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WAGENINGEN
UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH

Catalysing entrepreneurial solutions for societal challenges

creating a difference together

Contents

Colophon

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www.universityfundwageningen.eu
www.starthubwageningen.nl

Empowering entrepreneurial ambition
for impact

Societal impact starts with people who have ideas, knowledge, and the ambition to make a difference. Wageningen University & Research (WUR) and University Fund Wageningen believe that solutions to today's global challenges emerge when talented students, scientists and graduates are empowered to develop their entrepreneurial potential.

By connecting entrepreneurship with education and scientific knowledge, we help students, researchers and young professionals develop the entrepreneurial skills needed to turn ideas and research into innovative solutions. Whether addressing sustainable food systems, resilient ecosystems, health or a circular society, progress depends on people who dare to challenge the status quo and create new pathways for change.

That is why WUR and University Fund Wageningen invest in tailored incubation support and the next generation of entrepreneurial changemakers.

Through the Wageningen Impact Catalyst programme, students, scientists and graduated young professionals receive tailored support to transform ideas and ambitions into impactful solutions. This includes entrepreneurial skill development and guidance throughout the crucial stages of development, from idea generation and prototyping to refining the value proposition and assessing societal impact.

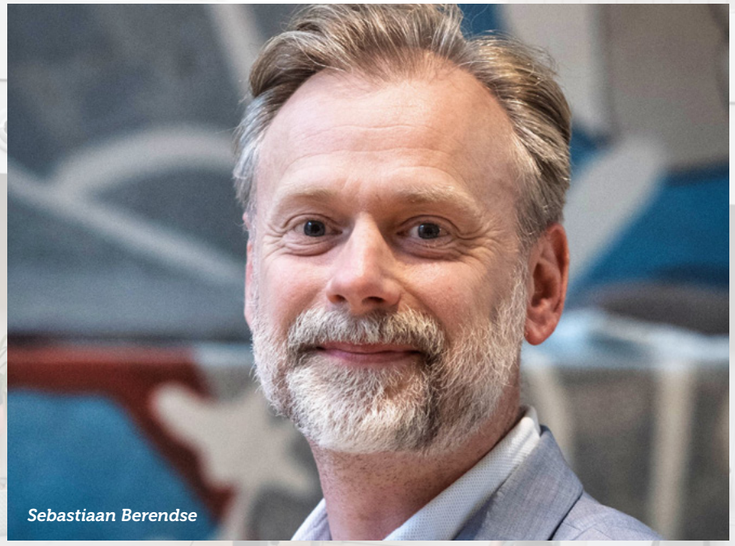
With access to coaching, expertise, funding, resources and networks, entrepreneurial initiatives within the Wageningen ecosystem are empowered to grow into solutions that address societal challenges.

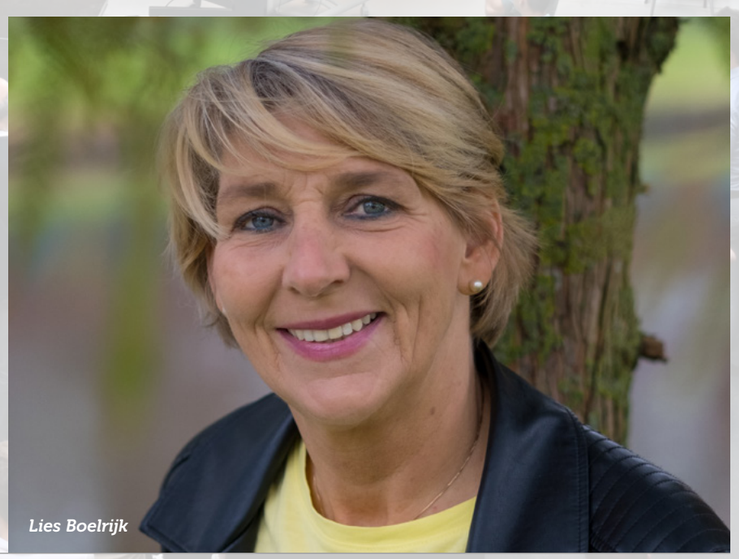
This brochure showcases a selection of inspiring initiatives emerging from Wageningen University & Research. It includes stories of people who combine science, an entrepreneurial mindset and societal commitment to create practical solutions and drive meaningful impact towards a more sustainable future. This would not be possible without the support of alumni, mentors and our entrepreneurial community.

Together, we create the conditions for ideas to grow and for people to make a lasting impact. We warmly invite you to join us.

Sebastiaan Berendse,
Director Value Creation & Impact
Wageningen University & Research

Lies Boelrijk,
Director University Fund Wageningen


Sebastiaan Berendse


Lies Boelrijk

Catalysing entrepreneurial solutions
through philanthropy

With the increasing complexity and urgency of global challenges, it is more important than ever to connect WUR's scientific insights with practical solutions. Turning knowledge into societal impact requires not only groundbreaking research, but also the ability to translate knowledge and ideas into solutions that can be applied in society.

Startups and spin-offs play an important role in this process. By developing new approaches, technologies and social innovations, these entrepreneurial initiatives can accelerate the transition towards sustainable food systems, resilient ecosystems, and a circular society.

Financial support is crucial during the incubation phase, enabling the development of business models, prototypes, market research, and knowledge-building. Yet securing funding at this stage remains difficult. Thanks to the support of our donors and partners, University Fund Wageningen provides the funding opportunities needed to nurture entrepreneurial talent at Wageningen University & Research. This starts with developing an entrepreneurial mindset, with programmes such as the Youth Food Lab and WUR Student Challenges. Thanks to the generous donations and mentoring support of our Friends of University Fund Wageningen and the Wageningen Ambassadors, we can contribute to the talent development of students. And thanks to the support of private donors, who make awards and vouchers such as the Lizzy Award and the Wageningen Entrepreneurship Grant possible, we help create impactful ventures.

SUPPORT WAGENINGEN ENTREPRENEURS AT EVERY STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT

Together, we help students, researchers and recent graduates turn ideas into initiatives that use Wageningen knowledge to address societal challenges. Through grants, vouchers, competitions, and investment opportunities, we bring promising ideas closer to society.

