

Clemson University spin-off uses corn to make plastics

08/26/2004 - The Pendleton-based Clemson University spin-off company Tetramer Technologies, LLC received a \$100,000 grant from the National Science Foundation to demonstrate the commercial feasibility of plastics partially derived from renewable sources. Phase II \$500,000 and two SBIR \$100,000 grants received from the NSF small business program.

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Most plastics, varnishes and packaging foams are made from oil. Environmental regulations and consumer conscience are driving less polluting. Polylactic acid is a byproduct of corn. It currently is dissolves -- a property not desirable in drink containers, boat coatings.

Clemson University professor Dennis Smith and his research group developed chemicals that make regular plastics with polylactic acid. The environmental friendliness of the corn-based product and the durability of regular plastics (billions of pounds per year) the amount of single-use, nonbiodegradable pollutants from plants that produce plastics for everything from cars to

"By finding commercial applications for Clemson research, Tetramer said Earl H. Wagener, CEO of Tetramer. "We're creating jobs throughout the university in the Upstate."

This NSF grant allowed Tetramer to hire three more employees, staff 20 full-time employees over the next five years. In addition to possible jobs for Clemson's engineering graduates, Tetramer has technical institutes.

Wagener, a 1967 Clemson graduate in physical organic chemistry, returned to South Carolina to head the company. Wagener has venture capital experience at Dow Chemical, Stepan Co. and The ChemQuest Group Inc.

Tetramer was formed in February 2001 by professors in Clemson's Center for Optical Materials Science and Engineering. The development lab in the region focused on the development of new optical materials. Their research attracted more than \$13 million in