



MSU INNOVATION CENTER

ANNUAL **REPORT**

2026



Dear Innovators, Collaborators and Friends of MSU,

Innovation begins with discovery, but its true value is realized when new knowledge moves beyond the university and begins improving lives, strengthening communities and creating new opportunities.

At the MSU Innovation Center, we help make that movement possible. We connect researchers with the expertise, funding, entrepreneurial talent and partners needed to turn promising ideas into practical solutions. We also help companies engage with Michigan State University's research capabilities and extraordinary talent in ways that address meaningful challenges and create lasting value.

The stories in this year's annual report demonstrate what can happen when those connections come together.

You will see how human heart models, developed at MSU, could provide more predictive ways to evaluate new therapeutics, and how MSU Technologies and the broader innovation ecosystem helped move that discovery toward commercial application through industry partnership. The work illustrates a future in which human-relevant research models may help improve drug development, disease modeling and regenerative medicine.

You will also learn how Sit Sense, Inc. is advancing smart seating technology designed to help reduce the risk of pressure injuries for people with limited mobility. Its journey from university research toward a commercialization-ready venture reflects the combined value of intellectual property guidance, translational funding, entrepreneurial education, mentorship and regional startup support.

And you will see how a long-standing partnership between MSU and Kraft Heinz has grown into a multifaceted collaboration that advances sustainable packaging research, explores new applications of artificial intelligence and prepares students to become the next generation of packaging leaders. It is a powerful example of how university-industry relationships can evolve beyond individual projects to create sustained value for faculty, students, companies and society.

Although these stories represent different technologies, industries and pathways, they share a common foundation. Each shows that meaningful innovation is rarely the work of one person or organization. It depends on the collaboration of researchers willing to pursue bold questions, students bringing fresh perspectives, companies sharing real-world challenges, investors and economic development partners supporting emerging opportunities, and the team at the MSU Innovation Center to help navigate the path from discovery to impact.

As you explore this year's annual report, I hope you see more than a collection of accomplishments. I hope you see an innovation ecosystem at work and the extraordinary possibilities that emerge when people unite around a shared commitment to creating a better future.

Thank you to our faculty, students, staff, corporate and community partners, entrepreneurs, investors and friends who make this work possible. Your ideas, expertise and commitment continue to expand what Michigan State innovation can achieve.

With gratitude and optimism for what lies ahead,



CHARLES A. HASEMANN, PHD
Associate VP for Innovation & Economic Development

BY THE NUMBERS



Total Dollars of Corporate Supported Programs

\$26,238,341



See how collaboration fuels innovation. Read about MSU's partnership with Kraft Heinz on **page 5** and discover how industry engagement helps accelerate research, student opportunities, and real-world impact.

217 Invention Disclosures

All-time high!

Every license represents an opportunity to move university innovation into the marketplace. Read the CytoHub story on **page 10** to see how an MSU technology found a pathway to real-world use.



39 Issued U.S. Patents

Top 5 all-time high

63 Executed License/
Option Agreements

\$4,058,769

Total Dollars of Royalties Received

Sit Sense is just one example of an innovation making the journey from research to startup.

Explore its story on **page 13** and see how MSU entrepreneurs are creating solutions with real-world impact.



6 Startups Launched

All-time high!

Every breakthrough starts with a promising idea. Turn to **page 17** to meet researchers advancing innovative technologies through MSU's translational funding programs and discover what's next in the innovation pipeline.

Curious what happens after a company launches? Visit **page 18** for highlights from across MSU's startup portfolio and examples of companies creating economic and societal impact.



27 advance grants awarded statewide, **13** to MSU faculty.

\$640,053 awarded to advance grant funding, **\$310,228** to MSU.

14 MTRAC AgBio grants awarded statewide, **12** to MSU faculty.

\$1,140,369 awarded to MTRAC AgBio grant funding, **\$940,000** to MSU.

17 Tech-Dev awards to MSU faculty, totaling **\$268,124**.



A Partnership Built Around Real-World Packaging Challenges

For [Kraft Heinz](#) and [Michigan State University's School of Packaging](#), the partnership begins with a shared question: how can packaging better protect food, reduce environmental impact, improve the consumer experience, and prepare the next generation of packaging leaders?

Together, Kraft Heinz and MSU are tackling some of the industry's most pressing challenges, from developing more sustainable materials to using artificial intelligence to identify packaging issues that traditional testing can miss. The collaboration has supported peer-reviewed research, strengthened classroom learning, informed industry practice, and created meaningful opportunities for students to learn directly from packaging professionals.

The length of the relationship matters, but not simply because it has endured. It matters because the partnership has continued to evolve with the needs of the industry. Built on trust, shared goals, and a willingness to keep finding new ways to work together, the relationship has allowed MSU faculty and Kraft Heinz teams to move from individual projects to a broader model of collaboration.

