

Original Research Article Effect of liquid biofertilizers on productivity, quality and soil biota of fodder sorghum

ABSTRACT

The field experiment was conducted during *Rabi* season of 2022 on sandy clay loam soils at wetland farm of the S.V. Agricultural College, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, India, to study the effect of liquid biofertilizers on productivity, quality, and soil biota of fodder sorghum. The treatments were allocated in randomized block design and replicated thrice. The soil was neutral in reaction (6.9 pH), low in available nitrogen (115 kg ha^{-1}), medium in available phosphorus (29 kg ha^{-1}) and low in available potassium (156 kg ha^{-1}) status. The initial soil contains bacteria ($13.08 \times 10^7 \text{ CFU g}^{-1}$ soil), fungi ($4.04 \times 10^4 \text{ CFU g}^{-1}$ soil) and actinomycetes ($1.54 \times 10^3 \text{ CFU g}^{-1}$ soil). The results revealed that the maximum green (32.1 t ha^{-1}) and dry (13.0 t ha^{-1}) fodder yield as well as crude protein (7.3 %) were obtained with the application of 75% RDF + *Azospirillum* + PSB + KSB (Both seed & soil application). Furthermore, this treatment produced a significantly higher soil bacterial ($23.2 \times 10^7 \text{ CFU g}^{-1}$ soil), fungal ($13.7 \times 10^4 \text{ CFU g}^{-1}$ soil) and actinomycetes ($10.3 \times 10^3 \text{ CFU g}^{-1}$ soil) population at harvest.

Keywords: Liquid biofertilizers, fodder sorghum, *Azospirillum*, Green fodder yield, Sandy clay loam soils, Productivity, Soil biota.

1. INTRODUCTION

India's livestock production is vital to the country's Agricultural sector and considerably boosts GDP. Green fodder and dry fodder availability are currently deficient by 35.6 percent and 10.95 percent, respectively [1]. Looking ahead to 2050, the IGFRI Vision 2050 study projects a demand for 1012 million tonnes of green fodder and 631 million tonnes of dry fodder. However, the livestock industry has challenges due to a scarcity of fodder and its poor quality. The gap between the dry and green feed supply is typically 40%; by 2025, this disparity can increase to 45%. To fulfil the vast animal population in India's high fodder demand, there is a need to boost forage crop output and productivity while maintaining soil health and environmental sustainability [2].

Crops used as cereal fodder contain a high concentration of digestible starch, water-soluble carbohydrates and fibre, making them a source of high energy for animals. Sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor* (L.) Moench) is an essential fodder crop in India since it is the most important, adaptable and widely cultivated and meets 60% of the country's demands for livestock. It can withstand heat, drought, and waterlogging better than other fodder crops, but its output remains modest and needs adequate nutrient management [3].

A balance between raising crop productivity, preserving soil health and environmental sustainability is more important for long-term food security [4]. Hence, integration of organic, chemical and biological sources of plant nutrients is essential in managing and maintaining soil health in sustainable Agriculture. Biofertilizers are the best sources for improving soil nutrient availability, leading to better nutrient uptake by plants. Nitrogenous biofertilizers are capable of fixing atmospheric nitrogen which includes *Azospirillum* species and for phosphorus, includes *phosphate solubilizing bacteria* (PSB) which solubilize the phosphorus, for potassium, it includes *potassium solubilizing bacteria* (KSB) and these variants are available in both solid and liquid consortia.

Due to their versatility and efficiency, liquid biofertilizers have become more and more well-liked in recent years. Liquid biofertilizers are formulations that include favourable bacteria, fungi and algae that promote growth of plants, enhance soil fertility and boost nutrient uptake. Compared to conventional fertilizers, liquid biofertilizers are more affordable, environmentally friendly, and sustainable [5]. They might also reduce the need for artificial fertilizers and the environmental harm caused by Agriculture.

