

MAPA Regulation fuels surge in Brazil's agri-drone industry

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Brazil's agricultural drone market is experiencing rapid expansion, driven in large part by regulatory clarity introduced through MAPA's Ordinance No. 298 in 2021, which legalized and structured the commercial use of drones for aerial spraying. Since then, the market has taken off—from an estimated 3,000 drones in 2021 to around 35,000 units in operation today.

This data was presented by consultant Eugênio Schroder during Droneshow, a key agri-tech trade fair held at Expo Center Norte in São Paulo, focused on agricultural drone service providers.

At the same event, MAPA announced that new regulatory updates are on the way, including a new decree and ordinance aimed at modernizing legislation to match technological advancements. "Drones have evolved, and the legislation needs to keep up," said Uellen Colatto, head of the ministry's Agricultural Aviation Division. Two public hearings have already been held, and the proposed decree is being sent to the Civil House. Once signed by the President, MAPA will publish new ordinances with more specific and updated rules.

Among the upcoming changes is the transition from the Sipeagro system to SDA Digital—a modern platform that will streamline the accreditation of training institutions and the certification of technical personnel in agricultural aviation.

Despite the boom, challenges remain. A key issue is the use of unregistered drones. While Ordinance 298 mandates registration and training for drone operators, only 2,618 drones have been officially registered for spraying so far, highlighting a gap in enforcement and compliance.

Schroder emphasized the accessibility of drones, describing them as “democratic” tools that are viable for farms of all sizes. Service provider André Veiga underlined the market’s untapped potential, estimating that 50,000 drones would be needed to meet demand across all Brazilian crops. He also advised new entrants to keep backup equipment and batteries, noting, “If you have one, you don’t have any.”

The event also featured key figures from MAPA, including Estanislau Steck, the ministry’s superintendent in São Paulo, and Lucas Fernandes de Souza, an agricultural engineer who discussed regulatory developments in agricultural aviation.

As Brazil moves forward, the combination of strong demand, advancing technology, and updated policy is setting the stage for a more structured and expansive agricultural drone ecosystem.