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Influence of Organic-Inorganic Interaction on Nutrient Use Efficiency and Sugarcane Yield in Calcareous Soils of the Indo-Gangetic Plains, India

Sanjeev Kumar Sinha ^{a++}, Ajeet Kumar ^{b#*}, Brajesh Kumar ^{ct},
Amrita Kumari ^{d‡} and A. K. Singh ^{e^}

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ABSTRACT

The current study aims to evaluate integrated nutrient management on cane production and nutrient use efficiency of applied nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium in sugarcane in terms of agronomic efficiency and physiological use efficiency.

Enhancing nutrient use efficiency beyond the typical 50% threshold is crucial for improving sugarcane production and juice quality, while also reducing dependency on synthetic fertilizers and mitigating environmental impact. Nutrient use efficiency (NUE) measures how well plants can absorb and use nutrients to produce their highest possible yields. Thus, the NUE idea encompasses three crucial processes in plants: nutrient absorption, assimilation, and utilisation. To tackle this challenge, a field experiment was conducted at the Kalyanpur research farm, Dr. Rajendra Prasad Central Agricultural University, Pusa, Bihar. Using a randomized block design with three replications, the experiment involved

^a Department of Soil Science, Regional Research Station, Madhopur, West Champaran, Bihar-845454, India.

^b Department of Soil Science, Sugarcane Research Institute, Dr. Rajendra Prasad Central Agricultural University, Pusa (Samastipur)-848125, Bihar, India.

^c Department of Soil Science, Post Graduate College of Agriculture, RPCAU, Pusa Samastipur, Bihar, India.

^d Bihar Agricultural University, Sabour, Bhagalpur -813210, India.

^e Dr. Rajendra Prasad Central Agricultural University, Pusa (Samastipur)-848125, Bihar, India.

⁺⁺ Associate Professor;

[#] Assistant Professor-cum-Scientist (Sr. Scale);

[†] PG Research Scholar;

[‡] Assistant Professor-cum-Jr. Scientist;

[^] Director Research, Directorate of Research;

*Corresponding author: E-mail: ajeet.sri@rpcau.ac.in;

the sugarcane variety CoP-112. Although the treatments showed no significant impact on germination percentage, plant height, cane length, diameter, and individual cane weight, the combination of the recommended dose of fertilizers (RDF) with vermicompost and biofertilizer (*Azotobacter* + PSB) at a rate of 4 kg/ha resulted in the highest millable cane (125.4×10^3 /ha) and cane yield (94.0 t/ha). This combination led to increases of 78% and 24% over the sole prescribed dose of fertilizer and the absolute control, respectively. No significant differences were observed in juice quality among the treatments. The highest agronomic use efficiency was recorded in plots treated with RDF + vermicompost + *Azotobacter* + PSB, showing a 75% improvement over plots receiving only the recommended dose of fertilizer. These findings highlight the effectiveness of integrated nutrient management as the optimal strategy for promoting sustainable sugarcane production. The study demonstrated the effectiveness of integrating vermicompost and biofertilizer (*Azotobacter* + PSB) with the recommended dose of fertilizers for enhancing sugarcane yield and nutrient utilization efficiency.

Keywords: Nutrient use efficiency; sugarcane; vermicompost; biofertilizer; juice quality.

1. INTRODUCTION

The recent trend is over-dependence on fertilizer nutrients in sugarcane. However, in the long run, a proper blend of organic and inorganic sources is needed. Organic sources of nutrients not only help supplement the nutrients in sugarcane but also maintain favourable physical, chemical and biological soil environment [1]. In India's tropical and subtropical regions, sugarcane (*Saccharum* spp. hybrid complex) is a significant cash crop that is planted extensively. It is crucial to both our nation's agricultural and industrial sectors. Because of its many uses and exceptional capacity to satisfy the demands of an expanding population, it is frequently referred to as "wonder cane". Plants can use only mineralized nutrients. One of the major challenges when using manure is predicting the amount of mineralizable N that will be derived from organic N in manure for both current and future growing seasons. N released from manure is essential to meet the crop N demand [2]. Sugarcane is a C₄ plant with high productivity that is used to produce ethanol, a renewable transportation fuel, as well as sugar [3]. According to Shankaraiah and Murthy [4], it is far more advantageous to employ both chemical and organic fertilisers together for sustainable sugarcane production. To meet the high crop nutrient requirement, it is not viable to completely replace inorganic fertilisers with organic fertilisers. Therefore, it is crucial to employ organic manure along with inorganic fertilizer or integrated nutrient management to stop the loss of soil fertility [5,6]. Utilising organic manures, crop residues, and biofertilizers in conjunction with other plant nutrients prevents soil fertility from declining. In addition to improving soil fertility, it will maintain the physical, chemical, and biological health of the soil. This justifies the development of methods for the careful blending of various nutrition sources, which will increase the potency of both sources and minimize the negative effects of excessive chemical use [7,8,6]. In order to maintain high yields, increase fertiliser use efficiency including Nutrient Use Efficiency (NUE),

and restore soil health, integrated nutrient management (INM), which incorporates the cooperative use of several nutrient sources, appears to be a promising technique [9,10,6].

The Sugarcane crop uses up a lot of nutrients and severely depletes the soil's nutrients. In addition to other micronutrients, it removes 208 kilograms of N, 53 kg of P, 280 kg of K, 30 kg of S, 3.4 kg of Fe, 1.2 kg of Mn, 0.6 kg of Zn and 0.2 kg of Cu from the soil in order to produce 100 tonnes per hectare yield [11,6]. Although mineral fertilisers are a rapid and reliable approach to increase crop productivity, their continued usage in sugarcane farming has led to the loss of essential nutrients as well. Due to the higher cost and other constraints of mineral fertilizers, farmers often use recommended quantities in a balanced proportion. Nutrient use efficiency (NUE) measures how well plants can absorb and use nutrients to produce their highest possible yields [6]. Thus, the NUE idea encompasses three crucial processes in plants: nutrient absorption, assimilation, and utilisation. Under integrated nutrient management, it is crucial to use both readily available renewable organic and biological plant and animal sources in addition to mineral fertiliser to preserve soil sustainability [12,6].

