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**THE INFLUENCE OF ZINC AND COPPER FERTILIZER
APPLICATION ON ZINC, COPPER AND CADMIUM
CONCENTRATION IN MIXED PASTURE**

**A Thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Applied Science in Soil Science at
Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.**

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September, 1996

ABSTRACT

There has been considerable debate about the accumulation of cadmium (Cd) in agricultural soils and its subsequent uptake by pasture plants due to phosphate fertilizer application. Ruminants grazing pastures absorb a small fraction of this Cd, and some of this is subsequently accumulated in the liver and kidney. Although tissue accumulation of Cd in grazing livestock is generally small ($< 1 \text{ mg Cd kg}^{-1}$ fresh tissue), but any reduction in plant uptake is beneficial in reducing such accumulation further, especially in the kidneys. Uptake of Cd by pasture may be affected by the concentration of other nutrient cations, such as zinc (Zn) and copper (Cu). In addition, since Zn and Cu are complexed by the same metal binding protein (metallothionein) as Cd, a change in the ratio of these nutrients in pasture may also reduce Cd accumulation rates by interfering with Cd accumulation.

In order to assess the effects of Zn and Cu on Cd uptake by pasture, a field experiment was conducted, using three pairs of pasture plots with low ($0.2 \text{ mg Cd kg}^{-1}$) and high ($0.6 \text{ mg Cd kg}^{-1}$) background Cd status. Twelve sub-plots (1.44 m^2) were laid out in each plot and increasing levels of Zn (0, 5, 15 and 40 kg ha^{-1}) and Cu (0, 2, 5 and 10 kg ha^{-1}) were added as $\text{ZnSO}_4 \cdot 7\text{H}_2\text{O}$ and $\text{CuSO}_4 \cdot 5\text{H}_2\text{O}$ respectively. Pasture samples were collected at regular intervals and analysed for dry matter yield, botanical composition and Zn, Cu and Cd uptake. Soil samples were extracted with 0.01M CaCl_2 and 0.1M HCl solution to measure the plant available Zn, Cu and Cd.

It was found that the plots with a high background Cd status in the soil resulted in a higher Cd concentration in mixed pasture ($0.22 \text{ mg Cd kg}^{-1} \text{ DM}$) than those with a low background Cd status ($0.10 \text{ mg Cd kg}^{-1} \text{ DM}$) at the first harvest (after 73 days). The Cd concentration in the mixed pasture was higher during the summer (December) period than in the early spring (September).

Application of Zn fertilizer increased the Zn concentration in pasture from 37 to $150 \text{ mg kg}^{-1} \text{ DM}$ at the first harvest. Excessive amounts of Zn lead to a decrease in DM yield. The growth of pasture was controlled principally by the amount of plant available Zn,

which depended on the amount of both added Zn and added Cu. The effect of the added Cu was to increase the toxicity of the added Zn.

Application Cu fertilizer increased the Cu levels from 9 to 16 mg kg⁻¹ DM at the first harvest. The Cu concentration in pasture continued to decrease with time following the addition of fertilizers. The legumes are more tolerant of Cu than grass. The Cu concentration in harvest 4 (after 159 days) ranged from 6.9 to 7.0 mg kg⁻¹ DM in grass and 8.9 to 9.9 mg kg⁻¹ DM in legumes.

The Cd concentration in the pasture decreased with increasing Zn concentration in the pasture at the first harvest. The effect of Zn on Cd uptake was more pronounced on plots with a high background Cd status in the soil. The effect of Zn on Cd concentration depends on the external Zn concentration levels.

There was no consistent effect of Cu concentration on Cd concentration. The effect of the addition of Cu and Zn in fertilizer was to lower the Cd:Cu and Cd:Zn ratios in the herbage.

There was a good relationship between soil available Zn as extracted by 0.1M HCl and Zn concentration in the herbage. A similar observation was obtained for Cu. But there was no consistent relationship between 0.01M CaCl₂ extractable Cd and the Cd concentration in pasture.

The results indicated that pasture and soil analysis for Cd and Zn may provide useful guides to situations where Cd concentrations in pasture may be decreased by Zn applications.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is the heartfelt gratitude that I acknowledged the many people who have made the completion of this study possible.

Firstly and most importantly to Dr. N. S. Bolan for his unfailing supply of advice, continuous guidance, patience and friendship during my study period.

To Dr. A. D. Mackay for his continuous guidance and encouragement. His advice was often keenly sought throughout the study.

To Dr. J. Lee for his supervision, guidance and valuable discussion.

To member of AgResearch specially to Mr. J. Rounce for help with the chemical analysis.

To Dr. R. W. Tillman for his supervision, encouragement and valuable discussion.

To Dr. M. J. Hedley and Dr. P. Loganathan for valuable guidance and suggestions.

To Dr. S. Ganesh for valuable discussion and also help in statistical analysis.

To AgResearch for providing the experimental site and also for providing the facility for the analysis of samples and also help in botanical composition.

Members of Soil Science Department, particularly to Mr. L. D. Currie, B. Toes, I. Furkert, Ross J. Wallace and Mrs. Glenys C. Wallace for their help with field and laboratory work.

To Mr. Malcolm Boag for his comprehensive proof reading of the thesis.

The staff and postgraduate students, past and present, of the Soil Science Department all of whom contributed in a variety ways.

To my wife, Salma and son, Sami for their patience and encouragement throughout the study.

To the Academic Board and University Council for awarding the Helen E Akers scholarship.

And to the C. Alma Baker Trust Fund and MURF for providing the financial support for the analytical cost.

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