

Identigen hiring to stay on growth track

Firm would more than double jobs locally for meat-tracing system

By Mark Fagan

October 21, 2007

Identigen Ltd., an Ireland-based company with North American headquarters in Lawrence, is preparing to more than double its employment in town within the next 12 months, as it aims to land some of the biggest meat-production customers on the continent.

Identigen intends to have up to 40 technical and support staffers in Lawrence by October 2008, the beginning of what is intended to be 200 to 300 in North America within three to five years, said Donald Marvin, president and chief executive officer of Identigen North America.

The company already is in negotiations to at least double its lab and office space at 4824 Quail Crest Place in Lawrence, to make room for more equipment and personnel to handle existing and anticipated demand for Identigen's signature TraceBack technology — a testing system that uses DNA to track meat from producer to processor to particular packages on a store shelf.

The system is designed to add value for meat producers and retailers by helping reassure shoppers that they are getting what they pay for, both in terms of quality and safety.

"It's a consumerism wave that's been well-documented and well-entrenched in Europe over the last 10 years," Marvin said last week from his office in Denver, where he meets with Colorado-based producers and processors. "Now we're starting to see that new consumerism hit the shores here in North America. ... Consumers, when they go to the local grocery store, wherever that may be, they want to know where their meat comes from, and is it safe."

Country-of-origin labeling and loads of recent recalls involving *E. coli* contamination all point toward heightened demand for accountability and security in the provision of meat products, he said.

"We think that Identigen is ideally positioned to take advantage of what's sweeping the country right now,"

he said. "It's going to be a catalytic event, and it will end up being a tsunami that really hits, and we're just trying to get optimally positioned to try to respond to that."

Identigen already provides testing services for Irish stores owned by Tesco, a company considered the Wal-Mart of Europe, and more are expected to be announced in the coming months. Identigen also is handling tests for another company, as yet unannounced.

All of the tests are conducted in Lawrence, hundreds of miles and an ocean away from Identigen's corporate headquarters in Ireland.

"Because of our scale, and because of the technology in Lawrence, we just find it much more cost-effective to do the final DNA analysis in Lawrence than on the other side of the pond," Marvin said. "That's pretty impressive."

Long-term plans call for having the "large majority" of Identigen's anticipated 200 or 300 North American employees working in Lawrence, Marvin said. The community is along the "animal science corridor" that runs from Manhattan to Columbia, Mo.; allows for ready collaboration with Kansas University and Kansas State University; and is within reasonable proximity of major meat producers and processors.

Lawrence provides a ready supply of technically proficient workers, Marvin said, and the Lawrence operations — now with a staff of 15 — soon will be shopping for 20 to 25 people with backgrounds in science, finance and information technology.

And that's only the beginning.

"We are building a global company of consequence," Marvin said. ■

Source: *Lawrence Journal-World*, October 21, 2007.
Reprinted with permission