Keeping the above facts in view the present study was planned to investigate the effect of applying liquid bio inoculants of *Azospirillum* sp., PSB and KSB in combination on the performance of fodder sorghum under field conditions.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present investigation entitled “Effect of liquid biofertilizers on productivity, quality and soil biota of fodder sorghum” was conducted during *rabi*, 2022 in wetland farm of S.V. Agricultural College, ANGRAU, Tirupati, which is geographically situated at 13° 56' 564" N latitude and 79° 67' 684" E longitude, with an altitude of 182.9 m above the mean sea level. The soil was neutral in reaction (6.9 pH) low in available nitrogen (115 kg ha⁻¹) and medium in available phosphorus (29 kg ha⁻¹) and low in available potassium (156 kg ha⁻¹) status. The initial soil contains bacteria (13.08 X 10⁷ CFU g⁻¹ soil), fungi (4.04 X 10⁴ CFU g⁻¹ soil) and actinomycetes (1.54 X 10³ CFU g⁻¹ soil). The experiment was done using a randomized block design with three replications. Treatments includes T₁: Absolute control, T₂: 100% RDF, T₃: 75% RDF + *Azospirillum* + PSB + KSB (Seed treatment@10 ml kg⁻¹), T₄: 75% RDF + *Azospirillum* + PSB + KSB (Soil application@1.25 l ha⁻¹), T₅: 75% RDF + *Azospirillum* + PSB + KSB (Both seed & soil application), T₆: 50% RDF + *Azospirillum* + PSB + KSB (Seed treatment@10 ml kg⁻¹), T₇: 50% RDF + *Azospirillum* + PSB + KSB (Soil application@1.25 l ha⁻¹), T₈: 50% RDF + *Azospirillum* + PSB + KSB (Both seed & soil application). The crop was sown with a seed rate of 25 kg ha⁻¹ at a spacing of 30 x 10 cm. Recommended dose of fertilizer was 60 - 40 - 30 N, P₂O₅, K₂O kg ha⁻¹. Soil application of biofertilizers was done by mixing 1.25 l ha⁻¹ of each bio inoculant in 500 kg of well-decomposed FYM and applied as basal dose (applied 24 hrs before sowing). Seed treatment of biofertilizers was done by mixing 10 ml of each bio inoculant with 1 kg of seed and drying for 10-15 minutes under shade before sowing. Irrigation and weeding were done as and when required. At 50% flowering, harvesting was completed. The data on various parameters were statistically analysed using the randomised block design method recommended by Panse and Sukhatme [6].

2.1 Yield parameters

Green fodder yield: Forage sorghum from net plot area was harvested separately by leaving 5 cm stubbles from ground surface. Green fodder yield of sorghum was weighed in net plot area and total green fodder yield was expressed in t ha⁻¹.

Dry fodder yield: After harvesting of fodder sorghum from net plot area, plants were left in the field for a period of one week for sun drying. Then dry fodder yield of sorghum was weighed in net plot area and total dry fodder yield was expressed in t ha⁻¹.

2.2 Quality parameters

Crude protein: Total nitrogen content of plant samples was estimated by modified Micro kjeldhal method [7] and the crude protein content was estimated by using the following formula which was expressed in percentages.

$$\text{Crude protein (\%)} = \text{N (\%)} \times 6.25$$

Crude fibre: Crude fibre content in whole plant was estimated by acid-alkali digestion method and was expressed in percentage.

$$\text{Crude Fibre(\%)} = \frac{\text{Weight before ashing} - \text{weight after ashing}}{\text{Weight of the sample taken}} \times 100$$

2.3 Soil microbial population

Microbial mass in the soil was normally expressed in colony forming units per gram of soil (CFU g⁻¹ of soil). The viable count for bacteria, fungi and actinomycetes was done on Nutrient Agar (NA), Rose bengal Agar, and Kenknight and Munaier's mediums, respectively. After incubation, colonies developed and the viable count of soil microbes was enumerated by the following formula.

$$\text{Colony forming unit per g of sample} = \frac{\text{Number of colonies} \times \text{Dilution factor}}{\text{Quantity of sample}}$$

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data pertaining to productivity, quality and soil microbial population at harvest, as influenced by application of liquid biofertilizers at different levels of recommended dose of fertilizers, were presented in Tables and discussed in different sections.

