

Development of Crop.LCA, an adaptable screening life cycle assessment tool for agricultural systems: a Canadian scenario assessment

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Abstract

There is an increasing demand for sustainable agricultural production as part of the transition towards a globally sustainable economy. To quantify impacts of agricultural systems on the environment, life cycle assessment (LCA) is ideal because of its holistic approach. Many tools have been developed to conduct LCAs in agriculture, but they are not publicly available, not open-source, and have a limited scope. Here, a new adaptable open-source tool (Crop.LCA) for carrying out LCA of cropping systems is presented and tested in an evaluation study with a scenario assessment of 4 cropping systems using an agroecosystem model (DNDC) to predict soil GHG emissions. The functional units used are hectares (ha) of land and gigajoules (GJ) of harvested energy output, and 4 impact categories were evaluated: cumulative energy demand (CED), 100-year global warming potential (GWP), eutrophication and acidification potential. DNDC was used to simulate 28 years of cropping system dynamics, and the results were used as input in Crop.LCA. Data were aggregated for each 4-year rotation and statistically analysed. Introduction of legumes into the cropping system reduced CED by 6%, GWP by 23%, and acidification by 19% per ha. These results highlight the ability of Crop.LCA to capture cropping system characteristics in LCA, and the tool constitutes a step forward in increasing the accuracy of LCA of cropping systems as required for bio-economy system assessments. Furthermore, the tool is open-source, highly transparent and has the necessary flexibility to assess agricultural systems.

Keywords: LCA, cropping systems, tool, scenario assessment, agriculture, open-source

1. Introduction

Agriculture is responsible for feeding a growing world population, while concerns about environmental impacts rise. Worldwide, there is a need to develop bio-based economies or “bio-economies” with reduced fossil fuel use and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (Philp, 2015; World Bank, 2015). These bio-economies need to be sustainably managed to reduce environmental impacts, while increasing productivity and profitability (Huisings et al., 2015; Pölzl et al., 2014). It is therefore important to quantify the impacts and synergies of agricultural systems on ecosystem services and the environment (Bosch et al., 2015; Goglio et al., 2014). The variability in pedo-climate conditions, management practices, cultivars, etc. is considerable and affects the environmental impacts of cropping systems (Nemecek et al., 2014).

With its holistic approach, life cycle assessment (LCA) has been used in many research studies to evaluate environmental impacts in agricultural production systems (Biswas et al., 2008; Nemecek et al., 2015). A variety of impact categories have been included in agricultural LCA: global warming potential (GWP), acidification potential (AP), eutrophication potential (EP), cumulative energy demand (CED), toxicity potential, and impacts on biodiversity (Goglio et al., 2012; Huijbregts et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2009; Nemecek et al., 2015).

In cropping systems, it has been observed that the impact of a crop is significantly affected by the previous crop in the cropping system (Hokazono and Hayashi, 2015; Knudsen et al., 2014; Nemecek et al., 2015). Some research has proposed Cereal Unit allocation to fully assess cropping systems, which is based on an agriculture-specific biophysical unit developed for the purpose of agricultural statistics (Brankatschk and Finkbeiner, 2014), and a methodology based on rotation allocation (Brankatschk and Finkbeiner, 2015). Other research studies proposed a dual approach by considering either each crop separately or the cropping system as a whole (Knudsen et al., 2014). Instead, Nemecek et al. (2015) considered the interval for each crop combination as starting after the harvest of the preceding crop and ending with the harvest of the main crop, together with assessing the cropping system as a whole.

Main LCA tools include SimaPro, GABI and OpenLCA which is an open source software under the Mozilla Public License (MPL 2.0) agreement. All these LCA tools were developed for

general purposes including the agricultural sector. However they were not specifically designed to assess agricultural systems, and they do not readily consider effects of crop management on soil emissions (Ciroth, 2007; GABI, 2016; SimaPro 8.3, 2016). Thus, researchers and the private sector have developed several tools for agricultural LCA (BASF, 2015; Nemecek et al., 2015; Tuomisto et al., 2015). For instance, SALCA (Swiss Agricultural Life Cycle Assessment) was developed by Agroscope to assess agricultural systems mainly in Central Europe (Nemecek et al., 2015). AgBalance is another tool developed to carry out LCA of agricultural systems. However, the user cannot access or modify the code of either tool. In addition AgBalance, which was conceived for the sustainability assessment of agriculture, must be purchased by the user (BASF, 2015; Nemecek et al., 2010; Teuscher et al., 2014). In contrast, other tools, such as the European Union (EU) Carbon Calculator and ULICEES, were developed to compute carbon (C) footprints (Tuomisto et al., 2015; Vergé et al., 2012), while the FEAT model also included energy consumption (Camargo et al., 2013). Porta et al. (2008) developed eVerdEE, a simplified tool for environmental product declarations in the agricultural sector. Similarly, the Cranfield LCA tool was developed to assess agricultural systems under United Kingdom (UK) conditions using Microsoft® Excel (Williams et al., 2010), while the LCAD tool was specifically designed to assess anaerobic digestion systems (Styles et al., 2014, 2015). LCAcommons is both a set of tools and life cycle inventories (LCI) developed for different production processes, including agricultural products, by several United States (US) governmental institutions (USDA, 2015). The existing LCA tools developed to assess agriculture are either simple tools, not publicly available, not modular or not open-source, which is considered advantageous for the LCA community (Ciroth, 2007). In this study, a new adaptable open-source tool (Crop.LCA) to carry out screening LCA of cropping systems is i) presented, ii) tested in an evaluation study consisting of a scenario assessment of 4 cropping systems using an agroecosystem model to predict soil emissions (i.e., CO₂, N₂O, CH₄ and NH₃ volatilisation), and iii) used to compute the contribution of each process to overall 100-year horizon GWP.

