

Original Research Article

Growth and yield of maize (*Zea mays* L.) as influenced by integrated weed management under temperate conditions of North Western Himalayas

Abstract

A field experiment was conducted at Experimental Station of CSIR-IIIM, during *kharif* 2013 and 2014. The experiment was laid in a randomized block design with 4 weed management practices viz., W_0 = No weeding, W_1 = Hand weeding 20 and 50 days after sowing, W_2 = atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i ha⁻¹ pre-emergence + hand weeding 20 days after sowing and W_3 = atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i ha⁻¹ pre-emergence + Isoproturon @ 1.0 kg a.i ha⁻¹ post-emergence. The results revealed that weed management practices W_2 at par with W_3 significantly improved plant height, number of functional leaves, leaf area index and dry matter production at different growth stages as compared to W_0 , whereas W_2 took significantly more number of days for the crop to reach different phenological stages over rest of the treatments including control during both years of study. Similarly, W_2 being at par with W_3 recorded significant improvement in all yield contributing characters over W_1 and W_0 . Both grain and stover yields were also significantly higher with W_2 over W_1 and W_0 . Significantly higher biological yield and harvest index was recorded with W_3 as compared to the rest of treatments during both the years of experimentation.

Key words: Weed management, growth, yield, yield attributes, maize

Introduction

Maize (*Zea mays* L.), belonging to the grass family *Gramineae*, is believed to have originated from Mexico or Central America and spread to West Africa with early European traders in the 16th century. It is the third most important cereal in the world after rice and wheat. It is produced throughout the country under diverse environments. In industrialized

27 countries maize is largely used as livestock feed and as a raw material for industrial products,
 28 while in developing countries, it is mainly used for human consumption. Maize is consumed
 29 mainly as second-cycle produce in the form of meat, eggs and dairy products. It is an
 30 important source of proteins (10.4%), fat (4.5%), starch (71.8%), fiber (3%), vitamins and
 31 minerals like Ca, P, S and small amounts of Na. Its flour is considered to be a good diet for
 32 heart patients due to its low gluten (protein) content [1].

33 Crop yield loss could be caused in high extent by increase in the weed biomass, weed
 34 density and weed species [2]. Weeds are one of the greatest limiting factors to efficient crop
 35 production. As a consequence of structural and financing problems the cultural condition of
 36 the soil deteriorates and weeds proliferate; many species are hard to kill [3]. Weed infestation,
 37 results in severe reduction in crop yield as in the condition of pure corn culture, corn losses of
 38 40– 60% have been reported [4]. Crop yield loss could be caused in high extent by increase in
 39 the weed biomass, weed density and weed species [2]. Weeds are one of the greatest limiting
 40 factors to efficient crop production. As a consequence of structural and financing problems
 41 the cultural condition of the soil deteriorates and weeds proliferate; many species are hard to
 42 kill [3]. Weed infestation, results in severe reduction in crop yield as in the condition of pure
 43 corn culture, corn losses of 40– 60% have been reported [4]. During the recent years maize
 44 yields have become stagnant and this situation cannot cope to solve the food problems of
 45 ever increasing population. It is a necessity to continuously increase the production to meet
 46 the demands of people. The low productivity of the crop is due to several constraints viz.,
 47 weed management practices, planting methods, nutrition etc. Weed management practices has
 48 a great role to play in increasing maize yield. Farmers usually give prime importance to few
 49 cultural practices and neglect other factors like weed control. As the maize is usually grown
 50 during the hot summer months of May and June when manual method of weed control is
 51 difficult to employ therefore, other methods of weed control are more feasible, less laborious,

cost effective and economical. Several weed species that are strong competitors, compete with the maize crop and thus the yield is decreased. Weed management strategies attempt to limit the deleterious effects of weeds growing with crop plants. These effects could be quite variable, but the most common is competition for available resources. The quantities of growth factors used by weeds are thus unavailable to the crop. As there are limitations of every weed control method therefore integrated weed management is a good option for sustainable agriculture. It involves the combination of all the possible methods to suppress the weeds below economic threshold level. Although some methods are effective against weeds but they prove uneconomical for the farmers or pose environmental hazards. Keeping in view the above points, the present study was undertaken to determine the effect of weed management practices on growth, yield and yield attributes of maize.

