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Agricultural AI on the upswing

By

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The robot takeover is in full swing, with a particular eye toward agriculture. According to PitchBook Data Inc. and reported in the Wall Street Journal, \$1.54 billion has been invested in agricultural software companies in 2021, surpassing the \$1.42 billion invested last year. According to PitchBook Data Inc., investment in the sector for the previous two years was \$1.03 billion combined.

According to the Wall Street Journal, among the sectors taking in money this year were pest control, the gauging of crop and soil performance and the search and destroy of weeds.

“Farmers are under immense pressure to produce more crops with fewer pesticides, fertilizers and other resources, including water,” Michael Gilbert, chief executive of Vancouver startup SemiosBio Technologies Inc. told the Wall Street Journal, explaining rising interest in AI technology. “To do so farmers need to monitor a constant stream of data on plants, soil and atmospheric conditions.”

There is also a labor and monetary factor.

For example, Carzalia Valley Produce in Columbus, NM, has tested an Autonomous LaserWeeder. James Johnson, Carzalia’s vice president, estimates the robot could save the 3,100-acre farm between \$800 and \$1,500 an acre in labor costs.

“There are fewer people today who want to work in the fields,” he told the Wall Street Journal. “Our costs of labor, and availability of labor, has gotten more difficult. We’re going to have to switch to more automation.”

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