

# The right fit

Prince Edward Island's emerging bioscience industry is grounded in the province's primary industries, the sea and land

For more than a century, Upton Farm was part of the economic lifeblood of Prince Edward Island. The pastoral 275-acre property on the shore of the North River in Charlottetown once churned out the agricultural units of commerce that the province sold to the world. But times change; today the humble potato still carries its share of economic clout on P.E.I., but new industries such as aerospace, renewable energy, and bioscience are also taking their place in the economic milieu. Upton Farm is about to take its place in that 21st-century economy too.

In June the P.E.I. government signed a deal that will create the first bioscience business and research park in the province. When it opens in the fall of 2011 in a corner of Upton Farm's new municipal parkland, the PEI BioCommons will be a linchpin of the emerging bioscience industry, nurturing and developing businesses from fledgling startups to multi-national corporations that will create new pharmaceuticals,

research facility in Charlottetown, the opportunity to move up the value chain was there for the taking. "Bioscience is a tremendous fit for Prince Edward Island," says Ghiz. "It's grounded in our primary industries, whether you're talking about the sea or the land. We've got so many assets here—a great climate for business, an educated workforce, good infrastructure, and an attractive spot to work and to live."

But in a global industry, P.E.I. was a very small player, and after a decade the sector is still in its infancy. "Ten years ago we only had two or three bioscience businesses in the province," says PEI BioAlliance executive director Rory Francis. "Now we have 30." Francis' organization deserves a lot of the credit for that exponential growth. The PEI BioAlliance is a unique partnership of businesses, research, and government organizations dedicated to building the Island's bioscience industry. Facilitating initiatives in research, business, human resources,

## AT A GLANCE

**SECTOR:** Bioscience

**KEY INVESTOR:** Government of Prince Edward Island

**MILESTONE:** The first bioscience research and commercialization park in the province.

**RESEARCH FOCUS:** pharmaceuticals, nutraceuticals, bioenergy, and food

**VISIT:** [www.peibioalliance.com](http://www.peibioalliance.com)



P.E.I. Premier Robert Ghiz (third from left) is a big proponent of bioscience businesses.

nutraceuticals, bioenergy, and foods. "We're investing in our future, and we can already see the results," says P.E.I. Premier Robert Ghiz. "The BioCommons will put us on the map as a centre of science excellence and business success that will reap long-term rewards for Prince Edward Island. We need to be the best in the world in our part of the market."

In a province where agriculture is king, bioscience seems like an obvious choice. With institutions such as the Atlantic Veterinary College, the University of Prince Edward Island, the P.E.I. Food Technology Centre, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's century-old

and infrastructure, the partnership has played a large role in growing the P.E.I. cluster. "This is where small is powerful," says Francis. "We have leaders in business, leaders at UPEI and the National Research Council, leaders in our provincial and federal agencies, working as a team. It's amazing what can be accomplished." It's an economic initiative that goes beyond the borders of Prince Edward Island to bring benefits to the whole region and to Canada, which is currently ranked third in the world in bioscience and biotech.

Today the major players in the province's bioscience industry include the Swiss company

Novartis, the American diagnostics company Genzyme, and the homegrown pharmaceutical company BioVectra. They're creating a synergy that is already fostering the growth of smaller companies with good ideas. The BioCommons is the missing piece of the puzzle that will bring those ideas to the international marketplace. "This represents the next stage of our evolution as a bioscience cluster," says Francis. "We have to have a quality of infrastructure that is world class if we're going to attract the kind of businesses we need."

The \$30-million BioCommons will include as its centrepiece a 60,000-square-foot Business Accelerator Centre housing a collection of business/lab incubators where small bioscience companies can set up shop, plus a scale-up facility to allow them to take products out of the lab and into the early stages of manufacturing. Core services in the Centre will include contract research organizations (CROs) providing product and process-development services to the smaller tenants. The Centre will also provide commercialization support, with market assessment, business, financing, and regulatory advice. By its fifth year of operation, the forecast is for the BioCommons Park to be home to 500 employees and generate sales of \$90 million.

Most of those sales will come from exports, which is one of the features that makes bioscience here such a key industry. "Thanks to the hard work of many hands, we have the conditions here for a seriously exciting success story," says Francis. "Too often in Canada we've been consumers of products and technologies commercialized elsewhere in the world. Here we're turning that around, and that will create real prosperity. Bioscience is an industry that will play a big role in P.E.I.'s economic future." — TOM MASON