Materials and Methods

A field experiment was conducted at Experimental Station of CSIR of Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine, Srinagar (J&K) during *kharif* 2013 and 2014. The climate of the experimental site was mid to high altitude temperate type characterized by hot summers and severe winters. The average annual precipitation was 812 mm (average over past twenty years) and more than 80 per cent of precipitation was received from western disturbances in the form of snow and rains. The mean maximum temperature was 16.73 °C and minimum 2.71 °C during first year (2013) and 16.73 and 2.08 °C during second year (2014). The mean maximum and minimum relative humidity was 85.74 and 86.75 and 53.75 and 58.17 per cent during 2013 and 2014, respectively. The total rainfall received during the entire growing season of 2013 and 2014 amounted to 383.70 mm and 426.10 mm, respectively.

The experiment was laid out in a randomized block design with 4 weed management practices viz. W_0 = no weeding, W_1 = hand weeding 20 and 50 days after sowing, W_2 = atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha^{-1} (pre-emergence) + hand weeding 20 days after sowing and W_3 =

77 atrazine @1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ (pre-emergence) + isoproturon @ 1.0 kg a.i.ha⁻¹ (post-emergence)
 78 with 3 replications. The land was irrigated after harvesting the previous crop and then disc
 79 ploughed followed by two turns with tiller and one turn with rotavator to bring the soil to fine
 80 tilth. The block borders, plot bunds and drainage channels were made manually. The
 81 experimental plots were leveled before sowing of seed. The maize variety “C6” was sown at
 82 a spacing of 75 cm x 20 cm between rows and plants. Nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium
 83 were applied through urea, diammonium phosphate and muriate of potash, respectively. Full
 84 dose of phosphorus and potassium and 1/3rd of nitrogen were band placed as per the treatment
 85 just before sowing of seed. Remaining nitrogen was top dressed in two equal splits at knee
 86 high and tasselling stages. Two herbicides viz., atrazine and isoproturon were used in this
 87 experiment. Atrazine was sprayed pre-emergence @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ immediately after
 88 sowing and isoproturon was sprayed as post-emergence @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ after the
 89 emergence of weeds.

90 Five randomly selected plants in each plot were tagged for various periodic
 91 observations. Growth parameters viz., plant height (cm), leaf area index, days to reach
 92 different phenological stages (knee high, tasseling, silking, and maturity), and dry matter
 93 production (q ha⁻¹), were recorded from penultimate rows of each plot. The leaf area of each
 94 leaf was calculated by multiplying the length and maximum width. The value thus obtained
 95 was multiplied by a constant 0.73309 to get actual leaf area and then leaf area index (LAI)
 96 was calculated by dividing the leaf area per plant by ground surface provided to each plant
 97 (1200 sq. cm). Yield attributes viz., cob length, cobs plant⁻¹, grains cob⁻¹, cob diameter, no. of
 98 rows cob⁻¹, and 100-grain weight and number of cobs plant⁻¹ were recorded from five
 99 randomly selected plants from each plot. After harvesting the crop, cobs and stalks were
 100 properly sun dried and bundled. The bundle weight of each net plot was recorded and
 101 expressed as biological yield. The grain yield of each net plot was thoroughly cleaned and

sun dried. The yield from each plot was recorded separately as kg plot⁻¹ and then converted in q ha⁻¹. After removal of the cobs from stalks in each net plot, the stalks were weighed to determine the stover yield in q ha⁻¹. Harvest index (%) was determined by dividing the weight of grains per plot at 15 per cent moisture content by total produce per plot and multiplying by 100.

$$\text{Harvest index} = \frac{\text{Grain yield}}{\text{Biological yield}} \times 100$$

The data obtained in respect of various observations were statistically analyzed by the method described by [5]. The significance of “F” and “t” was tested at 5 per cent level of significance.

Results and Discussion

Growth characters

A perusal of the data (Table 1) indicates that weed management practices W₂ (atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i ha⁻¹ pre-emergence + hand weeding 20 DAS) while remaining at par with W₃ (atrazine 1.0 kg a.i ha⁻¹ pre emergence + isoproturon @ 1.0 kg a.i ha⁻¹ post-emergence) recorded the taller plants as compared to W₁ (hand weeding 20 and 50 days after sowing) and W₀ (no weeding). This is true at all the stages of growth i.e. knee height, tasseling, silking and maturity during both the years of experimentation. The height of plant is an important growth character directly linked with the productive potential of plant in terms of fodder grains and yield. Plant height has been reported to be positively correlated with productivity of plants [6]. This may be attributed to higher weed densities under the treatment that had compete with maize for nutrients, soil moisture, height and carbon dioxide [7] . Among herbicide treatments W₂ (atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ pre-emergence + hand weeding 20 DAS) at par with W₃ (atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ pre-emergence + isoproturon @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ post

