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STUDIES ON THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT
OF THE TOMATO (Lycopersicon esculentum Mill.)

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
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at
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
	Abstract	
	Acknowledgements	
	List of Tables	
	List of Figures	
	Introduction	
1	Review of Literature	1
1.1	The young tomato plant	1
1.1.1	Introduction	1
1.1.2	The rate of leaf production and the rate of leaf growth.	1
1.1.3	Leaf number below the first inflorescence	2
1.1.4	Time to initiation of the first inflorescence	3
1.1.5	Flower number in the first inflorescence	4
1.1.6	Seasonal effect on time to flowering of the first inflorescence	7
1.1.7	Arrested development of the first inflorescence	8
1.1.8	The effects of temperature and light intensity on the growth of young tomato plants.	11
1.1.9	Earliness	12
1.1.10	Summary	14
1.2	The mature plant	14
1.2.1	Introduction	14
1.2.2	Seasonal effects on the growth and development of the tomato plant.	15
1.2.3	Partitioning of dry matter in the tomato	20
1.2.4	Effects of modifying the fruit load	21
1.2.5	Effect of leaf removal treatments and the presence of extra leaves	23
1.2.6	Effect of nutrition	26

Chapter		Page
	1.2.7	Assimilate distribution in the tomato plant 27
	1.2.8	Compensation effects between inflorescences and trusses 31
	1.2.9	Summary 33
2		The effect of nitrogen supply during propagation on flowering and fruiting. 36
	2.1	Introduction 36
	2.2	Materials and methods 37
	2.3	Results 38
	2.3.1	Introduction 38
	2.3.2	Main effects 39
	2.3.3	Interactions 42
	2.3.4	Response of plants to a change in nitrogen level. 43
	2.4	Discussion 45
	2.4.1	Flower initiation and number 45
	2.4.2	Early growth and yield 45
	2.4.3	Final growth and yield 46
	2.4.4	Explanation of the effect of high nitrogen prior to truss initiation increasing fruit yield in truss 1. 47
	2.5	Summary 50
3		The effect of temperature level at different stages during propagation on the yield of single-truss tomatoes. 52
	3.1	Introduction 52
	3.2	Materials and methods 53
	3.2.1	General 53
	3.2.2	Treatments 54
	3.2.3	Post treatment stage 55
	3.3	Results 57
	3.3.1	Introduction 57
	3.3.2	Effect of temperature level at different stages during propagation on yield, number and mean weight of fruit. 57

Chapter		Page
3.3.3	Treatment effects on yield	58
3.3.4	Relationship between yield and fruit number per plant.	59
3.3.5	Relationship between mean weight and number of fruit per plant.	59
3.3.6	Shoot dry matter content of young plants.	59
3.3.7	Effect of temperature level at different stages during propagation on dry weight of plant top.	60
3.3.8	Relationship between dry weight of plant top and fruit yield.	61
3.3.9	Relationship between percent total shoot dry weight in leaves and fruit yield.	61
3.4	Discussion	61
3.4.1	Fruit yield	61
3.4.2	Dry weight of plant top and percent total shoot dry weight in the leaves.	64
3.5	Summary	65
4	Effect of the amount and position of leaf tissue on the yield of single-truss tomatoes.	67
4.1	Introduction	67
4.2	Materials and methods	67
4.3	Results and discussion	69
4.3.1	Relationship between fresh weight of fruit and leaf dry weight.	69
4.3.2	Relationship between percent total plant dry weight in reproductive tissues and percent total plant dry weight in leaves.	71
4.3.3	Relationship between percent total plant dry weight in reproductive tissues and percent total plant dry weight in roots.	72
4.3.4	Importance of leaf position	73
4.4	Summary	73

Chapter		Page
5	Competition effects between fruit trusses	74
5.1	Introduction	74
5.2	Materials and methods	74
5.3	Results and discussion	76
5.3.1	Analysis of results	76
5.3.2	Fruit yield	77
5.3.3	Dry weight of plant top	80
5.3.4	Effect of truss number on net assimilation rate of the unstopped series	81
5.4	Summary	83
6	Effect of leaf level, pollination level and truss number on growth and development	84
6.1	Introduction	84
6.2	Materials and methods	84
6.3	Results and discussion	86
6.3.1	Introduction	86
6.3.2	Yield truss 1.	87
6.3.3	Yield truss 2.	89
6.3.4	Yield truss 3.	90
6.3.5	Total yield	90
6.3.6	Seed number per fruit	94
6.3.7	Dry weight of plant top	95
6.3.8	Ratio of dry weight of leaf to dry weight of plant top	96
6.4	Summary	97
7	The source economic sink relationship	99

Appendices

Bibliography

ABSTRACT

During the propagation of tomato plants a high and a low level of nitrogen was applied in factorial combination before and after initiation of truss 1. The high level of nitrogen prior to initiation produced earlier flowering and an increased yield in truss 1. It was suggested that a contributing factor to the latter response was that, where a change in nitrogen level was involved, the change from high nitrogen to low nitrogen produced a more productive plant response than when the sequence of applications was reversed. Flower number and earliness of flowering of certain trusses was increased by the high level of nitrogen applied after initiation. Initially the plants grew faster and cropped earlier in response to high nitrogen, but there were no differences in either the final amount of growth or the final crop.

