



Startup Weekend to Hold 54-hour Agriculture and IoT Event in Ventura County

January 12, 2016 Lauren Manning, AgFunder

Startup Weekend, a 54-hour startup competition that fosters ecosystem development, is coming to Ventura County, California.

Designed to help local startups launch, receive mentorship, and recruit experienced entrepreneurs as board members, the event will focus on creating innovative ideas at the intersection of agriculture and the Internet of Things (IoT). The competition will also focus on bringing IoT solutions to the healthcare industry.

Taking place March 11-13 at the Rancho Campana High School in Camarillo, CA, the event aims to attract entrepreneurs, system architects, application engineers, programmers, agriculture experts, plant scientists, and other professionals. They will then be tasked with devising new sensing methods for agriculture to launch new businesses that provide agricultural IoT systems.

At the weekend's outset, each startup will have 60 seconds to pitch their ideas to the attendees. Teams will form around the best ideas as they identify the resources and skills that each team member brings to the table. The remainder of the weekend will be spent bringing the ideas to life with the help of mentors and seasoned startup entrepreneurs. Mentors include Microsoft systems engineer Randy Hill, global vegetable production technology lead Sean Walters, Monsanto registered seed technologist David Johnston, and technology entrepreneur and investor Kevin Bromber.

On the Sunday, the teams will have a chance to pitch their prototypes to a panel of judges consisting of some of the most successful CEOs and executives from the region. The judging panel includes names such as Albert Garcia, Semtech CEO; Alex Teague, senior VP of major citrus and avocado producer Limoneira; and Daniel Schoenewald, executive VP of Advanced Motion Control.

The judges will select two winners—one for agriculture and one for healthcare—to claim a \$10,000 prize, in addition to a host of other in-kind awards like free co-working space, professional services, and products.

Ventura County is home to a rich agricultural economy, with over 190,343 acres of farmland providing over \$2 billion in value to the region. It's also home to Semtech, one of the largest suppliers of analog and mixed-signal semiconductors.

"Focusing on agriculture is a no brainer for this event, because if you look around here, all you see is a lot of farms," says Martin Shum, the man in charge of organizing Startup Weekend Ventura County and a board member of the local Chamber of Commerce. "Ag is also behind the eight ball regarding technology deployment, so it seemed like a good place to focus."

The format of the event is also key, pairing domain experts like agriculturalists and plant scientists with system analysts, engineers, programmers and other professionals to develop ideas. As Shum notes, it's nearly impossible to solve problems you don't understand, making these pairings and collaborations crucial to the event's success. On the flip side, even the most entrepreneurial farmer may have trouble getting his or her idea off the ground without the programming, engineering, or science components necessary to making it happen.

Ag and IoT have proven to be a good selection, with Shum receiving a considerable amount of interest in the event from both private and public sector sources. This has included endorsements and contributions from Monsanto, the Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner, and State Assembly Member Jacqui Irwin.

According to Shum, Ventura County used to rank among the best of the best when it came to fostering startup businesses in the area. Over time, he notes, the ecosystem began to dissolve, and startup business development slowed. Through the event, entrepreneurs will have a chance to network with successful entrepreneurs whose names hold clout in front of potential investors and VC firms, he added.

"If entrepreneurs don't have name recognition, they need someone to endorse them, which shows the VCs that this is a serious startup," he says. Shum hopes that the teams take advantage of the face-to-face meetings that this event will provide and that the momentum continues beyond the weekend. Attendees will also have a chance to meet a number of speakers attending the event, including John Greathouse, partner at early-stage B2B investment firm Rincon Venture Partners and Randy Churchill, SVP of technology banking at entrepreneur and VC focused Square 1 Bank.

"We want this to be real. The way I have advised the panel on how to judge is to vote for an idea only on the basis that you are willing to use it because you are the potential customer," says Shum, who hopes this judging ethos will foster early adoption of the competition's most successful ideas.

For more information about Startup Weekend Ventura County and how to buy tickets, [click here](#).