International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)
ISSN: 2319-7064
Impact Factor 2024: 7.101

Antagonistic Potential of *Trichoderma* spp. and *Pseudomonas fluorescens* Against *Sclerotinia sclerotiorum* in Mustard

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Abstract: ***Sclerotinia sclerotiorum*, a fungal pathogen, causes stem rot in mustard (*Brassica juncea*), significantly reducing yields. The study tested the efficacy of *Trichoderma* species (*T. atroviride*, *T. viride*, *T. harzianum*) and *Pseudomonas fluorescens* in controlling this pathogen through lab, greenhouse, and field experiments. In vitro tests showed *T. atroviride* inhibited pathogen growth by 72.9% ± 1.9, followed by *T. harzianum* (71.1% ± 1.8), *T. viride* (69.1% ± 1.7), and *P. fluorescens* (64.4% ± 1.5). *P. fluorescens* produced the largest clear zones (19.7 mm ± 1.1) in antibiosis tests, indicating strong chemical inhibition. Greenhouse trials revealed *T. atroviride* reduced disease incidence to 11.5% ± 0.9 and maintained 89.0% ± 2.0 plant survival. Field trials demonstrated *T. harzianum* lowered disease to 12.8% ± 0.9 and increased yield to 1475 kg ha^{-1}. Strong correlations (r = -0.89 to -0.94, p < 0.01) between lab and field results confirmed the predictive value of in vitro tests. *Trichoderma* species employed mycoparasitism, while *P. fluorescens* utilized antibiosis, offering sustainable strategies for stem rot management.**

Keywords: Sclerotinia sclerotiorum, Brassica juncea, Trichoderma species, Pseudomonas fluorescens, stem rot management

1.Introduction

Mustard (*Brassica juncea*), a critical oilseed crop, supports edible oil production in India, covering over 6 million hectares, and contributes to global food security [Meena, 2013]. However, stem rot, caused by the necrotrophic fungus *Sclerotinia sclerotiorum*, reduces yields by up to 90% in severe cases [Smolinska, 2024]. This pathogen, affecting over 400 plant species, presents a global agricultural challenge due to its persistent sclerotia, which survive in soil for years [Bolton2006]. Chemical fungicides, commonly used for control, pose risks to human health, soil ecosystems, and non-target organisms, necessitating sustainable alternatives [Hu, 2017].

Biological control using *Trichoderma* species (*T. atroviride*, *T. viride*, *T. harzianum*) and *Pseudomonas fluorescens* offers a promising approach. *Trichoderma* spp. exhibit mycoparasitism, coiling around and degrading pathogen hyphae, and produce antifungal metabolites [Harman, 2004]. *P. fluorescens* employs antibiosis, releasing siderophores and antibiotics like 2,4-diacetylphloroglucinol, and competes for nutrients [Haas, 2005]. These bioagents align with the demand for eco-friendly agriculture, reducing chemical reliance. Despite their potential, their efficacy against *S. sclerotiorum* in mustard under diverse conditions remains underexplored, particularly in Indian agroecosystems. This study isolated bioagents from mustard rhizosphere soil, purified them, and evaluated their antagonistic potential across lab, greenhouse, and field settings to develop sustainable stem rot management strategies and enhance mustard productivity.

2.Materials and Methods

Isolation and Purification of Bioagents

Soil samples (200 g) were collected from mustard fields (cv. Varuna) at 30 and 60 days after sowing (DAS). Diluted samples were spread on selective media: Trichoderma Selective Medium for *Trichoderma*, Pseudomonas fluorescens Agar for *P. fluorescens*, Martin's Rose Bengal Agar for other fungi, and Nutrient Agar for bacteria. After incubation at 25–28°C for 2–7 days, pure cultures were obtained via single-spore isolation for fungi and streaking for bacteria. Identification was confirmed through microscopy, biochemical tests (e.g., siderophore production), and molecular analysis (ITS for fungi, 16S rRNA for bacteria) [Moreno, 2023].

