Effect of growth stages and fertility levels on growth, yield and quality of fodder oats (Avena sativa L.)

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Received: May 9, 2016; Revised received: March 25, 2017; Accepted: June 6, 2017

Abstract: A field experiment was conducted to evaluate the yield and quality parameters of oats (Avena sativa L.) at forage research farm in Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana. Four different nitrogen levels viz. 0 (control), 50, 75 (recommended) and 100 Kg N/hawere applied in the form of urea. Samples were collected at three different growth stages i.e. 30, 45 and 60 DAS. As the growth of plant continued decrease in total nitrogen (45%), non protein nitrogen (37%), ether extract (13%), ash content (24%) and digestibility (23%) was observed. But increase in free amino acids (48%) and cell wall constituents i.e. ADF (19%), NDF (31%) and CF (34%) with plant’s growth was reported. The interactive effect of varying levels of inorganic fertilizer application on the chemical composition of the plant at various growth stages revealed an increase in total nitrogen (18%), non protein nitrogen (26%), ether extract (18%), free amino acids (32%), ash content (13%) and digestibility (7%) with increase in fertilizer level however ADF (7%), NDF (2%) and CF (3%)content decreased with increased levels of nitrogen fertilization. Correlation studies showed that significant negative correlation was present for in vitro dry matter digestibility with acid detergent fiber (r = - .861**), neutral detergent fiber (r = - .891**) and crude fiber (r = - .740**) at recommended dose of N fertilization. The objective of this study was to investigate the effect of different doses of nitrogen fertilization at different growth stages on quality components in oats fodder.

Keywords: Chemical composition, Growth stages, Nitrogen levels, Oats, Yield

INTRODUCTION

In agriculture the significance of fodder crops needs no emphasis due to the fact that livestock needs nutritious and regular fodder availability to meet the demand of milk, meat, butter and other by-products as per human demands (Devi, 2002). Among the different rabi fodder crops, oats (Avena sativa L.) is one of the most important rabi fodder crop. Oats requires the cool and moist weather for germination, tillering, booting and heading stage. It was produced in 10212 million ha area with an annual production of 233 million tons in the world. In India, cultivated fodder is limited to 4.9% of the total cropped area (Kumar et al., 2012). The total area under cultivated fiders is 8.6 million ha on individual crop basis. The crop occupies maximum area in Uttar Pradesh (34%), followed by Punjab (20%), Bihar (16%), Haryana (9%) and Madhya Pradesh (6%). Oats rank fifth in terms of world cereal production. It is extensively grown as forage crops and becoming increasingly important in many regions of the world. It is the most important winter cereal fodder which is highly palatable, rich source of energy, protein, vitamin B1, phosphorus, iron and other minerals. Amongst various practices, cutting management and nutritional demands are important considerations to make the fodder available to livestock especially during long lean period of winter. Fodder quality is of great importance as well as higher forage yield. The fodder quality of oats depends on many factors such as fertilization, irrigation, genotype, plant density and harvesting time. Maturity stage at harvest is the most important factor determining forage quality, and forage quality decreases with advancing maturity. Also, the maturity of forage crops influence forage digestibility and consumption by animals (Ball et al., 2001). The most common variations associated with harvesting time are forage yield (Gul et al., 2008; Ayub et al., 2003), dry matter % age, neutral and acid detergent fibre, CP (Khan et al., 2007) and in-vitro dry matter digestibility (Bayble et al., 1995). A high percentage of protein is required in the diet of ruminants because production of milk, meat and reproduction mainly depends on protein ingredient of the animals’ diet (Arshadullah et al., 2011). The previous studies reflected that the quality of forages can be regulated by just selecting the harvest time at which plants are rich in nutrients concentration. Generally, fiber concentration of the forage crops increases while quality and digestibility decreases as aging prolongs (Ball et al., 2001). Forage digestibility is related to chemical compositions particularly of fiber, lignin and to some ex-
tent of crude protein. Acid detergent fiber (ADF), and neutral detergent fiber (NDF) are commonly used as standard forage testing techniques for fiber analysis. ADF can be used to calculate digestibility, while intake potential is predicted through NDF (Ball et al., 2001). Crude fiber (CF) mainly consists of cellulose, hemicelluloses and lignin.

