

SIMB News

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Innovating the Future: Robert Donofrio's Journey from Conception to Commercialization in Science



Journal of Industrial Microbiology and Biotechnology

Editor-in-Chief: Yi Tang

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EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE

Kris Rath

Email: kris.rath.4.0@gmail.com

ADVERTISING

For information regarding rates, contact

SIMB News

3929 Blenheim Blvd., Suite 92A

Fairfax, VA 22030-2421

P: 703-691-3357, ext 26

F: 703-691-7991

Email: haley.cox@simbhq.org

www.simbhq.org

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On the cover

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CONTACT SIMB

(703) 691-3357

Executive Director

Haley Cox, Ext. 26

Director of Member Services

Jennifer Johnson, Ext. 23

Meeting & Exhibits Coordinator

Tina Hockaday, Ext. 24

Visual Design & Web Manager

Suzannah Citrenbaum, Ext. 27

Accountant

Al Trapal, Ext. 22

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Letter from the Editor-in-Chief

Dear SIMB Community:

I am so excited to join SIMB as the Editor-in-Chief of *SIMB News* for the 2025–2028 term. I want to express my deepest gratitude to the presidents, Ramon Gonzalez, Nigel Mouncey, Michael Resch, and Robert Donofrio and the SIMB Board for this incredible opportunity. I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Dr. Melanie Mormile, the outgoing Editor-in-Chief, for her outstanding contributions over the past five years in advancing the magazine's mission of informing and inspiring our Society's membership. Also, I am grateful to Associate Editors, Betty Elder and Kristien Mortelmans; Executive Director, Haley Cox; and many others for their dedication and support in preparing *SIMB News* articles.

The fields of microbiology and biotechnology are advancing at an extraordinary pace, driven by the integration of data science and artificial intelligence (AI). These technologies are making processes increasingly data-driven, with generative AI revolutionizing the industry. By enabling faster product development, enhancing genetic engineering and synthetic biology, optimizing bioprocesses, improving product quality, and advancing manufacturing through automation, AI has become a catalyst for efficiency, sustainability, and innovation. These breakthroughs are profoundly transforming how industries operate, adapt to emerging challenges, and remain at the forefront of scientific progress.

Adding to this transformation is the rise of smart manufacturing, which has become a focal point in the biotechnology sector. This cutting-edge approach combines AI, robotics, and advanced analytics to improve precision and efficiency in production processes. As the industry evolves, the demand for a skilled STEM workforce becomes increasingly urgent to unlock the full potential of these technologies and to drive continued advancements in smart manufacturing.

However, the biotechnology sector also faces significant challenges, particularly in managing supply chain disruptions. Geopolitical tensions, resource constraints, and global pandemics have created obstacles that impact production timelines, innovation, and costs. These disruptions highlight the critical need for resilient and adaptive supply chains to sustain the growth and accessibility of biotechnological innovations, ensuring the industry's ability to thrive amidst uncertainty.

In this issue, we are excited to feature an article by Robert Donofrio, former Chief Science Officer at Neogen Corporation and a distinguished leader in innovation and commercialization. Currently serving as a Board Member and President-Elect of the Society for Industrial Microbiology and Biotechnology, Robert brings invaluable insights to our membership. We are also thrilled to share an interview with Dr. Michelle Roza, Vice Chair of the National Security Commission on Emerging Biotechnology and Vice President of Technical Capabilities at In-Q-Tel. Dr. Roza's work emphasizes how emerging biotechnologies will shape national security and related technologies in the future.

To ensure *SIMB News* continues to reflect the interests of its members, we plan to make significant updates to the magazine and have sent a survey to gather your valuable feedback. I would like to thank all past and present Presidents, board members, and committee members for their guidance and collaboration. It is a privilege to serve as your Editor-in-Chief, and I look forward to working with all of you to expand the reach and impact of *SIMB News*. Together, we will ensure the magazine continues to inspire and inform in the years ahead.

Warm regards,

Kris Rath

Editor-in-Chief, *SIMB News*

Featured SIMB Corporate Member Profiles

SIMB Corporate Members represent the core of our community and provide key support, research, and applications in industrial microbiology and biotechnology. Check out the latest announcements or company introductions to get the latest information from SIMB Corporate Members.

DCI

DCI announces a leadership transition: Jeff Keller mentors new President Dan Larsen, ensuring continued growth, innovation, and customer-focused excellence.

Read more at: <https://www.dciinc.com/blog/leadership-transition-dci-jeff-keller-dan-larsen/>



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2024–2027 SIMB Strategic Plan

1 Scientific Excellence and Leadership

SIMB will identify the technical needs of our community to advance the industry and facilitate solutions

- Continue to foster collaboration and knowledge sharing between academic, industrial, and government stakeholders
- Offer educational opportunities and programs that focus on current and future trends with input and support from industry partners
- Elevate the Journal of Industrial Microbiology and Biotechnology to be a key information source for the SIMB community
- Recognize and promote the current leaders, future leaders, and scientific excellence of our community

2 Communication and Outreach

SIMB will connect and advocate for our community to internal and external stakeholders

- Increase capacity and opportunities for the SIMB community to advocate for industrial microbiology and biotechnology, the Society and the field's impact
- Partner with organizations to introduce SIMB to new audiences
- Provide tools to help the community develop and promote the industrial microbiology and biotechnology workforce
- Conduct, support, and/or amplify information gathering activities relevant to the SIMB community

3 Inclusion and Responsibility

SIMB will promote and maintain a responsible community that is welcoming to all

- Provide activities and communication that ensure a sense of belonging amongst members and the community
- Enable our community to work toward relevant sustainable development goals for a positive global impact
- Maintain an inclusive community supported by an enforceable Code of Conduct
- Foster a governance structure that embodies transparency and accountability

4 Value and Function

SIMB will enhance membership value and maintain its financial and operational viability

- Provide products and services to meet the needs of the SIMB individual membership
- Understand and answer the needs of SIMB corporate members
- Maintain product and service costs at sustainable levels while expanding or enhancing services to membership
- Strengthen stable, long-term revenue streams that work to support the Society's mission and vision

Fit to Print

Pioneering the Future: A Conversation with Dr. Michelle Rozo on Emerging Biotechnology and National Security

Vice Chair of the National Security Commission on Emerging Biotechnology and Vice President of Technical Capabilities, IQT

Biography: Dr. Michelle Rozo currently serves as the Vice Chair of the National Security Commission on Emerging Biotechnology, a U.S. legislative branch advisory entity tasked with thoroughly reviewing how advancements in emerging biotechnology and related technologies will shape the current and future activities of the Department of Defense. The Commission is preparing to deliver its major report to Congress with a suite of policy recommendations designed to keep the United States ahead in biotechnology and leverage these innovations for the future.

