

Azospirillum inoculation in pregerminating wheat seeds

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Abstract: *Azospirillum* cells were inoculated in pregerminating wheat during seed imbibition. Surface-sterilized seeds of *Triticum aestivum* cv. Buck Pucará were sequentially soaked for 3 h in water and 3 h in the inoculum of 3×10^8 *Azospirillum brasilense* Sp 245 cells \cdot mL⁻¹, to allow bacteria to enter during imbibition. Germination and seedling growth were accomplished in sterile distilled water at 20°C, in the dark. To compare with more traditional methods based on plant-*Azospirillum* colonization after germination, seedlings from noninoculated seeds were inoculated in parallel by immersing roots in the same inoculum, for the same period of time. Autoclaved inocula were used as controls in all cases. We observed about 5×10^8 *Azospirillum* cells \cdot g⁻¹ fresh weight in 11-day-old wheat seedlings inoculated before or after seed germination. However, roots from seed-inoculated seedlings had higher both bacterial concentration and length. On the other hand, seeds inoculated during imbibition and dried to 14% water content retained 3.7×10^6 viable cells \cdot g⁻¹ dry weight up to 27 days. Moreover, seeds stored for 30 days were not only able to germinate but also to harbor over 10^6 cells \cdot g⁻¹ fresh weight in roots after 7 days growth. Here we present the possibility of obtaining in a simple and inexpensive way, seeds containing high numbers of viable *Azospirillum* cells, which could avoid the use of external carriers or adhesives.

Key words: *Azospirillum*, wheat, inoculation.

Résumé : Du blé en prégermination, au stade d'imbibition, a été inoculé avec des cellules d'*Azospirillum*. Des grains de *Triticum aestivum* cv. Buck Pucará, stérilisés en surface, ont été trempés dans de l'eau durant 3 h puis soumis, également durant 3 h, à un inoculum de 3×10^8 cellules \cdot mL⁻¹ d'*Azospirillum brasilense* Sp. 245 pour permettre l'entrée des bactéries au cours de l'imbibition. La germination et la croissance des plantules se sont opérées dans de l'eau distillée à 20°C, sans lumière. Pour comparer les méthodes plus traditionnelles de colonisation des plantules par l'*Azospirillum* après la germination, des plantules issues de grains non-inoculés ont été inoculées en parallèle par immersion des racines dans une même concentration d'inoculum et pour une même période de temps. Des inoculum autoclavés ont été utilisés comme témoins dans tous les cas. Les examens ont révélé que les plantules de 11 jours, qu'elles aient été inoculées avant ou après la germination, contenaient environ 5×10^8 cellules d'*Azospirillum* \cdot g⁻¹ de poids frais. Toutefois, les racines des plantules inoculées lors de l'imbibition des grains étaient plus longues et présentaient une concentration de bactéries plus élevée. D'autre part, des grains inoculés au cours de l'imbibition, puis séchés jusqu'à une teneur en eau de 14%, ont retenu $3,7 \times 10^6$ cellules viables \cdot g⁻¹ de poids sec, jusqu'à 27 jours. De plus, de tels grains entreposés durant 30 jours ont non seulement pu germer, mais leurs racines contenaient plus de 10^6 cellules \cdot g⁻¹ de poids frais après 7 jours de croissance. La possibilité d'obtenir des grains contenant des nombres élevés de cellules viables d'*Azospirillum* de façon simple et non dispendieuse, sans devoir recourir à des adhésifs ou des enrobages externes, est ici présentée.

Mots clés : *Azospirillum*, blé, inoculation.

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Several microorganisms can colonize plant roots and establish useful plant-bacteria associations. *Azospirillum* is a plant-growth-promoting rhizobacterium able to produce hormone-like substances (Bottini et al. 1989; Fallik et al. 1989) and fix atmospheric nitrogen in association with grasses (Elmerich et al. 1992).

Higher biomass and grain yield (Reynders and Vlassak 1982; Warembourg et al. 1987) and increased mineral and water uptake (Kapulnik et al. 1985) have been reported in wheat inoculated with *Azospirillum*. However, "no" responses are frequent (Kapulnik et al. 1987; Michiels et al. 1989) and highly dependent on several factors such as bacterial survival and viability in the field (Okon 1985), motility variations among populations (Bashan and Levanony 1987), adsorption to soil particles, and competition with indigenous population at the rhizosphere (Bashan et al. 1987). Any of these factors can affect the successful establishment of *Azospirillum* in the rhizosphere, rhizoplane, and eventually, in the roots of target plants (Bashan et al. 1987; Okon 1985). All these factors, however, are related to the way inoculation is performed, including the application procedures, size of inoculum, formulation, and application timing.

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