Original Research Article

Spore density and arbuscular mycorrhizal colonization in sunflower

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to evaluate the number of spores and mycorrhizal root colonization in Cerrado soil (Red-Yellow Latosol) cultivated with different genotypes of sunflower. Sampling of rhizospheric soil occurred in three periods: sowing, flowering and sunflower harvest. The experimental design was a randomized complete block design with four replications. To proceed the evaluations different sunflower hybrids were selected: M 734, Agrobel 960 and Helio 358, in 2009, and M 734, Embrapa 122 and HLA 860 H.O. in 2010. The measured parameters were number of total spores in 50 g of soil in three periods: sowing, flowering and harvesting and the arbuscular mycorrhizal colonization was evaluated only in the final of the experiment. The mean number of spores was 4,94 g $soil^{-1}$ and 4,64 g $soil^{-1}$ in 2009 and 2010, respectively. The maximum spore production occurred during the flowering period and mycorrhizal colonization was not influenced by the genotype. The mycorrhizal colonization rate ranged from 21 to 28% in 2009 and from 28 to 48% in 2010. The number of spores varies from 153 to 342 in 2009 and 147 to 320 in 2010, and the maximum production occurs, in average, in the flowering period. Lower soil phosphorus levels favors arbuscular mycorrhizal colonization.

Keywords: Helianthus annuus L.; soil; arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi, root colonization.

1. INTRODUCTION

Soil quality and the viability of improvements through chemical, physical and biological management are essential factors for success in agricultural production. In this context, the study and the use of soil microbial population has shown the way to link sustainability to efficiency.

The symbiotic association between plant and fungi is called mycorrhiza. Root colonization by arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi (AMF) generates several improvements; the plant provides photosynthates to the fungus, and this, through the branching and extension of the mycelium, increases the area of nutrient absorption for the plant [1]. Thus, AMFs can be used as an alternative to reduce the use of agricultural inputs, mainly fertilizers of chemical synthesis.

The influence of arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi acts not only on soil particles aggregation but also on plant growth, providing essential nutrients [2] and improving their ability to withstand adverse conditions.

Studying, AMF inoculation in sunflower, it was observed an increase in chapter diameter, thousand achenes weight and achenes yield, parameters that were related to the better development of the plants through the association with AMFs, due the higher absorption of nutrients as P, K and Fe [3].

The sunflower cultivation (*Helianthus annuus* L.) has aroused interest, especially in Brazilian Midwest, due to the broad adaptability to edaphoclimatic conditions, suitability for crop rotation and uses in the production of edible oil, biodiesel, ornamentation, animal food, among others [4,5].

Considering that in the soils of the Cerrado Biome, for the optimization of the agricultural production, is necessary the use of a high amount of inputs, and that the agronomic efficiency is tied to the good indexes of soil quality, the present work aimed to evaluate the number of spores in different times and mycorrhizal colonization in Cerrado Biome soil, under cultivation of three sunflower genotypes.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The experiment was carried out at Santa Luzia Farm, in Campo Verde (MT-Brazil), latitude 15°45'12"S and longitude 55°22'44"W. The soil of the experimental area is classified as Red-Yellow Latosol with clayed texture, acid pH, average bases saturation of 50%, absence of aluminum and high content of organic matter (Table 1). In the farm the system of minimum cultivation is adopted, for more than 10 years, being the most used crops soybean and corn. The specie that preceded the sunflower in both years was soybean.

Table 1. Chemical and physical properties of soil under sunflower cultivation in the 2009 and 2010 harvests at Farm Santa Luzia, Campo Verde – MT, Brazil

Year	pH $CaCl_2$	P	K	Ca	Mg	Al	H	OM	CTC
		mg dm^{-3}			$cmol_c dm^{-3}$			gdm^{-3}	$cmol_c dm^{-3}$
2009	5,1	21,8	76	3,2	0,9	0	4,4	37,8	8,7
2010	4,9	8,0	80	3,3	0,7	0	5,5	39,9	9,7

	Bases saturation (V%)	Sand	Silt	Clay	Saturation (%)			
		g kg^{-1}			Ca	Mg	K	H
2009	49,3	196	133	671	36,7	10,5	2,3	50,7
2010	43,3	172	200	628	33,9	6,8	2,1	56,7

P: phosphorous; K: potassium; Ca: calcium; Mg: magnesium; Al: aluminium; OM: organic matter; CTC: cation exchange capacity; H: hydrogen.

