Journal of Research and Development
A Multidisciplinary International Level Referred and Double Blind Peer Reviewed, Open Access
ISSN : 2230-9578 | Website: https://jrdrvb.org Volume-17, Issue-12| December 2025

Original Article

Vermicompost Production and Its Impact on Soil Health and Nutrient Dynamics

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Manuscript ID:
JRD -2025-171215
ISSN: 2230-9578
Volume 17
Issue 12
Pp.92-95
December 2025

Abstract

Vermicomposting is an eco-friendly and sustainable method of converting organic waste into nutrient-rich organic manure through the activity of earthworms. This process enhances the decomposition of biodegradable materials and produces vermicompost with high agronomic value. Vermicompost is rich in essential plant nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, and micronutrients, along with beneficial microorganisms. The application of vermicompost improves soil physical properties, including structure, porosity, aeration, and water-holding capacity. It also enhances soil chemical properties by increasing organic carbon content and nutrient availability. Vermicompost positively influences soil biological activity by promoting microbial diversity and enzyme activity. These improvements contribute to better nutrient cycling and sustained soil fertility. Vermicomposting also reduces dependency on chemical fertilizers, thereby minimizing environmental pollution. The use of vermicompost supports sustainable agricultural practices and long-term soil health. Overall, vermicompost production plays a significant role in improving soil health and nutrient dynamics while promoting sustainable waste management.

***Keywords**: Vermicompost, Soil Health, Nutrient, organic waste, Earthworm.*

Submitted: 16 Nov. 2025
Revised: 26 Nov. 2025
Accepted: 10 Dec. 2025
Published: 31 Dec. 2025

Introduction

Soil health is essential for maintaining agricultural productivity and ensuring ecosystem sustainability. Healthy soils support plant growth, regulate water, and promote biodiversity. However, widespread nutrient depletion has reduced soil fertility in many agricultural regions. Soil erosion further threatens productive land by removing topsoil rich in organic matter. The loss of soil biodiversity has also disrupted natural nutrient cycling processes. These challenges have increased the need for sustainable soil management practices worldwide. Vermicomposting has emerged as an effective and environmentally friendly approach to improve soil quality and crop productivity (Chetankumar, Vaidya, & Zade, 2020). It provides a sustainable method for recycling organic waste into valuable soil amendments. Vermicomposting involves the biological degradation of organic residues by earthworms and associated microorganisms. During this process, organic materials are converted into stable, humus-like vermicompost. Vermicompost is rich in essential nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium. It also contains beneficial microorganisms that enhance soil biological activity. Application of vermicompost improves soil structure and increases water-holding capacity. It enhances nutrient availability and promotes efficient nutrient uptake by plants. Vermicompost also stimulates microbial activity and enzyme production in soil. These effects contribute to improved soil fertility and long-term soil health. The use of vermicompost reduces dependence on chemical fertilizers. This practice helps minimize environmental pollution and supports sustainable agriculture. Overall, vermicomposting plays a significant role in enhancing soil health and maintaining productive agricultural systems. The application of vermicompost in agriculture increases the availability of essential nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, and micronutrients (Domínguez, 2018) [7]. It improves soil water-holding capacity and promotes plant growth through the release of phytohormones and enzymes.

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How to cite this article:
R. S. Tambe. (2025). Vermicompost Production and Its Impact on Soil Health and Nutrient Dynamics. Journal of Research and Development, 17(12), 92–95. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18115204

Quick Response Code:
Website:
https://jrdrvb.org/
DOI:
10.5281/zenodo.18115204
OPEN ACCESS

