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By Michael Barker

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UK drone boost from new tie-up

Partnership between National Centre for Precision Farming and Chinese firm XAG offers potential for new technology in Europe



L-r: Parmjit Chima, Justin Gong, Dr David Llewellyn and Debbie Heeks

The National Centre for Precision Farming (NCPF) at Harper Adams University and drone and robot specialist XAG have announced a strategic academic and research partnership.

Chinese firm XAG focuses on agricultural automation and research and development of unmanned devices. It is one of the world's largest agricultural drone manufacturers, with a large-scale manufacturing and operational centre in China.

Over a period of 12 months XAG crop-spraying drones have flown 1.7 million times in total, serving more than 700,000 Chinese farmers covering two million hectares of land.

Justin Gong, co-founder and vice president of XAG, said: "As the strategic partnership has been officially established, I am sincerely looking forward to the collaborations between XAG and Harper Adams University to develop localised done and robotic solutions which suit the UK and European farmers.

"We hope our technology can equally serve UK and European farmers, to help them improve productivity using sensors mounted on the drones to monitor the condition of the crop and subsequently only applying the chemical precisely on area requiring treatment.

"In addition, we would like to devote more on researching about AI technologies and ground-based robots to free farmers' hands, also to accelerate the popularisation of drone application. With HAU's research strengths on agriculture and sustainable farming, I believe we can make the most of our potentials."

Parmjit Chima, head of engineering at Harper Adams, said: "It's great to see the university being recognised as a leader in agricultural drone and robotics technology by XAG in this mutually beneficial collaboration to develop new agri-tech solutions for farmers both at a national and international level."

Harper Adams Research Support and Project Lead, Debbie Heeks said: "At present, UK legislation does not permit

the use of drones for crop spraying. However, Harper is working closely with the relevant authorities, such as CAA and others to enable trials involving drones for the first time in the country.

"At the recent Agricultural Innovation Conference and Exhibition, XAG donated a high specification agricultural spraying drone to Harper. The P20 2018 Plant Protection UAS, named Barbara, is a fully autonomous system. It was presented to us by Justin Gong, Bridge Liu and Walter Chen.

"It's a very clever system and it's very exciting that we have the opportunity to work with it and XAG. We hope that our work with the system will help strengthen the case for using crop spraying drones in the UK."

<http://www.fruitnet.com/asiafruit/article/1474/parts-of-san-diego-quarantined-as-psyllid-count-mounts>

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