

Field Robot Event 2018 - Task Description

Together with the DLG-Feldtage, 12th – 14th June 2018 at the Bernburg-Strenzfeld, Germany

Remark: The organizers tried to describe the tasks and assessments as good and fair as possible, but all teams should be aware of that we might need to modify the rules before or even during the contest! These ad hoc changes will always be decided by the jury members.

0. Introduction

The organizers expect that a general agreement between all participating teams is that the event is held in an “Olympic Manner”. The goal is a fair competition, without any technological or procedural cheating or gaining a competitive advantage by not allowed technologies. The teams should even provide support to each other with all fairness.

Any observed or suspected cheating should be made public immediately.

The jury members are obliged to act as neutrals, especially when having connections to a participating team. All relevant communication will be in English. For pleasing national spectators, the contest moderation could partly switch to a national language.

In 2018 five tasks will be prepared to challenge different abilities of the robots in terms of sensing, navigation and actuation: Basic Navigation, Advanced Navigation, Sensing, Weeding Control and Free Style (option).

If teams come with more than one machine the scoring, ranking and awarding will always be machine related and not team related.

All participating teams must contribute to the event proceedings with an article describing the machine in more details and perhaps their ideas behind it or development strategies in general.

During the machine runs for each task no team members are allowed to be in the inner contest area where the maize plants are and close to the robot during the performance. If the robot performance fails, it has to be stopped from outside with a remote switch. To enter the inner contest area is only allowed after (!) the robot has stopped. The control switch activating team member then can go to the machine and manually correct it. When the team member has left the inner contest area only then the robot is allowed to continue its operation. This procedure shall promote the autonomous mode during the contest and make the performance more attractive to spectators.

0.1. General rules

The use of a GNSS receiver is not allowed except for the Free Style in Task 5¹. The focus for the other tasks in terms of localization shall be on relative positioning and sensor-based behaviours.

Crop plants

¹ If you wish to use a GNSS, you must bring your own.

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The crop plant in task 1 to 4 is maize (corn) or *Zea Mays*². The maize plants will have a height of approximately 20 - 40 cm. The general appearance of the crop plants is location specific as well as yearly specific.

Damaged plants

A damaged plant is a maize plant that is permanently bent, broken or uprooted. The decision that a maize plant is damaged by a machine or not would be made by the jury members.

Parc fermé

During the contests, all robots have to wait in the parc fermé and no more machine modification to change the machine performance is allowed with regard to fairness. All PC connections (wired and wireless) have to be removed or switched off and an activation of a battery saving mode is recommended. This shall avoid having an advantage not being the first robot to conduct the task. The starting order will be random. When a robot will move to the starting point, the next robot will already be asked by the parc fermé officer to prepare for starting.

Navigation

The drive paths of the robots shall be between the crop rows and not above rows. Large robots or robots which probably partly damage the field or plants will always start after the other robots, including the second chance starting robots. However, damaged plants will be replaced by spare ones, to always ensure the same operation conditions for each run.

0.2. General requirements for all robots

Autonomous mode

All robots must act autonomously in all tasks, including the freestyle. Driving by any remote controller during the task is not allowed at any time. This includes steering, motion and all features that produce movement or action at the machine. Stopping and starting function for manual corrections of the machine is the only exception.

During start, the robot is placed at the beginning of the first row. The starting line is marked with a white cross line. Any part of the robot must not exceed the white line in the start. For signaling the start and end of a task there will be a clear acoustic signal. After the start signal, the robot must start within one minute. If the robot does not start within this time, it will get a second chance after all other teams finished their runs, but it must - after a basic repair - as soon as possible brought back into the parc fermé. If the robot fails twice, the robot will be excluded from the task list.

Start & Stop Controller

All robots must be equipped with and connected to one wireless remote START/STOP controller. Additional remote displays are allowed but without user interaction, e.g. laptop.

Preferably, the remote controller is a device with two buttons clearly marked START and STOP. Alternatively, the coding may be done with clear green and red colours.

² Plant density 10 m², row width of 0.75 m, plant spacing 0.133 m

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It is allowed to use a rocker switch with ON/OFF position with hold, if the ON and OFF are clearly marked with text in the remote controller.

Any button of the remote controller may not be touched for more than one second at a time. In other words, a button, which has to be pressed all the time, is not allowed.

The remote controller may contain other buttons or controls than the required/allowed START/STOP inputs, but no other button may be used at any time during any task.

