
Effects of organic fertilizer application on the transformation of nitrogen in paddy soil

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Supsuan, P., Surin, P. and Yampracha, S. (2018). Effects of organic fertilizer application on the transformation of nitrogen in paddy soil. *International Journal of Agricultural Technology* 14(7): 1999-2014.

Abstract The effect of different types of organic fertilizer on the availability of nitrogen in paddy soil was determined. The soil samples were collected from an organic rice field in Nongchok District, Bangkok. The results showed that the soil pH of all treatments increased from 5.3 to 6.9 and 7.2. The cumulative N mineralization of sunn hemp was the highest (121.33 mg N/kg), but no significant difference was compared to for other organic fertilizers. The change of AHN was increased at the start of incubation and decreased after 70 days of incubation. It indicated that the AHN changed to ammonium. The potential N mineralization of control, cow manure, compost and sunn hemp were 95.34, 109.90, 107.23 and 114.53 mg N/kg, respectively. The K values indicated the mineralization rate of control, cow manure, compost and sunn hemp which were 0.2095, 0.2075, 0.2053 and 0.1992 mg N/kg, respectively.

Keywords: Nitrogen, Organic fertilizers, Paddy soil

Introduction

Nitrogen (N) is one of the essential macronutrients that may limit rice growth and yield (Duan *et al.*, 2007). Organic fertilizers are organic compounds that contain plant nutrients and organic substances, which can improve the physical, chemical and biological properties of soil (Albiach *et al.*, 2000). Organic fertilizer is a significant source of N for organic farming systems. Organic rice systems have a high nitrogen shortage because of the N in organic fertilizers that can be utilized when the process is decomposed by microorganisms (Kyuma, 2004). The N availability content, pattern and rate of mineralization are different depending on organic fertilizer properties, soil properties and the environment (Masunga *et al.*, 2016). Usually, N mineralization of organic fertilizer in aerobic conditions must be higher than the anaerobic conditions, such as in paddy soil (Dahlin *et al.*, 2005). Under anaerobic conditions, the decomposition of organic N is dependent on the

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availability of alternate electron acceptors such as ferric iron and sulfate, which are far less efficient electron acceptors than O₂ in aerobic conditions (Sahrawat, 2004).

The dynamic change of nitrogen in paddy soil is mineralization of organic compound to ammonium (NH₄⁺). NH₄⁺ will accumulate in the soil solution and the surface of the soil colloids, which can exchange (Wang *et al.*, 1993). Thus, the ammonium nitrogen produced in paddy soil can be used as an index of N availability (Waring and Bremner, 1964). A major key for successive use of organic fertilizers in soil requires knowing the amount of N applied and the rate of N mineralization (Mikkelsen and Hartz, 2008). The pattern and rate of nitrogen mineralization depend on organic fertilizer properties such as C:N ratio, total N and chemical composition (Myint *et al.*, 2011).

Farmyard manure, compost and green manure are some of the major sources of N fertilizer for organic rice cultivation in Thailand. The application of organic fertilizers stimulates the mineralization of labile organic N in the soil (Zhang *et al.*, 2012). Wen *et al.* (1995) reported that apparent N mineralization was approximately 10% from manure compost over a field in growing season. Hartz *et al.* (2000) reported that the average N mineralization rate during incubation gave average available N at 20%, 9%, 6%, and 2% for dried chicken manure, other manure, manure compost, and plant residue compost, respectively. Short-term N immobilization commonly occurred with slow mineralization organic fertilizer such as manure (Hartz *et al.*, 1996; Hartz and Giannini, 1998). Low N mineralization rates suggested that very large amendment application rates would be required to significantly increase short-term soil N supply. This was particularly true of composts and may help to explain the crop N deficiency frequently encountered in fields during transition to organic management. Commonly, N release from legume residue is rapid in the tropics (Perin *et al.*, 2006). Leguminous green manure crops may add N to crop systems through biological fixation, while the slow release of N from decomposing green manure residue may be well timed with plant uptake (Cline and Silvernail, 2002; Cherr *et al.*, 2006). Cherr *et al.* (2006) reported that sunn hemp (*Crotalaria juncea* L.) produced 12.2 Mg/ha of fresh matter and added 172 kg N/ha in a 14-week period after being incorporated.

