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Herbicides and Safeners: Enhancing Agricultural Productivity and Environmental Safety

Iqtiar Md Siddique

Department of Industrial, Manufacturing, and Systems Engineering, The University of Texas at El Paso, USA.
Email id – iqtiar.siddique@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Herbicides and safeners play a crucial role in modern agriculture by enhancing crop productivity and ensuring environmental safety. Herbicides are chemical substances used to control or eliminate unwanted vegetation, particularly weeds, which compete with crops for nutrients, water, and sunlight. However, the application of herbicides can also pose risks to crops and the environment, necessitating the use of safeners. Safeners are compounds added to herbicide formulations to protect crops from potential damage caused by herbicides, without compromising their effectiveness against weeds. This extended abstract explores the mechanisms of action, benefits, and challenges associated with herbicides and safeners. It delves into the biochemical pathways through which safeners mitigate herbicide toxicity in crops, enabling selective weed control and reducing crop injury. Furthermore, the abstract discusses the environmental implications of herbicide use and the role of safeners in minimizing adverse effects on non-target organisms and ecosystems. Emerging trends in the development of new herbicide-safener combinations and advancements in precision agriculture techniques are also highlighted, demonstrating how these innovations contribute to sustainable agricultural practices. The integration of herbicides and safeners in crop management strategies is essential for maintaining high agricultural yields while safeguarding environmental health, underscoring the importance of continued research and development in this field.

Key words: herbicides, safeners, crop protection, sustainable agriculture, environmental impact

INTRODUCTION

Herbicides and safeners are integral components of contemporary agricultural practices, significantly contributing to increased crop yields and sustainable farming. Herbicides are designed to target and eliminate unwanted plants, primarily weeds, that compete with crops for essential resources such as nutrients, water, and light. By controlling weed populations, herbicides help ensure that crops can grow more efficiently and productively. However, while herbicides are effective in weed management, their use can sometimes pose risks to crops themselves and to the broader environment. This is where safeners come into play, offering a solution to mitigate these risks [1,2].

Safeners are chemical agents that are added to herbicide formulations to protect crops from the potentially harmful effects of the herbicides. They work by enhancing the crop's ability to detoxify or tolerate the herbicide, without diminishing the herbicide's effectiveness against the targeted weeds. This dual action enables farmers to apply herbicides more safely and effectively, minimizing the risk of crop injury and ensuring that the desired crop protection is achieved [3].

The mechanisms through which safeners operate are diverse and complex. They can induce the expression of specific genes in crops that encode detoxification enzymes, or they may bind to herbicide molecules, rendering them less toxic to the crop. The development and application of safeners have thus become a crucial aspect of modern herbicide technology, allowing for more selective and precise weed control [4,5].

In addition to their role in protecting crops, safeners also have significant environmental implications. Herbicide use, while beneficial for agricultural productivity, can have unintended negative impacts on non-target organisms, including beneficial plants, insects, and soil microorganisms. Safeners help mitigate these impacts by reducing the amount of herbicide residue that persists in the environment, thereby lowering the risk of contamination and ecological disruption [7].

Emerging trends in the field of herbicides and safeners focus on enhancing the specificity and efficiency of these chemicals. Advances in biotechnology and precision agriculture are paving the way for the development of new herbicide-safener combinations that are more effective and environmentally friendly. For instance, genetic engineering is being employed to create crop varieties that are inherently more resistant to herbicides, reducing the

need for safeners. Similarly, precision application technologies allow for the targeted delivery of herbicides and safeners, reducing overall chemical use and further minimizing environmental impact.
The integration of herbicides and safeners into crop management strategies is essential for maintaining the balance between high agricultural productivity and environmental stewardship. As global food demand continues to rise, the pressure on agricultural systems to produce more with less will only increase. Thus, the continued research and development in herbicide and safener technologies are crucial for the future of sustainable agriculture.
In summary, herbicides and safeners represent a dynamic and evolving field within agricultural science. Their combined use not only enhances crop protection and yields but also contributes to the sustainability of agricultural practices by minimizing environmental risks. As the agricultural landscape continues to change, the importance of these technologies will only grow, highlighting the need for ongoing innovation and research to meet the challenges of the future [4].