The partnership's strength reflects decades of sustained interaction, built on trust, shared goals, and a long-standing commitment to student success.

WHY THIS PARTNERSHIP MATTERS FOR TEACHING FACULTY

For MSU faculty, the value of this partnership extends well beyond research funding. It enhances the classroom experience by integrating real-world industry challenges into the curriculum. Kraft Heinz's ongoing involvement through mentoring, curriculum feedback, and active participation in courses such as PKG 102 keeps faculty informed about the latest trends, regulatory changes, and technical challenges in the packaging industry.

Faculty benefit from direct industry input that shapes course content and learning objectives. Kraft Heinz engineers mentor students, serve on alumni boards, and provide feedback that informs curriculum design. Their involvement in initiatives such as Career Fair Prep days and alumni mentoring programs ensure students are prepared for the realities of the workforce. This exposure to real-world challenges, such as sustainability, digital packaging capabilities, and supply chain complexities, enables faculty to translate industry needs into applied research and classroom projects.

By bringing Kraft Heinz professionals into the classroom, the partnership gives students direct exposure to current industry challenges and helps them connect packaging theory with practical applications.

COLLABORATION SPOTLIGHT: RAFAEL AURAS AND SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING

[Dr. Rafael Auras](#) is internationally recognized for his expertise in polymers, life cycle assessment, and sustainable packaging systems. His work with Kraft Heinz exemplifies how academic research can drive industry transformation.

Food packaging must balance multiple demands, including protecting product quality, extending shelf



This collaborative work allows us to accelerate the identification of viable material alternatives for compostable packaging.

life, and meeting sustainability goals. Achieving barrier performance in sustainable materials is one of the toughest challenges in packaging science. MSU research on biodegradable packaging materials has informed Kraft Heinz's approach to sustainable packaging and innovation, helping the Kraft Heinz team make decisions for the development of more effective sustainable packaging solutions. This partnership with Dr. Auras and team resulted in two papers published by MSU in peer-reviewed scientific journals focused on approaches to accelerate the biodegradation of packaging materials in simulated composting conditions.

"This collaborative work allows us to accelerate the identification of viable material alternatives for compostable packaging," said [Edgar Castro Aguirre, Kraft Heinz Principal Engineer for Sustainable Packaging](#).

The impact of this work is significant. Kraft Heinz gained data-driven insights to guide packaging decisions for sustainable packaging development. MSU published peer-reviewed papers that advanced scientific knowledge and influenced industry best practices. Graduate students completed thesis projects on compostability and sustainable materials, preparing them for leadership roles in sustainable packaging.

"This partnership allows us to tackle fundamental challenges that matter to society," Auras said. "We're creating packaging that protects food and the planet."



DR. RAFAEL AURAS
Professor, School of Packaging



This partnership allows us to tackle fundamental challenges that matter to society. We're creating packaging that protects food and the planet.





COLLABORATION SPOTLIGHT: EUIHARK LEE AND AI-POWERED PACKAGING INSIGHTS

[Dr. Euihark Lee](#) brings a unique perspective to packaging research, combining mechanical engineering, data science, and machine learning to solve problems that traditional methods overlook. Physical testing simulates shipping and handling but can't capture all variables in real-world conditions. Failures often surface only after products reach consumers, which can impact the brand's reputation and increase costs.



We're bridging the gap between physical testing and consumer reality. This is the future of packaging evaluations.

Dr. Lee's team developed an AI-driven sentiment analysis framework to mine thousands of Amazon reviews for packaging-related complaints. This approach identifies hidden issues such as leaks, broken seals, or difficult-to-open caps that standard tests miss. It benchmarks Kraft Heinz's packaging performance against other brands using publicly available data and employs predictive modeling to forecast potential failure points before products hit the market.

"The results were eye-opening. The findings surfaced design improvement opportunities that could reduce damage rates and increase consumer satisfaction, said [Junmo Kwon, Kraft Heinz Senior Packaging Manager](#).



DR. EUIHARK LEE

Associate Professor, School of Packaging



MSU filed a patent application for Lee's AI framework, with support from the Innovation Center, positioning the university as a leader in digital packaging solutions. "We're bridging the gap between physical testing and consumer reality," Lee explained. "This is the future of packaging evaluations."

BUILDING A TALENT PIPELINE THAT DELIVERS

Research may drive innovation, but people make it happen. That's why Kraft Heinz invests heavily in MSU students. Through mentoring in PKG 102, engineers guide students for six to eight weeks, helping them envision their careers. One of the first students mentored through this program, [Sarah Holland, Kraft Heinz Packaging Engineer](#), is now a mentor herself.

