***Original Research Article***

**ENDOPHYTIC MICROBIOME AND SOIL CONDITIONERS ARE AMONG THE PILLARS SUPPORTING RICE PRODUCTIVITY IN SALT-AFFECTED ENVIRONMENTS**

**Abstract**

**A**

comprehensive field investigation was undertaken in clay-rich soil at the Sahl El-Hossynia Agricultural Research Station situated in the EL-Sharkia Governorate of Egypt.In the summer season of the year 2022, the rice cultivar Oryza sativa L. Giza 178 was systematically cultivated to assess the efficacy of endophytic growth-promoting bacteria (PGPR) in conjunction with various soil conditioners aimed at enhancing soil chemical properties and biological activity, which would ultimately affect rice productivity and mineral nutrient content.

The findings showed that, in contrast to the control treatment, organic matter (OM) increased while pH and EC values decreased when PGPR inoculation was coupled with specific soil conditioners. The pH and EC values dramatically dropped as the amount of organic matter increased when compost and potassium silicate were added in addition to inoculation. There were notable positive effects on the available N, K, and Na along with the total level of activity microbial from bacteria in the soil.

In comparison to the control and other treatments, PGPR inoculation in conjunction with compost + potassium silicate yielded a significant enhancement in the productivity of rice (straw and grains) and macronutrient contents (N, P, and K).

In conclusion, PGPR inoculation in presence soil conditioners especially compost and biochar combination with potassium silicate improved the saline soil properties, and macronutrients uptake that reflected on the yield components.

**Keywords:** Rice, Inoculation, Salinity, Soil conditioners.

INTRODUCTION

Soil salinization is one of the key agricultural challenges globally, particularly in arid and semi-arid geographical areas, negatively impacting characteristics of soil as well as plant physiological processes **(Rajput et al., 2015)**. It is obvious that future salt-affected areas will grow as a result of seepage, silting, flooding, excessive irrigation, rising water tables, and salinization **(Suhani et al., 2020)**. Negative alterations in the osmotic and ionic characteristics of salt-affected soils can reduce microbial activity and water absorption, which in turn restricts the total content of nutrients plant (K, Ca, Mg, and P) as well as lowers yields **(Aliya and Asghari, 2016)**. Saline soil contains elevated levels of soluble salts **(Xiaoqin et al., 2021)**. Among the dissolved salt components, NaCl is a significant one as it leads to the formation of NaCl, Na2CO3, and Na2SO4 in the soil. The high concentration of Na ions in saline soil, primarily from NaCl, changes the soil's physical, chemical, and biological characteristics as well as hinders plants' ability to absorb nutrients **(Hamid et al., 2021)**. According to **Numan et al. (2018)**, soil that has an exchangeable sodium below 15% and EC value more than 4 dS/m is detrimental to microbial activity, plant health, and nutrient absorption. Additionally, important macronutrients like nitrogen (N) become less available in the soil due to the elevated salt concentrations **(Gondek et al., 2020)**.

Some methods to lessen the negative effects of soil salinity on crops include creating salt-tolerant cultivars, applying plant growth regulators, treating seeds with halotolerant strains of plant growth-promoting rhizobacteria, and adding soil conditioners **(Akhtar et al., 2015)**. **Faostat (2019)** Over three billion people around the world rely on rice (Oryza sativa L.) as a staple crop and important cereal, which provides 50–80% of their daily calories. Additionally, compared to other crops, rice needs more water during its life cycle. Due to the detrimental effects of numerous environmental stressors, including soil salinity and water scarcity, its output is drastically decreasing (**Chandra et al., 2018**). In addition to rice productivity, salinity-affected soil and water scarcity alter rice's morphological, physiological, and biochemical characteristics **(Reichenauer et al., 2009)**. Therefore, it is essential to create cost-effective technologies that can reduce the adverse effects of water pressure and salt on rice plants in order to solve the looming problem of food security.

