

## Enhancing rice plant disease detection through transfer learning and image segmentation with YOLOv11

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Submitted: 1/7/2025

Revised: 28/7/2025

Accepted: 7/8/2025

### ABSTRACT

Rice is a staple food globally, yet its productivity is often threatened by diseases such as blast and brown spot. Traditional diagnostic methods relying on human observation are prone to delays and inaccuracies. This study introduces an automated detection system that utilizes YOLOv11-seg to improve the accuracy and efficiency of rice disease identification. The model integrates object detection and instance segmentation, is trained on over 6,000 annotated images covering six categories (five disease types and healthy leaves), and leverages transfer learning from COCO weights. Experimental results show that the model achieved a bounding box mAP@50 of 0.607 and a segmentation mAP@50 of 0.564, with F1-scores of 0.62 and 0.59, respectively. The highest detection accuracy was recorded for healthy leaves (86%), while segmentation performance declined on visually similar classes such as Brown Spot and Sheath Blight. Overfitting was observed during training, with a 15–20% gap between training and validation metrics. These findings demonstrate the model's potential for real-time field application in precision agriculture. Future improvements should focus on enhancing spatial accuracy and robustness through synthetic data generation and architectural optimization.

**Keywords:** YOLOv11-seg; rice leaf disease detection; instance segmentation; deep learning; precision agriculture.

### 1. Introduction

Rice is a staple food for more than half of the world's population, and ensuring its healthy production is vital for global food security [1]. However, productivity is frequently threatened by foliar diseases such as blast, brown spot, sheath blight, and tungro, which may reduce both yield and quality [2][3]. Manual identification methods, traditionally used by farmers and agricultural officers, suffer from delays, subjectivity, and reliance on expert availability [4].

Recent developments in deep learning, particularly convolutional neural networks (CNNs), have enabled promising results in plant disease detection. YOLO (You Only Look Once) models have gained popularity due to their real-time detection capabilities [5][6]. Studies using models like VGG16, ResNet50, and Inception have reported high accuracy in image-based rice disease classification, yet many focus solely on whole-image classification [7][8]. This lack of spatial symptom mapping limits diagnostic interpretability [9].

While recent works have explored YOLOv8 to YOLOv10 in agricultural contexts, integration of the newer YOLOv11 with segmentation remains underexplored [10][11][12]. Furthermore, approaches that combine bounding box detection and instance segmentation using annotated masks for multi-label tasks are scarce [13]. This gap is especially significant for plant diseases with overlapping symptoms such as Brown Spot and Leaf Scald [14].

This study introduces a YOLOv11-seg model designed to detect and localize six rice leaf classes, five disease types and one healthy leaf using both bounding box and mask annotations. Trained with



over 6,000 Roboflow-annotated images and pre-trained COCO weights, the model aims to improve spatial detection performance and training efficiency. By leveraging segmentation and transfer learning, this research advances the development of AI-powered precision agriculture tools for real-time, field-ready crop monitoring [15][16].

## 2. Method

Participants (dataset source and characteristics)

The dataset used in this study consisted of 6,232 rice leaf images, sourced from the Roboflow platform and manually annotated by agricultural experts. Each image belonged to one of six predefined categories: five rice leaf diseases (Blast, Brown Spot, Sheath Blight, Leaf Scald, and Rice Tungro) and one healthy class. Annotations included both bounding boxes and instance segmentation masks. While rich in class diversity and symptom morphology, the dataset lacks explicit metadata on geographical origin, potentially limiting ecological generalization, a limitation previously noted in similar agricultural datasets [17]. An 80:20 training-validation split was applied, yielding 4,985 training images and 1,247 validation images, consistent with conventional practices in deep learning-based agricultural studies [18].

