

Design and Implementation of Lightweight Polymer-Based Drone System for Targeted Agricultural Spraying

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Abstract

Agriculture has entered a new era of innovation, with drone technology emerging as a key tool in pesticide and fertilizer application. Unlike conventional methods that expose farmers to hazardous chemicals resulting in health issues such as skin disorders, neurological impairments, and in extreme cases, fatal illnesses drone-based spraying offers a safer and more efficient alternative. In India, the adoption of this technology is accelerating due to its ability to reduce human exposure while improving operational accuracy. This study focuses on recent progress in drone subsystems, including intelligent sensors for agriculture, advanced spraying mechanisms, real-time GPS navigation, flight control units, and electronic speed controllers. A distinct highlight of this work is the use of polymer-based and composite materials in constructing key drone components, such as frames, rotor assemblies, and sensor housings. Materials like carbon-fiber-reinforced polymers (CFRPs) and durable thermoplastics provide excellent mechanical performance, resistance to agrochemical degradation, and weight reduction crucial for enhancing drone endurance and stability. Protective polymer coatings further ensure longevity under harsh field conditions. The system is designed to dynamically adjust pesticide output based on flight parameters, ensuring targeted, even spraying. These advancements not only streamline field operations and minimize chemical waste but also support higher crop productivity.

Keywords: Drone, Pesticides, Agriculture, Spray, Flight Controller, GPS, Polymer

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture remains a fundamental pillar of the Indian economy, contributing nearly 18% to the

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national GDP and providing livelihoods for about half of the population. Despite its importance, the sector faces significant challenges, including poor crop surveillance, inefficient irrigation practices, and inconsistent pesticide application, all of which limit productivity and sustainability [1–3].

This study introduces a novel design approach for an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) intended to tackle these issues through advanced automation in agricultural operations. The UAV, based on quadcopter architecture, is engineered to deliver precise pesticide and fertilizer application, significantly reducing human labor and enhancing operational efficiency. The system integrates GPS technology and intelligent sensors for accurate field mapping, alongside automated spraying mechanisms for the uniform distribution of agrochemicals.

A distinctive aspect of the proposed UAV is the incorporation of polymer and composite materials in its construction [4, 5]. Components such as the drone frame, propellers, and protective casings are fabricated using lightweight, high-strength polymers and carbon-fiber-reinforced composites. These materials provide essential benefits, including resistance to chemical corrosion, reduced structural weight, and enhanced mechanical performance factors that contribute to longer flight duration and increased payload capacity. The paying load capacity is 5- 6 Kg with light weight and four rotatory motors give it support to provide stability and control.

The use of polymeric coatings enhances durability under harsh environmental conditions. This integration of smart technology and polymer materials supports precision agriculture by promoting targeted application, minimizing chemical waste, and improving crop yields. The approach aligns with sustainable agricultural goals and reflects the growing role of polymers in next-generation farming solutions [6–9]. The purpose of this research article gives an approach to promote the drone technology for targeted crop nutrition, reduces environmental impact, and boosts overall agricultural productivity. By incorporating such advances, India's agricultural sector can achieve better sustainability, improved efficiency, and increased crop yield.