Various kinds of organic fertilizer may have different N mineralization in paddy soil, which means less mineralization than aerobic soil. Moreover, the estimation of N mineralization may be useful for N management and rice cultivation in organic systems. Usually, study of N mineralization was done in laboratory and transfer the results to the field by modeling (Sharifi *et al.*, 2007; Griffin and Honeycutt, 2000; Griffin *et al.*, 2005; Pereira *et al.*, 2005 and Rao *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, the objective of this research was to determine the

effects of different types of organic fertilizer on the availability of nitrogen in paddy soil as well as establish a model for estimating N mineralization from organic fertilizers.

Materials and methods

Soil and organic fertilizers

The soil samples were collected from an organic rice field in Nongchok District, Bangkok, Thailand (latitude 13°55'23.0" N longitude 100°54'32.2" E). The soil was classified into Bangkok soil series (very-fine, smectitic, nonacid, isohyperthermic Vertic Endoaquepts). The soil in this area has been used for rice cultivation for more than 30 years and transitioned to organic farming more than 10 years ago, with only farm yard manure, green manure and compost used. The surface soil was collected at a depth of 0-15 cm. Soil samples were air dried, ground to pass through a 2 mm sieve, and well mixed before analysis and incubation.

Soil and organic fertilizer analysis

The soil samples were analyzed for soil pH (soil: water, 1:1), electrical conductivity (EC soil: water, 1:5) (Richards, 1954) and total nitrogen (total N), which were determined using a CNS analyzer (LECO Coporation, 2016). Available phosphorus (P) was determined using a colorimetric method after extracting by the Bray II method (Bray and Kurtz, 1945). Exchangeable potassium (K), exchangeable calcium (Ca) and exchangeable magnesium (Mg) were extracted by 1M ammonium acetate pH 7 (Chongpraditnun, 2001). Exchangeable K, Ca and Mg were determined by inductively coupled plasma optical emission spectrophotometry (ICP-OES).

Three types of organic fertilizers consisting of cow manure, compost and sunn hemp (*Crotalaria juncea* L.) were used in this study. Cow manure and compost were collected from farm fields in Nongchok District, Bangkok. Compost was prepared from the decomposition of cow manure and rice straw at a ratio of 1:3 and decomposed for 60 days. Sunn hemp was collected at 50% of flowering stage from a paddy field in Ladkrabang District, Bangkok. All organic fertilizers were oven dried at 70 °C and sieved by passing through a 2 mm sieve. Organic fertilizers were analyzed for pH using a pH meter to measure the organic fertilizer to water ratio equal to 1:5, which usually should be measured at a ratio of 1:2. However, the organic fertilizers were saturated with water (Pan-in, 2008). Total nitrogen (total N) and total carbon (total C)

were determined by CNS analyzer (LECO Coporation, 2016). Total phosphorus (total P_2O_5), total potassium (total K_2O), total magnesium (total Mg), total calcium (total Ca), were digested by $HClO_4:HNO_3$ (2:1) and concentration determined by ICP-OES.

