

# FOOD Quality



Farm to Fork Quality Assurance

*Web site brings contract laboratories and life science companies together*

BY MARK A. DESORBO



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—Ron Murray, director of the Calgary, Alberta, Canada-based Internet company, [www.contractlaboratory.com](http://www.contractlaboratory.com)

The search for a contract laboratory that can do everything from testing for total phosphorous in frozen cooked lobster meat to chemical residues in nutraceuticals and pharmaceuticals perhaps starts in the yellow pages, gradually progresses to a reliable trade journal and then ultimately ends up on the Internet.

At least that's what Murray and Pamela Wertzlik, company president and a former safety officer in the FDA's New Jersey office, are hoping. And it seems to be already happening for the 18-month-old startup. Last year, the site help make 381 connections. At the time of this report, 335 connections had already been made in 2005 and Murray estimates that the site will do in excess of 1,000 for the whole year.

**PORK PURVEYOR PONDERES RANCIDITY RANCHER** for superior food safety. Cooked lobster meat processor in China seeks a phosphorus-finding lab for regular, quality tryst. Honey maker longs for pollen counter.

While the wording might not be exact, this is the gist of what life science companies and contract laboratories find at [www.contractlaboratory.com](http://www.contractlaboratory.com).

"We've been compared to an Internet dating site before," says Ron Murray, director of the Calgary, Alberta, Canada-based Internet company. "We bring people together."

The site not only offers leads for labs seeking work in a host of industries, including food and beverage, nutraceutical, agriculture, pharmaceutical, medical devices, biotechnology and cosmetics, but it is also an e-marketplace for careers, advice, products, articles and case studies.

## CASTING A LINE

There are plenty of fish in the sea when it comes to contract laboratories and probably even more situations - compromising and uncompromising.

As with any Internet dating site, the bashful and bold can flourish by simply casting a line to see who bites.

Visitors to [www.contractlaboratory.com](http://www.contractlaboratory.com) are encouraged to register for membership, which is free and allows access to search and browsing functions for labs or jobs. Once a new member's information is received, a randomly generated password is e-mailed to them for future log-ins.

The membership does not, however, allow access to laboratory test request, business opportunities and product requests details and contact information.

But a company, say a food processor, can submit a laboratory test request for free. Required information includes testing type, urgency, description and requirements. The company has the option to remain anonymous by simply typing "confidential" in the company name, location and contact information section. That was the case of the frozen cooked lobster meat processor in China.

The request is then posted on the "Incoming Test Request Database," and labs meeting requirements are often found within 24 to 48 hours, Murray says. "The worst case scenario is I can't find them a lab," he adds. "Another worst case scenario is that I find them 10 labs in two days."

One of the main aspects in assisting a company find a lab is honing on federal requirements. Murray says because the FDA has drastically revamped microbiology provisions over the last year, "there's a lot of hand-holding to be done."

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## MAKING A CATCH

Her blue eyes and smile or his rugged good looks are just the incentives he or she needs to click open a profile.

Labs, too, find these lures: A food company seeks a lab to find cashew nut shells in a cashew butter product. Another processor needs pre-shipment inspection for imported foods, while another firm is asking for fat levels in the various cooking oils it presses.

Once a lab finds an enticing ad, it simply clicks the description link; but there's a catch to making the catch. The laboratory must pay an annual fee of \$1,500 to gain such access and remain on the site. If the lab has multiple facilities, it is \$500 for each additional facility, although this negotiable, Murray is quick to point out.

"Sales people in labs realize that what they find here are real leads," he says. "We're talking to labs and companies that are sending us the work they don't want."

Murray explains that one particular laboratory in Massachusetts has facilities in France, Montreal and other parts of the U.S.

"So if they answer a request out of Europe, we'll pass along the information to their facility in France," he adds. "More and more, we are getting labs worldwide. We almost always have a North American contact, but some of our labs are purely a Southeast Asian or a European lab and they are primarily seeking leads from only those areas."

## LABS IN LOVE

The annual fees that labs pay allow firms to post a company profile, categorized by state or Canadian province and country. Laboratories can also post job openings, press releases, upcoming events as well as articles, case studies and tips.

One firm, Alliance Technologies LLC, a lab based in Mon-

mouth Junction, N.J., offered tips on using contract services wisely, saying outsourcing partners are a means "to boost your productivity and capabilities without adding permanent capabilities."

According to its posting, Alliance says finding the right outsourcing partner should bring rewards with a strategic alliance for bolstering business, while the wrong partner will slow progress.

A few simple questions can help lead a company to a laboratory that supplements its efforts to develop a product, maintain quality, understand the chemistry or accelerate expansion, the tip indicates:

1. Know what you need; ask the analytical or contract research lab if they have the instrumentation to meet your analysis or testing needs. Find out if your contractor has experience in the techniques, chemistries or materials you are working with.

2. Know what you'll get; what kind of turnaround time is required for your project? Is their pricing competitive with the industry? Does your laboratory service provider abide by an ethics policy?

The Web site, Murray adds, also partners with companies that produce trade shows and professional organizations such as The Center for Professional Innovation and Education (Wayne, Pa.).

"I like the service," says Dave Clarke, sales and marketing manager of JR Laboratories Inc. (Burnaby, British Columbia). "We wanted to enroll in the service to get a little more publicity, but we did not expect to get immediate contractual wins, which was the biggest surprise."

JR Laboratories specializes in analytical chemistry services for biotech, food and natural health product sectors, and Clarke indicates that while many multinational, multi-million dollar food companies form in-house labs, a lot could be saved and liability reduced by outsourcing microbiology to an established, accredited lab.

"Our core focus is in four sectors," he says. "Primary are the biotech and pharmaceutical sectors; second is the natural health product sector and third is food sciences, specifically relating to

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chemical analysis of drugs, chemicals, pesticides, herbicides and hormones. When there are requests for such tests from the food industry, we jump at that."

Clarke says he's been using the service since February, but has only made a few visits to the site.

"I visited the site only six times, but out of all those times, I have generated successful contacts. We have a 50 percent success rate of winning new business. I am quite pleased with it," he adds. "It's a great service. I just wish I had more time to take advantage of it." —FQ

*For a complete list of contract laboratories, check out pages 27 to 31 of the 2005 Food Quality Buyers Guide.*