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Local tech firm wants to increase greenhouse operations efficiency

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RedBud Software Inc. offers a product that aims to improve the efficiency of certain tasks within the indoor agricultural space, including research greenhouses and the emerging cannabis industry.

Based on research from The Ohio State University, the company's browser-based software is marketed to the controlled environment agriculture, or CEA, industry.

Bob Wiggins, the startup company's CEO, said the product isn't like other financial or business process management software.

"We're really an operations software," he said.

The software tackles four different areas of controlled environment agriculture facilities: space allocation, pest management, task assignment and equipment maintenance.

For space allocation, the software manages the physical placement of crops within the confines of a greenhouse or similar facility like a game of Tetris over the plant's growth cycle.

With pest management, the software can track any threats to crops such as insects and diseases.

With task management, head growers can use the software to assign tasks to its teams of employees instead of them "driving in a golf cart yelling at people" what to do, Wiggins said. The software will notify the grower what tasks were completed and which ones still need to be done. The process would be useful to controlled environment agriculture companies that usually have hundreds of employees.

In addition, the software helps track when equipment, which companies spend thousands of dollars on, needs routine and emergency maintenance, Wiggins said.

RedBud Software formed last year but started operations earlier this year after raising hundreds of thousands of dollars in a round of funding. Wiggins declined to provide a figure.

Joan Leonard, who had worked as Ohio State's greenhouse coordinator for more than 30 years, developed the technology.

"I know the pain points," she said in a blog post from Rev1 Ventures, a startup accelerator that's supported

RedBud Software. "When I was managing the greenhouses, I was always trying to find ways to run them more efficiently. There was no solution to turn to that helped us automate day-to-day operations more effectively, instead of manually, so we decided to develop our own, with the IT group at OSU. When I first started down this road, it was purely to help me and make my job easier."

The company received award and grant funding from the OSU Technology Commercialization Office and the Ohio Third Frontier's Technology Validation and Start-up Fund to develop the product. Wiggins said the software has undergone some feature updates throughout this year.

"We'll be doing six software releases this year," he said. "We try to do one every two months."

Wiggins ran several startups and a venture fund on the West Coast. He moved to Columbus two years ago to work with Columbus' startup scene and joined RedBud because he thought it was a good opportunity.

Wiggins added that the United States is becoming a quick adopter of controlled environment agriculture practices whereas Europe has more history with the practices. He said the market for CEA-related software is valued at \$1 billion in the United States compared with \$5 billion worldwide. He expects the company will have a large footprint in the research greenhouse space.

"We're off to the races," he said.

