Academic Journal of Plant Sciences 5 (4): 138-141, 2012
ISSN 1995-8986

DOI: 10.5829/idosi.ajps.2012.5.4.337

Effect of Different Tillage Methods on Crop Yield and Yield Components of Melon

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Abstract: A two year field experiment was conducted to investigate the response of crop yield and yield components of melon to different tillage methods in the arid lands of Iran. Tillage treatments in the study were moldboard plow + two passes of disk harrow as conventional tillage (CT), two passes of disk harrow as reduced tillage (RT), one pass of disk harrow as minimum tillage (MT) and no-tillage (NT) as direct drilling method. The statistical results of the study indicated that tillage method significantly ($P \leq 0.05$) affected crop yield, fruit weight (FW), fruit length (FL), fruit diameter (FD) and total soluble solids (TSS), but there was no significant differences in other components such as number of plants per hectare (NPPH) and number of fruits per plant (NFPP). The maximum value of crop yield (27.2 t ha^{-1}), NPPH (6360) and NFPP (1.9) was obtained in case of CT treatment, while maximum value of FW (3.6 kg) and TSS (10.25%) was observed in case of RT treatment. Also, maximum value of FL (29.0 cm) and FD (17.2 cm) was noted in case of MT treatment. Conversely, the minimum value of crop yield (20.6 t ha^{-1}), NPPH (5910), FW (1.9 kg), FL (26.4 cm) and FD (14.1 cm) was obtained in case of NT treatment, while minimum value of NFPP (1.2) was observed in case of RT treatment. Moreover, minimum value of TSS (9.75%) was noted in case of MT treatment. Therefore, moldboard plow followed by two passes of disk harrow (CT) was found to be more appropriate and profitable tillage method in improving crop yield and yield components of in the arid lands of Iran.

Key words: Melon · Tillage method · Crop yield · Yield components

INTRODUCTION

Melon (*Cucumis melo*) is one of the most important vegetable crops of Iran and is well adapted to its soil and climatic condition. Melon ranks third in cultivated area and production after tomato and watermelon. Although the use of improved varieties and fertilizers has increased melon production to much extent, the full potential of crop production has not yet been achieved [1].

Soil tillage is among the important factors affecting soil physical properties and crop yield. Among the crop production factors, tillage contributes up to 20% [2]. Tillage method affects the sustainable use of soil resources through its influence on soil properties [3]. The proper use of tillage can improve soil related constrains, while improper tillage may cause a range of undesirable processes, e.g. destruction of soil structure, accelerated erosion, depletion of organic matter and fertility and disruption in cycles of water, organic carbon and plant nutrient [4]. Use of excessive and unnecessary tillage operations is often harmful to soil. Therefore, currently there is a significance interest and emphasis on the shift to the conservation and no-tillage methods for the purpose of controlling erosion process [5].

Conventional tillage practices modify soil structure by changing its physical properties such as soil bulk density, soil penetration resistance and soil moisture content. Annual disturbance and pulverizing caused by conventional tillage produce a finer and loose soil structure as compared to conservation and no-tillage method which leaves the soil intact [6]. This difference results in a change of number, shape, continuity and size distribution of the pores network, which controls the ability of soil to store and transmit air, water and agricultural chemicals. This in turn controls erosion, runoff and crop performance [7].

On the other hand, conservation tillage methods often result in decreased pore space [8], increased soil strength [9] and stable aggregates [10]. The pore network in conservationally tilled soil is usually more continues

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because of earthworms, root channels and vertical cracks [11]. Therefore, conservation tillage may reduce disruption of continues pores. Whereas, conventional tillage decreases soil penetration resistance and soil bulk density [12]. This also improves porosity and water holding capacity of the soil. Continuity of pore network is also interrupted by conventional tillage, which increases the tortuosity of soil. This all leads to a favorable environment for crop growth and nutrient use [7]. However, the results of no-tillage are contradictory [5]. No-tillage methods in arid regions of Iran had an adverse effect on crop yields [13]; while Chaudhary *et al.* [14] comparing conventional tillage method to no-tillage method concluded that higher moisture preservation and 13% more income was obtained in case of no-tillage.

At this time, a wide range of tillage methods is being used in Iran without evaluating their effects on soil physical properties and crop yield. Therefore, the present investigation was planned to determine the effect of different tillage methods on soil physical properties and crop yield of melon in the arid lands of Iran.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Site: This study was carried out at the Research Site of Varamin, Iran on a clay loam soil for two successive growing seasons (2006 and 2007). The research site is located at latitude: 35° 19' N, longitude: 51° 39' E and altitude: 1000 m in arid climate (150 mm rainfall annually) in the center of Iran.

