

(12) INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(19) World Intellectual Property
Organization
International Bureau



WIPO | PCT



(10) International Publication Number
WO 2012/143679 A2

(43) International Publication Date
26 October 2012 (26.10.2012)

- (51) International Patent Classification: Not classified
- (21) International Application Number: PCT/GB2012/000361
- (22) International Filing Date: 19 April 2012 (19.04.2012)
- (25) Filing Language: English
- (26) Publication Language: English
- (30) Priority Data: 1106748.5 20 April 2011 (20.04.2011) GB
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- (81) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of national protection available): AE, AG, AL, AM,

AO, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BH, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CL, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DO, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, GT, HN, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KM, KN, KP, KR, KZ, LA, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LY, MA, MD, ME, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MY, MZ, NA, NG, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PE, PG, PH, PL, PT, QA, RO, RS, RU, RW, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, ST, SV, SY, TH, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, ZA, ZM, ZW.

(84) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LR, LS, MW, MZ, NA, RW, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European (AL, AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV, MC, MK, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, RS, SE, SI, SK, SM, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Published:

— without international search report and to be republished upon receipt of that report (Rule 48.2(g))



WO 2012/143679 A2

(54) Title: COATING COMPOSITIONS FOR PATHOGEN CONTROL IN COTTON

(57) Abstract: Coating compositions for cotton plant seed, wherein the coating composition comprises an organic carrier material and one or more biological agents that are active against one or more pathogens cotton plant.

COATING COMPOSITIONS FOR PATHOGEN CONTROL IN COTTON

The present invention relates to coating compositions including an organic component and a biological agent for applying to cotton plant seed from which roots and shoots are capable of growing, uses of coating compositions on cotton plant seeds, methods of producing such coating compositions and seeds coated with such coating compositions. In particular, the invention relates to coating compositions that comprise an organic carrying material and biological agents selected from chemicals and biological agents active against one of more plant pathogens selected from bacterial, fungal and arthropod pathogens that infest seeds of cotton plants.

Losses in yield in cotton crops are recorded annually and come about as a result of plant infestations due to pathogens such as bacteria, fungi and arthropods which can infest the plant at various stages of development, such as at the seed stage. Agronomic losses due to pathogen infestations remain high despite many defensive measures that have been devised by man to combat such infestations. Such defensive measures include the use of synthetic chemicals; the employment of genetic engineering of cotton plants; and the use of live biological agents that are applied in the form of coatings, sprays and washes to seeds.

Pesticides in the form of chemical agents such as fungicides, bactericides and arthropodocides, typically in the form of insecticides and/or acaricides may be applied to cotton crops in the form of soil drenches, seed treatments and the like. Such kinds of chemical treatments tend to be indiscriminate in their action and may adversely affect beneficial bacteria, fungi and arthropods as well as the plant pathogens at which such treatments are targeted.

When conventional pesticides are used as seed treatments the seeds are coated with pesticide directly or the pesticide is applied to the seed in the presence of an inorganic carrier. Such seed treatments are typically applied in liquid form or as wet slurry and subsequently the seeds are dried. Such treatments are mostly aimed at providing direct protection against pathogens such as arthropods and/or seed borne microorganisms and/or soil borne microorganisms that attack the seed. The high level of chemicals that are typically used introduces a chemical load to the environment that may give rise to ecological concerns.

One problem in applying a biological agent that is a chemical agent in conventional seed coating procedures is that the chemical agent is typically applied as slurry and this may give rise to an uneven application of the coating whereby the seeds are not fully coated or a percentage of the seeds, up to 20% depending on seed type and the coating procedure

employed, do not get fully coated. Furthermore, the seed coatings may not be uniform and this gives rise to physical weaknesses in the seed coat and the coating may flake off.

A further problem arises when using biological agents that are selected from beneficial live bacterial and fungal species that may be applied conventionally to seeds, for example as spores in conjunction with an inorganic carrier in the form of particulate compositions or in the form of liquid compositions which may then be dried back, is that the applied biological agents rapidly lose viability. Without the intention of being bound by theory, it is thought that as the seeds are dried off the micro-environment alters and the viability of applied live biological agents may be seen to decrease sharply and almost as soon as the applied composition dries. The loss of viability of the biological agent is typically associated with the splitting of the fungal or bacterial spores which renders them non-viable.

It has now been found that by using an organic carrier material in conjunction with a biological agent, the viability of the biological agent is improved on cotton seeds, relative to the viability of biological agents applied to such seeds conventionally. Furthermore, the coating of the seed is less susceptible to flaking off.

It is an object of the present invention to supply improved seed coatings comprising biological agents for cotton plant seeds. This and other objects of the invention will become apparent from the following description and examples.

According to the present invention there is provided a cotton plant seed coating composition, wherein the said coating composition comprises at least one organic carrier material in the form of particles wherein the carrier material is selected from waxes having a melting point of $\geq 50^\circ$ Centigrade and one or more biological agents that possess an activity against one or more pathogens of a cotton plant.

The cotton plant seed coating composition is applied to cotton plant seeds from which roots and shoots are capable of growing. For the purposes of the present invention a cotton plant seed is one from which roots and shoots are able to grow. Reference to "seed" and "seeds" is used interchangeably herein and means cotton seeds, typically viable seeds, to which compositions of the invention may be applied.

The organic carrier material is selected from organic materials that can be applied to cotton plant seeds either as a powder wherein the powder particles are of a pre-determined volume mean diameter, or in liquid form, such as an oleaginous formulation or as an aqueous formulation.

Generally, the composite particles of use in a dry powder composition of the invention

possess a volume mean diameter of a certain size as defined herein. To obtain particles of organic materials of a volume mean diameter applicable for use in the invention, organic materials in the form of, for example, 1 to 5 kilogram blocks or tablets may be broken up or kibbled into small millimetre-sized pieces (such as from 2mm – 8mm approximate diameter in size, for example from 4mm to 6mm) in a kibbling machine. The millimetre-sized pieces can then be passed through a comminuting means such as a standard mill, e.g. an Apex Comminuting mill, and milled or comminuted into particles having an approximate diameter in the range from 100 μ m - 500 μ m, for example from 250 μ m - 300 μ m. The micron-sized comminuted particles can then be passed through a micronising apparatus, such as an AFG micronising air mill to obtain particles of a desired VMD range, such as from 15 μ m - 20 μ m, that is of use in the present invention. The skilled addressee will appreciate that such procedures for obtaining small particles are well known in the art. Preferably, dry powder compositions of the invention comprise composite particles having a volume mean diameter of $\geq 5\mu$ m, for example of 10 μ m, 11 μ m, 12 μ m, 13 μ m, 14 μ m, 15 μ m up to 40 μ m or any value thereinbetween. As stated herein, the volume mean diameter of the composite particles is typically $\geq 10\mu$ m or $\geq 12\mu$ m and may lie in the range from 10 μ m to 200 μ m and may have a value that lies anywhere there inbetween, for example from $\geq 5\mu$ m to 100 μ m; or from $\geq 10\mu$ m to 40 μ m; or from $\geq 10\mu$ m to 30 μ m or any desired volume mean diameter value in between. Preferably, dry powder compositions of the invention comprise particles having a volume mean diameter of $\geq 5\mu$ m, for example of 8 μ m, 9 μ m, 10 μ m, 11 μ m, 12 μ m, 13 μ m, 14 μ m, 15 μ m and the like up to any volume mean diameter of choice, such as up to 200 μ m or any volume mean diameter in between for example 40 μ m or 30 μ m. Such compositions are considered to be less of a thoracic hazard to humans and are not thought to be allergenic.

