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EFFECTS OF *Pseudomonas* sp. AND *Pseudomonas chlororaphis* STRAINS TO CARROT SEED GERMINATION AND INFECTION BY *Fusarium* spp.

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Pseudomonas is one of the most commonly used genera for biological control, with strains known as a fungal antagonist due to its wide spectrum of antifungal activity against soil-borne plant pathogens. Knowing that some *Pseudomonas* can cause damage to the host plants by inhibiting seed emergence and the growth of plant seedlings, it is necessary to choose strains beneficial to germination and vigour of seeds and antagonistic to seed pathogens. Phytopathogenic fungi that belong to *Fusarium* genus affect numerous agriculturally important plants including carrot. The aim of this study was to examine natural infection of *Daucus carota* L. cv. Vizija seeds, antagonistic activity of *Pseudomonas* sp. and *P. chlororaphis* strains toward pathogens and bacterial effect on seed germination. Vizija, a new variety of carrot used for this study, reflects a modern approach in vegetable breeding techniques. It has intense dark purple roots, that are over 25 cm long. Vizija is meant to be consumed in a form of fresh vegetable, when its antioxidant activity is the strongest. Also, it can be industrially processed, by drying or freezing. Vizija has a great yield potential, and can be cultivated in unfavorable conditions as well. Three *Fusarium* species were isolated from seeds, as natural infection: *F. solani*, *F. oxysporum* and *F. subglutinans*. Different fraction and concentration of one *Pseudomonas* sp. and two *P. chlororaphis* strains were tested for fungal growth inhibition assay and improvement of seed germination and seedling growth. Pure culture (10^6 CFU mL⁻¹) and cell-free supernatant in two concentrations (10^6 and 10^8 CFU mL⁻¹) of each strain were applied to seed for 30 min before germination test. Germination tests were carried out by the paper towel method. The ratio of seed germination was measured after 7 and 14 days of incubation in the dark at 25°C. All tested fractions of *P. chlororaphis* strains improved germination rate comparing to control. All tested fractions of *Pseudomonas* sp. Ek1 induced low increases of germination after 7 days, while overnight culture decreased germination in 5% after 14 days. *P. chlororaphis* strains significantly affected germination and, depending on fraction applied, showed 8-22% and 24-43% higher values than control after 7 days, as well as 30-38% and 36-72% higher values (14d) for K35 and Q16 strains, respectively. All strains significantly improved seedling growth and reduced seed infection by three *Fusarium* species observed in control. The best antagonism was observed for K35 strain with average values of 0.5 and 1.25% of infection after 7 and 14 days of germination, following by Q16 (1 and 2.5%) and Ek1 (3 and 8%), while 20 and 54% of infection was counted for control. Based on results obtained in this study, *P. chlororaphis* Q16 and K35 strains improve seed germination and are also effective as biocontrol agents against carrot seed pathogens *F. solani*, *F. oxysporum* and *F. subglutinans*.

Key words: *Pseudomonas chlororaphis*, *Fusarium* spp., germination, seed, *Daucus carota* L.

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