

MICROCLIMATE MODIFICATION ON THE GROWTH AND YIELD OF STRAW MUSHROOM INTERCROPPED UNDER MAIZE FIELD DURING SUMMER

Abstract

A field experiment was carried out during summer 2022 (February - May 2022) at the Agro Climate Research Centre, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University in Coimbatore to study the microclimate modification on growth and yield of paddy straw mushroom under outdoor cultivation as maize intercrop. There were eight treatments comprising the combination of spacing (60 x 25 cm, 45 x 25 cm, paired row 45/75 x 25 cm, and paired row 30/60 x 25 cm) and with or without mulch application, which tested under randomized block design with three replications. The study concluded that the closer normal row spacing (45 x 25cm) with or without mulch and closer paired row spacing (30/60 x 25 cm) with mulch provided favourable microclimate during summer for faster growth, higher yield and biological efficiency for paddy straw mushroom intercropped maize. The results also inferred that both the afternoon (14.22 hours) microclimate variables viz., temperature (low) and relative humidity (high) had played major role for higher yield and BE of paddy straw mushroom as maize intercrop.

Keywords: Paddy straw mushroom, *Volvariella volvacea*, maize intercropping, microclimate, spacing, mulch.

1. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is still the prime sector of the Indian economy and shares on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) again reached 20 per cent mark by 2020-21 after 17 years, previously by 2003-04. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change stated that the increased climate change stress would have a negative effect on food security and nutrition, especially in developing countries by increasing the frequency, intensity and severity of heatwaves, floods and droughts on food availability and production [1]. According to global research that used an empirical model, the average negative impact of anthropogenic warming trends from 1961 to 2017 was 5.3 per cent for the three main food crops of rice, wheat, and maize accounting for 5.9%, 4.9% and 4.2%, respectively.

Intercropping is a low-input smallholder system adaptation technique that can boost output in the face of both temporal and spatial climate change. In cereal based intercropping,

maize has been recognized as a key crop and is regarded as the base crop in the additive series. A land equivalent ratio greater than one was found in all of the intercropping systems studied using maize as the base crop, proving that intercropping was preferable to monocropping [2, 3]. Wide row spacing is commonly used in maize cultivation, and inter row space can be effectively used to generate additional profits.

The geographic arrangement of component crops influences intercropping production. Planting geometry has a major influence on canopy structure and light absorption, both of which have a large impact on crop yield. Planting in paired rows, on the other hand, enables the inclusion of a complementary crop to increase overall yield without diminishing the number of maize plants. Advantage of intercropping over monocropping is that it enhances production by improving resource collection and use efficiency in areas like light, water, temperature, and humidity. Anthony and Rene showed that intercropping lower canopy temperature because of the advantages of having two crops, including enhanced land cover, higher soil moisture retention, reduced soil surface evaporation, and increased relative canopy moisture [4]. He *et al.*, stated that intercropping alter the microclimate, especially in terms of temperature, RH, and light intensity [5]. According to research by Dahmardeh *et al.*, intercropping systems increased soil moisture, temperature, soil N, and yield when compared to other solo crops [6]. The intercropping system's variable microclimate has created an environment that is more conducive to growth and high output than solo crops.

Paddy straw mushroom is also referred to as “warm mushroom” as it raises at a relatively high temperature. The third-largest cultivated fungus in the world, paddy straw mushrooms (*Volvariella volvacea*), are prized for their delectable flavour and can be used as a table dish from 10 days of their seeding [7, 8]. The ideal temperature and relative humidity for straw mushroom growth are 30-35°C and 80-90 percent, respectively [9, 10]. The species grows in tropical weather at around 30-35°C for the mycelia development stage, and at around 28-30°C for the fruiting body production stage [11].

Biological efficiency of this mushroom variably depends on the orientation of beds, compactness, shape and number of beds. Garcha *et al.*, studied a significant increase in the production of fruiting bodies on the helix and tyre type beds [12]. Beds are covered with polythene sheets, which might promote mycelial ramification by maintaining a constant temperature and showing higher yield [13, 14]. The fruit body yield of *V. volvacea* is significantly influenced by the *Volvariella* strain's yielding potential, the cultivation methods employed, and the climate conditions maintained throughout the entire cropping cycle [15].

