

## DG RESEARCH

## European Commission to boost technology transfer to bio-industry

► **Brussels** – With a brand-new information on biotechnology developments arising from EU-funded research projects the European Commission aims at improving the contacts between researchers and companies. The new catalogue "100 Technology offers stemming from EU Biotechnology RTD results" ([www.cordis.europa.eu.int/lifescihealth/src/leaflet.htm](http://www.cordis.europa.eu.int/lifescihealth/src/leaflet.htm)) is intended to boost commercial exploitation of research results. "Growth and jobs are fueled by innovation and innovation is fed by research," stated Janez Potocnik, European Commissioner for Science and Research on occasion of the presentation of the new information resource. "With this publication, the Commission is helping researchers to make their results known and put new technologies at the disposal of industry that can make the most of them."

The biotech offerings cover biotech solutions from the EU's Research Framework Programmes FP4, FP5, and FP6.

Examples featured in the catalogue include applications for agri-biotechnology (34), biopharmaceuticals (7), and biomed-



cal technologies to support diagnostics (10) and therapy (21). Additionally, 20 platform technology solutions are presented. The description include the current stage of development, IP protection, their potentials for exploitation, and contact details. ◀

## EUROPEAN UNION

## Organic logo for GM foods

► **Brussels** – A draft EU law on organic produce may allow genetically modified organisms (GMO) to creep into a food sector created to be free of any biotechnology, green groups criticized in early January. New regulations proposed by the European Commission last December would permit products accidentally mixed up with up to 0.9% of GMOs to bear the EU organic logo. Whilst the Commission said this was a realistic approach to GM spread and ensured that organic farmers were not penalized, green groups underlined that they want to set the threshold at 0.1%, the cur-

rent detection limit for GMOs. The Commission is likely to present the proposal, due to come into force in 2009, to EU agriculture ministers this month.

While green groups and GMO-wary EU governments would like to see very low GMO thresholds both the Commission and biotech industry experts say this is impossible to achieve. Up to now there were no specific thresholds for GMO admixtures to organic products. The Commission now wants to change this. But it does not take into account that GMO-free produce is one of the organic principles. ◀

## EUROPE

## EU countries go for YIC status

► **Brussels** – National biotech associations representing the Swedish, Finnish, Estonian, and Norwegian biotech companies have started a joint project aimed at establishing special tax and social cost schemes for young innovative companies (YIC), such as already established in France since January 2004. "In France about 150 biotechs were able to opt for this status," according to Caroline Carmagnol from France Biotech, which supports the "Nordic/Baltic YIC initiative" together with EuropaBio. "This helped them to save at least 20% from the wage bill by the means of social cost exemptions for R&D personel." The firms reinvested the money directly in R&D, according to 2004 numbers: 74% recruited new personel, 51% started new R&D projects, and 49% bought new R&D equipment, explains Carmagnol.

"It is more effective to give the companies tax exemptions for investing in R&D rather than offering them support from many incentive programmes governed by large public bodies," believes Thor Amlie, Director of the Norwegian Bioindustry Organization. "We will work for the implementation of the same measures as implemented in France but we are fully aware that this will not be any easy task." – "Especially in the nordic countries, which all have high taxes," adds Per Vretblad from Swedish SIK, who leads the EU funded project. The participants of the YIC initiative have already set up task force groups and are lobbying at the national level, according to Vretblad. Next steps include the presentation of a benchmark study and organizing a workshop with the nordic partner organizations.

The nordic initiative could be a model for Europe. "Investors do not invest in tax," explains Johan Vanhemelrijck, Secretary General at EuropaBio. "If a company can assure an investor that their euro will fund one euro's worth of research, that will make a huge difference to investors." ◀