



Agri drone use likely to double by end of FY25

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WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S thrust on promoting drones for agricultural activities like crop mapping, analysis and application of nutrients and pesticides, manufacturers see an exponential increase in demand for these unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in the next couple of years.

According to industry estimates, while 3,000 drones are currently being utilised in the agriculture sector, the number could rise to over 7,000 by FY25. This, analysts feel, would help boost crop productivity significantly through optimum use of water, soil nutrients and crop protection formulations.

"The number of drones in operations could grow to 10,000-15,000 in the next couple of years with rapid adoption in the agriculture sector," Chirag Sharma, managing director, Drone Destination based in Gurgaon, which focuses on services and training of pilots operating these instruments. Stating that the company has trained 5,000 drone pilots on the operational aspects, Sharma said there would be significant growth in services associated with drone operations and maintenance.

"Drone use will become more prominent with government support by the end of FY26, as it helps save 70% water usage and reduce 20-30% on the fertiliser applications," Ramanathan Narayanan, CEO, Dhaksha Unmanned Systems, a Chennai-based drone manufacturer and subsidiary of fertiliser major Coromandel International told *FE*. Currently, the cost of each drone is ₹6-7 lakh.

With corresponding increase in usage of drones, RG Agarwal, chairman, Dhanuka Group, a crop protection major, said "the number of certified drone pilots has risen from 346 in 2022 to over 10,000 at present and this trend is expected to continue".

"Drones' applications extend far beyond just spraying fertilisers; these UAVs are helping crop management through field mapping, early detection of pests and diseases, and even soil analysis leading to increase in crop yield," Pradeep Palelli, CEO and co-founder, Thanos Technologies, a Hyderabad-based drone manufacturer said. The company manufactured 250 drones last fiscal and has enhanced its annual production capacity to 3,000 drones.



■ Industry expects number of drones used in agriculture to rise from 3,000 at present to 7,000 by FY25

- It could grow to 10,000-15,000 in the next couple of years with rapid adoption, say some companies
- Drone usage is likely to help save 70% water usage and reduce 20-30% on the fertiliser applications

Last year, the government approved the 'drone didi' scheme for providing 15,000 drones to the women self-help groups (SHGs) in identified clusters, with an outlay of ₹1,261 crore for the period from FY25 to FY26. The Centre would provide 80% assistance to cover the cost of the drones and accessories up to a maximum of ₹8 lakh per SHG.

To promote usage of nano urea and di-ammonium phosphate (DAP), leading fertiliser cooperative IFFCO had said in July 2023 that it had procured 2,500 drones to spray nano soil nutrients. The cooperative is training 5,000 rural entrepreneurs for the purpose.

Several corporations, including Syngenta India, are promoting extensive usage of technologies such as artificial intelligence and drones to expand outreach among farmers of its crop protection products consisting of insecticides, herbicides and fungicides.

In April 2023, the agriculture ministry had released standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the application of pesticides using drones for 10 crops including rice, wheat, cotton and maize.



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## Centre plans new FPO policy to improve farmers' income, quality of produce

### Centre plans new FPO policy to improve farmers' income, quality of produce

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The government is planning to bring out a policy on farmer producer organisations (FPOs) after a gap of 11 years that will be aimed at creating a level-playing field for all those who are not getting financial benefits.

There was a need to revise the national policy for the promotion of FPOs as many more FPOs have been created after the policy was first unveiled in 2013, sources said. Besides, only those FPOs which have been created under the financial assistance scheme are at an advantageous position



**ABOUT TIME.** There was a need to revise the national policy for the promotion of FPOs as many of them have been created after the policy was first unveiled in 2013<sup>m</sup>

compared to those functioning independently before the rollout of the Centre's

scheme. The Centre in 2020 had launched the Central Sector Scheme for Formation and Promotion of 10,000 FPOs with an outlay of ₹6,865 crore as part of measures to increase farmers' income. Over 8,000 FPOs have already been registered under the scheme till February, the Agriculture Ministry data show.

Under the scheme, FPOs are provided financial assistance up to ₹18 lakh per FPO over a period of three years. Besides, it also allows the Centre to release matching equity grant up to ₹2,000 per farmer member of an FPO with a limit of ₹15 lakh per FPO. Further, the Centre extends a credit guarantee fa-

cility up to ₹2 crore of project loan per FPO. "The need for a revision in policy was also felt as the cooperative sector has gone for a massive change with the Centre's revised focus on primary agriculture credit societies (PACS). Last year, there was a meeting held for the convergence of PACS and FPOs and accordingly a model draft agreement has been created.

#### TO GET PRIORITY

Though the Cooperative Ministry has made provisions for PACS, similar incentives are yet to be suggested for FPOs. This type of vacuum may be filled in the next FPO policy," said a

source. Once the policy is laid out, FPOs may get a priority in selling their produce in government set-up, though they have to be at competitive rates, sources said.

Citing the instances of organisations like government-owned Kendriya Bhandar, which has been preferring private companies over FPOs in sourcing farm-products, the policy may help the farmers' groups to get access to such institutions. Also, the policy may help create a linkage between FPOs and big retailers/exporters and improve the quality of agricultural produce. The last policy had said that the provisions

would apply equally to FPOs already registered and those FPOs which would be registered subsequent to the issue of the policy.

However, experts said that the intention is more important than policy as implementation is the key for its success.

"There were several recommendations in the last policy, which the Agriculture Ministry never tried to implement in the last 11 years though it was its own policy," said Rampal Jat, president of Kisan Mahapanchayat. He cited the case of procurement in which FPOs could have been involved to buy the produce at MSPs on behalf of the government.