



# Nitrous Oxide Emissions Generated in Coffee Cultivation: A Systematic Review

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## ABSTRACT

The objective of the research was to provide an overview of soil N<sub>2</sub>O emissions in coffee cropping systems; summarizing available field data on soil emissions and identifying controlling factors (fertilizer type, precipitation, temperature, altitude). A systematic search of Scopus, Science Direct, Springer, and Scielo for experimental-type studies was conducted from January 2000 to October 2021. Of the seventy manuscripts determined through the search strategy, eight studies met the inclusion criteria. Analysis of the included studies revealed that they were conducted in Ecuador, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua; the rainfall of the fields ranged from 910 mm to 2740 mm per year and the average temperature was 20.3°C. Coffee is planted under agroforestry systems and monocultures; in addition, the most abundant forest species in coffee agroforestry systems are leguminous plants of the Inga and Erythrina genus and 60% of the studies have been developed with the Catuai coffee variety. The pH and humidity of the soil where coffee plantations are developed range from 4.67 to 6.34 and 53.3 to 67.05% respectively. Finally, the fertilizers used are of chemical, organic, and chemical + polymer origin, at fertilization rates ranging from 66 to 400 kg.N.ha<sup>-1</sup>.yr<sup>-1</sup> and N<sub>2</sub>O emissions ranging from 0.2 to 12.8 kg.N.ha<sup>-1</sup>.yr<sup>-1</sup>. Overall, the present systematic review provides a scientific basis for evaluating N<sub>2</sub>O emissions generated in coffee crops.

## INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is responsible for 10 to 12% of total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, 52% of N<sub>2</sub>O, 18% of CO<sub>2</sub> and 84% of CH<sub>4</sub> (IPCC 2014), the increase in the atmospheric concentrations of these gases generates global warming (Guo et al. 2021). Coffee is the most traded tropical agricultural product worldwide, its cultivation thrives in more than 50 countries and covers an area of more than 11 million hectares (Davis et al. 2012, De Beenhouwer et al. 2015), due to population growth and increased demand for this product, GHG emissions from these agricultural ecosystems tend to continue to increase (Wang et al. 2021). The increase of coffee monoculture systems in Latin America has led to the application of a high rate of mineral fertilizers to improve the productivity and profitability of these plantations (Romero-Alvarado et al. 2002); however, the excessive use of these inputs by coffee growers generates several environmental problems (Capa et al. 2015), for example, eutrophication (Borbor-Cordova et al. 2006), reduction of soil microorganism biodiversity (De Beenhouwer et al. 2015), GHG emissions (Hergoualc'h et al. 2012, Hergoualc'h et al. 2008). Maintaining or increasing crop productivity while reducing GHG emissions is one of

the major challenges facing agriculture (Lesk et al. 2016).

N<sub>2</sub>O is a long-lived GHG in the atmosphere, whose global warming potential is 298 times that of CO<sub>2</sub> (Forster et al. 2007), is mainly emitted in agricultural soils fertilized with nitrogen (Recio et al. 2020) and is the substance that has the greatest effect on the destruction of stratospheric ozone (Ravishankara et al. 2009). Both nitrification and denitrification are considered to be the main biological processes leading to N<sub>2</sub>O emission in agroecosystems (Butterbach-Bahl et al. 2013, Recio et al. 2020). Nitrification generally occurs under aerobic conditions, while denitrification occurs under oxygen-deficient conditions, although the two processes often occur simultaneously when there is a close coexistence of oxic and anoxic conditions (Baggs & Philippot 2011, Hallin et al. 2018). These two processes are favored by the amount of soil water (water-filled pore space, WFPS) under saturation (40-60% WFPS) (Sanz-Cobena et al. 2017).

Different N<sub>2</sub>O emission reduction strategies have been established in nitrogen-fertilized agroecosystems (Sanz-Cobena et al. 2017), these include the synchronization of the N applied with the N demand of the crop, the use of water-saving irrigation systems to prevent N<sub>2</sub>O formation

through denitrification in water-saturated soils, and the use of water-saving irrigation systems to prevent the formation of  $N_2O$  through denitrification in water-saturated soils (Guardia et al. 2017) or application of nitrification inhibitors (NI) (Sanz-Cobena et al. 2016). The most commonly used INs are dicyandimide (DCD) and 3,4-dimethylpyrazole phosphate (DMPP) which have demonstrated a high potential to decrease nitrifying activity and consequently decrease  $N_2O$  emissions (Cayuela et al. 2017, Lam et al. 2018).

