

USDA wants to use drones to keep E. coli out of our food supply

When the new [Food Safety Modernization Act](#) became law in 2011, it required farmers to test for E. coli and other bacteria. However, the law does not give them any direction on how to do so....The USDA's [Agricultural Research Service](#) has been [researching whether drones can be used to examine irrigation ponds](#), in the hopes of coming up with a new standard for ensuring that water is safe to use on crops.

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The ARS is exploring whether drones can be used to provide aerial coverage of irrigation ponds to find indicators of bacteria like E. coli. The service is trying to find a relationship between E. coli and the algae and other content in ponds, according to Jaclyn Smith, a biological technician with ARS. Drones can deliver more accurate and higher-resolution images of ponds than satellites, says Billie Griffith, a biological technician and drone pilot with ARS. Equipped with infrared cameras and cameras that capture different wavelengths of light, drones can detect higher concentrations of bacteria.

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Farmers need to sample their irrigation water and demonstrate that it is safe to put onto crops....[I]t is important to sample the water because bacteria in water can filter into the plant matter and cause illnesses....The recent [E.coli outbreaks that affected romaine lettuce](#) indicate that the threat....to public health is not going away.

Read full, original article: [USDA Explores Whether Drones Can Be Used to Test for E. coli in Irrigation Ponds](#)