



AgriScope

Monthly e-Magazine on Agriculture & Interdisciplinary Sciences

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Volume-02

Issue-05

May-2026

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SMART DIAGNOSTICS AND SUSTAINABLE PROCESSING FOR FOOD SAFETY AND GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY

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Article ID: 25001

Abstract

Food safety and global food security are intrinsically linked challenges that demand integrated technological solutions. The increasing burden of foodborne diseases, coupled with post-harvest losses and environmental stressors, has intensified the need for innovative approaches in the agri-food sector. According to the World Health Organization, unsafe food causes



approximately 600 million cases of illness annually, emphasizing the magnitude of the issue. At the same time, the Food and Agriculture Organization reports that nearly one-third of global food production is lost or wasted, significantly undermining food security. In this context, smart diagnostics and sustainable processing technologies have emerged as transformative tools. These systems, driven by artificial intelligence, biosensors, and interconnected digital platforms, facilitate real-time monitoring, early hazard detection, and optimized resource utilization. Their integration into food systems enhances both safety and sustainability, ultimately contributing to resilient and efficient global food networks.

1. Introduction

The global food system is undergoing a period of profound transformation due to population expansion, climate variability, and increasing consumer demand for safe and high-quality food. By 2050, food production must increase by nearly 70% to meet global demand, yet this requirement is constrained by limited natural resources and environmental degradation. One of the most critical concerns in this context is the prevalence of foodborne hazards and post-harvest losses.



Microbial contamination, improper handling, and inefficient storage systems result in significant quantitative and qualitative losses. In developing regions, these losses are particularly severe due to inadequate infrastructure and limited access to modern technologies. Beyond economic loss, such inefficiencies also contribute to nutritional insecurity and increased greenhouse gas emissions. Recent research highlights that traditional methods of food quality assessment and preservation are often reactive rather than preventive. Conventional microbiological techniques, while reliable, are time-consuming and unsuitable for real-time decision-making. This gap has led to the emergence of smart diagnostics and sustainable processing technologies, which aim to shift food safety management from a reactive to a predictive and preventive paradigm.

2. Smart Diagnostics in Food Safety

2.1 Advanced Detection Technologies

The evolution of diagnostic technologies has significantly improved the ability to detect food contaminants at early stages. Molecular diagnostic methods such as PCR and LAMP operate by amplifying specific nucleic acid sequences of pathogens, enabling highly sensitive detection even when microbial populations are low. More recently, CRISPR-based systems have revolutionized pathogen detection by combining genetic specificity with rapid response times. These systems utilize programmable nucleases to identify target DNA or RNA sequences, producing detectable signals within minutes. In parallel, biosensor technology has gained prominence due to its ability to provide rapid, on-site analysis. Biosensors function through the interaction between a biological recognition element (such as enzymes, antibodies, or nucleic acids) and a transducer that converts this interaction into a measurable signal. Advances in

nanotechnology have further enhanced biosensor performance, enabling detection limits at the nano- or pico-scale and reducing analysis time significantly. Spectroscopic methods, including near-infrared and hyperspectral imaging, offer a non-destructive approach to food quality assessment. These techniques rely on the interaction of light with food components, generating spectral signatures that reflect chemical composition and structural properties. By analyzing these signatures using chemometric models, it is possible to detect adulteration, monitor ripeness, and identify microbial spoilage without physically altering the sample.

2.2 AI and Machine Learning Integration

Artificial intelligence has become a cornerstone of modern food diagnostic systems, primarily due to its ability to process large datasets and identify complex patterns. Machine learning algorithms are increasingly used to interpret data generated by sensors and imaging systems, enabling automated and accurate decision-making. For instance, deep learning models such as convolutional neural networks (CNNs) have demonstrated remarkable success in image-based food quality analysis. These models can distinguish between healthy and defective produce, detect contamination, and classify food products based on quality attributes with high accuracy. Moreover, predictive models are being developed to estimate shelf life by analysing factors such as temperature, humidity, and microbial growth kinetics. Another significant application of AI lies in risk assessment and early warning systems. By integrating data from multiple sources, including environmental sensors and historical records, AI systems can predict potential contamination events and recommend preventive measures. This predictive capability represents a paradigm shift from traditional quality control methods, which often rely on post-contamination detection.

2.3 Smart Packaging and Real-Time Monitoring

Packaging technologies have evolved from passive containment systems to active and intelligent platforms capable of interacting with the food environment. Smart packaging incorporates sensors and indicators that provide real-time information about product quality and safety. For example, intelligent packaging systems can monitor parameters such as pH, oxygen concentration, and the presence of volatile organic compounds associated with spoilage. These systems often use colorimetric indicators that change colour in response to environmental changes, providing a visual indication of product freshness. IoT-enabled devices further enhance monitoring capabilities by enabling continuous data transmission throughout the supply chain. Sensors embedded in packaging or storage environments can track temperature fluctuations, humidity

levels, and gas composition, ensuring that optimal conditions are maintained during transportation and storage. This level of monitoring significantly reduces the risk of spoilage and enhances traceability, thereby increasing consumer confidence.

3. Sustainable Food Processing Technologies

3.1 Smart Processing Systems

The integration of digital technologies into food processing has led to the development of smart processing systems characterized by automation, connectivity, and data-driven optimization. These systems utilize sensors to continuously monitor processing parameters such as temperature, pressure, and flow rate, ensuring consistent product quality. Advanced concepts such as digital twins allow the creation of virtual models of processing systems, enabling simulation and optimization without disrupting actual operations. This approach not only improves efficiency but also reduces energy consumption and operational costs.

3.2 Hurdle Technology

Hurdle technology represents a strategic approach to food preservation that combines multiple factors to inhibit microbial growth. Rather than relying on a single preservation method, this approach employs a series of “hurdles” that microorganisms must overcome to survive. These hurdles may include reduced temperature, low pH, decreased water activity, and the presence of preservatives. The combined effect of these factors creates an environment that is unfavourable for microbial growth while preserving the sensory and nutritional qualities of the food. This approach is particularly valuable in minimizing the need for intense thermal processing, thereby maintaining product quality.

3.3 Emerging Non-Thermal Technologies

In recent years, non-thermal processing technologies have gained attention as sustainable alternatives to conventional heat-based methods. Techniques such as high-pressure processing (HPP), pulsed electric fields (PEF), and cold plasma treatment effectively inactivate microorganisms while preserving the nutritional and sensory attributes of food. For instance, HPP applies high levels of hydrostatic pressure to disrupt microbial cell membranes, leading to inactivation without significant heat generation. Similarly, PEF uses short bursts of high voltage to permeabilize cell membranes, enhancing microbial inactivation and improving extraction

processes. These technologies are particularly advantageous for heat-sensitive foods such as juices and dairy products.

3.4 Waste Reduction and Resource Efficiency

Sustainable food processing also emphasizes the efficient use of resources and the reduction of waste. One of the key strategies in this area is the valorisation of food by-products, where waste materials are converted into valuable products such as bioactive compounds, dietary fibers, and biofuels. In addition, the application of AI and IoT in supply chain management enables better demand forecasting, inventory control, and logistics optimization. These systems reduce overproduction and minimize losses during distribution. Water and energy conservation technologies further enhance sustainability by reducing the environmental footprint of food processing operations.

