

**USE OF TANNERY SLUDGE AND URBAN
COMPOST AS A SUBSTRATE FOR SWEET
PEPPER SEEDLINGS**

ABSTRACT

There are many commercial substrates available in the market of vegetables nowadays. However, a growing pressure turned for sustainability in farming, promotes a line of utilization of waste with agricultural potential, such as the use of urban waste compost and tannery sludge, which, when available, can be used as sources of compost and alternative organic matter. The objective of this study was to evaluate the potential of tannery sludge associated with the urban waste compost in the substrate composition of sweet pepper seedlings, especially regarding emergence, development, and quality of seedlings. The experimental design was a randomized block design with six replications and eight treatments. The treatments consisted of mixtures of the residue of dehydrated tannery sludge and urban waste compost, varying in the proportions of 10%, 30%, 50%, 70%, 90% and 100% of each, as well as the use of a commercial substrate as a conventional treatment for the comparisons. Graphs were performed through linear regression analysis for the treatment of statistical data. The percentage of emergence, development, and quality of seedlings were evaluated 54 days after planting. The alternative substrates showed high potential in the production of seedlings, in which all the combinations used in the study were superior to the conventional treatment, except the germination, which did not present difference. The range for the use of tannery sludge in the preparation of substrates for sweet pepper seedlings is between 32.7 and 48.2% in a mixture with urban waste compost. The plants presented better quality with the use of 46.0% of tannery sludge and 54.0% of urban compost in the preparation of the substrate.

Keywords: *Capsicum annuum L.*, propagation, sustainability, waste

1. INTRODUCTION

Farming and industrial practices such as the overuse of agrochemicals, waste generation, and disposal, poor soil, and irrigation management may degrade soil and contaminate water resources and the atmosphere. In this context, there is a growing global concern associated with interrelated environmental issues such as soil degradation and

22 erosion, desertification, urban waste management as well as the greenhouse effect and
23 climate change [1,2].

24 Intensive farming and agroindustrial activities generate large amounts and
25 different types of organic waste [3]. The production of these urban and industrial organic
26 wastes is widespread. Therefore, strategies to recycle such composts in agriculture must be
27 developed.

28 For the reuse of waste in agriculture, biological processes such as composting
29 have been widely practiced, converting such waste into fertilizers rich in nutrients and soil
30 amendments [4]. This composting process is the spontaneous biological decomposition of
31 organic waste in an aerobic environment [5].

32 Other residues such as bovine tannery sludge is a potential agricultural fertilizer as
33 it is rich in several essential nutrients for vegetables. Moreover, its benefit has been reported
34 by several researchers [6-8]. Considering the high cost of agricultural inputs, this would be
35 an attractive alternative in soil fertilization, therefore, promoting higher productivity and lower
36 costs [9].

37 One of the destinations that have been explored for the use of such residues is in
38 the preparation of substrates in the most diversified crops, as observed in studies carried out
39 by Berilli et al. [10] and those used in conilon coffee seedlings by Sales et al. [11] and in
40 *Schinus Terebinthifolius* Raddi and in the culture of *Thymus zygis* [12]. Such waste becomes
41 very advantageous, thus economically contributing and reducing the environmental impact,
42 especially in regions near industries that produce such waste [13].

43 Sweet pepper (*Capsicum annuum* L.) is a vegetable that belongs to the
44 *Solanaceae* Family. It shows excellent economic relevance and is highly consumed in Brazil,
45 with an estimated annual crop area of 13,000 hectares [14]. Although studies on the use of
46 tannery sludge and urban compost in several crops have been found in the literature, there
47 is still scarce information on the use of these sludge in such vegetable species as the sweet
48 pepper.

49 Hence, the objective of this work was to evaluate the potential of tannery sludge
50 associated to the urban waste compost in the substrate composition of sweet pepper
51 seedlings, especially regarding emergence, development, and quality of seedlings.

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53 2. MATERIAL AND METHODS / EXPERIMENTAL DETAILS / METHODOLOGY

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55 The experiment was carried out at the Federal Institute of Education, Science and
56 Technology of Espírito Santo - Alegre Campus, located in the municipality of Alegre, state of
57 Espírito Santo. The climate in the region is Cwa according to the classification of Köppen,
58 that is, tropical hot humid, with cold and dry winter [15,16]. The experimental design used in
59 the study was in randomized blocks, with six replications and eight treatments, each
60 experimental plot had eight seedlings, in a total of 64 seedlings per replicate and 384 in the
61 whole experiment.

