

Director, AgBioResearch

Leadership Profile

Fall 2026



Executive Summary

Michigan State University (MSU) seeks a collaborative and strategic leader to serve as the next Director of [AgBioResearch](#). Applications, nominations, and expressions of interest are invited.

Michigan State is the nation's premier land-grant university and one of the top research universities in the world. As a member of both the Association of American Universities (AAU) and the Big Ten Academic Alliance, MSU is nationally recognized for its academic excellence, impactful research, and global outreach. It is also known for its Spartan grit and resilience. MSU is stronger because of its community, which includes more than 51,000 students, 5,600 faculty and staff, and a network of over half a million living alumni who are extremely loyal supporters and cheerleaders for the university.

AgBioResearch traces its origins to the Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station, established in 1888, and remains central to MSU's commitment to innovation, discovery, and public impact. Reporting to the Associate Provost and Dean of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Dr. Matthew Daum, the Director of AgBioResearch oversees a major component of Michigan State University's land-grant mission, supporting more than 275 scientists across seven colleges and a significant portion of the \$228 million in annual research expenditures. The Director leads a complex statewide organization with an operating budget of more than \$51 million, eight direct reports, approximately 25 staff, and a network of on- and off-campus research facilities. With responsibility for research administration, evaluation and analytics, infrastructure, and long-term planning, the Director helps ensure AgBioResearch's continued impact and success in Michigan and beyond.

Building on a strong foundation of scientific excellence, stakeholder trust, and statewide impact, the Director will guide AgBioResearch through a rapidly evolving funding and policy landscape while advancing solutions that strengthen agriculture, food systems, natural resources, environmental sustainability, and economic development. Significant opportunities lie ahead, including modernizing critical infrastructure, leveraging recent investments in greenhouse and dairy research facilities, and securing new sources of support to ensure the long-term competitiveness and sustainability of Michigan's agricultural and natural resource sectors.

The Director will serve as a highly visible advocate for agricultural and natural resources research, cultivating relationships with policymakers, industry leaders, commodity groups, funding agencies, donors, and community stakeholders while strengthening collaboration across MSU. Working closely with university and college leadership, faculty, and MSU Extension, the successful candidate will align research priorities with stakeholder needs and expand the impact of AgBioResearch across Michigan and beyond. This role offers the opportunity to foster a people-centered culture, break down organizational silos, elevate MSU's global reputation, and position AgBioResearch at the forefront of innovation in areas ranging from climate resilience and advanced food systems to emerging technologies and interdisciplinary discovery, ensuring continued fulfillment of the university's land-grant mission for decades to come.

The Director of AgBioResearch must possess a demonstrated record of visionary leadership in a complex research-intensive environment and the ability to lead a broad, multidisciplinary enterprise. Candidates must have an earned doctorate and a distinguished record of scholarly achievement sufficient to merit appointment as a tenured professor within the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at Michigan State University.

To submit a nomination or express personal interest in this position, please see Procedure for Candidacy at the end of this document.

Opportunities and Expectations for Leadership

MSU's next Director of AgBioResearch will assume leadership of one of the nation's most comprehensive and influential agricultural research enterprises at a pivotal moment. As the research engine that is a core component of MSU's \$1B research enterprise and stewards a statewide network of research and extension centers, AgBioResearch is uniquely positioned to advance solutions that strengthen Michigan agriculture, natural resources, food systems, environmental sustainability, and economic development. Building upon a strong foundation of stakeholder trust, research excellence, and global impact, the next Director will have an extraordinary opportunity to shape the future of agricultural research in Michigan while navigating significant changes in funding, infrastructure, and the broader research landscape.

Secure and Diversify Funding to Sustain AgBioResearch's Mission

A top priority will be ensuring the long-term financial sustainability of AgBioResearch. State appropriations and federal capacity funds remain critical, yet shifting federal priorities, increasing competition for research dollars, and uncertainty in public funding require a more diversified and strategic approach. The next Director must advocate effectively with state and federal policymakers, strengthen relationships with commodity organizations and industry partners, and identify new opportunities for support. Particular attention will be needed to sustain and grow signature initiatives such as Project GREEN, the Michigan Alliance for Animal Agriculture, and the Agricultural Resiliency Program, while positioning AgBioResearch to compete successfully for emerging federal, corporate, and interdisciplinary funding opportunities.

