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INTEGRATED CROP MANAGEMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN RAJASTHAN

Siyaram Meena[1], Vinay Soni[1], Ramawtar[1], Mayank Goyal[2], K.C. Nagar[2], Aarti Yadav[1] and Santosh Kumari Ninama[1]

[1]College of Agriculture, Bhilwara, MPUAT, Udaipur (Rajasthan)
[2]Dryland Farming Research Station, Arjia, Bhilwara, MPUAT, Udaipur (Rajasthan)

Corresponding author: siyaram0231@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Agricultural production in Rajasthan is challenged by variable rainfall, limited water availability, soil constraints and rising input costs. Integrated Crop Management (ICM) addresses these challenges by combining suitable crop and cropping-system selection, soil-test-based nutrient management, moisture conservation, efficient irrigation, integrated weed management and need-based pest and disease control. These practices are particularly relevant to rainfed and semi-arid areas, where crop performance depends on rainfall distribution and the efficient use of soil moisture and nutrients. Evidence from farmer-field demonstrations in south-eastern Rajasthan indicates that integrated management in mustard can improve productivity and economic returns compared with prevailing farmer practices. However, outcomes depend on crop requirements, local agro-climatic conditions, available resources and farm economics. This article outlines the major components of ICM and their potential contribution to productive, resource-efficient and sustainable agriculture in Rajasthan.

Keywords: Integrated Crop Management, sustainable agriculture, resource-use efficiency, soil health, water management, integrated pest management, Rajasthan.

Introduction

Agriculture in Rajasthan spans arid and semi-arid areas as well as relatively wetter parts of the south and south-east. Variable rainfall, long dry spells, limited irrigation, low soil fertility in many locations and salinity or alkalinity in affected areas can constrain crop production. These conditions make the efficient management of soil, water, nutrients and other farm inputs essential. Crop productivity therefore depends not only on the choice of crop but also on how well field operations are coordinated through the growing season.

Integrated Crop Management (ICM) is an approach that combines agronomic practices to improve crop performance and use available resources efficiently. Its components include selecting suitable crops and varieties, choosing appropriate cropping systems, applying nutrients according to soil-test results and crop needs, conserving soil moisture, managing weeds and monitoring pests and diseases. These practices should be adapted to crop growth stages, field conditions and weather rather than applied as isolated recommendations.

Field-level evidence from south-eastern Rajasthan has reported higher mustard seed yield, net returns and benefit–cost ratios under integrated crop management than under prevailing farmer practices. Such findings demonstrate the potential of ICM under the conditions evaluated, although results can vary by crop, location, season and management package. Agricultural universities, Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) and extension agencies can help farmers select locally suitable practices. ICM is therefore a practical framework for improving farm productivity while conserving resources.

1. Selection of Suitable Crops and Cropping Systems

Crop selection should reflect rainfall distribution, soil characteristics, moisture availability, irrigation facilities and the length of the growing season. Pearl millet (Pennisetum glaucum), clusterbean (Cyamopsis tetragonoloba) and moth bean (Vigna aconitifolia) are important options in many arid and semi-arid areas because they are suited to dryland conditions. Depending on the agro-climatic zone and water

availability, farmers may also grow maize, chickpea, mustard and other locally recommended pulses.

Crop rotation and intercropping can diversify farm output and improve the use of available resources. Pearl millet intercropped with clusterbean or moth bean is one possible option where locally recommended. Cereal-legume combinations can spread production risk and may help protect soil, depending on crop arrangement and field conditions. Legumes can contribute nitrogen through biological fixation, but the benefit depends on effective nodulation, crop growth, residue management and soil conditions. Farmers should select crop combinations and row arrangements based on local recommendations, rainfall patterns, available labour and market needs.