2. Crop.LCA tool

2.1. General characteristics

The Crop.LCA tool was designed in 2015-2016 to perform screening LCA of cropping systems using local data according to ISO standards (ISO, 2006a, 2006b, 2013). Crop.LCA allows users to carry out site-specific assessment, as defined by Potting and Hauschild (2006), of the environmental impacts of cropping systems. It is open-source, community-based, and adaptable to a wide range of crops and types of crop management after collecting site specific data. Crop.LCA is at the same time a LCA software, it integrates models for nitrate leaching, soil P loss and soil erosion and allows to use model estimates or observations for GHG emissions to be accounted for in the life cycle assessment of cropping systems. The tool was developed by the authors, synthesising and integrating recent advances in agricultural LCA methodology with the aim of being flexible and specifically tailored for the assessment of agricultural systems. To serve as an adaptable software tool, Crop.LCA includes its source code, which users can modify. Figure 1 illustrates the framework of the tool, which can be used to rapidly perform screening LCA of cropping systems using 1 ha of land as the functional unit. Considering the recommendations given by Hayashi (2013) for food sustainable consumption and production and in agreement with Goglio et al. (2014) and Nemecek et al. (2011a), other functional units (kg of harvested product, GJ of harvested energy output, unit of economic value from agricultural production) can be computed from the value per ha generated by the tool for each impact category. The harvested energy output is the energy output of the grain yield and the amount of straw/residues harvested from the field. The current version of Crop.LCA computes the LCI of energy consumption and of key chemicals: fossil CO₂, biogenic CO₂, CH₄, N₂O, CO, NH₃, NO₂, SO₂, non-methane volatile organic compounds, particulate matter, SF₆, nitrate leaching, PO₄⁻³, and phosphorus (P) emissions. Active ingredients for pesticides were considered only for the impact categories included in the tool, while heavy metals were excluded. The Crop.LCA tool uses the LCI to estimate CED according to Huijbregts et al. (2010), 100-year horizon GWP according to the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) 5th Assessment Report (Myhre et al., 2013), AP and EP according to the CML method (CML, 2015). The current version of Crop.LCA does not include any water-related impacts except EP. The tool also computes contributions to GWP of different processes (e.g., soil emissions of CO₂; CH₄ and

N₂O; machinery use, production and repair; fertiliser production and transport). If the results of soil CO₂ emissions are negative, it means that soil C sequestration occurred.

2.2. System boundary

The system boundary considered by Crop.LCA includes the agricultural phase, along with soil GHG emissions, NH₃ volatilisation, NO₃⁻ leaching and all upstream processes, including machinery production, transport, maintenance and repairs, fertiliser, pesticide and seed production and transport (Fig. 2). The downstream limit is the transport of the agricultural products (e.g. grain, hay or silage) to the farm centre (i.e., location of the main farm facilities, including barns, silage pits and machinery storage facilities) (Fig. 2). Drying, silage pit filling, and hay storage are excluded. In agreement with previous research and ISO standards, all upstream processes from raw material extraction up to the regional storehouse (i.e. a building of the local suppliers of agricultural inputs) are included (Audsley et al., 1997; Brentrup et al., 2004; ISO, 2006a, 2006b, 2013). Transport processes from raw material extraction to the farm centre were included within the system boundary.

2.3. Data sources and treatment for the life cycle inventory

Field data are used as inputs to Crop.LCA. All upstream processes used emission factors derived from available literature. For instance, data for the production of fuel, electricity, steel, and rubber in Crop.LCA were derived from GHGenius ((S&T)2, 2014). GHGenius is a tool developed to account for environmental impacts of different vehicles in Canadian and US conditions with a cradle-to-wheel approach ((S&T)2, 2014). The data currently available in Crop.LCA for both background and foreground processes are relevant to North American conditions; however, data from other sources can be integrated in Crop.LCA by changing the corresponding input files available on the bitbucket platform (<https://bitbucket.org/croplcateam/crop.lca>), following the user manual and by collecting site-specific data for background processes. Data for seed, fertiliser and pesticide production were taken from other data sources (Bhatty et al., 1979; Boehmel et al., 2008; Brentrup et al., 2004; Ceccon et al., 2002; Gasol et al., 2012; Goglio et al., 2012; Haciseferoğulları et al., 2003; (S&T)2, 2014). Urea and ammonia production data were derived from several data sources associated with North American conditions (Brentrup et al., 2004; Sheehan et al., 1998; (S&T)2, 2014). Data for inputs used during cultivation were treated as described below.

2.3.1. Machinery use, and machinery production, maintenance, and repairs

The machinery use LCI includes field operations, transport of machinery from the farm centre to the field, farm transport, and production and transport of the fuel necessary for both field operations and farm transport. Field operations are accounted for on the basis of field working capacity and the power needed to carry out the specific field operation (Dyer et al., 2010; Dyer and Desjardins, 2003). For farm transport with heavy-duty diesel trucks and light-duty petrol trucks, specific emissions and fuel consumption data from GHGenius were used ((S&T)2, 2014). For all agricultural diesel machinery, oil consumption was estimated on the basis of the ASABE standard D 497.7 (ASABE, 2011; Goglio et al., 2014). In all transport processes, the return journey of the machinery is included, in accordance with Gasol et al. (2012) and Goglio et al. (2012, 2014).

Machinery production impacts were estimated based on weight, working capacity, and total lifetime of the machine (ASABE, 2011; Audsley et al., 1997; Brentrup et al., 2004). Tractor production was computed using GHGenius ((S&T)2, 2014). Production impacts for machinery other than tractors were subdivided into material extraction impacts and those related to machinery manufacture, in accordance with Audsley et al. (1997) and Goglio et al. (2014). For manufacturing, electricity was the only energy source considered and the energy mix used was based on the location of the machinery factory (Audsley et al., 1997). This information was gathered by carrying out a survey of machinery manufacturers and suppliers in Canada, in agreement with Audsley et al., (1997) and Goglio et al. (2014).

Impacts of maintenance and repairs for machinery are included on the basis of the overall energy used during machinery manufacturing and the production of raw materials for machinery, in accordance with Audsley et al. (1997). In our accounting process, the overall energy is split among energy sources (e.g., electricity, diesel) to estimate total or cumulative energy consumption and emissions from maintenance and repair of machinery, and production of materials used during maintenance and repairs.

2.3.2. Fertiliser, seed and pesticide production

Crop.LCA computes the LCI related to fertiliser use on the basis of the actual amount of fertiliser applied to fields. In the case of multiple fertilisers, the contribution of each component is considered in the production process. For instance, if a fertiliser is composed of urea and ammonium phosphate, the production of each is included. Seed production is computed on the basis of the number of seeds (maize, *Zea mays* L.) or the weight of seeds used during seeding. Pesticide production is accounted for on the basis of the amount of pesticide applied to fields, the type of pesticide or active ingredient, and its concentration. During pesticide transport, the quantity of the total formulation is used in calculations.