Before the start of any task, the remote controller must be placed on the table that is located at the edge of the field. One member of the team may touch the START and STOP inputs of the remote controller. The possible remote display must be placed on the same table too.

The remote controller must be presented to the Jury members before the run. A jury member will watch the use of the START/STOP remote controller during the task execution.

In each task, the robot must be started by using the remote controller START input, not pressing any buttons on the robot itself.

During any task, while the robot is stopped in the field by using the remote controller, it is allowed to use any buttons of the robot itself, e.g. to change the state of the navigation system.

While the robot is STOPPED and one team member is allowed to be in the field, besides rotating the robot, the team member is allowed to touch the buttons and other input devices mounted on the robot. Other remote controllers besides START/STOP controller are strictly prohibited to be used at any time.

Implementation note: If using Logitech Cordless Gamepad or equivalent as a remote controller, the recommended practice is to paint/tape one of the push button 1 green and push button 2 red, to mark START and STOP features.

Manual correction of the robot

One team member is allowed to enter the field after the same (!) team member has pressed the STOP button of the remote controller and the robot has completely stopped (no motion). It is recommended to install some indicator onto the robot to see that the robot is in STOP mode before entering the field in order to avoid disqualification.

The START/STOP operator is also responsible for the eventually manual robot corrections. Due to the fact that it can be difficult for him/her to monitor the robot's behavior from a large distance, another team member can be inside the 2 m area between a red textile tape and the crop plant area (see picture 1 and 2 at the end of this document). This second team member could give instructions to the operator, but this supporting person is only an observer and is not allowed in any case to enter the crop plant area or interact with the robot.

After leaving the remote control on the table, the operator is allowed to rotate - not to move - the robot in the field. The only exception for moving is within the row, where the robot may need to get back to the path if a wheel or track of the robot has collided stem of maize plant, to avoid further damage of plants. Carrying the robot is only allowed

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after significant navigation errors in order to bring it back (!) to the last correct position and orientation.

In the headland, only rotating to give the robot a new orientation is allowed, no moving or even carrying is allowed at all.

0.3. Awards

The performance of the competing robots will be assessed by an independent expert jury committee. Beside measured or counted performance parameters, also creativity and originality, especially in task 4 and task 5 (freestyle), will be evaluated. There will be an award for the first three ranks of each task. The basic navigation (1), advanced navigation (2), sensing (3), and weeding (4) together will yield the overall competition winner. Points will be given as follows:

Rank	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	etc.
Points	30	28	26	25	24	23	22	21	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10	etc.

Participating teams result in at least 1 point, not participating teams result in 0 points. If two or more teams have the same number of points for the overall ranking, the team with the better placements during all four tasks (1, 2, 3 and 4) will be ranked higher.

1. Task “Basic navigation” (1)

1.1. General description

For this task, the robots are navigating autonomously. Within three minutes, the robot has to navigate through long curved rows of maize plants (*picture 1* at the end of this text). The aim is to cover as much distance as possible. On the headland, the robot has to turn and return in the adjacent row. There will be no plants missing in the rows. This task is all about accuracy, smoothness and speed of the navigation operation between the rows.

At the beginning of the match it will be told whether starting is on the left side of the field (first turn is right) or on the right side (first turn is left). This is not a choice of the team but of the officials. Therefore, the robots should be able to perform for both options. A headland width of 2 meters free of obstacles (bare soil) will be available for turning.

1.2. Field Conditions

Random stones are placed along the path to represent a realistic field scenario. The stones are not exceeding 25 mm from the average ground level. The stones may be small pebbles (diameter <25 mm) laid in the ground and large rocks that push (max 25 mm) out from the ground, both are installed. In other words, abilities as defined by machine ground clearance and to climb over small obstacles are required.

A red 50 mm wide textile tape is laid in the field 2 m from the plants.

1.3. Rules for robots

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For starting, the robot is placed at the beginning of the first row without exceeding the white line.

If the robot is about to deviate out from the path and hit maize plants, the team member with the remote controller must press STOP button immediately. The STOP button must be pressed before the robot damages stems of the maize plants. The team is responsible to monitor the behavior of the robot and to use the STOP button when necessary.

1.4. Assessment

The distance travelled in 3 minutes is measured. The final distance will be calculated including especially a bonus factor when the end of the field is reached in less time than 3 min. The final distance including a bonus factor is calculated as:

Final distance = corrected distance * 3 minutes / measured time.

The corrected distance includes travelled distance and the penalty values. Travelled distance, penalty values and performance time are measured by the jury officials.

