

### **Incubation studies to find out the transformation of different fractions of Boron**

#### **ABSTRACT**

In soil, Boron is found in five different fractions *viz.* readily soluble, specifically adsorbed, oxide bound, organically bound, occluded or residual B. The relative concentration of these fractions in a soil at a given time depends on properties of soil like pH, amount and nature of clay, lime content, organic matter, soil moisture and plant factors. Distribution of these different forms of B in soil surface is always influenced by sub-surface soil and capability of these underlying B should also be taken into consideration while evaluating the reasons for variability of these forms. An incubation study was conducted in the laboratory to know the transformation of applied boron in soils at field capacity. Soil samples were collected periodically at 0, 30, 60 and 90 days after incubation (DAI) and analyzed for different fractions of boron. The experiment was carried out under completely randomized block design (CRD). Altogether there were 6 treatments replicated thrice namely,  $T_0$ = Control,  $T_1$ = 0.5 mg B  $kg^{-1}$  soil,  $T_2$ = 1 mg B  $kg^{-1}$  soil,  $T_3$ = 1.5 mg B  $kg^{-1}$  soil,  $T_4$ = 2 mg B  $kg^{-1}$  soil and  $T_5$ = 2.5 mg B  $kg^{-1}$  soil. From the incubation experiment, it was inferred that with applied boron, the organically bound B fraction was higher next to residual form when compared to other forms of boron. At 30 days of incubation, different fractions of boron showed an increasing trend for added levels of boron compared to control (which continued to decrease with days). This might be due to recently applied boron entering the soil solution. However, at 60 and 90 days different fractions of boron in the soil started decreasing which might be due to the fact that boron entered into a tightly bound state within the soil. In general, Boron fertilization increased the availability of boron content in soil and hence increased its availability to the crop. The sequence of the content of different fractions of boron in acid soils of Imphal-West District was Readily soluble-B > Organically bound-B > Oxide bound-B > Specifically adsorbed-B > Residual-B.

**Keywords:** Boron, soil, fractions, incubation, transformation

#### **1. Introduction**

Boron is a chemical element which is represented by the symbol B and atomic number 5. Boron is among one of the essential plant nutrients and compounds of boron such as boric acid and borax are used in agriculture as fertilizers. Boron is required by the plants in petty quantities, with excess being toxic. Boron is a non-metal micronutrient which is the only non-metal of the group 13 of the periodic table and has transitional properties between non-metals and metals (Marschner, 1995). Boron constitutes about 0.001 percent by weight of Earth's crust. B in Indian agriculture has emerged as an important micronutrient and its deficiency was

found next only to zinc (Sathya *et al.*, 2009). Gupta (1993) reported that about one third of the cultivated soils in India are deficient in Boron and on an average, 18.3 % of total cultivated soils in India are deficient in Boron (Shukla *et al.*, 2014). B deficiency are usually found in sandy soil prone to leaching, calcareous soils (>15% calcium carbonate), high pH soils (> 7) and soils which are recently limed (Borkakati and Takkar, 2000; Alloway, 2008).

Singh (2001) reported that the contents of hot water soluble B in Indian soils ranged from 0.75 to 8.0 mg kg<sup>-1</sup>. Availability of soil B to plants is often related to the total B content as well as other properties such as pH, organic matter and CaCO<sub>3</sub> contents, interaction of nutrients, type of plant or variety and environmental factors, which strongly influence the emergence of B toxicity or deficiency in plants (Sakal *et al.*, 1996; Saha and Singh, 1997). Boron that are available to plant exists in soil mostly as a neutral boric acid molecule and decomposing organic matter serves as the main source of this boron. Boron is usually present as an un-dissociated boric acid in the soil solution which is taken up by the plants. Boron accessibility is highly influenced by the characteristics of soil such as pH, electrical conductivity, texture, cation exchange capacity, organic matter and calcium carbonate of soil (Evans and Sparks, 1983).