4. Role in Global Food Security

The integration of smart diagnostics and sustainable processing technologies plays a crucial role in strengthening global food security. By reducing losses, improving efficiency, and enhancing productivity, these innovations ensure a more stable and reliable food supply. Early detection of contamination prevents large-scale spoilage, while efficient supply chain management ensures that food reaches consumers in optimal condition. Furthermore, precision agriculture technologies improve crop yields and resource efficiency, contributing to long-term sustainability.

5. Challenges and Limitations

Despite their potential, the adoption of these technologies faces several challenges. High initial investment costs and limited infrastructure in developing regions restrict accessibility. Additionally, the increasing reliance on digital systems raises concerns about data security and privacy. Another significant challenge is the lack of standardized protocols and regulatory frameworks, which can hinder the widespread implementation of new technologies. Addressing these issues requires coordinated efforts from governments, industry stakeholders, and research institutions.

6. Future Prospects

The future of food safety and security lies in the continued integration of advanced technologies. Emerging trends include the development of autonomous food systems capable of

self-monitoring and self-correction, as well as the use of blockchain technology for enhanced traceability. The field of food informatics is also expected to play a critical role by integrating data from multiple sources to support informed decision-making. As these technologies evolve, they will contribute to the creation of resilient, sustainable, and efficient food systems.

7. Conclusion

Smart diagnostics and sustainable processing technologies represent a paradigm shift in the management of food safety and security. By enabling proactive monitoring, efficient resource utilization, and reduced waste, these innovations address some of the most pressing challenges facing the global food system. Their widespread adoption will be essential for ensuring a safe, sustainable, and secure food supply for future generations.

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OSMOTIC DEHYDRATION: AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD PROCESSING

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Abstract

Osmotic dehydration (OD) is an emerging and energy-efficient food preservation technique that enhances the quality, shelf life, and nutritional value of horticultural produce. Unlike conventional drying methods, OD operates at mild temperatures and relies on osmotic pressure gradients to remove water while preserving sensory attributes. This article explores the principles, innovations, applications and future potential of osmotic dehydration in modern food processing systems.



Keywords: Preservation. Osmotic dehydration, Energy.

1. Introduction

<p>Fruits and vegetables are highly perishable due to their high moisture content, leading to significant post-</p>	
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harvest losses. Traditional drying methods often degrade quality attributes such as color, flavor, and nutrients. Osmotic dehydration offers a promising alternative by partially removing water through immersion in hypertonic solutions such as sugar or salt (Asghari et al., 2024). This method not only extends shelf life but also improves product quality, making it suitable for value-added food processing industries.

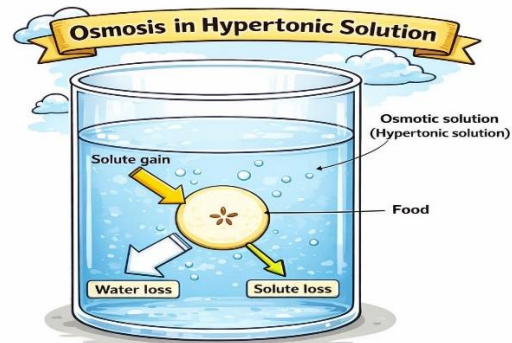


FIG 1 : Principle of Osmotic Dehydration

2. Principle and Mechanism

Osmotic dehydration is based on mass transfer driven by osmotic pressure differences between the food material and surrounding solution. When food is immersed in a concentrated solution:

- Water diffuses out of the food
- Solutes diffuse into the food
- A semi-permeable cell membrane controls the exchange (Pandiselvam et al., 2022)

This results in simultaneous water loss and solid gain, a phenomenon known as counter-current diffusion (Mari et al., 2024). Unlike conventional drying, no phase change occurs, reducing energy consumption significantly (Asghari et al., 2024).

3. Key Advantages of Osmotic Dehydration

Osmotic dehydration offers several advantages over traditional drying methods:

3.1 Quality Enhancement

- Retains natural color, flavor, and aroma
- Preserves heat-sensitive nutrients

- Improves texture and appearance (Yadav & Singh, 2014)

3.2 Energy Efficiency

- No latent heat requirement
- Lower processing temperatures reduce energy demand (Asghari et al., 2024)

3.3 Product Innovation

- Enables development of intermediate moisture foods
- Produces ready-to-eat snacks like candied fruits (Chandra & Kumari, 2012)

3.4 Shelf-Life Extension

- Reduces water activity
- Inhibits microbial growth (Sriraman et al., 2021)

4. Process Parameters Influencing OD

The efficiency of osmotic dehydration depends on several factors:

- **Temperature:** Higher temperatures increase water loss rate
- **Solution concentration:** Higher concentration enhances osmotic pressure
- **Food-to-solution ratio:** Maintains effective mass transfer
- **Time:** Longer duration increases dehydration but may affect quality (Mari et al., 2024)

5. Innovative Advancements in Osmotic Dehydration

Recent technological developments have significantly improved OD efficiency:

Emerging Technologies

- **Ultrasound-assisted OD** – enhances mass transfer
- **Pulsed Electric Field (PEF)** – increases cell permeability
- **Vacuum impregnation** – improves solute penetration

- **High-pressure processing** – accelerates dehydration

These innovations reduce processing time and improve product quality. (Yadav & Singh, 2014)

6. Applications in Food Industry

Osmotic dehydration is widely used in:

- Fruit processing (apple, mango, pineapple, aonla)
- Vegetable preservation
- Dairy and confectionery products
- Ready-to-eat snacks and breakfast cereals

It also enhances sensory qualities such as sweetness, texture, and color stability. (Mari et al., 2024)

7. Challenges and Limitations

Despite its advantages, OD faces certain challenges:

- Slow mass transfer rate
- Possible sugar or salt uptake affecting taste
- Disposal or reuse of osmotic solutions
- Higher processing time compared to advanced drying (Dahiya & Rajput, 2025)

8. Future Scope and Sustainability

Osmotic dehydration has strong potential in:

- Low-cost farmer-level processing units
- Integration with technologies like Refractance Window Drying (RWD)
- Development of functional and fortified foods
- Reduction of food waste through reuse of osmotic solutions

Sustainable innovations and hybrid drying techniques can make OD a key technology in future food systems.

9. Conclusion

Osmotic dehydration is a cost-effective, energy-efficient, and quality-preserving technique that bridges traditional and modern food processing. With advancements in technology and increasing demand for minimally processed foods, OD holds immense potential for transforming the horticulture sector and reducing post-harvest losses.

