

Biowaste Mixtures Affecting the Growth and Elemental Composition of Italian Ryegrass (*Lolium multiflorum*)

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11 Biowaste Mixtures Affecting the Growth and Elemental Composition of Italian Ryegrass (*Lolium multiflorum*)

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Abstract

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Biosolids (sewage sludge) can be beneficially applied to degraded lands to improve soil quality. Plants grown on biosolids-amended soils have distinct concentrations of macronutrients and trace elements, which can be beneficial or present a risk to humans and ecosystems. Potentially, biosolids could be blended with other biowastes, such as sawdust, to reduce the risks posed by rebuilding soils using biosolids alone. We sought to determine the effect of mixing biosolids and sawdust on the macronutrient and trace element concentration of ryegrass over a 5-mo period. *Lolium multiflorum* was grown in a low fertility soil, typical for marginal farm areas, that was amended with biosolids (1250 kg N ha⁻¹), biosolids + sawdust (0.5:1) and urea (200 kg N ha⁻¹), as well as a control. Biosolids increased the growth of *L. multiflorum* from 2.93 to 4.14 t ha⁻¹. This increase was offset by blending the biosolids with sawdust (3.00 t ha⁻¹). Urea application increased growth to 4.93 t ha⁻¹. The biowaste treatments increased N, P, Cu, Mn, and Zn relative to the control, which may be beneficial for grazing animals. Although biowaste application caused elevated Cd concentrations (0.15–0.24 mg kg⁻¹) five- to eightfold higher than control and urea treatments, these were below levels that are likely to result in unacceptable concentrations in animal tissues. Mixing biosolids with sawdust reduced Cd uptake while still resulting in increased micronutrient concentrations (P, S, Mn, Zn, Cu) in plants. There were significant changes in the elemental uptake during the experiment, which was attributed to the decomposition of the sawdust.

Core Ideas

- Biowastes (biosolids + sawdust) were effective in improving a low-fertility soil.
- The biowaste mixture improved growth and quality of *Lolium multiflorum* over 5 months.
- The biowaste treatments increased N, P, Cu, Mn, and Zn.
- Mixing biosolids with sawdust reduced Cd uptake.
- Biowaste induced changes in elemental composition increased over the 5-month period.

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BIOSOLIDS are a product of municipal wastewater treatment. They are primarily derived from domestic sources, which are combinations of human feces, urine and gray water, as well as small inputs from industry and occasionally stormwater (Lu et al., 2012). Biosolids are produced at an annual rate of 27 kg per person, and their disposal can be expensive (e.g., incineration or in landfills) or environmentally damaging via legal or illegal disposal into waterways (LeBlanc et al., 2009).

Biosolids provide nutrients and organic matter, which can improve soil structure (Antolin et al., 2005; Singh and Agrawal, 2008), enhance plant growth (Miao et al., 2009; Mok et al., 2013), and increase soil microbial activity (Cytryn et al., 2011). The efficacy of biosolids in improving soil quality depends on their provenance and treatment. Biosolids application to soil can also cause negative effects because they can introduce pathogens (Vasseur et al., 1996; Zelenki et al., 2005) and contaminants, including heavy metals (Oliver et al., 1994; Miao et al., 2009; Lomonte et al., 2010; Lopes et al., 2011) that may be hazardous to soil biological processes and to human health. Therefore, the rate of biosolids addition to land is regulated with respect to the levels of heavy metals, organic compounds and pathogens (EEC, 1986; USEPA, 1993; NZWWA, 2003). Excessive biosolids applications to land can result in excessive runoff or leaching of plant nutrients such as nitrate (NO₃⁻) and phosphate (PO₄³⁻) into receiving waters (Agupowicz et al., 2008; Knowles et al., 2011). Therefore, biosolids are more suitable for rebuilding eroded land, low-fertility with poor soil structure, such as marginal farm areas (Froque et al., 1990; Shahid and Al-Shankiti, 2013). Such sites are not directly linked to the human food chain, and the high organic matter contents of biosolids may be more effective than mineral fertilizers for restoring degraded soils.

