

How Trump's 'get-tough' immigration policy is impacting agricultural technology innovation

President Donald Trump's get-tough attitude on immigration is spurring a surge of high-tech investment in America's heartland, where farmers are scrambling for new ways of coping with labor shortages and slumping profits.

Finding people for the sometimes back-breaking tasks of planting and harvesting crops has become more and more difficult in the U.S., where the industry has relied on cheap immigrant labor for generations. Since taking office in January [2017], Trump has compounded the problem with actions to limit foreign workers. But that's also encouraged some investors to bet that growers will increasingly need new tools to cut costs and boost productivity.

In the first quarter of 2017, a surge of cash has poured into agricultural technology companies, including some big-time investors such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Sam Altman's Y Combinator. Startups received \$200 million through 29 deals, the most of any quarter since researcher CB Insights began tracking the data in 2012.

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Technology isn't new to agriculture. Since John Deere invented the steel plow in the early 1800s, farming has embraced new tools from tractors that use global positioning systems to genetically modified seeds. But even though much of the \$400 billion U.S. farm economy is mechanized, fresh produce and dairy remain heavily dependent on human labor. Much of that comes from immigrants, both documented and unauthorized.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion, and analysis. Read full, original post: In Trump's America, heartland hooks up with Silicon Valley