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Deep Learning-Based Crop Disease Detection Using Convolutional Neural Networks: A Multi-Crop Analysis

Susovan Dutta[1]
[1]*Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Narula Institute of Technology — duttasusovan4@gmail.com*

Abstract—Agriculture plays a fundamental role in sustaining human civilization, yet crop diseases remain one of the most significant threats to global food security. Early and accurate detection of plant diseases is critical to minimizing crop loss and improving agricultural productivity. Traditional methods of disease identification rely heavily on manual inspection by agricultural experts, which is time-consuming, costly, and impractical for large-scale farming operations. In recent years, deep learning techniques, particularly Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), have demonstrated remarkable potential in automating visual recognition tasks, including plant disease classification from leaf images. This paper presents a CNN-based approach for automated detection of diseases across multiple crop varieties including rice, wheat, tomato, and potato. The proposed model is trained and evaluated on the publicly available PlantVillage dataset, which contains thousands of labeled leaf images spanning healthy and diseased plant categories. Data augmentation techniques such as rotation, flipping, and zooming are applied to improve model generalization and reduce overfitting. The proposed CNN architecture is benchmarked against established models including VGG16, ResNet50, and MobileNetV2. Experimental results demonstrate that the proposed model achieves a classification accuracy of 97.4%, outperforming several baseline architectures while maintaining computational efficiency. The findings suggest that CNN-based automated disease detection systems hold significant promise for real-world deployment in precision agriculture and smart farming environments.

Keywords—Crop Disease Detection, Convolutional Neural Network, Deep Learning, Transfer Learning, PlantVillage Dataset, Smart Agriculture

I. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is the backbone of economies across the developing world, providing livelihoods to billions of people and ensuring food security for growing populations. India alone employs more than 50% of its workforce in agriculture, making crop health a matter of national importance. However, plant diseases cause an estimated 20–40% loss in global crop production annually, posing a severe threat to food supply chains and farmer incomes.

Conventional disease diagnosis depends on visual inspection by trained agronomists or farmers, a process that is inherently subjective, slow, and difficult to scale across vast agricultural lands. With the rapid proliferation of smartphones and affordable cameras in rural areas, image-based automated disease detection has emerged as a viable and practical solution.

Deep learning, particularly Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), has revolutionized image classification tasks across numerous domains. CNNs are capable of learning hierarchical visual features such as color variations, lesion shapes, and texture patterns directly from raw images without requiring manual feature engineering. This capability makes them well-suited for detecting subtle visual symptoms of crop diseases from leaf photographs.

This paper proposes a CNN-based framework for detecting diseases across multiple crop types including rice, wheat, tomato, and potato. The objectives of this work are: (i) to develop an accurate multi-crop disease classification model, (ii) to evaluate its performance against established baseline architectures, and (iii) to demonstrate its potential for real-world deployment in smart farming environments.

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II. RELATED WORK

Agriculture is the backbone of economies across the developing world, providing livelihoods to billions of people and ensuring food security for growing populations. India alone employs more than 50% of its workforce in agriculture, making crop health a matter of national importance. However, plant diseases cause an estimated 20–40% loss in global crop production annually, posing a severe threat to food supply chains and farmer incomes.

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III. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

The proposed methodology follows a structured pipeline consisting of five key stages: dataset preparation, data preprocessing, CNN model design, training, and performance evaluation.

3.1 Dataset The PlantVillage dataset, a publicly available benchmark repository, is used in this study. It contains over 54,000 labeled leaf images covering 38 disease classes across 14 crop species. For this study, four crop categories are selected — rice, wheat, tomato, and potato — encompassing both healthy and diseased samples. The dataset is divided into 80% training and 20% validation subsets.

3.2 Data Preprocessing All input images are resized to a uniform resolution of 224×224 pixels to ensure compatibility with the CNN architecture. Pixel values are normalized to the range [0, 1] to stabilize gradient updates during training. To enhance model generalization and reduce overfitting, data augmentation techniques are applied, including random horizontal and vertical flipping, rotation up to 30 degrees, zoom variations, and brightness adjustments.

3.3 CNN Architecture The proposed model consists of a series of convolutional layers for feature extraction, followed by max-pooling layers for spatial dimensionality reduction. Batch normalization is applied after each convolutional block to accelerate training and improve stability. Dropout layers with a rate of 0.5 are incorporated to prevent overfitting. The final classification head consists of fully connected dense layers with ReLU activation, followed by a softmax output layer corresponding to the number of disease classes.

3.4 Training Configuration The model is trained using the Adam optimizer with an initial learning rate of 0.001. Categorical cross-entropy is used as the loss function. Training is conducted over 30 epochs with a batch size of 32. A learning rate scheduler reduces the learning rate upon plateau to further improve convergence.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The proposed methodology follows a structured pipeline consisting of five key stages: dataset preparation, data preprocessing, CNN model design, training, and performance evaluation.

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V. CONCLUSION

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