2.3.3. Nitrate leaching, soil P loss, ammonia volatilisation and soil GHG emissions

Nitrate leaching is estimated for Crop.LCA by the SQCB (Sustainability Quick Check for Biofuels) model (Faist Emmenegger et al., 2009; Nemecek et al., 2014). Crop.LCA integrates the USLE (Universal Soil Loss Equation) to predict soil erosion according to Faist Emmenegger et al. (2009) and Nemecek et al. (2014). Soil P loss is estimated from soil erosion and the amount of P applied by integrating the SALCA-P model into Crop.LCA (Nemecek et al., 2010, 2014; Teuscher et al., 2014). Ammonia volatilisation and soil GHG emissions (i.e., CO₂, CH₄ emissions, N₂O) are read as inputs and included in computation of the LCI. In particular, Crop.LCA sums up GWP from all sources including CO₂ from soil C changes and computes soil CO₂ emissions in agreement with currently available LCA methods (Goglio et al., 2015). Crop.LCA predicts indirect N₂O emissions from nitrate leaching and ammonia emissions using the IPCC Tier 1 method (De Klein et al., 2006).

2.4. Program design and availability

Crop.LCA was coded in the open-source program R (R Development Core Team, 2005) as a modular tool with separate functions for different processes (e.g., field cultivation, production and transport of fertiliser, nitrate leaching, soil GHG emissions, soil P loss). This allows the inclusion or exclusion of specific processes by disabling or enabling the functions in the source code. The open-source code and user manual are publicly available (<https://bitbucket.org/croplcateam/crop.lca>). The R code can be readily modified, and the input

files can be edited in a spreadsheet following the user manual. All input files are in comma separated value (.csv) format. For background processes, Crop.LCA uses data from literature and other databases (e.g., GHGenius)(S&T)2, 2014). Other modules in Crop.LCA have also been designed to compute GWP, EP, and AP.

3. Evaluation study

3.1. Case study scenario assessment

A case study was used to validate Crop.LCA, based on a scenario assessment of 4 cropping systems studied in a field experiment described by Glenn et al. (2010, 2011, 2012) and Maas et al. (2013), located at the Glenlea Research Station (49.64°N, 97.16°W; 235 m a.s.l.), on the Red River plain (<2% slope) near Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Mean soil organic C content (0–0.2 m) at the beginning of the study was approximately 3.2%. Particle size distribution was 60% clay, 35% silt, and 5% sand. The impact categories and system boundary considered in the LCA are the same as those in Crop.LCA. The functional units used are ha of land and GJ of gross energy output.

The conventional (CONV) cropping system (Table 1) has a crop management system similar to that of the annual cropping system described by Glenn et al. (2010, 2011, 2012). The CONV, no-tillage (NT), and residue (RES) systems include the same crop sequence with no cover crops (maize-spring wheat (*Triticum aestivum* L.)-canola (*Brassica napus* L.)-spring barley (*Hordeum vulgare* L.)), while in the legume (L) system, faba bean (*Vicia faba* var. *minor* L.) replaces maize (Table 1). In the RES system, straw and maize stover are left in the field, unlike in the other systems (Table 1). Full details can be found in the supplementary material.

For the scenario assessment, a Canadian version (DNDC v.CAN) (Grant et al., 2016; Kröbel et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2013) of the DNDC (Denitrification and Decomposition) model (Li et al., 1992, 1994) was run using 28 years (1985–2012) of climate data (i.e., daily max. and min. temperature, precipitation, global solar radiation, humidity and wind speed). DNDC estimates of GHG emissions, grain yields, crop residues, and nitrate and ammonia losses were used as inputs for the Crop.LCA tool. Yearly data (1st Jan –31st Dec) for each impact category were aggregated

to compute a mean impact for each 4-year rotation (e.g., 1985–1988, 1989–1992) of the cropping systems to have 7 sample elements for statistical analysis. Yearly data were used, as all of the crops have a similar life cycle (~150-day growth, spring sown with fall harvest). Only 2% of the harvested area of crops in the study region is sown in autumn (CANSIM, 2016). However, Crop.LCA can compute impacts for different timeframes when necessary (e.g. harvest of the previous crop to harvest of the given crop). The impacts for spring wheat were also calculated separately, since it is a major crop in the region (CANSIM, 2016). The harvested energy output (GJ) is computed from yields and the upper heating value (or gross energy) of the harvested biomass.

3.2. DNDC model and simulations

DNDC was originally developed to estimate N₂O emissions (Li et al., 1992), but it has been expanded to simulate soil C and nitrogen (N) dynamics and CO₂ emissions (Li et al., 1994). The model has been developed and tested for many soils, climates, and cropping systems. Several regional versions are available on the Global Research Alliance Modelling Platform (<http://gramp.org.uk/models/family/2>). DNDC (DNDCv.CAN) was first run for 10 years to stabilise C and N pools before estimating soil GHG emissions for each system. The climate data, crop, and soil inputs for the simulations were obtained from Uzoma et al. (2015), who found DNDC reasonably simulated soil temperature, soil water content, soil N, and N₂O emissions for annual cropping.

3.3. Statistical analyses

Statistical analyses were conducted with R to investigate whether i) the CED, GWP, AP, and EP of the cropping systems and ii) the GWP of wheat, for both functional units (ha and GJ), were statistically different. A Friedman test was first performed, followed by pair-wise non-parametric comparisons, considering each 4-year rotation separately for the entire cropping system assessment and each year of wheat cultivation separately (Siegel and Castellan, 1988). There were thus 7 sample elements (i.e., 4-year rotation average) available for the statistical analyses, while one value for each 4-year rotation was used to assess impacts of wheat cultivation. Crop.LCA was also used to perform contribution analysis of soil emissions.

