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Startup of the week: Goddard Labs

by [Gregory Zeller](#)

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Tags: [Goddard Labs](#), [Hunter College](#), [Long Island Capital Alliance](#), [Stony Brook University Calverton Business Incubator](#), [Technology](#)

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COMPANY:

Goddard Labs

LOCATION:

[Stony Brook University Calverton Business Incubator](#)

LAUNCHED:

December 2011

CO-FOUNDERS:

Noel Goddard, James Goddard

EMPLOYEES:

1 full-time

PRODUCT:

Handheld molecular-diagnostic tool

LAUNCH INVESTMENT:

About \$35,000 – covering rent, patent-filing and other legal costs, plus lab equipment. “They give you a sink,” Noel Goddard says. “You have to build out everything else.”

FUNDING SOURCES:

Friends and family

MAJOR CHALLENGES: NG:

“It was a matter of job-sharing for a while – I spend 80 percent of my time teaching at [Hunter College](#). The second challenge was the transition from scientist to businessperson. It’s a different mindset completely.”

PRODUCT STATUS:

In development

The Food Safety Modernization Act, signed into law Jan. 4 by President Barack Obama, marks a fundamental change for American food producers. The first food-reform law in 70 years switches federal focus from dealing with bacterial outbreaks to preventing them – and some of its provisions are difficult for producers to swallow, according to molecular biologist Noel Goddard, especially farmers who already “aren’t making tons of money on lettuce.”

The big problem for agricultural interests: slow and expensive testing mandated by the new law. Hence the first product from Goddard Labs, a startup tucked inside Stony Brook University's Calverton Business Incubator: a handheld tool that more quickly and efficiently prepares agricultural samples for their subatomic close-ups.

As explained by co-founder Goddard, a Rockefeller University Ph.D. and biophysics professor in the Department of Physics and Astronomy at New York City's Hunter College, it's fairly advanced stuff. The tool contains an enzyme substrate – that's the substance on which enzymes act – that fishes microbes from a slurry of water and whatever produce is being tested and prepares them for transfer to high-tech molecular-diagnostic facilities.

Less confusing are the benefits such a tool might provide for cash-strapped farmers who don't have the time, and sometimes the inclination, to wait and see if their crops are contaminated with listeria or salmonella, both exceedingly rare.

"We're targeting sample-collection and prep time that's reduced from 24 hours to 30 minutes," Goddard noted.

The scientist sharpened her business acumen at SBU's Innovation Boot Camp and plans to teach at Hunter through this summer before switching full-time to the new family business, which she launched with her father, James. Goddard Labs will then double-time its development efforts, aiming to produce a working prototype by Christmas.

That prototype will make it easier to pitch her product to potential investors, but Goddard is already on the prowl for VC opportunities: She cited a meeting this week with the nonprofit business-development organization [Long Island Capital Alliance](#).

"It's much easier to approach the angel-level investor when you can hold the thing in your hand and say, 'I'm trying to market this,'" Goddard said. But, like testing a head of lettuce for bacterial infections, "biotech R&D can be very slow."

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