UNIVERSITY FUND WAGENINGEN

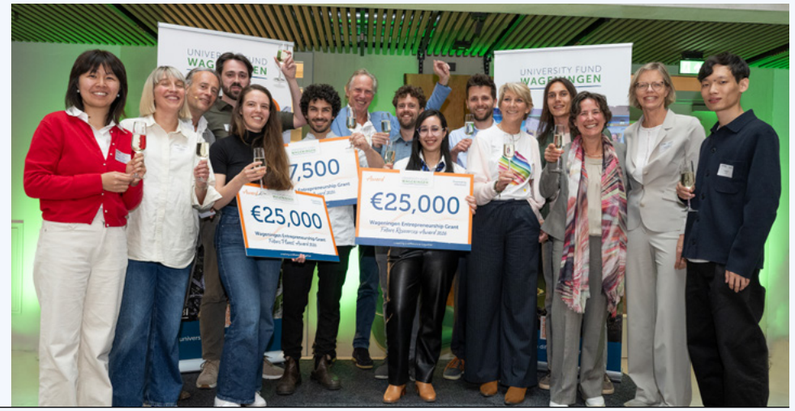
SUPPORT TALENT	SUPPORT RESEARCH	SUPPORT ENTREPRENEURSHIP
Student challenges & talent development Scholarship & awards Stimulate knowledge exchange young researchers	Raising extra funds for research programs Connecting donors with researchers and vice versa	Cultivating entrepreneurial competences and supporting WUR entrepreneurs with funding and startup development

DEVELOP ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS	RECOGNISE ENTREPRENEURIAL IDEAS	SUPPORT CONCEPT VALIDATION	PRE-SEED FUNDING FOR IMPACT
Supporting (extra)curricular activities	Offering financial support to further develop ideas	Providing funding to validate concepts and prototypes	Connecting ventures to funding and partner networks for further growth
• WUR Student Challenges • Youth Food Lab • Student entrepreneurship programme (STEP)	• Wageningen Entrepreneurship Grant • Pay-it-forward funding, incl. Ripple Fund	• Wageningen Impact Catalyst programme • Lizzy Award, pay-it-forward funding, incl. Ripple Fund	• Pre-seed funding for ventures • Alumni Investment Fund

More info: universityfundwageningen.eu/entrepreneurship

Winners Wageningen Entrepreneurship Grant
Salma Rian won the Future Resources Award (€25,000) with HydraPeck, developing the first high-moisture feeding system specifically designed for large-scale poultry production.

Milo Kleijnjan and his team won both the Future Planet Award (€25,000) and the Get Unstuck Award (€7,500) with Omnomyco, transforming seasonal wild species into consistent, high-quality products without putting additional pressure on natural ecosystems.



Help shaping tomorrow's solutions

Join us in supporting the next generation of Wageningen entrepreneurial changemakers.
Since 2026, University Fund Wageningen and WUR have introduced two new funds that enable donors, alumni and partners to support entrepreneurial changemakers at different stages, from validating purpose-driven ideas to helping promising ventures grow.

RIPPLE FUND

The Ripple Fund supports early-stage entrepreneurs who put social and environmental value at the center of their startup: budding changemakers who build solutions that are good for people, society and the planet, without sacrificing their values for rapid growth or short-term profit. The Ripple Fund provides small vouchers to individuals and teams affiliated with WUR or committed to contributing to the Wageningen community. The funding helps turn ideas into ventures that combine impact with sustainable business models.

Unlike traditional grants or loans, the Ripple Fund carries no repayment obligation, only a commitment to pay it forward once the startup becomes financially sustainable. It is built on four principles rather than growth potential alone. *Ethics First* requires moral reasoning embedded in way of working and governance; *Integrity Over Hype* rewards transparency and substance over marketing; *Collective Support* asks recipients to mentor, share lessons, or reinvest voluntarily in the fund; and *Inclusive Access* widens participation by addressing founder-related and systematic barriers. The result is a self-sustaining, values-driven cycle of early-stage support.

The voucher is meant specifically to cover out-of-pocket costs critical to validation such as early validation experiments, prototyping and user testing, stakeholder engagement activities, ethics audits and advisory support, or impact measurement design. It supports startups when ethical considerations create barriers to growth, for example, when making faster or cheaper choices could compromise core values, or when responsible decisions increase short-term costs or risks. Moreover, the fund's credibility and network can help startups gain the access or legitimacy needed to overcome these barriers.

The Ripple Fund provides more than financial support. A voucher gives a confidence boost, a community signal, and a launchpad for high-impact ideas. A donation to the fund isn't just a gift - it is an investment in a cycle of impact. One donation fuels one startup. One startup gives back to fund another. Together, we create a self-sustaining engine for innovation with purpose. A ripple can then become a wave.

The ripple fund, a small ripple today, a wave of impact tomorrow!

Bridging knowledge and capital *for impact*

Through the establishment of an alumni-based investment fund in partnership with Graduate Ventures, WUR is further strengthening its commitment to entrepreneurship driven by Wageningen knowledge and innovation, while actively engaging its global alumni network.

WAGENINGEN PRE-SEED FUND

The fund supports entrepreneurial ventures emerging from WUR research and knowledge, including startups and spin-offs founded by researchers, PhD candidates, students and WUR graduates. It provides support across different stages of venture development, from pre-seed activities through to seed-stage growth.
Alumni can participate in three ways: by supporting the pre-seed fund through donations, by investing in the seed fund, and by contributing their expertise and networks as mentors.
This adds investment potential to the existing startup ecosystem of the incubator, accelerator an programmes around WUR. In which investing, donating and mentoring go hand in hand. Entrepreneurship becomes even more firmly embedded as a strategic pillar within WUR, where around 10–15 startups and spin-offs are launched each year, alongside the approximately 180 scale-ups and SMEs operating on Wageningen Campus.

The fund's first investment was awarded to Gravity Gardens. This startup is bringing space-inspired technology into agriculture, with the aim of improving crop development. It is an excellent example of how Wageningen knowledge translates directly into impactful new ventures, bundling expertise from various backgrounds. As Gravity Gardens puts it: "This investment provides us not only with funding, but also with wider access to the Wageningen network and knowledge ecosystem. That is exactly what is needed to accelerate the practical application of our groundbreaking technology."

1 Hippotainer

From student idea to global food innovation

While studying at Wageningen University & Research, Tijmen Blok and Jort Maarseveen had a belief that everyone should have access to fresh, nutritious vegetables. With backgrounds in biology, business administration and life sciences, they began experimenting with container farming as "just an idea" to make agriculture accessible anywhere in the world.

"It all happened very quickly," Jort recalls. "Before we knew it, we had built our first prototype and even took it to Ukraine, where we sold it to a customer and trained local people to use our system." After graduating, Tijmen and Jort turned their student initiative into a company, supported by Wageningen's entrepreneurial ecosystem through **Starthub Wageningen**.

