

Georgia: Aiming for the Top Five in Life Sciences

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– Charles Craig, president, Georgia Bio



The state of Georgia is known as the “Crossroads in Global Health.” While many in state government, research institutions, companies and life science organizations are committed to the healthcare sector, they are determined to expand the state’s life science industry to crack the top five in the country within 10 years.

Most of Georgia’s life sciences companies are clustered in what’s called the Innovation Crescent that stretches from Atlanta to Athens and includes Augusta where the Medical College of Georgia is located. Included in the crescent is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, located near Emory University and downtown Atlanta. Emory is partnered with the Carter Center, which is focused on human rights and elimination of disease in developing nations. The American Cancer Society, American Arthritis Foundation and CARE International are also headquartered in Atlanta.

The life sciences industry in Georgia employs 30,000 people in both the public and private sectors. The state’s Department of Economic Development reports that the life science companies have 160 products on the market and another 300 products in development or pending approval. Most of the life science companies are small with less than 10 employees, but among well-established corporations that call Georgia home are Merial, a global animal health company, CIBA Vision, a leader in the research, development and manufacturing of contact lenses and lens care products, and Sciele Pharma, a specialist in the sales, marketing and development of branded prescription products for cardiovascular, diabetic, women’s health and pediatrics.

“I don’t think I can stress this enough. When you take a look at Georgia, while most of the biotech applications are for improving healthcare and that’s consistent across the nation, there’s also a strong agricultural biotech and biofuels industry developing here,” said Charles Craig, president of Georgia Bio, the state’s industry trade organization and the Biotechnology Industry Organization state affiliate.

The investment in agriculture and biofuels is spurring the development of a second life sciences cluster in the Valdosta area centered on the University of Georgia’s Tifton Campus. The campus is home to the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and the Georgia Agriculture Innovation Center. To the northeast, Range Fuels is building one of the first commercial, cellulosic ethanol plants near Soperton, GA. The plant is slated to produce 20 million gallons of ethanol a year using gasification technology to convert wood and wood waste to a biofuel. Two ethanol production facilities are operational in the state while others are under construction.

To support the overall expansion of Georgia life sciences, the Georgia Research Authority invested \$470 million of state and industry partner funds into the state’s public and private research institutions and founded 24 Centers of Research Excellence that support basic and translational research in numerous areas from animal health, biomedicine, systems biology, nanotechnology to drug design. GRA also sponsors the Eminent Scholars Program® that has yielded more than \$1 billion in outside grants and contracts for the state. The organization’s Venture Lab is located in six universities and bridges the gap from discovery to formation of an early stage company that is ready for a business incubator.

With all that’s going on in Georgia life sciences, the best place to learn more is the BIO International Convention May 18 to 21 at the Georgia World Conference Center in Atlanta. **1**



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