"As a former student and current industry mentor in PKG 102, I've seen firsthand the value of this course in connecting students with professionals who can offer guidance and mentoring. The open discussions foster a mutually beneficial environment where students gain industry insights and mentors like myself are challenged to think in new ways," Holland said. "This course has helped me build a lasting network in the packaging industry, and I'm grateful to now pay it forward as a mentor."

Kraft Heinz regularly recruits talent from MSU for their co-op program, reflecting confidence in the solid foundation students gain through the university's comprehensive curriculum and industry exposure. Students also participate in job-shadowing days and site visits at Kraft Heinz's R&D facility in Glenview, Illinois, gaining hands-on experience and valuable industry insight.



The talent coming from MSU reflects the comprehensive curriculum offered by the School of Packaging, as well as the university's strong industry collaboration.



This exposure provides students with a well-rounded education and valuable practical experience, making them highly sought-after candidates for our co-op program.

"The talent coming from MSU reflects the comprehensive curriculum offered by the School of Packaging, as well as the university's strong industry collaboration," said [Jill Tomlinson, MSU Packaging Alumni & Kraft Heinz Packaging Manager](#). "This exposure provides students with a well-rounded education and valuable practical experience, making them highly sought-after candidates for our co-op program."

The company also supports student well-being through initiatives such as [Snacks for Success](#), which provides product donations to fuel students during finals week.

THE ROLE OF MSU INNOVATION CENTER AND BUSINESS CONNECT

Behind every successful industry-university collaboration is a structure that makes it easy for innovation to happen. At MSU, the [Innovation Center](#) serves as the gateway for corporate engagement, helping industry partners connect with the university's research expertise, intellectual property, and talent. Through [Business Connect](#), companies like Kraft Heinz are matched with faculty whose work aligns with real-world challenges, enabling collaborations that are both strategic and sustainable.

“MSU’s partnership with Kraft Heinz is a model for holistic engagement and a great example of how industry–university partnerships can be mutually beneficial,” said [Nick Miller, Executive Director of Business Connect](#). “The key to this has not only been shared interests, but also an intentionality on both sides to explore new avenues to collaborate.”

That intentional approach allows partnerships to grow beyond individual projects. Business Connect helps identify opportunities for sponsored research, manages contracts and compliance, and works closely with the [MSU Technologies](#) team who safeguards faculty innovations through patents, guides promising technologies toward commercialization, and moves ideas from the lab to the marketplace through licensing. Together, this support provides industry partners with a trusted, streamlined way to engage with the university.



“They take care of the paperwork so I can concentrate on research,” said Auras. “Without their support, these partnerships would take much longer to launch.” For companies like Kraft Heinz, this means faster access to MSU’s resources, clearer pathways from research to application, and a long-term partner committed to shared success.

LOOKING AHEAD: A BLUEPRINT FOR THE FUTURE

As both organizations look to the future, the focus remains on sustainability, innovation, and preparing the next generation of packaging professionals. The MSU–Kraft Heinz partnership is a model for how universities and corporations can co-create value that benefits students, industry, and society.

“Our partnership with Michigan State University’s School of Packaging delivers strategic, long-term benefits to both institutions: MSU gains real-world research impact, student engagement, and industry collaboration, while Kraft Heinz gains early access to emerging packaging technologies, accelerated sustainable innovation, and enhanced internal expertise and thought leadership,” said [Maxine Roman, Kraft Heinz Lead of R&D Innovation Collaboration & Partnerships](#).





From Mini-Hearts to Market: How MSU and CytoHub Are Advancing Human-Relevant Cardiac Innovation

For decades, cardiovascular drug development has faced a costly problem: treatments that look promising in early studies often fail when tested in people. Animal models and flat cell cultures have advanced science, but they cannot fully capture the complexity of the human heart. That translation gap slows the search for safer drugs and better therapies for heart disease.

At Michigan State University, Dr. Aitor Aguirre, associate professor in the [Department of Biomedical Engineering](#), is helping close that gap by building human heart models from stem cells. His lab develops tiny, three-dimensional heart organoids and assembloids—living models that beat, respond to disease signals, and more closely reflect human biology than traditional research systems.

“We apply an engineering perspective to biology,” Aguirre says. “Instead of mechanical parts, we work with biological ones. We are engineering the human heart in a dish.”

A HUMAN MODEL WITH A VISIBLE PULSE

Often described as “mini-hearts,” Aguirre’s models are about the size of a lentil and self-organize into structures with cardiac muscle, vascular cells, immune components and other features of human heart tissue. Under the microscope, they beat with a visible rhythm.



DR. RAJIB BISWAS
CEO & Founder



DR. AITOR AGUIRRE
Associate Professor, Department of
Biomedical Engineering

That matters because researchers and companies need better ways to understand how drugs affect the heart before they reach patients. Cardiotoxicity remains a major reason therapies fail late in development. A human-derived model that reveals risk earlier could help companies refine compounds sooner and reduce wasted time and cost.

