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**EFFECT OF PLOIDY ON INTERSPECIFIC
HYBRIDISATION BETWEEN *Trifolium repens* L.
AND RELATED SPECIES**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN SEED TECHNOLOGY
in the Plant Science Department of
Massey University, Palmerston North
New Zealand**

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1995

ABSTRACT

Two interspecific *Trifolium* hybrids were available at the time this project was initiated. The first hybrid (3x H-6909-5) was a sterile triploid obtained from a *T. repens* x *T. nigrescens* cross to transfer clover cyst nematode (*Heterodera trifolii* Goffart) resistance from *T. nigrescens* to *T. repens*. The second was a tetraploid hybrid (4x H-435) and its octoploid derivative (8x H-435), developed between 4x *T. ambiguum* and *T. repens* to transfer genes conferring longevity and virus resistance from *T. ambiguum* to *T. repens*. This was the first partially fertile hybrid reported between the two species. Chromosome doubling had increased pollen stainability in the octoploid clones (8x H-435).

The objectives of this project were to generate backcross progenies from these two hybrids at various ploidy levels, and to endeavour to achieve successful flow of genes between the parental species.

The triploid H-6909-5 ($2n=3x=24$) was highly sterile and produced no seed from approximately 3,000 reciprocal crosses to both parental species. It was chromosome doubled by an *in vitro* colchicine method using 0.1% and 0.05% colchicine for 48-72 h, depending on treatment. Three chromosome doubled plants (approximately 10% of the surviving meristems) from treatments with 0.05% colchicine and 48 or 60 h duration of application were obtained. Chromosome doubling resulted in a marked increase in fertility, as pollen stainability was increased from 9.9% in 3x H-6909-5 to an average of 89.2% (range 87.7-90.9%) in 6x H-6909-5. Subsequent backcrosses of 6x H-6909-5 and interbreeding of backcross derivatives resulted in an array of fertile hybrids at 4x, 5x and 7x levels, and some aneuploids. The occurrence of 7x BC₁F₁ progeny from the *T. repens* x 6x H-6909-5 (4x x 6x) cross is the first evidence of functional female 2n gametes in *T. repens*. The failure or success of different backcrosses, BC₁F₁ x BC₁F₁ and BC₁F₁ x 6x F₁ crosses supported a 2 maternal:1 paternal endosperm balance number (EBN) hypothesis to explain seed set in wide crosses. The EBN system will be helpful for predicting the success of future crosses if endosperm failure is the cause of hybrid embryo abortion. Meiotic chromosome pairing in F₁ and BC₁F₁ progeny

indicated the presence of allosyndetic pairing, suggesting that genetic exchange between the two species is possible.

T. nigrescens appeared to be a useful source of clover cyst nematode resistance. In the initial screening a mean number of 23.4 (range 0-150) cysts per plant was recorded for *T. nigrescens* in comparison to a mean number of 149.7 cysts per plant for *T. repens*. Rescreening of sixteen surviving *T. nigrescens* and five *T. repens* genotypes confirmed the initial screening results. H-6909-5 (3x and 6x) was also screened for clover cyst nematode resistance, and their resistance equalled that of the resistant *T. nigrescens* genotype. H-6909-5 (3x and 6x) had significantly fewer cysts/g root dry weight than the susceptible *T. nigrescens* and *T. repens* genotypes.

The second array of backcross progenies was generated from crosses involving 8x H-435 and *T. repens* and *T. ambiguum*. 8x H-435 was only cross fertile with *T. repens* and resulted in 145 seeds from 1,578 reciprocal crosses. Eleven out of 19 initially grown BC₁F₁ plants were all hexaploid ($2n=6x=48$). Mean pollen stainability for nine out of the 19 BC₁F₁'s was 32.9% (range 19.1-64.9%). Meiotic chromosome pairing in the 6x BC₁F₁ plants averaged 2.1 univalents, 18.1 bivalents, 1.1 trivalents and 1.6 quadrivalents. From meiotic configurations it was not possible to conclude whether chromosomes of the two species had paired autosyndetically or allosyndetically but the occurrence of a high frequency of multivalents (up to three trivalents and four quadrivalents) indicated both types of pairing.

