

Classification and Spatial Distribution of Macronutrients and Micronutrients in the Soil of Greenhouse Sweet Cherries

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Abstract: To understand the distribution of trace elements in the soil of greenhouse sweet cherry, using soil samples from solar greenhouse sweet cherry orchards in Chifeng, Inner Mongolia as the object, the trace element indicators in the soil of different sweet cherry production areas were analyzed using the "S" shaped 5-point sampling method. Descriptive statistics were conducted. The results showed that in the soil, the average value of CaO is 3.38%, level 2 and relatively abundant, relatively deficient accounting for 4.76%; that of MgO is 0.74%, level 4 and relatively deficient, relatively deficient accounting for 100%; that of total S is 293.24 mg/kg, level 2 and relatively abundant, relatively deficient accounting for 38.1%; that of total Cu is 20.61 mg/kg, level 4 and relatively deficient, relatively deficient accounting for 52.38%; that of total Zn is 62.06 mg/kg, level 3 and moderate, relatively deficient accounting for 52.38%; that of total B is 30.73 mg/kg, level 4 and deficient, relatively deficient accounting for 95.24%; that of total Mo is 0.70 mg/kg, level 2 and abundant, relatively deficient accounting for 38.1%. Although sweet cherries can be cultivated and produced normally in the sunlight greenhouse in Chifeng, the levels of trace elements in the soil are low and the variability is large. Effective measures need to be taken to improve and supplement them. In future production, it is recommended to increase the application of magnesium iron micro fertilizers to meet the demand of large cherries for trace elements.

Keywords: Classification, Spatial Distribution, Macronutrients and Micronutrients, Sweet Cherries, Greenhouse

Introduction

Sweet cherry (*Prunus avium* L.) is the abbreviation of European sweet cherry, also known as large cherry, belonging to the Rosaceae family (Xin *et al.*, 2013). Sweet cherries are native to West Asia and southeastern Europe, adapted to cool and dry climates, and more suitable for cultivation in northern China, such as Liaoning in North, Northwest, and Northeast China. The cultivation of sweet cherries in protected areas in China began in the 1990s (Liu *et al.*, 2009). Due to its advantages of good quality (Bondarenko *et al.*, 2024), high economic benefits, strong resistance to adverse weather, and the ability to achieve premature and high yields, it has developed rapidly in many areas of China in the past decade. Chifeng is in the southeastern part of Inner Mongolia, between 41°17'10"N-45°24'15"N. It has

an annual sunshine duration of 2700-3100 hours and an average annual temperature of 0-7 °C. It belongs to the semi-arid continental monsoon climate zone of the mid temperate zone, and is suitable for cherry growth. However, the average temperature in the coldest month of winter (January) in Chifeng is around -10 °C, and the extreme lowest temperature is below -27 °C. The cultivation of sweet cherries in the open field will suffer from freezing damage and cannot be produced.

Facility agriculture in Chifeng began in the 1990s, with facilities mainly consisting of solar greenhouses and plastic greenhouses. Main crops are eggplants, fruits, melons, and vegetables, making it one of the main pillar industries in the local area. However, with the increase of planting years, soil continuous cropping obstacles and soil borne diseases have become increasingly prominent. Coupled with the unstable vegetable market and the

trend of increasing labor costs, economic benefits are declining day by day. Sunlight greenhouse sweet cherries have the advantages of low artificial input cost and stable economic benefits, gradually becoming the preferred crop for structural adjustment in main production areas of facility agriculture. Researches have shown that sweet cherries can overwinter and grow normally with good quality in Chifeng (Tian *et al.*, 2024), and have gradually become one of the key characteristic industries for development.