In addition, to atmospheric nitrogen fixation by *Acetobacter* in sugarcane crops [13] and supplying the soil with organic matter, sugarcane can be intercropped with a short-term, quick-growing intercrop such as a pulse or green manure crop. After the leguminous intercrops' grains were harvested, crop leftovers might be added to the soil. As a result, part of the fixed nitrogen may be released for the sugarcane crop through the breakdown of the root system, including root nodules and residues [14,6]. For long-term maintenance of crops and soil, the use of chemical fertilizers in conjunction with the right proportion of vermicompost can be done. This creates a favourable condition for stable high cane yield. Uninterrupted nutrient supply to the crop during the growth period is pivotal to releasing the full yield potential of the crop. Vermicompost has been shown to have several positive impacts on plant growth and soil health [6]. *Azotobacter* (nitrogen-fixing biofertilizers) have a higher potential for use in non-leguminous crops, reducing soil fertility issues while increasing productivity. In light of this, the current study aims to evaluate integrated nutrient management on cane production and nutrient use efficiency of applied nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium in sugarcane in terms of agronomic efficiency and physiological use efficiency [6].

1.1 Statement of Problem

The cultivation of sugarcane holds significant importance in India's tropical and subtropical regions, contributing significantly to both agricultural and industrial sectors. Termed as the "wonder cane" due to its versatility and capacity to meet growing demands, sugarcane serves as a vital source for ethanol production and sugar. However, the intensive cultivation of sugarcane necessitates substantial nutrient inputs, leading to concerns regarding soil fertility depletion [6]. Traditional approaches relying solely on chemical fertilizers have shown limitations, with continued usage exacerbating nutrient loss and environmental impact. Integrated

nutrient management emerges as a promising solution, advocating for the synergistic utilization of organic manures, biofertilizers, and mineral fertilizers to sustain soil fertility and enhance crop productivity. The inefficiency of solely relying on mineral fertilizers, coupled with their higher costs, underscores the urgency of implementing INM practices [6]. Addressing the complex nutritional requirements of sugarcane while maintaining soil health necessitates a balanced approach, incorporating various nutrient sources to optimize nutrient utilization efficiency (NUE). Moreover, exploring additional strategies such as intercropping with nitrogen-fixing crops and integrating vermicompost further enhances the sustainability and productivity of sugarcane cultivation [6]. Therefore, the present study aims to assess the efficacy of INM in enhancing sugarcane production and NUE, focusing on the agronomic and physiological efficiency of applied nutrients, including nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, to provide insights into sustainable sugarcane cultivation practices.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Experimental Site

During the sugarcane crop season of 2021–2022, the field experiment was conducted at the Research farm in Kalyanpur at the Dr. Rajendra Prasad Central Agricultural University in Pusa, Bihar. The farm is situated at 52.0 m above mean sea level and 25°95' N latitude, 85°77' E longitude. The experimental site had a subtropical climate. The experimental plot was well-drained, medium upland and had uniform topography [6]. The soil was sandy loam having pH 7.93, available nitrogen 230.6 kg/ha, available P₂O₅ 23.5 kg/ha and available K₂O 130.3 kg/ha.

2.2 Treatment Details

| Treatments | Particulars |
|----------------|--|
| Design | : Randomized Block Design RBD |
| Replications | : 03 |
| T ₁ | : Absolute control |
| T ₂ | : RDF (Recommended dose of fertilisers) |
| T ₃ | : RDF+VC (Vermicompost) |
| T ₄ | : RDF+ VC+ <i>Azotobacter</i> |
| T ₅ | : RDF + VC + <i>Azotobacter</i> + PSB (Phosphorus Solubilizing Bacteria) |
| T ₆ | : RDF + GM (Green gram) |
| T ₇ | : RDF + GM + <i>Azotobacter</i> |
| T ₈ | : RDF + GM+ <i>Azotobacter</i> + PSB |

2.3 Methods of Planting and Input Applications

Using a Bihar senior ridger, furrows were made in each plot according to the spacing between the treatments. Fertilisers, vermicompost, green manure, and biofertilizers were used in accordance with the treatments. Applying urea, diammonium phosphate (DAP) and muriate of potash (MOP) as sources of N,

P₂O₅, and K₂O. The full doses of P and K, together with half of the amount of N, were administered as basal [6]. After the first irrigation and during the earthing up process, the remaining N was top dressed in the form of urea in two equal splits. The biofertilizer was mixed in compost and applied in the furrow planting. Green gram was sown in the interspace of sugarcane (between rows), and it was incorporated into the soil 60 days after planting [6].

2.4 Climatic Conditions during the Growth Period

The maximum and minimum temperatures were 37.1°C and 7.2°C respectively, and the maximum rainfall was 268.4 mm between the growing periods. The weather data of the experimentation period is presented in the Fig. 1 [6].



Plate 1. Collection of soil and sugarcane samples, Juice analysis & soil analysis

2.5 Cane Juice Analysis

The method described by Spencer and Meade [15] was used to determine the cane juice quality, including brix, pol, and purity percent, and commercial cane sugar (CCS) was calculated. Brix was measured by a brix hydrometer. Commercial cane sugar was calculated by the formula, $CCS (\%) = \{S - (B - S) \times 0.4\} \times 0.73$; where B is the corrected brix reading and S is the sucrose percent in juice [6].

