WARF
Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation

FACT SHEET
WARF History

The Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation (WARF) is the private, non-profit organization formed in 1925 to support scientific research at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. It achieves its mission by patenting inventions arising from the university's laboratories and licensing them to companies for the benefit of the university, the inventors and society.

The idea for WARF was conceived by Harry Steenbock, a UW-Madison biochemistry professor. In 1923, he discovered that irradiation with ultraviolet light increased Vitamin D content. His invention held the potential to prevent rickets, a devastating bone disease brought about in children due to a Vitamin D deficiency. He knew that patenting his invention was the only way the technology could be regulated, and he moved to file a patent application. When he was approached by the Quaker Oats Company with a deal worth nearly $1 million to buy the exclusive rights to the invention, Steenbock felt strongly that the income should be turned over to the University to further scientific research.

Steenbock approached UW–Madison administrators with his idea to create an agency that would protect discoveries made by university researchers, ensure the technologies were developed properly, and return financial gains to university research programs. In June of 1925, the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation was officially founded. It was funded by eight alumni and governed by five volunteer trustees.

In February 1927, WARF issued its first license agreement with the Quaker Oats Company, which would use Steenbock’s discovery to fortify the Vitamin D content of breakfast cereals. WARF also licensed the technology to pharmaceutical companies to develop Viosterol, a medicinal form of Vitamin D. As a result of the products developed using Steenbock’s discovery, childhood rickets was virtually eradicated. In the intervening years, WARF has contributed more that $750 million to fund research, build facilities, purchase land and support numerous faculty and graduate student fellowships at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Over the years, WARF has reached licensing agreement that have resulted in the development of products that have made tens of millions of lives safer and healthier. They include: **Karl Paul Link's** discovery of coumarin, the basis for Coumadin®, the world's most widely prescribed blood thinner for treating cardiovascular disease, and its counterpart, warfarin, still the most widely used rodenticide worldwide; a storage solution for transplant organs developed by **Folkert Belzer** and **James Southard**, which dramatically increased the amount of time organs could remain viable outside the body and significantly expanded organ availability; **Paul Moran's** magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) innovation that has greatly improved the diagnosis of trauma-induced injury and various disease states, and **Charles Mistretta's** MRI advances, which have done the same for the diagnosis and treatment of cardiovascular disease; and pharmaceuticals based on **Hector DeLuca's** Vitamin D derivatives, which have been prescribed worldwide to treat bone disorders and other diseases resulting from Vitamin D deficiencies.

More recently, **Dr. James Thomson's** isolation of human embryonic stem cells has paved the way toward the development of treatments for currently incurable diseases, including Parkinson's disease and diabetes.

WARF continues to cultivate future successes by completing more than 100 license agreements on UW–Madison technologies each year, agreements that hold the promise of advancing human health and safety.

WARF Affiliates

WiCell Research Institute
WiCell is a non-profit subsidiary of WARF that was created to support human embryonic stem cell research on the UW-Madison campus. WiCell's mission is to provide cells to academic scientists all over the world and to engage in research using the scientific expertise of UW-Madison researchers.

WiSys
WARF created WiSys Technology Foundation in 2000 as a non-profit subsidiary to provide technology transfer services to the UW-Systems 12 four-year campuses, 13 two-year colleges and UW-Extension. WiSys works to facilitate technology transfer at each system school and also collaborates with local businesses and economic development professionals to bring UW System technologies and human resources into the surrounding communities.