In liquid formulations, particles of a pre-determined volume mean diameter are suspended therein in a suspension formulation and applied to the seeds which are then dried using conventional drying procedures. Preferably, the organic carrier material is applied to cotton plant seeds in a dry powder form, the particles of the organic carrier material may have a volume mean diameter of any conventional size as herein described. To such dry powders, chemicals of use against arthropod pathogens such as insects, arachnids (e.g. mites) and if appropriate, their larvae, eggs, or pupae; chemicals of use against bacterial pathogens; and chemicals of use against fungal pathogens may be added. Additionally, beneficial live biological agents may be added to cotton plant seeds that are able to target bacterial pathogens of the cotton plant and/or to target fungal pathogens and/or arthropods of the cotton plant. Spores of choice of beneficial live biological agents such as fungal conidia or hyphae or mycelia of fungi that do not form spores or conidia-like structures may be added to dry powders of use in the present invention. Suitable organic carrier materials of use in the invention are typically made up of organic materials such as waxes having a melting

point of $\geq 50^{\circ}\text{C}$, more preferably of $\geq 60^{\circ}\text{C}$, and most preferably are made up of hard waxes having a melting point of $\geq 70^{\circ}\text{C}$.

Natural waxes of use in the present invention include carnauba wax, beeswax, Chinese wax, shellac wax, spermaceti wax, myricyl palmitate, cetyl palmitate, candelilla wax, castor wax, ouricury wax, wool wax, sugar cane wax, retamo wax, rice bran wax and the like.

Synthetic waxes of use in the present invention include suitable waxes selected from paraffin wax, microcrystalline wax, Polyethylene waxes, Fischer-Tropsch waxes, substituted amide waxes, polymerized α -olefins and the like.

Mineral waxes of use in the invention include montan wax (e.g. Lumax® Bayer) ceresin wax, ozocerite, peat wax and the like.

Suitable organic carrier particles of use in the present invention may be selected from waxes such as carnauba wax, beeswax, montan wax, Chinese wax, shellac wax, spermaceti wax, myricyl palmitate, cetyl palmitate, candelilla wax, castor wax, ouricury wax, wool wax, sugar cane wax, retamo wax, and rice bran wax. Such waxes typically display a high enthalpy of lattice energy during melt. Preferably the organic carrier material is carnauba wax which may be applied in liquid form, typically in the form of a suspension, or in powder form as discrete particles. Generally, the particles of use in the invention possess a volume mean diameter as herein described.

Additionally, the organic carrier particles of use in compositions of the invention may contain other components such as additives selected from UV blockers such as beta-carotene or p-amino benzoic acid, colouring agents such as optical brighteners and commercially available colouring agents such as food colouring agents, plasticisers such as glycerine or soy oil, antimicrobials such as potassium sorbate, nitrates, nitrites, propylene oxide and the like, antioxidants such as vitamin E, butylated hydroxyl anisole (BHA), butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT), and other antioxidants that may be present, or mixtures thereof. The skilled addressee will appreciate that the selection of such commonly included additives will be made depending on end purpose, and perceived need.

Liquid formulations of the invention may be formulated as an aqueous formulation or as an oleaginous formulation, depending on design. Aqueous formulations may include surfactants selected from commercially available surfactants such as Libsorb, Silwet L77, Tween 80, Torpedo II, Newmans T80, Fortune, Guard, Rhino, Biopower, and the like.

Oleaginous formulations, that is to say oil-based formulations, may contain any oil suitable for use in the present invention which may be selected from petroleum oils, such as paraffin

oil, and vegetable oils such as rapeseed oil, soybean oil, sunflower oil, palm oil and the like. Oil formulations of use in the invention contain organic carrier particles as described herein and these in turn may be admixed with flow agents such as hydrophilic precipitated silicas, for example Sipernat 383 DS, Sipernat 320, EXP 4350, and Sipernat D-17 and the like. Such free-flowing agents may be dispersed in oils, for example, for anti-foaming purposes.

The skilled addressee will appreciate that where an aqueous or an oil formulation may be used to apply biological agents of use in the invention, the liquid element should be removed from the coated seed after coating is achieved, for example by drying off using conventional drying processes.

A biological agent for the purposes of the present invention is one that can be used to control the population of a plant pathogen of a cotton plant, and may be selected from chemical fungicides, arthropodicides such as insecticides and acaricides, bactericides; or a mixture of two or more thereof; and/or from live biological agents that are able to control the population of one or more seed or soil borne pathogens of a cotton plant seed. Preferably, the population of the soil borne pathogen on or in the immediate vicinity of the cotton plant seed is reduced either by the biological agent rendering it unable to reproduce and/or by killing it. Examples of biological agents of use in the present invention include chemicals for use on cotton plant seeds selected from arthropodicides, such as insecticides and acaricides, fungicides and bactericides commonly employed in the art. Suitable examples of such chemicals include nicotinoid insecticides such as imidacloprid [(*E*)-1-(6-chloro-3-pyridylmethyl)-*N*-nitroimidazolidin-2-ylideneamine], methylcarbamate insecticides such as methiocarb [4-methylthio-3,5-xylyl methylcarbamate], oxime carbamate insecticides such as thiodicarb [(3*EZ*,12*EZ*)-3,7,9,13-tetramethyl-5,11-dioxa-2,8,14-trithia-4,7,9,12-tetraazapentadeca-3,12-diene-6,10-dione], and thiazole insecticides such as clothianicidin [(*E*)-1-(2-chloro-1,3-thiazol-5-ylmethyl)-3-methyl-2-nitroguanidine], Thiamethoxam (*EZ*)-3-(2-chloro-1,3-thiazol-5-ylmethyl)-5-methyl-1,3,5-oxadiazinan-4-ylidene(nitro)amine; suitable fungicides for use on seeds in accordance with the invention include those selected from acyl amino acid fungicides such as mefenoxam [methyl *N*-(methoxyacetyl)-*N*-(2,6-xylyl)-D-alaninate], pyrrole fungicides such as fludioxinil [4-(2,2-difluoro-1,3-benzodioxol-4-yl)-1*H*-pyrrole-3-carbonitrile], thiazole fungicides such as thiabendazole [2-(thiazol-4-yl)benzimidazole or 2-(1,3-thiazol-4-yl)benzimidazole], and conazole fungicides such as difenoconazole [3-chloro-4-[(2*RS*,4*RS*;2*RS*,4*SR*)-4-methyl-2-(1*H*-1,2,4-triazol-1-ylmethyl)-1,3-dioxolan-2-yl]phenyl 4-chlorophenyl ether].

The skilled addressee will appreciate that compositions of the invention may also be added direct to the soil or growing medium into which cotton seeds are to be planted. Such compositions may be added as powders and mixed with the soil or applied as liquid

suspensions using conventional procedures.

Soil borne pathogens for the purposes of the present invention are ones that are able to colonise the seed cuticle and/or ones that populate the soil and which are capable of acting on cotton seeds. Such soil borne pathogens are typically bacteria and/or fungi. Examples of soil borne bacterial and fungal pathogens that attack cotton plants include *Agrobacterium tumefaciens*, *Xanthomonas campestris* pv *malvacearum*, *Erwinia herbicola*, *Rhizoctonia* spp. e.g. *R. solani*, *Pythium* spp, *Sclerotium* spp. such as *S. rolfsii*, *Fusarium* spp. such as *F. oxysporum* f. sp. *vasinfectum*, *Phytophthora* spp., *Verticillium* spp. such as *V. dahliae*, *Phoma* spp. such *P. exigua*, *Alternaria* spp. such as *A. macrospora*, *A. alternata*, and the like.

