RESPONSE OF OKRA (*Abelmoschus esculeutus* (L.) Moench) AND WEEDS TO PLANT SPACING AND WEEDING REGIME IN A HUMID FOREST AGRO-ECOLOGY OF SOUTH-EASTERN NIGERIA

ABSTRACT

Field experiment was carried out in late 2015 and repeated in early 2016 cropping season at the Teaching and Research Farm of the University of Port Harcourt, Choba, Rivers State, Nigeria to determine the appropriate spacing and weeding regimes for okra production. Three spacing (60 cmx15cm; 60cm x 20cm and 60cm x 30cm) and three weeding regimes [no weeding, weekly weeding, and twice at 3 and 7 weeks after planting (WAP)] were used. The experimental design was a 3x3 factorial scheme laid out in a Randomized Complete Block Design (RCBD) with three replications. The results showed that plant spaced at closer spacing of 60 x 15cm suppressed weeds better than other spacing in both years of study. Okra performance was better at closer spacing of 60cm x 15cm than in other spacing regimes. Similarly, weedy check had higher weed growth and least performance than other weeding regimes. There was significant interaction between spacing and weeding regimes. Plant spaced at closer spacing of 60 x 15cm combined with weekly weeding plots had the lowest weed density and dry weight of (0.00 no/m^2 and 0.00g/m^2 in both years of study. While 60cm x 30cm combined with no weeding gave the highest weed density and dry weight (395.00no/m^2 and 306.33no/m^2) and (88.33no/m^2 and 95.33g/m^2) in the late and early 2015 and 2016 cropping seasons respectively. The interaction effect further showed that the highest fresh pod yield was obtained from plant spaced at 60 cm x 15cm with weekly weeding (3.02 t/ha and 2.26t/ha) followed by 60 cm x 15 cm with twice weeding at 3and 7 WAP (2.96 and 2.22t/ha). While, plant spaced at 60cm x 30cm with no weeding had the lowest fresh pod yield (0.08 t/ha and 0.03t/ha). Since, the yield obtained from 60 cm x 15cm

with twice weeding (3and 7 WAP) was not stastically different from 60 cm x 15 cm weekly weeding, it is recommended to resource poor okra farmers whom might not have money to carried out weekly weeding in this region

Keywords: Pod yield, plant spacing, weeding regimes, weeds suppression, southeastern Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Okra (*Abelmoschus esculentus* (L.) Moench) is a vegetable crop belonging to the family of Malvaceae. It is extensively grown in the tropic and sub- tropics but had its origin in Central Africa (Remison 2005). A total of 1 – 2 million hectares are yearly cultivated in Nigeria (Anonymous, 1988). In Nigeria, it is cultivated in almost all the states because of its mucilaginous drawing fruit. It is a multi-purpose fruit vegetable for human consumption; feeds for livestock, fibers raw material for textile and paper industries (Remison, 2005). Despite its importance, the yield obtained from the farmers' plots in Nigeria is less than 2.5 t/ha (Kumar, 2010)) when compared to 6.39 t/ha obtained from world average (Konyeha and Alatise, 2013). This low yield could be as result of in appropriate spacing and weed regime practiced by farmer.

One of the cultural practices that farmers used in controlling weeds in okra farm is spacing. It is distance between one cultivated crop and another. Spacing between rows and along rows varies one type of crop to another. When adequate plant spacing is used for planting crops, it enables crops to have high yield as water and nutrients would be made available for the crop. Adequate plant spacing ensures judicious use of land by avoiding wasteful used of land; since, it is the only the number of plants the land can accommodated is planted while in Inadequate plant spacing opposite is the case. Maurya *et al*. (2013) noted that desirable planting spacing could lead to optimum pod yield while undesirable planting spacing could result in almost low yield and poor quality pods. Crop grow at a closer spacing with high plan population density benefit in competition against weeds because closer spacing quickens the promptness of canopy closure. and improves canopy radiation interception, increasing crop performance (Andrade *et al*., 2002). It also reduced weed infestation and competitive capability (Zimdahl, 1999).

Knowledge of the critical period of weed competition in okra helps growers implement effective and timely weed management practices. Critical period of weed control can be defined in two ways namely: the weed competition period and the weed free time requirement. The weed competition period defines the maximum period in which weeds can be allowed to compete with the crop without resulting in an unacceptable yield loss that is; it defines the beginning of the critical period of weed control (Kenezevic *et al*., 2003). The weed-free time requirement referred to as the minimum amount of time a crop must be maintained free of weeds to prevent crop yield loss (the end of the critical period of weed control). Havoc caused by weeds differed from one geographical location to another, types of crop species, planting date, cropping pattern and crop density.