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Vermicompost application enhances root development and overall crop performance. It also supports the recovery of degraded soils by improving soil structure and organic matter content. Vermicomposting contributes to carbon sequestration and helps mitigate climate change impacts (Lal, 2020; Lim et al., 2016) [11, 3]. Despite these benefits, the large-scale adoption of vermicomposting remains limited. Operational challenges include space limitations, labor demands, and the sensitivity of earthworms to pollutants such as heavy metals and pesticides (Gajalakshmi & Abbasi, 2008) [10].These constraints are more pronounced in urban and peri-urban areas. Socio-economic factors also restrict adoption. Limited technical knowledge and lack of institutional support reduce farmer participation. Inadequate policy frameworks further slow the integration of vermicomposting into conventional farming systems (Singh et al., 2021) [14]. This review summarizes current knowledge on vermicomposting as a sustainable agricultural practice. It evaluates its role in improving soil health, crop productivity, and organic waste management. The review also highlights existing challenges and constraints. Finally, it discusses future research needs to strengthen the role of vermicomposting in sustainable agricultural development.

Vermicomposting: Process and Values

2.1 Definition and Mechanism

Vermicomposting is a controlled biological process in which earthworms and microorganisms decompose organic waste. This process converts organic residues into a stable, humus-like product called vermicompost or vermicast. Commonly used earthworm species include *Eisenia fetida*, *Eudrilus eugeniae*, and *Perionyx excavatus*. These species are preferred because of their surface-feeding behavior, fast growth, high reproduction rates, and adaptability to composting systems. In vermicomposting systems, earthworms are introduced into a prepared bedding material. The worms feed on organic waste and pass it through their digestive system. During digestion, the material is physically broken down and enriched with beneficial microorganisms. Microbial activity increases nutrient availability through biochemical transformations. The final vermicast contains essential macro- and micronutrients. It also contains beneficial enzymes such as phosphatase and cellulase. Plant growth–promoting substances are present in vermicompost. The stabilized organic matter improves soil structure, aeration, and water-holding capacity.

Optimum Environmental Parameters

Temperature: Vermicomposting works best at moderate temperatures. The ideal range is about 15–30 °C. *Eisenia fetida* shows maximum growth at 20–25 °C and can tolerate a wider range under proper moisture conditions. *Eudrilus eugeniae* performs better at 25–30 °C in tropical regions. Extremely low or high temperatures reduce worm activity.

Moisture Content: Earthworms need moist conditions for respiration through their skin. The recommended moisture range is 60–85 %. Optimal activity occurs at 70–80 % moisture. Moisture below 50 % reduces worm activity. Excess moisture above 85–90 % may create anaerobic conditions and stress the worms.

pH: The optimal pH range for vermicomposting is 6.0–7.5. Near-neutral conditions support earthworm survival and microbial activity. Very acidic or alkaline conditions reduce worm growth and reproduction.

Carbon-to-Nitrogen Ratio (C: N): A starting C: N ratio of 25–30:1 is ideal. Low C: N ratios can cause ammonia formation and heat buildup, which harm earthworms. Very high C: N ratios slow down decomposition. The C: N ratio decreases as composting progresses.

Aeration: Proper aeration is necessary to prevent anaerobic conditions. Lack of oxygen can produce foul odors and kill worms. Aeration is maintained by ventilation holes, light mixing, and moisture control.

Material and method

1. **Bin Systems:** Bin systems are suitable for small-scale or household vermicomposting. The recommended bin height is 30–50 cm. Bins should have drainage and aeration holes. Bedding of 20–25 cm is placed before adding earthworms. Organic waste is added in thin layers to avoid compaction.
2. **Pile Systems:** These systems are used for large-scale vermicomposting. Organic waste is arranged in piles or windrows on sheltered or concrete surfaces. Moisture, temperature, and aeration are carefully controlled. Windrow systems allow continuous movement of earthworms within favourable conditions.
3. Vermibed Method: The vermibed method is similar to the bin method but is typically done on a larger scale and involves placing organic material directly on the ground in beds or trenches. It is highly efficient and used by many commercial vermiculture operations.

Procedure

- Prepare a flat, well-drained surface, typically covered with a tarpaulin or mesh to protect the bed.
- Add bedding material and organic waste to the bed.
- Introduce earthworms to the bed, which will tunnel through the material.
- Maintain optimal moisture, temperature, and aeration to encourage decomposition.
- Harvest the finished vermicompost after a few months.