Nitrogen (N) is major limiting nutrient for growth of forage crops and this explains the improvement in forage yield by external supply of N to soils that are deficient. (Tena and Beyene 2011). In most forage crops, the nitrogen fertilization resulted higher dry matter production (Ayub et al., 2007; Karasu et al., 2009), with higher protein (Keskin et al., 2005). While limited supply of nitrogen keeps the crops greenish for longer time (Russel et al., 1992) and reduces synthesis of organic nitrogen (Kedic et al., 2005) in plants. Therefore, judicious rates of nitrogen application must be ensured for obtaining higher dry matter with good quality.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Four oats genotypes OL-9, Kent, OL-10 and OL-125 were raised in experimental area of Department of Plant Breeding and Genetics PAU, Ludhiana (30.9°N, 75.85°E and 252 m asl), India. The crop was sown on 12 November, 2014 in plots consisting of 15 rows with 20 cm spacing. The experiment was conducted in randomized block design (RBD) in factorial arrangement with three replications. For each genotype, four nitrogen treatments (0, 50, 75 (recommended dose), 100 Kg N/ha) were given. Nitrogen was applied through urea in split doses as per the treatments. Half dose of N was applied at the time of irrigation and the remaining half was applied after one week of previous application. Whole plant samples were collected at three different growth stages i.e. 30, 45 and 60 DAS to determine quality components. Yield and growth attributes were analyzed using analysis of variance (ANOVA). Further, mean separation of treatment effects was accomplished using Tukey’s least significant difference test. All data analysis was carried out using SAS software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Chemical composition of oats fodder at different growth stages and N treatments: Total nitrogen content decreased significantly (F= 13968.22, p<0.001) as the growth of plant continued (Table 1). At 60 DAS, maximum total nitrogen content was observed in OL-125 genotype (2.80 %). Total nitrogen content generally decreased with the advancement of the plant growth due to the synthesis of structural carbohydrates with advancing plant age. Similar results were observed in wild soyabeans (Zhai et al., 2008). N treatment resulted in significant (F= 1376.05, p<0.001) increase in total nitrogen content. Similar results were reported in fodder oats (Kumar et al., 2014), maize varieties (Tajulet al., 2013) and lettuce (Liu et al., 2014). This may be due to increased availability of nitrogen there by more uptake and corresponding increase in protein content of herbage. Maximum total nitrogen content in all genotypes was observed at 100 Kg N/ha and minimum at 0 Kg N/ha. Non protein nitrogen (NPN) content decreased significantly (F=3227.27, p<0.001) as the growth of plant continued. Maximum NPN content was observed at 30 DAS. Nitrogen fertilization increased significantly (F=559.10, p<0.001) NPN content. Maximum NPN content was observed at 100 Kg N/ha in all genotypes at different growth stages. Eppendorfer (1971) reported that non-protein nitrogen is stored in the vegetative tissue at the expense of protein N. Among different genotypes, maximum NPN content was observed in OL-10 (2.10 %) genotype. In vitro dry matter digestibility (IVDMD) content decreased significantly with plant’s growth (F=2297.75, p<0.001) as shown in Table 1. Among growth stages, overall mean was observed maximum at 30 DAS (88.39%) followed by 45 DAS (82.61 %) and 30 DAS (67.67%). This may be due to the fact that in mature plants, stem comprise a much larger portion of the plant than leaves (Mcdonald et al., 2001). Similar results were observed in Panicum maximum (Taufe et al., 2002). Moderate levels of NDF and ADF at early growth stages may be responsible for generally high IVDMD in fodders (Njidda, 2014). Increasing N levels significantly (F= 116.77, p<0.001) increased the IVDMD content in fodder oats. Pathan et al. (2012) also reported similar findings in Napier bajra hybrid. Maximum digestibility at different N levels was observed in Kent genotype.

