

Research Article

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Evaluation of Irrigation Frequency and Selenium Fertilization Impacts on the Nutritional Traits of *Moringa oleifera* and *Moringa peregrina*

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Abstract

This study was conducted to determine the combined effect of irrigation frequency and selenium (Se) fertilizer levels on the chemical composition of *Moringa oleifera* (*M. oleifera*) and *Moringa peregrina* (*M. peregrina*), with the ultimate goal of incorporating *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina* in livestock feed. The combined effect of irrigation frequency and selenium (Se) fertilizer levels were studied in a completely randomized split plot design. The experiment included two plant species (*M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina*), four irrigation frequencies (7, 10, 15, and 20 days), and three Se levels (0.0, 12.5 and 25 mg/L). The results of the study indicated that the irrigation frequency and the foliar spray with organic amino selenium fertilizer affected ($p < 0.05$) proximate analysis (crude protein, ether extract, crude fiber and ash contents), as well as the minerals contents (P, Ca, Mg and Se) of the dried leaves and upper fine stems of *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina* in the different cutting periods. The effect of organic amino selenium fertilizer application and irrigation frequency on all studied traits allowed the classification of *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina* vegetative plant parts as suitable for livestock feeding. Selenium foliar spray can be considered as a safe method to increase the selenium content of both *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina* vegetative parts, which may contribute to increase the functional feeding quality of these plants.

Keywords: Moringa; Water conservation; Foliar spray; Nutrients content

Introduction

Livestock production in arid and semi-arid zones of the world is facing great difficulties, mainly due to the fact that most of the natural range areas have poor forage plants with low nutritional value, especially in regard to digestibility and crude protein content. Feed production also decreases dramatically during the dry seasons at rates of up to 80%. To counter these problems, it has been proposed

to include tree species with high nutritional value in the animal diet and thus improving production standards in the animals' production sector [1]. When range plants are capable of easily releasing their nutrients contents, they can cheaply enhance grazing animals' performance [2–4]. The intake of forage plants by herbivores slows down the digestion process and thus allows sufficient time for the

digestion and absorption of the forage nutritional components, and consequently good body growth rates. The productivity of herbivorous animals such as sheep and poultry can be improved by using high-protein feeds. Among the alternative sources of high-protein feed are Moringa plant species.

Generally, Moringa tolerates various environmental stresses such as soil acidity [5-7], ambient temperatures (-1 - 48 °C), as well as prolonged drought periods [8], which makes it suitable for cultivation in the stressed environments prevailing in the dry regions of the world. As a forage, it has excellent ability for regrowth after repeated cuttings [9] and produces high amounts of biomass [10]. All parts of the Moringa tree can be used as a source of forage, making it one of the most important shrubs or pasture trees that spreads throughout the tropics [11-13].

Moringa plant species are characterized by their nutritional value, particularly their leaves. Moringa leaves are an excellent source of minerals, vitamins and protein which ranges between 19 - 35% dry matter [14,15]. It is worth mentioning that protein represents the most important nutrients component in animal feeds [16], as well as the most expensive ingredient [17]. The amino acid content of Moringa leaves is comparable to that of soybean [18,19], with a digestibility of 79.2% [20]. Nineteen amino acids have been reported in Moringa leaves, of which 10 amino acids are essential for animal nutrition. Lysine and methionine as essential amino acids are present at a level of 19.6 and 2.9 mg/g DM, respectively [21]. In addition, Moringa leaves contain 321 - 521 g/kg DM neutral detergent fiber, 224 - 361 g/kg DM acid detergent fiber [22], 2.27 - 2.98 Mcal metabolizable energy/kg DM, and 79% dry matter digestibility in vitro [10,23]. Moringa leaves also contain very high levels of vitamins A (6.8 mg/kg DM), B (423 mg/kg DM) and C (220 mg/kg DM), as well as 0.6 - 11.2% minerals [24], 1.28 - 4.96% fats [25], and high levels of flavonoids as antioxidants [26]. The chemical composition and digestibility of Moringa plant species vary in accordance with geographical regions, type of soil, type and level of applied fertilizer, and cutting frequency [27,28].