Incubation experiment

The experiment was conducted in a laboratory. Organic rice soil was incubated with three organic fertilizers, i.e. cow manure, compost fertilizer and green manure, with a batch experiment. The experimental design was completely randomized with 3 replications. Four treatments consisted of 1) non-fertilizer application (control), 2) amended with cow manure, 3) amended with compost, and 4) amended with sunn hemp. Each organic fertilizer was amended at a rate of 300 mg N/kg. One hundred grams of soil sample was mixed with organic fertilizers and put in a 250 ml glass bottle. Subsequently, the 200 ml of distillation water was added to maintain the flooding condition. The bottles were then stored at a constant temperature of 30 °C for 120 days. The soil samples in each batch were collected at 0, 3, 5, 7, 14, 21, 28, 42, 56, 70, 98 and 120 days after incubation. The soil samples were analyzed for pH, ammonium (NH_4^+) and alkaline hydrolysable nitrogen (AHN). Soil samples were collected for analysis of total nitrogen and organic carbon at 0 and 120 days. Soil pH was measured using a pH meter (soil: water, 1:1), while extractable ammonium (NH_4^+) was determined by 2N KCl extraction and stream distillation (Miegroet, 1995). Alkaline hydrolysable N was determined using the method described by Khan *et al.* (2001) and Bushong *et al.* (2008). Total C and total N concentration were determined using a CNS analyzer (LECO Coporation, 2016).

Nitrogen mineralization model

The kinetic model used for calculation of soil mineralizable nitrogen is shown in equation (1) as described by Dessureault-Romppe *et al.* (2014):

$$N_t = N_0 \times (1 - e^{-kt}) \quad (1)$$

where N_t is the cumulative amount of nitrogen mineralization at time t , N_0 is potential mineralization nitrogen and k is the mineralization rate (Dessureault-Romppe *et al.*, 2015, Thomas *et al.*, 2015, Wijanarko and Purwanto, 2016 and Wang *et al.*, 2017). N_0 and mineralization rate were calculated by non-linear regression model. The cumulative amount of nitrogen mineralization at the time

of each organic fertilizer was estimated to examine the index of agreement (Willmott *et al.*, 2012) and modeling efficiency (Mohanty *et al.*, 2011).

The index of agreement (d) and modeling efficiency (EF) were evaluated to verify the precision of the N mineralization model. Typically, prediction data is compared with observation data. The methods used to calculate the index of agreement and modeling efficiency are described in equations (2) and (3) below:

$$d = 1 - \frac{\sum_{i=0}^n (P_i - O_i)^2}{\sum_{i=0}^n (|P_i - \bar{O}| + |O_i - \bar{O}|)^2} \quad (2)$$

$$EF = 1 - \left[\frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (P_i - O_i)^2}{\sum_{i=1}^n (O_i - \bar{O})^2} \right] \quad (3)$$

where P_i = predicted value, O_i = observed value, \bar{O} = mean of the observed values and n = number of observation.

Data analysis

The data were subjected to analysis of variance (ANOVA) and treatment means were compared by Duncan's multiple range test at $P \leq 0.05$.

Results

Soil properties before incubation

Soil properties before incubation were shown in Table 1. The soil texture was clay with strongly acidic (pH = 5.3). Electrical conductivity was 0.23 mS/cm. It was not affected plants growth (Table 1). Total nitrogen and total C were 2.41 and 23.90 g/kg, respectively. Available phosphorus, exchangeable potassium, exchangeable calcium, and exchangeable magnesium were 76.71, 251.53, 2998.79, and 661.96 mg/kg, respectively. The soil was high cation exchange capacity with 26.85 cmol/kg (Table 1).

Organic fertilizers properties before incubation

The pH of cow manure, compost, and sunn hemp were 8.20, 6.30 and 5.10, respectively (Table 2). Total N and total C of cow manure, compost, and sunn hemp were 7.80, 19.40 and 23.20 g/kg, respectively and 122.9, 260.70 and 432.90 g/kg, respectively for total C. Then, the C: N ratio of cow manure, compost, and sunn hemp were 15.76, 13.44 and 18.66, respectively. Alkaline hydrolysable N, easily N mineralization form, in cow manure, compost, and

sunn hemp were 217.48, 95.61 and 273.67 mg/kg, respectively. Total K₂O, Ca and Mg of cow manure and sunn hemp was higher than compost (Table 2).