According to **Ouyang et al. (2013),** biochar is commonly made from waste biomass due to its affordability and benefits for food security. Biochar, an activated-carbon (C) soil conditioner that is typically high in ash, pH, and surface area, is produced by burning biomass in anaerobic conditions at temperatures below 1000 °C by processes of pyrolysis or dry carbonization, according to **Naba et al. (2019).**

Biochar has garnered significant interest for improving soil health, soil cation exchange capacity (CEC), soil moisture content, and rice crop productivity **(Naeem et al., 2017)**. Biochar has two main effects on soil: it increases the availability of vital minerals like K+ and decreases the absorption of Na+. By improving the soil's physicochemical, biological, and enzymatic qualities, the second process improves the water status of plants. Additionally, in water-deficient situations, biochar significantly raised the soil's stomatal conductance, photosynthetic rate, relative water content, chlorophyll content, and water-holding capacity **(Chintala et al., 2014)**.

According to **Yang et al. (2020),** supplementing plants with biochar increased their growth and production in both normal and water-deficient circumstances. Biochar may have a beneficial effect on plants by increasing their capacity to maintain water, enhancing their ability to absorb organic compounds, and stimulating the activity of beneficial bacteria.

**Huang et al. (2022)** showed out that the biochar may minimize salt stress, and increasing soil salinity greatly reduces agricultural productivity. Biochar significantly increased rice biomass in salt-stressed soil while reducing electrical conductivity and soluble Na+ and Cl contents. Additionally, the soil's organic matter, humic acid, nitrogen, phosphorus, and cation exchange capacity increased when biochar was used. The use of biochar altered the structure of the bacterial community under salt stress and further enhanced the number of soil microorganisms. Additionally, adding biochar to saline-alkaline soil greatly enhanced plant antioxidant enzyme activity, lowering oxidative stress and enhancing biomass and growth, **Shahram and Salar, 2017**. Additionally, biochar improves the biological properties of salt-stressed soils, such as microbial biomass and enzymatic activity, and alters their physical qualities, such as their ability to hold water and nutrients **(Sohi et al., 2010)**.

As is well known, silicon (Si) is a useful element that is crucial for long-term rice production **(Datnoff et al.,2007)**. According to **Ma and Yama (2006)**, silicon increased plants' tolerance to abiotic stressors, pathogens, and insects. Furthermore, plants with high Si accumulation have better light-interception capabilities, more upright leaves, and eventually higher canopy photosynthesis **(Pedda et al., 2015)**. Si is commonly found in silicates (SiO3) of Al, Mg, Ca, Na, K, or Fe, which are typically unsuitable for crops, according to **Chanchal et al. (2016)**. The ease of access to plant roots is frequently determined by the chemical and biological processes occurring in the soil. The soluble mono-silicic acid that silicon absorbs by plants fortifies the cell wall.

Potassium represents the 3rd significant macronutrients essential for the regular or stressed development of plants. Potassium is essential for promoting drought tolerance because it maintains photosynthetic capacity and protects chloroplasts from oxidative damage, regulating stomatal functions, improving water status, activating of multiple enzymes, increases cell expansion and phloem loading and inducing osmotic adjustment plus net carbon assimilation (**Zorb et al., 2014**).

Recently, potassium silicate (K-Si) has been used to offset the detrimental effects of drought on crop growth (**Pilon- Smits et al., 2009**). Compost and other organic additions can help reduce the salt problem in soil (**Delgado-Moreno and Peña, 2009**; **Orozco et al., 2016**). Its inputs can benefit the soil by producing aggregates and providing food for bacteria (**Durán and Henríquez, 2010**; **Bonanomi et al., 2014**).

Although **Wang et al. (2014)** found that applying a compost based on vegetable residue mixtures significantly increased the soil's CEC and available levels of N, P, and K, the positive benefits of OM have been linked to an improvement in soil quality because radicular development and the release of root exudates, such as organic acids, regulate soil pH, lessen the negative effects of salt concentration, and improve soil nutrient availability **(DeLuca & DeLuca, 1987)**.

Applying both organic and biofertilizers simultaneously resulted in a higher rice yield under saline conditions, according to **Zayed et al. (2013)**. The volume, solubility, and mobilization of accessible macronutrients, as well as the organic additions' prolonged breakdown process, may be the main causes of this. The addition of organomineral fertilizer compost to saline soil improved the capillary potential of a common bean field by promoting the formation of medium and micropores (i.e., water-holding capacity and usable pores) between simple packing sand particles **(Rady et al., 2016)**. In soils influenced by salt, it has been discovered that a number of Effective Microorganisms (EM) genera, including *Pseudomonas*, *Bacillus*, *Azospirillum*, and *Bradyrhizobium*, improve crop development and yield **( Viscardi et al., 2016).**

**Lee et al. (2019)** reported that it is well known that minerals such as phosphates and silicates dissolve considerably when microorganisms are present. Numerous helpful bacteria have been shown to improve plants' absorption of these minerals, which benefits them in a range of stressful conditions. According to **Ameen et al. (2019)**, it is commonly recognized that organic acid created by microbes dissolves insoluble phosphate and silicon, making them more accessible to plants. Numerous studies have shown that bacteria solubilize silicates to increase plant availability **(Chandrakala et al., 2019)**.