The frequency of hoe weeding is high in okra as result of the plant inability to developed adequate canopy cover that would effectively shade the ground to prevent weed growth at its early stages of establishment. High weed frequency has also been reported in other vegetable crop like carrot, pepper and tomato (Joshua and Deji, 2004). Uncontrolled weed growth caused yield reduction of 88-90% (Melifonwu, 1999), 74-76% (Iyagba *et al*., 2013) in okra farm when compared to weed free. okra and weed compete for growth resources light, moisture and nutrients. The accurate time to weed might helped to reduce the competition and lessen weed competition (Moenandir,1993). In the life cycle of crop, not all the growth stages of a crop are susceptible to weed competition. However, there is a misunderstanding that weeding at any period during plant growth will subdue the issues of competition with weeds (Priyono Suryanto, 2017). Hence, the knowledge of the critical period of weed control will assist farmers to known the appropriate time to weed a farm so as to attained optimum yield . Remison (2005)noted that the critical period of weed competition in okra occurred between 3 and 7 weeks after planting. Keeping the crop weed free until 3 weeks after planting (WAP) reduced okra performance because of the harmful consequence of succeeding weed growth while weed growth up to 3 WAP and subsequently keeping the plots weed-free had no harmful consequence on okra (Adejonwo *et al*. ,1989)

Okra growers' cultivate okra without having the good knowledge of proper spacing and the right time to weed their farm .The consequence of these unsound practices can led to poor okra performance. Hence, the objective of this current study was to evaluate the effect of appropriate spacing and weeding regimes for okra production in humid forest agro ecology of southeastern Nigeria.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Experimental site

The field experiment was conducted at the Teaching and Research Farm of the University of Port Harcourt during late (21^{st} August – 21^{th} November, 2015) and early   (13^{th} May – 13^{th} August,2016) cropping seasons evaluate the appropriate spacing and weeding regimes for okra production. University of Port Harcourt is located in a humid forest agro-ecology with latitude 04^{o} 54' 538'N and longitude 006^{0} 55' 329'E with an elevation of 17metres above sea level. The area has an average temperature of 270C, relative humidity of 78% and average rainfall that ranges from 2500-4000mm (Nwankwo and Ehirim, 2010). The area had distinct wet and dry seasons. The wet season has double rainfall peaks. There are two cropping season, early from March to July and late from August to December. The experimental site was left fallow for seven years before the commencement of the study. Weeds such as *Chromolaena odorata, Aspilia africana, Commelina benghalensis, Panicum maximum* and *Cyperus* spp. dominated the vegetation.

Soil analysis

Prior to the experimentation, representative soil samples were taken randomly from the experimental plot at uniform depth of 0-15cm with an auger for physico-chemical properties. These soil properties were determined by standard laboratory procedures (IITA, 1979)

Source of planting material

An emerald cultivar of okra was used as a planting material. It was obtained from Rivers State Agricultural Development Program (R.A.D.P).The cultivar has been used by farmers in the region and it takes 56-60 days to mature with an average height of 120cm. It has a dark green pod which is angular without spines.

Treatments, experimental design and cultural details

The experimental design was a 3x3 factorial scheme arranged in a randomized complete block design (RCBD) with 3 replications in both seasons. Spacing and weeding regimes constituted the factors. The Three spacing were: 60 cm x 15 cm, 60 x 20 cm and 60 cm x 30 cm equivalent to three population densities: 1,11, 111, 83, 333 and 55, 555 plants /ha) plants /ha while the three weeding regimes were: no weeding, weeding twice at 3 and 7 weeks after planting (WAP), and weekly weeding . The experiment occupied land dimension of 35m x 11m (385m^2) which is approximately 0.04ha. The experimental area was manually clear with cutlasses and hoes, and the debris was packed. Each block was divided into nine plots with each treatment allocated to a plot. The plot size was 3m x 3m (9m^2) with alleyway of 1m. Okra seed was sown on August 21 and May 13 in 2015 and 2016 respectively using different spacing of 60 x 15 cm, 60 x 20 cm, and 60 x 30 cm with three seeds per hill. The three seedlings were thinned to one seedling at two weeks after planting (2WAP). Some plots were hoe weeded at 3 and 7WAP and weekly.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collected were weed and okra**.** Weed data collected were: weed density and weed biomass. They were assessed with 50cm x 50 cm quadrat at 3, 6 and 9WAP. Okra data such as: plant height, and leaf area index were randomly taken in-situ of five plants from the middle row at 3, 6 and 9WAP while the yield and components (number of pods, and yield per plant and yield per hectares) were taken at harvest.