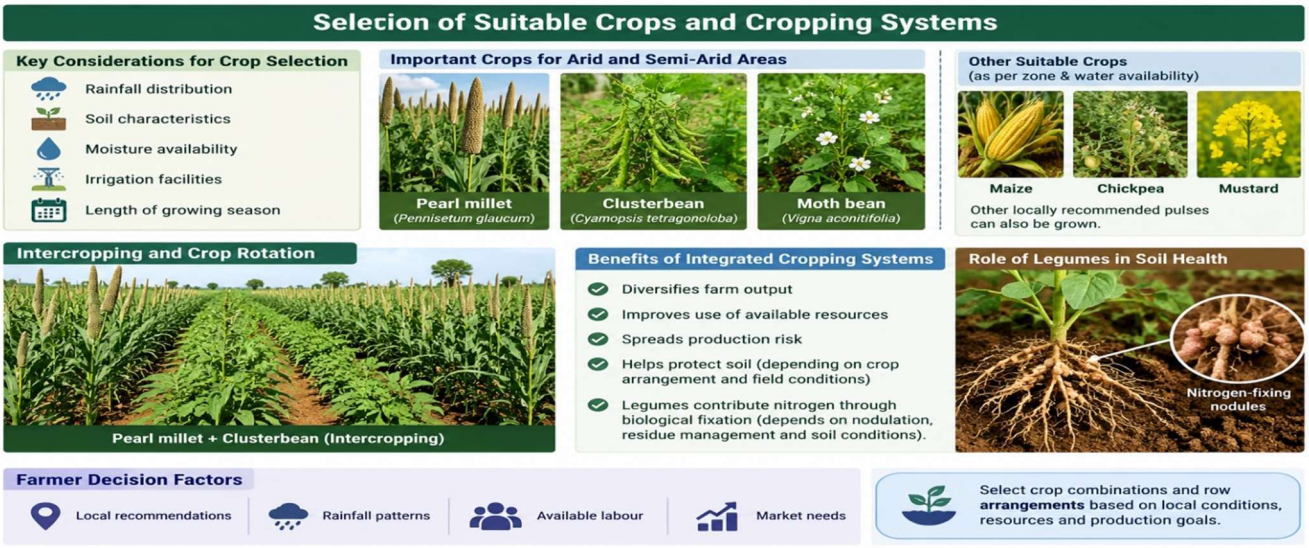


Figure 1. Selection of suitable crops and cropping systems for arid and semi-arid regions of Rajasthan.

2. Integrated Soil and Nutrient Management

Soil fertility and nutrient availability influence crop growth, yield and input-use efficiency. Soil testing helps assess pH, electrical conductivity, organic carbon and available nutrients, allowing farmers to identify deficiencies and soil-related constraints before deciding on fertilizers or amendments.

Important practices include:

- Soil testing : Test soil at recommended intervals and use the results to guide nutrient and soil-amendment decisions.
- Balanced fertilization: Apply nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, sulphur and other nutrients according to soil-test results, crop requirements and local recommendations.
- Organic sources: Use well-decomposed farmyard manure or compost where available to add organic matter and support soil structure and biological activity.
- Legumes and biofertilizers: Include suitable legumes in rotations and use crop-specific Rhizobium inoculants where recommended.
- Micronutrients: Correct confirmed deficiencies, such as zinc or iron, using recommended sources and application methods. Select amendments for saline or sodic soils on the basis of soil-test results.
- Crop residues: Retain or incorporate suitable residues where feasible to recycle nutrients and support soil organic matter.

Integrated Nutrient Management (INM) combines mineral fertilizers with organic manures, crop residues and suitable biofertilizers. These sources are complementary, but their contributions depend on nutrient content, availability and crop demand. Fertilizer rates should not be based on a fixed formula for every field; they should follow soil-test results, crop-specific recommendations and local agricultural guidance. Nutrient management works best when coordinated

with moisture conservation and timely crop operations.

