

# LINK

Moving  
Life  
Sciences  
Forward

## NOVA SCOTIA ENTREPRENEURS ATTRACT BIG BUSINESS TO THE PROVINCE



**ASCENTA  
HEALTH  
finalizes Sale**

**DSM invests  
millions  
locally**

# A Message from BioNova's Managing Director

**A**s we reflect on Summer in Nova Scotia, BioNova is gearing up for a busy season ahead and I would like to take this opportunity to provide you with a look at our present and upcoming endeavors – BioNova leads the life sciences industry and we offer support to continue to grow the industry in Nova Scotia.



In October BioNova will host the 14th annual BioPort Atlantic conference, the premier life sciences industry event in Atlantic Canada. This year's theme is 'Bold ideas for Big opportunities' which represents the innovation and potential coming from the sector in Nova Scotia. BioPort provides a forum to educate, inform and

inspire the life sciences community to develop their ideas, commercialize their technologies and build links within the region and internationally.

BioNova will also be hosting the BioInnovation Challenge in October, an opportunity for early stage start-ups from N.S, N.B and P.E.I to capitalize on valuable coaching and exposure for their new, innovative life sciences idea while competing for funds and services to help them grow. This year's event has a cash prize, an in-kind services package and professional pitch training valued at \$30,000.

I encourage you to read through this issue of LINK to better understand the innovative work being done in our province, that will not only benefit you but our economy.

All the best,  
Scott Moffitt

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1344 Summer Street, Suite 124, Halifax, NS B3H 0A8  
[www.bionova.ca](http://www.bionova.ca)

Scott Moffitt MSc, Managing Director  
[smoffitt@bionova.ca](mailto:smoffitt@bionova.ca)

Kerri Mannette, Program Manager  
[kmannette@bionova.ca](mailto:kmannette@bionova.ca)

Shana McRae, Marketing and  
Communications Officer/Editor  
[smcrae@bionova.ca](mailto:smcrae@bionova.ca)

Ciara McGlinchey, Operations  
Coordinator  
[cmcglinchey@bionova.ca](mailto:cmcglinchey@bionova.ca)

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Photo's in this issue provided by: Ascenta Health, DSM, Nature's Way of Canada, Athletigen, Chelation Partners, Health QR and Novartis



**BOLD  
IDEAS  
FOR BIG  
OPPORTUNITIES**

## SAVE THE DATE

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Life Sciences Industry Event  
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Presented by:



# LOCAL ENTREPRENEUR RE-INVENTS FISH-OIL SUPPLEMENT AND ATTRACTS

**W**hen the CEO of leading dietary supplement company Nature's Way Products Inc. was on a business trip in Vancouver he came across a well packaged liquid omega-3 supplement that was flying off of the shelves of a local supermarket. He immediately contacted his Chief Product Officer, who at the time was looking to add a top quality omega-3 product to the Nature's Way portfolio and let him know his search was over.

Twelve years earlier in 2003, Marc St-Onge a Biologist who studied at Dalhousie University was on a personal health journey when he founded the omega-3 supplement manufacturing company Ascenta Health Ltd. After dealing with his own health struggles he focused his research on omega-3, a fatty acid harvested from fish and plant oil with dynamic health benefits. At the time the omega-3 market was struggling to gain popularity as consumers were resistant to the products unsavoury taste and smell – a stigma St-Onge was committed to change.

"The quality of our product was top priority for us, we knew in order to be successful in a challenging market we would need to revolutionize the experience of taking an omega-3 supplement for people," said St-Onge.

Traditionally omega-3 supplements have been sold in capsules that are purchased from a local pharmacy. The supplements boost the body's omega-3 intake and are essential for the proper functioning of many of the body's cells.

The fatty acids are generally harvested from animals such as fish, squid and krill or from marine oils taken from algae. These sources provide the highest nutritional benefits and if taken regularly can reduce risk of heart disease, improve symptoms of arthritis and can help to treat depression. Traditionally many of the capsule based supplements have been made with low quality or oxidized fish oil which can leave a pungent aftertaste – an unpleasant experience for consumers.

