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# Predicting Wetting Patterns in Soil from a Single Subsurface Drip Irrigation System

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#### ABSTRACT

**S**oil wetted pattern from a subsurface drip plays great importance in the design of subsurface drip irrigation (SDI) system for delivering the required water directly to the roots of the plant. An equation to estimate the dimensions of the wetted area in soil are taking into account water uptake by roots is simulated numerically using HYDRUS (2D/3D) software. In this paper, three soil textures namely loamy sand, sandy loam, and loam soil were used with three different types of crops tomato, pepper, and cucumber, respectively, and different values of drip discharge, drip depth, and initial soil moisture content were proposed. The soil wetting patterns were obtained at every thirty minutes for a total time of irrigation equal to three hours. Equations for wetted width and depth were predicted and evaluated by utilizing the statistical parameters (model efficiency (EF), and root mean square error (RMSE)). The model efficiency was more than 95%, and RMSE did not exceed 0.64 cm for three soils. This shows that evolved formula can be utilized to describe the soil wetting pattern from SDI system with good accuracy.

**Keywords:** HYDRUS-2D, wetting patterns, subsurface drip irrigation, root water uptake.

انماط الترطيب المتنبئة في التربة من منقط منفرد تحت سطحي

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الخلاصة

يلعب نمط التربة المبتلة من منقط تحت سطحي أهمية كبيرة في تصميم نظام الري بالتنقيط تحت السطح (SDI) من أجل توصيل المياه المطلوبة مباشرة إلى جذور النباتات. تم محاكاة معادلة لتقدير ابعاد المساحة المبتلة في التربة مع الاخذ بالاعتبار امتصاص الماء من الجذور عدديا باستخدام برنامج 30 / HYDRUS-2D. في هذه الدراسة تم استخدام ثلاث نسجات من الترب وهم التربة الرملية المزيجية و المزيجية الرملية والمزيجية مع ثلاث انواع من محاصيل الطماطم والفلفل والخيار على التوالي، وافترضت قيم مختلفة لتصريف المنقط وعمق المنقط، ومحتوى رطوبة التربة الحجمي الابتدائي. تم التنبؤ بأنماط ترطيب التربة كل ثلاثين دقيقة من وقت الري الكلي

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المساوي شلات ساعات. في هذه الدراسة ، تم التبؤ وتقيم معادلات العرض والعمق المبلل باستخدام المعاملات الاحصائية (كفاءة النموذج وخط متوسط مربع الجذر). كانت كفاءة النمذجة أكبر من 95% ومتوسط مربع الجذر لاتزيد عن 0.64 سم للترب الثلاثة. هذا يدل على أن الصيغة المطورة يمكن استخدامها لوصف نمط التربة المبتله مع دقة جيدة. الكلمات الرئيسية: 2D-HYDRUS - انماط الترطيب- منقط ري تحت سطحي- امتصاص ماء الجذر

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the important aspects of designing the subsurface trickle irrigation system is the shape of the wetted patterns that are affected by several factors. These factors are soil texture, initial soil moisture content, duration of irrigation, drip discharge, and drip depth. Many investigations used empirical, numerical and mathematical, methods to describe the soil wetted pattern from subsurface drip **Singh**, et al., 2006., and **Aldhfees**, et al., 2007. Others evolved commercial software to simulate water movement in the soil. HYDRUS (2D/3D) is one of the software that can be utilized to simulate the shape of soil wetting pattern from a subsurface drip irrigation for a variety of conditions.

**Singh, et al., 2006,** presented empirical formulas to simulate wetting pattern from a subsurface trickle irrigation. Their formulas depended upon the results of their experiments that were carried out on sandy loam soil. The wetted widths and depths were measured after 0.5, 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7 hr of the operation of the system, and drip tape set at depths 0.05, 0.10, and 0.15 m beneath the soil surface. Their formulas were:

$$W = 3.27 \, V^{0.44} \, (\frac{K}{QZ})^{-0.06} \tag{1}$$

and

$$D = 3.86 \, V^{0.31} \, (\frac{K}{QZ})^{-0.19} \tag{2}$$

where:

W = wetted width under SDI, (m),

D = wetted depth under SDI, (m),

V = total amount of water in soil per unit length,  $(m^2)$ ,

Q = discharge per unit length of lateral,  $(m^2/s)$ ,

K = hydraulic conductivity of soil, (m/s), and

Z = depth of lateral placement, (m).