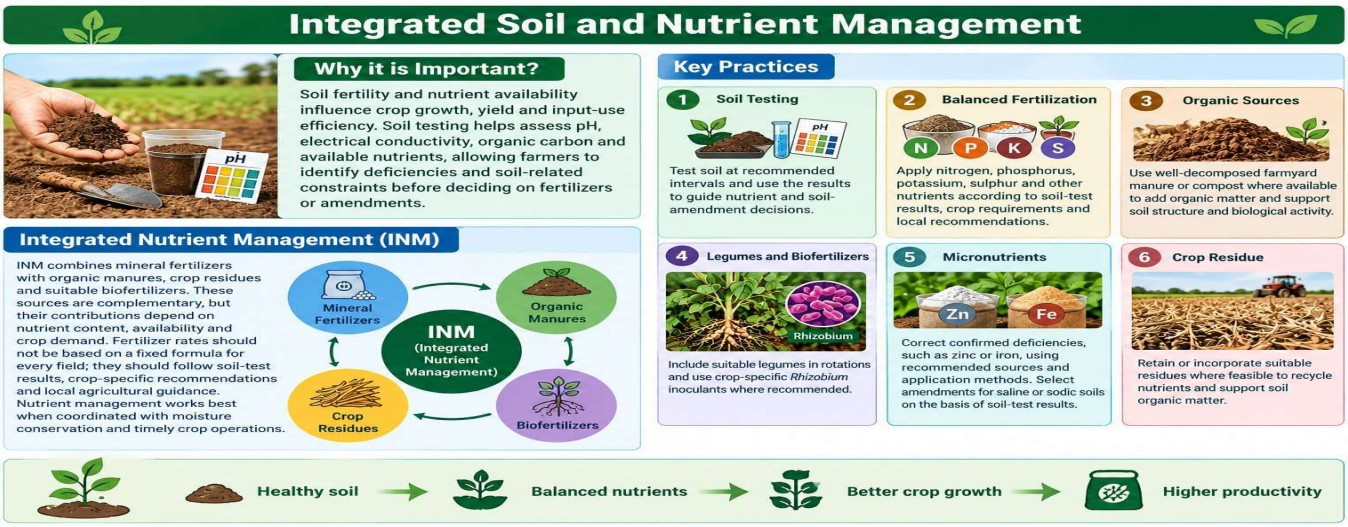


Figure 2. Integrated soil and nutrient management practices for sustainable crop production.

3. Efficient Water Management and Moisture Conservation

Rainfall in Rajasthan is often variable, dry spells can occur during the growing season, and irrigation water is limited in many areas. Water management should therefore combine rainwater harvesting, in-situ moisture conservation, appropriate irrigation scheduling and drainage where needed.

- Rainwater harvesting: Maintain suitable field bunds, farm ponds and other locally appropriate structures to reduce runoff and store water for supplemental irrigation where feasible.
- In-situ moisture conservation: Use suitable land configuration, contour bunding or other recommended measures to improve infiltration and reduce runoff on sloping or erosion-prone land.
- Efficient irrigation: Use sprinkler systems for suitable field crops and drip irrigation where appropriate, considering crop needs, soil type, water quality and installation costs.
- Mulching and residues: Retain suitable crop residues or use recommended mulch materials to reduce direct soil evaporation and moderate soil temperature.
- Irrigation scheduling: Apply water according to crop requirements, soil moisture, weather and critical growth stages. Avoid unnecessary or excessive irrigation.
- Drainage: Provide adequate drainage where required to reduce waterlogging and salt accumulation in susceptible fields.

In rainfed systems, conserving rainfall and reducing unproductive runoff can improve crop water availability. In irrigated fields, appropriate scheduling and well-maintained equipment can reduce avoidable water losses. No single practice suits every farm; selection should reflect rainfall, soil, crop, water availability and local recommendations.



Figure 3. Efficient water management and moisture conservation practices for sustainable agriculture in Rajasthan.

4. Integrated Weed Management

Weeds compete with crops for water, nutrients, light and space. Their effect depends on the crop, weed species, weed density, weather and duration of competition. Uncontrolled weeds, especially during the crop's critical period of competition, can reduce crop growth and yield. Integrated Weed Management (IWM) combines preventive, cultural, mechanical and chemical methods.

- Prevention: Use clean seed and prevent weed-seed spread through machinery, irrigation channels and contaminated residues.
- Crop establishment: Follow recommended seed rate, sowing depth and row spacing to establish a uniform crop stand.
- Crop rotation and intercropping: Use suitable systems that diversify canopy development and field operations and may suppress particular weeds.
- Manual and mechanical control: Undertake hand weeding, hoeing or mechanical control at appropriate crop and weed growth stages.
- Mulching: Use suitable residues or mulch materials where appropriate to suppress weed emergence.
- Herbicides: Use only products registered and recommended for the target crop and weed species, following label directions, dose and application timing.

The critical period of weed competition differs among crops and environments, so control timing should be crop-specific. Herbicides suitable for one crop may injure another. Combining non-chemical measures with careful herbicide use, rotating effective modes of action where appropriate and preventing weed-seed production can support long-term management and reduce resistance risk.



