OcÃ©alia backs Cyclair to scale robotic weeding, signaling new push for herbicide alternatives in European agriculture

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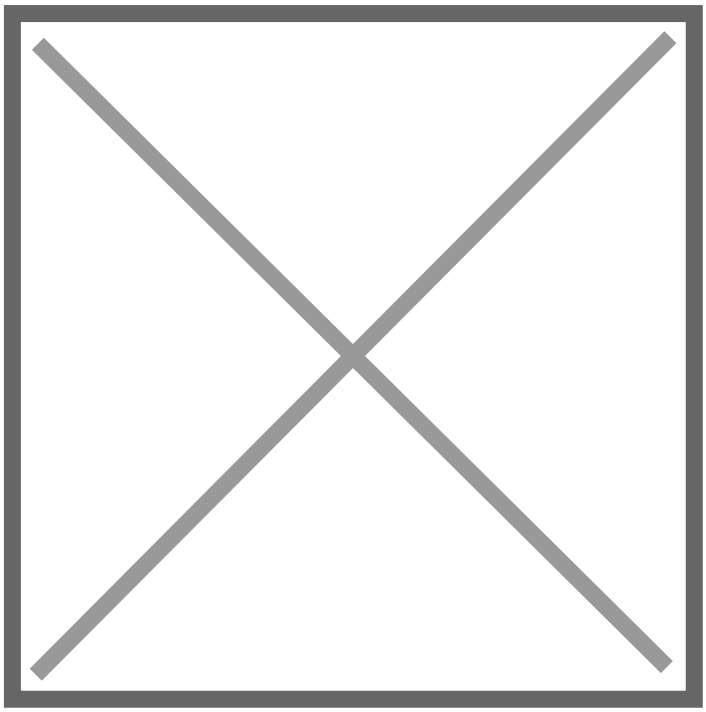

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French agricultural cooperative group OcÃ©alia has taken a strategic minority stake in agri-robotics company Cyclair, reinforcing its commitment to sustainable farming under its Cap 2030 roadmap and accelerating the deployment of autonomous weeding technologies across field crops.

The investment reflects a broader shift within European agriculture, where cooperatives and growers are increasingly seeking scalable alternatives to conventional herbicides amid tightening environmental regulations, rising sustainability expectations, and growing demand for precision farming solutions.

Founded in Pressac in western France, Cyclair has developed an autonomous mechanical weeding robot designed specifically for large-scale field crop operations. The technology combines computer vision and LIDAR-based navigation, enabling the machine to identify crop rows, distinguish weeds from cultivated plants, and navigate field obstacles without relying on GPS guidance.

The system is currently deployed in maize, sunflower and rapeseed cultivation, with future expansion planned into cereals, vegetable crops and higher-value specialty segments. Beyond weed management, the platform also functions as a field intelligence tool, collecting agronomic data such as crop development indicators that can support more informed farm management decisions.

For OcÃ©alia, the partnership aligns closely with its Sillon Responsable sustainability framework, which positions technological innovation as a key lever for improving environmental performance while maintaining economic viability for farmers.

A central focus of the collaboration is ensuring that robotic weeding can compete economically with traditional chemical weed-control programmes. Current herbicide-based interventions typically cost between â?¬35 and â?¬85 per hectare depending on crop and application complexity. Both organisations are working toward achieving comparable operational economics, a critical factor in driving broader adoption beyond early technology adopters.

To accelerate commercial deployment, OcÃ©alia and Cyclair have jointly submitted a proposal under Franceâ??s PRAAM programme, a national initiative designed to support large-scale testing of agricultural innovations and new business models. The proposal includes a performance-guarantee mechanism that shifts a portion of adoption risk away from farmers and toward solution providers, potentially lowering barriers to technology uptake.

The partnership is also exploring technical synergies with OcÃ©aliaâ??s network of Lely Centers, creating opportunities to leverage existing robotics expertise and establish local maintenance and support infrastructure across the cooperativeâ??s operating regions.

The investment underscores a growing recognition that autonomous field robotics could play an increasingly important role in future crop production systems, particularly as growers seek practical pathways to reduce dependence on chemical inputs while improving operational efficiency. As precision agriculture evolves from experimentation to large-scale implementation, collaborations between farmer-owned cooperatives and technology developers are emerging as a critical mechanism for translating innovation into field-level impact.

With regulatory scrutiny of agrochemical use intensifying across Europe and labour availability becoming a growing concern in many farming regions, robotic weed management is rapidly moving from a niche innovation toward a mainstream component of sustainable crop production strategies.

Source: iGrow News