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Sustainable Floriculture: Eco Friendly Practices and Biofertilizer Integration

P. Mamatha

Ph. D scholar, Department of Floriculture and Landscape Architecture, College of Horticulture, SKLTGHU, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad. India.

Mail id: mamatha33339999@gmail.com

Abstract

The term sustainable floriculture is becoming more and more popular over the past years because the issues of environmental damage, overuse of chemicals, and resource waste grow more acute in the traditional systems of flower production. The increased demand of high quality flowers and the trend in consuming environmentally friendly products has compelled the implementation of greener practices that would guarantee high productivity in the long run without interfering with the ecological integrity. Sustainable floriculture is a combination of environmental friendly production methods, economic feasibility and social responsibility, thus, a crucial aspect of climate resistant and market oriented horticulture. Green floriculture is focused towards minimized reliance on synthetic fertilizers and pesticides through integrated nutrient management, integrated pest and disease management, water saving irrigation methods and with the utilization of biodegradable and renewable inputs. The practices help in good soil health, biodiversity conservation and minimized pollution of soil and water resources. Secured farming, accuracy in irrigation, and organic additions also contribute to the efficiency of the use of resources and reduce the carbon footprint of floricultural activities. The biofertilizers are at the centre of immensely contributing to the floriculture industry making it sustainable by enlisting the benefits of the microorganisms in improving nutrient availability, plant growth, and soil microbial activity. Bacteria that fix nitrogen, solubilize phosphates and potassium and mycorrhizal fungi achieve biological mobilization of these nutrients and eliminate the use of chemicals as fertilizers. Combinations of biofertilizers with organic manures and lower level of

inorganic fertilizers have decoded growth, flowering and quality characteristics of most of the floricultural crops like rose, chrysanthemum, gerbera, marigold and tuberose. Also, biofertilizers can improve soil structure, nutrient cycles, and plant health against biotic and abiotic stressors. Their usefulness has also been reinforced by the use of biofertilizers in the context of covered and precision cultivating systems, which guarantees the optimization of the root zone and specific nutrient supplies. Although proven to have its benefits, issues like poor performance in the field, short shelf life and technical awareness still presents a problem to the broad adoption. It is necessary to overcome these limitations by quality assurance, training of farmers and favorable policy provisions.

Introduction

Floriculture is a fast growing sector of horticulture which has made a remarkable contribution in the diversification of agriculture, creating jobs and earning foreign exchange. The rising demand of cut flowers and ornamental plants which is caused by urbanization, change of lifestyle and the rise in hospitality and event sectors has heightened commercial flower production in all parts of the world. The traditional floriculture systems however, have been typified by overdependence on chemical fertilisers, pesticides and intensive irrigation systems that have caused severe environmental impacts like soil erosion, water contamination, biodiversity degradation and higher production expenses. These issues have highlighted the importance of more environmentally responsible and sustainable methods of flower farming. Sustainable floriculture focuses on the incorporation of production activities that are equal in economic profitability with environmental protection as well as social well being. It will reduce the environmental impact of floricultural production activities and guarantee regular output and quality. Sustainable production systems of flowers are based on practices that are environmentally friendly (e.g. integrated nutrient control, integrated pest and disease control, efficient water use technology, usage of organic and biodegradable inputs). The practices will not only mitigate the load of chemicals on the environment but also boost the health of the soil, increase efficiency in the use of resources, and improve productivity in the long run. Biofertilizers have become one of the

major ingredients in sustainable floriculture, which includes other inputs of biofertilizers. Biofertilizers are useful microorganisms that improve the availability of nutrients through biological activities, which include nitrogen fixation, phosphorus solubilization, potassium mobilization and mycorrhizal associations. Biofertilizers enhance the natural cycling of nutrients in the soil as opposed to synthetic fertilizers and Microbial diversity in the soil, leading to healthier plants and better flowering performance. They have been found to increase the growth, flower production and quality of various floricultural crops when used in combination with organic manures and low levels of chemical fertilizers. The increased focus on the climate-smart approach to agriculture and sustainable intensification has also created a greater interest in the ecological friendliness of floriculture practices. The opportunity to utilize biofertilizers effectively is further provided by the use of technology in the form of protected cultivation and precision farming, which creates the most suitable conditions in the root-zone and enhances the efficiency of nutrient use. In addition, the rise in consumer consciousness and demand of sustainable produced flowers have created new market opportunities to the eco-certified and organic floricultural products.

