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SMART DRIP FERTIGATION INTEGRATED WITH IoT AND AI: ENHANCING WATER AND NUTRIENT USE EFFICIENCY IN SUMMER VEGETABLE CROPS

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Producing More with Less Water: A Technological Revolution in Agriculture

Water Scarcity: A Critical Challenge for Modern Agriculture

Water scarcity has emerged as one of the most significant constraints affecting agricultural productivity worldwide. Rising temperatures, erratic rainfall patterns, declining groundwater resources and increasing competition for water have intensified the need for efficient resource management. Under these circumstances, farmers are challenged to achieve higher productivity while minimizing water consumption. The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Things (IoT) with drip fertigation technology offers a promising and sustainable solution, particularly for summer vegetable production.

Role of Artificial Intelligence in Crop Management

Artificial Intelligence (AI) plays a vital role in modern crop management by improving the efficiency and accuracy of agricultural operations. By analyzing large volumes of data from soil sensors, satellite imagery, drones, weather forecasts and historical farm records, AI helps farmers make informed decisions regarding crop cultivation. AI systems can identify optimal planting times, monitor crop health, detect nutrient deficiencies and predict potential pest or disease outbreaks before they become severe. These technologies enable precise irrigation and fertilizer application, reducing resource wastage while maximizing crop yield. Additionally, AI-based predictive models assist farmers in adapting to changing environmental conditions and minimizing production risks. As a result, AI enhances productivity, promotes sustainable farming practices and supports better farm management throughout the growing season.

Smart Irrigation Systems: Advancing Precision Water Management

- Soil moisture sensors
- Weather monitoring equipment
- Automated irrigation controllers

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- Smart pumps and control valves
- Mobile and cloud-based monitoring platforms

Soil moisture sensors continuously monitor moisture levels within the root zone. When moisture falls below a predetermined threshold, the system automatically initiates irrigation. Once the desired soil moisture level is restored, irrigation is terminated without manual intervention. Farmers can remotely monitor and manage irrigation operations through mobile applications, reducing labour requirements and ensuring timely water application. Such precision irrigation systems significantly reduce water wastage while maintaining optimal soil moisture conditions for crop growth.

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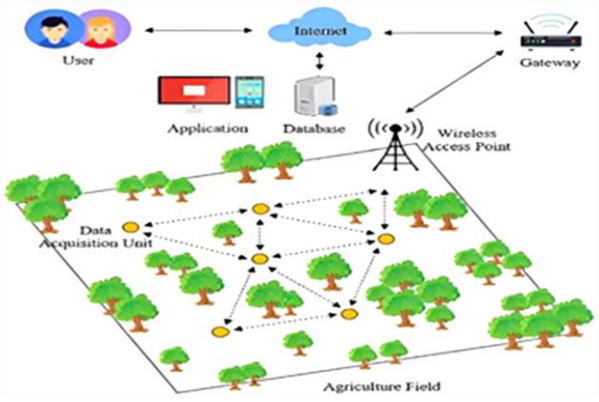

Performance of Smart Drip Fertigation in Summer Vegetable Crops

Summer vegetable cultivation includes economically important crops such as tomato, chilli, brinjal, okra, ivy gourd, ridge gourd, bitter gourd, bottle gourd, watermelon and cucumber. Numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of drip fertigation in improving water-use efficiency, nutrient utilization, crop productivity and profitability in these crops.

Tomato

Drip fertigation has been shown to increase tomato yield by approximately 22–27% compared with conventional fertilizer application methods. The direct application of water and nutrients to the root zone promotes vigorous plant growth, enhanced nutrient uptake and superior fruit quality.

Chilli

Research findings indicate yield improvements ranging from 50–67% under fertigation. The use of water-soluble fertilizers through fertigation has also resulted in significantly higher yields compared with traditional fertilization practices.

Brinjal

Fertigation in brinjal cultivation can reduce irrigation water usage by 37–49% while simultaneously enhancing crop productivity and resource-use efficiency.

