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## Healthy foods focus of new centre

**\$31.2-M facility involved in cutting-edge research**

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By Larry Kusch

AS more people look at foods -- rather their medicine cabinets -- to keep them healthy, Manitoba researchers and entrepreneurs are poised to give them what they want.

The opening yesterday of a \$31.2-million cutting-edge research and development centre at the U of M Smartpark could make Manitoba a hotbed for the manufacturing of functional foods and nutraceutical products, its proponents say.

"The entrepreneurial spirit is here in the province. It's now (time to) get together and do the research and do the commercialization," said Curtis Rempel, research development manager with the new Richardson Centre for Functional Foods and Nutraceuticals.

Although officially opened yesterday, the centre has been operating for several months -- and catching the eye of food giants like Kraft and Kellogg's as well as several Manitoba entrepreneurs.

The European-based food and beverage giant, Groupe Danone, known for its Evian water, has contracted with the centre to help it develop a yogurt that will control cholesterol levels, Rempel said.

Companies like Kellogg's and Kraft have also been in contact with the centre as they look to add similarly beneficial health properties to their foods, although they have not signed any deals yet, he said.

"We have some small start-ups that we have been talking to, we have some multinationals that we've been talking to, and we have sort of groups in between -- Canadian based, U.S.- based companies," Rempel said.

One local company has contracted with the centre to help it develop a soy product that could be beneficial for men's prostate health, he said.

"It has a water soluble base so you could put it in orange juice or (other) fruit juices."

The Richardson Centre was built with about \$19 million in federal and provincial funds as well as private investment from the city's Richardson family and its companies, Agricore United and other private interests.

It will collaborate with St. Boniface General Hospital and the Food Development Centre in Portage la Prairie to test and develop foods and pills for the commercial market.

Yesterday, there were plenty of oohs and aahs as about 200 visitors checked out the attractive new building and its state-of-the-art equipment, which included an "electronic tongue" and an "electronic nose."

The machines, which cost more than \$300,000 apiece, help researchers sort out good properties from bad in making foods.

"From what I've seen so far, I'm amazed," said Conservative MLA Jack Penner. "This is the future of agriculture."

Hartley Richardson, president and CEO of James Richardson and Sons Ltd., said the centre should spur opportunities for adding value to crops being produced on the Prairies.

"One would hope that as the science becomes commercialized, that we'll see the spinoff right here in Manitoba. Certainly, we're always looking for ways to add more value closer to home rather than ship the raw commodities to be processed someplace else."

Earl Geddes, vice-president of product development and marketing for the Canadian Wheat Board, said the centre will be invaluable for food processors.

"As we move to making health claims for cereal products or any agricultural product, you need facilities like this to prove it," Geddes said.

Premier Gary Doer, who attended yesterday's opening, said industry related to biotechnology, biomedicine and the biosciences is growing faster in Manitoba than in any other province.

He said the centre will attract "bright young people from across Canada" and help Manitoba keep its good young minds at home.

"We think this sends the right signals to our young people to attend the University of Manitoba and to follow their dreams here at this new functional foods centre."

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## About the centre

Cost: \$31.2 million. Funding came from the federal and provincial governments and business, including James Richardson & Sons and Agricore United.

Purpose: To help develop, test and commercialize new foods with demonstrable health benefits as well as nutraceuticals based from crops grown on the Prairies.

Who's in charge? The centre's director is Dr. Peter Jones, internationally recognized for research involving foods that can combat high cholesterol.

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