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Digital Agriculture and Artificial Intelligence Applications for Sustainable Resource Management and Future Food Security

Jelang Jelku D. Sangma[1,2,3]

[1]Department of Food Science and Nutrition, University of Agricultural Sciences, GKVK, Bangalore, Karnataka - 560065, India
[2]Department of Food Science and Nutrition, Eudoxia Research, University, 256 Chapman Road STE 105-4, New Castle, USA
[3]ICSSR at College of Community Science, Central Agricultural University (Imphal), Tura, Meghalaya – 794005, India

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*Corresponding Author: **Jelang Jelku D. Sangma** | Email Address: **jelang.jelku3@gmail.com**

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Abstract

The global food and agricultural sector is undergoing a rapid technological transformation driven by digital agriculture, artificial intelligence, remote sensing, Internet of Things technologies, robotics, geographic information systems, cloud computing, and advanced data analytics. These technologies provide new opportunities to improve agricultural productivity while reducing the excessive use of land, water, fertilizers, pesticides, energy, and other resources. Digital agriculture enables the collection and integration of large volumes of spatial, temporal, environmental, crop, soil, livestock, and socioeconomic data, whereas artificial intelligence can transform these datasets into actionable information for farm management and decision-making. Applications include precision irrigation, variable-rate fertilization, crop and disease monitoring, yield prediction, weather forecasting, soil assessment, weed detection, automated machinery, livestock monitoring, supply-chain optimization, and early warning systems for climate-related risks. These technologies can contribute to sustainable resource management by improving input-use efficiency and reducing unnecessary environmental losses. Artificial intelligence also has potential to strengthen future food security through improved productivity, reduction of post-harvest losses, climate-smart agricultural planning, and more efficient distribution of food resources. However, the benefits of digital agriculture are not automatically guaranteed. Limited rural connectivity, high technology costs, inadequate digital literacy, data ownership concerns, cybersecurity risks, algorithmic bias, interoperability problems, and unequal access may widen existing inequalities between farmers and regions. AI-based recommendations require reliable datasets and appropriate local validation.

Keywords: *digital agriculture, artificial intelligence, precision agriculture, sustainable resource management, food security.*

1. Introduction

Agriculture is facing a complex combination of challenges arising from population growth, climate change, land degradation, water scarcity, declining biodiversity, changing consumption patterns, and increasing pressure on natural resources. Future agricultural systems must produce sufficient quantities of safe and nutritious food while maintaining soil health, conserving water, reducing pollution, and adapting to increasingly variable climatic conditions. Traditional agricultural management approaches, which frequently rely on generalized recommendations and uniform application of inputs, may be inefficient when substantial variation exists within fields, farms, landscapes, and climatic zones. Digital agriculture provides an opportunity to address this variability through continuous data collection, spatial analysis, predictive modelling, and site-specific management [1]. Digital agriculture refers broadly to the application of digital technologies throughout agricultural production, processing, distribution, and consumption. It includes precision agriculture, remote sensing, geographic information systems, mobile applications, Internet of Things devices, cloud computing, unmanned aerial vehicles, robotics, automated machinery, blockchain, digital marketplaces, and artificial intelligence. The integration of these technologies enables agricultural systems to become increasingly data-driven and responsive.

Artificial intelligence is particularly important because agricultural systems generate large and complex datasets that may be difficult to interpret using conventional statistical approaches alone. Machine-learning algorithms can identify patterns in satellite imagery, sensor measurements, weather records, soil data, crop images, market information, and historical yield records. These patterns can subsequently support predictions and management decisions. AI applications have therefore expanded from experimental crop-disease recognition to broader applications involving crop forecasting, irrigation management, weed detection, livestock monitoring, resource allocation, and supply-chain management [2]. The potential importance of these technologies extends beyond increasing yield.

Sustainable agriculture requires the efficient use of inputs and the reduction of environmental externalities. If irrigation can be applied according to crop water requirements, fertilizer can be supplied according to spatial nutrient variability, and pesticides can be targeted only where disease or pest pressure occurs, considerable reductions in unnecessary input use may be possible. Digital technologies can also help farmers identify problems at an early stage, potentially reducing crop losses and improving resilience.

The relationship between digital agriculture and food security is consequently multidimensional. Food security depends not only on food availability but also on access, utilization, stability, and resilience. Digital technologies can contribute to these dimensions by increasing production efficiency, improving market access, reducing post-harvest losses, strengthening early warning systems, and supporting climate adaptation. However, technological interventions must be implemented within appropriate socioeconomic, environmental, and institutional frameworks [3-5]. This review discusses the major applications of digital agriculture and artificial intelligence in sustainable resource management and examines their potential contribution to future food security.

