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Nitrogen scheduling and conjoined application of nano and granular urea on growth characters, growth analysis and yield of sweet corn (*Zea mays var saccharata*)

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Abstract

Field experiment was carried out at Chettikuttai Village of Harur taluk, Dharmapuri district, Tamil Nadu during July- October 2021 to study the “Nitrogen scheduling and conjoined application of nano as well as granular forms of urea in sweet corn (*Zea mays var saccharata*)”. The soil of the experimental field was sandy clay loam in texture with a pH of 7.7. The experiment was laid out in randomized block design with ten treatments and replicated thrice. Among the different treatments, application of 25% N as granular urea (GU) at basal + 25% N as nano urea (NU) at 4 leaf stage + 25% N as nano urea at 8 leaf stage + 25% N as nano urea at tasseling stage (T₈) proved superiority by registering better growth characters like plant height (197.9 cm) and dry matter production (10567 kg ha⁻¹), growth analysis *viz.*, Leaf Area Index (LAI) (7.05), Crop Growth Rate (CGR) (10.58gm⁻² day⁻¹), Absolute Growth Rate (AGR) (105.836 g plant⁻¹ day⁻¹), Relative Growth Rate (RGR) (0.01690 g g⁻¹ day⁻¹) and Net Assimilation Rate (NAR) (0.1420 g m⁻² day⁻¹) and Green cob yield (8809 kg ha⁻¹) and Green fodder yield (13650 kg ha⁻¹). This was statistically comparable with the 20% N as granular urea at basal + 20% N as nano urea at 4 leaf stage + 40% N as nano urea at 8 leaf stage + 20% N as nano urea at tasseling stage (T₅). However, the treatment control (T₁- without N) registered low values on all the above traits.

Keywords: Sweet corn, nano urea, growth, yield, LAI, CGR, AGR, RGR and NAR

Introduction

Sweet corn (*Zea mays var saccharata*) also called as sugar corn is a type of maize with high sugar content belongs to the family poaceace, it is one of the warm season crop. It is a variety of maize, but it differs from all other type of corn because it produces and retains a high amount of sugar content in kernels (Zohair, 2010) [20]. Unlike field corn types, which are picked when the kernels are dried and completely matured, sweet corn varieties are harvested when the kernels are still in milky stage. Sweet corn is harvested when immature and eaten as a vegetable, rather than a grain (Carla *et al.*, 2021) [18]. There is a great scope for commercial sweet corn production due to increasing demand of sweet corn in the market. Sweet corn being a C₄ plant has enormous potential for cultivation and well responds to applied inputs. Generally corn as a typical cereal crop responds favorably to fertilizer application. The Plants require a specific amount of some nutrients in a specific form to be added in time for their growth and development (Sharma *et al.*, 2017) [15]. Nitrogen is an essential primary nutrient for plant growth. The most commonly used source of nitrogen is urea (46% N). However, soil nitrogen concentration is reduced due to leaching, use efficiency of nitrogen is also low in urea application (Subbaiya *et al.*, 2012) [19].

The use of chemical fertilizers causes major environmental problems such as heavy metal accumulation in soil and plant systems (Abdel *et al.*, 2017) [1]. Therefore modern ideas of nano fertilizers are the most advanced technology in the way of supplying mineral nutrients to crops. Compared to chemical fertilizers their supplemental pattern of nutrients for plant needs minimizes leaching and improves fertilizer use efficiency (Subbarao *et al.*, 2013) [17]. Regarding N fertilizers, the application of nanotechnology can provide fertilizers that release N when crops need, It eventually leads to increase in N efficiency through decreases in N leaching and emissions and long-term incorporation by soil microorganisms (Davaranah *et al.*, 2017) [9]. With this background, the current experiment was carried out to “study the Nitrogen scheduling and conjoined application of nano and granular forms of urea in sweet corn” with the following objective, to study the impact of nano urea on growth characters and

yield of sweet corn.