Mulching modulates the soil temperature and moisture regime by altering surface evaporation, in addition mulches improve soil structure and moisture retention while inhibiting weed growth [16, 17, 18, 19]. In a natural microclimate under maize, outdoor paddy straw mushroom growth produces high returns with little modifications [8].

Outdoor paddy straw mushroom cultivation may be successful by utilising the favourable microclimate offered by the rows of crops in order to generate large yields with little expenditure. The management strategies for intercropping the paddy straw mushroom are believed to work best with the microclimate that predominates in maize crop's wider row spacing. Despite the fact that there has been little research on intercropping paddy straw mushrooms and these studies had only been conducted in specific microclimates.

In this context, the postgraduate thesis study entitled “Optimizing weather requirements to maximize yield potential of maize intercropped paddy straw mushroom (*Volvariella volvacea*)” was undertaken at Agro Climate Research Centre, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore to fill the research gap related to the microclimate and its modifications for intercropping paddy straw mushroom in maize.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A field experiment was conducted at the Eastern Block Farm, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore, during summer 2022 to assess the various agronomic management options to create suitable microclimate for paddy straw mushrooms (*Volvariella volvacea*) intercropped in maize.

During the summer season (February to May 2022), the total quantity of rainfall received during the maize growing period was 59 mm in 5 rainy days, compared to 41 mm in 3 wet days during mushroom cultivation. Summer 2022 average Tmax and Tmin were 33.9°C and 22.8°C, respectively, for maize and 34.6°C and 24.6°C, respectively, for mushroom cultivation season. The mean RH of summer 2022 at 0722 hours and 1422 hrs was 83 and 44 per cent, respectively, for maize and 84 and 50 per cent, respectively, for mushroom growing period. Summer 2022 mean BSS was 7.1 hours day⁻¹ with mean solar radiation of 348 Cal cm⁻² day⁻¹ for maize and 7.1 hours day⁻¹ and 321 Cal cm⁻² day⁻¹ for mushroom growing period, respectively. The mean wind speed and evaporation for the maize cropping period in summer 2022 were 5.6 KMPH and 6.1 mm day⁻¹, respectively, and 4.6 KMPH and 5.7 mm day⁻¹, respectively, for the mushroom cropping period.

Field experiment was conducted in Randomized Block Design (RBD) with three replication and eight treatments. Main crop is TNAU maize hybrid CO 8 under irrigated

conditions. The micro climate modification was affected by maize row spacing, planting method and mulching as per the treatment schedule (Table 1). Other cultivation operations of maize were done in accordance with the recommendations of the Crop Production Guide (CPG, 2020). Paddy straw was used for mulching. The statistical analysis of data was done using ANOVA technique for Random Block Design at 0.05 probability level.

Table 1 Treatment details

Treatment Number	Particulars
T ₁	60 cm × 25 cm spacing
T ₂	45 cm × 25 cm spacing
T ₃	45/75 × 25 cm paired row spacing
T ₄	30/60 × 25 cm paired row spacing
T ₅	T ₁ + Mulching
T ₆	T ₂ + Mulching
T ₇	T ₃ + Mulching
T ₈	T ₄ + Mulching

2.1. Mushroom intercropping in Maize

Totally 192 circular compact beds (8 beds × 8 treatments x 3 replications) measuring 20 cm in height and 30 cm in diameter were prepared using 3kg (dry weight) pasteurized paddy straw twists. Roughly powdered Horse gram powder had mixed with paddy straw mushroom spawn pieces and sprinkled on top of the bed, which was approximately amounting 2 per cent of the beds dry weight. These mushroom beds had intercropped in maize during 55 to 85 days after sowing of maize and the layout of intercropping was depicted in Figure 1. In order to keep out extraneous objects, to keep moisture and heat in, these beds were covered with semi-transparent blue polythene covering throughout the mushroom cropping cycle.