Knowledge of different fractions of boron is necessary to understand the chemistry of B in soils as it enables to know about plant availability, its binding forms, dynamics, and possible impacts of B on environmental. The knowledge of the effect of different amendments and chemical fertilizers on native soil boron and the distribution of boron in different fractions are also essential for the proper management of soils. In soil, Boron is found in five different fractions *viz.* readily soluble, specifically adsorbed, oxide bound, organically bound, occluded or residual B. The relative concentration of these fractions in a soil at a given time depends on properties of soil like pH, amount and nature of clay, lime content, organic matter, soil moisture and plant factors. Only few forms of B are available to plants and their determination is important for evaluating its availability to plants. Padbhushan and Kumar (2017) reported that residual B is the fraction present in soil solution which is absorbed by soil particles weakly, and for plant uptake, it is the most readily available form. It accounts for 1 to 2% of Total boron. The second most plant available form is Specifically adsorbed boron which may be associated with organic matter (OM) or adsorbed onto clay surfaces or in soil. Distribution of these different forms of B in soil surface is always influenced by sub-surface soil and capability of these underlying B should also be taken into consideration while evaluating the reasons for variability of these forms. Considering these facts in mind, an experiment was conducted to find out the transformation of different fractions of Boron at different intervals.

## 2. Materials and Methods

An incubation study was conducted in the laboratory to know the transformation of applied boron in soils at field capacity. Forty gram of air dried soil was taken in each of a series of 100mL beakers. Boron treatments were added in the form of solution (Na<sub>2</sub>B<sub>4</sub>O<sub>7</sub> · 10H<sub>2</sub>O) and mixed uniformly with 40g of soil. The samples were

incubated in the laboratory at room temperature for a period of 90 days. Soils of each treatment were maintained at the respective water holding capacity of the soil. Any loss of water through evaporation was compensated by periodic addition of double distilled water. Soil samples were collected periodically at 0, 30, 60 and 90 days after incubation (DAI) and analyzed for different fractions of boron viz. readily soluble boron, specifically adsorbed boron, oxide bound boron, organically bound boron and residual boron. The experiment was carried out under completely randomized block design (CRD). Altogether there were 6 treatments replicated thrice. Treatments included in the incubation studies were: T<sub>0</sub>= Control, T<sub>1</sub>= 0.5 mg B kg<sup>-1</sup> soil, T<sub>2</sub>= 1 mg B kg<sup>-1</sup> soil, T<sub>3</sub>= 1.5 mg B kg<sup>-1</sup> soil, T<sub>4</sub>= 2 mg B kg<sup>-1</sup> soil and T<sub>5</sub>= 2.5 mg B kg<sup>-1</sup> soil. The fractions of boron were estimated by using different extractants as explained by Datta *et al* (2002). The Readily soluble B was extracted by 0.01M CaCl<sub>2</sub> solution (soil:extractant ratio of 1:2) and shaken for 16 hrs. Specifically adsorbed B is extracted with 0.05M KH<sub>2</sub>PO<sub>4</sub> (1:2) and shaken for 1 hr. Oxide bound B was extracted by 0.175M NH<sub>4</sub>-oxalate (1:4) and shaken for 4 hrs. Organically bound B was extracted by 0.5M NaOH (1:4) and heating at 85<sup>o</sup>C. Residual B can be extracted with 1:5:5 ratios of HF, H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>, HClO<sub>4</sub> and heating at 135<sup>o</sup>C. The different fractions of boron from the above extract were determined by following Azomethine-H method (Wolf, 1971). Statistical Analysis was done by the help of an online statistical software- OPSTAT.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

#### **3.1 Readily soluble boron**

Among the different fractions, readily soluble boron fraction exhibit an increasing trend for elevated levels of boron compared to control (Table 1 and Fig. 1). At 30 days of incubation, the readily soluble boron in soils reached a maximum content (0.64 kg ha<sup>-1</sup>) at B level @ 2.5 kg ha<sup>-1</sup>. At 60 and 90 days after incubation, the release pattern of this fraction with the application of B fertilizer @ 2.5 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> exhibited a decreasing course with figures of 0.57 and 0.47 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> respectively. During the incubation period, the readily soluble boron in soils ranged from 0.05 to 0.64 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> and reached the maximum at B @2.5 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> after 30 days of incubation. This paltry contribution in soil under this study might be due to the low availability of available boron. Similar discoveries also described by Karthikeyan and Shukla, (2011).

#### **3.2 Specifically adsorbed boron**

The specifically adsorbed boron fraction in soils increased with elevated levels of boron application and reached a peak on 30<sup>th</sup> day of incubation. The boron level at @ 2.5 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> had increased the specifically adsorbed boron content at 0 and 30 days after incubation (0.66 and 0.69 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> respectively). Altogether from the inception to end of the incubation period, soils noted the highest specifically adsorbed boron content with 0.69 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> at 30 days due to administration of B fertilizer @ 2.5 kg ha<sup>-1</sup>. At 60 and 90 days after incubation, the release pattern of this fraction with the application of B @ 2.5 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> exhibited a decreasing course with figures of 0.62 and 0.52 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> respectively (Table 1 and Fig. 2). In terms of their contribution to total boron in soil, the released fraction was found to be lowest which differ from 0.11 to 0.69 kg ha<sup>-1</sup>. This might be probably due to the derivation of specifically adsorbed boron from weak binding sites of either the organic and inorganic constituents, as established with the findings of Hou *et al.*, (1994).