Advance a Strategic Vision for Infrastructure Renewal and Research Competitiveness

The next Director will be expected to champion major capital priorities, including continued development of the new dairy facility, continued modernization of greenhouse infrastructure, and investment in research centers, farms, forestry facilities, and specialized laboratories across the state. Success will require balancing immediate operational needs with a long-term vision for ensuring that MSU remains nationally competitive and capable of supporting cutting-edge research, teaching, and outreach while developing more sustainable and diversified funding models for the university's research farms and facilities.

Strengthen Partnerships Across Michigan and Beyond

Michigan's agricultural and natural resources economy is distinguished by its remarkable diversity, encompassing traditional row crops, specialty crops, animal agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and emerging industries. The next Director will have the opportunity to deepen AgBioResearch's partnerships with growers, commodity groups, industry leaders, state agencies, legislators, and community stakeholders while fostering stronger collaboration across MSU. Success will depend upon quickly gaining an appreciation for the breadth and complexity of Michigan agriculture, serving as a trusted convener, and ensuring that research investments align with stakeholder needs and emerging opportunities.

Foster Collaboration, Communication, and Organizational Culture

The next Director will collaborate extensively with the Associate Provost and Dean, MSU's Office of Research and Innovation, fellow associate deans, department chairs, and directors to advance AgBioResearch's priorities while contributing to broader college and university goals. They must possess a natural curiosity about disciplines and areas of research beyond their own expertise and proactively foster connections across the institution. The successful leader will be skilled at convening diverse stakeholders, building consensus, and promoting transparency and trust, while ensuring that resources, opportunities, and investments are allocated thoughtfully

and equitably across AgBioResearch's and CANR's broad portfolio of research programs, facilities, and stakeholder communities.

Position AgBioResearch for the Future of Agricultural and Natural Resources Research

As agriculture confronts challenges related to labor shortages, climate resilience, environmental stewardship, food security, and changing market demands, AgBioResearch is well-positioned to lead innovation. The next Director will have the opportunity to think boldly about emerging opportunities in areas such as automation, robotics, artificial intelligence, human, animal, and plant health, advanced food systems and safety, and interdisciplinary research. The successful leader will honor AgBioResearch's long-standing strengths while encouraging innovative approaches, leveraging data and analytics to inform investments, and building collaborations that allow MSU to remain at the forefront of agricultural discovery and application.

Champion the Land-Grant Mission and Elevate AgBioResearch's Influence

The next Director will serve as one of the university's most visible advocates for the role of agricultural and natural resources research in improving lives across Michigan and beyond. The Director must embrace MSU's land-grant mission, appreciate both fundamental and applied research, and effectively translate the value of research to a broad range of audiences. The Director must engage successfully with faculty and staff, producers, policymakers, industry leaders, university leadership, and the public, ensuring that AgBioResearch's contributions are recognized and that its priorities remain central to MSU's research, outreach, and economic development agenda.



Professional Qualifications and Personal Qualities

The Director of AgBioResearch must possess a demonstrated record of visionary leadership in a complex research-intensive environment and the ability to lead a broad, multidisciplinary enterprise that advances the land-grant mission through discovery, innovation, and impact. Candidates must have an earned doctorate and a distinguished record of scholarly achievement sufficient to merit appointment as a tenured professor within the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at Michigan State University.

