



Obsolete Strawberry Farm Workers Being Replaced By Robotic Pickers

Technocrat engineers build because farmers say Americans don't want to pick fruit. Seasonal labor used to come from Mexico, but apparently 20 million illegal aliens in America don't want to pick the fruit either. □
TN Editor

The problem is so pressing that competitors are banding together to fund Harv, which has raised about \$9 million from corporate behemoths like Driscoll's and Naturipe Farms, as well as from local farmers.

Wishnatzki, who created Harv with former Intel engineer Bob Pitzer, one of the minds behind the television hit "BattleBots," has invested \$3 million of his own money.

The electronic picker is still pretty clumsy.

During a test run last year, Harv gathered 20 percent of strawberries on

every plant without mishap. This year's goal: Harvest half of the fruit without crushing or dropping any. The human success rate is closer to 80 percent, making Harv the underdog in this competition.

But Harv doesn't need a visa or sleep or sick days. The machine looks like a horizontally rolling semitruck.

Peek underneath and see 16 smaller steel robots scooping up strawberries with spinning, claw-like fingers, guided by camera eyes and flashing lights.

Growers say it is getting harder to hire enough people to harvest crops before they rot. Fewer seasonal laborers are coming from Mexico, the biggest supplier of U.S. farmworkers. Fewer Americans want to bend over all day in a field, farmers say, even when offered higher wages, free housing and recruitment bonuses.

Human and machine have 10 seconds per plant. They must find the ripe strawberries in the leaves, gently twist them off the stems and tuck them into a plastic clamshell. Repeat, repeat, repeat, before the fruit spoils.

One February afternoon, they work about an acre apart on a farm the size of 454 football fields: dozens of pickers collecting produce the way people have for centuries - and a robot that engineers say could replace most of them as soon as next year.

The future of agricultural work has arrived here in Florida, promising to ease labor shortages and reduce the cost of food, or so says the team behind Harv, a nickname for the latest model from automation company Harvest CROO Robotics.

Harv is on the cutting edge of a national push to automate the way we gather goods that bruise and squish, a challenge that has long flummoxed engineers.

Designing a robot with a gentle touch is among the biggest technical obstacles to automating the American farm. Reasonably priced fruits and vegetables are at risk without it, growers say, because of a dwindling pool of workers.

“The labor force keeps shrinking,” said Gary Wishnatzki, a third-generation strawberry farmer. “If we don’t solve this with automation, fresh fruits and veggies won’t be affordable or even available to the average person.”

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Huawei/US Conflict Hinders Plans For 5G Rollout

China's behemoth Huawei is hindered by the growing concern of foreign leaders that it is an organ of the Technocrat dictatorship. Huawei's plans for 5G domination are thus in serious jeopardy. □ TN Editor

The US-led offensive against Chinese tech firm Huawei is creating big problems for mobile operators as they start building the next generation of wireless networks.

The United States is trying to persuade other countries not to allow Huawei equipment into new superfast 5G networks because it claims the gear could be used by the Chinese government for spying.

Huawei strongly denies the accusations. And it has already built up such a strong lead in 5G technology that it's practically irreplaceable for many wireless carriers that want to be among the first to offer the new services.

"Banning Huawei will create a vacuum that no one can fill in a timely fashion and may seriously impair 5G deployments worldwide," said Stéphane Téral, a mobile telecom infrastructure expert at research firm

IHS Markit. The uncertainty is particularly problematic for Europe, where Huawei was expected to play a key role in building 5G networks that the region's leaders say are vital for its economic future.

The international rollout of 5G has become a front line in the broader clash over advanced technology between the United States and China that is reshaping the relationship between the world's top two economies.

The United States doesn't have a heavyweight global competitor to Huawei in telecommunications equipment. The Chinese firm's biggest rivals are Ericsson (ERIC) of Sweden and Nokia (NOK) of Finland. But they have struggled for years with losses and job cuts while Huawei has powered ahead, generating annual revenue of more than \$100 billion, building a strong base in China and amassing intellectual property that will help determine the future of 5G.

Unhappy mobile operators

Some top international mobile operators are warning that by shutting Huawei out of 5G networks, countries risk undermining their own tech capabilities. The new wave of wireless communications is expected to increase internet speeds as much as 100 times compared with 4G networks, and help power emerging technologies like smart cities and connected vehicles.

Vodafone's (VOD) CEO Nick Read cautioned last month that a complete ban on all Huawei gear would substantially delay the availability of 5G. The mobile carrier has suspended the installation of the Chinese company's equipment in core networks in Europe while it speaks with authorities and the company.

In August, Vodafone slammed the Australian government's decision to ban Huawei from providing 5G technology for networks there, saying the move "fundamentally undermines Australia's 5G future."

UK telecom group BT's chief architect, Neil McRae, put the situation in stark terms late last year.

"There is only one true 5G supplier right now, and that is Huawei," he

said at an industry event in London. “The others need to catch up.”

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UK Parliament Calls Mark Zuckerberg and Facebook ‘Digital Gangsters’

The corporate culture at Facebook created by its founder Mark Zuckerberg, is likened to ‘digital gangsters’ who see themselves as above the law. Regulation will follow. □ TN Editor

[Facebook](#) deliberately broke privacy and competition law and should urgently be subject to statutory regulation, according to a devastating parliamentary report denouncing the company and its executives as “digital gangsters”.

The [final report](#) of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport select committee's 18-month investigation into disinformation and fake news accused Facebook of purposefully obstructing its inquiry and failing to tackle attempts by Russia to manipulate elections.

"Democracy is at risk from the malicious and relentless targeting of citizens with disinformation and personalised 'dark adverts' from unidentifiable sources, delivered through the major social media platforms we use every day," warned the committee's chairman, Damian Collins.

The report:

- Accuses [Mark Zuckerberg](#), Facebook's co-founder and chief executive, of contempt for parliament in refusing three separate demands for him to give evidence, instead sending junior employees unable to answer the committee's questions.
- Warns British electoral law is unfit for purpose and vulnerable to interference by hostile foreign actors, including agents of the Russian government attempting to discredit democracy.
- Calls on the British government to establish an independent investigation into "foreign influence, disinformation, funding, voter manipulation and the sharing of data" in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, the 2016 EU referendum and the 2017 general election.

Labour moved quickly to endorse the committee's findings, with the party's deputy leader, Tom Watson, announcing: "Labour agrees with the committee's ultimate conclusio

n - the era of self-regulation for tech companies must end immediately.

"We need new independent regulation with a tough powers and sanctions regime to curb the worst excesses of surveillance capitalism and the forces trying to use technology to subvert our democracy."

The culture secretary, Jeremy Wright, who is to meet Zuckerberg this week to discuss harms resulting from social media, will likely come under pressure to raise the committee's concerns with the Facebook

chief executive directly.

Launched in 2017 as concern grew about the influence of false information and its ability to spread unscrutinised on social media, the inquiry was turbocharged in March the following year, with the [Cambridge Analytica data-harvesting scandal](#).

The Observer revealed the company had secretly acquired data harvested from millions of Facebook users' profiles and was selling its insights to political clients to allow them to more effectively manipulate potential voters. The company has since [collapsed into administration](#).

The committee argues that, had Facebook abided by the terms of an agreement [struck with US regulators](#) in 2011 to limit developers' access to user data, the scandal would not have occurred. "The Cambridge Analytica scandal was facilitated by Facebook's policies," it concludes.

The 108-page report makes excoriating reading for the social media giant, which is accused of continuing to prioritise shareholders' profits over users' privacy rights.

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