### **3.3 Oxide bound boron**

The oxide bound boron fraction in soils increased with elevated levels of boron application and highest release was found on 30<sup>th</sup> day of incubation. The effect of different boron at @ 2.5 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> levels had increased the content at 0 and 30 days after incubation (1.13 and 1.16 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> respectively). Altogether from the inception to end of the incubation period, soils noted the highest oxide bound boron content with 1.16 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> at 30 days due to administration of B fertilizer @ 2.5 kg ha<sup>-1</sup>. Throughout the period of this incubation experiment, the oxide bound form of boron differs from 0.68 to 1.16 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> (Table 1 and Fig. 3). At 60<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> day of incubation, this form exhibit a reduced trend which might be due the reason that oxide bound boron fraction entered into tightly bound boron at surfaces of mineral as well as Al or Fe that has been replaced isomorphously by B within the octahedral sheet of the minerals. The outcome also validated with prior discovery of Hou *et al.*, (1994).

### **3.4 Organically bound boron**

The boron level at @ 2.5 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> had boosted the organically bound boron content at 0 and 30 days after incubation (1.63 and 1.65 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> respectively). The organically bound boron fraction in soils increased with elevated levels of boron application. Altogether from the inception to end of the incubation period, soils noted the highest organically bound boron content with 1.65 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> at 30 days due to administration of B fertilizer @ 2.5 kg ha<sup>-1</sup>. The level of boron at @ 2.5 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> rose the organically boron which differ from 1.16 to 1.65 kg ha<sup>-1</sup>. At 60 and 90 days after incubation, the release pattern of this fraction with the application of B @ 2.5 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> exhibited a reduced trend with figures of 1.58 and 1.48 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> respectively (Table 1 and Fig. 4). This form of boron increased with increasing levels of boron which solely depend on the organic carbon content of the soil (Karthikeyan and Shukla, 2011).

### **3.5 Residual boron**

It was observed that the residual boron fraction in soils increased with elevated levels of boron application. Boron level @ 2.5 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> had increased the content of residual boron at 0 and 30 days after incubation (38.31 and 38.34 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> respectively). Altogether from the inception to end of the incubation period, soils noted the highest residual boron content with 38.34 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> at 30 days due to administration of B fertilizer @ 2.5 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> which was the maximum among all the fractions of boron. The residual boron fractions predominated in the soil and stretched from 31.65 to 38.34 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> which contributed to 92.22 percent to total boron due to administration of B fertilizer @ 2.5 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> (Table 1 and Fig. 5). The residual form of boron was found to be the highest amounts that contributed to soil boron which generally differ from 70 to 99% of total soil boron (Raza *et al.*, 2002). This fraction of boron was considered to be the major contribution to total boron among all other fractions of boron (Karthikeyan and Shukla, 2011).

