



## Harvesting innovation



The recent partnering of entrepreneurs and researchers in the East of England has provided unique opportunities for business development without costing the earth.

InCrops, a new virtual enterprise hub based at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, is stimulating commercial activity in the alternative and non-food crop sector by establishing business networks for sharing research knowledge.

Project leader Dr John French,

With the East of England home to the world's leaders in of plant bioscience research, the InCrops e-hub is perfectly situated to connect entrepreneurs with researchers in new, bio-renewable and low carbon products. With support from the InCrops team of Business Innovation Managers, these innovative ideas can be turned into commercial realities.

Dr John French, director, InCrops explained: "There are significant challenges in introducing new alternative and non-food crops given the suppressed state of the UK's agriculture and the huge issues of climate change affecting the region. Global markets need to be tapped effectively and significant benefits can be brought to regional businesses through the partnerships created."

Through the e-hub, the InCrops enterprise team provides specialist advice and guidance that would not otherwise be available to businesses bridging the gap between research and development, securing patents and attracting investors or public sector support.


Commenting on the power of the project John said: "It's not simply a question of cultivating crops for food or other uses - we need to maximise our use of crops and also reduce waste. As climate change starts to affect the region, the investigation of how future crops can be used for fibre, high-value chemicals and extracts, protein and starch is going to become increasingly important."

The £4.06 million project includes an investment of £1.15 million investment from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and £1.05 million from the East of England Development Agency (ERDF) has helped to make the e-hub concept a reality.

InCrops has a unique structure involving 13 regional project partners including major research institutes, universities and environmental partners. Additional collaborations with national organisations such as the National Non Food Crops Centre and DECC and growing international links are bringing added benefit to the region.

“All of the partners recognise that this is a unique opportunity and are working together to see their expertise translated into exciting new and increasingly sustainable products” John said. “The talent available in this region is enormous and the creation of a single point of focus means businesses can access the right expertise quickly and easily.”

This five-year project aims to deliver benefits to the region’s economy through assisting 200 businesses leading to 50 new businesses starting-up and 70 jobs being created or safeguarded as result.

Priority Axis 1			
<b>Funding:</b>	Total Project Cost: £4.06m ERDF: £1.15 million ERDF: £1.05 million Partners: £1.85 million		
<b>Solution for Business Product:</b>	Networking for Innovation		
<b>Scope:</b>	East of England	<b>Project Duration:</b>	June 2008–May 2013
<b>More Information:</b>	Dr. John French, director, InCrops: info@incropsproject.co.uk or +44 (0)1603 591765 www.incropsproject.co.uk 		
<b>ERDF Details:</b>	The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) is a seven-year investment programme part financed by the European Union. Its objective is ‘towards low carbon economic growth’ in the East of England and €110.9 million has been allocated to our region. The fund aims to help small and medium size enterprises respond to the challenges of climate change and the huge commercial potential behind a low carbon economy. For more information visit <a href="http://www.communities.gov.uk/regeneration/regenerationfunding/europeanregionaldevelopment/eastengland/">http://www.communities.gov.uk/regeneration/regenerationfunding/europeanregionaldevelopment/eastengland/</a> 		