

MANY PROSPECTS FOR NEW UAS USE

News / Airlines



To those researching potential commercial **uses** of unmanned aircraft systems, the possibilities seem endless, according to participants in a panel discussion Monday.

Six men who have worked with the technology in different capacities gathered onstage Monday at the **UAS** Summit & Expo to talk about the future of the industry as it wades into commercial applications.

While consumers may have visions of aerial pizza delivery in their heads, the uses being explored by local and national firms are more about gathering and analyzing data these machines are able to gather if outfitted with the right equipment.

Mike Tully, president and CEO of Aerial Services, which creates maps from imagery gathered by UAS, said that research into commercial use has raised some concerns as more companies gain access to the technology.

"This enabling technology coupled with rapid innovation causes this kind of disruption," he said of incidents caused by irresponsible operators, including flying in unauthorized areas or near-collisions with airliners.

The Federal Aviation Administration bans commercial unmanned aircraft use unless a company secures an exemption from the agency.

Locally, the technology sees use in aerial photography, inspection and agriculture.

John Nowatzki, a researcher with North Dakota State University, said the school has been testing out aircraft at its research centers located around the state.

While the sensors on the aircraft can detect factors such as nutrient deficiencies in crops, Nowatzki said it still requires an agricultural scientist to interpret the imagery and find out exactly what kind of deficiency is presented.

At the end of the day, the industry needs to figure out what kind of services it can offer that farmers will want to pay for, he said.

While some use the technology to monitor living things, others use it to inspect infrastructure and take aerial photos of buildings and properties.

Grand Forks startup SkySkyopes uses its aircraft to give clients maintaining structures such as wind turbines or cellphone towers a chance to spot problems without having to send a crew to great heights, President Matt Dunlevy said.

Law enforcement in Grand Forks County also uses the technology. The Northeast UAS Unit, composed of officers from the Grand Forks Sheriff's Department and Grand Forks Police Department, can fly in 17 North Dakota counties.

Its presence could soon grow by another county this month if the FAA approves a request to fly in Polk County, according to sheriff's deputy Al Frazier.

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