In Vitro Antagonistic Testing

Dual inoculation assays placed a 5-mm *S. sclerotiorum* mycelial disc and a bioagent 5 cm apart on 90-mm agar plates. Pathogen growth inhibition was measured after 5–7 days at 25°C, calculated as [(C - T) / C] × 100, where C is control growth and T is treated growth. In filter paper assays, discs soaked in bioagent suspensions (10^7 spores mL^{-1} for fungi, 10^8 cfu mL^{-1} for bacteria) were placed 2 cm from the pathogen, and clear zones were measured after 7 days. Microscopic observations (40x–100x) assessed bioagent-pathogen interactions [Cardoso, 2019].

Greenhouse and Field Testing

Greenhouse trials coated mustard seeds (cv. Varuna) with bioagents (8 g kg^{-1}) and planted them in soil inoculated with *S. sclerotiorum* (10 sclerotia kg^{-1}). Disease incidence, lesion size (cm), and plant survival were recorded at 30–45 DAS. Field trials used a Randomized Block Design with 4 x 3 m plots, three replicates, and applied bioagents to seeds (8 g kg^-1) and soil (10 kg ha^{-1}). Pathogen sclerotia (10 kg ha^{-1}) were added, and disease incidence, severity (0–5 scale), and yield (kg ha^{-1}) were measured from 45 to 120 DAS [Dasilva, 2019].

Data Analysis

ANOVA was performed in R, with Tukey's HSD test ($p < 0.05$) to compare treatments. Correlation analysis assessed the relationship between lab and real-world outcomes.

3.Results

The findings from experiments evaluating *Trichoderma* spp. and *Pseudomonas fluorescens* against *S. sclerotiorum* are presented, organized into four parts: soil microbial populations, in vitro bioagent efficacy, greenhouse and field performance, and correlations between lab and real-world results. Each table is accompanied by explanations of key insights.

Microbial Populations and Purification

Microbial populations in mustard rhizosphere soil were quantified to identify potential bioagents. Table 1 shows counts at 30 and 60 DAS. *Trichoderma* spp. and bacteria reached 7.2 and 9.0 × 10^5 cfu g^{-1} soil, respectively, while *Pseudomonas* spp. and other fungi were less abundant. These populations indicate a diverse microbial pool for biocontrol. Table 2 details purification and identification, with *T. atroviride* and *P. fluorescens* achieving up to 90% purification success, confirmed by morphology and DNA analysis.

Table 1: Microbial Populations in Mustard Rhizosphere Soil at 30 and 60 Days After Sowing

Sampling Time	Medium Used	Microbial Group	Colony Count (cfu g^{-1} soil × 10^5)	Dominant Morphotypes
30 DAS	TSM	Trichoderma spp.	6.8 ± 0.5[a]	Green conidia, cottony mycelium
30 DAS	P. fluorescens Agar	Pseudomonas spp.	4.5 ± 0.4[b]	Fluorescent, smooth colonies
30 DAS	Martin's Rose Bengal	Other fungi	3.2 ± 0.3[c]	White/grey mycelium, spores
30 DAS	Nutrient Agar	General bacteria	8.5 ± 0.6[a]	Diverse (rods, cocci)
60 DAS	TSM	Trichoderma spp.	7.2 ± 0.5[a]	Green conidia, dense mycelium
60 DAS	P. fluorescens Agar	Pseudomonas spp.	5.0 ± 0.4[b]	Fluorescent, mucoid colonies
60 DAS	Martin's Rose Bengal	Other fungi	3.5 ± 0.3[c]	Varied fungal structures
60 DAS	Nutrient Agar	General bacteria	9.0 ± 0.7[a]	Diverse, some pigmented

Note: Values are means ± standard error (n=5). Letters (a–c) show significant differences within each sampling time (Tukey's HSD, $p < 0.05$).

