

Pigs move into Spring Point facility

For the millions of people worldwide who are afflicted with diabetes, researchers are now one step closer to a potential cure for the disease.

Spring Point Project, a non-profit organization created to expedite the widespread availability of islet tissue for diabetes care, has now conducted the first animal population of its recently constructed bio-secure animal facility in New Richmond to breed and maintain high-health, pathogen-free pigs.

Insulin-producing islet cells from such high-health pigs are needed to meet the demands in the diabetes community that cannot be realized by using transplantation of human islets.

This facility was funded by a \$6.2 million grant from the Diabetes Research & Wellness Foundation's (DRWF), a Washington, D.C.-based non-profit worldwide network dedicated to finding and funding the cure for diabetes. Ryan Companies, U.S., constructed the DRWF Islet Resource Facility. The opening and start of operations was celebrated just a few weeks ago.

The 21,000-square-foot bio-secure building will be home to approximately 100 high-health, "medical-grade" pigs. Pancreatic islet cells from those pathogen-free pigs will be used for transplantation into diabetes patients in clinical trials. There are very few buildings of this kind in the world.

"We had a favorable response from the FDA on the design and operations of this building," said Dr. Henk-Jan Schuurman, CEO of Spring Point Project. "Now, our goal is to be ready for clinical trials within three years, and to provide an FDA-approved standard treatment soon thereafter. We are very pleased that the first animals in the facility meet the high-health standards."

"The start of operations in the Islet Resource Facility marks a major milestone in our ability to offer islet transplants to all patients with diabetes who meet medical criteria," said Dr. Bernhard Hering, a world-renowned diabetes expert and Scientific Director of the Diabetes Institute for Immunology & Transplantation at the University of Minnesota, which may run pre-clinical and clinical trials with Spring Point Project. "Human islet cell transplants have reversed diabetes in 90 percent of our recipients. However, the shortage of human donor organs greatly limits the applicability of islet transplants. Pig islets will solve



Photo submitted

The first pigs to populate the new Spring Point Project facility in New Richmond arrived by c-section on Feb. 15. The pigs will be raised in a hyper-clean environment and will eventually be used in clinical trials in an effort to cure diabetes.

this demand issue and are at the forefront of a far-reaching cure for patients with diabetes."

The demand for high-health pig islets has been significantly heightened since Dr. Hering and his team last March documented their medical milestone in the prestigious scientific journal Nature Medicine - pig islet cell transplantation yielding long-term diabetes reversal in monkeys, opening the path to unprecedented new opportunities for patients with diabetes.

"This is the reason Spring Point Project was established," said Tom Cartier, president and chairman on the board of Spring Point Project. "The Diabetes Research & Wellness Foundation was among the first to come on board to support our activities, and together with the help of some very generous donors, we can stand here today with this world-class islet resource facility. We also appreciate the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation for their substantial support of the research team at the University of Minnesota Diabetes Institute for Immunology and Transplantation. We're moving closer to a cure for diabetes as a result of everyone's efforts."

An experienced team at Spring Point Project under leadership of Dr. Schuurman, and working with geneticist Dr. Scott Fahrenkrug of the University of Minnesota, is overseeing the breeding of the animals for safety and high islet production in the facility.

The Hutterian Brethren, a religious farming community in South Dakota, is contributing its expertise with the overseeing and care of the animals.

"The focused efforts in a

unique partnership combining top-class expertise in all disciplines needed is the best safeguard for success and based DRWF's decision for funding," commented W. Michael Gretschel, volunteer president of the Diabetes Research & Wellness Foundation. "We will provide the world new hope for transplants that will relieve patients from the day-to-day burdens of insulin administration and threats of high and low blood sugars that cause deadly complications—from blindness to heart attacks, strokes and kidney failure."

Melissa Johnson, appointed by President Bush as Executive Director of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, addressed the many participants at the facility's opening ceremony, underscoring the interest by the US government in this milestone towards a new and innovative therapy for diabetes patients.

There are 20.8 million people in the United States, or 7 percent of the population, who have diabetes. Diabetes alone represents 11 percent of the nation's health care expenditure.

DRWF has funded more than \$25 million toward the cure for diabetes research. It has committed \$6 million to SPP with the goal to accelerate Dr. Hering's clinical trials.

To contact Spring Point Project, visit www.SpringPointProject.org. To contact Diabetes Research & Wellness Foundation, visit www.diabeteswellness.net. To contact the Diabetes Institute for Immunology and Transplantation, visit www.diabetesinstitute.org.

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