FARMING PRACTICE
SOIL AMENDMENT WITH BIOCHAR

IMPACT: NUTRIENT LEACHING AND RUN-OFF

Reference 27

Liu, Q; Zhang, YH; Liu, BJ; Amonette, JE; Lin, ZB; Liu, G; Ambus, P; Xie, ZB 2018 How does biochar influence soil N cycle? A meta-analysis Plant Soil 426:211–25 10.1007/s11104-018-3619-4

Background and objective

The amendment of soils with biochar has been suggested as a promising solution to regulate the soil N cycle and reduce N effluxes. However, a comprehensive and quantitative understanding of biochar impacts on soil N cycle remains elusive. 1) identify how and why the response of soil N cycle to biochar application varies across different biochar and soil properties; and 2) explore whether biochar production process entails hidden risk of extra pollutant N emissions. The study is expected to develop constructive biochar management for decreasing soil N losses without incurring negative side effects.

Search strategy and selection criteria

A literature search was performed through Web of Science, Google Scholar, Springer Link, Wiley Blackwell, and China Knowledge Resource Integrated (CNKI) databases using the keywords 'biochar', 'black carbon', 'soil', 'nitrogen'. 1) the research was on soil N cycle in response to biochar addition; 2) biochar was produced by pyrolyzing organic materials anaerobically (technology levels range from highly advanced facilities to simply equipped stoves); and 3) control and biochar treatments were subjected to the same management (e.g. same tillage, watering, fertilization, or residue addition).

Data and analysis

Mean effect sizes and the 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals (CIs) based on 9999 iterations for each grouping categories were generated based on a random-effect model. The total heterogeneity of effect sizes among studies (QT) was partitioned into within-group (QW) and between-group (QB) heterogeneity. A QB larger than a critical value suggests a significant difference between subgroups.

Number of papers	Population	Intervention	Comparator	Outcome	Quality score
208	Not specified	Soil amendment with biochar	No amendment	Metric: Nitrogen leaching; Effect size: Logarithm of ratio of the considered metrics in the intervention to the considered metrics in the control	0.6875

Results

- Biochar on average significantly reduces the leaching of soil NH_4+, NO_3-, and total inorganic N by 22% ($P = 0.009$), 29% ($P < 0.001$), and 26% ($P < 0.001$), respectively.
- Wood biochar leads to the highest decrease in soil total inorganic N leaching, which is slightly more efficient than straw biochar, while manure biochar has a non-significant effect on soil N-leaching.
- Biochar produced under lower pyrolysis temperature is more effective in reducing soil N leaching.

Factors influencing effect sizes

- Soil organic carbon : In soils with lower organic carbon, biochar favors a larger decrease in soil total inorganic N leaching
- Biochar application rate : Along with the increase of biochar addition rate, the extent of decrease in soil total inorganic N leaching increases

Conclusion

Biochar on average significantly reduces the leaching of soil NH_4+, NO_3-. Wood biochar and biochar produced under lower pyrolysis temperature lead to the highest decrease in soil total inorganic N leaching.