

Company to experiment with drones in federal pilot

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With the prospect of Amazon and UPS drones dropping packages at your door and farmers surveying their fields from above, federal aviation officials are looking to experiment with looser airspace regulations.

The state of Kansas and Black & Veatch are helping.

Black & Veatch, an Overland Park-based engineering firm, is working with the Kansas Department of Transportation on a federal initiative announced in May by U.S. Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao. Kansas is one of several sites chosen for a federal pilot program that will help determine whether federal regulations could be eased to boost use of drones, or [unmanned aerial vehicles](#), in rural areas.

Kansas and other pilot sites could inform future Federal Aviation Administration regulations.

"As drones become more mainstream with their versatility, these projects in Kansas and elsewhere are key in testing all applications of these [unmanned aircraft systems](#) and, if successful, may ease airspace rules for everyone's betterment," said Jamare Bates, head of Black & Veatch's unmanned aerial vehicle, or UAS, operations.

Black & Veatch said in a press release that it will help test drones beyond the line of sight of the operator, which is currently barred by the FAA. Testing will focus on inspecting infrastructure and improving

precision in agriculture by helping farmers better use seeds, pesticides and fertilizer.

"A [drone](#)'s promise of giving a bird's eye view of any problematic area of cropland—and getting (drone)-delivered treatment for it—comes at a time when producers face mounting pressure to meet food demand," the release says.

Drones also could help farmers take high-definition images or video of assets, inspect fields and gather data.

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