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Effect of Different Tillage Methods on Biological Growth and Quality Characteristics of Sugar Beet

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Abstract: A two-year study was carried out to investigate the effect of different tillage methods on biological growth and quality characteristics of sugar beet (*Beta vulgaris*) during 2008 and 2009 growing seasons. Tillage treatments were moldboard plow + two passes of disk harrow (MDD) as conventional tillage method; moldboard plow + one pass of rotavator (MR), chisel plow + one pass of rotavator (CR) and two passes of disk harrow (DD) as reduced tillage methods; one pass of rotavator (R) and one pass of tine cultivator (C) as minimum tillage methods and no-tillage (NT). Biological growth components, i.e. root yield, root numbers per hectare (RNPH), sugar yield, root dry matter (RODM), root length, rim diameter and some quality characteristics of sugar beet such as sugar content, potassium, sodium, alpha-amino nitrogen (ALAN) and molasses were measured for different tillage treatments. Different treatments significantly ($P \leq 0.05$) affected RNPH and potassium, but there was no significant difference in other studied traits. Although effect of different tillage treatments on root yield, sugar yield, RODM, root length, rim diameter, sugar content, sodium, ALAN and molasses was not significant, results of the study indicated that tillage operations were useful in improving the biological growth and quality characteristics of sugar beet.

Key words: Sugar beet · Tillage method · Biological growth · Quality characteristics · Iran

INTRODUCTION

Sugar beet (*Beta vulgaris*) is one of the most important crops in a wide variety of temperature climates [1-3]. It is a hardly biennial plant with large (1-2 kg) storage root and great amount (15-20%) of sucrose. Sugar beet accounts for 30% of the world's sugar production [4]. The European Union, the United States and Russia are the three biggest sugar beet producers in the world. The top ten sugar beet producer countries are France, Germany, United States, Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, Italy, Poland, United Kingdom and Spain with 29, 25, 25, 22, 16, 14, 12, 11, 8 and 7 million tons, respectively. Also, the European Union and Ukraine are major exporters of sugar from beets. Besides, the United States harvested 406,500 hectares of sugar beets in 2008 alone [5]. On the other hand, the average cultivated area and national production of sugar beet in Iran for the last three years was about 178,000 hectares and 5.9 million tons, respectively [6]. Although the use of better varieties, mechanical planting, chemical fertilizers, herbicides application and mechanized harvesting have increased sugar beet production to a great extent, the complete potential of sugar beet production has not yet been attained as compared to the top ten sugar beet producers.

Tillage is one of the most essential crop production factors that influence soil properties [7, 8] and consequently biological growth of crop [9-14]. Appropriate tillage operations can enhance soil properties, while excessive, inappropriate and unnecessary tillage operations may result in a range of undesirable processes [15-20]. Although for most situations, conventional tillage methods have been the main tillage methods for establishing sugar beet since the first part of the 20th century, they are now expensive operations in terms of work rate and fuel consumption [21]. The costs, as well as the environmental concerns have leaded farmers and researchers to adopt alternative tillage methods [22]. For these reasons, there is a considerable attention and significant emphasis on moving towards the conservation tillage methods, i.e. reduced tillage, minimum tillage and no-tillage methods

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[7, 8, 10-15, 20, 23-27]. Conservation tillage methods may be used for sugar beet [28-31]. However, the results of these methods may be contrary [20]. Conservation tillage operations may reduce biological growth of sugar beet [4]. Conversely, decrease of soil tillage practices may have no significant effect on the biological growth of other crops [25-27, 32, 33]. Conservation tillage methods may also lead to raised diversity of weed species and population [33, 34] and have a harmful effect on biological growth of crop [35]. But, other studies have confirmed the opposite [36].

In Iran, most of the cultivated area is under conventional tillage methods and conservation tillage methods have not been studied enough. For this reason, information on response of sugar beet to different tillage methods is meager. Therefore, this study was planned to study the response of biological growth and quality characteristics of sugar beet to different tillage methods.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Site: This study was conducted at the Research Site of Hamedan Province, Iran for two successive growing seasons (2008 and 2009). The experimental site is located at latitude of 34° 52' N, longitude of 48° 21' E and altitude of 1730 m in semi-arid climate (298 mm rainfall annually) in the west of Iran. Mean temperature and monthly rainfall of the experimental site from sowing to harvest during study years (2008 and 2009) are indicated in Fig. 1.