Systematic reviews (SR) is a useful and comprehensive technique to search, collect, select, evaluate and synthesize all the existing evidence on a specific problem, this method suggests key features, including the development of a thorough search and coding method, analysis-interpretation, and systematic reporting (Bai et al. 2022). Recently, several SR studies on GHG emissions have been reported (Gao et al. 2018, Guardia et al. 2017, Hu et al. 2020, Lynch 2019); however, there are no such studies focused on  $N_2O$  emissions in coffee cultivation. The objective of this SR was to provide an overview of soil  $N_2O$  emissions in coffee cropping systems; summarizing available field data on soil  $N_2O$  emissions and identifying  $N_2O$  control factors (fertilizer type, precipitation, temperature, altitude) as a basis for developing  $N_2O$  mitigation strategies.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Search Strategy

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines were followed for the literature search and review (Moher et al. 2014). Duplicate articles were eliminated, then all titles and abstracts were evaluated following the inclusion and exclusion criteria to identify relevant research for the present review, after which full-text articles were reviewed to determine whether they met the inclusion criteria according to the research objective.

The databases used in the search for articles were Scopus, ScienceDirect, Springer, and Scielo. The keywords used were “nitrous oxide” and “coffee monoculture” or “nitrous oxide” and “coffee agroforestry systems” or “carbon footprint” and “coffee cultivation” or “óxido nitroso” y “café”. All original full-text articles in English or Spanish, published from January 2000 to October 2021, were considered for review. To increase the quality of the review, only peer-reviewed literature was examined and results published in the form of master’s theses, Ph.D. dissertations, and conference abstracts were excluded.

### Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria for the selection of articles were a)

research studies conducted in the field; b) studies measuring cumulative emissions ( $kg \cdot ha^{-1}$ ) of  $N_2O$ ; c) means, standard deviations (or standard errors), and several replicates that were reported, and/or could be calculated; d) experimental duration, N application rate and management practices that were reported. All study designs had to correspond to primary studies, including randomized controlled trials, crossover, cohort, case-control, case reports, and case series.

The following criteria were used to exclude articles (a) studies with a secondary design, such as meta-analyses, systematic reviews, and narrative reviews; (b) non-experimental studies; (c) studies in which other greenhouse gases were estimated; (d) articles without full text available; (e) studies whose object of research is other than  $N_2O$  emissions in coffee crops; (f) opinion articles, commentaries, and editorials were not considered for inclusion.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Selection of Research Articles

A total of 70 articles were identified across the four databases and 10 articles were excluded due to duplication. Of that number, 46 articles were excluded after the first review of the title and abstract as it was determined that they did not meet the inclusion criteria. Next, 14 articles were evaluated by reading the full text to certify that they met all inclusion and exclusion criteria. Finally, the total number of studies included in the present systematic review was eight (Fig. 1).

### Analysis of Included Studies

Table 1 shows the eight selected papers, indicating the country in which the study was carried out, as well as the precipitation, temperature, and altitude of the study areas.

Of the studies found, 75% were developed in Costa Rica, 12.5% in Ecuador, and the other 12.5% in Nicaragua. The range of precipitation reported in the RS goes from 910 mm to 2740  $mm \cdot yr^{-1}$ . Coffee is planted in areas with rainfall ranging from 750 mm to 3000 mm per year (Laderach et al. 2011). Precipitation is the climatic factor with the greatest impact on the decrease in coffee production (Rivera Silva et al. 2013), the reduction of rainfall in relation to the reduction of coffee productivity is estimated at 75-90% (Laderach et al. 2011).