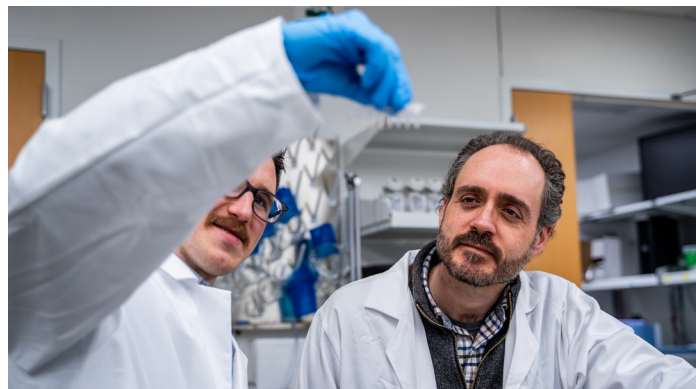
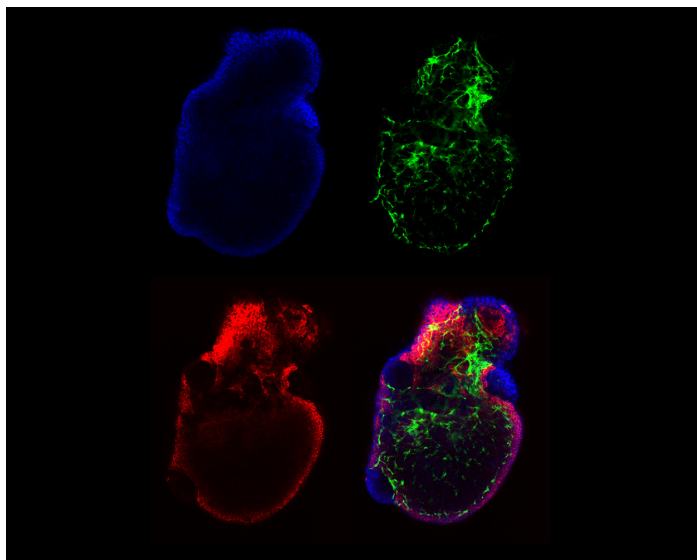
One compelling demonstration involves atrial fibrillation, the most common heart arrhythmia worldwide. In the lab, Aguirre's team introduced inflammatory molecules to heart organoids and watched their steady pulse shift into a chaotic, rapid-twitching state. When the team added an experimental anti-inflammatory treatment, the rhythm stabilized.

"Atrial fibrillation is the most common arrhythmia worldwide," Aguirre says. "For 40 years, we have been unable to develop effective drugs because accurate models were lacking."

FROM MSU DISCOVERY TO CYTOHUB PLATFORM

The technology is now moving toward commercial use through [CytoHub Inc.](#), a biotechnology company developing human-relevant cardiac platforms for drug discovery, disease modeling and regenerative medicine. CytoHub licensed MSU's heart organoid and assembloid technologies and is translating them into [CardioVive™](#), a platform for testing cardiac safety and efficacy in a more predictive human system.

[Dr. Rajib Biswas, CEO of CytoHub](#), says the platform creates new possibilities for drug development.



"This platform allows us to model human heart development and disease in a way that's never been possible before," he says. "We can test drugs, study congenital defects, and even explore regenerative therapies—all without relying on animal models."

CardioVive™ is being developed as a scalable model of human heart tissue. CytoHub's broader platform also includes CytoHub.AI a machine-learning system designed to support automated cell growth, differentiation and quality control.

"CardioVive™ is not just a research tool," Biswas says. "It's a predictive, scalable, and AI-optimized platform that can transform how we develop and test new therapies."

BUILDING A PATH THROUGH COMMERCIALIZATION

Moving a university discovery from the lab into a company requires more than scientific promise. It takes intellectual property protection, licensing expertise, startup support and partners willing to validate the technology. MSU's innovation ecosystem helped provide that path.

[MSU Technologies](#), part of the [MSU Innovation Center](#), helped protect the underlying inventions and structure the licensing path. After CytoHub connected with Aguirre about potential collaboration, MSU Technologies helped formalize the relationship.

"Following discussions with CytoHub's leadership team, MSU Technologies executed an Option Agreement, providing a limited license to CytoHub for internal validation studies," said Anupam Jhingran, Technology Manager for the MSU Innovation Center. "After the successful completion of these studies, CytoHub exercised its option rights and has recently obtained a worldwide exclusive license to apply

our technologies to enhance drug discovery and healthcare.”