Soil Sampling and Analysis: A composite soil sample (from 21 points) was collected from 0-30 cm depth during the study years and was analyzed in the laboratory for pH, EC, OC, N, P, K, Fe, Zn, Cu, Mn, B and particle size distribution. Details of soil physical and chemical properties of the research site during both years (2008 and 2009) are given in Table 1.

Field Methods: The experiments were laid out in a RCBD with four replications. Tillage treatments were moldboard plow + two passes of disk harrow (MDD) as conventional tillage method; moldboard plow + one pass of rotavator (MR), chisel plow + one pass of rotavator (CR) and two passes of disk harrow (DD) as reduced tillage methods; one pass of rotavator (R) and one pass of tine cultivator (C) as minimum tillage methods and no-tillage (NT). During the study years, tillage treatments were carried out

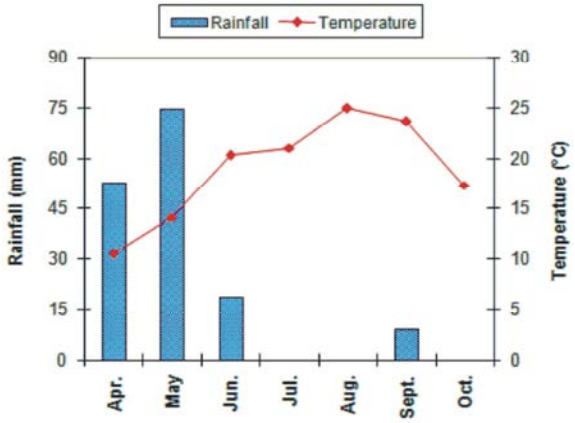

Fig. 1: Mean monthly rainfall and temperature during biological growth of crop (mean of 2008 and 2009)

on the same plots. The size of each plot was 20.0 m long and 6.0 m wide. There were 12 rows of sugar beet in each plot with 50-cm row spacing. In both years of study, one of the commercial varieties of sugar beet cv. Zarghan was planted on April 3, 2008 and April 5, 2009 using a 6-row sugar beet drill. Recommended levels of urea (300 kg ha^{-1}) in both years and triple super phosphate (50 kg ha^{-1}) only in the first year of study were used. For all treatments, irrigation scheduling was based on the basis of evaporation from A-class pan installed close to the experimental plots. Also, pest and weed control operations were performed based on common local practices and commendations. All other essential operations were kept identical for all the treatments.

Observation and Data Collection: At harvest, plants from an area of 12.0 m^2 per each plot were harvested to determine biological growth components, i.e. root yield, root numbers per hectare (RNPH), sugar yield, root dry matter (RODM), root length and rim diameter for all treatments. Moreover, a sample of 20 kg of sugar beet roots were taken at random and sent to the Sugar Beet Laboratory at Hamedan Sugar Factory to determine some quality characteristics, i.e. sugar content, potassium, sodium, alpha-amino nitrogen (ALAN) and molasses for all treatments. Sugar (sucrose) content was measured in fresh root samples by using Saccharometer as described by AOAC [37]. Potassium, sodium, alpha-amino nitrogen (ALAN) and molasses were measured using an auto analyzer.

Table 1: Soil physical and chemical properties of the experimental site during study years 2008 and 2009 (0-30 cm depth)

Date	pH	EC (dS m^{-1})	OC (%)	N (%)	P (ppm)	K (ppm)	Fe (ppm)	Zn (ppm)	Cu (ppm)	Mn (ppm)	B (ppm)	Soil texture
2008	7.9	0.72	0.92	0.09	10.5	280	6.2	0.8	2.3	16.2	0.7	Loam
2009	8.3	0.55	0.36	0.04	25.6	310	6.4	1.0	2.4	14.4	0.7	Loam

