



# Effect of Stocking Density of *Labeo rohita* (Rohu) for the Production of Stunted Yearling in Cage Culture Conditions

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## Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author VJG conceptualized and designed the study. Authors SHG and BRV collected the data. Author BRV drafted the manuscript. Data analysis was carried out by Author VJG and SHG. All authors reviewed, revised, and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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## ABSTRACT

The present experiment evaluated the Optimization of *Labeo rohita* (Rohu) stocking density for the production of stunted yearling in cage culture conditions. Fingerlings were stocked at three different stocking densities i.e., 100, 200 and 300 (T1, T2, and T3, respectively) and reared for 180 days in cage culture condition. Water quality and growth parameters of all treatments were compared during the experiment. A significant ( $p<0.05$ ) decrease in growth and survival concentration relative to the higher stocking density was observed. Though some of the parameters showed significant ( $p<0.05$ ) differences among the treatments, the water quality remained within an optimum level, throughout the experiment. An increase in stocking density led to a significant reduction ( $p<0.05$ ) in

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ABW and survival of fingerlings. Treatment T1 (100 nos/cage) recorded significantly higher growth than treatment T2 (200 nos/cage) and treatment T3 (300 nos/cage) of both locations during all the years. Among the treatments, T1 recorded significantly higher values of body weight (38.12 g) as compared to T2 (30.87 g) and T3 (27.19 g) but treatment T3 (27.19 g) was at par with T2 (30.87 g). Treatment T1 recorded higher average body weight at both locations during all the years 2013-14 (L1-31.30g and L2-35.98g), 2014-15 (L1-30.91 g and L2- 60.23 g) and 2015-16 (L1-26.37 g and L2-43.93 g) as well as in pooled results (L1-29.53 g and L2-46.72 g) as compared to rest of the treatments. The fish survival data revealed that at both locations and during all the years, there was little variation. As per the survival rate in different treatments, T3 is found most economical.

**Keywords:** Cage culture; growth; survival; *Labeo rohita*; stocking density.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Globally aquaculture is one of the fastest-growing industries (Tacon, 2020) and has been playing a significant role in the economic development front on account of its contribution to food security, national income, employment opportunities as well as generating source of revenue (Kumar and Shivani, 2014). It is the main source of animal protein for billions of people Worldwide, where capture fishery and aquaculture serve the livelihoods of >10% of the overall population (Anonymous, 2020b).

Aquaculture is one of the fastest-growing industries globally (Tacon, 2020) and has made a significant contribution to economic development by enhancing food security, national income, and employment opportunities, as well as generating revenue (Kumar and Shivani, 2014). It serves as a primary source of animal protein for billions of people worldwide, with capture fisheries and aquaculture supporting the livelihoods of more than 10% of the global population (Anonymous, 2020b).

India plays a pivotal role in global fisheries, contributing significantly to both inland and marine capture production. The country accounts for 16.7% of the global inland aquatic animal capture, with an output of 1,890 thousand tonnes, and 4.5% of the global marine animal capture, producing 3,597 thousand tonnes. While India demonstrates remarkable performance in capture fisheries, its contribution to global aquaculture production remains relatively modest at 10 thousand tonnes, compared to the world inland aquaculture production of 9 thousand tonnes. The fisheries and aquaculture sectors, recognized as critical components of India's "Blue Economy," have experienced substantial advancements, underscoring their importance in ensuring food security, employment generation, and economic growth. (SOFIA-FAO, 2024).

Inland aquaculture presently contributes 12.1 million tonnes (in 2021-22) of fish annually with the three Indian major carps viz., catla (*Labeo catla*), rohu (*Labeo rohita*) and mrigal (*Cirrhinus mrigala*) constituting 51.96% of the production. Cage culture and pen culture are those activities that can be helpful to supplement aquaculture production in areas with limited land-based resources for aquaculture (Dept of Fisheries, 2022).

