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Invigorating microbial innovations

After 15 years of building North American brand, Winnipeg-based XiteBio Technologies Inc. eyes overseas markets



Made in Manitoba

By: [Aaron Epp](#)

Posted: 6:00 AM CDT Monday, Mar. 23, 2026

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Out of the laboratory and into farmers' fields.

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If you had to describe Manas Banerjee's career trajectory in fewer than 10 words, you could do a lot worse than that.

Banerjee is the CEO and founder of XiteBio Technologies Inc., an agricultural biotechnology company based in south Winnipeg, but before that, he was a researcher, scientist and professor at a number of institutions.





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'What I wanted to do is applied research where I can deliver something to the farmers and they can use it, and I can see with my own eyes the difference it's making,' says Manas Banerjee, CEO and founder of XiteBio Technologies Inc.

After earning a PhD in soil microbiology from the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, Banerjee moved to Canada. He was a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Saskatchewan, a research associate at the University of Manitoba and an adjunct professor at Western University (Ontario), publishing numerous papers and book chapters related to soil science.

Along the way, he worked as a scientist for Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada, and as the director of research and development at a privately owned Canadian seed company.

Ultimately, neither publishing papers about microbiology nor working under other people fit into Banerjee's vision for his life.

"There's a lot of scientists all over the world and every 30 seconds there's a paper coming out — (but) nobody cares about the research paper coming out," he says. "What I wanted to do is applied research where I can deliver something to the farmers and they can use it, and I can see with my own eyes the difference it's making."

So, in March 2010, Banerjee started XiteBio.

"I was teaching basically plant microbial interaction, and I taught all those things at the master's and PhD level," he says. "And then I said, 'If I really believe this, why not put my skin in the game and see what happens?'"

XiteBio's mission is to build relationships with farmers by providing easy to use microbial innovations that increase production and reduce input costs.

The company has developed patented technologies producing seed inoculants using naturally occurring bacteria. These technologies invigorate the existing soil and create synergy between the introduced bacteria and the bacteria already in the soil.

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Technologists Lynette Loredo (front) and Susan Dyck at work at XiteBio Technologies Inc., at 3194 St Mary's Rd.

The result is farmers don't have to use more fertilizer, but crops are consistent and uniform. XiteBio also makes its products straightforward to use.

The company's three pillars of product development, according to Banerjee, are ease of application, ease of application and ease of application.

"It has to fit like a glove to a farmer's hand — only then are they going to use it," he says. "They're not going to change their management system because you have a good product or they're not going to buy a \$10,000 (piece of) equipment to use your product, so we have to pull our hairs and come up with something that they will like."

Those products are developed in-house at XiteBio's 5,500-square-foot innovation, research and development facility, which sits on four acres of land on St Mary's Road. The company also has a 10,000-sq.-ft. quality assurance and distribution centre in Headingley.

The company employs 16 people, half of them in Manitoba.

While Banerjee declines to disclose XiteBio's annual revenue, he estimates, as of last year, farmers have used the company's seven products on more than 35 million acres of land.

Customer retention hovers between 80 and 85 per cent, he says, adding, "I probably know more than 80 per cent of my customers."

One of them is Jake Ayre. He and his parents own and operate Southern Seeds, a pedigree seed retailer near Minto.

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Dyck works on culture counting.

The business has sold XiteBio's products for at least 10 years, Ayre says, and he and his father use them on their 4,500-acre farm.

"Manas is always available for any questions we might have about the products, as he is not only the CEO but one of the architects behind the product," Ayre says. "Having that local manufacturing, that local support and also something that's been tried and tested in Manitoba (is important)."

Farmers aren't immune to geopolitical tensions, he adds. As the war in Iran continues, they face soaring fertilizer and fuel prices as the spring planting season approaches.

"When there's a trade disruption or with the Strait of Hormuz closed, it can really affect product availability and pricing," Ayre says. "So, the more local (products available), the better."

XiteBio offers a consistent product and stands behind its guarantees, Ayre says, adding that Banerjee's life experience and knowledge about biology and agriculture make him "one of the most interesting people you can sit down and have a coffee or beer with."

"(He's) very knowledgeable and he can also explain it down to someone who doesn't have a PhD like he has," Ayre says. "That's a skillset that not everyone has. But he's also very open to learn or chat or give feedback ...

His mind is always looking for not only things that work now, but into the future. He's got great foresight."

XiteBio's plan for its first 15 years was to develop a strong presence in North America, Banerjee says. The company's goal for the next five is to introduce its products overseas.

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"France, Turkey, Ukraine, China and India have tested our product and (the results) are positive," he says.



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A sample of the commercial agricultural biotech supplies the Winnipeg company makes.

Banerjee earned a terminal degree, has a shelf in his office that includes books he's contributed to, holds a handful of patents and has been recognized with awards — including a nomination in 2017 for the prestigious Manning Innovation Award, which honours innovators who have developed and successfully marketed a new concept, process or procedure.

Still, it's quite possible what Banerjee is most proud of is XiteBio's commitment to customers.

"It's very important for a company like us to be sensitive to the customer," Banerjee says.

"What are their needs and how can we help them ... so that they have one less problem to solve, one less problem to tackle."

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Reporter   

Aaron Epp reports on business for the Free Press. After freelancing for the paper for a decade, he joined the staff full-time in 2024. [Read more about Aaron.](#)

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