The minimum temperature reported in the SR was 16°C, the maximum temperature was 24°C and the average temperature was 20.3°C. These values are within the optimal temperature range for coffee cultivation, which establishes the average temperature between 18 and 22°C and the maximum temperature of 30°C (Descroix & Snoeck 2009, Sarmiento-Soler et al. 2019), higher temperatures accelerate

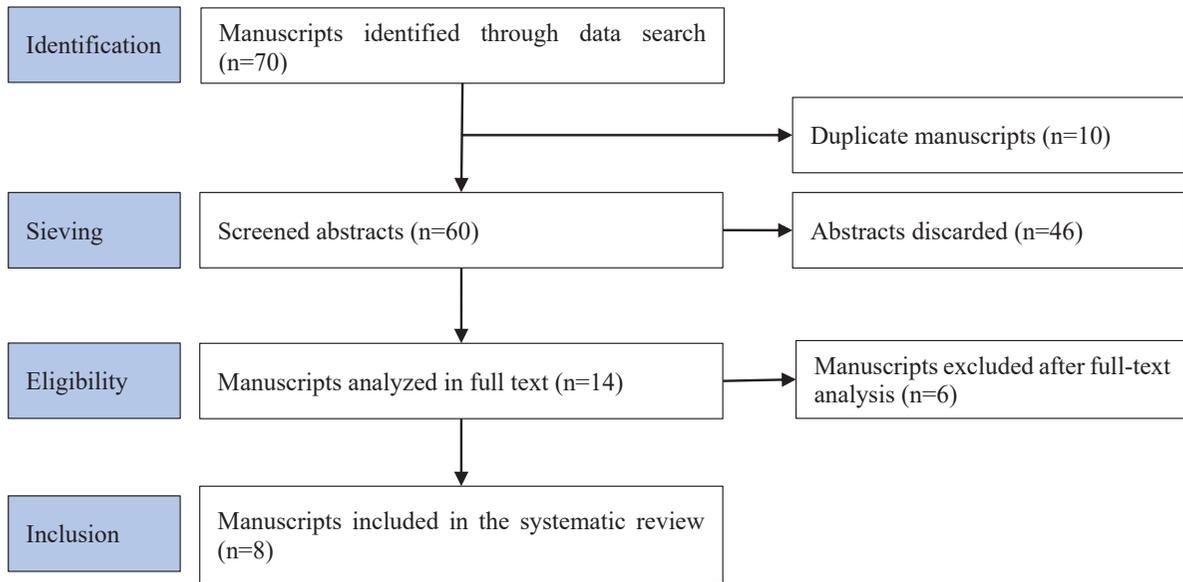


Fig. 1: Eligible item identification flowchart.

the development and maturation of the fruits and this leads to a decrease in the cup quality of the coffee, in addition, continuous exposure to high temperatures generates stress, which is manifested by slow growth and abnormalities such as yellowing of the leaves (Davis et al. 2012) similarly, in areas where the average annual temperature is below 17-18°C, growth also becomes slower (DaMatta & Ramalho 2006). Climatic characteristics influence the development and growth of coffee in different ways and at different stages of growth (Camargo 2010).

As for N<sub>2</sub>O emissions, they increase with increasing temperature; in general, there is a positive correlation between temperature and N<sub>2</sub>O emissions (Aguilera et al. 2013) the optimum range for nitrification is between 25

and 30°C, while denitrification can occur in a range between 4 and 60°C. In addition, the increase in temperature produces an increase in soil respiration, which leads to O<sub>2</sub> consumption and the appearance of anaerobiosis, which in turn favors denitrification (Ussiri & Lal 2012). In addition, the amount and distribution of precipitation influence soil N<sub>2</sub>O emissions (Du et al. 2006).

Table 2 details aspects such as the coffee cultivation system, associated forest species, variety, age, and the number of coffee plants per ha.

In the SR it was found that coffee is planted under agroforestry systems and monocultures, however, coffee has a variety of cultivation systems, from complex agroforestry,

Table 1: Climatic and location conditions in which the selected studies were carried out.

Author and year of publication	Country	Altitude (msnm)	Precipitation (mm)	Average temperature (°C)
Capa et al. (2015)	Ecuador	2100	910	18
Harmand (2007)	Costa Rica	600	2740	23
Hergoualc'h et al. (2008)	Costa Rica	1180	2300	21
Hergoualc'h et al. (2012)	Costa Rica	1180	2300	21
Montenegro (2019)	Costa Rica (Naranjo)	1200	2200	21
Montenegro (2019)	Costa Rica (San Marcos)	1650	2223	16
Montenegro (2020)	Costa Rica (Naranjo)	1200	2200	21
Montenegro (2020)	Costa Rica (San Marcos)	1650	2223	16
Noponen et al. (2012)	Costa Rica	685	2600	22
Noponen et al. (2012)	Nicaragua	445	1386	24

Table 2: Characteristics of the cultivation system installed in each selected studio.