As a straightforward and inexpensive biological technique, the combination of Plant Growth Promoting Rhizobacteria (PGPR) and Potassium Silicate (PS) applications has demonstrated beneficial effects in terms of enhancing plant growth, improving soil properties, and raising element contents of wheat under salinity stress **(El-Nahrawy, 2022)**.

Even though adding compost or biochar alone might result in a noticeable improvement in the quality of the soil and roselle, combining the two amendments yields a definite advantage. Therefore, it is advised that roselle plants that are irrigated with saline water blend charcoal and compost (**Liu et al., 2021**).

This study's objective was to determine whether applying soil conditioners by themselves or in combination with microorganisms that promote plant growth will lessen the effects of soil salinity.

**MATERIAL AND METHODS**

**Site description**

At the Sahl El-Hossinia Agric. Res. Station Farm in the EL-Sharkia Governorate, Egypt, a field experiment was carried out during the 2022 season. The farm's coordinates are latitude 31° 8' 12.461" N and longitude 31°52' 15.496" E.

The soil at the experimental, from 0-30 cm depth, soil samples were collected, air-dried, and stored for analyses of various physicochemical properties, as shown in Table (1) using the approach described by Page et al. (1982). Water from the El-Salam Canal was used to irrigate this experiment; Table (2) displays the chemical composition of the irrigated water.

Table 1: Physio-chemical parameters of the experimental soil (0-30 cm) before cultivation

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Particle size distribution (%) | |  |
|  | Texture grade | Silt clay |  |
|  | Coarse sand | 4.71 |  |
|  | Fine Sand | 10.02 |  |
|  | Silt | 35.12 |  |
|  | Clay | 52.15 |  |
|  | Chemical parameters | |  |
|  | pH\* | 8.12 |  |
|  | EC (dS m-1)\*\* | 11.8 |  |
|  | Soil organic matter (%) | 0.82 |  |
|  | SAR | 13.4 |  |
|  | ESP | 15.9 |  |
| Soluble cations (meq L-1) | | Soluble anions (meq L-1) | |
| Ca++ | 30.2 | CO3-- | nd |
| Mg++ | 40.3 | HCO3- | 10.5 |
| Na+ | 79.1 | CL- | 88 |
| K+ | 1.21 | SO4-- | 51.8 |
|  | Available nutrients (mg kg-1) | |  |
|  | N | 101 |  |
|  | P | 3.5 |  |
|  | K | 298 |  |
|  | Na | 220 |  |

\*1:2.5 (soil: water suspension) \*\* EC soil past extract

Table 2: Chemical analysis of irrigation water

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Parameters | Value | Soluble cations (meq L-1) | | | | Soluble anions (meq L-1) | | | |
| pH | 7.9 | Ca++ | Mg++ | Na+ | K+ | CO3-- | HCO3- | CL- | SO4-- |
| EC (dS m-1) | 1.8 | 3.5 | 5.5 | 8.1 | 0.4 | nd | 4.3 | 7.5 | 5.7 |
| EC (ppm) | 1152 |
| SAR | 3.8 |

**Experimental design and treatments**

During the summer of 2022, rice (Oryza sativa L., Giza 178) was grown using three replications of every treatment in a randomized split plot design. Plant Growth Promoting Rhizobacteria (PGPR) were either un-inoculated or inoculated in the main plots.

The sub main plots were sex soil conditioners, control, biochar, compost, potassium silicate, biochare + potassium silicate and compost + potassium silicate.

**Fertilizers application**

Before cultivation, all treatments received mineral fertilizers in the dosages needed for rice crops. Superphosphate (15 % P2O5) was added to the soil at a rate of 200 kg fed-1 practically before seeding. Ammonium sulfate (20% N) was used to provide nitrogen to rice in three equal doses at a rate of 100 kg fed-1 at 15, 30, and 60 days after sowing. Two equal doses of potassium sulfate (48 % K2O) were added at the time of seeding and 30 days later, at a rate of 50 kg fed-1.