"At Starthub Wageningen, you find people who know what it takes to start a company. They provide training, expertise, and everything you need to turn a good idea into reality," explains Jort. After a seven-day bootcamp, the founders developed a validated business plan and gained the foundation to grow Hippotainer as a company.

"That bootcamp was the starting point of our company. It gave us the foundation to turn Hippotainer into a real business." Hippotainer was awarded the **Wageningen Entrepreneurship Grant** in 2025, which provided valuable support in further developing their venture.

"Before we knew it, we had built our first prototype and even took it to Ukraine, where we sold it to a customer and trained local people to use our system."
Jort Maarseveen

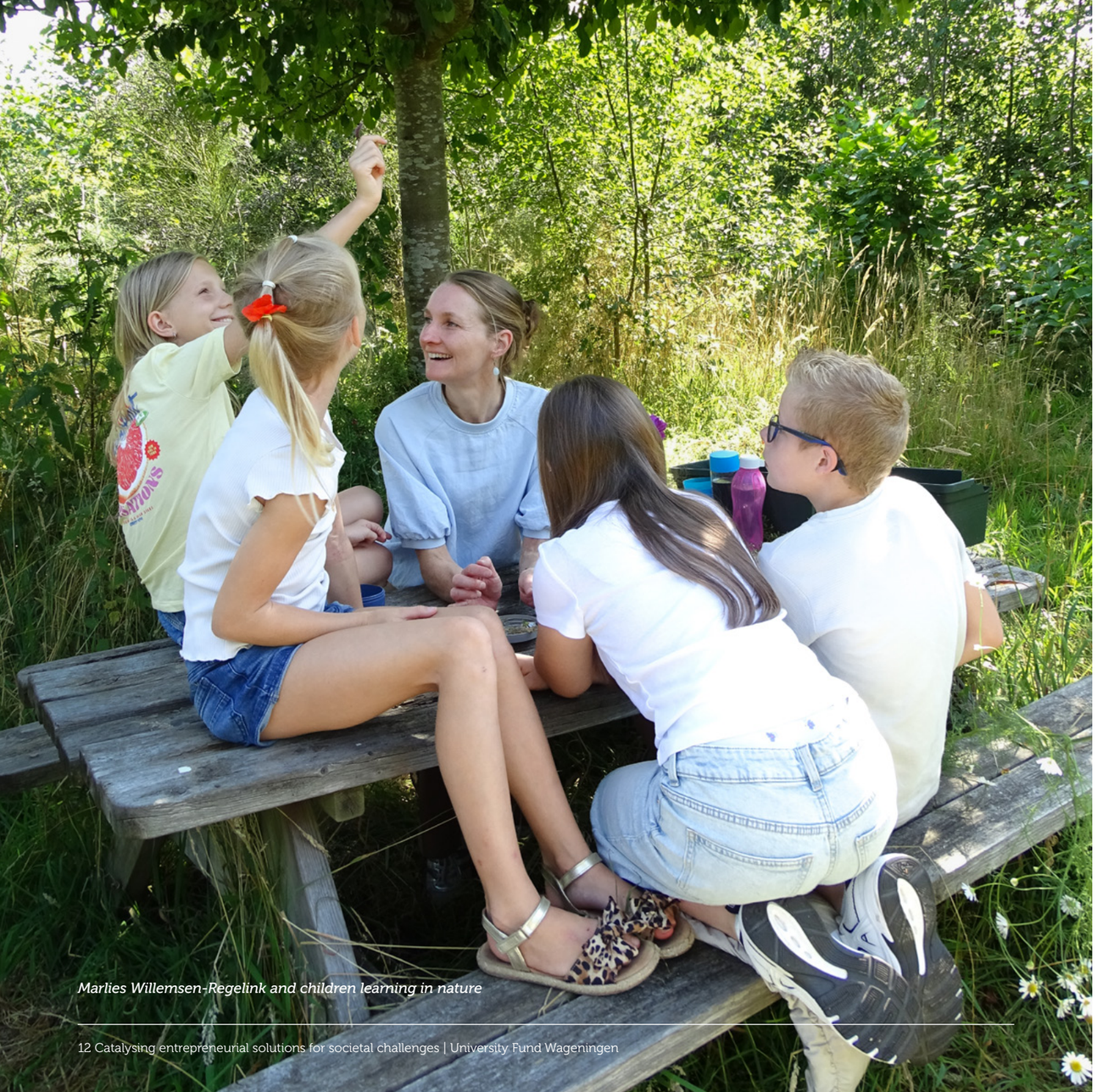
Since then, Hippotainer has remained closely connected to Wageningen Campus, later joining the **StartLife Accelerate** programme. The company received pre-seed funding from StartLife, in collaboration with the Province of Gelderland and Oost NL, to further develop its solution.

Today, Hippotainer offers fully controlled, efficient, and scalable container-based systems that enable local growers to produce fresh vegetables anywhere in the world using advanced hydroponic technology.

www.hippotainer.com

Hippotainer

Tijmen Blok, co-founder Hippotainer and Anuj Patidar, Msc Plant Science



Marlies Willemsen-Regelink and children learning in nature

2 Buiten Bloeiers

Helping children bloom outside

Some of life's most valuable lessons are learned far away from the classroom. For Marlies Willemsen-Regelink, founder of Buiten Bloeiers, childhood memories of growing up on a farm and playing freely outdoors sparked a lifelong belief that every child should have the opportunity to explore, discover and connect with nature. That conviction led to Buiten Bloeiers, helping schools bring learning outdoors.

After nearly twenty years working in food education at team Taste-lessons at Wageningen University & Research, Marlies saw a growing disconnect between children and the natural world. Many no longer know where their food comes from or have the freedom to discover nature for themselves. Building on the collaboration with Farm Education Netherlands and Food Forest Droevendaal, Buiten Bloeiers creates outdoor learning experiences where children explore food, biodiversity, and healthy soils by doing. As Marlies explains: "It's not just about thinking and learning, but really about feeling as well."

"It's not just about thinking and learning, but really about feeling as well."
Marlies Willemsen-Regelink

Turning that vision into a growing initiative became possible through the entrepreneurial ecosystem of Starthub Wageningen. The **Wageningen Impact Catalyst** programme, personal coaching and a supportive community of fellow entrepreneurs helped Marlies transform years of educational experience into a scalable concept. "Everyone tries to help each other move forward," she says, describing the startup community as "a kind of family."

Although still in its early stages, Buiten Bloeiers is already building partnerships with educators, researchers, and organisations across Wageningen to strengthen outdoor education and measure its impact. Marlies hopes more schools will discover the value of learning in nature, because the best classroom has no walls at all.

