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BIODEGRADABLE SEED COATINGS: A GREENER SOLUTION

Cirumalla Mrudhula[1]*, Janapareddy Rajesh[2]

[1]Department of Agricultural Microbiology, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Tamil Nadu, India

[2]Department of Seed Science and Technology, Bidhan Chandra Krishi Viswavidyalaya, West Bengal, India

**Corresponding author email*: cmrudhula2736@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Biodegradable seed coatings represent an eco-friendly and sustainable approach to enhancing seed performance while minimizing environmental impact. Derived from natural materials such as starches, proteins, clays, and plant oils, these coatings support germination, deliver nutrients, and offer pest protection without leaving harmful residues. Their ability to decompose naturally improves soil health and reduces dependency on synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. As agriculture faces increasing environmental pressures, these coatings offer a promising alternative for both conventional and organic systems. While challenges such as cost and durability persist compared to synthetic counterparts, ongoing innovations are improving accessibility and performance, enabling the cultivation of healthier, more resilient crops.

KEYWORDS: Biodegradable seed coatings, Organic farming compatibility, Sustainable agriculture, Seed protection

INTRODUCTION

Seed coatings are protective layers composed of various materials including minerals, fertilizers, fungicides, insecticides, polymers, and occasionally biological agents. These coatings are applied to seeds to enhance germination, facilitate nutrient uptake, and provide protection against pests and diseases, particularly during the initial stages of plant growth. Both conventional and organic farmers utilize seed coatings to improve crop yields while reducing reliance on chemical inputs. Seed coatings are typically categorized into two broad types: synthetic and biodegradable. Synthetic coatings, although effective, contribute to soil and environmental pollution due to their persistence in the soil. In contrast, biodegradable seed coatings decompose into non-toxic byproducts such as water, carbon dioxide, and organic matter after fulfilling their purpose, offering a more environmentally sustainable solution.

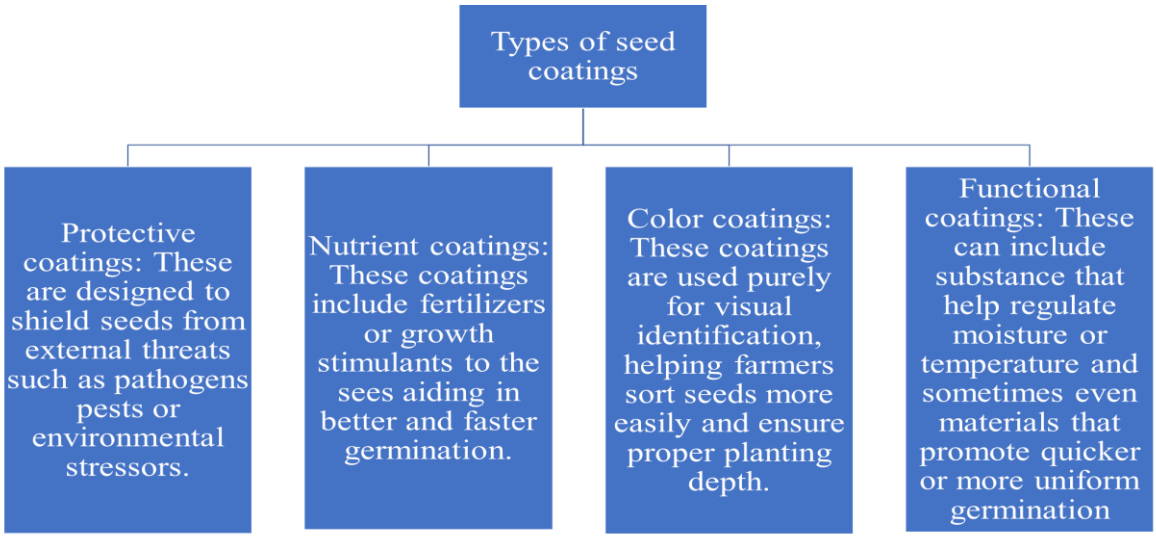

Figure 1: Classifications of seed coatings based on functional role

BIODEGRADABLE SEED COATINGS

Biodegradable seed coatings are produced using natural, eco-friendly materials designed to enhance crop yield and seed performance while reducing environmental impact. These coatings protect and nourish seeds during the early stages of growth and decompose over time, leaving no toxic residues. Unlike petroleum-based synthetic coatings that can degrade soil quality and contaminate groundwater, biodegradable alternatives promote healthier ecosystems by supporting soil microbial communities and nutrient cycling (Sohail et al., 2022).