According to a further aspect of the invention there is provided use of an organic carrier wherein the organic carrier is made up of particles of wax in the manufacture of a cotton seed coating composition that includes a biological agent as defined herein above. The organic carrier particles are selected from natural waxes, synthetic waxes, and mineral waxes having a melting point of $\geq 50^{\circ}\text{C}$, more preferably of $\geq 60^{\circ}\text{C}$, and most preferably are made up of hard waxes having a melting point of $\geq 70^{\circ}\text{C}$. Waxes of use in the invention may be selected from carnauba wax, beeswax, montan wax, Chinese wax, shellac wax, spermaceti wax, myricyl palmitate, cetyl palmitate, candelilla wax, castor wax, ouricury wax, wool wax, sugar cane wax, retamo wax, and rice bran wax or a mixture of two or more thereof, and preferably, the seed coating that is used includes particles of carnauba wax. Preferably, in this aspect of the invention, the organic carrier particles have a mean volume diameter $\geq 5\mu\text{m}$ as herein described.

In a further aspect of the invention there is provided use of wax as an organic carrier in dry particulate form in a cotton seed coating composition of the invention as herein described. Suitable organic carrier particles employed in this aspect of the invention are selected from natural waxes, synthetic waxes, and mineral waxes having a melting point of $\geq 50^{\circ}\text{C}$, more preferably of $\geq 60^{\circ}\text{C}$, and most preferably are made up of hard waxes having a melting point of $\geq 70^{\circ}\text{C}$. Suitable organic carrier particles may be selected from carnauba wax, beeswax, montan wax, Chinese wax, shellac wax, spermaceti wax, myricyl palmitate, cetyl palmitate, candelilla wax, castor wax, ouricury wax, wool wax, sugar cane wax, retamo wax, and rice bran wax or a mixture of two or more thereof. Preferably, the seed coating composition comprises organic carrier particles that are of carnauba wax. Organic carrier particles employed in this aspect of the invention have a mean volume diameter $\geq 5\mu\text{m}$ as herein described, such as in the range of $\geq 10\mu\text{m}$ to $200\mu\text{m}$.

In a still further aspect of the invention there is provided a method of manufacturing a cotton

seed coating composition as herein described that comprises

- 1) selecting an organic carrier material wherein the carrier material is selected from waxes having a melting point of $\geq 50^{\circ}$ Centigrade;
- 2) comminuting said organic carrier material into particles of a desired volume mean diameter $\geq 5\mu\text{m}$, such as in the range from $\geq 10\mu\text{m}$ to $200\mu\text{m}$; and
- 3) adding biological agent to the product particles of step 2).

The biological agent of use in this aspect of the invention is typically selected from a chemical agent which is an insecticide or an acaricide or a mixture thereof, or a chemical fungicide or a fungus species and/or a bacterium species or a mixture of two or more thereof.

Examples of live biological agents (also known as biocontrol organisms or biocontrol agents) that are commonly referred to in the art as "biological antagonists" that may be used in seed coating compositions of the present invention include *Pseudomonas spp.* such as *P. fluorescens*, *Trichoderma spp.* such as *T. viride* (in seed dressings is active against *Rhizoctonia solani*, *Macrophomina phaseolina* and *Fusarium spp.*) and *T. harzanium* e.g. *Trichoderma harzianum* Rifai strain KRL-AG2 (T-22)(available from Bioworks Inc, Geneva, USA), *Burkholderia cepacia* type Wisconsin (available from Stine Microbial Products, Memphis, USA) *Burkholderia cepacia* (available from Soil Technologies Corp., Fairfield, USA), *Bacillus spp.* such as *B. subtilis* e.g. *B. subtilis* GB03 (available from Gustafson Inc., Plano, USA), *Agrobacterium radiobacter* Strain 84 (available from AgbioChem Inc, Florida, USA), and the like.

Suitable fungicides that may be used in seed treatments on cotton seeds include those fungicides selected from acyl amino acid fungicides such as mefenoxam [methyl *N*-(methoxyacetyl)-*N*-(2,6-xylyl)-D-alaninate], pyrrole fungicides such as fludioxinil [4-(2,2-difluoro-1,3-benzodioxol-4-yl)-1*H*-pyrrole-3-carbonitrile], thiazole fungicides such as thiabendazole [2-(thiazol-4-yl)benzimidazole or 2-(1,3-thiazol-4-yl)benzimidazole], conazole fungicides such as difenoconazole [3-chloro-4-[(2*RS*,4*RS*;2*RS*,4*SR*)-4-methyl-2-(1*H*-1,2,4-triazol-1-ylmethyl)-1,3-dioxolan-2-yl]phenyl 4-chlorophenyl ether] and the like.

Suitable examples of such chemicals further include nicotinoid insecticides such as imidacloprid [(*E*)-1-(6-chloro-3-pyridylmethyl)-*N*-nitroimidazolidin-2-ylideneamine], methylcarbamate insecticides such as methiocarb [4-methylthio-3,5-xylyl methylcarbamate], oxime carbamate insecticides such as thiodicarb [(3*EZ*,12*EZ*)-3,7,9,13-tetramethyl-5,11-dioxo-2,8,14-trithia-4,7,9,12-tetraazapentadeca-3,12-diene-6,10-dione], thiazole insecticides

such as clothianicidin [(*E*)-1-(2-chloro-1,3-thiazol-5-ylmethyl)-3-methyl-2-nitroguanidine], and Thiamethoxam (*EZ*)-3-(2-chloro-1,3-thiazol-5-ylmethyl)-5-methyl-1,3,5-oxadiazinan-4-ylidene(nitro)amine and the like.

The organic carrier material in this aspect of the invention may be selected from carnauba wax, beeswax, montan wax, Chinese wax, shellac wax, spermaceti wax, myricyl palmitate, cetyl palmitate, candelilla wax, castor wax, ouricury wax, wool wax, sugar cane wax, retamo wax, and rice bran wax or a mixture of two or more thereof. Preferably, the selected carrier material is carnauba wax.

In a further aspect of the invention, there is provided a cotton seed coating composition, such as a seed coating composition produced by the methods as described herein.

In a further aspect of the invention there is provided a cotton seed comprising a coating composition as described herein..

In a further aspect of the invention there is provided a method of coating cotton seed with a coating composition that comprises an organic carrier material and a biological agent that has an activity against a cotton plant pathogen selected from a fungal pathogen, a bacterial pathogen and an arthropod pathogen so as to limit damage by the said pathogen to cotton plants, the method comprising adding the said biological agent to an organic carrier material wherein the organic carrier material is in dry particulate form, mixing the two components together and applying the resulting composition to cotton seeds.

The treatment composition is applied to the plant seed in dry particulate form or liquid form as hereinbefore described, and preferably in dry particulate form. The organic carrier material in this aspect of the invention is selected from waxes as herein described, such as carnauba wax, beeswax, montan wax, Chinese wax, shellac wax, spermaceti wax, candelilla wax, castor wax, ouricury wax, and rice bran wax or mixtures of two or more thereof. Preferably, the organic carrier material is carnauba wax.

The treatment composition in this aspect of the invention typically includes one or more biological agents selected from insecticides and acaricides, fungicides, bactericides and live biological agents as herein before described.

There now follow examples and that illustrate the invention. It is to be understood that the examples are not to be construed as limiting the invention in any way.

Examples Section

Control of *Fusarium oxysporum* spp. [United Kingdom National Culture Collection (UKNCC)]

on cotton (*Gossypium hirsutum*) by means of seed treatments using examples of the antagonists: *Trichoderma harzianum*, *Pseudomonas fluorescens* and *Bacillus subtilis* [United Kingdom National Culture Collection (UKNCC)].

