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Burlington synthetics firm grows with Ontario grant

BURLINGTON - April 9, 2011 - A local company plans to turn a \$3-million provincial grant into a revolutionary breakthrough in the search for environmentally sensitive paper.

EcoSynthetix, which recently moved its global headquarters and research labs to Burlington from the United States, will use the money to finance \$7 million in new equipment to be used in its search for ways to replace petroleum as an ingredient in paper making.

Born from research at the University of Waterloo, EcoSynthetix already has a product on the market that uses corn, wheat and beets to create the chemical coatings and binders that allow colourful graphics to stick to paper and cardboard boxes. Called Ecosphere biolatex binder, the product was used in the program books for this year's Super Bowl.

"We're the only company actually doing this right now," said CEO John van Leeuwen. "We're starting to play an important role in the bio-based economy.

"There are lots of clean tech companies out there with good ideas, but not many are driving revenue with them yet," he added.

The company has gone from five employees to 20 in the last year, and with the new equipment it hopes to double that employment by the end of the year. Van Leeuwen said the 15-year-old company has also seen its revenue grow 650 per cent and is planning an initial public offering later this year.

The company says if a typical coated paper mill were to switch to its product it could take 10,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide out of the air a year. If the entire industry were to make the change, 10 million tonnes would be taken out of the air. That's equivalent of the annual emissions of 1.7 million cars.

In announcing the provincial support, a forgivable loan, Minister of Research and Innovation Glen Murray said the public money will help to put the company "in a state of perpetual innovation."

EcoSynthetix is hoping to tear off a piece off an enormous industry for itself – the global market for latex polymers is about \$20 billion and growing while the global paper and paperboard market is expected to reach close to \$800 billion in 2013.

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