Theory and Idea of Sustainable Floriculture

Sustainable floriculture is a method used to produce flowers, in which the primary aim embarks on the realization of long-term economic sustainability and protection of environmental health, and advancement of social welfare. It entails proper utilization of natural resources, the use of inputs that are environmentally friendly and the use of management techniques that do not regress the ecological base and continue to ensure productivity. In contrast with traditional floriculture where the focus is usually on short-term productivity and aesthetic appearance after the use of a large amount of chemical fertilizer and pesticides, sustainable floriculture is focused on healthy growth, resource preservation and ecological balance. Sustainable floriculture is anchored on the concept of sustainable agriculture, which is anchored on three pillars that are inter-related, which include environmental sustainability, economic sustainability and social sustainability. Environmental sustainability aims at reducing the negative effects of floricultural

operation to soil, water, air, and biodiversity. Economic sustainability holds that flower production systems will be profitable and economically sustainable in the long term, whereas social sustainability will deal with the concerns pertaining to the health of labor, livelihood of the farmers, and the health of the consumers. These dimensions together contribute to designing floriculture systems, which are productive, resilient, and socially responsible. Effective management of resources is a central concept of sustainable floriculture. The consumption of water, nutrients, energy, and land is done in a way that will give the maximum output and limit the wastes and pain to the environment. Drip irrigation, fertigation, harvesting rain water, and accurate control of nutrients are areas of practice that will be significant in the conservation of water and the limitation of nutrient losses. Efficiency in resource consumption is not only the reduction of the cost of production but also alleviating the environmental impact of the floriculture businesses. Another principle of sustainable floriculture is connected with soil health and biodiversity conservation. Through healthy soils that are high in organic matter and other beneficial microorganisms, there is good plant growth and increase in nutrient recycling. Organic manures, compost, green manuring as well as biofertilizers are used in enhancing the soil structure, microbial activity and availability of nutrients. Sustainable floriculture leads to the reduction of chemical dependency by biodiversity of habitats and crops with the aim of ensuring ecological balance and natural pest control. Overuse of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides result in degradation of the soil, resistance to pesticides and contamination of water bodies. Sustainable floriculture encourages the use of integrated nutrient management and integrated pest and disease management strategies that are compatible, i.e. biological, cultural, mechanical and chemical. Biological control agents, botanical pesticides, and biofertilizers decrease the levels of chemical deposits in the environment and increase their safety. The concept of climate resilience becomes a growing concept in floriculture sustainability. Extremes and weather variability have a high threat on flower production. Sustainable systems increase resilience by means of secure cultivation, diversified systems of cultivation, and application of stress resistant varieties. The environment friendly practices are also part of mitigation, as it minimizes the emission of

greenhouse gases and encourages sequestration of carbon in form of organic amendments. Cost effective production habits, increased stability of yield and the availability of high end markets are aspects that contribute to ensuring economic viability. Sustainable floriculture is likely to have lower input prices, better quality of flowers and increased market value, especially in organic and eco-certified sectors. Economic sustainability is also further enhanced by value addition, certification, and branding of sustainably produced flowers. The last pillar of sustainable floriculture is social responsibility. Growers and farm workers have access to healthy working environments, less exposure to dangerous chemicals, and good income opportunities. Sustainable floriculture will also act in response to the increased consumer demand of flowers which are environmentally and ethically produced.

Environmental Problems of Traditional Floriculture

Although conventional floriculture maintains substantial agricultural revenue and people, the level of production is usually linked to various environmental issues, as a result of intensive production methods. The aim to pursue high yields, appearance, throughout the year has contributed to overuse of chemicals inputs, exhaustion of natural resources as well as ecological pressure. Although these practices have been effective in the short run, they have severe impacts on the sustainability of the environment and the long-term productiveness of floricultural systems. The use of chemical fertilizers excessively is one of the challenges associated with conventional floriculture as far as the environment is concerned. Nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium fertilizers are usually administered in large dosages, to enhance large-scale vegetative growth and flowering. But when the uptake of nutrients in the plants is inefficient, leaching and run off may occur, and not only soil but also water bodies may be contaminated. Nitrate effusion to groundwater is a hazard on human health and phosphorous effusion to surface water enhances surface water eutrophication which disturbs water life. Constant use of chemical fertilizers also denatures the soil structure and decreases the content of organic matter, which negatively impacts on soil fertility. Another serious issue of conventional floriculture is the intensive use of synthetic pesticides. Flower crops are very vulnerable to pests and diseases and there is not much

room to tolerate the damage as per the standards of aesthetic quality. This leads to the proliferation of frequent and random usage of pesticides. This causes pesticide resistance among pests, secondary pests to reoccur and natural enemies to be killed including pollinators, which are very useful to humans. The pesticide residues in the soil and water also increase the environmental pollution and risk to the workers and consumers of the farm. The main impact of the traditional floriculture practices is soil degradation. The constant monocropping of flower crops without proper organic soil supplements leads to loss of soil nutrients and microbial diversity. Compaction of soils, accumulation of salinity and imbalance in pH are common in intensively farmed fields of floriculture. These have an adverse effect on the development of the root, nutrient availability and finally crop productivity leading to a series of progressive dependency on chemical inputs.