Author and year of publication	Crop system	Associated forest species	<i>Coffea arabica</i> variety	Age of the coffee crop (years)	Number of coffee plants per ha
Capa et al. (2015)	Monoculture	-	Caturra	1	5000
Harmand (2007)	Agroforestry system	<i>Eucalyptus deglupta</i>	Costa Rica 95	14	5900
	Monoculture	-	Costa Rica 95	14	5900
Hergoualc'h et al. (2008)	Agroforestry system	<i>Inga densiflora</i>	Catuai	8	4722
	Monoculture	-	Catuai	8	5000
Hergoualc'h et al. (2012)	Agroforestry system	<i>Inga densiflora</i>	Catuai	7	4722
	Monoculture	-	Catuai	7	4722
Montenegro (2019)	Agroforestry system	<i>Inga</i> spp, <i>Erythrina</i> spp	Catuai	7	5848
	Agroforestry system	<i>Inga</i> spp, <i>Erythrina</i> spp	Catuai	15	5848
Montenegro (2020)	Agroforestry system	<i>Inga</i> spp, <i>Erythrina</i> spp	Catuai	7	5848
	Agroforestry system	<i>Inga</i> spp, <i>Erythrina</i> spp	Catuai	15	5848
Noponen et al. (2012)	Agroforestry system	<i>Erythrina poeppigina</i>	Caturra	9	5000
	Agroforestry system	<i>Inga laurina</i>	Pacas	9	4000

simulating secondary forests, to intensive monocultures (Perfecto et al. 2005), choosing a particular cropping system is a very important management decision because cropping systems will provide different benefits, e.g. nutrient regulation, pest control, microclimate regulation, pollination and productivity (Chain-Guadarrama et al. 2019, Padovan et al. 2018). Coffee planted under agroforestry systems may be affected, reducing its productivity (Franck et al. 2007, Vaast et al. 2006) however, it provides a variety of ecosystem services (Perfecto et al. 2005), on the other hand, coffee planted as a monoculture and using high fertilization rates can achieve high yields (DaMatta et al. 2018, Perfecto et al. 2005). The most abundant forest species in coffee agroforestry systems are leguminous plants of the genus *Inga* and *Erythrina* (Cannavo et al. 2011) emissions, such as the data found in this SR. If we talk about N<sub>2</sub>O emissions, these would increase in a coffee crop planted under an agroforestry system due to the higher amount of organic matter and water in the top layer of soil under the trees (Hergoualc'h et al. 2008, Verchot et al. 2006).

In the last decades, this variety has been replacing older varieties of coffee due to its productivity, especially in Central America, and in the last decades, the Catuai variety has been replacing older varieties of coffee (Hergoualc'h et al. 2008).

Table 3 shows the edaphic characteristics of the areas where the studies included in this SR were carried out. In the SR it was found that the pH and humidity of the soil where the coffee plantations are developed range from 4.67 to 6.34 and 53.3 to 67.05% respectively, these properties influence N<sub>2</sub>O emissions. N<sub>2</sub>O emissions are the product

of microbial processes that in turn are controlled by physical and chemical properties of the soil that influence the growth of microorganisms, among these properties are texture, availability of oxygen (O<sub>2</sub>), organic C, mineral N, moisture, and pH (Müller et al. 2014). Soil moisture has a considerable influence on N<sub>2</sub>O production, due to its relationship with the concentration of oxygen O<sub>2</sub> in the soil, the higher the water content, the lower the O<sub>2</sub> content in the soil pores, when the percentage of water-filled pores (WFPS) is between 50 and 70% and decreases to values below 50% or above 80%, the process of complete denitrification predominates, therefore, the reduction of N<sub>2</sub>O to N<sub>2</sub> is more

Table 3: Edaphic conditions in which the selected studies were conducted.

