Cultivation of the Multipurpose Tree, *Jatropha curcas* Using Recycled Water in Saudi Arabia: A forward-looking Study

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**ABSTRACT**

The lack of water is one of the most important global and local challenges. Therefore, the use of useful trees which are tolerant to difficult environmental conditions and their cultivation requirements are the least. Hence, the idea of this study is to raise the possibility of using sewage water to grow *Jatropha* trees and exploiting this tree to combat desertification and produce biofuels in Saudi Arabia. In addition, Saudi Arabia invested about US$23 billion in the infrastructure of sewage gathering and treatment. The adaptability of *Jatropha* to cultivation in harsh conditions, with the increasing global demand for renewable fuel sources, put *Jatropha* among the most promising alternative and low-cost feedstocks of biofuel crops. Furthermore, *Jatropha* oil may be utilized in saponification reactions to produce soap. Also, this oil is approved for cooking and lighting. Thus, *Jatropha* system could comprise essential quarters of rustic and regional development. *Jatropha* is cultivated on one million ha worldwide. In addition, many studies recommended *Jatropha* to be planted in poor lands of Egypt using nutritious and recycled treated wastewater, and to be a component of Egyptian strategy for renewable energy production. Overall, this study suggested that *Jatropha* tree is adaptable to the Saudi environment and can be cultivated using treated sewage water. In addition, *Jatropha* cultivation requirements are minimal, while its benefits are maximal.

**INTRODUCTION**

The Arabian Peninsula (AP) is regarded as the largest peninsula worldwide (3,237,500 km²). The AP includes Jordan, Iraq, Yemen, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Saudi Arabia (KSA). KSA covers about 2,250,000 km² of the AP. Saudi Arabia is a water-deficit and arid-climate country with limited lasting water bodies, lower rainfall patterns and higher evaporation rates. KSA was classified as the third highest country in daily per capita water use worldwide (GAS, 2016). Besides, the KSA population counted about 35 million by 2020 and is prospective to reach about 56 million by 2050 (Rambo et al., 2017; GAS, 2018). The increasing population and developing economy of KSA led to increasing demand for the finite natural resources of water (aquifers). For the above-mentioned reasons, the exploitation of the natural aquifers is requested to meet the water requirements of the Saudi people. The increasing demand for water consumption over time is illustrated in Fig. (1).
In the early eighties, the national agricultural program of KSA started to fulfill the self-sufficiency of food needs. In the last decades, a considerable decrease in groundwater levels and quality were observed. The better management of water resources could restrict careless and irresponsible policies of water consumption in KSA (Lippman, 2014). The daily water consumption of KSA was estimated at 7 billion m$^3$. Approximately 60% of the consumed water is desalinated (Al-Suhaimy, 2013).

*Jatropha curcas* is a succulent plant and well-adapted to grow in arid conditions. *Jatropha* is a well-known multipurpose tree, which is cultivated on a large scale in the tropical region. It may be consumed as a medicinal and food crop, or it may be cultivated for the production of biofuel (seeds contain from 27 to 40% oil of its dry weight) or used for the construction of a living fence (Francis *et al.*, 2005; Corte-Real *et al.*, 2016). As it produces many toxins, it is rarely attacked by insects (Alsharhan *et al.*, 2003; Corte-Real *et al.*, 2016). Lower servicing and cultivation requirements, with elevated oil content, made these plants very appealing as cost-effective biofuel feedstocks (Francis *et al.*, 2005).

Sustainable development in KSA is challenged by the increasing water demand and limited water wealth. Therefore, the main objective of this article is to suggest an initiative on the prospective use of sewage wastewater for *Jatropha* trees’ cultivation in Saudi Arabia.

**The State of Water Resources in Saudi Arabia:**

As the KSA is a part of the hot dry region, it is characterized by no rivers, no lasting lakes, lower annual rainfall (lower than 100 mm), temperature variation, higher evaporation rate, and finite groundwater reservoirs (Chowdhury and Al-Zahrani, 2013). Additionally, the master aquifers are going to deplete by the plus exhaustion and lower

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**Fig. 1:** The pattern of water consumption illustrating the increasing demand on water over time (statistica.com).
rainfalls. To meet demands, KSA has increased its freshwater production from traditional (surface and groundwater), and nontraditional (desalinated and recycled treated wastewater) water sources (GAS, 2018). Treated wastewater, desalinated water, groundwater, and surface water are the primary freshwater sources in KSA. Treatment of wastewater provides approximately one percent of the total KSA fresh water supply (Fig. 2).

