

MAS ISW Reading Reports

Simon Deussen

05.12.2020

Contents

1	Reading Report: <i>Field Test of an Autonomous Cucumber Picking Robot</i>	2
2	Reading Report: Chapter 56 <i>Robotics in Agriculture and Forestry</i> from <i>Springer Handbook of Robotics</i>	5
3	Reading Report: <i>Plant detection and mapping for agricultural robots using a 3D LIDAR sensor</i>	11
4	Reading Report: <i>Agricultural robots for field operations: Concepts and components</i>	13
5	Reading Report: <i>Agricultural robots—system analysis and economic feasibility</i>	15
	References	18

1 Reading Report: *Field Test of an Autonomous Cucumber Picking Robot*

(Henten et al., 2003)

Abstract

At the Institute of Agricultural and Environmental Engineering (IMAG B.V.) an autonomous harvesting robot for cucumbers was developed and tested in a greenhouse in autumn 2001. Analysis of the harvest process had revealed that at a 2 ha Dutch production facility four robots are needed to replace the skilled human work force during the peak season. Then assuming a success rate of 100%, a harvest cycle might take at most 10 s per cucumber fruit. In this paper the results of the field test of the harvesting robot are reported and analysed in view of the performance criteria mentioned above. Cucumbers (*Cucumis sativus* cv. Korinda) were grown in a high-wire cultivation system. In four independent experiments the robot was tested. The average success rate was 74.4%. The majority of failures originated from inaccurate positioning of the end-effector at the stalk of the fruit. It was found to be a great advantage that the system was able to perform several harvest attempts on a single cucumber from different harvest positions of the robot. This improved the success rate considerably. A single successful harvest cycle took 65.2 s per cucumber. Since not all attempts were successful, a cycle time of 124 s per harvested cucumber was measured under practical circumstances. The test confirmed the ability to harvest more than one cucumber using a single set of images which reduced the cycle time of a successful harvest to 56.7 and 53.0 s if two or three cucumbers were harvested. To bridge the gap between the measured performance and the design specifications, future research focuses on improving the success rate, faster hardware and software for image processing and motion planning as well as the reduction of the motion time of the manipulator.

Keywords

Harvesting, Computer Vision, Machine Vision, Stereo Vision, Experiment

Questions

What are the motivations for this work?

- The authors wanted to create a comparable solution to recent advances in harvesting tomatoes and eggplants
- Human labour for harvesting is a tedious and expensive task.
- Robot labour needs to be able to harvest one cucumber every 10 seconds. This experiment tries to show the current (2001) limitations.

- Inside high-wire greenhouses mobile robots can move along tracks next to the cucumber plants which creates a somehow structured environment.
- This proposed architecture should allow complete autonomous harvesting.

What is the proposed solution?

- Mobile system consisting of a robotic arm having a thermal cutter and a suction cup for cutting and grabbing the cucumbers. One camera for taking two images (768x512px) at different positions to find 3D coordinates.
- They restricted the way to cucumbers could grow so that they are always in a specific range reachable for the robots manipulators.
- Removed leaves before hand to lessen occlusion errors.
- They also removed cucumbers growing too close to each other.
- The systems moves along a rail in 33cm steps. At each step the cameras look for cucumbers and if found and big enough proceed with the harvesting.
- The harvesting does not take additional images. All informations come from the initial 2 pictures. Even if multiple cucumbers are found, the initial information and processing has to be enough.
- Because the range of the system is around 1m, the 33cm step allow up to 3 harvest attempts for each cucumber.

What is the work's evaluation of the solution?

- For this experiment the authors took in-depth runtime measurements and error protocols.
- On average the system managed to harvest ca. 75% of a present cucumbers.
- For the whole experiment with multiple attempts and failures, the resulting harvesting time was **124s** per cucumber!!!
- If every first attempt would have been successful, the resulting time would have been **75s** per harvested cucumber.
- Most errors (ca. 36%) came from an misplaced end-effector resulting from poor 3D coordinates.

What is my analysis of the identified problem, idea and evaluation?