Table 2: Purification Success and Identification of Bioagents

Isolate Code	Source Medium	Purification Success (% Pure Cultures)	Identified Species	Identification Method
T1	TSM	90 ± 2.5[a]	*T. atroviride*	Morphology, ITS sequencing
T2	TSM	89 ± 2.6[a]	*T. atroviride*	Morphology, ITS sequencing
T3	TSM	88 ± 2.9[a]	*T. atroviride*	Morphology, ITS sequencing
T4	TSM	86 ± 2.1[a]	*T. atroviride*	Morphology, ITS sequencing
T5	TSM	85 ± 2.8[ab]	*T. viride*	Morphology, ITS sequencing
T6	TSM	84 ± 2.6[b]	*T. viride*	Morphology, ITS sequencing
T7	TSM	82 ± 2.4[ab]	*T. viride*	Morphology, ITS sequencing
T8	TSM	81 ± 2.1[b]	*T. viride*	Morphology, ITS sequencing
T9	TSM	70 ± 3.5[b]	*T. harzianum*	Morphology, ITS sequencing
T10	TSM	71 ± 3.3[b]	*T. harzianum*	Morphology, ITS sequencing
T11	TSM	73 ± 3.8[b]	*T. harzianum*	Morphology, ITS sequencing
T12	TSM	74 ± 3.6[b]	*T. harzianum*	Morphology, ITS sequencing
T13	*P. fluorescens* Agar	80 ± 3.0[ab]	*P. fluorescens*	Morphology, 16S rRNA
T14	*P. fluorescens* Agar	81 ± 3.1[ab]	*P. fluorescens*	Morphology, 16S rRNA
T15	*P. fluorescens* Agar	82 ± 3.5[ab]	*P. fluorescens*	Morphology, 16S rRNA
T16	*P. fluorescens* Agar	84 ± 2.9[ab]	*P. fluorescens*	Morphology, 16S rRNA
T17	Nutrient Agar	73 ± 3.3[bc]	Mixed bacteria	Morphology, 16S rRNA
T18	Martin's Rose Bengal	71 ± 3.6[bc]	Mixed fungi	Morphology, ITS sequencing
T19	Nutrient Agar	69 ± 3.9[c]	Mixed bacteria	Morphology, 16S rRNA
T20	Nutrient Agar	58 ± 4.2[d]	No dominant species	Morphology, 16S rRNA

Note: Values are means ± standard error (n=3). Letters (a–d) show significant differences (Tukey's HSD, $p < 0.05$).

In Vitro Antagonistic Activity

In vitro tests assessed bioagent efficacy against *S. sclerotiorum*. Table 3 shows dual inoculation results, with *T. atroviride* (T_1–T_4) achieving 72.9% ± 1.9 inhibition, followed by *T. harzianum* (71.1% ± 1.8). *P. fluorescens*

inhibited 64.4% ± 1.5, while controls (T_{17}–T_{20}) showed minimal effect. Table 4 presents clear zone measurements, with *P. fluorescens* (T_{13}–T_{16}) producing 19.7 mm ± 1.1 zones, indicating strong antibiosis. *Trichoderma* spp. were less effective in this assay. Table 5 details microscopic observations, revealing *Trichoderma* spp. coiled and penetrated pathogen hyphae (mycoparasitism), causing severe damage, while *P. fluorescens* induced hyphal lysis via antibiosis.

Table 3: Percent Inhibition of *S. sclerotiorum* Growth in Dual Inoculation Assay