In India, carp culture forms the backbone of freshwater aquaculture generally dominated by Indian major carp, namely catla, rohu, and mrigal which contribute a majority of the total Indian aquaculture production (Anonymous, 2020b). At present Indian Major Carp production from village ponds is very low (500-1000 kg/ha/year) in the context of the potential production of 10,000 kg/ha/year. Indian fish culture has witnessed rapid development in the last 2-3 decades. As the farmers became well-known with the technology of different fish culture systems, they modified the technology to suit their requirements. Among the different modifications adopted by the farmers to suit their needs, the use of stunted carp fingerling around the year is important (Veerina et al., 1993).

The present study was conducted to evaluate the growth performance and survival rates of stunted fish fingerlings under varying stocking densities in cage culture conditions. The objective was to optimize the stocking density required to produce economically viable stunted yearlings at the pond site while determining the optimum range of stocking density for achieving favourable growth and survival rates, thereby ensuring economic feasibility.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Experimental site:** The present experiment was conducted for a period of six months (180 days)

from August to January 2013, 2014 and 2015 in the freshwater pond of L1 - SWMRU (Soil and Water Management Research Unit) Navsari Agricultural University (NAU) in Navsari District and L2 - CSSRS (Coastal Soil Salinity Research Station) Danti-Umbarhat, NAU Navsari.

The size of the cage was 15m<sup>3</sup> (2m x 4m x 2.5m). Cages were made with PVC pipe material with a thickness of 75mm and mesh size of 8mm knotless. Cages were settled in one floating bamboo frame. Nine floating cages were set up at once using bamboo (*Bambusa spinosa*), coir, kuralon nylon ropes plastic barrels, etc.

**Cage construction and installation:** In this experiment, 9 floating net cages each having an area of Outer dimension of 200cmx100cmx200cm (2 m<sup>3</sup>) and an Inner dimension of 200cmx100cmx90cm (1.8 m<sup>3</sup>) made of synthetic nylon net (mesh size 1.1 cm) were installed in the pond of both the locations. Every net cage was fixed and hung with a bamboo pole frame and enclosed at the top with another piece of plastic net (mesh size 2.5 cm) to prevent the runaway of fish by jumping and bird predation. The bamboo poles were enclosed with long pieces of wooden raft for trouble-free movement, feeding to fish and sampling of the experimental fish on the cage structure. The structure of the cage was fixed with anchors at both shore sides by nylon rope to make easy floating and moving of the whole cage structure with 9 individual cages depending on the water level.

**Fish stocking:** In the present study, three different stocking densities of rohu—100, 200, and 300 fish per cage—designated as T1, T2, and T3, respectively, were tested in triplicates for each treatment group. Hatchery-produced *Labeo rohita* (5.39±0.15 g) (mean±SD) were transported to the experimental site in oxygenated polyethylene bags and acclimated to the environment. The before being placed in the cages. The initial length and weight of each fingerlings were measured individually in centimeters (cm) and grams (g) using a scale and a digital electronic balance with accuracy upto up to 1 mm and 0.1 g, respectively. Finally, the. The cages were then randomly stocked with fish fry, and the number of fish in each cage was recorded according to the treatments.

Throughout the experimental period, any mortality was promptly recorded and removed. The cages were retrieved from the water at 15-

day intervals to inspect for potential damage and to ensure proper cleaning. A soft brush was used to clean each experimental unit (cage), removing algae, sponges, and other attached organisms. Additionally, the nets were routinely inspected for tears caused by predators, with damaged sections either repaired or replaced immediately as necessary.

**Sampling and data analysis:** Physico-chemical parameters of water such as temperature (°C), pH, hardness (mg/l) and total alkalinity (mg/l) were monitored weekly in the morning between 7 and 8 a.m. during the experiment as per the APHA (1992). Water temperature was recorded with a glass Celsius thermometer, pH was measured using a digital pocket pH meter. Other chemical parameters were measured using a titration method.

