Smart Feeding, Smart Profits: How AI Is Transforming Fish Feed and Nutrition

Kinnera Tejaswini[1*], Kalli Vasanthi[1], Saidam Ashok Kumar[2]

[1]ICAR-Central Institute of Fisheries Education, Mumbai

[2]Department of Fisheries, Government of Andhra Pradesh

*Corresponding author

Email address: kinnera.fntpb101@cife.edu.in

Abstract

Feed management is central to profitability and sustainability in aquaculture, as feed accounts for the largest share of production costs. Inefficient feeding practices such as fixed schedules and overfeeding often lead to poor feed conversion ratios (FCR), water quality deterioration, and increased disease risk. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is emerging as a practical solution to improve feeding precision. By integrating data from cameras, water quality sensors, and automated feeders, AI systems monitor fish behaviour, appetite, and environmental conditions to adjust feed quantity and timing in real time. This approach reduces feed wastage, improves FCR, stabilizes pond conditions, and enhances overall productivity. Accessible low-cost technologies are making AI-assisted feeding feasible even for small and marginal farmers. Rather than replacing farmer expertise, AI functions as a decision-support tool, combining field experience with data-driven insights to promote efficient, profitable, and environmentally responsible aquaculture practices.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Precision Feeding, Feed Conversion Ratio (FCR), Sustainable Aquaculture, Smart Aquaculture Systems

Introduction

In fish farming, we often say, "Show me your feeding, and I'll tell you your profit." Feed is the single biggest cost in most farms, usually accounting for 60–70% of the total production cost (Li et al., 2021; Mizanur et al., 2024). When feed is managed well, ponds stay healthy and farmers earn. When feed is mismanaged, even the best seed and infrastructure

cannot save the crop. Across India, from small carp ponds to intensive shrimp and tilapia systems, the central question is the same: Are we feeding correctly, at the right time, and in the right amount? Today, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is starting to help farmers answer this question more accurately than ever before (Kumar et al., 2024; Global seafood alliance, 2025).

Why Feeding Is the Backbone of Fish Farming

Feed is more than a bag of pellets; it is an investment in growth. If fish convert feed efficiently, farmers gain more weight per kilogram of feed, improving Feed Conversion Ratio (FCR) and profit (Mizanur et al., 2024). A small improvement in FCR can mean a big saving over an entire crop. But when pellets go unbeaten and sink, they quickly turn from "nutrient" to "pollutant." Wasted feed increases ammonia, reduces dissolved oxygen, and can trigger disease and mortality (Happy feeds india, 2026). In simple terms, every extra handful of wasted feed is like throwing both money and water quality into the pond.

Traditional Feeding Problems: What Really Happens on Farms

After three decades of visiting farms, I see the same practical issues repeating:

- **Feeding by fixed habit** — Many farmers feed a certain number of bags per day simply because "this is what we always do," without adjusting for fish size, temperature, or recent growth.

- **Wrong frequency and timing** — Some feed too rarely, giving large doses that fish cannot fully consume. Others feed during the hottest part of the day when oxygen is low and appetite naturally drops.

- **Not watching fish behaviour** — In ponds with sinking feed or turbid water, farmers often cannot clearly see how much fish are actually eating. Uneaten feed at the bottom goes unnoticed.

- **Ignoring water quality link** — Overfeeding is still one of the most common causes of poor water quality, stress, and disease outbreaks (Li et al., 2021).

These are not "farmer failures" but management challenges. Until recently, farmers only had their eyes, experience, and rough records. Now, AI is adding another support system.

What Ai Brings to Fish Feed and Nutrition

AI in aquaculture simply means using smart tools that collect data, learn patterns, and support better decisions (Kumar et al., 2024). Cameras, sensors, and automatic feeders can now "observe" fish and ponds continuously and help answer questions like:

- How much feed do the fish actually need today?

- Are they eating fast or slowly?

- Is low oxygen or high temperature affecting appetite?

- Should we reduce or delay feeding?

Computer vision and sensor-based systems can track fish movement, feeding speed, and water parameters like oxygen, pH, and temperature (Fish farm feeder, 2026). These systems then use AI models to suggest or automatically adjust feeding rates and timing. In simple terms, AI looks at what is happening in the pond and then says, "Today, feed a little less," or "Now is a good time to feed," helping the farmer avoid both underfeeding and overfeeding (Fish farm feeder, 2025).

A Simple Example: AI-Based Feeding Decision on A Carp Farm

Imagine a 1-hectare carp pond using floating feed. Traditionally, the farmer feeds 40 kg twice a day, morning and evening, by guesswork. Sometimes the fish eat everything, sometimes feed is left over, but the schedule rarely changes.

