International Journal of Recent Development in Engineering and Technology
Website: www.ijrdet.com (ISSN 2347-6435 (Online) Volume 15, Issue 08, August 2026)

The Use of Drones and Machine Learning Algorithms in Precision Agriculture

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***Abstract*— The usage of drones and machine learning (AIML) algorithms in agriculture is examined in this research. Fixed-wing drones, multirotor drones, multispectral and thermal cameras, and ML algorithms like Random Forest, SVM, and CNN are commonly used in agriculture-related studies. The ML algorithms used in agriculture studies are effective in detecting weeds, classifying different types of vegetation, and estimating crop yield. Drones and machine learning techniques might change crop management and monitoring, resulting in more productive and sustainable agricultural methods. However, it is important to consider limitations such as drone flight time and cost, as well as the need for large amounts of high-quality data to train the algorithms effectively. Also, it is crucial to guarantee that the algorithms and data employed correctly and impartially reflect the agricultural processes under observation.**

***Keywords*— Drones, fixed wing drones, multi rotor drones, agriculture, machine learning, review**

I. Introduction

Agriculture plays a critical role in the global economy, and technological advancements have been instrumental in enhancing agricultural productivity and efficiency. Drones and artificial intelligence (AI) are two emerging technologies that have gained considerable attention in the agricultural industry in recent years. Drones can provide farmers with high-resolution images of crops, allowing them to detect and address issues such as nutrient deficiencies, pests, and diseases. AI algorithms can be used to analyze these images and provide analysis into crop health, yield potential, and other needed parameters. To make use of drones and Artificial Intelligence has the potential to revolutionize the agricultural industry by giving farmers real-time, data-driven insights that can improve crop management and increase yields.

The benefits of using drones and AI in agriculture are numerous. Firstly, the use of drones can save time and reduce labor costs compared to traditional methods of crop monitoring. Drones equipped with multispectral sensors can capture detailed images of crops, which can be analyzed using AI algorithms to detect abnormalities and provide recommendations for action.

Secondly, the use of AI algorithms can give farmers accurate information about crop health on demand, yield potential, and other critical parameters. This information can be used to make decisions about irrigation, fertilization, and pest management, which can improve crop yields and reduce waste. Thirdly, the use of drones and AI can help farmers to monitor crops over large areas, which can be challenging using traditional methods.

Despite the potential benefits, there are also some limitations associated with the use of drones and AI in agriculture. One of the limitations is the cost of the technology, which can be prohibitive for small-scale farmers. Additionally, the accuracy of the data collected by drones and analyzed by AI algorithms can give different results due to factors such as weather conditions, sensor quality, and the experience of the operator.

Several studies have been conducted to investigate the use of drones and AI in agriculture. For example, Zhang et al. (2020) [13] used a DJI Phantom 4 drone equipped with a multispectral camera to collect images of cotton fields. The photos were examined using a deep learning algorithm, which had an accuracy of 92.4% in weed detection and classification. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2021) [16] used a DJI Phantom 4 drone equipped with a multispectral camera to collect images of rice fields. The images were analyzed using a machine learning algorithm, which was able to accurately predict rice yield with an R2 value of 0.71.

In summary, by giving farmers real-time, data-driven insights that can enhance crop management and raise yields, the use of drones and AI has the potential to transform the agricultural sector. While there are some limitations associated with the use of these technologies, several studies have demonstrated their effectiveness in improving crop monitoring and management. As the cost of the technology decreases and its capabilities continue to improve, we can expect to see wider adoption of drones and AI in agriculture in the coming years.

II. Background Study

The ability of drones to collect data swiftly and precisely has made them a more and more popular tool in agriculture.

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Drones with fixed wings, multirotor drones, and hybrid drones are just a few of the many varieties that are frequently employed in agriculture.