After 180 days of trial, the whole cage structure was moved to the shore of the pond and all fish were harvested by repeated scoop netting and then fish were counted, measured and weighed for each cage. To determine the growth response, yield and survivability of experimental fish, the following parameters were calculated:

$$\text{Weight gain (WG)} = \text{final fish weight (g)} - \text{initial fish weight (g)}$$

$$\text{Weight gain (\%)} = (\text{final weight} - \text{initial weight}) \times 100 / \text{initial weight}$$

$$\text{Average daily weight gain (ADWG)} = (\text{final fish weight} - \text{initial fish weight}) / \text{days}$$

The used stocking density for *Labeo rohita* was 100, 200 and 300 fry per cage. Fish fry was obtained from a private hatchery in Navsari. The fry was stocked in the morning hours. The rearing period for *L. rohita* was 6 months.

The fry was fed twice a day at a rate of 0.5% of body weight with the respective feed types. The amount of feed in respective feed types was mixed with water and prepared as dough. The feed dough was provided to the fish using a feeding tray hung inside the cages 60 cm below the water surface.

The means of the treatments were compared using one-way Analysis of Variance 'ANOVA' technique was applied to test the significance of the treatments. The data analysis was done at Department of Agricultural Statistics, Navsari Agricultural University, Navsari.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Average body weight:** The year-wise results related to the growth (weight) of stunted yearling of *L. rohita* at two locations and different stocking densities are reported in Table 1. The results presented in Table 1 revealed that all the treatment's effects were significant on average body weight (g) during individual years as well as in pooled analysis. Treatment T1 50/m<sup>3</sup> (100 nos/cage) recorded significantly higher growth than treatment T2 100/m<sup>3</sup> (200 nos/cage) and treatment T3 150/m<sup>3</sup> (300 nos/cage) of both locations during all the years. Among the treatments, T1 recorded significantly higher values of body weight (38.12 g) as compared to T2 (30.87 g) and T3 (27.19 g) but treatment T3 (27.19 g) was at par with T2 (30.87 g). Treatment T1 recorded higher average body weight at both locations during all the years 2013-14 (L1-31.30g and L2-35.98g), 2014-15 (L1-30.91g and L2-60.23g) and 2015-16 (L1-26.37g and L2-43.93g) as well as in pooled results (L1-29.53g and L2-46.72g) as compared to rest of the treatments. Statistical analysis in relation to the individual growth also supports in favour of 50/m<sup>3</sup> ( $p < 0.01$ ) than that of 100/m<sup>3</sup> and 150/m<sup>3</sup>. This is possibly due to low stocking density, enough natural live food and breathing space as well as fewer struggles prevailing in the condition. Lembi et al. (1968) and Kilambi et al. (1977) showed that decreasing individual growth with increasing stocking density might be due to more struggle during feeding at heavily populated cages.

In the present study, lower stocking density 50/m<sup>3</sup> (100 fish/cage) of stunted *L. rohita* in cages showed superior growth performance in terms of higher final body weight, which indicates that at lower stocking density stunted fish have superior growth potential. On the other side, higher 150/m<sup>3</sup> stocking density (300 fish/cage) negatively affected the growth performance of stunted rohu. In broad-spectrum, at higher stocking densities, individual fish get reduced breathing space which affects social interaction and increases stress. In stressed situations, fish spend additional energy for stress mitigation which reduces the regular growth of fish (Biswas et al., 2015; Ofor and Afia, 2015). Similar growth pattern was reported in catla fish (Sukumaran et al., 1986; Govind et al., 1988) Rohu fish (Kohli et al., 2002; Chattopadhyay et al., 2013; Biswas et al., 2015) hybrid catfish (Ofor and Afia, 2015) *Labeo catla* and *Labeo rohita* (Kohli, 2002).