Data generated were subjected to statistical analysis of variance (ANOVA) and significant treatment means were compared using least significant difference (LSD) at 5% probability level

RESULTS

Soil characteristics and rainfall data of the experimental sites

The physiochemical properties of the soil in the experimental site are presented in Table1. The soil in the experimental site was sandy loam and slightly acidic. Total organic carbon was moderate. The nitrogen contents of the soils were quite adequate. Available phosphorous (P) were quite adequate in both years of experimentation. The levels of Calcium (Ca), Magnesium (Mg) and Potassium (K) Sodium (Na) content of the soil at both sites were quiet adequate. Base saturation was adequate. Generally, there were no marked differences in soil characteristics between the two sites of both years of experimentation. The soils in both sites had moderate soil fertility, which seemed suitable for crop growth and development. Table 2 shows the amount of rainfall data during the experimental period in late 2015 and early 2016. The total amount of rainfall in early 2016 (1079.60mm) outclassed that of the 2013 cropping season (675mm) by 59.82 %.

Table 1. Physicochemical properties of the experimental site in late 2015 and early 2016 cropping seasons

	Value	
Soil parameters	2015	2016
Physical properties (%)		
Sand	82.20	81.10
Silt	6.00	6.90
Clay	11.80	12. 00
Textural class	Sandy loam	Sandy loam
Chemical properties		
pH in H_2O	6.10	6.00
Organic carbon (%)	1.82	1.75
Total Nitrogen (%)	0.17	0.16
Available P mg/kg	20.17	18.95
Exchangeable bases		
Ca cmol/kg	2.20	1.94
Mg cmol/kg	0.26	0.25
K cmol/kg	0.25	0.23
Na cmol/kg	0.22	0.21

Exchangeable acidity (cmol/kg)	0.02	0.01
ECEC (cmol/kg)	2.95	2.64
Base saturation (%)	99.32	99.62

Table 2. Rainfall data at the experimental sites during late 2015 and early 2016 cropping seasons

Months/year	Rainfall mm
Late 2015	
August	120.00
September	55.50
October	300
November	200
Total	**675.50**
Early 2016	
May	341.50
June	217.50
July	353.60
August	167.00
Total	**1079.60**

Source: Department of Geography, University of Port Harcourt

Weed growth characteristics

Weed density and Weed dry weight

The effect of treatments and their interactions on weed density and weed dry weight in okra are presented in Table 3 and 4. ~~There were significant differences (P<0.05) in weeding regime, spacing and their interaction(spacing x weeding regime) throughout the time of sampling time in both planting seasons. Weed density decreased gradually as from 3 WAP to 9WAP irrespective of spacing, weeding regime and interaction between spacing and weeding regime.~~ There were significant main and interaction effects of weeding regine and spacing on both weed density and weed dry weight, and both weed density and dry weight consistently decreased from 3 to 9 WAP irrespective of spacing, weeding regime or their interaction. Thus, the highest weed density and dry weight among the sampling periods was at 3 WAP followed by 6WAP and 9WAP. Plant spaced at a wider spacing of 60 cm x 30cm had the highest weed density and dry weight at each sampling time in both seasons while plant at closer spacing of 60 cm x 15cm had the lowest weed density and dry weight. Similarly, among the weeding regimes, no weeding and weeded twice plots recorded the highest weed density and dry weight while plot that was weekly weeded had the lowest weed density and dry weight . Furthermore, there was significant interaction effect of spacing and weeding regimes on weed density and dry weight (P < 0.05). Plant spaced at closer spacing of 60 x 15cm combined with weekly weeding plots had the highest weed density and dry weight throughout the sampling periods than other treatments combination.

