



## Iowa firm gets FAA approval for UAS commercial operations

By Patrick C. Miller | June 04, 2015

Aerial Services Inc. has been using manned aircraft for mapping and surveying for nearly 50 years, but it now has approval from the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to use unmanned aerial systems (UAS) in its commercial operations.

ASI—based in Cedar Falls, Iowa—is among the growing number of companies receiving Section 333 commercial exemptions from the FAA to incorporate UAS into daily operations.

“There will be new opportunities for a remote sensing firm like ours and many others that have never flown anything in the national airspace,” said Mike Tully, ASI CEO. “There will be specialized applications that today may not be done because a manned aircraft is just too expensive, but are made possible by this new tool.”

ASI received permission from the FAA to use the senseFly eBee and the senseFly eBee Ag for professional geospatial services “to clients associated with precision agriculture, land use planning, mining, mapping, and forestry to conduct inventories, speciation, and other biometric analyses.”

As with other FAA exemptions for small UAS, ASI is limited to operating its unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) below 500 feet, within line of sight and only during the daytime. The exemption enables the company to operate UAS anywhere in the U.S. with the exception of populated areas and airports.

“By far the greatest opportunity will be when we can fly these things beyond visual line of sight,” said Tully, who expects ASI later this summer to add other rotary-wing and fixed-wing UAVs with greater capabilities.

Currently, Tully said that between the FAA restrictions and the limited capabilities of the sUAS his company can fly, there are applications for which a manned aircraft remains the best solution. For example, to gather data on more than one or two farm fields, it’s less expensive to use a manned aircraft than it is to send out two people and a drone in a pickup.

According to Tully, the key development for the aerial remote sensing industry will be when the FAA allows beyond line-of-sight operations at higher altitudes using larger UAS with longer endurance times.

“That’s not going to happen until sense-and-avoid technology is integrated into the aircraft and the FAA works through the process of integrating these into the airspace up above 2,000 feet with commercial and civil aircraft,” he said. “That’s going to be a while, but that’s where the real game change occurs.”

By working with the geography department at the University of Northern Iowa which has an FAA certificate of authorization for UAS research, ASI has gained experience in operating UAVs.

“We’ve been flying their aircraft for some time now,” Tully said. “We’re quite comfortable with the technology and are looking forward to flying much more and, for the first time, commercially now that we have the exemption.”



Precision agriculture is one of the applications in which Iowa-based Aerial Services Inc. will be engaging using the senseFly eBee.  
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