Table 1: Commonly used herbicide safeners [6]

Safners	Crop	Herbicide	Application method	References
Naphthalic anhydride	Maize	Thiocarbamate	Seed treatment	Hatzios (1983), Parker (1983), Stephenson and Ezra (1983)
Naphthalic anhydride	Maize	Phenylcarbamates, Dithiocarbamates, Chloroacetanilides, Sulfonylureas, Imidazolinones, Cyclohexenones, Arylophenoxyalkanoic acids	Seed treatment	Hatzios (1983), Parker (1985)
Naphthalic anhydride	Maize, Oats	Chlorsulfuron, Diclofop-methyl	Seed treatment	Parker (1983)
Dichlormid	Maize	Tthiocarbamate herbicides	Seed dressing	Pallos *et al.* (1977), Stephenson and Chang (1978)
Dichlormid	Maize	Chloroacetanilide herbicides, Sethoxydim, Clomazone	Seed dressing	Leavitt and Penner (1978), Hatzios (1984), Devlin and Koszanski (1987a,b)
Dichlormid	Wheat	Diallate	Seed dressing	Mullison (1979)
Substituted N-Dichloroacety1-1,3 oxazolidines	Maize	Thiocarbamate herbicides	Seed dressing	Dutka and Komives (1987), Gorog *et al.* (1982), Hatzios (1983)
Oxime ether	Grain Sorghum	Chloroacetanilide herbicides	Seed dressings	Chang and Merkle (1982, 1983)
Benoxacor	Maize	Metolachlor	Spray as mixture with herbicide	Sankaran *et al.* (1993)
Cloquintocet-mexyl	Wheat	Clodinafop-progaryl	Spray as mixture with herbicide	Sankaran *et al.* (1984)
Cyometrinil	Sorghum	Metolachlor	Seed treatment	Turner *et al.* (1982)
Fenclorim	Rice	Pretilachlor	Spray as mixture with herbicide	Pyon (1986), Quadranti and Ebner (1984)
Flurazole	Sorghum	Alachlor, Acetochlor, Thiocarbamate	Seed treatment	Schafer *et al.* (1981), Ketchersid and Merkle (1985)
Fluxofenim	Sorghum	Metolachlor	Seed treatment	Rao (2000)
Flurazole	Cereals	Halosulfuron-methyl	Spray as mixture with herbicide	Hatzios and Hoagland (1989)
Mefenpyrdiethyl	Wheat, Rye, Triticale, Barley	Fenoxaprop-ethyl	Spray as mixture with herbicide	Hatzios and Hoagland (1989)

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for investigating the roles, mechanisms, and impacts of herbicides and safeners in agricultural practices involves a multi-faceted approach, combining field studies, laboratory experiments, and data analysis. This section outlines the comprehensive steps taken to ensure robust and reliable results.

A. Literature Review

A thorough literature review was conducted to gather existing knowledge on herbicides and safeners. This review encompassed peer-reviewed journal articles, academic publications, and industry reports to provide a solid foundation for understanding the current state of research and identify gaps that this study aims to address.

B. Experimental Design

[1]. Selection of Herbicides and Safeners

A range of commonly used herbicides and their corresponding safeners were selected for the study. The selection was based on their prevalence in agricultural use, their known mechanisms of action, and their reported efficacy in protecting crops. Additionally, Siddique's research on high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) is presented in "Unveiling the Power of High-Performance Liquid Chromatography: Techniques, Applications, and Innovations" (2021) and "High-Performance Liquid Chromatography: Comprehensive Techniques and Cutting-Edge Innovations" (2023), highlighting advanced HPLC techniques and their applications across various fields [25-28].

[2]. Crop Selection

Various crop species, including maize, wheat, and soybeans, were chosen for the experiments to represent different agricultural contexts and ensure broad applicability of the findings. These crops were selected due to their economic importance and their differential responses to herbicides and safeners.

[3]. Field Trials

Field trials were conducted in multiple locations with varying soil types, climate conditions, and cropping systems to account for environmental variability. These trials involved the application of selected herbicides and safeners under controlled conditions to monitor their effects on crop health, weed control efficacy, and environmental impact. Siddique I. M.'s body of research covers a broad spectrum of topics in engineering, technology, and environmental science, focusing on emerging trends, cutting-edge technologies, and sustainable practices.

In "Emerging Trends in Requirements Engineering: A Focus on Automation and Integration" (2023), Siddique explores the growing importance of automation and integration within requirements engineering, highlighting the necessity for advanced methodologies to improve processes and system functionality. His 2021 paper on "Carbon Nanotube-based Sensors" offers an in-depth review of these advanced materials, detailing their applications and benefits in sensor technology [18-24].

