The farmer takes a drone

April 14 2015, by Jess Reid

Drones on dairy farms? It may sound like fun, but for UWA student Matthew Rowbottom, the high-tech machines could be useful to time-poor dairy farmers. He is researching the effectiveness of drones, or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), in monitoring the growth of pasture biomass on dairy farms.

Matthew, who is from Bunbury and is completing an Honours thesis in Agricultural Science at The University of Western Australia, has won a national Western Dairy grant to help him in his investigations.

Pasture is one of the cheapest forms of feed on a dairy farm and cultivating good pasture growth on a farm is key to building a business that maximises profitability and is sustainable into the long-term.

"Different ways of assessing pasture growth in the field already exist and the most common is visual judgement based on experience," Matthew said.

"The aim of my project is to develop a quick method of assessing pasture biomass and help improve the efficiency of grazing management.

"Drones offer the potential of creating a predictive visual precision tool that will inform farmers how much feed is on offer.

"Ultimately, I hope my research project will show the benefits of drones as a non-invasive pasture management technique requiring minimal effort and extra learning from time-poor farmers."

Matthew's project will be located at Rodwell Farms, a dairy property near Boyanup in WA and the research will take place over the next three months, finishing in July.

Provided by University of Western Australia