

Province provides funding for biotech

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The provincial government has invested in biotechnology research in an effort to help New Brunswick compete with the energy giants of Western Canada.

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ALWARD

Premier David Alward said such innovative technologies, including the production of bio-fuels and alternative energy sources, have significant growth potential.

"We need to be building an economy based on innovation, starting to look strategically at the resources that we have," the premier said in an interview Friday.

"Research and development needs to be an important part of that, because that's what's going to allow us to be more productive, more competitive."

Almost \$700,000 in funding was announced Friday for the New Brunswick Community College's Edmundston campus and its applied research-and-technology facility in Grand Falls.

Kevin Shiell, the college's scientific director, said the money will allow for larger-scale testing of the production of ethanol, an alternative fuel that can be made from anything from grains or potato waste to expired cola.

"Any place that you can think of that there's sugar, you can make it into ethanol," he said.

Ethanol can then be blended with conventional gasoline to reduce the amount of petroleum needed to power vehicles or any other equipment.

With federal laws demanding fuels increasing ethanol content, as of the end of December, fuel sold in Canada must have at least five per cent ethanol content.

Shiell said the investment will allow the research facility to ferment larger batches of ethanol that will better allow them to mimic commercial production. While he doesn't believe it will be the "silver bullet" to solve Canada's oil dependency, it can be a part of the solution.

Shiell said New Brunswick needs such facilities to catch up with the rest of Canada.

"Atlantic Canada would be the furthest behind in adopting bio-energy, at having companies successfully develop these projects," he said, emphasizing the need to use resources already found in the region.

"Right now we're behind, but I think we can come even with the rest of Canada and even ahead by developing technologies that are very unique to this region."

Alward agreed the province needs to draw on its strengths and further develop partnerships with local businesses to be successful.

"If we think of some of the very large projects that take place out west, we don't have the capacity to be able to take those on," he said.

"Sometimes there's a significant hole or gap to the commercialization (of a technology) and this project actually helps fill that gap."

In addition to fostering economic growth, Alward said, funding such research facilities also gives college and university graduates more options to stay in New Brunswick and can help attract businesses to the province.

The investment in ethanol research is part of a string of joint federal and provincial announcements Alward made across northern New Brunswick on Friday and today

Funding for the research is split between the federal and provincial governments, with each contributing equal amounts.

The Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency is paying Ottawa's share, with the New Brunswick Regional Development Corp. and Department of Energy paying for the province.

On Friday, Alward unveiled an additional \$200,000 for the construction of a regional emergency centre in Saint-Leonard, and along with his federal colleagues, he visited an outdoor skating rink in Saint-Andre that received more than \$59,000 in improvements.

Today, Alward and federal National Revenue Minister Keith Ashfield will make joint funding announcements in Charlo, Belledune, Nigadoo and Beresford.

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