

Alternative sources of phosphorus in beet production aiming at the organic system¹

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ABSTRACT

The demand for beet produced in the organic system has increased. This study aimed to evaluate the beet production with the use of different proportions of phosphorus sources. A randomized block design was used. The treatments were established in a 6 x 2 + 1 factorial arrangement, corresponding to 6 proportions of the phosphorus fertilizers Yoorin[®] thermophosphate (YT) and bone meal (BM) (100 % of P₂O₅ with YT; 80 % of P₂O₅ with YT + 20 % of P₂O₅ with BM; 60 % of P₂O₅ with YT + 40 % with BM; 40 % of P₂O₅ with YT + 60 % with BM; 20 % of P₂O₅ with YT + 80 % with BM; and 100 % of P₂O₅ with BM), 2 doses of P₂O₅ (180 - recommended - and 360 kg ha⁻¹) and 1 control without these phosphorus fertilizers. The plant height, number of leaves, root and shoot fresh and dry weight, transverse and longitudinal root diameter and total root yield were evaluated. The recommended fertilizer dose resulted in higher values, when compared to twice the recommendation. The proportion of 0 % of thermophosphate and 100 % of bone meal provided the highest mean values for the evaluated parameters. High phosphorus doses showed to be harmful to beet production.

KEYWORDS: *Beta vulgaris* L., thermophosphate, bone meal, organic fertilization.

Beet or beetroot (*Beta vulgaris* L.), a species of the Quenopodiaceae family, is one of the main vegetables produced in Brazil. It is rich in iron, sodium, potassium, vitamin A and vitamin B complex, and can be cultivated for sugar production, human consumption or used as animal feed (Tivelli & Trani 2008).

For beet, phosphate fertilizers favor the adequate development of tuberous roots, contributing to the achievement of a better yield and quality of the commercial product, such as a higher content of soluble solids and adequate sugar content (Mahmoud

RESUMO

Fontes alternativas de fósforo na produção de beterraba visando ao sistema orgânico

A demanda por beterraba produzida em sistema orgânico tem aumentado. Objetivou-se avaliar a produção de beterraba com a utilização de fontes de fósforo em diferentes proporções, utilizando-se delineamento de blocos ao acaso. Os tratamentos foram arranjados em esquema fatorial 6 x 2 + 1, sendo 6 proporções dos adubos fosfatados termofosfato Yoorin[®] (TY) e farinha de ossos (FO) (100 % de P₂O₅ com TY; 80 % de P₂O₅ com TY + 20 % com FO; 60 % de P₂O₅ com TY + 40 % com FO; 40 % de P₂O₅ com TY + 60 % com FO; 20 % de P₂O₅ com TY + 80 % com FO; e 100 % de P₂O₅ com FO), 2 doses de P₂O₅ (180 - recomendada - e 360 kg ha⁻¹) + 1 controle sem estes adubos fosfatados. A altura de plantas, número de folhas, massa da matéria fresca e seca de folhas e raiz, diâmetro transversal e longitudinal de raízes e produtividade total de raízes foram avaliados. A dose recomendada resultou em valores superiores, em comparação ao dobro da recomendação. A proporção de 0 % de termofosfato e 100 % de farinha de ossos proporcionou maiores valores médios para as características avaliadas. Altas doses de fósforo mostraram-se prejudiciais ao cultivo de beterraba.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Beta vulgaris* L., termofosfato, farinha de ossos, adubação orgânica.

et al. 2014, Bouras et al. 2021). Furthermore, phosphorus is an essential nutrient for the cellular metabolism of plants, as it is directly related to the transfer of energy during important plant growth processes, such as photosynthesis, respiration, carbohydrate metabolism and nitrogen fixation, among others (Ghaly et al. 2019).

In recent years, the demand for beet produced in the organic system has increased. Despite this market growth, little information is currently found in the literature on the influence of organic fertilization on the beet production (Magro et al.

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2015). This information is necessary to optimize the use of nutrients, mainly phosphate fertilizers, since phosphorus is a scarce and limited natural resource.

The use of natural phosphates has increased because they are products cheaper than inorganic ones and have agronomic efficiency, providing the nutrient along the cycle, promoting a high yield, and, depending on the source, can be used both in conventional and organic systems (Cardoso et al. 2019).