Acid detergent fiber (ADF) content increased significantly (F= 899.20, p<0.001) as the growth of plant continued and maximum ADF content in all genotypes was observed at 60 DAS (Table 2). Similar results were reported in maize (Firdous and Gilani 1998) and sorghum (Firdous and Gilani 2001). The significant (F= 649.75, p<0.001) decrease in ADF content was observed with N fertilization in fodder oats. This may be due to the fact that increased uptake of nitrogen imparts succulence to green plants by reducing fiber content. Similar results have been reported for fodder oats (Kumari et al., 2014), Brassica rapa L. (Paul et al., 2014), Napier bajra hybrid (Sharma et al., 2012).
Table 1. Total nitrogen, non protein nitrogen and in vitro dry matter digestibility of oats at different growth as influenced by different N levels.

| Nitrogen application | Total Nitrogen (%) | Non protein nitrogen (%) | in vitro dry matter digestibility (%) |
|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|
|                      | 30                  | 45                       | 60 | Mean | 30 | 45 | 60 | Mean | 30 | 45 | 60 | Mean | 30 | 45 | 60 | Mean |
| 0 Kg N/ha            | 4.16d               | 2.35i                    | 2.32 | 2.32 | 2.23d | 1.43i | 1.36i | 1.67 | 1.43i | 1.36i | 1.67 | 86.22cd | 76.77f | 65.01i | 76.00 |
| 50 Kg N/ha           | 4.6c                | 3.73g                    | 2.54 | 2.54 | 2.53c | 1.68g | 1.49h | 1.90 | 1.68g | 1.49h | 1.90 | 87.37ab | 81.56e | 67.09hi | 79.01 |
| 75 Kg N/ha           | 5.04b               | 3.45f                    | 2.72 | 2.72 | 2.70b | 1.87f | 1.75g | 2.11 | 1.87f | 1.75g | 2.11 | 89.00ab | 84.48d | 68.39gh | 80.62 |
| 100 Kg N/ha          | 5.35a               | 3.73e                    | 2.86 | 2.86 | 2.90a | 2.0e | 1.87f | 2.26 | 2.0e | 1.87f | 2.26 | 89.98a | 87.59bc | 70.17g | 82.58 |

Genotypes

|                      | 60                | Mean | 45                | Mean | 30            | Mean | 60            | Mean |
|----------------------|-------------------|------|-------------------|------|---------------|------|---------------|------|
| OL-9                 | 4.82b             | 2.35i | 3.61p             | 2.74a | 1.86d | 1.59p | 2.06e | 88.50o | 79.90d | 66.00f | 78.13k |
| Kent                 | 4.86b             | 2.35i | 3.47q             | 2.61p | 1.73c | 1.38p | 1.91q | 89.18o | 85.63h | 69.23t | 81.34c |
| OL-10                | 5.05c             | 2.68f | 3.63p             | 2.71a | 1.78k | 1.80p | 2.10q | 87.71o | 81.93t | 66.53h | 78.72c |
| OL-125               | 4.34c             | 2.80f | 3.48q             | 2.27f | 1.63k | 1.72f | 1.87f | 88.19o | 82.96t | 68.92h | 80.02f |
| Overall mean         | 4.79x             | 2.62f | 2.58x             | 1.75y | 1.62x | 1.62x | 1.62x | 88.39x | 82.61y | 67.67z | 80.02f |

CD (5%)

A = Genotype 0.031, B=N level 0.031, C=Growth stage 0.027, AB = 0.0615, ABC=0.106

Values with same letter(s) are not significantly different at P< 0.05 (Tukey’s post-hoc test)

Table 2. Acid detergent fiber, neutral detergent fiber and crude fiber of oats at different growth as influenced by different N levels.

