

IMPROVING PESTICIDE APPLICATION USING MODEL PREDICTIVE
CONTROL WITH ACTIVE DEMAND MANAGEMENT FOR PRECISION
AGRICULTURE

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IMPROVING PESTICIDE APPLICATION USING MODEL PREDICTIVE
CONTROL WITH ACTIVE DEMAND MANAGEMENT FOR PRECISION
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ABSTRACT

The use of robotics in precision agriculture has significantly improved productivity over the years by automating activities such as spraying, harvesting, and sowing. Without robots, the typical way of applying a fixed amount of pesticide over a specific season or time not only results in economic loss via wasted pesticide but also leads to sub-optimal results in terms of pest control leading to low yield and loss of capital in the agricultural industry. Existing techniques for automating pesticide application only focus on the problem of best route selection for the pesticide spraying robots given a predetermined demand for pest without due consideration to the dynamic and complex nature of the interaction between pests and host plants. Moreover, these techniques either consider simplistic scenarios with only one robot or even if they consider a fleet of vehicles, the proposed solution results in poor coordination among the robots resulting in slow field coverage times as well as higher charge or fuel consumption. To solve these issues, this research introduces the concept of active demand management to the agricultural vehicle routing problem (VRP) along with an efficient solution for vehicle routing using model predictive control (MPC). Demand management is introduced and modelled using the mass-spring damper system along with an estimate of the risk of a pest infestation to obtain a state-space model. Analogous to an electromechanical system, the notion of damping is related to pesticide demand, with an objective to reduce demand. The resulting state-space model is then utilized to solve the agricultural VRP for two cases, a single vehicle and a fleet of vehicles. For the single vehicle case, a discrete-time MPC plant model is used to optimize the delivery of pesticide such that the demand is minimized or in other words to reduce the risk of pests while using a greedy algorithm to efficiently route the vehicle to a specific area in an agricultural field. To solve the problem of pesticide application using a fleet of vehicles, an MPC algorithm is converted into a mixed integer linear programming (MILP) optimization problem. The optimization problem in addition considers the charging and capacity constraints for a set of autonomous vehicles (AV) also considers the evolution of charge and pesticide amount carried by the AVs. This results in an overall solution to autonomous mobility on demand in the agricultural industry. Extensive MATLAB/Simulink simulations show that the proposed technique not only results in significant reduction of up to 80% in terms of field coverage time but also results in a reduction of up to 93% in terms of charge consumption as compared to state of the art existing techniques. The percentage improvement achieved demonstrates the advantage of using MPC.

