very high temperatures achieved during the burn. For more information Email: info@horstine-farmery.com. BAA has launched a campaign to encourage farmers to clean and burn pesticide packs using such incinerators; two flyers are being printed entitled "Dirty Packs Will Cost You Money" and "Only Incinerate Clean Packs".

Paradigm Genetics and Bayer

Paradigm Genetics Inc. achieved another milestone in connection with its collaboration agreement with Bayer AG in the search for novel screening targets that may lead to the development of new herbicides. Additional assays on target genes discovered in Paradigm's GeneFunction Factory are in development. Two milestones were achieved in February 2000, when Paradigm delivered the first assay under the agreement and delivered release 1.1 of a customised FunctionFinder bioinformatics system. Bayer is providing its experience in the development of crop protection products for the agricultural market. Paradigm Genetics is industrialising the process of gene function determination for four major sectors of the global economy: nutrition, crop production, industrial products, and human health (<http://www.paradigmgenetics.com>)

Bayer relocates headquarters of Consumer Care Division

Bayer relocated its Consumer Care Division to Morristown, NJ, USA, on 1 May 2000. This segment manufactures and markets over-the-counter (OTC) pharmaceuticals and household insecticides. Bayer considers North America the largest growth market in this segment. Around half of turnover by Bayer's Consumer Care business are generated in the US, Canada, Mexico and Central America.

Snippets

...the Aventis joint venture with HangZhou General Pesticide to make fipronil in Hangzhou, China, has been approved by the Chinese government.

...Aventis CropScience has bought 25% of French vegetable oils producer Novance, Oise. According to Aventis, Novance gives it a platform in biotechnology research for industrial products derived from new oil-producing plants.

...Dow AgroSciences plans to close its European research facility at Letcombe in Oxfordshire, UK, with the loss of approximately 50 jobs. The company's Formulation Science and technology group will be consolidated at the existing King's Lynn site, with non-laboratory functions being relocated to a nearby office

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