

Seminars to focus on biotechnology law

By Alicia Doyle

Monday, November 4, 2013

The legal, economic and ethical concerns of biotechnology will be addressed in monthly seminars that begin this week in Thousand Oaks.

“Science & Society: Legal, Economic and Ethical Concerns in Biotechnology” will be presented by the Biotech Law Section of the Ventura County Bar Association through the Ventura BioCenter in Thousand Oaks.

Biotechnology is the engineering of living organisms to perform tasks or functions that serve human needs, said Panda Kroll, professor of biotechnology law and regulation at CSU Channel Islands.

“Like it or not, advances in biotechnology affect us all,” said Kroll, who has practiced law in Ventura County for 12 years.

The seminars, which will begin Thursday, are designed for anyone interested in the leaps taken when innovations in technology converge with competing interests, Kroll said.

“We hope that scientists and nonscientists alike will have their thoughts provoked and interest piqued,” Kroll said of the series.

The breeding and use of microorganisms to accomplish goals such as making wine, cheese, beer and bread is considered early biotechnology, said Greg Cauchon, founder and president of Amethyst Life Sciences, a technology holding company based at the Ventura BioCenter.

In the modern era, the word “biotechnology” has come to mean doing this through recombinant means — generally, the insertion of foreign DNA into a living organism, he said.

“This can be ... as complex as inserting an entire nucleus into an unfertilized egg, as was done to produce the first cloned sheep, Dolly,” Cauchon said. “The term ‘biotechnology’ is also used to refer to the industry which has grown up to support and commercialize these activities.”

The series aims to promote an awareness of science and law, bring together the major industries in Ventura County and foster discussions, Cauchon said.

“We are fortunate that there is a wealth of community members with expertise in various biotechnology applications who are willing to share their knowledge and experience,” Cauchon said.

For instance, the December seminar, “Seeds and Seed Patents,” will be presented by Michael Newman, who owns Camarillo seed company Corona Seeds.

“Mr. Newman can speak with firsthand experience about myths and realities associated with agricultural biotechnology,” Cauchon said.

He said Ventura County is home to such notable biotech companies as Amgen, Baxter, Ceres and Stellar.

The Ventura BioCenter, a biotech business incubator, was established in 2012 to help people start biotech companies. Today, entrepreneurs can lease lab space on a monthly basis and start working on their projects immediately.

The biotechnology industry is what the Internet was 20 years ago — unmapped and exciting, Kroll said.

“The discovery of the human genetic code in the Human Genome Project and biomedical advances have been welcomed enthusiastically, while cloning and genetically modified food have met with distrust,” Kroll said.

“As with all technologies, just because we can do something, doesn’t mean we should, nor does it mean we will,” he added. “There are a lot of myths — both pro and con — about biotechnology. The seminars are intended to inject some realism about its uses and misuses.”

If you go

What: Science & Society: Legal, Economic and Ethical Concerns in Biotechnology

When: 7:30-9 a.m. Nov. 7, Dec. 5, Jan. 7, Feb. 6 and March 6, 7:30-9 a.m.

Where: Ventura BioCenter, 1176 Tourmaline Drive, Thousand Oaks

Admission: Free to the public; \$15 for members of the Biotech Law Association of the Ventura County Bar Association; \$20 for non-Biotech Law Association members

Reservations: pk@dk4law.com

Information: <http://www.venturabiocenter.com>; <http://www.dk4law.com>; 988-4848



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