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3 NASPA Diagnostics

Bringing fast DNA diagnostics into the real world

The foundation of NASPA was built not on a business plan or market opportunity, but on a scientific breakthrough born from curiosity-driven research in the Swarts lab at the Laboratory of Biochemistry, Wageningen University & Research. The Swarts lab studies the prokaryotic immune system, with a special interest in prokaryotic Argonaute proteins.

The team discovered that certain 'short' prokaryotic Argonautes can be programmed to recognize specific DNA sequences with extraordinary precision, paving the way to the development of a new generation of rapid molecular diagnostic tools.

During his PhD in the Swarts lab, Patrick Barendse characterized various prokaryotic Argonautes, contributing to the understanding of these bacterial immune systems. As a postdoctoral researcher, Patrick worked on developing the emerging Argonaute-based diagnostic technology. Recognizing its potential to address unmet diagnostic needs beyond the laboratory, he took the lead in developing the research into a practical diagnostic platform and, ultimately, a startup.

Determined to turn this discovery into real-world impact, Patrick joined forces with Daniël Besselink, an entrepreneur with experience scaling climate-tech and impact ventures. Together, they set out to replace slow, centralized laboratory testing with fast, accurate diagnostics that can be performed anywhere. Much like a highly precise COVID home test, their technology can deliver immediate, on-site results, which enables diseases to be detected before they spread. Potential applications range from crop protection and animal health to water quality and, ultimately, human healthcare.

WUR played a pivotal role in transforming the idea into a company. The **Wageningen Impact Catalyst** programme supported Patrick's transition from researcher to founder, while, alongside an **ERC Proof-of-Concept grant**, the WUR **Road to Innovation Grant** provided crucial early support for technology validation and to identify the most promising entry markets. Today, NASPA continues to develop its technology in the WUR Helix laboratories as it prepares to scale beyond the lab.

Starting in the agri-food sector, NASPA aims to help farmers prevent crop losses through rapid disease detection. However, the easily (re-) programmable NASPA platform extends far beyond agriculture, with the long-term vision of bringing affordable, life-saving diagnostics to remote communities worldwide.

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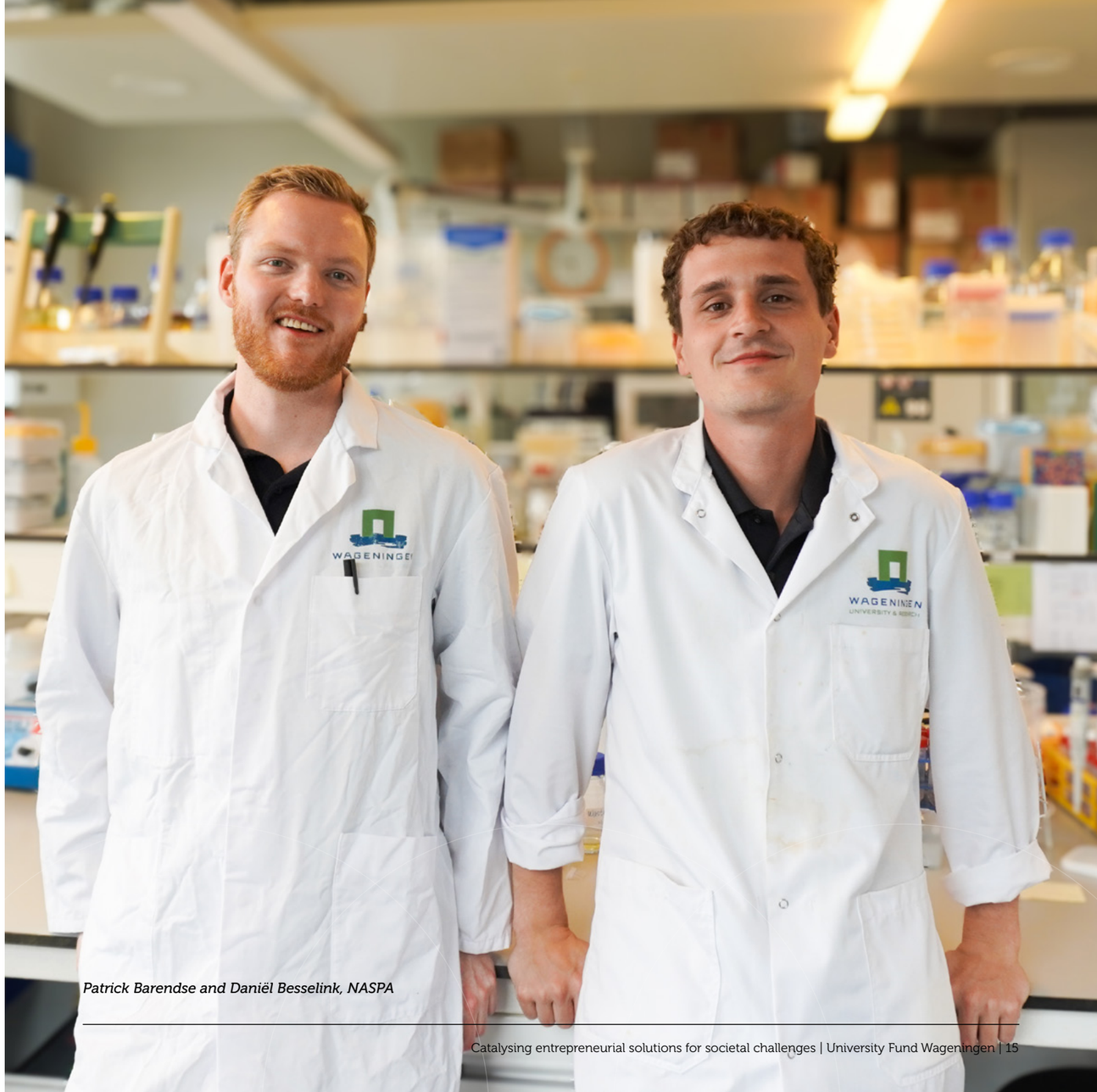
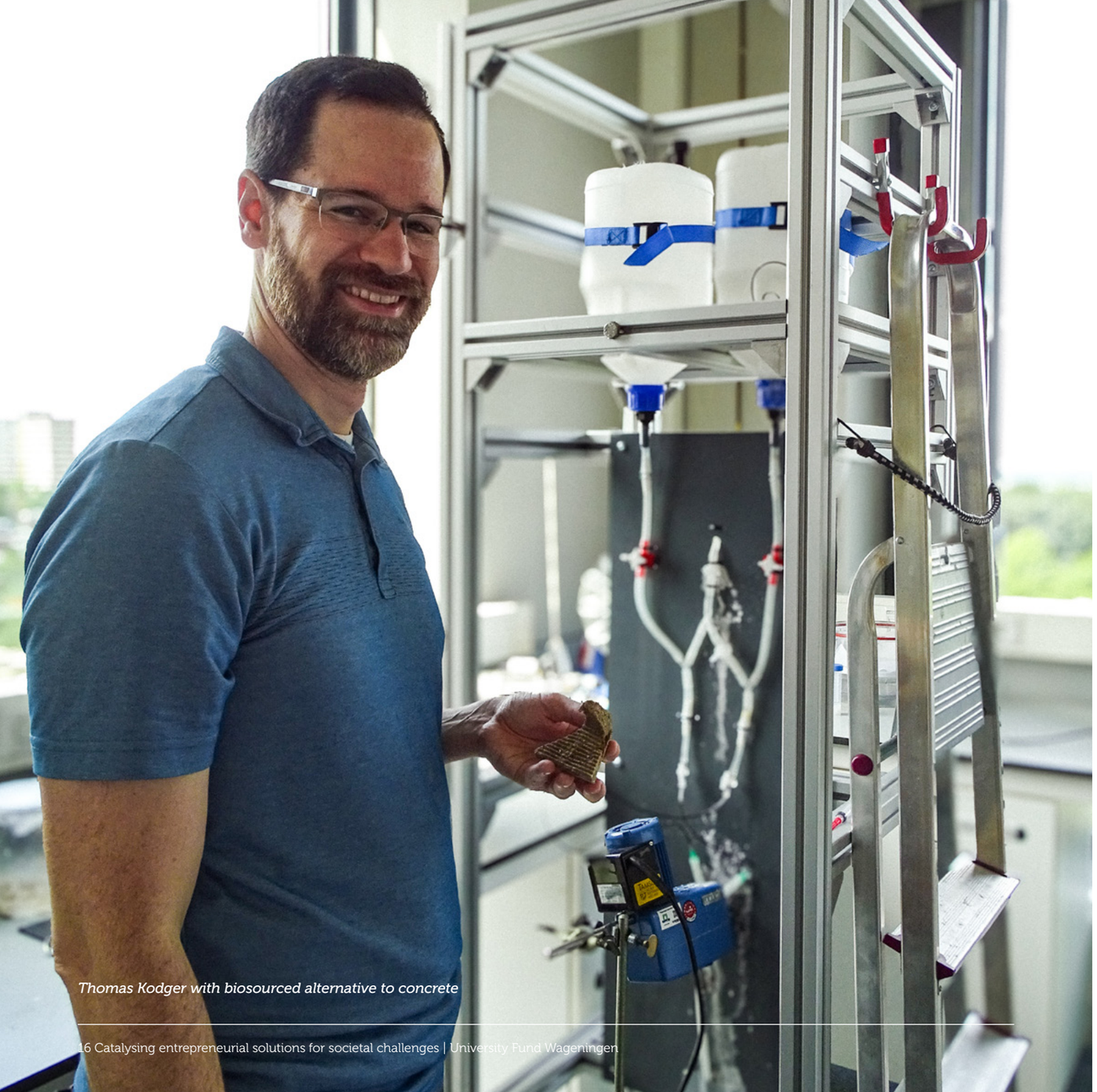


