

SACRAMENTO BUSINESS JOURNAL

MOST ADMIRED CEOs



DENNIS MCCOY | SBJ

COMPANY SIZE: SMALL

MARCUS MEADOWS-SMITH

CEO, BioConsortia

Marcus Meadows-Smith recalls the moment that inspired his shift from running a \$2 billion global synthetic chemicals corporation on the East Coast to heading an environmental startup in California.

The catalyst came as a question from his daughter when he reproved her for throwing out “perfectly good” light bulbs in exchange for more energy efficient ones.

“My daughter said ‘well, dad, what are you doing for the environment?’ in a way that only a 13-year-old can,” Meadows-Smith said. “It was just the right question on the right day.”

Now, the 61-year-old CEO of BioConsortia leads the Davis-based biotech R&D company that focuses on reducing the harmful ecological consequences of commercial agriculture by harnessing microbes to create more environmentally sustainable products, like alternatives to synthetic fertilizer and pesticides.

“We are passionate about feeding the world while protecting the environment,” Meadows-Smith said. “We are discovering and developing naturally occurring microbes in order to help commercial agriculture grow crops at very high levels of efficacy or

yield — so as they are today — but with products that are less damaging to the environment.”

Incorporated in 2014, its Davis lab and headquarters succeed the company’s 1994 inception in New Zealand where a handful of scientists continue developing microbial products in a smaller Auckland facility as part of BioConsortia’s transpacific team of about 50, Meadows-Smith said adding he’s been CEO since its incorporation.

“We’ve got a great team,” Meadows-Smith said. “It’s those people who get up every day, are excited by what they do and make progress to that, and we have an incredible team of scientists who are doing that.”

Vice President of Business Development Sarah Reiter said she joined the executive team in April and has known Meadows-Smith for 15 years from working together at another biopesticide firm, AgraQuest, where he was previously CEO. Reiter said Meadows-Smith’s aptitude for building teams and managing investors has propelled the company towards an “avalanche of closing deals,” as products head towards commercialization through ripening partnerships, like with leading fertilizer company Mosaic.

“I think he’s done a really good job setting expectations for (investors), being really clear about what we’re trying to do and that has allowed us the space and time to do a really deep, thoughtful, unhurried development process,” Reiter said. “The expectation is the science is so deep and so good that deals will come and they’re right, my department is super busy.”

Reiter said Meadows-Smith’s passion for agriculture is something he truly lives and demonstrates through his family-owned and operated winery, Great Bear Vineyards, located in Davis not far from the company’s headquarters where they utilize products like those BioConsortia is developing.

“He really creatively uses his winery as a resource... to both entertain but more importantly to underline why we do what we do,” Reiter said, adding the company’s holiday party took place at the vineyards. “It’s good to have our teams go out there and see that agriculture is beautiful, and that it’s hospitable and it can be really lovely, but also see some of the challenges that farmers are trying to handle every day.”

—Katerina Graziosi, Contributor