2. Concept of Digital Agriculture

Digital agriculture represents a transition from conventional farm management toward data-driven agricultural systems in which information is continuously collected, analyzed, interpreted, and used to support decisions. Unlike conventional precision agriculture, which has often focused primarily on within-field variability and variable-rate input application, digital agriculture encompasses a broader agricultural ecosystem extending from soil and crop management to supply chains, markets, finance, advisory services, and food distribution [6]. Modern digital agricultural systems integrate multiple technologies [6]. Remote sensing provides information about crop condition, vegetation characteristics, soil properties, and environmental variability. Sensors installed in fields can monitor soil moisture, temperature, electrical conductivity, nutrient-related parameters, and microclimatic conditions. Unmanned aerial vehicles can generate high-resolution images of individual fields, while satellite platforms provide repeated observations over large geographical areas. Geographic information systems integrate spatial information and allow farmers and researchers to visualize and analyze patterns.

The Internet of Things provides connectivity between sensors, machinery, mobile devices, and cloud platforms. Data generated by these devices can be transmitted continuously and analyzed in near real time. Cloud computing allows large datasets to be stored and processed without requiring farmers to maintain extensive local computing infrastructure [7]. Artificial intelligence acts as an analytical layer within this digital ecosystem. Machine-learning and deep-learning models can identify relationships among variables and generate predictions or recommendations. The combination of sensing, connectivity, computation, and AI creates a foundation for increasingly automated and adaptive agricultural systems.

3. Artificial Intelligence in Agriculture

Artificial intelligence encompasses computational methods that enable machines to perform tasks associated with learning, pattern recognition, prediction, classification, optimization, and decision-making.

In agriculture, AI commonly includes machine learning, deep learning, computer vision, natural-language processing, reinforcement learning, and predictive analytics [8]. Machine-learning algorithms can be trained using historical datasets to predict crop yields, classify crop conditions, estimate irrigation requirements, identify disease symptoms, and detect weeds. Deep-learning approaches, particularly convolutional neural networks, are widely used for image-based agricultural applications because they can automatically extract complex visual features from crop and field images. AI-based agricultural systems generally follow a sequence involving data acquisition, preprocessing, model development, prediction, decision support, and management intervention [7]. The quality of the final recommendation depends heavily on the quality and representativeness of the input data. Consequently, local calibration and validation are essential, particularly when models developed in one geographic region are transferred to another.

4. Remote Sensing and Crop Monitoring

Remote sensing is one of the most important components of digital agriculture. Satellite imagery, aerial photography, and drone-based observations provide repeated information about agricultural landscapes without requiring physical sampling of every location. Vegetation indices derived from multispectral imagery can provide information about crop vigor, canopy development, biomass, and stress. More advanced sensors can detect changes associated with water deficiency, nutrient limitations, disease, and other physiological disturbances [8]. AI can improve the interpretation of remotely sensed data by classifying crops, detecting abnormal vegetation patterns, estimating biomass, and predicting yields. Combining satellite imagery with field observations and weather data can produce more reliable crop-monitoring systems [9]. Early identification of crop stress is particularly important for sustainable resource management. If water stress is detected before severe yield loss occurs, irrigation can be targeted to affected areas. Similarly, identification of localized disease or pest outbreaks can support targeted interventions rather than uniform application across entire fields.

5. Artificial Intelligence for Precision Irrigation

Water scarcity is one of the major constraints on agricultural sustainability. Conventional irrigation systems may apply water uniformly even when crop water requirements vary spatially and temporally. Digital technologies allow irrigation to become more responsive to actual crop and soil conditions. Soil-moisture sensors can continuously measure water availability in the root zone. Weather stations provide information on rainfall, temperature, humidity, wind speed, and solar radiation. Remote sensing can provide information on crop canopy conditions and evapotranspiration. AI algorithms can combine these datasets to estimate crop water requirements and generate irrigation recommendations [10]. AI-enabled irrigation systems may use predictive models to determine when and how much water should be applied. Automated irrigation controllers can subsequently implement these recommendations. Such systems have the potential to reduce over-irrigation, waterlogging, nutrient leaching, and energy consumption associated with pumping. The sustainability benefit is greatest when irrigation decisions are integrated with soil characteristics, crop growth stage, weather forecasts, and local water availability rather than relying on a single sensor or fixed schedule.

