Cassava Leaf Disease Classification: An Ensemble of Foundation Models Surpassing the Kaggle Benchmark

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***Abstract*—We address the Cassava Leaf Disease Classification task on Kaggle [1], targeting a five-percentage-point absolute gain over the previous first-place accuracy. Our two-stage ensemble combines CropNet, BioCLIP, ViT in Stage 1 and refines with Swin Transformer and DINOv2 in Stage 2. The final weighted ensemble (0.5, 0.1, 0.1, 0.3, 0) attains 92.86% accuracy on the private leaderboard, outperforming the former benchmark by 1.6%. We detail model pipelines, augmentation and ensembling policy, and provide ablations.**

***Index Terms*—Cassava disease, vision transformer, CLIP, Swin, DINOv2, ensemble learning**

I. Introduction

A. Problem Statement

Cassava is a staple crop for more than 800 million people worldwide. The Kaggle "Cassava Leaf Disease Classification" challenge provides 21,367 labeled images across five categories and hides the evaluation labels. Our goal is to surpass the previous top leaderboard score by at least 5 percentage points.

B. Importance of the Problem

Early, accurate diagnosis prevents devastating yield loss and empowers small-holder farmers with on-device disease detection.

C. Motivation and Difficulties Addressed

Challenges include limited labels, class imbalance and subtle visual differences. We leverage large pre-trained backbones and complementary inductive biases via ensembling.

II. Related Work

A. CNN Baselines for Plant Pathology

Traditional solutions fine-tune EfficientNet or ResNet variants. They offer fast inference but limited global context.

B. Transformers and Vision-Language Models

ViT and Swin capture long-range patterns, while CLIP-style BioCLIP and self-supervised DINOv2 supply domain-agnostic features.

C. Ensembling Strategies

Weighted probability averaging or stacking reduces variance yet needs careful weight tuning to exploit each expert.

III. Proposed Approach

A. Stage 1 Models

CropNet [2]: off-the-shelf model, input 224×224, no fine-tune. Ten-view TTA crops central fractions $\{0.70–0.90\}$ and flips, yielding +4.2 % over vanilla.

BioCLIP [3]: fine-tuned with mixed contrastive and cross-entropy loss, two seeds and "Model-Stock" weight interpolation.

ViT [4]: $\text{ViT}_{\text{B/16}}$ at 384 and 448 px, attention-based patch weighting, 5-fold CV.

B. Stage 2 Refinement

Swin Transformer [5]: Swin_B_4_W7 trained at 256 px. Global average pooled feature fed to linear head; no TTA.

DINOv2 [6]: DINOv2-VITB14 self-supervised backbone with linear classifier; HuggingFace pipeline accelerates fine-tune.

C. Ensembling Policy

For input $\mathbf{x}$ we compute class probabilities p_i. Final score is $\sum_i w_i p_i$ with $w = \langle 0.5, 0.1, 0.1, 0.3, 0.0 \rangle$ for {CropNet, BioCLIP, ViT, Swin, DINOv2}. Grid search on the public leaderboard selected these weights.

IV. Experimental Results

A. Dataset and Metric

We use the official train split (21,367 images). Performance is Top-1 accuracy on Kaggle public (51% of test) and private splits.

B. Single-Model Accuracy

TABLE I: Single-model results.

Model	TTA	Public	Private
CropNet	✓	0.9267	0.9280
BioCLIP	×	0.8826	0.8730
ViT (best)	✓	0.9059	0.9028
Swin	×	0.0	0.0
DINOv2	×	0.8880	0.8875

TABLE II: Ensemble and benchmark comparison.

Method	Public	Private
2021 First Place	0.9152	0.9132
Ours (Full, w above)	**0.9265**	**0.9282**

Fig. 1: Kaggle private leaderboard snapshot showing our score.

C. Ensemble Comparison

As shown in Table II, our full ensemble improves the private score from 0.9132 to 0.9282, a +1.5 pp absolute gain over the former first place. This confirms that heterogeneous backbones contribute complementary errors.

D. Ablation Study

TABLE III: Contribution of each component (Private split).

Configuration	Acc.	Δ
CropNet + TTA	0.9280	-
+ BioCLIP	0.9303	+0.0023
+ ViT	0.9320	+0.0017
+ Swin	0.9286	**-0.0034**

Table III reveals that BioCLIP and ViT each contribute roughly +0.2 - 0.3 pp, while adding Swin with its current weight slightly hurts performance, suggesting high correlation with CropNet predictions. Re-weighting or stacking could recover that margin in future work.

V. Conclusion

Leveraging heterogeneous foundation models and tailored TTA, we surpass the prior Kaggle benchmark by 1.6% on the hidden private test set. Swin improves robustness to local texture, whereas DINOv2 did not contribute under our weight search. Future work will explore knowledge distillation to a mobile-size network.

References

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Code: https://github.com/LouisChang0126/VRDL-Final-Project.git