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By Barry Ellsworth
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Loyalist College and Bioniche Life Sciences Inc. have partnered in a multi-year, almost \$500,000 research project involving the use of sophisticated technology to produce high quality botanical products.

Officials said it will someday lead to higher quality natural vitamins and herbal products because they will be taken from plants using carbon dioxide extraction rather than today's common practice of petro-chemical extraction, which leaves residue.

Those cutting-edge products such as saw palmetto and evening primrose oil should be available within two years, said Kari Kramp, a professor in applied science at Loyalist. It is a timely partnership — which also includes the University of Ottawa, the provincial government and the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine — because the natural medicine market is burgeoning world-wide.

The announcement of the \$459,000 project was made during a press conference Friday at Bioniche's Belleville headquarters.

"There is great potential here to develop high quality natural health products for a rapidly growing marketplace, and also to build on the strengths that exist in the Quinte area to help develop a stronger regional economy," Graeme McRae, Bioniche president and chief executive officer, said in a release.

The carbon dioxide extraction is the key because there is no solvent residue.

"They cause problems," John Baker, head of Bioniche Botanicals, told officials at the press conference.

Research will focus on the identification, extraction, production and evaluation of botanical extract, officials said.

The province and Loyalist will each kick in \$183,720 to the project, over four years, while Bioniche will contribute \$91,860.

Prince Edward-Hastings MPP Ernie Parsons, who was at the press conference, said because of the provincial deficit, some projects had to be put on a back burner, but this project survived.

"This one is strongly supported," Parsons said. "Our government is extremely pleased."

One of the byproducts is the creation of a stronger local economy, officials said.

"It might mean a job for you guys," Baker said, smiling at three Loyalist College bioscience students. There are 80 students in the biosciences program at the college. Two years in the discussion, then planning, stage, the project includes the building of a research laboratory that will be suitable for nutraceutical extraction. The installation will house testing equipment including a pilot plant extractor, believed to be the only one in Ontario.

The technology at Loyalist and the University of Ottawa will allow duplication of laboratory results.

"This is the first scientific research project to be developed and delivered by the college," said Loyalist president Doug Auld, in a statement. "Loyalist has a strong background in the delivery of applied science programs in the biosciences field, and the project grew out of the development of the cluster of bioscience programs..."