

Biotech billionaire on mission to put self-destructing mosquitoes to use against Zika

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In the expanding realm ruled by Randal J. Kirk, sliced apples don't brown. Salmon grow twice as fast without swimming upriver to spawn. Beloved cats are reborn.

And male mosquitoes are unleashed with the sole mission to mate, pass on a gene that kills their offspring, and die.

Until recently, Mr. Kirk, 62, was a relatively unknown, self-made billionaire, buying up or investing in companies in the biotech world. So when his company Intrexon acquired the British company Oxitec last summer, it attracted little attention as he extended his reach into genetically modified insects.

But that move has thrust Mr. Kirk into the forefront of a scramble to control the Zika virus, suspected of causing babies to be born with tiny heads and damaged brains. It is rampant in Latin America and threatening the United States.

While Zika was not on his radar when the deal was announced, Mr. Kirk now appears to be the prescient owner of a potential bioweapon — Oxitec's [genetically engineered mosquitoes](#), which he says could save millions of people from Zika by causing the population of wild disease-transmitting mosquitoes to self-destruct.

Now Mr. Kirk must persuade federal agencies, foreign governments and nonprofit health organizations to place orders. He must counter caution from the World Health Organization and federal officials, who question whether the technique will be effective on a large scale. And he must overcome qualms about genetic engineering that have prompted opposition to the mosquitoes in the Florida Keys and elsewhere.

Read full, original post: [A Biotech Evangelist Seeks a Zika Dividend](#)