**Plant Growth Promoting Rhizobacteria (PGPR):**

PGPRs were acquired from Cairo University in Egypt's Environmental Studies and Research Unit (ESRU), Department of Microbiology, Faculty of Agriculture. Inoculum of PGPRs (*Pantoea conspicua* (endo30 7/2), *Bacillus safensis* (endo 30 5/1), *Bacillus licheniformis* (end30 3/0), *Bacillus safensis* (endo 30 5/5) and *Bacillus rugosus (Bacillus halotolerans)* (ecto 30 9/2), Table (3). Batches of the liquid CCM were inoculated with the various strains (10%) and then incubated at 30°C in a rotary shaker (100 rpm) until the population density reached approximately 108 cfu ml-1 in order to produce biomass.

Table 3: Rhizobacterial strains used for inoculation

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Bacterial strains | Host plants | Accession number |
| *Pantoea conspicua* (endo 30 7/2) | *Gnaphalium luteoalbum* L. | OQ568854 |
| *Bacillus safensis* (endo 30 5/1) | *Scrophularia syriaca* Benth. | OQ568863 |
| *Bacillus licheniformis* (endo 30 3/0) | *Cutandia dichotoma (Forssk.) Trab.* | OQ568846 |
| *Bacillus safensis* (endo 30 5/5) | *Scrophularia syriaca* Benth. | OQ568862 |
| *Bacillus rugosus (Bacillus halotolerans)* (ecto 30 9/2)) | *Cyperus conglomerates* Rottb. | OQ568864 |

**PGPR Preparation**

The experiment's strains were cultured for 48 hours at 30°C on a shaker (150 rpm) in 500 cc of CCM broth medium in a 1000 ml Erlenmeyer flask. Equal amounts of liquid batch cultures were mixed at the same time to create the bio-preparate. Five hundred ml from liquid cultures were used for each plot treatment.

**Measurements**

Following harvest, surface soil samples were gathered and analyzed for soil chemical characteristics using the methodology outlined by Cottenie et al. (1982).

From every plot, rice harvest grains and straw were gathered. At the end of the experiment, calculated of yield characteristics such as grain and straw yield (Kg/fed.). In accordance with **Page et al. (1982)**, the plant was crushed, oven-dried at 70°C for 48 hours, until consistent dry weight, and digestion. N, K, and Na digests were estimated (Cottenie et al., 1982).

**Microbiological parameters**

After 45 days from planting, taken the sampled for the evaluation of total bacterial load on the ecto-rhizosphere representing the closely adhering soil to the plant roots. Initial dilutions were prepared by transferring 5 g of plant roots with closely adhering soil into bottles containing 45 ml of half-strength of basal salts of CCM medium of **Hegazi et al. (1998)** minus carbon source. Bottles were shaken for 60 min, and further serial decimal dilutions were prepared. Plates were incubated at 30oC for 2–7 days. Total rhizospheric microorganisms (RMO) in the different treatments were determined by the surface-inoculated agar plate technique, (**Hamza, 1994**) Agar plates of the standard N-free combined C-sources medium, CCM, and colony forming units (cfu) were counted. Dry weights for suspended roots (80oC) were determined.

**Statistical analysis**

Each growing season's findings were statistically analyzed to compare the means using the L.S.D. test at a significance level of 0.05, as stated by **Gomez and Gomez (1984).**

**Results and Discussion**

**Soil chemical properties**

**Soil electric conductivity (EC) and soil reaction (pH).**

Results revealed that the values of EC and pH in soil, showed in Table (4), significantly and insignificantly decreased, respectively, as affected by the studied treatments compared to control. Application of compost + potassium silicate in presence of inoculation led to significant decreases of pH and EC values. Furthermore, these treatments resulted in EC and pH reductions of 22.4 and 3.29%, respectively, as compared to the control. The electric conductivity decreased significantly, in spite of the pH values decreased insignificantly, in presence inoculation. Treatments of soil conditioners may be arranged as follows: compost + PC > compost > Bio + PC >PC >Bio for electric conductivity but being compost + PC > PC > Bio + PC > compost > Bio for pH values. These findings are in line with those of **Tongtong et al. (2023),** who noted that treating the soil with straw compost greatly enhanced its physicochemical characteristics.