| Nitrogen application | Acid detergent fiber (%) | Neutral detergent fiber (%) | Crude fiber (%) |
|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
|                      | 30 | 45 | 60 | Mean | 30 | 45 | 60 | Mean | 30 | 45 | 60 | Mean |
| 0 Kg N/ha            | 33.84c | 33.68c | 37.08a | 34.87 | 38.98h | 48.90d | 54.75a | 47.54 | 18.80h | 24.42bc | 26.36a | 23.23 |
| 50 Kg N/ha           | 27.76e | 30.80d | 35.15b | 31.24 | 36.23i | 45.80e | 52.37h | 44.80 | 17.23h | 22.23de | 24.68b | 21.68 |
| 75 Kg N/ha           | 25.66f | 28.80e | 33.22c | 29.23 | 34.15j | 43.95f | 50.89e | 43.00 | 15.09j | 22.22f | 23.75e | 20.35 |
| 100 Kg N/ha          | 23.89g | 26.37f | 31.60d | 27.29 | 32.44k | 41.6g | 48.17d | 40.59 | 13.1kh | 20.98g | 22.73ef | 19.01 |

Genotypes

|                      | 60 | Mean | 45 | Mean | 30 | Mean | 60 | Mean |
|----------------------|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|------|
| OL-9                 | 25.98a | 31.19cd | 34.79a | 30.66o | 34.12c | 43.47o | 53.36o | 43.65o | 17.03c | 23.01c | 23.05c | 21.03o |
| Kent                 | 31.73b | 34.15i | 31.74p | 30.96q | 33.93c | 46.53p | 53.28p | 44.58p | 15.59h | 24.79h | 24.88h | 21.75p |
| OL-10                | 27.48c | 30.27d | 35.13j | 30.96q | 33.93c | 46.53p | 53.28p | 44.58p | 15.59h | 24.79h | 24.88h | 21.75p |
| OL-125               | 25.98a | 28.87e | 32.99b | 29.28r | 36.78f | 45.19h | 50.18b | 44.05pq | 17.20h | 20.79d | 25.62a | 21.20o |
| Overall mean         | 27.79f | 29.92y | 34.27x | 35.45x | 44.95v | 51.55x | 88.22cd | 76.77f | 65.01i | 76.00 |

CD (5%)

A = Genotype 0.357, B=N level 0.357, C=Growth stage 0.309, AB = 0.714, AC=0.618, BC=0.618, ABC=1.23

Values with same letter(s) are not significantly different at P< 0.05 (Tukey’s post-hoc test)
### Table 3. Ether extract, ash content and free amino acids content of oats at different growth as influenced by different N levels.

| Nitrogen application | Ether extract (%) | Ash content (%) | Free amino acids content (mg/g) |
|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
|                      | 30    | 45    | 60    | Mean | 30    | 45    | 60    | Mean | 30    | 45    | 60    | Mean |
| 0 Kg N/ha            | 4.05f | 3.07k | 3.51h | 3.54  | 4.12de| 4.23e | 11.34h| 13.41 | 1.38i | 2.34g | 3.32  | 2.35  |
| 50 Kg N/ha           | 4.44c | 3.29j | 3.83g | 3.85  | 15.14cd| 14.96de| 11.77gh| 13.96 | 1.79h | 2.83e | 3.70c | 2.77  |
| 75 Kg N/ha           | 4.78b | 3.43i | 4.14e | 4.15  | 16.00bb| 15.57bc| 12.23eg| 14.60 | 2.19g | 3.22d | 4.03b | 3.15  |
| 100 Kg N/ha          | 4.98a | 3.79g | 4.34d | 4.37  | 17.4a  | 16.17b| 12.92f | 15.50 | 2.56f | 3.57d | 4.32a | 3.48  |
| Genotypes            |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| OL-9                 | 5.14a | 3.30j | 4.23d | 4.22e | 15.55c| 14.55d | 12.52c | 14.21f| 2.20g | 3.37d | 3.96b | 3.17b |
| Kent                 | 4.84p | 3.17k | 3.50i | 3.83s | 16.37bc| 15.63bc| 11.94c | 14.65f | 1.85h | 2.78j | 3.47d | 2.70f |
| OL-10                | 4.41c | 3.49l | 3.95j | 3.95s | 15.84abc| 14.38ld| 12.01i | 14.08f | 2.15g | 3.10m | 4.34l | 3.20l |
| OL-125               | 3.88k | 3.63b | 4.14c | 3.88e | 15.41bc| 16.43e | 11.80c | 14.54f | 1.73b | 2.72f | 3.61i | 2.69f |
| Overall mean         | 4.56x | 3.40y | 3.96y | 3.96y | 15.79x | 15.25y | 12.07x | 14.54f | 1.98b | 2.99y | 3.85x | 3.85x |