The experimental design applied in the field was randomized blocks, with four replications. The plots were formed by four rows of 6.0 meters, spaced in 0.8 meters, between rows, and 0.3 meters, between plants, considering as useful area the two central rows. The fertilizer used was 30-80-80 kg ha^{-1} of NPK and 2.0 kg ha^{-1} of boron on the sowing hill and 30 kg ha^{-1} of N top-dressing, at 30 days after sowing. The rainfall distribution in the region, during the experiment, is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Rainfall (mm $month^{-1}$) in Campo Verde - MT, from February to July, in 2009 and 2010

Year	February	March (S)	April	May (F)	June	July (H)	Total
2009	262	132	16	10	22	0,2	442,4

2010	385	206	325	55	3	2	974,0

S: sowing; F: flowering; H: harvest.

To evaluate whether the response to fungi colonization was linked to genetic differences in sunflower different hybrids were selected: M 734, Agrobel 960 and Helio 358, in 2009, and M 734, Embrapa 122 and HLA 860 H.O. in 2010. Rhizospheric soil sampling was obtained at 0-20 cm depth, in three periods: sowing (first half of March), flowering (60 days after sowing) and harvesting (after maturation).

The evaluated parameters were total number of spores in soil, and arbuscular mycorrhizal colonization, whose root sampling occurred during crop harvest. The spore extraction was carried out by the wet sift methodology [6], in which the soil was processed in a sieving systems (0.42 and 0.053 mm mesh) and centrifuged with water at 2800 rpm for 4 min. Subsequently, the samples were resuspended in 50% sucrose solution, centrifuged and washed. The spores were counted in a stereomicroscope in a petri dishes with vessels.

For mycorrhizal colonization, the roots were washed, clarified with KOH (10%), acidified with diluted HCl [7] and stained with trypan blue [8]. Ten segments of 1-2 cm in length were selected for slide assembly. Then the quantification of colonization percentage under optical microscope (40x) was done considering the number of colonized root.

Analysis of variance were preceded and the significant means were compared by Tukey test with 5% of significance.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For the factor year, there was no difference in the number of spores of AMF (Table 3). This may occurred since the studied area adopted the minimum cropping system for more than 10 years. According to the authors [9], the association and mycorrhizal propagules dissemination is more affected in the initial phases of the occupation and use of the soil, with later stabilization.

Table 3. Quantification of spores of arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi in Cerrado Biome soil, under sunflower cultivation, in two years and three periods, in Campo Verde – MT, Brazil

Year	Genotype	Sowing	Flowering	Harvest	Average
		n° spores 50 g soil^{-1}			
2009	M 734	153 bB	296 aA	267 aA	247 a
	Agrobel 960	185 abB	342 aA	233 abB	
	Helio 358	262 abAB	311 aA	174 aB	
	Average	200 B	317 A	225 B	
2010	M 734	234 abAB	270 aA	147 bB	232 a
	Embrapa 122	191 abA	254 aA	216 abA	
	HLA 860 H.O.	271 aAB	320 aA	184 abB	
	Average	232 AB	281 A	182 B	
	CV (%)		11,60		

Means followed by different letters, uppercase in line and lowercase in column, differ from each other, by the Tukey test (P =0.05). CV: coefficient of variation.

For the periods, spore density in flowering was higher in the two years of study, with a general average of 317 in 2009 and 281 in 2010 (Table 3). The authors cited in the reference [10] confirm that maximum spore production can occur in the flowering period and in the final growth stage of the host. Possibly this increase in the amount of spores may be related to the higher production of resistance structures in a period of lower rainfall (situation of stress).

According to the authors cited in the reference [2], the spore density of AMFs is generally higher in agricultural systems, and variations may occur due to edaphoclimatic factors, growing time, agricultural practices as well as the implanted crop.

The authors cited in the reference [11] studying Cerrado biome verified that the arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi contribute to the growth of cultivated plants in annual cropping and pasture systems and the number of spores of the native fungi varies, being the crop and the cultivation system determinant for the enrichment of mycorrhizal fauna.

The interaction between the genetic factors and the period was significant, demonstrating that the genetic material influences the sporulation process. However, the variations were low indicating the stabilization of the mycorrhizal fungi sporulation.

In a carried study was verified that spore densities vary from 301 to 608 for maize crop, whereas in soybean cultivated soil the values were between 239 and 287 [12], similar to those obtained in the present work with sunflower. Mycorrhizal dynamics involving root colonization and sporulation occur in different ways in different crops due to the compatibility between AMF and the genetic characteristics of plants [13]. In addition, environmental, climatic and edaphic factors generate changes in the symbiotic process [14].

In sugarcane the occurrence of AMF increase when the crop was preceded by sunflower [15]. Likewise, sunflower favored the inoculum potential of AMF in the soil, and subsequent corn growth [16]. Annual crops, green manures and forage species have a high degree of mycorrhizal dependency, acting as a soil conditioning, multiplying the native mycorrhizal community [17,14]. In this sense, sunflower is an option to benefit the soil mycorrhizal population in crop rotation / succession systems.