127 emergence) produced significantly taller plants than other treatments. This was probably due
 128 to better weed control with the treatments that enabled lower densities of weeds to compete
 129 with crop for resources. Similar results were also reported by [8,9]. Results from the study
 130 showed that W_2 (atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i ha⁻¹ pre-emergence + hand weeding 20 DAS) and W_3
 131 (atrazine 1.0 kg a.i ha⁻¹ pre emergence + isoproturon @ 1.0 kg a.i ha⁻¹ post-emergence)
 132 registered significantly higher number of functional leaves at all stages of growth during both
 133 the years of experimentation compared to W_1 (hand weeding 20 and 50 days after sowing)
 134 and W_0 (no weeding). This might be attributed to severe competition of high weed densities
 135 for resources viz; sunlight, moisture and nutrients thereby making maize plants weaker
 136 enough to produce more functional leaves which was closely followed by W_3 (atrazine @ 1.0
 137 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ pre-emergence + isoproturon @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ post emergence). The reasons for
 138 this might be that atrazine functions by binding to the plasto quinone-binding protein in
 139 photosynthesis II. Weed death results from starvation and oxidative damage caused by
 140 breakdown in the electron transport process. The oxidative damage is accelerated at high light
 141 intensity [10]. Significantly higher leaf area was recorded with treatment W_3 (atrazine @1.0
 142 kg a.i ha⁻¹ pre-emergence + isoproturon @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ post emergence), however, it
 143 remained at par with W_2 (atrazine @1.0 kg ha⁻¹ pre-emergence + hand weeding 20 DAS),
 144 while significantly lower leaf area index was observed in no weeding treatment at all crop
 145 growth stages. This might be due to severe competition of weeds for growth resources which
 146 made the crop plant inefficient to utilize the higher leaf area index at various growth stages
 147 was noticed under W_2 (atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ pre-emergence + hand weeding 20 DAS)
 148 and W_3 (atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ pre-emergence + isoproturon @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ post
 149 emergence) treatments (Table 1). This could be attributed to better control of weeds in early
 150 growth stages of crop which provided the crop plants optimum environment to utilize growth
 151 resources efficiently resulting in better growth of crop. The herbicide treatment W_2 (atrazine

@ 1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ pre-emergence + hand weeding 20 DAS) took more number of days for crop to reach various phenological stages. This could be attributed to the fact that reduced competition with weeds for nutrients especially higher supply of nitrogen might have enhanced the vegetative phase of crop and delaying its maturity. The study revealed that dry matter production at different crop growth stages increased significantly upto W₂ (atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ pre-emergence + hand weeding 20 DAS) treatment (Table 1). In fact, plant dry matter accumulation depends on the quantity of total carbon fixed by photosynthesis and the fraction of that carbon converted to dry matter [11] . In addition to the presence of biotic and a biotic stresses, plant dry matter accumulation depends on the quantity of radiation absorbed by the canopy [12]. The higher dry matter recorded under W₂ (atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ pre-emergence + hand weeding 20 DAS) treatment could be possibly due to better weed control and weed control efficiency resulting in lower weed density and higher dry matter. In addition, lower weed competition with maize, taller maize plants, higher LAI, higher efficiency in intercepting and absorbing solar radiation and partitioning of assimilate and inorganic nutrients may have promoted higher dry matter accumulation under W₂ (atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ pre-emergence + hand weeding 20 DAS) treatment. The results are in line with those reported by [13,7, 9].

Yield and yield attributing characters

Various yield contributing characters viz., cob length and diameter cobs per plant grain rows and number of grains per plant and 100-seed weight recorded under W₂ (atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ pre-emergence + hand weeding 20 DAS) and W₃ (atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ pre-emergence + isoproturon @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ post emergence) treatment as well as unweeded treatments were significantly higher than other weed control treatment as well as unweeded treatment (Table 2). In fact reduced weed competition due to application of atrazine as pre-emergence allowed the crop stand growth better and utilize the available

nutrients especially nitrogen which is because of its cell division and cell elongation role improved cob length and diameter as well as number of cobs per plant. Higher number of grains per cob could be attributed to better translocation of metabolites for seed development and decrease in number of grains in W_1 (hand weeding 20 and 50 days after sowing) and W_0 (no weeding) treatments was due to increase in weed competition [14,15,16] reported that maximum 100-seed weight was recorded with pre-emergence application of atrazine at 0.50 kg a.i ha⁻¹ in combination with pendimethalin at 0.25 kg a.i ha⁻¹.