The primary environment for crop growth is soil, and soil quality and fertility are prerequisites for ensuring high crop yield and quality. Sweet cherries have relatively high requirements for soil conditions. When building a garden, fertile soil, deep soil layers, neutral or slightly acidic sandy loam soil should be selected (Xiao *et al.*, 2023; Desie *et al.*, 2023). There have been reports on the nutrition status of trace elements in sweet cherry soil. Using the "S" shaped 5-point sampling method, Wang *et al.* (2025) found that the content of exchangeable Ca and Mg in Zaozhuang, Shandong Province is relatively high, and there is no need for fertilization and improvement. The content of effective Zn and B is relatively low, belonging to level 4. Zheng analyzed the chemical properties of greenhouse sweet cherry soil in Dalian using the "S" shaped 5-point sampling method. It was found that in the soil, Fe was low, and Mn was low or very low (Zheng, 2021). Liu *et al.* (2009) investigated the soil of protected sweet cherries in five regions of Liaoning Province using the "S" shaped multi-point (8-16) sampling method. The soil is abundant in nutrients such as available Ca, Mg, and Zn, with 62.61% having an effective content exceeding 20 mg/kg, and the highest reaching 132 mg/kg. It has been found that the content of trace element nutrients in sweet cherry soil varies significantly depending on the geographical location of the planting area. With the large-scale development of greenhouse sweet cherry industry in Chifeng, Inner Mongolia, the current content of trace elements in the soil and whether it can meet the growth and development needs of sweet cherries are urgent problems that need to solve. This study sampled the soil of the main production area of sweet cherries in solar greenhouses in Chifeng, Inner Mongolia, and measured the trace element indicators in the soil. Through descriptive statistical analysis and grade evaluation of the above indicators, the spatial variation characteristics are elucidated, providing a reference for soil improvement and fertilization techniques for sweet cherry planting in this city and surrounding areas in the future.

Materials and Methods

Soil Sample Collection

In May 2024, representative sweet cherry greenhouses were selected for sampling in the main

production areas of sunlight greenhouses in Chifeng, including Ningcheng County, Hongshan District, Songshan District, Aohan Banner, Wengniute Banner, Kalaqin Banner, and Linxi County. The large cherry variety was 'Meizao', with a tree age of more than 3 years, and a total of 21 samples. There were 5 soil samples from Ningcheng County, 3 from Hongshan District, 2 from Songshan District, 7 from Aohan Banner, 2 from Wengniute Banner, 1 from Kalaqin Banner, and 1 from Linxi County. In the same greenhouse, the "S" shaped sampling method is used. Five trees were selected from each greenhouse, and three points were taken from each tree. The soil was drilled from 0-40 cm using stainless steel soil. After mixing the soil samples collected from multiple points, 1 kg was left according to the quartering method, air dried naturally, and finely ground with a wooden stick through a 1 mm diameter nylon sieve. After sieving, mixing, bagging and labeling, it was ready for testing. The map of Chifeng is shown in Figure 1.



Fig. 1: Chifeng

Measurement Parameters and Analytical Methods

Soil calcium oxide, magnesium oxide, ferrous oxide, and total zinc were analyzed using the inductively coupled plasma atomic emission spectroscopy;

Total S was analyzed using infrared absorption spectroscopy;

Total Cu and Mo were determined using inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry;

The total B was determined using photoelectric direct reading emission spectroscopy.

The grading standards for soil nutrient element content refer to Zheng (2021), Li *et al.* (2009), and Wang *et al.* (2025).

Data Processing

Data processing was performed using Microsoft Excel 2007 software and SPSS 23.0.

Results

Descriptive Statistical Characteristics of Trace Element Indicators in Soil

According to Table 1, the average values of CaO, MgO, and total S in the soil of greenhouse cherry in

Chifeng are 3.38%, 0.74%, and 293.24 mg/kg, respectively. The coefficients of variation are moderate (Zhou *et al.*, 2019), with MgO having the smallest coefficient of variation at 18.92%. CaO and total S have larger coefficients of variation at 49.11% and 63.16%, respectively. For trace elements, the average values of total Cu, total Zn, total B, and total Mo are 20.61, 62.06, 30.73, and 0.70 mg/kg, respectively, with coefficients of variation ranging from 20.86% to 37.14%. The average value of FeO is 2.32%, with a coefficient of variation of 21.98%. The coefficient of variation for all five trace elements is moderate. The larger the coefficient of variation, the greater the difference in the content of trace elements in the soil of different sweet cherry areas, and the more uneven the distribution.