BACKGROUND STUDY

Significant advancements in drone-mounted spraying systems have been reported in recent years, demonstrating the growing potential of UAVs in precision agriculture. Yallappa D et al. (2017) [10] developed an innovative hexacopter equipped with LiPo batteries and brushless DC motors, capable of carrying 5.5 liters of liquid with an operational endurance of 16 minutes. Their work focused on optimizing droplet size, pressure, and liquid discharge rate. In an effort to improve efficiency and cost-effectiveness, Rahul Desale et al. (2019) [11] proposed a UAV design tailored for agricultural spraying and field monitoring, using the KK 2.1.5 microcontroller along with GPS and onboard cameras. Their approach emphasized the importance of lightweight construction to reduce energy consumption and improve performance. Abdul Hafeez et al. (2022) [12] further highlighted the role of drones in crop monitoring and pesticide application, incorporating AI and deep learning technologies for enhanced remote sensing. The increase in drone adoption post-2017 was largely due to improved payload capacity and the use of lighter materials, including polymer composites. Xue et al. (2016) [13] designed an automatic UAV-based spraying system utilizing an ultra-low-power MSP430 microcontroller and integrated route planning software, which enabled precise navigation to predefined targets. Dongyan et al. (2015) [14] investigated aerial spraying performance using the M-18B and Thrush 510G aircraft, examining the impact of flight height on swath width and droplet distribution. Finally, Huang et al. (2015) [15] developed a low-volume sprayer mounted on an unmanned helicopter, which could carry up to 22.7 kg and operate for 45 minutes per gallon of fuel laying the foundation for modern aerial application techniques. The incorporation of lightweight polymer structures in such UAVs continues to enhance efficiency, endurance, and scalability in agricultural practices.

A key area of progress has been the integration of polymer-based and composite materials in UAV airframes, propellers, and spray modules. These materials, including carbon-fiber-reinforced polymers (CFRPs) and high-performance thermoplastics, contribute to significant weight reduction while maintaining structural integrity. Their corrosion resistance is especially beneficial when handling agrochemicals, increasing drone lifespan and operational reliability. The use of polymer and composite materials has played a transformative role in the development of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), particularly for agricultural applications such as crop monitoring and pesticide spraying. Traditionally, drone systems faced constraints related to structural weight, exposure to agrochemicals, and mechanical durability. Recent innovations in material science, especially in polymers and their composites, have helped overcome these limitations, enabling drones to achieve greater efficiency, endurance, and operational safety. Materials such as carbon fiber-reinforced polymers (CFRPs), glass fiber-reinforced polymers (GFRPs), and high-performance thermoplastics have been widely adopted in drone manufacturing [16–18]. These materials are lightweight yet strong, making them ideal for drone frames, propellers, and spray system housings. Their chemical resistance and ability to

withstand environmental exposure make them particularly useful for agricultural operations involving corrosive substances like pesticides and fertilizers. Several studies have highlighted the impact of these materials on drone performance. Drones incorporating polymer composites have demonstrated longer flight durations due to weight reduction, along with improved payload capacities. In addition, polymer enclosures protect sensitive components such as sensors, microcontrollers, and battery systems from moisture, dust, and chemical exposure, thereby enhancing the overall lifespan and reliability of the system. The emergence of additive manufacturing techniques, such as 3D printing using polymer-based filaments, has further accelerated the customization and prototyping of drone components [18]. This flexibility allows rapid adaptation of drones for different agricultural environments, optimizing functionality without significantly increasing production costs. The Table 1 represented technology involved in drone for crop protection.

Table 1. Technology Involved in Drone for Crop Protection.

Drone Model/Type	Features	Advantages	Disadvantages	References
Spraying Drones	Equipped with precision spraying systems and GPS mapping.	- Efficient and uniform pesticide/herbicide application. - Reduces chemical exposure for workers. - Saves time and labor costs.	- Limited battery life affects coverage area. - Initial investment cost is high. - Requires trained operators.	[19]
Imaging Drones	Multi-spectral or thermal cameras for monitoring crop health and pest detection.	- Early pest detection and health monitoring. - Non-invasive and detailed analysis. - Enhances decision-making.	- Not suitable for direct action like spraying. - Data processing can be time-consuming. - High equipment costs.	[20]
Hybrid Drones	Combines spraying with imaging capabilities.	- Offers both monitoring and action. - Reduces the need for multiple systems. - Real-time analysis and action.	- Heavier design affects flight time. - Maintenance is more complex and expensive. - Higher operational skill required.	[21]
Fixed-Wing Drones	Designed for long-duration flights and large-area coverage.	- Covers larger areas efficiently. - Suitable for large-scale farming. - Long battery life compared to rotary drones.	- Limited maneuverability in small fields. - Higher landing space requirements. - Often lacks precise spraying capabilities.	[22]
Rotary-Wing Drones	Multirotor drones capable of precision spraying and maneuvering in tight spaces.	- High maneuverability. - Suitable for small and uneven terrains. - Easy to operate and deploy.	- Shorter flight duration compared to fixed-wing drones. - Limited payload capacity.	[23]
Autonomous Drones	Programmed with AI for autonomous flight, obstacle avoidance, and precision application.	- Reduced need for manual operation. - Higher accuracy in task execution. - Can operate in low-visibility conditions.	- Expensive hardware and software. - Risk of failure in complex terrains without human oversight. - Needs robust field mapping.	[24]
Swarm Drones	Multiple drones coordinated for simultaneous action across large fields.	- Increases efficiency by covering multiple areas simultaneously. - Reduces time for large-scale applications.	- Complex control systems required. - High coordination costs. - Risk of inter-drone collision in dense crop areas.	[25]

METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

The flight controller, the primary component of the drone, is responsible for managing and optimizing flight operations through the use of complex firmware. The flight controller, which is integrated with brushless direct current (BLDC) motors, synchronizes various operations to guarantee

stability and smooth control while in flight. In order to manage the BLDC motors' speed and direction, electronic speed controllers, or ESCs, are essential. The ESCs enable fine control by producing high-frequency signals, which allow the drone precisely and carry out duties effectively.

BLDC Motor

The Figure 1 (a) represented brushless direct current (BLDC) motor, which is essential to the construction of drones for agricultural crop protection because it ensures dependable and effective drone operation. The thrust needed to raise the drone and its payload such as fertilizer or pesticide tank is supplied by BLDC motors, allowing for constant hovering and smooth flying for accurate applications.



Figure 1. Components of Drone for Constructions.

In order to maximize flying duration, particularly in expansive agricultural areas, their great efficiency and energy-saving skills are essential. BLDC motors are perfect for the harsh conditions of

agricultural settings since they have fewer mechanical parts and no brushes, making them extremely durable and low maintenance. These motors, when combined with electronic speed controllers (ESCs), guarantee quick and exact changes in direction and speed, enabling drones to successfully avoid obstacles and spray precisely. Agricultural drones with BLDC motors provide the accuracy, dependability, and durability required to improve crop protection techniques, which in turn boosts output and lowers the health hazards connected to manual pesticide application.

Propeller

The figure 1(b) shown propeller which used in drone design It is crucial to the design of drones for agricultural crop protection because it offers the lift and push needed to move the drone and its cargo efficiently. Propellers convert the rotational force of the BLDC motors into aerodynamic thrust, enabling precise hovering, stable flight, and manoeuvrability for the efficient application of pesticides or fertilizers. Agricultural drone propellers usually range in diameter from 12 to 30 inches, contingent on the drone's dimensions and weight. Because they produce more lift to sustain large payloads, larger propellers are utilized for heavier drones. Propellers are made to carry payloads that weigh five to twenty-five kilograms or more, which includes the weight of pesticide tanks, the drone's body, and its batteries. Materials that are strong and lightweight are necessary for effective operation. Composite materials, nylon-reinforced plastic, and carbon fiber are often utilized materials. Because of its excellent strength-to-weight ratio, longevity, and ability to use less energy while in flight, carbon fiber is particularly favoured.

The project consists of A sturdy nylon part with a 4.5-inch pitch and a 10-inch length, the 1045 propeller is perfect for a range of aerial applications. Its sleek black color improves visibility while in flight, and its 7.7 mm shaft diameter guarantees a secure attachment to suitable motor shafts. Because to its sturdy design and low weight (only 25 grams), this propeller is a favourite among drone enthusiasts for dependable operation and simple installation [26–28].

