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ENTERTAINMENT TRAVEL

Fraunhofer gets federal funds for vaccine work

Newark company developing drugs to fight anthrax, plague

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BY GARY HABER
THE NEWS JOURNAL
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The Fraunhofer USA Center for Molecular Biotechnology in Newark will receive \$3.5 million in federal funds to continue developing plant-based vaccines to fight anthrax and plague.

Funding for the center was included in a congressional appropriations bill signed last month by President Bush.

Rep. Mike Castle, who, with Sens. Joe Biden and Tom Carper, supported the legislation, said that in addition to protecting people from bioterrorism, a vaccine could have economic benefits for Delaware as the state cultivates "cutting-edge companies in the life sciences and biotech."

The appropriation continues funding for an existing \$7



THE NEWS JOURNAL/CARLA VARISCO

Vidadi Yusibov, executive director of Fraunhofer USA, says federal funding is "absolutely vital for us to move to the next stage" of vaccine development.

million in grants Fraunhofer received from the U.S. Navy's Biological Defense Research Division to develop a combined anthrax-plague vaccine.

The new appropriation is "absolutely vital for us to move to the next stage," said Vidadi Yusibov, the Fraunhofer center's executive director.

The added federal funding will be used to hire additional researchers and start prototype production of small quantities of the vaccine. The goal is to be able to apply to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in 2007 for approval to test the vaccine in humans, Yusibov said.

Rather than cultivating plants for specific medicinal properties, Fraunhofer uses commonly grown plants, such as tobacco, as a vessel for growing protective antigens, which are then turned into a vaccine form.

The center also may be in line for a large amount of state money.

Gov. Ruth Ann Minner on Thursday said the \$20 million for high-tech economic development in her proposed 2007 budget includes money to support Fraunhofer's vaccine development efforts.

Fraunhofer is working on a vaccine to protect healthy individuals against exposure to both anthrax and plague. It also is developing a vaccine to treat people exposed to the diseases. The goal is to develop treatments that can be stockpiled for longer and produced more quickly and less expensively than existing vaccines.

Fraunhofer also is in the third year of a four-year, \$5.7 million National Institutes of Health grant in

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collaboration with Dow Chemical Co. to fight infectious diseases, including anthrax.

"The Fraunhofer Center for Molecular Biotechnology continues to play a major role in protecting our soldiers abroad and those of us here at home," Carper said in a statement.

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