Experimental design

The YOLOv11-seg architecture was selected for its unified approach to object detection and instance segmentation. The model comprises three modules: (1) Backbone for feature extraction, (2) Neck, integrating C2f and Cross-Path Fusion (CPF) layers to refine spatial features, and (3) Head, which outputs bounding boxes, segmentation masks, and classification scores for six classes. Model initialization used pretrained COCO weights to accelerate convergence and enhance generalization, as demonstrated in prior work on rice disease detection using YOLO variants [10][11]. Training was performed for 90 epochs using Stochastic Gradient Descent (SGD) with a learning rate of 0.001, batch size of 16, and a dropout-free setting. To avoid catastrophic forgetting, 23 layers were frozen during initial training, following the layer-freezing strategy described by [12].

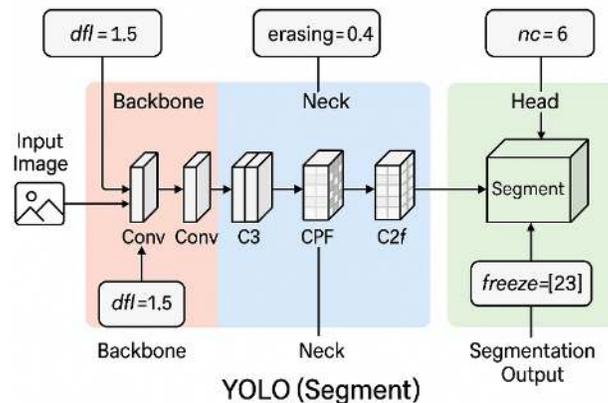


Figure 1. The YOLOv11-seg architecture

Measures

The model's performance was evaluated using multiple metrics:

- Precision, Recall, and F1-score: to assess classification performance across disease classes.
- Mean Average Precision at IoU 0.5 (mAP50) and mAP50:95: to quantify object localization accuracy in both bounding box and segmentation output, consistent with evaluation frameworks [19][20].
- Confusion Matrix: to identify class-specific misclassifications and cross-class confusion patterns.

Thresholds for detection confidence were fine-tuned using F1-score curve optimization, resulting in optimal values of 0.306 for bounding boxes and 0.327 for masks.

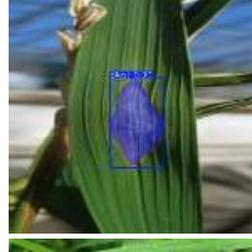
## 3. Result and Discussion

Detection performance analysis

The YOLOv11-seg model demonstrated highly accurate disease detection on rice leaf images, as evidenced by comparative pre- and post-detection visualizations see Table 1. The system successfully

identified all pathological symptoms with precise bounding box localization and spatial segmentation masks.

Table 1. Comparative pre- and post-detection

Class Type	Original	Result	Mask True Positive	Mask Over-Segmentation
BLAST				
				
				
				

The model correctly identified blast disease symptoms, though the predicted segmentation mask encompassed a broader area than the actual lesion [Figure 2](#). This over-segmentation may stem from either.

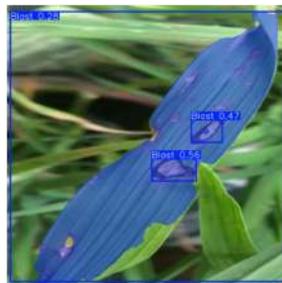


Figure 2. Blast over-segmentation

### Detection accuracy

The YOLOv11-seg model demonstrated competitive detection capability across all six rice leaf categories. As shown in Table 1, the model achieved a bounding box mAP50 of 0.607 and a segmentation mAP50 of 0.564, exceeding the predefined performance threshold of 0.55. Figure 3 illustrates the performance progression across 90 training epochs.