CD (5%)<br>Growth stage 0.019, AB = 0.044, AC= 0.038, BC= 0.038, ABC= 0.076<br>A = Genotype 0.026, B = N level 0.006, C = Growth stage 0.057, AB = 0.131, AC = 0.113, BC = NS, ABC = 0.277

Values with same letter(s) are not significantly different at $P < 0.05$ (Tukey’s post-hoc test)

### Table 4. Yield and yield parameters of oats (*Avena sativa* L.) at 60 DAS as influenced by different N levels.

| Nitrogen doses | Green fodder yield | Dry fodder yield | Plant height | Leaf length | Leaf breadth | No. of tillers | Leaf/stem |
|----------------|-------------------|-----------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|----------------|-----------|
| 0 Kg N/ha      | 42613a            | 57.77d          | 100.43c      | 113.42d     | 2.69d        | 52.75c         | 0.52c     |
| 50 Kg N/ha     | 324.47b           | 87.22c          | 118.67b      | 127.50c     | 3.00c        | 69.75b         | 0.61bc    |
| 75 Kg N/ha     | 337.47b           | 94.03b          | 123.38ab     | 138.92b     | 3.24b        | 75.21b         | 0.65ab    |
| 100 Kg N/ha    | 426.13a           | 130.13a         | 130.98a      | 149.58a     | 3.51a        | 88.25a         | 0.73a     |

Genotypes<br>OL-9, Kent, OL-10, OL-125<br>Overall mean<br>CD (5%)<br>A = Genotype 4.30, B = N level 4.30, AB = 8.61

Values with same letter(s) are not significantly different at $P < 0.05$ (Tukey’s post-hoc test)
On average at each growth stage, max-
significantly (F=3946.48, p<0.001) with growth of
the plant (Table 2). On average at each growth stage, max-
significantly (F=3946.48, p<0.001) with growth of
The content of Neutral detergent fiber (NDF) increased
yielding mal feeding point of view, fodder with low
and Bermuda grass (Kering et al., 2011). From high
yielding mal feeding point of view, fodder with low
ADF as well as NDF is always preferred.
Table 5. Correlation coefficient between quality components of oats at different growth stages.

| Quality components | DAS | Total Nitrogen | Non protein nitrogen | Ether extract | Ash | Free amino acids | In vitro dry matter digestibility | Acid detergent fibre | Neutral detergent fibre |
|--------------------|-----|----------------|----------------------|--------------|-----|----------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Non protein nitrogen | 30 | .906** | | | | | | | |
| | 45 | .934** | | | | | | | |
| | 60 | .892** | | | | | | | |
| | 30 | .662** | .777** | | | | | | |
| Ether extract | 45 | .701** | .576* | | | | | | |
| | 60 | .849** | .816** | | | | | | |
| | 30 | .805** | .744** | .603* | | | | | |
| Ash | 45 | .561* | .330 | .540* | | | | | |
| | 60 | .538* | .606* | .728** | | | | | |
| | 30 | .792** | .831** | .706** | .770** | | | | |
| Free amino acids | 45 | .872** | .970** | .591* | .215 | | | | |
| | 60 | .731** | .835** | .712** | .693** | | | | |
| In vitro dry matter digestibility | 30 | .662** | .638** | .615* | .719** | .679** | | | |
| | 45 | .700** | .640** | .571* | .661** | .533* | | | |
| | 60 | .496 | .413 | .286 | .381 | .217 | | | |
| Acid detergent fibre | 30 | -.594* | -.550* | -.369 | -.480 | -.751** | -.607* | | |
| | 45 | -.795** | -.682** | -.774** | -.707** | -.601* | -.900** | | |
| | 60 | -.740** | -.662** | -.656** | -.628** | -.500* | -.844** | | |
| Neutral detergent fibre | 30 | -.886** | -.879** | -.636** | -.697** | -.906** | -.609* | .809** | |
| | 45 | -.936** | -.902** | -.599** | -.569 | -.849** | -.659** | .730** | |
| | 60 | -.455 | -.383 | -.308 | -.500* | -.204 | -.934** | .833** | |
| | 30 | -.610* | -.456 | -.129 | -.750** | -.581* | -.606* | .460 | .518* |
| Crude fibre | 45 | -.860** | -.800** | -.751** | -.668** | -.723** | -.857** | .887** | .801** |
| | 60 | -.752** | -.679** | -.724** | -.746** | -.700** | -.657** | .817** | .620** |

