Performance of Products for Management of Sclerotinia Leaf Drop of Lettuce in 2002

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Abstract

Sclerotinia leaf drop in Arizona is caused by two soil-borne fungi, Sclerotinia minor and S. sclerotiorum. Moist soil and moderate temperature favor this disease. Some new products in development were evaluated for control of leaf drop on lettuce during the winter vegetable growing season of 2001-2002. Sclerotia of each pathogen were applied to plots after thinning and just before the first of two applications of test compounds. Significant reduction of Sclerotinia leaf drop caused by S. minor occurred in plots treated with Endura, whereas other products tested against this pathogen did not significantly reduce the level of disease compared to nontreated control plants. The highest level of disease reduction in plots infested by S. sclerotiorum was achieved by the fungicide Ronilan as well as the biological material Contans. Somewhat lower but still significant disease control was achieved with Endura on plots infested with S. sclerotiorum. In this field trial, Endura provided the best level of disease control in plots infested with S. minor, whereas Contans provided the best level of disease control in plots infested with S. sclerotiorum.

Introduction

Sclerotinia minor and *S. sclerotiorum* are two soil-borne fungi that cause leaf drop of lettuce in Arizona. As with other fungal diseases of vegetable crops, environmental conditions govern disease development. Mild to moderate temperatures and moist soil conditions favor leaf drop; therefore, the incidence of the disease normally is highest from November through March in western Arizona lettuce fields. To minimize the occurrence of Sclerotinia leaf drop, a fungicide treatment can be applied to the lettuce beds immediately after thinning when the plants are very small. This fungicide application, which can be followed in about 3 weeks by another treatment, forms a chemical barrier between the soil and the developing leaf canopy of the lettuce plant. With this chemical barrier in place, the bottom leaves and stem of each lettuce plant will be protected from colonization by the germinating sclerotia of the pathogens.

Timely application of an effective fungicide is a critical component of an overall disease management strategy when lettuce is planted in fields with a history of leaf drop. Some new agrochemicals are in development that have activity on the group of plant pathogens that includes *Sclerotinia*. Two other products are biological disease control materials; Serenade contains a bacterium (*Bacillus subtilis*) and Contans consists of a fungus (*Coniothyrium minitans*). A field trial was initiated during the 2001-2002 vegetable season to test the potential efficacy of these new products on Sclerotinia leaf drop of lettuce.

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Materials and Methods

This study was conducted at the Yuma Valley Agricultural Center. The soil was a silty clay loam (7-56-37 sand-silt-clay, pH 7.2, O.M. 0.7%). Sclerotia of *Sclerotinia minor* were produced in 0.25-pt glass flasks containing 15 to 20 sterilized 0.5 in. cubes of potato by seeding the potato tissue with mycelia of the fungus. After incubation for 4 to 6 weeks at 68EF, mature sclerotia were separated from residual potato tissue by washing the contents of each flask in running tap water within a soil sieve. Sclerotia were air-dried at room temperature, then stored at 40EF until needed. Inoculum of *Sclerotinia sclerotiorum* was produced in 2-qt glass containers by seeding moist sterilized barley seeds with mycelia of the pathogen. After a 2 month incubation at 68EF, abundant sclerotia were formed. The contents of each container were then removed, spread onto a clean surface and air-dried. The resultant mixture of sclerotia and infested barley seed was used as inoculum. Lettuce 'Winterhaven' was seeded and watered October 30, 2001 on double rows 12 in. apart on beds with 40 in. between bed centers. Treatments were replicated five times in a randomized complete block design. Each replicate consisted of 25 ft of bed, which contained two 25 ft rows of lettuce. Plants were thinned November 16 at the 3-4 leaf stage to a 12 in. spacing. After thinning, for plots infested with *Sclerotinia minor*, 0.13 oz (3.6 grams) of sclerotia were distributed evenly on the surface of each 25-ft-long plot between the rows of lettuce and incorporated into the top 1-inch of soil. For plots infested with *Sclerotinia sclerotiorum*, 0.5 pint of a dried mixture of sclerotia and infested barley grain was broadcast evenly over the surface of each 25-ft-long lettuce plot, again between the rows of lettuce on each bed, and incorporated into the top 1-inch of soil. Sclerotia were applied to plots on November 29. Treatment beds were separated by single nontreated beds. Unless noted otherwise in the data table, treatments were applied with a tractor-mounted boom sprayer (flat-fan nozzles spaced 12 in. apart) that delivered 50 gal/acre at 100 psi. Test materials were applied to the surface of the bed and plants on December 3 and again on December 20, 2001. Mean soil temperature (EF) at the 4 in. depth was as follows: Dec, 59; Jan, 59; Feb, 62. Total rainfall in inches was as follows: Dec, 0.01; Jan, Feb, Mar 1-4, 0.00. Furrow irrigation was used for the duration of this trial. The severity of disease was determined at plant maturity (March 4) by recording the number of dead plants in each plot. As a point of reference, the original stand of lettuce was thinned to approximately 55 plants per plot.

Results and Discussion

Significant reduction of Sclerotinia leaf drop caused by *S. minor* occurred in plots treated with Endura. Other products tested against *S. minor* did not significantly reduce the level of disease compared to nontreated control plants. The highest level of disease reduction in plots infested with *S. sclerotiorum* was achieved by the fungicide Ronilan as well as the biological material Contans. Somewhat lower but still significant disease control was achieved with Endura on plots infested with *S. sclerotiorum*. In this trial, Endura provided the best level of disease control in plots infested with *S. minor*, whereas Contans provided the best level of disease control in plots infested with *S. sclerotiorum*. These products will be tested in future field studies to evaluate and compare their relative efficacy in management of Sclerotinia leaf drop.

Sclerotinia leaf drop of lettuce fungicide trial, 2002.

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Treatment [1]	Rate (lb a.i./acre)	Dead plants per 25 ft plot [2]	
		S. minor	*S. sclerotiorun*
Endura (BAS 510) 70WG	0.4	9.6	23.6
Endura (BAS 510) 70WG	0.5	9.8	27.0
Ronilan 50DF	1.0	14.0	11.0
Plantpro 20EC + Companion 20EC	0.08 + 0.66 gal. product	14.6	36.6
Pristine (BAS 516) 38WG	0.6	15.2	30.2
Plantpro 20EC + Companion 20EC (water incorporation) [3]	0.35 +1.98 gal. product	16.0	35.0
Plantpro 20EC + Companion 20EC (water incorporation) [3]	0.52 +1.98 gal. product	16.2	38.8
Serenade WPO	6.0 lb. prod.	17.2	36.0
Serenade WPO	4.0 lb. prod.	17.8	37.4
Rovral 4F	1.0	18.4	22.4
Contans (water incorporation) [3]	4.0 lb. prod.	19.4	10.4
Contans (water incorporation) [3]	2.0 lb. prod.	21.6	12.0
Contans (water incorporation) [3] (first application); Endura (second application)	4.0 lb. prod.; 0.5	18.8	12.0
Nontreated	-------	18.2	35.6
LSD (Least Significant Difference, *P*=0.05)		8.0	6.9

1 Treatments were applied to soil on Dec 3 and again on Dec 20, 2001.

2 Disease assessment was performed at crop maturity on Mar 4, 2002. Each 25 ft. plot contained approximately 55 plants. All diseased plants were dead or dying.

3 Product applied to bed surface between lettuce rows in 1.0 gal of water per plot. An additional 1.0 gal of water was applied to further incorporate the product into the soil.