In addition, Dr. Rozo is the Vice President of Technical Capabilities at In-Q-Tel (IQT), the not-for-profit strategic investor for the U.S. national security community and America's allies.

From 2021 to 2022, Dr. Rozo was the Director of Technology and National Security at the U.S. National Security Council, where she advised the President and the National Security Advisor on biotechnology and national security policy. She also previously held the position of Principal Director for Biotechnology within the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Research & Engineering at the Department of Defense (DOD).

A molecular biologist by training, Dr. Rozo studied severe infectious diseases as a staff scientist with the Naval Medical Research Center in Fort Detrick, Maryland. She holds a Ph.D. in Biology from the Cell, Molecular, Developmental Biology, and Biophysics Program at Johns Hopkins University, as well as a B.A. in Biology from Northwestern University.

Can you share any experiences or influences that sparked your interest in science and biotechnology?

It harkens back to my childhood when I did my first experiment at the age of seven. I grew up in State College, Pennsylvania where Penn State University is. My father worked in the Entomology Department, and they host a 'Bug Camp' every year. In 'Advanced Bug Camp' I designed my first scientific experiment about parasitic wasps and the senses they use to find their prey. I formulated my hypotheses, designed the experiment, and carried it out in a lab. From then on I was hooked. Science was this amazing merging of intellect and hands-on practice that I found very exciting. From that early age, I knew I wanted to be a biotechnologist.

Later, I went to Johns Hopkins University for my graduate work in molecular biology. I realized quickly in graduate school that I didn't want to be a bench scientist, but that I wanted to have an impact in many different settings. From there I found infectious disease as a field and that was a great output to impact a wide range of people.



How did your research on severe infectious diseases at Fort Detrick impact your perspective on biotechnology and its applications?

When I moved on to Fort Detrick and the Naval Medical Research Center, it really showed me how biotechnology can help with the global challenge of infectious disease, and not in ways limited to therapeutics and vaccines, but in novel ways of diagnosis, streamlining of care, and making do in low-resource settings.

One of my projects as a post-doc and staff scientist was exploring how biomarkers could be used in a diagnostic assay that could be used easily in low-resource settings, for example to indicate if a patient was likely to progress into septic shock or not. The outcome we wanted was to be able to effectively direct care to those individuals who needed it the most when presenting with an emergency or infectious disease. I was able to investigate sepsis all over the world—in West Africa, Southeast Asia, and here in the United States. This showed me the potential reaches of biotechnology.

Could you highlight some of the key biotechnology initiatives you led or contributed to during your tenure at the U.S. National Security Council and the Department of Defense?

During my tenure at the Department of Defense (DOD), I was tasked with leading the biotechnology modernization strategy. When I stepped into the organization, there was a really strong basic research program with exciting biotechnology work being done across the Department, like at the military service research labs and the Defense Advanced Research Program Agency's (DARPA) Biological Technologies Office (BTO). That really shifted my perspective on what biotechnology can do outside of health, like novel means of production of critical chemicals and new materials suited for defense applications. But

this was all still at the research stage, and the DOD was struggling to translate these novel capabilities past the lab into prototypes and full-scale manufacturing. The ultimate goal was to get these products into the hands of service members and my work focused on changing that paradigm of being stuck in the research phase.

I was able to help the DOD increase resources for transitioning research, for example by marshaling senior support through the Department to create a tri-service prototyping program called 'Biotechnology for a Resilient Supply Chain' that took research into higher tech-readiness levels. Another of my efforts was helping to launch BioMADE, a biomanufacturing innovation institute, which is a public-private partnership around the science of bioindustrial manufacturing.

I took my experience at the DOD into my role at the National Security Council (NSC) where I coordinated biotechnology efforts across all relevant departments and agencies across the federal government, which is almost all of them. At the NSC I lead the development of a national biotechnology and biomanufacturing initiative across health, agriculture, industry, energy, and defense. That initiative coordinated regulations, increased funding for biomanufacturing, and led to the development of biotechnology strategies.

Now, as Vice Chair of the National Security Commission on Emerging Biotechnology, I have taken all of that experience and view of biotechnology across the government to the Commission's work.

What role do you see biotechnology playing in enhancing national security, and how has your work at IQT influenced this perspective?

Biotechnology plays a crucial and multifaceted role in enhancing national security. It extends beyond traditional defense applications to encompass economic resilience and global competitiveness, food security and agricultural productivity, health security, and energy independence.

A good example of this is how biotechnology can break our reliance on foreign sources of critical components in our supply chains. We learned during the COVID-19 pandemic just how much of the critical inputs for our economy and military come from abroad and how fragile that supply chain is. For example, rare earth elements go into everything from cars and computers to our telecommunications systems and defense and are sourced from abroad. Biotechnology has a potential solution for this: Biomining can allow us to access previously untapped sources of rare earth elements. It is a process by which microorganisms are used to extract those materials from mining waste or recycled electronic waste. Biotechnology can in the future open up new supply chains for critical materials like these, which is a huge opportunity for national security.

IQT aims to help the US and our allies cultivate a resilient bioeconomy, reduce dependency on unreliable supply chains, and ensure America's technological leadership as we face unprecedented national security challenges. I am on the technical team, which means I am responsible for technical diligence, or vetting the technical aspects of biotech companies for potential investment opportunities. In this role, I have the privilege of speaking to and evaluating companies across the U.S. and abroad that are working on innovative biotechnology applications. I see every day how much they contribute to this expansive definition of national security.

You are also the Vice Chair of the National Security Commission on Emerging Biotechnology. What is the Commission and why is that work important for the biotechnology industry specifically and for the United States more broadly?

The Commission is a legislative advisory body. We are subject matter experts, former government officials, and elected members of Congress tasked with advising Congress on emerging biotechnology and national security. That means we have been asked to make legislative recommendations for how the United States can remain at the leading edge of the technology and continue to leverage biotechnology for national security.

We have spent the last two years talking to thousands of people across the country and around the world in academia, industry, the government to understand the state of play in emerging biotechnologies today. Ultimately, the United States has not yet made biotechnology a strategic priority and while we have historic strengths, there are vulnerabilities in our system that need to be shored up. Our forthcoming recommendations to Congress will be a playbook for strengthening biotechnology in the United States and help to mobilize the private sector. If we don't act now, we will fall behind and risk our economic, food, health, and national security.

Is the Commission exploring how artificial intelligence is affecting biotechnology and biological data?

The Commission views the coming inflection point for biotechnology to be fueled by the intersection of artificial intelligence and biotechnology (AIxBio). It is critical that the United States has AI-ready biological data that researchers in industry and academics are able to leverage that information towards new discoveries. We will have a series of recommendations in our report focused on that intersection and making biological data a strategic priority.

What advice would you give to young scientists and professionals aspiring to make a meaningful impact in the fields of microbiology and biotechnology?

