



Optimizing Agricultural Supply Chains with Machine Learning Algorithms

Komal Saxena^{1*}

AIIT, Amity University,uttar pradesh, Noida

ksaxena1@amity.edu

Dr. Mayur Dilip Jakhete²

Assistant professor E&TC, Pimpri Chinchwad University, Pune

jakhete.mayur@gmail.com

Dr. Pilli. Lalitha Kumari³

Associate Professor, Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Malla Reddy Institute of Technology, Secunderabad, Telangana

lalithakumari4@gmail.com

Dr. Mini Jain⁴

Assistant Professor, Institute of Business Management, GLA University, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh

miniujain06@gmail.com

Atish Mane⁵

Assistant Professor, Mechanical Engineering, Bharati Vidyapeeth's college of Engineering Lavale Pune. Maharashtra India

mane.atish@bharativedyapeeth.edu

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4549-8004>

Karthik H P⁶

School of Agriculture, SR University, Warangal, Telangana

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Abstract

Agricultural supply chains serve as the vital link between producers and consumers, ensuring the efficient flow of agricultural products. Their optimization is essential to address challenges like seasonal variations, transportation complexities, and quality control. Machine learning, with its predictive modeling, demand forecasting, route optimization, inventory management, quality control, and risk management capabilities, offers a promising solution to revolutionize the agricultural industry. These supply chains consist of various components, including producers, distributors, retailers, and consumers, each contributing to the network that delivers agricultural products. To enhance efficiency and product quality, innovative solutions are required to overcome challenges such as seasonal fluctuations and quality concerns. Machine learning empowers supply chain stakeholders to make data-driven decisions, automate processes, and optimize various aspects of the supply chain. This technology enhances the resilience and efficiency of agricultural supply chains, ensuring the delivery of fresh and safe products to consumers. Effective data collection and preprocessing are essential for leveraging machine learning's potential. Through sourcing, cleaning, and structuring data from diverse sources, stakeholders enable machine learning algorithms to make informed recommendations and

CC License CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0	predictions. Machine learning's application in agricultural supply chains, exemplified by predictive modeling for crop yield through weather data analysis and disease detection, illustrates the power of data-driven technologies in enhancing crop production, reducing losses, and ensuring a secure global food supply. Keywords: <i>agricultural supply chains, machine learning, demand forecasting, route optimization, inventory management, data preprocessing</i>
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I. Introduction

Machine learning algorithms are fundamental to artificial intelligence and data science, enabling computers to learn and improve from data without explicit programming. They have a wide range of applications, including image and speech recognition, recommendation systems, and data analysis. In supervised learning, algorithms are trained on labeled data to make predictions or classifications. For classification tasks, common algorithms include Logistic Regression, Decision Trees, Random Forest, Support Vector Machines (SVM), and Neural Networks. Regression algorithms, such as Linear Regression and Polynomial Regression, predict continuous outcomes like prices or scores. Unsupervised learning involves finding patterns or structures in unlabeled data. Clustering algorithms like K-Means, Hierarchical Clustering, and DBSCAN group similar data points, aiding market segmentation and anomaly detection. Dimensionality reduction algorithms like Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and t-Distributed Stochastic Neighbor Embedding (t-SNE) help in reducing the number of features in a dataset while preserving key information. This approach combines labeled and unlabeled data, useful when acquiring fully labeled data is costly or time-consuming. It's used in various applications, including text classification and image recognition. In reinforcement learning, agents learn to make sequences of decisions by receiving feedback in the form of rewards. It's crucial in robotics, game playing, and autonomous systems. These machine learning algorithms play a pivotal role in solving complex problems and making data-driven decisions across diverse domains. [1]

