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"Puerto Rico: America's Pharma Powerhouse with Global Ambitions"

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Ella Woger-Nieves, CEO of Invest Puerto Rico, highlights the island's growing role in reshoring U.S. pharmaceutical manufacturing and expanding biopharma collaborations with India and beyond



Ella Woger-Nieves, Chief Executive Officer of Invest Puerto Rico, spoke to *BioSpectrum Asia* and *BioSpectrum India* on the sidelines of BIO 2025, offering insights into how Puerto Rico has firmly positioned itself as the leading pharmaceutical exporter in the United States. With $54.3 billion in annual life sciences exports to over 120 countries, the island is leveraging its strategic location, FDA-aligned manufacturing ecosystem, and robust talent base to attract global biopharma investments. In this Interaction, Woger-Nieves discusses Puerto Rico's infrastructure, policy incentives, global outreach including recent engagements in India, and its long-term vision as a hub for next-generation therapeutics.

Puerto Rico has become the #1 pharmaceutical exporter in the United States, with $54.3B in total life sciences exports annually to over 120 countries. What are the key factors that have enabled Puerto Rico to become such a vital player in the U.S. pharmaceutical supply chain?

Puerto Rico is home to world-class businesses such as Amgen, Bristol Myers Squibb, Johnson & Johnson, and Eli Lilly's manufacturing operations. Puerto Rico's prominence as the No.1 producer and exporter of pharmaceuticals in the U.S. supply chain is no coincidence—it's the result of decades of infrastructure investment, regulatory alignment, and talent development. We offer a unique combination of a highly skilled, bilingual workforce with deep expertise in FDA-regulated manufacturing, world-class facilities that meet the highest GMP standards, and full compliance with U.S. laws and regulations. Our strategic geographic location also allows us to serve U.S. markets swiftly, securely, and tariff-free, making Puerto Rico not only a reliable but also a resilient supply chain partner. This has enabled us to play a critical role in ensuring continuity of care for U.S. institutions like the Department of Defense and the VA.

Given that approximately 90% of air cargo leaving Puerto Rico consists of bioscience products, how has the San Juan Airport's pharmaceutical certification enhanced Puerto Rico's competitiveness in the global biopharma logistics landscape?

The pharmaceutical certification of San Juan's Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport, particularly its IATA CEIV Pharma certification, is a game changer. It affirms that Puerto Rico's logistics infrastructure meets the highest standards for temperature-controlled, time-sensitive biopharma shipments. This has significantly strengthened our value proposition to global life sciences companies by ensuring safe, compliant, and efficient movement of critical products. It also reinforces Puerto Rico as not just a manufacturing hub, but a strategic node in the global biopharma logistics network. Additionally, Governor Gonzalez was at the helm to secure a two-year exemption from federal air cabotage laws, allowing foreign airlines to transfer cargo freely and ultimately increase efficiency and reduce costs.

You've emphasized that as a U.S. territory, Puerto Rico avoids import tariffs imposed on foreign trade partners. How are you communicating this strategic advantage to global pharmaceutical and biotech companies—especially those in emerging markets like India?

We emphasize Puerto Rico's unique position as a U.S. jurisdiction with global reach. Unlike offshore locations, companies manufacturing in Puerto Rico have duty-free access to the U.S. market while operating under a legal framework fully aligned with U.S. standards. This is particularly attractive to firms in emerging markets like India that are seeking secure and tariff-free entry into the U.S. Our messaging is reinforced through targeted outreach, international roadshows, and high-level engagements where we demonstrate how Puerto Rico can de-risk market expansion while enhancing speed to market. The India visit was one example of our proactive approach in fostering bilateral collaboration rooted in mutual growth. Invest Puerto Rico also recently attended SelectUSA, a U.S. Commerce Department event that promotes foreign direct investment. There, we announced the arrival of Dot Ai, a company that transforms supply chain and asset management. Dot Ai's leadership team chose to expand to Puerto Rico instead of Mexico. This is the most recent example of a company seeing the value of operating in the U.S.

What types of pharmaceutical products or therapeutic areas—such as insulin, vaccines, or cancer therapies—are you particularly prioritizing for manufacturing expansion on the island?

Puerto Rico is actively focusing on high-value, complex biologics and pharmaceuticals, particularly in areas such as oncology, diabetes, and vaccine production. These segments require sophisticated capabilities, regulatory rigor, and technical know-how—all of which Puerto Rico offers. We are also seeing rising interest in gene therapies, biosimilars, and advanced drug delivery systems. Our goal is to be a strategic base for next-generation therapeutics, supporting innovation while addressing critical public health needs. Puerto Rico is the perfect place for companies large and small.

Invest Puerto Rico recently visited India to attract business partnerships. Could you share key outcomes or takeaways from your visit, and how you see India fitting into Puerto Rico's strategic vision for biopharma collaboration?

Our visit to India confirmed a strong mutual interest in deepening pharmaceutical and biotech ties. India has a world-class generic drug industry and a growing footprint in complex biologics—two areas that complement Puerto Rico's strengths in advanced manufacturing and regulatory excellence. Key outcomes included high-level dialogues with leading pharma players, new interest in site selection opportunities, and a clearer path for collaboration on R&D and supply chain resilience. We see India not just as a trade partner, but as a strategic collaborator in building a more agile, diversified, and secure pharmaceutical ecosystem for the U.S. market and beyond.

Looking ahead, what support mechanisms—such as tax incentives, infrastructure investment, or workforce development—does Puerto Rico offer to life sciences companies considering expansion or relocation?

Puerto Rico offers incentives designed for manufacturers that work well in the life science industry. These incentives include no U.S. federal tax on eligible income, up to 50% tax credit on R&D expenditures, and Foreign Trade Zones that provide duty-free storage, processing and distribution of imported medical components. We are also investing significantly in infrastructure—such as our grid—and bolstering our STEM talent pipeline through partnerships with universities and technical training centers. We have a holistic, business-ready environment where life sciences companies can scale efficiently and sustainably. Currently, Puerto Rico's legislators have re-introduced an incentive to Congress, called the Medical, Manufacturing, Economic Development and Sustainability (MMEDS) Act. We're excited for the potential of this bill to bring companies back to America.

Finally, how does Invest Puerto Rico plan to strengthen the island's positioning in the broader U.S. and global pharmaceutical ecosystem over the next five years?

Our vision is to position Puerto Rico as the premier reshoring hub for pharmaceutical innovation and manufacturing in the Western Hemisphere. Over the next five years, we're focused on three pillars: attracting investment in emerging therapeutics, enhancing infrastructure and workforce capacity, and forging international partnerships that align with our long-term goals. We're also working closely with federal stakeholders to align Puerto Rico's capabilities with U.S. supply chain resilience initiatives. Governor Jennifer González-Colón's executive order promotes the relocation of overseas pharmaceutical manufacturing products to Puerto Rico, and Governor Gonzalez reached out to top White House officials to offer Puerto Rico's well-established, yet currently underutilized, manufacturing capacity as an economic engine to help grow American prosperity. Through strategic branding, global outreach, and continuous ecosystem development, Invest Puerto Rico is committed to ensuring the island remains a cornerstone of pharmaceutical production and innovation globally.

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