Patrick Barendse and Daniël Besselink, NASPA



Thomas Kodger with biosourced alternative to concrete

4 SeaCrete

A biosourced alternative to concrete: learning from a tiny architect beneath the sea

One of nature's most remarkable engineers is only a few centimetres long. The sandcastle worm builds its home grain by grain, using a powerful underwater glue that hardens without harmful chemical reactions. That tiny marine creature became the inspiration for Thomas Kodger and Tinka Murk to start SeaCrete.

By combining a glue inspired by the sandcastle work with waste oyster shells or coral rubble, SeaCrete created a natural building material that allows oysters and corals to settle almost immediately. Unlike concrete, which can raise the pH of surrounding seawater and has a large CO_2 footprint, SeaCrete provides a marine-friendly substrate that better mimics natural habitats. Through its collaboration with Reefolution in Kenya, the team is now also exploring applications for coral reef restoration.

> ***"If you want to have impact on your research, sometimes you have to do it yourself and make your own company."***
> Thomas Kodger

The technology was simply too new for companies to adopt. As Thomas reflects: "If you want to have impact on your research, sometimes you have to do it yourself and make your own company." WUR's entrepreneurial ecosystem helped bridge the gap between science and society, providing patent support, entrepreneurial training, funding opportunities and valuable connections with experienced entrepreneurs.

SeaCrete is now officially recognised as a **spin-off of Wageningen University & Research** and is focused on proving its technology through its first restoration projects in the Netherlands. The company has also secured pre-seed funding through **StartLife**. Its ambition is clear: replace concrete with a bio-inspired alternative that helps rebuild and restore marine ecosystems, from oyster reefs to the foundations of offshore wind farms. Inspired by one small worm, SeaCrete is proving that nature often holds the blueprint for rebuilding nature itself.

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5 Omnomyco

Combining scientific innovation with respect for nature's diversity

Across forests and ecosystems, countless wild mushroom species hold untapped potential as future ingredients. One striking example is Chicken of the Woods: a bright orange fungus with a firm, meaty texture that chefs use in place of chicken on the plate. That's a role most people don't expect from a mushroom. It's a prized delicacy, but notoriously hard to cultivate. By combining scientific innovation with respect for nature's diversity, Omnomyco is transforming how we access unique forgotten ingredients.