Table 1. Soil properties before incubation

Soil property	Organic rice paddy soil (Bangkok soil series)
Soil texture	Clay
Sand (%)	25.96
Silt (%)	24.72
Clay (%)	49.32
Soil pH (water: soil; 1:1)	5.30
Electrical Conductivity (water: soil; 1:5) (mS/cm)	0.23
Cation exchange capacity (cmol/kg)	26.85
Total Nitrogen (g/kg)	2.41
Total Carbon (g/kg)	23.90
C:N ratio	9.92
Available Phosphorus (mg/kg)	35.47
Exchangeable Potassium (mg/kg)	251.53
Exchangeable Calcium (mg/kg)	2,998.79
Exchangeable Magnesium (mg/kg)	661.96

Table 2. Organic fertilizer properties before incubation

Chemical property	Cow manure	Compost	Sunn hemp
pH (organic fertilizer: water; 1:5)	8.20	6.30	5.10
Total N (g/kg)	7.80	19.40	23.20
Total C (g/kg)	122.90	260.70	432.90
C:N ratio	15.76	13.44	18.66
Alkaline hydrolysable N (mg/kg)	217.48	95.61	273.67
Total P ₂ O ₅ (g/kg)	0.48	0.23	0.25
Total K ₂ O (g/kg)	34.35	6.39	19.23
Total Mg (g/kg)	4.82	3.04	5.18
Total Ca (g/kg)	23.46	7.09	7.53

Soil pH during incubation period

The results showed that at the initial day of incubation (day 0), soil pH of the soil amended with cow manure was highest with pH value 5.8 (moderately acid). Meanwhile, soil pH of the soil amended with compost, sunn hemp and control were 5.7, 5.5 and 5.5, respectively (Figure 1). Soil pH during initial until 14 days of incubation increased rapidly and at fourteen days of incubation pH was highest in all treatments (Figure 1). Soil pH of control was significantly different with soil pH of the soil amended with cow manure, compost and sunn hemp which pH values were 7.1, 7.3, 7.4 and 7.4, respectively. After 14 days

of incubation, soil pH of all treatment slightly decreased and stable with soil pH values around 6.9-7.3 until the end of incubation. However, soil pH of all treatment from 21 -120 days after incubation was not significantly different.

pH	Day after incubation											
	0	3	5	7	14	21	28	42	56	70	98	120
<i>P</i> -value	<0.0001	0.0085	0.0060	0.0567	0.0035	0.9566	0.3555	0.2573	0.2966	0.4697	0.0037	0.1514
CV (%)	0.61	0.95	0.63	0.40	0.82	1.08	0.50	0.78	1.15	0.79	0.41	1.80

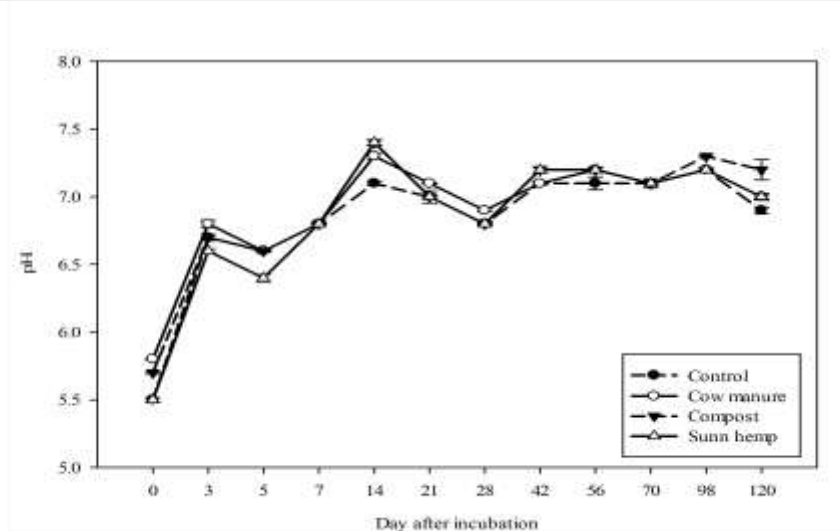


Figure 1. Change of soil pH during incubation period in paddy soil amended with and without different organic fertilizers (vertical bars indicate standard errors of means, n=3). The table above graph show analysis of variance of soil pH during incubation period