Moringa plant species in dry and arid regions are irrigated for the first two months for the establishment of the plants, thereafter they rarely require watering [29]. The tree with a good root system tolerates drought and needs watering only when wilting symptoms are clear. However, information regarding irrigation methods and water requirements of *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina* in relation to the chemical composition of their leaves and upper stems parts is scarce.

Selenium is an essential plant micronutrient that has been shown to enhance plant growth and development as well as contributing to plant tolerance to environmental stresses [30-33]. Selenium has been detected in all living organisms and has a significant effect on plants and animals' health [30]. Selenium can be absorbed by plants in selenate (SeO_4), selenite (SeO_3) or organic forms [32]. However, Se accumulation in plants depends on the form and concentration of Se, as well as the availability of competing ions [33]. Foliar application of Se has been practiced increasing Se content in different plant species [34].

To our knowledge, no information so far is available about the effect of irrigation frequencies, levels of selenium fertilizer, and cut-

ting intervals on the chemical composition of *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina*. Therefore, to bridge this knowledge gap, the present study was conducted with the aim of evaluating the effect of irrigation frequencies, selenium fertilizer levels and cutting periods on the chemical composition and the nutritional value of *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina*, and to test the hypothesis that the nutritional value of both *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina* could vary pending on the irrigation frequency, Se fertilizer level and cutting periods.

Materials and Methods

The present study was conducted during summer season 2021 at Al-Badraniya Farm located in Al-Ghat town, Central region of Saudi Arabia (26°1'36"N 44°57'39"E). The central region's climate is characterized by hot summers, cold winters, and scarce rainfall during winter and spring. The study was conducted as split plot arrangement in a randomized complete block design with three replications. The treatments applied in the study included two plant species (*M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina*), four irrigation periods (7, 10, 15, and 20 days), and three Se fertilizer levels (0.0, 12.5 and 25 mg/L). The selenium treatments were done by foliar spray of organic amino selenium fertilizer 2.5% (Organic Standards Fertilizer Production Company, Riyadh, KSA). Each replicate was divided into two main plots, which were assigned to the two Moringa species (*M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina*). Each main plot was divided into four subplots for the four irrigation frequencies, while each subplot was divided into three sub-subplots for the three Se fertilizer treatments. Each subplot consisted of four (6m in length) furrows. The distance between the furrows is 25cm, with 20 cm between plants within each furrow. An implanted space was left between adjacent sub-subplots. Also, there was a two meters' distance between neighboring subplots as buffer zones to prevent the horizontal seepage of water between the different subplots.

Hundred kg of triple superphosphate, 50kg of potassium sulfate and 200kg urea per ha were added to the soil. The triple superphosphate and the potassium sulfate as well as half of the urea were applied at sowing, and the other half of the urea was applied in equal amounts after the first and second plant cuts at the peak of the vegetative growth stage.

Experimental treatments (Moringa species, irrigation frequencies, selenium levels) were randomly distributed over the three replicates. The seeds of the two Moringa species were sown during the first week of March 2021 and irrigated using drip irrigation until the plants' establishment stage (three weeks), thereafter the plants were irrigated according to the studied irrigation frequencies. The Se treatments were applied as foliar spray early in the morning.

A sample of 100g fresh leaves and upper fine stems was harvested from each treatment, oven dried at 65 °C, then ground by a grinding machine to pass through a 20-mesh sieve. The ground plant materials were stored in paper bags and placed in a desiccator to determine their chemical composition. The second and third cuts were performed at 45 days' intervals from the preceding cut, and the same procedures were followed for samples collection and treatment. The crude protein (CP), fat (EE), ash and crude fiber (CF) contents were estimated by the methods described in AOAC [35].

