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Brazilian scientists team up for cancer genome project

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Brazilian researchers have entered the competitive field of human genome sequencing with the signing of an agreement between the state funding agency of São Paulo (FAPESP) and the US-based Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research.

Each will contribute US$5 million to a two-year Human Cancer Genome Project. According to FAPESP, the programme is “aimed at providing sequences from genes expressed in tumours that are important within the context of public health in the state of São Paulo”.

The project will sequence and analyse short DNA fragments created from the central coding portions of human genes. Although a US patent is being sought for the technique used to generate these expressed sequence tags (ESTs), the sequences will be freely available on the Internet. “No sequences will be patented. All the data will be

promptly published," says Ed McDermott Jr, president of the Ludwig Institute, who visited Brazil to sign the agreement.

The programme follows on from the Organization for Nucleotide Sequencing and Analysis (ONSA), a network of 30 laboratories in the state of São Paulo now in the final steps of sequencing the complete genome of the plant pathogen *Xylella fastidiosa*. The groups will build upon their experience with this pathogen, which causes many economically important plant diseases, notably citrus variegated chlorosis, which poses a major threat to São Paulo's orange farming (see *Nature* **389** 654; 1997).

ONSA is a 'virtual' institute that links the sequencing laboratories, keeping down costs and red tape. The acronym, which sounds like the word *onça* (jaguar) in Portuguese, mimics the Institute for Genomic Research (TIGR), according to José Fernando Perez, FAPESP's scientific director.

Five centres will carry out the sequencing, each helped by four other labs. The centres will be at the chemistry institute, the faculty of medicine at São Paulo, and the faculty of medicine at Ribeirão Preto, all from the University of São Paulo; at the Paulista School of Medicine, São Paulo; and at the Hemocentro of the University of Campinas. The programme aims to generate between 500,000 and 750,000 EST sequences, and about 200 million bases of human genome sequence.

The project will be monitored by a four-member steering committee, composed of Marcelo Bento Soares of the University of Iowa, John Sgouros of the Imperial Cancer Research Fund in London, and Webster Cavenee and Richard Kolodner of the Ludwig Institute in San Diego.

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