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FCC Allows Access To Galileo For Improved Geolocation

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The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) allows businesses and individuals, including those who operate unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) for professional use, within the United States to access certain satellite signals from the European Union's Galileo Global Navigation Satellite System (Galileo).

This access, which was granted in the fall, permits entities to use Galileo's E1 and E5 signals to augment the United States' Global Positioning System (GPS), resulting in improved availability, reliability, and resiliency of position, navigation, and timing services within the U.S.

While the breadth of effect of this decision by the FCC is far-reaching, access to Galileo may be more significant for UAVs. For example, the immediate effects of access to Galileo signals are likely to be felt by those entities who currently use UAVs in precision farming operations.

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Precision agriculture is essentially high-tech farming, where satellite technology and other sensors, such as those affixed to UAVs, are used to measure the properties of soil and surrounding air. With the information gathered from these sources, farmers are better able to react to the needs of individual crops, which should result in higher yields and greater efficiency. Farmers in the U.S. utilizing UAVs in precision farming have previously had to rely solely upon GPS to gather required satellite data, but the FCC's approval regarding Galileo means these farmers are likely to reap the benefits in increased crop yields and profitability moving forward.

Several U.S. devices already have the hardware required to access Galileo signals, including the latest generations of smartphones. However, many state-of-the-art devices will require software patches to access Galileo. Once formatted properly, devices access Galileo's signals in the same manner as they now access GPS signals.

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