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FAO commissions launch first regional drone pilot training programme for desert locust control operations in Oman

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FAO regional office for near east and North Africa

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The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), through the Desert Locust Control Commission in the Central Region (CRC) and the Desert Locust Control Commission in the Western Region (CLCPRO), in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources of the Sultanate of Oman, has launched the first regional training programme for drone pilots dedicated to desert locust survey and control operations.

This landmark initiative brings together specialists from affected countries in the Central and Western Regions to strengthen national and regional capacities in the application of unmanned aerial systems for surveillance, monitoring, and control of desert locust populations. It represents a major step forward in integrating advanced digital and precision-agriculture technologies into locust management operations.

The programme builds on the successful introduction of drones in desert locust surveys and monitoring activities in recent years and marks a transition from pilot testing to structured, institutionalized capacity development. It aims to ensure that Member States are equipped with qualified personnel, standardized operational procedures, and modern tools to respond rapidly and effectively to emerging threats.

The five-day training combines classroom instruction, simulator-based learning, and extensive field practice.

The training is implemented in partnership with Micron, the main technical provider of aerial spraying systems, with the generous support of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources of Oman, the FAO office in Muscat and comprehensive logistical and operational support from the local partner, Ankaa Space Company.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Dr Mamoon Al Sarai Al Alawi, Executive Secretary of the Desert Locust Control Commission in the Central Region, highlighted the programme's strategic importance in strengthening early warning systems, improving operational efficiency, and accelerating field response.

â??This training marks a critical step in moving from pilot initiatives to full operational integration of drone technology in desert locust management. It will empower national teams with advanced technical skills, enhance operational safety, and ensure the effective and sustainable use of these tools in protecting crops, livelihoods, and food security,â?• he said.

Participants from CRC and CLCPRO Member Countries are benefiting from direct exposure to international standards and best practices, enabling them to replicate and scale up drone-based operations at national level. The programme also contributes to building a regional pool of certified drone operators who can be rapidly mobilized during emergency situations.

In addition to technical training, the programme promotes regional cooperation, experience sharing, and harmonization of operational protocols. It strengthens collaboration among national locust units, regional commissions, research institutions, and private-sector partners, reinforcing collective preparedness against transboundary pest threats.

The initiative forms part of FAOâ??s broader strategy to modernize desert locust management through digitalization, remote sensing, robotics, and precision application technologies. It complements existing tools such as eLocust, RAMSES, satellite monitoring, and geographic information systems, creating an integrated, data-driven response framework.

FAO remains committed to supporting Member States in strengthening early warning and response systems, promoting innovation, enhancing human and institutional capacities, and building resilient, sustainable mechanisms to prevent and manage desert locust outbreaks and other transboundary plant pests and diseases. These efforts contribute directly to FAOâ??s â??Four Bettersâ?• agenda: Better Production, Better Nutrition, Better Environment, and Better Life and to global food security and sustainable development goals