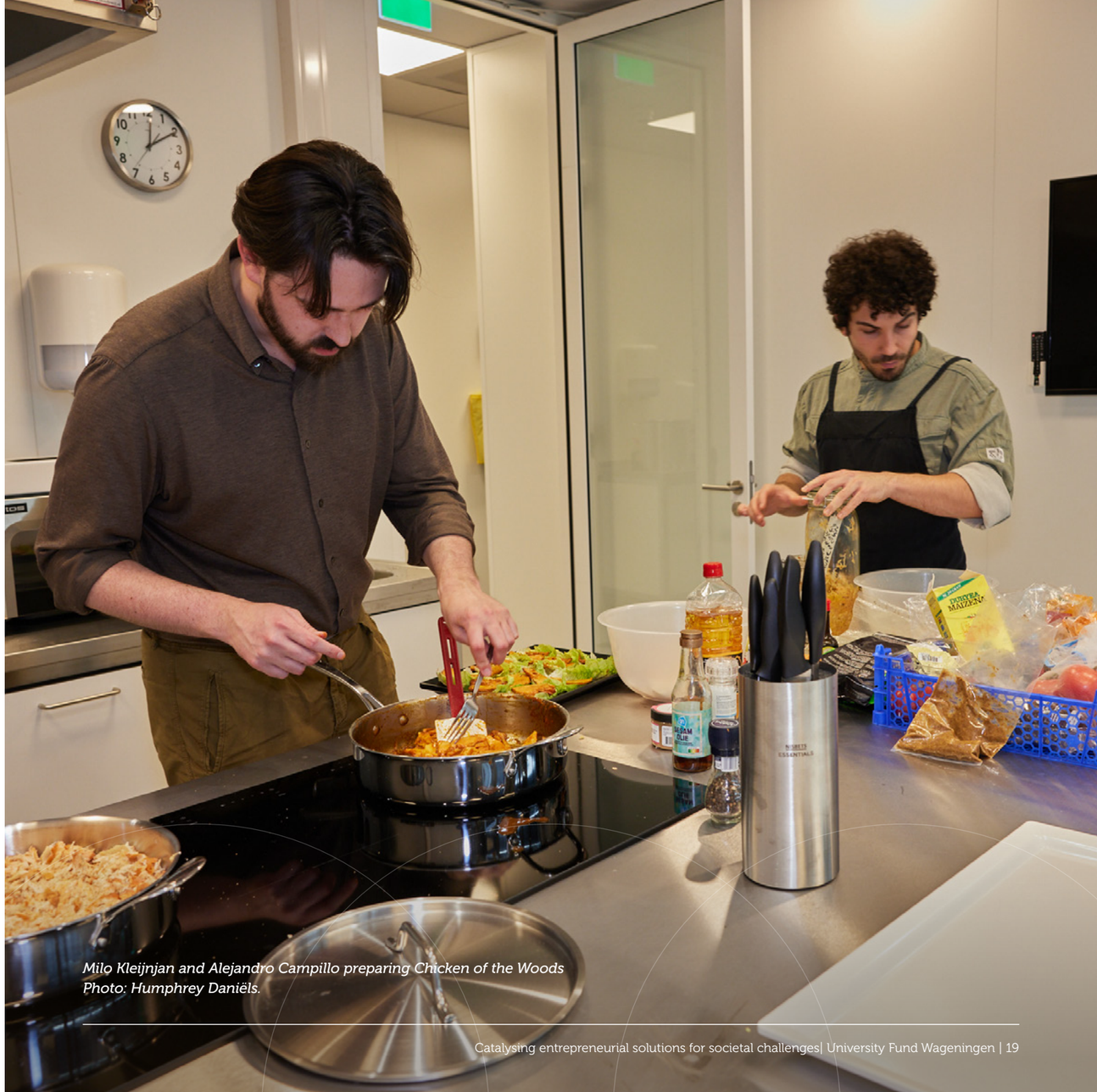
While studying Molecular Life Sciences at Wageningen University & Research, Milo Kleijnjan joined **Starthub Wageningen** to explore entrepreneurial ideas. One of these was a bamboo impact project in South Africa. While researching value from bamboo, the team started experimenting with growing mushrooms on bamboo sawdust. That raised a new question: could wild gourmet mushrooms be cultivated sustainably and at scale?

That idea became the foundation of Omnomyco. Founded by Milo Kleijnjan, Mayke Schelhaas and Alejandro Campillo, Omnomyco aims to transform seasonal wild species into consistent, high-quality products without placing additional pressure on natural ecosystems, by breeding stable, domesticated strains that any mushroom farm can grow with its existing equipment.

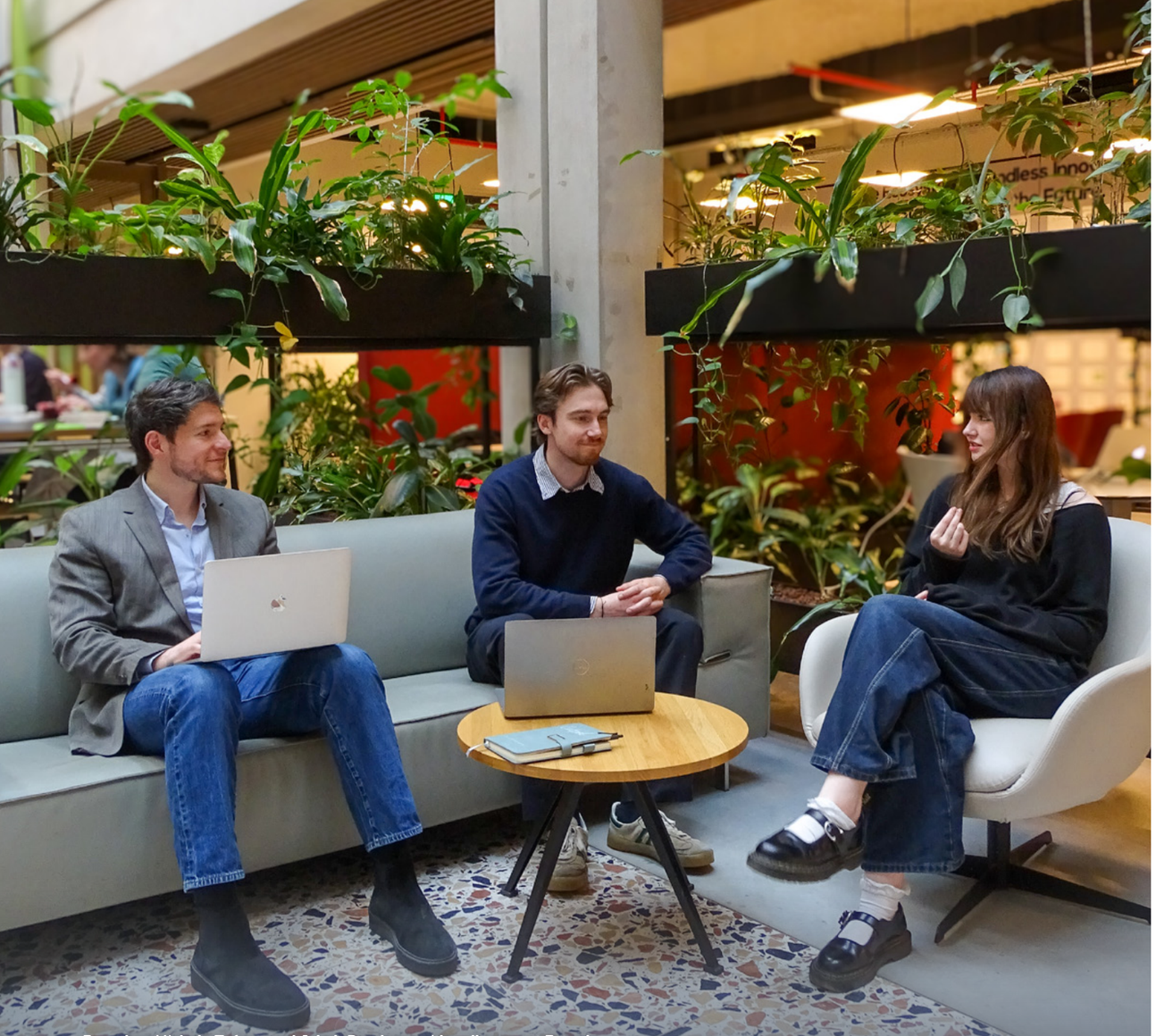
"The value of the Wageningen network lies in the openness and willingness of people to share their experiences. Speaking with other entrepreneurs in the early stages helped us refine our ideas and take the first steps towards building Omnomyco."

