The effect of nitrification inhibitor 3,4-dimethylpyrazole phosphate (DMPP) on nitrifying organism populations under in vitro conditions

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Received 6 April 2011; revised 23 May 2011; accepted 1 June 2011.

ABSTRACT

The application of nitrification inhibitors is a technique to reduce the nitrate concentration on leachates that delay ammonium oxidation by reducing the activity of ammonium oxidizing bacteria in soils. Two experiments were carried out in order to estimate the influence of DMPP on the population of ammonium oxidation bacteria under in vitro conditions. In both experiments, three treatments were established. The treatments were the following: a) ammonium oxidation bacteria established in a growing media without fertilizers, b) ammonium oxidation bacteria established in a growing media with Urea, and c) ammonium oxidation bacteria established in a growing media with DMPP. Results obtained showed that the population of the ammonia oxidizing bacteria diminished in the DMPP treatment as compared with the urea and control treatments. In conclusion, DMPP influences on ammonium oxidation bacteria activity being a useful tool in fertilizers strategies to reduce the contamination by nitrates in groundwater.

Keywords: Ammonium Oxidizing Bacteria; Fertilizers; Nitrogen; Nitrification Inhibitors; Winogradsky

1. INTRODUCTION

Nitrogen (N) plays an important role on the growth and yield, since it is required in highest amounts by plants and, hence; constitutes the basis of fertilization strategies for agronomic and horticultural crops [1]. In actual agricultural practices, nitrogen is usually used in greater quantities than those needed in order to guarantee a high yield [2]. As a consequence, nitrogen over fertilization may cause environmental degradation due to nitrogen losses [3]. Nitrogen losses are caused by Nitrate (NO₃⁻) and ammonium (NH₄⁺) leaching, erosion, volatilization, denitrification and fixation in soil organic matter [4]. NO₃⁻ leaching from agricultural soils is one of the important global environmental concerns [5]. These losses contribute to NO₃⁻-N contamination of groundwater [6]. A high NO₃⁻-N content in groundwater and drinking water does harm people and livestock [5].

A technique to diminish NO₃⁻-N leaching into groundwater and to conserve NH₄⁺ fertilizers applied to soils is the retardation of biological oxidation of NH₄⁺-N to NO₃⁻-N [5,6]. Actually, there are compounds that effectively inhibit nitrification when applied to soils in conjunction with NH₄⁺ fertilizers or NH₄⁺-producing compounds, such as urea or ammonium sulphate [6,7]. These compounds are called nitrification inhibitors (NI). NI delay ammonium oxidation by reducing the activity of Nitrosomonas bacteria (ammonium oxidizing bacteria) in the soil. Ammonium oxidation bacteria transform NH₄⁺ into NO₂⁻, which in turn is oxidized to NO₃⁻ by Nitrobacter bacteria [8]. Recently, DMPP have been introduced in Colombia to be used in nitrogen nutrition of different crops [9]. Likewise, contamination of surface water and/or groundwater by nitrates leaching has obtained importance in managing of crops, mainly; in rose crops in Colombia [10]. In particular, little is known about the effect of fertilizers, especially, NI on microorganisms present in tropical soils. For that reason, the aim of this study was to estimate the influence of DMPP on the population of ammonium oxidation bacteria collected from tropical soil under in vitro conditions.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS
2.1. Isolation Bacteria

In our study, two experiments were carried out in May 2010. Ammonium oxidation bacteria were obtained by the preparation of Winogradsky’s columns [11]. Soil for columns was collected on 10 December 2009 from upper 10 cm of a rose crop established in Mosquera, Colombia (4°42′28″ N and 74°13′58″ W). For bacteria extraction, 10 ml from middle of Winogradsky’s column was diluted in 250-ml Erlenmeyer flask containing 90 ml of a NH₄ salt solution for ammonium oxidation bacteria which had the following composition: NaHPO₄ (13.5 g), KH₂PO₄ (0.7 g), MgSO₄·7H₂O (0.1 g), NaHCO₃ (0.5 g), FeCl₃·6H₂O (0.014 g), CaCl₂·H₂O (0.18 g) and (NH₄)₂SO₄ (0.5 g) per liter of water [12]. Three growing media were established in a shaker incubator (Labline 3527, Lab-Line instrument, Inc, USA) during 15 days at 28°C and 150 rpm, to achieve fully aerobic conditions. After the period of incubation, 10 ml of solution were taken from the growth media to determine the existence of ammonium oxidation bacteria by the presence of NO₂⁻ and NO₃⁻ using the Griess’s reagent, respectively [5]. Then, NH₃ oxidizers were obtained by the technique described by Skinner and Walker [13]. Consequently, isolated colonies of ammonium oxidation bacteria from agar were taken by a handle. Next, those colonies were diluted in a salt solution of NaCl at 20% w/v. To estimate the initial concentration of inoculum, twofold dilutions series from 10⁸ to 10⁰ were done realized, and after that, inoculum was set in agar during 48 h. Subsequently, inoculum concentration was calculated by counting colonies as described by Madigan et al. [14]. The initial concentrations were 6.2 × 10⁵ cfu/ml and 3.7 × 10⁵ cfu/ml for each experiment, respectively.