1.1 Importance of agricultural supply chains

Agricultural supply chains are complex and interconnected systems that facilitate the movement of agricultural products from farms to consumers. These supply chains play a pivotal role in ensuring the availability and accessibility of food products globally, supporting food security and the well-being of communities around the world. One of the primary reasons for the significance of agricultural supply chains is their crucial contribution to food security. These networks enable the consistent and efficient delivery of fresh produce, staple foods, and various agricultural products to consumers. Without well-organized supply chains, there would be an increased risk of food shortages, uneven distribution, and price volatility, which can have detrimental effects on communities and economies. Efficient agricultural supply chains also play a vital role in minimizing food waste. Food losses occur at various stages of the supply chain, from harvest to consumption. However, well-managed supply chains help reduce these losses by ensuring that agricultural products reach their destinations in a timely manner. This is essential, given the alarming amount of food wasted globally, which has both economic and environmental consequences. Furthermore, agricultural supply chains contribute to economic stability, particularly in regions where agriculture is a primary source of income. By connecting farmers, distributors, retailers, and consumers, these supply chains stimulate economic activity, create jobs, and support livelihoods. The stable flow of agricultural products through these networks helps ensure that farmers receive fair compensation for their produce, sustaining rural economies and communities. [2]

1.2 Role of ML in optimizing supply chains

Machine learning plays a transformative role in optimizing supply chains, revolutionizing the way businesses manage their operations. Its impact is multi-faceted and extends across various aspects of supply chain management. One of the key areas where machine learning excels is demand forecasting. By analyzing historical data, market trends, and external factors, machine learning algorithms can predict future demand more accurately than traditional methods. This enables businesses to adjust their inventory levels, production schedules, and distribution strategies to meet customer demand while minimizing overstock or stockouts. Route optimization is another crucial aspect of supply chain management where machine learning shines. Machine learning algorithms can analyze real-time data on factors like traffic, weather, and road conditions to determine the most efficient routes for transportation. This not only reduces transportation costs but also minimizes delivery times, enhancing customer satisfaction. Inventory management is also greatly enhanced by machine learning. These algorithms can identify optimal inventory levels, taking into account lead times, demand variability, and costs associated with holding excess inventory. This prevents overstocking and understocking, leading to cost savings and improved efficiency. Quality control and maintenance in supply chains benefit from machine learning as well. Sensors and data analytics allow for real-time monitoring of equipment and product quality. Predictive maintenance models can anticipate when machinery or vehicles are likely to fail, enabling proactive maintenance to prevent costly breakdowns. Risk management is an essential aspect of supply chain optimization. Machine learning algorithms can analyze a multitude of data sources to identify potential risks, whether they are related to geopolitical issues, supplier reliability, or market fluctuations. This early warning system enables supply chain managers to mitigate risks and develop contingency plans. [3]

2. Agricultural Supply Chains

2.1 Components of Agricultural Supply Chains

Agricultural supply chains are intricate networks comprising various components that work together to ensure the efficient production, distribution, and delivery of agricultural products to consumers. Each component serves a specific role in the process, contributing to the overall functionality of the supply chain. Here are the key components of agricultural supply chains. [4]

1. **Producers (Farmers):** Producers are the foundation of the agricultural supply chain. They include farmers who cultivate crops and raise livestock. Farmers make critical decisions about what to plant or raise based on market demand, weather conditions, and available resources. They are responsible for the initial stages of production, from planting and nurturing crops to the care and management of livestock. Producers have a direct impact on the quality, quantity, and sustainability of agricultural products.
2. **Distributors:** Distributors play a pivotal role in connecting producers with retailers or other parts of the supply chain. They purchase agricultural products in bulk from producers or processors and manage the transportation, warehousing, and delivery of these products to various destinations. Distributors often specialize in specific types of products and may serve as middlemen between producers and retailers.
3. **Retailers:** Retailers are the point of contact between the supply chain and consumers. They operate grocery stores, markets, supermarkets, or online platforms where consumers purchase agricultural products. Retailers make decisions regarding product selection, pricing, promotions, and display to attract consumers and meet their diverse needs. They play a crucial role in ensuring that products are available, accessible, and appealing to the end-users.
4. **Consumers:** Consumers represent the ultimate endpoint of the agricultural supply chain. They are the individuals, households, or businesses that purchase and use agricultural products for

consumption, further processing, or resale. Consumer preferences, dietary trends, and purchasing behavior have a significant influence on product demand and quality requirements. Meeting consumer needs and expectations is a primary objective of the supply chain, and it drives many of the decisions made by other components.