62 The species used for the experiment was *Capsicum annuum* L., in which was used
63 Cascadura Ikeda variety seeds of Feltrin ® Company, presenting 80% emergency as
64 informed by the company. Sowing was carried out on a 64-cell polypropylene tray, in which
65 each tray represented a repetition. The substrate used was the mixtures of urban waste
66 compost and tannery sludge. Maxfertil® commercial substrate was also used (Table 1).

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68 **Table 1. Description of the treatments used in this experiment (v/v).**

Treatments	Component of the substrate
TC	100% Comercial substrate (Maxfertil)
TUC100	100% Urban compost
TSC0	10% tannery sludge + 90% urban compost

TSC30	30% tannery sludge + 70% urban compost
TSC50	50% tannery sludge + 50% urban compost
TSC70	70% tannery sludge + 30% urban compost
TSC90	90% tannery sludge + 10% urban compost
TSC100	100% tannery sludge

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70 The tannery sludge was supplied by a tannery located in the municipality of Baixo
 71 Guandu, state of Espírito Santo. It is a residue from the effluent from bovine leather tanning
 72 after dehydration. The urban waste compost was supplied by an urban solid waste
 73 composting and sorting plant of the city of Montanha, state of Espírito Santo. The chemical
 74 properties of each substrate component are described in Table 2.

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76 **Table 2. Chemical characteristics of each substrate used for sweet pepper seedling**
 77 **growth.**

Parameter	Unit	Urban compost	Tannery sludge	Commercial (Maxfertil)
pH in CaCl ₂	-	7.30	7.28	5.78
TOMT	%	50.52	32.86	53.33
OMC	%	41.54	30.57	50.94
Organic Carbon ^{1/}	%	23.08	16.98	28.3
C/N ratio	-	9/1	9/1	26/1
Nitrogen (N) ^{2/}	g dm ⁻³	24.90	18.20	10.80
Phosphorus (P ₂ O ₅) ^{3/}	g dm ⁻³	12.90	7.60	6.90
Potassium (K ₂ O) ^{3/}	g dm ⁻³	18.10	3.80	5.30
Calcium (Ca) ^{3/}	g dm ⁻³	40.70	208.40	9.00
Magnesium (Mg) ^{3/}	g dm ⁻³	5.10	21.30	3.60
Sulfur (S) ^{3/}	g dm ⁻³	5.20	4.60	2.20
Iron (Fe) ^{3/}	g dm ⁻³	8.70	1.40	8.30
Zinc (Zn) ^{3/}	mg dm ⁻³	119.20	76.00	39.70
Copper (Cu) ^{3/}	mg dm ⁻³	32.50	9.50	26.50
Manganese (Mn) ^{3/}	mg dm ⁻³	160.00	71.80	326.60
Borum (B) ^{4/}	mg dm ⁻³	32.50	59.00	10.40
Sodium (Na) ^{3/}	mg dm ⁻³	6,300.00	20,800.00	200.00
Total Chrome (Cr) ^{3/}	mg dm ⁻³	0.03	17,500.00	0.04

78 *OMC: Compostable Organic Matter; TOM: Total Organic Matter; Results in dry matter basis*
 79 *(mass/mass); 1/ potassium dichromate oxidation; 2/ Sulfur digestion; 3/ Nitro-perchloric digestion; 4/*
 80 *Dry digestion.*

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82 Regarding the execution of the experiment, propagation trays with 128 cells each
 83 were used, so that three seeds per cell were added to the substrate, and the trays were kept
 84 in a greenhouse covered with translucent polypropylene material followed by shadow type

85 screen with 50% light and a platform located at 70 cm from the ground. Micro-sprinkler
86 irrigation was performed twice a day until the end of the experiment.

87 Thinning was performed 17 days after the emergency, leaving only one plant per
88 cell. After the thinning, the number of leaves and height of the seedling were monitored. The
89 evaluations were carried out 51 days after planting, in which the following variables were
90 analyzed: Emergency (%); Plant height (PH); Number of fully expanded leaves (NL); Leaf
91 area (LA) in cm²; Stem diameter (SD) in mm; canopy diameter (CPD) in cm; dry matter mass
92 of the aerial part (APDM), root dry matter mass (RDM) and total dry matter mass (TDM) in
93 grams. Dry matter was determined by the gravimetric method in a greenhouse with forced
94 air circulation at 65 °C for 72 hours, weighed with the aid of a precision analytical balance.