There are so many ways to have impact—you can have impact at the bench, in teaching, in the field, in policy, in communications, in business, in government—what is really important is that we have more voices who are trained in biotechnology in more places across all sectors. On the Commission we use this term, ‘bioliteracy’, meaning a fluency with biotechnology and the life sciences. We imagine a future in which people use biotechnology in the same ways we use technology like smartphones today. That biotechnological future begins with a bioliterate public, bioliterate policymakers, and a nation ready for that future.

My message to young scientists is this: You have such impact from the training and experiences that you have had. Continue to give that knowledge and use it around the world to spur the creation of a biotechnological future.

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In Memoriam

Next *SIMB News* issue will include additional information on the SIMB impacts and legacies of both Jennie Charlotte Hunter-Cevera and Janet Westpheling.

In Memory of Janet Westpheling

Janet Westpheling was born to Laura and Thomas Westpheling in Clarksdale, Mississippi, July 11, 1951. Jan is survived by her husband, David Garfinkel, sisters, Judy Hauenstein of Columbus, Ohio and Monica (Jerry) Jennings of Clarksdale, Mississippi, and many cousins. Among them, a very special recognition goes to Tony (Sonny) Correro of Atlanta, Georgia. Jan and Sonny have been dear friends since childhood. She also leaves behind stepdaughters Amanda Young and Emily Winicki and several step grandchildren. Jan was preceded in death by her parents, Laura and Thomas Westpheling, her sister Martha Morgan of Amory, Mississippi, and her brother-in-law Harry Hauenstein. Jan graduated from Carmel High School, Carmel IN (1969).



She earned BS (1972) and MS (1974) degrees in Microbiology at Purdue University and a PhD (1980) at the John Innes Institute in Norwich, England. Jan was a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (1981) and Harvard University (1982-86) prior to joining the research faculty at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine (1987). Jan was recruited as an Assistant Professor (1990) by the Department of Genetics at the University of Georgia. Jan rose through the ranks and was promoted to Professor with tenure (2003). Jan directed an internationally recognized research program where she studied the regulation of antibiotic synthesis and developed innovative genetic methods to produce biofuels and bioproducts in important but understudied microorganisms. Her work was supported by the University of Georgia and research grants from the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, and the Department of Energy. Jan trained and mentored numerous undergraduates, 13 graduate students, 14 postdoctoral fellows, and published 72 peer-reviewed articles. Among her honors and service, Jan was awarded a Creative Research Medal (2000) and Award (2015) from the University of Georgia. Jan was named a Senior Foundation Fellow (1995-2001) and helped recruit and advise undergraduate Foundation Fellows (1992-2024) at the University of Georgia. Jan was very active in the Society for Industrial Microbiology and Biotechnology (SIMB) for over 30 years. She served as Treasurer and member of the Board of Directors (2011-17), SIMB President (2018-21) and received the Charles Porter Award for service (2022).

Contributions may be made to the Janet Westpheling Memorial Fund in the Jere W. Morehead Honors College, which will provide support for the Foundation Fellowship and College, ensuring that Jan's legacy of dedication to students continues: give.uga.edu/westpheling

<https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/athens-ga/janet-westpheling-12249090>

In Memory of Jennie Charlotte Hunter-Cevera

Jennie Charlotte Hunter-Cevera, 77, of Ellicott City, Maryland, died Wednesday, March 5, 2025 peacefully in her home after a long battle with cholangiocarcinoma. She was born March 4, 1948 in Monessen, the daughter of the late Lester W. and Pearl T. DeRose Hunter.



Jennie always considered the Mon Valley her home, no matter where life took her. She was a 1966 graduate of Monessen High School. She graduated from West Virginia University in 1970 with a bachelors degree in biology, and went onto earn a masters degree in microbiology at WVU in 1972. While working full time at E.R. Squibb & Sons, Inc. she earned a Ph.D. from Rutgers University in microbiology in 1978. Her passion for microbiology would serve as the cornerstone of her long and diverse career across industry, government, and academia. Her work as a microbiologist focused on exploring and finding solutions to different environmental and industrial problems, spanning pharmaceutical, food, agricultural and biotechnology areas.

One of Jennie's key talents was for innovation and improvement. She developed isolation procedures for different microbes, improved processes for fermentation and purification of products, and developed screens to characterize microbial physiology. Highlights include 12 patents, discovery of a new class of antibiotics, discovery of novel enzymes and other metabolites, and isolation of novel organisms. This work was achieved during her time at Cetus Corporation, the Biotic Network (for which she was Co-Founder and Director), and as head of the Center for Environmental Biotechnology at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in California.

Jennie was also a talented manager and administrator, and she spent the latter half of her career as the President of the University Maryland Biotechnology Institute, an Executive Vice President at Research Triangle Park, Acting Secretary of the Maryland Higher Education Commission, and Senior VP of Academic Affairs and Interim Provost at Mount Saint Mary's University. At these institutions, she developed new programs, improved organization structure, developed and implemented strategic plans, and secured and generated new funding. In addition to all of this, what Jennie seem to enjoy most about these positions was the ability to empower her team, mentor talent, and enable people to become engaged and passionate about their work.

She was also the founder and CEO of Hunter-Cevera & Associates, a consulting company that helped find integrated solutions to complex problems for many businesses, biotechnology companies, and university departments.

Over the course of her career she published many scientific articles and served as reviewer and editor for different scientific journals. She served on numerous committees, advisory boards and panels.

She presented lectures and seminars at national and international scientific conferences and symposiums. She had received numerous awards and received multiple research grants. She enjoyed meeting and working with new people and enjoyed traveling to all the places in the world that her work took her. In addition to science, Jennie's other passion was drawing, sketching and painting. She loved walking, bowling, tennis and swimming. Jennie was also very spiritual and enjoyed spending time in prayer and being in the presence of nature while reflecting on God.

In September 2022, she said goodbye to her husband of 41 years, Raymond A. Cevera. She is survived by her daughter, Kristen Hunter-Cevera and husband Dehann Fourie of Fairfield, California; son, Jonathan Hunter-Cevera and wife Heera Lee of Ellicott City, Maryland; brother, William D. Hunter and wife Debbie of Lexington, Kentucky; sister, Melcena R. Mendicino and husband James of West Newton, PA. She is also survived by stepdaughters, Lisa Everson Cevera, Noelle Raciti, stepson, Scott Cevera and wife Cathy, stepson, Marc Cevera, and stepdaughter, Stacy Sartoris and husband Tony, as well as numerous nieces, nephews, cousins, and step-grandchildren.

