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"Energy Optimization In Micro-Electron-Mechanical Systems (MEMS)Technology - Integrated Wireless Sensor Networks For Agriculture"

B. SWAPNA
Assistant Professor,Vaagdevi Degree and PG College(Autonomous),Hanamkonda,Telangana-506001

P.RAMA DEVI
Assistant Professor,Vaagdevi Degree and PG College,(Autonomous),Hanamkonda,Telangana-506001

ABSTRACT:
The emergence of Wireless Sensor Networks (WSNs) has opened new avenues for research in the agricultural and farming sectors. In recent years, WSNs have found extensive use in diverse agricultural applications. This paper provides a comprehensive review of the potential applications of WSNs, alongside the challenges and issues associated with their deployment for enhanced farming practices. To address specific needs, the study examines the devices, sensors, and communication technologies integral to WSNs in agricultural contexts. Various case studies are presented to explore existing solutions documented in the literature, categorized based on design and implementation parameters. The paper also surveys WSN deployments for farming applications within both Indian and global contexts, highlighting the advantages and limitations of these solutions. Furthermore, it identifies areas for improvement and proposes future research directions, leveraging advanced technologies to address prevailing challenges.

Keywords: Wireless Sensor Networks (WSNs),Agricultural technology,WSN deployment,Devices and sensors, Smart farming, Precision agriculture.

I. INTRODUCTION

Modern agriculture faces the challenge of meeting the growing demand for food production to sustain the ever-increasing global population. To address this, advanced technologies and innovative solutions are being implemented to optimize data collection and processing, thereby boosting productivity. Additionally, the pressing issues of climate change and water scarcity necessitate the adoption of more efficient and sustainable practices in modern farming. Automation and intelligent decision-making have become crucial in achieving these goals. Consequently, technologies such as ubiquitous computing, wireless ad-hoc and sensor networks, Radio Frequency Identification (RFID), cloud computing, the Internet of Things (IoT), satellite monitoring, remote sensing, and context-aware computing are gaining widespread popularity in this field.

A. MOTIVATION

Among the various emerging technologies, the agricultural sector has extensively explored the use of Wireless Sensor Networks (WSNs) to enhance traditional farming methods. The advent of Micro-Electro-Mechanical Systems (MEMS) technology has facilitated the development of compact and cost-effective sensors. With their ubiquitous functionality, self-organizing small nodes, scalability, and affordability, WSNs have proven to be a promising tool for advancing agricultural automation. Applications such as precision agriculture, automated irrigation scheduling, plant growth optimization, farmland monitoring, greenhouse gas tracking, production process management, and crop security exemplify their potential.

However, WSNs face certain limitations, including low battery life, restricted computational capacity, and limited memory in sensor nodes. These constraints present significant challenges in designing effective WSN applications for agriculture. For instance, WSNs are widely used to monitor environmental conditions and soil nutrient levels, enabling predictions about crop health and production quality over time. Similarly, irrigation scheduling can be optimized using WSNs by monitoring soil moisture and weather conditions.

The scalability of WSNs allows for the enhancement of existing applications by simply adding more sensor nodes to monitor additional parameters. Nonetheless, issues such as determining optimal deployment strategies, defining measurement intervals, and developing energy-efficient medium access and routing protocols need to be addressed. Sparse node deployment with extended data collection intervals may prolong network lifespan, but challenges arise from deployment region characteristics. For example, physical obstructions in the field can cause signal attenuation, disrupting inter-node communication.

In the Indian context, WSN-based farming solutions must be extremely cost-effective to remain accessible to end-users. With the growing population, the demand for food grains is also escalating. Recent reports highlight concerns about insufficient growth in food grain production to meet this increasing demand.

