Caribou Biosciences, Genus Ink CRISPR Deal to Develop New Traits in Livestock

May 18, 2016 | a GenomeWeb staff reporter

NEW YORK (GenomeWeb) – Animal genetics firm Genus and gene-editing company Caribou Biosciences announced today that they have signed an agreement providing Genus an exclusive license to Caribou's CRISPR-Cas9 gene editing technology platform for certain livestock species.

The companies say they plan to apply the technology to making food-producing animals such as pigs and cattle healthier. The four-year research program will be funded by Genus, and may be extended for an additional three years. Genus will pay Caribou an upfront fee, and Caribou will be eligible to receive additional regulatory and commercial milestone payments, as well as royalties on licensed product sales.

Specific financial terms of the deal were not disclosed.

Genus said it plans to start the program by focusing on the development of Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome Virus (PRRSv) resistant pigs. PRRSv can cause persistent infection in pigs leading to reproductive failure, reduced growth, and premature death, and there is no cure. Genus hopes to use CRISPR technology to inactivate a gene that produces the CD163 protein, which the PRRS virus requires for infection to occur.

Further, Genus said it invested $5 million in Caribou's recently completed $30 million Series B equity funding round.

"This latest investment into genome editing ensures Genus will remain at the forefront of the development and application of technology to support the well-being of livestock," said Genus CSO Jonathan Lightner in a statement. "Caribou's CRISPR-Cas9 gene editing platform and its unique skills are significant to Genus as they provide the capabilities necessary to achieve the next stage of our PRRSv and other gene-editing pipeline programs."

This article has been updated from a previous version to clarify that the research program, not the license agreement, is for a term of four years.

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