Aguirre’s recognition as the [2026 Innovator of the Year](#) underscores the broader significance of the work. His lab has generated multiple invention disclosures and patent applications, while several related technologies have been licensed or are moving through the commercialization pipeline.



The Innovation Center has been critical to protect our inventions and publicize them to interested companies.

[Jon Debling, Senior Technology Manager](#) at MSU Technologies, describes the commercial potential this way: “We are excited to support the translation of Professor Aguirre’s work into commercial use, as the potential for addressing human diseases is huge. Several technologies have already been licensed, and new inventions continue to fill the pipeline for the next generation of organoid systems.”

Aguirre says that support has been essential. “The Innovation Center has been critical to protect our inventions and publicize them to interested companies,” he says. Without that bridge, promising discoveries can remain undeveloped.

STARTUP SUPPORT AND EARLY MOMENTUM

CytoHub’s growth has also been supported by the [MSU Research Foundation](#). [Red Cedar Ventures](#), an investment arm of the Foundation, provided \$50,000 in pre-seed funding to help the company establish operations, validate its technology and build toward commercialization.

The Foundation’s [Entrepreneur-in-Residence](#) program also provided strategic guidance, including support from Dr. Marquicia Pierce on business strategy, fundraising preparation and early-stage growth.

Since licensing the technology, CytoHub has established operations at [JLABS](#) in San Diego, validated aspects of CardioVive™, and begun building industry relationships. The company is also advancing HeartReady™, a preclinical regenerative medicine concept using mature, lab-grown cardiomyocytes derived from the CardioVive™ platform.

“HeartReady™ is still in preclinical development,” Biswas says, “but the potential is enormous. We’re talking about a therapy that could one day reverse the damage caused by heart attacks and restore quality of life for millions of patients.”

For Biswas, the work is personal. His father suffered a heart attack while Biswas was transitioning from academia to industry, an experience that shaped his commitment to cardiac regenerative medicine. “I wanted to do something that could help patients like my father,” he says. “That’s what drives me every day.”

WHY IT MATTERS FOR MSU AND HUMAN HEALTH

The MSU-CytoHub story reflects the purpose of university commercialization: connecting public research with partners that can advance discoveries toward real-world use. Early-stage support from MSU, the [Corewell Health-MSU Alliance](#), federal agencies and foundations helped Aguirre’s lab mature the technology.

For MSU, the partnership demonstrates how faculty innovation, technology transfer, startup investment and corporate engagement can work together. For CytoHub, it provides a foundation for tools that could improve drug safety, accelerate discovery and support future regenerative therapies.

The future points toward more personalized and predictive medicine. Aguirre envisions patient-specific heart models that could help doctors test therapies before prescribing them, study disease in human-relevant tissue and improve AI-driven predictions of cardiac risk.

“This is precision medicine in action,” Aguirre says. “Engineered organoids make clinical practice more precise.”

From a lab bench in East Lansing to a biotech lab in San Diego, a tiny beating heart is helping show what the future of medicine could look like: more human, more predictive and closer to the patients it is meant to serve.



Sit Sense, Inc.:

Building a Better Path from Discovery to Impact

[Dr. Tamara Bush](#) and [Dr. Justin Scott](#) have spent years studying how seating design can help reduce pressure injuries for patients with limited mobility. Their work led to [Sit Sense™](#), a smart seating technology that automatically redistributes pressure by adjusting a patient's position before vulnerable areas of the body are placed at greater risk. Built on biomechanics research showing how strategic seat articulation can shift pressure and improve blood flow, Sit Sense, Inc. is now moving from university discovery toward clinical and commercial application.

Today, Sit Sense, Inc. has evolved beyond a university research project into a startup company with ambitions to improve patient care in hospitals, rehabilitation centers, nursing facilities, and even aging in the home. But the journey from laboratory discovery to startup formation did not happen overnight. It required a coordinated network of translational funding, entrepreneurial education, mentorship, and regional startup support that helped transform an innovative concept into a commercialization-ready venture.

That path reflects the purpose of Michigan State University's (MSU) innovation ecosystem: helping promising research move through the practical steps required to become useful in the world.



TURNING RESEARCH INTO A MARKET-READY PRODUCT

At each stage, the [MSU Innovation Center](#) helped convert Sit Sense™ from promising research into a venture prepared for the marketplace. [MSU Technologies](#) guided the intellectual property strategy and patent process, while the broader Innovation Center network helped connect the team with mentors, startup resources, and translational funding opportunities that could move the technology beyond the laboratory.

The foundation of Sit Sense™ began with research conducted by Dr. Bush and Dr. Scott examining how chair movement and seating configurations can redistribute pressure and improve blood perfusion in vulnerable body regions. Their findings showed that specialized chair articulations could reduce pressure in high-risk areas while increasing blood flow, both important factors in reducing pressure injury risk.