3.4. Results

The L cropping system had the lowest mean GWP per ha ($3740 \text{ kg CO}_2\text{eq ha}^{-1} \text{ y}^{-1}$, Fig. 3a), 23% less than that in the CONV system. In contrast, wheat in the RES system had the lowest mean GWP per ha ($1670 \text{ kg CO}_2\text{eq ha}^{-1} \text{ y}^{-1}$, Fig. 3c), with high variability due to the interaction of climate, soil and crop management. Per GJ, GWP for wheat in the RES system also had high variability (Fig. 3d). Considering the entire cropping systems, the NT and CONV systems had the lowest mean GWP per GJ (34 and $38 \text{ kg CO}_2 \text{ eq GJ}^{-1}\text{y}^{-1}$, respectively) (Fig. 3b). Statistical tests confirmed that these differences in GWP were significant for both functional units at $p < 0.05$, except for GWP per GJ of wheat (Fig. 3d). GWP was strongly affected by soil C dynamics, which influenced soil CO_2 emissions (-230% of GWP, on average; range = -9.8% to -391% depending upon the cropping system assessed); the negative sign indicates a reduction in GWP due to CO_2 absorption of the crop from the atmosphere and the consequent increase in soil C from retained residues. The contribution of direct N_2O emissions to GWP averaged 171% among the systems while the mean contribution of the indirect N_2O emissions to GWP was smaller (12%).

The CONV system had the highest mean CED per ha ($19.2 \text{ GJ ha}^{-1} \text{ y}^{-1}$) (Fig. 4a), while the L system had the lowest (19% less than that in CONV). The NT system had the lowest mean CED per GJ of energy output ($0.153 \text{ GJ GJ}^{-1} \text{ y}^{-1}$), 2.4% less than that in the CONV system (Fig. 4b). These differences among cropping systems were statistically significant for both functional units at $p < 0.05$. There was little difference in EP per ha among the 4 cropping systems (Fig 4c). The L system had the lowest mean EP ($19.1 \text{ kg of PO}_4^{-3}\text{eq ha}^{-1} \text{ y}^{-1}$), 4.5% less than that in the CONV system. For EP per GJ, the NT system had the lowest EP ($0.157 \text{ kg of PO}_4^{-3}\text{eq GJ}^{-1} \text{ y}^{-1}$, Fig. 4d), 3.5% less than that in the CONV system. The RES system had the highest mean AP per ha ($32.3 \text{ kg SO}_2\text{eq ha}^{-1} \text{ y}^{-1}$, Fig. 4e), 13.4% higher than that in the CONV system, while the L system had 18.8% less AP than the CONV system. In line with AP per ha, mean AP per GJ was highest in the RES system ($0.565 \text{ kg SO}_2\text{eq GJ}^{-1} \text{ y}^{-1}$, Fig. 4f), 68.0% higher than that in the CONV system, while the NT system had the lowest AP ($0.199 \text{ kg of SO}_2\text{eq GJ}^{-1} \text{ y}^{-1}$), 14.3% less than that in the CONV system. Differences in AP and EP were statistically significant for both functional units at $p < 0.05$.

4. Discussion

4.1. Scenario assessment

The scenario assessment demonstrated the ability of Crop.LCA to capture characteristics of these different cropping-system scenarios. Introduction of legumes into the cropping system reduced most of the impacts considered. In particular, the cropping system with legumes decreased CED by at least 3.9%, GWP by 23.0%, and AP by 19% per ha.

Values of CED per ha ($13\text{--}19 \text{ GJ ha}^{-1} \text{ y}^{-1}$) were close to the range of values reported by Pelletier et al. (2008) for organic and conventional wheat, maize, and canola ($1.9\text{--}17 \text{ GJ ha}^{-1} \text{ y}^{-1}$) on the basis of average Canadian conditions for cultivation and using statistical data. CED per GJ ($0.15\text{--}0.32 \text{ GJ GJ}^{-1}$) agreed with results obtained by Goglio et al. (2014) ($0.25\text{--}0.39 \text{ GJ GJ}^{-1}$) using SimaPro and DNDC model results for two locations in western Canada with climate and soil similar to those of the present study.

The GWP obtained with Crop.LCA are similar to those of other LCAs of cropping systems using emission factors and models to estimate soil GHG emissions and reactive N species, but other research often disregard soil C dynamics (Bacenetti et al., 2014; Börjesson and Tufvesson, 2011; Brentrup et al., 2004; Goglio et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2009; Nemecek et al., 2011b, 2011a). Several C footprint studies have been conducted under similar conditions (Dyer et al., 2010; Dyer and Desjardins, 2003; Shrestha et al., 2013, 2014). Most Crop.LCA estimates of GWP are higher than the C footprints reported from these studies due to soil GHG accounting methods (in particular for soil N_2O and soil CO_2 emissions) and system boundaries (inclusion of soil borne emissions) which differ from those in the present study. The contribution analysis revealed the importance of soil emissions to total GWP. For the cropping systems assessed here, the contribution of soil C change to the GWP was -230%, while direct N_2O emissions contributed 171% of the GWP on average. In Crop.LCA soil emissions can be accounted for by including them as inputs (i.e. from different sources: measurements, models, emission factors). This is an interesting feature of the tool, considering the high level contribution of soil emissions in the overall GWP of cropping system (Garrigues et al., 2012; Goglio et al., 2014). These results are larger than those of Zaher et al. (2013), who reported up to a 70% contribution of direct N_2O

emissions to overall GWP in a cropping system containing wheat and barley in eastern Washington, US.

The EP results per ha ($19\text{--}21 \text{ kg PO}_4^{3-}\text{eq ha}^{-1}$) are in line with those of other LCA studies for similar crops (e.g., wheat and maize) ($17\text{--}58 \text{ kg PO}_4^{3-}\text{eq ha}^{-1}$) (Bacenetti et al., 2015; Goglio et al., 2012) under different soil and climate conditions. The EP for the entire cropping system was at least 24% larger than those obtained for maize cultivation at several locations in the US maize belt (Kim et al., 2009) using the DAYCENT model, most likely due to different methods used to estimate nitrate leaching.

The AP results per ha lie within the range of those reported by Kim et al. (2009) for US maize production using DAYCENT ($22\text{--}53 \text{ kg SO}_2\text{eq ha}^{-1} \text{ y}^{-1}$). However, AP per ha in the current study was at least 5.4 times as large as the AP reported by Goglio et al. (2012), who performed an LCA of cropping systems, including maize and wheat, in Mediterranean conditions. In contrast, AP per ha was >55% lower than the AP reported by Bacenetti et al. (2015) for maize cultivation in northern Italy. The results obtained in this study demonstrate the strong influence that crop selection can have on the overall performance of cropping systems (Camargo et al., 2013; Gan et al., 2011; MacWilliam et al., 2014; Nemecek et al., 2015), highlighting the importance of designing sustainable cropping systems within the context of a bio-economy.