High stocking density is accepted as a stressor by many scientists for a number of species (Wedemeyer, 1976; Klinger et al., 1983; Gatlin et

al., 1986; Vijayan et al., 1990). Veerinaet al. (1993) stated that the fish farmers in Andhra Pradesh generate stunted carp fish fingerling by stocking early fingerling at higher stocking densities with sub-optimal levels of feeding and rearing them for 6 to 12 months. Puttaswamy and Ramesh (1995) have reported the production of stunted Indian major carp fingerling of 28 to 30 g size by stocking fry at one lakh/ha and rearing for 6 months, with sub-optimal level of feeding and fertilization. Vijayan and Leatherland, (1988) have shown a significant decrease in food consumption and feed gain ratio of fish stocked at high stocking densities indicative of a decrease in the metabolic efficiency. Dimitrov (1976) stated that the best production of carp in floating cages was achieved at higher stocking densities (80 and 50 fish/m<sup>2</sup>) than the lower one (25 fish/m<sup>2</sup>). Backiel and Le Cren (1967) show that the growth and production of fish are to a certain extent, dependent on the population density. Powell (1972) mentioned the harmful effects of higher stocking density on the culture of fish were the decline of growth rate, increase of FCR and low survival rate. A higher survival rate in the present study was obtained in low stocking density (50/m<sup>3</sup>) cages.

**Average body length:** The results revealed that the treatment effect on the final length of *L. rohita* fish was not significant at both locations during the second and third years, as well as treatments were also recorded as non-significant during the third year. The effect of stocking density was significant on body weight. But it was not so in the case of body length. In all the cases treatment T1 (50/m<sup>3</sup>) showed superiority over treatment T2 (100/m<sup>3</sup>) and T3(150/m<sup>3</sup>).

In all the years, the effect of locations and treatments on the number of fish stocked was significant during the second and third years in length of fish. In all the treatments, stocking densities of *L. rohita* fish @ 50/m<sup>3</sup> (100 nos/cage) showed superior over 100/m<sup>3</sup> (200 nos/cage) and 150/m<sup>3</sup> (300 nos/cage) at both locations. During all the years, the L x T interaction effect was significant in the stocking density of *L. rohita* fish. Treatment T1 recorded higher average fish body length at both locations during all the years 2013-14 (L1-12.37cm and L2-14.42cm), 2014-15 (L1-14.01cm and L2 17.30 cm) and 2015-16 (L1-13.43 cm and L2- 15.99 cm) as well as in pooled results (L1-13.27 cm and L2-15.91 cm) as compared to rest of the treatments. Here also, T1 recorded significantly higher length of fish than T2 and T3 but T3 was at par with T2 of the combinations.

**Table 1. Effect of different treatments on mean final body weight (g) of *L. rohita* fish (Mean of 10 nos)**

Treatments	Final Weight											
	Year-1			Year-2			Year-3			Pooled		
	L1	L2	MEAN	L1	L2	MEAN	L1	L2	MEAN	L1	L2	MEAN
T1	31.30	35.98	<b>33.64</b>	30.91	60.23	<b>45.57</b>	26.37	43.93	<b>35.15</b>	29.53	46.72	<b>38.12</b>
T2	24.53	27.37	<b>25.95</b>	27.00	49.80	<b>38.40</b>	22.65	33.88	<b>28.27</b>	24.73	37.02	<b>30.87</b>
T3	22.97	19.15	<b>21.06</b>	20.32	46.73	<b>33.53</b>	22.33	31.61	<b>26.97</b>	21.87	32.50	<b>27.19</b>
<b>MEAN</b>	<b>26.27</b>	<b>27.50</b>	<b>26.88</b>	<b>26.08</b>	<b>52.26</b>	<b>39.17</b>	<b>23.78</b>	<b>36.48</b>	<b>30.13</b>	<b>25.38</b>	<b>38.74</b>	<b>32.06</b>
	<b>SEm±</b>	<b>CD at 5%</b>		<b>SEm±</b>	<b>CD at 5%</b>		<b>SEm±</b>	<b>CD at 5%</b>		<b>SEm±</b>	<b>CD at 5%</b>	
L	0.8115	NS	L	2.3665	7.79	L	0.4289	1.32	L	5.0973	NS	
T	0.9939	3.06	T	2.8983	8.93	T	0.5253	1.62	T	1.0115	<b>2.89</b>	
LxT	1.4056	4.33	LxT	4.0988	NS	LxT	0.7428	2.29	LxT	1.4330	NS	
CV%	9.06			15.13			4.27		YL	1.4654	<b>4.51</b>	
									YT	1.7948	NS	
									YLT	2.5382	NS	
									Y	1.4050	NS	
									CV%	12.71		