The mineral contents of the leaves and the upper fine stems samples of both Moringa species: calcium (Ca) and magnesium (Mg) were estimated using atomic absorption spectrometry. Phosphorous (P) was determined chromatically. Selenium was determined according to the method of Pedrorero et al. [36] using an ICP-MS device (Pasma Quant MS Elite, Germany). All analyzes were performed in duplicate.

Statistical analyses. The chemical composition of Moringa species was subjected to one-way analysis of variance. (ANOVA) according to the general linear model (GLM) using the SPSS 20.0 statistical software. In case of significant differences between the treatments means, Duncan's multiple range test at 5% level of significance was used to compare the treatments means.

Results and Discussion

The drip irrigation frequency had significant effects ($P < 0.05$) on the proximate composition of dried leaves and upper fine stems of *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina* (Table 1). The proximate composition of *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina* indicated significant differences between the two Moringa species with respect to all the studied traits (Table 1). The highest percentages for all studied traits were recorded in *M. oleifera* in the third cut with drip irrigation frequency every 20 days, and the lowest percentages were recorded in *M. peregrina* especially in the first cut with drip irrigation frequency every 7 days. Regardless of the cutting period and irrigation regimes, *M. oleifera* recorded the highest values of all studied traits.

Table 1: The effect of irrigation frequency (days) on the proximate composition of *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina* dried leaves and upper fine stems at different cutting periods.

Treatments*	First cut		Second cut		Third cut	
	<i>M. oleifera</i>	<i>M. peregrina</i>	<i>M. oleifera</i>	<i>M. peregrina</i>	<i>M. oleifera</i>	<i>M. peregrina</i>
Crude protein (%)						
7 days	17.8c	16.3a	18.8c	16.8a	19.9c	17.3c
10 days	19.2b	16.5a	20.4b	17.2a	22.7b	17.9bc
15 days	20.5a	16.7a	21.8a	17.5a	24.1a	18.5ab
20 days	21.2a	17.2a	22.5a	17.9a	24.9a	19.3a
SE	1.05	0.67	1.15	0.64	1.8	0.7
Fat (%)						
7 days	1.2 c	1.0c	1.6d	1.5c	2.0c	1.8c
10 days	1.4bc	1.3bc	1.9cd	1.8bc	2.4bc	2.1bc
15 days	1.7b	1.6ab	2.4b	2.0ab	2.7b	2.4b
20 days	2.1a	1.8a	2.8a	2.3a	3.2a	2.9a
SE	0.3	0.25	0.35	0.3	0.45	0.4
Ash (%)						
7 days	5.3a	4.3a	5.6a	4.5b	5.8b	5.0b
10 days	5.4a	4.5a	5.7a	4.7ab	6.0ab	5.2ab
15 days	5.7a	4.8a	6.0a	5.0ab	6.3ab	5.7ab
20 days	6.2a	5.2a	6.5a	5.5a	6.8a	6.0a
SE	0.27	0.22	0.31	0.35	0.35	0.25
Crude fiber (%)						
7 days	7.2d	6.4c	8.7d	7.4c	9.1c	8.8c
10 days	7.8c	6.7c	9.3c	7.7c	9.7c	9.1c
15 days	8.5b	7.3b	10.0b	8.2b	10.3b	9.7b
20 days	8.6a	7.7a	10.7a	8.8a	11.0a	10.3a
SE	0.35	0.35	0.65	0.45	0.65	0.45

*Means within the same column for each trait with different letters are significantly different at $P < 0.05$.