2.6 Nutrient Use Efficiency (NUE)

Nutrient use efficiency is expressed in terms of the partial factor productivity (PFP), agronomic use efficiency (AUE), physiological use efficiency (PUE) and crop recovery efficiency (CRE) of N, P and K. The different efficiencies like PFP, AUE, PUE and CRE were calculated as, $PFP = Y_N / F_N$; $AUE = (Y_N - Y_0) / F_N$; $PUE = (Y_N - Y_0) / (U_N - U_0)$; $CRE = (U_N - U_0) / F_N$; where Y_N is crop yield in the treated plot ($kg\ ha^{-1}$), Y_0 is crop yield ($kg\ ha^{-1}$) in the untreated plot, F_N is the amount of fertilizer applied ($kg\ ha^{-1}$), U_N is total nutrient uptake in above-ground biomass at maturity ($kg\ ha^{-1}$) in a plot that received fertiliser and U_0 is the total nutrient uptake in above-ground biomass at maturity ($kg\ ha^{-1}$) in a plot that received no fertiliser [6].

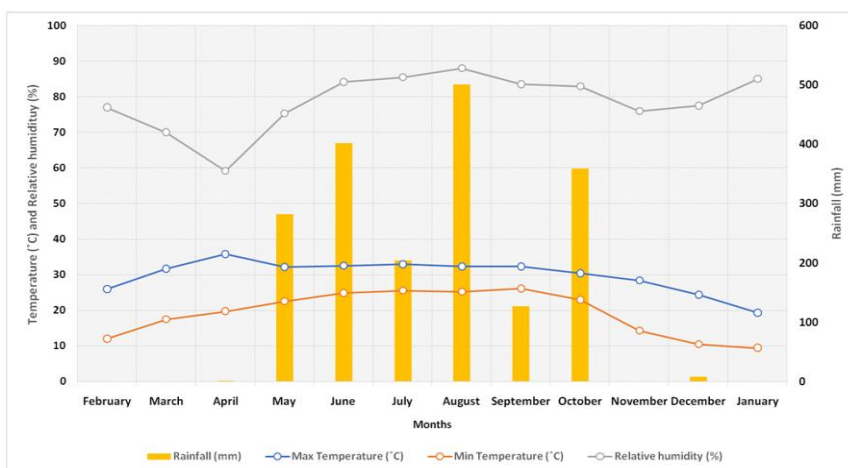


Fig. 1. Weekly meteorological parameters during experimentation period

2.7 Statistical Analysis

The data was statistically analysed using the analysis of variance (ANOVA); utilising the statistical programmes OPSTAT and Microsoft Excel. The Duncan Multiple Range Test (DMRT) was used to determine whether there was a significant difference between the treatments at $p \leq 0.05$ [6].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Growth Attributes

According to the findings, the combined application of inorganic and organic sources as well as biofertilizers caused a significant fluctuation in the sugarcane germination percentage at 45 days after planting (DAP) (Table 1). The combined use of RDF + vermicompost + *Azotobacter* + PSB recorded the highest germination percentage (43.4%) and its range varied from 43.4 to 36.5 percent but there was no significant difference between the treatments [16,6]. The tiller population of sugarcane had significant differences among the treatments at 120, 150 and 180 DAP by the combined application of inorganic, organic and biofertilizers as shown in Fig. 2. Regardless of treatment differences maximum tillers was recorded at 120 DAP and gradually declined thereafter at 150 and 180 DAP [6]. The maximum number of tiller population (170.7, 168.2 and 165.3 $\times 10^3$ /ha) was recorded at 120, 150 and 180 DAP in treatment which received RDF + vermicompost + *Azotobacter* + PSB which is 89, 90 and 92% higher over untreated plot respectively. This can be possible due to better availability of nutrients in soil because of the addition of inorganic fertilizers in combination with organic manures (vermicompost, green manure) and biofertilizers which resulted in more uptakes of nutrients [6]. The improved tiller populations may have resulted from the increased nutrient absorption caused by integrated nutrient management [17]. The data on plant height of sugarcane was recorded at 180 days after planting and it varies from 205.9-240.3 cm (Table 1). It was found that the integrated application of nutrients showed no significant difference among the treatments [6]. The work is in accordance with the work of Bhardwaj et al. [18]. However, taller plants were observed in treatment which constitutes RDF + vermicompost + *Azotobacter* + PSB which is 16% higher over the treatment which constitutes no fertilisers. Significant differences were observed in dry matter production which was very slow during early growth stages (90 DAP and 120 DAP). However, it increases sharply up to 150 DAP followed by a gradual increment till the harvest stage. While at the harvest stage, it was found non-significant [6]. The plots receiving no fertilizer and the recommended dose of fertilizer accumulated the least dry matter and it was decreased by 33, 19%, 43, 33%, 55, 45%, and 25, 5% at 90, 120, 150 and harvest stage, respectively, in comparison to the treatment which comprises RDF + vermicompost + *Azotobacter* + PSB (Fig. 2). Application of only recommended dose of fertilizers had less dry matter accumulation as compared to integrated nutrient management might be due to loss of nutrients through various ways [6].