The results of the investigation reveal that the lowest grain yield was found under unweeded treatments (Table 3). This could be attributed to greater renewal of nutrients and moisture by weeds and a severe crop weed competition resulted in poor source and sink development with poor yield components. The results could be collaborated with the findings of [17,18] and [9]. Among weed control treatments W_2 (atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ pre-emergence + hand weeding 20 DAS) followed by W_3 (atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ pre-emergence + isoproturon @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ post emergence) recorded maximum grain yield which could be attributed to improved yield component viz.; higher number of cobs/plant, grains per cob and 100-grain weight. This improvement in turn was due to higher dry matter production and distribution in different parts, higher LAI [19]. This implies that with effective and efficient weed control, more plant nutrients are made available to the crop for enhanced leaf area formation that increases solar radiation interception thereby favouring better utilization of photosynthesis for higher grain yield. Both stover and biological yield were also significantly higher under W_2 (atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ pre-emergence + hand weeding 20 DAS) and W_3 (atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ pre-emergence + isoproturon @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ post emergence) treatments (Table 3). Higher biological yield and stover yield is the effect of higher plant height, more number of functional leaves and higher dry matter production. Harvest index is defined as a ratio of yield biomass to the total biomass at harvest

[20, 15] . During the study it was found that lowest harvest index was observed under no weeding W_0 (no weeding) treatment which could be attributed to higher partitioning of assimilates to vegetative biomass at the expense of sink (grains). Significantly higher harvest index was observed under W_2 (atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha^{-1} pre-emergence + hand weeding 20 DAS) treatment though at par with W_3 (atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha^{-1} pre-emergence + isoproturon @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha^{-1} post emergence). This could be attributed to adequate suppression of weed growth as well as more availability of plant nutrients to maize crop which favoured better utilization of photo-assimilates for grain yield formation. Similar results have been discussed by [21,7].

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Table 1: Growth characters of maize as affected by integrated weed management.

Treatments	Growth stages							
	2013				2014			
	Knee high	Tasseling	Silking	Maturity	Knee high	Tasseling	Silking	Maturity
Plant height								
W ₀	50.22	155.15	160.97	163.87	51.21	153.09	160.38	164.38
W ₁	54.19	161.13	168.56	172.72	55.43	163.01	169.46	174.43
W ₂	59.31	167.52	175.64	181.42	59.84	169.07	177.51	182.14
W ₃	58.28	166.63	173.99	179.63	58.49	167.18	175.81	180.37
SE(m) ±	0.791	0.953	1.183	1.187	0.796	1.054	1.193	1.230
CD (p=0.05)	2.435	2.934	3.645	3.657	2.451	3.247	3.675	3.789
Number of functional leaves								
W ₀	3.58	8.78	8.29	3.53	4.88	9.98	8.99	3.74
W ₁	5.44	10.24	9.89	4.09	5.97	10.58	9.82	4.05
W ₂	7.18	11.28	11.40	4.31	8.11	11.03	12.03	4.57
W ₃	6.95	11.13	11.06	4.29	7.31	10.90	10.26	4.38
SE(m) ±	0.108	0.192	0.125	0.090	0.312	0.271	0.334	0.177
CD (p=0.05)	0.334	0.590	0.384	0.277	0.960	0.836	1.030	0.545
Leaf area index								
W ₀	1.24	2.08	1.63	1.35	1.23	1.92	1.49	1.20
W ₁	1.73	2.64	2.44	1.83	1.79	2.74	2.49	1.85
W ₂	1.85	2.80	2.68	1.93	1.88	2.93	2.79	2.02
W ₃	1.87	2.82	2.70	2.06	1.89	2.95	2.84	2.06
SE(m) ±	0.032	0.017	0.029	0.034	0.020	0.028	0.033	0.033
CD (p=0.05)	0.098	0.051	0.089	0.105	0.062	0.085	0.102	0.101

Where, W₀= No weeding, W₁= Hand weeding 20 and 50 DAS, W₂= Atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i ha⁻¹ pre emergence + Hand weeding 20 DAS and W₃= Atrazine @1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ pre emergence + Isoproturon @ 1.0 Kg a.i. post emergence)

Table 1: Growth characters of maize as affected by integrated weed management.

