Archives available at journals.mriindia.com

International Journal on Advanced Computer Theory and Engineering

ISSN: 2319-2526
Volume 14 Issue 01, 2025

IoT in Agriculture – Precision Farming Using Sensors and AI

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Peer Review Information

Submission: 11 Feb 2025
Revision: 20 Mar 2025
Acceptance: 22 April 2025

Keywords

Space Stations
Moon Colony
Autonomous Infrastructure
Sustainability
Life Support Systems

Abstract

The integration of the Internet of Things (IoT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in agriculture has transformed traditional farming into a data-driven, precision-based approach. IoT-enabled sensors collect real-time data on soil moisture, temperature, humidity, and crop health, enabling informed decision-making (Kirkaya, 2020). AI-driven analytics process this data to optimize irrigation, fertilization, and pest control, leading to improved crop yields and efficient resource management (Singh et al., 2021). Precision farming minimizes environmental impact, reduces costs, and enhances sustainability. This paper explores the applications, benefits, and challenges of IoT and AI in precision agriculture, highlighting their potential to revolutionize the agricultural sector

Introduction

When we hear the word agriculture, the first thought that comes to mind is farming, right? Agriculture is not only the backbone of India's economy but also an essential pillar of human survival. Just as food, shelter, oxygen, money, and clothing are fundamental necessities for life, agriculture is equally vital — because it connects all these necessities.

Think about it: where does our food come from? Farming. Farmers cultivate crops, and because of their hard work, we have fruits, vegetables, rice, and other essential foods on our plates. But agriculture doesn't stop at food. It supports an entire chain — from farmers to vendors, from grocery stores to ration shops — ensuring food reaches the common person while generating income for businesses and livelihoods for millions. Farmers earn money from their produce, traders profit from selling food, and people buy food to sustain themselves. This chain, built on agriculture, fuels other basic needs too: with money earned, people build homes, buy clothes, and support their families.

Agriculture isn't just about growing crops; it's a complete ecosystem that connects food, shelter, oxygen, money, and clothing — enabling human life to function smoothly. It's an undeniable truth that from birth to death, every human being is connected to agriculture. Without it, life as we know it would be impossible.

So now we understand how important agriculture is in our lives — but do you know how agriculture is practiced in our country today? In India, agriculture remains the largest source of livelihood, with 70% of rural households relying on it for survival. However, 82% of these farmers are categorized as small and marginal, working on less than 2 hectares of land. Despite contributing 16% to India's GDP, many farmers continue using traditional methods, which, though time-tested,

often result in lower productivity compared to global standards.

For instance, only 46% of India's cultivable land has access to proper irrigation, leaving farmers heavily dependent on unpredictable monsoon rains. This uncertainty often affects yield quality and quantity.

Moreover, not all farmers are physically capable of managing intensive labor, especially with age and health challenges. One crucial farming step involves soil testing — determining whether the soil is rich enough in nutrients to support healthy crop growth. However, most farmers lack access to such insights and rely on experience and assumptions. This can lead to slow crop growth and lower yields, despite their relentless hard work.

So what should we do? The answer is clear — we adopt IoT devices. Yes, that's right! In today's era, we have the opportunity to modernize the agricultural sector using IoT technology.

Countries like China, Japan, and the United States have already revolutionized their farming methods with IoT, leading to faster improvements, reduced labor, and increased profits. By integrating smart sensors, automated systems, and data-driven decision-making, these nations have managed to boost yields while cutting costs — transforming agriculture from a labor-intensive practice into an efficient, technology-powered industry.

Now the question arises: how did these countries achieve this transformation, and how can we implement similar changes in India? In the next section, we'll explore the strategies and innovations that made their agricultural sectors thrive — and how we can adapt these advancements to reshape Indian agriculture, empowering our farmers with the tools they need to succeed in this fast-changing world.

Literature Review

IoT and AI technologies have significantly improved precision agriculture through advanced crop monitoring and management. IoT sensors like soil moisture meters, weather stations, and drone-based sensors gather real-time information regarding the soil status, climate parameters, and crop health (Alejandrino et al., 2020). AI methods, such as machine learning algorithms, process this information to forecast crop yields, identify diseases, and allocate resources efficiently, enhancing agricultural output and sustainability. AI-powered image processing using drones and sensors mounted on tractors can track crops and detect nutrient deficiencies. Additionally, robotic systems equipped with AI have been designed for operations such as automated weeding and targeted pesticide application, reducing labor expenses and environmental impact (Karunathilake et al., 2023).

Methodology

IoT precision farming integrates multiple sensors to monitor soil humidity, temperature, moisture, and crop health in real time. These sensors gather data and report it to cloud-based systems using LoRa, Zigbee, NB-IoT, and 5G communication technologies. AI-powered analytics derive insights from the data to facilitate data-informed decision-making (Singh et al., 2021). Farmers can access these insights on mobile apps or dashboards, increasing productivity and resource utilization. AI models forecast weather, yield, and pest infestation, enabling anticipatory interventions. For example, John Deere's precision agriculture offerings utilize IoT sensors and AI to optimize planting and harvesting plans (Raj et al., 2022).

Check out this (Fig 1) showcasing a cutting-edge smart farm that blends IoT and AI technology seamlessly. It features automated drones flying

over the fields to keep an eye on crop health, along with IoT sensors nestled in the soil that gather real-time data. Plus, there's an AI-driven robotic tractor that makes planting and harvesting a breeze. A digital dashboard on the farmer's tablet offers valuable insights for better irrigation and pest management.