“Pressure injuries place a tremendous burden on both patients and the healthcare system,” said Dr. Bush. “Our goal has always been to create a technology that can continuously monitor and adjust seating positions, relieving pressure before injuries occur and helping improve quality of life for patients.”

A major commercialization milestone came in 2023, when the Sit Sense, Inc. researchers received their first translational funding through the [Advance Grant program](#) based in the MSU Innovation Center. This critical funding supported initial prototype development and the early testing and design improvements needed to move beyond an initial lab-built model to create a substantially upgraded, pre-commercial version better suited for demonstrations, investor conversations, and future clinical use. Development of the improved model occurred under a 2025 grant provided through the [Michigan Translational Research and Commercialization \(MTRAC\) program](#). Both Advance and MTRAC are competitive statewide translational grant programs administered by the [Michigan Economic Development Corporation \(MEDC\)](#) and funded through the [Michigan Strategic Fund](#). Together, they proved to be catalytic in the development of Sit Sense™.

THE VENTURE FELLOW BRIDGE

Another important turning point for Sit Sense was participation in [MSU's Venture Fellows Postdoc program](#).

The one-year program, supported through a partnership among MSU, the [MSU Research Foundation](#), the MEDC, and the [Tech Transfer Talent Network](#), helps recent Ph.D. graduates gain hands-on commercialization experience while advancing promising university technologies toward startup formation. Fellows receive entrepreneurial training, mentoring, customer discovery support, market analysis experience, and exposure to the practical realities of building a company.



DR. TAMARA BUSH

Associate Dean for Inclusive Excellence



Our goal has always been to create a technology that can continuously monitor and adjust seating positions, relieving pressure before injuries occur and helping improve quality of life for patients.



DR. JUSTIN SCOTT

Co-Founder

For Dr. Scott, the program provided something that traditional postdoctoral training often does not: a structured opportunity to learn commercialization while actively building a business. Traditional postdoctoral pathways typically focus on publishing papers and securing research grants. The Venture Fellows program instead emphasizes entrepreneurship, customer discovery, commercialization strategy, and startup development.

“The Venture Fellows Postdoc program created a bridge that allowed us to move from a university research project toward a real company,” said Dr. Scott. “It gave us the opportunity to learn the commercialization process while creating the plans and connections needed to execute it.”

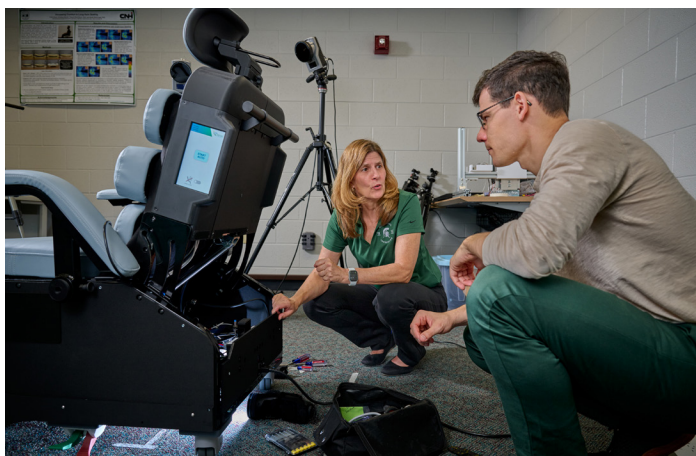
From Dr. Bush’s perspective, the fellowship filled a critical gap.



The Venture Fellows Postdoc program provided a bridge that allowed us to transition from university research toward commercialization while building relationships with the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem.

“There isn’t always a clear on-ramp from academia into company formation,” she said. “The Venture Fellows Postdoc program provided a bridge that allowed us to transition from university research toward commercialization while building relationships with the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem.”

The experience helped reshape the team’s commercialization strategy. Licensing the technology had initially seemed like the most likely path forward. As the team gained exposure to startup resources, entrepreneurial training, and investor opportunities, they began to see company formation as a viable way



to pursue funding, build partnerships, and carry the technology toward broader impact.

“It changed our trajectory,” said Dr. Bush. “We began to recognize that creating a company opened the door to additional funding opportunities, investor engagement, and a broader path to impact.”

SUPPORT BEYOND CAMPUS

After building a stronger commercialization foundation through MSU’s innovation ecosystem, Sit Sense continued to advance through a coordinated network of university, regional, and small-business development resources across the greater Lansing community.

The MSU Research Foundation, [Lansing Economic Area Partnership \(LEAP\)](#), and [Michigan Small Business Development Center \(SBDC\)](#) worked together to provide Sit Sense with entrepreneurial guidance, business development assistance, funding support, and connections to specialized resources as the technology transitioned from university research into an independent startup company. This collaborative support helped the team navigate company formation, strengthen its commercialization strategy, access [Local Accelerator Funds and Business Accelerator Funds](#), and continue advancing the automated medical recliner toward clinical readiness.