~~*Weed dry weight*~~

~~The effect of plant spacing and weeding regimes on weed dry weight of okra during the late 2015 and early 2016 cropping seasons at different sampling periods followed the same pattern as weed density but with different values (Table 4).~~

Table 3: Effect of plant spacing and weeding regime on weed density (no./m^2) in okra during 2014 and 2015 cropping seasons

weeks after planting		Weeding Regimes (WR)-2015				Weeding Regimes (WR)-2016			
	Spacing (S) (cm)	No weeding	Weeding twice	Weekly weeding	Spacing mean	No weeding	Weeding twice	Weekly weeding	Spacing mean
	60 x15	450.67	451.67	0.00	300.78	701.00	699.67	0.00	466.89
3WAP	60 x 20	551.00	551.33	0.00	367.44	910.00	920.00	0.00	610.00
	60 x 30	600.00	599.67	0.00	399.48	1233.33	1216.67	0.00	816.67
	weeding mean	533.89	534.22	0.00		948.11	945.45	0.00	
	LSD(=0.05)								
	Spacing			1.317				20.455	
	Weeding			1.317				20.455	
	Interaction (S X WR)			2.281				35.428	
	60 x15	222.00	63.33	0.00	95.11	456.67	116.67	0.00	191.11
6WAP	60 x 20	351.00	145.67	0.00	165.56	533.33	255.00	0.00	262.78
	60 x 30	501.33	170.00	0.00	223.78	816.67	416.67	0.00	411.11
	weeding mean LSD(=0.05)	358.11	126.33	0.00		602.22	262.78	0.00	
	Spacing			3.583				57.15	
	Weeding			3.583				57.15	
	Interaction (S X WR)			6.206				100.312	

	60 x15	191.67	30.00	0.00	73.89	376.67	60.33	0.00	145.67
	60 x 20	241.67	68.00	0.00	103.22	460.00	192.00	0.00	217.33
9 WAP	60 x 30	395.00	91 .67	0.00	162.22	644.67	306.33	0.00	317.00
	weeding mean	276.11	63.22	0.00		493.78	186.22	0.00	
	LSD(=0.05)								
	Spacing			2.207				16.823	
	Weeding			2.207				16.823	
	Interaction (S X WR)			3.822				29.138	

Table 4: Effect of plant spacing and weeding regime on weed dry weight (g/m^2) of okra during 2014 and 2015 cropping seasons

Weeks after planting	Weeding Regimes (WR)-2015				Weeding Regimes (WR)-2016				
	Spacing (S) (cm)	No weeding	Weed twice	Weekly weeding	Spacing mean	No weeding	Weed twice	Weekly weeding	Spacing mean
	60 x15	55.00	55.67	0.00	36.89	171.67	155.33	0.00	109.
3WAP	60 x 20	93.33	93.67	0.00	62.33	233.33	234.33	0.00	155.89
	60 x 30	140.00	139.33	0.00	93.11	366.67	348.67	0.00	238.45
	weeding mean	96.11	96.22	0.00		257.22	246.11	0.00	
	LSD(0.05)								
	Spacing			5.988				28.765	
	Weeding			5.988NS				28.765NS	
	Interaction (S X WR)			10.372				49.822	
	60 x15	45.00	16.00	0.00	20.33	116.67	61.00	0.00	59.22
6WAP	60 x 20	80.33	25.00	0.00	35.11	182.67	83.33	0.00	88.67
	60 x 30	122.33	39.67	0.00	54.00	213.67	188.33	0.00	134.00
	Weeding mean LSD(0.05)	82.55	26.89	0.00		171.00	110.89	0.00	
	Spacing			0.910				23.587	
	Weeding			0.910				23.587	
	Interaction (S X WR)			1.576				40.854	
	60 x15	31.67	5.33	0.00	12.33	56.67	21.00	0.00	
	60 x 20	65.00	10.67	0.00	25.22	74.67	31.33	0.00	
9 WAP	60 x 30	88.33	21.00	0.00	36.44	95.33	40.00	0.00	
	weeding mean	61.67	12.33	0.00		75.56	30.78	0.00	
	LSD(0.05)								
	Spacing			1.148				1.285	
	Weeding			1.148				1.285	
	Interaction (S X WR)			1.988				2.225	

Okra performance

Plant height

Treatment effect on okra plant height is presented in Table 5. There was significant increase in plant height ~~throughout observation periods~~ in both seasons of the study. As plant spacing increased, plant height deceased at various levels of spacing in each of the sampling interval. The tallest plants were obtained from okra grown at closer spacing of 60 x 15cm in all sampling intervals in both seasons of the experiment, while plant spaced at 60 x 30cm had the shortest plant. Similarly, among the weeding regime, plots that were weeded weekly produced significantly taller plants than other spacing. In addition, the interaction effect between spacing and weeding regime was significant throughout the sampling period. Plant spaced at 60 x15 cm with weekly weeding application produced the tallest plants while the shortest plants were produced from plant spaced at 60 x 30cm with no weeding but at *par* with 60 x 30cm with twice weeding at 3 and 7WAP in both seasons.

