

**EFFECT OF IRRIGATION WITH SALINE WATER
AND CLOVER-BASED ORGANIC AMENDMENT
IN GROWING MEDIUM FOR ORGANIC
TOMATO TRANSPLANTS
PRODUCTION**

By

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ABSTRACT

Ayman Ragab Abu El Ela Mohamed. Effect of irrigation with saline water and clover-based organic amendment in growing medium for organic tomato transplants production. Unpublished M.Sc. Thesis, Department of Agriculture and desert areas affected by salinity, Faculty of Agriculture, Ain Shams University, 2018.

This study was conducted to evaluate the growth of tomato transplants irrigated with saline water in a commercial soilless potting media amended with fermented Egyptian clover produced by anaerobic fermentation of a mixture of clover and water for different periods (1, 2 and 3 weeks). Treatments were distributed in a completely randomized factorial design included three salinity levels in irrigation water (260, 1000 and 2000 mg l⁻¹) without and with fermented clover corresponding to 0, 10, 20 and 30% of the substrate (1peat: 1perlite: 1vermiculite) by volume. Plant height (cm), number of leaves (N°), vegetative fresh and dry weights (g) per plant were recorded 35 days after sowing. Further, selected chemical constituents of leaves such as content of NPK (mg kg⁻¹) and chlorophyll a+b (mg l⁻¹) were determined. The obtained results showed that the mean values of the aforementioned parameters were increased due to the incorporation of clover-based amendment with higher pronounced effect recorded for fermented clover as compared to non-fermented clover. The highest values were obtained due to the incorporation of three weeks fermented clover at 20% mixing percentage followed by 30%. There were significant differences among water salinity treatments; fresh water (260 mg l⁻¹) recorded the highest vegetative growth of tomato transplants. Furthermore, fermented clover alleviated the salt stress on plants and increased the growth parameters under saline water irrigation. These results suggested that clover can be used, instead of imported media, supporting by fermentation to enhance the ability of clover to supplement the transplants with the nutrient needs and cope the salinity condition.

Keywords: Tomato seedling, clover amendments, fermentation, saline water.

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CONTENTS

Title	Page
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1.Problem Statement	1
1.2. Need for Research	3
1.3.Objectives and Scope	3
2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	4
2.1.Overview.....	4
2.2.Non-Conventional Water Resources in Water-Scarce Countries	4
2.2.1.Water Scarcity in Egypt	5
2.2.2. Potential Use of Non-Conventional Water Resources	5
2.2.3. Saline and/or Sodic Groundwater	6
2.3.Tomato Plant	7
2.3.1.Economic Importance	7
2.3.2. Origin and Distribution	7
2.3.3.Nutritional Value and Uses	8
2.3.4.Plant Characteristics	8
2.3.5.Ecological Adaptation	9
2.3.6.Tomato Transplants Production	10
2.4.Tomato as a Model for Saline Water Use.....	11
2.4.1.Effect of Salinity on Tomato Growth	11
2.4.2.Effect of Salinity on Seeds Germination and Transplants	11
2.4.3.Effect of Salinity on Roots and Shoots	12
2.4.4.Effect of Salinity on Fruits Quality and Chemicals Components	13
2.4.5. Salinity and Water Requirements and Plant Nutrients	13
2.5.Horticulture Nurseries and Growing Media.....	14
2.5.1.Growing Media	14
2.5.2.Characteristics of Growing Media	15
2.5.2.1. Physical Properties	15

Title	Page
2.5.2.2. Chemical Properties	16
2.5.2.3. Biological Properties	17
2.5.3.Economical Characteristics	17
2.6. Growing Media Components.....	17
2.6.1. Inorganic Components	17
2.6.1.1. Sand	17
2.6.1.2. Perlite	17
2.6.1.3. Vermiculite	18
2.6.1.4. Zeolite	18
2.6.1.5. Pumice	18
2.6.1.6. Tuff	18
2.6.1.7. Rockwool	19
2.6.2. Organic Growing Media	19
2.6.2.1.Peat	19
2.6.2.2.Peat-substitute Growing Media or Alternatives to Peat	20
2.6.2.3. Coir.....	20
2.6.2.4. Bark	20
2.6.2.5. Sawdust	21
2.6.2.6. Compost	21
2.7. Growing Medium for Tomato Transplants Production Using Organic Amendments and Saline Water Irrigation.....	22
2.8. Humic Acids	23
3. MATERIALS AND METHODS.....	24
3.1.Overview.....	24
3.2. Vegetal Material and Sowing.....	24
3.3. Substrate Components.....	24
3.4. Characterization of the Materials	25