ABSTRAK

Penggunaan robotik dalam pertanian teliti telah menambah baik pengeluaran dengan automasi penyemburan, penuaian dan penyemaian. Tanpa robot, kaedah menggunakan jumlah racun perosak yang tetap pada musim dan masa yang tertentu bukan sahaja merugikan ekonomi dengan pembaziran racun perosak tetapi, menyebabkan keluaran yang tidak optimum dari segi kawalan perosak yang menjurus kepada pengurangan hasil dan kerugian modal dalam industri pertanian. Teknik-teknik yang sedia ada bagi pengautomatan aplikasi penyemburan racun perosak hanya mencari laluan yang terbaik kepada robot penyembur racun perosak dengan memberikan permintaan yang telah ditentukan terlebih dahulu terhadap perosak, tanpa mengambil kira interaksi antara perosak dan tumbuhan yang dinamik dan kompleks. Teknik-teknik ini hanya mengambil kira senario yang mudah dengan hanya menggunakan sebuah robot atau sekiranya sekumpulan kenderaan diambil kira, penggunaan bahan api yang tinggi. Untuk menyelesaikan isu ini, penyelidikan ini memperkenalkan konsep pengurusan permintaan aktif kepada masalah laluan kenderaan pertanian (VRP) yang efisien untuk laluan kenderaan menggunakan kawalan ramalan model (MPC). Pengurusan permintaan telah diperkenalkan dan dimodelkan menggunakan sistem spring-jisim peredam bersama anggaran risiko serangan makhluk perosak untuk menghasilkan model keadaan-ruang. Serupa dengan sistem elektromekanikal, peredam merujuk kepada permintaan racun perosak dengan objektif untuk mengurangkan permintaan. Model keadaanruang akan digunakan untuk menyelesaikan masalah VRP dalam dua kes, iaitu untuk sebuah kenderaan dan sekumpulan kenderaan. Bagi kes sebuah kenderaan, model MPC masa-diskrit telah digunakan untuk mengoptimumkan penghantaran racun perosak dengan meminimumkan permintaan, dengan erti kata lain mengurangkan risiko makhluk perosak dan algoritma tamak digunakan untuk menghalakan kenderaan ke sesuatu kawasan tertentu dalam kawasan ladang. Untuk menyelesaikan masalah penyemburan racun serangga bagi sekumpulan kenderaan, algoritma MPC telah diubah kepada masalah pengoptimuman pengaturcaraan nombor bulat linear campuran (MILP). Masalah pengoptimuman mengambil kira kekangan pengecasan dan kapasiti bagi sekumpulan kenderaan autonomi (AV) yang juga mengambil kira evolusi pengecasan dan jumlah racun serangga yang dibawa oleh AV. Hal ini menghasilkan penyelesaian yang menyeluruh kepada pergerakan autonomi dalam permintaan industri pertanian. Simulasi meluas menggunakan MATLAB/Simulink telah menunjukkan bahawa teknik yang dicadangkan bukan sahaja menghasilkan pengurangan masa liputan yang signifikan sehingga 80%, malah juga mengurangkan jumlah pengecasan sehingga 93% berbanding dengan teknik-teknik yang sedia ada. Peratus peningkatan yang dicapai menunjukkan kelebihan menggunakan MPC.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACO	-	Ant Colony Optimisation
AFO	-	Agricultural field Operation
ASM	-	Active set method
ANN	-	Artificial Neural Network
AV	-	Autonomous Vehicle
CeNMPC	-	Centralized Non-linear Model Predictive Control
CPFR	-	Collaborative Planning Forecasting
CPU	-	Central Processing Unit
CVRP	-	Constrained Vehicle Routing Problem
DC-VRR	-	Support Vector Machine
DeMPC	-	Decentralized Model predictive control
DLQR	-	Discrete-time Linear Quadratic Regulator
DM	-	Demand Management
DMPC	-	Distributed model predictive control
DcMPC	-	Discrete-time Model Predictive Control
FAO	-	Food and Agricultural Organisation
FL	-	Fuzzy logic
FLMPC	-	Feedback Linearization Model Predictive Control
GA	-	Genetic algorithm
GADPP	-	Genetic Algorithm with Dynamic Programming Procedure
GLNPSO	-	Global, local, and near neighbour particle swarm optimization
HDMPC	-	Hierarchical Distribution Model Predictive Control
IPM	-	Interior Point method
LMPC	-	Linear Model Predictive Control

RHC	-	Receding Horizon Control
RMPC	-	Robust model predictive control
RnPC	-	Random Model Predictive Control
SA	-	Simulated Annealing
ScMPC	-	Scenario Model Predictive Control
SHC	-	Shrinking Horizon Control
ScMPC	-	Stochastic model predictive control
SPEA-II	-	Strength Pareto Evolutionary Algorithm
TS	-	Tabu Search
UAV	-	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UTM	-	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
VRP	-	Vehicle Routing Problem
VRPB	-	Vehicle Routing Problem with Backhauls
VRPBTW	-	Vehicle Routing Problem with Backhauls and Time Windows
VRPPD	-	Vehicle Routing Problem with Pickup and Delivery Service
VRPPDBTW	-	Vehicle Routing Problem with Pickup and Delivery Service with backhauls and time window
VRPTW	-	Vehicle Routing Problem with Time Windows

LIST OF SYMBOLS

α	-	Embedding parameter
γ	-	damping coefficient
ϑ	-	vector form of predicted output variable
θ	-	State input variable
ζ	-	Predicted output variable
β	-	Embedding parameter
ϕ	-	anomaly
ω	-	disturbance in the demand of pesticide
\mathcal{I}	-	Actual inviolability
$\hat{\mathcal{I}}$	-	Forecasted inviolability
v^k	-	Vehicle k
τ^k	-	Time for an Av to reach its Destination
τ_{ij}^k	-	Time for an Av k to move from area i to area j
$v_{ij}^k :$	-	Vehicle k moving from area i to area j
F_s	-	Set-point signal
N	-	Horizon
U	-	Horizon
N_c	-	Control horizon
N_p	-	Prediction horizon
y	-	Initial displacement
R	-	Damping factor
$f(t)$	-	input force
$y(t)$	-	Damping Coefficient pesticide level
k_I	-	String constant for Unsprung masses
k_f	-	String constant for sprung masses

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Pests are creatures that cause damage to crops, livestock and forestry, and nuisance to people in farms and homes. Pests include insects, mites, pathogens, weeds, nematodes, and arthropods. Agricultural and horticultural crops are attacked by a variety of pest species. The damage inflicted by pests can be direct crop injury as well as indirect fungal, bacterial or viral infections. With the ever increasing demand for more production, pests are considered a major constraint in crop productivity and profitability around the world. This may lead to an estimated 45 % of pre- and post-harvest losses [2] thereby necessitating the need to improve yield and provide an optimal environment for plant growth. Pesticide application is, therefore, critical to overcome the pest problems. Pesticide, however, can be toxic and hazardous for the environment as well as humans and animals. The traditional approach of applying a fixed amount of pesticide over a specific time leads to problems like wastage of capital, pest resistance and sub-optimal pest management as pests and diseases typically have an uneven spatial and temporal distribution [3,4]. Different species of pests react differently to variations in temperature and rainfall. The particular conditions with a significant impact on pests and crops include extreme temperatures, precipitation level variation and extreme flooding[5]. Thus, the spatiotemporal variability in weather conditions resulting from short- and long-term climate variability could affect water availability, soil conditions, crop yield, and crop vulnerability to pest and pathogen infestations.