3.1 Yield parameters

Green fodder yield

Significantly higher green fodder yield (32.1 t ha⁻¹) (Table 1) (Fig. 1) of fodder sorghum was observed with 75% RDF + *Azospirillum* + PSB + KSB (Both seed & soil application) (T₅) which was on par with 100% RDF (T₂). Significantly lower green fodder yields (13.9 t ha⁻¹) were noticed with absolute control (T₁). Significantly higher green fodder yield of fodder sorghum was recorded with 75% RDF + *Azospirillum* + PSB + KSB (Both seed & soil application) (T₅) due to cumulative effect of elevated growth stature as well as yield structure. Moreover, enhanced mineral and water uptake, root development and vegetative growth together with the conversion of unavailable plant nutrients into available form by biofertilizers all contribute to higher nutrient uptake, which eventually increases green fodder yield. These results are supported by findings of Yadahalli *et al.* [8] and Singh *et al.* [9].

Dry fodder yield

Application of 75% RDF + *Azospirillum* + PSB + KSB (Both seed & soil application) (T₅) was recorded significantly higher dry fodder yield (13.0 t ha⁻¹) (Table 1) (Fig. 1) of fodder sorghum which was in turn on par with 100% RDF (T₂). Significantly lower dry fodder yields (6.0 t ha⁻¹) was noticed with absolute control (T₁). Significantly higher green fodder yield of fodder sorghum was showed with 75% RDF + *Azospirillum* + PSB + KSB (Both seed & soil application) (T₅) might be attributed to balanced nutrients provided to the crop which resulted in significantly increase in green fodder yield and hence dry fodder. This may also be due to increased availability and absorption of nutrients mostly nitrogen and phosphorus to plants which eventually resulted in additional vegetative growth due to improvement in plant height and tillers on account of enlargement of cells. These results are according with Kumar *et al.* [10] and Verma *et al.* [11].

3.2 Quality parameters

Crude protein

The highest crude protein content (7.3 %) (Table 1) (Fig. 1) of fodder sorghum was noticed with 75% RDF + *Azospirillum* + PSB + KSB (Both seed & soil application) (T₅) which was on par with 100% RDF (T₂) and lower crude protein yield (5.4 %) was recorded with absolute control (T₁). Significantly higher crude protein yield of fodder sorghum was recorded with 75% RDF + *Azospirillum* + PSB + KSB (Both seed & soil application) (T₅) due to fixation of nitrogen by *Azospirillum* inoculation resulted in increased availability of nitrogen, which has helped in the synthesis of more protein as nitrogen is a constituent of various metabolites including protein and amino acids. The increase in protein content may be due to more uptake of nutrients with combined application of nutrient sources. The results are also in close association with the results of Yadahalli *et al.* [8] and Gupta A and Mayuri D [12].

Crude fibre

Application of different levels of liquid biofertilizers did not show any significant difference on crude fibre content. Yet with no marked differences, higher crude fibre content of fodder sorghum was recorded with the application of 100% RDF (T₂) (32.8 %) (Table 1) and low crude fibre was noticed with 75% RDF with biofertilizer combinations. This was followed by application of 50% RDF with different biofertilizers. Fodders containing low crude fibre content is an indication of more palatability by animals and they contain digestible nutrients.

