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## Fargo's AltraVax gets \$600K grant

Fargo-based vaccine development company AltraVax Inc. has received a \$600,000 grant to develop influenza B virus vaccines.

By: [Craig McEwen](#), INFORUM

Fargo-based vaccine development company AltraVax Inc. has received a \$600,000 grant to develop influenza B virus vaccines.

AltraVax will use the two-year grant from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and its proprietary MolecularBreeding technology to create vaccines to protect against two influenza B strains that co-circulate each flu season.

"This is a great win for this new company," said James Burgum, AltraVax board chairman.

The goal is to have the vaccines ready to test in humans in 18 to 36 months, Burgum said.

The time frame will depend on getting large vaccine companies to partner with AltraVax, said Dr. Robert Whalen, chief scientific officer.

Whalen said he anticipates there will be a number of companies to partner with because influenza vaccine research is such a critical area.

"We plan to initially demonstrate success with the improved influenza B vaccine and also apply this technology platform to the more challenging problem of creating a truly universal vaccine for protection from the effects of both seasonal and pandemic influenza viruses," he said.

Receiving the grant is a validation that AltraVax is on the right track and has chosen the right targets to work on, Whalen said.

"We're trying to solve real problems, and the National Institutes of Health Review Committee has validated our thinking and has agreed that we have the wherewithal to work on the project properly and can make a real contribution," he said.

AltraVax was launched in January by Burgum, who is managing director of venture capital fund Arthur Ventures LLC, and Michael Chambers, who launched vaccine development company Aldevron in 1998.

AltraVax acquired from Redwood City, Calif.-based Maxygen Inc. exclusive rights to its MolecularBreeding technology platform. Whalen was director of infectious diseases at Maxygen.

AltraVax will be doing pre-clinical work on the vaccine project in Fargo. DNA-shuffling technology will be done at its research laboratories in Sunnyvale, Calif., Burgum said.

"We're pretty excited. This is a good first step for this influenza program that we have," he said. "Long term, the vision is to create an influenza vaccine that would last multiple years."

AltraVax's DNA-shuffling technology is applicable to all sorts of vaccine problems, Whalen said.

"There's basically no lack of problems for us to work on, no lack of vaccines to improve and no lack of new vaccines to discover," he said.

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