Memorial contributions may be made to Shekinah Ranch Camp (www.yourcamp.org/giving/) or One Spirit for the Lakota People of Pine Ridge Reservation (www.onespiritlakota.org/) Online condolences may be made to the family at www.fryefuneralhome.com

<https://www.fryefuneralhome.com/obituary/jennie-hunter-cevera>



Innovating the Future:

Robert Donofrio's Journey from Conception to Commercialization in Science



Meet Robert Donofrio, a leading figure in scientific innovation. As the Chief Science Officer with over 25 years of experience, Robert has successfully launched over 100 new products and led significant integrations, including the 3M Food Safety acquisition. He is currently serving as a Board Member and as President Elect of the Society for Industrial Microbiology and Biotechnology. We are excited to bring you his insights and experiences in this SIMB News interview.

Can you share some key accomplishments and learnings from your leadership experience, including your involvement in acquisitions and the creation of BioScope Innovations?

I've always been a servant leader and recognize that success can only be achieved with a focus on the team and their development. Establishing a culture that promotes diversity, innovation, and collaboration has been a focus throughout my career. I am extremely proud of the way my teams embraced change and drove growth and continuous improvement through the many acquisitions Neogen Company executed. Throughout my career, I was the scientific lead for over two dozen acquisitions, including the largest food safety acquisition to date—the acquisition of 3M's Food Safety Division by Neogen—which grew Neogen from \$450M to over \$900M in annual revenues. This project spanned three years, with the first year involving extensive due diligence into the 3M team, product lines, capabilities, and systems, followed by integration encompassing the following two years. To ensure success, it was essential that we focused first and foremost on the individuals and team and leading with empathy. Through many one-on-one, team, and exploratory capability meetings, the team quickly gelled and focused on executing priority product development projects. We established Centers of Excellence for R&D and transformed our development process to incorporate inter-team collaboration to accelerate project completion. It was extremely enriching to see how the team came together, and in my final year at Neogen, we exceeded all previous benchmarks for annual new product revenue and on-time delivery.

In January 2025, I retired from Neogen. I am extremely proud of the team's accomplishments, both in commercial product launches and in adapting and thriving through change and rapid growth. I am staying engaged through multiple boards and committees and have just launched my own consulting firm, BioScope Innovations. In this endeavor, I will focus on providing my expertise and assistance in areas such as culture and mentoring, lab management and efficiencies, process and system gap analysis, ideation and development, accreditations and approvals, technology evaluation, due diligence and integration, and networking and collaboration. I am excited to see what the future holds and am eager to help guide and shape the future of SIMB as incoming President.



Can you share some of the most exciting breakthroughs you've been a part of at Neogen, particularly in areas like pathogen diagnostics, immunodiagnostics, and genomics?

I've been fortunate to work with a highly talented and innovative R&D team during my tenure at Neogen. We shared a common passion and dedication to improving global food safety, focusing on delivering solutions across the food biosecurity landscape. Neogen's growth strategy combined organic growth with strategic acquisitions, leading to multiple breakthroughs with unique products we developed ourselves and novel improvements to acquired products. A major contributing factor to Neogen's ability to innovate was its diversity. Our team included subject matter experts in various disciplines, such as microbiology (media formulation, indicator organisms, and pathogens), molecular biology and bioinformatics, cell culture and fermentation, protein engineering, antibody development, genomics and proteomics, analytical chemistry and biochemistry, immunodiagnostics, and IVD expertise. Following the acquisition of 3M Food Safety, Neogen expanded its in-house expertise to include instrumentation development, engineering (mechanical, electrical, optical, and adhesives), and product design. This was complemented

by a discipline of continuous improvement, ensuring we were always ideating on future solutions for the industry.

Can you share some specific improvements or features you are particularly proud of in the Soleris Next Generation Platform?

The Soleris Next Generation Platform integrated the strengths of two existing systems, enhancing sensitivity, selectivity, and time to results. It also offered improved performance characteristics, such as quicker time to results, reduced assay cost, and improved UI/UX and data management features.

What were some of the main challenges that were faced during the development of the Raptor Reader for mycotoxin lateral flow, and how were they overcome?

One of the main challenges was maintaining market leadership despite increased competition. This was overcome by developing the Raptor Integrated Analysis Platform, which streamlined workflows for mycotoxin detection and quantification. It provided greater control of testing parameters, and simplified the workflow to be robust and easy to use in various testing environments.

How has the industry adoption of Listeria Right Now impacted sanitation practices in processing plants?

The industry adoption of Listeria Right Now significantly improved sanitation verification in processing plants. It provided a first-to-market commercial solution for *Listeria* spp. with no enrichment and results in less than an hour, allowing plants to quickly determine the efficacy of cleaning and sanitation practices. This rapid testing capability has been widely adopted for verifying sanitation practices, vectoring, and identifying *Listeria* harborage sites.

How do you envision the role of biotechnology, particularly in food and animal safety, evolving in the global landscape?

The evolution of global food safety will be shaped by a number of megatrends, including automation, labor, data analytics, supply chain risks, and climate change. In the realm of food safety, automation will play a pivotal role by increasing transparency and addressing labor and supply chain shortages, making it a critical aspect

of development over the next decade. Additionally, achieving faster time to results, ideally within the same shift, is a significant goal. There is also a push for obtaining more information from a single sample or isolate, such as serotype, virulence, and antibiotic resistance. Vertical integration of key raw materials and the pursuit of sustainable alternatives to raw materials and test components are also important considerations to address supply chain constraints. Furthermore, risk management and predictive analytics, tied to data integration, are essential for advancing food safety.

What are the biggest challenges you've encountered in translating R&D innovations into market-ready solutions, and how have you overcome them, particularly in areas like rapid microbiology and molecular biology?

The issues and challenges faced in translating R&D innovations into market-ready solutions include keeping pace with regulatory changes, speed of industry adoption, displacing market leadership, and mitigating a slow adoption curve compared to the expectations of senior leadership and shareholders. To overcome these challenges at Neogen, key stakeholders in the industry were engaged throughout the development process to gain their insight on performance needs and leverage their expertise on workflow and potential matrix issues. R&D and commercial teams worked to be in sync with our government and regulatory affairs team to ensure alignment to policy changes and to anticipate future guidance actions. Independent studies were commissioned to evaluate performance claims, and there was a continual effort in technology scoping and a willingness to displace existing technologies. Additionally, securing applicable third-party approvals for the technology solutions was essential to provide confidence and trust to the stakeholders and product users.

With your extensive experience in establishing strategic collaborations, how do you approach fostering partnerships between academia, industry, and government to advance biotechnology and ensure product efficacy and safety?

