

Area X.O — Drive the Future

Ottawa Smart Farm brings technology into the equation

The Story

The Ottawa Smart Farm, located at the Area X.O Futureplex, is a one-of-a-kind operation that aims to help the agriculture industry innovate in partnership with the City of Ottawa. Part of a national network of smart farms, the Ottawa operation is led by Invest Ottawa and also has \$29 million in public- and private-sector investments.

“We’re making farming more productive,” says farmer-in-residence Jordan Wallace. The work he does for Invest Ottawa could be of benefit for his own mixed-grain family farm and, as he also owns a technology company, he’s the perfect person to guide the farm. Technology is, after all, what the smart farm is all about.

The Obstacle

Farmers are bombarded with technological advances that promise everything from increased productivity to sustainability. But the technology comes with a price. The Ottawa Smart Farm plays an important role in testing available software and letting farmers know what works so they can do the math to rationalize the expense.

“Why should I install \$100,000 worth of weather stations when I’m not getting enough data to make decisions?” Wallace says, as an example.



The Solution

The answer to that \$100,000 question becomes much clearer with data available from the Ottawa Smart Farm.

Through one experiment using a new system, Wallace discovered he could use 30 per cent less fertilizer than he had been and get better results. But the system costs \$300,000.

“By giving a farmer those numbers, they can find out if that expenditure makes sense for their farm, from an environmental standpoint and from a cost-of-production standpoint — more yield equals more profit — with fewer input costs.”

With that particular system, he required his tractor only half as often so he burned less diesel fuel.



The Update and the Future

“We want to help farmers make decisions based on the data we’re collecting,” Wallace says.

The future involves leveraging cutting-edge technology that’s not widely available today, to collect relevant data and, with the help of students studying geographic information systems, farmers will learn how to interpret that data. “We’re trying to leverage Ottawa’s smart-centre power,” he says.

“We need to bring in industries that have specialized in their selected siloes.”

Testimonial

Wallace, who has a family farm and a technology company, plans to implement fertile-stripping at his farm.

“And we’re working with that to improve water quality and smart drainage, as well,” Wallace says. “With the data we’ve seen from the Smart Farm, we’re going implement increased changes and additional changes to help adapt what we’ve seen to improve our costs of production. The farm provides access and data and it becomes a learning tool.”

- Jordan Wallace, Founder, Farmer-in-Residence
Ottawa Smart Farm



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