6. Digital Soil Management

Soil is a fundamental agricultural resource, and its degradation threatens long-term food production. Digital soil mapping combines field measurements, remote sensing, terrain information, climate data, laboratory analyses, and machine-learning algorithms to estimate soil properties across large areas. AI models can assist in predicting soil organic carbon, texture, pH, salinity, nutrient availability, and other characteristics. Spatial soil information can support site-specific fertilizer application and soil amendment strategies [11]. Digital soil management can also contribute to monitoring soil degradation. Changes in vegetation, erosion patterns, salinity, and soil moisture can be assessed through repeated remote sensing. When combined with field observations, these datasets can provide early warnings of declining soil quality. Precision nutrient management is particularly relevant to environmental sustainability. Instead of applying identical quantities of fertilizer across an entire field, digital systems can support variable-rate applications based on spatial nutrient requirements. This may reduce unnecessary fertilizer use, nutrient losses, and contamination of water resources.

7. AI-Based Crop Disease and Pest Detection

Crop diseases and insect pests cause substantial agricultural losses. Conventional disease diagnosis frequently depends on visual inspection, which may be subjective and difficult to implement over large areas. Computer vision and machine learning offer scalable alternatives. Digital images captured by smartphones, drones, or field cameras can be analyzed using trained AI models. Deep-learning algorithms can identify visual patterns associated with disease symptoms, nutrient deficiencies, insect damage, or other forms of crop stress. Early disease detection can improve integrated pest management by allowing interventions before disease becomes widespread. AI systems can also support pest forecasting by combining weather conditions, crop stage, historical pest records, and environmental variables [12]. However, disease recognition models must be validated under field conditions because lighting, cultivar differences, background vegetation, symptom development, and multiple simultaneous stresses can reduce classification accuracy. AI should therefore complement rather than completely replace expert diagnosis.

8. Precision Fertilizer Management

Fertilizers are essential for maintaining crop productivity, but excessive or poorly timed application can result in economic losses and environmental pollution. Nitrogen losses through volatilization, leaching, and denitrification can contribute to greenhouse-gas emissions and water-quality degradation. Digital agriculture can improve nutrient management by combining soil testing, crop sensing, weather information, yield maps, and machine-learning models. AI can estimate crop nutrient requirements and identify areas with different fertilizer needs. Variable-rate fertilizer application allows inputs to be adjusted according to field variability [13]. Remote sensing can also identify differences in crop vigor that may indicate nutrient stress. Integration with weather forecasting can improve timing by reducing the risk of nutrient loss during heavy rainfall. Such approaches can increase nutrient-use efficiency and support sustainable intensification by attempting to maintain or improve crop productivity while reducing unnecessary nutrient inputs.

9. AI and Crop Yield Prediction

Accurate yield prediction is important for farmers, governments, food processors, traders, and policymakers. Conventional yield estimates often rely on field sampling and historical averages. Digital technologies provide opportunities for more dynamic forecasting. AI models can integrate satellite imagery, weather data, soil properties, crop-management information, historical yields, and phenological observations. Machine-learning models can identify complex interactions among these variables and generate yield estimates before harvest. Reliable forecasts can improve food-security planning by identifying potential production deficits early. Governments can use such information for grain procurement and strategic reserves, while farmers and agricultural businesses can improve logistics and marketing decisions [14]. Yield prediction can also support climate-risk management. If drought or heat stress is expected to reduce production in a particular region, early information can facilitate alternative sourcing and targeted support.

10. Smart Farming and the Internet of Things

The Internet of Things has enabled the development of connected agricultural systems in which sensors, machinery, irrigation equipment, mobile devices, and cloud platforms communicate with one another. Field sensors can monitor soil moisture, temperature, humidity, nutrient-related parameters, and microclimate. Livestock sensors can monitor movement, feeding behavior, body temperature, and location. Connected machinery can record operational information and automatically adjust field operations. IoT systems generate continuous streams of data. AI can analyze these data to identify abnormal conditions and trigger alerts or automated responses. For example, an irrigation system may automatically activate when soil moisture falls below a defined threshold, while livestock-monitoring systems can flag abnormal behavior that may indicate illness [15]. The combination of IoT and AI therefore creates opportunities for real-time agricultural management. Nevertheless, reliable connectivity, sensor calibration, maintenance, interoperability, and cybersecurity are necessary for effective operation.