These components are shown in the figure 1, which collectively contribute to the efficient functioning of agricultural supply chains, ensuring that agricultural products are produced, distributed, and delivered to consumers in a timely and sustainable manner. The interactions and coordination among these components are essential for the availability and accessibility of agricultural goods in the market.

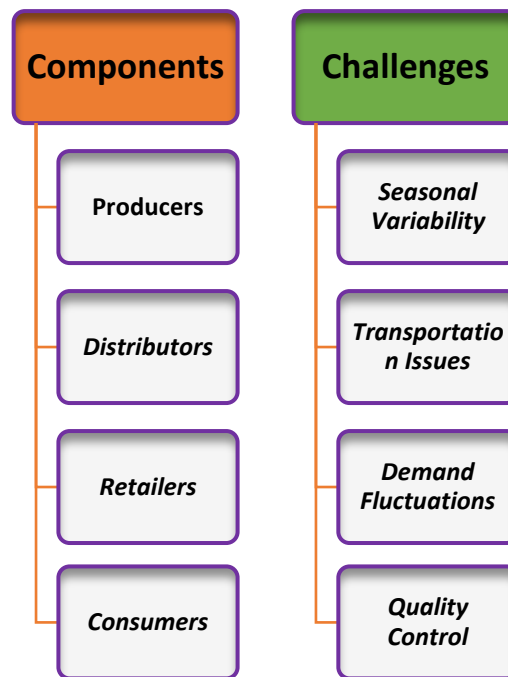


Fig 1: Components and Challenges of agricultural supply chains

2.2 Challenges in Agricultural Supply Chains

- **Seasonal Variability:** Seasonal variability is a significant challenge in agricultural supply chains. Many agricultural products, such as fruits and vegetables, have specific growing seasons. Managing the supply chain efficiently during these times is challenging because there may be periods of excess supply followed by scarcity. Seasonal labor availability can fluctuate, affecting the planting, harvesting, and processing of crops. Resource availability, such as water for irrigation, can also be subject to seasonal variations. Proper storage and preservation methods are required to maintain the quality of products during off-seasons. This can be costly and may pose logistical challenges.
- **Transportation Issues:** Transportation challenges are common in agricultural supply chains. These supply chains often extend into rural areas where transportation infrastructure may be inadequate. Poor roads and limited access to transportation can lead to delays and increased costs. Some agricultural products, such as fresh produce or dairy, require temperature-controlled transportation. Maintaining the cold chain can be challenging, especially in regions with unreliable electricity or infrastructure. The final leg of transportation, known as the last-mile delivery, can be congested and complicated. Efficient last-mile delivery is essential for timely access to consumers.

- *Demand Fluctuations:* Demand fluctuations pose a continuous challenge in agricultural supply chains. Market volatility can result from changing consumer preferences, economic conditions, and global events. Sudden fluctuations in demand can disrupt the supply chain, leading to inefficiencies and waste. Lack of real-time data and visibility into market trends and consumer demand can contribute to understocking or overstocking issues, affecting the profitability and efficiency of the supply chain.
- *Quality Control:* Quality control is paramount in agricultural supply chains. Ensuring product quality from farm to consumer is an ongoing challenge. Factors like improper handling, contamination, and poor storage can lead to quality deterioration. Maintaining food safety standards is crucial. Contamination or spoilage issues can have severe consequences for public health and the reputation of businesses and the supply chain. In cases of quality issues or recalls, traceability of products becomes crucial. Tracking the origin of a product in a complex supply chain can be challenging without the right systems in place.

