

Smart Agriculture and The Internet of Things: Transforming Practices for a Resilient and Resource-Efficient Food System

Sharad S. Jagtap¹, Dr. G. Sudhagar², Sanjyot S. Patil³

¹Electronics and Communication Engineering Department, Bharath Institute of Higher Education and Research (BIHER), Chennai, India,

¹Assistant professor at Anantrao Pawar College of Engineering and Research Email: sharadjagtap0710@gmail.com ORCID ID: 0009-0004-3059-5612

²Electronics and Communication Engineering Department, Bharath Institute of Higher Education and Research (BIHER), Chennai, India, Email:

sudhagar.ece@bharathuniv.ac.in

ORCID ID: 0009-0002-5996-5694

³Electronics and Telecommunication Engineering Department, Vidya Pratishthan's Polytechnic College, Pune, India, Email:

sanjyot.s.patil@gmail.com , ORCID ID: 0009-0006-0189-5717

Abstract

The agricultural sector faces mounting pressure from population growth, climate variability, resource scarcity, and labor shortages, requiring a fundamental shift from traditional, experience-based farming toward data-driven, precision-based practices. The Internet of Things (IoT) — a network of interconnected sensors, actuators, and computing systems capable of collecting, transmitting, and acting upon real-time environmental and operational data — has emerged as a central enabling technology in this transition. This paper examines the architecture, applications, and quantitative results of IoT-enabled smart agriculture, synthesizing market data and efficiency evidence on precision irrigation, soil and crop monitoring, livestock management, autonomous machinery, and supply chain traceability, and evaluates the economic, environmental, and social benefits of these systems alongside persistent barriers to adoption.

Keywords: smart agriculture, Internet of Things, precision farming, sensor networks, sustainable agriculture, agri-tech

1. Introduction

Agriculture has historically been governed by cyclical, generalized decision-making — planting calendars, uniform irrigation schedules, and blanket applications of fertilizers and pesticides based on regional norms rather than field-specific conditions [1]. This model, while effective at the scale of subsistence and early industrial farming, is increasingly inadequate against the compounding pressures of the twenty-first century. Estimates suggest global agricultural output must rise substantially by mid-century to meet the needs of a growing population, even as arable land per capita shrinks and climate change introduces greater unpredictability into growing seasons [2].

Smart agriculture — sometimes termed precision agriculture, digital farming, or Agriculture 4.0 — responds to these pressures by embedding computation and connectivity directly into the physical processes of farming [3], [4]. At the core of this paradigm is the Internet of Things (IoT): networks of low-cost, often battery-powered sensors and actuators that monitor variables such as soil moisture, temperature, humidity, nutrient levels, and animal vitals, and that can trigger automated responses without direct human intervention [4].

This paper is organized as follows. Section II reviews the conceptual and technical architecture underlying agricultural IoT systems. Section III surveys major application domains. Section IV presents a quantitative analysis of market growth and efficiency outcomes. Section V discusses adoption barriers and risks. Section VI considers emerging trends, and Section VII concludes with policy and research implications.

II. Technical Architecture of Agricultural IoT Systems

IoT systems in agriculture are generally organized into four interdependent layers, summarized in Table I: a perception layer for physical sensing and actuation, a network layer for data transmission across distributed and often remote areas, a data and analytics layer for aggregation and modeling, and an application layer through which farmers interact with the system [4], [5].

Because agricultural operations are frequently distributed across large, remote areas with limited existing infrastructure, connectivity solutions differ substantially from urban IoT deployments. Low-Power Wide-Area

Network (LPWAN) protocols such as LoRaWAN and Sigfox are widely used for their long range and minimal power consumption [6], while cellular technologies including narrowband IoT (NB-IoT) and 5G support higher-bandwidth applications such as real-time video from field cameras or drones [6], [7].

