

# UMBC News

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## **Plant Sensory Systems Joins bwtech@UMBC**

### ***Company Developing Innovative Agricultural Technologies***

Plant Sensory Systems, an agricultural biotechnology company, has chosen the technology incubator at bwtech@UMBC as its headquarters. The company's owners, Kathleen and Frank Turano, felt the services and support offered by bwtech@UMBC were an ideal fit for their young company's needs.

The Turanos founded Plant Sensory Systems in July and moved to the incubator at the end of December. Currently, the company is working on two projects: making plants that use nitrogen more efficiently and creating plants that can produce more sugar or plant oils to aid in the production of biofuels. "If we can make plants that use nitrogen more efficiently, then farmers won't have to use as much fertilizer. Not only will this save costs, but there will be less nitrogen run-off into streams and rivers," explained Frank Turano.

At the moment, their focus is on genetic research using a laboratory model plant. Their long-term goal is to license their technologies and/or partner with seed or agricultural biotechnology companies to apply the technologies they develop to a variety of crops. They are currently talking to seed companies to establish relationships.

The Turanos' interest in biological research and sensory systems is an outgrowth of their professional experience: Frank is an associate professor of molecular biology and biochemistry at George Washington University (he has resigned, effective in May 2008) and Kathleen was formerly a professor of ophthalmology at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. After interviewing at several incubators, they chose bwtech@UMBC as the place to launch their business. "They have a solid track record of launching companies and offer a host of business support services to help companies get off the ground," said Kathleen Turano.

Both Turanos plan to take advantage of the opportunity to obtain advice and share experiences with the CEOs of the other incubator companies at the variety of networking events offered at bwtech@UMBC.

“Plant Sensory Systems represents exactly the type of early-stage company that we hope to attract to our incubator program”, said David Fink, bwtech@UMBC’s director of entrepreneurial services. “The Turanos bring strong scientific credentials from local research institutions. Their projects are very innovative and the company has great potential to benefit the Maryland economy.”

**About bwtech@UMBC:**

bwtech@UMBC (<http://www.bwtechumbc.com>) is a 71-acre research and technology community at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC). It comprises the technology business Incubator and Accelerator, home to over 30 early-stage high-tech and life science companies, and the Research and Technology Park, with a total development capacity of 350,000 square feet of office and laboratory space. bwtech@UMBC offers collaboration with university faculty and students, and enjoys a strategic and convenient location, close to downtown Baltimore, BWI Thurgood Marshall Airport, and Washington, D.C. bwtech’s annual economic impact on the state is estimated to be over \$300 million.

**About UMBC:**

UMBC is a medium-sized public research university of 12,000 undergraduate and graduate students who collaborate with faculty to address real-world challenges. Located just south of Baltimore near I-95 and the BWI airport, UMBC's residential campus houses state-of-the-art facilities in the sciences, engineering, arts, social sciences and humanities. UMBC combines the energy of a research university with the close community feel and attention to individual students found in liberal arts colleges.