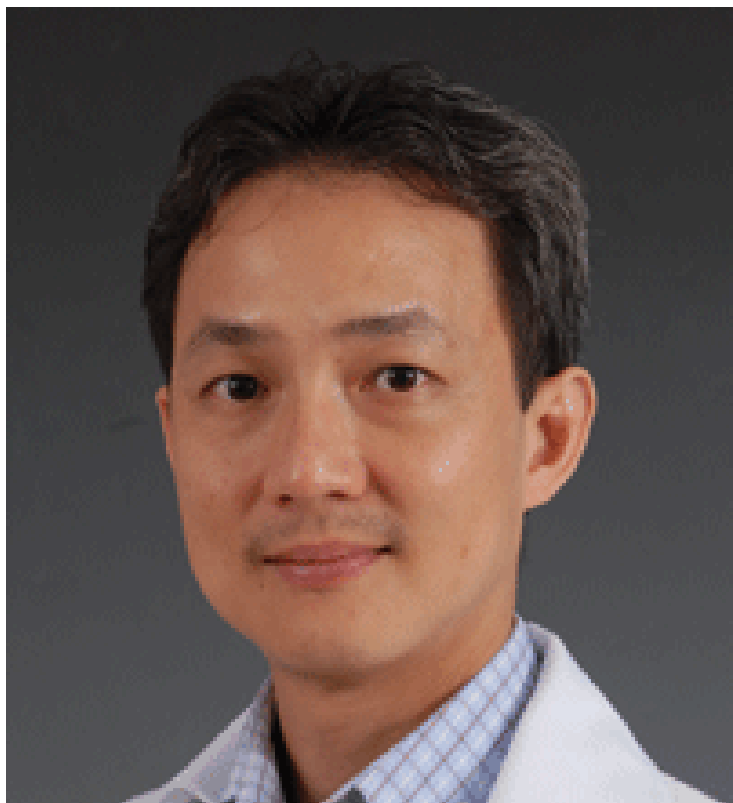


Biogenica Scientific brings out kit to certify halal food

16 March 2012 | Influencers | By BioSpectrum Bureau

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Biogenica Scientific Sdn Bhd (BSSB), a Malaysian biotechnology company, incorporated in 2008, has developed the first-of-its-kind antibody-based rapid diagnostic test kit to detect non-halal components in food. Halal is an Islamic Arabic word that means "lawful" or "permissible".

This first-of-its-kind testing kit has been developed under the leadership of Dr Ong Ming Thong, chief technical officer, Biogenica Scientific. He is a biochemist and has graduated from the University of Geneva, Switzerland. Owing to his vast experience in the industry, as well as in the academia, he has translated his expertise in molecular and cell biological diagnostic kit development, monoclonal antibody production and engineering, bioprospecting of medicinal plants, and cell and molecular oncology into projects that are highly appreciated by local and foreign institutions.

Genesis

A young and growing company, Biogenica Scientific, acquired BioNexus status in August 2009 for its capacity to conduct continuous research activities for the improvement of its existing detection kits/methods of non-halal components in food. With an objective to be a leader in molecular diagnostic field, Mr Yeoh Guan Pheng, chief executive officer of BSSB, put the

operational experience acquired from his previous stints in Asian countries as well as his scientific education background to work.

Beginning with a team of 14, BSSB is built with the support of qualified researchers and technicians, and has formed alliances with experts to further enhance its research and development activities. The company has entered into collaborations with local research and learning institutions as well.

Currently, the diagnostic kits developed by BSSB are targeted at food manufacturers and retail users. Exploring the market beyond Malaysia, BSSB is eying international markets such as France, Switzerland, Holland, Japan and Indonesia.

"In addition to the multiplex polymerase chain reaction (PCR)-based detection method, the company is currently developing rapid test kits for detection of non-halal components in food for the use of general public without having to go to a laboratory," says Dr Ong Ming Thong.

Innovative and first-of-its-kind projects have a high likelihood of facing a financial crisis. Shareholders at BSSB took the risk of self-financing the company. However, now the company is looking forward to building alliances with potential investors. With the focus on building a strong, knowledge-based human resource base, BSSB has voluntarily taken training from BiotechCorp. The company boasts of a strong team of human resources that consist of a group of qualified scientists and management personnel who work very well as an effective team.

Looking ahead

With a view to expand its presence, BSSB is looking for strategic alliance partners to set up service laboratories to run the screening of non-halal components (porcine meat) in food. The trade in halal food is estimated to be at about \$400 billion, globally. The laboratories will be using the kits produced by BSSB to offer these testing services.

The team is identifying potential partners in Malaysia as well as those in Western Europe and Northern China. Besides, the company is actively seeking technology partners to enhance its research activities including planned collaboration with university laboratories, local and foreign biotech companies.

On receiving the BioSpectrum Asia Pacific Emerging Company of the Year Award, Dr Ong Ming Thong says, "We are surprised as well as glad. We take this as an encouragement to move ahead in the field filled with challenges. This will also help us in building recognition among the industry players."