The challenge to change the perception of omega-3 supplements became a business goal for St-Onge who wanted to evolve the product into something that people would enjoy. His first mission was to build a leading research platform around the product's chemistry and seek out world class suppliers both locally and internationally.

**"I was really proud to be leading a company that pioneered an innovative omega-3 product that was now on the market, all while being environmentally responsible," said St-Onge.**

For the next stage he focused on building a state of the art and sustainable manufacturing facility in Dartmouth where he could oversee the production of the supplements in-house. From these efforts NutraSea was born, Ascenta's leading product line of omega-3 supplements in liquid form.

"I was really proud to be leading a company that pioneered an innovative omega-3 product that was now on the market, all while being environmentally responsible," said St-Onge.

When Nature's Way approached Ascenta Health they were looking for a top tier omega-3 product that would meet their high quality and manufacturing standards – they were not disappointed. In May of 2015, Ascenta announced that they had entered into a sale agreement with Nature's Way for an undisclosed amount. The acquisition would help expand the NutraSea product in the U.S.



**Ascenta** 

# BIG BUSINESS

marketplace, a space where Nature's Way had developed a strong and dedicated national sales team. Ascenta's manufacturing facility, operations and the majority of their employees would also stay intact in Nova Scotia as a division of Nature's Way Products of Canada. In a press release from Ascenta at the time of the sale St-Onge offered a statement reflecting on the company he built from the ground up over the last decade.

"From our beginnings as a small Dartmouth based start-up to our current position as an industry leader, we have achieved a lot in 12 short years. With a global player like Nature's Way the growth opportunities are expanded and will solidify the brand as a leader in the North American market."

In Nova Scotia the life sciences industry is poised to become an ideal-setting to foster the success of companies like Ascenta with leading researchers and research facilities available in the province. Ascenta's journey is indicative of what other life sciences companies could achieve with the right support and business ecosystem for attracting big industry, as their story is not the first for Nova Scotia.

In May of 2012, three years prior to Ascenta Health's acquisition, Royal DSM a global life science and material sciences company announced that it had successfully acquired Nova Scotia based Ocean Nutrition Canada, a leading global provider of fish-oil derived nutritional products for a total enterprise value of \$540 million, one of the largest acquisitions in Atlantic Canadian history.



Marc St-Onge, Founder of Ascenta Health

Although St-Onge has sold his successful NutraSea brand he has taken his years of knowledge and profits and turned his focus towards a new project. As part of the sale agreement, the lifelong entrepreneur has retained ownership of Ascenta Skin, the company's newly developed high-end skincare brand. The product's formula contains a number of innovative skin-focused ingredients, including omega-3, that is ingestible in liquid or gel-capsule form and is clinically proven to fight signs of skin aging and protect against UV-related sun damage, all this from the inside-out. The product is currently available for sale online as well as various spas and dermatologists throughout Canada.

As for the future of Nature's Way, they are expecting growth and will continue to employ people in manufacturing, research and sales and marketing locally and build upon the successful

foundation laid out by Ascenta through their manufacturing facility and top-tier products.

[www.ascentahealth.com](http://www.ascentahealth.com)  
[www.natureswaycanada.ca](http://www.natureswaycanada.ca)



# GLOBAL LIFE SCIENCES COMPANY DSM INVESTS MILLIONS IN

The old adage 'a sea of opportunities' rings true for entrepreneurs in Nova Scotia where much of the economy both old and new has been harvested from the ocean. With supporting infrastructure from within the province which offers access to world class marine-related research institutes and the highest concentration of researchers in the sector, the life sciences industry has been poised for growth.

In the Spring of 2009, Scottish native David Elder was working in the manufacturing industry in Toronto when he came across an interesting job in the emerging Omega-3 market based out of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. Although the position required some specific technical skills, he was confident that he would be the right fit for the job and pushed to meet with the company. After a successful interview Mr. Elder accepted his new position as the Senior Director of Operations for Ocean Nutrition Canada Ltd., a company pioneering the Omega-3 fish oil industry.

Ocean Nutrition was founded in 1997 by John Risley, CEO of Clearwater Fine Foods, one of the world's leading seafood companies that saw potential in the fledgling Omega-3 market for treating heart disease. Four years into their production the company opened its first micro-encapsulation plant after researchers discovered a breakthrough technology that transformed fish oil into a fine powder. This discovery solidified their role as a leader in the Omega-3 fish oil industry and would attract attention from international investors.