Additionally, the successful candidate will possess:

- A record of distinguished leadership in higher education, agricultural research, natural resources, environmental sciences, or a related field, with demonstrated success leading large, complex organizations and multidisciplinary teams.
- Experience overseeing substantial financial, human, and physical resources, including budgets, research infrastructure, research centers, and sponsored research portfolios.
- The ability to articulate and advance a bold strategic vision for AgBioResearch that strengthens Michigan State University's leadership in agriculture, food systems, natural resources, environmental sustainability, and related research domains.
- A deep appreciation for the land-grant mission and a commitment to translating research discoveries into meaningful outcomes for producers, communities, industry partners, policymakers, and society.
- Demonstrated success in fostering a culture of research excellence, supporting faculty achievement, and advancing collaborative scholarship across diverse disciplines and organizational boundaries.
- A record of success securing and advocating for public and private investments in research, as well as cultivating productive relationships with government agencies, commodity groups, industry leaders, foundations, and other strategic partners.
- Exceptional interpersonal, communication, and relationship-building skills, with the ability to effectively engage faculty, staff, students, alumni, stakeholders, legislators, donors, and funding agencies.
- A highly collaborative leadership style characterized by transparency, accessibility, integrity, and a commitment to shared governance and inclusive decision-making.
- Demonstrated success in building partnerships across colleges, disciplines, and external organizations to advance interdisciplinary research, innovation, and stakeholder impact.
- A strong commitment to mentoring and developing faculty, staff, and future research leaders (including graduate students) while fostering an environment that supports creativity, innovation, accountability, and continuous improvement.
- The ability and willingness to serve as an effective advocate for AgBioResearch and Michigan State University at the state, national, and international levels, elevating the visibility and impact of the institution's research enterprise.
- A demonstrated commitment to fostering an environment that values diverse perspectives, promotes belonging, and enables all members of the community to thrive and contribute at the highest levels.
- Impeccable personal and professional integrity, sound judgment, emotional intelligence, and a leadership presence that inspires trust, confidence, and collaboration.

AgBioResearch

Founded on February 26, 1888, as the Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station, Michigan State University AgBioResearch (ABR) is part of a nationwide network of agricultural experiment stations created after the passage of the Hatch Act to benefit farmers and deliver agrarian advancements. Today, its focus has broadened to include a robust research portfolio covering food, health, and the environment.

AgBioResearch is composed of a network of on-campus laboratories and research centers across Michigan. Over 300 faculty across seven colleges conduct research as part of the ABR portfolio. In addition to the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, ABR is affiliated with the College of Arts and Letters, College of Communication Arts and Sciences, College of Engineering, College of Natural Science, College of Osteopathic Medicine, College of Social Science, and the College of Veterinary Medicine.

The research programs of MSU AgBioResearch help to keep Michigan agriculture and natural resources industries competitive, foster stewardship of natural resources, ensure food safety, build stronger, healthier families and communities, and spur economic development throughout the state. The mission of AgBioResearch - to engage in innovative, leading-edge research that ensures the wise use of agricultural, natural, and community resources and enhances the quality of life in Michigan, the nation, and the world - is an integral part of Michigan State University's responsibilities as a land-grant university. Researchers across the MSU campus seek to discover economically feasible, scientifically based solutions to global challenges such as climate change, water issues, invasive species, and food safety and security.

ABR's success is based on partnerships with the Michigan agriculture and natural resources sectors, MSU Extension, commodity organizations, governmental funding agencies, and exceptional legislative support at the state and federal levels. Industry and stakeholder input heavily guide its research in meeting specific needs and addressing emerging threats.

Centers

AgBioResearch activities are conducted in laboratories, greenhouses, and several south campus experimental lands in East Lansing. Research also takes place at the 14 off-campus field research centers, ranging from a forest biomass innovation center in the Upper Peninsula to fruit and vegetable research centers in the southernmost counties of the state. ABR's [research centers and on-campus research facilities](#) provide growers, natural resource managers, and commodity groups with critical information they need to remain viable and competitive in the global economy.

Programs and Institutes

- [Project GREEN](#)
- [Michigan Alliance for Animal Agriculture](#)
- [Agricultural Resiliency Program](#)
- [Partnership for Ecosystem Research and Management](#)
- [Institute of Water Research](#)
- [Center for PFAS Research](#)
- [Plant Resilience Institute](#)



Extension and AgBioResearch State Advisory Council

Michigan State University Extension and MSU AgBioResearch work hand in hand to turn knowledge into action. Together, they connect people, communities, and businesses across the state, nation, and world with MSU's research-based expertise.