Leaf area index (LAI)

LAI response to treatment followed similar trend as in plant height (Table 6). The highest value LAI was obtained from okra spaced at 60 x 15cm while the lowest was from plant spaced at 60 x 30cm at the various periods of observation in both seasons. In the same vein, plots that were weeded weekly gave the highest LAI value when compared to others. The interaction between spacing and weeding regimes on LAI was significant ($P< 0.05$). Plant spaced at closer spacing of 60 x 15cm combined with weekly weeding plots had the highest LAI throughout the sampling periods when compared to other treatments combination

Table 5: Effect of plant spacing and weeding regime on height (cm) of okra during 2014 and 2015 cropping seasons

weeks after planting		Weeding Regimes (WR)-2015				Weeding Regimes (WR)-2016			
	Spacing (S) (cm)	No weeding	Weed twice	Weekly weeding	Spacing mean	No weeding	Weed twice	Weekly weeding	Spacing mean

	60 x15	8.33	9.00	11.67	9.67	6.33	7.00	9.67	7.67
3WAP	60 x 20	9.00	7.03	10.67	8.23	5.00	5.00	8.67	6.22
	60 x 30	6.60	6.53	9.33	7.49	4.53	4.43	7.33	5.43
	weeding mean	7.31	7.52	10.56		5.29	5.48	8.56	
	LSD(0.05)								
	Spacing			0.512				0.501NS	
	Weeding			0.51				0.501	
	Interaction (S X WR)			0.886				0.867	
	60 x15	11.67	25.00	45.33	27.33	11.67	22.00	33.00	22.22
6WAP	60 x 20	9.33	21.33	39.33	23.33	8.33	19.00	29.00	18.78
	60 x 30	7.00	15.33	35.00	19.11	6.00	15.00	22.00	14.33
	Weeding	9.33	20.55	39.89		8.67	18.67	28.00	
	weeding LSD(0.05) spacing weeding mean Interaction (S X WR)			0.495 0.495 0.857		8.67	18.67	28.00 0.697 0.697 1.207	
	60 x15	29.00	36.00	67.00	44.00	22.33	42.00	57.33	40.55
	60 x 20	22.67	31.00	55.67	36.45	18.67	38.00	49.33	35.33
9 WAP	60 x 30	19.00	21.00	48.33	29.44	15.67	29.33	45.33	30.11
	weeding mean	23.56	29.33	57.00		18.89	36.44	50.66	
	LSD(=0.05)								
	Spacing			0.608				2.790	
	Weeding Regime			0.608				2.790	
	Interaction (S X WR)			1.053				1.368	

Table 6: Effect of plant spacing and weeding regime on leaf area index of okra during 2015 and 2016 cropping seasons

weeks after planting	Weeding Regimes (WR)-2015					Weeding Regimes (WR)-2016			
	Spacing (S) (cm)	No weeding	Weed twice	Weekly weeding	Spacing mean	No weeding	Weeding twice	Weekly weeding	Spacing mean
	60 x15	0.09	0.13	0.17	0.13	0.05	0.06	0.12	0.08
3WAP	60 x 20	0.07	0.09	0.11	0.09	0.04	0.03	0.08	0.05
	60 x 30	0.05	0.06	0.09	0.07	0.02	0.02	0.05	0.03
	weeding mean	0.07	0.09	0.12		0.04	0.04	0.08	

	LSD(0.05)								
	Spacing			0.032				0.007	
	Weeding			0.032NS				0.007NS	
	Interaction (S X WR)			0.055				0.012	
	60 x15	0.36	1.17	2.63	1.39	0.26	1.13	2.37	1.25
6WAP	60 x 20	0.18	0.60	1.20	0.67	0.08	0.52	1.12	0.57
	60 x 30	0.15	0.46	0.91	0.51	0.05	0.36	0.81	0.41
	weeding ===mean LSD(0.05)	0.23	0.74	1.59		0.13	0.67	1.43	
	Spacing			0.11				0.032	
	Weeding			0.11				0.032	
	Interaction (S X WR)			0.19				0.055	
	60 x15	0.73	2.64	5.29	2.89	0.63	2.56	4.36	2.52
	60 x 20	0.48	1.32	2.47	1.42	0.38	1.20	1.63	1.07
9 WAP	60 x 30	0.31	0.93	1.90	1.05	0.22	0.80	0.93	0.65
	weeding mean	0.51	1.63	3.22	0.41	1.52	2.31		
	LSD(=0.05)								
	Spacing			0.207				0.197	
	Weeding			0.207				0.197	
	Interaction (S X WR)			0.359				0.342	