3.2 Yield Attributes and Yield

The analysis of the data showed that in comparison to the absolute control and the recommended dose of fertiliser (RDF), the combined application of nutrients utilising inorganic, organic, and biofertilizers produced significantly more millable cane (Table 1). The treatment receiving RDF + vermicompost together with *Azotobacter* and Phosphorus Solubilising Bacteria (PSB) recorded significantly higher millable canes (125.4 $\times 10^3$ /ha) which were 78% higher than the

unfertilised plot [6]. This may be due to the fact that organic sources enhance the physical, chemical and biological environment of the soil creating the ideal conditions for nutrient release, whereas chemical fertilizer applications immediately supply the NPK levels through the recommended dose. A similar finding was recorded by Umesh et al. [19]. Furthermore, when nutrients from both organic and inorganic sources were supplied along with biofertilizers, a considerable increase in the quantity of millable canes was produced [20,6]. The sugarcane's cane length, cane diameter, and single cane weight did not significantly differ across the treatments. The cane length, cane diameter and single cane weight were increased by 11%, 9% and 20% respectively, in the RDF + Vermicompost + *Azotobacter* + PSB treated plot as compared to the unfertilized plot. The integrated use of organic and inorganic fertilizer combinations with biofertilizers also had an impact on the variation in cane output (Table 1); [6]. The maximum cane yield of 94.0 t/ha of sugarcane was recorded in RDF + vermicompost along with *Azotobacter* and PSB treated plot which was 124% higher than the 41.8 t/ha of an untreated plot. Throughout the sugarcane plant's growth phase, both the steady supply of plant nutrients from organic sources and the quick and easy availability of plant nutrients from inorganic sources [6]. The combined use of organic and inorganic fertilizers along with biofertilizers also provides a favourable soil environment for plant growth, which might have improved the cane yield. Balanced chemical fertilizer use alone will not be able to sustain cane productivity since one or more secondary and micronutrient deficiencies are becoming more prevalent [6]. When chemical fertilisers and organic manures were used together, productivity increased noticeably and overall soil fertility improved compared to when chemical fertilisers were used alone. A similar finding was recorded by Shukla et al. [21]. According to Singh et al. [22], the integrated usage of inorganic + organic fertilizer combined with biofertilizers (*Azotobacter* + PSB) considerably boosted cane production. Higher cane and sugar yield was reported by Durai and Devaraj [23] with the application of FYM + 100% NPK + Azospirillum.

3.3 Juice Quality

Data on juice quality are presented in Table 2. Regarding juice quality, including brix, pol, purity, and CCS%, none of the treatments had any significant impact. The genetic makeup of the cultivar has the greatest impact on juice quality (brix, pol, purity and CCS%). In the current study, the application of organic, inorganic, and biofertilizers could have created a favourable soil environment and increased the supply of nutrients due to various treatments, which could have proportionately improved the growth and maintained the juice quality under various treatments [6]. The results of the research confirmed the non-significant impact of applying biocompost on juice quality by Sinha et al. [5]. According to Sinha et al. [5], cane juice quality, including brix, sucrose, and purity content, is unchanged by the use of organic and conventional farming methods. According to research by Sinha et al. [20], both organic and inorganic nutrients had no impact on the juice's quality indicators of brix, pol, and purity.

Table 1. Growth, yield and yield attributes of sugarcane as influenced by different treatments during spring season

| Treatments | Germination percentage at 45 DAP | Plant height (cm) at 180 DAP | Millable canes at harvest ($\times 10^3 \text{ ha}^{-1}$) | Cane length at harvest (cm) | Cane diameter (cm) | Single cane weight (g) | Cane yield (t/ha) |
|---|----------------------------------|------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| T ₁ : Absolute control | 41.6 \pm 2.06a | 205.9 \pm 22.24a | 70.5 \pm 2.62c | 275.3 \pm 24.55a | 2.0 \pm 0.13a | 605 \pm 0.08a | 41.8 \pm 0.71 c |
| T ₂ : RDF | 38.1 \pm 0.30a | 223.9 \pm 8.55a | 100.6 \pm 8.44b | 296.7 \pm 18.78a | 2.1 \pm 0.15a | 722 \pm 0.04a | 71.6 \pm 10.02b |
| T ₃ : RDF + vermicompost | 36.5 \pm 5.19a | 227.8 \pm 15.04a | 122.3 \pm 4.56a | 299.4 \pm 18.36a | 2.2 \pm 0.15a | 748 \pm 0.03a | 90.2 \pm 7.29a |
| T ₄ : RDF + vermicompost + <i>Azotobacter</i> | 42.1 \pm 0.30a | 233.3 \pm 13.07a | 124.1 \pm 5.72a | 311.7 \pm 15.89a | 2.2 \pm 0.11a | 751 \pm 0.07a | 92.1 \pm 2.11a |
| T ₅ :RDF + vermicompost + <i>Azotobacter</i> + PSB | 43.4 \pm 2.96a | 240.3 \pm 8.73a | 125.4 \pm 2.18a | 312.8 \pm 14.44a | 2.2 \pm 0.07a | 757 \pm 0.05a | 94.0 \pm 5.32a |
| T ₆ : RDF + GM | 39.2 \pm 1.28a | 227.8 \pm 9.10a | 117.7 \pm 4.17a | 301.7 \pm 17.02a | 2.2 \pm 0.09a | 742 \pm 0.03a | 86.1 \pm 3.36ab |
| T ₇ : RDF + GM + <i>Azotobacter</i> | 40.7 \pm 0.54a | 230.6 \pm 7.34a | 119.1 \pm 9.76a | 304.4 \pm 19.27a | 2.2 \pm 0.08a | 753 \pm 0.00a | 88.5 \pm 4.25a |
| T ₈ : RDF + GM + <i>Azotobacter</i> + PSB | 41.1 \pm 2.01a | 238.3 \pm 16.41a | 121.9 \pm 0.47a | 312.2 \pm 15.93a | 2.2 \pm 0.05a | 743 \pm 0.01a | 89.6 \pm 0.74a |

Different letters in the same column indicate significant effect at 0.05 % level (Duncan multiple range test); RDF: Recommended dose of fertilizer (150 kg N, 85 kg P₂O₅, and 60 kg K₂O); GM: Green manure; PSB: Phosphate solubilising bacteria; Vermicompost was applied @ 5 t/ha, *Azotobacter* and PSB @4 kg/ha