III

3.4.1. Physical Properties	25
3.4.1.1.Moisture Contents (MC)	25
3.4.1.2.Water Holding Capacity (WHC)	25
3.4.1.3.Bulk Density	26
3.4.2.Chemical Properties	26
3.4.2.1.PH and Electrical Conductivity	26
3.4.2.2.Total Organic Matter	26
3.4.2.3.Total Nitrogen, Potassium and Phosphorous	26
3.4.3.Germination Bioassay	27
3.5. Formulation of Growing Media	27
3.6.Experimental Design	27
3.7.Variables Determined in the Transplants	29
3.8.Statistical Analysis	29
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.	30
4.1.Materials Characterization	30
4.1.1.Physical Characteristics	30
4.1.2.Chemical Characteristics	31
4.2.Phytotoxicity Test for the Component	32
4.3.Vegetative Growth of Tomato Transplants.....	33
4.4.Chemical Constituents	38
4.4.1.Chlorophyll a+b Content	38
4.4.2.Minerals Content	39
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.....	43
REFERENCES.....	45
ARABIC SUMMARY.....	

LIST OF TABLES

No.	Title	Page
(2.1)	Tomato botanical classification	7
(2.2)	Recommended temperatures for tomato transplant raising.....	10
(3.1).	Proportions (% by volume) of each component in the designed growing media.....	28
(4.1)	Analysis of growing media components.....	30
(4.2).	Effects of fermented and non-fermented clover rate in peat-vermiculite-perlite growing medium on tomato transplant height 35 days after sowing using fresh and saline water irrigation.....	34
(4.3).	Effects of fermented and non-fermented clover rate in peat-vermiculite-perlite growing medium on tomato transplant number of leaves 35 days after sowing using fresh and saline water irrigation.....	35
(4.4).	Effects of fermented and non-fermented clover rate in peat-vermiculite-perlite growing medium on tomato transplant fresh weight 35 days after sowing using fresh and saline water irrigation.....	36
(4.5).	Effects of fermented and non-fermented clover rate in peat-vermiculite-perlite growing medium on tomato transplant dry weight 35 days after sowing using fresh and saline water irrigation.....	37

(4.6).	Effects of fermented and non-fermented clover rate in peat-vermiculite-perlite growing medium on tomato transplant chlorophyll a + b content 35 days after sowing using fresh and saline water irrigation.....	39
(4.7).	Effects of fermented and non-fermented clover rate in peat-vermiculite-perlite growing medium on tomato transplant nitrogen content 35 days after sowing using fresh and saline water irrigation.....	40
(4.8).	Effects of fermented and non-fermented clover rate in peat-vermiculite-perlite growing medium on tomato transplant phosphorus content 35 days after sowing using fresh and saline water irrigation.....	41
(4.9).	Effects of fermented and non-fermented clover rate in peat-vermiculite-perlite growing medium on tomato transplant potassium content 35 days after sowing using fresh and saline water irrigation.....	42

LIST OF FIGURES

No.	Title	Page
(3.1).	Green dry, fermented and non-fermented clover used in the Study.....	25
(4.1).	Relative seed germination (RSG), relative root growth (RRG) and germination index (GI) for cress seeds.....	33

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem Statement

Production of uniform, vigorous vegetable transplants is the first step to ensuring rapid crop establishment and good performance in the field (**Jack *et al.*, 2011**). Growing mediums are the materials, other than soils, in which plants are grown. These covers different substances such as organic (peat, compost, tree bark, coconut, sawdust etc.) and inorganic materials (clay, perlite, vermiculite, mineral wool, volcanic tuff, etc.), While these substrates can be used alone, mixtures of the substrates such as peat and perlite; coir and clay, peat and compost are also be used widely (**Grunert *et al.*, 2008; Vaughn *et al.*, 2011; Nair *et al.*, 2011; Olle *et al.*, 2012**). The different growing materials are used to achieve the correct balance of air and water holding capacity for the plants to be grown as well as for the long-term stability of the medium (**Nair *et al.*, 2011**). Therefore, one of the most important factors in creating a soilless culture is pick a suitable substrate (**Olympios, 1995**).

