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Governor Patrick Celebrates State’s Thriving Robotics Industry During Visit to Harvest Automation

State Investment Supporting Growth of Innovative Manufacturer

BILLERICA – Thursday, October 3, 2013 – Governor Deval Patrick today celebrated growth and opportunity in the Massachusetts innovation economy during a tour of Harvest Automation’s onsite manufacturing facility and robotics testing area. Harvest Automation manufactures sophisticated robots to support the agricultural industry at farms across the nation. The company’s growth from two to 37 employees has been bolstered by state investment through MassVentures, a quasi-public organization supporting the expansion of early-stage technology companies to help fuel the Commonwealth’s innovation economy.

“Harvest Automation is an exciting part of a flourishing robotics industry here in Massachusetts,” said Governor Patrick. “Harvest and companies like it prove that our strategy of investing time, ideas and a little money in education, innovation and infrastructure is a winning strategy for the Commonwealth.”
Headquartered in Billerica, Harvest Automation released the first practical, scalable robots for a range of agricultural applications. Assisting farms across the country with their labor shortages, Harvest is enabling growers to create a sustainable workforce of robots to work safely alongside people to increase efficiency, reliability and quality. The robots are able to perform as much manual labor as required by each grower, helping human workers focus on other vital tasks. They also can increase plant quality by optimizing plant placement in fields and reduce non-labor production costs, including the use of water, pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers.

"We are very pleased to have Governor Patrick visit our company," said Harvest Automation Chief Executive Officer John Kawola. "We are building a high tech manufacturing business here in Massachusetts. Harvest Automation robots help farmers improve the efficiency, reliability and safety of their workforce and the state's investment and guidance were instrumental in getting us started."

In 2008, MassVentures invested $500,000 in Harvest Automation and, in 2009, joined their board of directors as an observer. MassVentures continues to be actively involved with the company, investing approximately $2 million to date. With its help, Harvest Automation has leveraged a total of $18 million in private investment.

"Harvest Automation is a great example of how the Commonwealth is willing to invest in new leaders, new technologies and leading-edge emerging market segments to help companies grow and prosper here in Massachusetts," said Nick Pappas, Vice President of MassVentures. "Massachusetts has emerged as a national leader in robotics and we at MassVentures are proud to play a part in it through our continued commitment to Harvest."

Harvest is also one of the start-up companies that participated in the Massachusetts Tech Hub Collaborative's 12x12 Initiative. Established in 2009, the Initiative brings some of the region's most recognized and well-regarded tech executives and venture capitalists together to support new tech start-ups through mentoring and networking.

"Through the 12x12 Initiative, Harvest Automation has gained access to a vital community of technology mentors and investors – seasoned executives in the Commonwealth's start-up ecosystem who have helped numerous young companies grow into technology leaders," said Pamela Goldberg, Chief Executive Office of the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative. "Harvest has used these all-important resources to grow their vision and produce innovative technologies. Their rapid expansion has helped provide a boost to the robotics sector, a key growth industry in the state, and has delivered vital high-skilled jobs to our economy."

Made up of close to 100 companies and 10 research institutions with over 35 different research programs, the Massachusetts robotics sector is experiencing a period of rapid growth here in the Commonwealth. In 2012, the companies making up the state's robotics sector had over $1.9 billion in sales and employed more than 3,200 people. Between 2008 and 2012, the sector created 900 jobs in Massachusetts and revenue grew annually at a rate of 11 percent.

"The growth of Harvest Automation reflects the coming of age of the innovation economy in Massachusetts," said Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Greg Bialecki. "We are well known for the cutting-edge technologies that get their start here, but now we are also becoming better known as a place where innovative companies choose to grow."
“Harvest Automation’s revolutionary and unique focus on agricultural robotics has spurred welcomed economic opportunity and job creation in the Town of Billerica,” said Senator Ken Donnelly. “We are grateful to the Patrick Administration for its continued investment in our state’s innovation economy, especially creative companies like Harvest.”

The visit included a tour of the company’s on-site manufacturing facility, a meet and greet with Harvest Automation employees and a first-hand look at the company’s products and robots and their test facility.

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