L1=Location 1, L2= Location 2, T1= Treatment 1, T2= Treatment 2, Treatment 3

**Table 2. Effect of different treatments on mean final body length (cm) of *L. rohita* fish (Mean of 10 nos)**

Treatments	Final Length											
	Year-1			Year-2			Year-3			Pooled		
	L1	L2	MEAN	L1	L2	MEAN	L1	L2	MEAN	L1	L2	MEAN
T1	12.37	14.42	<b>13.40</b>	14.01	17.30	<b>15.66</b>	13.43	15.99	<b>14.71</b>	13.27	15.91	<b>14.59</b>
T2	13.00	13.51	<b>13.26</b>	13.34	16.72	<b>15.03</b>	12.55	14.68	<b>13.62</b>	12.96	14.97	<b>13.97</b>
T3	12.70	11.74	<b>12.22</b>	13.87	16.19	<b>15.03</b>	12.90	14.40	<b>13.65</b>	13.16	14.11	<b>13.63</b>
<b>MEAN</b>	<b>12.69</b>	<b>13.23</b>	<b>12.96</b>	<b>13.74</b>	<b>16.74</b>	<b>15.24</b>	<b>12.96</b>	<b>15.03</b>	<b>13.99</b>	<b>13.13</b>	<b>15.00</b>	<b>14.06</b>
	<b>SEm±</b>	<b>CD at 5%</b>		<b>SEm±</b>	<b>CD at 5%</b>		<b>SEm±</b>	<b>CD at 5%</b>		<b>SEm±</b>	<b>CD at 5%</b>	
L	0.5090	NS	L	0.7392	3.5757	L	0.1556	0.48	L	0.3176	0.90	
T	0.6234	NS	T	0.9054	NS	T	0.1905	0.59	T	0.3582	NS	
LxT	0.8816	NS	LxT	1.2804	NS	LxT	0.2695	NS	LxT	0.5050	NS	
CV%	11.78			14.55			3.34		YL	0.5259	NS	
									YT	0.6441	NS	
									YLT	0.9109	NS	
									Y	0.2962	NS	
									CV%	11.22		