**Fig. 2:** The state of water resources in Saudi Arabia (Al-Saud, 2013).

**Treated Wastewater in Saudi Arabia:**

It is well-known that recycled wastewater is securely used in refrigeration, industry, and agriculture. Recycled wastewater is a cornerstone resource that has to be counted in the operated water system, especially, in the case of water scarcity. In the case of KSA, the total quantity of recycled wastewater (∼17%) used during 2015 was 610,000 meter$^3$/day, and ∼66% of which was utilized in agriculture (NWC, 2016). Low-quality treated wastewater resulted from the treatment plants because of their high-level operation. For increasing the percentage of compiled wastewater (∼60% in 2015), the collection system must be upgraded (Tchobanoglous, 1995; NWC, 2016; 2018). In addition, KSA invested about US$23 billion in the infrastructure of sewage gathering and treatment (Kajenthira et al., 2012; Al-Saud, 2013; Chowdhury and Al-Zahrani, 2013; SAWR-Q4, 2013; Scotney, 2014; Enssle and Freedman, 2017; USDE, 2017).

Generally, the utilization of recycled treated wastewater can minimize the dependency on freshwater wealth, and also lower the influx of water into the habitat. This influx could increase the deposition of nutritious materials (organic and mineral) into water systems, causing excessive richness and rapid growth of algae which contaminate the existent water bodies (Toze, 2004). A total of 30% of desalinated water was estimated by Global Water Intelligence to be lost during dissemination (GWM, 2017). Several cities in KSA, such as Riyadh, Jeddah, Jubail, Dhahran and Taif, have been cultivated with different plant species (date palms, foraging crops, landscape plants, trees, and grasses) by using recycled treated wastewater (Ouda, 2014a; 2014b). Its utilization in agriculture can save energy, and expenses and reduce the water footprint of crop cultivation. Additionally, it can minify fertilizer utilization by providing the crop needs of nutrients, and thus increasing crop productivity (Aljaloud, 2010). For example, Saudi Arabia could increase the yield of alfalfa and wheat by the utilization of treated wastewater (Aljaloud, 2010).
**Jatropha curcas:**

*Jatropha curcas* is a worldwide-distributed and highly tolerant woody tree. It is a member of the family Euphorbiaceae. This tree has multiple names in various countries of the world (e.g. goat nuts, physic nut, barbados nut, purging nut, and nettle spurge) (Wurdack et al., 2005). *Jatropha* was reported as a native species in America (Pecina-Quintero et al., 2014). *Jatropha* is greatly adapted to cultivation in several agro-climatic and stressful conditions, like arid, semi-arid conditions, lower nutrient supply, drought, and soil salinity. This plant can grow in peripheral and marginal lands (Henning, 2004; Azam et al., 2005; AbouKheira and Atta, 2009; Swanberg, 2009). Also, *J. curcas* was successfully cultivated by treated wastewater. It was suggested for biofuel mass production as a substitute for eatable crops (Henning, 2004; Gamal-Fakhry et al., 2016). This biofuel crop is characterized by a short life cycle, and its seeds have ≈40% oil content. *Jatropha* oil was successfully used to produce biofuel with improved characteristics which meet the international standards (Francis et al., 2005; AbouKheira and Atta, 2009; King et al., 2009; Divakara et al., 2010). The adaptability of *Jatropha* to cultivation in harsh conditions, with the increasing global demand for renewable fuel sources, put *Jatropha* among the most promising alternative and low-cost feedstocks of biofuel crops (Arruda et al., 2004).

**Botanical:**

The Flowering *Jatropha* tree, flowers, fruits and seeds were illustrated in Fig. (3). *Jatropha* genus is native to tropical America (Makkar et al., 1998; Divakara et al., 2010). It is a deciduous shrub with oily seeds. The height of a mature tree is seven to thirteen meters. *Jatropha* has green, heart-shaped, and long-necked leaves, and greenish-yellow small flowers. The green fruits turn yellowish-brown at maturity. Each fruit holds two to three black egg-shaped oily seeds (Kaushik, 2003; Brittaine and Lutaladio, 2010).

![Illustration of Jatropha](image1)

Fig. 3: Illustrating photography of: A: Flowering *Jatropha* tree, B: flowers of *Jatropha*, C: fruits of *Jatropha* and D: seeds of *Jatropha*. 
Flowering and Pollination:
Generally, *J. curcas* produces unisexual flowers as usual (monoecious plant). Male (masculine) flowers may surround a centric female flower. Sometimes, few numbers of masculine flowers were recorded during the inflorescence period. All flowers open simultaneously facilitating cross-pollination to happen (Kumar et al., 2017). Twice flowering per year was reported in Egypt (Soliman and He, 2015).

The floral sex ratio of *Jatropha* is crucial in seed yield (Gangwar et al., 2018). Targeting genes that are responsible for increasing female flowering and/ or male flowering inhibition is a promising approach to increasing female flowering in *Jatropha* (Gangwar et al., 2018).