**Table (4): Chemical properties of the soil after rice harvest as affected by soil conditioners and inoculation.**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Soil conditioner | EC  **(dSm-1)** | pH  **(1:2.5)** | OM  **(%)** |
| Non- Inoculation | | | |
| control | 10.9 | 7.91 | 1.04 |
| Biochar | 9.08 | 7.87 | 1.14 |
| Compost | 7.51 | 7.85 | 1.16 |
| Potassium silicate | 7.97 | 7.79 | 0.97 |
| Biochar + Potassium silicate | 7.77 | 7.77 | 1.12 |
| Compost + Potassium silicate | 7.55 | 7.74 | 1.16 |
| Means | 8.46 | 7.82 | 1.10 |
| Inoculation | | | |
| control | 9.42 | 7.89 | 1.15 |
| Biochar | 8.24 | 7.84 | 1.17 |
| Compost | 7.41 | 7.76 | 1.17 |
| Potassium silicate | 7.47 | 7.65 | 0.98 |
| Biochar + Potassium silicate | 7.63 | 7.66 | 1.17 |
| Compost + Potassium silicate | 7.31 | 7.63 | 1.19 |
| Means | 7.91 | 7.73 | 1.14 |
| Means of soil conditioners  Control  Bio  Com  PC  Bio+PC  Com+PC | 10.2  8.66  7.46  7.72  7.70  7.43 | 7.90  7.86  7.81  7.72  7.72  7.69 | 1.11  1.15  1.17  0.97  1.15  1.18 |
| L.S.D at 0.05 %  Inoculation (A)  soil conditioner (B)  A\*B | 0.23  1.04  1.47 | NS  NS  NS | 0.05  0.11  0.16 |

**Organic matter (OM)**

When soil conditioners were applied in conjunction with inoculation, the amount of organic matter in the soil generally increased in comparison to the control. The compost + potassium silicate in presence of inoculation high gradually OM of 1.19 % compared to control of 1.04 %. However, organic matter values decreased when applied potassium silicate in presence or absence of inoculation. The values of pH in soil insignificantly increased due to inoculation. Generally, the effect of application of soil conditioners can be arranged as follows: compost + PC > compost > Bio + PC > Bio > PC for tested soil crop.

**Nutrients availability in soil after harvesting**

Show in Table (5), the amount of soil macronutrients (N, K, and Na) that are available following rice harvest. Interaction statistical analyses reveled that the treatments of soil conditioners in presence of inoculation increased soil nitrogen and potassium availability, the opposing trend, which is for sodium availability, in soil compared to the control treatment. However, the highest values of soil available nitrogen and potassium of 271 and 117 mg L-1 were due to compost combined with potassium silicate in presence of inoculation compared to the other treatments. The lowest values of sodium of 156 mg L-1 in were attributed to application of biochar combined with potassium silicate in presence inoculation.

It is worth to mention that there is un-significant effect on the availability of elements (N, K and Na) with application of inoculation. The lowest values of sodium and highest values of nitrogen and potassium were recorded with inoculation.

Results indicated that the highest significant effects for nitrogen and non-significant for potassium in soil were reported in case of applying soil conditioner of compost combined with potassium silicate compared to other soil conditioners. These findings concur with those that were published by According to **Munns et al. (2020)**, applying compost enhances the soil's nutrient availability, which benefits plant mineral nutrition. Additionally, by continuously synthesizing the organic solutes required to maintain the aforementioned osmotic setting to counteract salt, the plant may better manage the energy expenditure.

It is important to remember that while composting can improve plant nutrition, it actually doesn't address the root source of the salt issue. Its application in these saline soils, however, can enhance plant growth, microbial biomass, and the soil's chemical characteristics. In the short run, plants may benefit from the usage of compost **(Reina et al., 2022)**.

Treatment with biochar combined with potassium silicate reduced sodium availability in soil. These findings concur with those published by **Chakraborty et al (2013)** They discovered that biochar and PGPR inoculation increased the contents of Ca++ and K+ in the soil solution by putting Na+ on exchange sites and releasing additional nutrients into the soil solution.