TABLE I FOUR-LAYER ARCHITECTURE OF AGRICULTURAL IOT SYSTEMS

Layer	Function	Representative Technologies
Perception Layer	Physical sensing and actuation in the field or facility	Soil moisture/EC probes, weather stations, multispectral cameras, livestock biosensors, solenoid valves
Network Layer	Transmission of sensor data across distributed, often remote areas	LoRaWAN, Sigfox, NB-IoT, 5G cellular, satellite links
Data & Analytics Layer	Aggregation, cleaning, and modeling of sensor data	Edge computing, cloud platforms, machine learning, predictive analytics
Application Layer	Farmer-facing interface for monitoring and control	Mobile/web dashboards, automated alerts, AI-assisted recommendations

III. Applications of IoT in Agricultural Practice

A. Precision Irrigation and Water Management

Water scarcity is among the most acute constraints on global agricultural productivity, and IoT-enabled irrigation systems represent one of the most mature and widely adopted applications. Soil moisture sensors distributed across a field feed data to controllers that adjust irrigation valves in real time, delivering water only where and when it is needed rather than on a fixed schedule [4], [8].

B. Soil and Crop Monitoring

Networks of in-field sensors continuously track soil nutrient composition, pH, and moisture, while aerial and satellite imagery assess crop health through vegetation indices such as NDVI [9]. This combination allows for variable-rate application of fertilizers and crop protection products, concentrating inputs on zones of genuine need [10].

C. Livestock Monitoring

Wearable sensors attached to livestock track vital signs, movement patterns, and location, enabling early detection of illness, estrus, or distress well before symptoms would be visible to human observation [11], [12].

D. Autonomous and Semi-Autonomous Machinery

GPS-guided tractors, autonomous weeding robots, and drone-based spraying systems rely on IoT connectivity to receive field-specific instructions generated from sensor and imagery data [13]. Major agricultural equipment manufacturers, such as Deere & Company, have continued to expand investment in connected, AI-assisted farm machinery as a core strategic priority [14].

E. Greenhouse and Controlled-Environment Agriculture

In greenhouse and vertical farming operations, IoT systems manage temperature, humidity, CO₂ concentration, and light exposure, often with full automation of ventilation, shading, and supplemental lighting [15].

F. Supply Chain Traceability

Beyond the farm gate, IoT sensors combined with blockchain-based record-keeping are increasingly used to track produce and livestock products through the supply chain, supporting food safety compliance and reduced spoilage [16], [17].

TABLE II SUMMARY OF MAJOR IOT APPLICATION DOMAINS IN AGRICULTURE

Application Domain	Primary IoT Technology	Principal Benefit
Precision Irrigation	Soil moisture sensors + automated valves	Reduced water consumption
Crop Monitoring	Multispectral imaging, NDVI analysis	Early stress/pest detection
Livestock Monitoring	Wearable biosensors, geofencing	Earlier illness detection, improved welfare
Autonomous Machinery	GPS guidance, connected robotics	Labor reduction, input precision

Controlled-Environment Ag.	Climate sensors + automated actuators	Consistent yield, land-use efficiency
Supply Chain Traceability	IoT sensors + blockchain ledgers	Food safety, verified provenance

IV. Quantitative Analysis: Market Growth and Efficiency Outcomes

This section presents quantitative results drawn from current industry market analyses and reported efficiency outcomes, illustrated in Figs. 1–4.

A. Market Growth Trajectory

The global IoT-in-agriculture market was valued at approximately \$17.78 billion in 2025 and is projected to expand to roughly \$41.29 billion by 2035, reflecting a compound annual growth rate near 8.8% [18].