Battery

A popular high-performance power source in drone technology, especially for agricultural crop protection applications, is the 11.1V / 2500mAh 3S 3C LiPo battery pack with XT60 connector which is shown in figure 1(c). This battery is powered by a 3-cell (3S) design and operates at a nominal voltage of 11.1V (with a full charge delivering 12.6V). Depending on their payload and power requirements, drones can fly for medium periods of time thanks to its sufficient energy storage capacity of 2500mAh. The battery can safely give up to 7.5A of current at the 3C discharge rate, guaranteeing dependable power delivery to the drone's motors and other parts without running the danger of overheating or losing power. With the ability to manage the high-current loads commonly needed for drone operations, the XT60 connector guarantees a safe and effective connection. The 11.1V / 2500mAh 3S 3C LiPo battery pack is an essential part for enabling accurate and prolonged flight in agricultural drone applications because of its large capacity, discharge rate, and effective connectivity. For a variety of remote controls and microcontrollers, the transmitter (Tx) 11.1V / 2500mAh 3S 3C LiPo battery pack with XT60 connector has a lower discharge rate. JST-XH style balancing connections are included with the transmitter (Tx) 11.1V/2500mAh 3S 3C LiPo battery pack with XT60 connector.

Flight Controller

High processing power and efficiency are provided by the 32-bit STM32F427 Cortex-M4 core with FPU operating at 168MHz, a potent microcontroller frequently utilized in drone design which is shown in figure 1(d). For embedded applications, the Cortex-M4 core offers improved performance for tasks including real-time computations, sensor data processing, and flight control. Adding a floating-point unit (FPU) allows for quicker and more precise mathematical calculations, which is particularly important for applications like sensor fusion, control algorithms, and navigation that call for intricate calculations. The STM32F427, which operates at 168MHz, provides high-speed processing, enabling the drone to manage tasks like real-time speed, altitude, and direction

modifications, maintain stability, and react swiftly to dynamic changes in flight conditions. The speed, processing power, and accuracy of this microcontroller make it perfect for controlling the intricate operations of agricultural drones, guaranteeing dependable and effective performance in crop protection and other agricultural duties. The flight controller has a 32-bit STM32F427 Cortex M4 CPU with a 168MHz FPU, 256KB of RAM, and 2MB of flash memory. It includes sensors including the MEAS MS5611 barometer, the Intense MPU 6000 accelerometer/gyroscope, the ST Micro L3GD20H gyroscope, and the ST Micro LSM303D accelerometer/magnetometer. For added security, a 32-bit STM32STM100 failsafe co-processor is also included. The flight controller has a small form factor and dependable performance, weighing 37.6g and measuring 85 x 52 x 15mm.

Radio Transmitter and Receiver

In drone technology, the FS-i6 radio transmitter and receiver pack is a popular control system, especially for uses like crop security. With its dependable and intuitive interface and six channels, the FS-i6 transmitter gives the operator control over the drone's flight mode, speed, and payload delivery, among other features. For reliable and interference-free communication, it uses a 2.4GHz frequency, which guarantees a solid and reliable connection between the drone and transmitter. Figure 1(e) shown FS-i6 receiver is a little but incredibly powerful device that relays control commands to the drone's flight controller by receiving signals from the transmitter. Long-range control and accurate responsiveness are features of this system that allow operators to effectively move drones over wide agricultural fields. The FS-i6 transmitter and receiver pack is a crucial part of controlling agricultural drones for accurate fertilization, pesticide spraying, and field monitoring because of its low latency, dependable performance, and ease of use. Gliders, boats, helicopters, and fixed-wing aircraft may all communicate reliably with the FS-i6 radio transmitter and receiver pack. With a maximum output power of less than 20 dBm and a 2.4GHz wireless frequency, it offers reliable signal transmission. It guarantees accurate control with its 6 channels and 4096 resolutions. It provides enhanced signal sensitivity and reception quality thanks to its two antennas and AFHDS 2A wireless protocol. With a range of 500 to 1500 meters and a low voltage alarm, it is powered by four 1.5AA batteries. Clear information is displayed in both Chinese and English on the STN transitive display. For compatibility, PS/2 (PPM) connectivity is supported.