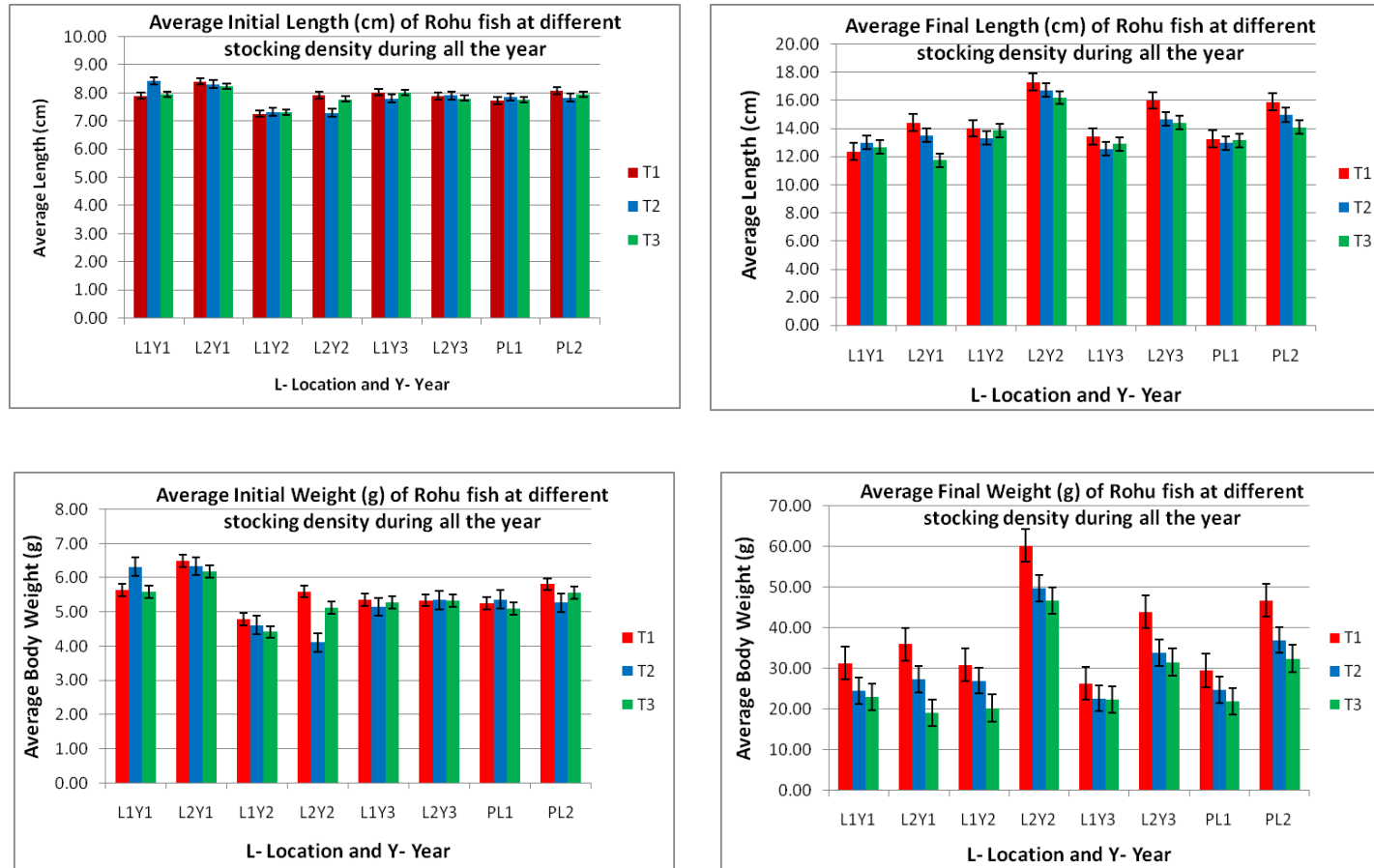


Fig. 1. Growth performance, of *L. rohita* fingerlings, reared in cages under different stocking densities

**Table 3. Average survival rate (%) of *L. rohita* fish (Stunted yearlings)**

Treatments/Location	Year-1	Year-2	Year-3	Mean
L1T1	72.33	99.33	98.33	90.00
L1T2	81.00	97.00	97.17	91.72
L1T3	67.83	97.78	96.56	87.39
Mean	73.72	98.04	97.35	89.70
L2T1	76.50	99.33	99.33	91.72
L2T2	71.44	97.67	98.17	89.09
L2T3	88.78	96.56	97.11	94.15
Mean	78.91	97.85	98.20	91.65

