

Advances in Soil Science

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Advances in Soil Science

Volume 14

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With Contributions by

J.B. Harsh, J.M. McCray, L.K. Porter, J.S. Schepers,
N. Senesi, S.J. Smith, M.E. Sumner, S.J. Traina, and Shihe Xu

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Preface

The study of soils today has taken on increased importance because a rapidly expanding population is placing demands on the soil never before experienced. This has led to an increase in land degradation. Land degradation is one of the most severe problems facing mankind. Volume 11 of *Advances in Soil Science* was devoted entirely to this critical area of soil science.

From the beginning of agriculture until about 1950, increased food production came almost entirely from expanding the cropland base. Since 1950, however, the yield per unit of land area for major crops has increased dramatically. Much of the increase in yields was because of increased inputs of energy. Between 1950 and 1985, the farm tractor fleet quadrupled, world irrigated area tripled, and use of fertilizer increased ninefold. Between 1950 and 1985, the total energy used in world agriculture increased 6.9 times.

Until recently, sustainability was seldom, if ever, mentioned in agricultural literature. Now, it is one of the most widely used terms. The high costs of irrigation development, escalating energy costs during the 1970s, public concern over potential negative impacts of fertilizer and pesticides on water supplies, soil erosion, soil compaction and salinity problems, and other concerns have caused many people to question whether many of the present agriculture systems can be sustained. As a result, soil science is beginning to focus more on sustaining the resource base. The productivity level of an agricultural soil at any point in time is the result of the interaction of degradative processes and conservation/reclamation practices that occur simultaneously. A sustainable system is any system in which the benefits from the soil conservation practices are equal to or greater than the negative effects of the soil degradative processes.

This series, *Advances in Soil Science*, was established to provide a forum for leading scientists to analyze and summarize the available scientific information on a subject, assessing its importance and identifying additional research needs. This goal seems even more appropriate today than in 1982 when the idea of the series was formulated. Much has been learned about our soil resources. The principles learned and the technology developed need to be used to increase food production and sustain the productivity of the resource base. *Advances in Soil*

Science fills a gap between the scientific journal and the comprehensive reference books. Scientists can delve in depth into a particular subject relating to soil science. Contributors are asked to develop and identify principles that have practical applications to both developing and developed agricultures.

Advances in Soil Science is international in scope and covers all subjects relating to soil science. This volume continues that format. Although we consider our audience to be primarily scientists and students of soil science, the series provides technical information to anyone interested in our natural resources and man's influence on these resources. Research in the future will focus on systems that are resource efficient and environmentally sound. The need to optimize crop production while conserving the resource base has never been greater.

The quick acceptance of *Advances in Soil Science* by both authors and readers has been very gratifying and confirms our perception that a need did exist for a medium to publish soil science reviews. I want to thank the authors for their excellent contributions and cooperation. I also want to thank members of the Editorial Board for their help in selecting such competent authors and the Springer-Verlag staff for their kind assistance and counsel. Last, and most important, I want to thank the readers for their acceptance and use of *Advances in Soil Science*.

B.A. Stewart

Contents

Preface	v
Contributors	ix
Assessing and Managing Agricultural Nitrogen Losses to the Environment	1
<i>S.J. Smith, J.S. Schepers, and L.K. Porter</i>	
I. Introduction	2
II. Contributions to N Input	2
III. N Loss Processes	3
IV. Practices to Ameliorate N Losses or Increase N Use Efficiency	15
V. N Research Tools	26
VI. Research Needs	30
References	32
Assessing and Modifying Ca and Al Levels in Acid Subsoils	45
<i>J.M. McCray and M.E. Sumner</i>	
I. Introduction	45
II. Soil Al and Plant Response	46
III. Ca Deficiency and the Ca/Al Relationship	56
IV. Ca and Al in Acid Subsoils	58
V. Conclusions	69
References	70
Application of Electron Spin Resonance (ESR) Spectroscopy in Soil Chemistry	77
<i>N. Senesi</i>	
I. Introduction	78
II. Basic Principles and Methodology of ESR Spectroscopy	78
III. Organic Free Radicals in Humic Substances	88

IV. Free Radicals in Humic Substance–Herbicide Interactions	97
V. Metal–Humic Substance Complexes	102
VI. Metal and/or Organic Interactions with Oxides, Hydrrous Oxides, and Clay Minerals	116
VII. Summary and Conclusions	120
VIII. Recommendations for Future Work	121
References	122
Microelectrophoresis Applied to the Surface Chemistry of Clay Minerals	131
<i>J.B. Harsh and Shihe Xu</i>	
I. Introduction	132
II. Quantitative Applications	132
III. Qualitative Applications	154
IV. Conclusions	161
References	162
Applications of Luminescence Spectroscopy to Studies of Colloid–Solution Interfaces	167
<i>S.J. Traina</i>	
I. Introduction	167
II. Fundamental Principles	168
III. Applications of Fluorescence to Colloidal Systems	177
IV. Conclusions	188
References	189
Index	191

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