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## Rhodiola research nurtures new ag industry

((Calgary, Alberta)) A \$740,950 investment by AVAC Ltd. provides a healthy boost to an Alberta-grown project that will soon see Alberta farmers harvest their first crop of *Rhodiola rosea*, an ancient medicinal herb with an international reputation for strengthening the bodies of Olympic athletes and Russian Cosmonauts, says Susan Lutz, senior development officer for Functional Foods and Natural Health Products with Alberta Agriculture and Food.

"We believe in this project and like how its multi-disciplinary approach ensures the value-added development of a kind of 'field-to-medicine-cabinet' for Alberta farmers and the Alberta economy," says Wendy Lam, a senior investment manager with AVAC Ltd.

AVAC invests in early-stage technology businesses and commercially-relevant agricultural research that expands value-added industry in Alberta.

Also known as Roseroot and Goldenroot, *Rhodiola rosea* has been harvested in the wild by Northern Europeans for centuries.

Intrigued by studies that show the compounds in its roots help the body adapt to stress, resist fatigue and boost brain functions while improving the immune, nervous and glandular systems, Alberta Agriculture and Food spearheaded a multi-year project to determine whether it can be grown here. Over the last three years, "we've learned a great deal about how to grow

commercial quantities of *Rhodiola rosea* in Alberta. We have distributed close to one million seedlings to growers and the Alberta *Rhodiola Rosea* Growers Organizational (ARRGO), which was formed in 2007, has a growing list of farmers who will work together to give buyers a central source to buy top-quality *Rhodiola rosea*," explains Lutz.

She anticipates the crop will eventually be grown on 400 acres in Alberta. ARRGO and the Alberta Natural Health Agricultural Network are working together to attract and educate new growers.

Initial research also answered important questions about the crop's market potential.

International buyers have already expressed interest in buying 3 tonnes of the root. *Rhodiola rosea* has the potential to be an \$80-million plant in North America and "we think Alberta could capture 25 per cent of that market," says Lutz.

Delivered over three years, the AVAC funds will help the *Rhodiola* Commercialization Project make commercially-grown *Rhodiola rosea* available to consumers in two forms. "Clinical trials are underway to determine a recommended dosage for gel cap formulations. We also want to make it available as a natural health product for use in foods as a functional ingredient," she adds.

AVAC expects the *Rhodiola* Commercialization Project to advance similar developments in the natural food industry, says Lam.

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