95 For determination of seedling quality, the Dickson quality index (DQI) [17] obtained
96 by using the following equation:

$$97 \quad \text{DQI} = [(TDM) / (PH/SD + APDM/ RDM)].$$

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100 The indirect chlorophyll meter model SPAD-502 - Minolta brand was used in the
101 leaves of the sweet pepper seedlings. The analytical measurement of total nitrogen in the
102 samples was also carried out by the Kjeldahl method, according to the methodology adapted
103 by Galvani & Gaertner [18]. For measurements of the leaf area and perimeter of the
104 seedlings, the leaves of each seedling were photographed, and with the aid of the
105 AutoCAD[®] software, they were vectorized, and then each of the respective parameters was
106 measured.

107 The data obtained in the study were submitted to analysis of variance using the
108 Dunnett test at 5% probability. When significant, regressions with the proportions of sludge
109 mixed with urban waste compost were unfolded. The complete statistical procedure was
110 performed with the help of the open source software R.

111 112 113 **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

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115 By observing the data of this experiment, it can be found that out of all the
116 evaluated characteristics, only the emergence of the plants did not present statistical any
117 difference. The other characteristics were affected by the treatments (Tables 3 and 4). As a
118 result, it was observed that the residues used in the study did not affect the emergence of
119 the pepper plants since no difference was when compared to the commercial Maxfertil
120 substrate (Table 3). According to Almeida et al. [19], high emergency values result in lower
121 production costs, as fewer losses caused by the inputs are found.

122 The characteristics stem diameter, canopy diameter and number of leaves showed
123 the same response pattern (Table 3), in which all treatments differed from the conventional
124 treatment, with values higher than it. This lower result of the conventional treatment may be
125 related to the more considerable amount of nitrogen from the tannery sludge and urban
126 compost. In addition, a higher C/N ratio is found in the conventional Maxfertil treatment
127 (Table 2), which may have resulted in lower N release for plants. Residues with a higher
128 concentration of C in relation to the nitrogen results in a greater N efficiency as its
129 mineralization is usually slow because the microorganisms absorb most of the available N,
130 which is made available only after decomposition of the material [20,21].

131 Plant height and leaf area (Table 3) displayed differences when compared to the
132 conventional treatment, except for TSC100, in which the substrate was made using 100%
133 dehydrated tannery sludge. The largest leaf area was obtained with the TSC30 treatment,
134 17.85 cm², which is higher than the TC in more than 1000%. The use of organic residues in
135 substrates can promote relative gains in the leaf area of the plants, as observed by Silva et
136 al. [22], using doses of bovine manure in the cultivation of pepper (*Capsicum frutescens* L.).
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Table 3. Means of stem diameter (SD), plant height (PH), canopy diameter (CPD), leaf area (LA) and number of leaves (NL) of sweet pepper seedlings grown in the commercial substrate with different concentrations of tannery sludge and urban residue compost.

Treatment	Emergence (%)	SD mm	PH -----cm-----	CPD	LA cm ²	NL
TC	81.21	1.07	2.29	16.43	1.48	2.00
TUC100	83.33 ^{n/s}	1.70*	4.57*	50.44*	13.52*	4.16*
TSC10	80.55 ^{n/s}	1.65*	4.64*	50.21*	14.71*	4.51*
TSC30	89.58 ^{n/s}	1.73*	5.34*	60.26*	17.85*	5.37*
TSC50	85.42 ^{n/s}	1.78*	5.03*	62.58*	16.12*	5.08*
TSC70	84.20 ^{n/s}	1.63*	4.72*	58.80*	16.16*	5.05*
TSC90	72.22 ^{n/s}	1.41*	3.09*	39.63*	9.94*	3.95*
TSC100	79.57 ^{n/s}	1.32*	2.54 ^{n/s}	33.35*	5.03 ^{n/s}	3.77*
Mean	82.01	1.54	4.03	46.46	11.85	4.24
CV(%)	9.52	5.91	10.19	11.64	33.28	6.97

144 *Means followed by * in the column are statistically different from each other by the test of Dunnett at*
145 *5% (p<0.05) level.*

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The use of the urban compost and the dehydrated tannery sludge as a substrate component significantly improved the dry matter mass of the aerial part, root system and total dry matter mass of the plants as observed in Table 4. The same pattern of response is observed with the Dickson quality index, in which all the treatments used in the study were different and superior to the conventional treatment. The quality index of Dickson has been used by several authors to evaluate the quality of seedlings of vegetables and other crops [23,24].