Milo Kleijnjan and his team won both the Future Planet Award and the Get Unstuck Award, as part of the **Wageningen Entrepreneurship Grant**. With its base in Wageningen, Omnomyco is now refining its cultivation process, expanding its team and taking the next step towards bringing forest delicacies to chefs and consumers beyond the Netherlands.

www.omnomyco.com



Milo Kleijnjan and Alejandro Campillo preparing Chicken of the Woods
Photo: Humphrey Daniëls.



Founders Michele Tufano and Jakob Romberg with colleague at Eatpol

6 Eatpol

AI powered consumer testing to the food industry

Why do so many promising food products disappear from supermarket shelves within just a few years? During his PhD at Wageningen University & Research, Michele Tufano discovered that the answer often lies not in the laboratory, but in consumers' kitchens. "While developing AI to analyse eating behaviour, I realised that food companies need to understand what happens when people use products in their own homes, because that is where real decisions about food are made," says Michele. That insight became the foundation of Eatpol, which has been officially recognised as a **WUR spin-off**.

Rather than asking consumers to rate products in sterile sensory booths, Eatpol brings product testing into people's homes. Participants document their complete experience, from opening the package to preparing, eating and storing the product, while AI analyses both behaviour and feedback. The result is a much richer understanding of why consumers embrace a product or leave it behind, enabling food companies to develop products that people genuinely choose, trust and love.

Through the **Wageningen Impact Catalyst programme**, where he received a voucher made possible by a private donation, and a **Road to Innovation Grant**, Michele validated the market and expanded his original research into a broader platform for consumer insights. "The support from **Starthub Wageningen** helped us validate our ideas and refine our approach" says Michele. Together with co-founder Jakob Romberg, Eatpol has already launched its first paid pilot, joined the **StartLife Accelerate** programme.and is now scaling its platform.

> ***"The support from Starthub Wageningen helped us validate our ideas and refine our approach."***
> Michele Tufano

By replacing assumptions with real-world consumer behaviour, Eatpol is helping food companies reduce failed product launches and create innovations that succeed where it matters most: in people's everyday lives.

www.eatpol.com

Eatpol

7 Afropulse

From research to real-world impact

What began as academic research has evolved into a growing social enterprise creating tangible impact across continents. Elisabeth Obeng, co-founder and CEO of Afropulse, was born in Italy to Ghanaian diaspora parents and experienced inequalities between Africa and Europe from an early age. During her studies and research at Wageningen University & Research, she came to see agri-food business as a bridge, connecting continents through equal trade for the achievement of sustainable and fair food systems.

Today, Afropulse is led by three co-founders. Elisabeth works alongside Lydia Konlan Madintin, who oversees sourcing and processing activities in Ghana, and Boaz van Driel, who focuses on European market development and product innovation. Together, they collaborate directly with smallholder farmers in Tamale (Northern Ghana), particularly women, creating reliable market opportunities and strengthening local value chains. Cowpeas are transformed into nutritious functional ingredients, allowing more value to remain within the region.

Cowpeas are transformed into nutritious functional ingredients, allowing more value to remain within the region.

In recent years, Afropulse has taken important steps forward. In 2025, the company received the **WUR Spin-off Label**, recognising its success in translating applied research into societal value. Additional support through the **Lizzy Award**, the Wageningen Impact Catalyst **Pay-it-Forward Voucher** and the Naomi Grant enabled the team to conduct pilot projects, develop processing protocols and introduce their products to potential European customers. More recently, support from the Dutch Embassy in Ghana and Oost NL has strengthened their ambition to create lasting socio-economic and environmental impact bridging continents.

