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ROOTNET: THE FASCINATING PLANT UNDERGROUND NETWORK

Nandita Das*, Ayandip Maity

Department of Agriculture, Brainware University, Barasat, Kolkata-700125, West Bengal, India

*Corresponding author email: ashokdas6753@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Once considered inert, plants are understood to participate in underground communication networks, termed "RootNet." Emerging evidence shows that roots exchange resources, signal chemically, and interact with symbiotic fungi, forming internet-like biological systems across ecosystems. This review explores mechanisms such as root exudates and mycorrhizal links that support kin recognition, pathogen defense, and cooperative nutrient transfer. Beyond ecology, RootNet informs innovations in plant-based sensors, bio-digital interfaces, and sustainable agriculture, including soil monitoring and restoration. Despite promise, uncertainties remain regarding specificity and human impacts, while future research may enable biofeedback systems enhancing food security and climate resilience.

KEYWORDS: Mycorrhizal Networks, Plant Languages, RootNet, Sustainable Agriculture, Underground Communication

INTRODUCTION

We have underestimated the complexity and intelligence of the silent, invisible world beneath our feet. According to recent findings in plant biology, roots communicate in addition to absorbing nutrients and water. Often compared to an underground plant internet, this "RootNet" allows plants to communicate, alert others to threats, and even work together. This covert network upends conventional wisdom on intelligence and communication, creating novel opportunities for bio-inspired technology, ecosystem monitoring, and sustainable agriculture.

THE STUDY OF PLANT COMMUNICATION

In the past, plants were thought to be passive beings that mechanically reacted to outside stimuli. Studies conducted since the early 2000s, however, have significantly changed this viewpoint. According to research, plant roots perceive changes in their surroundings, release chemical signals, and modify their activity accordingly (Baluska et al., 2009).

Chemical substances released by roots, known as root exudates, are essential for underground communication. These substances aid in kin identification, disease defense, and symbiotic relationships—particularly with fungi. The mycorrhizal network, sometimes known as the "Wood Wide Web," which links the roots of several plant species via fungal filaments, is among the more intriguing instances (Simard et al., 1997). This network allows plants and trees to send chemical signals, water, and nutrients over long distances.

ROOTNET: A NETWORK OF NATURAL INFORMATION

The name "RootNet" aptly describes the characteristics of this covert communication technology. Similarly, how the internet connects computers all over the world, RootNet creates a cooperative network out of individual plants. Before the threat spreads, plants use mycorrhizal fungus to relay distress signals to nearby plants when they are attacked through pests or diseases (Song et al., 2010).

It's interesting to note that this system seems to favor particular species or individuals over others, much like network bandwidth distribution, suggesting some sort of biological hierarchy or decision-making at the plant level. In a forest, for example, "mother trees" are known to transfer more carbon to their progeny than to unrelated trees (Simard and Durall, 2004). This brings up philosophical issues regarding the intelligence of plants and even their "social behavior."

INSPIRATION FOR ENGINEERING: BIO-DIGITAL INTERFACES

Not only do ecologists find the RootNet concept fascinating, but technologists have also been motivated to reconsider networking purposes, biosensors, and eco-feedback technology. If plants are able to build robust, flexible networks without centralized management, might this lead to new computer techniques or Internet of Things (IoT) networks?

In an effort to create plant-based sensors, researchers have begun to experiment with bio-electrical detection of signals in plants. For example, live environmental monitors are being designed using the electrical reactions of plants to surrounding changes (light, moisture, and pollutants) (Tanaka et al., 2020). Future smart farms may be able to use plants as sensors to monitor soil conditions and crop health without the need for electronic equipment by utilizing RootNet-like systems.

USES IN ECOLOGY AND AGRICULTURE

There are several uses for comprehending and utilizing RootNet:

Agricultural Sustainability: By guiding precision agriculture, RootNet can lessen the demand for chemical pesticides and fertilizers. It may be possible to design interconnected crops to "warn" one another about infections, enabling prompt and focused action.

Monitoring of Soil Health: Farmers can more accurately evaluate the nutrient cycles and soil microbial health by researching root exudates or plant-fungi interactions.

The ecology of restoration: Restoring plant communication networks in damaged settings through the introduction of specific mycorrhizal fungus or "hub plants" may hasten the recovery of forests or grasslands (van der Heijden and Horton, 2009).

PHILOSOPHICAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Long-held beliefs about plants must be reexamined in light of RootNet's recognition. Does this imply that plants are intelligent if they can share, interact, and even make decisions? Their intricate signaling networks imply a decentralized type of knowledge or problem-solving, despite the fact that they lack brains and consciousness (Baluska et al., 2006).

The way that people treat and use plants may be affected ethically by this insight. It promotes the idea that plants are active members of ecosystems rather than only passive resources.

OBSTACLES AND POTENTIAL RESEARCH

There are still a lot of unsolved questions despite significant progress:

- To what extent are the communications transmitted via RootNet specific?
- Can human activity alter or interfere with this network?
- Could these natural systems be improved or replicated in other fields through genetic engineering?

Future studies may reveal more intricate plant-to-plant “languages,” which could lead to real-time biofeedback systems for enhancing food security and climate resilience.

CONCLUSION

RootNet is a fundamental reality that lies under the soil and is changing our perception of the plant life. It is not merely a metaphor. The subterranean internet of plants exhibits a biological sophistication comparable to digital networks, from inter-root interaction to forest-scale networks. RootNet provides a preview of a future in which plants are active, intelligent components in an alive network rather than passive green backgrounds as science and technology merge with ecology.

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