The SPAD index and the content of N accumulated in the leaves showed a similar pattern of response, with values different and superior to the conventional treatment. Consequently, it can be noticed that the urban compost and tannery sludge increased the nitrogen content in the plants since these compost are rich in nutrients, especially for nitrogen (Table 2).

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Table 4. Dickson quality index (IQD), mass of the aerial part dry matter (APDM), root dry mass (RDM) and total dry mass (TDM), SPAD index and N content in sweet pepper seedlings grown in the commercial substrate and different concentrations of dehydrated tannery sludge and urban residue compost.

Treatment	DQI	APDM	RDM	TDM	SPAD	N g kg ⁻¹
		-----g-----				
TCM	0.003	0.008	0.004	0.012	10.40	0.95
TUC100	0.011*	0.041*	0.017*	0.058*	21.14*	1.47*
TSC10	0.010*	0.043*	0.015*	0.058*	22.96*	1.72*

TSC30	0.015*	0.061*	0.024*	0.085*	23.61*	1.90*
TSC50	0.016*	0.061*	0.024*	0.085*	28.45*	2.21*
TSC70	0.015*	0.060*	0.022*	0.082*	33.20*	2.23*
TSC90	0.010*	0.030*	0.014*	0.044*	34.40*	2.32*
TSC100	0.009*	0.023*	0.011*	0.034*	32.65*	2.26*
Mean	0.011	0.041	0.016	0.057	25.85	1.89
CV(%)	13.74	13.02	14.33	11.30	14.66	12.2

165 *Means followed by * in the column are statistically different from each other by the test of Dunnett at*
 166 *5% ($p < 0.05$) level.*
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168 At evaluating the stem diameter, plant height, canopy diameter, leaf area and a
 169 number of leaves as a function of the different combinations of tannery sludge and urban
 170 compost, a quadratic adjustment can be found in all characteristics (Figure 1). In all the
 171 evaluated characteristics, it is clear that the conventional substrate presented values below
 172 the different combinations between tannery sludge and urban compost, as well as by using
 173 100% of sludge and 100% of urban compost.

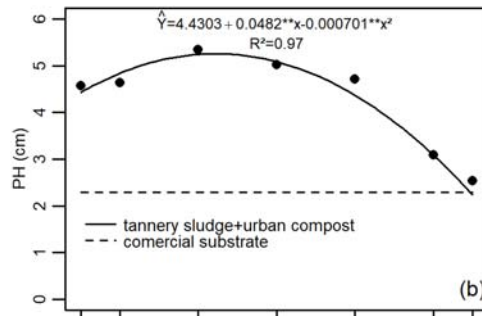
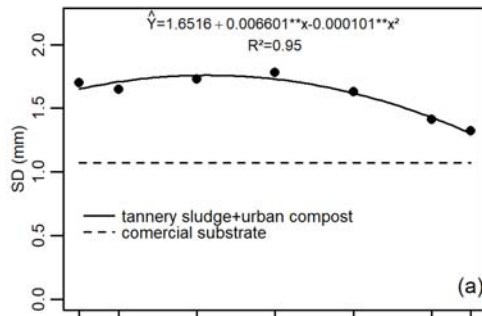
174 The best adjustments are observed in the plant height (Figure 1b) and leaf area
 175 (Figure 1d), with values of coefficient of determination of 0.97 and 0.96 respectively. By
 176 observing its estimation equation, it can be seen that the proportion that maximized the plant
 177 height gain was 36.0% tannery sludge and 64.0% urban compost, showing a maximum
 178 height gain of 5.3 cm. However, when the leaf area was estimated, it was observed a value
 179 close to that obtained for plant height, in which the proportion that maximized the gain in
 180 17.9 cm² of leaf area was through the use of the mixture of 39% tannery sludge and 61%
 181 urban compost.

182 Hence, it was observed that the use of 40% or more of tannery sludge in the
 183 substrate provided a reduction in the leaf area, in which this pattern of response can be
 184 attributed to the possible toxicities caused by chromium and sodium in this residue (Table 2).
 185 As observed in an experiment conducted by Berilli et al. [25], the addition of tannery sludge
 186 into the substrate raises the levels of chromium in plant tissues. Moreover, the accumulation
 187 of this element in the leaves may impair the normal growth of the plants and reduce the
 188 number of parenchyma cells that make up the leaf mesophyll [26].