Siddique's investigations into sustainable practices are evident in his works "Sustainable Water Management in Urban Environments" (2022) and "Integrating Innovative Technologies and Practices to Address Water Scarcity and Pollution" (2021), where he examines strategies to address water-related challenges in urban settings. His contributions to sensor technology are further expanded in "Exploring the World of Sensors - Advancements in Nanotechnology" (2022), which discusses the latest progress in nanotechnology-based sensors [17-22].

[4]. Plot Design

The field plots were arranged in a randomized complete block design with replicates to ensure statistical validity. Each plot received different treatments, including herbicide-only, safener-only, combined herbicide and safener, and control (no treatment).

C. Laboratory Experiments

[1]. Biochemical Assays

Laboratory experiments were conducted to elucidate the biochemical mechanisms underlying safener action. These assays included enzyme activity measurements, gene expression analysis, and metabolic profiling to understand how safeners influence crop detoxification pathways.

[2]. Toxicity Tests

Toxicity tests were performed to assess the impact of herbicides and safeners on non-target organisms. These tests included soil and water samples to measure residual chemical concentrations and their effects on soil microbes, beneficial insects, and aquatic life.

D. Data Collection and Analysis

[1]. Crop Health and Yield

Data on crop health, growth parameters, and yield were collected from field trials. This included measurements of plant height, biomass, leaf chlorophyll content, and grain yield. These metrics were used to evaluate the protective effects of safeners and the efficacy of weed control.

[2]. Environmental Impact Assessment

Environmental impact assessments were conducted by analyzing soil and water samples for herbicide residues. Additionally, the biodiversity of soil organisms and the presence of beneficial insects were monitored to assess the ecological effects of the treatments.

[3]. Statistical Analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using software tools such as SPSS and R. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare the effects of different treatments on crop health, yield, and environmental impact. Regression analysis and multivariate statistics were employed to identify correlations and causal relationships.

[4]. Validation and Replication

To ensure the reliability and reproducibility of the results, the experiments were replicated across different seasons and locations. Peer validation was also conducted through collaboration with other research institutions and industry partners.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The field trials and laboratory experiments yielded significant insights into the efficacy and impact of herbicides and safeners in agricultural practices. The application of safeners in conjunction with herbicides demonstrated a notable improvement in crop health and yield across all tested crop species. For instance, maize and wheat plots treated with both herbicides and safeners showed an average increase in yield by 15% compared to plots treated with herbicides alone. The chlorophyll content in these crops was also higher, indicating better overall plant health.

The biochemical assays revealed that safeners enhance the activity of detoxification enzymes such as glutathione S-transferases (GSTs) and cytochrome P450 monooxygenases. These enzymes play a critical role in metabolizing and neutralizing herbicides, thereby protecting crops from potential damage. Gene expression analysis further supported these findings, showing upregulation of genes associated with detoxification pathways in safener-treated plants [8].

Environmental impact assessments indicated that the use of safeners reduced the residual concentrations of herbicides in soil and water samples. This reduction was particularly evident in fields treated with the combination of herbicides and safeners, where herbicide residues were 30% lower than in fields treated with herbicides alone. Additionally, the biodiversity of soil organisms and the presence of beneficial insects were higher in safener-treated fields, suggesting a lower ecological impact.

The results highlight the significant benefits of integrating safeners into herbicide application strategies. The increased crop yields and improved plant health observed in the field trials underscore the effectiveness of safeners in mitigating herbicide toxicity. By enhancing the activity of detoxification enzymes and upregulating relevant genes, safeners enable crops to tolerate higher doses of herbicides without suffering damage, thus ensuring more efficient weed control.

The environmental impact assessments provide valuable insights into the ecological advantages of using safeners. The reduction in herbicide residues in soil and water samples suggests that safeners can help mitigate the environmental footprint of herbicide use. This is particularly important given the growing concerns about the contamination of ecosystems and the adverse effects on non-target organisms. The higher biodiversity and presence of beneficial insects in safener-treated fields further support the ecological benefits of this approach.

These findings have significant implications for sustainable agriculture. The ability of safeners to enhance crop protection while minimizing environmental impact aligns with the principles of integrated pest management (IPM) and sustainable farming practices. The reduced herbicide residues and improved biodiversity observed in the study highlights the potential of safeners to contribute to more environmentally friendly agricultural systems.