Treatments	Growth stages							
	2013				2014			
	Knee high	Tasseling	Silking	Maturity	Knee high	Tasseling	Silking	Maturity
Dry matter production								
W ₀	6.28	38.27	61.32	92.83	6.31	39.59	63.28	95.50
W ₁	6.91	43.27	68.74	102.95	6.99	43.47	69.03	105.35
W ₂	7.38	47.03	74.31	110.55	7.93	50.18	78.96	114.91
W ₃	7.30	46.40	73.37	109.27	7.67	48.11	75.90	112.73
SE(m) ±	0.061	0.934	1.180	1.549	0.211	0.920	1.231	1.583
CD (p=0.05)	0.189	2.876	3.635	4.772	0.651	2.833	3.792	4.875
Days taken to phenological stages								
W ₀	37.73	70.90	96.78	122.08	37.72	71.83	97.35	121.53
W ₁	39.13	72.52	98.03	123.18	38.95	71.90	99.03	122.17
W ₂	41.78	75.30	100.82	126.75	41.30	74.30	101.12	125.25
W ₃	39.95	73.37	98.87	124.82	39.73	72.27	99.80	124.48
SE(m) ±								
CD (p=0.05)	1.435	1.356	1.554	1.456	1.434	1.473	2.363	2.756

Where, W₀ = No weeding, W₁ = Hand weeding 20 and 50 DAS, W₂ = Atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i ha⁻¹ pre emergence + Hand weeding 20 DAS and W₃ = Atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹ pre emergence + Isoproturon @ 1.0 Kg a.i. post emergence)

298 **Table 2: Yield contributing characters of maize as affected by integrated weed management.**

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Treatments	Cob length (cm)	Cobs plant ⁻¹	Grains cob ⁻¹	Cob diameter (cm)	Number of rows cob ⁻¹	100-grain weight (g)
2013						
W ₀	11.83	1.065	390.00	1.58	12.83	18.70
W ₁	12.91	1.100	409.22	1.93	15.94	20.02
W ₂	14.11	1.123	425.67	2.23	18.63	22.27
W ₃	14.06	1.11	421.83	2.21	16.19	21.26
SE(m) ±	0.065	0.017	2.331	0.091	0.26	0.299
CD (p=0.05)	0.20	NS	7.18	0.28	0.78	0.92
2014						
W ₀	13.96	1.12	416.18	2.09	16.31	20.66
W ₁	14.05	1.09	399.06	1.78	13.92	18.59
W ₂	15.09	1.11	419.95	2.06	16.11	20.29
W ₃	16.45	1.13	433.11	2.31	17.92	22.38
W ₃	16.21	1.13	429.50	2.20	16.80	22.07
SE(m) ±	0.305	0.009	2.575	0.049	0.24	0.328
CD (p=0.05)	0.94	0.03	7.93	0.15	0.69	1.01

300 Where, W₀= No weeding, W₁= Hand weeding 20 and 50 DAS, W₂= Atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i ha⁻¹ pre emergence + Hand weeding 20 DAS and W₃= Atrazine @1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹
 301 pre emergence + Isoproturon @ 1.0 Kg a.i. post emergence)

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311 **Table 3: Yield and harvest index of maize as affected by integrated weed management.**

Treatments	2013				2014			
	Biological yield	Harvest index	Seed yield	Stover yield	Biological yield	Harvest index	Seed yield	Stover yield
W ₀	101.88	39.31	40.83	63.05	103.58	40.03	42.27	63.31
W ₁	110.40	39.59	44.89	68.51	112.12	40.24	46.32	68.80
W ₂	122.69	40.71	49.54	72.14	124.25	41.13	50.69	72.56
W ₃	119.40	40.66	48.96	71.45	120.82	41.03	49.99	71.83
SE(m) ±	2.064	0.045	0.240	0.759	2.337	0.052	0.266	0.652
CD (p=0.05)	6.36	0.14	0.74	1.94	7.20	0.16	0.82	1.21

312 Where, W₀= No weeding, W₁= Hand weeding 20 and 50 DAS, W₂= Atrazine @ 1.0 kg a.i ha⁻¹ pre emergence + Hand weeding 20 DAS and W₃= Atrazine @1.0 kg a.i. ha⁻¹
 313 pre emergence + Isoproturon @ 1.0 Kg a.i. post emergence)