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สำนักงานปลัดกระทรวงเกษตรและสหกรณ์

Drones for agriculture project launched



Hundreds of agricultural drones will be used in each of Thailand's 500 local communities to increase Thai farmers' efficiency and productivity, the Minister of Digital Economy and Society Prasert Jantararuantong announced yesterday (November 13).

The move is part of the 1 Tambon 1 Digital (Chumchon Drone Jai) project being implemented by the ministry in collaboration with the Digital Economy Promotion Agency (Depa), which was officially launched on Monday.

During the opening ceremony, Prasert defined the project's objectives as increasing knowledge and understanding, as well as upskilling communities and farmers across Thailand in the interpretation and maintenance of drones for agricultural purposes.

"The 1 Tambon 1 Digital (Chumchon Drone Jai) project will help push community enterprises to apply digital technology to generate income and keep pace with the resultant changes in the digital economy era," he said.

The project aims to build a digital society based on inclusive knowledge and knowledge application, which corresponds to the important goal of increasing digital capabilities and bolstering Thailand's competitiveness under the national plan for the mobilisation of the Thai digital economy and society.



“This blueprint also aims to bring about the safety and security of the digital economy and society and maximise the nation’s human capital,” he added.

Nuttapon Nimmanphatcharin, president and CEO of Depa, explained that the project will subsidise the cost of the drones by 60% so that farmers in the communities are able to have their own eyes in the sky.



It will be down to the communities to find the remaining 40%, whether through a low-interest loan from Depa’s partner network, such as Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives, or through a village fund.

However, if any community’s financial situation prevents it from applying for a loan, Depa offers another option – a free drone, albeit on the

condition that the demand for using drones in that area is greater than 4,000 rai (approximately 1,581.5 acres).

All the drones destined for the project are made by Thai companies and cost approximately 250 billion baht in total.

To avoid waste of resources, Depa has added more conditions that must be met. First, each community must send representatives to learn how to operate the drone and second, they must pass a test to obtain a drone operator's licence from the Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand before receiving a drone from Depa.



"The project is an integrated effort between depa and affiliated networks to promote the creation of a digital ecosystem and elevate communities with drone technology for agriculture through the development of knowledge, understanding, and proven skills of flying and maintaining drones by professors and experts in support of farmers and communities in every region nationwide," Depa president said.

To complete the drone ecosystem, the agency is cooperating with 25 networks, among them the Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand, the Civil Aviation Training Centre, the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives, the Department of Agriculture, the Defence Technology Institute, the Professional Qualification Institute, Kasetsart University, Suranaree University of Technology, and drone operators in Thailand.

These partnerships will benefit six areas of the project, namely developing courses for piloting or launching unmanned and long-range RC aircraft; promoting and supporting the use of digital technology and innovation for community groups in the production chain; research for and

development of the nation's defence industry; developing the unmanned aircraft industry; encouraging communities to apply drone technology to agricultural activities; and developing courses for drone repair and maintenance.



Depa has initially set aside around 200 million baht for the drones, training, and the construction of a maintenance centre.

Nuttapon expects that 50 service centres will be established across the country within a year of project implementation, propelling 500 communities to use drones in their agricultural activities covering no less than 4 million rai, or approximately 1.58 million acres.

Meanwhile, the agency anticipates training 1,000 participants in drone operation and 100 participants in drone maintenance.

The project's first year is projected to generate at least 350 million baht in economic value



"Depa estimates that the 1 Tambon 1 Digital (Chumchon Drone Jai) project will help to increase manufacturing capacity, reduce costs, lessen the duration of work, and lower the rate of sickness resulting from inhaling and touching chemicals. At the same time, it will enable both farmers and technicians skilled at using drones for agriculture in the community to generate jobs and income, which, in turn, will raise their quality of life," he said.

Approximately 100 communities have already applied for the project. Depa will consider the applications based on the previously mentioned requirements and will close applications once the target of 500 communities is met.

Prasert noted that the Digital Economy and Society ministry is ready to move forward and mobilise both the digital economy and society through the "Growth Engine of Thailand" policy, which is regarded as an essential operational plan aimed at increasing digital capabilities and creating Thailand competitiveness.

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