B. CONTRIBUTIONS

In this paper, we explore the different types of Wireless Sensor Networks (WSNs) and their potential in advancing various agricultural applications. We emphasize key farming and agricultural applications and examine how WSNs can enhance performance and productivity. Additionally, we categorize the network architecture, node architecture, and communication technology standards used in these applications. The paper also presents an overview of real-world wireless sensor nodes and various sensors, including those for soil, environmental conditions, pH, and plant health. In Section V, we review existing WSN deployments both globally and in India. The main contributions of this paper are as follows:

- We examine the current state-of-the-art in WSNs and their relevance to agricultural and farming applications.
- Existing WSNs are analyzed in terms of communication and networking technologies, standards, and hardware.
- We assess the prospects and challenges of current agricultural applications through detailed case studies, covering both global and Indian contexts.
- Finally, we discuss future applications, identifying areas for improvement in existing scenarios.

II. WIRELESS SENSOR NETWORK AND IT'S POTENTIAL AGRICULTURAL

A. TERRESTRIAL WIRELESS SENSOR NETWORK

WSNs are a network of battery-powered sensors inter-connected through wireless medium and are typically deployed to serve a specific application purpose. In TWSNs, the nodes are deployed above the ground surface. The advancements in MEMS technology has enabled the creation of smart, small sized, although low cost sensors. These powerful sensors empower a sensor node or mote to accurately collect the surrounding data.

Based on the sensed information, these nodes then network among themselves to perform the application requirements. For example, consider a precision agriculture environment where WSNs are deployed throughout the field to automate the irrigation system. All these sensors determine the moisture content of the soil, and further, collaboratively decide the time and duration of irrigation scheduling on that field. Then, using the same network, the decision is conveyed to the sensor node attached to a water pump. Gutierrez ´ et al. proposed one such automated irrigation system using a WSN and GPRS module.

Figure 1 depicts a typical wireless sensor network deployed on field for agricultural applications. The field consists of sensor nodes powered with application specific on-board sensors. The nodes in the on-field sensor network communicate among themselves using radio-frequency (RF) links of industrial, scientific and medical (ISM) radio bands (such as 902-928 MHz and 2.4-2.5 GHz).