Table 1: Descriptive statistical characteristics of trace elements in the soil of main cherry areas Evaluation of Trace Element Index Grades in Soil

Categories	Soil nutrient indicators	Sample size	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Mean	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variation (%)
Secondary Elements	CaO (%)	21	1.02	6.78	5.76	3.38	1.66	49.11
	MgO (%)	21	0.43	0.94	0.51	0.74	0.14	18.92
	Total S (mg/kg)	21	142.00	886.00	744.00	293.24	185.21	63.16
Trace elements	Total Cu (mg/kg)	21	13.9	27.20	13.30	20.61	4.30	20.86
	FeO (%)	21	1.42	3.30	1.88	2.32	0.51	21.98
	Total Zn (mg/kg)	21	42.20	117.00	74.80	62.06	17.57	28.31
	Total B (mg/kg)	21	17.60	54.60	37.00	30.73	8.00	26.03
	Total Mo (mg/kg)	21	0.37	1.24	0.87	0.70	0.26	37.14

Table 2: Nutrient content of trace elements in the soil of sweet cherry production areas

Soil nutrient indicators	Change range	Abundant	Relatively abundant	Moderate	Relatively deficient	Deficient
		Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
CaO (%)	1.02~6.78	3	11	6	1	0
MgO (%)	0.43~0.94	0	0	0	16	5
Total S (mg/kg)	142~886	5	2	6	3	5
Total Cu (mg/kg)	13.9~27.2	0	7	1	11	2
FeO (%)	1.42~3.3	0	0	0	0	21
Total Zn (mg/kg)	42.2~117	1	3	6	4	7
Total B (mg/kg)	17.6~54.6	0	0	1	11	9
Total Mo (mg/kg)	0.37~1.24	5	6	2	3	5

Secondary Element

According to the demand for inorganic elements during crop growth and development, Ca, Mg and S are classified as moderate elements. The content of nutrients in the soil is different in different sweet cherry producing areas of Chifeng (Table 2). According to the nutrient content grading standards of the second national soil survey (Wang *et al.*, 2025; Zhou *et al.*, 2019), there is one with a CaO content ranging from 0.42% to 1.16%, accounting for 4.76%, relatively deficient. Six are between 1.16%-2.68%, accounting for 28.57%, moderate; 11 are between 2.68% and 5.54%, accounting for 52.38%, relatively abundant; there are 3 of >5.54%, accounting for 14.29%, abundant.

There are 5 of MgO \leq 0.70%, accounting for 23.81%, deficient; 16 between 0.70% and 1.20%, accounting for 76.19%, relatively deficient.

There are 5 of total S \leq 172mg/kg, accounting for 23.81%, deficient; 3 between 172-219 mg/kg, accounting for 14.29%, relatively deficient; 6 samples between 219-270 mg/kg, accounting for 28.57%, moderate; 2 between 270 and 343 mg/kg, accounting for 9.52%, relatively abundant; 5 between 343 mg/kg, accounting for 23.81%, abundant.

Trace Element

According to the demand for inorganic elements during crop growth and development, Cu, Fe, Zn, B, and Mg are classified as trace elements. The nutrient content of trace element in the soil varies in different main sweet cherry producing areas of Chifeng (Table 2). Based on the nutrient content grading standards of the second national soil survey (Yan *et al.*, 2024; Wang *et al.*, 2023), there are 2 samples with a total copper content of \leq 16 mg/kg, accounting for 9.52%, deficient; 11 between 16-

21 mg/kg, accounting for 52.38%, relatively deficient; 1 between 21-24 mg/kg, accounting for 4.76%, moderate; 7 between 24%-29%, accounting for 33.33%, relatively abundant.

There are 21 samples with $Fe_2O_3 \leq 3.40$ %, accounting for 100%, deficient.

