

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

IRISH EYES SHINE ON BIOTECH

NEW YORK—Ireland is setting up a \$10 million fund to create four centers of biotech excellence. The "National Program for Biotechnology Research," which is still in draft form and awaiting government approval, reaffirms Ireland's emphasis on attracting biotech to the Emerald Isle.

"We see it as the new wave of technology," says Frank Turpin, vice president of Ireland's Industrial Development Authority (IDA). The IDA, along with other government, association, and private sources, will contribute to the new fund.

The current plan calls for one center in each of the following fields: immunodiagnostics and mammalian reproduction of cells, food and plant technology, molecular genetics, and microbial fermentation. Existing university structures will be used.

Since 1970, Ireland's aggressive industrial incentive programs have succeeded in attracting some 350 American companies—including about 50 pharmaceutical makers. Crucially important have been its tax laws, which guarantee a maximum 10 percent tax on corporate profits through the year 2000 and allow companies to freely depreciate their assets.

Schering-Plough's \$50 million interferon manufacturing plant, under construction in Cork, is the first American biotech operation to be located in Ireland. Schering's John E. Nine explains that Ireland offers three grant programs. In what he views as the most important arrangement, the government reimburses a company for a percentage of its capital expenses, based on the location for the plant and the number and training level of employees. Since the interferon plant, which is scheduled to go online next July, requires highly trained personnel (52 out of 125 workers will be degreed professionals), Nine reports, government paybacks were about twice as high as for a conventional pharmaceutical plant. Ireland also offers a training grants program to reimburse the company for training Irish nationals. And the government is willing to reimburse about 80 percent of the costs of doing basic research.

There are also drawbacks to locating in Ireland. Nine reports that while the telephone system is improving, it is still not of high enough quality for computer-to-computer communication. As an island, Ireland is burdened with high costs for products that must be imported, such as

fuels. And, with a population of only about 3.5 million, the pool of potential workers and possible university affiliations is somewhat limited—though the new fund should improve this situation.

One firm that does much of its research and manufacturing in Ireland is Irish International Biochemicals, Ltd., which maintains a facility in Dublin. Managing director Jeremy Cook highly recommends locating in


Ireland, as long as the plant is situated on the coast, near a city or town. He notes, however, that government incentives are strongest for locating in underpopulated, inland areas.

As final advice, Schering's Nine points to Ireland's overall receptiveness to high tech industries. He recommends that executives considering a plant in Ireland "take off their big corporate hats and get to know the people."
—Arthur Klausner

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