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Why Farmers Fail to Adopt New Technologies and How to Change It: Bridging the Gap Between Innovation and the Farm Gate in Indian Agriculture

*Harjeet Singh[1], Soyal Kumar[2], Harshit Tomar[3] and Mansi[4]
[1]Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Agricultural Extension Education, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel University of Agriculture and Technology, Meerut-250110, U.P.
[2]Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Genetics and Plant Breeding, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel University of Agriculture and Technology, Meerut-250110, U.P.
[3]Department of Vegetable Science, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel University of Agriculture and Technology, Meerut-250110, U.P.
[4]M.Sc. Scholar, Department of Genetics and Plant Breeding, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel University of Agriculture and Technology, Meerut-250110, U.P.
*Corresponding Author's email: hjeet1999@gmail.com

Indian agriculture stands at a critical crossroads. With over 58 percent of the rural population depending on farming for their livelihood, the sector contributes nearly 18 percent to the national GDP. Yet, productivity remains stagnant in many regions, and the adoption of modern technologies lags far behind its potential. From precision farming tools to artificial intelligence-driven advisory systems, a wealth of innovation sits on the shelf while farmers continue with age-old practices. The question is not whether these technologies work—they often do—but why they fail to reach the field. Understanding the barriers to adoption is the first step toward building an inclusive, technology-driven agricultural ecosystem that empowers every farmer, from the smallholder in Bihar to the agri-entrepreneur in Punjab. This article explores the root causes of low technology adoption and offers practical, evidence-based solutions to bridge the gap between laboratory innovation and farm reality.

Why Farmers Fail to Adopt New Technologies

Lack of awareness and limited access to credible information remain the foremost barriers. Many farmers, especially in remote and tribal areas, simply do not know what is available or how it benefits them. Weak extension services compound this problem. The current extension worker-to-farmer ratio in India is alarmingly low, often exceeding one to one thousand, leaving vast gaps in knowledge transfer and personalized guidance.

Financial constraints are equally daunting. With the average operational landholding shrinking to 1.08 hectares, small and marginal farmers face a severe liquidity crunch. High upfront investment costs for technologies such as drip irrigation systems, automated sensors, or drones deter even the most progressive farmers. The fear of risk—what if the crop fails despite the investment?—looms large. A single bad season can push a family into irreversible debt, making caution not just a choice but a survival strategy. Poor technical knowledge and digital illiteracy further widen the divide. While urban India races toward 5G connectivity, rural broadband penetration remains patchy. Many farmers struggle with basic smartphone navigation, let alone complex farm management applications. The absence of localized, vernacular content exacerbates the issue, leaving farmers alienated from digital ecosystems designed primarily in English for large-scale operations.

Traditional mindset and lack of demonstrations play a subtle but powerful role. Seeing is believing, and without sustained on-farm demonstrations, farmers view new technologies with suspicion. "My grandfather farmed this way, and so shall I," is a common refrain rooted in risk aversion. Poor market access means that even if a farmer adopts better practices, the price premium rarely reaches their pocket. Climate uncertainty—erratic monsoons, prolonged droughts, and unseasonal floods—makes long-term investments seem futile. Finally, weak institutional support, fragmented policies, and bureaucratic delays in subsidy disbursement erode trust and discourage experimentation.

