

Original Research Article

Evaluation of the Effects of Drip Irrigation and Fertigation on Tomato Yield and Water Dynamics under Protected Cultivation

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Abstract

The present study was conducted at experimental farm of CSKHPKV, Palampur during with the objectives of evaluating the effects of drip irrigation on soil water behavior and the effects of nutrient schedules on productivity and nutrient uptake at varying drip irrigation levels of tomato under protected condition. The treatments comprised of (a) Three drip irrigation levels; I₁ (Daily drip irrigation @ 2.0 litre/m² once in a day during first two months and @ 4.0 litre/m² thereafter), I₂ (Daily drip irrigation @ 1.0 litre/m² once in a day during first two months and @ 2.0 litre/m² thereafter) and I₃ (Daily drip irrigation twice a day with 6 hours interval at @ 1.0 litre/m²) and (b) Three nutrient schedules viz., NPK₇₅ (75% of RDF of which 25% applied as basal and rest 75 % through fertigation at 15 days interval), NPK₁₀₀ (100% of RDF of which 25% applied as basal and 75% through fertigation at weekly interval) and NPK₁₅₀ (150% of RDF of which 25% applied as basal and 75% through fertigation twice a week). The results indicated that the soil water content and soil water stock was higher under I₃ and I₁ and lower under I₂ treatments. However, marketable yield, water use efficiency (WUE) and NPK uptake was significantly higher in I₂ than I₁ and I₃. Among nutrient schedules, marketable yield, WUE and NPK uptake were significantly higher under NPK₁₅₀ nutrient schedule than NPK₁₀₀ and NPK₇₅. The gross return and benefit:cost (B:C) ratio was highest under I₂NPK₁₅₀ followed by I₁NPK₁₅₀ and lowest under I₃NPK₇₅. The study concluded that I₂ and NPK₁₅₀ was most suitable schedule due to higher marketable yield with less water use leading to highest water use efficiency under naturally ventilated polyhouse.

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Keywords: Drip irrigation, water productivity, fertigation, ~~soil water stock and water use efficiency~~tomato

Introduction

With the increasing population and improvement in the dietary habits, the consumption of vegetables has increased. Also, in the present scenario, vegetables play a major role by providing food and nutrition, economic security and more importantly, higher productivity with shorter maturity cycle with greater income leading to improved livelihood [1]. With the increasing population, the demand of vegetables will be 225 million tons by 2020 which will further increase to 350 million tons by 2030 [2]. Vegetable cultivation in Himachal Pradesh has gained significant importance on account of favourable agro-climatic conditions for growing quality off-season vegetables [3]. Low cost naturally-ventilated polyhouses provide a great scope to raise the off-season crop such as tomato for round the year supply [4]. At present, about 137 ha area in Himachal Pradesh has been brought under protected cultivation Greenhouse farming, also known as protected cultivation, is one of the farming systems widely used to provide and maintain a

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controlled environment suitable for optimum crop production leading to maximum profits [5]. This includes creating an environment suitable for working efficiency as well as for better crop growth [6]. The main advantage of greenhouse farming is that the production can be throughout the year, which is not possible in the open field farming due to heavy rainfall, high temperature and incidence of pest and diseases [6]. Irrigation system is one of the most important components affecting the yield and quality of agricultural produce in greenhouse farming system [4]. Water should be given in proper amount with accurate time application. Therefore, water management is a key to avoid plant moisture stress during the crop growth stages. Several efforts have been made to use irrigation water as efficient as possible under protected cultivation system [7]. The use of drip irrigation saves water and gives better plant yield and quality as it reduces the humidity build up inside greenhouse after irrigation due to precise application of water to the root zone of the crop [4].

Drip (trickle) irrigation offers the potential for precise water management as compared to furrow and sprinkler irrigation [8]. It also provides an opportunity to deliver nutrients in a timely and efficient manner near the root zone (Fertigation). Fertigation is an attractive technology in modern irrigated agriculture which not only increases yield and fertilizer use efficiency but also maintains optimal nutrient levels and water supply according to the specific needs of each crop and soil type [9]. The technique also applies both water and fertilizer at a low rate to the vicinity of plant root zone as per crop needs and according to crop developmental phase, resulting in higher yields and better quality of produce [10]. Further, it can reduce fertilizer usage and minimize groundwater pollution due to fertilizer leaching upon excessive irrigation [11]. Fertigation events can be scheduled as often as irrigation, several times per season. Hence, to obtain the higher crop and water productivity under protected environment, there is a need to regulate drip irrigation frequency based on climatic demand and required fertigation frequency with commonly available water soluble fertilizers such as 19:19:19, 12:61:0, 0:0:50.