11. Robotics and Autonomous Agriculture

Agricultural labor shortages and the demand for greater precision have encouraged the development of agricultural robots and autonomous machinery. AI-powered systems can assist with planting, weeding, harvesting, crop scouting, spraying, and transportation. Computer vision enables robots to distinguish crops from weeds and identify fruits or vegetables at appropriate harvesting stages. Autonomous vehicles can navigate fields using GPS, computer vision, and other positioning technologies. Robotic weeders can potentially reduce herbicide use by mechanically targeting individual weeds. Precision robotic systems may improve input-use efficiency because operations can be performed at high spatial resolution [16]. However, the economic feasibility of agricultural robotics depends on crop type, farm size, labor costs, terrain, machinery costs, and the availability of technical support.

12. Digital Livestock Management

Digital agriculture also extends to animal production. Sensors, cameras, RFID systems, wearable devices, and automated feeding systems can collect information about livestock behavior, movement, feeding, rumination, body temperature, and productivity [17]. AI algorithms can analyze these data to detect abnormal behavior, identify possible illness, monitor reproductive cycles, and optimize feeding. Early detection of disease can reduce mortality and unnecessary treatment while improving animal welfare. Precision feeding systems can adjust feed supply according to animal requirements. Improved feed efficiency may reduce production costs and decrease the environmental footprint associated with feed production.

13. Artificial Intelligence for Climate-Smart Agriculture

Climate change increases the frequency and severity of agricultural risks, including droughts, floods, heat waves, irregular rainfall, and emerging pest and disease pressures. Digital technologies can strengthen climate adaptation by improving monitoring, forecasting, and decision-making. AI models can analyze historical climate records and weather forecasts to estimate risks at specific locations and crop-development stages. Early warning systems can alert farmers to extreme weather events and provide recommendations regarding irrigation, planting dates, crop selection, or protective measures [18]. Digital tools can also support climate-resilient crop planning by identifying varieties and management practices suited to specific environmental conditions. Integration of climate models with soil, crop, and socioeconomic data can help policymakers develop location-specific adaptation strategies.

14. Digital Agriculture and Food Security

Food security is closely associated with the capacity to produce sufficient food, maintain stable production, reduce losses, and ensure access to agricultural resources and markets. Digital agriculture can contribute to these objectives through several pathways.

First, precision management can increase production efficiency by improving the use of water, nutrients, pesticides, seeds, and energy. Second, early detection of crop stress and disease can reduce avoidable yield losses. Third, AI-based yield forecasting can strengthen food-supply planning. Fourth, digital platforms can improve farmers' access to weather information, agronomic advice, markets, financial services, and input suppliers [19]. Digital technologies can also contribute to post-harvest management. Sensors and AI can monitor storage conditions, predict spoilage, classify food quality, and optimize transportation. Reducing post-harvest losses is particularly important because increasing food availability does not necessarily require producing more food if a substantial proportion is lost between harvest and consumption.

15. Digital Marketplaces and Agricultural Value Chains

Digital platforms are transforming agricultural marketing by connecting farmers with buyers, input suppliers, financial institutions, and advisory services. Mobile applications can provide market-price information and allow farmers to identify potential buyers. AI can analyze market trends, seasonal demand, weather conditions, and historical prices to support decision-making. Supply-chain optimization can reduce transportation distances, improve inventory management, and minimize food losses. Blockchain and distributed-ledger technologies have also been proposed for improving traceability. Digital records can potentially document the movement of agricultural products through different stages of the supply chain [20]. However, the usefulness of such technologies depends on data accuracy and the participation of all relevant stakeholders.

16. Digital Technologies for Resource Conservation

The central sustainability contribution of digital agriculture lies in improving the efficiency of natural-resource use. Water, soil, fertilizers, pesticides, energy, and land can all be managed more precisely when reliable information is available.

Table 1. Digital Technologies and AI for Sustainable Resource Management

Resource	Digital technology	AI application	Potential sustainability benefit
Water	Soil sensors, remote sensing, IoT	Irrigation prediction	Reduced water use
Soil	Digital soil mapping, GIS	Nutrient prediction	Improved soil management
Fertilizers	Crop sensing, yield mapping	Variable-rate recommendation	Improved nutrient-use efficiency
Pesticides	Drones, cameras, sensors	Disease and weed detection	Reduced unnecessary spraying
Energy	Smart machinery, IoT	Operational optimization	Reduced energy consumption
Land	Satellite imagery, GIS	Land suitability analysis	Improved land-use planning
Biodiversity	Remote sensing, ecological sensors	Habitat monitoring	Improved conservation planning
Labor	Robotics, automation	Task optimization	Increased operational efficiency