3.3 Soil microbial population

Significantly the highest soil bacterial (23.2 X 10⁷ CFU g⁻¹ soil), fungal (13.7 X 10⁴ CFU g⁻¹ soil) and actinomycetes (10.3 X 10³ CFU g⁻¹ soil) (Table 2) (Fig. 2) populations at harvest were observed in 75% RDF + *Azospirillum* + PSB + KSB (Both seed & soil application) (T₅) which was on par with 75% RDF + *Azospirillum* + PSB + KSB (Soil application @1.25 l ha⁻¹) (T₄). The lowest soil bacterial, fungal and actinomycetes populations were observed in absolute control (T₁) at harvest stage of fodder sorghum crop. Among all the treatments the highest number of soil microorganisms (soil bacteria, fungi and actinomycetes) were found with the 75% RDF + *Azospirillum* + PSB + KSB (Both seed & soil application) (T₅) treatment followed by 75% RDF + *Azospirillum* + PSB + KSB (Soil application @1.25 l ha⁻¹) (T₄) and this might be due to use of liquid biofertilizers in conjunction with chemical fertilizers provided soil with more easily mineralizable and hydrolysable carbon, increasing microbial activity and microbial biomass carbon. Datt *et al.* [13] have also reported similar findings. The application of organic fertilizers supplemented with different kinds of biofertilizers could be responsible for the increasing biomass levels of microorganisms in the soil. These fertilizers, in turn, give bacteria enough nutrients and promote the rapid growth of the microbial population in the soil. [14]. The populations of microbes were considerably highest when FYM was used along with biofertilizers as soil application and the FYM contained more growth-promoting elements like micronutrients, vitamins, and enzymes, which in turn increased the microbial population. In addition, *Azospirillum* + PSB + KSB increased the production of root biomass, which led to the highest production of root exudates, which increased the population of helpful bacteria, fungi, and actinomycetes in the rhizosphere soil [15].

Table 1 Effect of liquid biofertilizers at different levels of recommended dose of fertilizers on productivity, quality of fodder sorghum

Treatment Combinations	Green fodder yield (t ha ⁻¹)	Dry fodder yield (t ha ⁻¹)	Crude Protein (%)	Crude fibre (%)
T ₁ : Absolute control	13.9	6.0	5.4	32.6
T ₂ : 100% RDF	30.6	12.8	6.8	32.8
T ₃ : 75% RDF + <i>Azospirillum</i> + PSB + KSB (Seed treatment @10 ml kg ⁻¹)	26.5	11.3	6.4	31.4
T ₄ : 75% RDF + <i>Azospirillum</i> + PSB + KSB (Soil application @1.25 l ha ⁻¹)	27.3	11.3	6.5	31.9
T ₅ : 75% RDF + <i>Azospirillum</i> + PSB + KSB (Both seed & soil application)	32.1	13.0	7.3	31.4
T ₆ : 50% RDF + <i>Azospirillum</i> + PSB + KSB (Seed treatment @10 ml kg ⁻¹)	21.9	9.7	6.1	32.5
T ₇ : 50% RDF + <i>Azospirillum</i> + PSB + KSB (Soil application @1.25 l ha ⁻¹)	22.2	9.8	6.2	32.3
T ₈ : 50% RDF + <i>Azospirillum</i> + PSB + KSB (Both seed & soil application)	25.5	11.2	6.3	31.4
SEm.(±)	1.03	0.41	0.19	0.75
CD (P=0.05)	3.1	1.3	0.6	NS

Table 2 Effect of liquid biofertilizers at different levels of recommended dose of fertilizers on Soil microbial population at harvest