Fusarium Wilt

Symptoms

Symptoms of Fusarium wilt include a general wilt, which is especially evident in a dry environment at temperatures above 20°C, and yellowing and necrosis of lower leaf margins. The vascular system of infected plants is brownish to black. This is most apparent in the lower stem and upper taproot. The discoloration is generally continuous in contrast to the speckling nature of the discoloration in plants affected by Verticillium wilt.

In seedlings and young plants, cotyledons and leaves wilt and drop, resulting in bare stems. In severe cases, plants die. In mildly affected plants, lower leaves develop symptoms but plants survive, but with reduced vigour. Certain strains of the causal fungus only cause symptoms when plants are also infected with the root knot nematode. In those cases, galls are usually prevalent on lateral roots.

The fungus sustains itself on the outer surface of roots of many crops and weeds and survives indefinitely in soil. In addition, the pathogen is seed-borne in cotton, which accounts for long-distance spread, and is also spread whenever infested soil is transported on boots, farm equipment, in flood irrigation, etc. However, seed of cotton is often treated with chemicals to remove the lint that reduce micro-organisms on the seed surface.

Disadvantages of Conventional Seed Treatment

- i) **Limited dose capacity** – The amount of pesticide that can be applied is limited by how much will actually stick to the seed.
- ii) **Limited duration of protection** – The duration is often short due to the relatively small amount of biological agent (e.g. chemical) applied to the seed, dilution of the biological agent as the plant grows, and breakdown of the biological agent.
- iii) **Limited shelf life of treated seed** – Producing excess treated seed is undesirable because the shelf life of treated seed may be limited. Surplus treated seed cannot be sold for grain. This is a particularly serious limitation for seeds such as cotton, where seed germination and vigour decline relatively quickly.

All three of these limitations may be overcome or significantly reduced through the inclusion

of carnauba wax particles as a carrier for a biological agent, in this case dormant microorganisms that are applied to seeds. Under favourable conditions, the microorganisms grow and colonize the exterior of the developing seed or seedling. Biological agents may help in reducing seed decay, seedling diseases, or root rot.

The following tests are performed to examine the potential effect of the inclusion of carnauba wax particles.

Phase One – Isolate Cultures

1. Culture Maintenance

Records are kept with each isolate sub-culture being assigned an accession number. All plates and slides relating to that sub-culture are labelled with an accession number.

In addition, permanent lactophenol (LP) mount slide are made from each of the original cultures and file for reference purposes.

No more than three generations of sub-culture occur before passaging through a living host and re-isolating in order to maintain the fitness of the organism.

Sub-cultures are stored for future use on Potato Dextrose Agar (PDA) at 4°C.

Each isolate is assigned an accession number and sub-cultures are labelled with that number.

DNA is extracted for identity verifications and stored at -20°C. A reference sample of the pure culture is stored on glycerol at -20°C. Upon completion of the experiment DNA identification of the culture is repeated to confirm that the organism has not mutated during the course of the work.

2. Culturing of the causal agent

Isolation of a pathogenic fungus from diseased tissue into pure culture is one of the standard techniques in identifying and describing a disease. It is an essential step in proving the pathogenicity of previously un-encountered organisms.

Techniques commonly involve:

- a. Surface-sterilisation treatment
- b. Plating (possibly on selective medium) of samples of diseased tissue, with

appropriate precautions.

- c. Sub-culturing to get pure cultures.

3. *Purification of Cultures*

Small disinfected root pieces of an artificially inoculated plant are cultured on water agar. The fungal colonies that appear most frequently are likely the target pathogen. Several saprophytes may also be present in infected plant tissues and they may grow into the medium with the principal pathogen. Routine surface-sterilisation consists of wiping the tissue with (or immersing in) 0.1% solution of sodium hypochlorite (NaOCl - also referred to as "NaClO") followed by rinsing with sterile distilled water. To obtain a pure culture of the pathogen, a small sample is taken from the growing edge of a colony with a flamed loop or scalpel and streaked over the surface of a pre-poured plate of PDA. The inclusion of chloramphenicol (a bacteriostatic anti-microbial) at 30mg/l reduces the risk of bacterial contamination. As the streak progresses over the agar, fungal spores are separated until single spores are obtained from which separate colonies will grow.

Repeat this procedure until pure cultures are obtained.

4. *Single Spore Isolation*

Single spore isolations are important to investigate pathogenic variability. An inoculum of spores is placed in a tube containing 10 ml of sterile water. This spore suspension is streaked along a marked line on the surface of a thin tap water agar medium, and incubated at 22°C. After 24hr incubation, select germinated spores using a stereoscopic microscope and transferred one spore at a time to another agar plate.

5. *Slide Preparation for Microscopic examination and reference*

Identification of the pathogen, rather than the disease, requires microscopic examination of infected tissue. The tissue may be sectioned or surface scraped and then mounted in water/lactophenol. Fungal structures seen macroscopically may be separated from the host tissue to be examined and identified. Identification depends on spore formation and therefore infected material will be incubated in a moist environment overnight prior to examination in order to encourage sporulation. Cotton blue stain is added to the lactophenol in order to highlight fungal structure. The specimen is placed in a drop of satin on a glass slide and gently warmed by passing through a low flame for a few seconds before mounting in lactophenol.

Whole mount sections can be cleared and stained for ease of identification using the following method:

Clear leaf disks are obtained by heating them in a tube in lactophenol until clear (up to 20 minutes), without boiling. Stain by heating in 0.5% cotton blue in lactophenol on a slide for 5-10 minutes. Rinse thoroughly in lactophenol and mount in the same.

6. Growth and Media

Sub-cultures are assessed for growth and germination at a range of temperatures, 15°C, 22°C and 29°C. A range of media is examined for suitability. Whilst PDA is generally suitable for most fungal species it has been found that use of a low nutrient agar, such as tap-water agar, reduce prolific growth and can encourage sporulation. Therefore PDA, tap-water agar, and a selective media from literature, Czapek's Dox agar (Dawson (1962) Sabouraudia 1. 214-219), are included within the assessment trials.

A 5mm diameter disk is cut from the margin of an actively growing culture using a flamed cork borer. This is placed upside down in the centre of the pre-poured media plates. Five replicates are made for each media type and temperature (45 plates in total). Complete randomisation is applied to plates in each incubator. Plates are observed until one culture succeeds in completely covering the plate in any one media. At this point the following measurements are taken: fungus colony diameter, colour and margin. In addition, the level of sporulation is recorded.

Five 5mm disks are cut from each plate using a flamed cork borer and suspended in 20ml of distilled water (+0.05% Tween 20®). The sample is then sonicated for 2 minutes to release the spores and then vortexed to aid the formation of a uniform spore suspension. Samples are assessed for spore concentration using an Improved Neubauer haemocytometer using standard counting methodology.

The mean for each media type is calculated and ANOVA is applied to examine the results for significant differences.

Phase Two - In vitro studies:

1. Screen microorganisms and carnauba wax to determine interactions

In order to explain effects observed the microorganisms, pathogens and antagonists, will be screened against carnauba wax to identify any carrier only effect. This will enable the determination of treatment effect as well as any synergy occurring as a result of the use of

using an antagonist with carnauba wax particles.

- a. Plates of appropriate media are used based on the findings of the experiment above. Air-milled carnauba wax is sterilised using the autoclave and then ground using a twin blade mill, producing particles with an approximate VMD of 130µm. The sterilised media is then cooled to 50°C (molten stage). The carnauba wax is then incorporated into the media. Two concentrations of carnauba wax are tested; 1g/l and 10g/l. A 5mm diameter disk is cut from the margin of an actively growing culture using a flamed cork borer. This is placed upside down in the centre of the pre-poured media/carnauba wax plates. Five replicates are made for each concentration and incubated at the optimum temperature for growth/sporulation (as determined in previous experiment). Growth rates and characteristics are compared to the controls using data from the Growth and Media experiment above.