To foster partnerships between academia, industry, and government to advance biotechnology, our approach was driven by our corporate strategic plan to ensure

alignment and prioritization. We had set up an innovation office with this goal in mind. For academic collaborators, we identified subject matter experts and centers of excellence that align with our strategic focus. We engaged these collaborators by acting as sponsors for early-stage research funding and have initiated targeted technology scoping with tech transfer and innovation offices. We also leveraged a Scientific Review Council, an independent advisory board that provided guidance on industry and regulatory trends, identified potential technology collaborators, and ensured we remained true to our mission of advancing food safety and biosecurity. In the industry sector, we conducted ideation sessions with key customers and formed development partnerships. Additionally, we leveraged our scientific affairs group for regulatory matters, including technology demonstrations and independent evaluations with USDA research laboratories.

What innovative strategies or technologies do you believe hold the greatest potential to transform the biotechnology landscape, particularly in food safety, pathogen diagnostics, and genomics?

To transform the biotechnology landscape, particularly in food safety, several innovative strategies and technologies hold great potential. AI can significantly impact and accelerate research. In the last few years, a number of open-source and commercially available tools have become available. Diagnostic companies have leveraged a number of these tools to accelerate method and product development, including enzyme and antibody engineering; imaging technologies can be utilized for product authentication, adulteration detection, contaminant detection, and colony enumeration and differentiation; algorithm development and machine learning can provide faster time to results. Additionally, data digitization and analytics can inform faster decision-making and enable predictive analytics for risk assessment. However, these advancements require governance and rules of engagement to ensure control of company intellectual property. Coordinated leadership between IT, legal, and R&D is essential.

What are the key barriers to advancing biotechnologies in the food and animal safety sectors, and how can these challenges be addressed, especially in terms of regulatory standards and product validation?

The adoption of biotechnologies in the food and animal safety sectors is typically driven by regulation, although there are a few early industry adopters that product developers should align with. Third-party approvals are crucial for ensuring customer confidence in performance claims and instilling trust. However, issues can arise when new technology is more advanced in terms of sensitivity or performance compared to the reference gold standard, or when there is no reference method that applies to new targets of interest. To address these challenges, it is necessary to engage with approval bodies for alignment and to help advance their approach to facilitate the approval of novel validation approaches.

How do you ensure that sustainability, quality, and safety remain central to your R&D strategy, particularly when developing new diagnostic tools and technologies for the food safety industry?

Sustainability, quality, and safety are essential criteria to consider when developing a product or solution. At Neogen, we had these embedded as integral parts of the design and development process. During the ideation stage, these considerations were part of the brainstorming discussions. Specific criteria for each were incorporated into the product design specifications. For new product development, a typical stage gate process includes gate reviews as a product moves from initial feasibility to optimization, to pilot, and then to scale-up/launch. Parameters and goals for sustainability, quality, and safety are reviewed during each of the gate review meetings. The gate reviews involved multiple internal stakeholders (R&D, legal, quality, operations, procurement, regulatory, and commercial) and consensus is needed to move to the next stage of development. Executive leadership is involved throughout and will sign off when proceeding to scale up, transfer, and launch.

What advice would you give to young scientists, microbiology students, and emerging faculty or professors aspiring to make an impact in biotechnology, particularly in the fields of food safety and genomics?

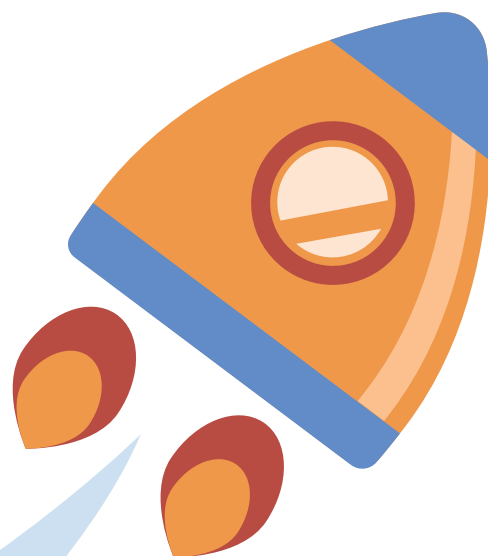
I would advise them to expand their network and engage with leaders in the industry to understand the issues they face and the approaches they are utilizing to overcome them. They should contact potential industry targets to learn about their internship programs and shadowing opportunities. Taking advantage of mentoring programs offered through Universities is also beneficial. Connecting with researchers in the sector to hear their experiences can provide valuable insights. Educating and diversifying oneself is crucial to becoming more marketable. It is important to start with the end goal in mind: do you want to be in a leadership position and manage a team, or are you more centered on being a subject matter expert and individual contributor? It's okay if you don't know the answer now; connecting with industry experts in your field can help gain a better perspective and advise on the skillsets required. Gaining AI expertise is essential as these tools will accelerate discovery and advance product development. If you will be leading a lab team or managing development projects, financial expertise will come in handy, so taking financial classes for budget management (P&L center management) is advisable. Learning soft skills to help with people management is also important. Researching the industry and companies you are interested in, understanding industry trends and frictions, and reviewing their mission statements to see what key points align with your interests are crucial steps. Lastly, don't be afraid to fail, but learn from these experiences.

Can you share your experience working with industry partners, and what areas of biotechnology have benefited you most from these collaborations at Neogen?

At Neogen, industry engagement was crucial in designing and developing products that would be impactful and meet their needs. We aimed to be a vested partner with key customer stakeholders by engaging them to understand their immediate needs, which could be based on regulatory changes, process implementations, supplier risks, or other emerging issues. We also sought to understand their perspective on the megatrends that would drive their business operations 5 to 10 years into

the future. We coordinated ideation and friction sessions with them, and the insights gained through embedding, observing, and listening helped inform and shape the solutions we developed. Industry partners also influenced product design specifications and workflow. We leveraged their expertise to understand key parameters to include in our experimental investigations: matrices to evaluate, which target organisms should be evaluated (inclusivity and exclusivity), designing UI/UX interfaces, and ultimately determining the performance goals of the assay. This information helped us dig deeper into the parameters of ease of use, time to results, and cost targets. We had key industry partners engaged throughout the development pipeline, including prototype evaluation and alpha and beta site testing.

We also actively engaged the startup community to investigate technologies that aligned with our strategic needs. We made connections with innovation and accelerator centers and tech transfer groups at universities. The focus of these discussions ranged



from technology scoping and investigations to assess intellectual property, assay performance, study data review, scale-up and manufacturing plans, and alignment with the commercial strategic plan.

For students and researchers interested in pursuing opportunities at Neogen, what advice do you have regarding internships, collaborations, or other pathways for gaining hands-on experience and contributing to the future of biotechnology?

For students and researchers interested in pursuing opportunities with industry, I encourage you to take the initiative and reach out. Contact the research leadership team at the companies of interest, connect with them on LinkedIn, and engage with them at conferences. Look for announcements from their companies on their website and social media to see who is presenting and where. Most scientists are eager to talk about their research and accomplishments. Attend lunch and learn when companies are presenting at various universities. Ask your department and university leadership if they have industry advisory boards and leverage those experts for their input. Many of these individuals use these activities to scope talent and recruit for future growth. Attend industry career fairs and make connections there. Additionally, engage with university tech transfer centers, innovation cores, and technology accelerators to learn about the industry partners they are working with.