GPS on chip Board Compass

The module's ultra-bright LED indications improve visibility and make it simple to check the status while it's operating figure 1(f). Installation is made easier by the standard Mk-style mounting holes it has. The module operates with a default baud rate of 38400 bps, which is adjustable up to 115200 bps, ensuring rapid and reliable communication. It provides thorough navigation data by producing GGA, GSA, and RMC frames. The default update rate is 1Hz, which can be upgraded to 5Hz for improved positioning accuracy. To help with direction finding, the module also has an integrated compass. With convenient connectors, it integrates seamlessly with the MEGA BLACK platform and supports both GPS and compass functionalities, making it ideal for navigation and orientation tasks in various applications.

Electronic Speed Controller

An essential part of drone systems, the YOURBOT ESC (Electronic Speed Controller) controls the direction and speed of the brushless DC (BLDC) motors as shown figure 1(g). In order to modify motor speed, it serves as an interface between the flight controller and the motors, translating control signals into the proper power output. The YOURBOT ESC is made to effectively manage high-current loads, guaranteeing fluid and accurate movement control of the drone. In order to protect the drone's electronics while it is in use, it also has features including low-voltage cutoffs, thermal protection, and overcurrent protection. The YOURBOT ESC's fast reaction times and steady performance contribute to flying stability, accuracy, and efficiency, which makes it indispensable for jobs like agricultural crop protection where precise manoeuvring and reliable motor performance are critical. Its 6V to 12V voltage range and 30W of horsepower guarantee compatibility and sufficient power for efficient motor running. It is perfect for aerial application when weight is important because

it is made of lightweight copter material and weighs only 150 grams. The ESC has a 2A Battery Eliminator Circuit (BEC) to provide auxiliary devices with a steady power source. With a steady current rating of 30A (max 40A for less than 10s), it reliably performs well in difficult situations. All things considered, the YOURBOT ESC meets the demands of both enthusiasts and hobbyists by offering reliable and effective drone speed control.

Material Selection and Frame Design

A key design consideration was the use of polymer composite materials to reduce weight and improve structural integrity. The drone's main frame and rotor arms were constructed using carbon fiber-reinforced polymers (CFRPs) and glass fiber-reinforced polymers (GFRPs). These materials were selected due to their superior mechanical strength, low density, and resistance to fatigue, which contribute to enhanced flight stability and increased payload capacity. The lightweight nature of these composites also improves energy efficiency, allowing longer flight durations on a single battery charge [29, 30].

Chemical Tank and Fluid Handling

The pesticide and fertilizer tanks were manufactured using high-density polyethylene (HDPE), a thermoplastic polymer known for its excellent resistance to chemical corrosion. HDPE was chosen to ensure safe storage and transport of agrochemicals within the drone system. In addition, the fluid delivery system used polyurethane tubing, which maintains flexibility and chemical compatibility under varying temperature and pressure conditions [31, 32].

Protective Housing for Electronics

To safeguard critical electronic components such as the microcontroller, GPS unit, battery pack, and sensors, enclosures were fabricated using polycarbonate (PC) and acrylonitrile butadiene styrene (ABS) polymers. These materials were selected for their toughness, impact resistance, and weather durability, ensuring reliable operation in outdoor agricultural environments.