Other issues of concern to the environment are water use and management. Floriculture products usually demand intensive irrigation in order to be of good quality and turgid and hence excessive utilization of water resources. Ineffective irrigation techniques like flood irrigation lead to loss of water in form of evaporation and run off. In places where there is a low supply of water, too much groundwater is pumped out of the ground to feed floriculture thereby causing water shortage and posing significant dangers to sustainability in the long term. Traditional floriculture also adds to the consumption of energy and greenhouse emissions. Frequent irrigation, manufacture of fertilizers, pesticides and transportation are some of the energy-intensive practices that contribute to the carbon footprint of flower production. The use of energy in the form of fossil fuel to heat, cool and light the crops in the systems that are placed with protection also adds to the environmental impact. Another challenge that has not been taken into consideration in the traditional floriculture is the generation of waste. The production areas are filled with plastic mulches, containers of pesticides and non-biodegradable packaging materials which pollute the soil and water. Mishandling of chemical waste increases environmental degradation.

Ecofriendly Practices in Floriculture

The concept of eco-friendly practices in floriculture is aimed at reducing the effect on the environment and ensuring productivity, quality of the flowers and economic rationality. Concerning the growing worries about soil erosion, water pollution, biodiversity destruction and climate change, the floriculture industry is also inclined to evolve into more sustainable production systems, which are based on the principles of natural processes, resources utilization, and lowered chemical addiction. These are the principles of sustainable floriculture that are needed to guarantee the long-term ecological stability and competitiveness in the market. Integrated Nutrient Management (INM) is one of the most important practices, which are green in the field of floriculture. INM takes into consideration the balanced application of organic manures, compost, green manuring, biofertilizers and lower amounts of chemical fertilizers to satisfy crop nutrient needs. Organic inputs enhance the structure of the soil, increase the activity of the microbial population, and make the use of nutrients more efficient, and biofertilizers promote the mobilization of nutrients biologically. This combined method prolongs the losses of nutrients and enhances the fertility of soils, prolongs the flower yield and quality. Another important green initiative is the Integrated Pest and Disease Management (IPDM). IPDM insists on prevention and ecological balance as opposed to the exclusive use of chemical pesticides. Crop rotation, sanitation, resistant varieties, and optimum planting density are cultural practices that reduce the level of pests. Floriculture uses mechanical and physical trapping such as sticky traps, pheromones traps and light traps. Parasitoid, predators, and microbial biopesticides are biological control agents that are effective in reducing the population of pests. The application of chemical pesticides is the last option and in a rational way and hence minimizes residues and environmental pollution. Water management is an important part of floriculture that is environmentally friendly. Drip irrigation and micro-irrigation systems are used so that the root zone receives accurate application of the water available, and this reduces wastage to evaporation and runoff. They can be combined with fertigation to enhance the efficiency of water and nutrient use. Saving of rain water and using treated wastewater will also help save water especially in areas where there is a shortage of water. Mulching using organic or biodegradable

substances contributes to the maintenance of soil moisture, temperature and suppression of the growth of weeds.

Sustainable floriculture has become concerned with using eco-friendly growing media and mulches. Biodegradable covers, cocopeat, and composted bark, and other renewable materials have been found to decrease the use of plastic products and enhance soil well-being. The soil-less materials like cocopeat and vermiculite are used in the cultivation of fruits and vegetables in a protected environment, which have excellent aeration and water retentions and allow the use of a sustainable production system. Eco-friendly floriculture is also supported with the help of protected cultivation and precise technologies that allow to optimize the use of resources and lessen the impact on the environment. Green houses and shade net houses provide conducive microclimates, reduce the intensity of the pests and minimise the application of chemicals. Sensors and automated irrigation systems among other precision equipment allow effective control of the inputs, reducing wastage and pollution. Sustainability in the floriculture is also supported by energy efficient practices. It is through solar power, efficient energy fuel irrigation pumps, and greenhouse construction design that reliance on fossil power is minimized. LED lighting increases in the sheltered floriculture reduces the energy use and enhances the growth and flowering of the plants.