Installation of new equipment at Mulgrave Facility

The company's success would eventually fall onto the radar of one of the world's biggest and best-known life sciences company's, Royal DSM. The timing was right as the Dutch group was rolling out their strategic plan to make over a billion dollars in growth enhancing acquisitions to boost their health and nutrition portfolio. Mr. Elder recalls their inaugural visit which took place not long after he joined the Ocean Nutrition team.

"At the time DSM had acquired a company in the U.S. that was focused on algal based Omega-3 and they wanted to add fish oil based Omega-3 to compliment that acquisition, which is how they ended up at Ocean Nutrition"

The meeting was a success and in the Spring of 2012 after 15 years in the Omega 3 fish oil business

Ocean Nutrition announced that they had been acquired by Royal DSM for \$540 million, one of the largest acquisitions in Atlantic Canadian history.

With the acquisition finalized, the former Ocean Nutrition now had a new multinational infrastructure around business, safety, health and environment to bring the business to the next level of growth. For Mr. Elder, who had been promoted to Senior



# NOVA SCOTIA ECONOMY

Director of Manufacturing, including responsibility for the company's Peruvian Omega 3 manufacturing site, the evolution was impressive. He noted some of the biggest changes to the company were made to marketing and commercializing the Ocean Nutrition brand as well as important improvements to health and safety standards – an area DSM had excelled at with 23,000 employees globally.

“One of the significant impacts was the guidance that they brought to us around business practices and increased safety measures,” said Mr. Elder. “They significantly improved the standards at which we work every day.”

Under DSM's umbrella the 15-year-old company was quickly evolving as the world's largest supplier of concentrated fish oils. Their omega-3 product trademarked as Meg-3 boasted the highest quality fish oil Omega-3 on the market and would be hitting shelves across the globe under mega brands such as Walmart, Tropicana, Pepsi Cola, Coca Cola and Costco's Kirkland. With supply and demand on the rise DSM would soon look to enhance the existing infrastructure making changes and upgrades to the business both internally and externally.

One of their biggest upgrades would be announced in late 2014 when they unveiled plans to expand the Mulgrave manufacturing facility with a \$30+ million investment. News of the expansion was celebrated within the industry and solidified DSM as a mainstay in the province. In June, the investment announcement was named the 'Good News Story of the Year' at the Good News and Blues industry event put on by BioNova with Mr. Elder in attendance to accept the award.



Through the upgrades DSM plans to increase their capacity of producing Omega 3 fish oil with improved facilities, improved equipment and improved technology. With the company's huge

scale and reach the Omega-3 products will now supply more regions and meet increased demand. For Mr. Elder one of the greatest highlights of the investment is the impact it has had on the local economy and the future it holds for Nova Scotia.

“Most of that money was paid to local contracting companies who supplied skilled tradespeople to construct the facility and provide the mechanical, piping and electrical work. That's bringing real wealth back into the province and with the improved facility we will continue to do that.”

[www.dsm.com](http://www.dsm.com)  
[www.meg-3.com](http://www.meg-3.com)



# HEADLINE HIGHLIGHTS

**A wrap up** of what's been happening in the life sciences industry



## MEDEC

### MEDEC and BioNova Launch Strategic Partnership

MEDEC, the national association representing Canada's Medical Technology companies and BioNova, the Nova Scotia Biotechnology and Life Sciences Industry Association, are pleased to announce the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding that will leverage the regional strengths of each association for the benefit of patients, and the medical technology industry. This agreement will enable member companies of each organization to have access to programs, advocacy efforts and industry knowledge offered by each association.



### Acadian Seaplants named Nova Scotia's Exporter of the Year



Nova Scotia's Exporter of the Year for 2015 is Acadian Seaplants Ltd. The Dartmouth-based company received the honour at the 31st annual Export Achievement Awards in Halifax Thursday afternoon. Founded in 1981, the firm processes seaweed-based products and exports to more than 80 countries around the world. With facilities in Cornwallis, Yarmouth and Charlesville and a seaweed processing plant in Ireland, the company employs more than 325 people. Acadian was selected from the nine regional winners announced earlier this year.