The response of the plants to a change in nitrogen level suggested that some of the increase in yield due to exposure of young plants to cold temperatures, may be due to the change in temperature level. Warm and cold temperatures were therefore applied in factorial combination before flower initiation (9 nights) and for a subsequent period (14 nights) which included the flower initiation stage, with single-truss tomato plants. Cold temperatures during both stages increased yield and number of fruit and decreased

mean fruit weight. The early treatment was the most effective. It was suggested that low temperatures produced an enhanced supply of assimilates to the apex, which then initiated more flowers and that cold temperatures appeared to influence yield solely due to its effect on flower number. Shoot growth was reduced as yield increased and it was suggested that competition occurs for assimilates between the leaves and fruit.

The remaining investigations were devoted to the relationship between vegetative and reproductive growth (source sink relationship) in the tomato plant. By the use of leaf removal treatments a study on the importance of the amount and position of leaf tissue on the yield of single-truss tomato plants was carried out. A close positive relationship was shown to exist between leaf dry weight and yield, while leaf position did not appear to be important. The leaf and root tissues were shown to be in competition with the reproductive tissues for dry matter.

The nitrogen experiment indicated that competition occurred between fruit trusses for assimilates. By allowing plants to develop different numbers of trusses and then examining the effects of these treatments on the yield of a particular truss, competition effects between trusses were shown to exist with all trusses except truss 1.

The final investigation was designed to demonstrate that the yield of truss 1 could be reduced by competition for assimilates. The treatments consisted of 3 leaf levels, 2 pollination levels and 3 truss numbers in factorial combination. Competition effects reduced the

yield of truss 1 and it was shown that such effects were influenced by the level of sink strength. Total yield was increased by increases in leaf level when sink strength was high and by additional trusses or extra pollination when the amount of leaf tissue was adequate.

Evidence was presented in the last three studies that economic yield in the tomato plant can be limited simultaneously by lack of both source and sink strength. The studies on competition effects between trusses indicated that the net assimilation rate in the tomato plant can be depressed by lack of sink strength. Aspects of the source sink relationship in the tomato plant are discussed.

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LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
2.1	Main effects of nitrogen levels before and after flower initiation on flower number, days to flowering and shoot dry weight.	39
2.2	Main effects of nitrogen levels before and after flower initiation on yield, mean weight and number of fruit.	40
2.3	Significant interactions of nitrogen level before and nitrogen level after initiation of truss 1.	42
2.4	Fruit yield in first truss, shoot dry weight, leaf area per unit shoot dry weight and shoot dry matter content.	43
3.1	Temperatures in glasshouses during treatment period.	54
3.2	Treatments applied to study the effects of temperature during propagation on the yield of single-truss tomatoes.	56
3.3	Effect of temperature level at different stages during propagation on yield, number and mean weight of fruit.	58
3.4	Treatment effects on fruit yield.	59
3.5	Shoot dry matter content of young plants.	60
3.6	Effect of temperature level at different stages during propagation on dry weight of plant top.	60
4.1	Number and position of leaves retained.	69
5.1	Yield truss 5.	78
6.1	Treatment effects on yield truss 1.	87
6.2	Treatment effects on yield truss 2.	89
6.3	Treatment effects on total yield.	91
6.4	Effect of pollination level on seed number per fruit.	94
6.5	Treatment effects on dry weight of plant top.	96
6.6	Interaction of leaf level and pollination level on ratio of dry weight of leaf to dry weight of plant top.	97

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Between Pages
1.1	The experimentally determined (upper) and diagrammatic (lower) seasonal pattern of fruit volume production (Cooper, 1933).	18-19
1.2	Treatments applied by Verkerk (1933)	page 25
3.1	Relation between yield and fruit number	59-60
3.2	Relation between mean weight and number of fruit.	59-60
3.3	Relation between dry weight of plant top and yield.	61-62
3.4	Relation between percent total shoot dry weight in leaves and yield.	61-62
4.1	Relation between yield and leaf dry weight.	69-70
4.2	Relation between fruit dry matter content and leaf dry weight.	69-70
4.3	Relation between percent total plant dry weight in reproductive tissues and leaves.	71-72
4.4	Relation between percent total plant dry weight in reproductive tissues and roots.	71-72
5.1	Diagrammatic representation of treatments applied.	page 75
5.2	Relation between yield truss 1 and truss number.	76-77
5.3	Relation between mean fruit weight truss 1 and truss number.	76-77
5.4	Relation between yield truss 2 and truss number.	77-78
5.5	Relation between yield truss 3 and truss number.	77-78
5.6	Relation between yield truss 4 and truss number.	78-79
5.7	Relation between fruit number trusses 2 and 3 unstopped series and truss number.	78-79
5.8	Relation between mean fruit weight trusses 2 and 4 unstopped series and truss number.	79-80

Figure		Between Pages
5.9	Relation between total yield and truss number.	79-80
5.10	Relation between total fruit number and truss number.	80-81
5.11	Relation between dry weight of plant top and truss number.	80-81
5.12	Relation between yield and dry weight of plant top.	81-82
5.13	Relation between total plant dry weight (above ground parts) unstopped series and truss number.	81-82