

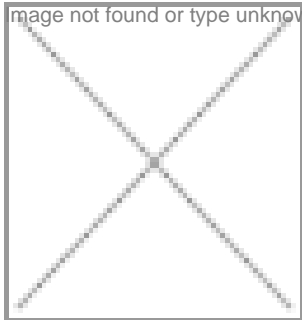
The Metahelix Way

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When in mid-November the 8th BioSpectrum Awards Jury decided to give the Product of the Year Award to the cry1C bt gene developed by Metahelix Life Sciences, the industry was actually recognizing the tireless efforts of a band of scientists-turned-entrepreneurs. Ten years ago, they left their cushy jobs in top seed companies and decided to develop a truly Indian transgenic product to best.

For nearly a decade, helped by angel investors, the Metahelix team pursued their dream, despite many ups and downs, a complex and long winding regulatory path. BioSpectrum has been chronicling the remarkable strides made by Dr K K Narayanan and his team all these years. Even when I met him to profile the product in late November, Dr Narayanan was clear that Metahelix will take a cautious approach with the product and spend a few years to earn the Indian farmers' goodwill and product endorsement.

At the same time, Dr Narayanan was fully confident about the gene and was steadfast in his belief that the benefits of this efficient technology should reach farmers around the world. And he had confided that the only way that can happen will be with the support of strategic investors who have deep pockets. He was already preparing the ground for that. Two weeks later, it happened. The TATA group recognized the importance of Metahelix and has given the company the requisite backing and financial muscle by picking up a majority stake through Rallis India, the group's agriculture arm.

Metahelix has got an infusion of nearly \$20 million when the angel investors exited through the Rallis arrangement. These funds will help Metahelix to prepare for the initial forays into the national market and take the right steps to seek regulatory approvals in the major cotton growing countries. The gene will be inserted in cotton hybrids initially and later into a variety of

vegetable crops and cereals. More than that, the company can now count on the huge financial strengths of the TATA Group to fulfill its ambition to put an Indian gene in crops around the world.

Biocon's Pfizer deal and Metahelix-Rallis arrangement are giving way to a new business trend in the small but growing Indian biotech industry. Within a decade of the emergence of this industry, despite the small revenue size, the companies are able to think globally and clearly aim to put India-made products in global markets. Very few India-made products have succeeded in doing so on their own terms. The Metahelix way will have many more followers in the industry in the coming decade.

You have all got used to the familiar pages of BioSpectrum for the last five years. Change is the only constant in all walks of life. BioSpectrum too has undergone some changes. The new look BioSpectrum you hold in your hands is the result of a year-long effort by the magazine's design and editorial team, with inputs from external experts, to give it a contemporary look and feel. We have chosen a design that will straddle the multiple delivery formats of print, digital and online seamlessly, while preserving the essential character of the trusted biotech magazine. I hope you all enjoy the new design. Do let us know what you think of the change. Wish you all a very Happy and Happening New Year 2011.

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