



ISSN Print: 2664-844X
ISSN Online: 2664-8458
NAAS Rating (2026): 4.97
IJAFA 2026; 8(9): 547-550
www.agriculturaljournals.com
Received: 28-07-2026
Accepted: 30-08-2026

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Evaluation of biogenic Nano-sulphur for improving growth, reproductive development and yield in soybean (*Glycine max* L.)

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DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.33545/2664844X.2026.v8.i9g.1917>

Abstract

A field experiment was conducted during the *kharif* season of 2025 at the Research Farm of the All India Coordinated Research Project on Weed Management, Dr. Panjabrao Deshmukh Krishi Vidyapeeth, Akola, Maharashtra to evaluate the influence of foliar-applied biogenic Nano-sulphur on growth, reproductive development and yield of soybean. The experiment was laid out in a Randomized Block Design with four replications using soybean variety '*PDKV Amba*'. Six treatments comprised absolute control (T_0), General Recommended Dose of Fertilizer (GRDF) (T_1), GRDF + soil application of bentonite sulphur @ 30 kg S ha⁻¹ at sowing (T_2), and GRDF + foliar application of Nano-sulphur @ 25, 50 and 75 ppm at 30 and 45 days after sowing (T_3 , T_4 and T_5 , respectively). Foliar application of Nano-sulphur significantly influenced plant growth and pod formation. The application of GRDF + Nano-sulphur @ 75 ppm at 30 and 45 days after sowing (T_5) recorded the highest plant height at 60 DAS (66.70 cm) and number of branches plant⁻¹ (5.20). The same treatment produced the maximum number of pods plant⁻¹ (39.90) and seed yield plot⁻¹ (2.55 kg). The results demonstrated that foliar application of biogenic Nano-sulphur @ 75 ppm at 30 and 45 days after sowing in conjunction with GRDF was the most effective treatment for improving soybean growth, reproductive performance and seed yield.

Keywords: Biogenic Nano-sulphur, foliar application, soybean, plant height, pod, seed yield

Introduction

Glycine max L. Merrill, or soybean, is a significant oilseed and protein crop grown all over the world. It is prized for its superior oil and protein and is used extensively for industrial, food, and feed applications. As a legume, it also uses biological nitrogen fixation to support sustainable cropping systems. However, deficits in certain nutrients, especially sulphur, which is essential for protein synthesis, enzyme activity, photosynthesis, nitrogen metabolism, and biological nitrogen fixation, frequently limit soybean yield. Additionally, sulphur is necessary for the synthesis of amino acids that include sulphur, which enhances the growth and quality of seeds. The risk of sulphur insufficiency in agricultural soils has increased due to intensive cropping and insufficient sulphur replenishment, whereas the effectiveness of conventional sulphur fertilisers depends on their supply, particle size, soil conditions, and synchronisation with crop demand.

Nanotechnology offers a promising approach for improving nutrient-use efficiency through Nano-fertilizers possessing high surface area and enhanced reactivity, potentially facilitating greater nutrient availability and utilization. Nano-sulphur has therefore emerged as a potential alternative sulphur source for crop production. Foliar application can further improve nutrient delivery by supplying sulphur directly to aerial tissues during critical vegetative and reproductive stages. Biogenic Nano-sulphur is of particular interest as an emerging Nano-enabled nutrient technology because biologically derived Nanoparticles offer potential advantages in terms of environmentally compatible production and agricultural application. Previous studies have reported beneficial effects of sulphur and Nano-based nutrient application on the growth and productivity of oilseed crops.

Despite these advances, field-based information on the response of soybean to different concentrations of foliar-applied biogenic Nano-sulphur remains limited.

Therefore, the present investigation was undertaken to evaluate the influence of foliar-applied biogenic Nano-sulphur on growth, reproductive development and yield attributes of soybean under field conditions.

Materials and Methods

The field experiment was conducted during the *kharif* season of 2025 at the Research Farm of the All India Coordinated Research Project on Weed Management, Dr. PDKV, Akola, Maharashtra, India.