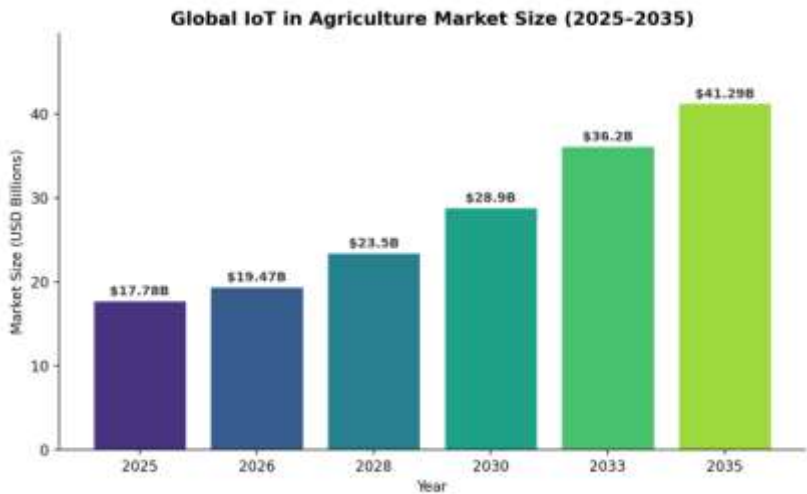


Fig. 1. Projected global IoT-in-agriculture market size, 2025–2035 (USD billions).

B. Regional Distribution

Adoption is geographically uneven. Asia-Pacific represents the largest regional share of the market, reflecting the scale of smallholder agriculture and government-led digitalization programs, followed by Europe and North America [18], [19].

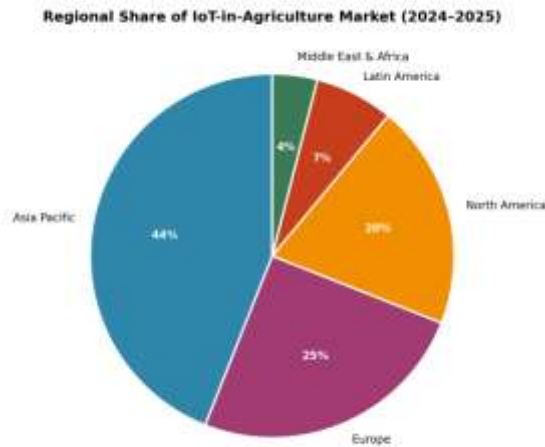


Fig. 2. Regional share of the global IoT-in-agriculture market.

C. Market Segmentation by Application

Within the broader smart agriculture market, precision farming represents the largest single application segment, followed by livestock monitoring and smart greenhouse deployments, as shown in Fig. 3 [20], [21].

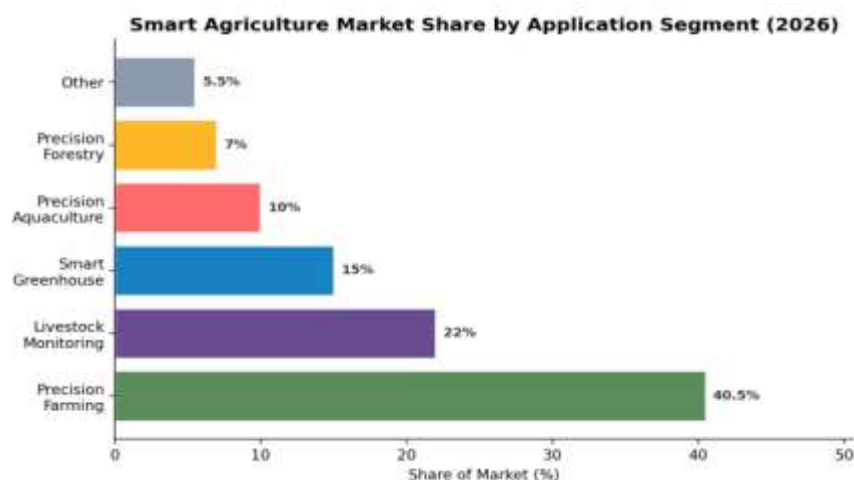


Fig. 3. Smart agriculture market share by application segment (2026).

D. Efficiency Outcomes: Traditional vs. IoT-Enabled Practice

Beyond market sizing, reported field outcomes indicate meaningful efficiency gains from IoT adoption relative to traditional practice across water use, fertilizer use, labor hours, and crop loss, alongside yield improvement [4], [10], [22], as shown in Fig. 4 and summarized in Table III, with traditional practice normalized to 100.

