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aOva Technologies

By Jaime Pullman

MADISON -- Bryan Renk's success lies in the mouths of poultry and swine.

Renk, the chief executive officer aOva Technologies, and the company's four other employees are banking on a unique feed additive that doesn't include antibiotics.

The Madison-based startup company, founded in 2001, is steadily attracting investor support due in part to their patented technology, in which naturally occurring egg antibodies, found in egg yolks, are put into powder form and used as an animal dietary additive. Dr. Mark Cook, aOva co-founder and a UW-Madison professor, created the additive.

Called *aPLA₂*, the additive can replace antibiotic feed additives, often used to as a mode of speeding up animal growth, specifically in the poultry and swine industries. It couldn't come at a better time. aOva's product entered a \$19-billion animal health industry as major players such as McDonalds have asked their meat suppliers to phase out the use of antibiotics for animal growth.

"Antibiotics in feed has driven bacterial mutation," says Renk, "and now there's a real push to get away from that." Since *aPLA₂* contains only naturally occurring proteins and antibodies, bacterial mutations are not a concern.

Renk reports that aOva has made small sales for *aPLA₂* so far, attacking the market from three angles: first through direct sales to large companies such as Tyson; second through sales to feed companies such as Cargill or Swanson; and third through marketing to feed ingredient companies such as ADM or BASF.

"We've really had great exposure so far," says Renk, "particularly because of (Dr. Cook's) reputation with the poultry industry."

Their product is still in the testing stages with many companies, because each company wants to test the product for themselves before they will take it on. As a small start-up company, aOva is working to keep up with the demand.

"If we go into a large player, we have to have enough product," Renk said.

It takes six weeks from start to finish for the product to make it from hen to the package. Right now their concerns rest more with making sure everything is done properly from a regulatory standpoint and with the possibility of bird flu, which would hinder their production if a flock were infected.

The company started with about cash from grants and founders. It has since grown to \$1.5 million in investment through its first round of angel investing in February 2005, and to \$3 million in the most recent round of angel investment. “We’re currently about halfway there,” Cook said. The company recently began its final round of fundraising and aim to finish it by the early May.

Renk is faithful in aOva’s potential. The company entered a billion-dollar poultry and swine industry and has other products in the pipeline that are, like *aPLA₂*, licensed with Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation. But *aPLA₂* is still their current concern.

“Right now,” says Renk, “our focus is on making a good, quality product and building a solid business.”

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