Statistical Analysis: All data were subjected to the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) following Gomez and Gomez [38] using SAS statistical computer software. Moreover, means of the different treatments were separated by Duncan's Multiple Range Test (DMRT) at $P \leq 0.05$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, biological growth components (root yield, RNPH, sugar yield, RODM, root length and rim diameter) and some quality characteristics (sugar content, potassium, sodium, ALAN and molasses) of sugar beet were studied to investigate the effect of different tillage methods on biological growth and quality characteristics of sugar beet. Results of ANOVA and means comparison for biological growth components of sugar beet under different methods of tillage during the study years (mean of 2008 and 2009) are presented in Tables 2 and 3, respectively. Results showed that different tillage methods significantly ($P \leq 0.05$) influenced RNPH, but there was no significant difference in other studied traits (Table 2). Moreover, results of ANOVA and means comparison for the selected quality characteristics of sugar beet under different tillage methods during the years of study (mean of 2008 and 2009) are presented in Tables 4 and 5, respectively. Results also showed that different methods of tillage significantly ($P \leq 0.05$) influenced potassium, but there was no significant difference in other studied traits (Table 4).

Biological Growth: The highest value of RNPH (135412 roots ha^{-1}) was recorded in the MR treatment, while the lowest value of RNPH (115000 roots ha^{-1}) was recorded in the NT treatment (Table 3). Although there was no significant difference in root yield, sugar yield, RODM, root length and rim diameter during the study years, results indicated that tillage operations were useful in increasing the biological growth of sugar beet. The highest values of root yield (82.7 t ha^{-1}), sugar yield (11.4 t ha^{-1}) and RODM (23.9%) were recorded in the MR treatment, while the highest values of root length (20.5 cm) and rim diameter (1.5 cm) were noted in the NT treatment (Table 3). Based on the results, tillage method affected the biological growth of sugar beet in the order of MR > CR > R > MDD > DD > C > NT. These results are in line with those reported by Khurshid *et al.* [9], Rashidi and Keshavarzpour [10], Rashidi *et al.* [11], Rashidi and Khabbaz [12] and Iqbal *et al.* [20] that tillage practices can be associated with improved soil physical and mechanical properties (increased pore space, decreased bulk density, increased moisture preservation and decreased penetration resistance), enhanced soil structure, better seed-soil/root-soil contact and superior weed control which positively influence biological growth of sugar beet. Similar results were also obtained by Romaneckas *et al.* [28], Adamaviciene *et al.* [29], Romaneckas *et al.* [30] and Jabro *et al.* [31]. They concluded that intensive tillage methods enhanced soil quality and had no significant effect on biological growth of sugar beet. In contrast, the lowest values of root yield (71.3 t ha^{-1}), sugar yield

Table 2: Analysis of variance for biological growth components of sugar beet under different tillage methods (mean of 2008 and 2009)

		Mean square					
Source of variation	Df	Root yield	RNPH	Sugar yield	RODM	Root length	Rim diameter
Replication	3	257.9 ^{NS}	127777616 ^{NS}	6.10 ^{NS}	7.21 ^{NS}	1.32 ^{NS}	0.10 ^{NS}
Treatment	6	72.36 ^{NS}	184223872 *	3.27 ^{NS}	5.96 ^{NS}	3.40 ^{NS}	0.08 ^{NS}
Error	18	390.7	62268312	10.5	3.17	5.12	0.04
C.V. (%)	---	25.4	6.20	31.3	8.04	11.7	15.2

NS = Non-significant

* = Significant at 0.05 probability level

(RNPH: root numbers per hectare; RODM: root dry matter)

Table 3: Means comparison for biological growth components of sugar beet between different tillage methods (mean of 2008 and 2009)

Treatment	Root yield (t ha^{-1})	RNPH	Sugar yield (t ha^{-1})	RODM (%)	Root length (cm)	Rim diameter (cm)
MDD	78.5 a	130000 a	10.5 a	22.0 a	19.6 a	1.2 a
MR	82.7 a	135412 a	11.4 a	23.9 a	18.0 a	1.1 a
CR	81.0 a	133333 a	11.2 a	23.4 a	18.6 a	1.1 a
DD	76.5 a	127500 a	9.97 a	21.8 a	19.6 a	1.3 a
R	80.9 a	130833 a	10.8 a	22.4 a	18.9 a	1.2 a
C	73.4 a	124583 ab	9.27 a	21.3 a	20.4 a	1.3 a
NT	71.3 a	115000 b	9.15 a	20.3 a	20.5 a	1.5 a