Change of alkaline hydrolysable nitrogen

The change of alkaline hydrolysable N during the incubation period was shown in Figure 2. At the initial day of incubation, alkaline hydrolysable N in the soil amended with cow manure was significantly differed with other treatments with the value 162.78 mg N/kg. Whereas, the soil in control and the soil amended with compost and sunn hemp were 128.78, 117.02 and 117.55 mg N/kg, respectively. After that, the concentration of alkaline hydrolysable nitrogen slowly increased unit 21 days after incubation. Moreover, on the third day of incubation alkaline hydrolysable nitrogen of sunn hemp was lowest and significant difference with control (Figure 2). Fifth and seven days of

incubation, alkaline hydrolysable N was higher than the soil amended with three organic fertilizers.

AHN	Day after incubation											
	0	3	5	7	14	21	28	42	56	70	98	120
<i>P</i> -value	0.0102	0.0006	0.1142	0.0111	0.0262	0.2145	0.0089	0.0101	0.0971	0.117	0.0428	0.0393
CV (%)	10.32	8.56	13.48	6.71	7.45	10.78	11.02	8.57	6.39	9.8	9.16	17.23

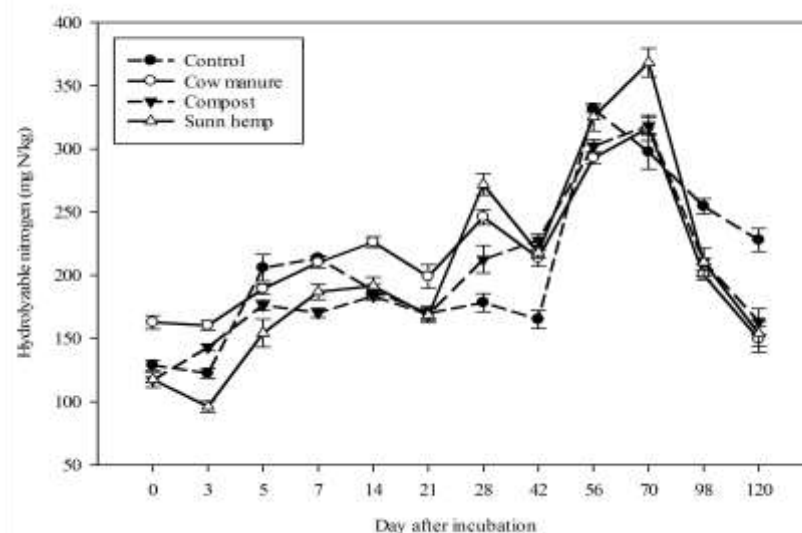


Figure 2. Change in alkaline hydrolysable nitrogen during incubation period in in paddy soil amended with and without different organic fertilizers (vertical bars indicate standard errors of means, n=3). The table above graph show analysis of variance of hydrolysable nitrogen during incubation period

After 21 days of incubation, alkaline hydrolysable N in control was significantly lower than other treatment until 56 days after incubation. After 56 days of incubation, alkaline hydrolysable N in control was fluctuation but it was clear significantly higher than the soil amended with three organic fertilizers (Figure 2). However, alkaline hydrolysable N in the soil amended with cow manure was higher than control until 56 days of incubation. Meanwhile, alkaline hydrolysable N in the soil amended with compost and sunn hemp at first seven days after incubation was lower than control. After 120 days after incubation, all amended soils were significantly differenced with control. Subsequently, the concentration of alkaline hydrolysable nitrogen in

control, the soil amended with cow manure, compost, and sunn hemp were 227.97, 149.51, 163.32, and 153.82 mg N/kg, respectively (Figure 2).