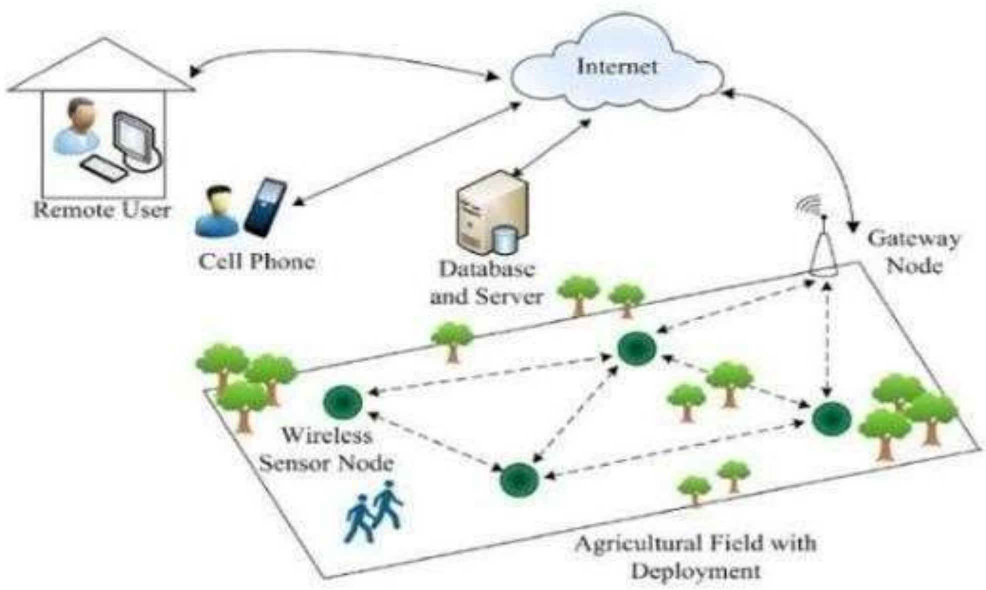

Fig. 1: A typical wireless sensor network deployed for agricultural application

Typically, a gateway node is also deployed along with the sensor nodes to enable a connection between the sensor network and the outer world. Thus, the gateway node is powered with both RF and Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) or GPRS. A remote user can monitor the state of the field, and control the on-field sensors and actuator devices. For example, a user can switch on/off a pump/valve when the water level applied to the field reaches some predefined threshold value. Users carrying mobile phone can also remotely monitor and control the on-field sensors.The mobile user is connected via GPRS or even through Short Message Service (SMS). Periodic information update from the sensors, and on-demand system control for both type of users can also be designed.

B. WIRELESS UNDERGROUND SENSOR NETWORKS

Another variation of Wireless Sensor Networks (WSNs) is the Wireless Underground Sensor Networks (WSNs), where wireless sensors are embedded within the soil. In this setup, higher frequencies experience significant attenuation, while lower frequencies are more capable of penetrating the soil. As a result, the communication range is limited, requiring a larger number of nodes to cover extensive areas. In contrast, wired sensor networks can extend coverage by using fewer sensors, but the sensors and wiring may be susceptible to damage from farming activities.

A typical agricultural application of underground sensor networks is depicted in Figure A. Unlike traditional WSN-based applications, where sensors are placed on the surface (as shown in Figure 1), the sensor nodes in WSNs are buried underground. A gateway node is also deployed to transmit data collected from the underground sensors to a surface sink placed above the ground. From there, the data can be sent over the Internet to remote databases and used for notifications to a user's mobile phone. However, due to the shorter communication range, a higher number of nodes need to be deployed in WSNs.

C. USEFULNESS OF WSNS

In the following, we highlight the salient features of WSNs that have enabled themselves as a potential tool for automation in the agricultural domain.

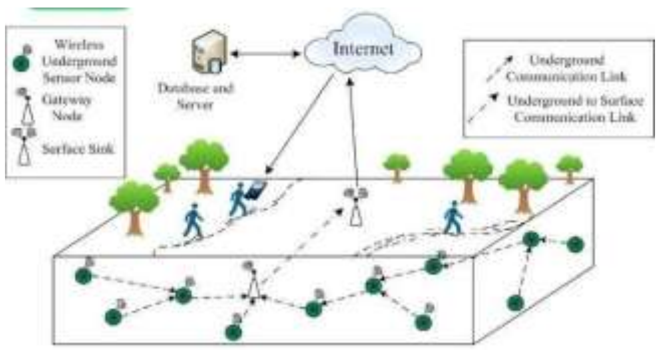

Fig. 2: typical wireless underground sensor network deployed for agricultural applications

Intelligent Decision-Making Capability: WSNs are inherently multi-hop, which improves energy efficiency over large areas, thereby extending the network's lifespan. This feature allows multiple sensor nodes to collaborate and collectively make decisions.

Dynamic Topology Configuration: To conserve battery power, sensor nodes remain in 'sleep mode' for most of the time. Through topology management techniques, these nodes can work together to make decisions. To maximize network longevity, the topology is structured so that the fewest nodes stay active.

Fault Tolerance: A common challenge in WSN deployment is the vulnerability of sensor nodes to faults. Unplanned node placement may lead to network partitioning, negatively affecting network performance. However, sensor nodes can 'self-organize' by dynamically adjusting the network topology to address such issues.

Context-Awareness: By sensing physical and environmental parameters, sensor nodes gain an understanding of their surroundings. As a result, the decisions they make are based on the contextual information they gather.

Scalability: WSN protocols are designed to be flexible, allowing them to function in networks of varying sizes and node counts. This scalability broadens the potential applications of WSNs.

Node Heterogeneity: While WSNs are often assumed to consist of homogeneous sensor devices, in real-world applications, nodes can vary in terms of processing power, memory, sensing capabilities, transceiver units, and movement abilities.

