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## Media Release

### For Immediate Release

March 31, 2009

#### Saint Mary's biologists awarded \$60,000 for biofuel research

Saint Mary's University biologist Dr. Kevin Vessey has received an Early Stage Commercialization Fund award from Nova Scotia's Office for Economic Development and InNOVAcorp Inc.

The \$30,000 award is to help Dr. Vessey and his research team further develop an inoculant to optimize sugar beet growth capacity for low cost, environmentally sound bioethanol production, a biofuel alternative to gasoline.

The award from the province brings the recent total funding for the biology research to \$60,000.

Earlier this month, Dr. Vessey was awarded \$20,000 from the Springboard Atlantic Proof of Concept Fund and \$10,000 from the Springboard Patent and Legal Fund to prepare a series of experiments to advance the discovery of the inoculant towards a commercial product.

Dr. Vessey and his team are combining sugar beet with naturally occurring bacteria that help provide nitrogen to the crop, thereby reducing the need for expensive and environmentally-unfriendly nitrogen fertilizers.

Sugar beet has some distinct advantages over other sources of biofuel. Its sugar concentration can be 25 per cent higher than sugar cane and its yield can be 10 times greater than corn and wheat. Yet despite these advantages, its reliance on nitrogen fertilizers limits its commercial feasibility as a source for bioethanol.

The inoculant developed by Dr. Vessey's team may be the answer.

"We're excited to see Dr. Vessey's research moving into the developmental phase," said Gina Funicelli, Director, Industry Liaison Office at Saint Mary's University. "Since we filed a patent in August 2008, we've received several expressions of interest from industry which we're currently pursuing."

*The Purpose of the Nova Scotia Office of Economic Development (OED) Early Stage Commercialization (ESCF) Fund is to provide funding for projects demonstrating readiness to advance a technology that has achieved (or is close to achieving) a prototype or proof-of-concept stage and is approaching market readiness with a possibility of attracting industrial partners and/or investment.*

*Springboard Atlantic is a commercialization network that works to increase collaboration among post-secondary institutions, and to facilitate and accelerate the transfer of research and development*



Dr. Kevin Vessey (front) and his Saint Mary's team including Chris Fitzner (left), Norma Snow, Gina Funicelli, Dr. Houman Fei and Abuduxikuer Abudureheman are developing an inoculant to help make sugar beet a commercially viable source of bioethanol production.

*(R&D) to the private sector.*



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