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Algenex supports development of recombinant biologics with €4m funding round

by Joseph Harvey



Spanish biotechnology firm Algenex has progressed to its next stage of development after securing approximately €4 million (\$4.5 million) in investment.

The funds will speed up work on the Madrid-based firm's two technology platforms that it believes can optimize the recombinant protein expression process and provide a cost-effective way to produce veterinary and human vaccines.

The company's CrisBio baculovirus-expression platform has so far primarily been used for the production of subunit veterinary vaccines. It is a "versatile, reduced-cost and scalable" insect-based protein production system that delivers up to 20 times more per volume unit than insect cells cultured in bioreactors, according to Algenex.

The funds will allow the company to scale up the CrisBio technology ahead of a submission by its commercialization partner to the European Medicines Agency of a minor species vaccine based on this platform.

Additionally, the investment will also support the further commercial roll-out of Algenex's TopBac system – a plug and play technology that "significantly increases the productivity of existing baculovirus systems". Algenex is currently developing vaccines for African swine fever and avian influenza using TopBac.

The company is also working on a vaccine for porcine circovirus type 2, using the CrisBio platform. Data is also available for this indication with TopBac.

Claudia Jiménez: “We have produced 200 different molecules, including proof-of-concept data in more than 20 vaccines. We hope to have our first approval in 2020. We are in talks with additional potential commercial partners.”

The financing round was led by Cleon Capital and Vita Advisory, and featured high net worth individuals from the biotechnology space. Existing investors also participated.

Nicola Zambón – founder and partner at Cleon – said: “We were impressed by the scientific accomplishments of Algenex in their initial years of development. The robustness of their technologies and potential to positively disrupt the way vaccines and other recombinant biologics are being produced convinced us to support the company’s growth strategy.”

Jiménez becomes leader

Algenex has also made some key additions to its management team. Claudia Jiménez has been appointed to the role of general manager and Virginia González has become chief financial officer. Ms Jiménez has around 20 years of experience in corporate development, investor relations and communications in finance and biotechnology.

Speaking at the recent Animal Health Investment Europe conference in London, Ms Jiménez told Animal Pharm the firm has previously licensed its technology to leading multinational companies for the production of diagnostic reagents and vaccines – a business that provides Algenex with royalties.

The firm’s first commercial license agreement was with Italian veterinary vaccines company Fatro in 2015. The deal provided Fatro the rights to develop a recombinant vaccine with the CrisBio technology. The company also has a global agreement with Boehringer Ingelheim Animal Health that provides the latter with access to the Top-Bac technology to develop vaccines.

Now, Algenex is shifting focus to its own portfolio of vaccines for both the animal and the human health sectors.

“We have produced 200 different molecules, including proof-of-concept data in more than 20 vaccines,” explained Ms Jiménez. “The technology has shown we offer the capacity to offer substantially increased yield production. We hope to have our first approval in 2020. We are in talks with additional potential commercial partners.”

Ms Jiménez also told conference attendees: “One of the most significant challenges in the industry is capacity and the current manufacturing technologies the industry is using has significant limitations in terms of capex and investment requirements, and also in terms of versatility, scalability and yield. We aim to transform this industry and we aim to use our biotechnology to do this.”

Other appointments, Aerts joins board

José Escribano – the firm’s founder, former scientific advisor and a specialist in viral infectious diseases – has joined Algenex on a permanent basis as chief scientific officer.

Romy Dalton was previously the company’s operations manager and will take the position of chief operations officer. Ms Dalton has significant know-how in the areas of molecular biology and virology.

The company also put together an advisory board featuring René Aerts, who is a previous member of the Merck Animal Health executive committee for five years, as well as its global head vaccine research.

The board also includes Jean Stéphane (previously a member of the corporate executive team of GlaxoSmithKline and chief executive of GSK Biologicals, which is now GSK Vaccines); Claudia D’Augusta (over 20 years of experience in corporate finance); Roberto Barzi (an investor in the healthcare sector for the past decade); and Nicola Zambón (an M&A and investment expert, who founded Cleon Capital).