

## **Vineland reflects on a decade of innovation**

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A decade ago, the CEO of Vineland Research and Innovation Centre (Vineland) was holding in his hands a proposal for renewal and reinvention mapping out an exciting future for the former Vineland Research Station.

Today, he can take stock of remarkable accomplishments by a team of scientists, along with valued partners and collaborators, who make horticulture in Canada a sustainable industry.

Take the new Collaborative Greenhouse Technology Centre, one of the largest pre-commercial scale horticulture research greenhouse in North America. At one acre under glass, it's a testament to the tenacity of Vineland's leadership and researchers dedicated to fostering industry collaboration on innovation and commercialization.



*Vineland's CEO Jim Brandle*

"For example, knowing that the cost of production is the single biggest challenge for the industry... our work in automation is changing the channel and supporting the industry with new technology," Brandle said.

Genome Canada grants, the first of which came in 2014, were “the moment in time we realized validation of our scientific credibility,” Brandle said. “A significant investment was made at Vineland to discover key genes in plant disease resistance, and to develop more flavourful tomatoes.”

The launch of Vineland’s first spin-off business, Platform Genetics Inc., is another feather in the research centre’s cap. It allows plant breeders everywhere to access Vineland’s Deep Variant Scanning platform, which has the power to quickly and inexpensively identify valuable genetic variations in plants.

There’s also a new sweet potato variety bound to be a fan favourite which is set to take root on a commercial scale in 2019. The world crops program is feeding diversity by providing growers with opportunities to cultivate okra plus Indian and Asian eggplant for new Canadians.

And consumers wanting to sink their teeth into more local food have been snapping up Cold Snap, a made-in-Canada pear available during the winter.

The real measure of success, however, has been seeing the fruits of Vineland’s labour in orchards, fields, greenhouses and of course, in supermarkets.

“Those early days were spent assembling a team and putting a research program portfolio together to get where we are today, with a group of projects that deliver acres in the field and shelf space in the grocery store,” said Brandle.

But he isn’t resting on Vineland’s laurels. Instead, he’s taking stock of what’s still to do, and it’s a lot. He has visions of more greenhouse vegetables being grown in Niagara, where space under glass has typically been reserved for floriculture.

Advancing automation is another goal.

“We want to build the technology base for agriculture in the province and advancing automation and technology sectors is the way to do it. Building robots and developing the software to run them, there’s lots of opportunities there,” he said.

Focusing on innovative energy production and more consumer-driven plant breeding are also in store.

Admittedly, it will take commitment to get there. Still, looking back 10 years, Brandle said the research centre is doing exactly what it set out to do with the support of industry partners and collaborators.

[Download the 2017-2018 Innovation Report here.](#)

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