

# A Swiss flavour for bioplastics in Australian sugarcane?

A world leader in plant-based bioplastics production is headed to Queensland for six months to enhance research already underway in the sugarcane biofactory program.

Professor Yves Poirier, Director of the Department of Plant Molecular Biology (DBMV) at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, will join researchers at the Cooperative Research Centre for Sugar Industry Innovation through Biotechnology (CRCSIIB). He will be hosted by the University of Queensland's Australian Institute for Bioengineering and Nanotechnology and will be based with Dr Brumbley's group at BSES Limited's David North Plant Research Centre.

Prof Poirier's specialty is plant biotechnology, an area that he honed through work at Michigan State University, DOE-Plant Research Laboratory and the Carnegie Institution of Washington, Department of Biology following a PhD from the Department of Experimental Medicine, McGill University, Montreal Canada where he was on the Dean's Honours list.

He joins a world class research team led by Dr Stevens Brumbley and Prof Lars Nielsen at the CRC who have a contract to develop bioplastics production directly in living, growing sugarcane plants.

The CRC expects that this biorenewable, biodegradable, environmentally friendly plastics will become in ever greater demand by a public ever more concerned about the huge environmental impacts of petrochemical based plastics.

According to CRC CEO Dr Peter Twine, "the new bioplastics bode well for Australia's sugar industry, potentially opening another market, and a potentially lucrative one at that."

The value of plastic products is over US\$60 billion a year in the US alone.

"Yet virtually none of this is sustainable. Current polymer products are nearly all derived from petrochemical sources and the industry is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, both in the production of plastics and when they are incinerated at the end of their life-cycle," he said.

"In addition, plastic waste is becoming a significant environmental issue, filling up land fills, killing wildlife, and creating a floating toxic island - 'The Great Pacific Garbage Patch' is estimated at 1.4 million



Professor Yves Poirier (right), will join (left) Dr Stevens Brumbley's group at BSES Limited's David North Plant Research Centre.

square kilometres (80 per cent the size of Queensland) and weighing approximately 3.5 million tonnes in the middle of the Pacific ocean.

"Replacing traditional plastic products with bioplastics can both cut down on

the energy needed for manufacturing and help reduce waste, improve air quality, conserve petroleum supplies, and reduce cleanup costs."

Contact CRCSIIB Communications Manager Julie Lloyd on 0415 799 890. ■

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