The CP percentages ranged from 17.8 to 24.1% in *M. oleifera* and from 16.3 to 18.5% in *M. peregrina*, which were similar to those reported by Abul-Ezz et al. [37] and Offor et al. [38]. However, the CP values were lower than those recorded by Kakengi et al. [39] and Olugbemi et al. [23], and higher than those reported by Amabye and Gebrihiwot [40]. The fat percentages ranged from 1.2 to

3.2% in *M. oleifera* and from 1.0 to 2.9% in *M. peregrina* which was lower than reported in Nigeria [38]. Differences in fat content could be attributed to the plant genotype, climatic conditions and the cutting stage [41]. The ash percentages ranged from 5.3 to 6.8% in *M. oleifera* and from 4.3 to 6.0% in *M. peregrina*. The here in reported ash contents of Moringa leaves were higher than those recorded in

Nigeria [21]. The crude fiber percentages ranged from 7.2 to 11.0% in *M. oleifera* and from 6.4 to 10.3% in *M. peregrina*. These values are lower than those reported by Offor et al. [38], but similar to those reported by Moyo et al. [21] and Melesse [42].

The cutting periods had positive impacts on the nutritional quality of the leaves of both *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina*. The chemical composition was generally higher in each cutting period as compared to the previous one. The results obtained in this study contradict those reported by Nouman et al. [43] and Sánchez et al. [44] who recorded no significant changes in the chemical composition of Moringa leaves due to cutting periods. Differences in nutrient values observed in this study as compared with those of previous studies may be due to genotypic as well as the environmental differences [45,46].

Table 2 presents the approximate composition of dried *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina* leaves and fine upper branches at different cutting periods. The studied traits included CP, fat, ash and CF. Application of selenium fertilizer increased ($P < 0.05$) the contents of the studied traits in both *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina* as compared to the control. Plants that received Se fertilizer at the level of 25 mg/L recorded the highest significant values for all studied traits in all plant cutting periods (Table 2). The lowest contents of all studied traits were recorded in *M. peregrina* as compared to *M. oleifera* regardless of the Se level or the cutting period (Table 2). Several studies have indicated the beneficial effects of Se at low concentrations on the growth rate of higher plants [47–50], and in increasing plant resistance against oxidative stress [51–53]. Furthermore, Se increased the net assimilation rate of soluble sugars and enhanced protein synthesis [48,54].

Table 2: The effect of selenium fertilization (mg/L) on proximate compositions of *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina* dried leaves and upper fine stems at different cutting periods.

Treatments*	First cut		Second cut		Third cut	
	<i>M. oleifera</i>	<i>M. peregrina</i>	<i>M. oleifera</i>	<i>M. peregrina</i>	<i>M. oleifera</i>	<i>M. peregrina</i>
Crude protein (%)						
0.0 mg/L	17.8c	16.1b	18.6c	16.4b	20.8b	16.9c
12.5 mg/L	20.7b	17.2a	21.3b	17.8a	24.2a	17.4bc
25 mg/L	22.8a	17.8a	23.7a	18.1a	25.1a	18.9a
SE	1.05	0.3	1.2	0.15	0.45	0.75
Fat (%)						
0.0 mg/L	1.2c	1.1b	2.4b	1.5c	2.7b	2.0c
12.5 mg/L	1.7b	1.4ab	2.5ab	2.0b	2.9ab	2.4bc
25 mg/L	2.1a	1.6a	2.8a	2.5a	3.2a	3.0a
SE	0.2	0.1	0.15	0.25	0.15	0.3
Ash (%)						
0.0 mg/L	4.5c	3.9c	4.9c	4.1c	5.7c	4.9c
12.5 mg/L	5.7b	4.5b	5.9b	4.7bc	6.4b	5.6b
25 mg/L	6.4a	5.7a	6.6a	6.0a	7.0a	6.9a
SE	0.35	0.6	0.35	0.65	0.3	0.65
Crude fiber (%)						
0.0 mg/L	7.5c	6.1c	8.7c	7.2b	9.5c	8.4c
12.5 mg/L	8.1b	7.3b	9.6b	8.6a	10.4b	9.7b
25 mg/L	8.7a	8.4a	10.7a	9.1a	11.3a	10.9a
SE	0.3	0.55	0.55	0.25	0.45	0.6

*Means within the same column for each trait with different letters are significantly different at $P < 0.05$.

