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Singapore: The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), which is Australia's leading scientific agency, has been granted foundational patents in the US and Europe for gene silencing technology using short hairpin RNAi (shRNA).

Potential human therapeutic applications using shRNA include protection against viruses, such as HIV or hepatitis. Animal applications include the selection of production traits in livestock and the treatment of, and protection against, diseases such as influenza in chickens.

The newly granted patents (US8183217 and EP1650306) substantially strengthen CSIRO's already extensive RNAi portfolio of more than 60 granted patents, stemming from the pioneering work of CSIRO plant industry scientists, who were the first to develop hairpin RNA in 1997.

Hairpin RNAi technology was first used in plants and has revolutionized the search for genes responsible for valuable traits. The technology has since been developed for use in animals, particularly in mammals where shorter RNAi molecules are commonly used. CSIRO makes its patented RNAi technologies available for licensing for research use and for the development of commercial products.