Managing Cassava Diseases
Transmitted through Asexual Seed

Cassava (Manihot esculenta) is planted on 18 million hectares in 102 developing countries. Propagation is by stem cuttings, which can transmit important diseases such as cassava bacterial blight (Xanthomonas axonopodis pv. manihotis), root rots (Phytophthora tropicalis, P. drechsleri, P. palmivora and others), and superelongation disease (Sphaceloma manihoticola).

INTRODUCTION

MATERIALS AND METHODS

On-farm field trials were established in three departments of Colombia to evaluate the effect of several control measures on the incidence and severity of root rots in harvested roots. Stem cuttings were grouped and submitted to four types of control as follows:

- **Thermotherapy**: Stem cuttings were immersed for 49 minutes in water heated to 49 °C over a wood fire (Figure 1).
- **Chemical control**: Stem cuttings were immersed for 5 minutes to test the effectiveness of suspensions of the following fungicides: copper oxychloride (Oxiclor® 35WP), captan [Orthocide® 50%], metadoxyl (Rudomin®), and benomyl (Benlate®) (3 g/L, commercial product).
- **Biological control**: Three strains of Trichoderma sp. were used to prepare suspensions of 10⁶ conidia/mL. Stem cuttings were then inoculated by immersing them in the suspensions for 10 minutes. The suspensions were also applied periodically to the soil near the base of each plant.
- **No treatment**: Traditional farmers’ practice.

RESULTS

Immersion of stem cuttings and periodic applications of suspensions of different strains of the biological agent Trichoderma increased yields by 11%. Trichoderma reduced by 71% the percentage roots affected.

CONCLUSIONS

- Treating cassava stem cuttings with hot water for 48 minutes at 49 °C effectively controls PRR, CBB, and insects (data not presented).
- Immersion of heat-treated stem cuttings in copper oxychloride, or a short pretreatment (10 minutes) 24 hours before the long treatment (5 hours), prevents undesired losses in germination.
- Immersion of stem cuttings in copper oxychloride controls CBB, PRR, and SED.
- CBB can also be controlled biologically by immersing stem cuttings in Lonlife (an extract from citrus seeds).
- The hot-water treatment, combined with the selection of healthy stem cuttings and immersion in a suspension prepared with the fungus Trichoderma viride, a biological control agent, will also control PRR.
- Resource-poor farmers in Colombia are currently validating technology packages, including the seed treatments presented herein.

REFERENCES