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Government of Canada and partners fund new genomics research project to eliminate *Listeria* from food supply

OTTAWA – June 27, 2013 — Genome Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), and Alberta Innovates Bio Solutions have partnered to support a \$1.4 million project that will help protect consumers from *Listeriosis*, a serious foodborne illness caused by *Listeria* bacteria.

The project, led by Dr. Linda Chui of the University of Alberta, will sequence and map the genomes of many *Listeria* strains to identify those strains that are likely to be most harmful to human health as well as those most likely to survive in food processing facilities. This research will lead to faster and more cost-effective ways to screen food for the *Listeria* bacteria and bolster food safety for Canadians.

"The Harper Government is committed to improving Canada's already robust food safety system, as outlined in the Safe Food for Canadians Action Plan," said Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz. "Through continued investments in science and innovation, we are creating opportunities to better identify and reduce risks for consumers, meaning safer food for Canadian families."

"We are pleased to see our investments in genomics research having tangible results," said the Honourable Gary Goodyear, Minister of State (Science and Technology). "This project shows how Canada's leadership in genomics-based research benefits Canadians by helping protect consumers from serious foodborne illness while developing a more competitive food sector."

Through this joint research effort, a database of *Listeria* genome sequences will be developed and genetic markers identified. These markers will be used to rapidly spot harmful *Listeria* strains in foods and food processing facilities.

"Genomics research such as this is equipping us with new, effective ways to combat threats to food safety. The impact this research will have on averting potential outbreaks and the consequences for Canadian families and industry is tremendous," said Pierre Meulien, President and CEO of Genome Canada.

"Ensuring the safety of food products is critical to public health and the competitiveness of our agri-food and agriculture industries," said Dr. Stan Blade, Chief Executive Officer of Alberta Innovates Bio Solutions. "New *Listeria* detection tests that produce results quickly will allow food producers and regulators to act swiftly and provides assurance of an even higher level of food safety for Canadians," he added.

Dr. Chui's 18-month research project is supported through an investment of \$250,000 each from Genome Canada (via Genome Alberta) and the CFIA, and \$100,000 from Alberta Innovates Bio Solutions. This investment is also being leveraged through co-funding from federal, provincial, academic and industry partners, including Maple Leaf Foods, increasing the total investment to \$1.4 million.

"The strength of our project is in the world-class expertise of the research team and the support of many distinguished organizations from across Canada," said Dr. Chui. "The different researchers on the team bring leading-edge expertise in many areas including food sample preparation, assays development, state-of-the art capacity in bioinformatics and genomics, pathogen detection and outbreak response."

Genome Canada is a not-for-profit organization that invests in genomics research to generate economic and social benefits for Canadians. Genome Canada builds bridges between government, academia and industry to forge a genomics-based public-private innovation enterprise focused on key life science sectors. We develop these partnerships to invest in and manage large-scale research and translate discoveries into commercial opportunities, new technologies, applications and solutions. For more information visit www.genomecanada.ca.

The **Canadian Food Inspection Agency** (CFIA) is Canada's largest science-based regulator. The Agency is dedicated to safeguarding food, animals and plants, which enhances the health and well-being of Canada's people, environment and economy. For more information, visit www.inspection.gc.ca.

Alberta Innovates Bio Solutions (AI Bio) is a publicly funded board-governed corporation that works with partners to identify, coordinate and fund research projects designed to help solve industry challenges with solutions that deliver economic, environmental and social benefits. Through this investment in science and innovation, AI Bio aims to help create new technologies and products that will grow Alberta's agriculture, food and forest sectors. Visit www.bio.albertainnovates.ca.

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Note to editors: Download photos of Dr. Chui at www.flickr.com/photos/aibiosolutions/sets/72157632762975887/

More information on Listeria and Listeriosis can be found at this link:
<http://healthycanadians.gc.ca/eating-nutrition/poisoning-intoxication/listeriosis-listeria-listeriose-eng.php>

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