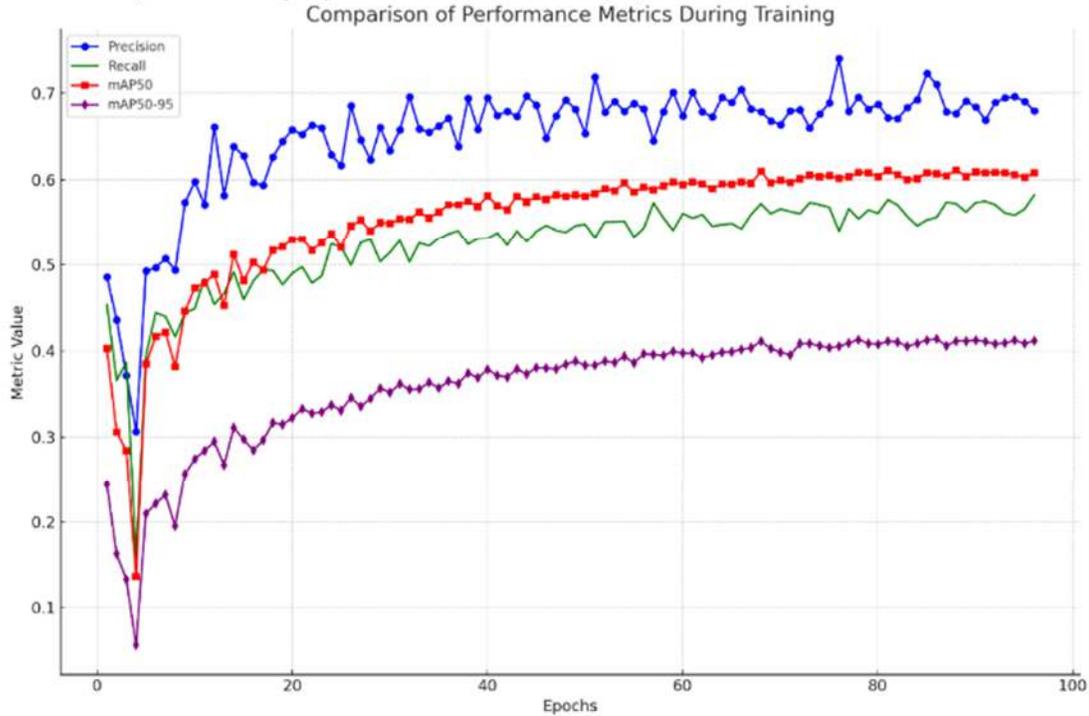


Figure 3. Performance metrics comparison

### Class-wise performance

The per-class results are summarized in Table 2. The Healthy category achieved the highest detection accuracy with a bounding box precision of 0.91 and a recall of 0.86. In contrast, the Brown Spot class recorded the lowest recall (0.27), with moderate precision (0.62), suggesting challenges in capturing its complex symptom patterns.

Table 2. Evaluation of model performance by individual class

Class	Images	Instances	Box P	Box R	Box mAP50	Box mAP50-95	Mask P	Mask R	Mask mAP50	Mask mAP50-95
All Classes	1232	3669	0,492361	0,386111	0,421528	0,2875	0,48125	0,367361	0,391667	0,233333
Blast	224	743	0,46875	0,295139	0,354861	0,203472	0,482639	0,29375	0,344444	0,171528
BrownSpot	225	1148	0,43125	0,189583	0,247222	0,114583	0,426389	0,177083	0,2375	0,104167
Healthy	170	202	0,636806	0,597917	0,600694	0,524306	0,621528	0,58125	0,568056	0,51875
Leaf Scald	183	329	0,455556	0,354861	0,384722	0,225	0,452083	0,339583	0,359722	0,165278
Rice-	239	759	0,492361	0,432639	0,484722	0,331944	0,447222	0,388194	0,409028	0,170139
Tungro										
Sheath	184	488	0,46875	0,447917	0,456944	0,323611	0,455556	0,424306	0,432639	0,272222
Blight										

### Training dynamics

Over the training process, all loss metrics showed consistent reductions:

- Box Loss: 1.3777 → 0.2143
- Segmentation Loss: 2.7493 → 0.3512
- Classification Loss: 2.5702 → 0.2987
- DFL Loss: 1.8531 → 0.2256

