



Horticultural research centre marks 10-year anniversary

Industry and consumer focused innovation drives Vineland success

July 25, 2017

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Vineland Research and Innovation Centre building

Vineland – It’s been 10 years since a new horticultural research facility in Niagara Region was launched as the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre (Vineland).

Since then, Vineland has been turning heads across Canada and internationally with its needs-based innovations. The organization reflects the entire horticulture value chain from farmers to consumers, and they’re not afraid to take big steps to help the industry solve problems.

“We started by understanding what needed to be done and how we needed to work to make a difference, which is real results with real impact from acres in the field to shelf space in the store,” says Vineland’s CEO, Dr. Jim Brandle.



Asian eggplants at Vineland

Addressing the labour intensive nature of horticultural production was a need identified early on. Today, machines designed in Vineland's robotics program and built in Ontario are coming into use in fruit and vegetable greenhouses, which Brandle says will go a long way in helping to keep growers competitive, as well as boost the local manufacturing and automation sector. Sweet potatoes, okra and Asian eggplant are offering new market opportunities for growers and consumers eager to eat more locally produced food.

And Vineland's rose breeding program made a big splash earlier this year when its Canadian Shield rose – a trademarked low-maintenance and winter hardy variety bred in Canada – was named Flower of the Year at Canada Blooms.



Greenhouse at Vineland Research and Innovation Centre

Another significant milestone was the construction of the largest, most modern horticultural research greenhouse in North America with commercial-scale height and growing rooms dedicated to horticulture, which opened in 2016 and was built around the needs of Canada's greenhouse vegetable and flower growers. "Today, we're commercializing innovations, from the Canadian Shield rose to new apple and pear varieties," Brandle says. "We are having the kind of impact that we sought in those early days."

Natural ways to control greenhouse pests – called biocontrols – are making a real difference to flower growers and a new technology that can identify genetic variants for traits in all plants has just been spun-off into a for-profit company.

"We're creating a reputation and that alone is an achievement because we're the new kid on the block," he says. "We have a ton of good people with and around the organization and on our board who are making this happen. "Vineland is an partner to the horticulture industry, according to Jan VanderHout, a greenhouse important

vegetable grower and Chair of the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association.



Canadian Shield roses

"They are very good at asking us what we want and taking a whole value chain approach to research and innovation," VanderHout says. "You need the right facilities and expertise and Vineland fills that need to the benefit of the industry as a whole."



Looking to the future, both Brandle and VanderHout predict that cap and trade pressure and high energy costs will result in more work around energy use and carbon footprint reduction. And Vineland's consumer-focused approaches will continue to drive new innovation, from high flavour greenhouse tomatoes to Ontario-grown apple varieties.

"We will further lever consumer-driven plant breeding and work with the intent around pleasing consumers and trying to understand what they want so we can build that into our selection criteria," Brandle says.

Photo source: Vineland, AgInnovation Ontario

Robot gently attaches to the mushroom it is about to harvest

<https://www.aginnovationontario.ca/en/horticultural-research-centre-marks-10-year-anniversary/#more-2043>