Author and year of publication	pH	Soil humidity [%]	Texture
Capa et al. (2015)	6.34	-	Clay loam
Harmand (2007)	6.2	53.3	Sandy
Harmand (2007)	6.1	53.3	Sandy
Hergoualc'h et al. (2008)	4.67	62.95	Clay
Hergoualc'h et al. (2008)	4.92	67.05	Clay
Hergoualc'h et al. (2012)	4.67	-	Clay
Hergoualc'h et al. (2012)	4.92	-	Clay
Montenegro (2019)	5	60	Clay loam
Montenegro (2019)	5	55	Clay
Montenegro (2020)	5	60	Clay loam
Montenegro (2020)	5	55	Clay
Noponen et al. (2012)	-	-	Clay
Noponen et al. (2012)	-	-	Sandy loam

Table 4: Nitrogen fertilization and calculated N<sub>2</sub>O emissions in selected studies.

Author and year of publication	Fertilizer type	Fertilization rate [kg.N.ha <sup>-1</sup> ]	Emissions N <sub>2</sub> O [kg.N.ha <sup>-1</sup> .yr <sup>-1</sup> ]
Capa et al. (2015)	Urea	200	2.90
	Urea	300	10.90
	Urea	400	12.80
	Control	0	1.30
Harmand (2007)	Ammonium nitrate	180	1.90
	Ammonium nitrate	180	1.90
Hergoualc'h et al. (2008)	Urea	250	5.80
	Urea	250	4.30
Hergoualc'h et al. (2012)	Urea	250	3.55
	Urea	250	2.32
Montenegro (2019)	Urea	0	0.63
	Urea	100	0.95
	Urea	225	0.95
	Urea	350	1.40
	Urea	0	0.63
	Urea	100	0.83
	Urea	225	1.00
	Urea	350	1.07
	Urea	350	1.07
Montenegro (2020)	Ammonium nitrate	250	1.00
	Calcium nitrate	250	0.94
	Polymer coated urea	250	0.87
	Urea	250	0.67
	Ammonium nitrate	250	0.65
	Calcium nitrate	250	0.60
	Polymer coated urea	250	0.65
	Urea	250	0.57
Noponen et al. (2012)	Moderate organic	66	0.20
	Intensive organic	248	1.56
	Conventional moderate	150	1.02
	Conventional intensive	287	1.87
	Moderate organic	140	0.37
	Intensive organic	346	1.83
	Conventional moderate	78	0.49
	Conventional intensive	157	0.95

important (Pilegaard 2013). In addition, denitrification and nitrification processes are affected by other soil physical and chemical parameters such as pH, temperature, and the presence of other species. Soil pH has been recognized as an important property controlling N<sub>2</sub>O emissions through its effect on soil microbial activity and diversity (Barton et al. 2013, Čuhel et al. 2010). At pH values close to 7 or basic,

N<sub>2</sub> production is favored over N<sub>2</sub>O emission (Šimek et al. 2002) which results in lower N<sub>2</sub>O emissions (García-Marco et al. 2016) than at acid pH.

In addition, texture influences N<sub>2</sub>O emissions, for example, in clay soils the number of macropores increases anaerobic zones, which leads to partial or total denitrification processes, resulting in higher N<sub>2</sub>O emissions from fine-text-

tured soils (Butterbach-Bahl et al. 2011). Table 4 details the type of nitrogen fertilizer used in the coffee crop, as well as the fertilization rate and N<sub>2</sub>O emissions of the crop.

In the SR it was found that the fertilizers used are of chemical, organic and chemical + polymer origin, at fertilization rates ranging from 66 to 400 kg N ha<sup>-1</sup> and N<sub>2</sub>O emissions ranging from 0.2 to 12.8 kg N ha<sup>-1</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup>, it has been observed that N<sub>2</sub>O emissions tend to increase as the fertilization rate does, as well as other studies, where they state that as the annual rate of N increases, so does the annual emissions of N<sub>2</sub>O in soils (Capa et al. 2015, Hergoualc'h et al. 2008, Noponen et al. 2012, Rahman et al. 2021) which are mainly due to nitrification and denitrification processes generated by high rates of nitrogen fertilization (Rochette et al. 2004). In addition to this factor, N<sub>2</sub>O emissions are due to environmental and agricultural factors, such as the presence of native mineral elements in the soil, soil moisture, temperature, type of tillage, and climatic conditions (Hergoualc'h et al. 2008).

## CONCLUSION

The systematic review included eight experimental studies that determined N<sub>2</sub>O emissions in coffee plantations, suggesting that this emission is directly proportional to the fertilization rate. The precise identification of the factors remains unclear. Further research is needed in this field to make recommendations to reduce N<sub>2</sub>O emissions.

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