

# Biotechnology



## THE OPPORTUNITY

Mexico lags behind the developed countries in its use of biotechnology, largely because of a major investment in publicly-funded, university-based research centres.

- Mexico is the leading developer of biotechnology in Latin America, largely because of a major investment in publicly-funded, university-based research centres.
- Because of the public-sector focus of its research efforts, Mexico has been slow to develop broad commercial biotechnology applications, and will depend on foreign expertise for future expansion.
- The sector is dominated by publicly-funded research institutes, but because of funding cuts, the government is now promoting privately-sponsored, market-oriented research.
- There are promising markets for laboratory equipment, consulting and training services, as well as for products based on biotechnology.
- The best prospects are for mature technologies with a proven track record in Canada.

## MEXICO'S BIOTECHNOLOGY DEBATE

Biotechnology is the application of biological organisms, systems or processes to the creation of products, including both goods and services. Some of these techniques have been used for centuries. For example, yeast is a biological product used for making bread, beer and wine. In recent years, biotechnology has

emerged as a cutting-edge industry with outstanding potential for future growth. Trend-setting applications include anaerobic digestion systems, biological pest control and bioleaching in the mining industry.

So far, Mexico has lagged behind the industrialized nations in the development and application of biotechnology. In the past, Mexican policy makers have tended to favour made-at-home, labour-intensive solutions to the nation's problems. But the potential benefits of acquiring foreign-developed technologies are now gaining wider recognition. Biotechnology is increasingly being incorporated into production processes, especially those in health care, agriculture, food processing and environmental remediation.

Most biotechnology applications in Mexico use basic or intermediate-level technology. They include fermentation engineering and the development of antibiotics and hormones. Advanced technologies have been used in isolated cases and are generating much interest. But significant technology transfers from countries such as Canada and the United States will be needed to fully develop the commercial applications.

## SUMMARY REPORT

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