

# AG INNOVATION

## On Display At 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual International Showcase

By Laurie Burstein



**H**undreds of agricultural leaders from across the globe will gather in St. Louis on May 23-24 for the Third Annual Ag Innovation Showcase. Held at the Danforth Plant Science Center, the Ag Showcase offers participants a platform for dialogue, discussion and deal making in the full range of agricultural sectors.

The two-day international Ag Innovation Showcase, presented by BRDG Park, Larta Institute, RCGA, Missouri Technology Corporation and St. Louis County Economic Council, spotlights cutting-edge entrepreneurs who are driving innovation in agricultural technologies in ag-bio, food and nutrition, biofuels, sustainable materials, information technology and animal health.

Kicking off this year's Showcase is a new element—the Global Ag Economic Forum. Featuring a panel of prominent international experts, the Ag Economic Forum explores economic trends which are driving agriculture in the world.

The session will focus on innovative approaches to financing and using agriculture to help alleviate tight markets by increasing investment in ag research, science and technology. The Forum includes insights on future developments in Brazil and China, which are beginning to play a large role in driving future agriculture trends.

Following the Global Ag Economic Forum, the two-day Ag Innovation Showcase features prominent keynote speakers and several panel programs. Keynote speakers include Gregory T. Lucier, chairman and CEO of Life Technologies Corp. and Jason Pyle, M.D., Ph.D. and CEO of Sapphire Energy Inc.,

addressing the new challenges and key issues in the rapidly changing area of agriculture, from biofuels to food production.

The Ag Innovation Showcase has established a reputation as the leading event for agriculture's industry leaders, entrepreneurs, venture capitalists and investors from around the world. Attendance at the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Showcase in 2010 increased more than 30 percent over the first year, and this year is expected to be standing room only.



Panel on "The Nexus of Energy & Agriculture" (left to right): Miguel Oliveira, director, Global Innovation, Bunge Limited; David Fischhoff, vice president, Technology Strategy, Monsanto Company; Jake Tarr, managing director, Kinetic Ventures; and Mich Hein (moderator), managing partner, Nidus Investment Partners.



The international scope of the Ag Showcase has also increased significantly. Countries such as Australia, Malaysia, England, Canada, India, Israel, Brazil and the Netherlands will be represented. Plus, one of the keynote speakers, Paulo Rabello de Castro, is a top economist from Brazil and will discuss Brazil's role in the world ag economy and potential future collaborations with the United States.

Mark Gorski, business development officer with BRDG Park and one of the event's chief organizers, says the Showcase has grown significantly each year. In the first year, the Showcase attracted 180 attendees and 250 last year. This year, the Danforth Center auditorium will be at capacity with 300 in attendance.

"Several hundred ag business leaders from around the world will converge at the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center to share insights and make connections," Gorski says. "The international scope, the quality and breadth of the venture capital firms, and the quality of the presenting companies, makes the Ag Showcase one of the top events of its kind."

Gorski says approximately 20 companies will present their business plans—up from last year. In addition, 30 of the top venture capital companies will be there to meet and ultimately fund, those with the most innovative ideas.

The participation of venture capital firms has greatly increased since the Showcase began. In 2009, just 8 or 9 mostly local VC firms attended. In 2010, Gorski says participation really took off with 25 of the top VC firms from the Silicon Valley and throughout the U.S. in attendance. This year, Gorski expects 30-plus VC firms.

"Not only will all the major VC firms be there, but every major industry player in the agricultural world will be there as well,"



Networking at the 2010 Ag Innovation Showcase.

Gorski says. Participating ag industry leaders include Monsanto, DuPont Pioneer, Archer Daniels Midland, BASF, Pioneer, Dow Agro Sciences, and many others.

The Ag Showcase is a major opportunity for ag biotech start-ups to get in front of the world's leading VC firms and industry leaders to vie for funding which is much needed to fuel innovation.

Dan Broderick, president of Global Agtech Investors Network (GAIN) and a sponsor of the Ag Showcase says, "Innovation in agriculture is more important than ever. With a need to double the world's food supply, the Ag Showcase helps create more capital for companies in order to support innovative agricultural solutions," he says. Broderick assisted in the selection of the 20 presenting companies from about 100 business plans that were submitted.

Gorski adds that agriculture continues to capture more interest among venture capitalists.

"Whatever the slowdown has been among venture capital investing in general, I think it has been offset by the expanded interest in agribusiness and biofuels. Agricultural technology is a good place to invest right now," he says.

The Ag Showcase is also good for St. Louis Gorski explains. Not only is St. Louis the home for the international Showcase, the region stands to benefit from the long-term success of the companies involved.

"Our goal is to provide a platform for young, emerging companies and give them the opportunity to be exposed to the top ag investors in the world. We also hope some of these companies will choose St. Louis as a home," Gorski says. ■