

Life sciences gets push from Mo. policymakers

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State and regional economies can benefit from Missouri's push into biotechnology and the life sciences, Gov. Jay Nixon said Monday.

"There is no sector of our economy riper for opportunity than the life sciences," the Democratic governor said, speaking to about 300 scientists and businesspeople at the Missouri Regional Life Sciences Summit.

The two-day gathering at the University of Missouri-Kansas City is aimed at building new partnerships with the potential for creating jobs.

"Missouri is already home to 4,000 agribusiness and life science companies," Nixon said. "That's an enormous asset that we can leverage.

"We want our life sciences and biotech companies to grow because they create good jobs and pay good wages."

Among the companies and organizations sponsoring or attending the conference were the National Agricultural Biosecurity Center at Kansas State University, the University of Missouri, Cerner Corp., and Bayer Animal Health.

Nixon plans to push a variety of new business incentives, despite protracted budget problems in the state. He discussed one of those incentives Monday — the Missouri Science and Innovation Reinvestment Act or MOSIRA, which would entail reinvesting state income taxes from science sector companies into new businesses.

Sen. Kit Bond, R-Mo., who also spoke at the conference, said "biotech is moving out of the lab and into the marketplace."

"Right here in western Missouri ... this is the heart of animal health in the U.S. and the world," Bond said.

He added that "this is an opportunity for science to provide more opportunities both in developing new science" and in creating jobs as "ideas come into the marketplace."

The industry can play a key role in helping replace jobs being lost in the current economy, Bond said.

State Sen. Jolie Justus, who spoke during a panel discussion, said Missouri has long concentrated on providing tax credits and incentives for companies that are less immediate and more "down the line."

But the Kansas City Democrat said that may be about to change with the recent

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appointment of David Kerr, former Kansas secretary of commerce, to be Missouri's new director of economic development. Kerr replaces Linda Martinez, Nixon's original pick for the position who resigned in September.

"We have got an economic development director who wants to start talking about some upfront money," Justus said. "All options need to be on the table."

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