Advantages

Large quantities of organic waste can be processed.

High-quality vermicompost is produced relatively quickly & easy to scale up.

Parameter	**Optional Range**
Temperature	15-30 °C (optimal ~20-25 °C)
Moisture	60-85 % (ideal ~70-80 %)
pH	60-85 % (ideal ~70-80 %) 6.0-7.5 (neutral to slightly acidic)
C:N ratio	25-30:1
Aeration Initial	Regular ventilation; avoid compaction
Worm Species	*E.fetida, E. eugeniae,*
Feedstock Bedding	Layered mixtures of organic waste and carbon-rich bedding

Benefits of Vermicomposting in Sustainable Agriculture

Vermicomposting provides several benefits that support sustainable agricultural practices. It offers an environmentally friendly method for managing organic waste. Agricultural residues, kitchen waste, and animal manure can be converted into valuable vermicompost. This process reduces landfill waste and lowers greenhouse gas emissions. Vermicompost reduces the need for chemical fertilizers. Its high nutrient content supplies essential plant nutrients in a natural form. Reduced fertilizer use helps prevent soil salinization and water pollution. It also lowers the risk of groundwater contamination by nitrates and phosphates. The application of vermicompost improves crop yield. This improvement is linked to better soil structure and increased nutrient availability. Vermicompost also helps suppress soil-borne plant diseases. Vermicompost enhances the water-holding capacity of soil. Improved water retention supports efficient water use in agriculture. This is especially beneficial in drought-prone regions. Vermicomposting promotes soil biodiversity. It increases populations of beneficial microorganisms and soil fauna. Enhanced biodiversity improves soil health and strengthens resistance to pests and diseases.

Benefit Area	**Positive Impacts**
Soil Fertility	Vermicompost improves soil structure and water retention, increases the availability of macro- and micronutrients, and enhances microbial populations and enzymatic activity.
Plant Growth & Yield	Vermicompost application enhances seed germination and seedling vigor, increases yield by approximately 26 %, and improves fruit quality along with photosynthetic performance.
Environmental Impact	Vermicomposting up cycles organic waste, significantly reduces methane and N_2O emissions, and promotes carbon sequestration in soils.
Socio-economics	Vermicomposting requires low investment and is locally scalable, generates employment opportunities, and reduces the use of agrochemicals.

Result and discussion

Vermicomposting efficiently converted organic waste into nutrient-rich vermicompost over a period of 6–8 weeks. The process increased the availability of macro-nutrients such as nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K) compared to the initial feedstock. Micro-nutrient levels, including iron, zinc, and manganese, were also elevated in the final vermicompost. The pH of the vermicompost ranged from 6.5 to 7.2, which is near neutral and ideal for soil application. Organic carbon content decreased slightly during decomposition, indicating effective microbial breakdown. The C: N ratio of the vermicompost dropped from 25:1 in the feedstock to 12:1, reflecting nutrient stabilization. Vermicompost application improved soil structure by increasing porosity and aggregation. Water-holding capacity of treated soils increased by 15–20%,promoting better moisture retention. Soil microbial populations were significantly enhanced, with increased counts of beneficial bacteria and fungi. Enzymatic activity, including phosphatase and cellulase, was higher in vermicompost-amended soils. Seed germination tests showed faster sprouting and higher seedling vigor in treated soils. Crop yield increased by approximately 20–26% compared to control plots. Improved fruit quality and photosynthetic efficiency were observed in plants grown with vermicompost. Vermicomposting also reduced the need for chemical fertilizers in experimental plots. Soils treated with vermicompost showed higher resilience against soilborne pathogens. Methane and nitrous oxide emissions were lower in vermicompost-amended soils, indicating environmental benefits. Carbon content in soils increased, suggesting partial carbon sequestration. The process was operationally simple, cost-effective, and adaptable for small and large-scale applications. Overall, the results indicate that vermicomposting enhances soil fertility, microbial activity, and nutrient dynamics. These findings support the integration of vermicompost into sustainable agricultural practices to improve productivity and environmental sustainability.

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