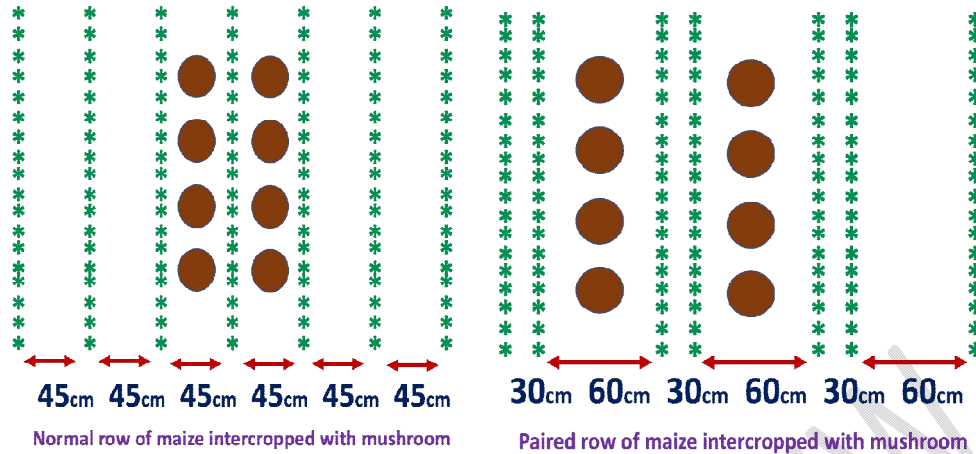


Figure 1 Layout of maize intercropped in maize

2.2. Microclimate observations

Air temperature and relative humidity inside the maize canopy was observed at 07.22 and 14.22 IST.

2.3. Growth and yield of paddy straw mushroom

Number of days to complete the important growth stages such as Number of Days For Spawn Running (DFSR), Days For Pin Head (DFPH), Days to First Harvest (DFFH) and total duration to complete the life cycle had observed in every plot. Totally three harvests had done and weighed plot wise for each harvest. The mushroom yield was expressed in gram per bed (g bed^{-1})

2.4. Biological efficiency (BE)

BE had used to assess the efficiency of substrate conversion in mushroom production and was determined as a ratio of harvested biological yield to the dry weight of the substrate. It is expressed in percentage.

$$\text{BE} = \frac{\text{Total weight (kg) of harvested fresh mushrooms}}{\text{Total dry weight (kg) of substrate used}} \times 100$$

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Agronomic management on the microclimate

Mean microclimate variable such as air temperature and relative humidity observed during the cropping period was detailed in Table 2. Mean temperature under in different treatments ranged from 26.6°C to 27.9°C during 0722 hours and 30.5°C to 33.4°C during 1422 hours. Between the treatments, the variation in temperature within the plant canopy was higher during the afternoon than morning hours.

Table 2 Spacing and mulching on the microclimate of maize crop

Treatment	Temperature		Relative Humidity	
	Field 07:22	Field 14:22	Field 07:22	Field 14:22
T1 Normal 60x25cm	26.9	33.0	89.9	61.0
T2 Normal 45x25cm	26.6	32.8	89.5	63.9
T3 Paired row 45/75x25cm	26.6	33.4	88.9	58.3
T4 Paired row 30/60x25cm	26.9	32.5	90.4	62.3
T5 T1 + Mulching	27.2	31.8	90.1	61.6
T6 T2 + Mulching	27.2	30.5	89.8	65.0
T7 T3 + Mulching	27.9	31.8	90.3	59.2
T8 T4 + Mulching	27.9	30.8	91.9	63.2

Lowest temperature during 07.22 hours had observed in 45 x 25 cm spacing without mulching, whereas the same spacing with mulching registered lowest temperature during 14.22 hours. The wider spacing paired row planting 45/75 x 25 cm recorded highest temperature (33.4°C) within the plan canopy during 1422 hours, followed by 60 x 25 cm normal planting. This might be due to increased interception of solar radiation inside the plant canopy under wider row spacing than the closer spacing.

Invariably the mulched plots showed lesser temperature during 14.22 than non-mulched plots. Evaporation of moisture retained by the mulches took more heat energy might be the reason for the lower temperature in mulched plot. According to Li *et al.*, mulch reduces the impact of external variables on the soil by boosting soil temperature and moderating temperature variations [17].

