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SproutX's Julia Waite with panel members James Cooper-Jones, of CropLogic, and Robert Williams, of Artesian Venture Partners, and event presenter Roei Jaakob.  
Picture: Louise Barker

# Tech pitch sound

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SUNRAYSIA agriculture professionals and producers put six ag-tech start-ups in the hot seat yesterday during the Pitch the Producers *Shark Tank*-style event.

Presented by SproutX and Mildura Regional Development as part of the Victorian Small Business Festival, the event was the first of its kind in regional Australia.

The ag-tech and farm-tech start-ups put their ideas to the test before fielding questions from an audience made of 70 Sunraysia horticulture professionals.

SproutX community operations manager Julia Waite said receiving feedback from farmers was crucial to ensure the companies were solving real problems.

"We're a business coach for start-ups but we need the input of people on the

ground to know what the real problems are," she said.

"We can't know everything that's happening on the ground so we really wanted to open up a dialogue because we recognise farmers are step one in how we can produce good solutions for the horticulture industry."

She said Mildura was chosen to host the event because of the region's density and diversity of crop types.

"Mildura is already investing in technology, as it relies on irrigation and Sunraysia farmers in this area have got to be incredibly efficient with water," she said.

"To survive here you have to be in tune with what's the latest technology and how to use it, and that's what farmers in the region are doing."

Some of the start-ups' products had an on-farm focus, such as analytics for making better farm decisions, micro

weather station-type technology, smart tractors and produce traceability.

Others had a more "consumer-facing" focus, with one company discussing their business for agri-tourism and providing new revenue streams for the sector.

"Technology in agriculture is becoming incredibly important to maintain margin share for farmers," Ms Waite said.

"With the weather becoming more unpredictable and resources such as electricity becoming more expensive, farmers have to be smarter and smarter in the way they manage their farm."

The opening address was delivered by executive general manager of Olam Orchards Australia Damien Houlahan and concluded with a panel of industry leaders from ag-tech companies Croplogic and Artesian Investment Capital.