Aldhfees, et al., 2007, suggested a mathematical model to simulate water distribution in sandy soil from subsurface line source. They solved the partial differential equation as mentioned by **Brandt**, et al., 1971 as explicit finite difference method. The mathematical model was:



$$D = 11.7 \ (V)^{0.63} \left(\frac{K_S}{Q}\right)^{0.45}$$

where:

D = vertical distance to the wetting front, (m),

V = volume of water applied, (litter),

Ks = measured saturated hydraulic conductivity of soil,(m/s), and

Q = source discharge rate, litter. ( $hr^{-1}/m$ ).

The results indicated that the model could be utilized to predict the vertical distance of the wetted pattern beneath the soil in sandy soil only.

**Kandelous and Simunek, 2010,** estimated the dimensions of the wetting zone for surface and subsurface drip irrigation by evaluated three approaches (Numerical, analytical, and empirical). They compared the field and laboratory data with predictions of the numerical HYDRUS - (2D) model, the analytical WetUp software, selected empirical models (Kandelous et al. model, Schwartzman, and Zur model, and Amin, and Ekhmaj model) Kandelous, et al., 2008.; Amin, and Ekhmaj, 2006.; Schwartzman, and Zur, 1986. The hydraulic properties of soil estimated by utilizing Rosetta for laboratory experiments and inverse analysis for field experiments. The results demonstrated that the HYDRUS (2D/3D) was a good tool to predict the wetting vertical and horizontal and should be selected more than the other models evaluated.

Abou Lila, et al., 2013, studied the effects of drip depth, irrigation amount, and frequency on the volume of soil wetted, deep percolation soil and salinity levels under SDI of tomato is growing with brackish water numerically by utilizing the HYDRUS (2D/3D). A numerical model was simulated for three soils namely sand, loamy sand, and sandy loam with drip discharge 1 l/hr. They noticed that the size of the wetted area around the drip based upon amount of irrigation and soil type, the lower frequency of irrigation increased the wetted volume of soil, deep percolation decreased when drip depth and amount of irrigation decreased, and the salinity of irrigation water, did not show any considerable effect with shallow drip depth.

**Rasheed, and Abid, 2018,** evolved an empirical formula to predict the dimension of the wetted zone from a buried vertical ceramic pipe through homogenous porous media in different soil types for different conditions. Their formula was based upon initial soil moisture content, drip flow rate, applied head, and pipe hydraulic conductivity and time of irrigation. The results showed that the evolved formulas are very general and can be utilized with very good reliability.

The main objective of this study is to develop an empirical formula that assists in determining the wetted width and depth from a single subsurface drip irrigation system with water uptake by plant's roots.

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#### 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Soil water movement was simulated utilizing the numerical model HYDRUS (2D/3D). The numerical model solves the Richards equation. The Richards equation prevailing water flow and can be expressed in axisymmetric coordinates as follows **Richards**, **1931**:

$$\frac{\partial\theta}{\partial t} = \frac{\partial}{\partial x} \left[ K(h) \frac{\partial h}{\partial x} \right] + \frac{\partial}{\partial z} \left[ K(h) \frac{\partial h}{\partial z} \right] + \frac{\partial K(h)}{\partial z} - S(h)$$
(4)

where:

 $\theta$  = the soil volumetric water content, (cm<sup>3</sup>/cm<sup>3</sup>),

h = the soil water pressure head, (cm),

S (h) = a sink term representing plant root water uptake,  $(cm^3cm^{-3}/hr)$ ,

t = time, (hr),

K(h) = the unsaturated hydraulic conductivity function, (cm/hr),

x = the horizontal spatial coordinates, (cm), and

z = the vertical spatial coordinates, (cm).

