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Clark State gets permission to fly drones

By Tristan Navera

The Clark County school has been granted permission by the Federal Aviation Administration to fly the EH-4 Quadcopter in conjunction with the Ohio/Indiana Unmanned Aerial Systems Center. That drone has been developed by SelectTech GeoSpatial. All three entities are based in Springfield.



The drones will support Clark State's own precision agriculture program — the craft will fly over designated farm fields to collect sensor data during planting and harvest seasons. It's hoped the data the systems can collect will be an asset to farmers, boost their crop yields and help them better manage their fields.

"Precision agriculture is expected to be among the highest users of UAS technologies, and Clark State is preparing its students for this emerging industry," said Aimee Belanger-Haas, assistant dean of business and applied technologies at Clark State. "Farmers livelihoods depend on knowing what is going on in his or her field."

Flight missions will start this spring.

The school is the latest Ohio educational institution to use unmanned systems. State and local officials have hoped research and development of the craft will help Ohio capture a share of an emerging industry expected to create 100,000 jobs and \$82 billion in investment over the next decade.

"Clark State is arming our future agricultural workforce with the skills needed to use a range of tools, including UAS, to gather and process data into usable knowledge that ultimately will improve the farmer's bottom-line," said Dick Honneywell, executive director for the UAS center.

Locally, Sinclair Community College, Wright State University and Ohio State University have all received permission from the FAA to fly drones in research and testing missions in Springfield, Wilmington, Fairborn and other places.

And Woolpert Inc. of Beavercreek was one of the first companies granted permission to fly commercially in survey missions in rural parts of Ohio.