Given your impressive track record at Neogen and NSF International, what legacy would you like your work to leave in advancing biotechnology, particularly in food safety and genomics?

I am very proud of the accomplishments my teams at NSF International and Neogen have made in advancing public health and global food biosecurity. The teams have developed dozens of new methods to support existing and new public health standards. They have commercialized impactful and innovative products to enhance and improve global food safety. The culture and mindset that I have helped to implement and grow have always emphasized collaboration, and we have fostered a mentoring and people-first approach, focusing on the

growth and needs of our team members. We have also maintained an innovative mindset and a continuous strive for improvement. I feel very blessed to have worked with such passionate and innovative colleagues and eagerly look forward to the amazing things they will accomplish in the future.



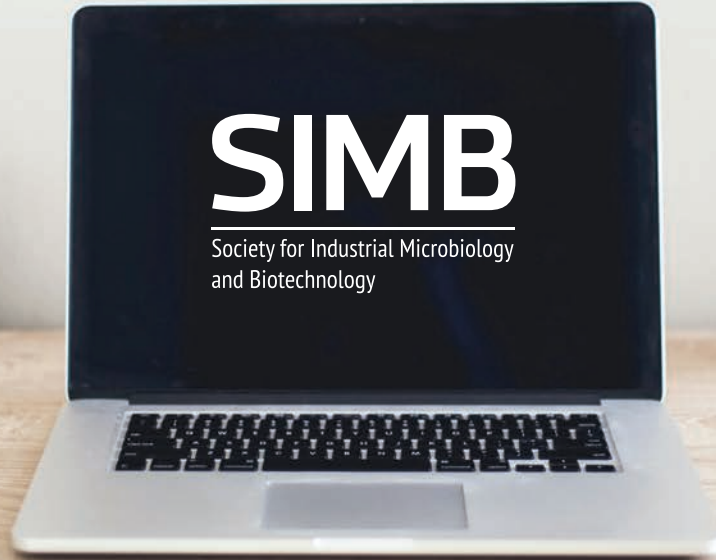


Photo by Kari Shea on Unsplash

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Online advertising is an effective way to reach your target audience and should be part of your marketing strategy. Get in front of the customers you want to reach with a SIMB eNews banner advertisement. Contact SIMB to learn more! Email info@simbhq.org today.



47th Symposium on Biomaterials, Fuels and Chemicals (SBFC)

The Pfister Hotel
Milwaukee, WI

May 4–7, 2025
www.simbhq.org/sbfc

Registration and Housing

Registration: Online registration ends on April 18, onsite registration available

Housing: Deadline April 14, Rate of \$225 plus taxes per night

Tabletop exhibition and sponsorships available:

- » Deadline to be in printed program: March 31, 2025
<https://www.simbhq.org/sbfc/exhibits>

Premeeting Workshop

Saturday, May 3, 2025

TEA and LCA with BioSTEAM: Quantifying the Economic and Environmental Impact of Emerging Biotechnologies

Organized by Yoel Cortes-Pena

2025 Program Chair



Ben Woolston, Northeastern University,

PROGRAM CO-CHAIR: REBECCA ONG, MICHIGAN TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

Past Program Chair

Kevin Solomon, University of Delaware

Keynote Speaker



Michelle A. O'Malley

CLIFF R. SCHOLLE PROFESSOR OF CHEMICAL ENGINEERING AND A PROFESSOR OF BIOENGINEERING, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

2025 Program

This year's program features 15 technical sessions spanning cellular and process engineering, feedstock utilization and design, and biomaterials. We are particularly excited to introduce a new session on synthetic biology for space exploration, as well as a special session that highlights the many past, present and future contributions of midwestern companies to the bioeconomy, in celebration of the conference's location. These will be joined by the latest advances in metabolic engineering, valorization of low-cost feedstocks, deconstruction of plastics, single-carbon metabolism, bioenergy crop development, lignocellulose breakdown, and more. Tying everything together will be our keynote speaker, Prof. Michelle O'Malley, whose work spans all of the central themes of SBFC and whose new NSF-funded anaerobic foundry will provide exciting opportunities for collaboration throughout the SBFC community.

TOPIC AREA 1

BIOFUELS, BIOPRODUCTS, AND SYNTHETIC BIOLOGY

Chairs: Charles Foster – dsm-firmenich; Rebecca Mickol – US Naval Research Laboratory; Dan Olson – Dartmouth College

Sessions:

- » Integrating chemical and biological processing for bioconversion
- » Finding the (redox) balance
- » Re-creating complex phenotypes
- » Engineering for space: Biology and biomanufacturing
- » Metabolic engineering strategies to overcome product titer limitations

TOPIC AREA 2

ALTERNATIVE FEEDSTOCKS AND BIOSYNTHETIC MATERIALS

Chairs: Coralie Backlund – Novo Nordisk; Lisa Guay – US DOE; Chuck Smallwood – Sandia National Laboratories

Sessions:

- » Organic waste valorization
- » Plastic Deconstruction

- » C1 Metabolism
- » Bio-based materials: New performance/process-advantaged biomaterials
- » Bio-based materials: Engineered living materials

TOPIC AREA 3

ENGINEERING AND DECONSTRUCTION OF BIOMASS

Topics of interest involve engineering of bioenergy crops for fuels and bioproduct production, biomass deconstruction and fractionation, biomass degrading enzymes, and cell free systems among others.

Chairs: Rebecca Ong – Michigan Technological University; Lynn Wendt – Idaho National Laboratory; Jian Shi – University of Kentucky

Sessions:

- » Trends in bioenergy crop development
- » Biomass deconstruction and lignin and carbohydrate upgrading
- » System analysis and integration of bioenergy production
- » Biomass-active enzymes and cell-free systems

SPECIAL SESSION

CELEBRATING THE MIDWEST BIOECONOMY

This special session will highlight and celebrate the past, current, and newly emerging contributions of Midwestern companies to the development of the bioeconomy, with a particular focus on those producing or providing products that enable the production of fuels, chemicals and materials in line with the mission of SBFC.

Convener: Jennifer Headman – POET

ADDITIONAL SESSIONS

POSTER SESSIONS AND STUDENT TALKS

Conveners: Antonio dos Santos – Boston College; Efrain Rodriguez-Ocasio – University of Wisconsin, Madison

Exhibitor Opportunities

Your organization can still support this meeting through Sponsorships or Exhibits!

Deadline for inclusion in the printed program is March 31. You can still participate in the meeting via exhibits and sponsorship if you contact us today.