Soil hydraulic characteristics were assumed using Van Genuchten - Mualem function as follows Van Genuchten, 1980; and Mualem, 1976.:

$$\theta(h) = \begin{cases} \theta_r + \frac{\theta_s - \theta_r}{(1 + |\alpha h|^n)^m} h < 0 \end{cases}$$
(5)

$$\Big|_{\theta_S} \qquad h \ge 0$$

$$Se = \frac{\theta - \theta_r}{\theta_s - \theta_r}, \quad m = 1 - \frac{1}{n}$$

$$K(h) = K_s S_e^{0.5} \left[ 1 - (1 - S_e^{\frac{1}{m}})^m \right]^2$$
(6)
(7)

Se = effective saturation, dimensionless,

 $\theta_{\rm s}$  = volumetric saturated water content, (cm<sup>3</sup>/ cm<sup>3</sup>),

 $\theta_{\rm r}$  = volumetric residual water content, (cm<sup>3</sup>/ cm<sup>3</sup>),

n = pore-size distribution index, dimensionless,

- $\alpha$  = inverse of the air-entry value, (cm<sup>-1</sup>), and
- Ks = saturated hydraulic conductivity, (cm/h).

The HYDRUS model solved the Richards equation utilizing Galerkin's finite element method. Soil wetting pattern from a subsurface drip irrigation was simulated by utilizing three different textural namely loamy sand, sandy loam and loam. The properties of these soils were listed in **Table 1**. The model of **Vrugt, et al., 2001** was used to describe a spatial root distribution in HYDRUS model. In **Table 2**, the parameters describing a spatial root distribution for HYDRUS model was shown.



The domain was specified to be 100 cm in width and 140 cm in depth. The drip represented a half circle with a radius of 1 cm, **Fig. 1**. Atmospheric boundary condition was assumed at the top edge of the flow domain. Zero flux boundary conditions along the vertical sides of the soil domain were set during all simulation except at the location of the drip. Variable flux boundary condition along the drip circumference was assumed. The bottom boundary was considered as free drainage boundary. **Fig. 1** shows these boundary conditions. The irrigation flux can be calculated in HYDRUS as follows, (assumed three emitters in one meter) and irrigation flux must not exceed the saturated hydraulic conductivity. The flux was calculated as follows:

$$q_{f=\frac{Q*N}{2\pi rL}}$$
(8) where:

 $q_f$  = irrigation flux per unit area, (cm/h), Q = flow rate of emitter, (cm<sup>3</sup>/h), N = number of emitters, r = radius of emitter, (cm), and

L = is length of irrigation line, (cm).

No.	Soil textural	Ks cm/hr	$\begin{array}{c c} Ks & \theta r \\ cm/hr & cm^{3/} cm^{3} \end{array}$		$\begin{array}{c c} \theta s & \alpha \\ cm^{3/} cm^{3} & cm^{-1} \end{array}$	
1	Loamy Sand	14.60	0.057	0.410	0.124	2.28
2	Sandy Loam	4.42	0.065	0.410	0.075	1.89
3	Loam	1.04	0.078	0.430	0.036	1.56

**Table 1.** Hydraulic parameters of the three soils.

Table 2. Parameters explaining a spatial root distribution for HYDRUS model.

No.	Soil textural	Crop type	z <sub>m</sub> , (cm)	z*(-)	pz,(-)
1	Loamy Sand	Tomato	110	1	1
2	Sandy Loam	Pepper	75	1	1
3	Loam	Cucumber	95	1	1



Figure 1. Schematic explaining the boundary conditions utilized in all simulations.

·100 cm

drainage B.C.

Free

In the simulation process, five initial soil moisture contents were utilized, and it was bounded between water content at field capacity and wilting point. These contents are shown in **Table 3.** The water flow from a subsurface drip was two dimensional axisymmetric; half of domain requires to be simulated in Hydrus-2D. Three drip depths were utilized in this work 10, 15, and 20 cm.

The soil wetting patterns were predicted at every thirty minutes for a total time of irrigation equal to three hrs. Drip discharge utilized to simulate the wetting patterns were 1, 1.5, 2, 2.5 and 3 *l*/hr for loamy sand soil, 0.4, 0.5, 0.6, 0.7, and 0.9 for sandy loam soil, and 0.1, and 0.2 *l*/hr for loam soil. **Figs. 2 and 3** show samples of wetting pattern for loamy sand soil and sandy loam, respectively. The emitter discharges were 0.5, 1, 1.5, 2 *l*/hr for loamy sand soil and 0.5,0.6, 0.7, and 0.9 *l*/hr for sandy loam soil in **Figs. 2 and 3**. As well the initial soil moisture content was 0.072 cm<sup>3</sup>/cm<sup>3</sup> and 0.088 cm<sup>3</sup>/cm<sup>3</sup> for loamy sand and sandy loam soil, respectively.