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Disease-Free Seed Systems through Aeroponics and Hydroponic Technology

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Article ID: 25003

Abstract

The increasing demand for high-quality and disease-free planting material has accelerated the adoption of advanced soilless propagation technologies in modern agriculture. Aeroponics and hydroponics have emerged as efficient and sustainable approaches for seed production, particularly in potato, where seed degeneration due to pathogens and viral accumulation significantly affects productivity. These systems provide controlled environments that minimize soil-borne diseases, enhance nutrient use efficiency and enable rapid multiplication of planting material. Aeroponic systems facilitate high mini-tuber production with improved uniformity, while hydroponics supports vigorous seedling growth with substantial water savings. The integration of tissue culture with these technologies further strengthens pre-basic seed production by ensuring genetic purity and reducing degeneration cycles. In addition, these systems offer advantages in terms of economic feasibility, climate resilience, and resource-use efficiency. However, their large-scale adoption depends on addressing challenges related to initial investment, technical expertise, and infrastructure. With appropriate policy support, capacity building, and institutional linkages, aeroponic and hydroponic technologies hold significant potential to enhance seed systems, improve productivity, and promote sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture.

Keywords: Aeroponics, Hydroponics, Disease-free seed, Potato and Tissue culture.

Introduction

Seed quality is one of the most critical factors determining crop productivity and sustainability (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2019). Conventional soil-based seed

production systems are often constrained by soil-borne diseases, pest infestation, poor nutrient management, and low multiplication rates. These limitations are particularly severe in potato, where degeneration caused by viral accumulation significantly reduces yield over successive generations (Buckseth *et al.*, 2016; Khurana, 2017). To overcome these challenges, soil-less cultivation systems such as aeroponics and hydroponics have gained prominence. These technologies provide controlled, pathogen-free environments that facilitate rapid plant growth and efficient seed multiplication. Research institutions and seed enterprises increasingly adopt these systems to meet the growing demand for certified, disease-free planting material (Otazu, 2010).

Seed Degeneration in Traditional Systems

In conventional field-based seed production, soil-borne pathogens such as *Rhizoctonia solani*, *Fusarium* spp., and *Phytophthora* spp. severely compromise seed health and quality (Khurana, 2017). Additionally, viral infections accumulate progressively across field generations, leading to seed degeneration and yield decline (Buckseth *et al.*, 2016). Traditional seed multiplication generally requires five to seven field generations, which increases exposure to pests and diseases and ultimately raises production costs (Otazu, 2010). The low seed replacement rate further limits farmer access to certified, high-quality seed.

Aeroponic Technology

Aeroponics is an advanced soil-less cultivation technique in which plant roots are suspended in air and intermittently misted with nutrient solutions. This system eliminates soil contact, thereby drastically reducing disease exposure and ensuring near-zero soil-borne pathogen incidence (Sharma & Singh, 2020). High oxygen availability around the root zone enhances root respiration and nutrient uptake, accelerating plant growth and development. For seed production, aeroponics offers remarkably high multiplication rates, producing 20 to 40 mini-tubers per plant under optimized conditions (Buckseth *et al.*, 2016). The system allows uniform nutrient delivery and efficient space utilization, making it suitable for commercial-scale seed farms. Moreover, reduced crop cycles enable multiple generations within a year, thereby shortening the seed production chain (Otazu, 2010). Countries such as Kenya have successfully implemented aeroponic technology for potato seed production, significantly enhancing seed availability (Mbiyu *et al.*, 2012). In India, large-scale adoption by research organizations and seed corporations has further strengthened pre-basic seed systems.

Hydroponic Technology

Hydroponics involves growing plants in nutrient-enriched water solutions without soil. This system enhances nutrient uptake efficiency and promotes faster vegetative growth under controlled greenhouse conditions (Calori *et al.*, 2017). Hydroponic systems are highly water-efficient, using up to 80-90 per cent less water compared to conventional field cultivation (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2019). The controlled environment reduces weed incidence and pest pressure, ensuring healthier seedlings with lower mortality rates (Singh & Pandey, 2019). Hydroponics is particularly suitable for greenhouse-based seedling and plug production, producing uniform and robust planting material. Under protected conditions, it also supports virus-free propagation when combined with strict sanitary measures.

Economic Feasibility and Scalability

The economic viability of aeroponic and hydroponic seed production systems is a critical factor influencing their large-scale adoption. Although the initial capital investment for infrastructure, climate control systems, and skilled labor is relatively high, the long-term benefits in terms of enhanced multiplication rates, reduced disease incidence, and improved seed quality often outweigh the costs. Studies have indicated that aeroponic systems can significantly reduce the number of field generations required, thereby lowering cumulative production expenses and minimizing yield losses associated with seed degeneration (Otazu, 2010; Buckseth *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, higher output per unit area and faster turnover cycles contribute to increased profitability. With appropriate financial support mechanisms such as subsidies, credit facilities, and public-private partnerships, these technologies can be made accessible to progressive farmers, start-ups, and seed enterprises, thereby improving scalability and commercialization potential (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2019).

Climate Resilience and Resource Use Efficiency

Aeroponics and hydroponics offer significant advantages under changing climatic conditions and increasing resource constraints. These systems operate in controlled environments, reducing exposure to abiotic stresses such as drought, temperature variability, and soil degradation. Hydroponic systems are highly water-efficient, utilizing up to 80–90% less water compared to conventional farming systems (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2019). Additionally, precise nutrient delivery minimizes fertilizer losses and environmental pollution, while aeroponic systems

improve root aeration and nutrient uptake efficiency, resulting in faster plant growth and higher productivity (Sharma & Singh, 2020; Singh & Pandey, 2019). These attributes make soilless cultivation technologies highly suitable for sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture.

Integration with Tissue Culture

The integration of tissue culture with aeroponics and hydroponics has revolutionized pre-basic seed production systems. Disease-free plantlets produced through tissue culture serve as Generation 0 (G_0) material, which is subsequently multiplied in aeroponic systems to produce Generation 1 (G_1) mini-tubers. These are then used for further field multiplication to generate certified seed in G_2 and G_3 generations (Pruski, 2015; Indian Council of Agricultural Research, 2022). This integrated approach significantly reduces degeneration cycles and enhances genetic purity and seed health.

Capacity Building and Institutional Support

The successful adoption of aeroponic and hydroponic technologies depends on adequate technical knowledge, infrastructure, and institutional support. Farmers and stakeholders require specialized training in nutrient management, system maintenance, and disease monitoring to effectively manage these systems. Capacity-building initiatives, including skill development programmes, demonstration units, and extension services, are essential for enhancing adoption rates (Indian Council of Agricultural Research, 2022). Research institutions and agricultural organizations play a vital role in developing standardized protocols and disseminating best practices (Pruski, 2015). Strengthening collaboration between research institutions, government agencies, and the private sector can further accelerate technology dissemination and ensure quality seed production systems.

Conclusion

Aeroponic and hydroponic technologies represent transformative innovations in the domain of disease-free seed production, particularly for crops such as potato where seed degeneration remains a persistent constraint. By providing controlled, soil-less environments, these systems effectively minimize pathogen load, enhance nutrient use efficiency, and enable rapid multiplication of high-quality planting material. The integration of tissue culture with aeroponic and hydroponic systems further strengthens the seed production chain by ensuring genetic purity and reducing the number of field generations required, thereby improving overall

system efficiency. Beyond their technical advantages, these technologies demonstrate strong potential in terms of economic viability, resource-use efficiency, and climate resilience. Higher productivity per unit area, reduced crop cycles, and efficient utilization of water and nutrients contribute to improved profitability and sustainability. However, the widespread adoption of these systems is contingent upon addressing challenges related to initial investment, technical expertise, and infrastructure availability. Therefore, a comprehensive approach involving policy support, capacity building, institutional strengthening, and public–private partnerships is essential to scale up these technologies. Strategic investments in research, training, and extension services will play a crucial role in facilitating technology dissemination and adoption. Overall, aeroponic and hydroponic seed production systems offer a viable pathway towards strengthening seed security, enhancing agricultural productivity, and promoting sustainable and climate-resilient farming systems.