Weather Parameters: The mean monthly rainfall and temperature data of the research site during the years of study (2006 and 2007) are given in Fig. 1.

Soil Sampling and Analysis: To determine soil physical and chemical properties of the research site, a composite soil sample (from 12 points) was collected from 0-30 cm depth 30 days before planting during the study years. Soil sample was analyzed in the laboratory for P, K, Fe, Zn, Cu, Mn, EC, pH, organic carbon, particle size distribution and dry bulk density. Details of soil physical and chemical properties of the research site are given in Table 1.

Field Methods: The experiments were laid out in a Randomized Complete Block Design (RCBD) having three replications. The size of each plot was 10.0 m long and 6.0 m wide. A buffer zone of 5.0 m spacing was provided between plots. There were two furrows in each plot.

Table 1: Soil physical and chemical properties of the research site (mean of 2006 and 2007)

Soil characteristics	Values
Texture	Clay loam
Sand (%)	24.6
Silt (%)	38.0
Clay (%)	37.4
Bulk density (Mg m^{-3})	1.15
EC (dS m^{-1})	2.30
pH	7.50
OC (%)	0.95
P (ppm)	40.4
K (ppm)	295
Fe (ppm)	2.84
Zn (ppm)	1.50
Cu (ppm)	1.13
Mn (ppm)	12.9

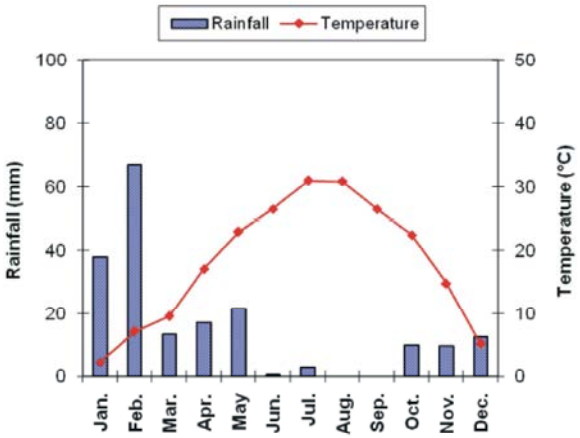

Fig. 1: Mean monthly rainfall and temperature (mean of 2006 and 2007)

The furrows had 10.0 m long, 75 cm wide and 50 cm depth and crop was sown manually on the both sides of each furrow by keeping row to row and plant to plant distance 3.0 m and 50 cm, respectively. The treatments were applied to the same plots during the 2 year (2006-2007) on farm study. Tillage treatments included one pass of moldboard plow followed two passes of disk harrow as conventional tillage (CT), two passes of disk harrow as reduced tillage (RT), one pass of disk harrow as minimum tillage (MT) and no-tillage (NT) as direct drilling method. In both growing season, one of the most commercial variety of melon cv. Jalali (Souski) was planted at the rate of 3 kg ha^{-1} on 5th May. The seed moisture and germination percentage were 15 and 95% respectively. Recommended levels of N (300 kg ha^{-1}), P (200 kg ha^{-1}) and K (100 kg ha^{-1}) were used as Urea, TSP and SOP, respectively. Pest and weed controls were performed according to general local practices and

recommendations. All other necessary operations except those under study were kept normal and uniform for all the treatments.

Observation and Data Collection: Standard procedures were adopted for recording the data on various growth and yield parameters. Crop yield, number of plants per hectare (NPPH), number of fruits per plant (NFPP), fruit weight (FW), fruit length (FL), fruit diameter (FD) and total soluble solids (TSS) were determined by harvesting fruits of the two middle rows of each plot.

Statistical Analysis: The data collected were analyzed statistically using Randomized Complete Block Design (RCBD) as described by Steel and Torrie [15]. Duncan's Multiple Range Test (DMRT) at 5% probability was also performed to compare the means of different treatments by using the computer software SPSS 12.0 (Version, 2003).

RESULTS

Crop Yield: Different tillage treatments significantly affected crop yield during both the years of study. The highest crop yield of 27.2 t ha^{-1} was recorded for the CT treatment and lowest (20.6 t ha^{-1}) for the NT treatment (Table 2).

Number of Plants per Hectare (NPPH): A non-significant effect of different tillage treatments on NPPH was found during the study years. However, the highest NPPH of 6360 was obtained for the CT treatment and lowest (5910) for the NT treatment (Table 2).

