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Fungal and Bacterial Antagonist for Nema Biocontrol

([*]Aakash V Patel[1] and Jaimin R. Pandya[2])
[1]PhD Research Scholar, Division of Plant Pathology, ICAR - Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi-110012, India
[2]Assistant Professor, Department of Plant Pathology, College of Agriculture, Navsari Agricultural University, Bharuch Campus – 392012, India
[*]Corresponding Author's email: aakashpatel2289@gmail.com

Fungal and bacterial antagonists are used in biological control strategies to manage plant-parasitic nematodes. These biological agents help reduce nematode populations by inhibiting their development, reproduction, or survival, offering an environmentally friendly alternative to chemical nematicides. Fungal and bacterial antagonists offer promising biological control solutions for managing plant-parasitic nematodes, which can cause significant damage to crops. These biological control agents are naturally occurring organisms or their derivatives that can suppress or reduce nematode populations in the soil, providing an environmentally friendly alternative to traditional chemical nematicides. Below is a more detailed explanation of how fungal and bacterial antagonists work, along with specific examples and mechanisms of action.

Fungal Antagonists

1. *Paecilomyces lilacinus* :

- A well-known nematode-trapping fungus, *Paecilomyces lilacinus* can parasitize nematodes, particularly root-knot nematodes (Meloidogyne spp.). It produces spores that attach to nematode eggs or juvenile stages, leading to their destruction.
- Mechanism of Action : *Paecilomyces lilacinus* is a well-known nematode-trapping fungus that parasitizes nematodes, particularly root-knot nematodes (Meloidogyne spp.). It produces conidia (spores) that attach to the nematode's surface, leading to fungal germination and the penetration of the nematode cuticle. The fungus then invades the nematode, leading to its death.
- Applications: The fungus is commercially available in products like BioAct®, which is applied to soil to reduce nematode populations.
- Effectiveness : *Paecilomyces lilacinus* is especially effective against nematodes that infect plant roots, such as root-knot, cyst, and lesion nematodes.

2. *Trichoderma spp.* :

- Several species of *Trichoderma* (such as *Trichoderma* harzianum, *Trichoderma* viride) have been studied for their nematode management potential. They produce metabolites and enzymes that can degrade nematode eggs and juvenile forms, and some species even trap nematodes in specialized structures like hyphal loops.
- Mechanism of Action : Several species of *Trichoderma* (e.g., *Trichoderma* harzianum, *Trichoderma* viride) are known for their ability to reduce nematode populations through several mechanisms:
  - Production of enzymes : *Trichoderma* species produce enzymes like chitinases, which can degrade the nematode eggshells, making it easier for the nematodes to be killed or parasitized.

- Competition : *Trichoderma* species compete for nutrients and space in the soil, reducing the available resources for nematodes.
- Antagonism : *Trichoderma* also produces volatile compounds and secondary metabolites that suppress nematode development.
- Applications : *Trichoderma* species are used both as seed treatments and soil inoculants.
- Effectiveness : *Trichoderma* harzianum is particularly effective against root-knot nematodes (Meloidogyne spp.), cyst nematodes, and other root pathogens.

3. *Arthrobotrys* spp. :

- This group of fungi is particularly known for producing specialized structures like adhesive networks and traps to capture nematodes. *Arthrobotrys* fungi can parasitize and kill various nematode species, including those that attack plant roots
- Mechanism of Action : *Arthrobotrys* is a genus of predatory fungi that forms specialized structures, such as adhesive networks and traps, to capture nematodes. The fungus secretes sticky substances that immobilize nematodes, allowing the fungus to invade and parasitize them. These fungi are particularly effective against soil-dwelling nematodes like cyst and root-knot nematodes.
- Applications : These fungi are typically used in soil inoculants.
- Effectiveness : *Arthrobotrys* fungi are capable of reducing populations of different nematode species and can be an important part of integrated nematode management.

4. *Verticillium chlamydosporium* :

- This soilborne fungus produces chlamydospores that can parasitize nematodes, especially root-knot nematodes. It also inhibits nematode reproduction by producing toxins and enzymes that break down nematode eggs.
- Mechanism of Action : This soilborne fungus produces chlamydospores that attach to nematode eggs or larvae, where they germinate and invade the nematode. The fungus produces toxins that kill the nematodes, particularly targeting species like root-knot nematodes (Meloidogyne spp.) and cyst nematodes (Heterodera spp.).
- Applications : *Verticillium chlamydosporium* is applied as a soil treatment to reduce nematode populations.
- Effectiveness : It has been shown to effectively control both the juvenile and egg stages of root-knot nematodes.

