Krishi Netra
ISSN : 3048-5207

The Role of Crop Modeling in Agricultural Sustainability

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Manuscript No: KN-V2-11/006

Abstract

Crop modeling is a crucial field that integrates agriculture, meteorology, and computer science to simulate and predict crop growth, development, and yield under varying environmental conditions. These models are valuable tools for farmers, researchers, and policymakers, aiding in informed decision-making and sustainable agricultural practices. Crop modeling is essential for managing crops in harsh conditions, optimizing crop system management, evaluating meteorological risks, making investment decisions, conserving resources, and determining optimal planting dates. Various types of models include,statistical & empirical models, mechanistic models, static and dynamic models, deterministic models, stochastic models, and simulation models, each having specific purposes in crop modeling. The input data required by crop models include site data, weather data, soil data, and crop management data, which are necessary for model development. The steps involved in model development include defining goals, defining the system and its boundaries, quantifying relationships, calibration, validation, and sensitivity analysis. A simple illustration of a crop soil water model demonstrates the modular format used in model construction, with different components like initialization, rate calculation, integration, output, and closing sections.

Crop modeling has evolved over the years, with various crop models being developed for different crops such as soybean, cotton, wheat, maize, rice, corn, sugarcane, kenaf, and more. These models help optimize crop management, analyze yield gaps, forecast yields, assess climate change impacts, and develop adaptation strategies. Despite its advantages, crop modeling faces challenges such as improper natural process projections, climate variability forecasts, model misuse, and data quality limitations. However, the future of crop modeling looks promising with advancements in data science, digital technologies, big data, AI, precision agriculture, and climate adaptation, which will revolutionize agricultural forecasting and decision-making processes.

Keywords: Crop modeling, Simulation, Decision-making, models, precision farming, Input data

Introduction:

Crop modeling is a dynamic field at the intersection of agriculture, meteorology, and computer science, aiming to simulate and predict the growth, development, and yield of crops under various environmental conditions. By integrating biological processes, such as photosynthesis and nutrient uptake, with meteorological data and agronomic practices, crop models offer valuable insights into crop management strategies, climate change impacts, and food security. These models serve as powerful tools for farmers, researchers, and policymakers, facilitating informed decision-making and sustainable agricultural practices. Models are the set of mathematical equation describing the behaviour of the system. Crop modeling is the use of equations or sets of equations to represent the behaviour of a system. In effect crop models are computer programmes that mimic the growth

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and development of crops (USDA, 2007).Simulation is the art of building mathematical models and study their properties in reference to those of the system.

Why we need Crop Modeling?

Crop modeling is important for various reasons, especially in the context of modern agriculture, which faces issues such as low soil quality, unpredictable weather patterns, and the need for sustainable resource management:

1. Managing crops in harsh conditions: Farmers can make well-informed decisions about which crops to plant and how best to manage them by using crop modeling, which aids in forecasting how various crops would perform in such circumstances.
2. Crop System Management: To maximize output while reducing resource inputs, ideal crop management techniques are essential. With crop modeling, farmers may test various management scenarios and see how they affect crop growth, production, and resource use. Using this information will aid in the development of sustainable crop production techniques.
3. Meteorological Risk Evaluation: To predict how crops will react to changing climatic circumstances, crop models include meteorological data. This aids farmers in identifying weather-related hazards and putting plans in place to lessen their influence on crop output.
4. Investment Decisions: Crop modeling gives information about the probable return on investment under various situations. Farmers can utilize this information to better allocate resources, reduce production costs, and increase profits.
5. Resource Conservation: To be sustainable, agriculture must use resources like water, soil nutrients, and energy efficiently. Crop models help farmers optimize resource use by finding the best crop kinds, planting dates, and cultivation procedures for a specific area. This helps to conserve natural resources while also reducing environmental effect.
6. Optimal Planting Date: Crop models help estimate the best planting date by taking into account soil temperature, moisture availability, and forecasted weather conditions. Farmers can now time their planting activities to coincide with the best crop establishment circumstances.

Different Types of models used:

1. Statistical & Empirical models: These models are direct descriptions of observed data, generally expressed as regression equations. These models give no information on the mechanisms that give rise to the response.Eg: Step down regressions, correlation, etc.
2. Mechanistic Models: These attempt to use fundamental mechanisms of plant and soil processes to simulate specific outcomes. The models are based on physical selection. Eg. photosynthesis based model.
3. Static and dynamic models: Static model does not contain time as a variable, whereas dynamic models contain time as a variable and expressed as differential equations
4. Deterministic Models: The models estimate the exactly same value of the yield of dependent variable. They also have defined coefficients. Eg: NPK doses area appliedand definite yields are given out.
5. Stochastic Models: The models are based on the probability of occurrence of some event or external variable. The models define yield or state of dependent variable at a given rate.
6. Simulation models:These are real-world representations. The models predict agricultural productivity

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depending on weather and soil conditions. They use differential equations to compute rates and variables.

Input data that crop models require:

Site data	Weather	Soil	Crop	Management
Country, altitude, latitude and longitude	Maximum temperature, minimum temperature, sunshine hours, rainfall, evaporation and wind speed	Type of soil, soil texture, soil structure, bulk density, soil moisture, soil pH and EC, soil N, P2O5, K2O and soil infiltration rate	Name of the crop, date of sowing, date of harvesting, rooting depth, *Kc* value, critical depletion and leaf area index	Applied fertilizer dose, quantity and method of irrigation water and seed rate

Table 2 : Input data that crop models require

Steps involved in model development:

- Define goals: Agricultural system.
- Define the system and its boundaries: Choose the variables.