Despite not being often the nutrient most accumulated by plants, including beet (Cardoso et al. 2017), phosphorus is applied in large quantities, since, in general, most of the soils in Brazil have acid reaction, low fertility and high phosphorus retention capacity, leading to the need to apply high doses of this macronutrient, causing negative impacts on production costs (Cecílio Filho et al. 2015, Nowaki et al. 2017, Cardoso et al. 2019). In addition, because it is applied in large quantities at each cultivation season, it is common for soils with intensive vegetable production to have high levels of this nutrient, and yet producers continue to apply phosphorus in each new production cycle (Cecílio Filho et al. 2015).

The phosphate fertilizers most used in vegetable production are simple and triple superphosphates (Cardoso et al. 2019), or formulated in which they are used with sources of nitrogen and potassium. However, these sources are not allowed in the fertilization of organic vegetables. In this scenario, one of the fertilizers most frequently used in organic production systems as a source of phosphorus is thermophosphate, due to its low aggressiveness to the soil. Accordingly, the use of Yoorin® thermophosphate as a phosphorus source has increased, given its mineral origin and the authorization for its use in organic cultivation (Riveros et al. 2021).

There are also other sources of phosphorus used in organic agriculture, such as bone meal, which has low solubility in water and good solubility in weak acids, resulting in the slow release of P to the soil, decreasing its adsorption (Cavallaro Júnior 2006, Ferreira & Balbino 2014). Bone meal is an alternative to supply phosphorus needs without using natural sources which are finite. In addition, the use of this material allows the reuse of a product that would otherwise be discarded in the environment and would become waste (Jupp et al. 2021).

However, although these P sources have been used in organic cultivation systems, there is scarce information available in the scientific literature about their use in vegetable production, and no information at all regarding beet. In addition, because they show different rates of P release into plants, using a mixture of phosphorus sources could be more advantageous than relying on a single source.

From this perspective, this study aimed to evaluate the production of beet using sources and proportions of phosphate fertilizers.

The research was conducted at the São Manuel experimental farm, owned by the Universidade Estadual Paulista, in Botucatu, São Paulo state, Brazil (22°46'28"S, 48°34'37"W and altitude of 750 m). According to the Köppen classification, the local climate is *Cfa*, corresponding to a warm, temperate (mesothermal) and humid climate. The average monthly rainfall during the experiment (06/21/2021 to 09/19/2021) was 113.4 mm, whereas the average maximum and minimum temperatures were 25.8 and 13.3 °C, respectively (Caiagro 2021).

The soil of the experimental area is classified as a Typical Dystrophic Red Ferralsol with sandy texture (Embrapa 2013) or Ferralsol (FAO 2022). The main soil chemical characteristics (0-20 cm) were determined by collecting a sample in the area before the implementation of the experiment, with the following results: $\text{pH}(\text{CaCl}_2) = 6.0$; organic matter = 11.0 g dm⁻³; $\text{P}_{\text{resin}} = 123.0$ g dm⁻³; base saturation (V) = 73.0 %; $\text{Al}^{3+} = 0.0$ mmol_c dm⁻³; $\text{H} + \text{Al} = 13.0$ mmol_c dm⁻³; $\text{K} = 2.4$ mmol_c dm⁻³; $\text{Ca} = 29.0$ mmol_c dm⁻³; $\text{Mg} = 5.0$ mmol_c dm⁻³; $\text{SB} = 37.0$ mmol_c dm⁻³; $\text{CEC} = 50.0$ mmol_c dm⁻³. The phosphorus content (123 g dm⁻³) is considered high, according to Trani et al. (1997).

The experimental design was randomized blocks, with five replications and plots measuring 1 m². Thirteen treatments were evaluated, resulting from a 6 x 2 + 1 factorial arrangement, corresponding to six proportions of two phosphate fertilizers allowed in the organic system [Yoorin® thermophosphate and bone meal x two doses of phosphorus - the recommended dose of 180 kg ha⁻¹ (Trani et al. 1997) and twice this value]. The studied proportions were: 100 % of P₂O₅ with Yoorin® thermophosphate; 80 % of P₂O₅ with Yoorin® thermophosphate + 20 % of P₂O₅ with bone meal; 60 % of P₂O₅ with Yoorin® thermophosphate + 40 % with bone meal; 40 % of P₂O₅ with Yoorin® thermophosphate + 60 % with bone

37.5 g plant⁻¹. On the other hand, for the lowest dose (180 kg ha⁻¹ of P₂O₅), the highest dry mass was obtained with the use of 100 % of phosphorus with bone meal, while the lowest root dry mass was obtained with 100 % of phosphorus and thermophosphate (Figure 1), representing a difference of 28 %.