The mineral content of the leaves and the upper fine stems of *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina* are shown in Table 3. Statistical analyzes showed differences ($P < 0.05$) in mineral contents of the two species due to the effects of drip irrigation frequency and cutting periods. It was clearly observed that on the basis of the means of each of the three cutting periods, the content of P, Ca, Mg and Se in the dry leaves and fine stems were highest when the two Moringa plant species were drip irrigated every 20 days. The contents of N, P, K, Ca, Mg and Se were higher in the third cut than the two other cut-

ting periods (Table 3). The minerals (P, Ca, Mg and Se) contents of the dry leaves and upper fine stems were the highest in the third cut under 20 days' drip irrigation frequency for both *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina* (Table 3). In general, the lowest minerals contents were recorded in plants subjected to 7 days' drip irrigation frequency, and the mineral contents were lower in *M. peregrina* compared to *M. oleifera* regardless of the cutting period (Table 3). The herein obtained results support the findings of the previous reports [55–57].

Table 3: The effect of irrigation frequency (days) on the mineral contents of *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina* dried leaves and upper fine stems at different cutting periods.

Treatments*	First cut		Second cut		Third cut	
	<i>M. oleifera</i>	<i>M. peregrina</i>	<i>M. oleifera</i>	<i>M. peregrina</i>	<i>M. oleifera</i>	<i>M. peregrina</i>
P (mg/g DM)						
7 days	2.31d	1.68d	3.36d	2.73d	3.53d	3.00d
10 days	2.45c	2.13c	3.50c	3.18c	3.68c	3.50c
15 days	2.78b	2.63b	3.83b	3.68b	4.02b	4.05b
20 days	2.93a	2.75a	3.98a	3.80a	4.18a	4.18a
SE	0.15	0.29	0.15	0.29	0.12	0.32
Ca (mg/g DM)						
7 days	2.08c	1.93a	2.18c	2.03a	2.29c	2.23a
10 days	2.42b	1.95a	2.54b	2.05a	2.67b	2.25a
15 days	2.55a	1.97a	2.68a	2.07a	2.81a	2.28a
20 days	2.62a	2.02a	2.75a	2.12a	2.89a	2.33a
SE	0.06	0.04	0.23	n.s	0.23	0.04
Mg (mg/g DM)						
7 days	0.53a	0.43a	0.56a	0.45b	0.58b	0.50b
10 days	0.54a	0.45a	0.57a	0.47ab	0.60ab	0.52ab
15 days	0.57a	0.48a	0.60a	0.50ab	0.63ab	0.55ab
20 days	0.62a	0.52a	0.65a	0.55a	0.68a	0.60a
SE	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04
Se (mg/kg DM)						
7 days	0.91d	0.56c	0.96d	0.59d	1.00d	0.65d
10 days	1.21c	0.97b	1.27c	1.02c	1.33c	1.12c
15 days	1.42b	1.19a	1.49b	1.25b	1.57b	1.37b
20 days	1.73a	1.26a	1.82a	1.32a	1.91a	1.46a
SE	0.31	0.24	0.32	0.22	0.34	0.28

*Means within the same column for each trait with different letters are significantly different at $P < 0.05$.

The P, Ca, Mg and Se contents in the leaves and the upper fine stems of both *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina* in the control samples were lower ($P < 0.05$) compared to the samples treated with Se fertilizer (12.5 and 25 mg Se/L) foliar spray (Table 4). Both Se fertilizer levels and the cutting stage affected ($p < 0.05$) the contents of P, Ca, Mg and Se in *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina* (Table 4). In all cases, the leaves and upper fine stems samples of *M. oleifera* that sprayed with Se fertilizer had higher minerals contents compared to *M. peregrina* (Table 4). The highest P, Ca, Mg and Se contents due to Se fertilizer application were recorded in the third cut for both plant species.