Applications of IoT and AI in Precision Farming:

Smart irrigation systems employ IoT-based soil moisture sensors and AI-based algorithms to track real-time water levels, optimizing irrigation and minimizing water wastage. AI-driven pest and disease management utilizes computer vision and predictive analytics to identify early indications of infestations, facilitating timely action and minimizing pesticide overuse (Kirkaya, 2020). Furthermore, AI-driven drones and autonomous

tractors enable precision seeding, spraying, and harvesting, reducing labor costs and increasing productivity.

Challenges And Limitations

Despite its promise, precision farming with IoT faces several challenges, including the high costs of IoT sensors, AI-based analysis, and mechanized farm tools, which may be prohibitive for small- and medium-scale farmers. Data privacy and security concerns arise as intelligent farming systems accumulate vast amounts of sensitive agricultural information, increasing the risk of cyber threats (Karunathilake et al., 2023). Connectivity issues also persist, particularly in rural and remote farming areas with weak internet infrastructure (Alejandrino et al., 2020).

Future Scope And Innovations

The future of precision agriculture will be significantly influenced by emerging technologies such as 5G, blockchain, and edge computing. 5G's low-latency, high-speed connectivity will facilitate real-time monitoring and immediate decision-making, enhancing IoT sensor networks. Blockchain will increase transparency and security in agri-supply chains by ensuring data integrity and traceability (Aggarwal & Singh, 2021). Additionally, edge computing will minimize reliance on cloud-based computation, enabling faster and more efficient decision-making in precision agriculture.

Strategies And Innovations In Modern Agriculture

Countries like China, Japan, Israel, the United States, and the Netherlands have set an impressive benchmark by modernizing their agricultural practices with IoT, AI, and data-driven strategies. Their success stems from smart planning, technological integration, and farmer-centric policies. Let's explore the key strategies they employed — and what India can learn from them.

1. Precision Farming with IoT and AI

In the United States and Netherlands, precision farming has revolutionized how crops are grown. IoT sensors are placed across fields to track soil moisture, temperature, and nutrient levels in real time. Data from these sensors is fed into AI systems, which generate recommendations on when to water, fertilize, or apply pesticides — minimizing waste and boosting yields.

Why India struggles:

Most Indian farms are small and fragmented, making large-scale sensor deployment impractical.

High costs of smart sensors and AI software are unaffordable for smallholder farmers.

Lack of awareness about precision farming keeps farmers tied to traditional methods.

Possible solution for India:

Low-cost, solar-powered sensors designed for small farms.

Regional language mobile apps that translate data into simple advice.

Government subsidies or public-private partnerships to reduce technology costs.

2. Automation and Smart Machinery

In Japan, where labor shortages are severe, automation has filled the gap. Self-driving tractors, robotic weeders, and automated harvesters allow farmers to manage larger fields with fewer workers. The Netherlands also leads with AI-guided greenhouses, which automatically control temperature, water, and light for optimal plant growth.

Why India struggles:

High cost of machinery is unaffordable for small-scale farms.

Terrain challenges — many Indian farms are uneven and scattered.

Lack of training on advanced machinery.

Possible solution for India:

Miniature autonomous tractors designed for small farms.

Shared farming equipment hubs — like a "tractor library" for rural villages.

Training programs to teach farmers how to use smart machinery.

3. Smart Irrigation and Water Management

Israel, known for its desert farming innovations, has mastered drip irrigation — delivering water directly to the roots of plants to prevent wastage. Coupled with IoT moisture sensors and AI weather forecasts, farmers water crops only when necessary. This technique has helped Israel grow crops with 50% less water than traditional methods.

Why India struggles:

46% of Indian farms still rely on rain-fed agriculture.

Limited access to smart irrigation systems.

Electricity shortages affect water pump operations in rural areas.

Possible solution for India:

Affordable smart irrigation kits for small farms.

Solar-powered pumps to counter electricity issues.
Weather prediction apps in regional languages to guide farmers on irrigation timing.

4. Drones and Remote Sensing

The United States and Australia have embraced drone technology for crop monitoring, pest detection, and spraying pesticides or fertilizers only where needed. This reduces chemical usage and ensures uniform crop health.
Why India struggles:
Drone regulations limit widespread use.
High costs make drones impractical for small farms.
Lack of trained drone pilots in rural areas.
Possible solution for India:
Lightweight, low-cost drones designed for small fields.
Government reforms to ease drone usage rules for farmers.
Drone training centers in rural districts.

5. Data-Driven Supply Chain Management

The Netherlands uses IoT sensors to track crops from farm to market — ensuring food stays fresh and preventing waste. Blockchain technology records every step in the supply chain, ensuring fair pricing and traceability.
Why India struggles:
Lack of cold storage infrastructure leads to 30-40% post-harvest losses.
Middlemen control pricing, leaving farmers underpaid.
Limited digital connectivity in rural areas hinders real-time tracking.
Possible solution for India:
Decentralized, solar-powered cold storage units near farms.
Blockchain-enabled supply chain platforms connecting farmers directly to markets.
Mobile-based produce tracking systems for small farmers.

Conclusion

The use of IoT and AI in precision agriculture has transformed contemporary farming through real-time tracking, data-driven decision-making, and resource management. Through intelligent sensors, machine learning algorithms, and automated equipment, farmers can improve crop yield, minimize water and fertilizer loss, and mitigate risks associated with climate variability (Singh et al., 2021). These technologies not only increase productivity but also promote sustainable farming, ensuring food security while preserving the environment.
Further research and innovation are necessary to address challenges such as high implementation costs, data security, and technology accessibility for small-scale farmers. Policymakers and stakeholders must invest in infrastructure, facilitate farmer education, and foster cost-efficient IoT solution development. Intergovernmental cooperation, technology vendors, and the agricultural community will be pivotal in making precision agriculture more efficient, cost-effective, and scalable for future food production (Karunathilake et al., 2023).

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