

# Dronedesk case study

## AGRICULTURAL SPRAYING

How **AutoSpray Systems** is using Dronedesk to help farmers get flying!



9 min read

When Andy Sproson decided to bring heavy lift drones to the agricultural sector, he was treading new ground in the UK. Time-poor farmers wanted to get their drones in the air, but faced months of seeking permissions and learning how to plan flights, log data, and remain compliant.

He had to get them in the air quickly. So he turned to Dronedesk.

### What is AutoSpray Systems?

Andy has been involved in the commercial drone industry for almost a decade. His journey started with a chance encounter with a drone operator who was kind enough to talk about what he was doing with his drone and how to get started flying drones.

So Andy started his journey with Scott, a friend and colleague, and began doing a variety of jobs from photography to surveys before settling on training and founding Pigs Can Fly (a cheeky nod to their history as police officers).



But they'd also spotted another opportunity: heavy lift operations in the agricultural sector. They could see that drones offered an opportunity to save huge amounts of time and money, from sowing seeds to spraying chemicals.

The drones on sale in the UK weren't quite up to the task, so Andy, Scott, and Rob founded AutoSpray Systems and entered into talks with XAG, which makes agricultural drones capable of carrying a 50-litre spray tank or a 80-litre granule hopper; perfect for agricultural use. Andy, Scott, and Rob emerged from talks with an exclusive deal to import and resell XAG drones within the UK.

But there was a problem.

*"A farmer could buy a drone tomorrow but can't fly it. So we developed a training course based on CAA-approved standard qualifications. But then the farmer might not get CAA permissions 'til Christmas. Because how the hell does a farmer who's working 70-, 80-hour weeks manage that high bar of entry?"*

The answer was straightforward.

*"We onboard them as one of our remote pilots and manage them through Autodesk."*

### **Dronedesk for agricultural drone operators**

Drones represent a huge opportunity for agricultural organisations, making it quicker, easier, and cheaper to scatter seeds and fertilisers and spray chemicals and paints. The difference between traditional methods and using a drone is huge.

But while using drones can save time, that time can be quickly eaten up again by planning flights, managing pilots and drones and batteries and more, not to mention keeping on top of licences, insurance, maintenance, and record keeping for compliance.

Which is why we designed Dronedesk in the first place: it helps drone operators keep the benefits and avoid the downsides.

So the fact that Dronedesk is offered right alongside their drones is a huge boon to AutoSpray customers.

*"A few weeks or months down the line, they understand it. Dronedesk is a lifeline. They tell us they couldn't see any other way of doing it."*

Many of them discover that the benefits extend just beyond saving time. Having all the information about your drone operations in one place doesn't just provide peace of mind. It means its easy to access, easy to export, and easy to use to show what you have and haven't done.

Which sometimes makes it easier to get paid.

*"Perhaps you get a government grant to seed flowers in a field. Our clients are using Autodesk as a compliance tool to demonstrate they've done the work so they can get paid."*

It also means it's easier to keep regulatory bodies happy. Andy's customers rest easy knowing that all of their flight information, all of their pilot licences and insurances, all of their resource management is all in one place. Not only is it easy to access, but the wealth of data within Dronedesk means pilots aren't relying on unreliable memories.



*"We've got a method statement, risk assessments, checklists, site survey, weather records. We can show we've flown 100 metres from an open water course, 100 metres from a school. Farmers don't need to fill in a form on Friday about what they did on Monday. And the HSE accept it all as a digitised spray record."*

So the drone operator isn't spending hours on paperwork and trying to remember what the weather was doing days ago. And bodies like the HSE get more accurate data.

It's a win-win.



## The flexibility AutoSpray needed

Andy and Scott had been using Dronedesk since they first started flying drones, so there was no question of using it to underpin what they were trying to do with AutoSpray Systems.

But things are a little different from what they were doing at Pigs Can Fly.

Once the customer has completed the AutoSpray's CAA-approved training course, the drone operator(s) are listed as pilots in Autodesk, enabling them to benefit from AutoSpray's CAA permissions.

But, of course, AutoSpray's customers don't want their information to be visible to each other. So Andy needed something more than Dronedesk offered.

*"So we had a quick call with Dorian and asked him how we could compartmentalise this? We described all our unique requirements. And he said we could have a white label system."*

The result was Autodesk. Each of AutoSpray's customers exists in its own compartmentalised section, so they can't see each other's information, and enjoys all the great features Dronedesk offers. AutoSpray also has the ability to view its customers information too, to ensure they're following the training AutoSpray has provided, abiding by regulations as well as their contractual obligations.

One of the things our founder, Dorian, is known for is his willingness to listen to customers and make changes. This was exactly what Andy needed.

*"As we learn about something, we email him and he changes it. Perhaps overnight, sometimes within an hour."*

These changes can be as minor as moving a button or changing terminology to fit a specific industry. They can also be larger, such as the bespoke maintenance notification Andy requested. But they can also be much, much bigger.

*"Once a month we check everyone to make sure they're doing everything we've taught them to. It was taking a day or two. So we asked Dorian if he could automate a random sample that emails a PDF to us and a link to the record. And Dorian had it sorted the next day."*

From the beginning, Dronedesk has been designed to be what drone operators need. So rather than dictate what operators should do or how they should go about flights, the design philosophy has always been one of listening to customers. So if something isn't working for you, Dorian is always a phone call or email away.

*"Dorian's given us the flexibility we need from the system."*

## Supporting the future of agricultural drone use in the UK



AutoSpray Systems is going from strength to strength, but Andy isn't resting on his laurels. Right now, drones can't be used to spray pesticides, but he's working towards securing that authorisation for AutoSpray and its customers. And he's confident that the wealth of data they have from their operators in Dronedesk can help in that regard.

After all, it's already helped AutoSpray secure additional authorisations, such as for Beyond Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS) operations.

*"We had to demonstrate risk assessment process and compliance to get permission. Thanks to Dronedesk, we could demonstrate we're able to produce a high level of document really quickly, a thorough risk assessment which we can amend specifically to our technical requirements for our Beyond Visual Line of Sight operations."*

With BVLOS secured, AutoSpray can now reach even more remote and inaccessible areas, meaning it can support more projects such as a peatland restoration, reforestation projects, and more.

And with authorisation to spray pesticides, AutoSpray Systems can bring time- and money-saving drone operations to more agricultural clients across the UK.

We're proud to have helped AutoSpray Systems use their drones, skills, and training to help farmers and agricultural clients across the UK. If you're thinking of using drones for your agricultural business and need a tool to help plan flights, manage your resources, and demonstrate your compliance, take a free trial of Dronedesk today.

All quotes are from Andrew Sproson - Co-Founder of AutoSpray Systems



Andrew Sproson

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