



Drones against red spider mites

A project that is still being studied involves the use of drones to protect industry tomatoes from red spider mites, reports Rossano Remagli Buoli, contractor and vice-president of the Uncai contractors association in Cremona.

"Contractors are entrepreneurs who invest in increasingly advanced machinery thanks to which we perform specialized work for companies. Over the years, a strong bond has developed between producers and contractors. We need each other to tackle market issues. Drones are the latest introduction and we are working to make this service available. We want to use this technology not only to map the land or acquire multispectral images, but also for phytosanitary defense with antagonist insects. There are evident advantages for the environment and the impact of a drone on a crop is practically zero."

When it comes to tomato crops, a drone can help against red spider mites. It flies over the infested crop and drops biodegradable capsules that contain an antagonist insect with the utmost precision.

Real tests will start in 2019. The antagonist insect used will probably be *Phytoseiulus persimilis*, a predatory mite employed successfully all over the world against the red spider mite (*Tetranychus urticae*). Females have a bright orange pyriform shaped body, are slightly larger than red spider mites and very mobile. They are characterized by a high research ability and can cover a lot of ground. Their development in optimal conditions is even faster than that of their prey.

But what would be the advantages? In addition to using useful insects, drones have a zero impact and can be used even after abundant rainfall. Only strong wind may impede their use. In just a few minutes, they can cover various hectares.

Another advantage is the possibility for contractors to cover larger areas as, unlike with bigger pieces of machinery, drones can be placed in the boot of a car and taken anywhere.

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