



English

Scientists at new research centre hope to pioneer farming in space - Space agency plans for long, manned missions

Toronto Star, The (Ontario, Canada) - Tuesday, May 15, 2001

Author: Vik Kirsch, TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE GUELPH MERCURY

The Canadian Space Agency won't be opening a deli on the final frontier anytime soon.

But as it plans to grow food in space to feed astronauts on long missions, it's turning to ground-breaking research at the University of Guelph, where scientist Mike Dixon and others from as far as Japan opened the \$7.9 million Controlled Environment Systems Research Facility yesterday.

The driving force behind it is director Dixon, a professor of plant agriculture who began adapting greenhouses for extraterrestrial applications with a \$50,000 government grant almost a decade ago.

"We've evolved from rather humble beginnings" to conceiving "gardeners in space," Dixon said. "My goodness."

Today the centre boasts 70 university faculty, researchers and technicians developing environments to grow food and recycle nutrients for space missions. "It was a labour of love for a large group," said Dixon.

Touted as unique, the centre will ultimately be home to 14 advanced hypobaric, or reduced pressure, chambers, up from the one on site today. Scientists will devise life-support systems based on plants and micro-organisms.

It's expected an international space effort may one day establish colonies on Earth's moon or, more ambitiously, Mars.

NASA representatives say it will be years before a mission is decided on, but they want to be prepared, since a return trip to Mars would take several years with current technology.

"You need to be doing the work now," NASA life support scientist Charles Barnes said.

Section: NEWS

Page: A04

Dateline: GUELPH

Record Number: 20010515TS1024779

Copyright (c) 2001, Toronto Star Newspapers Limited. All rights reserved.

To bookmark this article, right-click on the link below, and copy the link location:

[Scientists at new research centre hope to pioneer farming in space - Space agency plans for long, manned missions](#)