Number of Fruits per Plant (NFPP): The effect of different tillage treatments on NFPP was also found non-significant during the years of study. However, the highest NFPP of 1.9 was recorded for the CT treatment and lowest (1.2) for the RT treatment (Table 2).

Fruit Weight (FW): Different tillage treatments significantly affected FW during the study years. The highest FW of 3.6 kg was obtained for the RT treatment and lowest (1.9 kg) for the NT treatment (Table 2).

Fruit Length (FL): A significant effect of different tillage treatments on FL was also found during both the years of study. The highest FL of 29.0 cm was recorded for the MT treatment and lowest (26.4 cm) for the NT treatment (Table 2).

Fruit Diameter (FD): Different tillage treatments significantly affected FD during the years of study. The highest FD of 17.2 cm was obtained for the MT treatment and lowest (14.1 cm) for the NT treatment (Table 2).

Total Soluble Solids (TSS): A significant effect of different tillage treatments on TSS was also found during the study years. The highest TSS of 10.25% was recorded for the RT treatment and lowest (9.75%) for the MT treatment (Table 2).

DISCUSSION

In this study, response of crop yield and yield components of melon to different tillage methods was investigated. The salient components of crop yield such as NPPH, NFPP, FW, FL, FD and TSS were studied to analyze the effect of different tillage methods on growth and yield of melon. Results showed a significant response in the growth and yield of melon in the arid land of Iran.

The statistical results of the study indicated that tillage method significantly ($P \leq 0.05$) affected crop yield, FW, FL, FD and TSS, but there was no significant differences in other yield components such as NPPH and NFPP among the different tillage treatments during the study years (Table 2). The maximum value of crop yield (27.2 t ha^{-1}), NPPH (6360) and NFPP (1.9) was obtained in case of CT treatment, while maximum value of FW (3.6 kg) and TSS (10.25%) was observed in case of RT treatment. Also, maximum value of FL (29.0 cm) and FD (17.2 cm) was noted in case of MT treatment (Table 2). These results are in agreement with those of Khan *et al.* [7], who concluded that tillage practices produce a favorable environment for crop growth and nutrient use. These results are also in line with the results reported by Rashidi and Keshavarzpour [6] that annual disturbance and pulverizing caused by tillage practices produce a finer and loose soil structure which in turn affect the seedling emergence, plant population density and consequently crop yield. Conversely, the minimum value of crop yield (20.6 t ha^{-1}), NPPH (5910), FW (1.9 kg), FL (26.4 cm) and FD (14.1 cm) was obtained in case of NT treatment, while minimum value of NFPP (1.2) was observed in case of RT treatment. Also, minimum value of total soluble (9.75%) was noted in case of MT (Table 2). These results are in agreement with those of Hemmat and Taki [13], who concluded that no-tillage method in arid regions had an adverse effect on crop yields. These results are also in line with the results reported by Iqbal *et al.* [5] that

Table 2: Means comparison for crop yield and yield components of melon between different tillage methods (mean of 2006 and 2007)

Treatment	Crop yield* (t ha^{-1})	NPPH^{NS}	NFPP^{NS}	FW* (kg)	FL* (cm)	FD* (cm)	TSS* (%)
CT	27.2 a	6360 a	1.9 a	2.5 b	27.0 c	15.6 b	10.15 ab
RT	26.5 a	6145 a	1.2 a	3.6 a	27.9 b	15.9 b	10.25 a
MT	26.1 a	6060 a	1.7 a	2.7 b	29.0 a	17.2 a	9.750 b
NT	20.6 b	5910 a	1.8 a	1.9 c	26.4 d	14.1 c	9.950 ab

NS = Non-significant

* = Significant at 0.05 probability level

Means in the same column with different letters differ significantly at 0.05 probability level according to DMRT.

(NPPH: number of plants per hectare; NFPP: number of fruits per plant; FW: fruit weight; FL: fruit length; FD: fruit diameter; TSS: total soluble solids)

no-tillage method can not compensate the adverse effect of fine texture, very low organic matter and an overall initial weak structure of the soil.

CONCLUSSION

Among tillage treatments, moldboard plow followed two passes of disk harrow (CT) was found to be more appropriate and profitable tillage method in improving crop yield and yield components of melon in the arid lands of Iran.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author is very much grateful to the Sama Technical and Vocational Training College, Islamic Azad University, Varamin Branch, Varamin, Iran for giving all types of support in publishing this study.

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