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Engagement: Engaging Success

Livy Seirer

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Engaging success

Two university programs lead to new corporate partnerships

Building the foundation for a new tech startup

By *Livy Seirer*

A Kansas State University software development team that created the nationally used PEARS software program is now putting down roots in Manhattan.

The team has opened Canopy, a public benefit limited liability company that will continue to grow PEARS and serve new clients with community-focused programs.

“Our vision is to help social impact programs by providing the technical tools and evaluation resources needed to maximize their success,” said Aaron Schroeder, Canopy president and member of the K-State team that developed PEARS. “Our team has the privilege to serve some amazing clients who are dedicated to community-focused programs. We’re thrilled to continue that work and expand our reach in collaboration with both K-State and industry partners.”

PEARS — Program Evaluation and Reporting System — is a university-patented, web-based data management software that helps nutrition education professionals and extension administrators manage program data and demonstrate impact.

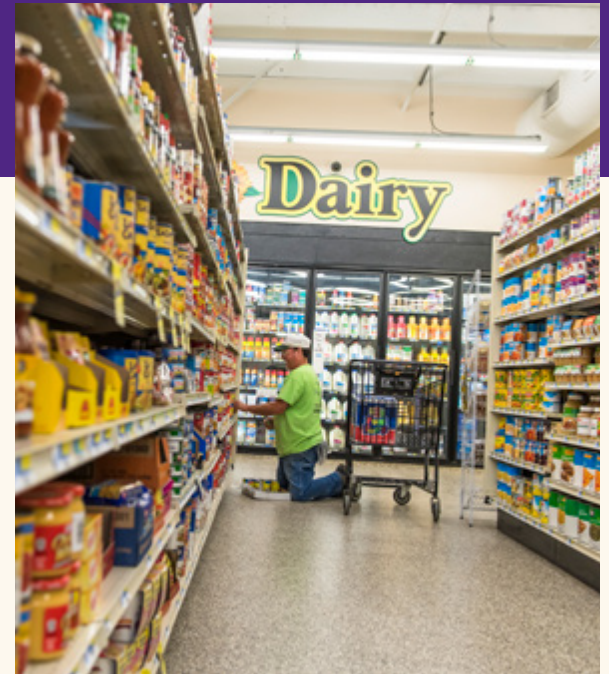
The PEARS system was originally developed through a collaboration between the Office of Educational Innovation and Evaluation, or OEIE, in the College of Education and K-State Research and Extension in 2015. It was initially created to help Kansas manage its SNAP-Ed, or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education, reporting system.

“We were able to develop and grow the software package within OEIE to the point that there was enough outside interest to license and commercialize the project,” said Debbie Mercer, dean of the College of Education. “This was a unique opportunity to collaborate with K-State Innovation Partners to commercially deploy a software package in a way that we’ve never done before.”

During a five-year incubation period within the university, the PEARS system was adopted by SNAP-Ed programs in 37 states and eight statewide extension programs. In 2021, PEARS was selected as the national SNAP-Ed reporting system by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. As a stand-alone entity, Canopy will be able to support existing PEARS users, further grow and deploy the PEARS software in new markets and develop new innovative technologies.

“We’re proud of the role we played in getting PEARS up and running,” said Ernie Minton, dean of the College of Agriculture and director of K-State Research and Extension. “The success of this project will undoubtedly pave the way for other technical innovations coming out of K-State.”

The unique licensing and commercialization process carried out by K-State Innovation Partners and the PEARS team establishes a framework for future technologies coming out of K-State. [K](#)



A K-State-patented data management software called PEARS is assisting community-focused programs. PEARS was initially created to help Kansas manage its SNAP-Ed, or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education, reporting system.



A new strategic alliance agreement between K-State and Elanco Animal Health Inc. focuses on research to improve the health of companion animals and livestock.

A strategic alliance to improve animal health

By Erin Pennington

Kansas State University and Elanco Animal Health Inc. are combining efforts to tackle innovation for companion animal and livestock health.

A five-year strategic alliance agreement between the university and Elanco will allow for collaborative research and intellectual property licensing for commercialization activities. Researchers will focus on activities supporting sustainable practices in livestock production and pet health; vector-borne and emerging disease prevention and treatment; and advanced understanding of the microbiome in animals. Elanco's research and development model includes attracting leading innovators as a partner of choice. They have chosen K-State as a primary key veterinary partner.

"K-State and Elanco have many areas of shared strengths and goals. The alignment is a natural fit," said Bonnie Rush, dean of the K-State College of Veterinary Medicine. "The exchange of scientific expertise between talented scientists from both entities will create a special environment for rapid advancements. The cumulative experience and balance of science and commercialization ensure technologic advancements will achieve practical application."

One of the key objectives of the partnership is to establish novel approaches to increase sustainable practices, reducing the carbon footprint of livestock production, with the ultimate goal of providing

innovative solutions to veterinarians and producers to maintain healthy animals using safe and efficient solutions.

Elanco will collaborate with K-State faculty, embed scientists in K-State laboratories and utilize specialized research resources to engage in fundamental and applied collaborative research. Through the partnership, Elanco will support K-State graduate students, fellows and faculty and facilitate an exchange of expertise through researcher exchange programs.

"An alliance with Kansas State University is truly a win-win for both organizations," said Jose Simas, executive vice president of the U.S. Farm Animal business for Elanco. "It provides Elanco with an opportunity to engage with experts beyond our own walls, focusing on timely innovation and practical solutions. Meanwhile, K-State has the opportunity to utilize the commercial expertise of a leading animal health organization with nearly 70 years of industry experience."

The collaboration allows research that is at the forefront of innovation for the monitoring of new diseases to tailor research programs and provide product solutions, as well as development of innovative approaches to existing vector-borne diseases by leveraging common strengths. [k](#)