17. Role of Big Data in Agriculture

Agricultural digitalization produces large datasets from satellites, weather stations, sensors, machinery, laboratories, markets, and farmer records. Big-data analytics provides a framework for integrating these diverse datasets. AI can identify relationships that may not be obvious through conventional analysis. For example, crop yield may depend simultaneously on rainfall distribution, soil properties, temperature, planting date, fertilizer application, and pest pressure. Machine-learning approaches can model such nonlinear interactions. However, agricultural big data present significant challenges. Datasets may differ in scale, format, accuracy, temporal frequency, and spatial resolution. Missing data and inconsistent measurements can reduce model reliability.

Data interoperability and standardized formats are therefore important for developing robust agricultural decision-support systems.

18. Challenges and Limitations

Despite substantial potential, digital agriculture faces important technological, economic, institutional, and social barriers. High initial investment costs can prevent smallholder farmers from adopting advanced sensors, drones, autonomous machinery, and AI systems. Rural connectivity may be inadequate, particularly in remote agricultural areas. Digital literacy is another major constraint. Farmers may require training to interpret digital information and integrate technological recommendations with their practical knowledge.

Technology that is overly complex or poorly adapted to local conditions may have limited adoption. Data ownership and privacy are increasingly important issues. Agricultural datasets may contain commercially valuable information about yields, farm practices, land use, and market transactions. Clear rules are needed regarding who owns the data, who can access it, and how it can be used. AI models may also contain biases if their training datasets are geographically limited or unrepresentative. A model developed under one climate, soil type, crop variety, or management system may perform poorly elsewhere. Therefore, local validation and continuous model updating are essential.

Cybersecurity is another emerging concern. Connected irrigation systems, autonomous machinery, and farm-management platforms could potentially be disrupted if digital security is inadequate. Agricultural digital infrastructure should therefore incorporate appropriate cybersecurity measures. Finally, digital agriculture should not be assumed to be environmentally sustainable in every situation. Sensors, drones, servers, electronic devices, and autonomous machinery require energy and materials. The environmental performance of digital systems should be assessed through life-cycle approaches.

19. Future Perspectives

The future of agriculture is likely to involve increasingly integrated digital ecosystems in which sensing, AI, automation, biotechnology, and ecological management operate together. AI models will increasingly combine satellite imagery, IoT measurements, weather forecasts, soil data, crop genetics, and management histories to generate more localized recommendations. Generative AI and conversational agricultural advisory systems may provide farmers with easier access to agronomic information. Instead of requiring farmers to interpret complex datasets independently, AI systems could translate information into practical recommendations adapted to specific crops, soils, and climatic conditions. Digital twins of agricultural systems may also become increasingly important. A digital representation of a field or farm could integrate soil, weather, crop-growth, and management information to simulate alternative scenarios before decisions are implemented. This could support irrigation planning, fertilizer optimization, crop selection, and climate-risk assessment. The integration of AI with robotics may further enable autonomous agricultural operations. Machines capable of sensing their environment and adapting their actions could perform highly localized planting, weeding, spraying, harvesting, and monitoring. Future systems should nevertheless prioritize human-centered digital agriculture. Farmers possess extensive experiential knowledge that should complement rather than be replaced by algorithmic decision-making. Successful systems will likely combine local knowledge with scientific measurements and computational predictions.

20. Conclusion

Digital agriculture and artificial intelligence have considerable potential to transform agricultural production and resource management. Remote sensing, IoT sensors, geographic information systems, machine learning, computer vision, robotics, automated machinery, and digital platforms can provide farmers and policymakers with timely information for making more precise and efficient decisions. These technologies can support precision irrigation, nutrient management, pest and disease detection, yield forecasting, livestock management, climate adaptation, post-harvest management, and agricultural marketing.

The greatest contribution of digital agriculture to sustainability lies in its capacity to match agricultural inputs more closely with actual biological requirements. Water, fertilizers, pesticides, energy, and labor can potentially be used more efficiently when management decisions are based on real-time and spatially explicit information. At the same time, improved forecasting and early-warning systems can strengthen agricultural resilience and contribute to future food security. However, technological development alone cannot guarantee sustainable or equitable agricultural transformation. Infrastructure, affordability, digital literacy, data governance, cybersecurity, algorithmic transparency, interoperability, and local validation must receive equal attention. Particular consideration is required for smallholder farmers and resource-limited regions so that digitalization does not increase technological inequalities.

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