- Those experiments (20 years ago) have been one order of magnitude too slow for a commercial application.
- I like the idea of using only one camera, but the extra cost would directly result in a speed up which would basically pay for itself to use a stereo camera.
- The evaluation was very good. The authors managed to create an details overview over the shortcomings.
- Especially the failure categorization is great. This should be an inspiration for similar failure reports for my own experiments.
- I was surprised that the paper was that old.
- 10 seconds runtime for the image analysis will be much faster nowadays.

What are the contributions?

- This paper was a report over an in depth experiment using this harvesting system.
- It sheds light in many failure classes and shows how to make a proper report.
- The robotic system had a bad execution time and accuracy.

What are the future directions of the research?

Harvesting crops in greenhouses will continue to be a key research topic. For this case I hope that the authors managed to increase the execution speeds.

What questions have I left?

- Mainly the comparison to todays systems. For the my next reading report I should find a more recent paper about the same topic.
- If the system can easily exchange the end-effectors, it should be possible to use the mobile platform for all kind of different tasks.

What is my main take away from this paper?

Great structured experiment with a promising setup. Having rails in a greenhouse is not too expensive and solves many navigation problems. I am looking forward to deepen my research in this area. Would it be possible to create a rail grid with multiple robots, cooperating in this task?

Summary

Definitely enjoyed the detailed reporting on different failures and execution times. This paper is an excellent blueprint on how to write a report over an experiment.

Rating

4/5

2 Reading Report: Chapter 56 *Robotics in Agriculture and Forestry* from *Springer Handbook of Robotics*

(Siciliano & Khatib, 2016)

Abstract

Robotics for agriculture and forestry (A&F) represents the ultimate application of one of our society's latest and most advanced innovations to its most ancient and important industries. Over the course of history, mechanization and automation increased crop output several orders of magnitude, enabling a geometric growth in population and an increase in quality of life across the globe. Rapid population growth and rising incomes in developing countries, however, require ever larger amounts of A&F output. This chapter addresses robotics for A&F in the form of case studies where robotics is being successfully applied to solve well-identified problems. With respect to plant crops, the focus is on the in-field or in-farm tasks necessary to guarantee a quality crop and, generally speaking, end at harvest time. In the livestock domain, the focus is on breeding and nurturing, exploiting, harvesting, and slaughtering and processing. The chapter is organized in four main sections. The first one explains the scope, in particular, what aspects of robotics for A&F are dealt with in the chapter. The second one discusses the challenges and opportunities associated with the application of robotics to A&F. The third section is the core of the chapter, presenting twenty case studies that showcase (mostly) mature applications of robotics in various agricultural and forestry domains. The case studies are not meant to be comprehensive but instead to give the reader a general overview of how robotics has been applied to A&F in the last 10 years. The fourth section concludes the chapter with a discussion on specific improvements to current technology and paths to commercialization.

Keywords

Overview, Case studies, coverage planning, weed control, high precision farming, crop yield estimation, Vehicle formation control, plant probing, leaf removal,

harvesting, precision forestry, aerial based precision farming

Questions

What are the motivations for this work?

Optimized Coverage for Arable Farming

- Minimizes soil compaction
- Reduces fuel cost
- Reduces time needed

Weed Control

- Weeds directly reduce yield by competing the crops over light, water and nutrients
- Weed control is needed to stop them from spreading
- Robotic control system offer greater mechanical precision and a reduction in herbicides needed.

High Precision Seeding

- When knowing the exact location of the seeded crops all following robotic operation can use this data
- No further local sensing is needed
- Can also be used as an input for localization

Crop Yield Estimation

- manually gathering the required data is labour- and time-consuming error prone process.
- accurate estimations will help growers in labour demand forecasting.
- Better planning reduces costs by optimizing packing and storage capacity.

Precision Irrigation Conventional irrigation technologies dent to over-watering. This is of course wasteful and also increases leaching of fertilizers.

Tree Fruit Production

- One of the hardest problems of farming because of the complex tree geometry
- Sloped terrain (vineyards)
- Need to sense the branches
- Occlusion of the fruits

Vehicle Formation control Using multiple robots together will increase the capabilities even further. One element of MRS is to control robots in a formation.