Table 2. Juice quality parameters as influenced by different treatments during spring season

| Treatments | Juice quality (%) | | | CCS (%) |
|--|-------------------|--------------|--------------------|---------------|
| | Brix | Pol | Purity coefficient | |
| T ₁ : Absolute control | 17.8 ± 0.48a | 15.7 ± 0.57a | 88.3 ± 0.87a | 10.9 ± 0.18 a |
| T ₂ : RDF | 18.3 ± 1.03a | 16.1 ± 0.27a | 88.4 ± 0.52a | 11.1 ± 0.17a |
| T ₃ : RDF + vermicompost | 18.3 ± 0.25a | 16.3 ± 0.44a | 89.2 ± 1.38 a | 11.3 ± 0.38a |
| T ₄ : RDF + vermicompost + <i>Azotobacter</i> | 18.6 ± 0.16a | 16.5 ± 0.57a | 88.6 ± 0.90a | 11.4 ± 0.13a |
| T ₅ : RDF + vermicompost + <i>Azotobacter</i> + PSB | 18.2 ± 0.30a | 16.1 ± 0.20a | 88.6 ± 2.52a | 11.1 ± 0.24a |
| T ₆ : RDF + GM | 18.9 ± 0.17a | 16.6 ± 0.68a | 87.9 ± 4.42a | 11.5 ± 0.17a |
| T ₇ : RDF + GM + <i>Azotobacter</i> | 19.3 ± 0.15a | 17.0 ± 0.40a | 88.0 ± 2.70a | 11.7 ± 0.44a |
| T ₈ : RDF + GM + <i>Azotobacter</i> + PSB | 19.2 ± 0.23a | 16.8 ± 0.35a | 87.4 ± 1.96a | 11.6 ± 0.35a |

Similar letters in the same column indicate no significant differences at 0.05 % level (Duncan multiple range test); RDF: Recommended dose of fertilizer (150 kg N, 85 kg P₂O₅, and 60 kg K₂O); GM: Green manure; PSB: Phosphate solubilising bacteria; Vermicompost was applied @ 5 t/ha, *Azotobacter* and PSB @4 kg/ha

Table 3. Correlation coefficient of growth, cane yield and juice quality in sugarcane

| | Tillers at 180 DAP | Plant height at 210 DAP | Dry matter accumulation (g/plant) at harvest | Millable canes ($\times 10^3$ /ha) | Single cane weight (kg) | Cane yield (t/ha) | Brix (%) | Pol (%) | Purity (%) | Commercial cane sugar (%) |
|--|---------------------|-------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Tillers at 180 DAP | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| Plant height at 210 DAP | 0.359 ^{NS} | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| Dry matter accumulation (g/plant) at harvest | 0.557 ^{**} | 0.377 ^{NS} | 1 | | | | | | | |
| Millable canes ($\times 10^3$ /ha) | 0.847 ^{**} | 0.346 ^{NS} | 0.629 ^{**} | 1 | | | | | | |
| Single cane weight (kg) | 0.530 ^{**} | 0.211 ^{NS} | 0.448 [*] | 0.543 ^{**} | 1 | | | | | |
| Cane yield (t/ha) | 0.854 ^{**} | 0.440 [*] | 0.638 ^{**} | 0.913 ^{**} | 0.657 ^{**} | 1 | | | | |
| Brix (%) | 0.327 ^{NS} | 0.450 [*] | 0.293 ^{NS} | 0.365 ^{NS} | 0.287 ^{NS} | 0.267 ^{NS} | 1 | | | |
| Pol (%) | 0.400 ^{NS} | 0.086 ^{NS} | 0.141 ^{NS} | 0.264 ^{NS} | 0.074 ^{NS} | 0.265 ^{NS} | 0.376 ^{NS} | 1 | | |
| Purity (%) | 0.004 ^{NS} | -0.124 ^{NS} | -0.178 ^{NS} | -0.050 ^{NS} | -0.187 ^{NS} | -0.032 ^{NS} | -0.283 ^{NS} | 0.571 ^{**} | 1 | |
| Commercial cane sugar (%) | 0.396 ^{NS} | 0.133 ^{NS} | 0.232 ^{NS} | 0.232 ^{NS} | 0.424 [*] | 0.376 ^{NS} | 0.243 ^{NS} | 0.754 ^{**} | 0.535 ^{**} | 1 |

