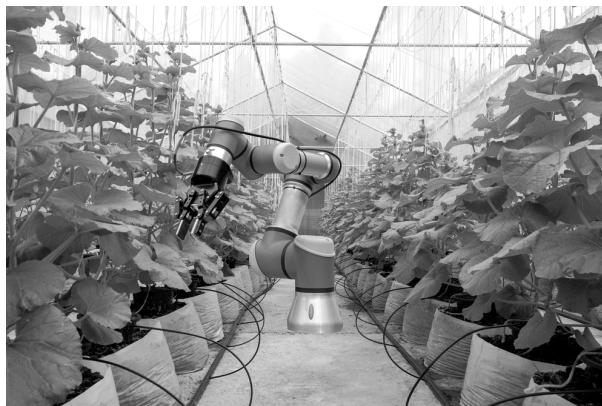


The fruit Iron Ox bears

adapted from an article by James Vincent

- 1 Iron Ox is one of a number of companies trying to automate the human-intensive work of agriculture. It uses a combination of robotic picking arms, hydroponic vats, and self-driving porters to grow vegetables. But despite its repeated claims that its farming is 'autonomous,' humans are still needed for a lot of the work. Laborers plant seedlings and package plants when they're ready to eat: robots just tend them while they're growing.



- 2 One big advantage of robot farms is that they 3 because of their modest size. Iron Ox says the greens it's producing for Bianchini's Market, a family owned grocery store in California, travel just 0.6 miles to get there, which is half the distance traveled by a typical head of lettuce. This means lower transportation costs and fewer food miles, a big factor when it comes to the environmental impact of what you put on your plate.
- 3 However, Iron Ox is selling just three varieties of leafy greens and delivering them to Bianchini's just once a week. The prices aren't exorbitant, but they are on the expensive side. A two-ounce box of red-veined sorrel will go for \$2.49, a two-ounce box of Genevieve basil will cost \$2.99, and four heads of baby lettuce will be \$4.99. That's competitive next to Whole Foods, where four heads of 'artisanal' lettuce cost \$3.24, but pricey compared to Walmart, which sells an 11-ounce box of greens for less than \$5.
- 4 Still, it's just the start for Iron Ox and the new wave of automated farming startups. And if the market they're trying to create starts to grow, who knows what fruit it will bear.

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