### Ascenta Health acquired by Nature's Way

Ascenta Health Limited announced that it has entered into a sale agreement with U.S.-based health brand, Nature's Way, for an undisclosed amount. As a division of Nature's Way, the company's operations and employees will continue in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. Ascenta Health was established in 2003 by Marc St-Onge and manufactures Omega-3 health supplements under its consumer brand NutraSea.



### Spring Loaded wins \$100K for bionic knee technology development



A Dartmouth-based company is now one step closer to selling its bionic knee braces to the masses. Spring Loaded Technology won a \$100,000 grand prize in a Canada-wide young entrepreneur contest. The funding, provided by the Business Development Bank of Canada, will help the company speed-up its production of their light-weight knee braces that have a mechanical hinge that provides more stability and mobility support for people with knee injuries, compared to more traditional braces.



### Semi-Finalists Chosen for BioInnovation Challenge

The semi-finalists have been chosen for the 2015 edition of The BioInnovation Challenge (BIC). The winner of the BioInnovation Challenge will receive a \$15,000 seed investment and a package of support services and mentoring valued at more than \$30,000. The 2015 BIC is presented by BioNova in partnership with the Atlantic Canada Opportunities

**MEDEC and BioNova** Launch Strategic Partnership

**Ascenta Health** acquired by Nature's Way

**Halifax firm's scanner** up for \$1m prize

**Novartis and Cyndi Lauper** just want psoriasis patients to have fun

Agency, BioNB, Cox & Palmer, Dalhousie Office of Industry Liaison and Innovation, Jennifer Cameron PR, Jardine Lloyd Thompson Canada, PEI BioAlliance, PwC Canada and Sandler Training. BIC will take place over two days in October. The 8 semi-finalists will present to a panel of judges on October 27 at the Life Sciences Research Institute. The top three presenters will then pitch to the judges and the conference audience at BioPort Atlantic, BioNova's annual conference, the following morning. The winner will be announced at the close of BioPort Atlantic on the afternoon of October 28.



**Novartis receives EU approval for new Revolade® use as first-in-class therapy for patients with severe aplastic anemia**

Novartis announced that the European Commission has approved Revolade® (eltrombopag) for the treatment of adults with severe aplastic anemia (SAA) who were either refractory to prior immunosuppressive therapy or heavily pretreated and are unsuitable for hematopoietic stem cell transplant. SAA is a blood disorder where the bone marrow does not make enough red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets. Two out of every one million people in Europe are diagnosed with aplastic anemia per year, a portion of which are severe cases. The exact cause of the disease is still unknown, but most cases of SAA are believed to be triggered by an autoimmune reaction

where the body attacks blood-forming stem cells located in the bone marrow. As a result, patients with SAA are at risk for life-threatening infections or bleeding. The European Commission approval applies to all 28 EU member states plus Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein. In August of 2014, eltrombopag (marketed as Promacta® in the USA), was approved by the US Food and Drug Administration for once-daily use in patients with SAA who have had an insufficient response to IST. Eltrombopag is also approved for SAA in Canada.

**Novartis and Cyndi Lauper just want psoriasis patients to have fun**



Novartis (\$NVS) is working hard to build up market share for new psoriasis med Cosentyx ahead of its forthcoming competition, and it's signed on '80s icon Cyndi Lauper to help. Lauper and the National Psoriasis Foundation are joining the Swiss pharma giant on an awareness push called "I'm PsO Ready," which aims to highlight the "physical, emotional and social challenges" of the skin disease and celebrate "everyday successes" for patients, the foundation said in a statement.



**Halifax firm's scanner up for \$1m prize**

A Halifax company that has developed a portable scanner to diagnose head trauma is in the running for up to \$1 million in prize money through an international startup competition. Mindful Scientific is one of 11 Canadian companies named as a semifinalist Wednesday by 43North, a Buffalo, N.Y.-based business idea competition. The other 10 companies are in Ontario. A total of 110 startups are vying for one of 11 awards worth a total of \$5 million. They were selected from over 3,000 initial entries. Besides the \$1-million top prize, there are multiple awards worth \$500,000 and \$250,000. Winners also receive free incubator space in Buffalo for a year, as well as guidance from mentors.

