

IMPACT: CROP YIELD

Reference 7

Smith, OM; Cohen, AL; Rieser, CJ; Davis, AG; Taylor, JM; Adesanya, AW; Jones, MS; Meier, AR; Reganold, JP; Orpet, RJ; Northfield, TD; Crowder, DW 2019 Organic Farming Provides Reliable Environmental Benefits but Increases Variability in Crop Yields: A Global Meta-Analysis FRONTIERS IN SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS 3 10.3389/fsufs.2019.00082

Background and objective

While many studies address the mean effects of ecologically intensive farming systems on sustainability metrics, few have considered variability. This represents a knowledge gap because producers depend on reliable provisioning of yields, profits, and environmental services to enhance the sustainability of their production systems over time. The objective of this meta-analysis is to assess the mean and variability of seven sustainability metrics from paired comparison studies of organic and conventional systems.

Search strategy and selection criteria

Data were leveraged from prior meta-analyses that reported means and standard deviations for paired organic and conventional systems related to the seven metrics of sustainability (biotic abundance, biotic richness, soil organic carbon, soil carbon stocks, crop yield, total production costs, and profitability). Estimates were gathered from the meta-data, which included one metric of mean and standard deviation averaged across replicates and years for each crop and/or organism measured in each study.

Data and analysis

Once log response-ratio effect sizes were calculated, one-sample t-tests were used to determine whether the mean effect sizes for each sustainability metric, and associated variability, differed between conventional and organic sites. In parallel with the t-tests, 90% confidence intervals were calculated for each metric examined by adding and subtracting from the mean the standard error multiplied by the critical t-value at an α of 0.10 for a two-tailed test.

Number of papers	Population	Intervention	Comparator	Outcome	Quality score
9	Previous meta-analyses assessing the performance of organic systems in comparison to conventional systems.	Organic systems (annual and perennial crops)	Conventional systems	Metric: Crop yield; Effect size: Logarithm of ratio of the considered metrics in the intervention to the considered metrics in the control.	56.25

Results

- Compared to conventional sites, organic sites had lower mean yields. However, the yield gap for perennial crops was not statistically significant.
- Compared to conventional sites, organic sites had higher yield variability (CV).
- Cropping systems with the highest yields tended to have the least variable yields.
- NULL
- NULL

Factors influencing effect sizes

- No factors influencing effect sizes to report

Conclusion

Lower mean yield and higher yield variability in organic systems than in conventional systems. No significant difference in perennials crop yield.