

Nothing worth mentioning in Europe?

Reading Tea Leaves

US biotech publisher Mary Ann Liebert (MAL) has taken a look into her crystal ball and discovered where future biotech action will be. In a large feature article on “emerging biotechnology clusters”, the MAL trade journal *Genetic Engineering News (GEN)* published on May 1st a list of the usual suspects and some rather spacey newcomers, presenting “the areas where biotech thrives” (in their opinion). Well-known biotech clusters in countries like Japan, China and Singapore are listed, as well as a couple of centres in developing nations such as Brazil and India.

However, the *Genetic Engineering News* experts from the new world have apparently almost forgotten “old Europe”. The Pas de Calais area around Lille, France, got a mention and in addition, they refer to the Rehovot area in Israel. In the “also worth a look” section, Barcelona, Spain, Ghent, Belgium, Montpellier, France and Scotland (the latter as “one of the continent’s largest and fastest-growing life science clusters”).

Pardon? Nothing going on in England, Ireland, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands, the Baltic states, and so on? What a shame! Ms. Liebert’s crystal ball must have clouded over if it found nothing worth mentioning there. -WK-



Enquiring her innovative crystal ball, biotech expert Mary Ann Liebert from the US hasn’t detected anything worth mentioning in developing nations such as Germany, England, Sweden and Finland.

Sanofi-Aventis establishes Paris plant

Betting on Biotech



Sanofi’s Chris Viehbacher (inset) is shifting to biotechnology.

From time to time, there’s nothing left to do except mock big pharma and its ridiculous efforts to be more “innovative”. However, Sanofi-Aventis has taken another run-up and, suddenly, your *Lab Times* reporter is no longer mocking. By launching a €200 million biotech partnering project, the world’s fourth-largest drugmaker is doing its very best to enter life science’s 21st century. Sanofi-Aventis plans to convert a factory in Vitry-Sur-Seine (8 km from the centre of Paris) into a biotechnology development centre, fully dedicated to researching, developing and producing biotechnology products. Another aim is to allure smaller biotech companies as partners.

Sanofi’s new CEO, Chris Viehbacher, a Canadian with German roots, recently admitted that to date his company had been remiss at focusing on biologics (medication that is made using living organisms and genetic engineering). The new factory “will give rise to Sanofi’s first cell culture biotechnology platform, to produce monoclonal antibodies as from 2012,” Viehbacher said, adding, “It’s an opportunity for [us] to do partnerships with biotechnology companies. -WK-

Qiagen exceeds all expectations

Total Equal

The German supplier Qiagen refuses vehemently to participate in the global economic crisis. In May, Europe’s largest biotech company published its quarterly figures, representing once again a business in incredibly rude health. Qiagen’s cash cow with the strongest increase was its molecular diagnostic division, representing 46 percent of total revenue, followed by aca-

demical research (27%) and the pharmaceutical industry (20% of total revenue). The overall revenue for the first three months of 2009 increased by 7 percent to €165 million, while profit increased by 9 percent to €30 million. Both figures were above expectations, according to the company. Qiagen’s Chief Executive, Peer Schatz, added that he was, “optimistic for Qiagen to reach its targets in 2009”. -WK-

Nycomed (not) for sale?

Confusing Rumours

Swiss drugmaker Nycomed, privately owned primarily by four private equity investors, is perplexing the pharmaceutical world. The producer of drugs in gastroenterology, respiratory and inflammatory diseases, recently rumoured to be up for sale, has now announced that it is aiming for an IPO (it would be one of the sector’s biggest in years). The move is dependent on market conditions and there is no target date set, a spokesperson stated.



IPO or selling the company? Nycomed’s Hakan Björklund is perplexing the pharmaceutical world.

In addition, Nycomed indicated that a mysterious potential buyer from the US would give a commitment by June to licence Nycomed’s smoker’s lung drug Daxas (treating Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, COPD). Such good news on Nycomed has been rare in the last months, as new subsidiary Altana (Konstanz, Germany) has often been criticised for repeated trial failures. Not so long ago, it was reported that the Zurich-based company with its 11,500 employees was preparing to sell itself for €10 billion to a larger rival. These apparent plans seem to have been dismissed by Nycomed’s owners, led by private equity firms Nordic Capital with a 41 percent stake and Credit Suisse with 25 percent. CEO Håkan Björklund recently announced that he is now “optimistic”. -WK-