

J. Craig Venter: He might change the world

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J. Craig Venter, the biologist who mapped the human genome, now reportedly wants to create a microbe that will turn cornstalks into ethanol.

Venter, who compares himself favorably with Charles Darwin, has teamed with Mexican billionaire Alfonso Romo Garza in the undertaking. "Of course, he's antagonistic," Garza told The Washington Post. "But I love controversial people because those are the people who change the world."

Using \$15 million he received from Garza, Venter has formed Synthetic Genomics Inc. in Rockville, Md., home of the Venter Institute and the Institute for Genomic Research, both of which have received U.S. Energy Department grants to explore using genomics for energy purposes.

Venter also seeks to modify microorganisms to continuously produce hydrogen, the Post said.

Also joining Venter in the new business are Hamilton O. Smith, winner of a Nobel Prize for physiology and medicine and an expert in DNA manipulation techniques, and Aristides Patrinos, who directed the U.S. Energy Department's biological and environmental research.

Venter predicts "Genomics is going to do for the energy and chemical field what it did in the early 1990s for medical biotechnology."

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