



World Class. Face to Face.

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Note to Editors: Photo of Birgitte Ahring available at www.tricity.wsu.edu

International Research Star Joins WSU as Director of Bioproducts Center in Tri-Cities

RICHLAND, Wash. — An internationally recognized microbiologist is joining Washington State University as the director of the Center for Bioproducts and Bioenergy and as the Battelle Distinguished Professor, based at WSU Tri-Cities.

Birgitte Ahring signed the offer letter this week at her home in Denmark, agreeing to lead WSU's interdisciplinary center that will focus research and academic programming in the use and conversion of biomass into bioproducts and biofuels.

"This is another example of Washington leading the way on clean energy and scientific research," said Gov. Chris Gregoire. "Dr. Ahring's scientific expertise will help our state develop bioproduct technologies that will drive innovation globally and job growth locally."

Gregoire recently met with Ahring in Olympia. The Center for Bioproducts and Bioenergy director position is slated to receive about \$1 million in "star researcher" funding from Washington state's Economic Development Commission and the Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Ahring will lead research conducted throughout the WSU system, but much of it will happen inside the Bioproducts, Sciences, and Engineering Laboratory, a 57,000-square-foot, \$24.8 million facility opening this spring at WSU Tri-Cities. BSEL is a partnership with Pacific Northwest National Laboratory and will include 10 jointly appointed scientists who will conduct cutting edge research and development in bioenergy. PNNL is operated by Battelle for the U.S. Department of Energy.

"The new Bioproducts, Sciences, and Engineering Laboratory is a cornerstone of the efforts by our university and our state to take a leadership role in the areas of sustainability and clean energy," said Elson S. Floyd, president of Washington State University. "Attracting a world-class researcher such as Dr. Ahring is an outstanding endorsement of that initiative. Clearly, this is a sign of great things to come."

WSU Tri-Cities Chancellor Vicky L. Carwein said Ahring brings teamwork skills in addition to her scientific talents, with an established track record for transformational research that has led to demonstration projects in Oregon and Denmark.

"Dr. Ahring's diverse background includes public-private partnerships, academic and industrial collaboration, high-level research, and a passion for educating others," Carwein said. "This is the kind of world-class leadership we need to grow the WSU Center for Bioproducts and Bioenergy into a major research and development enterprise."

Ahring received her Ph.D. in microbiology in 1986 from the University of Copenhagen and currently is a professor at The Technical University of Denmark. She is an internationally recognized authority in using anaerobic bacteria — bacteria that exists in an oxygen-free environment — to biodegrade waste.

She also is founder and Chief Executive Officer of BioGasol, an engineering and technology company that designs and develops technologies for second generation bioethanol production. Her company is a partner in the Pacific Northwest's first ethanol plant, which is funded with \$24 million by the U.S. Department of Energy. This plant is being built in Boardman, Ore., about 70 miles southwest of WSU Tri-Cities.

"I am excited about this new opportunity and look forward to working closely with scientists from both WSU and PNNL in kick-starting the new bio-economy," said Dr. Ahring in an e-mail from Denmark. She is expected to be full-time at WSU Tri-Cities in August.

"Together, our new team will have all the capabilities needed for making renewable chemicals and biofuels — without the help of oil resources that date back to the time of the dinosaurs," she said. "I see the new BSEL building as a vehicle for bringing a new sustainable business opportunity into the region."

The WSU-PNNL partnership brings together WSU expertise in agriculture research and PNNL proficiency in conversion technologies to create a world-class center to tackle the type of multidisciplinary research challenges that will be critical in the development of cost-effective bioproducts and biofuels.

"If a regional biofuels industry is to draw on locally produced resources and achieve any significant production volume, the development of new process technologies is vital," said Jud Virden, energy market sector manager at PNNL. "Dr. Ahring will provide the scientific leadership needed to maximize the foundation of capabilities that exists within the region to address these challenges using world-class science and new biotechnology tools."

Ahring plans to visit the WSU Tri-Cities campus for the BSEL building dedication ceremony at 11 a.m. on Thursday, May 8.

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Washington State University Tri-Cities (www.tricity.wsu.edu) is an urban campus along the Columbia River in Richland, Wash. Established in 1989 with upper division and graduate programs, WSU Tri-Cities offers 17 baccalaureate, 14 graduate, and five doctoral degree programs. The campus added freshman and sophomore courses in fall 2007 to become a true four-year public university, extending the WSU land-grant mission of providing affordable, accessible higher education. For more information, call 509-372-7250.

Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (www.pnl.gov) is a DOE Office of Science national laboratory that solves complex problems in energy, national security and the environment, and advances scientific frontiers in the chemical, biological, materials, environmental and computational sciences. PNNL employs 4,000 staff, has a \$750 million annual budget, and has been managed by Ohio-based Battelle since the lab's inception in 1965.