Biological Sciences
SoyMeds

Collaborate to produce soy-based proteins to address unmet needs in healthcare.

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In 2002 Ken Piller and Ken Bost of the Biology Department began a unique collaborative research project to determine whether soybeans could function as a practical host for the production of vaccines and other novel therapeutics that could be used to address unmet needs in healthcare. Their research efforts were successful and several years later at the urging of the UNC C Technology Transfer Office the two Kens co-founded a spin out company named SoyMeds. The formation of this start-up is a perfect example of a cross-disciplinary collaboration, as Dr. Piller’s background is in plant biology while Dr. Bost is a seasoned immunologist.

Together the two researchers have been using soybeans to produce immunomodulatory proteins that can be used to turn the immune system on and off. These soy-derived proteins could have applications as vaccines or as novel oral therapies to treat autoimmune diseases. Soybeans are unique in that they are extremely rich in protein content, inexpensive to grow, and can be stored for long periods of time (years to decades) without the need for a cold-chain. Furthermore, the actual production of seeds engineered to express specific therapeutic proteins, and the formulation of those seeds into the desired product can be separated in time and geography, underscoring the flexibility of the soybean platform.

To date, SoyMeds has been awarded >$2M in federal grants to develop the soybean platform with specific projects that focus on vaccine development, autoimmune disease therapeutics, and diagnostic proteins that can be used in cancer and other disease detection. In 2011 SoyMeds was awarded the North Carolina Technology Association’s prestigious Life Sciences Company of the Year award. To learn more about SoyMeds, please visit their website at www.soymeds.com.

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