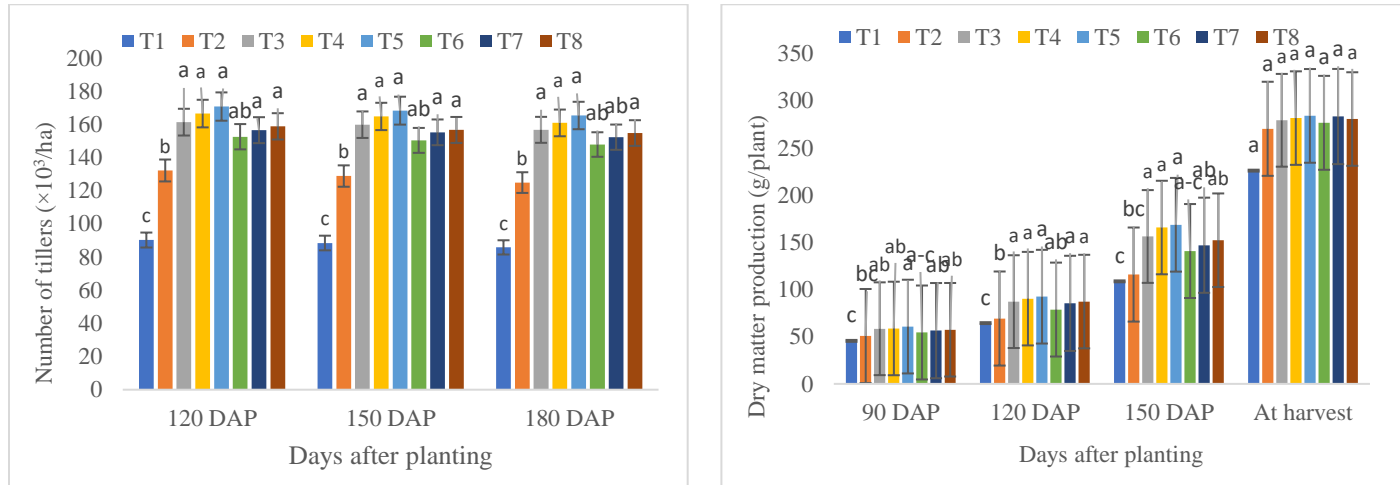
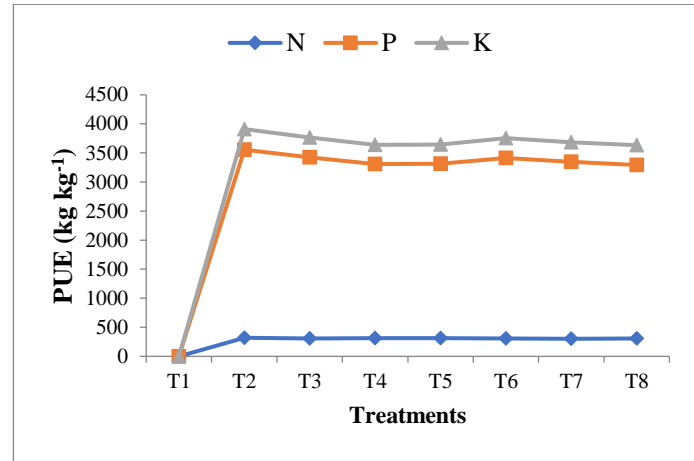
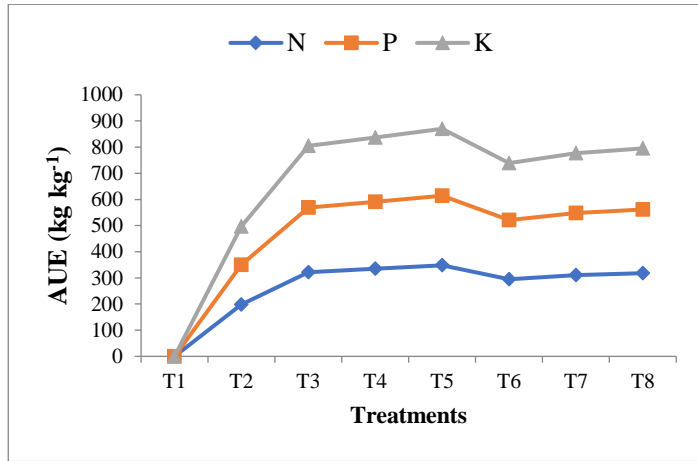


Fig. 2. Tiller population ($\times 10^3/\text{ha}$) and dry matter production at different growth stages of sugarcane



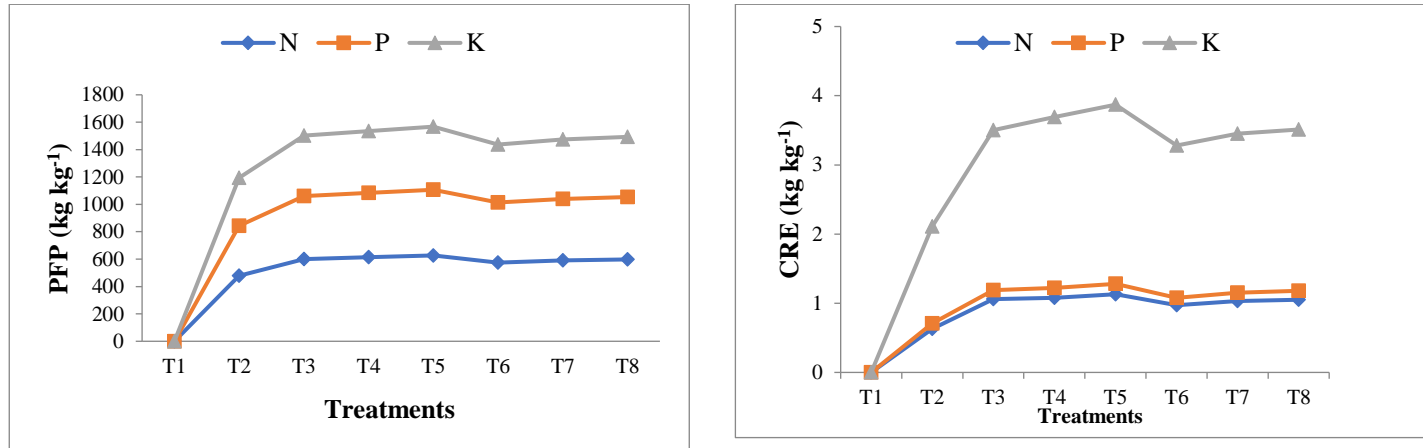


Fig. 3. Agronomic use efficiency (AUE), Physiological use efficiency (PUE), Partial factor productivity (PFP) and Crop recovery efficiency (CRE) as influenced by different treatments during the spring season of sugarcane