Materials and Methods

During July-October, 2021 a field experiment was conducted in the farmer's field in Chettikuttai village of Harur Taluk, Dharmapuri District of Tamil Nadu. The experimental field was located at 12°8' North latitude and 78°32' East longitude with an altitude of +351.57 m above mean sea level. The texture of the experimental field soil was sandy clay loam in with a pH of 7.7. The soil was low in available nitrogen, medium in available phosphorus and potassium. The study used the popular sweet corn hybrid SUGAR-75. The experiment used randomised block design, with three replications and ten treatments. The treatment schedule were as follows: T₁ -Control (without N), T₂ -100% RDN (120 kg) as granular urea, T₃ -20% N as granular urea at basal + 20% N as granular urea at 4 leaf stage + 40% N as nano urea at 8 leaf stage + 20% N as nano urea at tasseling, T₄ -20% N as granular urea at basal + 20% N as granular urea at 4 leaf stage + 40% N as granular urea at 8 leaf stage + 20% N as nano urea at tasseling, T₅ -20% N as granular urea at basal + 20% N as nano urea at 4 leaf stage + 40% N as nano urea at 8 leaf stage + 20% N as nano urea at tasseling, T₆ -25% N as granular urea at basal + 25% N as granular urea at 4 leaf stage + 25% N as nano urea at 8 leaf stage + 25% N as nano urea at tasseling, T₇ -25% N as granular urea at basal + 25% N as granular urea at 4 leaf stage + 25% N as granular urea at 8 leaf stage + 25% N as nano urea at tasseling, T₈ -25% N as granular urea at basal + 25% N as nano urea at 4 leaf stage + 25% N as nano urea at 8 leaf stage + 25% N as nano urea at tasseling, T₉ -33% N as granular urea at basal + 34% N as granular urea at 8 leaf stage + 33% N as nano urea at tasseling and T₁₀ -33% N as granular urea at basal + 34% N as nano urea at 8 leaf stage + 33% N as nano urea at tasseling. The seeds were dibbled at the rate of 12.5 kg ha⁻¹ with the spacing of 60 × 20 cm. Nano urea is foliar applied and granular urea is soil applied. The nutrition was applied as per treatment schedule Hand weeding was done at 20 DAS. Observations on growth attributes were recorded at 30, 60 DAS and at harvest and yield were recorded at harvest of sweet corn crop.

Results and Discussion

Growth characters

The conjoined application of nano urea and granular urea to sweet corn strongly influenced all growth characters. A thorough inspection of data revealed that, 25% N as GU at basal + 25% N as NU at 4 leaf stage + 25% N as NU at 8 leaf stage + 25% N as NU at tasseling stage (T₈) maximum plant heights (Table 1) of 99.2, 108.2 and 197.9 cm were observed at 30, 60 DAS and at harvest respectively, as well as dry matter production (Table 1) of 4805, 7980 and 10567 kg ha⁻¹ at 30, 60 DAS and at harvest. Foliar application of Nano fertilizer could improve growth of crops. Soil application methods allowed nutrients to enter plants through root hairs, lenticels, mucilage and exudates while foliar application of nano fertilizer is a beneficial method as it easily penetrated through stomata, hydathodes and trichomes, later transported to all parts of the plant via phloem pathway. Nano fertilizer extended the duration of nutrient release to the plant, enhances the absorption of nutrients, increase the accumulation of nitrogen in the plant, also balances the nutrient loss results in more plant height (Adibah *et al.*, 2020) [3].

The dry matter production depends upon the photosynthetic ability and nutrient use efficiency of the plant. Here the combined application of conventional fertilizers and effect of nano fertilizers, all the growth characters were increased significantly. That the nano fertilizers released regularly according to the plant's need without leaching or infiltration compared with traditional fertilizers improved plant height and dry biomass. These findings were consistent with those of Vafa *et al.* (2015) [18], Abdel-Aziz *et al.* (2018) [2], and Alzreejawi and Al-Juthery, (2020) [7].