No	Crop type	Soil textural	Initial volumetric water content, cm <sup>3</sup> /cm <sup>3</sup>				
1	Tomato	Loamy sand	0.065	0.068	0.070	0.072	0.073
2	Pepper	Sandy loam	0.080	0.081	0.085	0.088	0.09
3	Cucumber	Loam	0.12	0.13	0.14	0.15	0.16

 Table 3. Values of the selected initial soil moisture content.



#### **3. ROOT WATER UPTAKE**

The sink term S(h) representing plant root water uptake which can be determined utilizing the approach of **Feddes**, et al., 1976, represented by:

$$S(h) = \alpha(h).S_p = \alpha(h).\beta(z)L_X T_P$$
(9)

$$\beta(x,z) = \left(1 - \frac{Z}{Z_m}\right) * e^{-\left(\frac{P_Z}{Z_m} |Z^* - Z|\right)}$$
(10)

where

S (h) = actual root water uptake rate, ( $cm^3.cm^{-3}/hr$ ),

 $\alpha(h)$  = a dimensionless water stress response function for water uptake by plant roots Feddes, et al., 1978,

 $S_P$  = potential root water uptake rate, (cm<sup>3</sup>/cm<sup>3</sup> h),

 $\beta(z) = a$  function for describing the spatial root distribution Vrugt, et al., 2001, (cm<sup>-2</sup>),

 $L_x$  = the width of the soil surface associated with the potential plant transpiration, (cm),

 $T_p$  = the potential transpiration rate, (cm/hr),

 $Z_m$  = the maximum rooting lengths in the z-direction, (cm),

Z = the distance from the origin of the plant (tree) in the z-direction, (cm),

 $p_z$  = empirical parameters, assumed to be equal to one for  $z > z^*$ , and

 $z^*$  = empirical parameters, the depth of maximum intensity.

The width of the soil surface associated with the potential plant transpiration was considered equal to the width of flow domain Abo Lila, et al., 2012 and the transpiration rate for the three crops was assumed to equal 4 mm/day El-Nesr, et al., 2013.

#### 4. RESULT

Empirical formulas were predicted by using multiple regression analysis to estimate the dimensions of the wetted pattern for three different soil textures. To carry out a regression analysis, the program Statistica Version 12 was utilized. This multiple software depended upon an optimization procedure to find the best fit formula for a given set of conditions. The data obtained by implementing HYDRUS (2D/3D) for different flow rates, drip depth, initial soil moisture contents, and duration of irrigation were utilized to carry out the analysis. By doing so, an empirical formula was predicted for wetted width and depth for each soil texture as specified by the saturated hydraulic conductivity. Tables 5 and 6 shows the evolved formulas which explain the wetted width and wetted depth. The presence and absence of uptake roots of the plant did not affect on the wetted pattern. No one formula can be found to combine all formulas in Tables 5 and made hydraulic conductivity another variable to determine the wetted width in this formula because the values of hydraulic conductivity did not approach one another. As well, it can not combine the formulas in Table 6 for the same reason.



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#### 5. CRITERIA OF MODEL EVALUATION

The agreement of the predicted wetted pattern dimensions formulas with those resulted by using HYDRUS-2D was evaluated by the root mean square error, (RMSE) and modeling efficiency, (EF). These criteria are calculated as follows:

$$RMSE = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} (M_i - S_i)^2}{n}}$$
(11)
$$\sum_{i=1}^{n} (M_i - S_i)^2$$

$$EF = 1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} (M_i - S_i)^2}{\sum_{i=1}^{n} (M_i - \overline{M})^2}$$
(12)

where:

n = number of values,

 $S_i$  = values predicted by using Hydrus-2D/3D, (cm),

 $M_i$  = values gained from the evolved formulas, (cm), and

 $\overline{M}$  = mean of values gained from Hydrus-2D/3D, (cm).

**Tables 5** and **6** illustrate the values of the statistical parameters as mentioned above (RMSE, *EF*). It was evident from the results expressed in the tables that was the values resulted by utilizing HYDRUS (2D/3D) and those predicted from the evolved formulas with good agreement. The RMSE was less than 0.65 cm, while the EF was greater than 95% for three soils.