The favourable weather conditions that influence pest infestations on farm lands include temperature, wind, rainfall, and relative humidity [6]. Seasonal variability in weather patterns with preceding or dominant impact climate conditions provide not only a favourable environment for the production and distribution of insect species, but also affects crop growth and development, and ultimately the final yield.

The Existing efforts on pest prediction successfully forecast pest infestation according to weather conditions [7,8]. However, these efforts have only focused on the vehicle routing problem (VRP) without considering the risk of pests by assuming- a pre-determined demand for pesticide application based on the actual pest presence in the agricultural fields. This assumption not only defeats the purpose of precision agriculture but also results in sub-optimal controllers. Thus, it is imperative to apply the optimal amount of pesticide at an optimal time and place. Most of the aforementioned efforts consider the pesticide management problem as VRP, such as optimizing the path taken by vehicles to apply pesticide to an agricultural field given a pre-determined mapping of pests. Moreover, these techniques are based on complex optimization algorithms such as tabu search algorithm [9,10], fluid search optimization [11], simulated annealing [12], and evolutionary algorithms [13,14]. The objective of optimal pesticide application is not only to control but also to predict and mitigate the onset of a pest infection given the basic risk factors such as susceptibility of host plants, a virulent pathogen or pest and favourable weather conditions. The aforementioned studies [7,8] mainly forecast the onset of pests in such a way that optimal and timely pesticide application can be used not only to reduce the damage to plants but also to reduce the amount of pesticide used leading to an overall environmentally friendly and efficient approach. Exploiting the insights gained from these recent studies on predicting a pest infestation based on various risk factors, this research proposes a dynamic model to reduce the risk of pests even before the infestation starts. In particular, an active suspension system is proposed which takes as input not only the pre-determined demand of pests (such as the actual pest situation) but also the risk of a pest infestation at a specific instant of time to optimize the amount of pesticide to be sprayed at a specific location. The existing techniques are only considered the actual pest infestation to determine the optimal amount of pesticide to be sprayed. However, this approach does not reduce the risk of pests but can only control a pest infestation once it occurs.

The interactions between pests and a host plant are considered to be a complex and dynamic system with existing works also showing a significant correlation of weather with the onset of pests [6,15]. Therefore, the pest forecasting problem gets more complex with the addition of further uncertainty in the form of weather data. The problem of pest management, therefore, requires an interdisciplinary approach

that spans prediction, dynamics, optimization and control theory. The objective of optimal pesticide application is to predict and mitigate the onset of a pest infestation given the basic risk factors such as susceptibility of host plants, a virulent pathogen or pest and favourable weather conditions such as temperature, wind, rainfall, and relative humidity [6]. Seasonal variability in weather patterns with preceding or dominant impact climate conditions provides not only a favourable environment for the production and distribution of insect species, but also affects crop growth and development, and ultimately the final yield. Recent efforts [7, 8] have analyzed the weather forecast to predict the risk of pests and thus, have applied pesticide in advance to avoid large scale damage to the valuable crops. In an effort to proffer a different approach to the solution of the pest management problems identified above, this work focuses on the problem of efficient precision pesticide application using predictive control based on dynamic demand management (DM).

The agricultural field is divided into multiple areas and then, using an active mass-spring suspension system, a dynamic model is created to demand the management of pesticide by considering the pest risk. This demand management model is then, used in conjunction with discrete-time model predictive control (DMPC) to determine the optimal time, place, and amount of pesticide to be used. On the other hand, in order to optimize the path taken by the vehicle/robot to apply pesticide in each sampling instant of DMPC, two different techniques were considered. Firstly, a greedy algorithm is proposed for a single vehicle to efficiently solve the vehicle routing problem and secondly, a DMPC based algorithm is proposed for a fleet of autonomous vehicles/robots to perform the task. However, the agricultural field is assumed to be a collection of different areas where, the demand for each area is generated using a mass-spring damper system. The demand for each area is thereby considered in each time step of a model predictive control (MPC) based algorithm to optimize the assignment of AVs in different areas as well as routing them. Thus, in each time interval, based on the predicted future states of the model, the vehicle routing is controlled so as to minimize the charge consumed and field coverage time after a certain time period.