**Table 4. Water temperature and quality parameters (Mean±SD)**

Location	Parameters			2013	2014	2015	
				Mean			
L1 (SWMRU Pond)	Air	Max	Range	23-34	23-30	24-27	
			Avg±SD	29.0±3.40	26.4±2.42	25.9±1.24	
	Temp (°C)	Min	Range	12-25	13-22	17-25	
			Avg±SD	20.0±4.74	17.5±2.77	21.7±2.5	
	Water Temp (°C)	Surface	Range	21-31	20-28	23-27	
			Avg±SD	27.0±2.82	24.3±2.70	25.3±1.15	
		Bottom	Range	24-32	25-32	25-29	
			Avg±SD	29.3±2.34	27.9±2.30	27.0±1.28	
	Alkalinity (ppm)			Range	132-169	130-244	152-208
				Avg±SD	151.5±14.00	179.7±39.16	188.3±18.28
pH			Range	7.9-8.3	7.12-8.54	7.64-8.59	
			Avg±SD	8.12±0.16	8.08±0.36	8.02±0.26	
L2 (Danti Pond)	Air	Max	Range	23-32	21-31	26-31	
			Avg±SD	28.9±2.92	26.5±3.63	28.1±1.51	
	Temp (°C)	Min	Range	13-25	14-21	20-27	
			Avg±SD	21.6±4.17	17.6±1.98	23.3±2.27	
	Water Temp (°C)	Surface	Range	21-29	20-31	20-26	
			Avg±SD	26.9±2.59	24.9±3.82	24.3±1.91	
		Bottom	Range	22-33	25-33	23-29	
			Avg±SD	28.4±3.10	28.1±3.37	26.1±1.73	
	Alkalinity (ppm)			Range	139-206	129-286	157-274
				Avg±SD	168.3±18.09	209.5±47.71	201.2±29.49
pH			Range	7.7-8.5	7.5-8.7	7.9-8.7	
			Avg±SD	8.11±0.19	8.05±0.34	8.38±0.21	

**Survival rates:** The fish survival data revealed that at both the locations and during all the years did not show much variation (Table 3). As per the survival rate in different treatments, T3 (150/m<sup>3</sup>) is found most economical (Table 5). The results pertaining to the year-wise and pooled yield of *L. rohita* are reported in Table 1. The results revealed that during individual years as well as in pooled analysis, only the main effect of stocking density was found to be significant on the growth of *L. rohita*. In all cases, the Danti location (L2) recorded significantly higher average body weight in comparison to the SWMRU location (L1), but in pooled results, the difference between L1 and L2 was not significant.

Disease has been a major problem in aquaculture which is mostly due to its intensification (Gopal Rao et al., 1992; Robinette and Noga, 2001). The obtainable information suggests the improved performance of stunted carp fingerling in terms of growth and survival when stocked in rearing ponds with the most favourable environment. In the present study, the survival rate recorded for stunted rohu (87-94%) was slightly higher compared to normal mrigal (84.87%). Similar results with regard to stocking densities and survival rates have been reported by earlier workers (Refstie, 1977; Trzebiatowski et al., 1981; Holm et al., 1990). Veerinaet al. (1993) reported that in Andhra Pradesh, farmers obtained a mean survival rate of 70% when fish

**Table 5. Economics cost of production (per cubic meter basis)**

Treatments	Survival	No. of survivors	ABW (g)	Biomass (Kg)	Total feed (Kg)	Total cost of feed (Rs.)	Labour (Rs.)	Total operational cost (Rs.)	Gross income (Rs.)	Net income (Rs.)	BC ratio (Rs.)	Per yearling cost (Rs.)
<b>T1</b>	90.86	91	29.53	2.68	6.71	74	112.5	186.27	636.01	449.74	2.41	2.05
<b>T2</b>	90.41	181	24.73	4.47	11.18	123	112.5	235.46	1265.72	1030.26	4.38	1.30
<b>T3</b>	90.77	272	21.87	5.96	14.89	164	112.5	276.30	1906.17	1629.87	5.90	1.01

**Assumptions**

1. Feed cost - Rs. 11/kg
2. Labor cost calculated as 1 hr/day
3. Fingerling cost-Rs. 1/no.
4. Yearling market rate- Rs.7/no.
5. Rearing period - 6 months



reared under high density. So, in the present rearing system of rohu at high stocking density with a sub-optimal level of feeding, the survival rate obtained can be considered to be economical.

