

# Google backs climate-change weather insurance startup

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A rainbow is formed as irrigation trucks spray water over plants in an effort to keep them from freezing in Homestead, Florida, in 2010. Google on Monday was among investors pumping \$42 million into a climate change inspired technology startup that calculates the chances of crops being ruined by weather.

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WeatherBill launched Total [Weather](#) Insurance in 2010 as a way for US farmers protect themselves against being devastated by weather, which the US Department of Agriculture blamed for 90 percent of [crop losses](#) last year.

"The flip flop of weather from one year to the next is the biggest

challenge farmers face," said Steve Wolters, a farmer who grows corn, soybean and wheat in the US state of Ohio.

"It makes sense to me to take advantage of WeatherBill's automated weather insurance programs that pinpoint the [weather conditions](#) expected to affect my land and pay me if they happen."

WeatherBill continuously aggregates weather data and runs large-scale weather simulations on its computers.

The [automated system](#) lets farmers or others customize insurance policies to the amount of rain or seasonal temperatures they need for fields to flourish.

Those taking part in the startup's second round of funding with [Google Ventures](#) included Khosla Ventures, First Round Capital, Index Ventures, and Allen & Company. Total investment in the company was just shy of \$60 million.

"WeatherBill is one of those rare companies that has the leadership and vision to apply new technology to an ancient and daunting problem -- weather's impact on agriculture," said Vinod Khosla, founder of Khosla Ventures.

"Now WeatherBill can help farmers globally deal with the increasingly extreme weather brought on by [climate change](#)."

WeatherBill plans to use the money to hire engineers in its San Francisco headquarters and to expand its offerings globally. WeatherBill has about 30 employees.

"It is a technology company doing some work in insurance," Bill Maris of Google Ventures said of WeatherBill.

"This is going to have a real world impact on agriculture," he continued. "Helping farmers protect their financial futures and protecting the global food supply is something we can all be excited with."

gc/sgUS-military-Afghanistan-media

US never used 'psy-ops' on lawmakers: officials

WASHINGTON, Feb 28, 2011 (AFP) - US military officials on Monday adamantly rejected allegations in a magazine article that the army used psychological operations to influence US lawmakers on the Afghanistan war.

Commanders in charge of training Afghan troops had asked staff members for routine research using publicly available information about the views of visiting lawmakers and did not order deceptive methods usually employed against enemy armies, military officials said.

A military lawyer had looked into the case and concluded the orders were lawful, the officials said.

The allegations in last week's Rolling Stone magazine article come from an army lieutenant colonel, Michael Holmes, who charges he was asked to violate regulations and use his "information operations" techniques on prominent senators.

The article has prompted an official investigation, ordered by the commander of US and NATO troops in Afghanistan, General David Petraeus, but officials in Kabul and Washington have pushed back against the allegations.

When Lieutenant General William Caldwell took over the NATO training mission in Afghanistan, he ordered an end to information

operations which he deemed unnecessary for a unit overseeing training Afghan soldiers and police, said a military official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

When Holmes was asked to carry out standard communications work instead of his information operations specialty, he objected, saying it violated rules meant to separate public relations from deception aimed at adversaries, the official said.

The head of communications for the training mission, Lieutenant Colonel Shawn Stroud, said Holmes or others with information operations were asked to help with routine work and not ordered to engage in psychological manipulation against VIP visitors.

"I categorically deny the assertion that NTM-A used an Information Operations cell to influence distinguished visitors," Stroud said in a "personal" statement released to AFP on Monday.

"Personnel with backgrounds in IO (information operations) were utilized only because of their availability. They were never directed to use their specific IO skills while preparing background information for the command in advance of distinguished guest visits," he said.

He also said a staff military lawyer determined that having Holmes participate in the effort was "completely legal."

Stroud called the Rolling Stone article inaccurate and based solely on one source.

Another piece last year in Rolling Stone, written by the same reporter, Michael Hastings, led to the sacking of Petraeus' predecessor, General Stanley McChrystal.

The profile, titled "The Runaway General," quoted McChrystal's staff castigating civilian leaders in the White House, including President Barack Obama.

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