Food and Health Entrepreneurship Academy 2009

“Seeing ones research through the eyes of an entrepreneur instead of through the eyes of a scientist has been like landing on another planet.” Associate professor at the University of Copenhagen’s Department of Ecology, Peter Stougaard describes his experience at Food for Health Entrepreneurship Academy (FHEA).

According to Peter Stougaard, the academy focused on a new set of scientific success criteria:

“As a scientist, you’re used to being judged based on the number of citations in scientific journals. Of course we need to retain an independent research free of commercial interests, but the academy truly emphasized the importance of science aimed at the market,” he says.

Peter Stougaard has discovered a new enzyme in bacteria from Greenland, which amongst other things, can be used to produce lactose free milk.

“The academy has given me the tools to quickly evaluate the viability of my research from a commercial perspective. A process, I had no insight into before,” says the professor who will continue working with the *Coldzyme* idea, a company built around enzymes active at low temperatures.

“The low temperature saves energy, improves taste and ensures better hygiene during production. Other cold active enzymes could be used to in cold water laundry detergent. You start to see the “windows” in which your research really can make a difference,” he says.

Vibeke Orlien, Associate professor at the University of Copenhagen’s Department of Food Science participated in the Academy with an idea for a new, drinkable milk snack based on high pressure technology, which she is currently developing. High pressure technology enables faster gelation of milk products replacing the fermentation stage and thereby the need to add sugar to cover up the sour taste. Compared with competing products from Nestle and Danone, her product *KoLine* contains half the sugar and considerably less fat.

“When you’re in the lab, it can seem impossible to envision the isolated scientific research as part of a complete product. I did not come here to with the intent of becoming an entrepreneur, but I have to say that the academy has given me such a good overall view of each step in the commercializing process, that I feel encouraged to start,” says the professor from Copenhagen, who is also the head of her department’s innovation committee.

She will now commence the first taste tests of the product amongst parents and their children. The professor will also be following up with PepsiCo, whose representative at the academy was very interested in finding out whether the high pressure technology can be used in the company’s product portfolio.

“I would never have gotten a contact of this caliber had I not participated in FHEA. And also, I would probably not have realized the opportunity to employ the technology in other contexts. It is through new networks like this that true innovation happens,” says Vibeke Orlien.

Maja Madsen, a M.sc. student in Food Production, Innovation and Management at the Technical University of Denmark, was particularly impressed with the mentoring sessions held at FHEA. She is developing a measuring device to predict the texture (rheological properties) during food production helping food manufactures avoid significant production loss.

“The mentors asked tough questions that we typically didn’t address or think about at all. I was completely taken aback by all the golden nuggets of information and feedback we received on even our 150 word elevator pitch,” she says.

Danish sponsor of the academy is Innovation Center Denmark in Silicon Valley. Research attaché at the center, Lars Beer Nielsen, predicts that the inaugural academy will be the first of many similar initiatives in the new Food for Health Consortium.

“I’m proud that the Danish scientists were able to match their US counterparts and that they received concrete input aiding them in bringing their ideas from the lab to the market,” he says.

-Mette McCall