Crop plant damage by the robot will result in a penalty of 1 meter per plant.

The task completing teams will be ranked by the results of resulting total distance values. The best 3 teams will be rewarded. This task 1, together with tasks 2, 3 and 4, contributes to the overall contest winner 2018. Points for the overall winner will be given as described under chapter 0.3 Awards.

2. Task “Advanced navigation” (2)

2.1. General description

For this task, the robots are navigating autonomously. Under real field conditions, crop plant growth is not uniform. Furthermore, sometimes the crop rows are not even parallel. We will approach these field conditions in the second task.

The rules for entering the field, moving the robot, using remote controller etc. are the same as in task 1.

No large obstacles in the field, but more challenging terrain in comparison to task 1.

The robots shall achieve as much distance as possible within 3 minutes while navigating between straight rows of maize plants, but the robots have to follow a certain predefined path pattern across the field (*picture 2* at the end of this text). Additionally, at some locations, plants will be missing (gaps) at either one or both sides with a maximum length of 1 meter. There will be no gaps in row entries.

The robot must drive the paths in given order. The code of the path pattern through the maize field is done as follows: S means START, L means LEFT hand turn, R means RIGHT hand turn and F means FINISH. The number before the L or R represents the row that has to be entered after the turn. Therefore, 2L means: Enter the second row after a left-hand turn, 3R means: Enter the third row after a right hand turn. The code for a path pattern, for example, may be given as: S - 3L - 2L - 2R - 1R - 5L - F.

The code of the path pattern is made available to the competitors 15 minutes before putting all robots into the parc fermé. Therefore, the teams will not get the opportunity to test it in the contest field.

2.2. Field conditions

Random stones are placed along the path, to represent realistic field scenario where the robot should cope with holes etc. The stones are not exceeding the level of 35 mm from the average ground level in the neighborhood. The stones may be pebbles (diameter <35 mm) laid in the ground and large rocks that push (max 35 mm) out from the ground, both are installed. In other words, the robot must have ground clearance of this amplitude at minimum, and the robot must be able to climb over obstacles of max 35 mm high. No maize plants are intentionally missing at the end of the rows. However, due to circumstances of previous runs by other robots, it is possible that some plants at the end of the rows are damaged. The ends of the rows may not be in the same line, the maximum angle in the headland is ± 15 degrees.

No large obstacles in the field and all rows are equally passable. A red 50 mm wide textile tape is laid in the field 2 m from the plants.

2.3. Assessment

The distance travelled in 3 minutes is measured. The final distance will be calculated including especially a bonus factor when the end of the field is reached in less time than 3 min. The final distance including a bonus factor is calculated as:

Final distance = corrected distance * 3 minutes / measured time.

The corrected distance includes travelled distance and the penalty values. Travelled distance, penalty values and performance time are measured by the jury officials.

Crop plant damage by the robot will result in a penalty of 1 meter per plant.

The task completing teams will be ranked by the results of resulting total distance values. The best 3 teams will be rewarded. This task 2, together with tasks 1, 3 and 4, contributes to the overall contest winner 2018. Points for the overall winner will be given as described under chapter 0.3 Awards.

Picture 2 shows an example of how the crop rows and the path tracks could look like for task 2. Be aware, the row gaps and the path pattern will be different during the contest!

3. Task “Selective Sensing” (3)

3.1. General description

For this task, the robots are navigating autonomously. The robots shall detect weed patches represented by red and blue golf tees. Task 3 is conducted on the area used in task 2 with straight rows. Nevertheless, simple row navigation is required and the robot has to turn on the headland and return in the adjacent row. There will be nine (9) weed patches in total with three patches on each of the first three between row spacing. The end of the third row spacing is the finish line for this task 3.

The rules for entering the field, moving the robot, using remote controller etc. are the same as in task 1 and task 2.

3.2. Field conditions

The *weeds* are objects represented by blue and red golf tees distributed between the rows in the soil. The weeds are placed as weed patches in a squared area of 25 cm × 25 cm. The total number of weeds is 10 per weed patch but there are different

combinations regarding the number of the red and the blue tees. The tees are in the soil with only the head or upper part visible (ca. 1 to 2 cm). The weed patches are located in a centered band of 25 cm width between the rows. Robots may drive across or over them without a penalty. No weeds are located within the rows and on the headlands. A possible example is illustrated in picture 3.