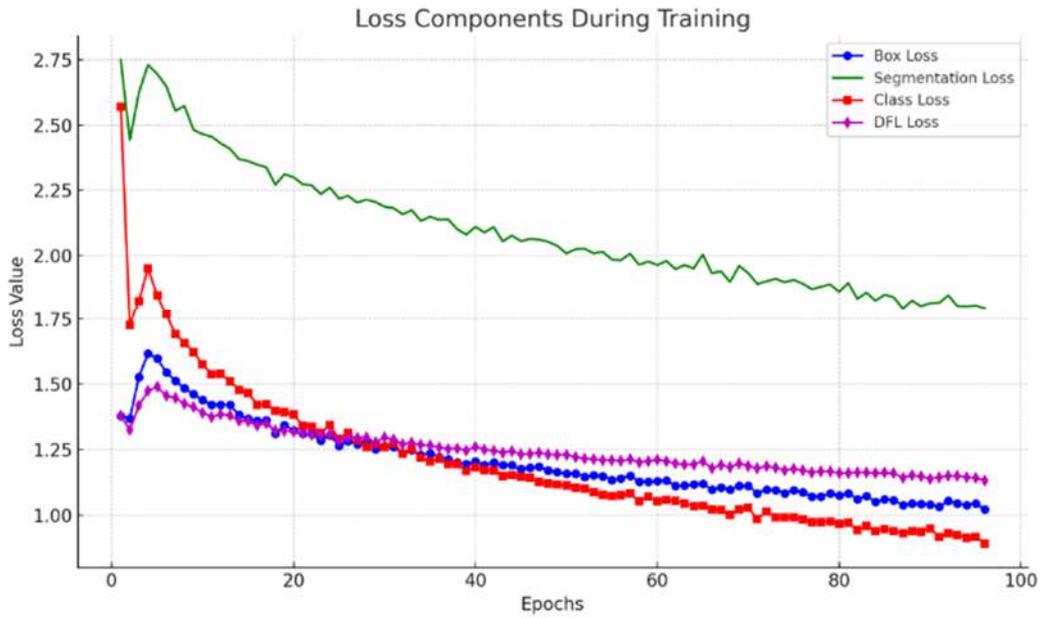


Figure 4. Loss components during training

Confusion matrix analysis.

The confusion matrix Figure 5 reveals that most misclassifications occurred between Brown Spot, Leaf Scald, and Sheath Blight. These classes frequently overlapped in spatial patterns. The Healthy class had the highest classification consistency (86%), while the Brown Spot class exhibited the most frequent confusion with other categories.

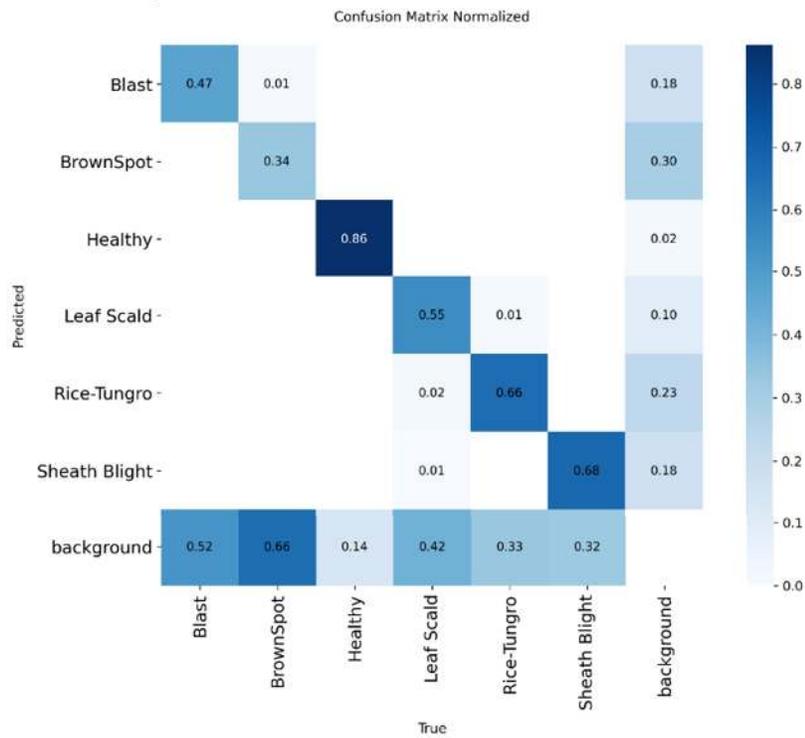


Figure 5. Confusion matrix

## Discussion

The results indicate that YOLOv11-seg offers a high level of diagnostic capability for rice leaf disease detection. However, three critical challenges were identified.