# START-UP SPOTLIGHT



## Athletigen looks to genetics to improve athletes and prevent disease

When Dr. Jeremy Koenig was growing up he developed a passion for sports and fitness, it was in his DNA. While his athleticism matured and he grew stronger his mother was experiencing the opposite transformation after being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, a debilitating disorder that weakens the body over time. This experience would form a lasting impact on how he viewed the human body and inspire his pursuit of genetic research to redefine people's path to health and fitness.

After receiving his PhD in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Dr. Koenig went on to found Athletigen Technologies Inc. a genetic sports science company that owns the world's largest sports genetics database. The company, which incorporated in 2014, provides personalized genetic profiles to help empower coaches, athletes and fitness enthusiasts to become better, faster and stronger. Their work emerges from the growing industry of personal genomics, using science to help people understand their genetic strengths and weaknesses and make the best use of their natural capabilities.

In order to get their genetic analysis customers must submit a DNA sample, also termed a 'spit kit', and the company will compare their genetic traits in terms of athletics against others around the world. The analysis they get back includes comprehensive information about how their genes relate athletic elements such as their metabolism, recovery time and willingness to exercise. These unique insights are captured on their personalized online performance dashboard, which supports customized training and ongoing fitness programs to help them improve health and achieve fitness goals faster.

Although Athletigen's primary focus is on performance enhancement in athletes they are also dedicated to using genetics to improve healthcare. Dr. Koenig is working with world renowned orthopedic surgeon Dr. Ivan Wong of Halifax on a project to identify early risk factors in people who are genetically

pre-disposed to needing a hip replacement. Currently, patients experiencing hip pain are given an MRI to identify the condition which is normally too far advanced by the time patients are experiencing symptoms to avoid surgery—something Dr.Koenig and Dr. Wong's genetic research could prevent.

As for the future of Athletigen, Dr. Koenig and his team have ongoing plans to enhance their research through collaborations with healthcare. While Athletigen entered the market specifically to create products for athletes and fitness enthusiasts, Dr.Koenig's mission is to continue to leverage genetics to provide a better quality of life for each individual, while building the largest and most comprehensive sports genetics research community in the world.

[www.athletigen.com](http://www.athletigen.com)



## Chelation Partners gives boost to antibiotics to fight resistant bacteria

Only a few decades ago, antibiotics were considered to be wonder drugs because they worked so well to cure deadly diseases. Over time, many strains of bacteria evolved resistance to antibiotics and have become much harder to control – a major healthcare problem scientists are trying to solve.

Dr. Bill Cheliak, Co-Founder of Chelation Partners is one of those scientists and has over 20 years of experience in the biotechnology fields including vaccines, human genetics and drug development. Dr. Cheliak and his team have been working on a new product they hope will make existing antibiotics more effective against resistant bacteria through the reduction of iron.



**Athletigen looks to genetics** to improve athletes and prevent disease  
**Chelation Partners gives boost** to antibiotics to fight resistant bacteria  
**HealthQR technology** reminds prescription holders to take their medicine

The idea came from Co-Founder Dr. Bruce Holbein in the early 90's when he was working for the Department of National Defense. Dr. Holbein was running tests on infected lab mice when he discovered that very small amounts of key types of iron were killing the mice. When the mice were starved of iron he found they were protected from the infection. This revelation of iron's role in weakening pathogens provided the basis for Chelation Partner's new product.

In the US alone, over 2 million people per year develop hospital acquired infections resulting in almost 100,000 deaths – the vast majority of which are increasingly the result of resistant pathogens. Due to the fact that many antibiotics have become less effective, Chelation Partners is prime to take on a \$50 billion market by starving pathogens of essential and irreplaceable iron to enhance and restore the efficacy of existing antibiotics.