Now the same pond is equipped with:

- A low-cost camera over the feeding area

- A sensor for dissolved oxygen and temperature

- An automatic feeder controlled by an AI-based app

The system learns for a few weeks how fish respond at different times, temperatures, and oxygen levels (Li et al., 2021). On a cool, cloudy morning, it observes that fish are eating actively. The AI allows the feeder to give close to the usual ration.

Fig. 1 AI-based feeding decision on a carp farm

By afternoon, the temperature rises and oxygen falls slightly. Fish slow down; they take longer to rise to the pellets. The camera and sensors detect this reduced activity. The AI then cuts the second feeding by, say, 20–30%, or suggests to the farmer on the mobile app: "Reduce evening ration; feeding speed low" (Spillfree, 2023). Over a crop, this small adjustment every day can reduce feed use by 15–30%, improve FCR, and keep water cleaner (SEARCA, 2025). The farmer's experience still guides stocking, fertilization, and harvest decisions, but AI helps fine-tune daily feeding.

How AI Helps in Key Feeding Decisions

- **Feed quantity optimization** — AI systems use growth models and previous feeding records to estimate current biomass and required daily ration (Mizanur et al., 2024)

- **Feeding frequency and timing** — By analysing hourly behaviour and oxygen levels, AI suggests the best times to feed and how many small meals are better than a few large ones (Li et al., 2021).

- **Understanding appetite and behaviour** — Computer vision tracks how quickly pellets are eaten and whether fish slow down or stop feeding, indicating satiety or stress.

- **Improving FCR** — Studies report improved FCR and up to 15% better feed efficiency when AI-guided feeding is used compared to fixed manual schedules.

- **Reducing feed wastage and pollution** — By cutting extra feed and matching rations to real appetite, AI systems significantly reduce uneaten feed and associated water pollution.

Traditional Feeding vs AI-Assisted Feeding

Table 1 Comparison of traditional and AI-assisted feeding approaches in aquaculture

Aspect	Traditional Feeding	AI-Assisted Feeding
Basis of decision	Habit, rough estimation	Data on behaviour, biomass, water quality
Feed quantity	Fixed or slowly adjusted	Adjusted frequently to real demand
Timing	Fixed times	Optimized based on appetite and oxygen
FCR	Variable, often sub-optimal	More stable, generally improved
Wastage	Often high	Noticeably reduced
Labor	More manual observation	More monitoring via app/dashboard

Benefits for Small and Marginal Farmers

Many small farmers worry that AI is only for big companies. Fortunately, that is changing. Low-cost automatic feeders, solar-powered feeding boats, and smartphone-based advisory tools are emerging in Asia and other regions (SEARCA, 2025). Some devices use simple cameras and locally built hoppers, making them more affordable and suitable for farmer groups and cooperatives (OumTech, 2025). For small farms, even a modest reduction in feed wastage and labor can make a big difference. Shared AI-enabled feeders within a cluster, or service models where a company installs and maintains the system while charging a small fee, are promising options (Global seafood alliance, 2025).

Benefits Beyond Profit: Water, Health, Sustainability

Feeding smarter is also farming greener. Less wasted feed means:

- Better water quality and fewer harmful algal blooms

- Lower risk of stress and disease in fish

- Reduced pressure on feed ingredients through improved FCR

- Lower energy uses in aeration and pumping when organic load is reduced

As global demand for fish grows, precision feeding with AI becomes an important tool for sustainable aquaculture, not just higher production.

Will AI Replace Farmers? A Clear No

AI is a tool, not a master. It does not know your local market, your canal water behaviour, or your village weather pattern as deeply as you do. What it does is process large amounts of data quickly and alert you to patterns that are easy to miss with the naked eye (Kumar et al., 2024). Good results come when farmer wisdom and AI tools work together. The farmer still decides when to stock, when to partially harvest, when to pause feeding due to disease suspicion, and how to manage inputs. AI supports decision-making; it does not make farmers unnecessary.

Future Outlook for Indian Aquaculture

India is moving steadily towards "smart aquaculture," with increasing use of IoT sensors, automatic feeders, and AI-based management platforms. Research institutes and companies are developing systems specifically suited to carp, catfish, tilapia, and shrimp farming under Indian conditions (Kumar et al., 2024). The big opportunity now is capacity building. If farmers receive proper training through Krishi Vigyan Kendras, fisheries departments, and Farmer Producer Organizations, they can adopt AI tools gradually starting with better record-keeping and simple feeding apps, and later moving to automated systems as budgets allow.

Conclusion: Feed Smart, Grow Smart

In aquaculture, every pellet count for profit, for water health, and for the planet. Smart feeding through AI helps farmers strike the perfect balance: efficient feeding, healthy fish, and sustainable ponds. As we step into a new era of aquaculture, embracing technology doesn't mean giving up tradition; it means strengthening it with science.

The future belongs to those who feed wisely. In the end, one message is clear: the farmers who combine their experience with smart feeding tools will lead the next generation of aquaculture turning every pellet into profit, and every pond into a more sustainable system.

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