3.3. Rules for robots

Each robot has only one attempt. The maximum available time for the run is 3 minutes. The robot should detect the weed patches. The detection of the weed patch with a higher number of red tees shall be indicated by one (!) loud acoustic signal while the detection of the weed patch with a higher number of blue tees must be confirmed by two (!) consecutive and loud acoustic signals. The length of each acoustic signal may not be longer than 1 second.

3.4. Assessment

The jury registers and assesses the signaling as follows:

- True positives (correct signals, correct detection) + / plus 6 points,
- False positives (wrong signals, but weed detection) + / plus 2 point
- False negatives (no signals) - / negative 2 points.

Crop plant damage by the robot will result in a penalty of 1 point per plant.

The total travelled distance will not be assessed. The task completing teams will be ranked by the number of points as described above. The best 3 teams will be rewarded. This task 3, together with tasks 1, 2 and 4, contributes to the overall contest winner 2018. Points for the overall winner will be given as described in chapter 0.3 Awards.

4. Task "Soil-engaged weeding" (4)

4.1. General description

For this task, the robots are navigating autonomously. The robots shall remove weeds from three (3) weed patches represented by red golf tees. Probably a soil engaged active tool is needed to succeed in this task. In order to minimize the used energy the tool should be active only on the weed spots. Task 4 is conducted on the area used in task 2 with straight rows. Nevertheless, no specific path sequence will be given as in task 2 and the robot has to turn on the headland and return in the adjacent row. The three weed patches will be placed one on each of the three first row spacing. Thus, the end of the third row spacing is the finish line for this task.

The rules for entering the field, moving the robot, using remote controller etc. are the same as in task 1, 2 and 3.

4.2. Field conditions

The weed patches are objects represented by red golf tees distributed between (!) the rows in the soil like in task 3. The weeds are placed as weed patches in a squared area 25 cm × 25 cm (10 red tees per weed patch). Only the upper part of the tees is visible (ca. 1 to 2 cm). The weed patches are located in a centered band of 25 cm width between the rows. Robots may drive across or over them without a penalty. No weeds are located within rows and on headlands. A possible example is illustrated in picture 4.

4.3. Rules for robots

Each robot has only one attempt. The maximum available time for the run is 5 minutes. The robot shall remove the red tees from the weed patch. Each tee removed from the weed patch counts, each tee moved to the headland outside the crop area counts more and each tee collected on the robot and transferred to the end of the third row spacing counts most. Tillage outside the weed patches will be punished.

4.4. Assessment

The Jury registers and assesses the number of weeds (tees) where they are remaining after the run:

- Tees that are stored and transferred to the finish line + / plus 4 points/tee
- Tees delivered to the headlands + / plus 2 points/tee
- Tees cleared and removed from weed patches + / plus 1 point/tee.

Tilled travelled distance between the rows and outside the patches will be punished with 1 negative point per meter even in an intermittently mode. A tolerance of 10 cm for tillage before and after the weed patches will not be punished.

Crop plant damage by the robot will result in a penalty of 1 point per plant.

The total travelled distance will not be assessed. The task completing teams will be ranked by the number of points as described above. The best 3 teams will be rewarded. This task 4, together with tasks 1, 2 and 3, contributes to the overall contest winner 2018. Points for the overall winner will be given as described in chapter 0.3 Awards.

5. Task “Freestyle” (5)

5.1. Description

Teams are invited to let their robots perform a freestyle operation. Creativity and fun are required for this task as well as an application-oriented performance. One team member has to present the idea, the realization and perhaps to comment the robot’s performance to the jury and the audience. The freestyle task should be related to an agricultural application. Teams will have a time limit of five minutes for the presentation including the robot’s performance.

