

Created at the U., the LouseBuster

The lice-killing device is a small part of the big job of transferring technology into the business world

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The University of Utah ranks 19th among the nation's top 25 schools when it comes to turning research into business opportunities.

This year's Association of University Technology Managers (AUTM) survey of 228 schools with "technology transfer" ranked the U. 19th in research-to-commerce licensing and related revenues. The school brought in more than \$16.1 million while launching six companies.

But that is just the beginning, says Brian Cummings, director of the U.'s technology commercialization office. He expects a top 10 ranking in the next survey.

"The survey is always about one year behind [based on 2005 results] and the 2006 data has yet to be gathered," Cummings said Wednesday. "I would assume we would be in the top 10" when AUTM releases its next survey a year from now, he said, noting that 20 companies were formed by the U. and its researchers in 2006.

A top 10 spot would put the U. in company, albeit distant, with the likes of No. 1 Emory University (\$585.6 million), and runners-up New York University (\$133.8 million) and University of California (\$92.9 million).

One of Utah's new enterprises is Larada Sciences, spun off to market the LouseBuster, which kills head lice with heated air. The device was co-invented by Dale Clayton, a biology professor, and two of his students, Joseph Atkin and Kevin Wilding.

"Right now we're in clinical trials aimed at getting Food and Drug Administration clearance, since it is considered a medical device," said Clayton, chief science officer for Larada. "By the end of the year we hope to be in production."

Like most technology transfer endeavors, the U. will get an unspecified share of licensing and other royalties if LouseBuster proves a success. Clayton is happy to share the proceeds, saying he could not have made the commercialization leap without the help of Cummings' office.

"They were critical as a source of information and guidance," Clayton said, acknowledging that "most scientists don't have a clue" about the documents needed to attract funding, obtain patents and protect other intellectual property rights.

Cummings says such collaboration between his office and researchers can mean money for both parties, but the benefits go far beyond the U.'s Salt Lake City campus.

It is a cyclical phenomenon. Each new company the school christens means more, high-paying jobs for Utahns. Commercial success for researchers also attracts growing investment in new projects.

"It is not so much this does for the university, [but] what it does for the local community and the state," Cummings said.

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