Brazilian start-up aims to go global with peptide discovery platform

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Brazil's Peptidus Biotech believes it can bring faster peptide molecule discovery to the animal health sector.

The firm's co-founder and chief executive, Bernardo Petriz, originally set up the business alongside Chief Scientific Officer Octávio Franco, an experienced peptide development specialist.

Dr Franco developed expertise in utilizing artificial intelligence to change the way bioactive peptides are discovered. He built a large database of novel peptides and his work at the Universidade Católica de Brasília was used to develop an anti-ageing peptide that was licenced to US cosmetic company OneSkin.

Dr Petriz said he proposed a new start-up to bring Dr Franco's research to commercial fruition. The founders had to decide between focusing on the human health space, the animal health sector or continuing their work in the cosmetics area. Peptidus was founded in 2023 and committed to developing peptide products for the animal health industry.

Dr Petriz told S&P Global Animal Health: "It provides a faster path to commercialization for our pharma partners, as development and regulatory pathways are more streamlined compared to human health."

The company believes peptides can offer high specificity, low toxicity, low immunogenicity and reduced adverse events, while they are also biodegradable.

Pipeline work

Rodrigo Ferreira – the company's chief operations officer – has a background in the animal health sector. He previously worked at Elanco, Bayer Animal Health and Vallée in senior business development roles in Brazil and Europe, before joining Peptidus in late 2023.

At the recent Animal Health, Nutrition & Technology Innovation Europe 2026 conference in London, Mr Ferreira said the company has "two faces".

One is its own development pipeline, which has produced two lead assets – an antimicrobial for bovine mastitis and an ani-infective for wound care in companion animals. Mr Ferreira noted the mastitis antimicrobial has shown to be very effective in studies. Peptidus is also working on other early-stage peptides in the areas of dermatology and weight loss.

The business is heading towards validation for the two lead candidates. Peptidus will carry out the formulation and proof-of-concept work for its peptides – a process that can take one or two years – before looking for commercial partners. Peptidus intends to achieve proof of concept for its mastitis antimicrobial and pet wound care product this year, as well licensure for both assets.

Although Peptidus is based in Brazil, Mr Ferreira suggested its aim is to create products that have a global scale. He also said the business wants to prove its model in the animal health sector, before moving into the human health industry.

The other aspect of the company's operations is its support external drug development – the start-up is currently in discussions with potential partners, who will provide their own targets. Peptidus claims it can produce a candidate peptide and validate it in around six months, which is around two or three times faster than regular molecule development work.

Not only is Peptidus faster at peptide development but it also believes it can improve its partners' chance of success when bringing a product through to full development by leveraging artificial intelligence to carry out candidate validation.

Mr Ferreira stated: “Around 90-95% of compounds will fail throughout the development process. With our technology we can reduce this, depending on the target.”

Series A ahead

Peptidus is situated at the Biotic Technology Park – a one million square-meter innovation district in Brasília – and has a team situated in Campo Grande. The start-up draws support from research partnerships with the Universidade Católica de Brasília and Universidade Católica Dom Bosco, while it has also received funding form the Brazilian government.

While Brazil is a significant meat and livestock industry, its number of animal health start-ups is relatively low. Dr Petriz suggested many businesses have previously decided to focus solely on the human health sector in order to target a larger market and snare the interest of investors. However, this has started to change in the last few years – since the COVID-19 pandemic indicated the value of the One Health concept.

Dr Petriz said many investors in Brazil are still keen for start-ups to dedicate themselves to human health. However, Peptidus made it clear to prospective backers its current seed round was solely for animal health. The start-up aims to soon complete its seed round before launching a series A round later this year.

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