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Urban & Vertical Vegetable Production: A Scientific Appraisal of Resource Efficiency and Sustainability

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Article ID: 25004

1. Introduction

Urban agriculture refers to the cultivation, processing and distribution of food within or around urban areas, including rooftop farming, community gardens and peri-urban agriculture. Vertical farming, a subset of urban agriculture, involves growing crops in vertically stacked layers under controlled conditions. Controlled Environment Agriculture (CEA) encompasses technologies that regulate environmental factors such as light, temperature, humidity and nutrient supply to maximize crop productivity.

The increasing global population, projected to reach 9.7 billion by 2050, alongside rapid urbanization (68% urban population by 2050), has intensified pressure on food systems (UN DESA, 2019). Simultaneously, arable land per capita is declining due to land degradation and urban expansion (FAO, 2020). These challenges necessitate innovative agricultural approaches capable of producing more with fewer resources.

Urban agriculture currently contributes approximately 5–10% of global vegetable production (FAO, 2020), indicating its growing role in enhancing food security and nutritional availability in cities. Vertical farming further strengthens this potential by enabling intensive production in limited spaces, independent of climatic constraints.

2. Concept and Types of Urban & Vertical Vegetable Production

2.1. Urban Farming Systems

Urban agriculture manifests in several forms:

- **Rooftop Farming:** Utilizes unused urban rooftops for vegetable cultivation. It improves insulation and reduces urban heat island effects.
- **Peri-Urban Farming:** Located on city outskirts, supplying fresh vegetables to urban markets with reduced transportation costs.
- **Community Gardens:** Shared spaces managed by local communities, promoting social cohesion and food access.

2.2. Vertical Farming Systems

- **Hydroponics:** Plants grow in nutrient-rich water solutions without soil. Nutrients are precisely controlled, improving efficiency.
- **Aeroponics:** Roots are suspended in air and misted with nutrient solutions, maximizing oxygen availability and nutrient uptake.
- **Aquaponics:** Integrates fish farming with plant cultivation, where fish waste provides nutrients for plants, creating a closed-loop system.

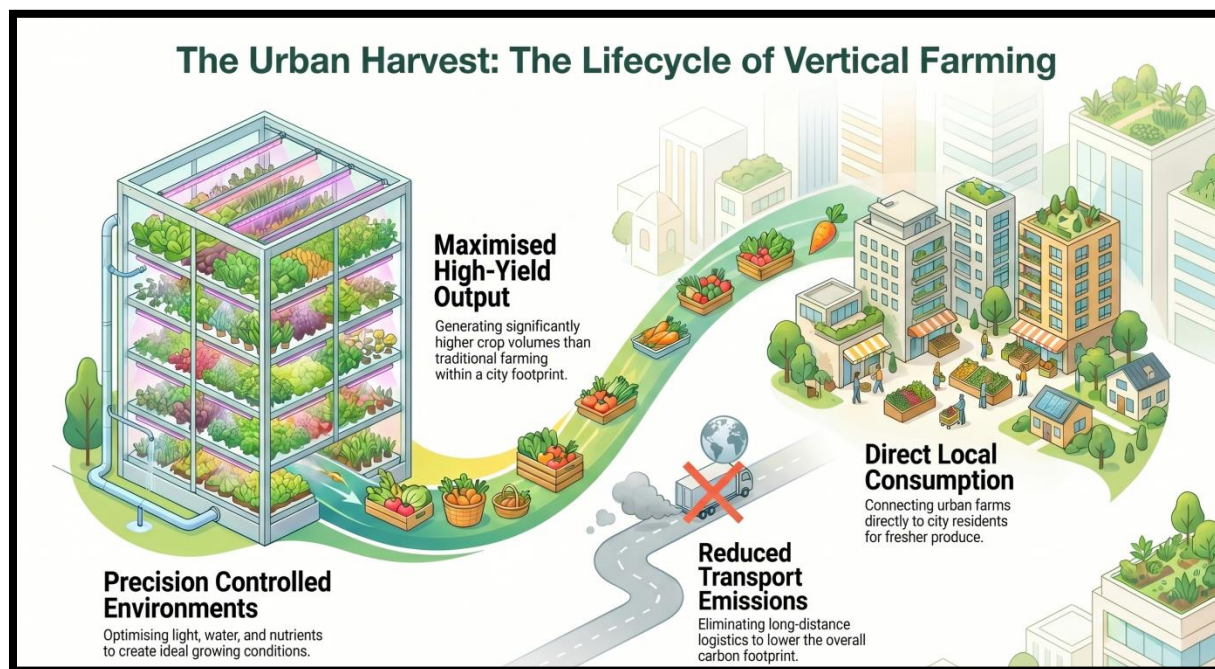
Each system is grounded in plant physiological principles, particularly nutrient uptake, root-zone oxygenation and water-use efficiency.

3. Scientific Basis of Vertical Farming

Vertical farming relies on precise manipulation of environmental variables:

- **Light Management:** LED lighting systems provide specific wavelengths (blue: vegetative growth; red: flowering). Optimized light spectra enhance photosynthetic efficiency and biomass production (Kozai et al., 2016).
- **Nutrient Delivery:** Hydroponic nutrient solutions are formulated based on crop requirements, ensuring balanced macro- and micronutrient supply.
- **Climate Control:** Temperature, humidity and CO₂ levels are regulated to maintain optimal growth conditions, minimizing stress and maximizing yield.
- **AI and Automation:** Sensors, IoT devices, and machine learning algorithms monitor plant health, nutrient levels, and environmental parameters, enabling precision agriculture within indoor systems.

Recent advancements include automated vertical farms using robotic harvesting and AI-driven climate control systems, improving efficiency and reducing labour dependency.



Source – Infographic prepared via Google notebook LM

4. Resource Efficiency Analysis

Vertical farming systems are often promoted for their superior resource-use efficiency. However, a critical scientific comparison is essential.

Comparative Resource Efficiency

Parameter	Conventional Farming	Vertical Farming
Land Use	High	Very low
Water Use	High	Up to 90% less
Yield per Unit Area	Baseline	Up to 10× higher
Pesticide Use	High	Minimal
Climate Dependence	High	Fully controlled

- **Water Efficiency:** Closed-loop hydroponic systems recycle water, reducing consumption by up to 90% compared to traditional farming (Despommier, 2010; FAO, 2020).
- **Yield Enhancement:** Vertical stacking and continuous production cycles enable yields up to 10 times higher per unit area (Benke & Tomkins, 2017).

