Volume 3, Issue 12
December I 2025
Agri Roots
e- Magazine
www.agrirootsmagazine.in
ISSN: 2583-9071

Triple Super Phosphate (TSP): A High-Efficiency Phosphatic Fertilizer for Sustainable Agriculture

ARTICLE ID: 0312

Kiranjeet Kaur
Assistant Professor, Sri Guru Granth Sahib World University, Punjab

Triple Super Phosphate (TSP) is a highly concentrated phosphatic fertilizer widely used in modern agriculture to enhance crop productivity and soil fertility. It provides a readily available source of phosphorus (P), a critical nutrient responsible for energy transfer, root development, flowering, and crop maturation. TSP is the preferred choice in systems requiring high phosphorus supply without additional nitrogen.

Chemical Composition and Key Nutrients

TSP is produced by reacting finely ground phosphate rock with phosphoric acid, followed by curing and granulation. Its typical composition includes:

- **Phosphorus (P):** 46–48% as P_2O_5 (≈20% elemental P)
- **Calcium (Ca):** 13–15%
- **Sulphur (S):** Trace amounts (≈1%)

This high nutrient concentration allows efficient transportation, handling, and targeted nutrient application.

Solubility and Nutrient Availability

TSP is known for its excellent solubility:

- **Water Solubility:** More than 89%
- **Citric Solubility:** Over 95%
- **Slow-Release Fraction:** 4–5% of P_2O_5

The high water solubility ensures that phosphorus becomes available to plant roots immediately after application. TSP does not contain nitrogen, making it ideal for crops requiring phosphorus without additional N input.

Behavior of TSP in Soil

Upon application, TSP granules dissolve quickly in moist soil, producing a localized acidic zone around each granule. This temporary acidity:

- Enhances phosphorus solubility

- Improves nutrient accessibility
- Supports early-stage root proliferation

As phosphorus diffuses from the granule, it gradually reacts with soil minerals, creating moderately insoluble compounds that contribute to the fertilizer's residual effect. The calcium content also supports soil structure improvement in acidic soils, though its liming effect is limited.

Improving Nutrient Use Efficiency (NUE)

Interaction of TSP with Urea

When used with urea, TSP:

- Slows the rate of urea hydrolysis
- Lowers pH at the application site
- Reduces ammonia volatilization
- Enhances nitrogen retention

Studies show that this combination delays peak ammonia release and improves both nitrogen use efficiency (NUE) and phosphorus use efficiency (PUE).

Global Relevance

Ammonium phosphate fertilizers like DAP and MAP contribute nearly 8% of nitrogen applied to fields worldwide, yet their nitrogen content is often overlooked. Proper integration of TSP and urea helps reduce nitrogen mismanagement, greenhouse gas emissions, and nutrient runoff.

Methods of Application

TSP may be applied through:

- **Basal application:**

1. Broadcasting and incorporating
2. Band placement (3–5 cm from seed) for higher efficiency

- **Blending:** Compatible with most granular fertilizers except strongly alkaline materials
- **Horticulture:** Applied in planting pits, drip lines, or localized zones

Band placement is generally preferred to reduce phosphorus fixation and enhance early root growth.

Agronomic Benefits of TSP

- Promotes strong early root development
- Enhances tillering, branching, flowering, and fruiting
- Supports energy transfer and metabolic activity
- Improves grain quality and crop yield
- Requires lower application rates due to high concentration
- Helps rebuild soil phosphorus in depleted soils

Suitable Crops and Soil Types

Crops

TSP is suitable for:

- **Cereals:** Wheat, rice, maize
- **Oilseeds:** Mustard, groundnut
- **Legumes:** Chickpea, lentil, pea, soybean
- Vegetables, fruits, flowers, sugar crops, and forage grasses

It is especially beneficial for legumes, which need phosphorus for nodule formation and biological nitrogen fixation.

Soil Conditions

Optimal performance is observed in:

- Slightly acidic to neutral soils
- Moderately alkaline soils

In very acidic or calcareous soils, phosphorus fixation increases, making proper placement essential.

Advantages Over Other Phosphate Fertilizers

Compared with SSP

- TSP contains over double the P_2O_5 (46% vs. 16–20% in SSP)
- Lower application volume and cost per unit of phosphorus
- However, SSP contains more sulfur; additional S sources may be needed when using TSP

Compared with DAP/MAP

- TSP is nitrogen-free → useful when nitrogen levels must be controlled
- Lower salinity risk relative to DAP/MAP
- Suitable for sensitive horticultural and high-value crops

Salinity Considerations

TSP has the weakest salinizing effect among major phosphate fertilizers, making it suitable for arid and semi-arid soils prone to salinity.

Environmental and Management Considerations

Efficient TSP use should align with soil testing and crop nutrient requirements. Key management practices include:

- Incorporation to prevent P runoff
- Strategic banding and split applications
- Integration with organic manures to improve P availability
- Avoiding surface application on sloping land

Use of low-impurity TSP helps minimize heavy metal accumulation.

Environmental and Safety Aspects

Phosphorus loss from TSP occurs primarily through:

- Runoff
- Soil erosion

This may contribute to eutrophication in water bodies. Therefore, the 4R nutrient stewardship approach is recommended:

- Right source
- Right rate
- Right time
- Right place

Modern TSP standards limit heavy metals such as cadmium, lead, arsenic, and chromium, making it safe for long-term use.

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