Bacterial Antagonists

1. *Bacillus firmus* (e.g., *Bacillus firmus* strain 183):

- This bacterium is widely used as a biological control agent for nematodes. It produces toxins that affect nematode eggs and juveniles. *Bacillus firmus* has been particularly effective against root-knot nematodes (Meloidogyne spp.).
- Mechanism of Action : *Bacillus firmus* (especially strain 183) produces toxic compounds that target nematode eggs, larvae, and juveniles. The bacterium can produce a variety of secondary metabolites, including surfactants and enzymes, that degrade the nematode's cuticle or eggshell, resulting in nematode death. *Bacillus firmus* has been particularly effective against root-knot nematodes.
- Applications : It is used as a soil inoculant or seed treatment.
- Effectiveness : It is very effective against nematodes like Meloidogyne spp., and its action is generally slower than chemical nematicides, but it provides long-term control.

2. *Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt):*

- Known for its insecticidal properties, some strains of Bacillus thuringiensis have shown promise in reducing nematode populations, particularly by producing proteins that affect nematodes.
- Mechanism of Action : While Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt) is best known for its insecticidal properties, some strains produce toxins that affect nematodes. These Bt toxins can disrupt nematode biology by interfering with their metabolism or by causing cell death. However, its effectiveness is often less pronounced against nematodes compared to its action against insects.

- Applications : Bt is often used in combination with other biocontrol agents or as a part of integrated pest management programs.
- Effectiveness : Some strains may reduce nematode populations, but they are generally less effective than other specialized nematode biocontrol agents.

3. *Pseudomonas fluorescens* :

- This bacterium produces a variety of metabolites, including antibiotics and enzymes, which can reduce nematode populations. P. fluorescens also competes for resources in the rhizosphere, suppressing nematode development.
- Mechanism of Action : This bacterium produces a range of antimicrobial compounds, including antibiotics and volatile organic compounds, that inhibit the growth of nematodes. Additionally, *Pseudomonas fluorescens* competes with nematodes for nutrients in the rhizosphere, thereby reducing the overall nematode population. The bacterium may also outcompete nematode-associated pathogens, promoting plant health.
- Applications : It is often used as a seed treatment or soil drench.
- Effectiveness : It can help suppress nematode populations indirectly by improving plant growth and by directly reducing nematode populations through antibiotic production.

4. *Pasteuria penetrans* :

- This soil bacterium is one of the most effective nematode biological control agents. It is particularly effective against root-knot nematodes. *Pasteuria penetrans* attaches to the cuticle of nematode juveniles, preventing their development and reproduction.
- Mechanism of Action : *Pasteuria penetrans* is a bacterium that attaches to the cuticle of nematode larvae, particularly root-knot nematodes. It forms spores that germinate and penetrate the nematode's body, causing its death. The bacterium is highly specific to certain nematode species, making it a targeted biocontrol agent.
- Applications : *Pasteuria penetrans* is applied to soil as an inoculant, where it attaches to nematodes during their juvenile stages.
- Effectiveness : It is particularly effective against root-knot nematodes, and once established in the soil, it can provide long-term suppression of nematode populations.

5. *Streptomyces* spp. :

- Some species of *Streptomyces* produce nematicidal compounds that are toxic to nematodes. They can reduce nematode populations and also help suppress other soilborne pathogens.
- Mechanism of Action : Some species of *Streptomyces* produce nematicidal compounds such as toxins and volatile organic compounds that can reduce nematode populations. These bacteria work by breaking down nematode eggs or killing juvenile nematodes in the soil.
- Applications : *Streptomyces* species can be used as soil treatments or incorporated into composts.
- Effectiveness : *Streptomyces* is effective against a variety of nematodes, especially when used in combination with other biocontrol agents or cultural practices.

Mechanisms of Action

- Production of enzymes : Fungal and bacterial antagonists often produce enzymes (such as chitinases, proteases, and cellulases) that degrade nematode eggs, larvae, or other stages of development.
- Parasitism and trapping : Some fungi produce specialized structures to trap and parasitize nematodes, while certain bacteria attach to and kill nematodes.
- Antagonistic metabolites : Many of these microorganisms release antibiotics, toxins, or volatile compounds that inhibit nematode growth or survival.
- Competition : These agents can also compete with nematodes for resources in the rhizosphere, limiting the availability of nutrients and thus reducing nematode populations.

Application Methods

- Soil inoculation : Both fungal and bacterial antagonists can be applied directly to the soil, often through drenches, granules, or incorporated into compost.

- Seed treatments : Some antagonists are used as seed treatments to protect plant roots from nematode attack during the early stages of growth.
- Foliar applications : Certain antagonists may also be applied to the foliage, where they can reduce nematode populations indirectly by improving plant health and reducing the overall stress on the plants.