- **Land Optimization:** By utilizing vertical space, these systems drastically reduce land requirements, making them suitable for dense urban areas.

However, these gains must be evaluated alongside energy inputs, particularly for lighting and climate control.

5. Economic and Energy Considerations

Vertical farming requires significant capital investment, typically ranging from ₹8 lakh for small-scale setups to over ₹1.5 crore for commercial operations in India.

Cost Components

- **Initial Investment:** Infrastructure, LED lighting, climate control systems
- **Operational Costs:**
 - Energy (largest component)
 - Nutrient solutions
 - Skilled labor or automation systems

Energy consumption is a critical limitation. Studies indicate that electricity costs can account for up to 30–50% of total operational expenses (Kalantari et al., 2017).

Despite high costs, vertical farms can achieve profitability through:

- Premium pricing of pesticide-free produce
- Consistent year-round production
- Proximity to urban markets reducing logistics costs

6. Environmental Sustainability Analysis

6.1. Benefits

- **Reduced Carbon Footprint:** Localized production minimizes transportation emissions.
- **Water Conservation:** Efficient recycling systems reduce freshwater usage.
- **Minimal Chemical Inputs:** Controlled environments reduce pest incidence.

6.2. Limitations

- **High Energy Demand:** Artificial lighting and climate control increase carbon footprint if powered by non-renewable energy.
- **Infrastructure Footprint:** Construction and materials contribute to embodied energy.

A balanced assessment suggests that sustainability benefits depend heavily on the energy source. Integration with renewable energy systems is crucial.

7. Case Studies and Practical Examples

7.1. Global Context

- **Singapore:** Due to land scarcity, vertical farms like Sky Greens have successfully integrated hydraulic systems for vegetable production.
- **Netherlands:** Advanced greenhouse technologies combine hydroponics and climate control to achieve high productivity.

7.2. Indian Context

India is witnessing a rise in urban farming startups focusing on hydroponic leafy greens and herbs. Cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru are emerging hubs for vertical farming initiatives. These systems cater to niche markets, including hotels, supermarkets, and health-conscious consumers.

8. Challenges and Constraints

- **High Initial Investment:** Limits adoption among small-scale farmers
- **Technical Expertise:** Requires knowledge of plant physiology, engineering, and automation
- **Energy Dependency:** Vulnerability to power costs and supply disruptions
- **Scalability Issues:** Difficult to scale economically for staple crops

These constraints highlight the need for technological innovation and policy support.

9. Future Prospects

Vertical farming is expected to play a significant role in:

- **Smart Cities:** Integration into urban infrastructure
- **Climate-Resilient Agriculture:** Protection against extreme weather
- **Food Security:** Localized, reliable food production

Policy Recommendations for India

- Subsidies for renewable energy integration
- Skill development programs in CEA technologies

- Financial support for startups and small entrepreneurs
- Inclusion in urban planning policies

10. Conclusion

Urban and vertical vegetable production systems represent a scientifically robust approach to addressing modern agricultural challenges. They offer significant advantages in resource efficiency, productivity, and sustainability. However, their limitations—particularly energy consumption and high costs—cannot be overlooked.

Rather than replacing conventional agriculture, vertical farming should be viewed as a complementary system, particularly suited for high-value crops and urban environments. A balanced integration of traditional and modern agricultural practices will be essential for building resilient and sustainable food systems.

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New Generation Biopesticides: A Sustainable Tool for Environmental Protection

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Article ID: 25005

Abstract

The increasing environmental and health concerns associated with synthetic pesticides have accelerated the search for safer alternatives. New generation biopesticides, derived from natural sources such as microorganisms, plants and semiochemicals, offer an eco-friendly and target-specific approach to pest management. These biopesticides not only reduce chemical residues in food and soil but also help in conserving biodiversity and maintaining ecological balance. Recent advancements in biotechnology, nanotechnology and formulation science have significantly enhanced their efficacy, shelf life and field applicability. This article discusses the types, mechanisms, advantages, challenges and future prospects of new generation biopesticides in ensuring sustainable agriculture and environmental protection.

Introduction

The green revolution's technology has led to significant increases in agricultural productivity through high-yielding varieties, chemical fertilizers and pesticides. However, this input-intensive approach has negatively impacted the environment and the sustainability of farming systems. The use of synthetic pesticides has harmed both abiotic and biotic factors, resulting in pesticide residues in soil, air and water and causing detrimental effects like physiological deformities, diseases and genetic disorders in various organisms. Chemicals like DDT, used broadly to control pests, have contaminated food and water sources, harmed beneficial insects and fostered resistance in pest populations.

Agriculture has long relied on chemical pesticides to ensure crop productivity and food security. However, indiscriminate use of synthetic pesticides has led to serious consequences such as environmental pollution, pest resistance, resurgence and adverse effects on non-target organisms, including humans (Pimentel, 2005). These concerns have prompted a paradigm shift toward sustainable pest management strategies.

Biopesticides have emerged as a viable alternative due to their eco-friendly nature, specificity and compatibility with integrated pest management (IPM) systems. The new generation biopesticides go beyond traditional formulations and include advanced microbial strains, genetically improved bioagents, RNA

interference (RNAi)-based products and nano-formulations (Kumar *et al.*, 2020). These innovations are transforming pest management practices and contributing to environmental sustainability.

What is Biopesticide?

Biopesticides, which are created from naturally occurring compounds and manage pests through non-toxic and environmentally benign methods, are becoming more and more popular worldwide. Animals (such as nematodes), plants (such as Chrysanthemum, Azadirachta) and microorganisms (such as *Bacillus thuringiensis*, *Trichoderma* and nucleopolyhedrosis virus) can all be the source of biopesticides, which include living organisms (natural enemies), their products (phytochemicals, microbial products) or byproducts (semiochemicals) that can be used to control harmful pests (Majid *et al.* 2011). The tried-and-true indigenous technical knowledge (ITK) of controlling pests using natural materials has proven to be highly successful, but many ITKs have been forgotten as a result of the introduction and use of chemical pesticides. The environment and human health are less threatened by biopesticides. In general, they are less hazardous than chemicals. They are generally less toxic than chemical pesticides, often target specific, have little or no residual effects and have acceptability for use in organic farming.

Types of New Generation Biopesticides

1. Microbial Biopesticides

These include bacteria, fungi, viruses and protozoa that control pests through infection or toxin production.

- *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) produces endotoxins effective against lepidopteran pests (Bravo *et al.*, 2011).
- Entomopathogenic fungi such as *Beauveria bassiana* infect insects through cuticle penetration.

2. Botanical Biopesticides

Derived from plant extracts, these include compounds like azadirachtin from neem (*Azadirachta indica*), which acts as an antifeedant and growth regulator (Isman, 2006).

3. Biochemical Biopesticides

These include natural substances like pheromones and plant growth regulators that interfere with pest behaviour and reproduction.