3.4 Nutrient Use Efficiency (NUE)

The results on NUE for the nutrients N, P, and K assessed in terms of PFP, AUE, PUE, and CRE are shown in Fig. 3. The variation in sugarcane production may be responsible for variations in partial factor productivity, physiological use efficiency, agronomic use efficiency, and crop recovery efficiency of plant crops [6]. Further, it was noticed that the application of RDF + vermicompost + *Azotobacter* + PSB gave higher AUE_n (348.1 kg kg⁻¹), AUE_p (614.2 kg kg⁻¹) and AUE_k (870.1 kg kg⁻¹) than the rest of the treatment. Partial factor productivity and crop recovery efficiency was also found higher values in treatments that constitute RDF + vermicompost + *Azotobacter* + PSB which was PFP_n (626.9 kg kg⁻¹), PFP_p (1106.5 kg kg⁻¹), PFP_k (1567.5 kg kg⁻¹), CRE_n (1.13 kg kg⁻¹), CRE_p (0.15 kg kg⁻¹), and CRE_k (2.59 kg kg⁻¹) respectively than the rest of the treatment. Physiological use efficiency of sugarcane plant crop was varied according to the uptake of nutrients by the plants as well as cane yield was obtained. The data variation of PUE_n (301.1-319.7 kg kg⁻¹), PUE_p (2983.8-3236.1 kg kg⁻¹), PUE_k (332.0-353.7 kg kg⁻¹) respectively. The present investigation's findings showed that using inorganic, organic, and biofertilizers in combination can boost sugarcane's N, P, and K of PFP, PUE, crop recovery efficiency, and agronomic use efficiency in sugarcane [6]. Increases in NUE may be the result of optimal nutrient availability in response to crop demand, which results in effective uptake. A similar finding was recorded by Tayade et al. [24].

3.5 Correlation Studies

Correlation studies (Table 3), revealed that cane yield was highly correlated with the number of tillers at 180 DAP ($r=0.85$), dry matter production at the harvest stage ($r=0.64$), number of millable cane ($r=0.91$), and single cane weight ($r=0.66$) respectively. However, plant height at 210 DAP was significantly correlated with cane yield. Dry matter production at the harvest stage, millable canes and single cane weight were highly correlated with the number of tillers at 180 DAP [6]. However, there was no statistically significant correlation between tiller and quality indicators like brix, pol, purity, and CCS% at 180 DAP. Plant height was significantly correlated with brix percentage and non-significantly correlated with dry matter production (DMP), millable cane, single cane weight, pol and CCS%. Dry matter production (DMP) was highly correlated with millable cane ($r=0.63$) and significantly correlated with single cane weight ($r=0.45$). Millable cane was highly correlated with single cane weight ($r=0.54$). Pol percent was highly correlated with purity and commercial cane sugar (CCS) percent ($r=0.57$ and $r=0.75$) respectively and CCS percent was also highly correlated with purity percent ($r=0.54$). Non-significant correlations were found between cane yield and brix, pol, purity, and CCS percentage [6].

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the study, it may be concluded that the application of different treatments resulted in significant differences between tiller populations, dry matter production, millable canes and cane yield while having a non-significant

effect on germination percentage, plant height, cane length, cane diameter and single cane weight [6]. A significantly higher value was recorded by combining organic, inorganic and biofertilizer nutrient sources over an absolute control and fertilized (RDF) plot. In terms of tillers, and dry matter accumulation, the number of millable cane and cane yield treatments that received RDF+Vermicompost+*Azotobacter*+PSB was significantly superior over others. While impact of various treatments on brix, pol, purity and CCS was found non-significant effect. This may be because the genetic makeup of the variety mostly determines the juice's quality [6].

5. KEY FINDINGS FOR RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings presented, we strongly recommend the adoption of integrated nutrient management practices to improve sugarcane production and quality while reducing reliance on synthetic fertilizers and mitigating environmental impact. The study demonstrated the effectiveness of integrating vermicompost and biofertilizer (*Azotobacter* + PSB) with the recommended dose of fertilizers for enhancing sugarcane yield and nutrient utilization efficiency.

Key findings include:

1. The combination of RDF with vermicompost and biofertilizer resulted in the highest millable cane and cane yield, with increases of 78% and 24% respectively over the sole prescribed dose of fertilizer and the absolute control.
2. Plots treated with RDF + vermicompost + *Azotobacter* + PSB exhibited a 75% improvement in agronomic use efficiency compared to plots receiving only the recommended dose of fertilizer.

These results underscore the efficacy of integrated nutrient management as the optimal approach for sustainable sugarcane production. Further research and policy initiatives should prioritize the widespread adoption of such practices to enhance productivity, improve nutrient use efficiency, and reduce the environmental impact of sugarcane cultivation.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of manuscripts.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Biography of author(s)



Dr. Sanjeev Kumar Sinha (Associate Professor)

Department of Soil Science, Regional Research Station, Madhopur, West Champaran, Bihar-845454, India.

He is a distinguished scholar and researcher affiliated with the Department of Soil Science at the Regional Research Station, Madhopur, West Champaran, Bihar, India under Dr. Rajendra Prasad Central Agricultural University, Pusa, India. He began his academic journey with a BSc in Agriculture from BAC, Sabour, in 1986, followed by an MSc in Agriculture in 1990 and a PhD from RAU, Pusa, in 1994. His areas of specialization mainly include soil fertility, sugarcane cultivation, and soil microbiology. With an impressive career spanning 20 years in research and academia, he has made significant contributions to the field of soil science. He has published 54 papers in these areas in several reputed journals. His expertise and dedication to the field have earned him prestigious accolades such as the Outstanding Soil Scientist Award and the Lifetime Achievement Award. Additionally, he is an esteemed member of several reputed NAAS journals, further highlighting his remarkable contributions to soil science and agriculture.