For root fresh mass (Figure 2), shoot dry mass (Figure 3) and yield (Figure 3), the data fit the

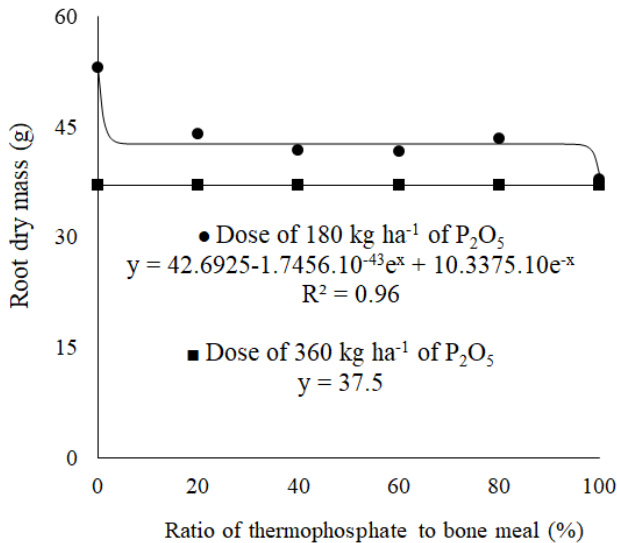


Figure 1. Root dry mass of sugar beet, as a function of phosphorous doses and proportions of Yoorin® thermophosphate, in relation to bone meal.

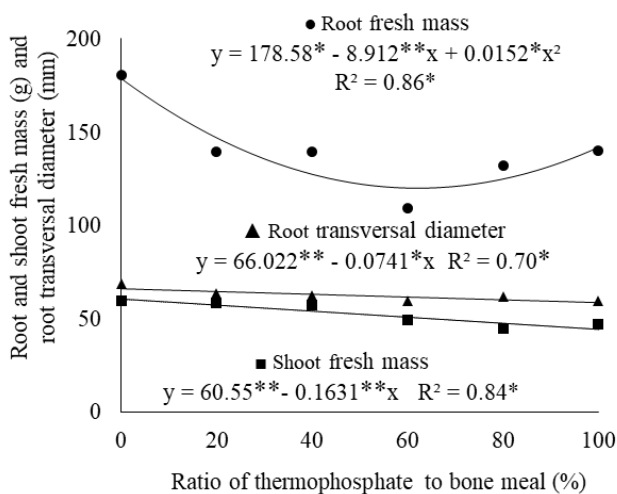


Figure 2. Root and shoot fresh mass and transversal diameter of beet, as a function of Yoorin® thermophosphate proportions, in relation to bone meal. * and **: significant at $p \leq 0.05$ and $p \leq 0.01$, respectively, by the F test.

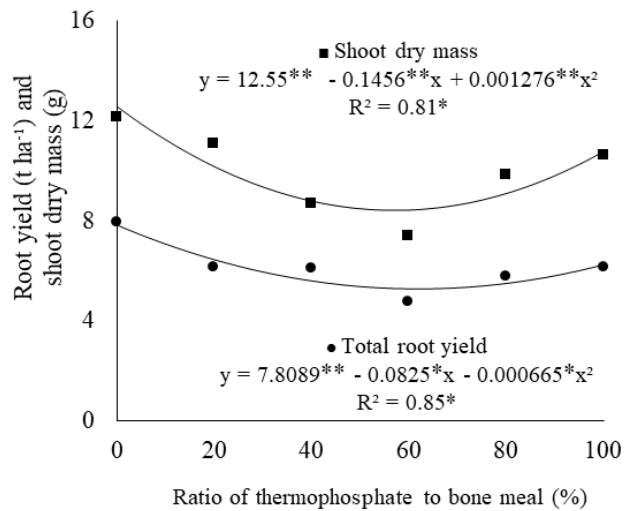


Figure 3. Shoot dry mass and root yield of beet, as a function of Yoorin® thermophosphate proportions, in relation to bone meal. * and **: significant at $p \leq 0.05$ and $p \leq 0.01$, respectively, by the F test.

quadratic model, with higher values being achieved when using 100 % of phosphorus applied with bone meal. For root diameter (Figure 2), the decrease in the values was linear, with higher values obtained when using 100 % of phosphorus applied with bone meal.