There are many different materials that have been used for vegetable and fruit production. Throughout the world, the raw materials used vary based on their local availability (**Schmilewski, 2009**). Such raw materials can be inorganic or organic, but growing media are often formulated from a blend of different raw materials in order to achieve the correct balance of air and water holding capacity for the plants to be grown as well as for the long-term stability of the medium (**Bilderback *et al.*, 2005; Nair *et al.*, 2011**). It is reported that a high percentage of inorganic growing media such as rock wool, sand, perlite, vermiculite, pumice, clays, and others, are used in soilless plant production while only about 12% uses organic growing media such as peat, bark, wood residues, coir, bagasse, rice hulls, alfalfa amendment and others (**Donnan, 1998; Sawan *et al.*, 1999; Böhme *et al.*, 2001; Böhme *et al.*, 2008**). However, there is no growing medium that can be labeled as the “best” since each

INTRODUCTION

particular medium has both advantages and disadvantages. Several factors determine the type of growing medium appropriate for specific growing conditions.

Production of transplants in small cells in peat-based medium is the most common and widely practiced method (**Raviv *et al.*, 1986**). To obtain healthy transplants, it is a common practice to fertilize medium with amendments or water-soluble fertilizers that provide nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), potassium (K), and other nutrients to the developing seedlings (**Weston and Zandstra, 1989**). The nutrient management aspect for conventionally grown transplants has been extensively researched and largely optimized; however, there are challenges for organic transplant production. There is little information available on aspects such as nutrient management in organic transplant production; as a result, organically produced transplants are often of low quality (**Diaz-Perez *et al.*, 2008**). With increase in demand for organically grown transplants, a number of soluble organic fertilizers and supplements have emerged in the market (**Kuepper and Everett, 2004; Treadwell *et al.*, 2007**).

These products are usually expensive and not always locally available (**Peet *et al.*, 2008**). Growers often design their own mixes using compost and other organic amendments. Organic growers largely depend on compost to manage nutrient requirements of growing transplants. Incorporation of large proportions of compost in the growing medium is not warranted because it can lead to increased salinity and could adversely affect seed germination, seedling growth, and yield (**Clark and Cavigelli, 2005; Sanchez-Monedero *et al.*, 2004**). Compost nutrient quality also varies based on raw materials used and process and duration of composting. Additionally, it is difficult to synchronize nitrogen mineralization from the compost-amended medium with crop N demand (**Treadwell *et al.*, 2007**). Supplementing compost-amended medium with a standardized organic amendment serves as a viable alternative for

INTRODUCTION

nutrient management in organic transplant production. There are a number of organic N sources available such as alfalfa meal, soybean meal, and blood meal. Most of these amendments have not been tested thoroughly despite their popularity and widespread use by growers (**Hochmuth *et al.*, 2006**). In most cases after incorporation of organic amendments, a certain period of time is required for N mineralization (**Agehara and Warncke, 2005**). In certain cases it is recommended that the plant-based amendment be mixed into the potting medium two weeks before sowing of seeds to prevent seed injury. **Nair *et al.*, (2011)** tested the use of a peat-compost- based growing mix supplemented with an alfalfa-based organic amendment derived from alfalfa, meat meal, molasses, and potash for organic tomato transplant production. The author concluded that application rate of 0.6% or 1.2% of alfalfa-based amendment produced transplants with suitable growth characteristics and met commercially acceptable standards for transplanting and handling at a reasonable estimated cost (**Nair *et al.*, 2011**).

On the other hand, competition for available fresh water resources has resulted in development of irrigation with saline water (**Ghassemi *et al.*, 1995**). Tomato is moderately tolerant to salinity and could act as a model crop for saline water use because it is already cultivated in a few warm and rather dry areas where irrigation is essential for high yield (**Zayton *et al.*, 2009**). Several saline/brackish water irrigation researches were carried out on open culture tomatoes (**Zayton *et al.*, 2009**). The results evidently revealed that if suitable management practices were adapted, it is feasible to irrigate tomato using relatively high saline water under arid conditions (**Zayton *et al.*, 2009**).

The tomato response to salt stress is differently regulated in different development stages (**Costa *et al.*, 1990; Saranga *et al.*, 1992; Foolad, 2004**). Salinity slows down tomato shoot growth and the growth of younger seedlings; the higher the saline concentration the larger the reduction in shoot growth (**Cuartero and Fernandez-Munoz, 1999;**