Tolerance to Communication Failures in Harsh Conditions: Due to their use in open agricultural environments, WSNs are exposed to harsh conditions that can affect communication. The WSN protocol stack includes mechanisms to mitigate the impact of these communication failures caused by environmental factors.

Autonomous Operating Mode: A key feature of WSNs is their ability to operate autonomously, adapting to changing conditions and ensuring continuous functionality without the need for manual intervention.

III. DESIGN OF A WIRELESS SENSOR NETWORK FOR AGRICULTURAL APPLICATIONS

A. NETWORK ARCHITECTURE FOR AGRICULTURE APPLICATIONS

This section discusses the network architecture used in various agricultural applications. The architectures are classified into different categories, with each suited for specific agricultural applications. Figure 3 illustrates the classification of these architectures based on various parameters.

The existing architectures are classified according to the movement of the networked devices and nodes as follows:

Stationary Architecture: In this architecture, sensor nodes are deployed at fixed locations and remain stationary throughout the application. Typical applications for stationary architectures include irrigation management systems, groundwater quality monitoring, and fertilizer usage control. In these applications, such as TWSNs, data logger (data collector) sensor nodes are placed in the field, while in WSNs, data collector nodes are embedded underground. Additionally, as shown in Figure 2, aggregator nodes can also be placed underground to collect data from the underground sensors and communicate with the external TWSNs.

Mobile Architecture: Mobile architectures involve devices that change their positions over time. An example of applications using this architecture includes autonomous networks of tractors and farmers carrying cell phones, which enable ubiquitous farming operations.

Hybrid Architecture: In hybrid architecture, both stationary and mobile nodes coexist. For instance, this architecture can be applied to farming applications that involve stationary field sensors, mobile farming equipment, cell phones with users, and moving livestock.

B. ARCHITECTURE OF SENSOR NODES

1. **Embedded Multi-Chip Sensor Nodes:** The components of a typical multi-chip sensor node are illustrated in Figure 5(a). Generally, a sensor node consists of an application-specific sensor array coupled with a transceiver unit for communication. A processor or micro controller serves as the "brain" of the node, and the sensor board may optionally include memory units to store data.

The architecture of sensor nodes can vary depending on the application requirements. For instance, to meet more demanding or complex processing needs, the processing power and on-board memory size are increased. Another significant technology is **System-in-Package (SiP)**, which involves combining multiple chips, including passive components (such as resistors and capacitors), into a single package with provisions for later attachment of external components. SiP technology reduces product costs while optimizing size and performance, making it ideal for agricultural applications. Agricultural systems based on SiP can be customized by attaching different sensors to the main package for various uses.

The following factors should be considered when selecting the components of a sensor node for agricultural applications:

Processor: The computational power of the sensor node depends on the choice of processor. Microcontrollers are preferred because they offer advantages such as low cost, flexibility in communication with other nodes, ease of programming, and low power consumption compared to traditional processors. Most microcontrollers operate on 3.5–5 V. Power consumption is a key factor in sensor node design, and microcontrollers are typically more energy-efficient than general-purpose processors.

Transceiver: Transmission and reception are major contributors to energy consumption in sensor nodes. In agricultural applications, network planners design deployment strategies to optimize power consumption of the sensor nodes.

Memory: Sensor nodes have two types of on-board memory—memory associated with the processor and external memory. Depending on the application, sensor nodes may need to store historical data for intelligent decision-making. Flash memory is often used for additional storage.

Power: Power is a critical factor in selecting sensor nodes, as their battery life is limited. In many agricultural applications, alternative energy sources, such as solar power, are used. However, solar power is only available during the day, and at night, nodes rely on battery power. Frequent battery changes increase maintenance costs, so energy-efficient algorithms are necessary to reduce energy consumption.

Cost: The total hardware cost is an important factor in selecting sensor nodes. Low-cost designs are preferred, especially for applications targeting low and middle-income countries (LMICs), where budget constraints are a significant concern.