There are 7 samples with total Zn ≤ 50 mg/kg, accounting for 33.33%, deficient; 7 between 50-62 mg/kg, accounting for 19.05%, relatively deficient; 6 between 62-71 mg/kg, accounting for 28.57%, moderate; 3 between 71-84 mg/kg, accounting for 28.57%, moderate; 3 between 71-84 mg/kg, accounting for 14.29%, relatively abundant; 1 with total Zn > 84 mg/kg, accounting for 4.76%, abundant.

There are 9 samples with total B ≤ 30 mg/kg, accounting for 42.86%, deficient; 11 between 30-45 mg/kg, accounting for 52.38%, relatively deficient; 1 sample between 45-55 mg/kg, accounting for 4.76%, moderate.

There are 5 samples with total Mo ≤ 0.45 mg/kg, accounting for 23.81%, deficient; 3 between 0.45-0.55 mg/kg, accounting for 14.29%, relatively deficient; 2 between 0.55-0.65 mg/kg, accounting for 9.52%, moderate; 6 between 0.65-0.85 mg/kg, accounting for 28.57%, relatively abundant; 6 between 0.65-0.85 mg/kg, accounting for 28.57%, relatively abundant; 5 with total Mo > 0.85 mg/kg, accounting for 23.81%, abundant.



Fig. 2: Spatial variation of CaO in the soil from south to north in the main producing areas of sweet cherries

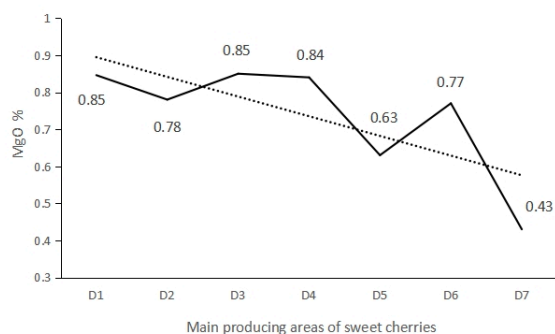


Fig. 3: Spatial variation of MgO in the soil from south to north in the main producing areas of sweet cherries

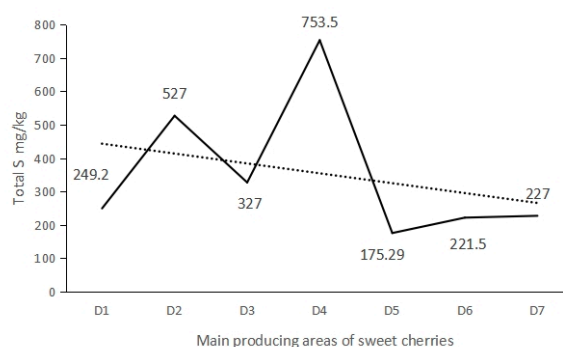


Fig. 4: Spatial variation of total S in the soil from south to north in the main producing areas of sweet cherries

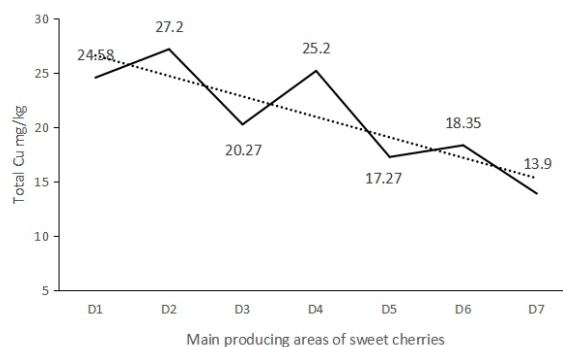


Fig. 5: Spatial variation of total Cu in the soil from south to north in the main producing areas of sweet cherries

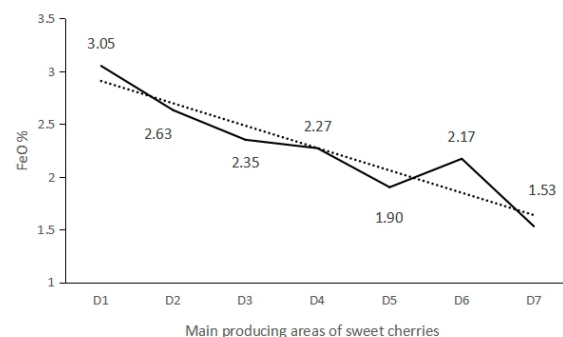


Fig. 6: Spatial variation of FeO in the soil from south to north in the main producing areas of sweet cherries