Addressing these challenges in the figure 1, which requires a combination of technology, logistical innovation, and cooperation among supply chain stakeholders. Developing strategies to manage seasonal variability, optimize transportation, predict demand fluctuations, and ensure consistent quality control are vital for the successful and sustainable operation of agricultural supply chains. [5-6]

3. Machine Learning in Supply Chain Optimization

3.1 Types of ML algorithms for supply chain optimization

1. *Predictive modelling:* Predictive modeling leverages historical data to forecast future events or trends within the supply chain. It encompasses a wide range of algorithms, including Decision Trees, Random Forest, and Gradient Boosting. These algorithms help in predicting various aspects of the supply chain, such as equipment failures, production delays, or fluctuations in customer demand. By identifying potential issues in advance, businesses can take proactive measures to address them, leading to smoother operations.
2. *Demand forecasting:* Demand forecasting is a fundamental component of supply chain management. It involves estimating future customer demand for products. Machine learning algorithms, like Time Series Analysis, ARIMA (AutoRegressive Integrated Moving Average), and Exponential Smoothing, analyze historical sales data, market trends, and influencing factors to provide accurate demand forecasts. This enables businesses to optimize inventory levels and production schedules, preventing stockouts or overstock situations.
3. *Route optimization:* Route optimization is critical for efficient goods transportation within the supply chain. Machine learning algorithms consider factors like traffic conditions, delivery time windows, and fuel costs to determine the most efficient routes for transportation. Algorithms such as Genetic Algorithms, Ant Colony Optimization, and Reinforcement Learning are applied to minimize transportation costs and delivery times, improving overall logistics efficiency.
4. *Inventory management:* Inventory management involves maintaining optimal stock levels while minimizing holding costs. Machine learning algorithms analyze data to determine reorder points, safety stock levels, and lead times for inventory. Economic Order Quantity (EOQ) models and deep learning techniques are commonly used to enhance inventory management, ensuring that products are readily available to meet customer demand without excess stock that ties up resources.

5. *Quality control:* Quality control in supply chains ensures that products meet specific quality standards. Machine learning algorithms analyze sensor data from production processes and supply chain operations to detect anomalies and deviations from quality standards. Anomaly detection algorithms, such as Isolation Forest and One-Class SVM, play a crucial role in identifying and addressing quality issues, preventing substandard products from reaching consumers.
6. *Risk management:* Risk management is essential for identifying and mitigating potential disruptions in the supply chain, such as supplier issues, natural disasters, or geopolitical events. Machine learning algorithms assess and predict risks by analyzing historical data and external factors. Methods like Bayesian Networks, Monte Carlo Simulation, and Predictive Analytics help supply chain managers develop strategies to mitigate risks, ensuring continuity in operations and safeguarding against unforeseen challenges.

These machine learning algorithms enable supply chain managers to make data-driven decisions, optimize operations, reduce costs, and enhance the overall efficiency and resilience of supply chain processes. By leveraging these tools, businesses can better adapt to changing market conditions and deliver products to consumers more effectively. [7]

4. Data Collection and Preprocessing

4.1 Sources of Data in Agricultural Supply Chains

Data is a critical resource within agricultural supply chains, offering valuable insights and knowledge that enhance decision-making and drive the optimization of various processes. Rely on a multitude of data sources, all of which contribute to improving efficiency, productivity, and sustainability. Here are some of the primary sources of data in agricultural supply chains: Farm operations data form the bedrock of agricultural supply chains. This data encompasses information related to crop planting and harvesting, livestock management, and various other farm-related activities. Farmers collect data on planting dates, crop varieties, yields, weather conditions, and pest control measures, among other things. Instrumental in optimizing production processes and ensuring the availability of agricultural products in the supply chain. The advent of modern farming practices has brought about the widespread use of sensors and IoT (Internet of Things) devices. These sensors and devices provide real-time data on parameters such as temperature, humidity, soil moisture, and crop health. They enable precision agriculture by offering critical insights into the condition of crops and the environment. Such data informs decisions about irrigation, fertilization, and pest control strategies. Market and price data are pivotal for decision-making in agricultural supply chains. Information about commodity prices, consumer demand, and market trends is indispensable for determining when and where to sell products. This data is often collected from commodity exchanges, market reports, and in-depth analysis of consumer behavior. The transportation and logistics sector plays a fundamental role in agricultural supply chains. Data concerning transportation routes, modes, and delivery schedules is crucial. GPS and tracking systems offer real-time data on the location and condition of products during transit, which, in turn, facilitates optimized transportation routes, reduced delivery times, and the preservation of the freshness of perishable goods. Evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of supply chain operations is central to its management. Supply chain performance data, typically expressed through key performance indicators (KPIs), allows stakeholders to gauge operations. These KPIs encompass metrics related to order fulfillment, inventory turnover, on-time deliveries, and product quality. Data-driven insights gleaned from such metrics help identify bottlenecks and areas in need of improvement. Environmental and weather data is of paramount importance for agriculture. Data regarding temperature, precipitation, humidity, and other meteorological factors is collected to assess the influence of weather conditions on crop growth. A