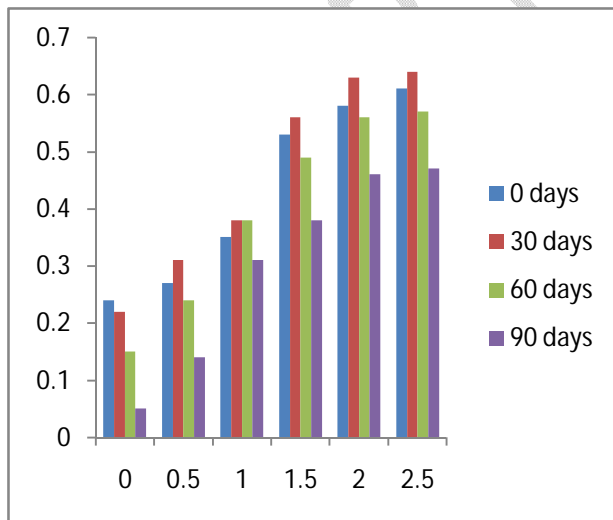


Fig. 1- Transformation of Readily soluble B

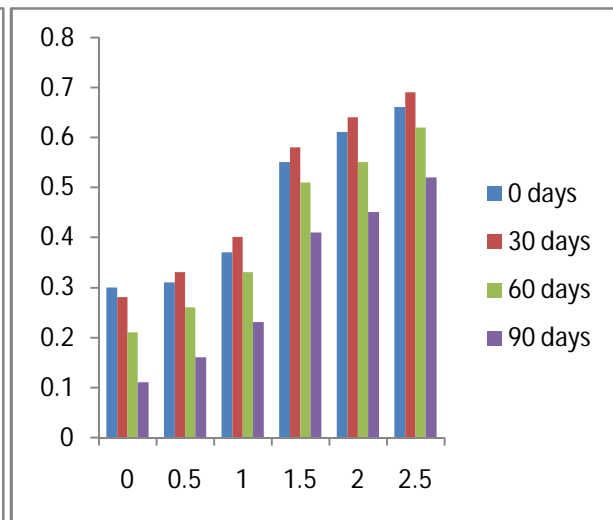


Fig. 2- Transformation of Specifically adsorbed B

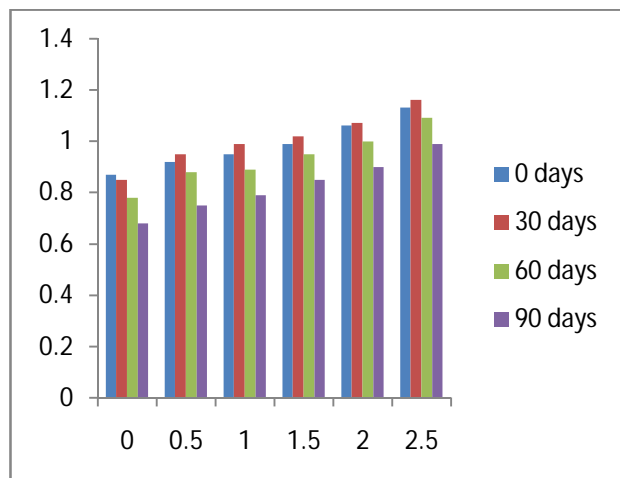


Fig. 3- Transformation of Oxide bound B

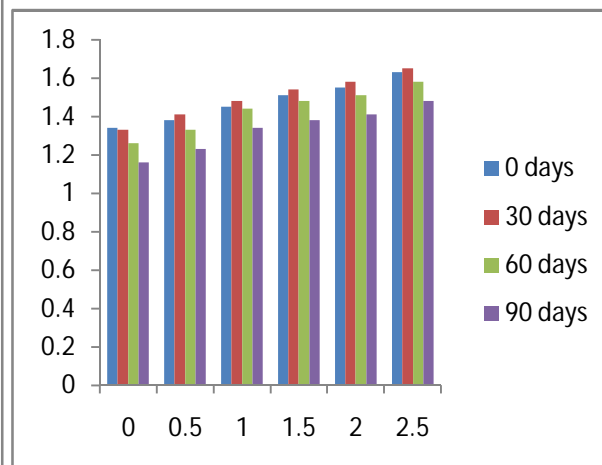


Fig. 4- Transformation of Organically bound B

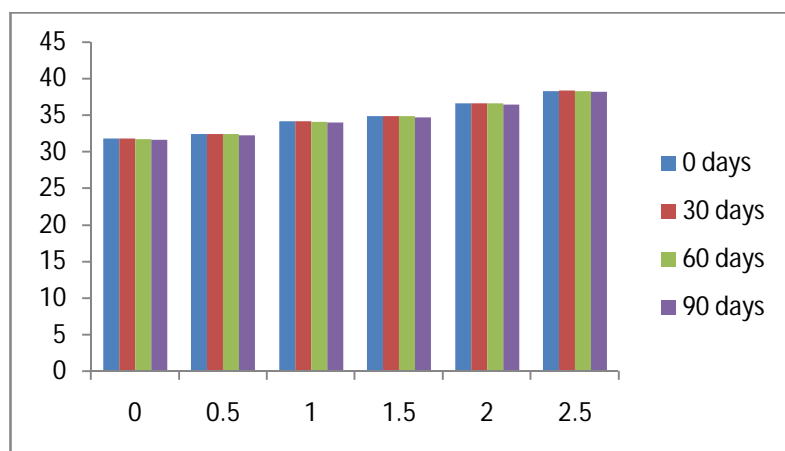


Fig. 5- Transformation of Residual B

**Table 1. Transformation of Boron in soil at different intervals**

Days after incubation	B levels (kg ha <sup>-1</sup> )	Boron fractions (mg kg <sup>-1</sup> )					
		Rea. S	Spe. ad	Ox. bound	Og. bound	Residual	Mean
0	0.0	0.24	0.30	0.87	1.34	31.84	6.92
	0.5	0.27	0.31	0.92	1.38	32.42	7.06
	1.0	0.35	0.37	0.95	1.45	34.13	7.45
	1.5	0.53	0.55	0.99	1.51	34.87	7.69
	2.0	0.58	0.61	1.06	1.55	36.63	8.09
	2.5	0.61	0.66	1.13	1.63	38.31	8.47
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>0.43</b>	<b>0.47</b>	<b>0.99</b>	<b>1.48</b>	<b>34.70</b>	
		T	F	T*F			
	<b>S.Ed</b>	0.013	0.011	0.028			
	<b>C.D<sub>0.05</sub></b>	0.025	0.022	0.055			
	0.0	0.22	0.28	0.85	1.33	31.82	6.90
	0.5	0.31	0.33	0.95	1.41	32.45	7.09
	1.0	0.38	0.40	0.99	1.48	34.16	7.48
	1.5	0.56	0.58	1.02	1.54	34.9	7.72

30	2.0	0.63	0.64	1.07	1.58	36.65	8.11
	2.5	0.64	0.69	1.16	1.65	38.34	8.50
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>0.46</b>	<b>0.49</b>	<b>1.01</b>	<b>1.50</b>	<b>34.72</b>	
		T	F	T*F			
	<b>S.Ed</b>	0.012	0.011	0.028			
	<b>C.D<sub>0.05</sub></b>	0.024	0.022	0.054			
60	0.0	0.15	0.21	0.78	1.26	31.75	6.83
	0.5	0.24	0.26	0.88	1.33	32.38	7.02
	1.0	0.38	0.33	0.89	1.44	34.05	7.42
	1.5	0.49	0.51	0.95	1.48	34.83	7.65
	2.0	0.56	0.55	1.00	1.51	36.58	8.04
	2.5	0.57	0.62	1.09	1.58	38.27	8.43
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>0.40</b>	<b>0.41</b>	<b>0.93</b>	<b>1.43</b>	<b>34.64</b>	
		T	F	T*F			
	<b>S.Ed</b>	0.011	0.010	0.024			
	<b>C.D<sub>0.05</sub></b>	0.021	0.01	0.047			
90	0.0	0.05	0.11	0.68	1.16	31.65	6.73
	0.5	0.14	0.16	0.75	1.23	32.28	6.91