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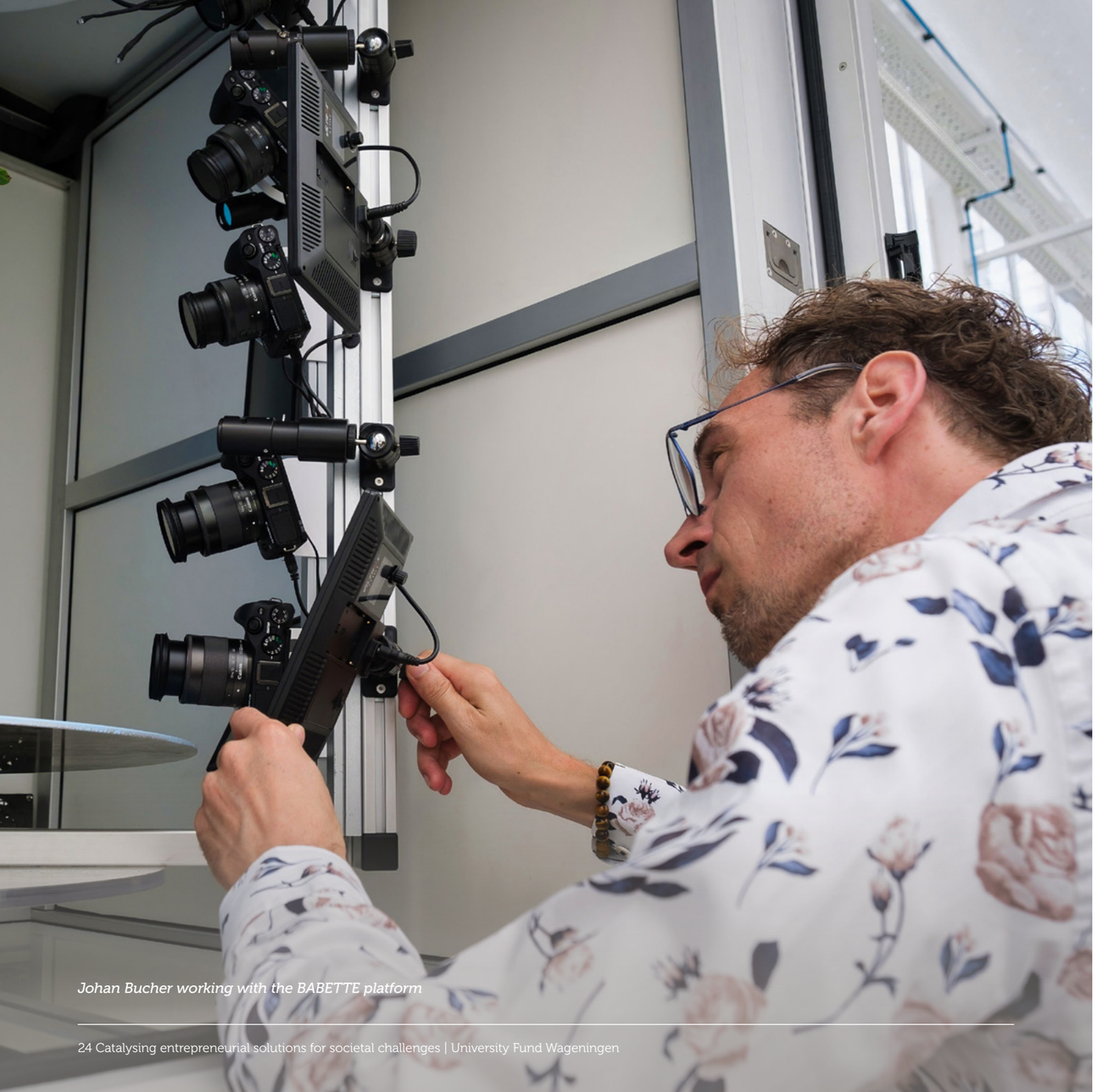
Female farmers in Tamale taking part in agronomic training led by the Afropulse local team, laying the foundation for food-safe and high-quality ingredient production through the Dutch Embassy-funded project.



Johan Bucher working with the BABETTE platform

8 BABETTE

Bringing plant growth to life

What if you could travel back in time to see exactly how a plant developed? That question inspired researcher Johan Bucher and his colleagues to create BABETTE: an innovative platform that captures plant growth in unprecedented detail. More than a camera system, BABETTE is a fully equipped growth chamber that allows researchers to observe, analyse and revisit every stage of a plant's development in a controlled environment.

"For years, we've faced the same challenge in plant science, crucial moments in a plant's development were simply too easy to miss through field observations or conventional time-lapse recordings. With BABETTE, we've fundamentally changed that," says Johan Bucher. "By combining rotating cameras with advanced imaging technology, we can effectively rewind and fast-forward through a plant's life, revealing growth patterns and developmental processes that were previously impossible to capture. This opens up exciting new possibilities for plant breeding, crop research and the development of more sustainable agricultural systems."

The development of BABETTE accelerated through WUR's Engineering Doctorate (EngD) programme and Wageningen Technical Solutions (WTS). Its transition from research prototype to market-ready technology was further strengthened by the **Wageningen Impact Catalyst** programme, which provided entrepreneurial coaching, venture development support and access to networks to prepare the technology for real-world application and commercialisation. BABETTE is officially recognised as **spin-off of Wageningen University & Research.**

The first BABETTE platform has already been delivered to an international customer, with further applications in plant breeding, crop research, and sustainable agriculture on the horizon.

"Winning the **Lizzy Award** enabled us to advance our two existing designs into a fully re engineered third generation solution," Johan Bucher explains." Wageningen Technical Solutions translated our ambitions into reality by incorporating our complete wish list of additional technical insights and improvements into this new design. Our next step is to secure funding to bring this third generation system to the market."

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Our Manifesto

We stand for a healthy and liveable future on Earth

We make a demonstrable contribution to a more sustainable world

We do this by building on our rich history spanning 75 years

By connecting special donors with special, talented WUR academics and WUR research

By stimulating scientific talent and entrepreneurship

By seeking solutions to today's societal challenges

By finding new ways to make a difference off the beaten track

With philanthropic partners who play a vital role in fulfilling our mission and whose valuable gifts facilitate our meaningful work

We talk to donors about their passions and motivations, as we value a personal connection with our partners who are committed to making a difference with us

Welcome to University Fund Wageningen!

About Starthub Wageningen

Starthub Wageningen is the pre-incubation space of Wageningen University & Research, bringing together aspiring entrepreneurs, experts and peers to help transform innovative ideas into impactful ventures through training, mentoring and a strong entrepreneurial community.

→starthub wageningen

Community Partners

- Wageningen University & Research
- University Fund Wageningen
- Starthub Wageningen
- StartLife Agrifoodtech Accelerator
- WUR Student Challenges
- Fablab
- Fastlane
- Center for Unusual Collaborations
- Biotech Booster
- Thematic Technology Transfer (TTT) Greentech
- And many more

Wageningen Impact Catalyst advisory board

- Anja Sinke, Coordinator collaboration programme energy storage at Energy Innovation NL
- Nynke Geerts, Counsel at Coupry
- Christiaan Koolloos, New business leader
- Gitte Schober, non-executive advisor
- Robbin Reijnen, Academic coordinator entrepreneurship at Wageningen University & Research

Let's support
entrepreneurial changemakers!

At Wageningen University & Research, students, researchers and recent graduates build on interdisciplinary research to develop science-based ideas that address global challenges. WUR's research-driven, problem-based education equips students and professionals with the knowledge, skills and perspectives to become responsible changemakers. Yet turning great ideas into real-world solutions requires more than scientific excellence or education; it also takes guidance, networks and early-stage funding.

With your support, University Fund Wageningen helps entrepreneurial changemakers across the WUR community take their first steps, from developing business models and building prototypes to validating their solutions. Your contribution can help bridge the gap between a promising idea and an innovation ready to make a difference.

universityfundwageningen.eu/entrepreneurship

Together, we drive sustainable solutions, economic vitality and societal well-being

WAGENINGEN UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH

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creating a difference together