

Focus on **CANOLA** **HEALTH CLAIMS** at new centre

WORLD-CLASS RESEARCH IN WINNIPEG INTO THE NUTRITIONAL quality and components of canola is on the plate for Dr. Peter Jones in 2006.

Jones became director of the new Richardson Centre for Functional Foods and Nutraceuticals on the University of Manitoba campus on November 1.

The \$25-million facility will enable researchers to identify and enhance health-promoting compounds in prairie crops and develop them into marketable food supplements and products.

The three-storey, 55,000 square-foot centre will house up to 40 full-time researchers from faculties of agricultural and food sciences, human ecology, medicine and pharmacy as well as from outside collaborating agencies.

Researchers will focus on food supplements extracted from canola and other prairie crops, identifying useful compounds, enhancing those compounds, developing ways to incorporate them into food products and determining consumer acceptability of the products.

The Richardson Centre has received major support from the Richardson Foundation, CIBC, Agricore United, Government of Canada, Province of Manitoba as well as from other private-sector donors.

In mid-January, new faces and new equipment were arriving daily. "We're busy today installing the analytical equipment inside this place to make it an absolute showcase for testing foods and nutraceuticals within the Canadian arena," Jones says. "In the next two to three months we'll have a superior analytical lab that is, I think, unmatched in Canada in terms of analytical and processing capability."

Research programs for functional foods and nutraceuticals are measured in years. Results play out in sales for a multi-billion dollar industry. An ideal positive outcome, for example, may be data supporting an efficacy claim for disease reduction risk for a functional food or nutraceutical from canola, flax, oats or barley.

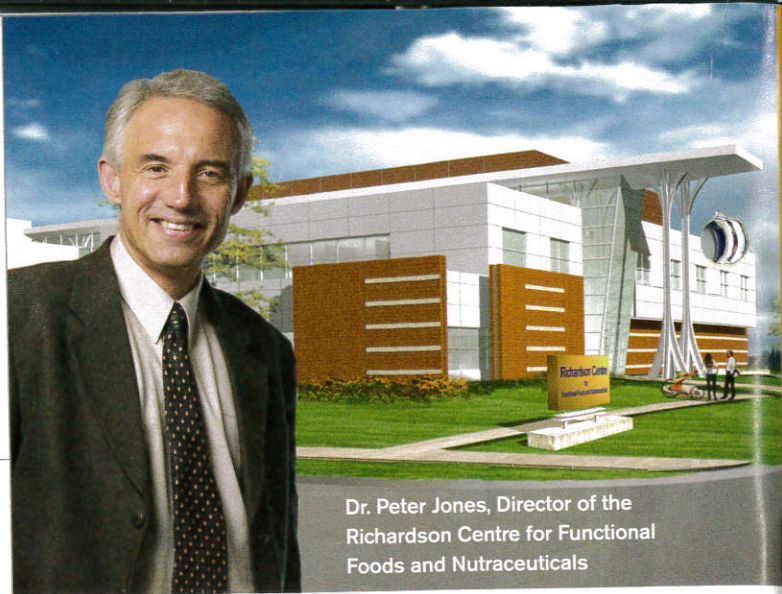
The Centre's research 'population' will be drawn from universities and private industry. Its research programs will cater to food and agri-food companies of all sizes, with a particular emphasis on national and multi-national food companies.

Industry research sponsors, initially, include three large food companies, a West Coast biotech company and a pharmaceutical firm.

Canola-based research discussions are in at ground level.

"Certainly, there are lots of potential avenues for canola," Jones says. "My research has looked carefully at omega-3 fatty acid metabolism as well as omega-9 (the oleic acid constituent in canola), so we plan to carry on with our research in the area of comparative fatty acid metabolism."

He adds, "My essential role is to fill these labs with people who are going to make a real dent in this agri-food, value-added initiative. We have eight analytical labs, a bio-processing area, a whole animal care facility, clinical nutrition feeding facilities, as well as offices and carrels for researchers and their students."



Dr. Peter Jones, Director of the Richardson Centre for Functional Foods and Nutraceuticals

ANTI-CHOLESTEROL CRUSADER

Jones is a pioneer in developing foods that can combat high cholesterol and other life-threatening conditions.

In addition to being Director of the Richardson Centre for Functional Foods and Nutraceuticals, he recently was appointed Canada Research Chair in Nutrition and Functional Foods. Formerly, he was Director of the Mary Emily Clinical Nutrition Research Center in the School of Dietetics and Human Nutrition at McGill University, in addition to being Director of the School itself.

"I am delighted to be joining the Richardson Centre for Functional Foods and Nutraceuticals as its Director at this key stage of its evolution," Jones says. "Without question, it is exciting to be part of such an enterprise that will be developing functional foods and ingredients and heralding them to Manitoba, to Canada and beyond."

"Given Canada's tremendous potential for developing value-added products in the food sector, the positioning of the Centre could not come at a better time."

A native of British Columbia, Jones has been a functional foods leader for more than two decades. He earned a doctorate in nutritional biochemistry at the University of Toronto, 1984, followed by a teaching career at universities in Chicago, Vancouver and Lyon, France.

At McGill University, Montreal, Jones led a laboratory research group of approximately 20 researchers focusing on functional foods – especially oils – in the context of chronic disease prevention. Jones also was an instructor in faculties of medicine, agriculture and environmental sciences at McGill.

"Our specific interest in the past 10 years has been around foods that go beyond just providing vitamins, minerals and energy. We've been looking at 'functional foods' that confer added health benefits over and above simply providing nutrients," he says.

Phytosterols in plants, "chemical cousins" to cholesterol, became part of his research program in British Columbia. Since then his research has shown that, when phytosterols 'bump cholesterol off the absorption shuttle' in the human digestive system, the result is lower blood cholesterol and diminished heart disease risk.

His McGill lab also developed a functional oil composed of phytosterols and medium-chain triglycerides (MCTs) that drew global attention from consumers, industry and researchers. The product is able to increase metabolism and improve cholesterol levels while reducing body fat.

Jones continues to work in various ways with industry. He serves as Chair of the Functional Foods and Nutraceuticals board for Forbes Meditech Inc., Canada, and as President of the Board, Danone Institute of Canada.

BY JOHN DIETZ