Differences are analysed using ANOVA.

- b. Disks of the pathogen and antagonists are dusted with different carnauba wax treatments and put on appropriate media. The carnauba wax particles need to be free of microorganisms to be able to carry out this experiment. Growth of treated and untreated organisms are compared.

2. ***Investigate antagonist action against pathogens***

i. **Effect of antagonists on viability of *F.oxysporum* mycelium (in vitro assay I)**

All antagonistic isolates are tested in a dual culture assay against pathogenic fungi on PDA or alternative pre-defined media. Agar plugs of *F.oxysporum* and the antagonist isolate to be tested are arranged 7 cm apart on 9cm agar plates. Inhibition zones and zones of overlapping are assessed after 7 days incubation at 19°C, 25°C and 31°C. Where an antagonist overgrows the mycelium of *F.oxysporum*, the zone of hyphal interaction between both is investigated microscopically (100x). Fungal strains without a microscopically visible effect on mycelium of *F.oxysporum* are excluded from further experiments. Furthermore, the viability of *F.oxysporum* in the region of interaction is tested by transfer of mycelial discs onto water agar plates 5 days after first contact. The *F.oxysporum* mycelium is assessed as viable when the growth of typical hyphae is observed microscopically (100x). Each experiment is repeated three times with three samples per replicate.

ii. **Effect of antagonists on germination of *F.oxysporum* sclerotia produced in vitro (in vitro assay II)**

Sclerotia of *F.oxysporum* of uniform size are placed on a 6 day old culture (PDA, 20°C) of the fungal antagonist. After incubation for 14, 28 and 35 days at 20°C, eight sclerotia per replicate (three replicates per antagonist) are transferred from the agar plate onto water agar. Mycelial growth from these sclerotia will be assessed under a light microscope (100x).

3. Confirmation of pathogenicity

Steps to perform Koch's postulates (Koch 1890, criteria designed to establish a causal relationship between a causative microbe and a disease)

- a) Describe the symptoms expressed by the diseased crop plants.
- b) Isolate the suspected pathogen — the same cultures should be isolated from plants with similar symptoms
- c) Obtain a pure culture and use it to inoculate healthy plant material.
- d) Observe the symptoms expressed by the inoculated plants—symptoms should be the same as those observed originally in the crop plants.
- e) Re-isolate the pathogen from the newly diseased material. The culture should be the same as the original purified culture.

i. Indirect Application - Plant

Using healthy plants - soil can be inoculated directly using a spore suspension made from a pure agar culture or from a culture grown in flasks. A fungal spore or bacterial suspension can be added post-emergence so that the root system is drenched by the suspension. Plants are then observed over 7 days and symptoms recorded. Koch's Postulates are applied in order to confirm that the symptoms relate to the inoculated pathogen.

ii. Direct Application – Seed

Inoculum for preparing spore suspensions is grown on water agar containing sterile seeds. Fungal spores and hyphae or bacterial spore and vegetative growth are scraped from the colony and transfer to sterile water. This spore suspension is then applied to seeds and mixed to ensure a uniform distribution. Seeds are then:

- Placed on moist filter paper and incubated at optimum growth temperature for 5 days.
- sown in heat sterilised potting compost and incubated in a propagator at optimum growth temperature for 7 days

Symptom expression and germination is recorded for both sets of experiments and Koch's postulates applied

4. *Carnauba Wax/Antagonist co-location analysis*

A dry powder formulation of spores is produced using a spore separator. Moisture content of the formulation is reduced to below 5% using a dehumidifier and silica beads. Spore concentration is determined using a Neubauer haemocytometer and standardised counting methodology.

Steps in Air Milling in Boyes Micronisation Process (for carnauba wax particles with a VMD of approx. 15µm and 75µm, respectively)

1. 2kg carnauba wax blocks are first kibbled into approximately 4 to 6mm pieces in a KT Handling Ltd Model 04 kibbler (serial no. 729/C) following the manufacturer's instructions.
2. The kibbled pieces are then passed through an Apex Construction Ltd Model 314.2 Comminuting Mill (serial no. A21306) and reduced further in size to a range of 250 to 300µm.
3. The comminuted particles are then passed through a Hosokawa Micron Ltd Alpine 100AFG jet mill (serial no. 168092) following the manufacturer's instructions, setting the mill at a suitable speed (a speed of 8000rpm for particles having a VMD of 15µm or at a speed of 2500rpm for particles having a VMD of 75µm), with a positive system pressure of 0.03bar.
4. The grinding air is to be kept to 6 bar, the system rinsing air flow and Classifying Wheel gap rinsing air are both to be set at a minimum of 0.5 bar and no more than 0.75bar, the cleaning air filter is to register a delta of no more than 5bar to achieve a final particle size with a VMD of 15µm or 75µm as required.

Entostat was combined with oilseed at three loadings (see below).

Two sizes of carnauba wax particle having VMDs of 15µm and 75µm, respectively are examined in combination with the spore formulation at two different ratios (1:3, 2:2). Samples of the carnauba wax/spore mixture are analysed using electron photomicroscopy to determine the co-location effect. Any variation observed is recorded.

In addition, both sizes of carnauba wax referred to, are mixed with a homogenised sample of mycelium and examined as described above.

5. *Carnauba Wax Particle loading*

Carnauba wax particle adhesion to seeds is approximated through the use of photomicroscopy (qualitative) and fluorometric analysis (quantitative). Two sizes of carnauba wax particles (with 1% glo-brite) are used having a VMD of 15µm and 75µm, respectively.

Four combinations: Two ratios of carnauba wax/spore formulation, together with one mycelial and a vehicle control (carnauba wax only), makes a total of eight treatments. Treatments are applied to 10g of seed and replicated three times. Three subsamples are taken from each replicate and the mean used in analysis.

For fluorometric analysis three 1g samples are each be added to 5ml of ethanol and sonicated to aid the release of the carnauba wax particles from the seeds. Samples are analysed using a Perkin Elmer L55 Fluorometer (Perkin Elmer, Ma, USA). Statistical analysis of variation between treatments is performed using ANOVA.

Seed size and architecture varies greatly between crop species and this influences application rates and method. A homogeneous mix is attained through tumbling seed and carnauba wax formulation in a cylinder, adapted to produce lateral mixing/tumbling through the inclusion of angled interior vanes, placed on a Wheaton roller for 5 minutes.

Phase Three – In vivo:

F.oxysporum, together with the most successful antagonist model is used in a series of in vivo experiments. The basic design is a split-plot experiment with temperature being the main plot factor (19°C, 25°C and 31°C) and carnauba wax/antagonist ratio (3 treatments: 2x spore, 1x mycelial) being the sub-plot. Four homogeneous mixes of each treatment are prepared using the method described above and these represent the replicates.

Treatments:

- 1) Application rate 1 – 7.5×10^6 conidia kg^{-1}
- 2) Application rate 2 – 7.5×10^8 conidia kg^{-1}
- 3) Application 3 – Mycelia
- 4) Control 1 – Vehicle control (Carnauba wax only)
- 5) Control 2 – no treatment

Mixes (true replicates): A, B, C, D

Subsamples of each mix: α , β , γ

Mixes and treatments are arranged according to a Randomised Complete Block design.

Pot studies

Each temperature (growth chamber) contains 60 plant pots.

Treated seed is sown in accordance with supplier's recommendation. Soil/compost (1:1 John Innes No.2 and Potting compost) is heat sterilised prior to inoculation with 10ml of *F.oxysporum* spore suspension and thoroughly mixed before sowing.