Tomato (*Lycopersicon esculentum*) is one of the low-calorie vegetables and is excellent source of antioxidants, dietary fiber, minerals and vitamins [12]. The antioxidants present in tomatoes are ~~scientifically~~ found to be protective of cancers, including colon, prostate, breast, lung, and pancreatic tumors [7]. In greenhouse ~~grown~~ tomatoes due to indeterminate nature of crop, vegetative and reproductive stage overlaps and the plant needs nutrients even up to fruit ripening stage for better growth and fruit size, hence, application method such as fertigation may be very effective in greenhouse tomato [13]. Tomato being high value cash crop, having higher nutrient requirements (150:120:60), with 12-15 pickings under protected conditions and with better root proliferation, the plants are likely to behave differently under different soil moisture regimes and fertigation levels. ~~Keeping this in view~~ ~~Thus~~, the present study was planned to evaluate the effect of drip irrigation and NPK fertigation levels on soil moisture availability, productivity and nutrient uptake of tomato under naturally ventilated polyhouse.

Material and Methods

Study Site

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The study was carried out at experimental farm of CSK Himachal Pradesh Krishi Vishvavidyalaya, Palampur, with tomato as a test crop in naturally ventilated polyhouse. The research farm lies in wet temperature zone. The mean air temperature varies from 2°C in January to around 36°C during the months of May-June. The Soil temperature drops as low as 2°C and frost incidences are common. The relative humidity in the region varies from 46 to 84 per cent. The average annual rainfall of the place is about 2500 mm. The soil of the naturally ventilated polyhouse was loam and rich in silt content. The average values of pH and OC of the surface soil (0-15 cm) were 5.67 and organic carbon 12.20 g kg⁻¹. The soil was low in available N (209.01 kg ha⁻¹), high in available P (30.1 kg ha⁻¹) and medium in available K (122.2 kg ha⁻¹).

Treatment details

The experiment comprising of three irrigation and three nutrient schedules. The nine treatment combinations were imposed in a completely randomized design replicated three times. For better establishment of seedlings, drip irrigation was operated daily for 10 minutes for initial 10 days in all the strips and thereafter drip irrigation was operated as per treatment throughout crop growth period. In nutrient schedules, NPK fertilizer doses calculated as per treatment were applied as basal and through fertigation in varying intervals starting from 3rd week of transplanting to 15 days before the final harvest. The details of treatments and detail of fertilizer quantity applied in each treatment are in Table 1 and 2.

Table 1: Details of treatment imposed

Treatment	Details of the treatment
A. Irrigation schedule (I)	
I ₁	Daily drip irrigation @ 2.0 litre/m ² once in a day during first two months and @ 4.0 litre/ m ² thereafter
I ₂	Daily drip irrigation @ 1.0 litre/m ² once in a day during first two months and @ 2.0 litre/m ² thereafter
I ₃	Daily drip irrigation twice a day with 6 hours interval at @ 1.0 litre/m ²
B. Nutrient schedule (NPK)	
NPK ₇₅	75% of RDF of which 25% applied as basal and rest 75% through fertigation at 15 days interval
NPK ₁₀₀	100 % of RDF of which 25% applied as basal and rest 75% through fertigation at weekly interval
NPK ₁₅₀	150 % of RDF of which 25% applied as basal and rest 75% through fertigation twice a week

Table 2: Details of the fertilizer material applied

Treatment	Basal dose (g m ⁻²)			Fertigation dose (g m ⁻²)/ split			No of splits	Fertigation intervals (days)
	Urea	SSP	MOP	19:19:19	12:61	Urea		
NPK₇₅	9.0	21.0	2.4	13.5	6.3	9.9	8	15
NPK₁₀₀	12.0	28.0	3.4	8.1	3.6	6.3	16	7
NPK₁₅₀	18.0	42.0	6.0	9.9	3.6	5.4	32	3

*Top dressing at monthly intervals.

Soil water content and water stock

The changes in soil water content during the season at 0-0.15 m soil depth were determined by thermo gravimetric method periodically during tomato crop growth period. Volumetric water content (Θ) for different depths was calculated by multiplying the water content (w/w basis) with pre-determined bulk density for that depth [14]. The soil water stock (S) was calculated by multiplying the ‘Θ’ values with sampling depth.