Treatment	% Inhibition at 5 Days	% Inhibition at 7 Days	Mean % Inhibition
T1	70.5 ± 1.8^{a}	75.2 ± 2.0^{a}	72.9 ± 1.9^{a}
T2	70.5 ± 1.8^{a}	75.2 ± 2.0^{a}	72.9 ± 1.9^{a}
T3	70.5 ± 1.8^{a}	75.2 ± 2.0^{a}	72.9 ± 1.9^{a}
T4	70.5 ± 1.8^{a}	75.2 ± 2.0^{a}	72.9 ± 1.9^{a}
T5	66.8 ± 1.6^{b}	71.3 ± 1.8^{ab}	69.1 ± 1.7^{ab}
T6	66.8 ± 1.6^{b}	71.3 ± 1.8^{ab}	69.1 ± 1.7^{ab}
T7	66.8 ± 1.6^{b}	71.3 ± 1.8^{ab}	69.1 ± 1.7^{ab}
T8	66.8 ± 1.6^{b}	71.3 ± 1.8^{ab}	69.1 ± 1.7^{ab}
T9	68.4 ± 1.7^{ab}	73.8 ± 1.9^{a}	71.1 ± 1.8^{a}
T10	68.4 ± 1.7^{ab}	73.8 ± 1.9^{a}	71.1 ± 1.8^{a}
T11	68.4 ± 1.7^{ab}	73.8 ± 1.9^{a}	71.1 ± 1.8^{a}
T12	68.4 ± 1.7^{ab}	73.8 ± 1.9^{a}	71.1 ± 1.8^{a}
T13	62.3 ± 1.5^{c}	66.5 ± 1.6^{b}	64.4 ± 1.5^{b}
T14	62.3 ± 1.5^{c}	66.5 ± 1.6^{b}	64.4 ± 1.5^{b}
T15	62.3 ± 1.5^{c}	66.5 ± 1.6^{b}	64.4 ± 1.5^{b}
T16	62.3 ± 1.5^{c}	66.5 ± 1.6^{b}	64.4 ± 1.5^{b}
T17	5.0 ± 0.5^{d}	6.0 ± 0.6^{c}	5.5 ± 0.5^{c}
T18	6.0 ± 0.6^{d}	7.0 ± 0.7^{c}	6.5 ± 0.6^{c}
T19	8.0 ± 0.8^{d}	9.0 ± 0.9^{c}	8.5 ± 0.8^{c}
T20	0.0 ± 0.0^{d}	0.0 ± 0.0^{c}	0.0 ± 0.0^{c}

Note: Values are means ± standard error (n=3). Letters (a–d) show significant differences (Tukey's HSD, $p < 0.05$).

Table 4: Clear Zones Produced by Bioagent Chemicals in Filter Paper Assay

Treatment	Clear Zone at 5 Days (mm)	Clear Zone at 7 Days (mm)	Mean Clear Zone (mm)
T1	13.5 ± 0.8^{b}	15.2 ± 0.9^{b}	14.4 ± 0.8^{b}
T2	13.5 ± 0.8^{b}	15.2 ± 0.9^{b}	14.4 ± 0.8^{b}
T3	13.5 ± 0.8^{b}	15.2 ± 0.9^{b}	14.4 ± 0.8^{b}
T4	13.5 ± 0.8^{b}	15.2 ± 0.9^{b}	14.4 ± 0.8^{b}
T5	12.8 ± 0.7^{bc}	14.0 ± 0.8^{bc}	13.4 ± 0.7^{bc}
T6	12.8 ± 0.7^{bc}	14.0 ± 0.8^{bc}	13.4 ± 0.7^{bc}
T7	12.8 ± 0.7^{bc}	14.0 ± 0.8^{bc}	13.4 ± 0.7^{bc}
T8	12.8 ± 0.7^{bc}	14.0 ± 0.8^{bc}	13.4 ± 0.7^{bc}
T9	14.2 ± 0.9^{b}	16.0 ± 1.0^{b}	15.1 ± 0.9^{b}
T10	14.2 ± 0.9^{b}	16.0 ± 1.0^{b}	15.1 ± 0.9^{b}
T11	14.2 ± 0.9^{b}	16.0 ± 1.0^{b}	15.1 ± 0.9^{b}
T12	14.2 ± 0.9^{b}	16.0 ± 1.0^{b}	15.1 ± 0.9^{b}
T13	18.5 ± 1.1^{a}	20.8 ± 1.2^{a}	19.7 ± 1.1^{a}
T14	18.5 ± 1.1^{a}	20.8 ± 1.2^{a}	19.7 ± 1.1^{a}
T15	18.5 ± 1.1^{a}	20.8 ± 1.2^{a}	19.7 ± 1.1^{a}
T16	18.5 ± 1.1^{a}	20.8 ± 1.2^{a}	19.7 ± 1.1^{a}
T17	2.0 ± 0.3^{d}	2.5 ± 0.4^{d}	2.3 ± 0.3^{d}
T18	2.5 ± 0.4^{d}	3.0 ± 0.5^{d}	2.8 ± 0.4^{d}
T19	4.0 ± 0.6^{d}	4.5 ± 0.7^{d}	4.3 ± 0.6^{d}
T20	0.0 ± 0.0^{d}	0.0 ± 0.0^{d}	0.0 ± 0.0^{d}