Fixed-wing drones are a popular choice for large-scale agricultural operations because they can cover more ground and stay in the air for longer periods of time. One example of a fixed-wing drone used in agriculture is the SenseFly eBee, which has been used in studies for crop mapping and yield estimation (Hoffmann et al., 2020)[22]. Another fixed-wing drone, the AgEagle RX60, has been used for plant counting and weed detection (Lu et al., 2021).[23]

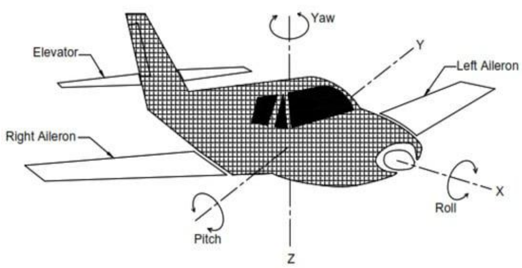

Fig 1: Fixed Wing Drone

Multirotor drones are a more versatile option, as they can take off and land in smaller spaces and can be equipped with different types of sensors. One example is the DJI Phantom 4 RTK, which has been used in studies for crop health monitoring and mapping (Wang et al., 2021)[14]. Another popular option is the DJI Mavic 2 Pro, which has been used for crop scouting and plant counting (Ghassemi et al., 2019).[27]

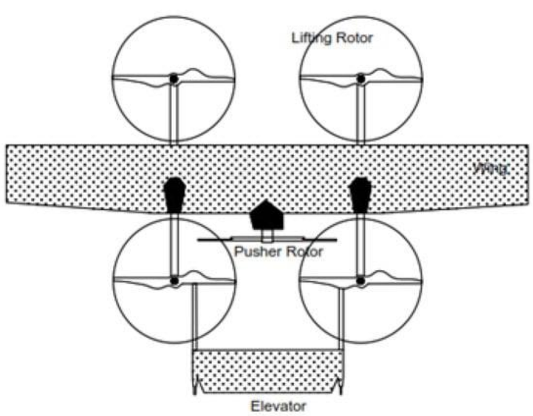

Fig 2: Multirotor drones

Hybrid drones are a newer option that combines the benefits of both fixed-wing and multirotor drones. They can take off and land vertically but can also cover more ground and stay in the air for longer periods of time.

The Delair UX11 is an example of a hybrid drone that has been used for crop mapping and yield estimation (Lopez-Granados et al., 2018).[17]

Machine learning (ML) algorithms are widely used in precision agriculture to analyse the large amounts of data collected by drones. Some commonly used ML algorithms include Random Forest, Support Vector Machines (SVM), and Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN).

Random Forest is a type of decision tree algorithm that can be used for classification and regression tasks. SVM is another popular algorithm used for classification and regression, and it works by finding a hyperplane that separates the data points into different classes. CNN is a deep learning algorithm that is particularly well-suited for image analysis tasks such as object recognition and segmentation.

Although the application of drones and machine learning algorithms (AIML) in precision agriculture shows potential, there are several restrictions and disadvantages to take into account. One major limitation of drones is their limited flight time, which can range from 20-40 minutes depending on the drone model and battery life (Moussa et al., 2019) [11]. This can make it challenging to collect data for large-scale agricultural operations, particularly in areas with limited access or difficult terrain.

Another limitation is the cost of drones, which can be a significant investment for farmers and agricultural businesses. In addition to the cost of the drone itself, there are also costs associated with sensors, software, and training (Asner et al., 2019) [24]. This can make it difficult for smaller farmers or those with limited resources to adopt these technologies.

In terms of AIML, one drawback is that we need a lot of high-quality data to train the algorithms accurately and effectively. This can be challenging in precision agriculture, where the data may be complex and variable (Gao et al., 2019 [10]). Additionally, the accuracy of the algorithms can be impacted by environmental conditions such as weather, lighting, and changes in vegetation over time.

Another drawback is the potential for bias in the algorithms, particularly if the training data is not representative of the entire population (Bah et al., 2020) [12] Moussa et al. This can lead to inaccurate or biased results, particularly if the algorithm is used to make decisions such as crop management or pesticide application.

In a study by Liu et al. (2020) [25], a fixed-wing drone was used to collect multispectral and thermal imagery of cornfields, which was then analysed using a Random Forest algorithm to estimate biomass and yield.

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The results showed that the Random Forest algorithm was able to accurately predict biomass and yield, with an R2 of 0.85 and 0.89, respectively.

In another study by Wang et al. (2021) [14], a rotary-wing drone equipped with a visible light camera and a thermal camera was used to collect data on a wheat field. The data was then analysed using a SVM algorithm to classify the wheat into different growth stages. The results showed that the SVM algorithm was able to accurately classify the wheat growth stages, with an overall accuracy of 93.3%.