AgBioResearch recognizes that the research is stronger when it reflects real-world needs and when citizens are engaged. That's why the MSU Extension and AgBioResearch State Advisory Council plays a critical role. Established in 1998, the council helps ensure that MSU Extension and AgBioResearch remain responsive, relevant, and connected to the communities and industries we serve. The council includes up to 25 members, who provide insight on emerging issues, identify opportunities for collaboration, and help elevate the value of Extension education and AgBioResearch discovery with policymakers and key stakeholders. The council includes one member from each of the 14 MSU Extension districts, with three members reflecting Southeast Michigan's population in District 11. There are also three representatives from AgBioResearch centers and up to six additional members appointed by the directors of MSU Extension and AgBioResearch to represent partner organizations and agencies.

Scientists

- More than 300 researchers from seven colleges across the MSU campus:
- Agriculture and Natural Resources
- Arts & Letters
- Communication Arts and Sciences
- Engineering
- Natural Science
- Social Science
- Veterinary Medicine

Priorities

- Establishing a healthy organizational culture built on trust, transparency, a growth mindset, and collaboration.
- Sound financial stewardship, including new infrastructure projects, and self-sustaining budgets for farm and experimental stations
- Modernized greenhouses, dairy infrastructure, anaerobic digester expansion, and Pavilion arena expansion
- With the Dean and Associate Provost, and the Associate Dean of Research, refresh the research portfolio strategy to align with MSU's One Health initiative, the Office of Research and Innovation, Michigan stakeholder needs, and differentiated research areas of distinction for MSU
- Relationship building and strong partnership development with stakeholders, including faculty, staff, state legislators, industry, foundations, and national organizations

About Michigan State University

Overview

Michigan State University has been advancing the common good with uncommon will for more than 165 years. The nation's premier land-grant university, MSU, was founded with the goal of democratizing higher education and bringing science and innovation into everyday life.

Today, MSU makes an impact in communities from East Lansing to East Africa as it pushes the boundaries of discovery, expands opportunities, and advances equity to create a better, safer, and healthier world for all.



One of the world's leading public research universities and a member of the Association of American Universities, MSU offers nationally ranked and recognized academic, undergraduate research, residential college, and service-learning programs, and is a leader in education abroad among public universities.

A diverse and inclusive academic community, MSU enrolls more than 50,000 students from all 50 states and nearly 140 countries, employs nearly 2,000 tenure-system faculty members, and offers more than 400 programs of study in 17 degree-granting colleges.

An indication of MSU's excellence and impact is its selection by the U.S. Department of Energy Office of Science to design and establish the Facility for Rare Isotope Beams – the preeminent user facility of its type in the world. Opened in 2022, the facility provides research opportunities for scientists from around the globe, fueling breakthrough applications while developing the next generation of scientific leaders.

Mission

MSU is an inclusive, academic community known for its traditionally strong academic disciplines and professional programs, as well as its liberal arts foundation. MSU's cross- and interdisciplinary enterprises connect the sciences, humanities, and professions in practical, sustainable, and innovative ways to address society's rapidly changing needs.

As a public research-intensive, land-grant university funded in part by the state of Michigan, MSU's mission is to advance knowledge and transform lives by:

providing outstanding undergraduate, graduate, and professional education to promising, qualified students in order to prepare them to contribute fully to society as globally engaged citizen leaders;

conducting research of the highest caliber that seeks to answer questions and create solutions in order to expand human understanding and make a positive difference, both locally and globally;

advancing outreach, engagement, and economic development activities that are innovative, research-driven, and lead to a better quality of life for individuals and communities, at home and around the world.

