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Akston Biosciences takes home Innovation Award at Animal Health Summit in KC
Corridor-hosted event rallies companies around supporting the next-generation workforce and technology-driven solutions.

KANSAS CITY, Mo., Aug. 29, 2023 — Akston Biosciences Corp., a Massachusetts-based startup that specializes in long-acting protein therapeutics for pets, secured the highest distinction during the 2023 Animal Health Summit, a gathering of industry leaders and innovators hosted by the KC Animal Health Corridor this week at the Midland Theatre in downtown Kansas City.

Akston Biosciences was one of 13 animal health startups that presented during the Emerging Companies portion of the Summit. In this *Shark Tank*-style event, entrepreneurs shared their visions of how they would impact the future of animal health. The audience was made up of investors and potential partners, as well as a slate of judges who evaluated the pitches and ultimately selected Akston Biosciences as the winner.

Through its proprietary monoclonal antibody production platform, Akston Biosciences is developing long-acting insulin drugs for dogs and cats that would allow for once-a-week injections. CEO Todd Zion, PhD, noted that current insulin products must be given twice daily, which contributes to the fact that 20% of diabetic pets are euthanized within a year of diagnosis. “We believe once-a-week insulin is going to get us to much better outcomes and save a lot of pets’ lives,” he said.

The company, which has invested in its own manufacturing facility, says it will utilize its technology to address a number of animal health needs in a manner that is cost-effective and efficient.

Another highlight from the Summit was the presentation of the Iron Paw Award to Fabian Kausche, MS, Dr.med.vet., a longtime industry innovator and leader. The Corridor awards the Iron Paw yearly to an individual who is dedicated to advancing innovation, education, public awareness and market expansion in the veterinary space.

“At the beginning of my career, I believed my success would be defined by the role I played in developing new products and technologies for the market,” Dr. Kausche said as he accepted the award during the Summit’s opening programming. “But as my career progressed, I found a much stronger interest in creating an impact on those working alongside me. My motivation shifted from technological development to human development.”

Dr. Kausche’s commitment to mentorship and support helped set the tone for this year’s Animal Health Summit. Lifting up the next generation of animal health professionals emerged as a theme from a number of the talks and panel discussions that followed.

During the Insights from Top Leaders panel, Scott Bormann, SVP, North America, Merck Animal Health, touched on what his company is doing to support young talent in the industry. Bormann said Merck Animal Health is supporting the new generation by awarding scholarships to young veterinary professionals and providing students with internships and co-ops through its Future Talent Program, helping them gain experience while also learning about the animal health field. When asked if he had any advice for young professionals who are looking to get into the industry, he shared Merck Animal Health's philosophy.

"Animal health is not just what we do; it's who we are," said Bormann. "Find your why, find what drives you and find your passion."

Supporting veterinarians' mental health also emerged as a key takeaway at the Summit. A panel highlighting various perspectives, including a veterinary college professor, business management consultant, practicing veterinarian and CEO of the AVMA, discussed solutions for improving practice efficiency and veterinary professionals' mental health. Matt Peuser, DVM, MBA, CVPP, CVA, owner of Advanced Medical Care of Olathe, praised industry companies and asked for patience and persistence.

"Because veterinarians in practice are so busy, we don't always have the time to make ourselves aware of available resources," Dr. Peuser said, "so please be persistent in sharing the message about your resources. Companies also should continue to advocate for veterinarians and options that make it easier to be more efficient and do a better job for animals."

About the KC Animal Health Corridor

Companies with a business location in the KC Animal Health Corridor account for more than half of the sales generated by the global animal health industry. The Corridor, anchored by Manhattan, Kansas, and Columbia, Missouri, is home to more than 300 animal health companies, representing the largest concentration in the world. For more information, visit www.kcanimalhealth.com.

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PHOTO CAPTION:

Kimberly Young, president of the Kansas City Animal Health Corridor, and Todd Zion, PhD, president and CEO of Akston Biosciences, share the stage after Akston Biosciences won the Innovation Award during the 2023 Animal Health Summit in Kansas City.

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