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SUMMARY

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Screening of avocado rootstock material for tolerance to *Phytophthora cinnamomi*

by

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During the initiation and execution of a rootstock breeding programme to overcome the financially crippling disease, *Phytophthora* root rot of avocado, various constraints have been identified for both the breeding as well as the screening aspect of the programme. A review of the literature revealed a complex host-pathogen interaction that should be taken into account in the recombination and screening of genetic material.

With the detection of beneficial genotypes being the crux of a breeding programme, this dissertation was focused on the screening of rootstock material for tolerance to *Phytophthora cinnamomi*. Screening should be scientific but at the same time also be time and cost effective. Specific attention was given to (i) the correct medium for screening mass numbers of seedlings, (ii) fast and effective cloning of single selections, and (iii) evaluation of clonal material for tolerance to *P. cinnamomi*.

Soil as a screening medium was compared with three inert hydroponic media as well as one aeroponic system. Only soil was found to be ineffective due to its properties. The other media tested, namely, sand, vermiculite, water and the aeroponic system were equal in performance. The medium to be used will depend on the preference of the breeder as each medium has its own pro's

and con's. It was, however, found that the evaluation criterion to be applied depends on the medium that is used.

With regard to cloning of single selections, a definite difference with regard to the cloning ability of the different selections was found. An inability to be etiolated was displayed by some of the selections and these could thus not be vegetatively propagated and were not further tested.

One of the tolerance mechanisms in the standard cultivar Duke 7, is root regeneration. It was thus expected that this characteristic cloning would give an indication of the rootstock's ability to tolerate *P. cinnamomi*. This could not be confirmed, but most of the selections did, however, perform better than Duke 7.

Comparison of feeder root percentage in non-inoculated and inoculated treatments was not sufficient for facilitating the final selection of candidate rootstocks from a large number of potential clonal selections. Four selections were made, based on the hypothesis that a larger root system will be a better forager and thus enhance the horticultural aspects of the rootstock-scion combination.

Valuable information was obtained with regard to various mediums and criteria to be used during mass screening and final screening of clonal selections. This knowledge must be taken into account in the planning of future breeding projects. During this project a total of 38 984 seedlings were screened and four selections were made. For both the nursery and the producer, knowledge of the clonal ability of a potential new rootstock is important from a financial point of view.

Samevatting

Ondersoek van avokado onderstam materiaal vir verdraagsaamheid teenoor *Phytophthora cinnamomi*.

deur

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Tydens die implementering van 'n onderstamteelprogram met die oog op die teëwerking van die finansiële impak wat *Phytophthora* wortelvrot of die avokado bedryf is verskillende tekortkominge aangedui. Struikelblokke in die kruisingsprogram sowel as in die sifting van die nageslag is geïdentifiseer. Literatuur het aangedui dat rekombinasie en seleksie van genetiese materiaal onderhewig is aan komplekse gasheer-patogeneen interaksies.

Die mees kritieke aspek van 'n teelprogram is die identifisering van voordelige nuwe genotipes en daarom is gefokus op die seleksie van onderstammateriaal. Alhoewel finansiële beperkinge bepaal dat sifting van potentiële nuwe onderstamme so koste- en tydseffektief as moontlik gedoen moet word, moet dit steeds wetenskaplik uitgevoer word. Aandag is veral aan die volgende aspekte gegee: (i) identifisering van gesikte media vir massasifting, (ii) evaluering van *Phytophthora cinnamomi* verdraagsaamheid van vegetatiewe onderstammateriaal, en (iii) klonering van enkel seleksies.

Vir 'n gesikte siftingsmedium is grond vergelyk met drie inerte hirdoponiese mediums, naamlik sand, vermiculiet en water, asook met 'n aeroponiese sisteem. Slegs grond is as ongesik gevind as gevolg van sekere fisiese eienskappe. Die ander media wat getoets is, naamlik sand, vermiculiet, water

en die aeroponiese sisteem blyk almal ewe bruikbaar te wees. Die medium wat gebruik gaan word hang grootliks af van die navorser se voorkeur en begroting aangesien elkeen sy eie voor- en nadele inhoud. Verskillende evalueringskriteria is egter vir elke medium geïdentifiseer.

Definitiewe verskille ten opsigte van die vinnige en effektiewe vermeerdering van enkel seleksies is gevind, selfs vir die met 'n gemeenskpalike ouer. Van die seleksies het swak gereageer op etiolering en kon dus nie verder vermeerder of getoets word nie.

Wortelregenerasie is by Duke 7 een van die oorlewingsmeganismes teen *P. cinnamomi*. Daar is dus verwag dat hierdie kenmerk 'n aanduiding sou kon gee van 'n seleksies se verdraagsaamheid teenoor *P. cinnamomi* te wees. Die hipotese kon egter nie vanuit die data bevestig word nie.

Die verskil tussen persentasie voedingswortels van geïnfekteerde en nie-geïnfekteerde plante was nie voldoende om die finale selektering van potensiële onderstamme vanuit 'n groep klonaal vermeerderde onderstamme te bewerkstellig nie. Behalwe in drie van die seleksies kon geen statistiese verantwoordbare verlies aan voedingswortels gevind word nie en het meeste van die seleksies soos Duke 7 vertoon. Vier seleksies is gemaak op grond van die hipotese dat onderstamme met 'n groter wortelmassa beter voeders is en dus tuinboukundige eienskappe van die onderstam-bostam kombinasie verbeter.

Waardevolle inligting is ingesamel ten opsigte van die onderskeie media en die metingskriteria wat gebruik kan word vir die sifting van groot aantal saailinge en die finale sifting van klonale seleksies. Die kennis moet gebruik word in die beplanning van toekomstige onderstamteelprogramme. Tydens hierdie projek is 38 984 saailing getoets en vier seleksies gemaak. Vanuit 'n finansiële oogpunt is die vinnige en ekonomiese vermeerdering van dié potensiële onderstamme 'n belangrike aspek.