** - Significant at p 0.01, * - Significant at p 0.05

Table 6. Correlation coefficient between quality components of oats at recommended (75 Kg N/ha) nitrogen dose.

| Total nitrogen | Non protein nitrogen | Ether extract | Ash | Free amino acids | In vitro dry matter digestibility | Acid detergent fibre | Neutral detergent fibre |
|----------------|----------------------|--------------|-----|----------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Non protein nitrogen Ether extract | .924** | | | | | | | |
| | .587* | .767** | | | | | | |
| Ash | | | | | | | | |
| | .725** | .551 | .127 | | | | | |
| Free amino acids | | | | | | | | |
| | .835** | .661* | .140 | .903** | -.890** | | | |
| Acid detergent fibre | | | | | | | | |
| | -.855** | -.679** | -.225 | -.707* | .886** | -.861** | | |
| Neutral detergent fibre | | | | | | | | |
| | -.968** | -.837** | -.447 | -.768** | .922** | -.891** | .890** | |
| Crude fibre | | | | | | | | |
| | -.917** | -.852** | -.690* | -.716** | .871** | -.740** | .686* | .909** |

** - Significant at p 0.01, * - Significant at p 0.05

and Bermuda grass (Kering et al., 2011). From high
yielding mal feeding point of view, fodder with low
ADF as well as NDF is always preferred.
The content of Neutral detergent fiber (NDF) increased
significantly (F=3946.48, p<0.001) with growth of
plant (Table 2). On average at each growth stage, max-
imum content was observed at 60 DAS (51.55%). Fird-
ous and Gilani (2001) also observed increased NDF
content with plant’s growth in sorghum species. N
fertilization resulted in significant (F= 389, p<0.001)
decrease in NDF content in fodder oats. On average,
minimum NDF content was observed in OL-9 geno-
type (43.65 %). Patel et al. (2007) reported that in-
creased supply of N fertilization and other minerals
resulted in decreased levels of NDF content in fodder maize. Balabani et al. (2010) also reported that NDF content peaked at low fertilizer levels and then decreased with increasing fertilizer rates.

Crude fiber (CF) mainly consists of cellulose, hemicelluloses and lignin. CF content above 30-35% is usually considered undesirable component in forages (Table 2). CF content increased significantly (F= 2152.67, p<0.001) with growth of plant and was found maximum at 60 DAS (24.39%) and minimum at 30 DAS (16.09%). Similar results were observed in oats (Xiangfeng et al., 2007). Higher doses of N fertilization resulted in significant (F= 8.27, p<0.001) decrease in the CF content. This might be due to the fact that nitrogen application increased the uptake of nitrogen which is the constituent of amino acids and protein and decreased the pectin, cellulose and hemicellulose content which are major constituents of fibre (Babu et al., 1995). Maximum CF content in all genotypes was observed at control conditions (0 Kg N/ha). Among different N fertilization rates, mean values showed minimum CF content in Kent genotype (20.26%). Similar results were reported in oats (Iqbal et al., 2013), fodder sorghum (Singh and Sumeriya, 2012), pearl millet (Rostamza et al., 2011) and cowpea (Hasan et al., 2010). The fodder having less crude fiber percentage is considered a good quality because the higher crude fiber percentage lesser will be digestibility. Therefore, because the application of nitrogen decreased fiber content, so it increased digestibility of the plants. Significant differences were depicted in crude fiber among genotypes and maximum CF content was observed in OL-10 genotype (21.75%).

