

Efficacy of Trichoderma spp. against Common Fungal Pathogens

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Summary: Nowadays, organic food production demands more environmental friendly control of plant diseases. Biocontrol based on *Trichoderma* spp. usage is a promising due to *Trichoderma* is aggressive to broad range of phytopathogenic fungi. Given that, the aim of this study was to test *in vitro* antagonistic ability of ten native Serbian *Trichoderma* strains to ten common fungal pathogens. Study confirmed that *Trichoderma* spp. inhibits radial growth of *Ascochyta pinodella* (76.9%), *A. pinodes* (60.0%), *A. pisi* (68.5%), *Fusarium graminearum* (71.1%), *F. proliferatum* (63.9%), *F. verticillioides* (62.6%), *F. oxysporum* (63.9%), *Macrophomina phaseolina* (63.8%), and *Pyrenophora teres* (83.9%). These are first reports of *Trichoderma* spp. *in vitro* efficacy against *A. pisi*, *A. pinodes*, *A. pinodella* and *P. teres*. The lowest inhibitory effect was registered in dual cultures with *Sclerotinia sclerotiorum* - 52.2%.

Key words: Ascochyta spp., Fusarium spp., M. phaseolina, P. teres, S. sclerotiorum, Trichoderma spp.

Introduction

The most common control methods of plant diseases that have been used so far are fungicide application in combination with host resistance to major pathogens. Nowadays, organic food production is in progress and demands more environmental friendly methods for dealing with devastating cosmopolitan pathogens such as Ascochyta pinodella, A. pinodes, A. pisi, Fusarium graminearum, F. proliferatum, F. verticillioides, F. oxysporum, Macrophomina phaseolina, Pyrenophora teres, and Sclerotinia sclerotiorum.

Farmers around the world are familiar with cosmopolitan aggressive pathogens, above all with *Sclerotinia sclerotiorum* (Lib.) de Bary and *Fusarium* species. *S. sclerotiorum* is known as a threat to numerous crops, such as: sunflower, soybean, oilseed rape, edible dry bean, chickpea, peanut, field pea, lentils and various vegetables as well (Bolton et al., 2006). *S. sclerotiorum* causes white rot of plants root, stem and fruit or pod, ending with complete plant wilting and rotting if infection starts early. In Serbia, Sclerotinia wilt is the most common form of Sclerotinia disease. Its average frequency on sunflower in Serbia is about 15-20%, but

in some years the frequency can reach even around 50% (Marić et al., 1988).

Taxonomy of Fusarium species is complex, and up to 1000 species have been identified at times. Out of 101 most economically important plants, 81 have at least one plant associated with Fusarium disease (Moretti, 2009). Generally, Fusarium species can cause root, stem and ear rot which causes yield reductions estimated between 10% and 30% in Europe (Logrieco et al., 2002). Species of Liseola section, where F. verticillioides Sheldon and F. proliferatum (Matsushima Nirenberg) belong, are common in temperate regions mainly as pathogens of maize (Logrieco et al., 2002;), wheat (Furlong et al., 2005), barley (Bottalico, 1998), oat (Bottalico & Perrone, 2002), hops (Stanković et al., 2008), sorghum (da Silva et al., 2006), asparagus (Elmer et al., 1999), etc. Maize, wheat and barley constitute almost 80% of European grain production, and another important pathogen of those crops, F. graminearum, is registered all over the world (Varga et al., 2002; Tomczak et al., 2002; Doohan et al., 2003; Tančić et al., 2009). Beside these crops, F. graminearum has been reported as pathogen of soybean (Dulić, 1987), rise (Nyvall et al., 1999), sorghum (Leslie et al., 1990), millet (Onyike et al., 1991) etc. F. oxysporum is also cosmopolitan species which can be isolated from deserts and tropical soils as well as from Arctic soils (Leslie & Summerell, 2006). It is known as an important vascular wilt pathogen on numerous plant species worldwide, mainly vegetable crops of Solanaceae family (tomatoes, peppers, potatoes, eggplant), but also alfa-alfa (Krnjaja

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et al., 2007), sunflower (Tančić et al., 2012), soybean (Jasnić et al., 2005), sugarcane, legumes, lettuce, watermelon etc. (http://eol.org/pages/187980/hierarchy_entries/5733121 6/overview).