Plants are placed in the growth chambers for a period of 21 days with observations of symptom expression made every 48 hours post emergence. Water is applied through capillary matting twice daily.

After 21 days plants are removed from their pots and the following assessment measurements taken:

- % germination
- % pre-emergence damping off
- % post-emergence damping off
- Root weight
- Shoot weight

In addition, symptom expression is assessed based on a damage scale.

Means of the measurements taken from the subsamples α , β , γ are compared for each treatment using ANOVA.

Samples are taken from 5 plants exhibiting symptoms and Koch's Postulates applied to confirm the causal organism (by comparison to the reference slide of the master culture).

The experiment will be repeated.

Second Example

Relating to:

Control of *Rhizoctonia solani* (United Kingdom National Culture Collection (UKNCC) on cotton (*Gossypium hirsutum*) by means of seed treatments using fludioxonil.

Experimental Design: as for the Pot Study in Example 1, above.

Carnauba wax is melted using copper pans. During cooling fludioxonil is added at 1% of the mass of the carnauba. This mixture is allowed to solidify before chipping and processing through a mill (as described above set at a milling speed of 6000 rpm), to produce particles with a VMD of 25 μ m.

Treatments for the Pot Study-

Control 1 – Vehicle control (Carnauba wax only)

Control 2 – no treatment

Treatment 1 – 1% fludioxonil carnauba wax at 10g per kg of seed

Treatment 2 – 1% fludioxonil carnauba wax at 3.2g per kg of seed

Assessment and analysis as with previous Pot Study

Third Example

Control of *Limonius* spp. (Coleoptera: Elateridae) Also known as wireworms, the larval form of the click beetle) on cotton (*Gossypium hirsutum*) by means of seed treatments using thiamethoxam.

Early-season wireworm damage consists of hollowed- out seeds where larvae have entered during germination. Seedling plants also can be injured or killed by larvae tunneling into the plant below the soil line. Occasionally, wireworms bore into the stalks of larger plants and tunnel in a few inches, but the damage is not significant.

Experimental Design – as Pot Study above

Carnauba wax is melted using copper pans. During cooling thiamethoxam is added at 1% of the mass of the carnauba. This mixture is allowed to solidify before chipping and processing through a mill to produce particles with a VMD of 25µm.

Treatments for the Pot Study-

Control 1 – Vehicle control (Carnauba wax only)

Control 2 – no treatment

Treatment 1 – 1% thiamethoxam carnauba wax at 4.2g per kg of seed

Treatment 2 – 1% thiamethoxam carnauba wax at 1.3g per kg of seed

Empty pots are lined with a nylon mesh screening material before filling with potting soil. A wire frame is constructed and the nylon meshed tied off over the frame to provide a caged experimental arena designed so that the insect cannot escape the treated area.

Seeds are allowed to germinate for three days before adding five 3rd instar larvae to the soil surface of each pot before resealing the mesh cage.

Observations are made over 21 days.

Plants are assessed for:

- % germination
- Damage
- Root weight
- Shoot weight

Suppression of causal agents of fungal disease in Cotton (*Gossypium hirsutum*) using a seed coating comprised of *Trichoderma* sp. and carnauba wax particles

The potential for *Trichoderma* sp. (Ascomycota) as a biocontrol agent in the defence against plant pathogens is known.

Trichoderma hyphae are capable of penetrating the hyphae of other fungi and extracting nutrients from within, resulting in the suppression and eventual death of the host. *Trichoderma* exhibits rapid mycelial growth and is capable of out-competing other fungi for nutrients.

There are several commercially available formulations of *Trichoderma* marketed as crop protection products. These are commonly supplied as a wettable powder formulation and applied to the area of cultivation as a drench. The disadvantage of this form of application is that it is necessary to treat the entire cultivation area, whereas it is the region immediately surrounding the seed or plant that requires the treatment. The larger the number of conidia delivered to this area the greater the level of control they are able to impart. Therefore a targeted application system able to deliver sufficient conidia to the required area offers a distinct advantage in the use of *Trichoderma* over conventional applications.

Experimental Aim: To assess the potential use of Entostat as a seed-coating technology for the delivery of beneficial microbes

Methods

Trichoderma harzianum was tested alongside Entostat on cotton. The study was not replicated therefore statistical analysis has not been applied.

Haemocytometer counts, method as described below, were used to assess the spore quantity in the wash from treated seed using 0.05% Tween²⁰ solution.

Spore density of *Trichoderma* was 10⁹ spores per gram.

Thousand seed weight of cotton used was 113.49g.

Treatments

The following treatments were used (per 100 seeds):

1. *Trichoderma* only (0.016g)
2. *Trichoderma* (0.016g) + Entostat (0.034g)
3. *Trichoderma* (0.034g) + Entostat (0.066g)
4. *Trichoderma* (0.034g) + Entostat (0.034g)
5. *Trichoderma* only (0.034g)
6. Entostat only (0.034g)
7. Entostat only (0.066g)

<i>Treatment</i>	<i>Spore Count per seed</i>
<i>Trichoderma</i> : 0.016g	2.7×10^5
<i>Trichoderma</i> : 0.016g + Entostat: 0.034g	2.7×10^5
<i>Trichoderma</i> : 0.034g + Entostat: 0.034g	4.2×10^5
<i>Trichoderma</i> : 0.034g + Entostat: 0.066g	6.3×10^5
<i>Trichoderma</i> : 0.034g	4.5×10^5

NB. Clumping of spores was observed in all treatments and this could affect the counting accuracy, with a tendency towards underestimation. It is notable that the inclusion of Entostat at the higher rate (0.066g) results in 50% increase in the spore count compared to the same number of *Trichoderma* spores combined with Entostat at 0.034g.

1. Baseline data: seed coating techniques

1.1. *Seed Coating*. *Trichoderma harzianum* (containing 7.75×10^9 colony forming units g^{-1} Sylvan Bio, Loches, France) with a germination percentage of 95% was applied to cotton supplied by Herbiseed, (Twyford, UK) using carnauba wax particles with a VMD of $9.7 \mu m$ (obtained using the process described above with a mill speed set at 12,500rpm). A target loading was set at 10^5 conidia per seed based on information obtained from literature.

Carnauba particles were mixed with the dry conidia powder at different ratios and applied 0.01g (0.2% by mass) directly to dry seed, 5g of seeds per concentration. For each concentration, four batches of 10 seeds were used for evaluation of conidia

loading.

Conidia to carnauba ratios used were:

100% Conidia, 50% Conidia, 25% Conidia and 9% Conidia with the remainder in each case being made up of carnauba wax particles.

1.2. *Enumeration.* Direct enumeration to determine conidia loading of seeds was done through the use of a haemocytometer (Improved Neubauer, Hawksley, Lancing, UK).

Inoculum: Preparation of suspension.

Propagules are usually formulated in a water carrier, although those with hydrophobic cell walls (such as *Trichoderma*) are not readily suspended in water. To uniformly suspend hydrophobic propagules in water it is necessary to sonicate and/or use mechanical suspension methods. Mechanical suspension of propagules using micropestles provides good suspension of conidia in water without causing damage to cells. A surfactant may also facilitate suspension of propagules (Tween20 at 0.05%). To suspend hydrophobic conidia, harvested conidia are placed in a 1.5ml microcentrifuge tube, ≈0.5ml of sterile water is added to the tube, the micropestle is inserted into the tube, and the conidial mass is gently agitated with the micropestle by hand. The micropestle is then attached to the motor (e.g. Kontes, Argos pellet pestle motor) and the suspension is vigorously agitated while moving the pestle in and up and down, and side to side motion, circa. 30 seconds. Since the haemocytometer method does not distinguish between viable and non-viable propagules, it is necessary to determine spore viability so that doses can be prepared on the basis of viable propagules.