Ether extract (EE) is composed of fats, oils, waxes, organic acids, pigments, sterols and vitamins A, D, E and K. Ether extract content varied significantly among different growth stages (F= 7446.57, p<0.05). At 30 and 60 DAS maximum EE content in OL-9 genotype (5.14 % and 4.23 % resp.) and at 45 DAS in OL-125 genotype (3.63 %) was observed (Table 3). Increasing N levels, increased EE content significantly (F= 2055.74, p<0.001) at different growth stages of fodder oats. Earlier investigation by Uddin et al., (2005) who reported that EE content of oat forage increased significantly (P<0.01) with the increasing level of N fertilizer from 0 to 115 kg N/ha. Similar trend of EE content with increasing dose of N fertilization was observed in fodder oats (Kumari et al., 2014 ;Vuckovic et al., 2005) and fodder pearl millet (Meena et al., 2012).

Ash content was observed maximum at early growth stages of oats fodder (Table 3) and decreased significantly with plant’s growth (F= 610.75, p<0.05). Similar results were observed in baby corn that mineral content was observed higher at early growth stages as compared to later growth stages (Thavaprakaash et al., 2008). N application significantly increased total ash content (F= 90.31, p<0.001). Increase in ash content with increasing dose of N fertilization may be due to the increased availability of N to the plants and mineral matter. Ruso (2006) explained that rates of nitrogen inputs are to maximize the level of nutrients in plants. Similar results were observed in fodder oats (Kumari et al., 2014 and Mahale et al., 2003), mustard (Paul et al., 2014) and fodder sorghum (Ayubet al., 2002). The data presenting the ash contents showed that oats genotypes exhibited significant (F= 8.36, p<0.05) variations for ash contents. Mean values showed maximum ash content in Kent genotype (14.65%) and minimum in OL-10 genotype (14.08%). The significant variations in ash contents among oats genotypes have already been confirmed (Khan et al., 2014). This may be due to differences in nutrient absorption from soil and utilization within the plants by different genotypes.

Free amino acid content was observed maximum at 60 DAS (3.85 mg/g) followed by 45 DAS (2.99 mg/g) and 30 DAS (1.98 mg/g) (F= 2128.87, p<0.001) (Table 3). Roy et al. (2013) observed highest amino acid content in mature leaves followed by young and senescent leaves in sunflower. Treatment with nitrogen fertilization resulted in significant increase in free amino acids content (F=439.18, p<0.001). Similar results were observed in wheat (Kaur et al., 2015) and maize (Losak et al., 2010) crop.

Yield: GFY increased significantly (F= 2781.08, p<0.001) with N fertilization. Khogali et al., (2011) observed increasing trend of GFY with N fertilization in fodder oats. Similar results were observed by some other researchers in maize (Paschalidis X et al., 2015 and Sharma et al., 2016), oats (Kumari et al., 2014), pearl millet (Shalin et al., 2013 and Ayub et al., 2007) and napierbajra hybrid (Tiwanaet al., 2004). The yield of an agricultural crop strongly dependent on the supply of mineral nutrients, particularly N (Sawan, 2006). Among genotypes, mean values showed maximum GFY content in OL-10 (341.86 q/ha) and minimum in OL-9 (320.56 q/ha). Genotypic differences were also observed in pearl millet (Damame et al., 2013) and fodder sorghum (Singh and Sumeriya, 2012). Significant interaction was observed between genotypes and N levels (F= 67.74, p<0.001).