4.2. Comparison with other LCA tools

Open-source LCA tools are highly sought within the LCA community (Ciroth, 2007) because they increase transparency, which hastens development. Having full access to the source code, the LCA user can modify functions as required, which was previously suggested as advantageous for the openLCA tool (Ciroth, 2007). The availability of the source code gives more flexibility, which is necessary to account for variability, which is common in agricultural systems (Börjesson and Tufvesson, 2011). Among the tools assessed, only Crop.LCA and the FEAT model are open-source (Table 2). However, the FEAT model is not modular, does not allow a multi-approach assessment, where a single crop and a cropping system are assessed at the same time and does not incorporate multiple methods to account for soil emissions (Camargo et al., 2013).

Crop.LCA was developed with a modular framework, which makes it easy to use from a programming standpoint, as with SALCA and the EU Carbon Calculator (Nemecek et al., 2010, 2015; Teuscher et al., 2014; Tuomisto et al., 2015) (Table 2). The modular framework also allows exclusion or inclusion of specific processes (e.g., machinery production, fertiliser application) by enabling and disabling the corresponding functions in the source code. Crop.LCA can therefore be rapidly adapted to different goals and scopes of agricultural LCA (Teuscher et al., 2014). The Crop.LCA tool can assess entire cropping systems over several years as a single entity, or individual crops, which is considered important (Brankatschk and Finkbeiner, 2015; Knudsen et al., 2014; Nemecek et al., 2015). In contrast with Crop.LCA, SALCA does not account for more than one input method to account for soil emissions and is not adaptable, while the EU Carbon Calculator considers only GWP, excludes other impact categories and does not allow multiple methods to be used for soil emissions (Table 2) (Tuomisto et al., 2015).

Crop.LCA is publicly available online, can be run in R with few commands, and uses .csv files. The user-friendly framework is similar to that of the SALCA and LCAD tools, the FEAT model and the EU Carbon Calculator, which are Excel-based macros. It is also similar to the eVerdEE tool, which includes a graphical user interface (Table 2) (Camargo et al., 2013; Nemecek et al., 2010; Porta et al., 2008; Styles et al., 2014, 2015; Teuscher et al., 2014; Tuomisto et al., 2015).

Unlike some previous tools developed for LCA or C footprint assessment, Crop.LCA includes other impact categories besides GWP, such as EP and AP (Camargo et al., 2013; Dyer and Desjardins, 2003; Tuomisto et al., 2015; Vergé et al., 2012) (Table 2). Furthermore, it was developed in compliance with ISO standards (ISO, 2006a, 2006b, 2013), focuses on crop management and applies characterization factors from the IPCC 5th Assessment Report (Myhre et al., 2013).

Crop.LCA is a comprehensive tool which can characterise field operations, depending on the type of machinery used, its weight and power. It shares these features with SALCA, but uses a more complex approach than eVerdEE (Nemecek et al., 2010; Porta et al., 2008; Teuscher et al., 2014). Crop.LCA has the potential to be adapted by the user to carry out LCA of a wide range of

crops, including catch crops, cover crops, and other temperate and tropical crops. For this reason, it can be used to assess bio-economic systems involving many products and production pathways (Philp, 2015). The current version of Crop.LCA cannot represent as many crops as several other tools (BASF, 2015; Camargo et al., 2013; Nemecek et al., 2010; Porta et al., 2008; Styles et al., 2014, 2015; Teuscher et al., 2014) (Table 2); however, they contain other limitations when compared with Crop.LCA. For instance, SALCA currently focuses on Swiss and central European systems. Other models can be used worldwide, such as AgBalance, eVerdEE, the FEAT model, and LCAD (BASF, 2015; Camargo et al., 2013; Porta et al., 2008; Styles et al., 2014, 2015). Crop.LCA can also be integrated to carry out either spatialised or regional LCA.

One limitation of Crop.LCA is that it is based mostly on North American conditions (Table 2). In addition like some other tools (USDA, 2015; Vergé et al., 2012), life cycle inventory analysis of the background processes was not part of the original development objectives of Crop.LCA. Thus, input data files for unit processes for background processes (e.g., the production of fertilizers, pesticides, seeds), occurring outside North American conditions, are currently not available and need to be prepared by the LCA practitioner using other software and databases (e.g., SimaPro, (SimaPro 8.3, 2016)) to conduct site-specific assessments. However, being open-source, users can select geographically specific input files (e.g. soils and impact factors) or use empirical data. Furthermore, users can develop the code to include other impacts, processes, data sources or features. Many calculation libraries are available in R, which offers the adaptability needed for assessing new bio-economic systems and current systems in new ways.

4. Conclusion

Crop.LCA can capture the interactions of soil, climate and crop management for a variety of cropping systems. The main strength of Crop.LCA is that it is transparent and open-source; therefore, the code can be modified by the LCA practitioner as needed. The availability of the source code provides more flexibility, which is necessary to account for variability in agricultural systems. Crop.LCA can also be used for site-specific assessments, increasing the accuracy of bio-economic assessments. The tool has the advantage of accounting for several substances,

allowing for the assessment of individual crops or cropping systems over several years. Further developments should include the introduction of new substances and impact categories.

In the scenario assessment, Crop.LCA captured variability among cropping-system scenarios. It highlighted the environmental benefits of introducing legumes in rotation. It also demonstrated that inclusion of soil C change significantly reduced the GWP of cropping systems; thus, it should be included in the assessment of bio-economic systems. Further developments are necessary to better estimate impacts of crop-management choices in the assessment of bio-economic systems, integrating scientific evidence provided by agricultural and bioenergy research in LCA methodology.

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Figure captions

Figure 1 Conceptual framework of the Crop.LCA tool (NPKS: fertiliser; LCA.ini(), name of the initialisation function to start Crop.LCA in the R environment; CED: Cumulative Energy Demand; GWP: global warming potential with a 100 year horizon; AP: acidification potential; EP: eutrophication potential)

Figure 2 Main processes considered within the system boundary for the production system analyzed by the Crop.LCA tool (RM: Raw materials; O: oil; F: fuel; LO: lubricating oil; M: machinery; Fert: fertilizer; Pest: pesticide; H: herbicide; S: seed).

