



## Sonoco Announces Partnership with Agricultural Company Harvest CROO Robotics

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### *Sonoco to develop packaging system for autonomous vehicle*

HARTSVILLE, S.C., May 10, 2018 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Sonoco (NYSE:SON), one of the largest diversified global packaging companies, has announced its position as a joint development partner and investor in the Plant City, Fla.-based robotics company Harvest CROO Robotics.

"This partnership solidly aligns with our focus on improving the supply chain for fresh produce by connecting harvesting technology with new packaging technology," said Sonoco CEO Rob Tiede. "Efforts to improve harvesting efficiency, decrease food waste and extend freshness life are key focus areas for us as we expand into fresh food packaging."

A key driver in the development of this integrated packaging and harvesting technology solution is the current and projected labor shortage in agriculture. The use of robotic harvesting technology, combined with the right packaging, offers a unique solution to help alleviate labor shortages and create more cost effective in-field harvesting. As the labor market tightens in the agriculture sector, costs rise for growers and there's a growing risk of food waste due to produce spoiling in the fields before being picked. Sonoco is developing the packaging that will support a fully automatic, fully autonomous harvester that can pick eight acres of strawberries in a single day. With this unique harvesting solution, the companies are exploring new opportunities, from extending shelf life for the fruit to delivering more consistent quality.

"The produce industry is on the cusp of a major revolution in robotics. Labor-related issues are going to have to be addressed through technology, and we believe we can be part of the solution," said Gary Wishnatzki, co-founder of Harvest CROO Robotics and owner of Wish Farms.

The automated strawberry picker will be able to work at least 20 hours per day, with the goal of being able to pick 95 percent of the fruit off of any plant. The new Harvest CROO technology will allow growers to avoid picking during the hottest part of the day, when berries bruise the easiest. The patented technology revolves around the concept of the Pitzer Picking Wheel. This wheel utilizes "conservation of motion" principles, with robotic picking heads that can achieve 360 degrees of rotation and will decrease the amount of movement the robot has to accomplish to complete the picking action. A series of claws on the wheel picks the berries, which are then transferred to a packing region of the harvester, where they will be inspected and packed into consumer units.

"This is just one example of our commitment to addressing food waste and access to fresh food in the U.S.," said Tiede. "We recently announced a partnership with Clemson University, Sonoco FRESH, which focuses on the development of new packaging technologies to extend the shelf life of fresh foods." The initiative establishes a multi-disciplinary hub for innovation and research to advance fresh food packaging and distribution. Sonoco will contribute \$1.725 million over 5 years.

#### **About Sonoco**

Founded in 1899, Sonoco (NYSE:SON) is a global provider of a variety of consumer packaging, industrial products, protective packaging, and displays and packaging supply chain services. With annualized net sales of approximately \$5 billion, the Company has 21,000 employees working in more than 300 operations in 33 countries, serving some of the world's best known brands in some 85 nations. Sonoco is committed to *Better Packaging. Better Life.*, and ranked first in the Packaging sector on Fortune's World's Most Admired Companies 2018 list. For more information, visit [www.sonoco.com](http://www.sonoco.com).

#### **About Harvest CROO Robotics**

Harvest CROO (Computerized Robotic Optimized Obtainer) Robotics 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. Since their founding, labor shortages have become even more acute across the specialty crop sector, particularly for the strawberry industry. Over 60% of the US strawberry industry has joined together as qualified investors in this project, 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, Naturipe Berry Growers, Driscoll's, and Grimes Produce Company. To learn more about Harvest CROO, including current career opportunities for experienced engineers, contact [info@harvestcroo.com](mailto:info@harvestcroo.com) or visit [www.harvestcroo.com](http://www.harvestcroo.com).

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