Treatment Combinations	Bacteria (No. X 10 ⁷ CFU g ⁻¹)	Fungi (No. X 10 ⁴ CFU g ⁻¹)	Actinomycetes (No. X 10 ³ CFU g ⁻¹)
T ₁ : Absolute control	11.7	6.3	3
T ₂ : 100% RDF	12.3	7.3	4.3
T ₃ : 75% RDF + <i>Azospirillum</i> + PSB + KSB (Seed treatment @10 ml kg ⁻¹)	17.6	9.3	6.7
T ₄ : 75% RDF + <i>Azospirillum</i> + PSB + KSB (Soil application @1.25 l ha ⁻¹)	21.9	12.3	9.3
T ₅ : 75% RDF + <i>Azospirillum</i> + PSB + KSB (Both seed & soil application)	23.2	13.7	10.3
T ₆ : 50% RDF + <i>Azospirillum</i> + PSB + KSB (Seed treatment @10 ml kg ⁻¹)	15.2	9	5.7
T ₇ : 50% RDF + <i>Azospirillum</i> + PSB + KSB (Soil application @1.25 l ha ⁻¹)	16.5	9.3	6.3
T ₈ : 50% RDF + <i>Azospirillum</i> + PSB + KSB (Both seed & soil application)	18.9	10	8
SEm.(±)	0.69	0.46	0.41
CD (P=0.05)	2.2	1.4	1.2

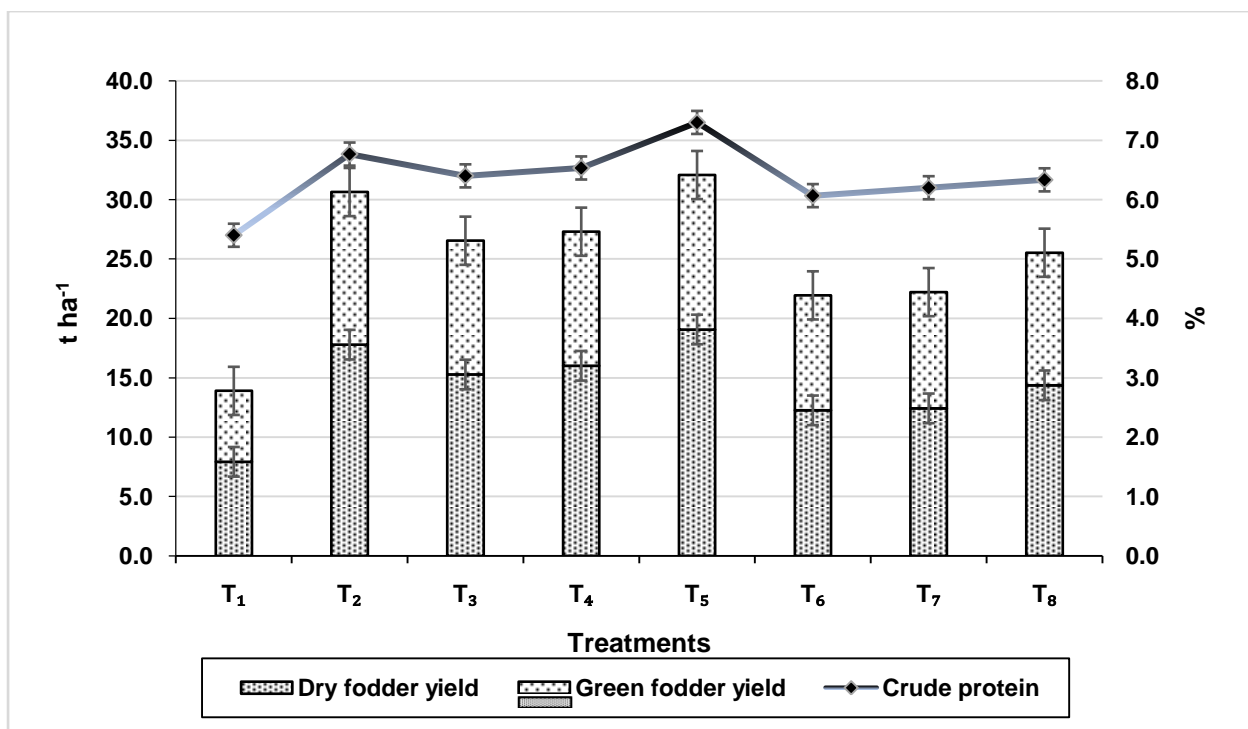


Fig. 1. Green fodder yield and dry fodder yield (t ha⁻¹) and crude protein content (%) of fodder sorghum as influenced by application of liquid biofertilizers at different levels of recommended dose of fertilizers.