Cumulative nitrogen mineralization

The cumulative N mineralization was calculated from extractable ammonium which releases each day of incubation. The cumulative N mineralization of all treatments is increased markedly with incubation time (Figure 3).

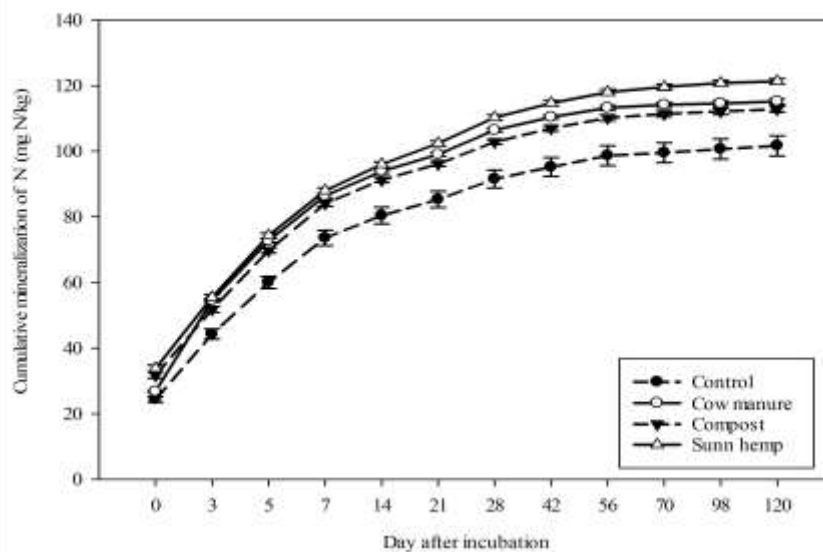


Figure 3. Cumulative N mineralized of nitrogen during incubation period in paddy soil with different organic fertilizers application (vertical bars indicate standard errors around means, n=3)

The cumulative N mineralization of control was lowest and significantly different from the soil amended with organic fertilizers throughout the incubation period (Figure 3 and Table 3). Nitrogen mineralization of soil amended with sunn hemp was highest but not significantly with another two organic fertilizers. Furthermore, cumulative N mineralization of cow manure was a little higher than compost (Figure 3). The cumulative N mineralization at the end of incubation period in control, cow manure, compost, and sunn hemp were 101.71, 115.21, 112.83 and 121.33 mg N/kg, respectively (Table 3). These results show that N in cow manure, compost, and sunn hemp mineralized 4.5, 3.71 and 6.54 percent of total N added, respectively.

Table 3. Effect of organic fertilizers on cumulative N mineralization during 120 days of incubation

Treatment	Days after incubation											
	0	3	5	7	14	21	28	42	56	70	98	120
Control	24.33a	44.25b	59.99b	73.61b	80.43b	85.35b	91.57b	95.27b	98.69b	99.57b	100.70b	101.71b
Cow manure	26.77b	54.54a	72.76a	86.42a	93.89a	96.07a	106.44a	110.42a	113.25a	114.17a	114.60a	115.21a
Compost	31.75a	51.79a	69.79a	84.10a	91.26a	96.19a	102.85a	107.00a	110.19a	111.41a	112.16a	112.83a
Sunn hemp	33.79a	55.47a	74.28a	88.03a	96.00a	102.40a	110.28a	114.66a	118.00a	119.61a	120.81a	121.33a
F-test	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
CV(%)	8.35	5.94	4.88	4.96	4.65	4.30	4.35	4.45	4.62	4.57	4.53	4.54

*Significant at $p \leq 0.05$, value followed by the same lowercase letter in the same column are not significantly difference at $p \leq 0.05$.