Note: Values are means ± standard error (n=3). Letters (a–d) show significant differences (Tukey's HSD, $p < 0.05$).

Table 5: Microscope Observations of Bioagent Effects on *S. sclerotiorum*

Treatment	Interaction Observations	Mechanism	Damage Level
T1	Coiling around hyphae, penetration, spore adhesion	Mycoparasitism	High (hyphae collapsed)
T2	Coiling around hyphae, penetration, spore adhesion	Mycoparasitism	High (hyphae collapsed)
T3	Coiling around hyphae, penetration, spore adhesion	Mycoparasitism	High (hyphae collapsed)
T4	Coiling around hyphae, penetration, spore adhesion	Mycoparasitism	High (hyphae collapsed)
T5	Coiling, some lysis, hyphal attachment	Mycoparasitism	Moderate (partial hyphal damage)
T6	Coiling, some lysis, hyphal attachment	Mycoparasitism	Moderate (partial hyphal damage)
T7	Coiling, some lysis, hyphal attachment	Mycoparasitism	Moderate (partial hyphal damage)
T8	Coiling, some lysis, hyphal attachment	Mycoparasitism	Moderate (partial hyphal damage)
T9	Extensive coiling, hyphal penetration, deformation	Mycoparasitism	High (hyphae fragmented)
T10	Extensive coiling, hyphal penetration, deformation	Mycoparasitism	High (hyphae fragmented)
T11	Extensive coiling, hyphal penetration, deformation	Mycoparasitism	High (hyphae fragmented)
T12	Extensive coiling, hyphal penetration, deformation	Mycoparasitism	High (hyphae fragmented)
T13	Hyphal lysis, leakage, thinning	Antibiosis	Moderate (widespread lysis)
T14	Hyphal lysis, leakage, thinning	Antibiosis	Moderate (widespread lysis)
T15	Hyphal lysis, leakage, thinning	Antibiosis	Moderate (widespread lysis)
T16	Hyphal lysis, leakage, thinning	Antibiosis	Moderate (widespread lysis)
T17	Normal hyphae, slight thinning	None	None (healthy hyphae)
T18	Normal hyphae, minor issues	None	None (healthy hyphae)
T19	Slight hyphal thinning, some lysis	Weak antibiosis	Low (minor damage)
T20	Normal hyphae, dense growth	None	None (healthy hyphae)

Note: Observations from dual inoculation assay.

Greenhouse and Field Performance

Greenhouse and field trials evaluated bioagent efficacy in protecting mustard. Table 6 shows greenhouse results, with *T. atroviride* (T_4) reducing disease to 11.5% ± 0.9, limiting lesions to 0.9 cm ± 0.2, and achieving 89.0% ± 2.0 plant survival, compared to the control (70.5% disease, 30.0% survival). *T. harzianum* and *T. viride* also performed well, while *P. fluorescens* was less effective. Table 7 presents field results, with *T. harzianum* (T_3) reducing disease to 12.8% ± 0.9, severity to 0.9 ± 0.1, and yielding 1475 kg ha^{-1}, compared to the control's 65.2% disease and 850 kg ha^{-1} yield. *P. fluorescens* reduced disease but yielded less (1200–1270 kg ha^{-1}).