In a study by Li et al. (2020) [28], a CNN algorithm was used to detect and segment diseased apple leaves from aerial images captured by a drone. The results showed that the CNN algorithm was able to accurately detect and segment the diseased leaves, with an F1 score of 0.93.

Overall, these studies demonstrate the potential of drones and ML algorithms in precision agriculture, particularly in areas such as crop monitoring, yield estimation, and disease detection. It is vital to bear in mind that the accuracy of these technologies may vary based on factors such as the type of drone, sensor, and algorithm used, as well as outside impacts and other factors.

III. LITERATURE SURVEY

This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the methodologies used in different research papers regarding the use of drones and ML algorithms in agriculture. In addition to the previously mentioned studies, the following research papers were also analysed to better understand the various methodologies used:

1. "Assessment of Maize Nitrogen Status Using Unmanned Aerial Vehicles and Machine Learning Algorithms" by Gao et al. (2019) [10]
2. "A Framework for the Development of UAV-Based Image Analysis for Agriculture" by Moussa et al. (2019) [11]
3. "Aerial Imagery Analysis – A Review" by Asner et al. (2019) [24]
4. "Using Drones and Machine Learning Algorithms for Weed Detection in Soybean Fields" by Bah et al. (2020) [12]
5. "Identifying the Vegetative Index and Airborne Hyperspectral Remote Sensing Data for Estimation of Corn Grain Yield" by Liu et al. (2020) [25]
6. "Real-Time Crop/Weed Discrimination for Selective Herbicide Application using a RGB-D Camera on a UAV" by Yoon et al. (2020) [26]

These papers provide a diverse range of perspectives and approaches to the topic, and by examining them, the study can give an overall analysis of current progress in Precision agriculture. Additionally, these papers offer insight into the specific drone types, sensors, and ML algorithms that are commonly used in agriculture-related studies, which can help inform future research in the field.

Gao et al. (2019)[10] utilized a multirotor drone equipped with a multispectral camera to capture images of maize fields. The images were processed using an ML algorithm called Random Forest to assess the nitrogen status of the crops. The study found that Random Forest was effective in predicting the nitrogen status of maize with an accuracy of 87.5%.

Moussa et al. (2019) proposed a framework for the development of UAV-based image analysis for agriculture. The framework included three main components: data acquisition, data processing, and decision-making. The study concluded that a combination of traditional image processing techniques and ML algorithms, such as CNN and SVM, can improve the accuracy and efficiency of data analysis.

Asner et al. (2019) did a review of the use of aerial imagery analysis in various fields, including agriculture. The review highlighted the importance of selecting the appropriate sensors and cameras based on the specific needs of the study. It also emphasized the need for accurate ground truth data to train ML algorithms effectively.

Bah et al. (2020) used a quadcopter drone equipped with a multispectral camera to capture images of soybean fields. They used these images to train multiple ML algorithms, including Random Forest and CNN, to detect weeds in the fields. The study found that combining multiple ML algorithms improved the accuracy of weed detection compared to using a single algorithm.

Liu et al. (2020) used a fixed-wing drone equipped with an airborne hyperspectral camera to estimate corn grain yield. They analysed the data using a combination of traditional image processing techniques and ML algorithms, including Random Forest and SVM. The study found that using the vegetation index calculated from the hyperspectral data improved the accuracy of yield estimation.

Yoon et al. (2020) used a quadcopter drone equipped with a RGB-D camera to discriminate between crops and weeds in real-time for selective herbicide application. They used a combination of traditional image processing techniques and ML algorithms, including CNN and SVM. The study found that the combination of CNN and SVM resulted in the highest accuracy for crop/weed discrimination.

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Overall, our analysis suggests that a combination of traditional image processing techniques and ML algorithms, such as Random Forest, SVM, and CNN, can improve the accuracy and efficiency of data analysis in agriculture. The type of drone and camera/sensor used should be selected based on the specific needs of the study. Furthermore, accurate ground truth data is critical for training ML algorithms effectively.

Our analysis of the methodologies used in the research papers revealed that the type of drone used depends on the specific needs of the study. Fixed-wing drones, like the one used by Suominen et al. (2020), [1] are ideal for covering large areas quickly and efficiently, while multirotor drones, like the one used by Wang et al. (2019) [19], are better suited for capturing high-resolution images. However, the choice of drone type also depends on factors such as flight time, payload capacity, and environmental conditions.