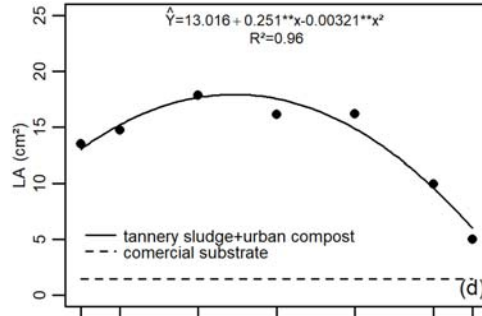
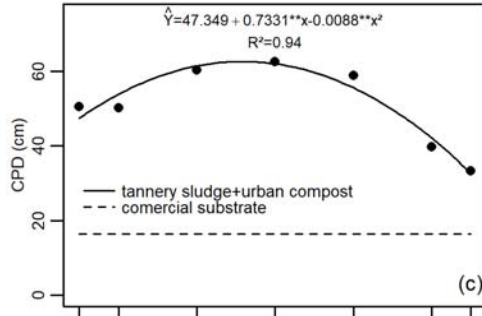
189 For the stem and canopy diameters (Figures 1 a, c), the proportions of tannery
 190 sludge that maximized the gain for these characteristics were 32.7% and 41.6%
 191 respectively. However, when leaf emission (Figures 1 e) was evaluated, this proportion
 192 showed a slight increase, reaching a maximum emission of 5.3 at the proportion of 48.2%
 193 tannery sludge + 51.8% urban compost residue.

194 Therefore, although the proportion of 48.2% of tannery sludge had presented
 195 higher leaf emission, these leaves were smaller than those obtained at tanning sludge doses
 196 of 39% as a greater gain in the leaf area was observed in this proportion. The authors Sales
 197 et al. [27] found a linear increase in the number of leaves with the application of tannery
 198 sludge via leaves in conilon coffee plants, nevertheless, they observed a reduction in the leaf
 199 area from the dose that maximized the gain (15.77 mL L⁻¹) which was caused by the
 200 reduced leaf size.
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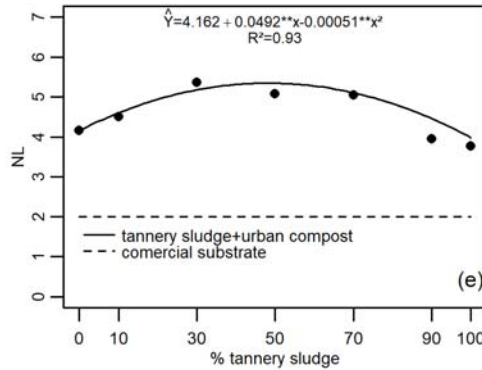
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210 **Figure 1. Regression for characteristics of stem diameter (a), plant height (b), canopy**
 211 **diameter (c), leaf area (d) and number of leaves (e) as a function of the different**
 212 **proportions of tannery sludge and urban compost.**