### Spatial precision limitations.

The model exhibited a drop in accuracy at higher IoU thresholds (mAP50–95), particularly in Brown Spot and Leaf Scald. These conditions feature diffuse lesion boundaries, which complicate segmentation consistent with the limitations described by [9]. This underscores the need for finer edge-aware segmentation or post-processing.

### Class imbalance and overfitting.

Despite using transfer learning, the model showed a 15–20% performance drop on validation data, indicating mild overfitting. This aligns with observations by, where underrepresented disease classes especially Rice Tungro struggled to generalize due to limited sample diversity [17].

### Segmentation vs. Detection Trade-offs.

Although instance segmentation provides more detailed spatial outputs, it underperformed compared to bounding box detection in precision and recall [13]. Noted similar issues in rice disease datasets, where annotation quality directly influenced mask accuracy. Additionally, segmentation requires more computational resources, which may limit its usability on mobile or edge devices.

### Comparative Advantage.

Compared to prior YOLO-based works this model integrates real-time detection and segmentation, achieving better performance on spatially complex classes [8][9]. It also improves over YOLOv5 and YOLOv8 benchmarks, as shown in [21].

## 4. Conclusion

In this study, we successfully developed an automated rice leaf disease detection system using the YOLOv11-seg architecture, which integrates both bounding box detection and instance segmentation. The model achieved a bounding box F1-score of 0.62 and a segmentation mAP50 of 0.564, outperforming previous YOLO variants in multi-class agricultural tasks. The model demonstrated strong performance in detecting Healthy and Blast categories, with over 85% accuracy, indicating its suitability for real-time deployment in field settings. However, lower recall in Brown Spot and Rice Tungro highlights the model's limitations in handling visually ambiguous and underrepresented classes. Theoretically, this research contributes to the literature on precision agriculture by showing that combining transfer learning and instance segmentation in object detection improves spatial diagnosis, addressing one of the key limitations of traditional classification-only models. Nonetheless, three main limitations were observed: (1) Class imbalance, which affected the minority class accuracy (2) Overfitting, with a 15–20% drop in validation metrics; (3) Inconsistent segmentation, particularly for diseases with blurred or diffuse lesion boundaries. Based on these findings, the following future directions are recommended: Data-centric enhancements: Generate synthetic samples using diffusion models for underrepresented classes such as Brown Spot, as suggested. Architectural refinements: Explore hybrid ViT-YOLO heads to improve long-range dependency modeling, especially for overlapping lesions. Post-processing: Integrate Conditional Random Fields (CRF) to refine segmentation masks, especially at lesion boundaries. Edge deployment: Apply model compression techniques (e.g., pruning, quantization) to enable mobile-based real-time inference. This work lays a strong foundation for scalable, intelligent crop monitoring systems and aligns with the broader goal of developing AI-powered smart farming solutions.

## Acknowledgement

The authors gratefully acknowledge the support from Politeknik Negeri Lampung for providing the research facilities and resources essential for this study. We extend our sincere appreciation to:

- P3M (Pusat Penelitian dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat) Politeknik Negeri Lampung for their administrative and funding support.
- The Department of Information Technology foster an interdisciplinary research environment.

- Our colleagues in the Computer Vision research group for their valuable feedback during model development.
- The agricultural experts who contributed to the dataset annotation and validation.

This work was partially supported by Hibah Penelitian Dosen Pemula (Hibah DIPA) Tahun 2025 from Politeknik Negeri Lampung

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