1) State variablesincludemeasurable factors like soil moisture content, crop output, etc.

2) Rate variables indicate the rate at which certain system processes take place, e.g. rate of photosynthesis and transpiration.

3) Auxiliary variablesmay include intermediary molecules produced during the life cycle of a plant, e.g.,water stress, etc.

- Quantify relationships (evaluation).
- Calibration: Before using a model, it is essential to calibrate it. Calibration is the process of evaluating and fine-tuning a model for collection of data using a specified set of inputs.
- Validation: Using local field data different from calibration data, the accuracy of the model is tested.
- Sensitivity analysis: The model is then examined with various alterations to the input elements to determine its response

An illustration of Crop- Soil Water Model

A simple model is presented to demonstrate an approach for moduler model construction (Hoogenboom et. al.). It consists of 4 parts which are, the main program , plant growth module , soil water balance module, weather input routine. The modular format used in the simple CROP model, where each module has the components given as under:

- Initialization section determines input data and initialize variables and is called once per simulation.
- Rate Calculationssection computes process rates and rates of change of state variables based on conditions at the end of the previous day of simulation. This routine is called once per time step of simulation.
- Integrationsection updates state variables using the rates previously calculated.
- Output section is called once per day to generate daily output reports.
- Close section is called once at the end of simulation to close output files and generate summary reports

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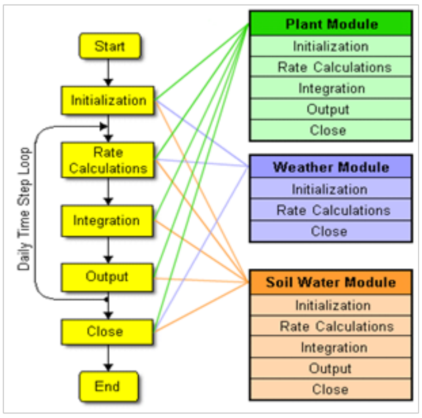

Fig 1: The modular format used in the simple CROP model
(Source:https://dssat.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/figure1.gif)

Crop models as per the recent literatures:

Crop Model	Description	References
REALSOY	Soybean	*Meyer and Curry* 1986
IRRIGATE	Irrigationscheduling model	*Tscheschke et al.,*1978
GOSSYM-COMAX	Cotton	*McKinion et al.,*1996
CropSyst	Wheat & other crops	*Stockle et al.,*1994
WOFOST	Wheat &Maize, Water and nutrient	*Supit et al.,*1997
SUCROS	Crop models	*Spitters et al.,*1988
ORYZA	Rice, water	*Kropff et al.,*1994
SIMRIW	Rice, water	*Horie.,*1987
SIMCOY	Corn	*Place and Brown.,*1987
CERES-Rice	Rice, water	*Alocilja and Richie.,*1998
CERES	Series of crop simulation models	*Jones et al.,*1984
QCAN	Sugarcane, potential conditions	*Liu and Kingston.,*1995
CANEGRO	Sugarcane, potential & water stress conds	*Inman-Bamber.,*1995
NTKenaf	Kenaf, potential growth, water stress	*Carberry and Muchow.,*1992
APSIM-Sugarcane	Sugarcane, potential growth, water and nitrogen stress	*Keating et al.,*1999

Table 2: Crop models, their descriptions, and references.

Advantages of Crop Modeling

1. **Optimizing Crop Management:**

Crop models help identify the best cultural techniques for maximum yield.

(a) Seed Rate: By using these models, one may identify the optimal rate of seeding.

(b)Irrigation: They mimic the ideal timing and volume of irrigation.

(c) Fertilizer: Crop models assist in figuring out when and how much fertilizer to apply.

2. Yield Gap Analysis: Using crop models, prospective yields can be simulated and yield gaps between potential and actual yields can be found.

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3. Forecasting and Prediction of Yield.
4. Assessment of Climate Change.
5. Applying Applied Problem Solving to Agriculture.
6. Resource Conservation: Crop models are instruments for agricultural resource conservation.
7. Studies on Precision Farming: These are helpful for research on precision farming.
8. Accurate Forecasting of Crop Growth and Yield Effects of Climate Change.
9. Adaptation Strategies: Using crop models helps in the development of mitigation plans for the negative impacts of climate change.

Challenges in Crop Modeling:

1. Improper Natural Process Projections.
2. Impractical Forecasts of Changes in Climate Variability.
3. Model Misuse.
4. Unsuitable Results for Plots with Heterogeneity.
5. Soil Heterogeneity at Small Distances by Nature.
6. Input Data Quality Limits Model Performance.
7. Sampling mistakes that affect the accuracy of the data.
8. Simple Methods for Validating Models.
9. Problems with Data Precision from Adjacent Sites.
10. Complexity Blocking the Development of the Ideal Crop Model

Future of Crop Modeling;

As data science and digital technologies continue to evolve, crop modeling will see exciting advancements. Integrating big data and AI will improve model accuracy, while precision agriculture and climate adaptation will enable hyper-local, responsive simulations. Automated, globally collaborative models will transform agricultural forecasting and decision-making.

Conclusion

In conclusion, crop modeling is an important field that combines a number of disciplines to simulate and forecast crop behavior in a range of environmental circumstances. These models facilitate informed decision-making and promote sustainable agricultural practices, making them essential tools for farmers, academics, and policymakers. With developments in data science, artificial intelligence, and precision agriculture, crop modeling looks to have a bright future despite obstacles including projections of climatic variability and data shortages. With climate change and population growth in mind, these advances have the potential to completely transform agricultural forecasting and decision-making processes, assuring food security and sustainability.

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ISSN : 3048-5207

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