Issues and Future Outlooks.

Implementation of sustainable floriculture activities and application of biofertilizers have become popular because of environmental issues and the demand by the consumers to use environmentally friendly flowers. Nonetheless, there are a number of challenges that still impede the mass adoption. Among the main challenges, there is the gap in knowledge of floriculturists. Most small and medium scale growers do not have any kind of awareness as to the advantages of biofertilizers, methods of application and the timing of application thus they end up getting suboptimal results. The training and extension services are usually restricted especially in rural regions where the floriculture is a nascent means of earning a living. The availability and quality of biofertilizers is another major problem. Although microbial inoculants like Rhizobium,

Azotobacter and phosphate solubilizing bacteria have been effective, their production and supply is still uneven. Their efficacy may be decreased because of poor storing conditions, poor shelf life, and contamination which discourages farmers to use them regularly. Also the initial expense and apparent risk of replacing chemical fertilizers with biofertilizers might put growers off particularly in the case of short term fluctuations in yields. Another challenge is integration with conventional practices. A large number of growers have been used to chemicals and pesticides to achieve instant outcomes. The slow activity of biofertilizers and organic amendments involves a lot of planning and patience which might not be in line with the demands of the market where a large volume and uniform quality of flowers has to be produced. In addition, the biofertilizer performance is influenced by climatic and soil variability. Inoculants of microorganisms might not be effective in extreme temperatures, salty soils, or acidic soils, and site-specific adaptation strategies are required. In spite of these setbacks, sustainable floriculture has an extremely bright future. The rising environmental awareness, the rising preference of chemical-free flowers, and more stringent control of the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides are providing a positive market environment regarding the use of eco-friendly practices. The governments and research institutions are starting to provide subsidies, incentive and training programs on the adoption of biofertilizer, which would help increase its adoption among the small-scale growers.

New avenues are also being provided by technological innovations. Using sensors, internet-of-things (IoT), and data analytics can streamline the use of water, nutrient, and biofertilizer to maximize efficiency and minimize the usage of resources that go to waste. Biofertilizer formulations innovations, including encapsulated microbes, multi strain consortia, and nanotechnology-based carriers would tend to enhance stability, shelf life, and efficacy in various field conditions. Moreover, there has been a growing focus on systems, a combination of organic manures, composts and biofertilizers with biocontrol agents and sustainable irrigation techniques. These methods have the potential of elevating soil content, plant endurance, and quality of flowers and minimizing pollution in the environment. Universities, government agencies, and floriculture companies should cooperate and conduct research to come up with

region-specific biofertilizer application in the ornamental crops.

Conclusion

Green floriculture has become an important avenue to ensuring the attainment of environmental protection, economic sustainability and longevity in the ornament horticulture industry. The traditional methods, which significantly depend on the use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and intensive irrigation, have caused degradation of soil, water pollution, and the disappearance of biodiversity that prompt the necessity to adopt more environmentally friendly methods. A holistic solution to the challenges of producing high-quality flowers and minimizing water, soil pollution, and agricultural methods, including using organic soil amendments, water-efficient irrigation methods, integrated pest management, and biofertilizers, is the implementation of sustainable practices. Biofertilizers are also important in the sustainable floriculture as they have improved soil fertility, plant growth, flowering and yield and reduced reliance on chemical inputs. Microbial inoculants which include nitrogen-fixing bacteria, phosphate solubilizing bacteria, potassium mobilizing microbes and mycorrhizal fungi do not only provide the necessary nutrients but also enhance the microbial diversity of soils and plant resilience to biotic and abiotic stresses. Biofertilizers can be used together with organic manures and composts to make it the basis of a sustainable nutrient management strategy that is affordable and safe to the environment. Though the advantages are apparent, other issues like lack of awareness, availability of quality biofertilizers, and the unwillingness to abandon the traditional methods based on chemicals are still hindering the implementation on a grand scale. Climate fluctuations and site-specific limitations also affect the functionality of biofertilizers and require location-specifically recommended and adaptive management methods. Nevertheless, the swelling consumerism of chemical-free and environmentally friendly flowers, government policies, new technologies, and innovations in the field of precision floriculture ensure a positive climate to the intensive application of sustainable practices. In the future, resource use can be optimized and offer efficiency to the eco-friendly floriculture systems even more with the integration of advanced tools, including those based on the use of the IoT and monitoring systems, as well as

digital decision-making platforms and better microbial formulations. To come up with region-specific protocols and best-practice guidelines of biofertilizer use and sustainable management, collaboration between researchers, extension agencies, policymakers, and growers is necessary.

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