

Acadian Seaplants to expand

Innovative company to double its capacity at Cornwallis Park plant

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Talk about stimulating growth. Acadian Seaplants Ltd. is doubling the capacity of its Cornwallis Park plant that manufactures

a compound aimed at alleviating stress in crops. The company's \$4-million, multi-year plan involves buying and upgrading a plant on Conestoga Street, across from its existing facility.

"We're building this facility to

double the capacity, but we're also doing that while we're at capacity," said Jean-Paul Deveau, who heads the Dartmouth-based biotech firm that exports to 70 countries.

"So our biggest challenge is to,

literally, move across the street without shutting it down.

"It's kind of like we're going to take the engine out of the car without turning the car off. It is a major challenge. But I have to give credit to our people. They

are absolutely fantastic."

The Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency is slated to announce financial support today for Acadian Seaplants. Deveau wouldn't divulge Monday how much taxpayers' money is involved, preferring to wait for

See **SEAPLANTS** / A2

Seaplants

continued from / A1

today's announcement.

"Without ACOA's support, we would be successful, but without ACOA's support, we would be a lot smaller," he said.

The move will take the company from its 15,000-square-foot building to a 100,000-square-foot facility, large enough to accommodate several stages of expansion. It will take 12 to 18 months to double the capacity of the existing plant.

"We have to do this in phases, and we are actually piping product from one side of the street to the other as we install the new equipment," Deveau said.

"And, of course, you're going to expand the volume as you expand your markets. So the whole thing has to all match in tandem. It really is an incremental approach."

The primary product of the Cornwallis facility is a plant growth regulator that goes by, among other names, Stimplex. It is derived from seaweed called rockweed that is harvested from Digby to Shelburne.

Don't mistake this for any simple fertilizer.

"It's a little more complicated than that," Deveau said. "The application rates are very, very low. Essentially, in the United States, it would be one gallon per acre. You would look at this as being what's called a crop biostimulant."

It is used on high-value crops, including apples, cherries, tomatoes, green peppers, strawberries, almonds and grapes.

"The product helps to alleviate the stress in plants," Deveau said. "So if your crop is under temperature stress, whether it's too cold so it's freezing or too hot, drought, stress, salinity

stress, these kinds of things, our product will help alleviate that in such a way so that the plant can then grow to its maximum potential."

Deveau remembers, at the age of nine, harvesting seaweed with his paternal grandfather for his garden in Salmon River, between Yarmouth and Meteghan.

"We would go down and he had oxen and cart and go and we'd load that up with pitchforks. Then we'd go and put it in the potatoes."

With total annual sales of \$40 million, Acadian Seaplants has come a long way from the company Deveau's father, Louis — who is still board chairman — started from his son's childhood bedroom in 1981.

"Every year, our sales have gone up and we would certainly anticipate that they would continue to go up," the company's president said Monday. "We see tremendous potential out there for the types of products that we're doing. We're a world-leading technology. We see tremendous opportunities in Nova Scotia."

The new factory is going into the former Shaw Wood plant, the former Cornwallis Park furniture maker the Shaw Group shut down in 2006, throwing 200 people out of work. At the time, Shaw Wood said it was unable to secure a new contract with wood furniture retailer Ikea, its only customer.

Deveau wouldn't divulge the price tag on the building. Acadian Seaplants will keep its existing Cornwallis facility, potentially to be used as a warehouse.

The new plant will also be used to manufacture a new mystery product that Deveau wouldn't say much about Monday.

"I can't tell you too much about it. But it is in the same division, which is the plant sci-

ence division, so it would be a product that would help grow crops also."

About 70 people work at the company's Cornwallis plant. But don't expect the number of those employed there to double yet.

"It would be incremental; it would not be linear," Deveau said.

"The real thing we're doing at the same time is we're automating a lot of it, and we're doing all of this so we can ensure that we're going to be competitive on a global basis."

The plant will be turned into "an extremely modern facility, ensuring that we will have value-added jobs that will be pre-

served, and then we'll grow into the future."

When they do expand the payroll, it won't be just manufacturing jobs, but also on the sales and marketing and technical support side.

Acadian Seaplants employs 300 people around the world. The bulk of them are in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and, to a lesser extent, Prince Edward Island.

"But we also have employees in the United States, Mexico, Chile, Brazil, Colombia and Japan," Deveau said. "Those people would be sales and technical support."

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