Figure 3 Boxplot of global warming potential with a 100 year horizon (GWP) for the cropping systems (a, b) and for wheat cultivation (c, d) according to the functional units considered (ha of land and GJ of energy output) (Bold line: median, Dashed line: mean, box: 25% and 75% quantiles, ○: maximum values, ♦: minimum values) (CONV: conventional; NT: no-tillage; L: legume; RES: residue)

Figure 4 Boxplot of (a,b) cumulative energy demand (CED), (c,d) eutrophication potential (EP,) and (e, f) acidification potential (AP) for the cropping systems with the functional units considered (ha of land and GJ of energy output) (Bold line: median, Dashed line: mean, box: 25% and 75% quantiles, ○: maximum values, ♦: minimum values) (CONV: conventional; NT: no-tillage; L: legume; RES: residue)

Figure 1

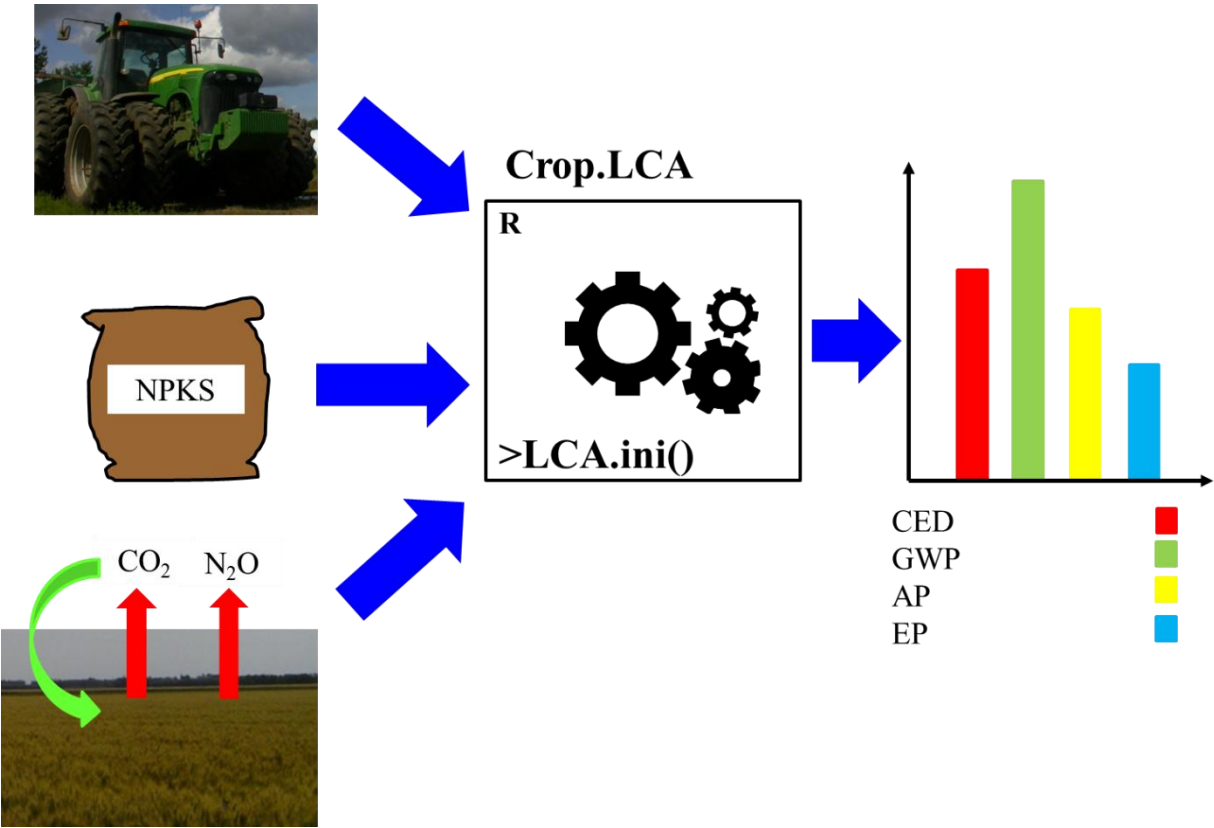


Figure 2

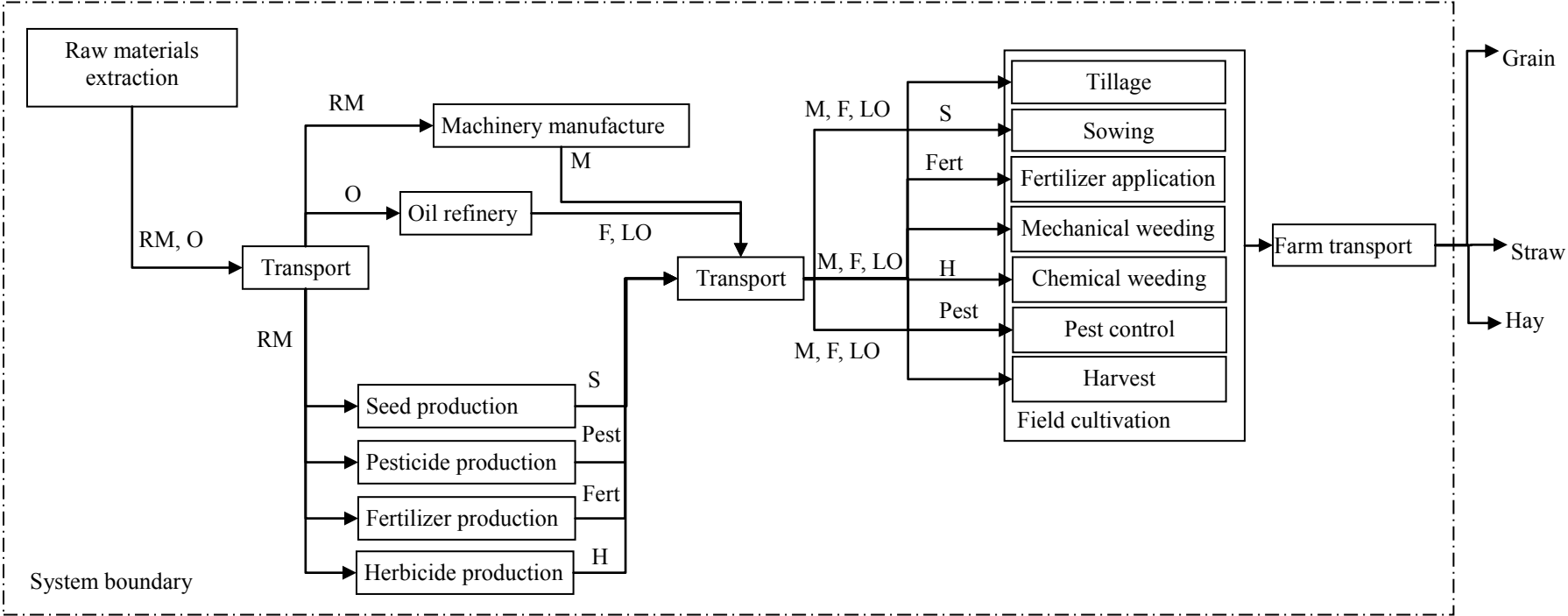


Figure 3

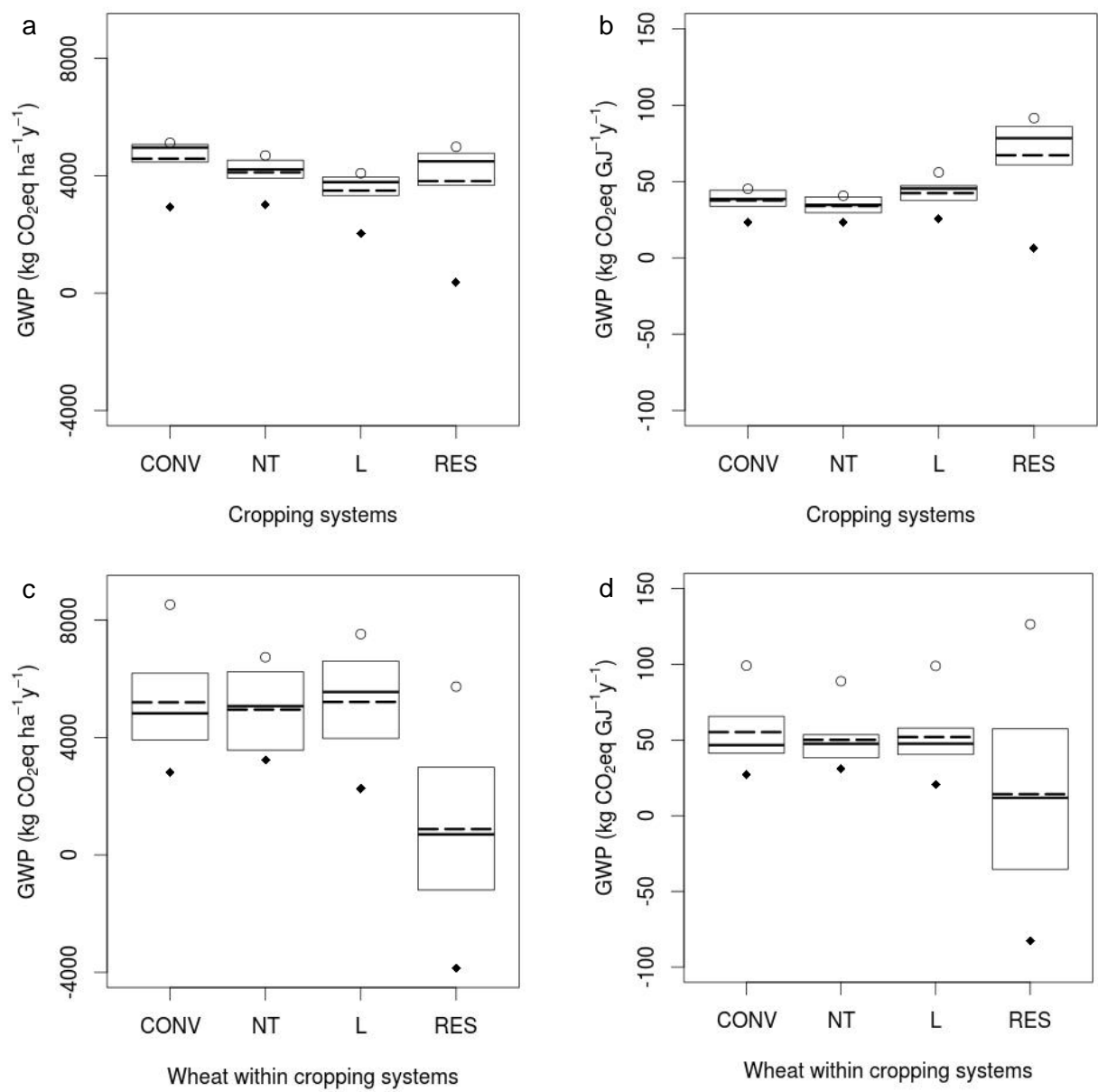


Figure 4

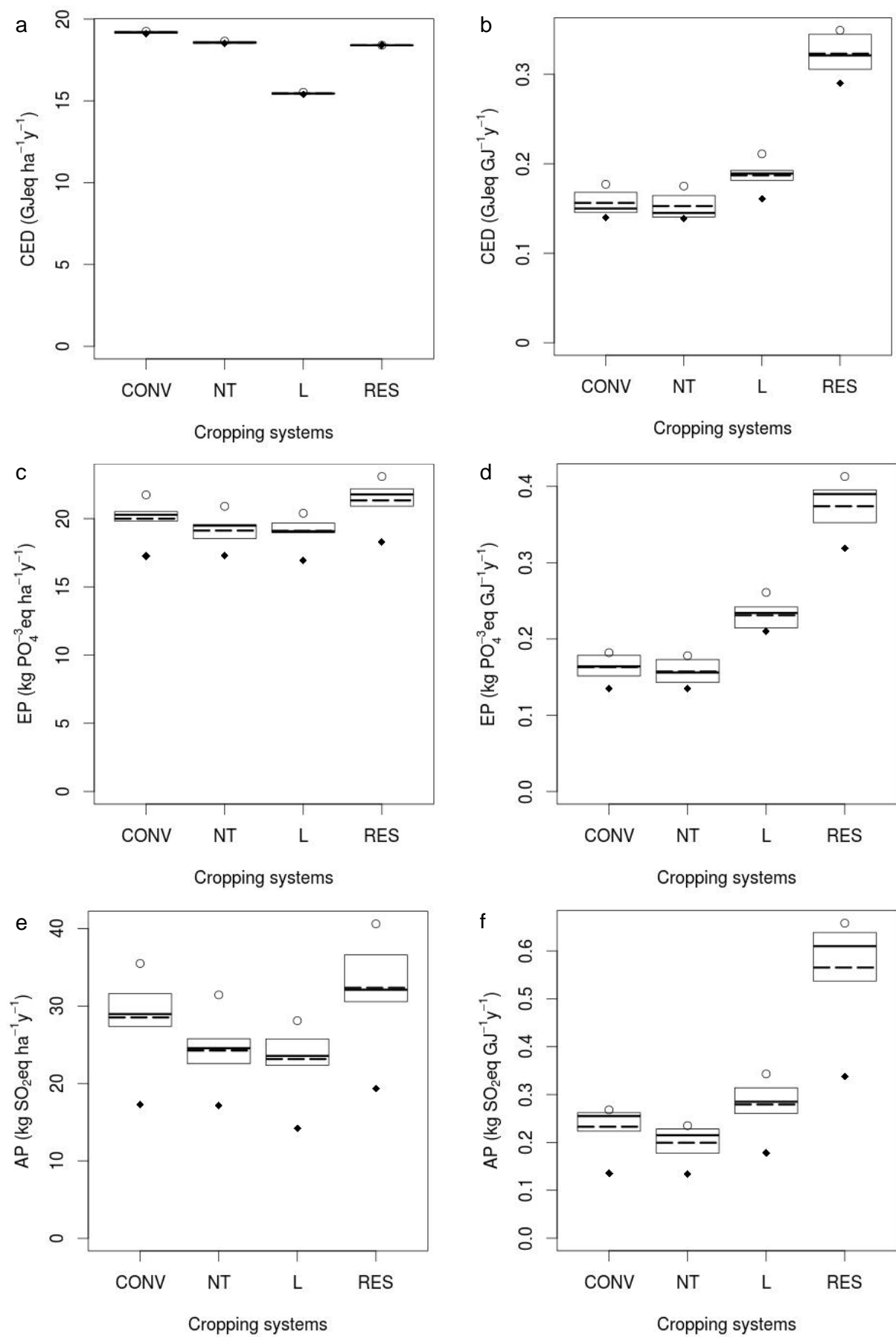


Table 1

Table 1 Summary of characteristics of cropping systems considered in the scenario assessment (Note: Fertiliser cells in the Crop.LCA input file contain the amount of fertiliser applied and its nutrient concentration; further details are given in the Supplementary Material. Bold text indicates differences among systems)

Cropping System		CONV	NT	L	RES
Name in the supplementary material		1	2	3	4
Crop sequence ^a		Maize-spring wheat-canola-spring barley	maize-spring wheat-canola-spring barley	Faba bean-spring wheat-canola-spring barley	maize-spring wheat-canola-spring barley