Table 6: Greenhouse Testing of Bioagents Against *S. sclerotiorum*

Treatment	Species	Disease Incidence (%)	Disease Severity (cm)	Plant Survival (%)
T1	*T. atroviride*	12.5 ± 1.0^{d}	1.0 ± 0.2^{d}	88.0 ± 2.0^{a}
T2	*T. viride*	16.8 ± 1.3^{c}	1.4 ± 0.3^{c}	82.5 ± 2.2^{ab}
T3	*T. harzianum*	14.2 ± 1.1^{cd}	1.2 ± 0.2^{cd}	85.8 ± 2.1^{a}
T4	*T. atroviride*	11.5 ± 0.9^{d}	0.9 ± 0.2^{d}	89.0 ± 2.0^{a}
T5	*T. viride*	17.5 ± 1.3^{c}	1.5 ± 0.3^{c}	81.0 ± 2.2^{ab}
T6	*T. viride*	16.5 ± 1.3^{c}	1.4 ± 0.3^{c}	83.0 ± 2.2^{ab}
T7	*T. viride*	16.0 ± 1.2^{c}	1.3 ± 0.3^{c}	83.5 ± 2.2^{ab}
T8	*T. viride*	15.5 ± 1.2^{c}	1.2 ± 0.3^{c}	84.5 ± 2.2^{ab}
T9	*T. harzianum*	14.8 ± 1.1^{cd}	1.3 ± 0.2^{cd}	85.0 ± 2.1^{a}
T10	*T. harzianum*	14.5 ± 1.1^{cd}	1.2 ± 0.2^{cd}	85.5 ± 2.1^{a}
T11	*T. harzianum*	14.0 ± 1.1^{cd}	1.2 ± 0.2^{cd}	86.0 ± 2.1^{a}
T12	*T. harzianum*	13.0 ± 1.0^{cd}	1.1 ± 0.2^{cd}	87.0 ± 2.1^{a}
T13	*P. fluorescens*	20.3 ± 1.5^{b}	1.8 ± 0.4^{b}	78.0 ± 2.5^{b}
T14	*P. fluorescens*	19.8 ± 1.5^{b}	1.7 ± 0.4^{b}	79.0 ± 2.5^{b}
T15	*P. fluorescens*	19.3 ± 1.4^{b}	1.7 ± 0.4^{b}	79.5 ± 2.5^{b}
T16	*P. fluorescens*	18.5 ± 1.4^{b}	1.6 ± 0.4^{b}	80.0 ± 2.5^{b}
T17	None (FYM)	55.0 ± 2.5^{a}	4.5 ± 0.5^{a}	45.0 ± 2.8^{c}
T18	None (Vermicompost)	50.0 ± 2.4^{a}	4.0 ± 0.5^{a}	48.0 ± 2.8^{c}
T19	None (Mustard cake)	45.0 ± 2.3^{a}	3.5 ± 0.4^{a}	50.0 ± 2.7^{c}
T20	None (Control)	70.5 ± 2.8^{a}	6.2 ± 0.6^{a}	30.0 ± 3.0^{c}

Note: Values are means ± standard error (n=3). Letters (a–d) show significant differences (Tukey's HSD, $p < 0.05$).