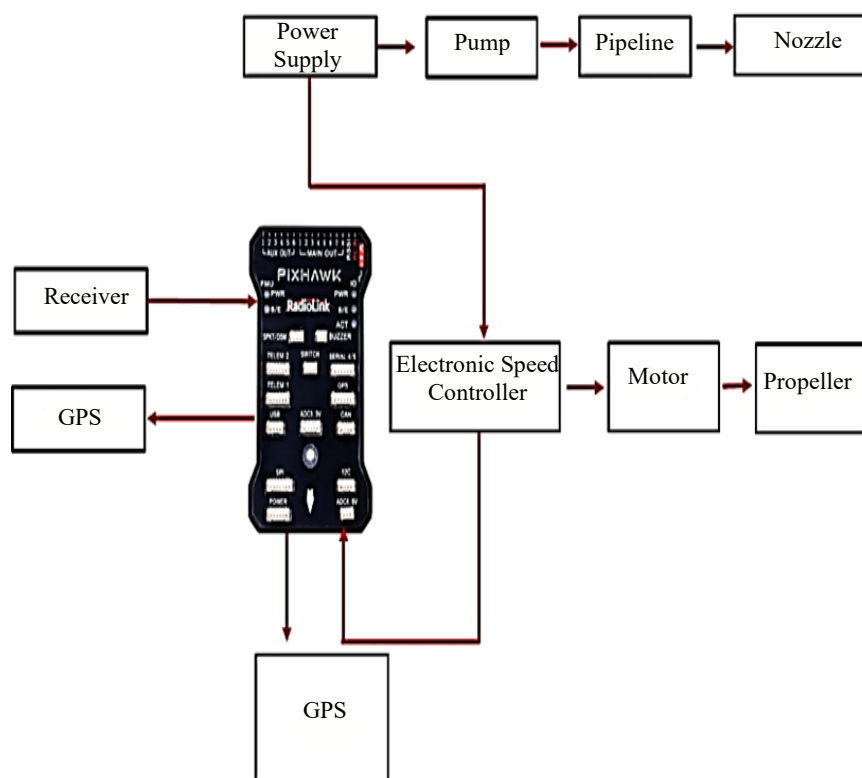


Figure 2. Block Diagram of Working Process.

CONSTRUCTION & WORKING

Figure 2 illustrates the block diagram and operational workflow of the developed agricultural drone system. The drone adopts a quadcopter configuration, comprising four arms constructed from lightweight carbon fiber-reinforced polymer composites, chosen for their high strength-to-weight ratio and durability under repeated flight cycles. Each arm supports a brushless DC (BLDC) motor securely mounted with a propeller, enabling stable and efficient lift generation. To regulate motor performance, Electronic Speed Controllers (ESCs) are integrated between the motors and the flight controller. These ESCs ensure precise control over the speed and direction of each motor, which is crucial for balanced maneuverability. Electrical energy is uniformly distributed across all active components through a power distribution board, which draws power from a high-capacity lithium-polymer (Li-Po) battery widely used for its high energy density and lightweight polymer electrolyte composition. The drone's control architecture includes a flight controller and receiver module, which process real-time signals transmitted from the operator's handheld transmitter. Integrated sensors such as accelerometers and gyroscopes help the flight controller analyze positional data and stabilize the drone dynamically. Additionally, a GPS module is interfaced with the flight controller, providing real-time coordinates to the Mission Planner software on the base station, thereby enabling automated and accurate flight paths. For agricultural spraying, a polymer-based storage tank typically made from chemically resistant high-density polyethylene (HDPE) is mounted at the center of the drone frame. Its sloped design ensures complete drainage and maximized payload utilization. Pesticide delivery is facilitated through flexible plastic tubing connected to precision spray nozzles, both made from polymer materials resistant to agrochemical corrosion. These nozzles are strategically positioned to ensure uniform and targeted distribution of pesticides over the crop surface. The landing gear, constructed from impact-resistant polymer materials such as ABS or nylon composites, ensures safe takeoffs and landings, even on uneven agricultural terrain. The entire assembly is aerodynamically optimized for weight distribution and structural integrity, enabling reliable operations across varied farming conditions. In operation, the transmitter sends flight and spray commands, which are wirelessly received by the onboard receiver. The flight controller then interprets these signals alongside sensor data to perform actions such as altitude hold, position correction, and spray actuation. This integrated system, powered and protected by advanced polymer and composite materials, makes the drone a highly versatile tool for precision agriculture and modern crop protection strategies.

