

Oppy is set to conduct two independent trials to test new technologies that could potentially provide solutions to persistent issues faced by the strawberry industry.

The first of said trials is a USDA-funded research project with the purpose of testing a new approach to pest and disease mitigation, the [company](#) said.

The study will be in cooperation with the University of California, Santa Cruz, and will explore alternative treatments for soil-borne pathogens that adversely affect strawberry cultivation, such as *Fusarium oxysporum* and *Macrophomina phaseolina*.

“We’re extremely excited to be working on finding cutting edge solutions to challenges facing the strawberry industry as a whole,” Oppy’s VP of Categories, Berries, and Greenhouse Jason Fung said in regards to the trial.

“Oppy’s participation in this research project has the potential to be truly transformative, as most soilborne pathogens are lethal to strawberry crops, so any improvements in reducing this will have a tremendous impact on our business on multiple fronts.”

The second trial, on the other hand, will focus on improving the efficiency of strawberry cultivation operations via the use of a robotic harvester with the hope that the machine can serve as a solution to common industry problems that have only been aggravated by the pandemic, such as labor scarcity.

Principally, this trial will determine if robotic picking is more efficient and cost-effective than traditional methods. It will also evaluate the harvester’s ability to select fruit based on specific standards, and how well it works with particular varieties.

“Automation in agriculture has been catapulted into the spotlight thanks to the unique challenges posed by the pandemic,” said Oppy’s Senior Manager of Insights and Innovation Garland Perkins.

“By assessing the first-ever commercially available robotic harvester for strawberries, Oppy has once again taken a leading role in exploring the future of our industry. Engaging with our stakeholders across the supply chain is necessary for the success of these trials, and reflects the collaborative approach that is essential for innovation.”

These trials are the latest in a series conducted by Oppy over over the past few years. Prior areas of investigation have been shelf life extension, varietal development, and automation.