Figure 4. Integrated weed management practices for effective weed control and sustainable crop production.

5. Integrated Insect Pest and Disease Management

Insect pests and plant diseases can reduce crop growth, yield and produce quality. Indiscriminate pesticide use may raise costs, harm beneficial organisms, leave unwanted residues and contribute to resistance. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) combines preventive, cultural, mechanical, biological and chemical methods to keep pest populations and crop damage at acceptable levels while reducing risks to people and the environment.

- Resistant varieties: Choose varieties with documented resistance or tolerance to locally important pests and diseases where available.
- Healthy seed: Use quality-assured seed and healthy planting material. Apply recommended seed or biological treatments where appropriate.
- Field monitoring: Inspect crops regularly for pests, symptoms, beneficial organisms and changes in crop health. Confirm the cause before choosing a treatment.
- Cultural practices: Use suitable crop rotation, recommended sowing dates and crop-specific sanitation measures.
- Biological and mechanical control: Conserve natural enemies and use appropriate biological agents, traps or mechanical measures for the target pest.
- Surveillance tools: Use pheromone traps, sticky traps and other tools for the pests they are designed to monitor.
- Need-based pesticide use: Apply registered products only when justified by pest incidence, disease risk or locally recommended action thresholds. Follow label directions, protective measures and pre-harvest intervals.

Where established for a particular crop and pest, the economic threshold level can help guide control decisions. Traps are target-specific: pheromone traps generally attract particular species, while yellow sticky traps monitor certain flying insects. Neither replaces regular field scouting. Chemical control should be one part of an integrated programme, not a routine response to every pest sighting.



Figure 5. Integrated insect pest and disease management practices for sustainable crop protection.

6. Timely Sowing, Crop Establishment and Field Operations

Sowing time influences crop establishment, resource use and yield. In Rajasthan, it should be determined by crop-specific recommendations, rainfall onset and distribution, soil moisture, temperature and irrigation availability. Sowing too early or too late under unsuitable conditions may result in poor emergence, uneven plant populations or greater exposure to moisture stress, weeds, pests and diseases.

- Seed and variety: Use viable, quality-assured seed of varieties recommended for the local season and agro-climatic conditions.
- Sowing window: Follow the recommended time for each crop, considering rainfall, soil moisture and irrigation.
- Plant population: Maintain recommended seed rate, row and plant spacing, and sowing depth.

- Seed placement: Use suitable seed drills or planters where feasible to improve seed distribution and placement.
- Intercultural operations: Undertake thinning, gap filling and hoeing when required and at suitable crop stages.
- Field preparation: Prepare a suitable seedbed while avoiding unnecessary tillage that may increase costs or moisture loss.