There was no difference between the doses for shoot fresh mass. However, a 26 % reduction was observed at the highest thermophosphate proportion (Figure 2), changing from 60.6 to 44.3 g, when using 100 % of bone meal and 100 % of thermophosphate, respectively. Despite the differences in fresh matter values, the observed values (average of 52.4 g plant⁻¹, ranging from 44.3 to 60.6 g) were also similar to those reported by Corrêa et al. (2014), Candian et al. (2016), Silva et al. (2018) and Aguilar et al. (2021), showing that, even in the treatment where the lowest values were observed (100 % of phosphate fertilization with thermophosphate), these are within the normal range reported by these authors.

When comparing the doses (Table 2), in addition to the vegetative parameters of the shoot part, there was also no difference for root length and diameter. On the other hand, for root fresh and dry mass, shoot dry mass and yield, higher values were obtained at the lowest dose of phosphorus (180 kg ha⁻¹ of P₂O₅).

The fact that when there was a significant difference between the phosphorus doses the superiority was for the lowest dose shows that there is really no need for greater amounts of this

nutrient. It was expected that, because these are organic sources with a slow nutrient release, when compared to inorganic fertilizers (e.g., single and triple superphosphate), higher doses could possibly yield better results. But, as the initial phosphorus content (123 g dm^{-3}) was high, doses higher than the recommended ones would not lead to better results.

According to Marschner (1995) and Cecílio Filho et al. (2015), phosphorus in excess can cause nutritional unbalance in the plant and micronutrient deficiency, especially for zinc, resulting in a lower yield, mainly in soil rich in P, as observed for beet in this research and for cauliflower (Cecílio Filho et al. 2015), tomato (Cecílio Filho et al. 2020) and arugula (Nascimento et al. 2020). Besides a possible yield reduction, the excess of P fertilization can promote environmental pollution and increased production costs (Zhang et al. 2019, Nascimento et al. 2020). According to Nascimento et al. (2020), besides zinc, the excess of phosphorus fertilization can affect the absorption of other nutrients such as copper, iron and manganese, resulting in a lower yield. So, the eventual phosphorus toxicity is not common (Malhotra et al. 2018), being more common the nutritional unbalance in the plant.

Phosphorus is an important nutrient for agriculture, due to its role as an essential macronutrient for plants (Malavolta 2006). The presence of phosphorus in the plant becomes indispensable, with its absence resulting in plant growth reductions, in addition to the risk of chlorosis on leaves and interveinal necrosis, mainly observed in older leaves. In adequate proportions, phosphorus favors root development and increases the uptake of water and other nutrients available in the soil, thus favoring the yield of harvested products (Fageria et al. 2017).

In a research with industrial-type tomatoes, Cecílio Filho et al. (2020) reported an increase in fruit yield when using up to 400 kg ha^{-1} of P_2O_5 in a soil rich in phosphorus (145 mg dm^{-3}). However, there were great production losses at higher levels, with the dose of $1,000 \text{ kg ha}^{-1}$ of P_2O_5 resulting in a lower yield than in the treatment without phosphorus application, what shows that the excess of phosphorus can be harmful. In another study, Coutinho et al. (2014) reported an increase in the production of commercial tomato in a soil with average phosphorus contents (23 mg dm^{-3}), with the application of up to 290 kg ha^{-1} of P_2O_5 , decreasing at higher doses. Zhang et al. (2007) and Nowaki et al. (2017) did

not observe a significant effect of phosphorus doses on the commercial yield of mustard and tomato, respectively, in soils with high levels of phosphorus.

According to Cecílio Filho et al. (2015), it is common to find soils with high levels of phosphorus in areas where vegetables are grown, mostly with a short cycle and with high phosphorus doses applied in each season. Thus, when applied in doses greater than the recommended one or consecutively without analyzing its levels, the applications become inefficient and may even impair the production, as reported by Nascimento et al. (2020), who observed a reduction in arugula yield at higher phosphorus doses ($0\text{-}300 \text{ kg ha}^{-1}$ of P_2O_5), in a soil rich in this nutrient (115 mg dm^{-3}). In the area where their research was carried out, despite having remained fallow for about three months, the soil had been used to produce vegetables for several years, always with phosphorus fertilization before the planting of each crop.

From the results obtained, it is observed that, in a soil with high phosphorus contents, it may not be necessary to apply phosphate fertilizers for each new crop, what can further increase the nutrient's level in the soil and eventually become a problem, with reduced yield and increased production costs.

For soils with high initial phosphorus contents, phosphate fertilization can be discarded and, if applied at a high dose, this nutrient can even negatively affect the production.

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