Plant Probing

- Automated sample taking will enable large scale experiments.
- It is hard to model deformable objects like plant parts (leaves, stems, flowers, fruits)
- Proper models will enable individual plant part care, sampling, harvesting, predicting, robotized phenotyping

Cucumber Harvesting Automated harvesting can improve efficiency and reduce labour costs. The same system can also be used to cut nonproductive leaves from the plants.

What is the proposed solution?

Optimized Coverage for Arable Farming

- Find the optimal way to move around in complex terrain.
- Introduction of *Optimal coverage planning algorithm*

Weed Control

- A robotic system to drive autonomous over trough the fields.
- machine vision based approach to identify weeds
- precise distribution of herbicides

High Precision Seeding

- a driver-less seeding system with high accuracy localization
- smaller wheels allow driving between rows eliminating soil compaction

Crop Yield Estimation

- A machine vision based system which is able to identify crops
- the system is manually driven through orchards at night and takes pictures with artificial light
- works for vineyards, apple orchards and strawberry ranches.

Precision Irrigation A wireless sensor network monitoring the exact soil conditions.

Tree Fruit Production

- Proposed a family of autonomous orchard vehicles.
- Only uses laser range finders, no gps for keeping the cost low

- Designed in a way to enable faster working human labourers.

Vehicle Formation control

- a control architecture based on a path tracking framework.
- should allow multiple robots to continue to drive in formation even in ruff terrain with poor grip conditions.
- the system uses RTK-GPS with an accuracy of 2cm.
- wireless communications between robots to communicate relative positions

Plant Probing

- System consisting of a robotic arm, time-of-flight camera and a measurement technologies
- image segmentation and model fitting are used to find single leaves from depth informations
- The robot arms first finds position from where it can see the whole plant and then it moves further to enable unobstructed viewing of a single leave.
- After selecting a target leave it will take a probe.

Cucumber Harvesting

- Mobile platform mounted on rails in greenhouses
- Harvesting contains several subproblems, one of them is finding the ripeness of the crops. In this case a target weight is given. Because cucumbers are mostly water it is possible to determine the weight from 3D data.
- The system has a single camera but it is possible to move it around to capture the needed 3D informations.
- After identifying the ripe cucumber, it is cut and moved collision free to a storage crate.

What is the work's evaluation of the solution?

Optimized Coverage for Arable Farming

- reduces turns needed ca. 15%
- reduces soil erosion cost ca. 25%
- reduces skipped area cost ca. 81%

Weed Control

- 77% of weeds got precisely eradicated

- reduction in herbicides

High Precision Seeding Not much data given, needs further study.

Crop Yield Estimation The results show that the system works surprisingly well in a different environments.

Precision Irrigation

- reduces the water needed by 75% against conventional watering
- should allow multiple robots to continue to drive in formation even in ruff terrain with poor grip conditions.

Tree Fruit Production The different approaches followed by the original authors showed that they are twice as fast as manual labor.

Vehicle Formation control

- they tested using two robots, where one should follow the other in a defined distance along sloped terrain
- the two robots managed to stay in their path with an accuracy of 15cm

Plant Probing In the summary is no further evaluation. Needs additional study!

Cucumber Harvesting

- The system needs on average 65 seconds to cut one cucumber
- Success rate: ca. 75%

What are the contributions?

Optimized Coverage for Arable Farming Finds Optimal paths for 2D and 3D terrain with soil erosion models.

Weed Control They presented 3 different systems to autonomously kill weeds in different scenarios. The second one (volunteer potatoes in sugar beets) seemed like the best one. Further research here!

High Precision Seeding Complete system which achieves high precision seeding.

Crop Yield Estimation A camera rig for small tractors to gather data, can be further improved in the future.

Precision Irrigation Wireless system for monitoring and control

Tree Fruit Production 3 different autonomous platforms navigating by themselves inside orchards. The system has accumulated 350km driven.

Vehicle Formation control A control architecture for two or more robots to stay in formation.

Plant Probing Stationary system to take leave samples.

Cucumber Harvesting Whole system harvesting cucumbers and cutting leaves. Has algorithm to determine the ripeness and for finding paths for collision free manipulations.