Another important pathogen common in mixed infections with F. oxysporum on sunflower and maize is M. phaseolina Tassi (Goid.) (Bhatti and Kraft, 1992). M. phaseolina is a soil borne pathogen with a wide host range which causes disease (charcoal rot) on more than 500 cultivated and wild species plant projects.ncsu.edu/cals/course/pp728/Macrophomina/ host.htm). This pathogen is prevalent in regions with arid subtropical and tropical climates, but it can be also registered in moderate climates when high temperature and dry conditions occurs. It is estimated that charcoal rot affects the crop throughout the world reducing seed yields by 20-36% (Jimenéz-Diaz et al., 1983).

P. teres, causal agent of net blotch of barley, is a major disease worldwide that causes yield losses ranged from 10% to 40% (Ma et al., 2004). It is most severe in temperate regions of high rainfall and humidity, but epidemics can occur in low rainfall areas as well (Steffenson & Webster, 1992). There are two types of symptoms caused by this pathogen: net-type lesions caused by P. teres f. teres and spot-type lesions caused by P. teres f. maculata. In recent years, epidemics of P. teres f. maculata have occurred throughout the world (McLean et al., 2010), reducing grain quality parameters such as 1,000-grain-weight by up to 19% (Jayasena et al., 2007).

Ascochyta blight is one of the most economically important diseases of pea and other legumes such as: faba bean, chick pea, grass pea, vetches, etc. (Peever et al., 2007; Barilli, 2016). Pathogens from this complex occur in all areas of the world where legumes are grown. Under favorable weather conditions, the average yield loss caused by Ascochyta blight is estimated above 50% (McDonald and Peck, 2009). Ascochyta blight of pea, is caused by a complex of three pathogens: *A. pisi* Lib., *A. pinodes*

(teleomorph: *Mycosphaerella pinodes* (Berk. & Blox.) Vestergr.) and *A. pinodella* (L.K. Jones). Among them, *A. pinodes* is the most important one (Ali et al., 1978) and can cause yield reduction between 50 to 75 % (Wallen, 1974).

Biocontrol of such devastating pathogens is a big challenge, but there is a great potential in Trichoderma spp. usage in these purposes. Presence of great variety of cellwall degrading enzymes and secondary metabolites makes Trichoderma strongly aggressive to broad range of phytopathogenic fungi (Vinale et al., 2008). When direct confrontation with pathogen occurs, the main biocontrol mechanisms of Trichoderma species are mycoparasitism and antibiosis (Howel, 2003). Trichoderma species are mainly soil fungi found in agricultural soils, native prairie, forests, salt marsh, desert soils of all climatic zones, but also in dead plant material, living roots of various plant species, seeds, lake water and air (Monte, 2001). World-wide distribution, fast growth and high spore production make those species easy to find and isolate. After all, it should be underlined that not all Trichoderma strains are effective, most of them are not, and some may even be phytotoxic or pathogenic (Menzies, 1993), so strain selection is of crucial importance.

Given that, the aim of this study was to test antagonistic ability of native Serbian *Trichoderma* isolates to ten common fungal pathogens (A. pinodella, A. pinodes, A. pisi, F. graminearum, F. proliferatum, F. verticillioides, F. oxysporum, M. phaseolina, P. teres, and S. sclerotiorum).

Material and Methods

Collection of isolates

Samples of common pathogens were obtained from naturally infected plants from four different host plants, while *Trichoderma* spp. isolates were obtained from soil samples originating from different localities in Serbia (Table 1). The collection was formed throughout the period of 2009-2015.