Yield and Crop Production:
Factors influencing the crop yield of *J. curcas* are varied. The crop productivity could be increased by providing water and fertilizer needs. Water lacks and/ or insufficient nutritional supply at specific growth stages were reported to reduce crop productivity of *Jatropha* (Michael, 1978). Additionally, branching complexity and height of the shrub were regarded to increase fruits, capsules, seeds, and in turn, oil content. Previous studies concluded that seed production varied in accordance with genotype and cultivation conditions (Francis et al., 2005).

Propagation:
*Jatropha* is cultivated in several ways including seeds, stem cutting and tissue culture (Corte-Real et al., 2016). To ensure higher yield, planting materials have to be selected from well-known strong and healthy parental trees (Corte-Real et al., 2016).

a) Seed Propagation:
Selection of seeds with improved characteristics like elevated oil content and high crop yield, to be cultivated in nourished nursery beds would guarantee superior germination and performance rates. This could be fulfilled by starting seedlings' growth in controlled conditions before the field plantation process (Kaushik, 2003). Other farmers preferred direct field seedlings by increasing the starting number of cultivated seeds, in order to compensate for the loss caused by the decrease in germination (Heller, 1996).

b) Vegetative or Cutting Propagation:
Propagation by cuttings is advantageous, especially in improved cultivars, because of fast establishment, higher performance rate, earlier yield, and genetic uniformity. In order to improve the production rate, cuttings of 25-40 cm, from one-year-old branches are selected and cultivated in seedbeds or polybags (Kaushik and Kumar, 2004; Achten et al., 2010; Dasumia et al., 2017).

c) Tissue Culture:
Tissue culture technology is usually used in scientific research and up to our knowledge, *Jatropha* was not commercially produced by such technology.

Fertilizing:
A key factor in improved *Jatropha* productivity is the utilization of the proper fertilizers in the proper timing and quantity. Although fertilizer application has positive effects, it also increased the cost of crop rotation. To maximize process effectiveness, *Jatropha* manuring should start with adding some fertilizers to the planting pit at the cultivation time, then the proper fertilizers are applied after the full establishment of the tree. Additionally, it is essential to provide the proper quantity of NPK fertilizers (containing nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium) to operate the entire power of *Jatropha* crop (Kumar et al., 2017). Up to our knowledge, no recommended fertilization program has been established for *J. curcas*.

Irrigation:
*J. curcas* performance under drought-stress conditions has been investigated, extensively (Achten et al., 2010). *J. curcas* could survive in arid or semi-arid
environments. Additional to the very low water needs of *Jatropha*, it could reduce transpiration by leaf dropping. Meanwhile, water shortage reduced crop yield and growth measures of the tree including the development of leaves (Maes et al., 2009; Genhua et al., 2012).

**Jatropha Cultivation:**

For field cultivation, 45 cm³ pits were done in the fields and transplanted with *Jatropha* seedlings at a density of 1330 to 1600 plants/ha (2.5m intra-tree spacing and 2.5-3m within rows). *Jatropha* grew rapidly between March and October. In autumn, trees shed leaves and remained in a hibernal dormancy till the next February (Maes et al., 2009).

**Climate and Soil Needs:**

*Jatropha* could cultivate in a wide range of latitudes and altitudes (500 m above sea level). The tree grows in the optimum temperature range from 20 °C to 28 °C. However, an extremely hot climate inhibits flower fertilization and crop yield. Also, *Jatropha* could not resist the extremely cold climate.

*Jatropha* was successfully grown in aerated loamy sandy and heavy clay soils at ≈45cm depth (Gour, 2006). *Jatropha* was able to develop in soils with pH values of 6.0-8.5. Good drainage is necessary for the cultivation of *Jatropha* because it cannot tolerate water-saturated soils. *Jatropha* succeeded in cultivation in environments with poor-quality water supply. But these conditions have negative effects on the crop yield (Santos and Silva, 2016).