What questions have I left?

Optimized Coverage for Arable Farming What is about the path length and exact fuel reduction?

Weed Control How is it possible to increase the velocity further? The machines are too slow.

High Precision Seeding Concrete implementations for further data fusion of seed map with the next scans for a living yield map.

Crop Yield Estimation Why is the system not self driving?

Precision Irrigation The savings in water needed and increase in growth speed are really impressive. How did this work? Did they somehow cheat on the data? Definitely study the original paper.

Tree Fruit Production Of course using vehicles is faster than manual work using ladders - but are they faster using the same approach with drivers? How does the navigation work with no GPS?

Vehicle Formation control How valid are the results today? Driving two robots in grass does not sound to impressive.

Plant Probing Can this system be mounted on rails?

Cucumber Harvesting How does the accuracy shrink when speeding the process up? How fast can this scale up?

Summary

Summarizes many different papers in-depth. Refer to this for further research.

Rating

5/5

3 Reading Report: *Plant detection and mapping for agricultural robots using a 3D LIDAR sensor*

(Weiss & Biber, 2011)

Abstract

In this article, we discuss the advantages of MEMS based 3D LIDAR sensors over traditional approaches like vision or stereo vision in the domain of agricultural robotics and compare these kinds of sensors with typical 3D sensors used on mobile robots. Further, we present an application for such sensors. This application deals with the detection and segmentation of plants and ground, which is one important prerequisite to perform localization, mapping and navigation for autonomous agricultural robots. We show the discrimination of ground and plants as well as the mapping of the plants. Experiments conducted using the FX6 LIDAR by Nippon Signal were carried out in the simulation environment Gazebo, with artificial maize plants in the laboratory and on a small maize field. Our results show that the tested plants can be reliably detected and segmented from ground, despite the use of the low resolution FX6 sensor. Further, the plants can be localized with high accuracy.

Keywords

Individual plant detection, Plant mapping, 3D LIDAR sensor, Agricultural robotics

Questions

What are the motivations for this work?

A key problem in agricultural robots is to detect and map individual plants for several reasons, including navigation, individual reports and individual care. For a robust plant mapping it is needed to use reliable sensors and algorithms. Much research is done in solving this problem using 2D and 3D cameras but this paper on the other hand, works on detecting plants using low cost and low resolution 3D Lidar sensors.

What is the proposed solution?

The solution contains an algorithm for detecting individual plant in a row using a FX6 3D Lidar sensor. This sensor is still in development, the current version has a resolution of 29 by 59 pixel creating 15 frames per second. To detect the plant from the resulting point cloud, the algorithm first detects the ground plane and second creates cluster for each plants using a k,d tree and decides for each cluster only using the bounding box dimensions.

What is the work's evaluation of the solution?

The proposed algorithm works seemingly fast, and manages to identify in a single frame 60% of the plants and using multiple frames with tracking it scores an average detection accuracy of 80-90%. Further the average accuracy of the position detection is 3 centimeters. One problem occurring repeatedly is that the algorithm fails to differentiate between the next plants if they grow into each other and the cluster connect.

What is my analysis of the identified problem, idea and evaluation?

The idea to use a low cost 3D sensor is quite good because, as mentioned in the paper, it works independent from existing lighting and is robust against fog and dust - conditions which occur frequently in the real world. The algorithm uses only a bounding box of a cluster to determine the position of the plant. This approach works okay when every plant grows neatly far away from their neighbours but fails in messy real world conditions. Some aspects are great on the other hand, it has a fast runtime, for example. I think this given approach would work better on a row basis and maybe use offline compute power to identify the individual plants? Because measuring these plants is a repeated operation, one could leverage the result of a computational more expensive offline algorithm and map the online point cloud directly onto an existing map.

What are the contributions?

This main contribution is an evaluation of a low-cost 3D lidar scanner with a basic point clustering algorithm in real time. besides that they also showcase other approaches for the same problem using traditional 2D camera systems and different scanners.

What are the future directions of the research?

The future research will include using stronger machine learning algorithms for clustering and plant separation. They also want to work on a row detection basis.

What questions have I left?

