Precision Agriculture: Transforming Indian Farming Systems

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OPEN ACCESS

Keywords

Precision agriculture, Resource-use efficiency, Sensors, Drones, Sustainable farming

How to cite this article:

Bihari, N. 2026. Precision Agriculture: Transforming Indian Farming Systems. *Vigyan Varta* 7 (01): 99-102.

ABSTRACT

Precision agriculture is an advanced approach to farm management that focuses on managing spatial and temporal variability within agricultural fields using modern technologies. Indian agriculture is facing several challenges such as declining soil fertility, water scarcity, rising input costs, climate variability, and predominance of small and marginal farmers. Conventional uniform input application often leads to inefficient resource use and environmental degradation. Precision agriculture integrates tools such as Global Positioning System (GPS), Geographic Information System (GIS), remote sensing, sensors, drones, and variable rate technology to apply inputs precisely according to crop and soil requirements. This approach enhances resource-use efficiency, improves crop productivity, reduces production costs, and minimizes environmental pollution (Gebbers & Adamchuk,2010; FAO,2017). Although the adoption of precision agriculture in India is still limited due to high initial costs and lack of technical knowledge, recent digital agriculture initiatives and agri-startups have created new opportunities. This article discusses the concept, technologies, applications, benefits, challenges, and future prospects of precision agriculture in Indian farming systems.

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture plays a crucial role in the Indian economy by providing livelihood to a large proportion of the population. However, Indian farming systems are under pressure due to shrinking landholdings, degradation of natural resources, water scarcity, and climate change (FAO, 2017). Traditional farming practices generally follow uniform application of inputs such as fertilizers, water, and pesticides, ignoring field-level variability. This often results in low input-use efficiency, increased cost of cultivation, and adverse environmental effects (Zhang *et al*., 2002).

Precision agriculture has emerged as a promising solution to address these challenges by adopting site-specific crop management practices. It enables farmers to make informed decisions based on real-time data related to soil, crop, and weather conditions, thereby improving productivity and sustainability (Gebbers & Adamchuk, 2010).

Concept and Principles of Precision Agriculture

Precision agriculture is defined as a farm management strategy that uses information technology to ensure that crops receive exactly what they need for optimum health and productivity (Zhang *et al*., 2002). The fundamental concept of precision agriculture is the management of variability within a field rather than treating the entire field uniformly.

The key principles of precision agriculture include applying the right input, at the right place, at the right time, and in the right amount. By understanding spatial and temporal variability in soil fertility, moisture availability, and crop growth, precision agriculture helps optimize resource use and reduce wastage (Gebbers & Adamchuk, 2010).

Key Technologies Used in Precision Agriculture

Global Positioning System (GPS) is used for accurate field mapping, soil sampling, and guiding farm machinery. Geographic Information System (GIS) integrates spatial data related to soil properties, crop growth, and yield to generate maps that support site-specific decision-making. Remote sensing and drones provide real-time information on crop health, nutrient stress, pest infestation, and water stress. Sensors and Internet of Things (IoT) tools monitor soil moisture, nutrients, and weather parameters. Variable Rate Technology (VRT) allows site-specific application of seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides (Zhang *et al*., 2002; ICAR, 2020).

Applications of Precision Agriculture in India

Precision agriculture supports site-specific nutrient management, precision irrigation, targeted pest and disease control, yield prediction, and precision sowing and harvesting. These applications improve efficiency, reduce losses, and enhance sustainability (ICAR, 2020).

Table 1. Precision agriculture technologies and their applications

GPS	Field mapping and machinery guidance
GIS	Soil and yield mapping
Drones	Crop health monitoring
Sensors	Soil moisture and nutrient monitoring
VRT	Site specific input application

Benefits of Precision Agriculture

Precision agriculture offers several agronomic, economic, and environmental benefits by promoting site-specific crop management. One of the major advantages is improvement in crop productivity through precise application of inputs based on soil and crop variability. Targeted management of nutrients and water helps in reducing crop stress and improving yield stability (Gebbers & Adamchuk, 2010).

Efficient utilization of inputs is another important benefit. Variable rate application of fertilizers and precision irrigation improve nutrient-use efficiency and water-use efficiency, thereby reducing wastage and input losses. This is particularly beneficial in regions facing water scarcity and declining soil fertility.

Precision agriculture also helps in reducing the cost of cultivation by minimizing unnecessary use of fertilizers, pesticides, and irrigation water. Targeted pest and disease management lowers pesticide consumption and associated environmental risks, resulting in improved farm profitability.

In addition, precision agriculture contributes to maintenance of soil health and environmental sustainability. Balanced nutrient application reduces nutrient leaching, soil degradation, and environmental pollution. Efficient nitrogen management also helps in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from agricultural fields (FAO, 2017; ICAR, 2020).

Overall, precision agriculture enhances productivity, profitability, and sustainability of farming systems and supports long-term agricultural development.

Challenges in Adoption

Adoption of precision agriculture in India is constrained by several factors. High initial investment for technologies such as GPS-enabled machinery, sensors, and drones remains a major barrier for small and marginal farmers (FAO, 2017). Limited access to credit and subsidies further restricts adoption. Small and fragmented landholdings reduce economic feasibility of precision tools. In addition, lack of technical knowledge, poor digital literacy, and inadequate extension support hinder effective use of data-driven technologies. Poor internet connectivity and digital infrastructure in rural areas also limit adoption (ICAR, 2020).

Future Prospects

The future of precision agriculture in India is encouraging due to increasing emphasis on digital and sustainable agriculture. Government initiatives supporting digital platforms and custom hiring centers are creating opportunities for wider adoption (ICAR, 2020). These centers allow farmers to access advanced equipment at affordable costs.

Growth of agri-startups and mobile-based advisory services has improved accessibility to precision tools. Integration of artificial intelligence and data analytics can further enhance crop monitoring and decision-making (Gebbers & Adamchuk, 2010). Collective adoption through Farmer Producer Organizations can accelerate implementation.

CONCLUSION

Precision agriculture has the potential to transform Indian farming systems by improving productivity, sustainability, and profitability. With proper policy support, affordable technologies, and farmer awareness, it can significantly contribute to food security and sustainable agricultural development.

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