Mean relative humidity under maize canopy ranged from 88.9 to 91.9 per cent during 0722 hours while 58.3 to 65 per cent during 1422 hours observation. Maximum relative humidity exhibited under normal spacing 45 x 25 cm coupled with mulching (65.0%) and minimum in paired row spacing 45/75 x 25 cm (58.3%) during 1422 hours observation.

3.2. Microclimatic modification in phenophases of mushroom

Paddy straw mushroom growth parameters observed during the field experiment was detailed in Table 3. Average days from sowing in bed observed for spawn run was ranged from 9 to 13.4 days and 10.2 to 15.3 days for pinhead formation while 11.8 to 17.2 days for first harvest. Mean total cropping period was ranged from 22.5 to 29.8 days. According to Ahlawat *et al.*, the substrate and environmental factors largely determine how long the cropping phase lasts, which can range from 20 to 30 days [20]. Findings of Thiribhuvanamala

et al., inferred that the total cropping period of straw mushroom under maize canopy were less comparatively with other cropping systems [8].

Table 3 Microclimate modification on the important phenophases of mushroom

Treatments		DFSR	DFPF	DFFH	TCP
T1	Normal 60 x 25cm	10.1	11.8	13.6	24.4
T2	Normal 45 x 25cm	9.4	10.8	12.5	23.7
T3	Paired row 45/75 x 25cm	13.4	15.3	17.2	29.8
T4	Paired row 30/60 x 25cm	9.9	11.3	13.2	24.4
T5	T1 + Mulching	9.5	10.7	12.4	23.5
T6	T2 + Mulching	9.0	10.2	11.8	22.5
T7	T3 + Mulching	12.1	13.9	15.8	27.2
T8	T4 + Mulching	9.6	11.0	12.7	23.0
Mean		10.4	11.9	13.6	24.8
SEd		0.5	0.6	0.7	1.3
CD (0.05)		1.2	1.3	1.5	2.8

During this study, maximum cropping period had observed under paired row with spacing 45/75x25 cm while minimum in normal spacing 45x25 cm coupled with mulching. The higher temperature and lower relative humidity under the wider paired row spacing (45/75x25 cm) without mulching become unfavourable for the paddy straw mushroom growth, whereas the lower temperature and higher humidity under closer row spacing with mulch fasten the spawn running and pinhead formation. The above impact was clearly observed in the harvest wise yield that exhibited in Figure 2.