Dry fodder yield (DFY) increased significantly (F=775.9, p<0.001) with N fertilization. Similar results were observed in fodder sorghum (Somasekaret al., 2014; Damame et al., 2013), Brassica rapa L (Paul et al., 2014), and fodder maize (Gasim, 2001). In a study, DM yield of some tropical grasses had peaked at N application of 300 Kg/ha (Rahman et al., 2008). Among genotypes, mean values showed maximum DFY in Kent (97.51 q/ha) and minimum in OL-9 (86.47 q/ha). Genotypic differences were also observed in pearl millet (Damame et al., 2013) and fodder sorghum (Dixit et al., 2005). Significant interaction (F=7.14, p<0.001) between genotypes and N lev-
els were observed.

**Growth attributes:** Plant height increased significantly (F=30.96, p<0.001) with N fertilization. Maximum plant height was observed at 100 Kg N/ha. An increase in plant height with N fertilization was observed in maize (Paschalis et al., 2015 and Sharma et al., 2016), oats (Dawit and Wegi, 2014) and rice (Mizan et al., 2010). Several other researchers also found positive relation of N fertilization with plant height (Dubey et al., 2013, Shahin et al., 2013, Odat et al., 2004 and Gasim, 2001). Genotypes varied significantly (F=7.86, p<0.01) in terms of plant height. Among genotypes mean values showed maximum plant height in Kent (124 cm).

Leaf length increased significantly (F=147.93, p<0.001) with N fertilization. Similar results of increasing leaf length with N fertilization were reported in fodder maize varieties (Amin and Hasan, 2011). An increased leaf area index with N fertilization was observed in oats varieties (Dubey et al., 2013) and in chick pea (Namvaret et al., 2011). Among genotypes, mean values showed maximum leaf length in OL-10 (140.9 cm) and minimum in OL-125 (122.2 cm). Similar results were observed in oats varieties (Dubey et al., 2013).

Leaf breadth increased significantly (F=158.24, p<0.001) with N fertilization. An increase in leaf area index with N fertilization was observed in maize (Tajul et al., 2013, Amin and Hasan, 2011, Aslam et al., 2011; Onasanya et al., 2009), wheat (Kibe et al., 2006), soyabean (Malik et al., 2006), barley (Alam and Haider, 2006) and mottgrass (Zahid et al., 2002). Among genotypes, mean values showed maximum leaf breadth in OL-10 (3.5 cm) and minimum in Kent (2.4 cm).

No. of tillers increased significantly (F=56.03, p<0.001) with nitrogen fertilization. Similar results were obtained in oats fodder by several researchers (Ahmad et al., 2011, Hasan and Shah, 2000). The number of tillers increased with increase in N fertilization in the second growth of crop in Ruzi grass (Batista et al., 2014). Among genotypes, maximum no. of tillers was observed in Kent (91.4). Significant interaction (F= 3.04, p<0.01) between genotypes and N levels. Leaf/stem ratio is an important component of forage quality. It varied non significantly (F=7.80, p<0.05) with N fertilization. An increase in L/S with N application upto 80 Kg N/ha and then decrease at 120 kg N/ha in fodder oats (Luukhamer et al., 2012). Similar results were reported in oats (Dawit and Wegi, 2014) and fodder maize (Sharma et al., 2016 and Gasim, 2001). Among genotypes, mean values showed maximum leaf/stem was in OL-9 (0.66) and Kent (0.66). Non-significant (F= 0.31, p>0.05) interaction was observed between genotype and N level.

**Correlation studies:** At recommended dose of nitrogen fertilization (75 Kg N/ha) significant positive correlation was observed between total nitrogen, non-protein nitrogen, ash and in vitro dry matter digestibility (Table 5). However, negative correlation was observed N levels with acid detergent fiber, neutral detergent fiber and crude fiber (Table 6). At different growth stages significant negative correlation was observed between ADF, NDF and CF content.

**Conclusion**

From present study it can be concluded that nitrogen doses and growth stages significantly affect the quality of fodder oats. As the growth of plant continued; non protein nitrogen, total nitrogen and ether content decreased significantly but ADF, NDF and CF increased affecting the digestibility of crop. With increased dose of N application cell wall constituents i.e. ADF, NDF and CF decreased significantly.

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