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Universities pivotal in developing ideas

Marketing talent, technology key to new products

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A Florida State University professor is developing a new drug that could help prevent concussions before they occur, or reduce the chance of long-term damage.

Jacob VanLandingham has been setting up meetings with the National Football League, NASCAR and the Department of Defense to discuss Prevasol.

During a morning session at the Greater Tallahassee Chamber of Commerce's Annual Community Conference, VanLandingham used his efforts to market the drug to illustrate the ways nearby universities are helping to translate their research into successful companies.

Another presenter, Chris Rey, is working on high-tech materials known as superconductors, which are sought by NASA and the military. His company, Tai-Yang Research, was drawn to the Big Bend by FSU's National High Magnetic Field Laboratory, known as the MagLab.

VanLandingham's new company, Prevacus, is named for what the drug could wind up doing for athletes and soldiers around the world if it attracts enough investment and gets the approval from federal regulators.

He said the drug is designed to mimic the brain-protecting properties of the female sex hormone progesterone, which can be used to attack inflammation in the brain, while eliminating negative side effects such as blood clotting and infertility in men.

The university has helped VanLandingham, who is also a professor in the College of Medicine, to patent the intellectual property associated with the drug and refine his pitch to investors. In addition, FSU helped his company land CEO Jamie Grooms, who also heads the Florida Institute for the Commercialization of Public Research.

The company is keeping its offices in Innovation Park and raising money for clinical trials, which could begin in less than three years. VanLandingham said the process could be fast-tracked by the federal government because despite a spate of recent publicity, concussions remain an "orphan" ailment with a dearth of medicines designed to treat them.

Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare is setting up new neuroscience facilities, which will give the company a place to run the trials. If the drug clears those hurdles, Prevacus could begin production in Tallahassee. The firm could also get acquired by a major pharmaceutical company, which could still pump millions of dollars into the local community and the university.

“We’re excited,” VanLandingham said. “Florida State University has been very good to us.”