

Summary Report: Strengthening Midwest agtech entrepreneurship in response to COVID-19

Wells Fargo Innovation Incubator (IN2): 2020 Channel Partner Strategic Award

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Over the last year, the Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute (DWFI) and Invest Nebraska have collaborated to support Midwest agtech startups through the Wells Fargo Innovation Incubator (IN2) Channel Partner Strategic Award. The award was used to understand critical agtech ecosystem needs in the Midwest and strengthen collaborations to help startups manage COVID-19 disruptions. As IN2 channel partners, DWFI was the primary award recipient and we were eager to use the award as an opportunity to work with Invest Nebraska's agtech incubator, The Combine. The Combine provides entrepreneurial support to companies serving tens of millions of acres of row crop agricultural production. The following is a summary of the many things we were able to accomplish with the funds from this award and with the help of our many partners in the ecosystem!

Rent relief and operational support for agtech and cleantech startups

We supported 4 ag and cleantech startups by providing seven months of rent relief in 2020. These startups all had leases for space at The Combine incubator throughout 2020. The Combine Incubator is Invest Nebraska's incubation space located at Nebraska Innovation Campus. In the time following this rent assistance, three of the startups have flourished while the fourth company has since exited The Combine. Here are some updates from the remaining companies that received rental assistance:

- **CropX**: CropX [acquired](#) another startup, New Zealand-based Regen, to expand their market.
- **FarmAfield**: FarmAfield has begun several solar power pilot programs here in Nebraska.
- **Platform Cattle**: The company has made additional sales to clients in Texas and Oklahoma.

In addition to providing rental space, The Combine provides significant technical and operational support to agtech startups. Thanks to this support from The Combine, which was amplified by funding from the channel partner award, 6 additional agtech companies in The Combine's portfolio have experienced exciting milestones over the last year:

- **AgWater Harvester**: The company has begun a small trial program with a Fortune 500 company.
- **Birds Eye Robotics**: The company has received a purchase order commitment from a strategic partner and a term sheet from their lead investor for their seed round.
- **Corral**: The company [recently won](#) a LaunchLNK grant as well as the University of Nebraska New Venture Competition.
- **Grain Weevil**: The team [was awarded](#) the MIT Lemmelson award for innovation in agriculture.
- **Thyreos**: The company [raised](#) a \$750,000 seed round and began a study on Infectious Bovine Rhinotracheitis.
- **TreadSure**: The company's app has passed 500 downloads as part of the beta release of its mobile application.

Workshops and related events

We hosted and promoted multiple workshops and events around strengthening agtech entrepreneurship with Invest Nebraska and other stakeholders in the ecosystem. Here are some of the selected workshops and events that we hosted:

- **"Customer discovery in agtech" with Nebraska Business Development Center** (August 4, 2020) – We learned a lot from running our customer discovery workshop and had some good discussions with participants. Based on positive feedback, we presented the workshop again later that year in November. You can watch the recorded workshop [here](#).
- **Navigating state resources for Ag startups with Nebraska Department of Economic Development** (September 14, 2020) – We presented this virtual workshop on grants and resources available for agtech startups in Nebraska. [Here](#) is the link to access the recorded workshop.
- **Intellectual property for agtech entrepreneurs with Suiter Swantz** (October 29, 2020)

We also promoted several other workshops and events with Invest Nebraska, including The Combine's Demo Day for Invest Nebraska's agtech portfolio companies last October.

Key Metrics

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| <i>Number of people/companies participating in events and discussions</i> | 226 |
| <i>Number of digital and audio media resources produced</i> | 19 |
| <i>Number of people/companies reached via mentoring, incubation, and acceleration curricula</i> | 60 |
| <i>Number of people/companies reached via Nebraska agtech map</i> | 20,000+ |
| <i>Number of people who viewed/read our agtech blogs</i> | 2,500+ |

COVID-19 impacts on Midwest agtech ecosystem report

We surveyed more than 40 portfolio pre- and post-revenue ag and cleantech startups in Nebraska and the broader Midwest region to understand key pain points related to COVID-19 and disruptions to supply chains and the general economy. We also consulted with key strategic partners (investors, growers, state economic development representatives, and food industry groups) for potential mitigation strategies. We synthesized the highs, lows, and short- and long-term implications from our interviews and published a short report summarizing our findings on COVID-19 impacts on the Midwest agtech ecosystem. Read the full report [here](#). (Reach: 1,500+ readers)

Nebraska agtech startup ecosystem map

Our first-of-its-kind "Nebraska agtech startup ecosystem map" was intended to capture agtech startups as well as the broader agricultural ecosystem in the state. We also included a range of partners, funders, industries, university programs, and advocates that intersect with and support agricultural startups. We plan to continue to update the map as new companies enter the space. [Here](#) is the Nebraska agtech map (Reach: 20,000+ readers).

Midwest agtech ecosystem writing

We committed to create several playbooks as part of our IN2 award application. As our work got underway, it became clear that detailed written playbooks wouldn't capture well the insights we were generating. Instead, in addition to the other outputs we described above, we wrote a couple of blogs summarizing some of the most important things we learned in Midwest agtech:

1. Where next, Midwest agtech?

In this blog post, Ankit Chandra and Nick Brozović discussed the trends they've seen and what this might mean for agtech in Nebraska and regionally. Read the full blog post [here](#). (Reach: 1,500+ readers)

2. Customer discovery for Agtech startups

In this blog post, Nick Brozović and Ankit Chandra reflected on the feedback and learning that they've received about customer discovery for Midwest agtech startups, based on experiences with founders, funders, farmers, and others involved in the process. [Here](#) is the link to access the full blogpost. (Reach: 1,500+ readers)