The results of the current study indicate that there are no neg-

ative effects of selenium fertilization on the mineral contents of *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina*. This is consensus with the findings of other studies, which included different fertilization methods and selenium levels [58–60]. The present study has proven that selenium promoted plant growth and didn't cause any negative impact on the studied minerals contents in the two Moringa species that can pose threats to humans or animals health. The herein reported selenium content in the upper vegetative parts of both Moringa species were within the safe "not toxic" ranges [61,62]. Thus, it can be concluded that the bio fortification process for both *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina* was successfully completed and the target safe levels were obtained.

Table 4: The effect of selenium fertilization (mg/L) on the mineral contents of *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina* leaves and upper fine stems at different cutting periods.

Treatments*	First cut		Second cut		Third cut	
	<i>M. oleifera</i>	<i>M. peregrina</i>	<i>M. oleifera</i>	<i>M. peregrina</i>	<i>M. oleifera</i>	<i>M. peregrina</i>
P (mg/g DM)						
0.0 mg/L	2.53a	2.24a	3.57a	3.29a	5.04a	4.91a
12.5 mg/L	2.62a	2.31a	3.67a	3.36a	5.20a	5.13a
25 mg/L	2.71a	2.35a	3.76a	3.40a	5.27a	5.24a
SE	0.41	0.33	0.29	0.45	0.21	0.54
Ca (mg/g DM)						
0.0 mg/L	2.79b	1.76c	2.89b	2.20c	2.97b	2.42b
12.5 mg/L	3.07b	2.31b	3.19b	2.78b	3.42b	2.85b
25 mg/L	3.80a	2.80a	3.95a	3.29a	4.28a	3.82a
SE	0.37	0.25	0.38	0.26	0.43	0.49
Mg (mg/g DM)						
0.0 mg/L	0.64c	0.33c	0.68c	0.54b	0.70c	0.60c
12.5 mg/L	0.72b	0.42b	0.78b	0.62a	0.79b	0.69b
25 mg/L	0.89a	0.55a	0.92a	0.67a	1.04a	0.89a
SE	0.09	0.07	0.07	0.03	0.13	0.1
Se (mg/kg DM)						
0.0 mg/L	1.15c	0.93c	1.19c	0.98c	1.26c	1.07c
12.5 mg/L	1.57b	1.27b	1.64b	1.34b	1.73b	1.46b
25 mg/L	2.55a	1.78a	2.62a	1.87a	2.81a	2.05a
SE	0.49	0.26	0.49	0.27	54	0.3

*Means within the same column for each trait with different letters are significantly different at $P < 0.05$.

Conclusion

The results of the current study indicated that the most effective method for both irrigation and application of Se fertilizer was the irrigation frequency every 20 days, and the foliar spray of Se fertilizer at the maximum vegetative growth of the plants. The highest concentrations of all studied traits were observed in the dry leaves and upper fine stems at drip irrigation frequency of 20 days for both *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina* in the third cutting period. Foliar spraying of Se fertilizer can be considered as a safe method to increase the Se content in *M. oleifera* and *M. peregrina*, which may contribute to increasing their nutritional value for livestock farming.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Data curation and formal analysis Elfadil Babiker, Ali Ashaikh and Faisal Alshamiry; funding acquisition Osman Altahir, Ahmed Alsagan, Khalid Abdoun and Mohammed Alsaadi; investigation Mohammed Alsaadi, Ahmed Al-Haidary, and Ali Ashaikh; methodology Elfadil Babiker, Ali Ashaikh and Faisal Alshamiry; project administration Ahmed Al-Haidary; supervision, Mohammed Alsaadi and Ahmed Al-Haidary; validation, Osman altahir, Ahmed Alsagan and Khalid Abdoun; writing - review and editing, Osman altahir, Ahmed Alsagan and Khalid Abdoun. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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