

University of Alabama research team wins \$30,000 grant

Staff report

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MicroGreen Technologies, a research team from the University of Alabama, won a \$30,000 grant Tuesday in the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama's business plan competition in Birmingham.

It was one of four research teams from state universities to win grants. The money will help further their research with a goal of creating a new business enterprise.

MicroGreen is developing a cost-effective, environmentally sustainable agricultural crop fertilizer that delivers phosphate to plant roots through beneficial bacteria. Its product reduces the amount of phosphates needed in fertilizers, which would save farmers money.

Robert Martinez, a microbiologist who heads the team, said the researchers have isolated the bacteria, which occurs naturally in soil. The team plans to do greenhouse tests on different plants and different soils. If those tests prove satisfactory, its product could next be tested on fields in West Alabama.

"This program is reflective of the renewal component of the Accelerate Alabama strategic plan for economic development in Alabama developed by Gov. Bentley's Economic Development Alliance," said a statement from Bill Taylor, EDPA president. "The strength of Alabama's economic development efforts is contingent to this three-pronged approach — recruiting new companies, retaining existing jobs and renewing the state through the creation of new jobs in sustainable, progressive industries."

In Tuesday's competition, each team delivered a 12-minute pitch to the panel of reviewers, culminating a process that began in September 2011. Since then, the teams received mentoring to refine their business plans from volunteer professionals across the state.

The competition was founded by the EDPA Foundation in 2005 to help commercialize technologies coming out of the state's research universities. The program is run in cooperation with Alabama State University, the University of Alabama, University of Alabama at Birmingham, University of Alabama in Huntsville, Auburn University and University of South Alabama. The program is funded with a grant from the Alabama Research Alliance and from private sponsorships.

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