Dr. Ajeet Kumar (Assistant Professor-cum-Scientist (Sr. Scale))

Department of Soil Science, Sugarcane Research Institute, Dr. Rajendra Prasad Central Agricultural University, Pusa (Samastipur)-848125, Bihar, India.

He obtained his PhD from the Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, and FHAS. He completed his BSc (Ag.) in 2001 and MSc (Ag.) in 2003 from Banaras Hindu University (BHU) Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India. He is an Assistant Professor-cum-Scientist at the Department of Soil Science, Sugarcane Research Institute, Dr. Rajendra Prasad Central Agricultural University Pusa (Samastipur)-848125, Bihar, India. He has 16 years of teaching, research, and extension experience. His areas of specialization mainly include soil microbiology, soil fertility, and soil chemistry. He has 186 scientific contributions in his credit involving 65 research papers, 52 popular articles 13 chapters in books, 04 books/manuals, 24 research/extension bulletins, and 28 edited publications.

He is the recipient of the BHU Binani Gold Medal for standing first in the MSc (Ag.) of the entire Institute of Agricultural Sciences, BHU. He was also awarded with BHU Gold Medal for standing first in the Department of Soil Science and Agricultural Chemistry at the MSc (Ag.) level. He is the Recipient of Thakur Das Nikobai Kapoor's endowment scholarship during his MSc (Ag.). He has also received the BHU research scholarship during his PhD degree. Moreover, he has received several in-service awards and recognitions. He has been awarded with HAS International Young Scientist Award 2017. He has been inducted as a Fellow of many scientific Societies. Additionally, he was honored with the Pragaya Ratan Award-2019, by Sushma Films; and Sadasya Western India Films Producers Association (WIFPA), Mumbai, India for outstanding contribution to agriculture education/research. He has also performed as an external examiner/question paper setter for different Universities and boards for several years. Moreover, he has delivered 389 invited lectures as a resource person in many training

programmes, symposiums, seminars, conferences, summer school, and winter school at national and international levels. He has given several TV talks on the latest technology. He is a member of the editorial/executive/advisory board of national and international NAAS-rated journals. He is president/chairman/member/member-secretary of important committees.



Brajesh Kumar (PG Research Scholar)

Department of Soil Science, Post Graduate College of Agriculture, RPCAU, Pusa Samastipur, Bihar, India.

He is a dedicated PG Research Scholar at the Department of Soil Science, Post Graduate College of Agriculture, Dr. Rajendra Prasad Central Agricultural University, Pusa, India. With 2 years of research and academic experience, he has already started to make a mark in the field of soil science. His areas of research mainly include soil fertility, sugarcane cultivation, and Integrated Nutrient Management (INM), specifically examining the effect of INM on the productivity and quality of sugarcane in calcareous soil. Despite being early in his career, he has published 3 research papers and has been recognized for his contributions with the Best Oral Presentation Award. His commitment to advancing agricultural science is evident through his scholarly activities and achievements.



Dr. Amrita Kumari (Assistant Professor-cum-Jr. Scientist)

Bihar Agricultural University, Sabour, Bhagalpur -813210, India.

She is presently working as an Assistant Professor-cum-Scientist at the Department of Horticulture (Vegetable and Floriculture), Bihar Agricultural University, Sabour, Bihar, India. She has completed her graduation and Doctorate degree from BAU Sabour with distinction and Post graduation from BHU, Varanasi, India. She has cleared the ICAR NET as well as the UGC NET Exam. She is an author or co-author of more than 15 research articles, book chapters, and several conference papers. She is dynamically involved in teaching (graduate and Doctorate students) and research. She has proved herself as an active scientist in the area of Horticulture (Vegetable Science).



Dr. A. K. Singh (Director Research, Directorate of Research)

Dr. Rajendra Prasad Central Agricultural University, Pusa (Samastipur)-848125, Bihar, India.

He obtained his BSc (Agri.) in 1984, MSc (Agri.) in 1987, and PhD in 1991 in Agronomy from the Institute of Agricultural Sciences, B.H.U, Varanasi, India. He started his service career as an Assistant Agronomist, at the Department of Agronomy at H.P.K.V., Palampur (H.P.) in November 1992. He had qualified for the ARS Examination in 1991 conducted by "ASRB, New Delhi". He was trained for 'Subject

Matter' at ICAR–Indian Institute of Pulses Research, Kanpur for six months. He has published more than 80 research papers in national and international journals, 15 review articles, 176 popular articles, 9 books, 56 training manuals, and short communications, and 4 papers published on policy issues.

He has continued his services at ICAR–Indian Institute of Sugarcane Research, Lucknow up to 10th September 2019. He joined as Director, of Sugarcane Research Institute, RPCAU, Pusa on 11th September 2019. He has also signed 8 MOUs with different organizations and developed the Agricultural Heritage Museum in Birth Place of Indian Agricultural Research & Education at RPCAU, Pusa. He has developed Integrated Nutrient Management Models for quality sugarcane production, sugarcane-based integrated farming system modules, crop diversification in relation to input use, drought management in sugarcane, ratoon management in sugarcane and agronomic evaluation of sugarcane genotypes for high nitrogen use efficiency. He was also conferred with Rajiv Gandhi Gyan Vigyan Purashkar from the Hon'ble President of India (2012) and ICAR-Dr. Rajendra Prasad Purashkar (2013). Besides these, he has been the recipient of prestigious awards like the Sugar Technologist Association of India–Noel Deerr Gold Medal (2016), U.P. Council of Agricultural Research–UPAAS Fellow (2016), Eminent Scientist Award, BHU, 2019, fellow of Indian Society of Agronomy (2015) and ISA–Gold Medal (2021). He completed management training on “Sugarcane Crop Modelling” at CIRAD, Reunion, France (2004).

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