Measurement of Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Sugarcane Plantation Soil in Thailand
Wilaiwan Sornpoon, Sébastien Bonnet, Savitri Garivait

Abstract—Continuous measurements of greenhouse gases (GHGs) emitted from soils are required to understand diurnal and seasonal variations in soil emissions and related mechanisms. This understanding plays an important role in appropriate quantification and assessment of the overall change in soil carbon flow and budget. This study proposes to monitor GHGs emissions from soil under sugarcane cultivation in Thailand. The measurements were conducted over 379 days. The results showed that the total net amount of GHGs emitted from sugarcane plantation soil amounts to 36 Mg CO₂eq ha⁻¹. Carbon dioxide (CO₂) and nitrous oxide (N₂O) were found to be the main contributors to the emissions. For methane (CH₄), the net emission was found to be almost zero. The measurement results also confirmed that soil moisture content and GHGs emissions are positively correlated.

Keywords—Soil, GHG emission, Sugarcane, Agriculture, Thailand.

I. INTRODUCTION

CLIMATE change continues to be a topic of considerable scientific debate and public concern. The concentration of greenhouse gases (GHG) including carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), and nitrous oxide (N₂O) in the atmosphere has been significantly increased due to human activities. This has given rise to growing concern about the consequences of such increase on global warming and climate change [1],[2]. Agricultural production plays an important role in atmospheric greenhouse gas concentration [3],[4] and agricultural soils are also viewed as a large contributor to GHG emissions, especially CH₄ from wetland fields [5], and CO₂ and N₂O for upland field [2]. The contribution of agricultural soils to CO₂, CH₄, and N₂O emissions depends on a biophysical process and a decomposition process of organic residue in soils. CO₂ is produced in the aerobic condition, while CH₄ is produced in the anaerobic condition, and N₂O produced naturally in the soil through microbial processes of nitrification and denitrification [6]. Also, emissions of GHG are significantly influenced by environmental factors such as temperature and rainfall, and by farm management practices. On the other hand, agricultural soils play an important role in the GHG global budget, with 3.5% of total carbon reserve of the earth [7]. A better understanding the emissions from agricultural soils is therefore a key issue for an effective quantification and of assessment of the overall change in the soil carbon flow and budget.

In Thailand, sugarcane cropping accounted for 1.28 million ha in Thailand in 2012 [8], with two different residue management systems; burning and no-burning sugarcane residue in the field. The cultivation of sugarcane is expected to expand during the next decades to support food and especially bioethanol production to meet the national energy need of the region. Currently, data on carbon flow and budget in sugarcane plantation system are still very scarce or inexistent, and consequently any evaluation of GHGs emissions from sugarcane plantation is difficult. On the other hand, an accurate and reliable quantification of soil emissions is required to better understand the agro-ecosystem response to global change. The objective of this study is to quantify the CO₂, CH₄, and N₂O emissions from sugarcane plantation soils over the whole growing seasons. Monitoring of GHGs conducted at experimental sites under burned and unburned sugarcane cultivation areas is described and discussed. GHGs emissions from sugarcane plantation are then analyzed and assessed.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A. Experimental Site

Field experiments were carried out on a sugarcane farm in Nakhon Sawan province, northern region of Thailand. This site has been cropped for over 20 years with sugarcane. The cropping system is consisted of sugarcane plant crop in rotation with 2-3 years ratoon. The sugarcane is harvested annually. The climate of this province is classified as a tropical monsoon climate, i.e. warm and wet conditions in summer and cool in winter. The mean annual temperature of the study area is 28.8°C. Regarding the rainfall, the annual average is about 1,100mm, of which about 86% occur during the period running from May to October as shown in Fig. 1 [9].
Emission measurements were made in blocks of sugarcane plant crop. Two treatments, i.e. with and without field burning, were implemented over a one year cropping cycle during January 2012-January 2013. Each of treatments was applied at a plot of 12m x 50m. For the treatment with burning, the selected area has been burned annually over the past 20 years. The area without burning was set in a plot which had not been burned for more than four years before the experiment, and located in the adjacent site of the area with burning. The soil was tilled in December 2011, after harvesting the ratoon crop. During the dry season, sugarcane variety KHONKEN 3 was planted in January 2012 with three times of irrigation. About 185 kg N ha\(^{-1}\) were applied annually, including 44 kg N ha\(^{-1}\) as a basal fertilizer at the planting time, and 141 kg N ha\(^{-1}\) in slits cut to a depth of 10-15 cm on each side of planted row and then covered with soil. The fertilizer application rates and timing was determined base on the typical practices of the local farmer.

