MEDIA RELEASE

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APPN and VITO Collaborate on Global Reference Drone Research Platform

APPN, the Australian Plant Phenomics Network and VITO, the Flemish Institute of Technological Research, have announced they will collaborate to further develop UAV-based (unmanned aerial vehicle) imaging and data analytics in the agriculture and environmental monitoring domain.

The partnership centres around VITO's MAPEO platform, a cloud-based solution designed to transform raw UAV-derived data into actionable insights.

This partnership follows the strategic collaboration VITO signed with Wageningen University & Research (WUR) announced in March. WUR, currently ranked as the number one university for agriculture, is a global authority in agricultural sciences. Together, the partners intend to collaborate to set new standards for data-driven research in agriculture and environmental science, applicable across national and continental boundaries.

Partners with specialised environmental expertise

APPN is Australia's national plant phenomics research infrastructure, providing open access to advanced phenotyping technologies, data resources, and expertise. Its nationwide network supports crop research and innovation aimed at developing more resilient and productive agricultural systems in the face of climate and environmental challenges. APPN is funded through the Australian Government's NCRIS program, State governments, Universities, and the GRDC to support plant phenotyping research infrastructure.

"The partnership with VITO and APPN on MAPEO will provide a unique opportunity to access and develop a research-grade UAV processing software suitable for a wide variety of platforms. It is vital to delivering our national collaborative data network and assets and link Australian researchers internationally," said APPN CEO Richard Dickmann.

VITO is a global leader in research in remote sensing and environmental innovations.

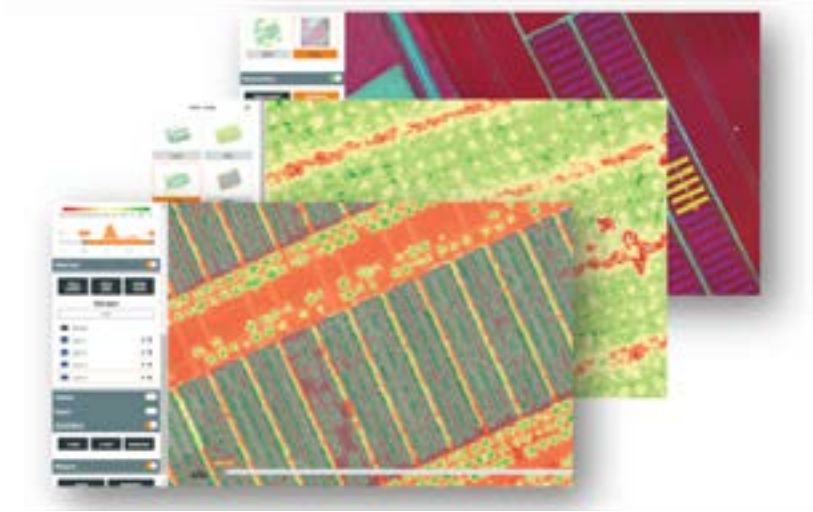
"One of VITO's strengths is building collaborative partnerships that bring together complementary expertise, technologies, and research infrastructures.

"Extending our existing partnership with WUR to the Australian Plant Phenomics Network is particularly exciting, as it enables us to connect leading

research communities across continents. Through our advanced remote sensing platforms, we can accelerate technological innovation and support the development of next-generation UAV-based phenotyping solutions for agricultural and environmental research," said Margot Verhulst, Business & Relationship Development, VITO.

Rick van de Zedde, the Program Manager for the Netherlands Plant Eco-Phenotyping Centre (NPEC) of Wageningen University & Research, stated: "This partnership around MAPEO will enable research projects to compare UAV-based plant phenotyping data for crop performance in multi-field trials on a global scale."

The APPN team (Kerry Bormann, Dr Trevor Garnett and Richard Dickmann), with WUR's Rick van de Zedde and the VITO team (Margot Verhulst, Dries Raymaekers, and Nick Gutkin) at the 9th International Plant Phenotyping Symposium in Accra, Ghana



Screenshots from the MAPEO platform

International network of UAV-based agricultural research

The partnership was formalised during the 2026 International Plant Phenotyping Symposium (IPPS) in Accra, Ghana, where representatives from APPN, WUR, and VITO met in person. This gathering emphasizes the growing international network of organisations collaborating on the future of drone-based phenotyping and agricultural innovation.

The new partnership connects leading expertise in plant phenotyping, remote sensing, and data analytics across Europe and Australia. Through closer collaboration, VITO aims to accelerate the development and adoption of UAV-based technologies that support agricultural and environmental research.

Scaling impact for a sustainable future

Building on the shared vision established by VITO and WUR earlier this year, these collaborations will focus on knowledge exchange, algorithm development, and the creation of scalable digital solutions offering reliable, quantitative information for plant phenotyping and environmental monitoring. By connecting research communities across continents, VITO will create new opportunities to translate scientific advances into practical applications for sustainable, climate-resilient agriculture.

Contact:

Want to learn more about this collaboration, or about APPN's remote sensing expertise and tools for agricultural applications?

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