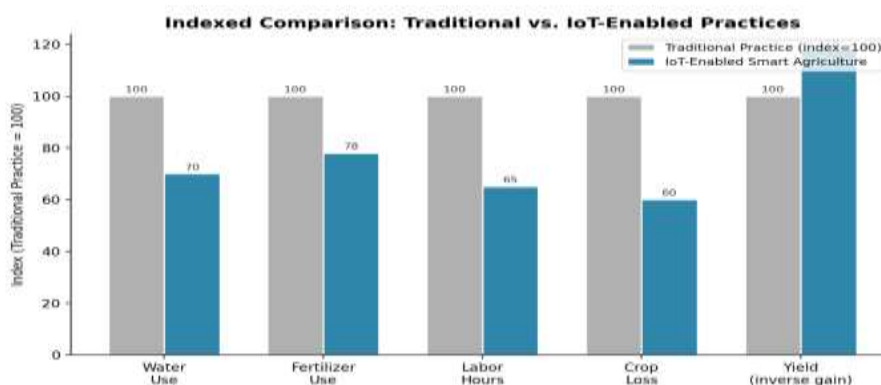


Fig. 4. Indexed comparison of resource use and outcomes: traditional vs. IoT-enabled practice (traditional = 100).

TABLE III INDEXED EFFICIENCY COMPARISON BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND IOT-ENABLED AGRICULTURAL PRACTICE

Metric	Traditional Practice (Index)	IoT-Enabled Practice (Index)	Approx. Improvement
Water use	100	70	~30% reduction
Fertilizer use	100	78	~22% reduction
Labor hours	100	65	~35% reduction
Crop loss	100	60	~40% reduction
Yield	100	118	~18% increase

Note: Index values are rounded, indicative figures informed by the ranges reported in [4], [10], and [22].

V. Barriers and Risks to Adoption

Despite documented benefits, several structural barriers constrain widespread and equitable adoption of agricultural IoT, summarized in Table IV. These include inconsistent rural connectivity infrastructure [23], high capital and operating costs for smallholder farmers [23], fragmentation across proprietary vendor systems [22], unresolved data ownership and governance questions [24], gaps in digital literacy [23], and the physical reliability challenges of sensors deployed in harsh outdoor conditions [25].

TABLE IV STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO AGRICULTURAL IOT ADOPTION

Barrier	Description	Most Affected Group
Connectivity infrastructure	Inconsistent rural broadband/cellular coverage limits continuous data transmission	Remote and smallholder farms
Capital and operating cost	Sensors, connectivity, and compatible machinery carry high upfront and recurring cost	Smallholder and subsistence farmers
Interoperability	Proprietary hardware/software formats complicate multi-vendor integration	All operators using mixed vendor systems
Data governance	Unresolved questions over data ownership between farmer, OEM, and software provider	All operators; competitive-sensitive data
Digital literacy	Effective use requires comfort with new tools and workflow changes	Older or less formally trained operators
Maintenance reliability	Field sensors are prone to damage, battery failure, and calibration drift	Operations lacking technical support capacity

VI. Emerging Trends and Future Directions

The integration of artificial intelligence with IoT sensor networks is deepening, moving beyond descriptive monitoring toward predictive and prescriptive analytics for pest forecasting, planting optimization, and harvest timing [7], [26]. Blockchain-based traceability is expanding beyond premium export markets into broader food-safety compliance [16], [17], and modular, subscription-based platforms are lowering entry costs for small and mid-sized farms [27], potentially narrowing the adoption gap identified in Section V [23].

VII. Conclusion

The Internet of Things has become a foundational technology in the transformation of agricultural practice, enabling a shift from generalized, calendar-based farming toward precise, real-time, data-informed management of soil, crops, livestock, and machinery. The quantitative evidence reviewed here — spanning market growth trajectories, regional distribution, and indexed efficiency outcomes — indicates substantial and continuing gains from IoT adoption. Realizing these gains broadly, rather than unevenly, will depend on deliberate investment in rural connectivity, interoperability standards, and inclusive data-governance policy.

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