TABLE I

SOIL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EXPERIMENTAL SITE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depth (cm)</th>
<th>Texture</th>
<th>pH</th>
<th>Organic matter (%)</th>
<th>Total nitrogen (g kg(^{-1}))</th>
<th>Phosphorus (mg kg(^{-1}))</th>
<th>Exchangeable K (mg kg(^{-1}))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Burned area</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-10</td>
<td>Clay</td>
<td>7.87 (0.15)</td>
<td>1.75 (0.06)</td>
<td>2.07 (0.03)</td>
<td>4.00 (1.15)</td>
<td>171.33 (9.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-30</td>
<td>Clay</td>
<td>7.93 (0.07)</td>
<td>1.30 (0.06)</td>
<td>1.87 (0.07)</td>
<td>2.67 (1.67)</td>
<td>143.67 (11.41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-55</td>
<td>Clay</td>
<td>8.13 (0.12)</td>
<td>0.47 (0.07)</td>
<td>1.47 (0.15)</td>
<td>&lt;1.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>37.33 (9.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-72</td>
<td>Clay loam</td>
<td>8.13 (0.12)</td>
<td>0.57 (0.09)</td>
<td>1.17 (0.07)</td>
<td>&lt;1.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>52.33 (13.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72-100</td>
<td>Clay loam</td>
<td>8.20 (0.06)</td>
<td>0.45 (0.03)</td>
<td>1.03 (0.03)</td>
<td>&lt;1.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>32.33 (6.89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unburned area</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-10</td>
<td>Clay</td>
<td>7.83 (0.09)</td>
<td>2.23 (0.03)</td>
<td>2.27 (0.18)</td>
<td>&lt;1.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>171.67 (1.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-30</td>
<td>Clay</td>
<td>8.00 (0.17)</td>
<td>1.40 (0.12)</td>
<td>1.80 (0.12)</td>
<td>&lt;1.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>145.67 (16.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-55</td>
<td>Clay</td>
<td>8.10 (0.20)</td>
<td>0.47 (0.04)</td>
<td>1.33 (0.09)</td>
<td>&lt;1.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>46.33 (13.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-72</td>
<td>Clay loam</td>
<td>8.00 (0.21)</td>
<td>0.57 (0.05)</td>
<td>1.23 (0.07)</td>
<td>&lt;1.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>51.67 (6.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72-100</td>
<td>Clay loam</td>
<td>8.03 (0.15)</td>
<td>0.48 (0.02)</td>
<td>1.17 (0.12)</td>
<td>&lt;1.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>57.00 (10.58)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The area can be classified as high activity clay soil type with low organic carbon. It is described locally as a Takhil and Mollisols soil series according to the USDA classification. The soil characteristics of the experimental site located in the burned and unburned areas are reported in Table I.