Marketable yield and water use efficiency

The tomato fruits were harvested in different pickings. After every picking, the fruits were weighed to obtain the total fruit yield. The yield obtained for each treatment was divided by the quantity of water used for the respective treatments by this method. Water use efficiency was worked out and expressed in kg ha⁻¹ mm⁻¹ of water used.

$$WUE (g m^{-2}mm^{-1}) = \frac{\text{Fruit yield (g m}^{-2}\text{)}}{\text{Total amount of water used (mm)}} \dots \dots \dots (1)$$

Soil sampling and analysis

The initial soil samples were collected before transplanting of the experiment, for analyzing various physico-chemical properties of soil. The available nitrogen was determined by alkaline permanganate method [15], phosphorus by Olsen’s method [16] and available potassium in soil was extracted using neutral normal ammonium acetate method.

Economic analysis

The cost of cultivation, net monetary returns and benefit:cost ratio (B:C) were calculated on the basis of prevailing market price of inputs and outputs.

Statistical analysis

The analysis of variance technique (ANOVA) in completely randomized block design was employed to analyze the data statistically by using SAS software, version 9.4 (SAS Institute, Inc., Cary, North Carolina, USA).

Results and Discussion

Soil Water Content and Soil Water Stock

The soil water content (θ) determined at regular interval throughout the growth period is shown in Table 3. The ' θ ' determined at early crop growth stages (17 DAT) was 0.38 and 0.38 in I₁, 0.37 and 0.37 m³ m⁻³ in I₂ and 0.40 and 0.39 m³ m⁻³ in I₃ at 0-0.15 and 0.15-0.30 m soil depths, respectively. The soil water content at 52 DAT was 0.34 and 0.32 m³ m⁻³ in I₁, 0.34 and 0.30 m³ m⁻³ in I₂ and 0.35, 0.37 m³ m⁻³ in I₃ at 0-0.15 and 0.15-0.30 m soil depth. The soil water content (θ) determined on 81 DAT was 0.38, 0.36 in I₁, 0.37, 0.36 m³ m⁻³ in I₂, 0.39 and 0.33 in I₃ at 0-0.15 and 0.15-0.30 m soil depths, respectively. The soil water content determined on 106 DAT indicated that the ' θ ' values were 0.36, 0.36 m³ m⁻³ in I₁, 0.36, 0.36 m³ m⁻³ in I₂ and 0.38, 0.32 in I₃ at 0-0.15, 0.15-0.30 m soil depths, respectively. The higher ' θ ' in surface layer in I₃ as compared to others may be attributed due to application of water twice a day. Similar results were reported by [4] and [17].

Table 3. Effect of drip irrigation on changes in soil water content and soil water stock (m³ m⁻³) during crop growth

Days after transplanting	Soil Water Content		Soil Water Stock	
	Soil depth (m)		Soil depth (m)	
	0-0.15	0.15-0.30	0-0.15	0.15-0.30
	Irrigation level (I₁)			
17 DAT	0.38	0.38	57.6	56.6
52 DAT	0.34	0.32	51.5	48.2
81 DAT	0.38	0.36	57.0	54.0
106 DAT	0.36	0.36	54.0	54.0
	Irrigation level (I₂)			
17 DAT	0.37	0.37	55.6	55.1
52 DAT	0.34	0.30	50.5	44.4
81 DAT	0.37	0.36	55.0	53.7
106 DAT	0.36	0.36	54.3	53.6
	Irrigation level (I₃)			
17 DAT	0.40	0.39	60.7	58.7
52 DAT	0.35	0.37	52.6	55.0
81 DAT	0.39	0.33	58.9	49.6
106 DAT	0.38	0.32	57.7	47.5

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The soil water stock (S) calculated for 0-0.15 and 0.15-0.30 m soil depth are given in Table 3. The soil water stock values at 0-0.15 m soil depth were 57.6, 51.5, 57.0 and 54.0 mm in I₁, 55.6, 50.5, 55.0 and 54.3 mm in I₂ and 60.7, 52.6, 58.9 and 57.7 mm in I₃ at 17, 52, 81 and 106 DAT, respectively. The corresponding values of 'S' at 0.15-0.30 m depth were 56.6, 48.2, 54.0 and 54.0 mm in I₁; 55.1, 44.4, 53.7 and 53.6 mm in I₂ and 58.7, 55.0, 49.6 and 47.5 mm in I₃ at 17, 52, 81 and 106 DAT, respectively. The overall results showed that the soil water stock was higher under I₃ and I₁ and lower under I₂ at 17, 52, 81 and 106 DAT at 0-0.15m depth. In I₁ treatments, the soil water stock was higher due to higher quantity of irrigation water applied in comparison to I₂. Similar results were reported by [4] and [18].

