

Vineland rolls out new custom services

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Written by Greenhouse Canada



Photo from: Vineland Research and Innovation Centre

Vineland Research and Innovation Centre has just introduced a new venture to their portfolio of activities – customized robotic and automation solutions, as well as consultation and technology assessments, for Canadian horticulture companies.

The not-for-profit organization has a history of conducting applied research in the sector, directly addressing problems in the field and in the greenhouse.

“We’re always scanning the industry and keeping in direct contact with growers to understand their needs,” says Darren Ward, manager of business planning and commercialization at Vineland. “The value of automation in easing the pressures around cost and availability of labour is understood in our industry, however the trend is that many processors and producers – especially small and medium-sized ones – don’t typically have the internal resources available to effectively take advantage of what automation can offer them.”

By resources, Ward is referring to the time and knowledge needed to completely analyze a production problem or process, then determine whether it can be improved upon, automated or addressed using another solution.

Having witnessed both failed and missed attempts at automation, Ward is confident that Vineland can fill this gap with the research centre’s knowledge and expertise, then help provide off-the-shelf or custom-designed automation solutions to meet the need. For example, Vineland has previously rolled out semi-custom sorting and grading systems for handling and palletizing. Other potential opportunities for cost reduction include automated sorting and grading, labour tracking, greenhouse automation and more.

The process would start with a discussion to better understand the client’s

operation, where their problem lies and what their objectives are, Ward explains. From there, Vineland personnel would observe existing operations, then collect and analyze data to pinpoint where areas could be improved.

“This may be where the process is complete, if for example the client requests a detailed report and a LEAN analysis for improving and reducing costs in existing manual processes,” he says. “Otherwise, opportunities to automate will be identified and selected based on practicality and target payback. From there, we’ll proceed with the evaluation of automation solutions from multiple vendors, drilling down to the best-of-breed solution(s) for the client’s needs and facilitate the implementation through deployment, training and use. This is a very high level description and the scope will vary with respect to the client’s needs, whether they want to evaluate a single process or piece of equipment or take a broad look at the entire operation to identify opportunities for improvement.”

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