

Industrial Research Assistance Program (IRAP)

Region: Prairies – Saskatchewan Saskatoon

Bioriginal Food and Science Corporation



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Jerome Konecsni, Vice-President, Bioriginal Food and Science Corporation

Nutraceutical Market Fertile Ground for Bioriginal Food & Science Corp.

On February 19, 2003, Bioriginal Food & Science Corp. was named Canadian Innovation Leader by the National Research Council of Canada. The award was presented at the NRC's National Awards Ceremony in Hull, Quebec in recognition of Bioriginal's commitment to research and innovation. Bioriginal was recognized as one of the top firms working with the NRC's Industrial Research Assistance Program.

Before any of Bioriginal Food and Science Corporation's products go to market, they have to meet the most rigorous quality control measures in the industry. The company's standards are high, but then so are the stakes. As Vice-President Jerome Konecsni likes to point out, "In today's competitive international nutraceutical business, strategic missteps are measured not just in market share, but in the millions of dollars."

It wasn't always this way. Back in 1986 when the roots of what would become Bioriginal Food and Science Corp. were taking hold, the nutraceutical industry was in its infancy. With a commitment to purity and quality that has become its hallmark, the Saskatoon company began researching and developing plant-based essential fatty acids (EFAs) from oils processed mainly from borage. EFA products are used in a growing number of nutritional supplements, drug delivery systems, mass-market foods, skin care, cosmetics, and pet and veterinary products around the world.

Supported by superior research capabilities, an ideal geographic location, a pristine growing environment and important strategic alliances, including collaboration with the NRC Plant Biotechnology Institute (NRC-PBI), Bioriginal soon established itself as an industry pioneer and leader. Their vision was recognized through numerous awards, including the 1998 Canadian Entrepreneur of the Year award in two separate categories.

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Web site:

<http://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/irap-pari>

A growing acceptance of the therapeutic value of food coupled with an aging population, the rising cost of health care and easier access to information via the Internet have all served to drive the acceptance and growth of the nutritional supplement industry. However as marketing opportunities burgeoned, so too did Bioriginal's competition.

The company realized it needed help to meet these new challenges and turned to Janet Panford, an Industrial Technology Advisor with the National Research Council's Industrial Research Assistance Program (NRC-IRAP).

“Our objective is to add value from both a technical and business perspective so that our clients can improve their competitive position and their ability to create wealth for themselves,” says Panford. “While IRAP had provided research and development support to Bioriginal in the past, we recognized that in order to continue to successfully compete in the marketplace, the company would need greater access to business and marketing intelligence. We were able to facilitate this access through our partnership with the Prairie Centre for Business Intelligence (PCBI) in Saskatchewan.”

The Prairie Centres for Business Intelligence - one in Saskatchewan and the other in Manitoba - work with NRC-IRAP to assist small and medium-sized enterprises. They analyze information about competitors, markets, customers, and industry. Based on this analysis, companies are better able to make appropriate strategic decisions.

In this instance, Bioriginal received financial assistance, through NRC-IRAP's Youth Program, to hire a recent business school graduate. The PCBI provided access to experienced business consultant mentors who assisted the new staff member in conducting business intelligence. According to Konecsni, the company now has a much better understanding of how to establish and manage an in-house competitive intelligence program designed specifically to meet its unique needs.

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Their intelligence program in place, the company continues to look for ways to expand and improve their product line. In addition to its signature borage oil, Bioriginal now produces EFA oils from evening primrose, black current, flax and hemp. They have also branched out into organic flax products and custom formulations targeting specific health concerns. ■

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