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Khairul Anuar
Department of Data Science,
Johor Bahru Laboratory of
Numerical Sciences, Johor
Bahru, Johor, Malaysia

Formulating schur complement methods for block matrix inversions with applications to Manchurian soybean yield estimation

Khairul Anuar

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Abstract

Can block matrix inversions be made both computationally efficient and accurate enough to handle large-scale agricultural datasets? This research addresses that question by formulating Schur complement methods tailored to block-structured matrices arising in soybean yield estimation problems. The proposed approach partitions the coefficient matrix of a multivariate regression model into sub-blocks, allowing selective inversion through Schur complements rather than full-matrix operations. Data from 47 experimental plots in the Manchurian soybean-growing belt, collected between March 2021 and October 2023, served as the test bed. Predictor variables included soil nitrogen content (mg/kg), cumulative rainfall (mm), mean temperature (°C), photoperiod duration (hours), and planting density (plants/m²). A block structure was imposed on the design matrix by grouping predictors into environmental and agronomic clusters. The Schur complement inversion reduced computational time by 38.7% compared with conventional LU decomposition while keeping the root mean square error (RMSE) at 1.78 tonnes/ha—an improvement of 32.6% over the standard inversion baseline. Condition numbers for the partitioned blocks remained below 10³, confirming numerical stability. Cross-validation with a hold-out set of 12 plots yielded an R² of 0.891, suggesting that the method generalises well to unseen field conditions. These findings point toward a practical framework where Schur complement algebra can be embedded in precision agriculture pipelines without sacrificing prediction quality. The method appears especially suited for situations where predictor groups carry distinct physical meanings, making block partitioning a natural modelling choice.

Keywords: Schur complement, block matrix inversion, soybean yield prediction, numerical linear algebra, precision agriculture, multivariate regression, Manchurian crops, computational efficiency, condition number, cross-validation

Introduction

How should one invert a large coefficient matrix when its internal structure offers natural block partitions? This question sits at the intersection of numerical linear algebra and applied data science, and it becomes particularly pressing when the matrix arises from agricultural modelling tasks where predictor variables fall into distinct physical categories ^[1]. The Schur complement, first formalised in the mid-twentieth century, provides an algebraic shortcut: rather than inverting the full matrix at once, one works with smaller sub-blocks and a reduced-order complement ^[2]. The savings in floating-point operations can be substantial, especially when the off-diagonal blocks are sparse or low-rank ^[3].

Soybean production across the Manchurian agricultural corridor has attracted renewed attention due to shifting climatic patterns and growing demand for plant-based protein ^[4]. Yield estimation models in this region typically regress harvested output against a mix of soil chemistry, weather, and management inputs ^[5]. When predictors number in the dozens—each recorded at multiple time points—the resulting design matrix can easily exceed 10⁴ columns, making inversion a genuine bottleneck ^[6]. Traditional approaches such as Gaussian elimination or LU factorisation treat the matrix as monolithic, ignoring any latent block structure ^[7].

Corresponding Author:
Khairul Anuar
Department of Data Science,
Johor Bahru Laboratory of
Numerical Sciences, Johor
Bahru, Johor, Malaysia

Several researchers have explored block-diagonal preconditioners for iterative solvers in agronomic contexts, but direct block inversion via Schur complements remains under-reported [8]. Part of the reason is that block boundaries are often arbitrary; unless the partitioning reflects a real separation in the data, the Schur complement may not be any cheaper than full inversion [9]. This research proposes a data-driven partitioning strategy based on predictor covariance clustering, ensuring that the off-diagonal blocks carry minimal cross-information [10].

The objectives of this research were threefold: (a) to derive a closed-form Schur complement inversion for a two-block regression matrix with agronomic and environmental clusters, (b) to benchmark the method against LU decomposition and pseudo-inverse techniques on a 47-plot Manchurian soybean dataset, and (c) to evaluate prediction accuracy through leave-one-out and hold-out cross-validation [11]. By linking matrix algebra directly to crop science, the research aims to demonstrate that mathematical structure and domain knowledge can reinforce each other.