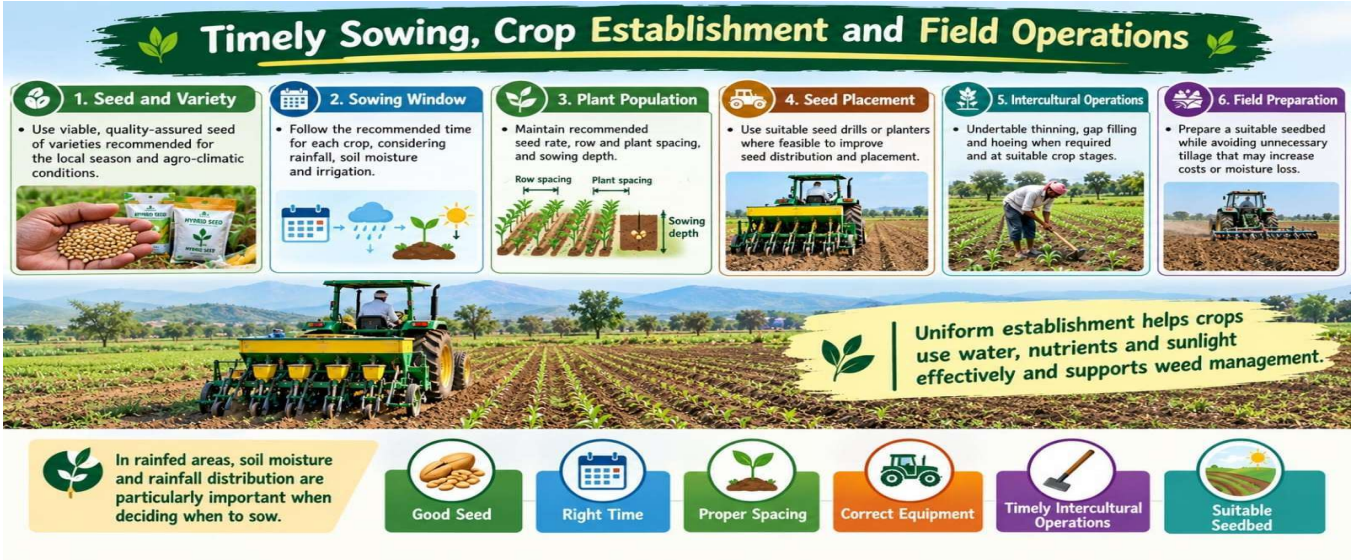


Figure 6. Timely sowing, proper crop establishment and field operations for improved crop growth and productivity in Rajasthan

Uniform establishment helps crops use water, nutrients and sunlight effectively and supports weed management. Operations should be coordinated with crop growth stages and weather conditions. In rainfed areas, soil moisture and rainfall distribution are particularly important when deciding when to sow.

7. Integrated Resource Management and Farm Economics

Efficient use of land, water, nutrients, labour, machinery and other inputs influences cultivation costs and profitability. Recycling suitable crop residues, using farmyard manure or compost where appropriate, and integrating livestock or agroforestry where suitable can diversify farm outputs and improve resource use.

- Resource recycling: Reuse suitable residues and organic materials to support nutrient cycling and reduce avoidable waste.
- Efficient input use: Plan seed, fertilizer, irrigation, plant-protection products, labour and machinery according to crop needs.
- Farm diversification: Consider crops, livestock or agroforestry according to land, water, labour, investment capacity and market opportunities.
- Record-keeping: Record input costs, labour, irrigation expenses, yield and selling prices to assess performance.
- Cost-return analysis: Calculate cultivation costs, gross returns, net returns and benefit-cost (B:C) ratio using consistent accounting methods.
- Weather-based planning: Use reliable forecasts and agricultural advisories to guide sowing, irrigation, fertilizer application, harvesting and crop protection.

Economic performance varies with yield, input prices, market access and management capacity. Farmers should compare alternatives using both agronomic performance and farm-specific costs, while considering long-term effects on soil and water resources.



Figure 7. Integrated resource management and farm economics for improving resource-use efficiency, farm profitability and long-term agricultural sustainability.

Practical Action Plan for Farmers in Rajasthan

Crop stage	Recommended management practices
Before sowing	Test soil; select suitable crops and varieties; prepare the field; check seed quality.
At sowing	Sow at the recommended time; follow seed rate, spacing and depth; treat seed where recommended.
Early crop growth	Establish a uniform crop stand; control weeds on time; apply nutrients according to crop needs.
Vegetative growth	Conserve moisture; manage nutrients; undertake intercultural operations; monitor crop health.
Flowering and reproductive stages	Irrigate at critical stages where needed; monitor pests and diseases; use need-based crop protection.
Before harvest	Assess maturity; harvest on time; arrange suitable post-harvest handling.
After harvest	Store produce safely; record yield and costs; manage residues appropriately; plan the next crop.

This action plan is a general guide. Individual practices should be adjusted to the crop, season, soil, climate, water availability and local technical recommendations.

Conclusion

Integrated Crop Management provides a practical approach to improving agricultural production in Rajasthan by combining suitable crop selection, soil-test-based nutrient management, efficient water use, timely weed control and need-based pest and disease management. Coordinating these practices can help farmers improve resource-use efficiency, avoid unnecessary input costs and maintain soil health.

The effectiveness of ICM depends on adapting practices to local soil and climatic conditions, crop requirements and available resources. Guidance from KVKs, agricultural universities and agriculture departments can help farmers adopt appropriate, science-based recommendations. Integrated Crop Management can therefore contribute to improved farm profitability and the long-term sustainability of agriculture in Rajasthan.

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