Soybean variety 'PDKV Amba' was grown in a Randomized Block Design (RBD) with four replications. Seeds were treated with Vitavax @ 2 mL kg⁻¹ seed and sown at a seed rate of 60 kg ha⁻¹ with 45 × 5 cm spacing. The gross plot size was 3.60 × 4.00 m and the net plot size was 2.70 × 3.80 m. Six nutrient-management treatments were evaluated comprising an absolute control (T₀), General Recommended Dose of Fertilizer (GRDF) (T₁), GRDF + soil application of bentonite sulphur @ 30 kg S ha⁻¹ at sowing (T₂) and GRDF + foliar application of Nano-sulphur @ 25, 50 and 75 ppm at 30 and 45 days after sowing (DAS) designated as T₃, T₄ and T₅, respectively. GRDF was applied to the respective treatments, bentonite sulphur was applied at sowing and Nano-sulphur was applied as foliar spray at 30 and 45 DAS. Growth, reproductive and yield attributes were recorded following standard field procedures. Plant height and number of branches plant⁻¹ were recorded at 30, 45 and 60 DAS using five representative plants selected from each net

plot. Plant height was measured from the base to the tip of the youngest fully expanded leaf and expressed in centimetres, while primary branches were counted and expressed as number plant⁻¹. At harvest, the number of pods plant⁻¹ and seeds pod⁻¹ were determined from the selected plants. The crop from each net plot was harvested, dried and threshed and seed yield was recorded as kg plot⁻¹.

The data obtained for different observations were subjected to analysis of variance appropriate for a Randomized Block Design. Treatment means were compared using the standard error of mean [SE(m)±] and critical difference (CD) at the 5% level of significance.

Results and Discussion

Plant height was significantly influenced by sulphur treatments at 30, 45 and 60 DAS. At 30 DAS, the maximum plant height was recorded with T₂ (30.07 cm) followed by T₅ (29.87 cm), whereas T₀ recorded the minimum (23.95 cm). At 45 DAS, T₅ recorded the highest plant height (61.20 cm) followed by T₄ (59.27 cm), T₃ (58.42 cm), T₂ (56.67 cm) and T₁ (50.67 cm), while T₀ recorded 40.67 cm. At 60 DAS, T₅ remained superior (66.70 cm) followed by T₄ (64.15 cm), T₃ (63.25 cm), T₂ (59.52 cm) and T₁ (52.32 cm) with the minimum value in T₀ (45.67 cm). The enhanced plant height under T₅ may be attributed to improved sulphur availability and utilization during active vegetative growth, supporting protein synthesis, photosynthesis, enzymatic activity and nitrogen metabolism.

Table 1: Performance of Soybean for growth traits influenced by foliar application of biogenic Nano-sulphur

Treatment	Plant height (cm)			Number of branches plant ⁻¹		
	30 DAS	45 DAS	60 DAS	30 DAS	45 DAS	60 DAS
Absolute control (T ₀)	23.95	40.67	45.67	1.45	2.39	2.67
General Recommended Dose of Fertilizer (GRDF) (T ₁)	29.22	50.67	52.32	2.12	2.85	3.75
GRDF + Soil application of bentonite sulphur @ 30 kg S ha ⁻¹ at sowing (T ₂)	30.07	56.67	59.52	2.41	3.37	4.05
GRDF + Foliar application of Nano-sulphur @ 25 ppm at 30 and 45 days after sowing (T ₃)	29.02	58.42	63.25	2.34	3.72	4.50
GRDF + Foliar application of Nano-sulphur @ 50 ppm at 30 and 45 days after sowing (T ₄)	29.40	59.27	64.15	2.40	4.11	4.71
GRDF + Foliar application of Nano-sulphur @ 75 ppm at 30 and 45 days after sowing (T ₅)	29.87	61.20	66.70	2.51	4.76	5.20
SE(m)±	0.451	0.301	0.390	0.039	0.073	0.078
CD at 5%	1.360	0.907	1.177	0.119	0.221	0.234
F-test	S	S	S	S	S	S

The number of branches plant⁻¹ was significantly affected by the treatments at all growth stages. At 30 DAS, T₅ recorded the maximum number of branches (2.51) followed by T₂ (2.41), T₄ (2.40), T₃ (2.34) and T₁ (2.12), whereas T₀ recorded the minimum (1.45). At 45 DAS, T₅ recorded the highest number (4.76) followed by T₄ (4.11), T₃ (3.72), T₂ (3.37) and T₁ (2.85) compared with 2.39 in T₀. At 60 DAS, T₅ maintained its superiority (5.20) followed by T₄ (4.71), T₃ (4.50), T₂ (4.05) and T₁ (3.75), while T₀ recorded 2.67 branches plant⁻¹. The greater branching under T₅ may be associated with improved sulphur nutrition, enhanced shoot development and increased photosynthetic capacity.