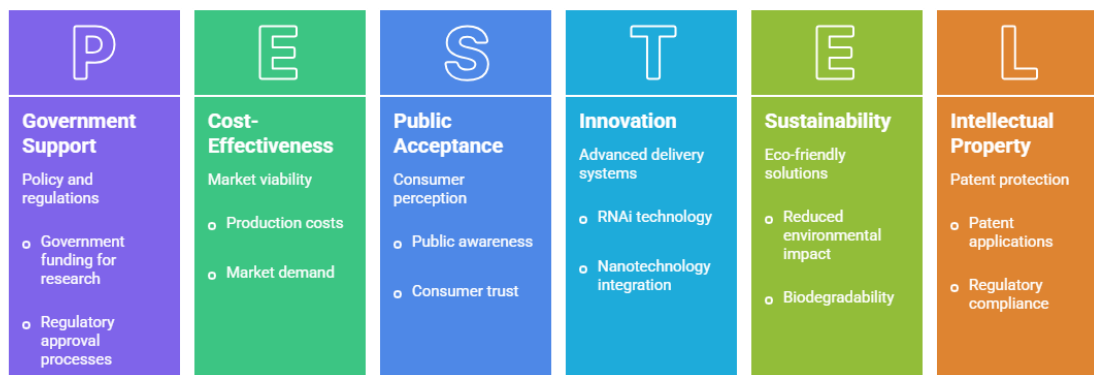
4. RNAi-Based Biopesticides

A cutting-edge approach where double-stranded RNA (dsRNA) silences essential genes in pests, leading to their death. This method is highly specific and environmentally safe (Zotti *et al.*, 2018).

5. Nano-Biopesticides

Integration of nanotechnology improves delivery, stability and effectiveness of biopesticides, reducing dosage and environmental contamination (Kah *et al.*, 2019).

New Generation Biopesticides



Most common biopesticides

Biopesticide	Type	Target Pest/Disease	Major Crops	Mode of Action
<i>Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt)</i>	Bacterial	Caterpillars (Lepidoptera)	Cotton, cabbage	Produces toxins → destroys insect gut
<i>Trichoderma viride</i>	Fungal	Soil-borne fungi (<i>Fusarium</i> , <i>Rhizoctonia</i>)	Vegetables, pulses	Antagonism & mycoparasitism
Neem (<i>Azadirachtin</i>)	Botanical	Sucking & chewing pests	All crops	Antifeedant & growth regulator
<i>Pseudomonas fluorescens</i>	Bacterial	Wilt, root rot diseases	Rice, vegetables	Induces systemic resistance (ISR)
<i>Beauveria bassiana</i>	Fungal	Whiteflies, aphids, beetles	Vegetables, fruits	Infects and kills insects
NPV (<i>Nuclear Polyhedrosis Virus</i>)	Viral	<i>Helicoverpa</i> , <i>Spodoptera</i>	Cotton, pulses	Infects larvae → death

Application Methods of Biopesticides

Biopesticides can be applied through different methods depending on the target pest and crop stage. Seed treatment is a common practice where bioagents such as *Trichoderma* and *Pseudomonas* are coated on seeds before sowing. This helps in protecting the seedlings from soil-borne pathogens and promotes early root development. Soil application involves mixing biopesticides with compost or farmyard manure and applying them to the soil, mainly to control root diseases caused by pathogens like *Fusarium* and *Rhizoctonia*.

For above-ground pests, foliar spray is widely used, where biopesticides such as *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) and neem-based formulations are sprayed directly on plant leaves to control caterpillars and sucking pests. Additionally, pheromone traps are used as a behavioural control method, where synthetic pheromones attract insects into traps, helping in monitoring pest population and disrupting their mating cycle. These application methods are essential for maximizing the effectiveness of biopesticides in integrated pest management systems.

Advantages of New Generation Biopesticides

- **Environmentally safe:** Minimal residual toxicity and reduced pollution
- **Target specificity:** Protects beneficial organisms like pollinators and natural enemies
- **Resistance management:** Lower chances of resistance development
- **Biodegradability:** Rapid degradation reduces persistence in the ecosystem
- **Compatibility with IPM:** Can be integrated with cultural, mechanical and biological control methods

Challenges and Limitations

Despite their advantages, several constraints limit widespread adoption:

- Short shelf life and sensitivity to environmental conditions
- Slower action compared to chemical pesticides
- Limited awareness among farmers
- Higher initial cost and inconsistent field performance
- Regulatory and commercialization hurdles

Future Prospects

The future of biopesticides lies in technological integration and innovation:

- Genetic engineering for improved strains
- AI-based pest monitoring and precision application
- Development of stable and cost-effective formulations
- Policy support and farmer education programs
- Integration with climate-smart agriculture practices

Conclusion

The rise of new generation biopesticides signifies a shift in agriculture towards environmentally sustainable methods. These biopesticides, sourced from natural elements like microorganisms and plant extracts, reduce toxic residues and environmental harm while protecting beneficial species. They are more specific and biodegradable than traditional pesticides, minimizing risks related to bioaccumulation and pest resistance. New innovations, such as RNA interference and nano-formulations, have improved their effectiveness for large-scale use and compatibility with Integrated Pest Management (IPM) systems. However, challenges like short shelf life and farmer awareness hinder adoption. Tackling these issues through research, farmer training and supportive regulations is essential. With climate change and rising demand for safe food, integrating biopesticides is crucial for sustainable agriculture and food security.

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Feeding the Future: The Changing Face of Vegetable Production in India

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Article ID: 25006

1. Introduction

Agriculture continues to be a cornerstone of the Indian economy, supporting nearly half of the population directly or indirectly. Within this sector, vegetable production plays a critical role in ensuring nutritional security, supplying essential vitamins, minerals and dietary fibres.

India is currently the second-largest producer of vegetables globally, with a production of about 220 million tonnes (NHB, 2025). The demand for vegetables is steadily increasing due to population growth, urbanization and rising awareness of healthy diets.