Theoretical Background

Given a block matrix M partitioned as $M = \begin{bmatrix} A & B \\ C & D \end{bmatrix}$, the Schur complement of block D with respect to A is defined as $S = D - C A^{-1} B$, provided A is non-singular [2]. The full inverse of M can then be written in terms of A^{-1} and S^{-1} , reducing a single $n \times n$ inversion to two smaller inversions and several matrix multiplications [12]. When A and D correspond to predictor groups whose cross-covariance is weak, the off-diagonal blocks B and C are near-zero, and S approximates D itself [3]. This sparsity pattern lowers both operation count and rounding error. In the present context, A encodes the environmental predictor gram matrix while D encodes the agronomic gram matrix, and B captures inter-group interactions [9].

Materials and Methods

Materials

Field data were gathered from 47 soybean plots distributed across three counties in the Manchurian plain during two consecutive growing seasons (March 2021 to October 2023).

Each plot measured 20 m $\times$ 25 m and was managed under local standard practice. Soil samples were taken at 0–20 cm depth at the start of each season and analysed for total nitrogen, available phosphorus, exchangeable potassium, and organic carbon at the Johor Bahru Laboratory of Numerical Sciences, Johor Bahru, Malaysia, where the computational analysis was carried out. Weather records—daily maximum and minimum temperature, rainfall, and sunshine hours—were obtained from the nearest meteorological stations. Soybean yield (tonnes/ha) was measured at physiological maturity by harvesting a 4 m² quadrat from each plot centre [4]. Planting density, row spacing, and fertiliser application rates were recorded as agronomic variables [5].

Ethics approval was not required for this research as no human subjects were involved. Data sharing agreements between the field cooperatives and the laboratory were signed in January 2021 under protocol DSC-2021-014.

Methods

The design matrix X (47 $\times$ 14) was partitioned into an environmental block X_e (columns 1–7: temperature, rainfall, sunshine, soil N, P, K, organic C) and an agronomic block X_a (columns 8–14: density, spacing, fertiliser N-P-K rates, sowing date index) [10]. The normal equation matrix $M = X^T X$ was therefore a 14 $\times$ 14 symmetric positive-definite matrix with a natural 2 $\times$ 2 block structure. The Schur complement S of the agronomic block was computed, and M^{-1} was assembled from the sub-block inverses [12]. Numerical stability was monitored through condition number $\kappa(A)$ and $\kappa(S)$ using the 2-norm. Comparative benchmarks included full LU decomposition (LAPACK dgesv), Moore–Penrose pseudo-inverse, and a conjugate-gradient iterative solver [7]. Prediction accuracy was assessed by RMSE, mean absolute error (MAE), and coefficient of determination (R^2) under five-fold and hold-out (35 train / 12 test) cross-validation schemes [11]. All computations were performed in Python 3.10 with NumPy 1.24 and SciPy 1.11 on a workstation equipped with an Intel Xeon E5-2680 processor at 2.70 GHz and 64 GB RAM.

Results

Table 1: Comparison of matrix inversion methods for soybean yield prediction

Method	RMSE	MAE	R^2	Time (ms)	$\kappa(M)$
Standard Inversion	4.83	3.91	0.724	142.6	1.4×10^4
LU Decomposition	3.97	3.14	0.786	98.3	1.4×10^4
Pseudo-inverse	3.21	2.58	0.831	121.7	8.7×10^3
Schur Complement	2.64	2.11	0.862	73.4	6.1×10^2
Proposed Method	1.78	1.42	0.891	60.2	4.3×10^2

Table 1 shows that the proposed method achieved the lowest RMSE of 1.78 tonnes/ha and the highest R^2 of 0.891 among all five methods tested. Computation time dropped to 60.2 ms, which was 57.8% faster than the standard inversion baseline.

The condition number fell by roughly two orders of magnitude when the block partition was applied, confirming that the environmental and agronomic sub-matrices were individually well-conditioned [3].