Nitrogen mineralization model

N mineralization potential and mineralization rate of soil with and without organic fertilizer amended were estimated using equation (1). The mineralization potential (N₀) of control, cow manure, compost, and sunn hemp were 95.34, 109.90, 107.23 and 114.53 mg N/kg, respectively (Table 4). The N mineralization potential of control was significantly different with amended soils. The k values which indicated the mineralization rate of control, cow manure, compost, and sunn hemp were 0.2095, 0.2075, 0.2053 and 0.1992 mg N/kg, respectively (Table 4). The k value was not significantly different.

The predicted mineralization on the time was calculated from N₀ and K value of each treatment. The index of agreement (d) and modeling efficiency were estimated from observed and predicted data. The index of agreement of the soil with and without organic fertilizer amended was close to 1 with the values 0.9859 - 0.9907 (Table 4). Meanwhile, modeling efficiency of control, the soil amended with cow manure, compost, and sunn hemp were 0.9591, 0.9631, 0.9424 and 0.9395, respectively (Table 4).

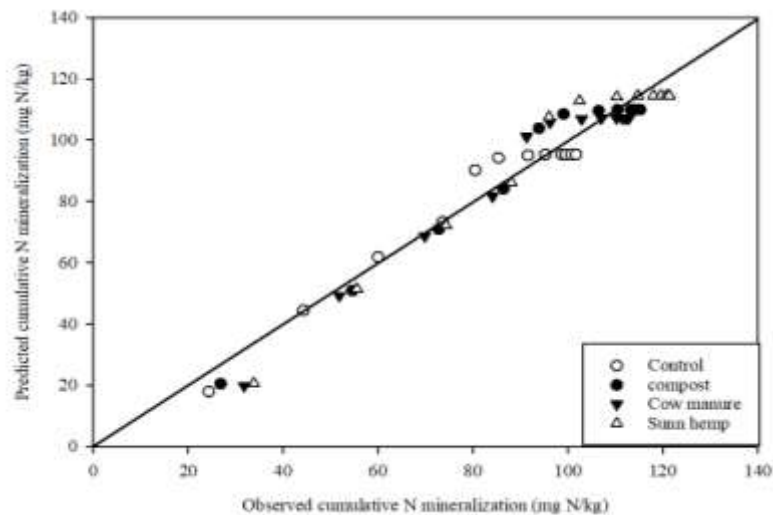
The 1:1 line between observed cumulative N mineralization and predicted cumulative N mineralization was indicated that the predicted cumulative N mineralization at low concentration was underestimated (Figure 4). The predicted cumulative N mineralization around 40 - 80 mg/kg seems to close the observed data (Figure 4). Whereas, the predicted cumulative N mineralization above 80 mg/kg was overestimated.

Table 4. Nitrogen mineralization potential and mineralization rate of soil with and without organic fertilizer amended, index of agreement and modelling efficiency

Treatment	N ₀ (mg/kg)	k	Index of agreement	Modelling Efficiency
Control	95.34b	0.2095	0.9899	0.9591
Cow manure	109.90a	0.2074	0.9907	0.9631
Compost	107.23a	0.2053	0.9868	0.9424
Sunn hemp	114.53a	0.1992	0.9859	0.9395
F-test	*	ns		
CV (%)	4.42	7.55		

N₀ = N mineralization potential, k = mineralization rate.

*Significant at $p \leq 0.05$, ns = not significant, value followed by the same lowercase letter in the same column are not significantly difference at $p \leq 0.05$.

**Figure 4.** The 1:1 line between observed cumulative N mineralization and predicted cumulative N mineralization

Discussion

Effect of organic fertilizers on soil pH

The soil pH tended to increase and stability after 14 days of incubation. Soil pH of the soil with and without organic fertilizer amended become neutral after 14 days of incubation as the influence by the reduction reaction (Kyuma, 2004; Attanandana, 2007). In addition, the application of organic fertilizers could increase soil alkalinity (Dong *et al.*, 2012). The application of cow

manure showed that the soil pH at initial incubation was higher than compost and sunn hemp due to high pH of cow manure. Moreover, the change of soil pH to neutral may confirm that the soil with and without organic fertilizer amended during the incubation period under reduction condition. It might notice that the soil pH increased rapidly at the initial of flooding resulted by high organic carbon in soil and organic fertilizer (Attanandana, 2007). The optimum pH for ammonification reaction, the first step of N transformation from organic N to NH_4^+ , was between 6.5 and 8.5 (Hopkinson and Giblin, 2008). So, the soil pH condition in this experiment was suitable for N transformation.

