

# Startup to manufacture key industrial chemicals (MMA) from renewable sources

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Startup Ascenix BioTechnologies will perfect and commercialize production methods to synthesize chemicals from renewable feedstocks. These chemicals, which are used to manufacture everyday items, are typically made from petroleum and often use harmful add-ins like hydrogen cyanide. The startup predicts this new bio-based process, developed by University of Minnesota researchers, will be more economical and environmentally friendly.

The core technology is poised to revolutionize production of certain chemicals, as it would require little modification to existing downstream manufacturing processes to enact. Invented by Kechun Zhang, a chemical engineering professor, the process yields chemicals comparable in performance to those created using petroleum-based materials.

"This technology is especially attractive because Dr. Zhang has done a tremendous amount of development in the lab," says Ascenix co-founder William Faulkner. "It's advanced to the point where we're already preparing for scale-up of the technology."

Although the process could be applied to the production of biofuels and myriad chemicals, the startup's initial focus is on methylmethacrylate (MMA), a chemical used to make acrylic glass, paints and coatings, automotive parts and electronics. Global production of the chemical is more than 6 billion pounds per year.

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