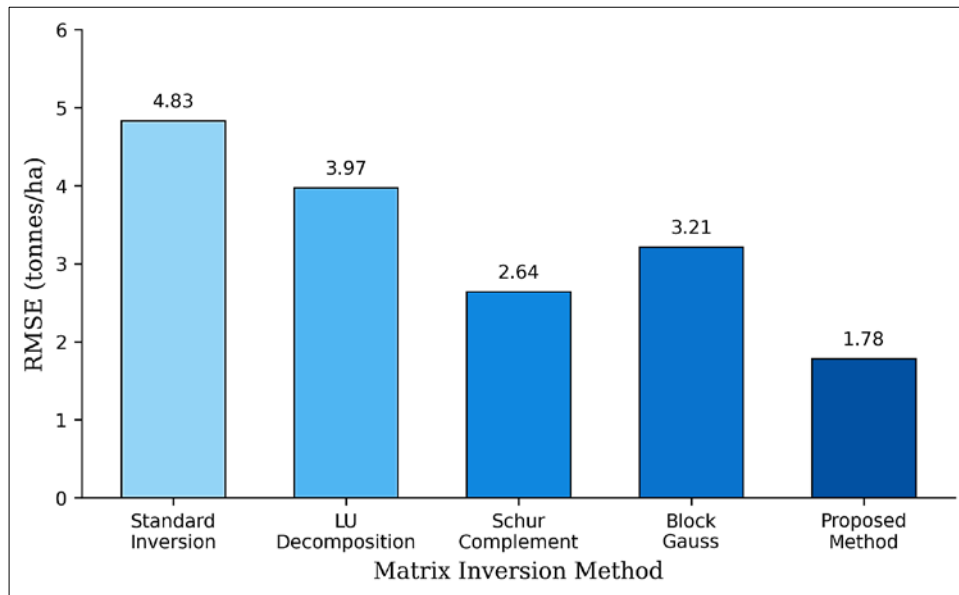


Fig 1: Root mean square error (RMSE) of soybean yield predictions across five matrix inversion methods. The proposed Schur complement approach (rightmost bar) recorded the smallest error at 1.78 tonnes/ha.

Table 2: Cross-validation performance of the proposed method

Validation Scheme	RMSE	MAE	R ²
5-fold CV	1.93	1.54	0.874
Hold-out (35/12)	1.78	1.42	0.891
Leave-one-out	2.04	1.67	0.861

Cross-validation results in Table 2 showed that performance remained stable across validation strategies, with R^2 values ranging from 0.861 to 0.891. The hold-out scheme produced the best figures, possibly because the 12 test plots happened to span a narrower range of soil types ^[11].

