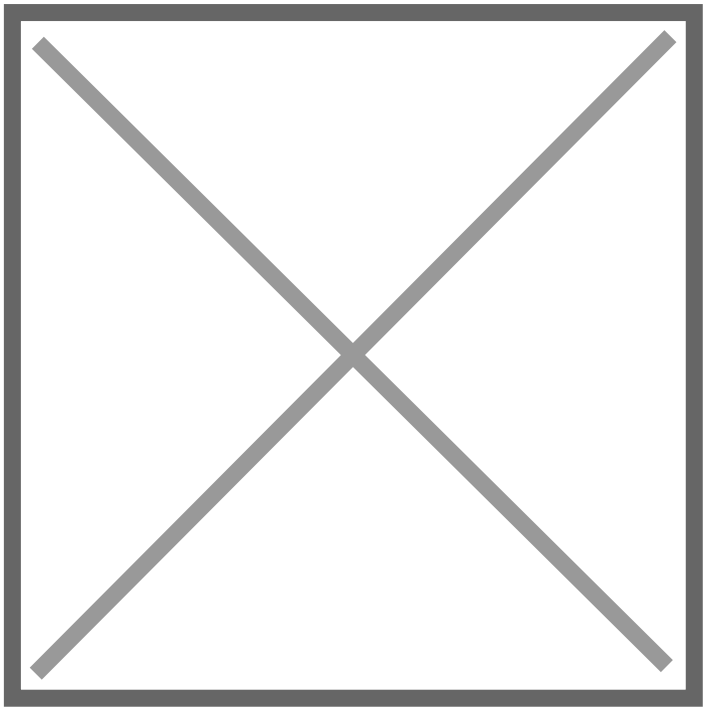
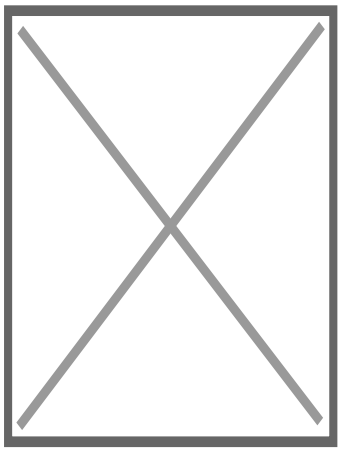
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Some Bright Spots

04 February 2009 | News



Some Bright Spots



Can any industrial segment insulate itself from the negative sentiments affecting almost every other sector in the national economy? This is the question now confronting the leaders of the biotechnology industry in the country and elsewhere. How does one deal with the current situation when there is a crisis of confidence all around? How should the biotech sector approach the situation, especially when its fortunes are linked to the phase of technological and regulatory developments only in the long run?

There is no clear patter so far from within the industry. There is certainly an element of caution and an urgency to cut out the frills and concentrate on the long-term activities. This is best exemplified by the Cover Story in this issue which is all about the bubbling biotechs. Another wave of entrepreneurship is currently lapping the shores of Indian biotech. A new set of gung-ho entrepreneurs, supremely confident about the ability to make it happen, with their bright ideas and even brighter business models, is now the toast of the biotech town. Not one of them profiled in the ensuing BioSpectrum pages even hinted at any uncertainly clouding their entrepreneurial visions.

Even more remarkable is the entry of a related segment, nanobiotechnology, to shore up the fortunes of Indian biotech. This new segment is all set for action. Over a dozen companies have come up, trying their best to incorporate cutting edge nano technologies to mainly improve drug delivery systems and processes. Drug delivery seems to be the sector which is likely to benefit the most from the adoption of technologies that make things happen at the nano levels. A nanobiotech ecosystem is also emerging in the country.

At the same time, the established biotech players hunkering down to tide over the short term impact of slightly slowing sales and the wrong calls on the forex rates. The wait and watch attitude of the established players in the industry seems to be having some negative impact on the overall sentiments. BioSpectrum had teamed up with the industry association, ABLE, to bring the entire Life Sciences industry on a common platform in Mumbai on February 18-19 as part of the Navigate 2009 event. We have listened to the feedback from the industry and deferred the event by 11 months to January 2010. The annual Bangalore Bio event, too has been rescheduled to June from the original April dates. There is a global wait and watch over the global biotech industry's annual gathering, scheduled to take place in May in Atlanta. The industry has panicked too early, and should actually imbibe some confidence from the new entrepreneurs who have not slowed down their plans amidst this gloom. That is actually the way to go forward for those who believe in the long term strengths of the biotech sector.

Some regulatory clouds over the vaccine issues have ben lifted and there is assurance that the promises on this score will be kept. However, the gathering storm over the issue of field trials of the country's first genetically modified (GM) food crop, a Bt brinjal variety, is a distraction. Ministers and activists have jumped into the fray, without waiting for the last word from the experts tasked with the stringent regulatory approval process.

It is time bio agri companies got together to counter the anti-GM campaign being waged on various fronts. Otherwise, it may be too late.

It is time to join the one-sided national debate that is now going on about GM foods. Scientists and industry leaders who have

supreme confidence in the GM food technology should speak up, like Prof. Montagu, the pioneering plant geneticist, has done in the special interview that appears in this issue of BioSpectrum. Stand up and be counted in this hour of crisis facing the segment which has the potential to transform Indian agriculture beyond recognition.

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