	1.0	0.31	0.23	0.79	1.34	33.95	7.32
	1.5	0.38	0.41	0.85	1.38	34.73	7.55
	2.0	0.46	0.45	0.90	1.41	36.48	7.94
	2.5	0.47	0.52	0.99	1.48	38.17	8.33
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>0.30</b>	<b>0.31</b>	<b>0.83</b>	<b>1.33</b>	<b>34.54</b>	
		T	F	T*F			
	<b>S.Ed</b>	0.016	0.014	0.035			
	<b>C.D<sub>0.05</sub></b>	0.031	0.028	0.069			
		Rea. S	Spe. ad	Ox. bound	Og. bound	Residual	
<b>range</b>		<b>0.05-0.64</b>	<b>0.11-0.69</b>	<b>0.68-1.16</b>	<b>1.16-1.65</b>	<b>31.65-38.34</b>	
<b>mean</b>		<b>0.40</b>	<b>0.42</b>	<b>0.94</b>	<b>1.44</b>	<b>34.65</b>	

#### 4. Conclusion

From the incubation experiment, it was inferred that with applied boron, the organically bound B fraction was higher next to residual form when compared to other forms of boron. At 30 days of incubation, different fractions of boron showed an increasing trend for added levels of boron compared to control (which continue to decrease with days). This might be due to recently applied boron into the soil solution. However, at 60 and 90 days different fractions of boron in the soil started decreasing which might be due the fact that boron entered into tightly bound state within the soil. In general, Boron fertilization increased the availability of boron content in soil and hence increased its availability to the crop. The sequence of the content of different fractions of boron in an acid soils of Imphal West District was Readily soluble-B>Organically bound-B>Oxide bound-B> Specifically adsorbed-B> Residual-B. Future research needs to be directed towards the fate of B in the soils using tracer (isotopic) techniques covering the major soil groups of Manipur. Particular attention should be given to elucidate the mechanism of adsorption/fixation of the applied B by the oxides and hydroxides of iron and manganese under flooded and upland soil conditions and other relevant factors in soil that may render B unavailable for the plants.

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