Growth analysis

Application of 25% N as granular urea at basal + 25% N as nano urea at 4 leaf stage + 25% N as nano urea at 8 leaf stage + 25% N as nano urea at tasseling stage (T₈) maximum values of growth analysis *viz.*, LAI (Table 2), CGR (Table 2), AGR (Table 3), RGR (Table 3) and NAR (Table 3). This could be because the foliar application of nano sources of nutrient considerably improved the leaf nutrient content and consequently increased the meristematic activities and cell elongation associated with protein synthesis of leaves make a pathway to produce more functional leaves and photosynthetic activity for a longer period of time and thereby contributing higher LAI (Alyasari *et al.*, 2019) [6].

The superior crop growth rate, relative growth rate and net assimilation rate was due to the fact that nano nutrients supplied through foliage has mobilised more efficiently by the plant resulting in enhanced growth attributes and ultimately enhanced the crop growth rate, relative growth rate and net assimilation rate. Furthermore, the increase in dry matter accumulation with foliar applications of nano N nutrient resulted in the ready availability of nutrients at critical period of crop demand. The above results are also in conformity with the findings of Egli, (2019) [10] and Alimamy *et al.*, (2022) [5].

Yield

The experimental results presented in Table 4 indicate that, Nano urea application has resulted significant changes in green cob yield (8809 kg ha⁻¹) and green fodder yield (13650 kg ha⁻¹). The conjoined application of 25% N as granular urea at basal + 25% N as nano urea at 4 leaf stage + 25% N as nano urea at 8 leaf stage + 25% N as nano urea at tasseling stage (T₈) results in highest production of green cobs and green fodder over the rest of the treatments. Increase in yields of sweet corn due to foliar application of nano N was due to increased growth parameters *viz.* plant height and dry matter accumulation in plants which ultimately resulted in higher yield. This could be attributed by nano particles their distinctive, unique behavior and characteristics due to their smallness, high surface area and their ability to increase their absorption speed. Increased enzymatic activity as well as increase in the speed of biochemical reactions when it is at the nano scale level (Alamery *et al.*, 2019) [4], (Lateef *et al.*, 2019) [13] and (Zahraa and Ahmed, 2020) [19].

It can be concluded that 100% RDN (120 kg N ha⁻¹) applied in three equal splits followed by foliar application of along with full recommended dose of P and K (60:45 kg ha⁻¹) improved yield of sweet corn (Patel *et al.*, 2021) [17]. The results showed that the application of mineral fertilizer in soil and nano fertilizers as foliar spray leads to the increase in the yield of sweet corn. The present results are confirmed with those of (Gomaa *et al.*, 2017) [12], (Muntasser *et al.*, 2019) [14], (Elavarasan *et al.*, 2021) [11].

Table 1: Effect of nano and granular urea on growth characters at different stages of sweet corn

Treatments	Plant height (cm)			Dry matter production (kg ha ⁻¹)		
	30 DAS	60 DAS	AT Harvest	30 DAS	60 DAS	AT Harvest
T ₁ - Control (without N)	54.8	91.8	104.0	2400	3530	4416
T ₂ - 100% RDN as Granular urea	63.7	105.0	120.7	2780	4309	5562
T ₃ -20% N as GU at basal + 20% N as GU at 4 leaf stage + 40% N as NU at 8 leaf stage + 20% N as NU at tasseling	88.1	152.1	175.5	4110	6702	8824
T ₄ -20% N as GU at basal + 20% N as GU at 4 leaf stage + 40% N as GU at 8 leaf stage + 20% N as NU at tasseling	75.0	126.0	147.8	3340	5422	7100
T ₅ - 20% N as GU at basal + 20% N as NU at 4 leaf stage + 40%N as NU at 8 leaf stage +20% N as NU at tasseling	98.7	171.7	195.6	4657	7700	10199
T ₆ -25% N as GU at basal + 25% N as GU at 4 leaf stage + 25% N as NU at 8 leaf stage + 25% N as NU at tasseling	90.5	157.5	180.2	4290	6990	9200
T ₇ -25% N as GU at basal + 25% N as GU at 4 leaf stage + 25% N as GU at 8 leaf stage + 25% N as NU at tasseling	77.3	132.3	152.3	3502	5680	7450
T ₈ -25% N as GU at basal + 25% N as NU at 4 leaf stage + 25% N as NU at 8 leaf stage + 25% N as NU at tasseling	99.2	180.2	197.9	4805	7980	10567
T ₉ -33% N as GU at basal + 34% N as GU at 8 leaf stage + 33% N as NU at tasseling	72.6	120.6	140.2	3163	5150	6755
T ₁₀ -33% N as GU at basal + 34% N as NU at 8 leaf stage + 33% N as NU at tasseling	86.4	147.4	171.1	3941	6616	8720
SEM±	2.54	4.37	4.68	121.36	201.7	252.05
CD at 5%	7.5	12.9	14.8	361.13	599.28	748.88