Table 1. Tested isolates data – isolate's code, origin, host plant and year of isolation

Isolate code	Species	Origin	Host Plant / Substrate	Year of Isolation
ScSc	S. sclerotiorum	Rimski Šančevi	sunflower	2010
MpH	M. phaseolina	Bačka Topola	sunflower	2009
FOx	F. oxysporum	Deliblato	sunflower	2009
FV	F. verticillioides	Rimski Šančevi	maize	2015
FP	F. proliferatum	Rimski Šančevi	maize	2015
FG	F. graminearum	Rimski Šančevi	maize	2014
PΤ	P. teres	Rimski Šančevi	barley	2014
APs	A. pisi	Rimski Šančevo	Field pea	2015
APn	A. pinodes	Novi Bečej	Field pea	2014
APl	A. pinodella	Lukićevo	Field pea	2014
TR1	Trichoderma sp.	Rimski Šančevi	Soil sample	2011
TR2	Trichoderma sp.	Kuršumlija	Soil sample	2012
TR3	Trichoderma sp.	Rakovački potok	Soil sample	2012
TR4	Trichoderma sp.	Rimski Šančevi	Soil sample	2012
TR5	Trichoderma sp.	Belegiš	Soil sample	2012
TR6	Trichoderma sp.	Surduk	Soil sample	2012
TR7	Trichoderma sp.	Belegiš	Soil sample	2012
TR8	Trichoderma sp.	Surduk	Soil sample	2012
TR9	Trichoderma sp.	Surduk	Soil sample	2012
TR10	Trichoderma sp.	Surduk	Soil sample	2012

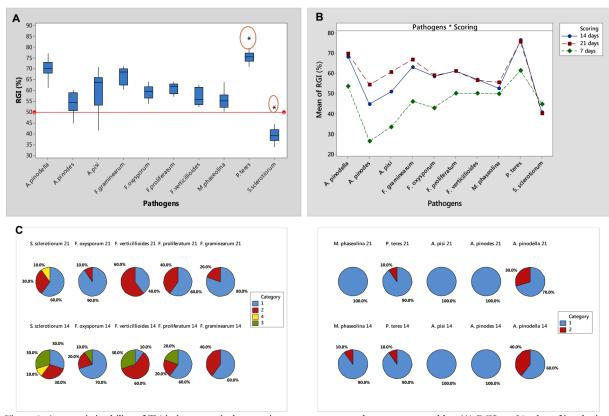


Figure 1. Antagonistic ability of *Trichoderma* spp. isolates against ten common pathogens measured by: (A) RGI on 21st day of incubation in vitro, (B) RGI on 7th, 14th and 21st day of incubation in vitro, (C) Bell's graduation on 14th and 21st day of incubation in vitro

Isolation of the fungus

Samples of maize ears, barley leaves, sunflower stems and heads, and field pea leaves and pods were collected from randomly chosen plants with typical disease symptoms. Pieces of infected tissue were placed on potato dextrose agar (PDA) medium amended with streptomycin and after seven days colonies with morphology and growth characteristics of *Fusarium* species, *S. sclerotiorum*, *M. phaseolina*, *P. teres* and *Ascochyta* species were selected for further purification. Suspensions of conidia or microsclerotia were dispersed on water-agar (WA) plates, and after 24 hours pure culture of each isolate were made by single spore or hyphal tip transfer technique (Leslie & Summerell, 2006). These purified isolates were used for further analyses.

Isolation of biocontrol agent

Trichoderma spp. isolates were obtained from soil samples originating from different soil types and localities in Serbia, mainly from the Vojvodina Province. The representative soil samples were taken from the surface layer (0–20 cm depth) using soil probe. Selective water agar (WA) media amended with streptomycin was used to isolate *Trichoderma* spp. from soil samples by particle-plating method. Total of 20 soil pieces per sample were analysed seven days after incubation at room temperature. The emerging fungal colonies were

observed under microscope, and transferred on suitable media for further analyses of morphological characters. For further research, all *Trichoderma* isolates were refined to single-spore isolates according to Leslie & Summerell (2006).