1.2 Problem Statement

In most of the farming practices, pesticides are usually applied uniformly throughout the fields to control the spread of diseases despite the fact that several pests and diseases exhibit an uneven spatial distribution, especially during the early stages of development. Thus, it is important to apply an optimal amount of pesticide at an optimal time and place. The existing works suffer from one or more of the following problems. Firstly, pesticide application problems are formulated as a vehicle routing problem with fixed and pre-determined demand. This leads to static models which do not consider the dynamics of pest's infestation [7, 8, 15]. Secondly, most existing techniques either consider a simple model consisting of a single vehicle or a fixed layout for the agricultural field with multiple vehicles [9, 10]. This approach compromises the generality of the proposed techniques and results in limited applicability. Thirdly, as most of the existing techniques are based on optimization technique which only look at one time interval, the resulting assignment and scheduling of a fleet of vehicles to multiple areas result in poor coordination among the vehicles. This leads to inefficient fuel/charge consumption as well as longer field coverage time. Finally, most of the existing techniques use complex meta-heuristic-based optimization algorithms. This results in higher computational complexity for the proposed techniques and eventually, these techniques are not feasible for real-time control of autonomous vehicles.

In view of the aforementioned problems, this study focuses on solving the above issues by developing an efficient solution for pesticide management which considers dynamic pesticide demand using real-time risk of pests. Moreover, the proposed technique uses predictive control to improve coordination among a fleet of vehicles over an optimization window which goes beyond the current time interval by predicting the state for several future time intervals. This results in a larger covered area of the agricultural field.

1.3 Objectives

Given the aforementioned problem statement, the main objectives of this thesis are as follows:

- i. Model dynamic pesticide demand management using an active mass-spring suspension system.
- ii. Develop a discrete-time model predictive controller to reduce the demand for pesticide.
- iii. Develop an autonomous on-demand scheduling and assignment algorithm to optimize pesticide application using a fleet of vehicles.

1.4 Scope

The scope and limitations of this work are as follows:

- i. Although, the proposed technique does not consider a fixed layout for the agricultural field, the starting and ending points for each vehicle are considered the same.
- ii. All vehicles consume charge at the same rate according to distance. Moreover, the charge rate at the charging station is considered to be the same for all vehicles.
- iii. This study does not develop a pest risk prediction model. The use of any existing pest risk infection model is based on assumption. Thus, the performance of the proposed technique may be limited by the choice of a prediction model.
- iv. It is assumed that all areas are connected through at least one path. The proposed technique assumes that only one vehicle can serve a given area at any one time.
- v. All the simulations are performed in MATLAB/Simulink.

1.5 Research Significance

Some of the potential applications for this research are:

- i. The proposed technique can be used to control the onset of a pest infection by optimizing pesticide application in advance, i.e., even if there are no pests but if the pest risk prediction model predicts the onset of pests, the proposed technique utilizes this information to avoid pest infestation before it occurs. Thus, unlike any existing technique, this research considers a pro-active approach which results in significant savings in terms of pesticide used as well as field coverage time (and according to fuel/charge).
- ii. The proposed technique uses predictive control to efficiently coordinate a fleet of vehicles over multiple time intervals. However, the existing techniques can only perform optimization over one time interval. This results in significantly faster convergence times and lower fuel or charge consumption.
- iii. MPC is well-known for its lower computational complexity as compared to evolutionary algorithms. Thus, the proposed technique takes advantage of this fact and uses MPC to efficiently solve the agricultural VRP problem.
- iv. The proposed technique is the first of its kind which can be used for autonomous mobility on demand in the domain of agriculture.

1.6 Thesis Organization

The rest of this thesis is organized as follows:

Chapter 2 provides an elaborate discussion of the existing literature related to this thesis. In particular, the focus of this chapter is to provide a foundation for demand management technique in various sectors, an overview of multi-objective optimization problem (MOP) as used in agricultural VRP and various MPC techniques applied in the field of agriculture. Finally, the chapter concludes with the presentation of the research niche identified in the review which forms the objectives of this thesis.

Chapter 3 presents the proposed technique. Various aspects of the proposed technique are discussed including the use of an active mass-spring suspension system for state-space model formulation, the MPC plant model, and scheduling and assigning pesticide demand to a fleet of vehicles with charge and capacity constraints, etc.

Chapter 4 presents the evaluation of the proposed technique using simulations in MATLAB/Simulink. The various performance aspects discussed in this chapter include the system dynamics for stability, field coverage time and total charge consumed. Moreover, a comprehensive comparison with existing techniques in literature is also presented.

Finally, Chapter 5, presents the conclusions for this thesis and also highlights the future recommendations.

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