My main concern was the quite simple simulation model on gazebo and i hope that they improve this.

What is my main take away from this paper?

It is possible to detect plants in real time using point clouds in the agricultural sector even with simple mathematical methods. The difference between a classical and those FX6 laser scanner is also interesting. I think plant detection like this is the way to go, by improving only the algorithm it should be possible soon to deploy at least field scouting robots in real world scenarios.

Summary

In depth paper for clustering point clouds into individual plants using a bounding box approach. Maths is explained nicely, can be used to build something similar.

Rating

4/5

4 Reading Report: *Agricultural robots for field operations: Concepts and components*

(Bechar & Vigneault, 2016)

Abstract

This review investigates the research effort, developments and innovation in agricultural robots for field operations, and the associated concepts, principles, limitations and gaps. Robots are highly complex, consisting of different sub-systems that need to be integrated and correctly synchronised to perform tasks perfectly as a whole and successfully transfer the required information. Extensive research has been conducted on the application of robots and automation to a variety of field operations, and technical feasibility has been widely demonstrated. Agricultural robots for field operations must be able to operate in unstructured agricultural environments with the same quality of work achieved by current methods and means. To assimilate robotic systems, technologies must be developed to overcome continuously changing conditions and variability in produce and environments. Intelligent systems are needed for successful task performance in such environments. The robotic system must be cost-effective, while being inherently safe and reliable human safety, and preservation of the environment, the crop and the machinery are mandatory. Despite much progress in recent years, in most cases the technology is not yet commercially available. Information-acquisition systems, including sensors, fusion algorithms and data analysis, need to be adjusted to the dynamic conditions of unstructured agricultural environments. Intensive research is needed on integrating human operators into the system control loop for increased system performance and reliability. System sizes should be reduced while improving the integration of all parts and components. For robots to perform in agricultural environments and execute agricultural tasks, research must focus on: fusing complementary sensors for adequate localisation and sensing abilities, developing simple manipulators for each agricultural task, developing path planning, navigation and guidance algorithms suited to environments besides open fields and known a-priori, and integrating human operators in this complex and highly dynamic situation.

Keywords

Agricultural robots, Robotics, Field operations, Autonomous

Questions

What are the motivations for this work?

The main subject of this paper is to show the current development, ideas and problems in the field of agricultural robotics. This review paper explains first the background, then the economic feasibility and further goes into concepts, principles and components.

What is the proposed solution?

The paper concludes, that with current technologies the broad usage in commercial farming is not possible yet and proposes to focus research on a number of fields. Those fields include sensor fusion for better localisation, engineering of better simple manipulators and the development of specific path planning, navigation and guidance algorithms for agriculture.

What is the work's evaluation of the solution?

This question is not applicable.

What is my analysis of the identified problem, idea and evaluation?

The authors make a great job in displaying the current technologies and their limitations. With this knowledge it is easy to identify a subproblem to work on.

What are the contributions?

Several points come to the mind. Firstly they create an in-depth background needed to understand the need of automated systems in agriculture, but also explain why it is so hard to create such systems. They propose a categorization of robotic system after the structure of their environment and object of interest. Both can be either structured or unstructured. This categorization creates four different categories. First, a structured environment and a structured object: This is the industrial domain. Second, a structured environment and a unstructured object: the medial domain. Further there is the unstructured environment with a structured object: the military, space, underwater and mining domains. The last domain, unstructured in environment and object of interest is the agricultural domain.

The next contribution are guidelines under which circumstances a robot can be commercially successful. These guidelines conclude that it is possible to start using robots even if the costs are the same as conventional methods if the work of the robots create more steady and predictable processes.

A big part of the review are categorization concepts, components and principles. These include Human-Robot-Systems versus Autonomous Robot Systems. In the component section the authors underline following topics: steering and mobility, sensing and self-localization, path planning and guidance and last but not least, manipulators and effectors.

What are the future directions of the research?

This question is not applicable.

What questions have I left?

Many questions, this paper is an excellent basis for further research.

What is my main take away from this paper?

One of the main problems is the highly dynamic environment and the need to react fast to unprecedented situations. This creates the question on how to define behavior in such a way to allow and strengthen the capabilities of improvisation.

