

Robotic weeder saves farmer time and money

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NEW LISKEARD — A weed-controlling robot has saved garlic farmer Doug Inglis a bundle in labour costs this season.

He says his cost of leasing the Naio Oz robot is \$3,000 less than the combined wages of three workers he employed after buying the farm last year.

The 75-year-old retired tile-drainage contractor already owned a robotic lawn mower that did a good job of cutting grass in his back yard. It served as the inspiration to get a robot for the new farm “because a lot of people don’t want to work anymore,” he observed. “If they do come to work, they tell you at 8 a.m. that they have to leave by 1 p.m. or something because they’ve got other things in their life that you have to learn how to deal with.”

It’s also a challenge to supervise and manage employees, he says. “And then if somebody doesn’t come, the others have to work harder.”

Inglis “really can’t say enough” about the French-made robot that he leased this year from Haggerty AgRobotics in Bothwell. About the size of a small filing cabinet laid on its side, and weighing about the same as an ATV, the unit knocks out weeds by dragging three v-shaped tines behind it at around 2 km/h. The wheeled machine will weed the equivalent of four acres — the land base he aims to eventually cultivate — in about 8 hours on a single charge, according to Inglis, who brings the unit home each night on a trailer for recharging.

“You just can’t believe what it’s like to start that thing up, then go away and do something else and look over, and the robot’s just working away,” he marvels. “I don’t know how you could make it any better.”

The agricultural robotic revolution “is coming faster than you might want to think,” he says. “It’s unbelievable, the comfort it gives you.”

He was bemused and delighted to come up to the machine recently as it rested in the field, with the words “mission accomplished” displayed on its control screen.

Inglis’s machine is part of a small but growing army of weed-killing robots in Ontario vegetable fields.

Haggerty AgRobotics founder and president Chuck Baresich says the Naio Oz unit is his most popular field robot.

The Oz is worth about \$60,000, although Baresich has found leasing to be of greater interest to his emerging client base. Seven of the units have gone out on lease this year at \$8,000 each for a 16-week seasonal stint. Two others have been sold outright.

His company offers six other in-field robot models, including larger Naio units capable of weeding up to four rows. There are 19 Haggerty robots currently deployed on customer fields, all of them in Southwestern Ontario, with the exception of Inglis’s unit and a couple in New York state.

The typical client is a market-garden operator with 50 to 100 acres of various vegetable crops, Baresich says. “They’ll have 3 acres of this, 3 acres of that, 5 acres of onions, 10 acres of something else, and they’ll use the Oz robot to help them weed some of those plots.”



Garlic farmer Doug Inglis says this robotic weeder has saved him \$3,000 this season.

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