5.2. Assessment

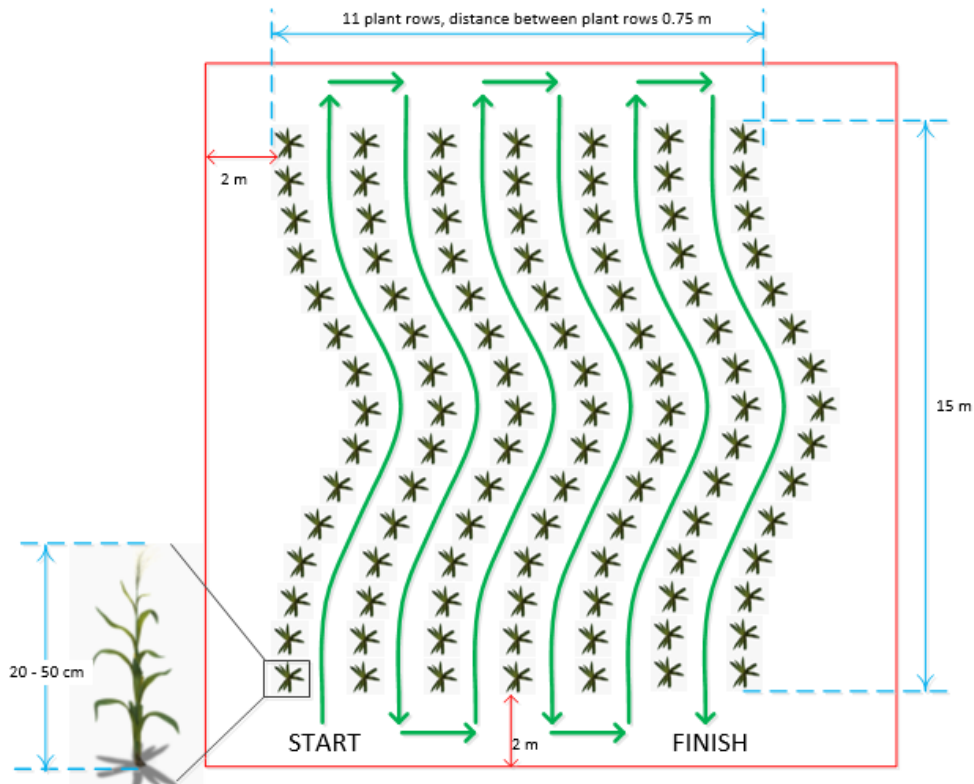
The jury will assess the (i) agronomic idea, the (ii) technical complexity and the (iii) robot performance by giving points from 0 (insufficient) to 10 (excellent) for each.

The total points will be calculated using the following formula:

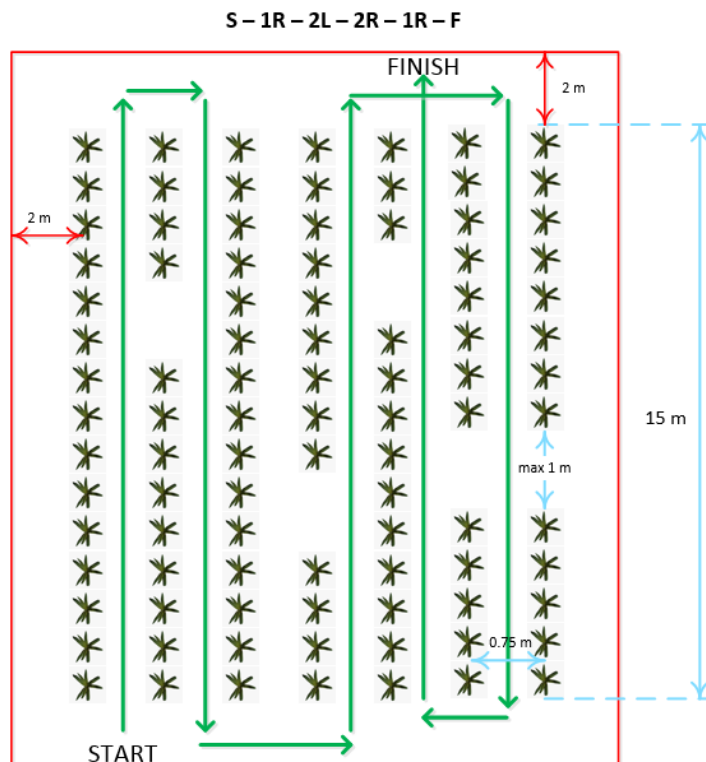
Final points = (agronomic idea + technical complexity) * performance.

The task 5 is optional and will be awarded separately. It will not contribute to the contest winner 2018.