2.*SYSTEM ON CHIP (SOC) SENSOR NODES:*

The system-on-chip (SoC) architecture, on the other hand, follows more application specific design targeting minimization of the power requirements and design cost. SoC provides an integration of multiple programmable processor cores, co-processors, hardware accelerators, memory units, input/output units, and custom blocks. Figure 5(b) shows the components of a typical SoC based sensor node. The envisioned applications for SoC is mainly in designing Network on Chips (NoCs) systems for multimedia and streaming applications which are computationally intensive.

Currently, in agricultural applications, the use of SoCs are very rare. However, the advent of SoC has a lot of potential for the agriculture and farming domain. Firstly, the use of So Cs based sensor nodes instead of current day embedded multichip sensor nodes will increase the computation power, and decrease the energy-consumption. Also, the size of the nodes will be less and thereby, portability of the overall system increases. Compared to multiple silicon dies in SiP, SoC is single die based, and thus, SoCs result in lesser size, but, higher cost.

IV. FUTURE WORK DIRECTIODIRECTION

A. Factors for Improvement

The following factors related to Wireless Sensor Networks (WSNs) require further attention for future advancements:

Cost: A cost-effective solution is essential to expand the reach and applicability of WSN-based systems.

Autonomous Operation: Future solutions should be designed for long-term autonomous operation without constant human intervention.

Intelligence: Future systems should incorporate inherent intelligence, enabling them to respond dynamically to challenges, such as energy conservation and real-time decision-making.

Portability: To enhance application flexibility, portability is crucial. Recent advancements in embedded systems, like System-in-Package (SiP) and System-on-Chip (SoC) technologies, can support this.

Low Maintenance: Designing systems that require minimal maintenance will help reduce long-term operational costs.

Energy Efficiency: To ensure long-lasting autonomous operation, solutions must be energy-efficient, incorporating intelligent algorithms to optimize power use.

Robust Architecture: A resilient and fault-tolerant architecture is necessary to guarantee continuous operation in emerging applications.

Ease of Operation: Since many end users are non-technical, applications must be simple and user-friendly.

Interoperability: Ensuring compatibility between different components and communication technologies will enhance the overall functionality of the system.

In addition to these global challenges, agricultural WSN systems in India face unique obstacles, including:

Cost: The high cost of sensors and related systems is a major barrier to widespread adoption in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

Variable Climate & Soil: Designing WSN-based agricultural systems for India is challenging due to the diverse climate and soil types across the country. The system's parameters must be adaptable to function effectively in various locations.

Segmented Land Structure: Unlike the USA, India's fragmented farming land presents a specific challenge that requires tailored deployment architectures for WSN-based agricultural applications, such as irrigation management.

V. RESULT

The integration of Wireless Sensor Networks (WSNs) is expected to significantly enhance the agricultural and farming sectors by introducing innovative solutions. This survey provides an extensive review of the current state of WSN deployments in advanced agricultural applications. Initially, we introduced the different types of WSNs—terrestrial WSNs and underground WSNs. We then explored various agricultural applications of WSNs and their potential to address farming challenges. The following sections covered the network and node architectures of WSNs, their associated factors, and classifications based on different applications. We also reviewed the available wireless sensor nodes and the communication techniques employed by these nodes. Through case studies, we examined existing WSN deployments for agricultural applications, both globally and in India. Lastly, we discussed the prospects, challenges, and potential improvements for these applications, offering directions for future research.

The survey of current research leads to several key conclusions. The state-of-the-art solutions primarily focus on WSN-based applications such as irrigation management, crop disease prediction, and vineyard precision farming. There is a clear demand for simplified, low-cost, and scalable systems, particularly for low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). At the same time, advancements in modern technologies present opportunities to innovate more efficient solutions. Specifically, there is a need for low-cost systems featuring autonomous operation and low maintenance. In summary, successful implementation of these applications requires thorough pre-planning, particularly to address challenges in both global and LMIC contexts.

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