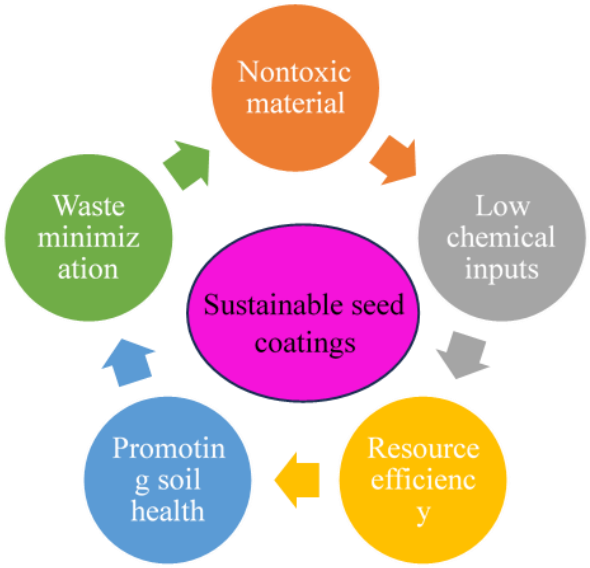

Figure 2: Benefits of sustainable seed coating

TYPES OF BIODEGRADABLE SEED COATINGS AND THEIR MECHANISMS

Biodegradable seed coatings are formulated from diverse natural sources that serve multiple functions—supporting germination, delivering nutrients, and defending against pests and pathogens. The primary types of biodegradable coatings include:

- **Polysaccharide-based coatings:** Derived from natural carbohydrates like starch, cellulose, guar gum, and alginate, these coatings improve moisture retention around the seed, especially in arid conditions, thereby enhancing germination rates.
- **Protein-based coatings:** Produced from casein, soy protein, or chitosan (from crustacean shells), these materials offer protection against soil-borne diseases and fungal infections. They also promote effective contact between the seed and soil, which is essential for optimal germination.
- **Clay-based coatings:** These form a hard, protective shell around the seed, offering resistance to mechanical damage, pest attack, and moisture loss. Though their degradation is slower, they do not leave harmful residues.
- **Organic oil and resin-based coatings:** Derived from natural sources such as neem oil, pine resin, or soybean oil, these coatings retain moisture and deter pests. Neem oil, in particular, offers natural fungicidal and insecticidal properties. A hydrophobic barrier created by these coatings also minimizes water loss during germination.

KEY BENEFITS AND ADVANTAGES OF BIODEGRADABLE SEED COATINGS

As sustainable agriculture gains global momentum, biodegradable seed coatings emerge as an innovative and eco-conscious solution. Their advantages include:

- **Improved Soil Health:** Many biodegradable coatings promote beneficial microbial activity, enhance nutrient cycling, and support long-term soil fertility. Materials containing plant-based ingredients or microorganisms create a biologically active rhizosphere that enhances crop resilience.
- **Reduced Chemical Input:** By incorporating natural nutrients and pest-repelling substances, these coatings diminish the need for synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, making them safer for pollinators and contributing to ecological balance.
- **Enhanced Germination and Early Growth:** Coatings protect seeds from abiotic stressors such as drought or temperature fluctuations and biotic threats like pathogens and pests, ensuring stronger seedling establishment.

- **Nutrient Delivery:** As the coating materials decompose, they release essential nutrients gradually, fostering healthy early-stage growth. Coatings embedded with beneficial microbes further stimulate root development.
- **Organic Farming Compatibility:** These coatings align with organic farming principles by utilizing non-toxic, natural materials. Many are made from certified organic inputs, making them suitable for certified organic operations.
- **Long-term Economic Benefits:** Despite higher upfront costs, biodegradable coatings can reduce reliance on costly agrochemicals and increase yields, offering financial savings over time.
- **Climate Resilience:** By supporting water retention and temperature regulation, biodegradable coatings help crops adapt to variable climatic conditions, improving food security in vulnerable regions.

CONCLUSION

Biodegradable seed coatings represent a significant advancement in sustainable agricultural practices, offering multifaceted benefits including improved germination, enhanced plant health, and reduced ecological impact. Their alignment with organic farming principles and ability to break down into non-toxic substances make them an ideal alternative to conventional synthetic coatings. As environmental concerns such as soil degradation and plastic pollution escalate, biodegradable coatings offer an effective means to protect seeds while fostering soil health and biodiversity. Though current limitations include production cost and performance variability, ongoing research and innovation continue to improve their practicality. With growing global interest in eco-friendly farming solutions, biodegradable seed coatings are poised to play a pivotal role in promoting agricultural sustainability and food system resilience.

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