Figure 1. Technology Adoption Process

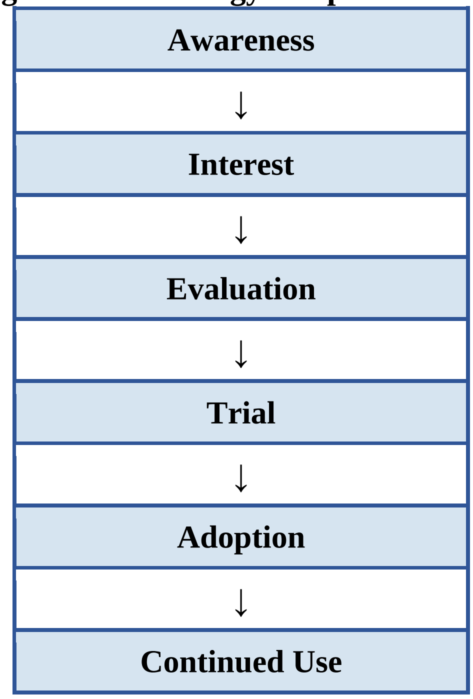

Figure 2. Factors Affecting Technology Adoption

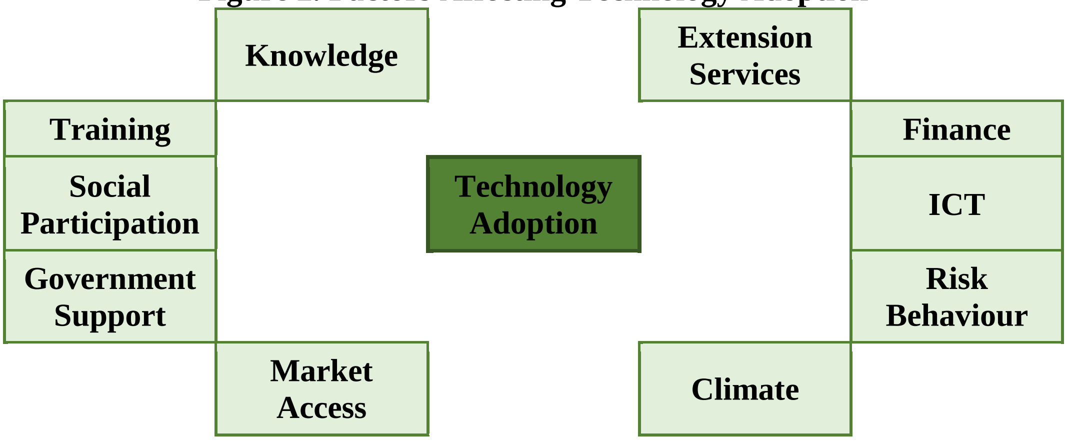

Table 1. Major Causes of Low Technology Adoption

Problem	Impact	Suggested Solution
Lack of awareness	Farmers remain uninformed about available technologies	Strengthen ICT-based extension and village-level awareness campaigns
Weak extension services	Poor knowledge transfer and low farmer-to-extension ratio	Recruit and train more extension workers; use digital tools
Financial constraints	Inability to purchase equipment or inputs	Expand microfinance, subsidies, and custom hiring centers
Small landholdings	Economies of scale are difficult to achieve	Promote FPOs and cooperative farming models
High investment cost	Technology appears unaffordable to smallholders	Introduce rental services and government cost-sharing

Fear of risk	Farmers avoid uncertainty due to potential losses	Provide crop insurance and guaranteed buyback schemes
Poor technical knowledge	Inability to operate or maintain new equipment	Conduct hands-on training and Farmer Field Schools
Digital illiteracy	Exclusion from ICT-based advisory services	Develop vernacular apps and community digital centers
Lack of demonstrations	Skepticism due to absence of visible proof	Establish demo farms and peer-to-peer learning networks
Traditional mindset	Resistance to changing established practices	Use progressive farmer ambassadors and social incentives
Poor market access	No price premium for quality produce	Strengthen e-NAM and direct market linkages
Climate uncertainty	Unpredictable weather discourages investment	Promote climate-smart practices and weather-indexed insurance
Weak institutional support	Delayed subsidies and poor coordination	Streamline bureaucracy and integrate service delivery

How to Change It

The solution begins with strengthening agricultural extension services. We need more boots on the ground—well-trained extension workers who speak the farmer's language and understand local agro-ecologies. Farmer Field Schools and demonstration farms offer powerful, experiential learning platforms. When farmers see a neighbor's yield double through precision farming, skepticism turns into curiosity and then into action.

Information and Communication Technology advisory services are proving to be game-changers. Mobile applications such as KisanSuvidha and WhatsApp-based extension groups deliver real-time weather updates, market prices, and pest alerts in local languages. Artificial Intelligence is no longer science fiction for Indian farms—AI-powered pest detection tools can identify crop diseases from a simple smartphone photograph within seconds. Precision farming, enabled by IoT sensors and drones, allows site-specific nutrient and water management, cutting input costs and boosting yields significantly.

Farmer Producer Organizations aggregate the bargaining power of smallholders, enabling collective investment in shared machinery and better market linkages. Capacity building and skill development must target not just farmers but also rural youth and women, who are often the invisible backbone of farm operations. Climate-smart agriculture—including conservation tillage, drought-resistant varieties, and agroforestry—must be promoted as insurance against weather volatility.

Government initiatives form the backbone of this transformation. Schemes such as PM-KISAN provide direct income support, while the Digital Agriculture Mission aims to create comprehensive farmer-centric digital ecosystems. Public-private partnerships can leverage corporate expertise for last-mile delivery. The Drone Didi initiative, empowering women with drone technology for spraying and monitoring, exemplifies how targeted programs can shatter social and economic barriers. AI-based pest detection platforms developed by ICAR scientists are already showing promising results in cotton and rice belts. Krishi Vigyan Kendras continue to serve as vital knowledge hubs, translating research into practice at the district level.

