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## Technology, Talent Keep Area's Agriculture Growing Strong

**AG:** Local Strengths Like Genetics, Big Data and Talent Power Agbio Scene



■ By JARED WHITLOCK

Decades ago on North County farms, the Ecke family turned the poinsettia into a top-selling Christmas plant. From former Ecke land, Cibus again wants to put the region on the map.

The company — which recently filed for a \$100 million initial public offering — employs gene editing to boost crop yields and hardiness. Cibus and other San Diego companies are at the forefront of agriculture biotech, or “agbio,” a space adding a new chapter to the county’s storied agricultural past.

The region’s agbio prowess runs from genetic sequencing to big data to plant breeding.

“Everything that we need is here,” said Cibus CEO Peter Beetham, ticking off the reasons.

At the top of his list: heaps of talent in genomics, microbiology and plant cultures, coupled with older-school knowledge in areas like greenhouse management.

Speaking of which, the Sorrento Valley-based company leases greenhouses

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**AG:** Farming Problems Get Tech Solutions as Cos. See an Open Field



■ By ELISE REUTER

Bright green avocado trees dot the hills surrounding San Diego County, while tens of acres of multicolored ranunculus flowers bloom each year in Carlsbad. These products are big contributors to San Diego’s agricultural sector, which brought in more than \$1.7 billion last year.

Behind these farms are a growing number of tech companies aiming to help solve some of the biggest challenges in agriculture. They aren’t just driven to San Diego for the good weather and the variety of crops that grow here. Many of their founders have roots in one of the area’s tech giants, such as **Qualcomm**

**Inc.**, **Illumina Inc.** or **General Atomics**, with a bumper crop of incoming talent from San Diego’s universities.

### Using Technology

Eric Larson, executive director of the **San Diego County Farm Bureau**, said many farms are focused on reducing their water usage.

“It’s mostly about irrigation technology,” he said. “Water is very expensive and growers are sensitive to the amount of water they use.”

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