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Drone use can boost African agriculture industry, experts claim

Remote sensing tools such as drones and other satellites can help farmers across Sub-Saharan Africa make better use of their land, experts say.

New technology that processes unprecedented levels of detail can inform vital decisions about livestock grazing and productivity.

Researchers aim to use remote sensing – such as unmanned aircraft and satellites – to provide farmers with information about crop yields, greenhouse gas emissions and irrigation levels.

Remote sensing technologies can help to better match agricultural systems to the natural resources available.

By scanning vast tracts of land from the air, researchers can gain an overview of the topographical area and reduce the time spent collecting accurate data.

They can also optimise the scale and timing of inputs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions per kilogram of food produced.

A recent two-day workshop in Nairobi aimed to identify knowledge gaps and barriers that may affect how remote sensing technology is implemented in farming.

The event was led by the University of Edinburgh and attended by experts from the UK, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Ethiopia and Nigeria.

New collaborations will be set up to address research questions raised at the event.

Researchers hope to gain funding from a number of streams, including the UK Research Council's Global Challenges Research Fund.

The workshop was organised by the University of Edinburgh's Global Academy of Agriculture and Food Security. The event took place at the International Livestock Research Institute in Nairobi.

Professor Geoff Simm, Director of the Global Academy of Agriculture and Food Security at the University of Edinburgh, led the event. He said: "Sub Saharan Africa faces pressing challenges in feeding its rapidly growing population sustainably over the next few decades –

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a challenge heightened because of climate change. Our workshop has identified regional research and translation needs, strengthened existing partnerships and stimulated new ones to help address these challenges.”

The event was funded by an Impact Accelerator Award from the UK’s Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council.

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