Seed washes and enumeration of *Trichoderma* loadings were done on 4 batches of seeds per treatment. Inoculum was washed from seeds by placing into 1ml sterile 0.05% Tween²⁰ (or substitute – similar non-ionic surfactant/dispersal agent) in a Eppendorf tube and vortexing for 30 seconds to remove conidia from the seed surface. Samples were then sonicated for two minutes to break up any conidial clumping. Counts obtained were used to calculate the mean conidia loading of seed coated with the various treatments. Results obtained using 100% conidia powder were used as a benchmark and the conidia/carnauba combination powders compared against it as a *determination of efficiency of loading.*

Confirmation of conidial viability was achieved by dilution plating on *Trichoderma Specific Media (TSM)* (see below). A dilution series was set up and duplicate plates inoculated from the series. Colony Forming Units (CFU) counts were made after 7 days, allowing inoculum levels on seeds to be quantified. In addition, fresh, unused conidia were plated to provide a comparison of before and after seed application.

Germination percentage was also measured. A satisfactory density of conidia was

obtained by spreading approximately 10^6 conidia in 100 μ l on the media in a 9cm petri dish. Conidia were incubated in the dark at 25°C for five days, and the area to be observed was then fixed using lactophenol. Phase contrast microscopy using an inverted compound microscope enabled sufficient examination of the conidia.

Conidia were considered viable if germtube lengths were two times the diameter of the propagule in question. Numbers of germinated and non-germinated conidia in arbitrarily-selected fields of view or in parallel transects, defined with an ocular micrometer, were counted. A minimum of 300 conidia were counted to provide an accurate estimate. It is desirable to determine the viability of propagules on replicate cultures and at various positions on the same plate.

This allowed calibration of the seed-coating techniques to obtain similar levels of *Trichoderma* loadings on the seeds for each coating method.

1.3. *Seed Germination.* One batch (5 seeds) of seeds from each treatment was placed on seed test paper (Whatman 181) in a 9cm Petri dish. Dishes were sealed with Parafilm and held at 20°C for 7-10 days and germination rate determined. This was repeated with untreated seed.

Trichoderma Selective Media (adapted from Williams, Clarkson et al 2003) was prepared as follows:

For 1000ml

Basal Medium Ingredients:

0.2g MgSO₄

0.9g K₂HPO₄

0.15g KCl

1.0g NH₄NO₃

3.0g glucose

0.15g rose bengal

20g agar

950ml distilled water

Basal Medium Process

Mix liquid ingredients with all solid ingredients, except the agar in a 1L Erlenmeyer flask. Add the 20g agar and stir or shake. Plug with cotton wool and cover with foil. Autoclave.

Biocidal Medium (per litre)

0.25g crystallized chloramphenicol

0.2g quintozone

0.2g captan

1.2ml propamocarb (Previcur)

50ml sterile distilled water

Seed Weight

Used as a measure of the homogeneity of the seed batch. Eight replicates of 25 seeds are weighed and the coefficient of variation (Cv) recorded. This coefficient should not exceed a value of 5. If it does then the procedure is repeated and the mean of all 16 samples used to calculate the number of seeds per gram.

<i>Crop</i>	<i>Mean Weight (g)</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Cv</i>	<i>TGW (g)</i>
Cotton	3.138	0.087	2.743	126.46

Results

Direct Enumeration Counts using Haemocytometer

Initial Spore Density of *Trichoderma harzianum* dry spore preparation (at 5% moisture content), determined using haemocytometer, was 7.75×10^9 spores g^{-1} ($n=4, \pm 2.6 \times 10^7$ 95%CL).

Summary

Cotton seed can be coated with *Trichoderma* spores in excess the target 10^5 spores seed⁻¹ for all treatments.

Use of Entostat increases the efficiency of spore delivery as a result of a reduction in wasted or lost spores.

The germination viability of the spores is unaffected by their use as a seed coating.

Enumeration through direct counting of spores using a haemocytometer or through the use of CFU counting gives statistically similar results and therefore either method may be used

once germination viability has been proved unaffected by the treatment.

As loading is a function of surface area to mass ratio, the loading potential of spores on a larger seed may be higher than that shown on cotton.

Effects of seed coating on disease suppression

Seeds are coated with *Trichoderma* using water or Entostat to achieve loadings of ca. 10^5 and 10^6 CFUs seed⁻¹. Water treatments are suspensions of spores in sterile water in which the seed samples are soaked for one hour. Seeds are then dried back, a likely commercial scenario, or sown wet coated. Entostat is applied at ratios of 3:1, and 9:1, Entostat to spores respectively. Seed treatment methods will then be compared on their ability to protect germinating cotton seedlings from *Fusarium oxysporum*, the causal agent of wilt disease in cotton.

Inoculation of seeds with *Trichoderma*. Cotton cv. DP69 is inoculated as follows (target concentration per seed):

- 1) *Trichoderma* at 10^5 /seed using a water suspension (wet coating)
- 2) *Trichoderma* at 10^6 /seed using a water suspension (wet coating)
- 3) *Trichoderma* at 10^5 /seed using a water suspension (dry coating)
- 4) *Trichoderma* at 10^6 /seed using a water suspension (dry coating)
- 5) *Trichoderma* at 10^5 /seed using Entostat at 3:1
- 6) *Trichoderma* at 10^6 /seed using Entostat at 3:1
- 7) *Trichoderma* at 10^5 /seed using Entostat at 9:1
- 8) *Trichoderma* at 10^6 /seed using Entostat at 9:1
- 9) No *Trichoderma*, water only
- 10) No *Trichoderma*, Entostat only
- 11) Seed only

Enumeration. *Trichoderma* is quantified using standard dilution plating methods on *Trichoderma* specific media. This confirms CFU loadings per seed for treatments 1-8. Dilution platings are carried out in duplicate.

***Fusarium* bioassay**

Inoculum preparation – *Fusarium oxysporum* is grown on PDA plates from stock cultures, and incubated at 20°C to produce actively growing colonies. Agar plugs are removed from the plates and used to inoculate sterilised (autoclaved at 121°C for 20 mins) John Innes

No.2 potting mix (80% moisture content; 60g) mixed with potato cubes (2 mm², 25g) in 500ml Erlenmeyer flasks. Flasks are incubated at 20°C for 14 days. Inoculum levels in the medium are quantified using a dilution plating method.

Effectiveness of seed treatment on *F. oxysporum*. Seeds are sown into individual cells of seed trays containing *F. oxysporum* -inoculated medium (approx. 15ml/cell). Four replicate batches of ten seeds per treatment are planted into the cells. Once sown, the trays are placed in a plant growth chamber (Weiss Gallenkamp Fitotron SG120) at 20°C with ca. 16h lighting. Cells are bottom watered. The number of seedlings surviving are recorded every 3 days for 21 days.

Time to emergence, percentage successful emergence and percentage plants expressing symptoms (including lesions and cankers) are recorded and the results analysed. Differences in Entostat treated seed and untreated seed are observed.