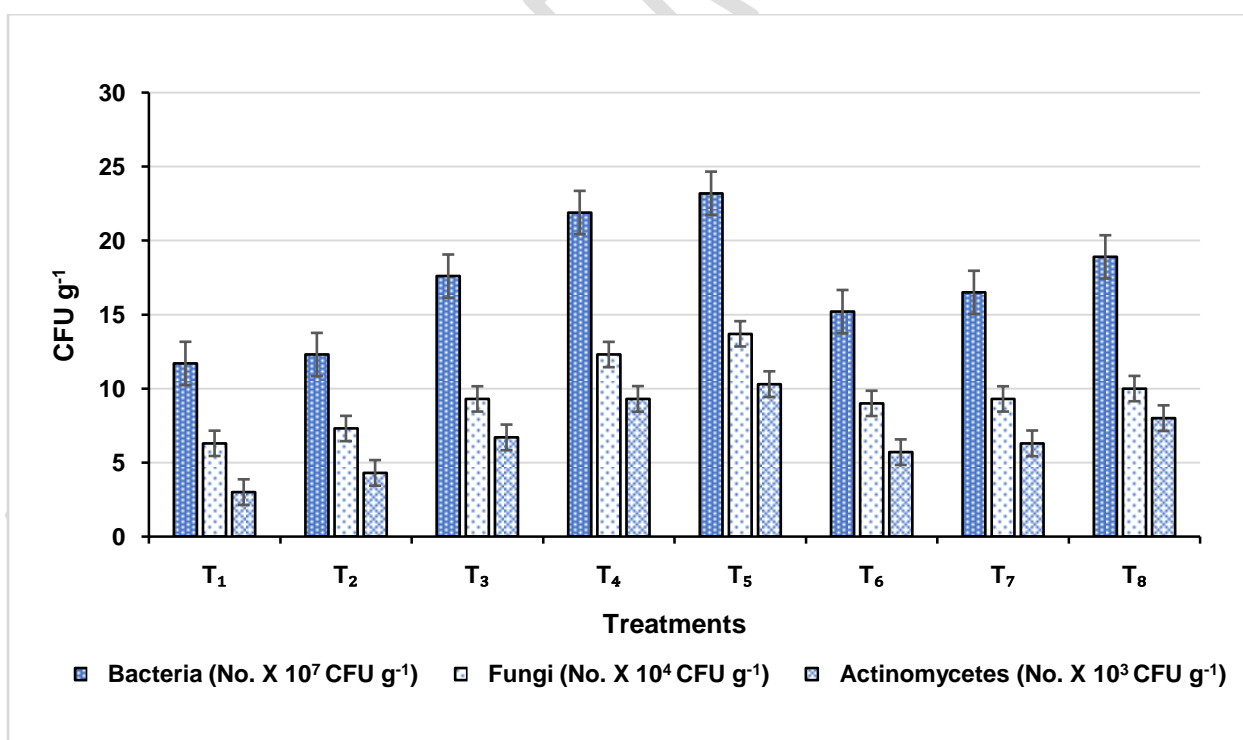


Fig. 2. Soil microbial population at harvest as influenced by application of liquid biofertilizers at different levels of recommended dose of fertilizers.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the present study indicated that combined application of 75% RDF + *Azospirillum* + PSB + KSB (Both seed & soil application) is the most efficient nutrient management practice. Which recorded highest green and dry fodder yield with high crude protein. Further this treatment resulted in higher soil microbial population which helps in sustainability of soil health. Since these findings are based on a single season, further investigation may be required to support them.

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