Dual Culture Test

Dual culture test was used for screening of ten Trichoderma isolates antagonistic effect on ten different pathogens in vitro. Each Trichoderma isolate plug of 7 days old culture (5 mm²) was confronted with the pathogens isolate plug in 90 mm Petri plates at the 60 mm distance on PDA in four replicates. Antagonistic abilities of Trichoderma isolates were registered periodically on 7th, 14th, and 21st day of incubation in dark at 25°C. After 21st day of incubation, Radial Growth Inhibition (RGI) was calculated according to Rodriguez et al. (2000). Additionally, evaluation according to Bell was included (de Figueirêdo et al., 2010): 1 - Trichoderma sp. grows and covers completely all colonies of phytopathogen surface; 2 - Trichoderma sp. grows and covers 2/3 of medium surface; 3 antagonist and phytopathogen colonize each one half of the medium surface and none seems to dominate each other; 4 - phytopathogen colonizes 2/3 of surface medium; 5 - phytopathogen grows and covers completely all colonies of Trichoderma sp. and the medium surface.

Statistical analysis

Factors that significantly influenced RGI were estimated using General Linear Model. For all analysis software Minitab 17 (trial version) was used.

Results and Discussion

Although *Trichoderma* species are mainly registered as an effective antagonists of many soil-borne pathogens on different crops this study shown that isolates of *Trichoderma* spp. which possess antagonistic ability against some pathogens are not effective against the others (Figure 1A). The significant influence of *Trichoderma* isolates and fungal species on RGI was confirmed with P=0.000 and P=0.000, respectively. *Trichoderma* spp. isolates were considered as effective when RGI exceeded 50%. In addition, significant influence of scoring intervals (P=0.000) as well as interaction between pathogens and scoring intervals (P=0.000) on RGI was confirmed (Figure 1B). In order to have a better insight in antagonist–pathogen interactions Bell's graduation was used (Figure 1C).

In this study only 1 out of 10 isolates was proven to be effective in S. sclerotiorum mycelial growth inhibition (RGI above 50%). This was consistent with studies of Joshiet al. (2010) who reported that only 10% of analysed Trichoderma isolates originating from Western Himalayas were effective in inhibition of mycelial growth of S. sclerotiorum. According to Joshi et al. (2010) inhibitory effect of tested Trichoderma spp. isolates is reported to be much higher than in this study. In contrast, Trichoderma isolates tested herein were highly effective against P. teres reaching RGI of 83.9% (Figure 1A). Generally, rapid growth of Trichoderma spp. isolates gives them important advantage over P. teres in the competition for space and nutrients, but more investigation should be done in order to explain the exact mechanism of inhibitory effect of Trichoderma isolates. Ali-Haimoudet al. (1993) reported that Trichoderma spp. were efficient antagonists of sclerotioid organ formation of Pyrenophora (syn. Drechslera) teres on barley.

In addition, results of this study are first report of *Trichoderma* spp. inhibiting activity on mycelial growth of *A. pisi*, *A. pinnodes* and *A. pinnodella*. So far, *Trichoderma* spp. antagonistic activity was mainly tested on *Ascochyta rebiei*, agent responsible for the anthracnose of chickpea. Benzohraet al. (2011) observed inhibiting action of *T. harzianum* on the mycelial growth of *A. rebiei*, followed by a complete stop of growth after the 7th day and RGI varied from 20-70%, which is similar to results presented in this work.

In this study, *Trichoderma* spp. isolates tested in dual culture with *M. phaseolina* expressed RGI between 50.6 – 63.8% which is a bit more effective than RGI of 33.2 – 61.4% obtained in dual culture test reported by Singh et al. (2008).