CLAIMS

1. A cotton seed coating composition, wherein the said coating composition comprises at least one organic carrier material in the form of particles wherein the carrier material is selected from waxes having a melting point of $\geq 50^{\circ}$ Centigrade and one or more biological agents that possess an activity against one or more pathogens of a cotton plant.
2. A coating composition according to claim 1 wherein the particles of wax have a volume mean diameter of $\geq 5\mu\text{m}$.
3. A coating composition according to claim 1 or claim 2 wherein the particles have a volume mean diameter in the range of from 10 to $200\mu\text{m}$.
4. A coating composition according to any one of claims 1 to 3 wherein the biological agent is selected from a chemical agent and a live biological agent; or a mixture of two or more thereof.
5. A coating composition according to any one of claims 1 to 4 wherein the biological agent is selected from chemical fungicides, arthropodocides including insecticides and acaricides, bactericides; or a mixture of two or more thereof.
6. A coating composition according to any one of claims 1 to 5 wherein the biological agent is selected from fungicides and insecticides; or a mixture thereof.
7. A coating composition according to claim 6 wherein the fungicides are selected from acyl amino acid fungicides, pyrrole fungicides, thiazole fungicides, conazole fungicides; and mixtures of two or more thereof.
8. A coating composition according to claim 7 wherein the fungicides are selected from mefenoxam [methyl *N*-(methoxyacetyl)-*N*-(2,6-xylyl)-D-alaninate], fludioxinil [4-(2,2-difluoro-1,3-benzodioxol-4-yl)-1*H*-pyrrole-3-carbonitrile], thiabendazole [2-(thiazol-4-yl)benzimidazole or 2-(1,3-thiazol-4-yl)benzimidazole], and difenoconazole [3-chloro-4-[(2*RS*,4*RS*;2*RS*,4*SR*)-4-methyl-2-(1*H*-1,2,4-triazol-1-ylmethyl)-1,3-dioxolan-2-yl]phenyl 4-chlorophenyl ether]; and mixtures of two or more thereof.
9. A coating composition according to any one of claims 1 to 6 wherein the insecticides are selected from nicotinoid insecticides, methylcarbamate insecticides, oxime carbamate insecticides, and thiazole insecticides; and mixtures of two or more thereof.
10. A coating composition according to claim 9 wherein the insecticides are selected from imidacloprid [(*E*)-1-(6-chloro-3-pyridylmethyl)-*N*-nitroimidazolidin-2-ylideneamine], methiocarb [4-methylthio-3,5-xylyl methylcarbamate], thiodicarb [(3*EZ*,12*EZ*)-3,7,9,13-tetramethyl-5,11-dioxo-2,8,14-trithia-4,7,9,12-tetraazapentadeca-3,12-diene-6,10-dione],

clothianicidin [(E)-1-(2-chloro-1,3-thiazol-5-ylmethyl)-3-methyl-2-nitroguanidine], and Thiamethoxam (EZ)-3-(2-chloro-1,3-thiazol-5-ylmethyl)-5-methyl-1,3,5-oxadiazinan-4-ylidene(nitro)amine; and mixtures of two or more thereof.

11. A coating composition according to any one of claims 1 to 10 wherein the organic carrier material is selected from waxes having a melting temperature $\geq 60^{\circ}\text{C}$ such as carnauba wax, beeswax, montan wax, Chinese wax, shellac wax, spermaceti wax, candelilla wax, castor wax, ouricury wax, and rice bran wax or a mixture of two or more thereof.

12. A coating composition according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the particles are carnauba wax particles.

13. A coating composition according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the biological agent is active against one or more pathogens selected from a bacterial species, a fungal species or an arthropod species.

14. A coating composition according to any one of claims 1 to 4 or 11 to 13 wherein one or more live biological agents is present in the form of bacterial spores and/or fungal spores located on the surface of the said particles and/or on the surface of the said seeds.

15. Use of an organic carrier wherein the organic carrier is made up of particles of wax in the manufacture of a cotton seed coating composition according to any one of claims 1 to 14.

16. Use according to claim 15 wherein the organic carrier particles are selected from natural waxes, synthetic waxes, and mineral waxes having a melting point of $\geq 50^{\circ}\text{C}$, preferably of $\geq 60^{\circ}\text{C}$, and preferably are made up of hard waxes having a melting point of $\geq 70^{\circ}\text{C}$.

17. Use according to claim 15 or claim 16 wherein the organic carrier particles are selected from carnauba wax, beeswax, montan wax, Chinese wax, shellac wax, spermaceti wax, myricyl palmitate, cetyl palmitate, candelilla wax, castor wax, ouricury wax, wool wax, sugar cane wax, retamo wax, and rice bran wax; or a mixture of two or more thereof.

18. Use according to any one of claims 15 to 17 wherein the seed coating composition comprises particles of carnauba wax.

19. Use according to any one of claims 15 to 18 wherein the organic carrier particles have a volume mean diameter $\geq 5\mu\text{m}$, such as in the range of $\geq 5\mu\text{m}$ to $200\mu\text{m}$.

20. Use of wax as an organic carrier in dry particulate form in a cotton seed coating composition according to any one of claims 1 to 14.

21. Use according to claim 20 wherein the organic carrier particles are selected from natural

waxes, synthetic waxes, and mineral waxes having a melting point of $\geq 50^{\circ}\text{C}$, more preferably of $\geq 60^{\circ}\text{C}$, and most preferably are made up of hard waxes having a melting point of $\geq 70^{\circ}\text{C}$.

22. Use according to claim 20 or claim 21 wherein the organic carrier particles are selected from carnauba wax, beeswax, montan wax, Chinese wax, shellac wax, spermaceti wax, myricyl palmitate, cetyl palmitate, candelilla wax, castor wax, ouricury wax, wool wax, sugar cane wax, retamo wax, and rice bran wax or a mixture of two or more thereof.

23. Use according to any one of claims 20 to 22 wherein the seed coating composition comprises organic carrier particles of carnauba wax.

24. Use according to any one of claims 20 to 23 wherein the organic carrier particles have a mean volume diameter $\geq 10\mu\text{m}$, such as in the range of $\geq 10\mu\text{m}$ to $200\mu\text{m}$.

25. A method of manufacturing a cotton seed coating composition according to any one of claims 1 to 14 that comprises

1) selecting an organic carrier material wherein the carrier material is selected from waxes having a melting point of $\geq 50^{\circ}$ Centigrade;

2) comminuting said organic carrier material into particles of a desired volume mean diameter $\geq 5\mu\text{m}$, such as in the range $\geq 10\mu\text{m}$ to $200\mu\text{m}$; and

3) adding a biological agent to the product particles of step 2).

26. A method according to claim 25 wherein the organic carrier material is selected from carnauba wax, beeswax, montan wax, Chinese wax, shellac wax, spermaceti wax, myricyl palmitate, cetyl palmitate, candelilla wax, castor wax, ouricury wax, wool wax, sugar cane wax, retamo wax, and rice bran wax or a mixture of two or more thereof.

27. A method according to claim 25 or claim 26 wherein the said material is carnauba wax.

28. A cotton seed comprising a coating composition according to any one of claims 1 to 14.

29. A method of coating cotton seed with a coating composition that comprises an organic carrier material and a biological agent that has an activity against a cotton plant pathogen selected from a fungal pathogen, a bacterial pathogen and an arthropod pathogen, the method comprising adding the said biological agent to an organic carrier material wherein the organic carrier material is in dry particulate form, mixing the two components together and applying the resulting composition to cotton seeds.

30. A method according to claim 29 wherein the coating composition comprises a

particulate composition that is applied to cotton seeds in dry particulate form.

31. A method according to claim 29 or claim 30, wherein the treatment composition comprises an organic carrier material that comprises an organic wax in particulate form selected from carnauba wax, beeswax, montan wax, Chinese wax, shellac wax, spermaceti wax, candelilla wax, castor wax, ouricury wax, and rice bran wax or mixtures of two or more thereof.

32. A method according to claim 31, wherein the treatment composition includes one or more biological agents selected from chemical insecticides and acaricides, fungicides, bactericides and live biological agents.

33. A method according to any one of claims 29 to 32 wherein the organic carrier material is carnauba wax.

34. A method according to claim 33, wherein the biological agent is selected from fungicides and insecticides.