Cucumber

Efficient fertigation practices have been associated with increased yields, improved fruit quality and higher economic returns due to precise nutrient and water management.

Okra

Yield improvements of approximately 20–25% have been reported under drip fertigation. Enhanced nutrient availability contributes to vigorous plant growth and improved pod quality.

Ivy Gourd

The timely and precise application of nutrients through fertigation can increase yields by 18–24%, while improving overall crop performance.

Ridge Gourd

Studies have documented yield increases of 20–26%, accompanied by improvements in fruit size, uniformity and market quality.

Bitter Gourd

Balanced nutrient supply through fertigation has been shown to improve productivity by 18–23% while supporting uniform fruit development and quality enhancement.

Bottle Gourd

Efficient fertigation schedules can increase yields by 20–25% through improved nutrient uptake and enhanced plant growth.

Watermelon

Fertigation can contribute to yield increases of 25–30%, producing larger fruits with improved sweetness and market appeal.

Cucumber

Yield improvements of 20–28% have been observed under fertigation due to the timely supply of water and nutrients, resulting in better fruit quality and increased marketability.

Fertilizers Recommended for Fertigation

The success of fertigation depends largely on the use of fertilizers that are highly soluble in water. Commonly recommended fertilizers include:

- **Urea** – A readily available source of nitrogen.
- **Potassium Nitrate (Multi-K)** – Supplies both nitrogen and potassium.
- **Mono Ammonium Phosphate (MAP)** – Provides nitrogen and phosphorus.
- **Water-Soluble NPK Fertilizers (Polyfeed)** – Deliver balanced nutrition.
- **Potassium Sulphate** – Supplies potassium and sulphur.
- **Phosphoric Acid** – An efficient source of phosphorus suitable for fertigation systems.

The use of fertilizers such as single superphosphate is generally discouraged because insoluble particles may clog drip emitters and distribution lines.

Best Management Practices for Fertigation

To maximize the benefits of fertigation, farmers should adopt the following practices:

- Conduct soil testing before developing fertilizer schedules.
- Apply nutrients in smaller doses at frequent intervals.
- Modify nutrient application according to crop growth stages.
- Increase fertigation frequency in sandy soils to reduce nutrient losses.
- Avoid excessive irrigation that may lead to nutrient leaching and reduced fertilizer-use efficiency.

Limitations of Conventional Irrigation and Fertilizer Application

Traditional irrigation and fertilizer application methods often result in inefficient resource utilization. Water is commonly distributed unevenly across the field, leading to losses through evaporation, runoff and deep percolation. Similarly, manually applied fertilizers may be lost through leaching or surface runoff, reducing nutrient availability to crops. Consequently, only 40–50% of the applied fertilizer is effectively utilized by plants, resulting in increased production costs and reduced input-use efficiency.

Benefits of Smart Drip Fertigation for Farmers

- Reduction in irrigation water consumption by 30–50%
- Enhanced fertilizer-use efficiency and lower fertilizer costs
- Reduced labour requirements
- Lower energy consumption and pumping costs
- Increased crop yields
- Improved produce quality and market value
- Real-time crop monitoring and remote system management
- Enhanced farm profitability and sustainability

Conclusion

Internet of Things (IoT)-enabled smart drip fertigation systems represent a transformative advancement in summer vegetable production. By integrating precision irrigation, targeted nutrient delivery and AI-driven decision support, these technologies enable efficient utilization of water and fertilizers while improving crop productivity and quality. As agriculture continues to face challenges associated with climate change and resource scarcity, the adoption of smart irrigation and fertigation technologies will become increasingly important. Embracing these innovations can help farmers achieve sustainable, profitable and climate-resilient vegetable production systems, paving the way for the future of smart agriculture.

"Empower your fields with smart farming technologies, making every drop of water and every nutrient count while unlocking greater productivity and profitability."