For the mycorrhizal colonization rate, it was observed a variation from 21 to 28% in 2009 and 28 to 48% in 2010 (Table 4) (Figure 1), with no difference between genotypes. According to the authors cited in the reference [18], mycorrhizal dependence can be defined as the plant's responsiveness to mycorrhization through increased growth, which may be related to the fertility and amount of phosphorus, present in the soil.

Table 4. Average percentage of AMF colonization in soil under sunflower cultivation, in Campo Verde - MT, Brazil, in 2009 and 2010

Year	Genotype	Mycorrhizal colonization (%)	Average
2009	M 734	28 a	24 b
	Agrobel 960	21 a	
	Helio 358	22 a	
2010	M 734	38 a	38 a
	Embrapa 122	48 a	
	HLA 860 H.O.	28 a	
CV (%)		16,24	

Means followed by different letters in the column differ from each other, by the Tukey test (P =.05). CV:coefficient of variation.

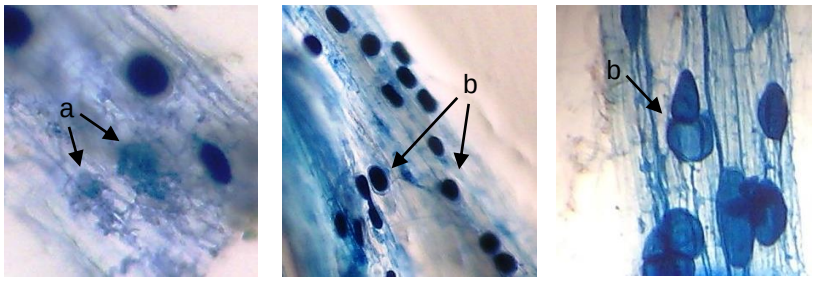

Figure 1. Sunflower root colonization by arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi (AMF). Fungal structures: arbuscules (a) and vesicles (b).

The authors cited in the reference [19] found colonization of AMF between 11 and 54% for arboreal species, for different crop rotation/succession systems, around 33 and 49% [20], as well as associated with crop of cassava with 31 to 71% in different localities [21] and in banana plant varying about 40 a 75% [22].

About the factor year, in 2010 there was a higher mycorrhizal colonization, which can be explained by the lower phosphorus content in the soil (Table 1). The effect of increase in phosphorus availability and decrease in symbiosis plant-mycorrhiza is negative [23] and emphasized in the literature [24] so, the reduction in the P content may lead to an increase in plant colonization. Evaluating different doses of P_2O_5 in the mycorrhiza colonization, it was found that doses greater than 30 mg P kg solo^{-1} decrease colonization in sunflower [25].

Studying sunflower hybrids, it was verified that higher doses of P decreased sporulation and AMF colonization [22]. In the same crop, another study reported colonization percentage around 66 to 71% and spore density about 155 to 294, however, the soil had lower phosphorous content, if compared with the present work [26]. Contrasting the results cited in the reference [26] and this research, a lower colonization was capable to produce similar or higher quantities of spores.

Comparing the results cited in the reference [27] and this research, it was observed that a lower colonization was able to produce similar or higher quantities of spores, so, the efficiency in mycorrhiza species perpetuation was superior.

In general, the relationship AMF-plant can be mediated by nutrient levels, present in the soil, since these fungi increase root exploration area, contributing to a greater absorption of nutrients for the plant. As the increase in soil phosphorus decreases the root mycorrhizal colonization and the plant dependence to mycorrhization [28], in soils with low levels of phosphorus, typical of the Cerrado biome, the AMF favors sunflower cultivation [25].

In addition, there is evidences that mycorrhizal-sunflower ratio enables greater plant resistance to heat, showing an interesting impact in Cerrado production systems, which is characterized by high temperatures [29].

Moreover, the potential of AMFs as biofertilizer for oleaginous crops is reforced, especially for soils with low fertility, since the practice allows to reach adequate levels of production, with less use of synthetic fertilizers making the productive system more sustainable [26].

Therefore, colonization and mycorrhizal sporulation vary according to the sunflower genotype and the evaluation period. On flowering period there were intense AMFs activity, moment that is required to the plant a high nutritional supply for grain production.

4. CONCLUSION

The number of spores varies from 153 to 342 in 2009 and 147 to 320 in 2010, and the maximum production occurs, in average, in the flowering period.

Mycorrhizal colonization in sunflower is not influenced by the genotype and the average percentage was 24 (2009) and 38 (2010).

Lower soil phosphorus levels favors arbuscular mycorrhizal colonization.

COMPETING INTERESTS

We declare that no competing interests exist.

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