Table 2: Effect of nano and granular urea on LAI and CGR at different stages of sweet corn

Treatments	LAI			CGR (g m ⁻² day ⁻¹)	
	30 DAS	60 DAS	AT Harvest	30-60 DAS	60 DAS-Harvest
T ₁ - Control (without N)	2.20	2.90	3.60	3.77	3.54
T ₂ - 100% RDN as Granular urea	2.85	3.63	4.19	5.10	5.01
T ₃ -20% N as GU at basal + 20% N as GU at 4 leaf stage + 40% N as NU at 8 leaf stage + 20% N as NU at tasseling	4.27	5.72	5.89	8.64	8.49
T ₄ -20% N as GU at basal + 20% N as GU at 4 leaf stage + 40% N as GU at 8 leaf stage + 20% N as NU at tasseling	3.53	4.66	4.90	6.94	6.71
T ₅ - 20% N as GU at basal + 20% N as NU at 4 leaf stage + 40%N as NU at 8 leaf stage +20% N as NU at tasseling	4.71	6.30	6.95	10.14	10.00
T ₆ - 25% N as GU at basal + 25% N as GU at 4 leaf stage + 25% N as NU at 8 leaf stage + 25% N as NU at tasseling	4.28	5.80	6.20	9.00	8.84
T ₇ -25% N as GU at basal + 25% N as GU at 4 leaf stage + 25% N as GU at 8 leaf stage + 25% N as NU at tasseling	3.74	4.81	5.19	7.26	7.08
T ₈ - 25% N as GU at basal + 25% N as NU at 4 leaf stage + 25% N as NU at 8 leaf stage + 25% N as NU at tasseling	4.85	6.58	7.05	10.58	10.35
T ₉ - 33% N as GU at basal + 34% N as GU at 8 leaf stage + 33% N as NU at tasseling	3.42	4.39	4.76	6.62	6.42
T ₁₀ -33% N as GU at basal + 34% N as NU at 8 leaf stage + 33% N as NU at tasseling	4.19	5.58	5.83	8.92	8.41
SEM±	0.12	0.16	0.17	0.27	0.29
CD at 5%	0.36	0.48	0.51	0.81	0.87

Table 3: Effect of nano and granular urea on AGR, RGR and NAR at different stages of sweet corn