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crucial role in decision-making, particularly in determining planting times and implementing crop protection measures. Within the context of food safety and quality control, supply chains also collect data related to regulatory compliance and product traceability. This includes information concerning certification standards, inspection reports, and traceability records, all of which are imperative for ensuring the safety and quality of agricultural products. Consumer and market feedback are invaluable sources of data within agricultural supply chains. Surveys, reviews, and various feedback channels provide insights into consumer preferences and product satisfaction. Such feedback assists businesses in making informed decisions about product offerings and marketing strategies. Finally, financial and economic data, such as commodity prices, currency exchange rates, and interest rates, profoundly affect decision-making within agricultural supply chains. Stakeholders use this data to manage financial risks, make investment decisions, and assess the cost-effectiveness of their operations. [8-10]

4.2 Data collection methods

Data collection methods in agricultural supply chains encompass various techniques for gathering information from diverse sources. These methods are crucial for acquiring the data needed to optimize operations and improve decision-making within the supply chain. Here are some common data collection methods are shown in the figure 2.

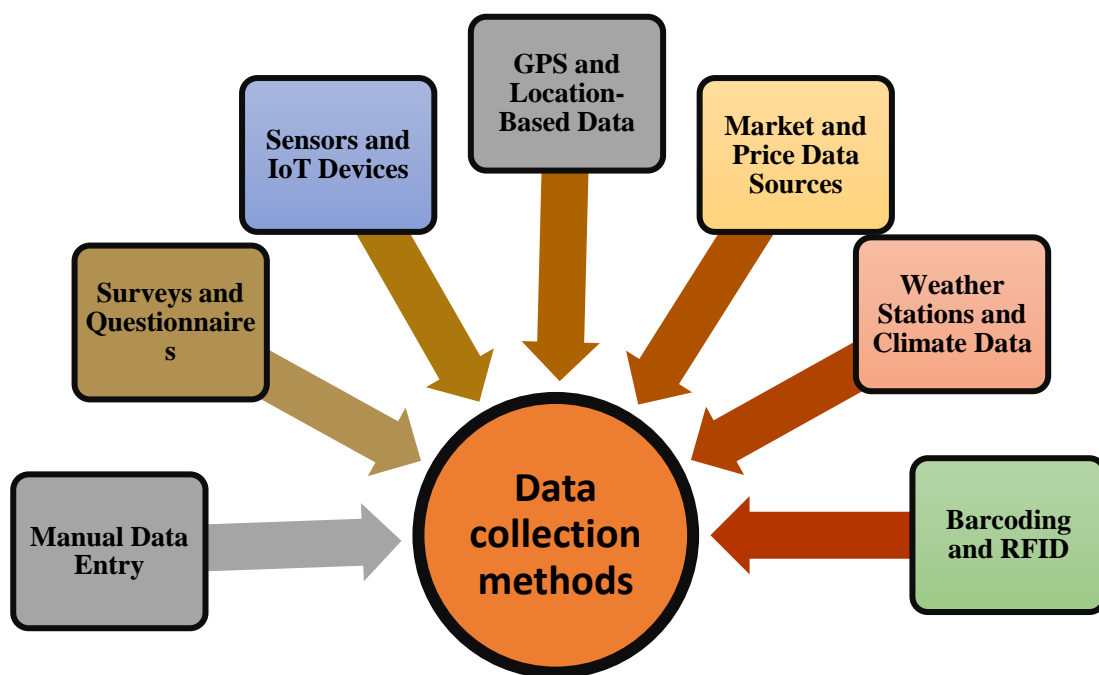


Fig 2: Data collection methods

1. *Manual Data Entry*: This method involves collecting data through direct human observation and input. Workers or field personnel record information manually, such as crop yields, inventory levels, and quality control checks. While straightforward, it can be time-consuming and prone to errors.
2. *Surveys and Questionnaires*: Surveys and questionnaires are used to collect specific information from various stakeholders in the supply chain, including farmers, distributors,

retailers, and consumers. They can provide insights into preferences, feedback, and market trends.