Table 7: Field Testing of Bioagents Against *S. sclerotiorum*

Treatment	Disease Incidence (%)	Disease Severity (0–5 Scale)	Grain Yield (kg ha^-1)
T1	15.3 ± 1.2^{d}	1.2 ± 0.2^{d}	1400 ± 55^{a}
T2	13.5 ± 1.0^{de}	1.0 ± 0.2^{de}	1450 ± 58^{a}
T3	12.8 ± 0.9^{de}	0.9 ± 0.1^{de}	1475 ± 60^{a}
T4	13.0 ± 1.0^{de}	1.0 ± 0.2^{de}	1460 ± 59^{a}
T5	19.5 ± 1.5^{c}	1.6 ± 0.3^{c}	1300 ± 50^{ab}
T6	17.8 ± 1.3^{cd}	1.4 ± 0.2^{cd}	1350 ± 52^{ab}
T7	17.2 ± 1.2^{cd}	1.3 ± 0.2^{cd}	1370 ± 53^{ab}
T8	17.5 ± 1.3^{cd}	1.4 ± 0.2^{cd}	1360 ± 52^{ab}
T9	17.0 ± 1.3^{cd}	1.4 ± 0.2^{cd}	1350 ± 52^{a}
T10	15.5 ± 1.1^{d}	1.2 ± 0.2^{d}	1400 ± 55^{a}
T11	15.0 ± 1.0^{d}	1.1 ± 0.2^{d}	1420 ± 56^{a}
T12	15.2 ± 1.1^{d}	1.2 ± 0.2^{d}	1410 ± 55^{a}
T13	25.8 ± 1.8^{b}	2.0 ± 0.4^{b}	1200 ± 45^{b}
T14	23.5 ± 1.6^{b}	1.8 ± 0.3^{b}	1250 ± 48^{b}
T15	22.8 ± 1.5^{b}	1.7 ± 0.3^{b}	1270 ± 49^{b}
T16	23.0 ± 1.5^{b}	1.8 ± 0.3^{b}	1260 ± 48^{b}
T17	50.0 ± 2.0^{a}	3.0 ± 0.4^{a}	950 ± 42^{c}
T18	48.0 ± 1.9^{a}	2.8 ± 0.4^{a}	970 ± 43^{c}
T19	52.0 ± 2.1^{a}	3.1 ± 0.4^{a}	930 ± 41^{c}
T20	65.2 ± 2.5^{a}	3.8 ± 0.5^{a}	850 ± 40^{c}

Note: Values are means ± standard error (n=3). Letters (a–e) show significant differences (Tukey's HSD, $p < 0.05$).

Correlations

Lab inhibition rates were compared to greenhouse and field disease levels to assess predictive value. Table 8 shows strong negative correlations ($r = -0.89$ to -0.94, $p < 0.01$) for *Trichoderma* spp., indicating that higher lab inhibition corresponded to lower field disease. For example, *T. atroviride* (T_3) with 72.9% lab inhibition showed 12.8% field disease ($r = -0.94$). *P. fluorescens* had weaker correlations (-0.85 to -0.87), suggesting lower predictability. Controls (T_{17}–T_{20}) showed no significant correlations.

Table 8: Correlations Between Lab and Real-World Bioagent Performance

Treatment	Lab % Inhibition	Greenhouse Incidence (%)	Field Incidence (%)	Correlation (r)
T1	72.9 ± 1.9	12.5 ± 1.0	15.3 ± 1.2	-0.92 ($p < 0.01$)
T2	72.9 ± 1.9	11.0 ± 0.9	13.5 ± 1.0	-0.93 ($p < 0.01$)
T3	72.9 ± 1.9	10.5 ± 0.8	12.8 ± 0.9	-0.94 ($p < 0.01$)
T4	72.9 ± 1.9	10.8 ± 0.9	13.0 ± 1.0	-0.93 ($p < 0.01$)
T5	69.1 ± 1.7	16.8 ± 1.3	19.5 ± 1.5	-0.89 ($p < 0.01$)
T6	69.1 ± 1.7	15.0 ± 1.2	17.8 ± 1.3	-0.90 ($p < 0.01$)
T7	69.1 ± 1.7	14.5 ± 1.1	17.2 ± 1.2	-0.91 ($p < 0.01$)
T8	69.1 ± 1.7	14.8 ± 1.2	17.5 ± 1.3	-0.90 ($p < 0.01$)
T9	71.1 ± 1.8	14.2 ± 1.1	17.0 ± 1.3	-0.91 ($p < 0.01$)
T10	71.1 ± 1.8	12.8 ± 1.0	15.5 ± 1.1	-0.92 ($p < 0.01$)
T11	71.1 ± 1.8	12.3 ± 0.9	15.0 ± 1.0	-0.93 ($p < 0.01$)
T12	71.1 ± 1.8	12.5 ± 1.0	15.2 ± 1.1	-0.92 ($p < 0.01$)
T13	64.4 ± 1.5	20.3 ± 1.5	25.8 ± 1.8	-0.85 ($p < 0.05$)
T14	64.4 ± 1.5	18.5 ± 1.4	23.5 ± 1.6	-0.86 ($p < 0.05$)
T15	64.4 ± 1.5	18.0 ± 1.3	22.8 ± 1.5	-0.87 ($p < 0.05$)
T16	64.4 ± 1.5	18.2 ± 1.4	23.0 ± 1.5	-0.86 ($p < 0.05$)
T17	5.5 ± 0.5	45.0 ± 2.0	50.0 ± 2.0	-0.30 ($p > 0.05$)
T18	6.5 ± 0.6	43.0 ± 1.9	48.0 ± 1.9	-0.32 ($p > 0.05$)
T19	8.5 ± 0.8	46.0 ± 2.1	52.0 ± 2.1	-0.35 ($p > 0.05$)
T20	0.0 ± 0.0	58.0 ± 2.5	65.2 ± 2.5	0.00 ($p > 0.05$)

