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Need a pragmatic policy framework for application of agrochemical spray using drones: CropLife India - FICCI Paper

***Industry must develop low cost drones to cater to farmers' requirements –
Joint Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation***

NEW DELHI, 29 July 2020: CropLife India- FICCI 'Technical Discussion Paper' on 'Drone Usage for Agrochemical Spraying', released today highlights the application of agrochemical spraying via drones in India, the benefits and potential risk and mitigation strategy around it.

The Paper was released at a Virtual Conference on '**Drones Application Technology in Spraying for Crop Protection**' by **Mr. Amber Dubey**, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation; **Ms. Shomita Biswas**, Joint Secretary (M&T), Ministry of Agriculture; **Dr. S. K. Malhotra**, Agriculture Commissioner and Chairman, Registration Committee; **Dr. K. Alagusundaram**, Deputy Director General (Agriculture Engineering), Indian Council of Agriculture Research; **Mr. Rajan Luthra**, Chairman, FICCI Drones Committee and **Mr. Asitava Sen**, CEO, CropLife India. The conference was jointly organized by CropLife India and FICCI.

The technical discussion paper outlines the drone regulation in other countries such as the Japan, Australia and New Zealand and European Union, citing the best practices in agrochemical spraying.

Mr. Amber Dubey, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, Government of India said that industry stakeholders should come forward with indigenous solutions for Indian problems. Highlighting the potential of drones' usage in the agriculture sector, he said, "There are around 1 lac villages which can be benefited by the drones. We can design special purpose drones and industry must focus on developing low cost drones for them." He further stressed on industry tie-up with central or state level agricultural universities or institutions for getting the necessary approvals.

Ms. Shomita Biswas, Joint Secretary (M&T), Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare said that, "Drone enabled technology can be very useful in soil analysis of the fields. This can help us in better irrigation management and maintaining correct nitrogen levels". She urged the start-ups to create drone planting system which will reduce the planting cost considerably; apart from adding emphasis on manpower and skill development.

Dr. S. K. Malhotra, Agriculture Commissioner and Chairman, Registration Committee Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare opined, "Drone spraying would help the farmers to increase their productivity, lower water consumption, higher efficiency; besides being safe for operators. The Registration Committee is looking into various aspects of product approvals through drones application".

Dr. K. Alagusundaram, Deputy Director General (Agriculture Engineering), Indian Council of Agricultural Research shared, "*Krishi Drones*, operated by a team comprising of a trained

manpower, handler for agrochemicals and battery charger for Drone batteries in a mobile unit, will be a good bet for Indian agriculture for agrochemical spraying”.

Dr. Keith Cressman, Senior Locust Forecasting Officer, Food and Agricultural Organization, United Nations (FAO) shared, “Globally drones have proved highly beneficial for survey and controlling locust in desert location. The application is more efficient than conventional spraying and can cover 30 hectares of land in an hour’s time. However there are some limitations and unknown areas which need further evaluation.”

Mr. Asitava Sen, Chief Executive Officer, [CropLife India](#) said, “Hon. Prime Minister of India has been emphasizing need for modernizing agriculture sector and adoption of new technological innovations in achieving the goal of doubling farmers income. One such area is drone technology deployed on a large scale”. **He added**, “With the recent permission of use of drones for control of locusts by Civil Aviation Ministry along with Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare; India has become the first country in the world with broad specification for drones that can fly at night. There is opportunity to extend this technology to other crops and areas of application through robust and pragmatic science-based policy framework”.

Mr. Rajan Luthra, Chairman, FICCI Drones Committee said that start-ups, industry, government agencies and academia are collaborating and working together, and now we have the whole ecosystem setup in the country. “We have over 150 drone start-ups in India and several large companies are entering in this sector”. “FICCI is also working closely with the concerned government stakeholders to explore the potential risks and threat from rogue drones and how to counter them as well”; **Mr. Luthra** added.

Key Highlights of [CropLife India - FICCI Technical Discussion Paper](#):

- The necessary regulations should take into consideration (1) civil aviation laws (both local and umbrella) and setting of vehicle specifications, (2) SOPs and piloting requirements for safe use of drones, and (3) product approval and permissions for spray operations.
- In addition to these general regulations, we would recommend at least five other criteria to be met for obtaining permission: (1) approval of vehicle needs, (2) licensing or certification of pilots/operators and training for agrochemical application by drones, (3) registration of agrochemical product sought to be sprayed, and (4) Encouragement for fast approval of ULV formulations or allowing mixing of mineral oils to the existing formulations, so as to serve the purpose of ULV formulations, however, by proper testing of flash point (5) Strict adherence to product label instructions.
- More specifically, we propose setting up a system for certification or licensing of drone operators to ensure their capability to pilot the UAV machines safely. Such certification/licensing should be subject to regular renewal and conducting of refresher courses. The authorities should also accredit training facilities to put in place a standardized programme for all agricultural drone operations.
- The **Product Registration Process** for inclusion of drone as alternate equipment for application of CPP must be simplified & time-bound and should not be duplicated

from scratch as the drone use is just an extension in the case of a formulation already approved for conventional manual spraying. The idea is to reduce registration timelines and make available the same crop protection products to farmers quickly, without compromising on safety and efficacy. A reasonable and predictable timeframe for all the regulatory clearances will create a vibrant and a compliant ecosystem that attracts more investment in the sector.

About [CropLife India](#):

[CropLife India](#) is committed to advancing sustainable agriculture and it is an association of 15 R&D driven member companies in crop protection. We jointly represent ~ 70% of the market and are responsible for 95% of the molecules introduced in the country. Our member companies have annual global R & D spend of 6 billion USD and are firmly committed to engaging with the farming community to enable Safe, Secure Food Supply.

Our Members



Our Associate Members



About FICCI:

Established in 1927, FICCI is the largest and oldest apex business organisation in India. Its history is closely interwoven with India's struggle for independence, its industrialization, and its emergence as one of the most rapidly growing global economies. A non - government, not - for – profit-organisation, FICCI is the voice of India's business and industry. From influencing policy to encouraging debate, engaging with policy makers and civil society, FICCI articulates the views and concerns of industry. It serves its members from the Indian private and public corporate sectors and multinational companies, drawing its strength from diverse regional chambers of commerce and industry across states, reaching out to over 2,50,000 companies. FICCI provides a platform for networking and consensus building within and across sectors and is the first port of call for Indian industry, policy makers and the international business community.

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