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Secretary Gassman Announces Grow Grant, Launches Training Initiative to Meet Demand for Skilled Workers in Biotech Industry

Labor Secretary highlights Governor Doyle's plan to help emerging industries, keep Wisconsin at forefront of research, part of his Grow Wisconsin – The Next Steps plan

MADISON – Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Roberta Gassman today announced an Emerging Industry Skills Partnership grant of \$85,000 to the Workforce Development Board of South Central Wisconsin to prepare 60 workers for rewarding careers in biotechnology and help meet the increasing demand for highly skilled workers in the region's growing biotechnology research cluster.

Governor Doyle made the Emerging Industry Skills Partnership part of his ***Grow Wisconsin – The Next Steps*** strategy for economic and workforce development. The grant that Secretary Gassman announced on his behalf will leverage an additional \$200,000 in federal and private funds to ensure that Wisconsin remains a leader in the emerging biotechnology industry.

"Dane County has become the biotech hotspot of the Midwest, and the workforce training initiative we are launching today with our partners will help us remain at the forefront of pioneering research," Secretary Gassman said. "With this effort, we take a big step forward in developing a highly skilled biotech workforce, allowing us to compete at the high end and enabling this important, emerging industry to pursue research so vital to the world."

The grant is one of 10 being awarded under the Governor Doyle's Emerging Industry Skills Partnership initiative, a total of \$850,000 to provide new and incumbent workers with the necessary skills and meet workforce demands in biotechnology, renewable energy and advanced manufacturing.

Secretary Gassman announced the grant during a visit to Third Wave Technologies, a molecular diagnostics firm developing products to detect human papillomavirus, or HPV, which can lead to cervical cancer. Joining her at the University Research Park location were representatives of other biotech firms and the leading partners in the training initiative, the Workforce Development Board of South Central Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Biotechnology and Medical Device Association (WBMDA).

As outlined by Secretary Gassman, the grant will:

- Provide job skills training to 30 new workers and additional skills training to 30 incumbent workers;
- Develop a clear understanding of region's emerging biotech firms and their workforce needs, and establish a career pathway framework to meet those needs;
- Build a biotech industry partnership focused on workforce development and include core members of the biotechnology and medical device association;
- Work with the association to develop, within their corporate leaders, the essential workforce development skills necessary to help fledgling research companies grow and thrive.

- more -

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Accepting the grant from Secretary Gassman were Pat Schramm, Executive Director of the Workforce Development Board of South Central Wisconsin and Jim Leonhart, Executive Director of the WBMDA.

“This grant will enable the biotechnology industry to develop both the workforce strategies and workers that will be needed for future expansion,” Schramm said. She said the grant would leverage not only federal money, but funding from other sources, such as Thrive, the Madison Region Economic Development Enterprise.

“Wisconsin’s bioscience industry has been built on the strength of well-educated scientists and business people,” Leonhart said. “The WBMA is pleased to be a partner with the state in its ongoing efforts to ensure that one of our bioscience industry’s fundamental advantages will continue to be our well trained and educated people.”

Other partners in the biotech training project include Madison Area Technical College, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the Capital Region Economic Development Entity (REDE) and the Department of Commerce.

Dane County has more than 6,100 biotech workers, nearly a third of all biotech workers in the state. Biotech jobs are projected to increase by 15 percent in south central Wisconsin through 2014. On average, biotech workers earn an estimated \$62,800 a year in Dane County and \$56,700 a year in the south central region. Slightly more than half the jobs require a bachelor’s degree. Nearly a third of the positions, primarily lab technician jobs, require a two-year associate’s degree.