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Volume 55

Series Editor

Ajit Varma, Amity Institute of Microbial Technology,  
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# Biofertilizers for Sustainable Agriculture and Environment

 Springer

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# Preface

With the introduction of high-yielding varieties and application of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, the agricultural production has increased significantly but gradually becoming dependent on the inputs of cumulative dosages of these menacing chemicals. These chemicals not only are expensive to the farmers but also reduce organic carbon and microbial activities in the agricultural soils and are harmful for human health as they enter the food chain. The increasing dependence upon such chemicals for greater agricultural production compels the scientific community to overcome this problem and find out realistic solutions.

The application of biofertilizers could be a desirable alternative as they make agriculture more sustainable and environmental-friendly; indeed, the growing crops using biofertilizers are worthy for human health. Biofertilizers are consist of plant remains, organic matter, and safe and beneficial microorganisms, which are natural, organic, biodegradable, eco-friendly, and cost-effective. Biofertilizers indeed meet the integrated nutrient demand of the crops, hence ascribed as indispensable for obtaining greater crop yield, and attribute to increased fertility and health of the soil by providing nutrients and natural environment in the rhizosphere. Microbes present in the biofertilizers are important because they produce nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, zinc, iron, and other nutrients required for the growth of plants. In fact, several microbes produce plant growth-promoting substances like auxins, cytokinins, and gibberellins, which are essential for the growth and development under vital soil conditions. Microorganisms like *Rhizobium*, *Azospirillum*, *Azotobacter*, *Azolla*, *Piriformospora indica* (*Serendipita indica*), and *Cyanobacteria*/blue green algae have been found to add a significant amount of nitrogen under optimum soil conditions, thereby largely reducing the use of chemical fertilizers. The application of such microbial inoculants showed a robust impact on the crop yield. Furthermore, several microbes exhibit the ability to recover heavy metals from soil, thereby making the soil environment suitable for growing crop plants.

Phosphate-mobilizing or phosphorus-solubilizing microorganisms convert insoluble soil phosphate into soluble forms by secreting several organic acids. Symbiotic fungi enhance the uptake of water and macro- and micronutrients by extending

extra-radical hyphae several meters beyond the depletion zone, thus increasing the nutrient uptake ability of the host plant. Moreover, they protect plant from environmental stresses like salinity and drought and also strengthen the defense system of plant, thereby suppressing the incidence of plant diseases, and thus help in the biocontrol of plant diseases. In general, biofertilizers improve physicochemical properties of the soil. Hence, it is pertinent to state that biofertilizers are a vital and powerful tool for sustainable agriculture and environment.

The book *Biofertilizers for Sustainable Agriculture and Environment* comprises 24 provocative chapters written by the experts of this field, highlighting the latest research on the beneficial microbial inoculants such as phosphate-solubilizing and phosphate-mobilizing fungi; N<sub>2</sub>-fixing bacterial inoculants (free living and symbiotic); phosphorus-, potassium-, and zinc-solubilizing bacteria; algal inoculants; microbes for the removal of heavy metals from agricultural fields for sustainable agriculture; microbes for recycling of biodegradable municipal, agricultural, and industrial waste; and biocontrol agents and biopesticides. Though, under current circumstances, the application of microbial inoculants cannot be treated as an alternative for chemical fertilizers and pesticides, indeed, these natural inoculants can largely be utilized to reduce the use of these chemicals. With a fortune of information on the different aspects of biofertilizers, this intensive volume indeed provides useful information, dealing with different groups of microorganisms and their beneficial effects, and is a valuable resource for researchers, academician, environmentalists, and students in the broad field of microbiology, biotechnology, and agriculture and for the industrialists involved in the production of biofertilizers.

We are highly delighted and thankful to all our contributing authors for their endless support and outstanding cooperation to write selflessly these authoritative and valuable chapters. We extend our sincere thanks to all our colleagues who helped us in the preparation and compilation of this generous volume. We thank the Springer officials, specially William F. Curtis, Eric Schmitt, Sabine Schwarz, Isabel Ullmann, Beate Siek, and Anand Venkatachalam, for their generous support and efforts in accomplishing this volume. We specially thank our families for their consistent support and encouragement.

