



Up, up and away...

Drone part of EMF agriscience classes

by Stephanie Croston

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A buzzing hum filled the air in the old gym at Friend High Jan. 30. Ten students took turns operating the Exeter-Milligan-Friend FFA chapter's drone, learning to take off, land and fly around the space.

Advisor Jesse Bower said the drone was purchased using a \$2,500 grant from the Nebraska Investment Finance Authority. With the grant, the chapter was able to purchase the drone, a carrying case and miscellaneous attachments.

The chapter was one of four in the state to receive a \$2,500 grant. Smaller grants were also distributed.

The grant application was due at the end of September, and the chapter was told in November it had received money. The chapter bought the drone from Precision Hawk in January.

Bower said the drone will be used in the agriscience classes for projects like field mapping. Junior high students will also be able to learn drone basics.

"With so many young people aspiring to farm, we can introduce this technology to them with the hopes that they will take it back to their farm and communicate with past generations the benefits of precision agriculture practices," Bower wrote in the grant application.

The drone has visual and video capability, which allows the students to fly it using a smart controller and app on a smartphone. Bower

said the biggest challenge currently is battery life. The drone will fly for about 31 minutes and has a maximum speed of almost 45 miles per hour.

The drone weighs just over three pounds and measures about 14 inches in diagonal.

Sensors keep the drone from running into walls or people or other obstacles, Bower said.

Bower and the FFA students hadn't taken the drone outside yet. She wanted them to be more confident flying it indoors before adding the outdoor conditions.

"The plan is to take kids to fields around the schools," she said.

Colton Benjamin, a member of the EMF FFA chapter, said the drone is fun to fly. His family owns a feedlot and uses drones to check the cattle, especially during calving season, fences and water. He said using a drone is easier and cheaper than sending someone out into the feedlot.

Drones are becoming more important in agriculture, Bower wrote in the application, and knowing how to operate one could give the students an edge.

"Knowing that a lot of people in FFA or the ag classroom are planning on going into an agricultural career, learning to operate a drone could be a necessity," Bower wrote.



STEPHANIE CROSTON/FS

Students in the Exeter-Milligan-Friend FFA chapter fly their new drone around the old gym at Friend High.



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The Exeter-Milligan-Friend FFA students pause for a photo with their new drone Jan. 30. Pictured are, from left: (front row) Christian Weber, Cooper Girmus, Jesse Duba, Colton Benjamin and Cameryn Brandt; and (back row) Mac Taylor, Fred Hausman, Dawson Logan, Vivian Weber and Grant Pavel.