Together, these organizations connected Sit Sense with mentors, specialized business services, customer and market development resources, entrepreneurial events, funding opportunities, and industry and healthcare relationships. The broader regional ecosystem also connected the company with resources available through the [Lansing Regional SmartZone](#) and [East Lansing Technology Innovation Center](#), providing a local commercialization environment that complemented the technology development and startup support originating at MSU.

This combination of university and regional support helped Sit Sense strengthen its market validation through healthcare partnerships, pilot activities, and continued customer engagement. It also helped position the company to secure a [\\$1.55 million National Science Foundation \(NSF\) Small Business Innovation Research \(SBIR\) Fast-Track award](#), with additional grant application support from the [BBC Entrepreneurial Training and Consulting \(BBCetc\)](#), for continued development of its automated medical recliner.

“LEAP is thrilled to see another medical tech company take form in our local ecosystem,” said [Bob Trezise, LEAP president and CEO](#). “Sit Sense, Inc. isn’t just a company, it represents an intentional effort through the partnership of MSU Research Foundation, MSU Innovation Center, East Lansing Technology Innovation Center, and the SmartZone to cultivate a groundbreaking idea into a company that can make a strong economic as well as societal impact.”

A MODEL FOR MICHIGAN STATE INNOVATION

Sit Sense, Inc. illustrates the power of bringing together research excellence, technology commercialization, entrepreneurial education, translational funding, and community partnerships.

The company benefited from multiple layers of support, including university research funding, intellectual property protection and commercialization assistance from MSU Technologies, translational funding programs such as MTRAC, the Venture Fellows Postdoc program, mentorship, startup development resources from the MSU Research Foundation, and regional entrepreneurial support.

Together, those resources helped transform an academic discovery into a company pursuing commercialization, clinical adoption, and real-world patient impact.

“Sit Sense™ is an excellent example of what can happen when researchers engage with the full innovation ecosystem,” said [Jon Debling, Senior Technology Manager](#) at the MSU Innovation Center. “The combination of translational funding,



Faculty inventions need more than funding to reach the marketplace. They need people, mentorship, entrepreneurial talent, and sustained funding. Sit Sense, Inc. demonstrates how combining those resources can help transform university innovation into a company positioned to improve lives and create economic opportunity.

commercialization support, entrepreneurial training, and startup mentorship helped move this technology from promising research toward becoming a company capable of delivering real-world impact.”

Explaining the supporting role of entities like the MSU Research Foundation in MSU’s Innovation Ecosystem, [Frank Urban, Director of Venture Creation for Life Sciences](#) at the MSU Research Foundation said, “Faculty inventions need more than funding to reach the marketplace. They need people, mentorship, entrepreneurial talent, and sustained funding. Sit Sense, Inc. demonstrates how combining those resources can help transform university innovation into a company positioned to improve lives and create economic opportunity.”

As Sit Sense, Inc. continues advancing its technology and pursuing commercialization, the company represents more than a promising healthcare innovation. It shows how Michigan State University can help researchers combine discovery, commercialization guidance, translational funding, entrepreneurial talent, and regional partnerships to move ideas from the lab toward meaningful patient impact.



ABOUT SIT SENSE

Sit Sense is a fast-growing, Michigan-based startup changing how pressure sores are prevented across healthcare settings. It is based on technology developed at Michigan State University. Sit Sense is actively soliciting potential customers to try its recliner and to give feedback. To learn more about Sit Sense and to sign up for additional information, visit sit-sense.com.

Impact on the Horizon: The Next Wave of MSU Innovation



Some of tomorrow's most promising technologies are taking shape today inside Michigan's research universities. At Michigan State University, translational funding helps move those discoveries from early scientific promise toward practical use, commercial opportunity, and public impact.

Supported by the [Michigan Strategic Fund](#) and administered by the [Michigan Economic Development Corporation \(MEDC\)](#), programs such as the [MTRAC AgBio](#) and the [Advance Innovation Hubs](#) provide critical resources at a pivotal stage in the innovation process. This funding helps researchers validate ideas, reduce technical risk, build prototypes, test market potential, and generate the evidence needed to attract partners, investors, licensees, or startup support.

That bridge between discovery and deployment is vital. Many university innovations are too applied for traditional basic research grants but still too early for private investment. Translational funding closes that gap, allowing strong ideas to mature into solutions that can improve health, strengthen agriculture, support advanced manufacturing, protect natural resources, and create new economic opportunities for Michigan.