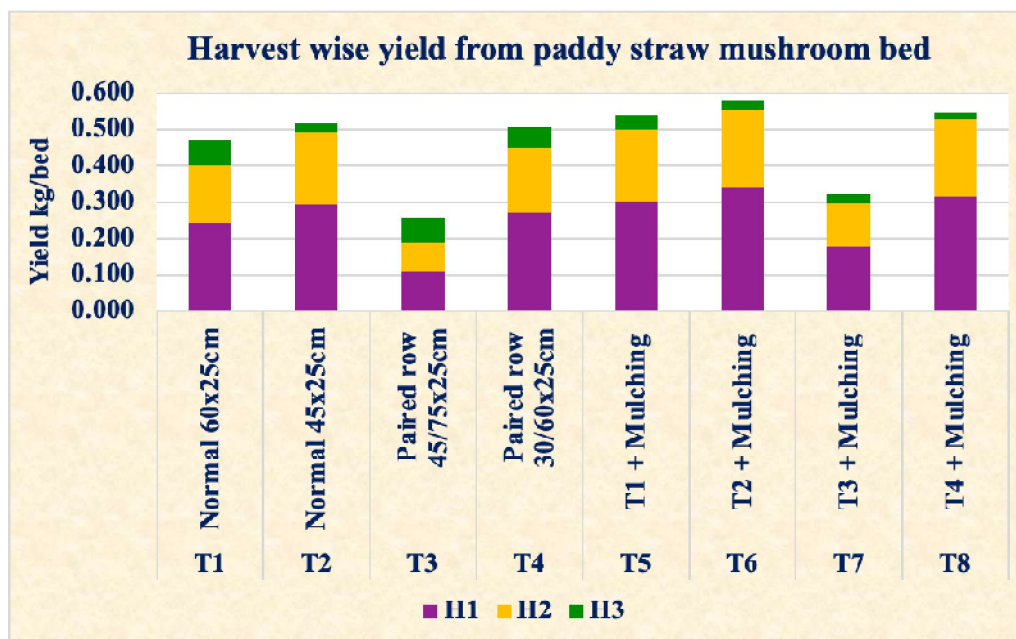


Figure 2 Microclimate modification on the harvest wise mushroom yield

Highest yield in first harvest had recorded in mulched plots with closer spacing (45 x 25 cm) followed by the wider spacing (60 x 25 cm) with mulch. Similar trend was observed in other mulched plots. Application of mulch had lowered the temperature and elevated the relative humidity during summer, which become favourable for the paddy straw mushroom that resulted in faster harvest. The wider spacing paired row (45/75x25 cm) with and without mulch recorded lowest harvest in all three harvests.

3.3. Microclimatic modification on yield and biological efficiency of mushroom

Effect of microclimatic modification on the yield of mushroom and its biological efficiency was given in Table 4. Average yield of mushroom ranged from 0.238 to 0.626 kg bed⁻¹. Maximum average yield obtained in normal spacing 45x25 cm coupled with mulching (0.578 kg bed⁻¹) while minimum in paired row 45/75 x 25 cm (0.256 kg bed⁻¹).

Mean biological efficiency of mushroom ranged from 7.9 per cent to 20.9 per cent. Maximum mean biological efficiency was obtained in normal spacing 45 x 25 cm coupled with mulching (19.3%) while minimum in paired row 45/75 x 25 cm (8.5%). According to Thiribhuvanamala *et al.*, *Volvariella volvacea* can be cultivated successfully from March to September with 18-20 per cent biological efficiency and outdoor cultivation of paddy straw mushroom yields good returns with low investment under maize cropping system with natural microclimate [7, 8].

Table 4 Microclimate modification on the mushroom yield and biological efficiency

Treatment	Yield kg/bed				Biological efficiency (%)			
	R1	R2	R3	Mean	R1	R2	R3	Mean
T1 Normal 60x25cm	0.477	0.491	0.435	0.468	15.9	16.4	14.5	15.6
T2 Normal 45x25cm	0.493	0.555	0.508	0.519	16.4	18.5	17.0	17.3
T3 Paired row 45/75x25cm	0.267	0.238	0.264	0.256	8.9	7.9	8.8	8.5
T4 Paired row 30/60x25cm	0.533	0.473	0.523	0.510	17.8	15.8	17.4	17.0
T5 T1 + Mulching	0.516	0.526	0.569	0.537	17.2	17.5	19.0	17.9
T6 T2 + Mulching	0.551	0.626	0.556	0.578	18.4	20.9	18.6	19.3
T7 T3 + Mulching	0.317	0.333	0.320	0.323	10.5	11.0	10.6	10.7
T8 T4 + Mulching	0.524	0.519	0.595	0.546	17.5	17.3	19.8	18.2
Mean	0.460	0.470	0.471	0.467	15.3	15.7	15.7	15.6
SEd				0.026				0.9
CD (0.05)				0.057				1.9

According to Ahlawat and Tewari optimum temperature and relative humidity for the growth of straw mushrooms are, respectively, 30-35°C and 80-90% [21]. Results from this microclimate modification clearly inferred that the normal planting had reduced the interception of solar radiation and promoted the favourable microclimate for the paddy straw mushroom, whereas the application of mulches added value to it by reducing the temperature and increasing the relative humidity under irrigated maize canopy. Importantly, both the afternoon (14.22 hours) microclimate variables *viz.*, temperature (low) and relative humidity (high) had played a major role in higher yield and BE of paddy straw mushroom as maize intercrop.

4. CONCLUSION

Study on the microclimate modification to improve the growth and yield of paddy straw mushroom under outdoor cultivation as maize intercrop during summer can be concluded that the closer normal row spacing (45 x 25cm) with or without mulch and closer paired row spacing (30/60 x 25 cm) with mulch provided favourable microclimate for faster growth, higher yield and biological efficiency.

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