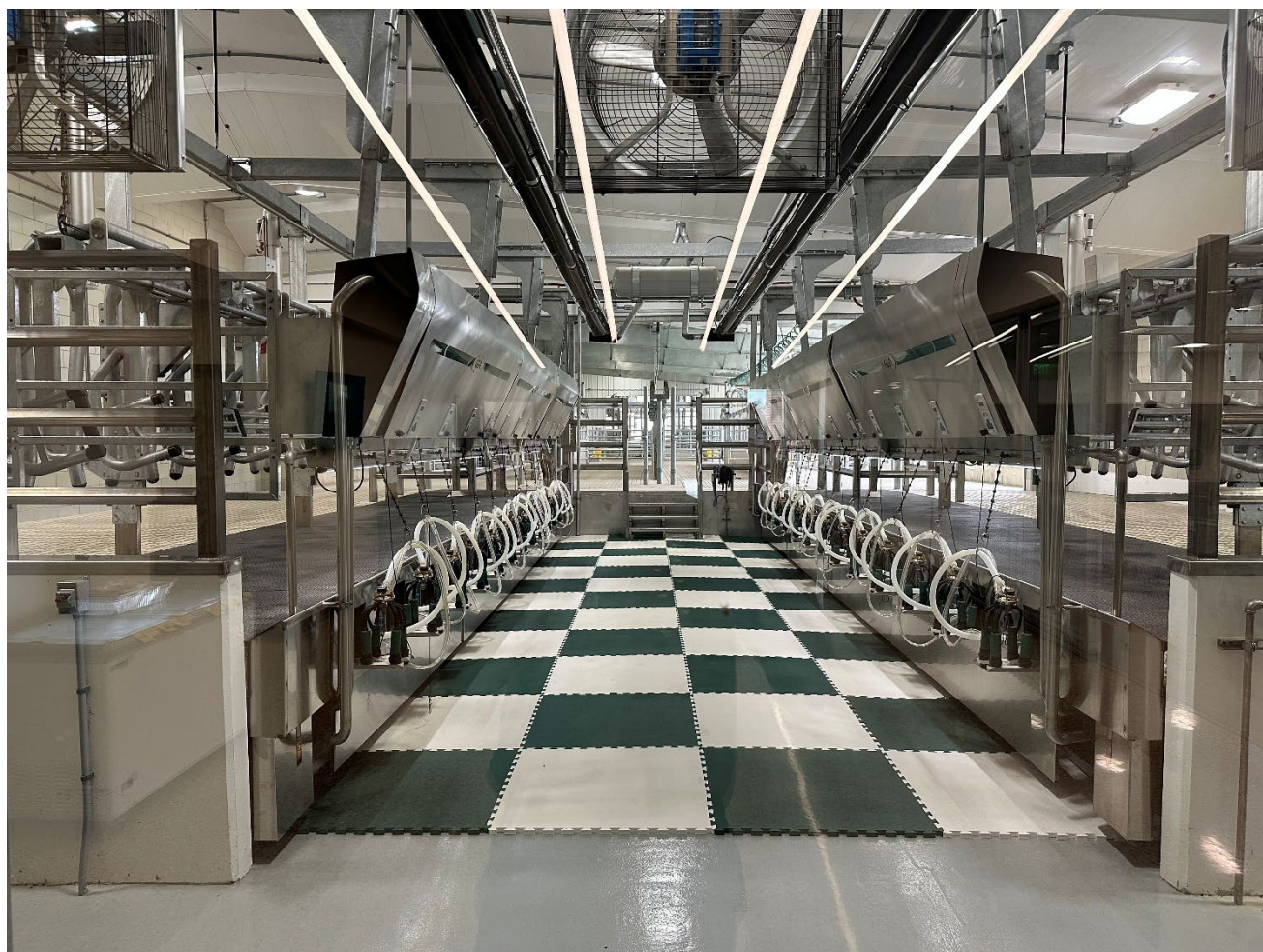
MSU Strategic Plan 2030

The strategic plan articulates a shared vision for MSU, shaped through an inclusive process that incorporated the input of many voices. It focuses on six major thematic areas that will guide the University's collective efforts moving forward. More information can be found here: [Overview](#) | [Strategic Plan](#) | [Michigan State University](#)

College of Agriculture & Natural Resources

Building relationships, solving problems, and meeting the needs of Michigan residents and the people of the world have been the focus of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (CANR) for more than 160 years.