3. **Sensors and IoT Devices:** Modern agriculture relies heavily on sensors and IoT (Internet of Things) devices. These devices are deployed in fields, storage facilities, and transportation to collect real-time data on parameters like temperature, humidity, soil moisture, and vehicle tracking. They offer highly accurate and continuous data streams.
4. **GPS and Location-Based Data:** GPS technology is used to track the movement and location of vehicles and products in transit. This data helps optimize transportation routes, reduce delivery times, and enhance fleet management.
5. **Market and Price Data Sources:** Information on commodity prices, market trends, and consumer demand is collected from sources such as commodity exchanges, market reports, and market research data providers. This data is instrumental for pricing and marketing strategies.
6. **Weather Stations and Climate Data:** Weather stations and climate data sources provide information on meteorological conditions. Data on temperature, precipitation, and humidity is crucial for crop management and decision-making based on weather patterns.
7. **Barcoding and RFID (Radio-Frequency Identification):** Barcodes and RFID technology are used for tracking products and inventory throughout the supply chain. These methods improve visibility and traceability of products, helping with inventory management and quality control.

The selection of data collection methods depends on the specific needs and goals of the supply chain. In many cases, a combination of these methods is used to gather comprehensive and accurate data, enabling stakeholders to make informed decisions, improve efficiency, and enhance the overall performance of agricultural supply chains. [11-12]

4.3 Data preprocessing techniques

1. **Data Cleaning:** Data cleaning, or data cleansing, is a crucial step in the data preprocessing process. It involves identifying and rectifying errors, inconsistencies, and inaccuracies within the dataset. This procedure is indispensable for ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the data used for subsequent analysis and modeling. Data cleaning encompasses various techniques, such as handling missing data, detecting and addressing outliers, reducing noise in the data, and eliminating duplicate records. The ultimate goal of data cleaning is to prevent potential biases and inaccuracies in machine learning models due to flawed or inconsistent data.
2. **Feature Engineering:** Feature engineering is an essential component of data preprocessing that focuses on creating new features or modifying existing ones to improve machine learning model performance. The aim is to represent the data in a way that enhances the model's ability to extract meaningful patterns and relationships. Feature engineering encompasses a range of techniques, including feature transformation, one-hot encoding, feature scaling, binning and discretization, and feature selection. Through these techniques, feature engineering can enhance model performance, reduce overfitting, and improve the interpretability of machine learning models.
3. **Data Normalization:** Data normalization, often referred to as data scaling, is a critical data preprocessing technique that standardizes the range of independent variables or features within the dataset. The primary purpose is to ensure that all features are measured on a common scale, preventing certain features from dominating the modeling process due to differences in their magnitudes. Common data normalization methods include Min-Max scaling, Z-score standardization, and robust scaling. Data normalization is particularly

important when features exhibit varying scales, as it aids in model convergence, makes the model more robust, and simplifies the interpretation of feature importance.

These data preprocessing techniques collectively play a pivotal role in improving the quality and suitability of the data for machine learning tasks. They not only enhance model performance but also enable the extraction of valuable insights and patterns from complex datasets, ensuring the robustness and accuracy of machine learning models in real-world applications.

5. Predictive Modeling for Crop Yield

5.1 Weather Data Analysis

Weather data analysis is a crucial application of machine learning within agricultural supply chains. It involves the utilization of historical and real-time weather data to gain insights into how weather conditions impact crop growth and overall agricultural productivity. Machine learning algorithms are deployed to extract meaningful patterns and relationships from a vast amount of meteorological information, including temperature, precipitation, humidity, wind speed, and solar radiation. By understanding the correlation between weather parameters and crop development, farmers and supply chain managers can make informed decisions, such as adjusting planting schedules, optimizing irrigation, and preparing for adverse weather events like droughts or storms. The analysis of weather data goes beyond simply observing the current climate; it encompasses predictive modeling. By leveraging machine learning techniques, supply chain stakeholders can develop models that forecast how future weather conditions may affect crops. These predictive models help in risk assessment, enabling farmers to proactively implement strategies to mitigate potential losses caused by unfavorable weather. Moreover, with the increasing availability of sensor data and remote sensing technologies, machine learning algorithms can also analyze data from on-field sensors and satellite imagery to provide real-time insights into local weather patterns and their impact on specific agricultural plots. This real-time data can inform immediate decisions related to crop management and resource allocation. [13]