213 *Significant at * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01*

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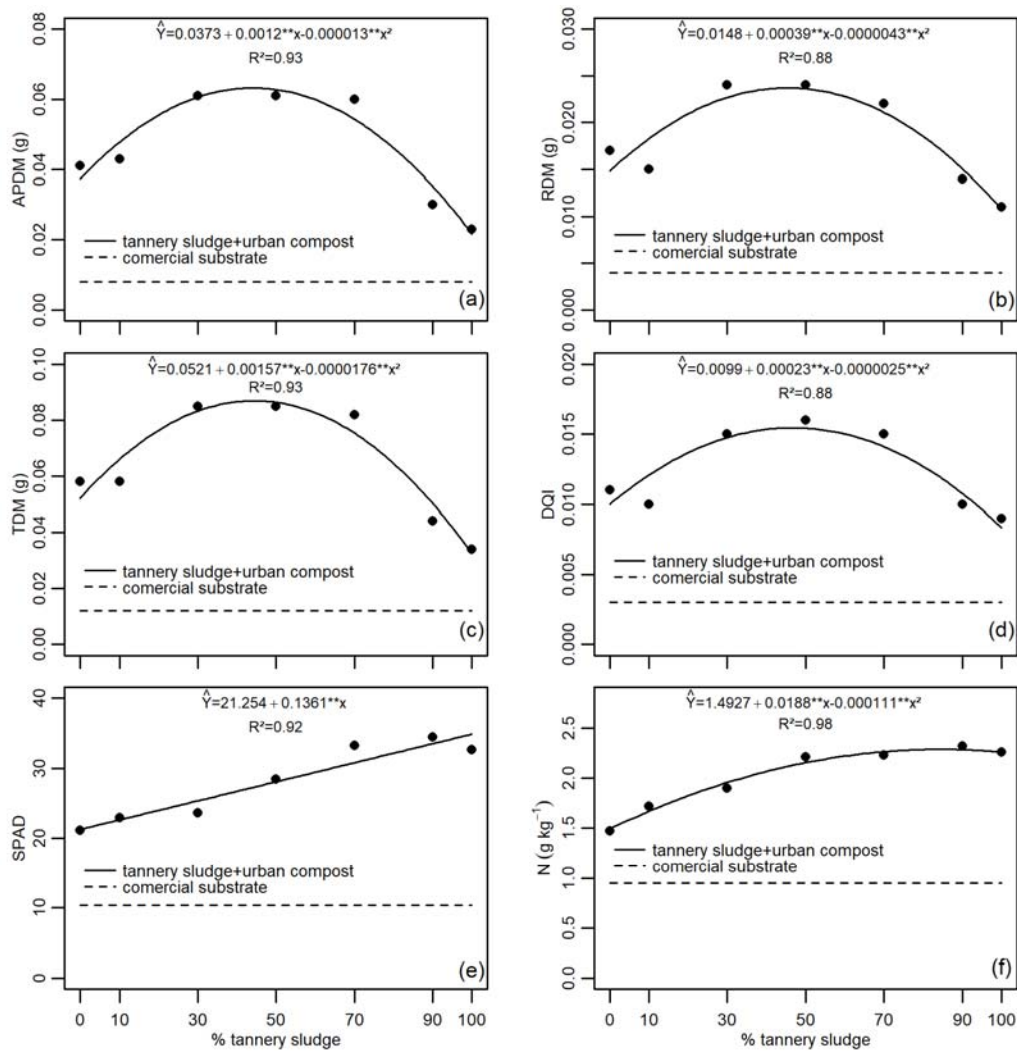
215 In relation to dry matter of the aerial part and the root system (Figure 2 a, b), it was
 216 observed that the proportions that maximized the gain were 46.2 and 45.3% respectively,
 217 while for the total dry matter of the plant (Figure 2c), the proportion of 44.6% showing 0.087
 218 grams maximized the gain. The same response pattern was observed for the DQI in the
 219 which the use of 46.0% tannery sludge + 54.0% urban compost was the proportion that
 220 maximized the gain for this characteristic.

221 As observed by Berilli et al. [10], the use of mixtures of residues with tannery
 222 sludge is very important as it helps to stabilize the organic matter since some plants do not
 223 withstand the high loads of dissociated elements or the salinization caused by this residue.

224 According to the authors, the tannery sludge was stabilized with the use of 30% humus
 225 mixed with 30% tannery sludge and 40% soil, showing better quality of coffee plants, with no
 226 deleterious effects of chromium and sodium.
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Figure 2. Regression for characteristics of dry matter of the aerial part (a), root dry matter (b), total dry matter (c), Dickson quality index (d), SPAD index (e) and N content (f) as a function of different proportions of urban compost and tannery sludge.

*Significant at * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01*

The SPAD index showed a linear gain (Figure 2 e) as the proportion of tannery sludge increased. However, when evaluating N accumulation in the leaves (Figure 2 f), it was found increases up to the proportion of 85% tannery sludge + 15% urban compost. In general, the use of these residues promoted considerable gains in the growth of sweet pepper seedlings when compared to the use of conventional Maxfertil treatment. Also, the growth characteristics evaluated in the study showed a maximum gain within the range from 32.7 to 48.2% tannery sludge mixed with urban waste compost in the preparation of the substrate.

246 **4. CONCLUSION**

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The data allowed to conclude that the urban compost residue is an adequate amendment to be used combined with tannery sludge in the substrate for the production of sweet pepper seedlings.

The use of tannery sludge and urban compost residues combined with the substrate did not affect the emergence of sweet pepper seeds and improved the development of the plants when compared to the conventional substrate.

The range for the use of tannery sludge in the preparation of substrates for pepper seedlings is between 32.7 and 48.2% in mixture with urban waste compound, for the preparation of the substrate for pepper plants.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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