The Electronic Speed Controllers (ESCs), the crucial connection between the flight controller and the motors, receive the optimized signals as soon as they are processed. Accurate control is ensured by the ESCs, which accurately control the current sent to the motors based on the signals received. The motors are turned on by this regulated current, which causes the propellers to rotate and produce the thrust needed for flight. At the same time, the Li-Po battery-powered pump pressurizes the tank's contents. The pressurized liquid disperses in a fine mist that uniformly covers the target area as it passes through the pipeline and out the nozzle. The pump's variable flow rate, which is managed by altering the input current, further increases the system's versatility. With the help of this feature, which is simple to control through the transmitter, operators can adjust spraying operations to suit the unique requirements of various agricultural situations.

RESULTS

The integration of drone technology in agriculture is transforming crop management practices by offering a more efficient, economical, and safer alternative to conventional pesticide application methods. Traditionally, farmers relied on manual hand pumps, which are not only time-consuming but also physically demanding and prone to inconsistent coverage. In contrast, drones equipped with automated spraying mechanisms can complete the same task in a fraction of the time, significantly enhancing operational efficiency and productivity. One of the most notable outcomes of this study is the reduction in energy consumption and operational cost. The developed drone system consumes as little as 3 watts of power per mission, translating to approximately ₹10 in energy expenditure. This is a considerable saving when compared to the ₹300–₹500 spent daily on manual pesticide spraying. Moreover, the precision control of drone-based applications minimizes chemical wastage and ensures

uniform fertilizer and pesticide distribution, directly contributing to improved crop health and yield. A critical factor contributing to the drone's superior performance is the strategic use of polymer and polymer composite materials in its design. Components such as the airframe, spray tanks, fluid lines, and electronic enclosures utilize advanced polymers like carbon fiber-reinforced polymers (CFRPs), high-density polyethylene (HDPE), and acrylonitrile butadiene styrene (ABS). These materials reduce the drone's weight, enhance flight endurance, and offer excellent resistance to chemical degradation caused by agrochemical exposure. This results in a durable and lightweight structure capable of operating reliably in harsh agricultural environments. Additionally, the use of impact-resistant polymers in landing gear improves structural resilience, enabling safe operations across uneven terrains. By reducing the load on motors and batteries, the lightweight polymeric construction contributes to extended flight times, making the system more practical for large-scale agricultural deployment. Beyond operational efficiency, drones contribute positively to farm worker health and safety. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), exposure to agricultural chemicals during manual spraying is linked to skin disorders and long-term health complications. By replacing manual processes with drone-based application systems, direct human exposure to pesticides is minimized, offering a healthier working environment for farmers.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Agricultural drones have proven to be transformative tools, particularly in challenging environments such as paddy fields, orchards, and uneven terrains where conventional spraying methods are less effective. By enabling precise and targeted application of fertilizers and pesticides, these UAVs not only enhance the efficiency of chemical usage but also minimize environmental impact. Instead of blanket coverage, drones can focus on affected crop zones such as a pest-infested area thereby reducing chemical waste and optimizing input costs for farmers. A major factor contributing to this technological advancement is the intelligent use of polymer and composite materials in drone construction. Lightweight yet durable materials like carbon fiber-reinforced polymers, HDPE, and impact-resistant ABS plastics ensure that these drones maintain structural integrity, chemical resistance, and high maneuverability, even in rugged or hard-to-access areas. These materials reduce the overall weight of the drone, enabling longer flight durations, improved payload handling, and reduced energy consumption. Time-saving is another key advantage drones can cover expansive fields in a fraction of the time required by traditional ground-based methods, allowing farmers to allocate their time and labor to other essential agricultural tasks. This is especially beneficial in large-scale farms where timely intervention is crucial for crop health and yield. Although initial investment and regulatory compliance remain challenges, the growing adoption of drone technology across vineyards, research farms, and orchard-based agriculture indicates its long-term viability. By combining efficiency with precision, and environmental responsibility with data-driven insights, agricultural drones empowered by modern polymer applications are shaping the future of sustainable and intelligent farming.

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