



Renmatix turns biowaste into plastic. Can the King of Prussia firm help save the planet?

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by **Aswin Mannepalli**, STAFF WRITER

Your water bottle could soon be made from a type of sugar, courtesy of Renmatix.

The King Of Prussia-based company takes biowaste and converts it into useful materials such as bioplastics.

So far, it counts Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates as a backer. He led a \$14 million investment in the company in September, asserting that Renmatix could help ease climate change by creating industrial fuels and even plastic bottles from plants.

Renmatix also notched deals with oil and chemical giants Total S.A and BASF that secured a ready customer base and gave Renmatix a global presence.

Renmatix persuaded former Pennsylvania governor Mark Schweiker to join the team as senior vice president. His roles include bridging the public and private sectors on site development, financial partnerships, raw-material procurement and public affairs.

Renmatix, which is privately held, declined to disclose revenues or other results.

The company's proprietary Plantrose process takes apart unused biomass waste and converts it into the building blocks for useful chemicals and fuels.

While traditional companies rely on capital intensive petroleum-based processes that can be highly polluting, Renmatix hopes to make fuels faster, cheaper and cleaner by using plants.

Renmatix is part of the bioeconomy, a growing sector in the state. A report by the U.S. Department of Agriculture found that the \$6.5 billion bioeconomy sector in Pennsylvania provided more than 151,000 jobs last year. Duke University professor Jay Golden, a co-author of the report, also ranked the keystone state as the nation's fourth largest bioproducts manufacturer, behind California, Georgia, and Texas.

Bioproducts include any biologically synthesized materials used in plastics, packaging, textiles, and refining. Pharmaceuticals and energy are excluded in its calculation.

Such promise has drawn significant venture capital investment. So far, Renmatix has attracted over \$140 million in financing from investors and partners including Gates, Total, BASF, and the Silicon Valley venture capital firm Kleiner Perkins.

The company which was founded in 2007, now employs 80 full time employees and has operations in Pennsylvania, Georgia and New York.

Renmatix also believes that Pennsylvania, especially the Philadelphia area, is an ideal location given its close proximity to universities and other businesses.

Golden found that the most successful states, such as Pennsylvania, not only provide financial incentives but actively promote companies through their departments of commerce, engage universities on education, and support company recruiting efforts.

While President Obama promoted the bioeconomy, the incoming Trump administration is still a bit of an unknown quantity. Indeed, using agriculture to make fuel has been denounced as a boondoggle in the past.

Both Golden and Schweiker argue that the sector is a nonpartisan no-brainer in part because its benefits may go far beyond fuels.

"No matter if you are a Republican or Democrat, you appreciate the documented opportunities the bioproducts industry plays in creating jobs and adding to our national and state economies," said Golden, who directs Duke's center for sustainability and commerce. "The sector creates jobs in rural America where so many feel the pain of outsourced manufacturing jobs."