**Quality parameters:** Fortnightly water samples were collected from both ponds (locations) and analyzed for pH and alkalinity. Water temperature data like air temperature, surface and bottom were taken on the pond site. Physico-chemical parameters at both locations did not have significant variations and were within the optimum range (table 4).

The water quality parameters measured at both SWMRU Pond (L1) and Danti Pond (L2) were within the suitable range for *Labeo rohita* growth under cage culture conditions. Air and water temperatures showed variation, with slightly higher averages at L1 compared to L2 across the years. Alkalinity levels were moderate to high, with slightly increasing trends observed over the study period. The pH levels remained stable and slightly alkaline, indicating favourable conditions for fish growth and health.

**Economics:** As the L x T interaction was not significant, the economics was calculated based on pooled results under investigation. Considering the seed yield of *L. rohita* fish and cost of cage culture, cost of feed, cost of labour, per yearling cost, gross income, net income and BCR were computed. The results showed that among the treatments of T3 (50/m<sup>3</sup>), gave a higher net income of Rs. 1906.17 with a benefit-cost ratio (BCR) of 5.90. The cost of production for producing stunted yearlings for T3(50/m<sup>3</sup>) is lower (Rs. 1.01) than those of all other treatments (Table 5).

The total cost increased with increasing stocking density generally due to higher operational costs (cost on fingerlings and feed) incurred at higher stocking density, while the capital cost was the same for all treatments. A similar trend was observed for gross income which was due to maximum yield from higher stocking density. The highest economic stocking density is the one that can get the maximum biomass/unit area, maximum net revenue and the highest BCR. These were achieved at the stocking density of 150 fingerlings/m<sup>3</sup>. However, an increase in net profit with increasing stocking density was shown in the case of Asian river catfish (Jiwyam, 2011) and African catfish (Hengsawat et al., 1997), which maybe because catfishes can accept high

levels of crowding stress and withstand inferior water quality compared to carps. Furthermore, in the above two experiments, growth retardation was not observed even in the higher stocking density tested. Economic production of fish may also be determined by the market value and consumers' preference for fish size (Hengsawat et al., 1997; Rahman et al., 2006). *L. bata* has a very good market price and consumer preference with sizes as small as 15–20 g (Datta et al., 1996; Bhattacharya et al., 2008). Furthermore, more crops can be produced if the target size is small as in the present case. Large rohu (>100 g) fetches a higher market price, which may be achieved at higher production cost and/ or duration. To produce larger Table 5 fish, alternatively, the stocking size of rohu can be increased, which demands additional experiments be conducted in the future.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The findings from the three-year study reveal that for achieving optimal growth and production of stunted yearling rohu (*Labeo rohita*) under cage culture conditions, a stocking density of 100 fingerlings per cage is the most suitable. However, a stocking density of 300 fingerlings per cage is recommended for maximizing economic returns. The results also indicate that stunted rohu exhibits superior growth performance at lower stocking densities, with 50/m<sup>3</sup> (100 fish per cage) being ideal for rearing. From an economic standpoint, treatment T3, with a stocking density of 150/m<sup>3</sup>, emerges as the most cost-effective option.

In conclusion, optimal growth and production of stunted yearling rohu (*Labeo rohita*) under cage culture conditions are best achieved with a stocking density of 100 fingerlings per cage. However, for maximizing economic returns, a stocking density of 300 fingerlings per cage is recommended. Superior growth performance is observed at lower stocking densities, with 50 fish/m<sup>3</sup> (100 fish per cage) being ideal for rearing. From an economic perspective, treatment T3, with a stocking density of 150 fish/m<sup>3</sup>, emerges as the most cost-effective approach.

#### DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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