Summary

In-depth review paper with some self citations but besides that it gives many new points to deepen my reseach.

Rating

5/5

5 Reading Report: *Agricultural robots—system analysis and economic feasibility*

(Pedersen, Fountas, Have, & Blackmore, 2006)

Abstract

This paper focuses on the economic feasibility of applying autonomous robotic vehicles compared to conventional systems in three different applications: robotic weeding in high value crops (particularly sugar beet), crop scouting in cereals and grass cutting on golf courses. The comparison was based on a systems analysis and an individual economic feasibility study for each of the three applications. The results showed that in all three scenarios, the robotic applications are more economically feasible than the conventional systems. The high cost of real time kinematics Global Positioning System (RTK-GPS) and the small

capacity of the vehicles are the main parameters that increase the cost of the robotic systems.

Keywords

Agricultural robots, Grass cutter, Autonomous vehicles, Economics, Feasibility study, Robotic weeding, Crop scouting

Questions

What are the motivations for this work?

The papers main focus lies on displaying the cost reduction possible by utilizing autonomous system for agriculture tasks. Most agricultural task can not use individual-plant-based solutions with conventional methods. By using robots and big data processing it will be possible to care for each plant individually. Taking care of an identified weed patch for example will need much less herbicides than spaying the whole field preemptively.

What is the proposed solution?

The authors propose solutions for using autonomous robots for field scouting - the identification and localisation of growing weeds -, intra-row and near-crop weeding and automated grass cutting.

What is the work's evaluation of the solution?

In all scenarios the authors showcase a reduction in primary and secondary costs in comparison to conventional methods.

Field scouting 20% cost reduction in labor and secondary benefits of the data because it is now possible to only deploy herbicides where needed.

Weeding Only by reducing the cost of the navigation system by half it is possible to save 12-21% or manuel costs. and reduction of herbicide use of 90%

Grass cutting Reduction of cost of 52% (but only when paying the gardener 27 Euro per hour, lol)

What is my analysis of the identified problem, idea and evaluation?

The usage of automated systems for growing crops is one of the key points in reducing the environmental footprint of large scale agriculture. The three analyzed areas are great entry points for deploying such systems. Especially the field scouting and the automated weeding are very interesting. For the evaluation the authors compared the costs of the components with average conventional costs witch is mostly reasonable, expect the estimated labor cost of the gardener of 27 Euros per hour for grass cutting.

What are the contributions?

The ideas of the authors in breaking down the cost of the robots into several components are very helpful to estimate economic costs of different system for this usage. The main contribution is this economic analysis which helped to spark more research in this direction.

What are the future directions of the research?

There will always be economic analyses for newer technology.

What questions have I left?

Because this paper is from 2006 I am eager to find a similar, more current breakdown.

What is my main take away from this paper?

That it is feasible to automate many agricultural tasks with almost existing technology.

Summary

Great in depth analysis but dated (2006), has good numbers for conventional cost estimates.

Rating

3/5

References

- Bechar, A., & Vigneault, C. (2016). Agricultural robots for field operations: Concepts and components. *Biosystems Engineering*, 149, 94 - 111. Retrieved from <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1537511015301914> doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biosystemseng.2016.06.014>
- Henten, E. V., Tuijl, B. V., Hemming, J., Kornet, J., Bontsema, J., & Os, E. V. (2003, nov). Field test of an autonomous cucumber picking robot. *Biosystems Engineering*, 86(3), 305–313. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biosystemseng.2003.08.002>
- Pedersen, S. M., Fountas, S., Have, H., & Blackmore, B. S. (2006, jul). Agricultural robots—system analysis and economic feasibility. *Precision Agriculture*, 7(4), 295–308. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11119-006-9014-9>
- Siciliano, B., & Khatib, O. (2016). *Springer handbook of robotics* (B. Siciliano & O. Khatib, Eds.). Springer International Publishing. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-32552-1>
- Weiss, U., & Biber, P. (2011, may). Plant detection and mapping for agricultural robots using a 3d LIDAR sensor. *Robotics and Autonomous Systems*, 59(5), 265–273. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.robot.2011.02.011>