B. Emission Measurement

A one-year experiment was conducted at the farmer’s field in the first year of planting, called the plant crop. Soil CO\(_2\), CH\(_4\), and N\(_2\)O fluxes were measured, and information on the local weather conditions, soil and farming management practices was collected during the experiment period. Gas samples were collected using static chamber method over 379 days of growing seasons (January 2012-January 2013). Six manual chambers were installed in the burned and unburned plots. Three chambers were placed at the middle of a row and the other three chambers at the between-row spacing over the fertilizer slit. To monitor the net GHG exchange through soil respiration while prevent the effect of photosynthesis, 0.25m x 0.25m x 0.15m size opaque chambers were used and installed in the area without plants. Gas samples were collected twice a month during the growth period, between 9 am to 12 pm. Each chamber was monitored by turn for 20 minutes for CO\(_2\) and CH\(_4\) emissions, and 30-60 minutes for N\(_2\)O emissions. Gas samples were extracted using a mini air pump (Mini Pump MP-2N, Sibata, Japan) at a flow rate of 2.5 L m\(^{-1}\) to inject into an aluminum Tedlar bag. Then, they were analyzed for CO\(_2\), CH\(_4\), and N\(_2\)O at the laboratory within 2-3 days after sampling. The concentrations of CO\(_2\) and CH\(_4\) in the gas samples were determined by gas chromatography (GC) using a flame ionization detector (FID), and N\(_2\)O by GC using 63Ni electron capture detector (ECD).

For assessment, the gas concentrations obtained from the chamber headspace were converted to mass or molecular basis using the ideal gas law depending on the temperature and pressure of enclosed air as shown in (1):

\[
C_i = \frac{q_i M_i P}{RT}
\]

where, \(C_i\) is the gas concentration in term of mass per volume concentration (mg. m\(^{-3}\)), \(q_i\) is the gas concentration in term of
volume per volume concentration (ppmv), M is molecular weight of each trace gas (g mol\(^{-1}\): 44 for CO\(_2\), 16 for CH\(_4\), and 44 for N\(_2\)O), P is the atmospheric pressure (1 atm), T is air temperature inside the chamber (K), and R is universal gas constant (0.08205 atm m\(^3\)/kmol K\(^{-1}\)).

Gas fluxes were calculated based on the slope of the gas concentration in the five samples taken at the measurement periods (2):

\[
F = \frac{V}{A} \frac{dC}{dt}
\]

where: F is gas flux (mg m\(^{-2}\) h\(^{-1}\)), V is chamber volume (m\(^3\)), A is the surface area covered by the chamber (m\(^2\)), and \(\frac{dC}{dt}\) is the increase/decrease rates of gas concentration (mg m\(^{-3}\) h\(^{-1}\)).

Daily average CO\(_2\), CH\(_4\), and N\(_2\)O fluxes and their standard error were calculated based on the original data measured in the field. In addition, all values of GHG emissions were converted to CO\(_2\) equivalent following the individual global warming potential for a period of 100 years for each gas using 1 for CO\(_2\), 21 for CH\(_4\), 310 for N\(_2\)O [10].

The ambient air temperature and rainfall data were collected from the local meteorological station near the experimental site. The air temperatures within the chambers were also recorded during each of gas sampling. Soil volumetric moisture content and soil temperature at the top soil (0-5 cm) near the soil chamber were measured using the soil moisture meter (ThetaProbe-HH2, Delta-T Devices Ltd., UK).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The 24-hour measurement period of CO\(_2\), CH\(_4\), and N\(_2\)O fluxes indicated that there was a clear diurnal cycle in the daily emission with high values during the daytime and low values at the nighttime as shown in Fig. 2. The influence of soil temperature and high soil aeration during the day are indeed affected by the gas diffusion in line with the study by Denmead et al. [11]. The observed daily pattern of GHG flux variation was probably due to the temperature change during the daytime, i.e. when the soil temperature increased, the soil effluxes also increased.

Regarding the daily flux, the GHGs fluxes of the burned and unburned sugarcane cropping systems were determined over 379 days during growing season. Weighted contribution to the total area of the sugarcane plant-rows (61.37%) and spaces between-rows (38.27%) were used to estimate the gas flux per hectare basis for both treatments. Hourly fluxes were scaled up to daily fluxes with correction of the diurnal variation for each gas emission.