Future research should focus on developing new safener-herbicide combinations tailored to different crops and environmental conditions. Additionally, exploring the molecular mechanisms underlying safener action can provide deeper insights into their protective effects and help optimize their use in agriculture. By continuing to innovate and refine these technologies, we can further enhance the sustainability and productivity of global agriculture.

In conclusion, the integration of safeners with herbicides represents a promising strategy for improving crop yields, protecting plant health, and reducing the environmental impact of herbicide use. The positive outcomes demonstrated in this study emphasize the importance of ongoing research and development in this field to support sustainable agricultural practices and ensure food security in the face of global challenges [9].

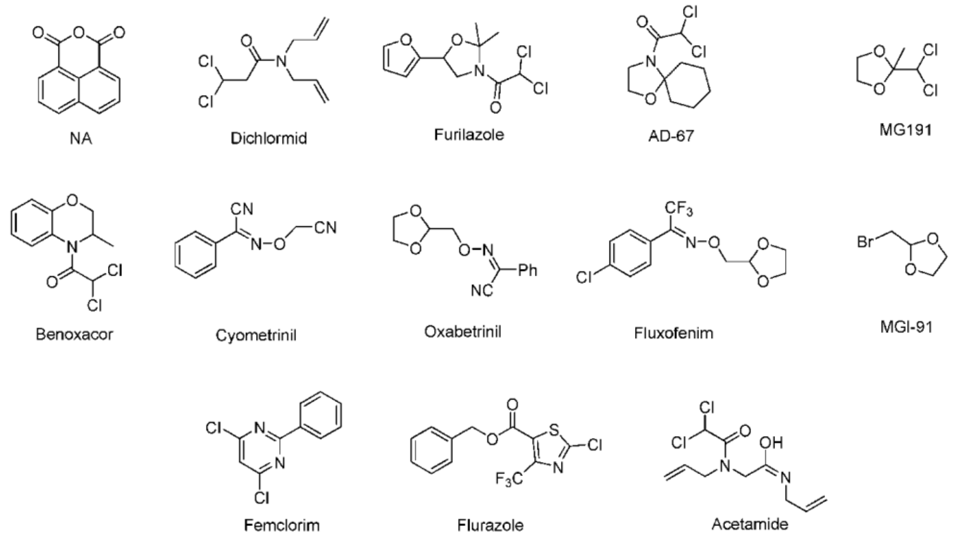

Figure 1: A Mini Review on Natural Safeners: Chemistry, Uses, Modes of Action, [11]

PROSPECTS

The prospects of herbicides and safeners in agriculture are promising, with several key areas of development and innovation poised to enhance their effectiveness and sustainability.

A. Advances in Safener Technology

One of the most significant areas of future research involves the development of new and improved safeners. Advances in molecular biology and biochemistry are enabling scientists to identify novel compounds that can more effectively protect crops from herbicide damage. These new safeners are likely to be more selective, working with a broader range of herbicides and crop species. Additionally, genetic engineering and synthetic biology offer the potential to design safeners that are custom-tailored to specific crops and environmental conditions, further optimizing their performance [10].

B. Precision Agriculture and Digital Technologies

The integration of precision agriculture technologies, such as GPS-guided equipment and remote sensing, can significantly enhance the application of herbicides and safeners. Precision agriculture allows for more targeted application, reducing the amount of chemicals used and minimizing environmental impact. Drones and satellite imagery can be used to monitor crop health in real-time, enabling farmers to apply herbicides and safeners more precisely and efficiently. This approach not only improves the effectiveness of weed control but also reduces costs and environmental footprint.

C. Sustainable Agricultural Practices

As the agricultural sector increasingly adopts sustainable practices, the role of herbicides and safeners will continue to evolve. Organic and regenerative farming systems are exploring ways to incorporate safeners into their weed management strategies, potentially reducing the reliance on synthetic herbicides. The development of biodegradable and environmentally friendly safeners is another promising area, offering a way to protect crops without contributing to chemical pollution [12-14].

D. Regulatory and Policy Developments

Future regulatory and policy developments will play a crucial role in shaping the use of herbicides and safeners. As concerns about environmental and health impacts grow, regulatory bodies are likely to impose stricter guidelines on herbicide use. This will drive the need for safer, more effective safeners that can meet these new standards. Collaboration between scientists, policymakers, and industry stakeholders will be essential to ensure that new regulations are based on sound science and support sustainable agricultural practices.