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

(RNPH: root numbers per hectare; RODM: root dry matter)

Table 4: Analysis of variance for some quality characteristics of sugar beet under different tillage methods (mean of 2008 and 2009)

		Mean square				
Source of variation	Df	Sugar content	Potassium	Sodium	ALAN	Molasses
Replication	3	8.78 ^{NS}	0.22 ^{NS}	0.33 ^{NS}	0.78 ^{NS}	0.12 ^{NS}
Treatment	6	3.03 ^{NS}	0.56 *	0.60 ^{NS}	0.54 ^{NS}	0.27 ^{NS}
Error	18	13.4	0.15	0.68	0.65	0.11
C.V. (%)	---	28.9	7.04	43.0	40.5	13.3

NS = Non-significant

* = Significant at 0.05 probability level

(ALAN: alpha-amino nitrogen)

Table 5: Means comparison for some quality characteristics of sugar beet between different tillage methods (mean of 2008 and 2009)

Treatment	Sugar content (%)	Potassium (mmol/100 g)	Sodium (mmol/100 g)	ALAN (mg/100 g)	Molasses (%)
MDD	16.8 a	5.4 b	1.9 a	1.9 a	2.4 a
MR	17.0 a	4.5 b	1.5 a	1.6 a	2.2 a
CR	17.0 a	5.3 b	1.6 a	1.7 a	2.3 a
DD	15.6 a	5.5 b	2.0 a	2.1 a	2.5 a
R	16.9 a	5.4 b	1.6 a	1.7 a	2.4 a
C	15.2 a	5.7 b	2.2 a	2.5 a	2.5 a
NT	15.2 a	6.4 a	2.6 a	2.5 a	3.0 a

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

(ALAN: alpha-amino nitrogen)

(9.15 t ha^{-1}) and RODM (20.3%) were recorded in the NT treatment, while the lowest values of root length (18.0 cm) and rim diameter (1.1 cm) were noted in the MR treatment (Table 3). These results are in agreement with those reported by Hill [15], Horne *et al.* [16], Ozpinar [33], Carter and Ivany [34], Borresen [35] and Bauder *et al.* [39] who concluded that conservation tillage methods may be associated with worse soil physical and mechanical properties (decreased pore space, increased bulk density, decreased moisture preservation and increased penetration resistance), inferior seed/root-soil contact and raised diversity of weed species and population which negatively influence biological growth of sugar beet.

Quality Characteristics: The highest value of potassium (6.4 mmol/100 g) was recorded in the NT treatment, while the lowest value of potassium (4.5 mmol/100 g) was noted in the MR treatment (Table 5). Although there was no significant difference in sugar content, sodium, ALAN and molasses during the years of study, results again indicated that tillage operations were useful in enhancing the quality of sugar beet. The highest value of sugar content (17.0%) was recorded in the MR treatment, while the highest values of sodium (2.6 mmol/100 g), ALAN (2.5 mg/100 g) and molasses (3.0%) were noted in the NT treatment. In contrast, the lowest value of sugar content (15.2%) was recorded in the NT treatment, while the lowest values of sodium (1.5 mmol/100 g), ALAN (1.6 mg/100 g) and molasses (2.2%) were noted in the MR treatment (Table 5). Again, a similar trend was obtained for the selected quality characteristics and tillage method affected sugar beet quality in the order of MR > CR > R > MDD > DD > C > NT (Table 5). Similar results were also obtained by Romaneckas *et al.* [28], Adamaviciene *et al.* [29], Romaneckas *et al.* [30] and Jabro *et al.* [31]. They reported that different methods of tillage had no significant effect on most quality characteristics of sugar beet.

CONCLUSIONS

Different tillage methods significantly ($P \leq 0.05$) affected RNPH and potassium, but there was no significant difference in root yield, sugar yield, RODM, root length, rim diameter, sugar content, sodium, ALAN and molasses. Although there was no significant difference in most studied traits, tillage operations were useful in improving the biological growth and quality characteristics of sugar beet. Also, the reduced tillage treatments MR and CR and the minimum tillage treatment R were considered as more beneficial and suitable tillage methods in improving the biological growth and quality characteristics of sugar beet.

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