Number of fruits/plant

Number of pods/plant was significantly ($p < 0.05$) affected by spacing, weeding regimes and their interaction. Plant spaced at 60 x15cm produced the highest number of fruits while the lowest number of fruits was produced from plant spaced at 60cm x 30cm in both seasons (Table 7). Similarly, among the weeding regimes, weekly weeding gave highest numbers of fruits but it was stastically similar to weeding twice plots, while the least number of fruits were produced from plots that were unweeded. In addition, the interaction effect indicated significant differences on number of fruitss. Plant spaced at 60 x15 cm with weekly weeding application produced the highest number of pods (16.67 in late 2015 and 14.67 in early 2016) but had comparable values with plant spaced at 60 x15cm with weeding twice (16.63 in late 2015 and 16.67 in early 2016). The lowest number of pods (4.33 in 2015 and 2.33 in 2016) was produced from plant spaced at 60 x 30cm with no weeding.

Fruit yield/plant

The effect of plant spacing and weeding regimes on number of pod yield/plant of okra during the late and early planting seasons of 2015 and 2016 are presented in Table 7. Plant grown at a spacing of 60 x 15cm produced higher pod yield /plant than other spacing. Similarly, within the weeding regime plots hoe weeded weekly had the highest yield but comparable with hoe weeded twice. The lowest yield was from no weeding plots. The interactions effect between spacing and weeding regimes was significant with plant spaced at 60cm x 15cm and weekly weeding producing the highest yield but statistically identical to plant spaced at 60 x 30cm with no weeding. Plant spaced at 60cm x 15cm and no weeding application produced the lowest yield. *Fresh pod yield (kg/ha)*

The effect of plant spacing and weeding regimes on number of pod yield/plant of okra during the late and early planting seasons of 2015 and 2016 are presented in Table 7. Pod yield was significantly influenced by spacing. Plant grown at a spacing of 60 x 15cm produced higher Pod yield /plant than other spacing. Similarly, within the weeding regime, plots hoe weeded weekly had the highest yield but had a comparable value with hoe weeded twice. The lowest yield was obtained from no weeding plots. The interactions effect between spacing and weeding regimes was significant in both seasons. highest fresh pod yield was obtained from plant spaced at 60 cm x 15cm with weekly weeding 3.02 t/ha and 2.26t/ha followed by 60 cm x 15 cm with twice weeding at 3and 7 WAP (2.96 and 2.22t/ha) in late and early 2015 and 2016 cropping seasons respectively. Plant spaced at 60cm x 30cm with no weeding had the lowest pod yield

pod yield (0.08 t/ha and 0.03t/ha) in late and early 2015 and 2016 cropping seasons respectively.

Table 7: Effect of plant spacing and weeding regime on number of fruits and fruit yield during 2015 and 2016 cropping seasons

Yield components	Weeding Regimes (WR)-2015				Weeding Regimes (WR)-2016				
	Spacing	No	Weeding	Weekly	Spacing	No	Weeding	Weekly	Spacing

	(S) (cm)	weeding	twice at 3and7WAP	weeding	mean	weeding	twice at 3and7WAP	weeding	mean
			late2015				Early2016		
	60 x15	8.33	16.33	16.67	13.78	6.33	14.33	14.67	11.78
No. fruits/plant	60 x 20	7.33	12.33	12.67	10.78	5.33	10.33	10.67	8.78
	60 x 30	4.33	9.33	9.33	7.66	2.33	7.67	7.67	5.89
	weeding mean	6.66	12.66	12.89		4.66	10.78	11.00	
	LSD(0.05)								
	Spacing			0.255				0.366	
	Weeding			0.255				0.366	
	Interaction (S X WR)	0.677		0.441				0.634	
	60 x15	2.71	26.67	27.00	18.46	2.33	20.00	20.33	14.22
	60 x 20	1.83	14.67	15.00	10.18	1.17	11.67	12.00	8.28
	60 x 30	1.47	9.67	10.00	6.69	0.61	6.00	6.33	4.31
Fruit yield (g/plant)	weeding mean	2.01	17.00	17.33		1.37	12.56	12.89	
	LSD(0.05)								
	Spacing			0.523				0.638	
	Weeding Interaction (S X WR)			0.523 0.906				0.638 1.106	
	60 x15	0.30	2.96	3.00	2.09	0.26	2.22	2.26	1.58
	60 x 20	0.15	1.22	1.25	0.87	0.10	0.97	1.00	0.69
	60 x 30	0.08	0.54	0.56	0.39	0.03	0.33	0.35	0.24
Fruit yield (t/ha)	weeding rmean LSD(0.05)	0.18	1.57	1.61		0.13	1.17	1.20	
	Spacing			0.045			0.055		
	Weeding			0.045			0.055		
	Interaction (S X WR)			0.077			0.095		

