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UT Faculty Receive Funds from UT Research Foundation to Drive Further Development of Technologies

The University of Tennessee Research Foundation (UTRF) has selected nine researchers or research teams to receive technology development grants for 2011. Grant funds will allow researchers to further develop or "mature" their technologies so that they are better positioned for licensing and commercialization.

Researchers were invited to propose work on inventions and discoveries that had been previously disclosed to UTRF or to propose work on new inventions and discoveries. A total of 41 proposals were submitted from the four campuses and three institutes that make up the University of Tennessee. UTRF funded eight proposals for a total of \$117,750. Funding for one additional program for \$15,000 was provided by AgResearch at the UT Institute for Agriculture.

UTRF used a panel of subject matter and technology commercialization experts from across the state to evaluate both the technology and the development plan proposed by each researcher. UTRF also solicited advice from Technology 2020 and Innova Memphis, economic development organizations engaged by UTRF to assist with technology commercialization.

The maturation program already has shown how modest amounts of funding can significantly impact the potential success of an invention and attract additional funding for research and commercialization. Prior to this year's investment, UTRF funded 29 projects over three years for a total of \$180,000. As a result, these projects have attracted almost 14 times that investment: over \$5.2 million in follow-on federal funding and \$45,000 in corporate matching funds have been secured for these technologies. Additionally there have been licenses or options executed for seven of the technologies, and licensing discussions are in process for several others.

The following proposals were selected for funding:

UT Health Science Center:

 Mohamad ElAbiad, Keith English, Ajay Talati, Jie Zhang and Jacques Samson (Department of Pediatrics) for a method to determine lung maturity in fetuses

- Monica Jablonski (Department of Ophthalmology) for a new ocular drug delivery system
- Wei Li, Jianjun Chen, Jin Wang, Duane Miller, Arnold Postlethwaite, and Andrzej Slominski (Departments of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Rheumatology and Pathology) for safety and dosing studies on a potential new arthritis treatment
- Lawrence Pfeffer and Charles Handorf (Department of Pathology) for a test to predict patient responsiveness to conventional Hepatitis C therapy

UT Institute of Agriculture:

- Raul Almeida, Doug Luther and Maria Prado (Department of Animal Sciences) for developing a vaccine for several strep-based illnesses
- Muthu Balasubramaniam, Blake Joyce and Neal Stewart (Department of Plant Sciences) for developing plants that can sense arsenic and other pathogens
- Zong-Ming (Max) Cheng (Department of Plant Sciences) for work that allows crops to withstand multiple environmental stresses such as drought and heat

UT Knoxville:

 Gary Sayler, Steven Ripp and Dan Close (Center for Environmental Biotechnology) and Seung Baek (Department of Pathobiology) to detect bioluminescent proteins using standard imaging techniques

UT Knoxville/UT Institute of Agriculture (joint proposal):

 Jayne Wu (Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science) and Shige Eda (Department of Animal Sciences, Institute of Agriculture) for development of a bacterial diagnostic device based on lab-on-a-chip technology

Upon completion of the development work, UTRF will receive reports from the researchers describing the new knowledge gained and improvements made in the subject technology. These results are expected to allow UTRF to better position the technologies for licensing to either an existing company or a new start-up entity.

The University of Tennessee Research Foundation (UTRF) helps inventors at the University of Tennessee (UT) turn their ideas and discoveries into products and services that benefit society. In addition to supporting the university research enterprise and commercializing the resulting inventions, UTRF also supports entrepreneurship as well as state and regional economic development efforts. UTRF serves all seven of the UT campuses and institutes across the state. For more information, visit http://utrf.tennessee.edu.

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