



Flashback: CIA Venture Capital Arm Funds Skin Care Products That Collect DNA

Why does the CIA have a venture capital company that invests in private technology? To get the latest and greatest surveillance technology with a built-in laboratory. Technocrats seek all data about all citizens. □ TN Editor

Skincare Sciences, a company with an innovative line of cosmetic products marketed as a way to erase blemishes and soften skin, has caught the attention of [beauty bloggers](#) on YouTube, Oprah's lifestyle [magazine](#), and celebrity skin care [professionals](#). Documents obtained by *The Intercept* reveal that the firm has also attracted interest and funding from In-Q-Tel, the venture capital arm of the Central Intelligence Agency.

The previously undisclosed relationship with the CIA might come as

some surprise to a visitor to the website of [Clearista](#), the main product line of Skincential Sciences, which [boasts](#) of a “formula so you can feel confident and beautiful in your skin’s most natural state.”

Though the public-facing side of the company touts a range of skin care products, Skincential Sciences developed a patented technology that removes a thin outer layer of the skin, revealing unique biomarkers that can be used for a variety of diagnostic tests, including DNA collection.

Skincential Science’s noninvasive procedure, described on the Clearista website as “[painless](#),” is said to require only water, a special detergent, and a few brushes against the skin, making it a convenient option for restoring the glow of a youthful complexion — and a novel technique for gathering information about a person’s biochemistry.

In-Q-Tel, founded in 1999 by then-CIA Director George Tenet, identifies cutting-edge technology to support the mission of the CIA and other intelligence agencies, and provides venture funding to help grow tech firms to develop those solutions.

“Our company is an outlier for In-Q-Tel,” Russ Lebovitz, the chief executive of Skincential Sciences, said during an interview with *The Intercept*. He conceded that the relationship might make for “an unusual and interesting story,” but said, “If there’s something beneath the surface, that’s not part of our relationship and I’m not directly aware. They’re interested here in something that can get easy access to biomarkers.”

Still, Lebovitz claimed he has limited knowledge of why In-Q-Tel selected his firm.

“I can’t tell you how everyone works with In-Q-Tel, but they are very interested in doing things that are pure science,” Lebovitz said. The CIA fund approached his company, telling him the fund shares an interest in looking at DNA extraction using the method pioneered by Skincential Sciences, according to Lebovitz.

Beyond that, Lebovitz said he was unsure of the intent of the CIA’s use of the technology, but the fund was “specifically interested in the

diagnostics, detecting DNA from normal skin.” He added, “There’s no better identifier than DNA, and we know we can pull out DNA.”

Perhaps law enforcement could use the biomarker extraction technique for crime scene identification or could conduct drug tests, Lebovitz suggested.

Carrie A. Sessine, the vice president for external affairs at In-Q-Tel, declined a media interview because “IQT does not participate in media interviews or opportunities.”

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