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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Microbial Biofertilizers: Types and Applications . . . . .</b>	<b>1</b>
	Lebin Thomas and Ishwar Singh	
<b>2</b>	<b>Fungal Inoculants for Native Phosphorus Mobilization . . . . .</b>	<b>21</b>
	J. C. Tarafdar	
<b>3</b>	<b>Potential Applications of Algae-Based Bio-fertilizer . . . . .</b>	<b>41</b>
	Probir Das, Shoyeb Khan, Afeefa Kiran Chaudhary, Mohammad AbdulQuadir, Mehמוד Ibrahim Thaher, and Hareb Al-Jabri	
<b>4</b>	<b>Ectomycorrhizal Fungi: Role as Biofertilizers in Forestry . . . . .</b>	<b>67</b>
	José Alfonso Domínguez-Núñez, Marta Berrocal-Lobo, and Ada S. Albanesi	
<b>5</b>	<b>Perspectives on the Role of Arbuscular Mycorrhizal Fungi in the In Vivo Vegetative Plant Propagation . . . . .</b>	<b>83</b>
	Ravichandran Koshila Ravi and Thangavelu Muthukumar	
<b>6</b>	<b>Silicon (Si)- and Zinc (Zn)-Solubilizing Microorganisms: Role in Sustainable Agriculture . . . . .</b>	<b>109</b>
	Narendra Kumawat, Rakesh Kumar, U. R. Khandkar, R. K. Yadav, Kirti Saurabh, J. S. Mishra, M. L. Dotaniya, and Hansraj Hans	
<b>7</b>	<b>Status and Prospects of Bacterial Inoculants for Sustainable Management of Agroecosystems . . . . .</b>	<b>137</b>
	Rasheed A. Adeleke, Adekunle R. Raimi, Ashira Roopnarain, and Sharon M. Mokubedi	
<b>8</b>	<b>Plant Nutrient Management Through Inoculation of Zinc-Solubilizing Bacteria for Sustainable Agriculture . . . . .</b>	<b>173</b>
	Satyavir S. Sindhu, Ruchi Sharma, Swati Sindhu, and Manisha Phour	

<b>9</b>	<b>Endophytic Bacteria as a Modern Tool for Sustainable Crop Management Under Stress</b> . . . . .	203
	Yachana Jha	
<b>10</b>	<b>Biofertilizers in Argentina</b> . . . . .	225
	Analia Liliana Anriquez, Juan Eduardo Silberman, José Alfonso Dominguez Nuñez, and Ada Susana Albanesi	
<b>11</b>	<b>Rhizobial Inoculants for Sustainable Agriculture: Prospects and Applications</b> . . . . .	245
	Iqra Naseer, Maqshoof Ahmad, Sajid Mahmood Nadeem, Iqra Ahmad, Najm-ul-Seher, and Zahir Ahmad Zahir	
<b>12</b>	<b>Biofertilizers and Their Role in Sustainable Agriculture</b> . . . . .	285
	Pinderpal Kaur and Sukhvinder Singh Purewal	
<b>13</b>	<b>The Use of Microorganisms for the Biodegradation of Sewage Sludge and the Production of Biocompost for Sustainable Agriculture</b> . . . . .	301
	Loubna El Fels, Bouchra El Hayany, Anas Aguelmous, Aziz Boutafda, Yassine Zegzouti, El Mezouari El Glaoui Ghizlen, Lamfeddal Kouisni, and Mohamed Hafidi	
<b>14</b>	<b>Circadian Rhythms in Plant-Microbe Interaction: For Better Performance of Bioinoculants in the Agricultural Fields</b> . . . . .	317
	Raghavendra Maddur Puttaswamy	
<b>15</b>	<b>Actinobacteria and Their Role as Plant Probiotics</b> . . . . .	333
	Esther Menendez and Lorena Carro	
<b>16</b>	<b>Organic Fertilizer from Algae: A Novel Approach Towards Sustainable Agriculture</b> . . . . .	353
	Pooja Baweja, Savindra Kumar, and Gaurav Kumar	
<b>17</b>	<b>Phosphate-Solubilising Fungi and Their Potential Role in Sustainable Agriculture</b> . . . . .	371
	Sanjana Kaul, Supriya Sharma, Apra, and Manoj K. Dhar	
<b>18</b>	<b>Fungi as Biological Control Agents</b> . . . . .	395
	Savita and Anuradha Sharma	
<b>19</b>	<b>Biocontrol Agents: Potential of Biopesticides for Integrated Pest Management</b> . . . . .	413
	Archana Singh, Richa Bhardwaj, and Indrakant K. Singh	
<b>20</b>	<b>Microbe-Mediated Plant Growth Promotion: A Mechanistic Overview on Cultivable Plant Growth-Promoting Members</b> . . . . .	435
	Swati Pattnaik, Balaram Mohapatra, Upendra Kumar, Matrujyoti Pattnaik, and Deviprasad Samantaray	



**21 Mycorrhizae and Tolerance of Abiotic Stress in Citrus Plants . . . . . 465**  
Chun-Yan Liu, Ying-Ning Zou, De-Jian Zhang, Bo Shu,  
and Qiang-Sheng Wu

**22 Arbuscular Mycorrhizal Fungi (AMF) from Heavy  
Metal-Contaminated Soils: Molecular Approach and Application  
in Phytoremediation . . . . . 489**  
Sanjeev Kumar and Saurabh Saxena

**23 The Role of Arbuscular Mycorrhiza in Sustainable Environment  
and Agriculture . . . . . 501**  
Xiongfei Guo

**24 Microbe-Mediated Removal of Heavy Metals for Sustainable  
Agricultural Practices . . . . . 521**  
Ivy Mallick, Anupama Ghosh, and Abhrajyoti Ghosh

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