



Biotech Career Feature

The Biotech Industry in North Carolina

Currently North Carolina leads the Southeast in the **biotechnology industry**. There are **225 life science companies** in the state and they employ **40,000 people** in a variety of biotech jobs, including lab testing, drug discovery, and biomanufacturing.



The industry is anchored by a number of large **pharmaceutical companies**, including BioGen Idec, Wyeth, and GlaxoSmithKline. From these big firms comes the management knowledge and technology to make plenty of biotech jobs at smaller companies. At least a dozen companies have come from GlaxoSmithKline, including **contract research organizations** and companies in the process of new drug development.

Much of the activity, as well as a large number of the biotech jobs, is centered around Research Triangle Park. This area is bordered by Durham, Raleigh, and Chapel Hill, and includes Duke University, North Carolina State University, and the University of North Carolina. About half of the biotech companies in the state are spin-offs started by research at one of the universities.

Created in the early 1980s, the North Carolina Biotechnology Center was the first biotech initiative to be funded by a state. Today this center helps companies network, get tech advice, and finance their projects. Another location in which you might encounter life science and biotech companies is the Wake Forest University area in Winston-Salem.

Research Triangle Park was created after World War II and was intended to create technical jobs to keep local university graduates from leaving the area. It's one of the oldest tech parks in the country. The first to use it were **engineering**, **computer**, and chemical companies. However, in 1970 GlaxoSmithKline (as Burroughs Wellcome) moved to the park, and the current facility employs 5,000 workers.



Overall, the 7,000-acre campus employs more than 40,000 people, 10,000 of whom work in life **science** companies and **biotech jobs**. Even with this many people working in North Carolina's Research Triangle Park, there is still plenty of room to

grow. Over 90,000 workers can be accommodated.

Research Triangle Park has long served as a model for other beginning technology parks. It's in the process of planning its next 50-year cycle of growth, including plans to combine life science and bioinformatics. Other states are just building their first biotech parks, while North Carolina is deciding what comes next to help expand theirs.

Biotech jobs are very important in North Carolina, as a growing industry. In the past five years, other industries have not done as well. In fact, 100,000 furniture **manufacturing jobs** and textile positions have disappeared, and many people who used to work in these positions are being retrained to work in biotech jobs. The \$60 million tobacco settlement the state received is being used to fund programs at local universities and community colleges for the creation of more biotech jobs and training. What was once a strong manufacturing force is being put to work in the life sciences industry.

These new skills mean that workers will have no trouble finding biotech jobs. The booming biomanufacturing sector, composed of medical device manufacturing, chemical manufacturing, and **pharmaceuticals**, employs over 20,000 people.

To make sure growth is encouraged, North Carolina State University is building a Biomanufacturing Training and Education Center worth \$36 million. This facility, at over 90,000 square feet, is intended to train 2,000 to 3,000 new students each year. It's also expected to attract new agribiotechnology, biomanufacturing, and pharmaceutical companies.

Companies already in the area include Diosynth Biotechnology, an 80-year veteran of the biomanufacturing business with two facilities in the Research Triangle park; Asklepios Biopharmaceutical in Chapel Hill, only two years old but created to make use of gene therapy breakthroughs at UNC; and Xsira Pharmaceuticals, once Norak Biosciences. With the name change comes a new focus. While Xsira was once a company dedicated to drug discovery, it's now licensing rights around the world to eight patents held by researchers at the Harbor-UCLA Medical Center.



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To continue growth in the biotech sector, the North Carolina Biotechnology Center recently awarded a grant of \$100,000 to a consortium based in Asheville. Charter members include the North Carolina Arboretum, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, North Carolina State University, the University of North Carolina Wilmington's Center for Marine Science, Appalachian State, Western Carolina, Wake Forest universities, and MARBIONC. In addition, key representatives from the Mission Healthcare Foundation are also part of the committee.

Industry support for this project and the biotech jobs it will create comes from Targacept, the North Carolina Natural

Products Association, and Gaia Herbs. This project aims to use the [scientific](#) foundation recently placed under the area's natural heritage of herb therapies to tap into the growing market for nutraceuticals and other natural products.

The biotech industry in North Carolina has a good outlook and there are a lot of possible job openings. Anyone looking for biotech jobs in the area should know that it's full of opportunities. All sorts of jobs are available, from research positions to manufacturing. If you're interested in the North Carolina biotech industry, there are great opportunities for you.

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