Tillage		Harrowing and disk harrowing	No tillage	Harrowing and disk harrowing	Harrowing and disk harrowing
Fertiliser ^b	Year 1	180 kg ha ⁻¹ NPKS 112 kg ha ⁻¹ Urea	180 kg ha ⁻¹ NPKS 112 kg ha ⁻¹ Urea	0 kg ha⁻¹ NPKS 0 kg ha⁻¹ Urea	180 kg ha ⁻¹ NPKS 112 kg ha ⁻¹ Urea
	Year 2	213 kg ha ⁻¹ NP	213 kg ha ⁻¹ NP	106 kg ha⁻¹ NP	213 kg ha ⁻¹ NP
	Year 3	317 kg ha ⁻¹ Urea	317 kg ha ⁻¹ Urea	317 kg ha ⁻¹ Urea	317 kg ha ⁻¹ Urea
	Year 4	212 kg ha ⁻¹ Urea	212 kg ha ⁻¹ Urea	212 kg ha ⁻¹ Urea	212 kg ha ⁻¹ Urea
Pesticide treatment number per year		1.5	2.5	1	1.5
Residue management		Straw and stover collected	Straw & stover collected	Straw and stover collected	Straw and stover left on the field

^a maize (*Zea mays* L.), spring wheat (*Triticum aestivum* L.), canola (*Brassica napus* L.), spring barley (*Hordeum vulgare* L.), and faba bean (*Vicia Faba* var. *minor* L.)

^bNutrient content: NPKS 35-25-10-10, NP 43-10, Urea 46

Table 2

Table 2 Comparison of several characteristics of the LCA tools

Tool	AgBalance	Cranfield LCA tool	Crop.LCA	EU Carbon calculator	eVerdEE	FEAT model	LCAcommons	LCAD	SALCA	ULICEES
Impact category assessed	Several	Several	Several	GWP	Several	Several	Several	Several	Several	GWP
Modular	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Adaptable ^a	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Copyright issues	Available after purchase	Free	Free	Free	Free	Free	Free	Not available	Authors mentioned and agreement signed	By citing authors
Crop assessed	Several	Several	Several	Several	Several	Several	Several	bioenergy crops	Several	Several
Geographical area	W ^b	UK	W ^b , currently focused on North America	Europe	W ^b	W ^b	North America	W ^b	Mostly focused on Europe	Mostly focused on North America
Availability	Available after purchase	Online	Online	Online	Online	Online	Online	Not available	On written request	On request
Code available	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Multiapproach for cropping systems ^c	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
Does the tool allow for more than one input method for soil- borne emissions? ^d	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
References	BASF 2015	Williams et al., 2010	Current publication	Tuomisto et al., 2015	Porta et al., 2008	Camargo et al., 2013	USDA 2015	Styles et al., 2014, 2015	Nemecek et al. 2010; Teuscher et al., 2014	Vergé et al., 2012

^aadaptable: Yes: the code of the tool and the data sources are available to the user for possible modifications which can be easily carried out, No: the code of the tool and the data sources are not available to the user for possible modifications which cannot be easily carried out.

^bW: Worldwide

^cmulti-approach: Yes: individual crops and entire cropping systems can be considered at the same time; No: individual crops and entire cropping systems cannot be considered at the same time

^dinput method, in this context, refers to the methodology used to compute and estimate soil borne emissions

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