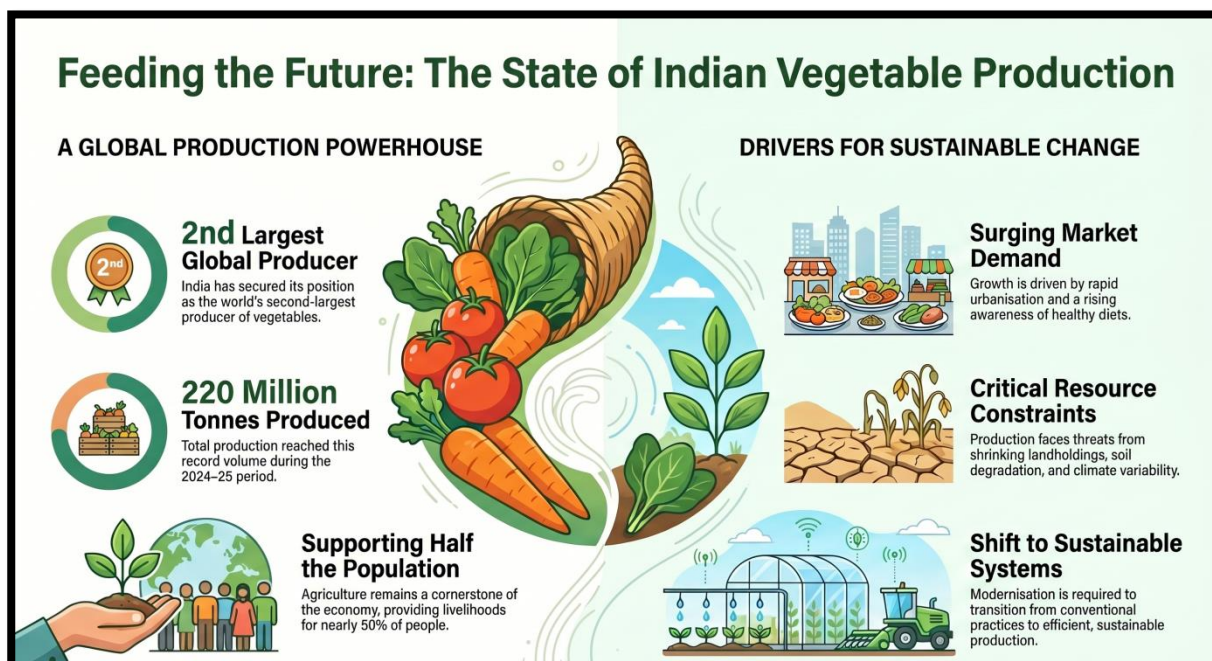


Figure 1- Feeding the Future: The State of Indian Vegetable Production

However, this growth is occurring under constraints such as shrinking landholdings, climate variability and soil degradation, necessitating a shift from conventional practices to more efficient and sustainable production systems.

2. Impact of Climate Change on Vegetable Production

Climate change has emerged as a significant constraint on vegetable productivity. Fluctuations in temperature, erratic rainfall and extreme weather events are directly affecting crop growth cycles, yield stability and produce quality.

For instance, temperature stress has been shown to reduce yields in crops like tomato and capsicum, particularly during reproductive stages (FAO, 2022). Additionally, changing climatic conditions are contributing to increased pest and disease incidence, shifts in cropping seasons and reduced water-use efficiency.

Adaptation strategies such as climate-resilient varieties, protected cultivation and integrated pest management (IPM) are becoming essential to sustain production under these uncertainties (Reddy et al., 2022).

3. Technological Advancements in Vegetable Production

Technological interventions are redefining vegetable farming in India. Among the most impactful innovations are:

3.1. Protected Cultivation

Greenhouses, polyhouses and shade nets enable year-round production, improved quality and higher productivity. These systems also reduce environmental risks and input wastage (Kumar & Gupta, 2020).

3.2. Precision Agriculture

Technologies such as drip irrigation, fertigation systems and sensor-based monitoring enhance input-use efficiency and reduce production costs.

3.3. Digital Agriculture

Mobile-based advisory platforms and ICT tools are enabling farmers to access real-time weather updates, pest and disease alerts, market price information etc. This improves decision-making and reduces uncertainty in production systems.

4. Sustainability and Soil Health

Soil health is fundamental to long-term agricultural sustainability. Continuous reliance on chemical fertilizers has led to declining soil organic matter and nutrient imbalances, affecting productivity (ICAR, 2023).

To address this, farmers are increasingly adopting Integrated Nutrient Management (INM), organic farming practices, biofertilizers and microbial consortia etc.

Maintaining soil organic carbon is particularly crucial, as it improves soil structure, water retention and nutrient availability, thereby enhancing resilience to climate stress.

5. Urbanization and Emerging Production Systems

Rapid urban expansion has reduced cultivable land, prompting the adoption of innovative production systems such as Vertical farming, Rooftop gardening, Urban horticulture etc.

These systems optimize space utilization and bring production closer to consumers, thereby reducing transportation costs and post-harvest losses.

6. Post-Harvest Management and Supply Chain Constraints

Post-harvest losses remain a critical bottleneck in India's vegetable sector. Estimates suggest that 15–25% of vegetables are lost due to inadequate handling, storage, and transportation infrastructure (Government of India, 2023). Major issues include limited cold storage facilities, inefficient logistics and supply chains and poor grading and packaging practices

Strengthening cold chains, promoting value addition (e.g., processing into pickles, sauces, dehydrated products) and improving market linkages can significantly enhance farmer income and reduce wastage.



Figure 2- Post Harvest Losses in Vegetable Supply Chain

7. Opportunities in High-Value Vegetable Crops

Changing consumer preferences, especially in urban areas, have increased demand for high-value and exotic vegetables such as:

- Broccoli
- Lettuce
- Coloured capsicum

India's total horticulture production has already exceeded 350 million tonnes (Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, 2023), indicating strong growth potential. Diversification into high-value crops offers higher returns per unit area, better market opportunities and export potential.

8. Government Initiatives and Institutional Support

The Government of India has introduced several schemes to promote vegetable production and horticulture development, including:

- **National Horticulture Mission (NHM)**
- **Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH)**

These programs provide financial assistance, capacity-building and training and infrastructure support. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives depends largely on awareness, accessibility and implementation efficiency at the grassroots level.

9. Conclusion

Vegetable production in India is at a critical juncture where increasing demand intersects with environmental and structural challenges. While the country has achieved remarkable growth in output, sustaining this trajectory requires a strategic shift toward:

- Climate-resilient practices
- Technological integration
- Sustainable soil management
- Efficient supply chains

Strengthening research-extension linkages and promoting farmer awareness will be key to bridging the gap between innovation and adoption. Furthermore, diversification into high-value crops and improved market access can significantly enhance farmer profitability. A holistic and coordinated approach involving policymakers, researchers, and farmers is essential to ensure a resilient, productive, and sustainable vegetable sector capable of meeting future food and nutritional demands.

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Potato: A Promising Crop for Chhattisgarh – Scope and Future Prospects

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Article ID: 25007

Abstract

Potato (*Solanum tuberosum* L.) has emerged as a strategic crop for enhancing agricultural diversification, nutritional security and farm income in non-traditional growing regions such as Chhattisgarh. The present article critically examines the expanding role of potato cultivation in the state by integrating production trends with emerging dimensions of value chain development, technological interventions and market opportunities. It highlights the suitability of potato within rice-based cropping systems and its potential as a short-duration, high-return crop under varying agro-climatic conditions. The discussion further incorporates aspects of resource-use efficiency, climate-resilient production practices and the role of improved varieties in overcoming regional constraints. The article also emphasizes the importance of strengthening institutional mechanisms, including seed systems, farmer collectives and agro-processing linkages, to ensure sustainable growth. Special attention is given to post-harvest management, cold chain development and processing potential as key drivers of value addition. By adopting a systems-based approach, the study identifies critical pathways for scaling potato cultivation in Chhattisgarh, positioning it as a viable component of climate-smart agriculture and rural economic development

Keywords: Agro-climatic adaptation, Potato, Nutritional security, Yield improvement, Crop diversification

Introduction

Potato (*Solanum tuberosum* L.), commonly referred to as the ‘King of Vegetables’ is a globally cultivated, nutritionally rich and versatile food crop. Originating from the Andean regions of South America, it has emerged as the fourth most important food crop worldwide after rice, wheat and maize (FAOSTAT, 2022). Today, potatoes occupy 16.49 million hectares globally with a production of over 403 million tonnes, highlighting its major contribution to food systems. India is one of the leading potato producers, with Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya

Pradesh and Punjab contributing significantly to national output (ICAR, 2021). In recent years, Chhattisgarh has also shown growing prominence in potato cultivation, covering 42,584 hectares and producing 6.52 lakh tonnes annually. Farmers across districts such as Sarguja, Raigarh, Jashpur, Bilaspur, Balrampur, Surajpur and Raipur increasingly prefer potato due to its profitability, adaptability and rising consumer demand (Government of Chhattisgarh, 2023).