Effect of organic fertilizers on nitrogen mineralization

The application of organic fertilizers stimulated the mineralization of labile organic N in the soil (Zhang *et al.*, 2012). Alkaline hydrolysable nitrogen may be an indicator for determined N transformation. The change of AHN fluctuated, for example, the initial day of incubation AHN in sunn hemp lower than control. It might be mentioned that N immobilization occurred. Short-term N immobilization was common with urban yard waste compost, with slow net mineralization thereafter (Hartz *et al.*, 1996; Hartz and Giannini, 1998). Whereas, 7 – 70 days of incubation AHN in control was lower than other treatments. At the end of incubation AHN in control was higher and significantly different with the soil amended with organic fertilizer.

The cumulative N mineralization of control was significantly changed by the soil amended with organic fertilizers. Effect of organic fertilizers (cow manure, compost, and sunn hemp) on cumulative N mineralization was non-significant differences due to high clay and organic matter content in soil. At the end of incubation, nitrogen mineralization of three organic fertilizers was lower than 10 percent of total N added (300 mg/kg) (Table 3) as similar to the results of Wen *et al.* (1995). Chivenge *et al.* (2011) reported nitrogen transformation rates of added organic N sources are generally faster in coarse than fine-textured soils. Soil total N concentration was also higher in the clay than the sandy-loam soil, but soil available N was greater in the sandy-loam soil. (Luce *et al.*, 2014). Mineralization rates of nitrogen in soil textures that are rich in silt and clay related to soil organic carbon and total N contents. Thus, the amount and type of clay in a soil affected N mineralization process (Najmadeen, 2011; Nieder *et al.*, 2011; Ramírez *et al.*, 2016). However, cumulative N mineralization of sunn hemp was higher than cow manure and compost and the sequence was sunn hemp > cow manure > compost. This sequence may relate to AHN content of organic fertilizer. Differences in organic-N mineralization

may be due to the specific characteristics of the organic materials (Zhang *et al.*, 2012). Commonly N release from legume residues is rapid in the tropics (Perin *et al.*, 2006).

Simulation of Nitrogen mineralization

Nitrogen mineralization potential found similar results as well as the cumulative N mineralization at the end of incubation. The N mineralization model fit well with observed data as indicated by an index of agreement and modeling efficiency. Nevertheless, the 1:1 line indicates that at low and high cumulative N mineralization was underestimate and overestimate, respectively. However, the N mineralization model helped to reduce N fertilization and N leaching, while saving considerable amount of N fertilizer (Heumann *et al.*, 2013). The ability of laboratory incubation to predict N mineralization in the field could be better evaluated and more reliable results were obtained in the field (Delphin, 2000).

It concluded that the incubation experiment with 120 days indicated the soil pH increased from 5.3 (strongly acidic) to 6.9-7.2 (neutral). The cumulative N mineralization and potential N mineralization in the soil amended with green manure as sunn hemp was the highest. The effect of organic fertilizer properties was not affected cumulative N mineralization and potential N mineralization. It may be due to high clay content and organic carbon in the organic rice soil. Soil with high clay content and organic carbon was less mineralization. The model for predicting cumulative N mineralization can be used and field experiment is needed to evaluate the precision of the model

Acknowledgement

This research was supported by Graduate Research Fund Faculty of Agricultural Technology, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang, Bangkok, Thailand.

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(Received: 12 September 2018, accepted: 31 October 2018)