



**SULFUR SOURCES FOR FLOODED AND NON
FLOODED RICE AND PASTURES**

**BY
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PREFACE

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree.

I certify that to the best of my knowledge any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

A black rectangular redaction box covers the signature of the author.

Made Dana

ABSTRACT

It has long been known that sulfur is an essential element for plant growth, however it has received little attention compared to the three main elements, nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. Sulfur deficiency in crop production has been reported in many parts of the world and has resulted in a decline in both the quality and quantity of crops. Little information is available on the behaviour of different sources of S in flooded and non-flooded rice and in pasture, hence this study.

Using an S-deficient granitic Aquic Haplustalf soil, two nested experiments planted to rice were conducted in a heated glasshouse of the Department of Agronomy and Soil Science, University of New England. The experimental components were S rate and S source, two water regimes (flooded and non-flooded) and two consecutive crops. In the S rate study, gypsum was applied at rates equivalent to 0, 5, 10 and 20 kg S ha⁻¹. Yield, S uptake and fertiliser S recovery were determined at active tillering (AT), 59 days after transplanting (dat), maximum tillering (MT, 89 dat) and maturity (M, 144 dat). The effectiveness of six commercial S-containing fertilisers, gypsum (G), elemental sulfur (E) of particle size < 0.01 mm, urea-S melt (US), sulfur-coated urea (SCU), elemental S coated triple superphosphate (HF) and S bentonite (SB), and three experimental elemental S coated triple superphosphates (TSP) which were developed at the University of New England, were investigated in comparison to a zero S control (C). In the experimental coatings, three different adhesives were used to bind elemental S to the TSP : polyvinyl alcohol (PVA), calcium ligno sulfonate (LS) and slack wax (SW). In the S source experiment, all fertilisers were applied at 10 kg S ha⁻¹. In both experiments S was applied to the first crop only. The release of S from the fertilisers was also investigated at different growth stages (AT, MT and M). The use of ³⁵S labelled soil allowed the study of fertiliser transformation and movement through the soil and plant system.

In the S response study and under both flooded and non-flooded conditions, there was a significant response in grain yield and total S uptake with applications up to 20 kg S ha⁻¹. The percentage recovery of applied fertiliser S in the whole plant declined with increasing S application rate at each growth period.

In the first crop under flooded conditions, highest grain yields were recorded in the G, PVA and LS treatments and the lowest in the SB and control (C) treatments. In this crop, the highest recovery of fertiliser S in the whole plant was recorded in the G treatment (51.6 %), whilst the lowest rate was in the SB treatment (23.1%). The ranking of the recovery of fertiliser S in the whole plant was G > PVA = LS > US = E = SW ≥ HF > SCU = SB.

In the second flooded crop, grain yield and recovery of fertiliser S in the whole plant were inversely related to that in the first crop. The highest grain yield was recorded in the SB treatment, although this was not significantly different from SCU, HF, SW, US, E, PVA and LS treatments, and the lowest grain yield was in the control, although this was similar to that of G. The recovery of fertiliser S was directly related to the grain yield; 39.6 % of the fertiliser S was recovered in the SB compared to 14.3 % in the G treatment.

In general, a similar trend in grain yield and fertiliser S recovery was observed under non-flooded and flooded conditions. The exception was in the SCU treatment where the yield and fertiliser S recovery in the whole plant, relative to gypsum, as higher under non-flooded than flooded conditions.

The effectiveness of different S and P sources was also evaluated on pastures. This experiment was conducted in the glasshouse using intact pasture cores containing the same soil as in the rice experiments and consisted of a factorial combination of 2 S sources : elemental S (E) and gypsum (G), 2 P sources : triple superphosphate (TSP) and rock phosphate (RP), 2 methods of S and P application (S mixed with the granulated TSP or granulated rock phosphate and S coated to TSP or RP granules) and two soil moisture conditions (leached and non-leached treatments). One non-fertilised treatment (C) was included in the experiment under both soil moisture regimes in order to calculate the percentage of S in plant derived from the fertiliser. In this experiment, the same amounts of S (20 kg S ha^{-1}) and P (40 kg P ha^{-1}) were applied in all fertilised treatments. At the same time, a separate experiment was also undertaken to study the effectiveness of different S coated fertilisers under non-leached conditions. In this experiment, five S coated fertilisers : PVA, LS, HF, SW and TSP + gypsum (G) and one non-fertilised treatment (C) were evaluated. Data for the PVA and C treatments were derived from the main experiment. The soil cores were oversown with perennial ryegrass (*Lolium perenne* L.) and white clover (*Trifolium repens* L.) and once these species were established. Harvesting was conducted every four to eight weeks up to 96 weeks, depending on the growth rate of the pastures. The reverse dilution ^{35}S technique was used to enable fertiliser S recovery to be calculated.

The combination of triple superphosphate (TSP) with gypsum resulted in a higher yield than that of the combination of elemental S with TSP in the early harvests. The TSP combinations produced higher yields than the rock phosphate treatments. A higher S loss through leaching was also recorded in the gypsum compared to the elemental S treatments. Under non-leached conditions, the cumulative recovery of fertiliser S in the gypsum treatments did not differ significantly from that in the elemental S treatments. However, under leached

conditions, a higher recovery of fertiliser S in the pasture tops was found in the elemental S than in the gypsum treatments.

The comparison of different S sources in this experiment showed that the G treatment produced the highest yield in the early harvests (13.5 g pot⁻¹ at weeks 4 + 8), but significantly lower than that of PVA and LS 24 weeks after application. HF and SW produced the lowest response in the early harvest and did not differ from that of PVA and LS after week 17. The lowest yield was recorded in the control. These differences were generally reflected in the S content and the recovery of the fertiliser S in the harvested pasture.

Up to week 8, highest recovery of fertiliser S (35.7 %) was recorded in the G treatment compared to less than 11 % in the other sources. After week 17, G treatment resulted in the lowest recovery (6.0 % at weeks 24 + 28 and 2.9 % at weeks 36 + 44). Among the elemental S sources PVA and LS resulted in a higher recovery than SW and HF up to week 17 with the reverse recorded after this time.

The release rate of S from the different sources and physical tests of the S-coated fertilisers were also undertaken. These tests included the physical strength against frictional forces and simulated raindrop impact. The strength of S-coated fertilisers (PVA, LS, SW and HF) against frictional forces was tested in a friabilator, whilst the strength against simulated rain drop impact was conducted in a leaching bed. When the fertilisers were tested in the friabilator the PVA, LS and SW showed stronger physical characteristics than those of HF. After 32 minutes rotation in the friabilator, 0.08, 0.09 and 0.07 % of the S coat was lost from the PVA, LS and SW granules respectively. These losses were lower than those from HF (0.70 %). In contrast, HF granules exhibited stronger physical characteristics than those of PVA and LS when these materials were tested in the leaching bed. After 3 hours of leaching 25.4 % and 29.3 % of elemental S were lost from the PVA and LS granules respectively. These were higher than those of HF (6.8 %).

A computer model of S release developed in an earlier study was used to predict the oxidation rate of elemental S applied at different times and with different particle sizes at two temperate and two tropical locations in Australia. The simulations showed that total oxidation over one calendar year to be 96.5 % at Armidale, 86.3 % at Dalwallinu, 99.9 % at Darwin and 100 % at Cairns. Generally, elemental S with fine particle size (<100 µm) was oxidized more quickly than the coarser soon after application both in temperate and tropical areas which resulted in an excessive S release compared to the S demand of pastures.

More field trials are required to test the agronomic and economic effectiveness of these materials in order to establish their potential as efficient S sources.

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