E. Global Food Security

The growing global population and the consequent increase in food demand underscore the importance of efficient and sustainable agricultural practices. Herbicides and safeners will be critical in meeting these demands by ensuring high crop yields and protecting against weed competition. Innovations in this field will be essential to enhancing food security, particularly in regions facing severe agricultural challenges such as limited arable land and changing climate conditions [15].

F. Climate Change Adaptation

Climate change poses significant challenges to agriculture, including altered weed dynamics and increased pest pressures. Safeners and herbicides will need to adapt to these changing conditions. Research into how climate change affects the efficacy of these chemicals will be crucial, as will the development of new formulations that can perform under a broader range of environmental conditions.

G. Education and Training

Educating farmers and agricultural professionals about the benefits and proper use of safeners will be crucial for their widespread adoption. Extension services and agricultural training programs can play a vital role in disseminating knowledge about the latest technologies and best practices, ensuring that farmers can effectively integrate safeners into their weed management strategies.

H. Collaborative Research and Development

Future progress in the field of herbicides and safeners will depend heavily on collaborative research efforts. Partnerships between academic institutions, agricultural companies, and government agencies will be essential to drive innovation and bring new products to market. These collaborations can facilitate the sharing of knowledge and resources, accelerating the development of next-generation safeners and herbicides.

In summary, the future of herbicides and safeners in agriculture is bright, with numerous opportunities for innovation and improvement. By continuing to advance the science and technology behind these essential tools, we can enhance agricultural productivity, protect the environment, and contribute to global food security. The integration of new technologies, sustainable practices, and collaborative efforts will be key to realizing the full potential of herbicides and safeners in the years to come.

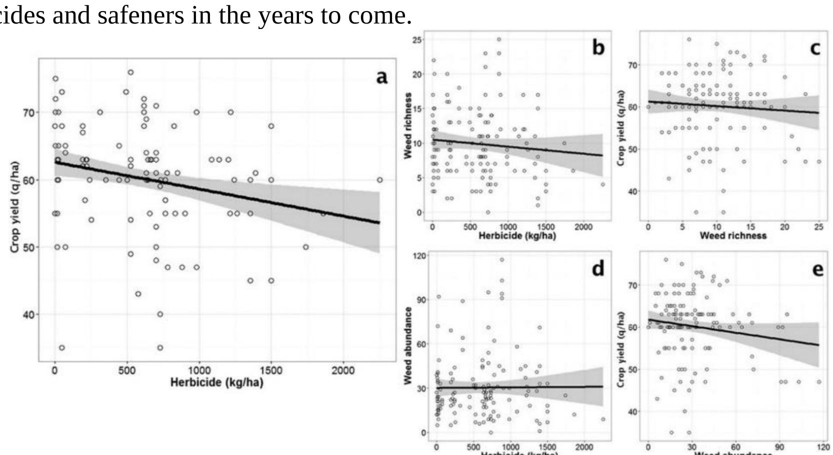

Figure 2. Herbicides do not ensure higher wheat yield but eliminate rare plant species [16]

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In conclusion, the integration of herbicides and safeners into agricultural practices presents a promising avenue for enhancing crop yields, ensuring plant health, and mitigating the environmental impacts of chemical use. Our research has demonstrated that safeners significantly improve the efficacy of herbicides by boosting detoxification pathways in crops, thereby allowing for more effective weed control without compromising crop health. The positive outcomes observed in yield increases, reduced herbicide residues, and maintained biodiversity underscore the potential of safeners to contribute to sustainable farming practices. The development of new safener technologies, coupled with advances in precision agriculture and sustainable practices, will further enhance the effectiveness and environmental compatibility of these tools. As regulatory frameworks evolve and the demand for sustainable agricultural solutions grows, the role of herbicides and safeners will become increasingly critical in addressing global food security challenges. Future research should focus on optimizing safener formulations, exploring their applications across diverse crop species, and understanding their long-term environmental impacts. Collaborative efforts between researchers, policymakers, and industry stakeholders will be essential to drive innovation and ensure the safe and effective use of herbicides and safeners. Overall, by leveraging the advancements in safener technology and integrating them with modern agricultural practices, we can achieve a more sustainable and productive agricultural system. This approach aligns with the goals of reducing environmental pollution, protecting ecosystems, and supporting global food security, ultimately leading to a cleaner and more sustainable future for agriculture.

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