Check out the multiple sponsorship opportunities available now as another way to be part of this unique event.

<https://www.simbhq.org/sbfc/exhibits/sponsorship/>

Act on the opportunity to represent a company or organization at this conference through tabletop exhibits.

<https://www.simbhq.org/sbfc/exhibits/>



75th SIMB Annual Meeting and Exhibition

Hyatt Regency San Francisco
San Francisco, CA

July 27–30, 2025
www.simbhq.org/annual

Important Meeting Deadlines

Awards: Nomination deadlines are April 10, 2025

Registration: Now open! Early registration deadline May 3, 2025

Abstract Submissions: Deadline May 13, 2025

Exhibits and sponsorships: Now open! Deadline for inclusion in program is June 30, 2025

» <https://www.simbhq.org/annual/exhibitsponsor/>

Housing: Deadline July 1, 2025, Rate of \$224 plus taxes per night

Premeeting Workshop

Sunday, July 27, 2025

FERMENTATION BASICS WORKSHOP

Organized by Tim Cooper

2025 Program Chair

José Avalos, Princeton University

Keynote Speaker

Douglas Cameron, First Green Partners

2025 Program

The program is open for submissions for poster, contributed oral, or invited oral presentations. The deadline for submission is May 13, 2025. The current draft of the program's topic areas and sessions can be seen below.

Biocatalysis Sessions:

- » Cell-free and orthogonal biocatalysis
- » Depolymerization and valorization of alternative feedstocks
- » Enzyme engineering: Strategies and applications
- » Biocatalysis at scale
- » Frontiers of chemistry

Cell Culture & Fermentation Sessions:

- » Challenges and successes in scale-up and scale-down of fermentation and downstream processing
- » Unconventional biomanufacturing using alternative feedstocks and cell free systems
- » Advancements in process development for biopharmaceuticals
- » Applications of data analytics to accelerate fermentation and cell culture
- » Advances and challenges in live microbes as products

Environmental Sessions:

- » Genetically modified microbes in complex environmental and human microbiomes
- » Sustainable biological production of inorganic materials
- » Microbial nutrient cycling in agriculture and anthropogenic waste processing

Metabolic Engineering Sessions:

- » Synthetic biology in metabolic engineering
- » Valorizing non-carbohydrate feedstocks
- » Computational and systems biology approaches

- » Biosynthesis I (commodity chemicals & biomaterials)
- » Biosynthesis II (specialty chemical and food ingredients)

Natural Products Sessions:

- » Modern natural product discovery
- » Enzymology in natural product biosynthesis
- » Synthetic and systems biology of natural products
- » Mode of action of natural products - (New modes of natural product bioactivity)
- » Informatics and data science for natural products research

Special Sessions:

- » Biomanufacturing of alternative proteins for future food security - A
- » Biomanufacturing of alternative proteins for future food security - B
- » Marine bioresources
- » Student Oral Session
- » SIMB 75th Celebration Panel

Honors and Awards

Open for Applications/Nominations

Open Now – All deadlines April 10, 2025 unless noted.

For full details, go to:

<https://www.simbhq.org/annual/awards/>

- » Charles Porter Award: This award recognizes meritorious service to SIMB
- » Charles Thom Award: Honor researchers for their exceptional merit in their field
- » Diversity Travel Award: Apply for yourself for the chance to be recognized (Deadline April 29, 2025)
- » Early Career Award: Distinguish and encourage young investigators
- » SIMB Fellowship Status: Special grade of SIMB membership
- » Waksman Outstanding Teaching Award: Recognize the important role of educators and allow SIMB to help support their endeavors

Exhibits and Sponsorship Opportunities

Exhibit Prospectus & Other ways to engage with the Annual Meeting

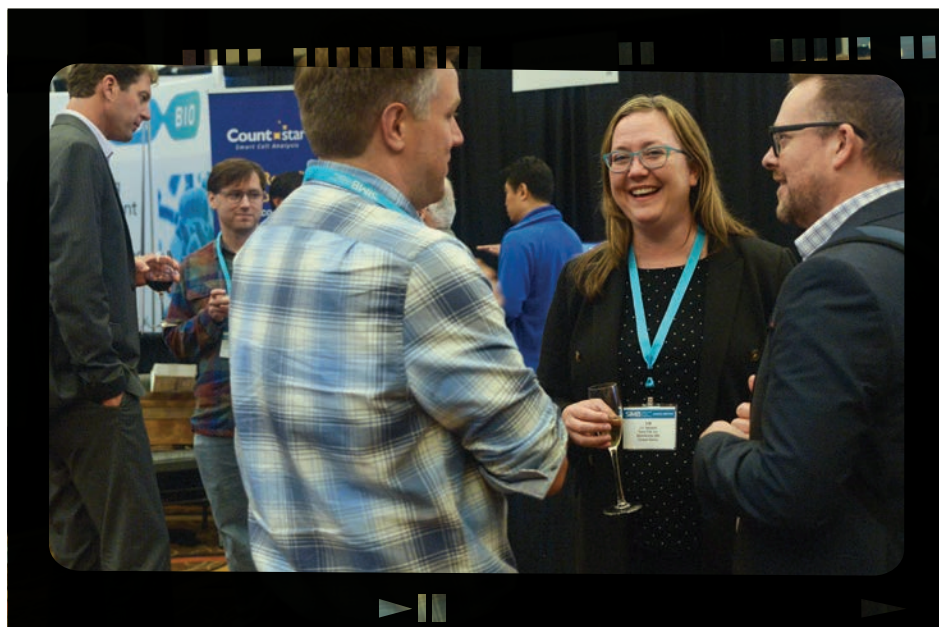
- » Exhibit booths are available to be booked:
<https://www.simbhq.org/annual/exhibitsponsor/>
- » Career Fair on Monday, July 28, with dedicated space to either look at reach the your next star employee:
<https://www.simbhq.org/annual/career-fair/>
- » Sponsorship and online or print advertisement opportunities to increase visibility and awareness of your organization or product
 - » <https://www.simbhq.org/annual/exhibitsponsor/sponsorship/>
Note the special opportunities for the SIMB 75th Anniversary that extend beyond the conference!
 - » <https://www.simbhq.org/annual/exhibitsponsor/advertising/>



SIMB

Society for Industrial
Microbiology
and Biotechnology

CELEBRATING 75 YEARS



We are excited to celebrate SIMB's 75th Anniversary with our members and supporters! As we continue to commemorate the 75th Anniversary, we invite you to be a part of this milestone celebration, culminating in the 75th SIMB Annual Meeting in San Francisco this July.

We have great opportunities for you to contribute, participate, and help us honor the legacy of SIMB.

SHARE YOUR SIMB STORY!

We're collecting member video testimonials to highlight the impact of SIMB over the years!