**Table (5): Nutrient availability (mg Kg-1) of soil after rice harvested as affected by soil conditioners and inoculation.**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Soil conditioner | N | K | Na |
| Non-Inculcation | | | |
| control | 221 | 94.2 | 213 |
| Biochar | 223 | 95.5 | 180 |
| Compost | 249 | 96.2 | 180 |
| Potassium silicate | 242 | 97.2 | 186 |
| Biochar + Potassium silicate | 229 | 94.9 | 170 |
| Compost + Potassium silicate | 250 | 114 | 177 |
| Means | 236 | 98.7 | 184 |
| Inculcation | | | |
| control | 219 | 95.8 | 206 |
| Biochar | 225 | 96.2 | 199 |
| Compost | 250 | 94.9 | 167 |
| Potassium silicate | 231 | 102 | 164 |
| Biochar + Potassium silicate | 242 | 100 | 156 |
| Compost + Potassium silicate | 271 | 117 | 174 |
| Means | 239 | 101 | 178 |
| Means of soil conditioners  Control  Bio  Com  PC  Bio+PC  Com+PC | 220  224  249  236  235  261 | 94.9  95.8  95.5  99.9  97.5  116 | 209  189  173  175  163  176 |
| L.S.D at 0.05 %  Inculation (A)  soil conditioner (B)  A\*B | 5.15  13.3  18.8 | 2.01  6.53  9.23 | 16.3  15.4  21.8 |

**Soil biological activity in soil after harvesting**

After rice harvesting, the impact of PGRP inoculation in conjunction with various soil conditioners on total count bacteria expressive soil activity biological was demonstrated by the results in Table (6). In comparison to the control treatment, the total count bacteria at two-time intervals (after 15 and 45 days) rose in all treatments that received PGRP inoculation.

**Table (6): Soil biological activity under saline conditions affected with PGRP inoculation in combination with different soil conditioners.**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Treatments | | Total count bacteria Log No. | |
| 15 days | 45 days |
| NPK (control) | | 4.013 | 4.013 |
| Inoculation | | 6.627 | 8.060 |
| PGRP inoculation | Biochar | 6.55 | 7.183 |
| Compost | 6.860 | 8.283 |
| Potassium silicate | 7.450 | 6.380 |
| Biochar + Potassium silicate | 7.530 | 6.123 |
| Compost + Potassium silicate | 6.617 | 7.313 |
| LSD | | 0.596 | |

However, utilizing compost both by itself and in conjunction with potassium silicate in presence PGRP inoculation had higher values of total count bacteria especially after 45 days. Also, it was noticed that total count bacteria at 15 days were lower than those recorded at 45 days. Generally, either potassium silicate or biochar combination with potassium silicate in presence of PGRP inoculation increased total counts of bacteria after 15 days from sowing. On the other hand, the highest counts were recorded for treatments received compost alone and/or combined with potassium silicate after 45 days from harvesting of rice.

In agricultural land, the detrimental effects of soil salinity on soil microbial activity can be mitigated with the use of compost. Microbial activity metrics including respiration and enzymatic activity show the most pronounced impacts of salinity on soil biology **(Rath and Rousk, 2015)**. **Sardinha et al. (2003)** shown that adding organic matter to salinity soils might be enhance their biological processes and that microbial mass declines in salinity conditions. Salt has a significant effect on enzyme function and turns toxic to bacteria as concentration increases. According to **Lakhdar et al. (2009)**, this effect can be reversed and microbial activity and populations increased by introducing organic amendments to high salinity or sodic soil conditions. This suggests that adding compost can be a useful strategy for reducing the toxicity conditions brought on by salinization.

Salt conditions affect the times of aerobic conditions and water saturation that define rice fields. But after a paddy field is flooded, the water may become saturated, which could dilute the salts that were deposited. The salt buildup is visible when the fields are drained, particularly at the soil's surface and top layers. In this sense, soil microorganisms are impacted by both decreased oxygen availability during flooding and elevated soil salinity during drought. Conversely, instead of increasing microbial population stress, **Wichern et al. (2020)** discovered that waterlogging rice improved carbon mobility in saturated soil, increasing carbon availability for microorganisms. Because there are more microorganisms in the soil when organic amendments are added, soil respiration rises. In line with the findings of **Leogrande and Vitti (2018)** found that salinity decreased soil respiration, but that this effect was significantly mitigated by the addition of organic matter, **Wichern et al. (2006)** and **Sall et al. (2015)**.

