

US names New York test site for small drones

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The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) announced Thursday a fifth test site for small drones, as it continues to hammer out regulations for their use in US airspace.

In a statement, the FAA said researchers at Griffiss airport in Rome, upstate New York would focus on the use of [unmanned aerial vehicles](#), or UAVs, in agricultural applications.

They will fly a PrecisionHawk Lancaster Platform UAV, a remote-controlled airplane that has a four-foot (1.2 meter) wingspan, weighs three pounds (1.35 kilograms) and carries a 2.2-pound payload.

"The safe integration of unmanned aircraft into the national airspace is our number one priority, but the agricultural research performed in Rome also may have far-reaching benefits to farmers in New York and across the nation," said Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx.

FAA is authorizing six locations in the United States to test how small, low-flying drones can safely operate within busy American skies, as it continues to draft a comprehensive set of rules to govern their use.

Other sites announced so far are in Alaska, Nevada, North Dakota and Texas.

Pending regulations, the FAA says flying drones for commercial gain without its approval is prohibited—despite a surge in popularity for UAVs and their varied potential uses.

Rome is south of rural Jefferson County, New York, where sheriffs working a burglary case have acknowledged the help of a local drone start-up in finding stolen guns beneath a body of water.

"They said they had a bit of an odd request," recalled Amanda DesJardins, who founded Horizon Aerial Media Services in Glen Park, New York earlier this year with husband Jason, in a telephone interview with AFP.

Flying a grid pattern, 15 meters (five feet) off the surface, Horizon's camera-equipped Phantom 2 Vision+ quadcopter pinpointed the loot "within half an hour," she said.

The Phantom 2 is among the most popular small [drones](#) on the market today. With a built-in camera, it sells for about \$1,200.

"When we spotted something, we could tell (investigators) where to go and look so they didn't have to go traipsing through everything," said DesJardins, adding that Horizon undertook the mission for free.

In Washington, the FAA is currently considering 22 petitions for exemption from its ban on commercial drone-flying, filed by filmmakers, surveyors, pipeline patrollers and a real estate agent, among others, an FAA spokesman told AFP.

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