Backcrosses of 6x BC₁F₁ plants to *T. repens* resulted in 134 BC₂F₁ seeds from 760 crosses. Three out of seven initially grown BC₂F₁ plants were pentaploids ($2n=5x=40$). Pollen stainability averaged 59.3% (range 44.4-70.1%) for four 5x BC₂F₁ plants. On the other hand 6x BC₁F₁ x 6x *T. ambiguum* crosses did not produce any seed and only two pentaploid plants were obtained from 6x BC₁F₁ x 4x *T. ambiguum* crosses. One of these had 17.6% pollen stainability while the other did not produce normal inflorescences.

The difficulty encountered in generating 6x backcross progeny with 6x *T. ambiguum* was overcome by the creation of a fertile "bridging population". However the "fertile bridge" did not eventuate until after two generations of crossing. The 6x

BC₁F₁ plants were intercrossed and produced 114 BC₁F₂ seeds from 663 crosses. Two of the six initially grown BC₁F₂ plants were studied for somatic chromosome counts and were found to be hexaploid ($2n=6x=48$). The average pollen stainability was 40.8% for all six BC₁F₂ plants. One of these 6x BC₁F₂ plants was cross compatible as a female with 6x *T. ambiguum* and resulted 17 seeds from 318 reciprocal crosses.

Most of the 6x BC₁F₁ plants combined the rhizomatous and stoloniferous growth habit of the parental species and two of the ten 6x BC₁F₁ showed significant improvement in stolon number, stolon length, shoot dry weight and nodulation over 8x H-435. However, 6x BC₁F₂ are likely to be superior to 6x BC₁F₁ progeny, as they have exhibited better expression of the combined stoloniferous and rhizomatous growth habit, improved fertility, frequent nodal rooting and heavier nodulation than the BC₁F₁ progeny. Consequently the 6x BC₁F₁ plants can either be used directly in the selection programme or as a "fertile bridge" between the two parental species.

This work has resulted in the development of two arrays of fertile backcross progenies by manipulation of chromosome numbers and the production of a range of hybrid plants combining agronomic characteristics of the parent species in varying genome balances and at a range of ploidy levels. It is therefore concluded that initial sterility of the primary interspecific hybrids need not be a barrier to successful interbreeding.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Bismillah Hirrahman Nirrahim

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

It gives me pleasure to acknowledge the help of many people in the formulation, execution and writing of this study.

I wish to express my appreciation to my supervisor Professor John G. Hampton (Seed Technology Centre, Massey University, Palmerston North) for his advice, encouragement and for the time he spent on reading and critically evaluating this manuscript.

I offer my sincere gratitude to my second supervisor Dr Warren M. Williams (AgResearch Grasslands Research Centre, Palmerston North) for his guidance in the planning, conducting, and writing of this study. It was Dr Williams keen interest and supervision which enabled me to complete this task. I specially acknowledge his constructive criticism, valuable discussion, encouragement, and above all for his moral support throughout my four years of study in New Zealand.

I am also indebted to the following people for their helpful advice and contributions to the work;

Mr Chris F. Mercer and Mr John Grant for their assistance in clover cyst nematode screening experiment.

Dr Derek R. Woodfield for his guidance and valuable discussion on most parts of my thesis and for his assistance in statistical analysis.

Dr Derek W. R. White for providing the triploid *Trifolium repens* x *T. nigrescens* F₁ hybrid.

Dr John R. Caradus for his valuable discussion and advice on statistical analysis.

Mr John L. Ford for providing the red and multifoliolate genotype of white clover ("Crimson Charm").

Mr Allan Nordmeyer for providing 4x and 6x *Trifolium ambiguum* genotypes.

Professor Murray J. Hill and all other Seed Technology staff for their moral support and assistance in so many ways.

Dr Phil Rolston and Mr Roger Claydon for being very close friends.

All staff members of AgResearch Grasslands Research Centre, for accommodation in their laboratory and for support throughout the project.

The New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade for financing my studies and living in New Zealand.

NWFP Agricultural University, Peshawar, Pakistan for allowing me to study in New Zealand.

I extend my gratitude to my parents who gave me wonderful support and love, but unfortunately are now deceased and will not be able to share in this personal achievement. I am grateful to all my brothers and sisters who prayed for my success, especially my oldest brother Syed Zainul Arifeen who supported me both morally and financially throughout my academic career. My sincerest thanks go to my wife Behramand for her moral support and practical assistance, understanding and most importantly for being by my side.

Finally, I owe acknowledgements to Professor Muhammad H. Quazi (Member Crop Sciences, Pakistan Agricultural Research Council, Islamabad, Pakistan) for his guidance and stimulation in the field of plant breeding over the years since 1986, when I was one of his students. To him I dedicate this thesis.

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