Nutrient Uptake

The soil nutrient status at harvest is given from Table 4 to 6. The available nitrogen (N) was higher in I₁ (177.75 kg ha⁻¹) as compared to I₂ and I₃. Under different nutrient schedules, the available nitrogen (N) was statistically higher in NPK₁₅₀ treatment as compared to NPK₇₅, but it statistically at par for with NPK₁₀₀ treatment. The available phosphorus (P) was higher in I₂ (20.96 kg ha⁻¹) irrigation level as compared to other treatments. Under different nutrient schedules, the available phosphorus (P) was significantly higher in NPK₁₅₀ (24.49 kg ha⁻¹) treatment as compared to NPK₁₀₀ (19.46 kg ha⁻¹) and NPK₇₅ (15.03 kg ha⁻¹) treatment. The available potassium (K) was significantly higher in irrigation level I₂ (160.78 kg ha⁻¹) as compared to other irrigation levels. Under different nutrient schedules, the available potassium was significantly higher in NPK₁₅₀ (169.24 kg ha⁻¹) as compared to NPK₁₀₀ (143.36 kg ha⁻¹) and NPK₇₅ (133.90 kg ha⁻¹) treatment. Similar results were reported by [19], [20], [21] and [22].

Table 4: Effect of drip irrigation and nutrient schedule on available nitrogen

Nutrient Schedule	Drip Irrigation levels			Mean
	I ₁	I ₂	I ₃	
NPK ₇₅	167.25	156.80	156.80	160.28
NPK ₁₀₀	177.83	188.16	156.80	174.26
NPK ₁₅₀	188.16	188.16	209.07	195.13
Mean	177.75	177.71	174.22	
LSD	DI	NPK	Interaction	
(P=0.05)	NS	27.589	NS	

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Table 5: Effect of drip irrigation and nutrient schedule on available phosphorus

Nutrient Schedule	Drip Irrigation levels		
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	I₁	I₂	I₃	Mean
NPK₇₅	16.43	14.63	14.04	15.03
NPK₁₀₀	18.07	18.67	21.65	19.46
NPK₁₅₀	21.65	26.43	25.39	24.49
Mean	18.72	20.96	19.91	
LSD	DI	NPK	Interaction	
(P=0.05)	0.959	0.959	1.661	

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Table 6: Effect of drip irrigation and nutrient schedule on available potassium

Nutrient Schedule	Drip Irrigation levels			
	I₁	I₂	I₃	Mean
NPK₇₅	129.17	162.03	110.51	133.90
NPK₁₀₀	141.87	156.05	132.16	143.36
NPK₁₅₀	168.00	164.27	175.47	169.24
Mean	146.35	160.78	139.38	
LSD	DI	NPK	Interaction	
(P=0.05)	9.914	9.914	17.172	

Marketable yield and water use efficiency

The effect of drip irrigation levels and nutrient schedule on marketable yield of tomato is given in Table 7. The marketable yield was significantly higher in I₂ (6.31 Kg m⁻²) as compared to I₁ (5.97 Kg m⁻²) and I₃ (5.88 Kg m⁻²). The results indicated that the saving of at least 50% of applied water with irrigation level I₂ for attaining the similar marketable yield with I₁. The yield under different nutrient schedule was significantly higher in NPK₁₅₀ (6.53 Kg m⁻²) as compared to NPK₁₀₀ (5.84 Kg m⁻²) and NPK₇₅ (5.78 Kg m⁻²) treatment. However, NPK₇₅ treatment was statistically similar with NPK₁₀₀ treatment. Similar results were reported by [23], [24], [21], [25], [26], [27] and [13]. The interaction between irrigation levels and nutrient schedule was significant and maximum yield was in I₂NPK₁₅₀ (7.00 kg m⁻²) and minimum in I₃NPK₇₅ (5.63 kg m⁻²).

