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## **NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION AWARDS GRANT TO HARVEST CROO ROBOTICS**

*Phase I of the Small Business Innovation Research Program set for 2017*

Tampa, FL (December 13, 2016) – The National Science Foundation has awarded a grant worth up to \$1 million. It is to be administered in two phases to Harvest CROO Robotics, supporting the mission to answer the need for agricultural labor with technology. The Small Business Innovation Research Program Phase I awards Harvest CROO \$225,000 to use in continued research and development of the [innovative robotic strawberry picker](#).

"We are very excited and honored to be awarded the SBIR Phase I grant," said Mark Brown, CFO of Harvest CROO Robotics. "Especially since only a small number of businesses that apply are funded."

The Harvest CROO Robotics team submitted a 20-page detailed proposal that included plans to develop a fully autonomous strawberry picking platform. Phase I begins December 15 and will continue through November 30. In that time, Harvest CROO Robotics will investigate and develop software and hardware tools to orchestrate a team of robotic subsystems. The goal is to meet the speed and cost requirements of a commercially viable robotic strawberry harvester.

"This generous grant helps us move the project forward," said Gary Wishnatzki, co-founder of Harvest CROO Robotics and owner of Wish Farms. "Working, in the field, with the mobile platform this strawberry season will allow us to analyze results and develop improvements."

Harvest CROO Robotics continues to develop and test the latest technology for agricultural robotics. The strawberry picker prototype was created three years ago as a potential solution to the industry's lack of available labor to harvest strawberries. The prototype can – in an actual working strawberry field – identify, select and pick only ripe strawberries while leaving unripe strawberries and plants unharmed. The use of this technology will improve the quality of the berries picked, reduce energy usage, and increase strawberry yields by at least 10 percent. Using the prototype last season, the picking rate was eight seconds per plant. With further improvements this season, that rate is projected to be cut in half.

"The grant will allow us to hire additional qualified staff members," said Brown. "This will help us to better solve one of the last remaining technical hurdles of bringing the harvester to market."

To learn more about Harvest CROO Robotics, including investment opportunities, contact [info@harvestcroo.com](mailto:info@harvestcroo.com) or visit [www.harvestcroorobotics.com](http://www.harvestcroorobotics.com).

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About Harvest CROO Robotics:

Harvest CROO (Computerized Robotic Optimized Obtainer) began in 2012 on Gary Wishnatzki's vision of creating a solution to the dwindling labor force in agriculture. With the expertise of co-founder and Chief Technical Officer, Bob Pitzer, they began developing the first Harvest CROO machines. In Previous rounds, \$1.8 million was raised through qualified investors. Many of these investors are members of the strawberry industry, including Sweet Life Farms, Sam Astin III, California Giant, Inc., Main Street Produce, Inc., Sweet Darling Sales, Inc. Innovative Produce Inc., DG Berry, Inc., Central West, and Naturipe Berry Growers. In Round C, Harvest CROO is seeking to raise \$3 million to build the next version, the Alpha unit, which will be the predecessor to a production model. To learn more about Harvest CROO, including current career opportunities for experienced engineers, contact [info@harvestcroo.com](mailto:info@harvestcroo.com) or visit [www.harvestcroorobotics.com](http://www.harvestcroorobotics.com).

About the National Science Foundation:

The National Science Foundation (NSF) is an independent federal agency that supports fundamental research and education across all fields of science and engineering. In fiscal year (FY) 2016, its budget is \$7.5 billion. NSF funds reach all 50 states through grants to nearly 2,000 colleges, universities and other institutions. Each year, NSF receives more than 48,000 competitive proposals for funding and makes about 12,000 new funding awards. NSF also awards about \$626 million in professional and service contracts yearly.

About the Small Business Innovation Research Program:

The Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program is a highly competitive program that encourages domestic small businesses to engage in Federal Research/Research and Development (R/R&D) that has the potential for commercialization. Through a competitive awards-based program, SBIR enables small businesses to explore their technological potential and provides the incentive to profit from its commercialization. By including qualified small businesses in the nation's R&D arena, high-tech innovation is stimulated and the United States gains entrepreneurial spirit as it meets its specific research and development needs.