**Figure 2**. Simulation of wetting pattern for a subsurface drip in a loamy sand soil,  $\theta i=0.072$  by volume, drip depth =10 cm, and different discharges after 1 hr.





**Figure 3**. Simulation of wetting pattern for a subsurface drip in a sandy loam soil,  $\theta$ i=0.088 by volume, drip depth =10 cm, and different discharges after 3 hr.

No.	Ks (cm/hr)	Wetted width (W), cm	EF	RMSE, (cm)
1	14.59	22.4256 $t^{0.4551} Q^{0.3318} \theta_i^{0.1284} Z^{0.02}$	0.97	0.58
2	4.42	22.2614 $t^{0.4722} Q^{0.3515} \theta_i^{0.1644} Z^{-0.0023}$	0.97	0.53
3	1.04	10.8094 $t^{0.4452} Q^{0.1404} \theta_i^{0.3479} Z^{0.2377}$	0.95	0.26

 Table 5. Formulas to estimate wetted width.

**Table 6.** Formulas to estimate wetted depth.

No.	Ks (cm/hr)	Wetted depth (D), cm	EF	RMSE, (cm)
1	14.59	22.1315 $t^{0.4635} Q^{0.3628} \theta_i^{0.1323} Z^{0.0666}$	0.99	0.64
2	4.42	22.1775 $t^{0.4377} Q^{0.3443} \theta_i^{0.1445} Z^{0.0078}$	0.99	0.39
3	1.04	10.1302 $t^{0.4143} Q^{0.1359} \theta_i^{0.2819} Z^{0.2309}$	0.95	0.53

# 6. INVESTIGATION OF Models

Models were tested by comparing the predicted values of wetted width and depth obtained from the evolved formulas with those results obtained from HYDRUS (2D/3D) software, and results from the formula evolved by **Singh, et al., 2006** model. **Table. 7** shows a comparison of results.

		0		Wetted width, cm			Wetted depth, cm		
Ks (cm/hr)	Emitter discharge, <i>l/</i> hr	Initial soil moisture content, cm <sup>3</sup> /cm <sup>3</sup>	Time, hr	Singh, et al. model <sup>1</sup>	HYDRUS <sup>2</sup>	Predicted <sup>3</sup>	Singh, et al. model <sup>1</sup>	HYDRUS <sup>2</sup>	Predicted <sup>3</sup>
14.59	0.5	0.072	0.5	9.09	10	9.70	11.23	10.5	10.27

Table 7. Comparison of wetted width and depth simulated with those predicted.



predicted by utilizing Singh et al., 2006.

<sup>2</sup> simulated by utilizing HYDRUS software.

<sup>3</sup>predicted by utilizing the formulas in **Tables 5** and **6**.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

Soil wetting pattern from a single subsurface drip was analyzed taking in account roots of different crops (tomato, pepper, and cucumber) and three soil textures namely loamy sand, sandy loam, and loam soil by utilizing the software HYDRUS-(2D/3D), Version 2.05. HYDRUS-(2D/3D) solves Richard's equation of nonlinear movement of water in unsaturated soils. An evolving formula was predicted by implement a multiple regression analysis. The software Statistica, Version 12 conducted the analysis. An equation to estimate the dimensions of the soil wetted pattern with water uptake by roots was obtained from this study. The RMSE was less than 0.65 cm, while the EF was greater than 95% for three soils. A good agreement was obtained between the values resulted by utilizing HYDRUS (2D/3D) and those predicted from the evolved formulas.

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### NOMENCLATURE

- $\theta_i$  = initial soil water content, *cm3/ cm3*
- $\theta_r$ = residual water content, cm<sup>3</sup>/cm<sup>3</sup>.
- $\theta_s$  = saturated water content, cm<sup>3</sup>/cm<sup>3</sup>.
- K<sub>s</sub>= saturated hydraulic conductivity, cm/hr.
- $\alpha$  = inverse of the air-entry value, 1/cm.
- n = pore size distribution index, dimensionless.
- Z= drip depth, cm.
- t = time, hr.
- Q = drip discharge, l/hr.
- SDI = subsurface drip irrigation.
- W = wetted width, cm.
- D = wetted depth, cm.