2.2. Treatments

After that, 10 ml of inoculum solution at 20% of NaCl were diluted in 250-ml Erlenmeyer flask containing 90 ml of a salt solution for ammonium oxidation bacteria (concentration is mentioned above) for each experiment, respectively. In both experiments, three treatments were established. The treatments were the following: i) a 250-ml Erlenmeyer flask containing 90 ml of an ammonium salt solution and 10 ml of NaCl at 20% with Urea plus DMPP at 1%. 37 mg of fertilizer were added by growing media. This amount is equivalent to 170 ppm that it is the commercial dose used at fertirrigation programs in rose crops. ii) a 250-ml Erlenmeyer flask containing 90 ml of a salt solution and 10 ml of NaCl at 20% with Urea (37 mg of fertilizer), and iii) a 250-ml Erlenmeyer flask containing 90 ml of a salt solution and 10 ml of NaCl at 20% without fertilizer (control). Each treatment was placed in a shaker incubator (Labline 3527, Lab-Line instrument, Inc, USA) during 14 days at 28°C and 150 rpm. Additionally, fertilizer was added to treatments with urea or Urea + DMPP at a dose mentioned above every 2 days during the incubation. To determine the concentration of inoculum at each sample point, 2 ml of each Erlenmeyer were taken to perform twofold dilution series up to 10⁷. Afterwards, inoculum was placed in plates with agar. Consequently, inoculum concentration was estimated by counting the colonies as described by Madigan et al. [14]. Samples were done every 2 days during 14 days. The same methodology was used in both experiments.

2.3. Statistical Analysis

Analyses of variance were carried out on the data to evaluate the effect of different treatments. Both experiments were analyzed together as a series of experiments. Values were transformed using the Log₁₀ transformation before analysis. Data were evaluated using Statistix Version 8.0 (Analytical Software, Tallahassee, FL, USA). Four replicates for each treatment were used.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An increasing ammonium oxidation bacteria population was observed during first 4 days after the beginning of treatments. Significant differences were found on ammonium oxidation bacteria population in both experiments at 6 days after the treatments started. Ammonium oxidation bacteria cultivated in a growing media with DMPP had a less population than bacteria established in urea or control treatments. After this period, ammonium oxidation bacteria population started diminishing in all treatments. At 14 days after the beginning of experiments, bacteria established in a media with urea had a higher population than DMPP and control treatments in both experiment 1and experiment 2 (Figures 1(a) and (b)).

Differences were found on ammonium oxidation bacteria population in the double interaction fertilizer treatments and the different experiments (Figure 2). Treatments with DMPP showed a lower amount of ammonium oxidation bacteria population than control and urea treatments at 6 days after beginning both experiments. DMPP inhibited the mean ammonium oxidation bacteria population by 5% and 12% compared to urea treatments in experiments 1 and 2, respectively. A similar trend was observed at 14 days after the treatments started, but the DMPP had a greater percentage of inhibition than at 6 days after the beginning of treatments. DMPP reduced the mean ammonium oxidation bacteria populations by 31% and 33% regarding urea in experiments 1 and 2, respectively. Also, DMPP diminished
bacteria populations were significantly reduced in soils fertilized with DMPP compared to soils fertilized with urea in rice crops. Likewise, our results showed that DMPP depressed the activities of ammonium oxidation bacteria as was also stated by Zerulla et al. [15] and Irigoyen et al. [16]. Li et al. [5] and Fernandez-Escobar et al. [17] also concluded that the NIs inhibited ammonium oxidation bacteria activity, causing NO$_3^-$-N reduction in leachates. Finally, the lack of growth in bacteria cultivated with DMPP during the experiment is mainly due to the effect bacteriostatic (not bactericide) of this molecule, since DMPP diminishes the growth of ammonium oxidizing bacteria, causing a reduction in the concentration of nitrate in the growing media [15].

In conclusion, the activity of the ammonium oxidation bacteria came from a tropical soil was inhibited by DMPP treatment as compared to the urea and control treatments. DMPP fertilizers could be considered an useful tool in fertilization programs of rose plants in order to reduce the contamination in surfacewater and/or groundwater by nitrates leaching, since studies conducted by Henao and Florez [14] estimated that that NO$_3^-$-N concentrations in leachates came from rose plants cultivated were above the drinking water quality standards (maximum contamination limit of 10 ppm NO$_3^-$-N) [18].

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was supported by the research division of the National University of Colombia Project code No 9403. Also, authors want to thank to Dr. Marcela Franco for her cooperation during this research.

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