Appendix

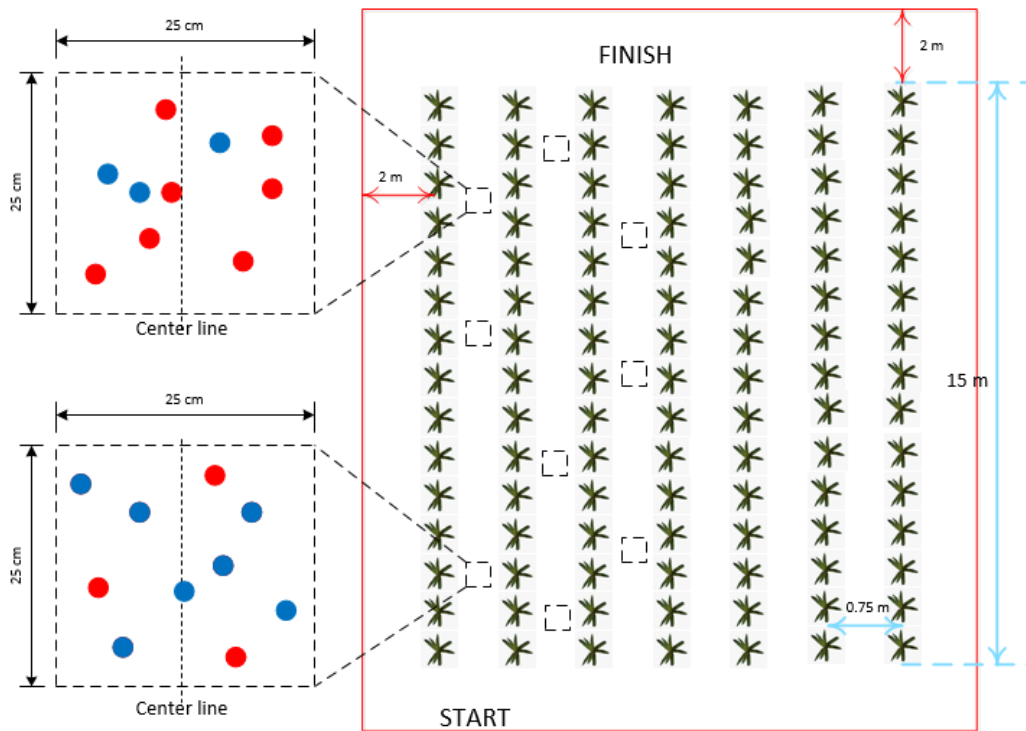


Picture 1 – Dimensions and row pattern for task 1.

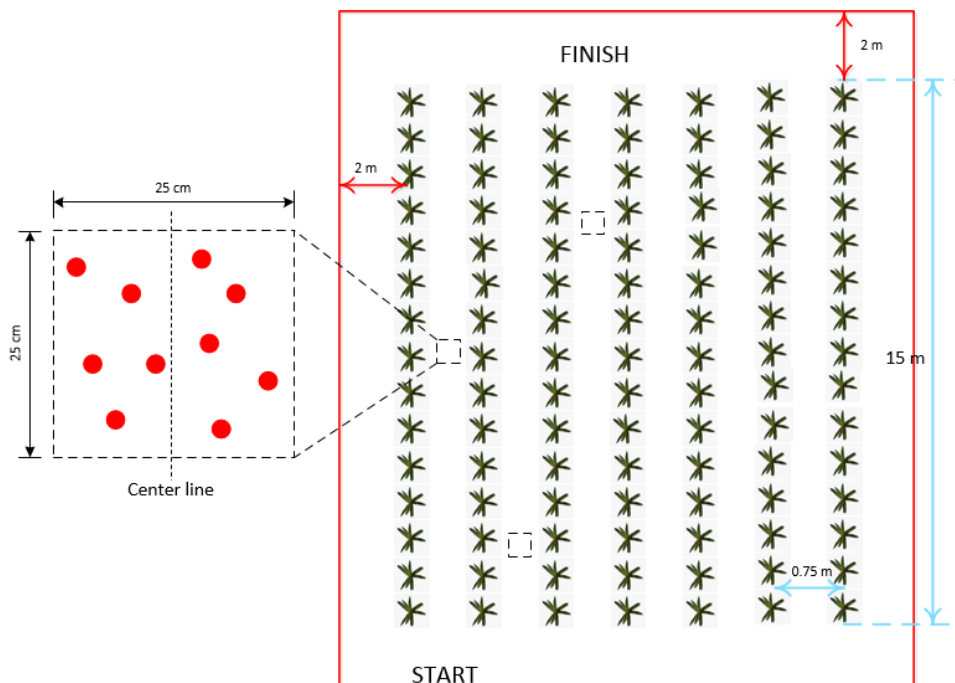


Picture 2 – Dimensions and example (!) of row navigation pattern for task 2.

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Picture 3 – Possible locations of the weeds for task 3. Two zoom areas of 25 cm × 25 cm of two weed patch (with different combinations of blue and red weeds) are also indicated.



Picture 4 – Possible locations of weed patches for task 4. The zoom area of 25 cm × 25 cm of one weed patch (with ten red weeds) is also indicated.