The \$1,687,919 in translational funding awards highlighted in this section represent real impact on Michigan's innovation horizon. These awardees are building the foundation for tomorrow's world-changing technologies and together illustrate how strategic investment in translational research keeps MSU's innovation pipeline moving from possibility to real-world progress.



Explore the 2026 MTRAC AgBio Grant Awards

to learn how full-scale translational funding is helping advance agricultural, environmental, animal health, and applied technology innovations toward real-world use.

View the 2026 Advance Innovation Hub Awards

to see how researchers across Michigan are moving promising health, sustainability, mobility, and advanced technology concepts closer to market.

Startup Milestones: Building the Future from MSU Innovation



Entrepreneurship is one of the most powerful ways MSU turns discovery into impact. When Spartan researchers, students and partners launch companies, their ideas move beyond the lab and into the marketplace, where they can strengthen industries, improve lives, create jobs and help address urgent challenges in health, agriculture, energy, advanced computing, education and more. This year's startup milestones show that momentum in action: companies connected to MSU reported new funding, regulatory progress, commercial partnerships, product launches, national recognitions and technical breakthroughs, from robotic apple harvesting and cardiovascular monitoring to quantum computing, grid modernization, sustainable agriculture and next-generation therapeutics.

From funding rounds and acquisitions to product launches and regulatory milestones, explore the full MSU startup portfolio on our website to see how Spartan-founded companies are creating economic and societal impact.

Explore the updates below to see how MSU-affiliated startups across our full portfolio are building companies, advancing technologies and making a difference in Michigan and around the world.



CIBO TECHNOLOGIES, INC. / TERION

Mar 31, 2026: Began three-year responsible-sourcing partnership with Ingredion

CiBO and Ingredion announced a three-year strategic partnership to scale regenerative agriculture and responsible-sourcing data across supply chains.

Sources: [CiBO Press Releases](#)

Jun 18, 2026: Combined with Indigo Ag's Source business to form Terion

Flagship Pioneering combined CiBO with Indigo Ag's Source business to form Terion, positioning the successor company around digital infrastructure for agriculture.

Sources: [Flagship Pioneering](#)



EEROQ CORPORATION

Dec 4, 2025–May 27, 2026: Received strategic backing from SEALSQ

SEALSQ made strategic investments and later agreed to lead EeroQ's next financing round.

Sources: [SEALSQ](#)

Jun 16, 2026: Reported first strong coupling to an electron charge qubit on helium

EeroQ announced the first demonstration of strong coupling between a microwave photon and the charge-qubit state of an electron on helium; the work was peer reviewed and published in Nature Physics.

Sources: [PR Newswire](#)



GREAT LAKES CRYSTAL TECHNOLOGIES, INC.

Venture Post-Doc Fellow: Paul Quayle; VP at Great Lakes Crystal

Jan 17, 2025: Received \$2.7M National Security Innovation Capital award

GLCT received \$2.7 million from National Security Innovation Capital to advance manufacturing readiness for large-area, high-performance single-crystal diamond substrates.

Sources: [GLCT Company News](#)

Jul 21, 2026: Announced scaling of semiconductor-grade diamond platform

GLCT announced that it was scaling production of semiconductor-grade diamond substrates, plates and wafers for advanced electronics applications.

Sources: [GLCT News](#)



INDAPTA THERAPEUTICS, INC.

Oct 14, 2025: Reported approximately \$50.8M in equity financing

A Form D summary reported \$50,800,176 sold in an offering.

Sources: [Form D summary](#)

Nov 7, 2025: Presented Phase 1/2 clinical activity in multiple myeloma

Indapta reported Phase 1/2 clinical activity in multiple myeloma, including confirmed responses in four of five evaluable patients at the reported dose level in combination with isatuximab, with no dose-limiting toxicities reported.

Sources: [Business Wire](#)



RETIA MEDICAL, LLC

Apr 24, 2025: Entered exclusive U.S. distribution agreement with Medtronic

Retia entered an exclusive U.S. distribution agreement with Medtronic, making the Argos cardiac-output monitor available through Medtronic's Acute Care Monitoring portfolio.

Sources: [Medtronic](#)

Feb 17, 2026: Received FDA 510(k) clearance for Argos Infinity

Retia announced FDA clearance for Argos Infinity, extending its cardiovascular-intelligence software to health-system and tele-ICU environments.

Sources: [PR Newswire](#)



SWITCHED SOURCE LLC

Mar 20, 2025: Announced \$5M manufacturing-facility investment

Switched Source announced a 20,000-square-foot Chicagoland facility expected to increase manufacturing capacity by 150%.

Sources: [Switched Source News](#)

Jan 20, 2026: Reported 60% growth in U.S. installations during 2025

The company reported units operating across more than ten utility service areas and territories serving approximately 10,000 homes and businesses.

Sources: [Business Wire](#)



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