Table 7: Effect of drip irrigation and nutrient schedule on marketable yield (kg m⁻²)

Nutrient Schedule	Drip Irrigation levels			
	I ₁	I ₂	I ₃	Mean
NPK ₇₅	5.80	5.90	5.63	5.78
NPK ₁₀₀	5.70	6.02	5.80	5.84
NPK ₁₅₀	6.40	7.00	6.20	6.53
Mean	5.97	6.31	5.88	
LSD	DI	NPK	Interaction	
(P=0.05)	0.10	0.10	0.17	

The effect of drip irrigation levels and nutrient schedule on water use efficiency in tomato is given in Table 8. The water use efficiency was significantly higher in I₂ (1.94 g m⁻² mm⁻¹) as compared to I₁ (1.83 g m⁻² mm⁻¹) and I₃ (1.86 g m⁻² mm⁻¹) treatment. Similar results were also reported by Ying et al. [28], Yaghi et al. [29] and Hakim and Chand [30]. The lowest WUE in I₁ was primarily due to higher amount of water used and produced lesser yield in comparison to other drip treatments. Under different nutrient schedules, the water use efficiency was higher in NPK₁₅₀ (1.94 g m⁻² mm⁻¹) followed by NPK₁₀₀ (1.90 g m⁻² mm⁻¹) and NPK₇₅ (1.79 g m⁻² mm⁻¹). Similar results were reported by [31] where optimal fertigation was a beneficial practice for improving water use efficiency. Similar results were also reported [22]. The higher WUE in NPK₁₅₀ was primarily due to better root growth and marketable yield. The interaction between irrigation levels and nutrient schedules was significant and maximum water use efficiency was obtained in I₂NPK₁₅₀ (2.12 g m⁻² mm⁻¹) and minimum was in I₃NPK₇₅ (1.76 g m⁻² mm⁻¹).

Table 8: Effect of drip irrigation and nutrient schedule on water use efficiency (g m⁻² mm⁻¹)

Nutrient Schedule	Drip Irrigation levels			
	I ₁	I ₂	I ₃	Mean
NPK ₇₅	1.82	1.78	1.76	1.79
NPK ₁₀₀	1.88	1.91	1.90	1.90
NPK ₁₅₀	1.78	2.12	1.93	1.94
Mean	1.83	1.94	1.86	
LSD	DI	NPK	Interaction	

(P=0.05)	0.079	0.079	0.137
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Net returns and economics

The combined effects of drip irrigation levels and nutrient schedules on returns and economics in tomato are given in Table 9. The net return was higher under I₂NPK₁₅₀ (Rs. 230) followed by I₁NPK₁₅₀ (Rs. 206) and lowest under I₃NPK₇₅ (Rs. 180). The higher net returns in I₂NPK₁₅₀ and I₁NPK₁₅₀ was due to higher marketable yield. The B:C ratio was highest in I₂NPK₁₅₀ (4.62) and lowest under I₃NPK₇₅ (3.97). The higher B:C ratio in I₂NPK₁₅₀ was due to higher yields in comparison to other irrigation levels and nutrient schedules. Similar results were reported by [22] and [32].

Table 9: Effect of drip irrigation and fertigation on returns and B: C ratio

Treatments	Net return (Rs)	B: C ratio
I ₁ +NPK ₇₅	187	4.11
I ₁ +NPK ₁₀₀	183	4.03
I ₁ +NPK ₁₅₀	206	4.14
I ₂ +NPK ₇₅	191	4.20
I ₂ +NPK ₁₀₀	195	4.31
I ₂ +NPK ₁₅₀	230	4.62
I ₃ +NPK ₇₅	180	3.97
I ₃ +NPK ₁₀₀	187	4.12
I ₃ +NPK ₁₅₀	198	3.98

Conclusions

The present study concluded that the irrigation level I₂, consisting of daily drip irrigation at a rate of 1.0 litre/m² during the initial two months, followed by a subsequent increase to 2.0 litre/m², in combination with NPK₁₅₀ fertilization (150% of RDF), was suitable for cultivation of tomatoes within a naturally ventilated polyhouse in the Himalayan region. This treatment regime exhibited higher marketable yield coupled with reduced water consumption, thereby resulting in higher water use efficiency. The I₂NPK₁₅₀ treatment demonstrated significantly higher net returns and benefit-cost ratio as compared to other treatments. Hence, we recommended for the adoption of

daily drip irrigation (I₂) in combination with NPK₁₅₀ fertigation for optimal tomato cultivation under protected conditions in Himalayan region.

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