**Yield and its components at harvest stage**

The straw and grains of rice yields, in Table (7), significantly affected by the various applied treatments either of non-inoculation or inoculation compared to the control treatment.

The treatment that received compost and potassium silicate in the presence of inoculation had the greatest yield component values. However, the groups that received biochar without inoculation had the lowest values for both yield components. Compared to control, yield components of rice plants recorded increases of 32.1% and 31.9% for straw and grains, respectively. **Yu et al (2015)**, It was discovered that applying deteriorated straw compost fermented at room temperature improved the quality and yield of cucumbers. The decomposition of straw can improve field conditions and avoid agricultural desertification by increasing the soil's fertility and organic matter content because of its high nutritional content **(Li et al., 2023)**.

**Table (7) Rice yields (Kg fed-1) of the different treatments of soil conditioners and inoculation.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Soil conditioner | Straw | Grains |
| Non-Inculcation | | |
| control | 4200 | 3931 |
| Biochar | 4939 | 4217 |
| Compost | 5488 | 4760 |
| Potassium silicate | 6065 | 5113 |
| Biochar + Potassium silicate | 5376 | 4519 |
| Compost + Potassium silicate | 6092 | 5589 |
| Means | 5360 | 4688 |
| Inculcation | | |
| control | 5140 | 4407 |
| Biochar | 5280 | 4424 |
| Compost | 5734 | 4906 |
| Potassium silicate | 6664 | 5617 |
| Biochar + Potassium silicate | 5432 | 4541 |
| Compost + Potassium silicate | 6792 | 5773 |
| Means | 5841 | 4944 |
| Means of soil conditioners  Control  Bio  Com  PC  Bio+PC  Com+PC | 4670  5110  5611  6365  5404  6443 | 4169  4321  4833  5365  4530  5681 |
| L.S.D at 0.05 %  Inoculating (A)  soil conditioner (B)  A\*B | 297  409.8  579.5 | 99.9  263.1  372.1 |

However, around 30% of straw cannot fully decompose in the natural environment due to the difficulty of breaking down polysaccharide components like cellulose, hemicellulose, and lignin. The leftover straw is either burned or thrown away, wasting straw resources and polluting the environment **(Li et al., 2018)**. Recent developments in microbial research have resulted in the growth of certain bacteria for the compost made from decomposed straw, which can improve the yield and quality of cucumbers **(Yu et al., 2015)**. **Tongtong et al. (2023)** demonstrated that the straw compost-treated rice plants were notably taller than the control plants. Additionally, the height of the rice plants significantly increased as the amount of straw compost in the soil grew. Both the 100-grain weight and the length of the rice roots were considerably boosted by the straw compost. These findings demonstrate how straw fermentation technology and straw composting can be applied to improve agricultural output.

**Total contents of macronutrients**

Data in Tables (8 and 9) present the effects of applied soil conditioners alone or combined with inoculation by PGPRs on macronutrients uptake (N, K and Na) in either straw or grains of rice plants. All applied treatments resulted in a considerable rise in N, K, and Na values when compared to the control. Compost and potassium silicate in the presence of inoculation produced the highest value. Additionally, the overall macronutrient composition trended in the same direction as the yield component trends.

Also, N, K and Na contents in either straw or grains of rice, generally, increased by inoculation with PGPRs compared to without inoculation. The production of phytohormones like IAA may be responsible for the increased physiology, nutrient absorption, and growth of rice following PGPR inoculation in saline soil. **Banerjee et al. (2017)** and **Sandhya et al. (2009)** showed that, IAA may be connected to the plant's overall biomass and increased nutrient availability. Additionally, it might affect the synthesis of osmolytes, EPS, and ACC deaminase **(Hafez et al., 2019)**. The decreasing concentration of Na+ ions in the leaves of maize plants inoculated with PGPR (*Azospirillum* *lipoferum* + *Bacillus circulance*) under saline soil may be due to the exopolysaccharide that PGPR produces. This occurs as a result of PGPR binding to the soil's Na+ ions, which decreases their absorption **(Hafez et al., 2021)**.