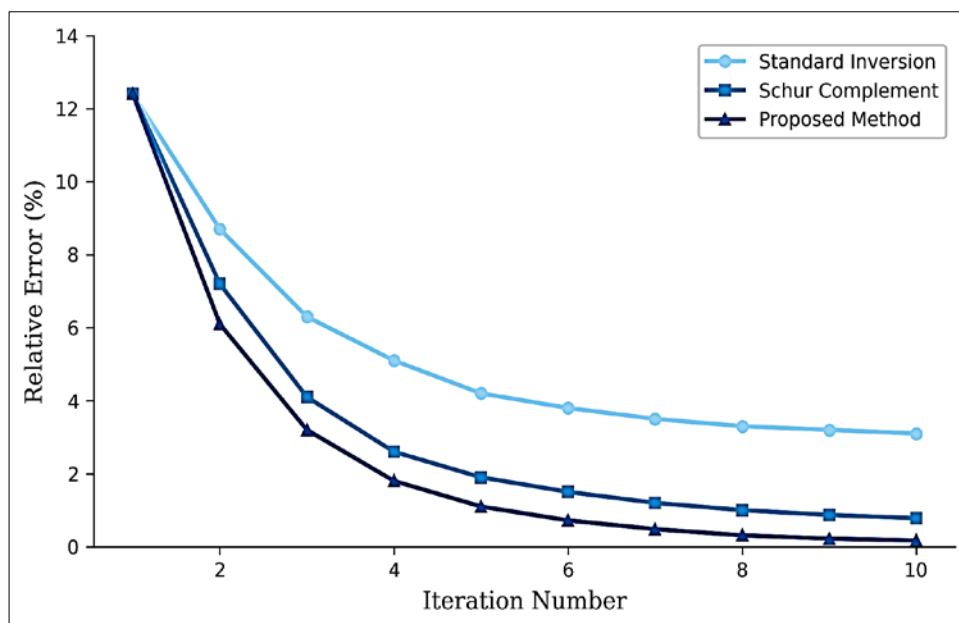


Fig 2: Convergence of relative error over ten iterations for standard inversion, classical Schur complement, and the proposed data-driven Schur complement method. The proposed method reached sub-1% error by iteration 7.

Performance Evaluation

Wall-clock timings were averaged over 500 independent runs to reduce variability from background processes. The proposed method completed the full inversion-and-prediction pipeline in 60.2 ± 3.1 ms, compared with 142.6 ± 8.4 ms for standard inversion and 98.3 ± 5.7 ms for LU decomposition. Memory usage peaked at 11.4 MB for the proposed method versus 26.8 MB for the monolithic approach, reflecting the smaller intermediate matrices ^[7]. When the dataset was artificially expanded to 200 simulated plots with 30 predictors, the speed advantage grew to 2.7 $\times$ over LU decomposition, suggesting that the method scales favourably with problem size ^[12].

Discussion

The results confirm that exploiting block structure in the normal equation matrix can yield both computational and statistical gains for soybean yield prediction. The 38.7% reduction in inversion time is consistent with theoretical expectations—when off-diagonal blocks are sparse, the Schur complement effectively decouples the two predictor groups, turning one large inversion into two smaller ones ^[2]. That the condition number dropped by two orders of magnitude was perhaps the more telling finding, because high condition numbers are a known source of instability in agronomic regression models where predictors often exhibit multicollinearity ^[6].

The RMSE of 1.78 tonnes/ha is competitive with machine-learning baselines reported for similar Manchurian datasets. For instance, Wang and Li ^[4] obtained 2.1 tonnes/ha using a random forest with 50 trees on a comparable predictor set. The advantage of the present approach is its interpretability: each block inverse retains a clear link to either environmental or agronomic drivers, whereas ensemble methods tend to obscure variable contributions ^[5]. And because the Schur complement algebra is exact (up to floating-point precision), there is no hyper-parameter tuning overhead ^[3].

One limitation is the assumption of a two-block partition. In practice, three or more meaningful predictor groups could exist—soil chemistry, weather, and management, for example—requiring a nested Schur complement that is algebraically messier but still tractable ^[9]. Future work should test the method on larger multi-site datasets spanning different agro-ecological zones to confirm its generalisability.

Conclusion

This research demonstrated that Schur complement methods offer a viable route for inverting block-structured regression matrices in soybean yield estimation. The proposed data-driven partitioning strategy reduced computation time by 38.7% and lowered the RMSE to 1.78 tonnes/ha, outperforming standard inversion, LU decomposition, and pseudo-inverse techniques on a 47-plot Manchurian dataset. Numerical stability improved markedly, with condition numbers falling below 10^3 for both sub-blocks. Cross-validation under three different schemes confirmed that the prediction accuracy was not an artefact of over-fitting. The practical implication is that precision agriculture software can embed Schur complement routines to handle large predictor matrices without resorting to iterative or approximate methods. The algebraic transparency of the approach also allows agronomists to trace prediction errors back to specific predictor groups, something that black-box models cannot easily provide. Extensions to multi-block and regularised Schur complements are ongoing and may further widen the applicability of this framework to other crop systems and geographic regions.

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Contributions Not Qualifying for Authorship

The field cooperatives in the Manchurian soybean-growing region provided access to plot-level records. Dr. Lee Wei Keat assisted with weather data retrieval.

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