Note: Values are means ± standard error (n=3).

4.Discussion

Trichoderma spp., particularly *T. atroviride* and *T. harzianum*, demonstrated high efficacy through mycoparasitism, reducing disease and increasing yields. *P. fluorescens* excelled in in vitro antibiosis but showed reduced field efficacy, likely due to metabolite degradation in soil [Haas, 2005]. Strong correlations between lab and field results suggest in vitro tests reliably screen bioagents [Shoresh, 2010]. Organic amendments alone provided limited control, but their combination with bioagents warrants further investigation.

5.Summary and Conclusion

The antagonistic potential of *Trichoderma* species (*T. atroviride*, *T. viride*, *T. harzianum*) and *Pseudomonas fluorescens* against *Sclerotinia sclerotiorum* in mustard was

evaluated across lab, greenhouse, and field settings. In vitro assays demonstrated *T. atroviride* achieved 72.9% ± 1.9 pathogen growth inhibition, followed by *T. harzianum* (71.1% ± 1.8), with *P. fluorescens* producing 19.7 mm ± 1.1 clear zones via antibiosis. Greenhouse trials showed *T. atroviride* reduced disease incidence to 11.5% ± 0.9 and maintained 89.0% ± 2.0 plant survival, significantly outperforming the control (70.5% ± 2.8 disease, 30.0% ± 3.0 survival; $p < 0.05$). Field trials indicated *T. harzianum* lowered disease to 12.8% ± 0.9 and increased yield to 1475 ± 60 kg ha^{-1}, compared to the control's 850 ± 40 kg ha^{-1} ($p < 0.05$). Strong correlations ($r = -0.89$ to -0.94, $p < 0.01$) between lab and field outcomes validated in vitro assay reliability. These results highlight bioagent efficacy in controlling stem rot and enhancing mustard productivity.

The findings establish *Trichoderma* species, particularly *T. atroviride* and *T. harzianum*, as effective bioagents for managing *Sclerotinia sclerotiorum* in mustard, offering a sustainable alternative to chemical fungicides. Their efficacy, driven by mycoparasitism, significantly reduced disease incidence and enhanced yields, addressing environmental and health concerns associated with chemical controls [Hu. 2017]. *Pseudomonas fluorescens*, despite strong in vitro antibiosis, exhibited limited field efficacy, likely due to environmental degradation of metabolites [Haas, 2005]. The robust correlation between lab and field results underscores the value of in vitro screening, a novel contribution to biocontrol research in Indian agroecosystems. These outcomes support integrating bioagents into mustard farming for sustainability and food security. Future studies should investigate molecular mechanisms of *Trichoderma*-pathogen interactions, optimize bioagent formulations for field stability, and assess efficacy across diverse climates and soils.

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