**Uses of Jatropha:**

*Jatropha* is a multiuse tree, having a great advantage as biofuel plants worldwide (Gour, 2006). The elevated oil content of seeds (63.2-66.4%) made them ideal for biodiesel and biofuel production (AbouKheira and Atta, 2009). *Jatropha* seeds contain a higher oil quantity than palm kernel seeds (44.6%), linseeds (33.3%), and soybean seeds (18.6%) (Hamzah et al., 2020). Furthermore, *Jatropha* oil may be utilized in saponification reactions to produce soap. Also, this oil is approved for cooking and lighting. Thus, *Jatropha* system could comprise essential quarters of rustic and regional development: providing household and rural energy needs; women's promotion via household soap production; minimizing poverty by creating job opportunities (e.g., soap industry, selling seeds and oil); and control of desertification via planting hedges of *Jatropha*, which is the animal repellent plant (Francis et al., 2005; Corte-Real et al., 2016). In addition, centralized processing of *Jatropha* system is unnecessary (King et al., 2009). Several usages for the other parts of *Jatropha* were suggested. Press cake byproduct of *Jatropha* still has a considerable amount of oil and nutritious materials. Biogas production (Augustus et al., 2002), and natural fertilizers were reported from press cake (Barceloux, 2008). Additionally, the ground seed coat of *Jatropha* can be utilized for adsorbing heavy metals from wastewater (Hsu et al., 2014). A diagrammatic representation of *Jatropha* system for rustic and regional development is shown in Fig. (4).

**Jatropha Cultivation Trials Worldwide:**

*Jatropha* is cultivated on one million ha worldwide, from which 800,000 ha in Asia, 120,000 ha in Africa, and 20,000 ha in America (Henning, 2004). *Jatropha* is a major producer of second-generation biofuels (obtained from non-food crops and plant residuals). *Jatropha* suits cultivation in idle, marginal and degraded lands (Barceloux, 2008). This tree is a strong, rapid and easily grown, desiccation-tolerant, pest-resistant and unappetizing plant to animals. In tropical countries, hedges of *J. curcas* were constructed to protect croplands from domesticated foraging animals. Additionally, *Jatropha* could survive with minimal environmental input in extremely harsh conditions (Divakara et al., 2010).
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**Fig. 4:** Diagrammatic representation of *Jatropha* system for rustic and regional development.

**Jatropha in Egypt:**

Keeping afforestation in Egypt addresses a number of environmental key issues. The safe and primary use of treated wastewater in reducing desertification is a major environmental issue. It is also harmonious with the increasing biomass production for potential biofuel production (A-CEAS Consulting, 2009). A starting area of 160,000 feddans in marginal desert lands is accessible for cultivating different plants. About 88,000 Feddans are appointed to hold a multi-branch company for wastewater recycling projects, and ≈11,000 Feddans are cultivated with several plants including *Jatropha* (Michael, 1978). The *Jatropha* experimental cultivation in Egypt started in 1997, using Indian seeds. Results encouraged the governmental section to expand the planted area of *Jatropha*. The cultivated area of *Jatropha* reached 100 Feddans in 2001. This area was principally drip-irrigated with treated sludge water. New Valley and Upper Egypt deserts are convenient for *Jatropha* implantation. Presently, more than 2000 Feddans of poor lands have been dedicated for *Jatropha* cultivation in Egypt (Hayder and Rakotondramanga, 2011). In addition, many feasibility studies recommended *Jatropha* be planted in poor lands of Egypt using nutritious and recycled treated wastewater, and to be a component of Egyptian strategy for renewable energy production (Gamassy, 2008; Gamal-Fakhry et al., 2016). In addition, “the national program for safe use of treated sewage water for afforestation” established *Jatropha* cultivation in Upper Egypt using treated sludge water. For germinating seedlings, *Jatropha* seeds were cultivated in greenhouses using black polyethylene bags, transferred to holes 30*30*30 cm of desert soils (spacing of 3*3 m), and drip-irrigated by treated sludge water (EC 1.04 and PH 7.47), without fertilization. Higher rates of growth and productivity than other countries were reported (Gamal-Fakhry et al., 2016).

Based on the previous trials which proved superior adaptability of *Jatropha* plant to grow in environments with minimal agricultural needs, and based on the availability of
these needs in the Al-Jouf region, our study recommended the use of treated wastewater in the cultivation of *Jatropha* trees to maximize its multiple benefits in sustainable development programs in Al-Jouf region.

**CONCLUSION**

Recently, *J. curcas* tree has received the worth attention as a multiuse oil tree. It is regarded as a biofuel source and it reduces environmental pollution as well. This tree has been used to combat desertification and reduce soil degradation in arid and peripheral marginal areas. *Jatropha* may grow at altitudes of up to 500 meters above sea level and thus grow in extremely harsh conditions. It can withstand drought for a long time by shedding its leaves. Meanwhile, it grows in alkaline soil but adapts to the cold climate with less capacity. Moreover, it does not parasitize on food crops and could grow in marginal lands and produces oilseeds under the lowest amount of water and soil requirements compared to other crops. *Jatropha* also grows well with treated wastewater. Overall it is a multi-purpose plant and has various advantages like short life span, minimum water and soil requirement. Also, *Jatropha* can reduce soil degradation and desertification in arid areas.

**REFERENCES**


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