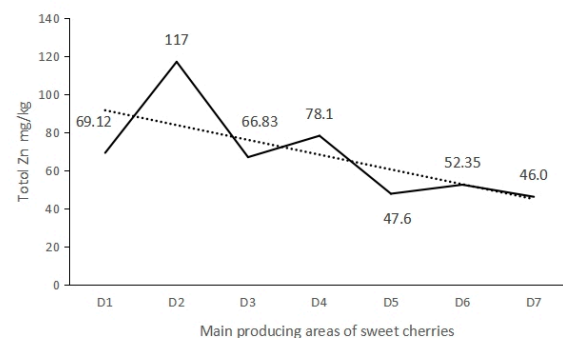


Fig. 7: Spatial variation of total Zn in the soil from south to north in the main producing areas of sweet cherries

Spatial Variation of Soil Elements

The geographical distribution of Chifeng from south to north is Ningcheng County, Kalaqin Banner, Hongshan District, Songshan District, Aohan Banner, Wengniute Banner, and Linxi County. The indicators increasing in the soil element content from south to north in different main sweet cherry producing areas include CaO (Figure 2), and the other indicators decrease (Figs. 3-9).

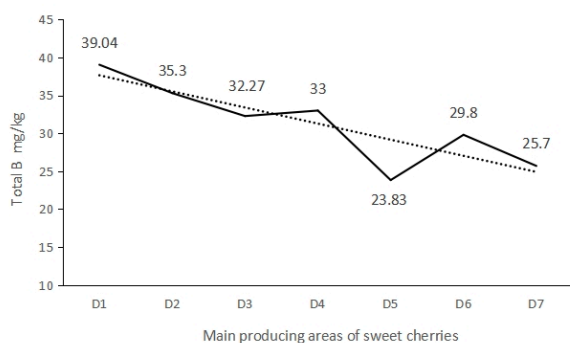


Fig. 8: Spatial variation of total B in the soil from south to north in the main producing areas of sweet cherries

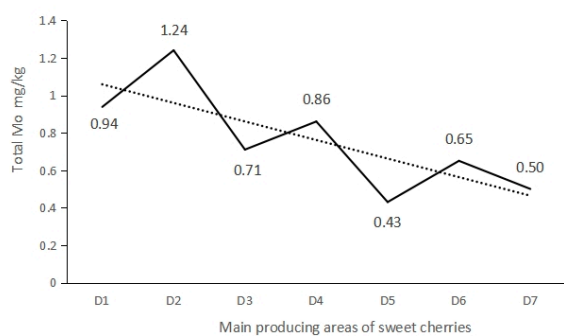


Fig. 9: Spatial variation of total Mo in the soil from south to north in the main producing areas of sweet cherries

Discussion

Soil is the main source of mineral elements and water necessary for the growth of fruit trees, and is the foundation of fruit tree cultivation (Liu & Sun, 2023; Li, 2019). N, P and K are essential elements for plants (Wu *et al.*, 2021), and their deficiency in soil can lead to nutrient deficiencies (Başayığit *et al.*, 2017), which require corresponding measures for supplementation (Saha, 2018; Zhang *et al.*, 2017). The moderate elements such as Ca, Mg, and S play a crucial role in crop photosynthesis, chlorophyll production, and catalysis of various enzymes in plants (Zheng, 2021). Insufficient supply of trace elements in soil can lead to poor growth of fruit trees, a decrease in fruit quality and yield (Desie *et al.*, 2023). The average of CaO in the sunlight greenhouse sweet cherries of Chifeng is 3.38%, which is level 2 and relatively abundant, that of MgO is 0.74%, classified as level 4 and relatively deficient; that of total