DISCUSSION

The soil used for the experiment in both years was rich in nutrient that could promote the growth and yield of okra. Organic carbon, Total nitrogen (N), Phosphorus (P), Potassium (K), Calcium (Ca) and Magnesium (Mg) and Sodium (Na) were adequate (Chude *et al.* 2004). The high fertility status of the soil could be attributed to long periods of fallow that the site was under.

Okra plant spaced at 60 x 15 cm reduced weed density and dry weight than other spacing as result of its high plant population density. Plant spaced at a closer spacing of 60 x 15cm had a plant population of 100 plants/plot (111,111plants/ha), 60 x 20 cm had 75 plants/plot (83,333plants/ha and 60 x 30cm had 50 plants/plot (55,555plants/ha). For instance at 9 WAP, Plant spaced at a closer spacing of 60 x 15cm reduced weed density by 54.45% and 54.05 % while 60 x 20cm reduced weed density by 28.42% and 31.44% when compared to 60 x 30cm in the late and early cropping seasons of 2015 and 2016 respectively. On the other hand, weed dry weight were reduced by 66.16% and 42.61% at a spacing of 60 x 15cm while it were reduced to and 30.79% and 21.68% at 60cm x 20cm when compared to 60 x 30cm in late 2015 and early 2016 cropping seasons. The probable reason for reduction in both weed density and dry weight could be attributed to its high population density, which forms high canopy cover that suppressed weed growth by intercepting solar radiation reaching the soil surface that could have stimulated weed growth. This further showed that closer spacing increased the competitiveness of the okra with weeds. This observation was in agreement with that of (Ibewuchi *et al*., 2005) that okra planted at a closer spacing suppressed weeds better than those spaced at a wider spacing. In the same vein, Bakhat and Khan (2014) noted that closer spacing increased the competitiveness with weeds in some crops like soybeans and tomatoes Plots that were unweeded, had the highest weed density and dry weight in all the sampling periods except at 3WAP. The probable reason for while the weeding plot at 3 and 7WAP had similar weed density and weed dry weight could be attributed to no application of weeding treatment at that initial stage of growth and the plots were not disturbed . Weed density and dry weight were taken at 3 WAP before the plots were weeded at that period. Weed density was reduced to 100% in weekly weeded plots in both seasons when compared to no weeding while it was reduced to 77.10 % and 62.29 % on plots weeded twice at 3 and 7 WAP in late and early seasons of 2015 and 2016 respectively. Similarly, weed dry weight was reduced to 100% and 59.26% by weekly weeded and weeded twice plots. The possible reason for the 100% weed reduction in weekly weeded plots could be attributed to the weed free condition of the plots. Generally, weeds were less in the late season than in the early season in plots that were weeded twice probably as result of differences in rainfall. Rainfall was more in the early season than in the late season by 59.82 %. This increase in rainfall could have prompted more weeds growth in the early season than in the late season.

