



By Carl  
Collen

Wednesday 3rd February 2021, 10:29 GMT

## Oppy continues strawberry tech research

Trials will explore the commercial viability of a specific systems-based approach as well as robotic harvesting



Oppy has announced that it is set to conduct two independent trials exploring the viability of new technologies, that aim to further advance strawberry production practices by offering solutions to persistent issues faced by the industry.

The fresh produce group will work with the University of California, Santa Cruz on the first of the trials, a USDA-funded research project that aims to test a systems-based approach to pest and disease mitigation.

The study will explore alternative treatments to mitigate pervasive and detrimental soil-borne pathogens during strawberry cultivation, including *Fusarium oxysporum* and *Macrophomina phaseolina*.

"We're extremely excited to be working on finding cutting edge solutions to challenges facing the strawberry industry as a whole," Said Oppy's vice-president of categories, berries and greenhouse, Jason

participation in this research project has the potential to be truly transformative, as most soilborne pathogens are lethal to strawberry crops, so any improvements in reducing this will have a tremendous impact on our business on multiple fronts."

The second trial aims to improve operational efficiencies in strawberry cultivation through a state-of-the-art robotic harvester.

Oppy and its partners will examine if the new harvester can assist in solving some of the industry's difficulties with labour scarcity, which have only been amplified during the pandemic.

The trial will determine if robotic picking is more efficient and cost-effective than traditional methods, as well as assess the harvester's ability to select fruit based on specific standards, and understand which varieties work best with this machine.

"Automation in agriculture has been catapulted into the spotlight thanks to

the unique challenges posed by the pandemic," Oppy's senior manager of insights and innovation Garland Perkins said. "By assessing the first ever commercially available robotic harvester for strawberries, Oppy has once again taken a leading role in exploring the future of our industry.

"Engaging with our stakeholders across the supply chain is necessary for the success of these trials, and reflects the collaborative approach that is essential for innovation," Perkins added.

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