Biocontrol of Fusarium spp. by Trichoderma species is mostly studied on F. oxysporum and effectiveness of

Trichoderma spp. against F. oxysporum f. sp. cubense (Thangavelu et al., 2004), F. oxysporum f. sp. adzuki (John et al., 2010), F. oxysporum f. sp. vasinfectum (Zang et al., 1996), F. oxysporum f. sp. lycopersici (Cotxarrera et al., 2002), and F. oxysporum f. sp. phaseoli (Sallam et al., 2008) was proved in vitro. Maximal RGI in dual culture test with F. oxysporum f. sp. phaseoli was 51.4% (Sallam et al., 2008), while isolates tested herein were more effective considering that minimal RGI registered was 53.9%. Potential antagonism of Trichoderma spp. to F. graminearum is tested in vitro by Foroutan (2013), and mycelial growth of F. graminearum was inhibited from 28.5 - 58.8% which is much lower than in this study (60.5 - 71.1%). Additionally, effectiveness of Trichoderma species in contact growth inhibition of F. verticillioides was confirmed by Sempere & Santamarina (2009) and Calistruet al. (1997) as well as in this study.

Figure 1B indicates that there is no significant change in RGI scored on 14th and 21st day for *A. pinodella, F. proliferatum, F. verticillioides, F. oxysporum, P. teres,* and *S. sclerotiorum* while for other pathogens final RGI should be scored on 21st day.

According to Figure 1C, it can be noticed that Trichoderma spp. isolates covered colonies of tested phytopathogens surfaces until 14th day: completely (grade 1), up to 2/3 (grade 2) and half of surface (grade 3), while on 21st day grades 1 and 2 dominated which classed Trichoderma isolates as effective competitors. The exception was one Trichoderma isolate which was dominated by S. sclerotiorum (grade 4, Figure 1C). More than 50% of tested isolates completely covered S. sclerotiorum colonies (grade 1) but contact inhibition did not stopped pathogens mycelia growth which resulted in low RGI on 14th and 21st day (Figure 1B). De Figueirêdo et al. (2010) reported that 37.5% of tested Trichoderma spp. isolates expressed satisfactory antagonism against S. sclerotiorum (grade 1), while 62.5% expressed mild antagonism (grade 2). After all, in this study most Trichoderma spp. isolates expressed satisfactory antagonistic potential, especially against pathogens M. phaseolina, A. pisi, A. pinodes, P. teres and other than S. sclerotiorum.

Conclusions

Study confirmed that tested isolates of *Trichoderma* spp. are effective biocontrol agents against pathogens such as *M. phaseolina, P. teres, Ascochyta* complex and *Fusarium* spp. *in vitro,* and after additional tests and molecular identification, potentially can be used in biocontrol of those pathogens *in vitro*. These are first reports of *Trichoderma* spp. *in vitro* efficacy against *A. pisi, A. pinodes, A. pinodella,* and *P. teres.* After all, results of this study confirmed that *S. sclerotiorum* is still one of the most aggressive pathogens and remains as a big challenge for *Trichoderma* spp. and biocontrol.

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Efikasnost Trichoderma spp. izolata protiv najčešćih gljivičnih patogena

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Sažetak: U današnje vreme, organska proizvodnja sve više zahteva primenu ekoloških metoda u suzbijanju biljnih bolesti. Biološka kontrola bazirana na upotrebi *Trichoderma* vrsta obećava jer su *Trichoderma* vrste izuzetno agresivne prema velikom broju fitopatogenih gljiva. Stoga je cilj ovih istraživanja bio da se *in vitro* testira antagonističko dejstvo deset *Trichoderma* spp. izolata poreklom iz Srbije na deset ekonomski značajnih fitopatogenih gljiva. Istraživanja su potvrdila da su testirani izolati *Trichoderma* spp. inhibirali radijalni porast vrsta do: *Ascochyta pinodella* (76,9%), *A. pinodes* (60,0%), *A. pisi* (68,5%), *Fusarium graminearum* (71,1%), *F. proliferatum* (63,9%), *F. verticillioides* (62,6%), *F. oxysporum* (63,9%), *Macrophomina phaseolina* (63,8%) i *Pyrenophora teres* (83,9%). Najniža inhibicija porasta patogena je registrovana u dvojnim kulturama sa vrstom *S. sclerotiorum* – do 52,2% inhibicije.

Ključne reči: Ascochyta spp., Fusarium spp., M. phaseolina, P. teres, S. sclerotiorum, Trichoderma spp.

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