Chelation Partners lead product is code named "DIBI" and will be sold or licensed to major pharmaceutical companies as an additive used to boost antibiotics and restore their power against drug resistant infections. DIBI is a polymer that removes iron and keeps it away from the pathogens. Without iron, the pathogens cannot grow, reproduce or cause an infection. The product is currently undergoing pre-clinical testing to gain regulatory approval to ensure it is safe, non-toxic and won't produce unexpected side effects. Dr. Cheliak predicts the product will be brought to market sometime around the year 2020 after it passes all regulatory hurdles.

[www.chelationpartners.com](http://www.chelationpartners.com)



**HealthQR technology reminds prescription holders to take their medicine**

Every year around 500,000 Canadians visit an emergency room because they did not take their prescribed medication properly. Medication adherence is a growing and costly healthcare problem that Patricia Ryan, Co-Founder of the Nova Scotia based start-up

HealthQR is hoping to address with the release of their new mobile health app.

The app's purpose is to educate and empower patients with the information they need to properly manage their medications and their health. It provides patients with notifications to take their medications on time and reminders when their prescriptions are about to expire or need refills, which they can renew through the app.



Patricia Ryan, Co-Founder of the Nova Scotia based start-up HealthQR

What makes the technology truly unique is that it syncs with the pharmacy's database. This provides patients with prescribed schedules for taking their medication, an added safeguard and convenience not found in similar apps where prescriptions are entered manually.

HealthQR envisions the technology will have the greatest impact on people who are at higher risk of non-adherence, such as those living with a chronic illness like diabetes, high blood pressure and arthritis. An estimated 29 million people across North America fit this demographic and would benefit from the medication management software for the remainder of their lives.

With the mobile health industry gaining in popularity, HealthQR's technology has caught the attention of major drug companies out of the U.S. The increased funding has accelerated research and development and sets the public release of their technology on course for the end of 2015.

In the meantime, Nova Scotian's can download the app for Android and iOS, which is exclusively available through the Compass Pharmacy group that has seven locations across Halifax and Dartmouth.

[www.healthqr.com](http://www.healthqr.com)

# Novartis

## invests in Nova Scotia research on PSORIASIS

**Psoriasis is a challenging and misunderstood skin condition that effects over 850,000 Canadians living with the diagnosis. With dedicated funding from Novartis Pharmaceuticals, a Swiss based company with five locations across Canada and the research of Dr. Richard Langley of Dalhousie Medical School there may soon be a better treatment available.**

In July 2014, the Novartis sponsorship gave Dr. Langley and his team of researchers the opportunity to conduct a pivotal study on the effects of a new drug being tested on psoriasis patients. The results, which were published in the New England Journal of Medicine provided an encouraging new treatment for psoriasis sufferers and identified a key protein that causes the skin condition.

“There are some very innovative researchers coming from Atlantic Canada and our goal is to support them in our joint pursuit of improving the quality of life of Canadians,” said Jason Brown, Novartis’ Health Policy and Patient Access Lead for Atlantic Canada.

The current treatment options for patients with psoriasis are limited and many live with painful, itchy lesions and experience damaging psychological effects from feeling stigmatized by the condition. Of those diagnosed with psoriasis, up to 50 per cent say they are dissatisfied with their current therapies – a statistic Dr. Langley is trying to change. Through his new drug he is able to provide a medication where approximately 90 per cent of patients are having a significant improvement in their skin.

The life sciences sector in Nova Scotia is well positioned as a leading industry with top-tier researchers and research facilities including a \$70 million Life Sciences Research Institute. However, further support programs dedicated to fostering more

collaborations between leading researchers and big industry in the province is still needed to continue to attract international investment.

The collaboration between Novartis Pharmaceuticals and Dr. Langley will soon have its full impact on the health care system. The drug, which is injectable, was approved by Health Canada earlier this year and will be available by prescription for patients shortly.

### About Novartis

- Novartis is a leading pharmaceutical company dedicated to discovering, developing and marketing innovative products to prevent and cure diseases, to ease suffering and enhance the quality of life of Canadians.
- Novartis recently launched a psoriasis awareness campaign with artist Cindy Lauper.
- In 2013 Novartis invested more than \$118 million dollars in Canadian R&D and Community Investments with greater than 141 Canadian projects in clinical development.
- Currently, Novartis employs close to 130 Atlantic Canadians.

[www.novartis.ca](http://www.novartis.ca)

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