Okra sown at a plant spacing of 60cm x15cm produced the tallest plant at each interval of sampling intervals probable as a result of intra specific competition among the plants for environmental resource especially sunlight. At relative to wider spacing of 60 x 30cm, plant spaced at closer spacing 60 x 15 cm and at intermediate spacing (60 x 20cm) increased okra height by 49.46% and 23..81% respectively in the late season of 2015; 34.67%, and 17.34% respectively in early 2016. The probable reason for this could be that plant spaced at 60cm x 15cm had more plant population density than that 60 x 20cm which resulted to crowdedness. At high density, plants tend to compete vigorously for limiting growth resources especially light due to overcrowding, hence will grow taller to enhance its acquisition of the limiting light resources (Chikoye *et al,*. 2005). The crowded nature makes the okra plants to struggle among themselves for available growth resources space, sunlight, moisture, carbon dioxide and soil nutrients. This finding is in consonance with that of Ibeawuchi *et al.* (2005) and Agba *et al.* (2011) who noted that okra spaced at closer spacing grew taller plants than those spaced at wider spacing. Plots that were weekly weeded followed by weeding twice produced taller plants than the unweeded plot due to uncontrolled weed growth. Compared to the no weeding treatment, weekly weeding and weeding twice plots increased okra height by 141.94% and 24.49% respectively in the late season of 2015, 168.18%, and 92.90% respectively in early 2016. When okra height was compared to weekly weeding and weeding twice treatments, uncontrolled weed growth reduced okra height by 58.67 % and 19.67 % in 2015, 62.71% and 48.16% in 2016 respectively. The reduction in plant height in no weeding plot could be because of interspecific competition between okra plant and weeds for growth resources. Invariably, the weeds out compete plant which resulted to stunted growth by producing shorter okra plant. This finding is in agreement with that other researcher

(Iyagba *et al.,* 2012; Oroka *et al.,* 2016;) who reported that uncontrolled weed growth reduced okra plant height. The greater leaf area index recorded at 60 x 15cm might be due to inadequate space for each plant as result of high population density. This showed that plants spaced at closer spacing of 60 x 15cm were able to compete for space and light than others spacing which is a mechanism that improves the crops suppressive ability (Holt, 1995). Similarly, Mouneke and Asiegbu (1997), also noted that increased in ground area cover engaged by singly okra plant resulted in the high leaf area index as plant population increases under closer spacing

. Fewer stands could be responsible for the less Leaf area index of okra observed at wider spacing of 60cm x 30cm, that result in less ground coverage. Okra fresh pod yield was higher at closer spacing of 60 x 25cm than other spacing. Compared to wider spacing of 60 x 30cm, increased okra yield by 435.9% (60 x 15cm) and 123.08% (60 x 20cm). in the late season of 2015; 558.33 % (60 x 15cm) and 187.50% (60 x 20cm) respectively in early 2016. Increased in number of pods as result of higher plant population per plot might be responsible for higher yield obtained from a closer spacing than others spacing. The higher yield could also be ascribed to better weed control through canopy cover, efficient water utilization due to less surface soil evaporation and better radiant energy usage. Ibewuchi *et al.*(2005), Smith and Ojo (2007, Falodun and Ogedegbe (2016), Agba *et al.* (2011) noted that closer/ narrow spacing increased okra yield than medium and wider spacing. Compared to the no weeding treatment, weekly weeding and weeding twice plots increased okra pod yield by 794 % and 772.22% respectively in the late season of 2015; 1066.67%, and 1000% respectively in early 2016. When okra fruit yield was compared to weekly weeding and weeding twice treatments, uncontrolled weed growth reduced okra pod yield by 88.82% and 88.54 % in 2015, 89.17% and 88.89 % in 2016 respectively. The results of the percentage uncontrolled weeds growth obtained from this study fell between 63% and 91% as reported by (Adejonwo *et al.,* 1989) Fresh pod yield was higher in the late season than in the early season. The probable reason for this are fewer weeds growth and insect pest (data not recorded) caused by low rainfall during okra growth period in late season of 2015.

The combined effect of the two factors (spacing and weeding regimes) resulted in adequate weed control and high okra performance than either of plant spacing or weeding regimes applied individually. For circumventing spending much money in controlling weeds, it may be appropriate to use spacing of 60cm x15cm combined with weeding twice at 3 and 7WAP as choice to weekly weeding.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms the abilities of plant spacing and weeding regimes, singly or jointly to significantly reduced weed growth and enhanced okra performance in humid agro ecology in southeastern, Nigeria.

Okra paced spaced singly at 60 x 15 cm suppressed weed growth, enhanced okra performance better than other spacing. Weeding regime at weekly and twice weeding did better than the weedy check in terms of weed suppression and okra performance. The study further showed that plant spaced at 60 cm x 15cm with weekly weeding followed by 60 cm x 15 cm with twice weeding (3and 7 WAP) had highest yield. Plant spaced at 60cm x 30cm with no weeding had the lowest pod yield. . The yield obtained from 60 cm x 15cm with weekly weeding and 60 cm x 15 cm with twice weeding (3and 7 WAP were statistically the same. Plant spaced at 60 cm x 15 cm with twice weeding (3and 7 WAP) is recommended to resource poor okra farmers whom might not have money to carried out weekly weeding in this region

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