In 1855, the Agricultural College of the State of Michigan, now known as Michigan State University, was founded to provide a practical education to all citizens regardless of social class. It was the first institution of higher learning in the United States to teach scientific agriculture and to educate students to become farmers, engineers, educators, and scientists. The CANR continues to lead advancements in agricultural and natural resources [research](#), [scholarship](#), and [outreach](#).



Areas of study:

- **Agriculture: Plant & Animals**

Programs in this area provide students with hands-on learning experiences in a wide variety of fields such as animal science, agribusiness management, and entomology.

- **Built Environments: Construction & Design, Packaging**

Programs in this area provide students with hands-on learning experiences in a wide variety of fields such as construction management, interior design, and landscape architecture.

The globally top-ranked School of Packaging holds the prestigious reputation of being the first, the largest, and the most comprehensive packaging school in higher education. It is the only school in the United States to offer a packaging Ph.D. degree.

- **Business: Management & Economics**

Programs in this area investigate the complex interaction between economies, policies, governments & regulations, supply chains, commodities, and consumers across the country and around the world.

- **Human Health: Food & Nutrition**

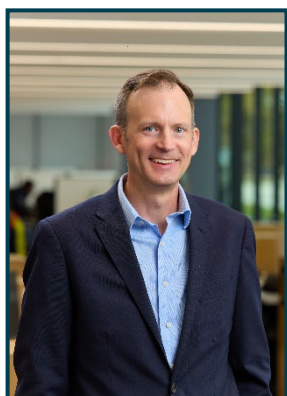
Programs in this area provide students with hands-on learning experiences in a wide variety of fields such as dietetics, food and nutritional sciences, packaging, and biosystems engineering.

- **Natural Resources: Sustainable Environments**

Programs in this area provide students with hands-on learning experiences in a wide variety of fields such as fisheries and wildlife, environmental economics and management, and forestry.

Leadership

Matthew Daum, Dean of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources



Matthew Daum is the associate provost and dean of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, or CANR. Daum was named dean in June 2025, after serving as interim dean of the college since July 2024. Prior to being named interim dean, Daum served as director of the MSU School of Packaging — where he had earned his bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees — and as assistant dean of corporate relations and strategy for CANR. Prior to his return to his alma mater in 2020, Daum had a 26-year career at HP Inc. (formerly Hewlett-Packard) based in Boise, Idaho, including roles as global director of engineering and global director of product marketing.



East Lansing

Michigan State University is located in [East Lansing](#), a vibrant college town just three miles from Michigan's capital, Lansing, the hard-working heart of Michigan.

The area offers countless things to do, see, and experience — from art galleries, concerts, restaurants, gardens, parks, and trails. And you don't have to venture far to discover Michigan's sandy beaches, ski slopes, and metropolitan life.

As the seasons change, so does Michigan State University. From vibrant fall color to blankets of fresh snow to spring blossoms on MSU's sprawling park-like campus, you'll never tire of the scenery.

[Discover more about Michigan here.](#)

[Learn more about East Lansing here.](#)



Procedure for Candidacy

All applications, nominations, and inquiries are invited. Applications should include, as separate documents, a CV or resume and a letter of interest addressing the themes in this profile.

WittKieffer is assisting Michigan State University in this search. For fullest consideration, candidate materials should be received by **November 9, 2026**.

Please submit all applications, nominations, and inquiries to the WittKieffer consultants, Jessica Herrington, Natalie Song, and Jessica Cummings, through WittKieffer's [candidate portal](#).

Nominations and inquiries can be directed to:

Jessica Herrington, Jess Cummings, and Natalie Song

msuabrdirector@wittkieffer.com

As an institution of higher learning, Michigan State University is committed to providing a safe environment for its students, faculty, and staff in support of its educational mission. With this commitment, the University will conduct a professional misconduct review of individuals seeking employment in Academic Management (i.e. Deans) and Executive Management searches.

All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, citizenship, age, disability, or protected veteran status.