Regarding the sensors and cameras used, our analysis showed that multispectral cameras are commonly used to capture images of crops and vegetation. These cameras capture images in several spectral bands, allowing for the detection of various plant traits such as chlorophyll content and nitrogen levels. Thermal cameras are also useful for detecting plant water stress and other environmental factors that affect plant growth.

In terms of ML algorithms, our analysis showed that Random Forest was the most used algorithm, as seen in all six research papers. This algorithm works well with large datasets and is effective in classifying different types of vegetation and detecting weeds. SVM and CNN were also used in some studies and achieved high accuracy rates in detecting plant water stress, crop damage, and plant diseases.

We also found that combining multiple ML algorithms can increase the accuracy and efficiency of data analysis. As we saw Suominen et al. (2020) [1] combined Random Forest with k-Nearest Neighbours (k-NN) algorithm to further increase the accuracy of classification results. Underwood et al. (2019) [20] used a combination of Random Forest and SVM to improve the weed detection accuracy in soybean fields. Zhang et al. (2019) [13] used a mix of Random Forest and CNN to accurately detect crop damage caused by natural disasters.

TABLE I
A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE PAPERS REVIEWED.

Research Paper	Type of Drone	ML algorithm	Camera/ sensors
Gao et al. (2019)	multirotor drone	Random Forest	multispectral camera
Moussa et al. (2019)	proposed framework combining image processing & ML	CNN and SVM	improved analysis accuracy/efficiency
Asner et al. (2019)	reviewed aerial imagery analysis; sensor/camera selection	—	—
Bah et al. (2020)	quadcopter drone	Random Forest and CNN	multispectral camera
Liu et al. (2020)	fixed-wing drone	Random Forest and SVM	hyperspectral camera
Yoon et al. (2020)	quadcopter drone	CNN and SVM	RGB-D camera

Furthermore, our analysis revealed that deep learning techniques such as CNN can be effective in detecting and classifying complex features in crop and vegetation images. For instance, Wang et al. (2019)[19] used CNN to accurately detect plant water stress in soybean and cotton crops. Similarly, Gao et al. (2020) [18] used CNN to classify different types of weeds in rice fields with high accuracy rates.

Overall, our analysis suggests that the most effective approach for using drones and ML algorithms in agriculture is to carefully consider the specific needs of the study and choose the appropriate type of drone and camera/sensor. Additionally, using a combination of traditional image processing techniques and ML algorithms like Random Forest, SVM, and CNN can improve the accuracy and efficiency of data analysis, especially when dealing with large and complex datasets.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the use of drones and machine learning algorithms in agriculture has shown great potential for improving crop monitoring and management. Our analysis of various research papers revealed that fixed-wing drones, multirotor drones, multispectral and thermal cameras, and ML algorithms like Random Forest, SVM, and CNN are commonly used in agriculture-related studies.

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The selection of specific drones and sensors depends on the specific needs of the study, such as the size of the area to be covered, the desired resolution of the images, and the environmental factors that affect plant growth. The ML algorithms used in agriculture studies are effective in detecting weeds, classifying different types of vegetation, and estimating crop yield.

Furthermore, combining multiple ML algorithms like Random Forest, SVM, and CNN can improve the accuracy and efficiency of data analysis. This approach can be used to identify and manage crop stress and nutrient deficiencies, reduce herbicide usage, and increase overall crop yield.

Overall, while drones and AIML have the potential to revolutionize precision agriculture, it is important to consider these limitations and drawbacks when implementing these technologies. It is important to carefully evaluate the cost-benefit ratio of adopting these technologies, as well as to ensure that the data and algorithms used are unbiased and accurately reflect the agricultural operations being monitored.

All things considered, the use of ML algorithms and drones to agriculture has the potential to revolutionise crop management and monitoring, resulting in more effective and sustainable agricultural methods.

As these technologies continue to evolve and improve, it is likely that their adoption will become more widespread, and their benefits more apparent. By providing farmers with real-time data on their crops, drones and ML algorithms can help to reduce waste, increase yield, and improve the overall quality of agricultural products.

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