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FIELD GROWN AND HARVESTED USING REMOTE-CONTROL VEHICLES

 WORK & LIFESTYLE

A trial plot has been sown and harvested using only drones and autonomous farming vehicles.

We have previously seen drones used for home security and to deliver lab samples between hospitals, and now the use of drones has been extended to farming. The [Hands Free Hectare](#) project, run jointly by the UK's [Harper Adams University](#) and farming tech company [Precision Decisions](#), has successfully planted, tended and harvested a crop using only autonomous vehicles and drones. The project was conceived as a way to increase the flexibility and economy of farming, and attract a wider variety of people to the field.

Hands Free Hectare used smaller, lighter agricultural machines, which were automated and controlled by the researchers. The project, which cost less than GBP 200,000, used older machinery that was readily available, open source technology and an autopilot from a drone for the navigation system. It demonstrated that there are no technological barriers to autonomous farming. Explains Jonathan Gill, researcher at Harper Adams University, "We believe the best solution is that in the future, farmers will manage fleets of smaller, autonomous vehicles ... We hope that this project has helped to inspire some people and shown them the range of interesting and innovative jobs that are available now in agriculture."

While this project was small in scope, farming what amounted to a trial plot, researchers hope that it might pave the way for farmers to manage fleets of smaller, remote-piloted vehicles rather than driving up and down the fields themselves, allowing farmers to use their time more effectively and

economically. The team plan to make a Hands Free Hectare beer with the barley they have harvested and repeat the experiment with a winter crop. How might the use of autonomous vehicles change the nature of farming in the future?

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