The number of pods plant⁻¹ was significantly influenced by the treatments with T₅ recording the maximum number (39.90) followed by T₄ (35.22), T₃ (34.35), T₂ (32.92) and T₁ (27.62), whereas T₀ recorded the minimum (23.65). The enhanced pod formation under T₅ may be attributed to improved sulphur availability during reproductive development, supporting photosynthesis, protein synthesis,

nitrogen metabolism and assimilate translocation. The number of seeds pod⁻¹ was not significantly affected; the highest numerical value was recorded under T₂ (2.35) followed by T₅ (2.32), T₄ (2.30), T₃ (2.27) and T₁ (2.25), while T₀ recorded the lowest value (1.90). The relatively stable response suggests that seeds pod⁻¹ was less responsive to sulphur nutrition and was probably influenced more by varietal and reproductive characteristics.

Seed yield plot⁻¹ was significantly influenced by the treatments. T₅ recorded the highest seed yield (2.55 kg plot⁻¹) followed by T₂ (2.40 kg), T₄ (2.27 kg), T₃ (1.85 kg) and T₁ (1.77 kg), whereas T₀ recorded the lowest yield (1.55 kg plot⁻¹). The superior performance of T₅ may be attributed to the cumulative improvement in plant height, branching and pod production, together with enhanced sulphur availability during critical growth stages. The greater reproductive sink under T₅ consequently contributed to higher seed production.

Table 2: Performance of Soybean for reproductive and yield contributing traits influenced by foliar application of biogenic Nano-sulphur

Treatment	Number of pods plant ⁻¹	Seed yield plot ⁻¹ (kg)
Absolute control (T ₀)	23.65	1.55
General Recommended Dose of Fertilizer (GRDF) (T ₁)	27.62	1.77
GRDF + Soil application of bentonite sulphur @ 30 kg S ha ⁻¹ at sowing (T ₂)	32.92	2.40
GRDF + Foliar application of Nano-sulphur @ 25 ppm at 30 and 45 days after sowing (T ₃)	34.35	1.85
GRDF + Foliar application of Nano-sulphur @ 50 ppm at 30 and 45 days after sowing (T ₄)	35.22	2.27
GRDF + Foliar application of Nano-sulphur @ 75 ppm at 30 and 45 days after sowing (T ₅)	39.90	2.55
SE(m)±	0.550	0.042
CD at 5%	1.658	0.129
F-test	S	S

Biogenic Nano-sulphur application emerged as an effective nutrient-management strategy for enhancing soybean productivity under the prevailing field conditions. Its integration with GRDF through foliar application of Nano-sulphur @ 75 ppm at 30 and 45 DAS significantly enhanced plant height, number of branches plant⁻¹, pod production, seed yield plot⁻¹ and harvest index. The pronounced response of this treatment suggests that timely foliar sulphur supplementation improved crop growth and reproductive development facilitating greater biomass partitioning towards seed production. These findings are in agreement with the observations of Scherer in 2001, Reis and co-workers in 2021, Getinet and co-workers in 2021, and Deak and co-workers in 2025, who demonstrated the importance of sulphur nutrition in improving soybean growth, nodulation, productivity and seed development.

Conclusion

The present investigation demonstrated that foliar application of biogenic Nano-sulphur in combination with GRDF significantly improved the major growth, reproductive and yield attributes of soybean. Among the treatments, GRDF + foliar application of Nano-sulphur @ 75 ppm at 30 and 45 DAS (T₅) was the most effective recording the highest plant height at 60 DAS (66.70 cm), branches plant⁻¹ (5.20), pods plant⁻¹ (39.90) and seed yield plot⁻¹ (2.55 kg). Thus, foliar application of biogenic Nano-sulphur @ 75 ppm at 30 and 45 DAS along with GRDF emerged as the most promising treatment for enhancing soybean productivity under the conditions of the present study. Further multi-season and multi-location evaluation is warranted to confirm its consistency and wider agronomic applicability.

Acknowledgement

The authors gratefully acknowledge the All India Coordinated Research Project on Weed Management, Dr. PDKV, Akola for providing field facilities and technical support during the *khari*, 2025 experiment. The authors also acknowledge the concerned research units and laboratories of Dr. PDKV, Akola for their support during the investigation.

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