Will these robots ever catch on?

A UK research company suggests the market for agricultural robots and drones, now about $3 billion annually, will balloon to $10b by 2022.

Acceptance of GPS technology in the past decade – just look at its use in cars – has grown to where farmers use this technology, with superb accuracy, to apply fertiliser and sprays. Tractors can now achieve sub-2cm accuracy by using GPS guidance. And they can hugely reduce inputs and outputs, and reduce driver fatigue over long days and difficult conditions, such as poor light or dust.

CRUSHA'S COMMENT
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The industry says around 300,000 tractors will this year be sold equipped with some form of guidance or auto-steer system. As prices keep tumbling it's predicted this will jump to 660,000 units annually by 2026.

The next stage seems to be unmanned, autonomous tractors, such as the concept units shown by CNH at the recent Farm Progress Show in the US: a full-size tractor, without cab, could cultivate, plant and spray without an operator. It appears now that the jury's out on whether the preferred choice would be full-size units, or a number of smaller, lighter 50hp units roaming a farm doing repetitive tasks. Interestingly, the technology is now in place but seems to be stymied by draconian regulations and/or lack of trust on the part of poten-

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV's) or dones continue to gain favour in the agriculture sector.