



# The Reservoir Unveils the First On-Farm Robotics Incubators

*Reservoir Farms Incubators Open First in Salinas and Merced in 2025*

*Anchor Partners Include Western Growers, UC ANR, Merced College, Hartnell College, and HawkTower*

WOODLAND, CA, October 23, 2024 — Today at FIRA USA 2024, the [Reservoir](#) announced the first-ever on-farm robotics incubators, [Reservoir Farms](#), set to open in the Central and Salinas Valleys in early 2025. This pioneering initiative significantly shifts how agricultural technology innovates through real-world testing environments, world-class resources, and critical industry partnerships.

California agriculture faces [critical challenges](#), including labor availability and cost, import competition, increased regulation, [water scarcity](#), and climate-related challenges, including extreme weather. These challenges have spurred significant advancements in agricultural precision, automation, mechanization, and robotics in recent years. Despite advancements, early-stage agtech projects lack critical ecosystem support, like connecting directly with growers, testing and validating their solutions, and accessing dedicated shop space and farmland. These gaps hinder capital efficiency and the development of critical solutions that meet the agricultural sector's needs.

Initial projects at the incubators will focus on early-stage agricultural innovations in automation and robotics, including rovers and drones, that accelerate the development of breakthrough solutions to the opportunities and imperatives faced by California farms producing high-value specialty crops, such as labor shortages, profitability, and adopting climate-smart technologies.

[Western Growers Association](#), a key advocate for advancing agricultural innovation, will provide financial and operational support as an anchor partner. Anchor educational partners like [UC ANR](#), [Hartnell College](#), and [Merced College](#) will play a crucial role in innovation and workforce development, preparing the next generation of agricultural researchers, professionals, and innovators to drive the future of farming in California. [HawkTower](#), a venture capital firm investing in early-stage startups developing breakthrough innovations for California's environmental and industrial imperatives, is also an anchor partner.

"The launch of Reservoir Farms is a critical step forward in ensuring the future resilience of California's agriculture and across the Central Coast and Central Valley," said Danny Bernstein, CEO of [the Reservoir](#) and Managing Partner of HawkTower. "By placing incubators directly on the farm, we enable innovators to test, iterate, and scale solutions in real-world conditions as a more immediate path to advance farming communities."

## **A New Model to Incubate AgTech Innovation**

The idea for [Reservoir Farms](#) emerged from extensive industry research and consultations with over 50 organizations in the specialty crop sector. Key insights uncovered critical gaps in startups' access to

real-world testing environments, shop space, and direct relationships with growers—factors severely hindered capital efficiency and posed a formidable barrier to innovation.

“Our goal is to eliminate the friction points that have historically slowed down the development of new agtech solutions,” said Walt Duflock, Senior Vice President of Innovation at Western Growers Association. “Reservoir Farms offers a new model, where startups can work side-by-side with growers to test their technologies, iterate in a low-stakes environment, and build scalable solutions to improve agriculture's operations.”

### **Supports Thriving Agtech Ecosystem and Job Creation**

The [Reservoir Farms](#) initiative also reflects a broad-based collaboration between key educational institutions, industry players, and local communities to ensure the next generation of agricultural professionals is equipped with the skills needed to support the region's growing agtech sector. Supporting partners include Central Coast Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Communities Organized for Relational Power in Action (COPA), Digital NEST, Farmhand Ventures, Merced County Farm Bureau, Milano Technical Group, Monterey Bay DART (Drone Automation & Robotics Technology), Monterey Bay Economic Partnership, Monterey County Farm Bureau, Tesseract Ventures, and The Vine.

“As robotics and automation become more integral to California agriculture, it's essential to have facilities like Reservoir Farms embedded within the farming community,” said Gabriel Youtsey, Chief Innovation Officer at UC ANR. “By bridging the gap between lab-based research and real-world application and accelerating tech transfer, Reservoir Farms can help build the workforce and technology needed to address the critical challenges on the farm, from labor shortages to climate change.”

### **A Focus on Specialized Services and Real-World Testing in California's Agricultural Heartland**

[Reservoir Farms](#) will open its first two locations in Salinas Valley and Merced in the first quarter of 2025. Participants can lease testing fields and shop space without the burden of multi-year leases, giving them the flexibility needed to scale. The incubators will offer fully equipped R&D workshops, secure storage for expensive equipment, and customized, pre-planted specialty crop fields for testing. These facilities will be complemented by Reservoir Farms' co-working spaces, meeting rooms, and a robust demo day schedule designed to connect startups with growers, investors, and other key stakeholders.

In addition, the Western Growers Association's validation process will provide startups with a quantitative “scorecard” that offers crucial metrics on scalability, efficacy, and financial viability. This validation, combined with UC ANR's field testing, will help startups refine their products and receive a critical stamp of approval that builds trust with growers and ensures a smoother path to commercialization.

#### **About the Reservoir:**

The Reservoir is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit building tech incubators for California's future. Founded in 2024, the Reservoir creates spaces where startups, researchers, organizations, and corporations can develop and test innovations beyond Silicon Valley, focusing on rural areas like the Central and Salinas Valleys. The Reservoir drives economic growth, workforce development, and environmental resilience across California's agricultural heartlands. Learn more at [www.thersvr.org](http://www.thersvr.org).

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