

# Now's the time for commercial innovation, officials say

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Yvon Belliveau says the recession may be a huge hurdle for many New Brunswick companies, but with a little government aid they can turn it into an opportunity to innovate if they act quickly enough.

"It gives companies the opportunity to stand back," said Belliveau, executive director of innovation and regional development for Business New Brunswick, during a panel discussion at the New Brunswick Manufacturers' Day conference held at the Delta Fredericton Hotel last week.

"If there's a little bit of slowdown in your company right now, you have the time to look at your current operation, consider if you're on the right path or if you should go after the same markets," he said.

Eric Cook, executive director and CEO of RPC, said during the panel that more than anything, those companies need to consider better applications for their ideas.

He said too much focus and too many funds are directed toward lab research, and not nearly enough is being done to make those ideas commercially viable.

"Innovation is defined as an idea that has social or economic value," Cook said.

"Both are required. Virtually all media reports only discuss the idea. People like to talk about inventions, but it's dangerous without commercial applications."

He said that danger lies in wasting money and potential.

Companies can hire his non-profit Crown corporation for research in areas such as aquaculture, mining and natural resources, he said.

If a patented product surfaces from that work, it becomes the property of the client, once all the bills are settled.

That's unlike what usually happens, as most universities that would rather keep a toehold in the product's future, Cook said.

Andre Charron, director of enterprise development at the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, said there are many government programs to help local companies foster better ties between research and development.

One of them is the Atlantic Innovation Fund, which has offered more than \$500 million to aquaculture, biotechnology and IT projects since 2002. Programs such as that one have made ACOA the largest investor in research and development in Atlantic Canada. He said the potential for fully applied research is apparent in Atlantic Canada.

Locally, he said, firms such as Green Imaging, which commercialized the University of New Brunswick's MRI centre to detect petroleum in core samples for oil companies, show the benefits of remaining market conscious in the lab.

"Companies are spun off from that kind of research, and that's the kind of end that needs to be kept in mind in the lab," he said.

"Research and development expenditures have increased considerably in Atlantic Canada, but they remain far below the Canadian average. There's still much more work to be done."