Real-World Success Stories from India

Across India, several initiatives are proving that change is possible. The Digital Agriculture Mission aims to create a unified digital ecosystem linking farmers with markets, advisories, and credit. The electronic National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) has integrated over 1,000 mandis, enabling transparent price discovery and reducing middlemen. PM-KISAN delivers direct income support to millions of farmers, easing liquidity constraints. Krishi Vigyan Kendras serve as vital knowledge hubs, translating ICAR research into village-level practice. The Drone Didi initiative trains women in drone operation for crop monitoring and spraying, breaking gender barriers while boosting efficiency. Meanwhile, AI-based pest detection systems developed by ICAR are helping cotton farmers identify pink bollworm infestations early, reducing pesticide use by up to 30 percent. Over 8,000 Farmer Producer Organizations are now aggregating produce and negotiating better prices, demonstrating the power of collectivization.

Figure 3. Digital Agriculture Ecosystem

KVK	↓	**ICAR**	↓	**Mobile Apps**
→	**Artificial Intelligence**	↙	**IoT Sensors**	←
Weather Advisory	→	**FARMER**	←	**Drone Services**
→	**Market Information**	↗	**FPO**	←
Banks	↑	**Extension Workers**	↑	**Government Schemes**

Infographic: Bridging the Technological Gap in Agriculture

Training Hands-on skill development through Farmer Field Schools and on-farm demonstrations	**Extension Services** Strengthening last-mile advisory through digital and personal contact
Artificial Intelligence AI-driven pest detection, yield prediction, and crop health monitoring	**Mobile Apps** Real-time market prices, weather alerts, and expert advice in local languages
Farmer Producer Organizations Collective bargaining, shared machinery, and better market access	**Credit Support** Microfinance, subsidies, and crop insurance to reduce financial barriers
Demonstrations Visible proof of technology benefits through demo farms and peer learning	**Women Farmers** Gender-inclusive programs like Drone Didi empowering rural women
Young Farmers Youth engagement in agri-tech startups and precision farming enterprises	**Climate-smart Agriculture** Drought-resistant varieties, conservation tillage, and weather insurance

Table 2. Modern Agricultural Technologies

Technology	Application	Benefits to Farmers
Artificial Intelligence	Pest detection, yield prediction, crop advisory	Reduces pesticide use, increases accuracy, saves labor
Mobile Applications	Real-time weather, market prices, expert advice	Instant access to information in local languages
IoT Sensors	Soil moisture, nutrient, and weather monitoring	Precision input application, water savings, higher yields
Drones	Crop spraying, monitoring, and mapping	Reduces labor, ensures uniform application, early detection
Precision Farming	Variable rate technology for seed, fertilizer, water	Cost reduction, environmental protection, yield optimization
Weather Advisory Systems	Hyperlocal forecasts and agromet advisories	Better planning, reduced weather-related losses
Blockchain	Supply chain traceability and	Transparency, premium pricing,

	certification	reduced fraud
Robotics	Automated weeding, harvesting, and sorting	Labor savings, efficiency, and timeliness
Vertical Farming	Soilless cultivation in controlled environments	Year-round production, minimal land and water use
Biotechnology	Drought-resistant and pest-resistant crop varieties	Reduced input costs, climate resilience, food security

Key Takeaways

- **Invest in grassroots extension services with adequate staffing and training.**
- **Develop localized, vernacular digital content accessible on basic smartphones.**
- **Expand Farmer Field Schools and demonstration farms for experiential learning.**
- **Provide affordable credit, crop insurance, and custom hiring centers.**
- **Strengthen Farmer Producer Organizations for collective bargaining power.**
- **Integrate AI, IoT, and drone technologies through public-private partnerships.**
- **Empower women and youth through targeted skill development programs.**
- **Promote climate-smart agriculture and weather-indexed insurance products.**
- **Streamline subsidy disbursement and reduce bureaucratic delays.**
- **Ensure transparent market linkages through platforms like e-NAM.**

Future Outlook

The future of Indian agriculture is digital, decentralized, and farmer-centric. As 5G connectivity expands to rural areas and satellite imagery becomes increasingly affordable, even the smallest landholder will access real-time advisory services. The convergence of artificial intelligence, blockchain for traceability, and Internet of Things will create transparent, efficient value chains. Youth entrepreneurship in agri-tech is rising, promising a new generation of farmer-innovators. The next decade will witness a decisive shift from subsistence to precision, provided we invest in human capital alongside hardware.

Conclusion

Technology adoption is not merely a technical challenge; it is fundamentally a social, economic, and institutional one. Farmers are rational decision-makers who carefully weigh risks against returns. To change adoption patterns, we must change the ecosystem—better extension, accessible finance, localized knowledge, and robust markets. When farmers trust the system, they embrace innovation willingly. The goal is not to replace the farmer's accumulated wisdom but to augment it with tools that honor their context and constraints. Only then will the seeds of innovation truly take root in Indian soil.

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