Treatments	AGR (g m ⁻² day ⁻¹)		RGR (g plant ⁻¹ day ⁻¹)		NAR (g g ⁻¹ day ⁻¹)	
	30-60 DAS	60 DAS-Harvest	30-60 DAS	60 DAS-Harvest	30-60 DAS	60 DAS-Harvest
T ₁ - Control (without N)	37.67	35.44	0.01287	0.00896	0.012386	0.009126
T ₂ - 100% RDN as Granular urea	50.97	50.08	0.01463	0.01020	0.013178	0.010687
T ₃ - 20% N as GU at basal + 20% N as GU at 4 leaf stage + 40% N as NU at 8 leaf stage + 20% N as NU at tasseling	86.40	84.88	0.01630	0.01100	0.014983	0.012191
T ₄ -20% N as GU at basal + 20% N as GU at 4 leaf stage + 40% N as GU at 8 leaf stage + 20% N as NU at tasseling	69.40	67.12	0.01613	0.01080	0.014213	0.011723
T ₅ - 20% N as GU at basal + 20% N as NU at 4 leaf stage + 40%N as NU at 8 leaf stage +20% N as NU at tasseling	101.43	99.96	0.01677	0.01124	0.015502	0.012558
T ₆ - 25% N as GU at basal + 25% N as GU at 4 leaf stage + 25% N as NU at 8 leaf stage + 25% N as NU at tasseling	90.00	88.40	0.01627	0.01100	0.014995	0.012284
T ₇ -25% N as GU at basal + 25% N as GU at 4 leaf stage + 25% N as GU at 8 leaf stage + 25% N as NU at tasseling	72.60	70.80	0.01613	0.01084	0.014226	0.011816

T ₈ - 25% N as GU at basal + 25% N as NU at 4 leaf stage + 25% N as NU at 8 leaf stage + 25% N as NU at tasseling	105.83	103.48	0.01690	0.01125	0.015553	0.012566
T ₉ - 33% N as GU at basal + 34% N as GU at 8 leaf stage + 33% N as NU at tasseling	66.23	64.20	0.01520	0.01084	0.014208	0.011698
T ₁₀ - 33% N as GU at basal + 34% N as NU at 8 leaf stage + 33% N as NU at tasseling	89.16	84.16	0.01643	0.01104	0.014840	0.012287
SEm±	2.71	2.93	0.00006	0.00004	0.00015	0.00004
CD at 5%	8.05	8.78	0.00021	0.00012	0.00049	0.00014

Table 4: Effect of nano and granular urea on green cob yield and green fodder yield of sweet corn

Treatments	Green cob yield (kg ha ⁻¹)	Green fodder yield (kg ha ⁻¹)
T ₁ - Control (without N)	3928	7450
T ₂ - 100% RDN as Granular urea	6145	10156
T ₃ - 20% N as GU at basal + 20% N as GU at 4 leaf stage + 40% N as NU at 8 leaf stage + 20% N as NU at tasseling	7878	12430
T ₄ - 20% N as GU at basal + 20% N as GU at 4 leaf stage + 40% N as GU at 8 leaf stage + 20% N as NU at tasseling	6934	11222
T ₅ - 20% N as GU at basal + 20% N as NU at 4 leaf stage + 40% N as NU at 8 leaf stage + 20% N as NU at tasseling	8714	13583
T ₆ - 25% N as GU at basal + 25% N as GU at 4 leaf stage + 25% N as NU at 8 leaf stage + 25% N as NU at tasseling	8026	12602
T ₇ - 25% N as GU at basal + 25% N as GU at 4 leaf stage + 25% N as GU at 8 leaf stage + 25% N as NU at tasseling	7029	11276
T ₈ - 25% N as GU at basal + 25% N as NU at 4 leaf stage + 25% N as NU at 8 leaf stage + 25% N as NU at tasseling	8809	13650
T ₉ - 33% N as GU at basal + 34% N as GU at 8 leaf stage + 33% N as NU at tasseling	6857	11150
T ₁₀ - 33% N as GU at basal + 34% N as NU at 8 leaf stage + 33% N as NU at tasseling	7765	12312
SEm±	226.06	314.39
CD at 5%	671.69	994.2

Conclusion

The present study provides a new finding of the nitrogen scheduling and conjoined application of granular and nano forms of urea on sweet corn. From the above study, it can be concluded that application of 25% N as GU at basal + 25% N as NU at 4 leaf stage + 25% N as NU at 8 leaf stage + 25% N as NU at tasseling stage increased the growth and yield could provide higher productivity and profitability for sweet corn growers of Tamil Nadu.

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