

# MU opens soybean genetics lab

By **TERRY GANEY** of the Tribune's staff

*Published Monday, October 2, 2006*

A Soybean Genome Mapping Facility laboratory opened today on the University of Missouri-Columbia campus during a ceremony that assembled university officials, scientists and some members of Congress who helped to land federal funds to equip the facility.

Henry Nguyen, director of the National Center for Soybean Biotechnology, said the lab will be used to identify gene traits and characteristics that will improve soybean crops.

"This facility will allow us to use cutting-edge technology to handle a large number of samples or to analyze a large number of genes at a given time," Nguyen said. "It will allow us to be much more efficient and effective in identifying what part of the genes or the characteristics we can select to improve soybeans."

Nguyen said the goal of such research is to develop soybean crop improvements in terms of production yield, drought tolerance, disease resistance and nutritional components.

The research is important to many Missouri farmers. Soybeans represent the state's largest crop, with more acres devoted to that plant than all other crops combined.

A National Science Foundation grant of \$1 million helped to equip the lab, located in the Agriculture Laboratory Building. After ribbon-cutting ceremonies today, a \$250,000 robotic sample-analyzing machine was demonstrated.

The machine can analyze a sample in 25 minutes. In the past, the same work would have required eight hours of a graduate student's time.

The lab is a component of the National Center of Soybean Technology in the nearby Kit Bond Life Sciences Center. The \$1 million grant brings to \$3 million the amount of money the center has received over the past three years.

University officials gave credit to U.S. Sens. Kit Bond and Jim Talent, R-Mo., and U.S. Rep. Kenny Hulshof, R-Columbia, for helping to attract federal funding to finance both the center and the laboratory.

Bond noted that renowned plant scientist George Washington Carver believed that no one should leave the world without producing some improvement.

"Many lives will be touched and changed by the discoveries that take place here," Bond said.



*Don Shrubshell photo*

Sean Blake, a research specialist at the University of Missouri School of Agriculture, right, shows the Biomek FX machine to U.S. Sen. Kit Bond, R-Mo., today at the agriculture lab building where the MU National Center for Soybean Technology will be located. The machine samples multiple specimens of the DNA of soybeans.

Talent, who helped sponsor a renewable fuels standards bill in Congress, said farmers will be growing the crops to provide the raw material for biodiesel and ethanol, fuels that will help with energy independence.

"The same people who are providing food will be producing fuel, and these are people we can count on," Talent said.

The center represents a collaboration of more than 40 scientists at MU, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's research center in Columbia and at the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center in St. Louis.

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