S is 293.24 mg/kg, classified as level 2 and relatively abundant. The range of available Ca in the soil of Dalian is 132.6-917.8 mg/kg, insufficient. Abundant Ca in the soil is due to the fact that the previous crop planted in sweet cherry soil was tomato. Local tomato growers realize that Ca can increase the hardness of tomato fruits, which can affect tomato quality and purchase price. Therefore, sufficient Ca fertilizer applied in the early stage results in abundant Ca in the soil. The range of available Mg in the soil is 43.6-101.0 mg/kg, which is insufficient. It was found that facility agriculture growers in Chifeng have not paid enough attention to the role of medium element Mg and the application of Mg fertilizer.

Although the content of trace elements in soil is low, it is an important component of all healthy organisms and is a necessary element for promoting metabolism (Guo *et al.*, 2023). Cu participates in the respiration of plants, affects the absorption and utilization of Fe by crops, and can also improve chlorophyll stability (Sharma *et al.*, 2015). Zn (Mert & Levent, 2015) and Mn mainly act as metal activators for enzymes in plants, playing important roles in carbohydrate metabolism and auxin synthesis, and are closely related to plant photosynthesis (Yan *et al.*, 2022). The average of total Cu in solar greenhouse sweet cherries of Chifeng is 20.61 mg/kg, classified as level 4 and relatively deficient, that of FeO is 2.32%, classified as level 5 and deficient; that of total Zn is 62.06mg/kg, classified as level 3, moderate; that of total B is 30.73 mg/kg, classified as level 4, relatively deficient; that of total Mo is 0.70 mg/kg, classified as level 2 and relatively abundant. In Dalian, the range of available Cu is 0.52-10.8 mg/kg, abundant; that of available Zn varies from 0.6 to 5.1 mg/kg, 50% of severely deficiency; that of available Fe is 7.0-55.8 mg/kg, abundant; that of available B is 0.12-1.2 mg/kg, with 40% of severely deficient. The main reason for Fe deficiency in the soil of Chifeng is that the previous crop is vegetables, and most growers attach low importance to Fe element. However, fruit trees have been planted in Dalian, and their contribution to Fe element is relatively high. Farmers attach great importance to the application and supplementation of Fe fertilizer. Overall, the nutrient levels of trace elements in greenhouse sweet cherry soil in Chifeng are better than those in Dalian.

Conclusion

Sweet cherry has a high demand for trace elements, and reasonable fertilization can help improve its yield and quality. The content and distribution of trace elements in the soil are influenced by various factors such as climate, terrain, and biology (Zhou *et al.*, 2020). The soil in Chifeng is suitable for the growth of sweet cherries. The content of CaO in different sweet cherry producing areas increases from south to north, while the other indicators decrease. Chifeng is deficient in MgO,

but abundant in calcium and sulfur. Mg can promote photosynthesis and prevent leaf yellowing. Base fertilizer can be applied, with 10-20 kilograms of Mg sulfate per acre. It can also be foliar sprayed with 0.2-0.3% magnesium sulfate solution during the growth period, once every 10-15 days. Iron fertilizer can be applied with 5-10 kilograms of ferrous sulfate per mu as base fertilizer, or sprayed with 0.1-0.2% ferrous sulfate solution during the growth period, once every 10-15 days. Scientific fertilization can effectively improve the yield and quality of sweet cherries. In trace elements, except for Zn and Mo, the other indicators are deficient. It is recommended to focus on supplementing trace element fertilizers such as Mg, Cu, and B in the future, especially the application of Fe fertilizers.

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Author's Contributions

Lijin Qin and Qingxiang Wang: Designed and performed the experiments, analyzed the data, and prepared the paper.

Yongli Lv and Junxiang Zhang and Jingsheng Wang: Participated to collect the materials related to the experiment.

Yangyang Xu and Dingfang Zhang and Jiahe Zhou: Designed the experiments and revised the manuscript.

Ethics

This study complied with ethical guidelines and obtained informed consent.

Conflict of Interest

There was no potential conflict of interest in the manuscript.

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