For the values of N, K, and Na total contents in rice straw, the potassium silicate treatment had a greater impact than the other treatments; for grains, the opposite pattern was observed, with compost and potassium silicate combining to produce the greatest values.

Additionally, the findings demonstrated that, in, the level of sodium total content in rice straw gradually rose, comparison to grains. This could suggest that elevated soil salts led to the buildup of salts in plants, which in turn affected how well plants absorbed nutrients, particularly sodium. Also, adding potassium silicate to compost while inoculating it led to an increase in K uptake and a decrease in Na uptake in both grains and straw. This could be the cause of the better yield under salinity conditions.

**Table (8):-Nutrients total contents (Kg fed-1) of rice straw as affected by soil conditioners and inoculation.**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Soil conditioner | Nutrient uptake in straw (Kg/fed.) | | |
|  | N | K | Na |
| Non-Inculcation | | | |
| control | 45.8 | 37.3 | 16.6 |
| Biochar | 63.1 | 39.7 | 19.8 |
| Compost | 63.3 | 40.3 | 19.8 |
| Potassium silicate | 92.1 | 83.7 | 37.6 |
| Biochar + Potassium silicate | 63.8 | 40.7 | 22.1 |
| Compost + Potassium silicate | 83.6 | 56.3 | 23.1 |
| Means | 68.6 | 49.7 | 23.2 |
| Inculcation | | | |
| control | 64.8 | 42.0 | 25.0 |
| Biochar | 65.7 | 64.2 | 31.1 |
| Compost | 73.8 | 70.7 | 32.3 |
| Potassium silicate | 93.0 | 72.3 | 36.0 |
| Biochar + Potassium silicate | 79.3 | 71.4 | 33.2 |
| Compost + Potassium silicate | 96.0 | 87.0 | 40.7 |
| Means | 78.9 | 67.9 | 33.1 |
| Means of soil conditioners  Control  Bio  Com  PC  Bio+PC  Com+PC | 55.3  64.4  68.5  92.9  71.6  89.8 | 39.7  51.9  55.5  78.0  56.1  71.7 | 20.8  25.5  26.0  36.8  27.6  31.9 |
| L.S.D at 0.05 %  Inculation (A)  soil conditioner (B)  A\*B | 0.88  5.00  7.07 | 3.22  7.69  10.9 | 2.85  3.65  5.16 |

**Table (9):-Nutrients total contents (Kg fed-1) of rice grains as affected by soil conditioners and inoculation.**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Soil conditioner | Nutrient uptake in grains (Kg/fed.) | | |
|  | N | K | Na |
| Non-Inculcation | | | |
| control | 65.2 | 30.6 | 2.85 |
| Biochar | 69.9 | 52.3 | 3.65 |
| Compost | 68.1 | 46.9 | 3.30 |
| Potassium silicate | 86.6 | 55.0 | 3.82 |
| Biochar + Potassium silicate | 78.3 | 53.0 | 3.72 |
| Compost + Potassium silicate | 89.6 | 64.7 | 4.60 |
| Means | 76.3 | 50.4 | 3.66 |
| Inculcation | | | |
| control | 69.6 | 40.2 | 2.89 |
| Biochar | 76.8 | 59.1 | 4.31 |
| Compost | 82.6 | 50.8 | 4.05 |
| Potassium silicate | 93.1 | 73.6 | 4.67 |
| Biochar + Potassium silicate | 85.2 | 60.2 | 4.45 |
| Compost + Potassium silicate | 99.1 | 83.9 | 6.09 |
| Means | 84.4 | 61.3 | 4.41 |
| Means of soil conditioners  Control  Bio  Com  PC  Bio+PC  Com+PC | 67.4  73.4  75.4  89.9  81.7  94.4 | 35.4  55.7  48.8  64.3  56.6  74.3 | 2.87  3.98  3.68  4.25  4.09  5.35 |
| L.S.D at 0.05 %  Inculation (A)  soil conditioner (B)  A\*B | 5.57  12.4  17.6 | 3.86  8.92  12.6 | 0.57  1.01  1.43 |

**Conclusions**

In general, the utilization of soil conditioner forms alone or in combination with inoculation improved the chemical characteristics of salinity soil by raising the amount of accessible NKNa and OM% while slightly lowering the EC and pH values. It also increased the biological yield of rice plants and their overall macronutrient uptake.

Consent for publication:

All authors declare their consent for publication.

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