Potato offers multiple advantages rich nutritional composition, high caloric productivity, short growing period and suitability for diverse agro-climatic regions. However, challenges like warm climatic conditions, limited availability of suitable varieties and disease susceptibility call for region-specific scientific solutions. Understanding genetic variability and the relationship between agronomic traits is essential for developing improved cultivars tailored to Chhattisgarh's conditions.

A Global Crop with Local Significance

Globally, potatoes occupy about 16.49 million hectares with a production of 403.5 million tonnes (FAO, 2022). China, India and Russia are among the top producers. In India alone, potatoes cover around 2.25 million hectares with a production of 43.3 million tonnes, making it one of the country's most widely cultivated crops (ICAR, 2021). Chhattisgarh, though not traditionally known as a major potato-producing state, has shown rapid growth in both area and productivity. Potatoes are mostly grown in districts such as Sarguja, Raigarh, Jashpur, Bilaspur, Balrampur, Surajpur and Raipur. The state produces about 6.52 lakh tonnes annually from 42,584 hectares and farmers are increasingly adopting the crop due to its reliable market value and adaptability.

Why Potato Matters Today

The importance of potato cultivation has increased globally for several reasons:

- **High Nutritional Value:** Potatoes are rich in carbohydrates, vitamin C, vitamin B6, fibre (especially in the skin), potassium and antioxidants (Camire et al., 2009). A medium-sized potato provides more potassium than a banana and is almost fat-free.
- **Food Security:** The UN declared 2008 as the *International Year of Potato* in recognition of the crop's ability to fight hunger and support poor communities in developing countries (UN, 2008).
- **Adaptability:** Potatoes grow well in diverse environments from cool hills to warm plains and fit easily into multiple cropping systems (FAO, 2022).
- **High Productivity:** Potatoes produce more food per unit area and time compared to most major crops, making them ideal for regions with small landholdings.

Potato in Chhattisgarh: Opportunities and Challenges

In Chhattisgarh, potato cultivation is expanding due to improving awareness, market demand and the suitability of certain agro-climatic zones (Government of Chhattisgarh, 2023).

However, the region faces unique challenges:

- The climate of the plains is warmer, which affects vegetative growth and tuberization.
- Variety suitability remains an issue, as many cultivars have been developed for cooler regions.
- Farmers require location-specific, high-yielding, disease-resistant potato varieties.

Despite these challenges, the state has shown impressive growth: the annual increase in area, production and productivity stands at 9.01 per cent, 10.93 per cent and 1.76 per cent, respectively.

Scope of Potato Cultivation in Chhattisgarh

The scope of potato cultivation in Chhattisgarh is expanding rapidly due to its increasing suitability as a high-value, short-duration crop within the state's diverse agro-climatic conditions. The crop fits well into existing rice-based cropping systems, particularly during the rabi season, allowing efficient utilization of residual soil moisture and available irrigation resources. There is considerable potential to increase area under potato in districts such as Sarguja, Jashpur, Balrampur and Raigarh, where relatively cooler climatic conditions are favourable for tuber development. Additionally, the scope includes enhancing productivity through adoption of improved varieties, scientific nutrient management and integrated pest and disease management practices tailored to local conditions.

Beyond production, significant opportunities exist in strengthening the potato value chain within the state. The development of cold storage infrastructure, grading, packaging and processing units can reduce post-harvest losses and enhance farmer profitability. Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) and cooperative models can play a critical role in aggregation, input supply and market linkage. Furthermore, the promotion of processing-grade varieties, seed production systems and mechanization suitable for smallholders can improve overall efficiency. With appropriate policy support, technological interventions and market integration, potato cultivation in Chhattisgarh has strong potential to contribute to income generation, employment creation and agricultural diversification.



Figure 1. Potato cultivation and value chain development in Chhattisgarh. (Source: AI-generated image created using DALL·E (OpenAI), 2026)

Future Prospects of Potato Cultivation in Chhattisgarh

The future prospects of potato cultivation in Chhattisgarh are highly promising, driven by increasing demand, technological advancements and opportunities for crop diversification. With rising urbanization and changing dietary patterns, the demand for potatoes, both for fresh consumption and processing, is expected to grow steadily. This creates a favourable market environment for farmers to expand cultivation. The state's agro-climatic diversity, particularly in northern districts with relatively cooler temperatures, provides a suitable niche for enhancing productivity through the adoption of improved, region-specific and climate-resilient varieties.

A major area of future growth lies in strengthening the seed system and promoting the availability of quality planting material. Development of disease-free, high-yielding and heat-tolerant varieties will be critical to overcoming climatic constraints. In addition, advancements in precision agriculture, such as weather-based advisories, drip irrigation and fertigation, can significantly enhance input-use efficiency and stabilize yields. Integration of potato into climate-smart and diversified cropping systems will further improve resource utilization and farm sustainability.

Post-harvest management and value addition present substantial untapped potential. Investment in cold storage infrastructure, processing units (chips and fries) and efficient supply chains can reduce losses and increase farmer income. Chhattisgarh can emerge as a regional hub for potato processing if supported by public-private partnerships and agro-industrial linkages. Strengthening Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) will also enable better aggregation, bargaining power and direct market access.

Policy support and institutional interventions will play a decisive role in realizing these prospects. Targeted extension services, capacity building and access to credit and insurance can encourage farmers to adopt improved practices. Moreover, linking potato cultivation with government schemes on horticulture development, agri-infrastructure and rural entrepreneurship can accelerate growth. Overall, with strategic planning, technological integration and market-oriented development, potato cultivation in Chhattisgarh has the potential to become a key driver of agricultural transformation, income enhancement and nutritional security in the state.

Conclusion

Potato cultivation in Chhattisgarh represents a significant opportunity for transforming the state's agricultural landscape through diversification, intensification and market orientation. While the crop has already demonstrated encouraging growth in area and productivity, its long-term sustainability will depend on addressing region-specific challenges such as heat stress, varietal adaptability and limited access to quality inputs. A strategic shift towards climate-resilient varieties, precision farming practices and integrated crop management is essential to enhance productivity and reduce production risks. Equally important is the development of a robust value chain encompassing efficient storage, processing and marketing systems. Strengthening farmer institutions, improving access to credit and promoting public-private partnerships can accelerate the adoption of innovative technologies and enhance market competitiveness. With coordinated efforts from research organizations, policymakers and extension agencies, potato cultivation can evolve into a high-value, employment-generating enterprise. Ultimately, it holds strong potential to contribute to nutritional security, income enhancement and sustainable agricultural development in Chhattisgarh

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