From Fig. 3, the soil CO\(_2\) emissions from the sugarcane plant-row area were significantly higher than that emission from the spaces between-rows area. The trend of CO\(_2\) emissions was found to increase with the plant age. On the other hand, no significant difference of CO\(_2\) emission was observed between the burned and unburned sites. The total CO\(_2\) fluxes over 379 day of planting (DAP) were about 35.56 ± 0.73 and 35.99 ± 1.20 Mg ha\(^{-1}\) for burned and unburned areas, respectively. The soil CO\(_2\) emission rates of the growth season were 93.84 ± 1.94 kg ha\(^{-1}\) day\(^{-1}\) for burned plot, and 94.96 ± 3.16 kg ha\(^{-1}\) day\(^{-1}\) for unburned plot.

Regarding CH\(_4\) emissions, they were close to zero as what could be expected for dry crop soil. In addition, for both burned and unburned areas, there was no significant difference between the sugarcane plant-rows and spaces between-row areas as shown in Fig. 3. The CH\(_4\) emission rate for the unburned treatment was -1.24 ± 0.20 g ha\(^{-1}\) day\(^{-1}\), and -1.28 ± 0.17 g ha\(^{-1}\) day\(^{-1}\) for the burned area. Likewise, there was insignificant difference in the total CH\(_4\) emission over the measurement period between the two sites, -0.48 ± 0.07 and -0.47 ± 0.08 kg ha\(^{-1}\) for the burned and unburned system, respectively.

For N\(_2\)O, the emission from sugarcane plant-rows soil was significantly lower than that from spaces between-row soil (Fig. 3). The N\(_2\)O emission rate mean daily value under the burned system was 4.86 ± 1.16 g ha\(^{-1}\) day\(^{-1}\), and 4.73 ± 0.99 g ha\(^{-1}\) day\(^{-1}\) for the unburned one. The total emission of N\(_2\)O of the whole growth period was 1.84 ± 0.42 and 1.79 ± 0.38 kg ha\(^{-1}\) for burned and unburned system, respectively. No significant difference in N\(_2\)O emissions was observed between the two sites.

For soil volumetric moisture content and soil temperature, the difference between burned and unburned sugarcane areas was insignificant. Also, it was found that soil moisture content was positively correlated with GHGs emitted from soil, while none correlation was between soil emission and soil temperature.

Table II summarizes the GHGs emissions from soils in the burned and unburned areas as shown in Fig. 2. The influence of soil temperature and high soil aeration during the day are indeed affected by the gas diffusion in line with the study by Denmead et al. [11]. The observed daily pattern of GHG flux variation was probably due to the temperature change during the daytime, i.e. when the soil temperature increased, the soil effluxes also increased.

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Fig. 2 Example of diurnal cycle of soil CO₂, CH₄, and N₂O flux at (a) the middle of sugarcane plant-rows and (b) the spaces between-rows of the burned area (measurements of 23 March 2012, i.e. during the dry season)
The close chamber technique was used for monitoring GHG including CO₂, CH₄, and N₂O emitted from sugarcane plantation soils under burned and unburned systems in Thailand. The measurement was done over 379 days during the 2012/2013 growing season of a new plant crop. It was found that no significant difference in total GHGs emission from soils under the burned and unburned systems. The net emission for the season of one year cycle was 36 Mg CO₂eq ha⁻¹, of which 99% were reported as CO₂. Nearly none emission was observed for CH₄. The emission of N₂O from sugarcane plantation soils was very small, only 0.38 – 0.39 Mg CO₂eq ha⁻¹. In addition, it was found that the soil moisture content was an important factor in controlling GHGs fluxes from soil, especially for CH₄. The results obtained from this experiment were under site-specific conditions, e.g. new plant crop, one-year growing season only, etc., and therefore may not be representative of all sugarcane plantations in Thailand. To confirm the findings of this study, a multi-growing seasons continuous monitoring of at least three years at different regions of the country is highly recommended.

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REFERENCES