- Send a video recording of your testimonial directly to Allen at ls1@mit.edu.
- Schedule a 15-minute Zoom session with Allen, where he will record your testimonial for you.

We'd love to have your video no later than Monday, June 30.

DESIGN THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY T-SHIRT!

Help us create a special 75th Anniversary t-shirt or polo! You can contribute by:

- Suggesting key design elements.
- Submitting original artwork.

Submit your ideas by April 7 via email to info@simbhq.org.

JIMB 75TH SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION

The *Journal of Industrial and Biotechnology (JIMB)* is proud to present a special collection of papers that encapsulates the pioneering spirit and groundbreaking research that has been the journal's hallmark for the past 75 years.

<https://academic.oup.com/jimb/pages/75th-anniversary-collection>

MORE TO COME, INCLUDING...

- Updated articles on SIMB history in SIMB News.
- Digitization of SIMB's print archives.
- A special panel celebrating the history and future of SIMB at the Annual Meeting.

Join us in making this anniversary special!

We look forward to celebrating with you.

Upcoming SIMB Meetings

MAY 4-7, 2025

47th Symposium on
Biomaterials, Fuels and
Chemicals

The Pfister • Milwaukee, WI

www.simbhq.org/sbfc

JULY 27-30, 2025

75th SIMB Annual Meeting
and Exhibition

Hyatt Regency San Francisco •
San Francisco, CA

www.simbhq.org/annual

NOV. 9-12, 2025

RAFT® 16 – Recent Advances
in Fermentation Technology

Marriott Myrtle Beach Resort
and Spa at Grande Dunes •
Myrtle Beach, SC

www.simbhq.org/raft

Upcoming Industry Meetings

MAY 26-28, 2025

Himmelfahrtstagung on
Bioprocess Engineering 2025

Bremen, Germany

[https://dechema.de/en/
BioPro25.html](https://dechema.de/en/BioPro25.html)

JUNE 2-4, 2026

ASM Microbe 2026

Washington, DC

<https://www.asm.org>

AUG. 16-21, 2026

20 th International
Symposium on Microbial
Ecology (ISME)

Auckland, New Zealand

[https://isme-microbiology.org/
events/isme20-in-auckland](https://isme-microbiology.org/events/isme20-in-auckland)

OCT. 7-8, 2026

International Conference
on Plant Pathology and
Environmental Microbiology
(ICPPEM)

New York, New York

<https://waset.org>

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Audit	Debbie Yaver	dyaver@naturesfynd.com	2027	Tim Davies, Laura Jarboe	Haley Cox
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Ethics	Thomas Klasson	thomas.klasson@usda.gov	2025	Noel Fong, Scott Baker, Susan Bagley	Haley Cox
Finance	Katy Kao	kao.katy@gmail.com	2026	Michael Resch, Rob Donofrio, Elisabeth Elder, Ramon Gonzalez, Debbie Yaver, Dick Baltz	Haley Cox
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Nominations	Nigel Mouncey	njmouncey@gmail.com	2025	Tim Davies, Carrie Eckert, Melanie Mormile, Ben Shen, Jonathan Sheridan	Haley Cox
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Planning	Rob Donofrio	RDonofrio@neogen.com	2025	In Development	Haley Cox
Publications	Hal Alper	halper@che.utexas.edu	2025	Ramon Gonzalez, Kris Rath, Yi Tang, Ben Shen	Haley Cox
JIMB	Yi Tang	yitang@g.ucla.edu	2025	JIMB Editors	Haley Cox
SIMB News	Kris Rath	kris.rath.4.0@gmail.com	2027	Melanie Mormile, Kristine Mortelmans, Elisabeth Elder, Leo H. Liu	Katherine Devins
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Core Topic Areas	Aindrila Mukhopadhyay	amukhopadhyay@lbl.gov	2025	Ben Shen, John Evans, Kirsten Benjamin, Deepti Tanjore, Mark Blenner, Katy Kao	Haley Cox
75th Anniversary	Ramon Gonzalez	ramon@mojiabio.com	2025	Board of Directors and Archives Committee	Haley Cox

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			Term		Staff liaison
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Member Benefits:

- Meeting Registration Discounts (Each \$500 voucher is good toward any SIMB meeting registration fee)

Silver - Two (2) \$500 vouchers

Gold – Three (3) vouchers

Diamond - Four (4) vouchers

Other Current Benefits:

- Recognition and corporate profile in *SIMB News*
- Discounted exhibit booths and tables
- Discounted advertisements and job postings

Visit www.simbhq.org/corporate-membership



Society for Industrial
Microbiology
and Biotechnology

Your membership. Your community. Your success.

It takes a strong network of people and organizations to succeed in this industry, and SIMB helps you stay connected. Your membership is a powerful investment in your future, so be sure to renew it today to keep all these great benefits!

- ✓ **Network** with diverse professionals in industry, academia, and national labs
- ✓ **Learn** the latest tools, methods, and applications so you and your team stay up-to-date
- ✓ **Exchange ideas** between areas of microbiology and biotechnology
- ✓ **Access** industry-oriented news and education backed by scientific rigor
- ✓ **Promote** your work, accomplishments, and contributions to the world
- ✓ **Get support** in your career from student to CEO



Student Membership

\$40 

Regular Membership

\$150 

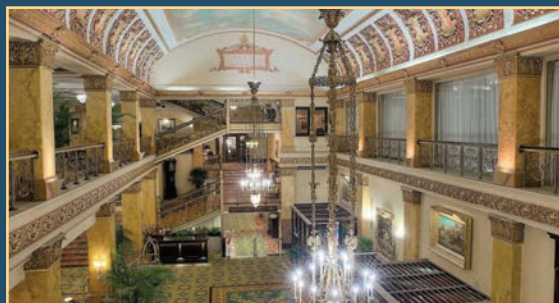
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starts at **\$1,000** 

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at simbhq.org/membership



FUTURE SIMB MEETINGS



47TH SYMPOSIUM ON BIOMATERIALS, FUELS AND CHEMICALS

May 4–7, 2025

The Pfister
Milwaukee, WI
[**simbhq.org/sbfc**](https://simbhq.org/sbfc)



75TH SIMB ANNUAL MEETING & EXHIBITION

JULY 27–30, 2025

Hyatt Regency San Francisco
San Francisco, CA
[**simbhq.org/annual**](https://simbhq.org/annual)



RAFT[®] 16 – RECENT ADVANCES IN FERMENTATION TECHNOLOGY

NOVEMBER 9–12, 2025

Marriott Myrtle Beach Resort and Spa at Grande Dunes
Myrtle Beach, SC
[**simbhq.org/raft**](https://simbhq.org/raft)

Thank you for your support!

Your participation helps us grow the field, facilitate new connections, and build a better future for the industrial microbiology and biotechnology community.