5.2. Disease Detection

Disease detection in agriculture, facilitated by machine learning, is a transformative application that plays a pivotal role in safeguarding crop health and ensuring sustainable food production. With the world's growing population and the increasing need for efficient agricultural practices, early and accurate disease detection is vital for preventing crop losses and preserving the global food supply. Machine learning algorithms are being harnessed to revolutionize disease detection in several ways. These algorithms are capable of processing vast amounts of data, including images of crops, leaves, or soil, to identify signs and symptoms of diseases or infestations. This process, often referred to as image recognition or computer vision, enables automated and real-time disease diagnosis. By analyzing images captured by drones, satellites, or on-field sensors, machine learning models can swiftly identify anomalies such as discoloration, lesions, or patterns associated with specific diseases. This enables early intervention, as farmers can take targeted actions to mitigate the spread of diseases, such as adjusting irrigation, applying pesticides selectively, or even quarantining affected areas. Machine learning models can also harness data from various sources, including environmental conditions, sensor readings, and historical disease prevalence, to predict disease outbreaks. Predictive models utilize a range of techniques, such as time series analysis and ensemble methods, to forecast the likelihood of diseases occurring under specific conditions. Farmers can proactively prepare for potential outbreaks by adopting preventive measures, thereby reducing the impact on crop yields and maintaining food security. In addition to disease detection and prediction, machine learning can assist in identifying the most appropriate disease management strategies. By considering factors like disease

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resistance profiles of crops, weather forecasts, and economic considerations, these models can recommend optimal treatment plans. This empowers farmers to make informed decisions about crop protection and resource allocation. Autonomous robotic systems equipped with sensors and cameras can traverse fields, collecting data and assessing plant conditions.

Conclusion

Agricultural supply chains are the linchpin of our food systems, serving as the vital bridge between producers and consumers. The optimization of these supply chains stands as a paramount requirement to ensure a consistent and efficient flow of agricultural products, particularly in the face of challenges like seasonal variations, transportation complexities, and quality control imperatives. Machine learning, with its array of capabilities encompassing predictive modeling, demand forecasting, route optimization, inventory management, quality control, and risk management, presents a promising remedy to address these challenges and instigate a revolution in the agricultural sector. The constituents of agricultural supply chains, inclusive of producers, distributors, retailers, and consumers, each contribute to the intricate network responsible for delivering agricultural products to end-users. Confronted with challenges like seasonal oscillations and quality intricacies, innovative solutions become a necessity to enhance both efficiency and product quality. Harnessing machine learning, supply chain stakeholders can embrace data-driven decision-making, process automation, and the optimization of various facets of the supply chain. This extends from enhancing production and inventory management to refining transportation logistics and ensuring stringent quality control measures. These technological advancements serve to bolster the resilience and efficiency of agricultural supply chains, assuring the timely delivery of fresh and safe products to consumers. The implementation of effective data collection and preprocessing methods remains the bedrock for unlocking the full potential of machine learning in supply chain optimization. Through the systematic sourcing, meticulous cleaning, and well-structured organization of data from diverse sources, stakeholders empower machine learning algorithms to provide informed recommendations and predictive insights. Machine learning's application in agricultural supply chains, as exemplified by predictive modeling for crop yield through weather data analysis and disease detection, serves as a compelling testament to the profound impact of data-driven technologies. It not only enhances crop production, mitigates losses, and secures the global food supply but also sets the stage for a future where agriculture operates at the intersection of efficiency, sustainability, and resilience, thereby meeting the needs of an ever-expanding global population.

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