Some of the negative effects of biosolids addition to soil, namely environmental impacts of heavy metals, can be mitigated

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Abbreviations: PAHs, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons; DOM, dissolved organic matter; DOC, dissolved organic carbon; SOM, solid organic matter.

by blending the biosolids with other biowastes including biochar (Knowles et al., 2011), lignite (Simmler et al., 2013) and wood waste (Paramashivam et al., 2015). Bugbee (1999) reported that blending biosolids with sawdust could improve plant growth, while reducing NO_3^- leaching by increasing the C/N ratio. In addition to reducing NO_3^- leaching, wood waste, which can be expensive and environmentally damaging to dispose of, can effectively sorb heavy metals such as Cd, Cr, Cu, Ni, Pb and Zn from industrial effluents (Ajmal et al., 1998; Marchetti et al., 2000; Yi et al., 2000). Bulut and Tez (2007) demonstrated that there was variation in the sorption of individual metals ($\text{Pb} \approx \text{Cd} > \text{Ni}$), which was attributed to the affinity of each element to the proteins, carbohydrates, and phenolic compounds in the sawdust.

Sawdust undergoes decomposition when mixed with N-rich material. During decomposition, the cation exchange capacity of the sawdust increases, as more functional groups form on the surface of the sawdust particles (Jokova et al., 1997). Therefore, it is likely that the sorption of metals by sawdust will increase, at least temporarily, as it decomposes. Sawdust may be beneficial in countries with forestry operations that produce large quantities of wood waste, which can be expensive and environmentally damaging to dispose of (Robinson et al., 2007).

Previous studies have shown that biosolids increases the growth of ryegrass (Crush et al., 2006; Santibanez et al., 2008). Biosolids also increase the uptake of Cd, Cu and Zn into the plant biomass (Ahumada et al., 2009; Bai et al., 2013; Mugica-Alvarez et al., 2015). Therefore, contaminants such as Cd may enter grazing animals and result in concentrations in excess of food safety standards in animal products (Reiser et al., 2014). In contrast, the increase in Cu and Zn in the plant biomass can be beneficial to the health of grazing animals in areas where these elements are deficient, or where high Zn concentrations are needed such as a prophylaxis to facial eczema (Anderson et al., 2012).

We hypothesize that mixing sawdust with biosolids will reduce the solubility and hence the plant uptake of heavy metals from biosolids-amended soil. We aimed to determine whether mixtures of biowastes (biosolids + sawdust) could be used to rebuild a low-fertility soil without resulting in excessive metal concentrations in the aerial portions of ryegrass. Specifically, we sought to elucidate the effect of biosolids, either alone or mixed with sawdust, and urea on the growth and concentration of macronutrients and trace elements in *L. multiflorum*.

Materials and Methods

Experimental Setup

The experiment was conducted at Lincoln University greenhouse facility ($43^{\circ}38'42''$ S, $172^{\circ}27'41''$ E). Low-fertility soil, with no history of fertilizer addition, was collected from a marginal farm area near Bideford, New Zealand ($40^{\circ}45'56''$ S, $175^{\circ}54'42''$ E). The soil has been classified as an orthic brown soil, and has been chosen as a representative of marginal soils commonly found around farm systems. Biosolids and sawdust were collected from the Kaikoura Wastewater Treatment Plant, New Zealand ($42^{\circ}21'37.00''$ S, $173^{\circ}41'27.35''$ E). Biosolids were homogenized thoroughly after sieving (≤ 10 mm). Tables 1 and 2 show the properties of the soil, biosolids, and sawdust.

Twenty-four 10-L pots (25 cm diam., 29 cm height) were filled with 10 kg of soil to a soil bulk density of 1.3 g cm^{-3} . Pots were incubated at ambient conditions in the greenhouse for 14 wk before treatment application. Three treatments (urea, biosolids, and biosolids + sawdust) and a control were setup randomly with six replicates each within the experimental setup. The treatments comprised urea (2.11 g dry weight), biosolids (245 g dry weight), and the same amount of biosolids mixed with sawdust (123 g dry weight). The application rates for urea and biosolids were equivalent to 200 and $1250 \text{ kg N ha}^{-1}$, respectively, with the

Table 1. Properties of soil, biosolids and sawdust used in the experiment. Values in parentheses represent standard error of $n = 5$ replicates.

	Soil	Sawdust	Biosolids
pH	6.1	5.7 (0.1)	4.5 (0.0)
Moisture content, % w/w	25.5	230.4 (2.7)	106.2 (4.2)
Dry matter, % w/w	79.7	30.3 (0.2)	48.6 (1.0)
C/N ratio	14.3	808.4 (154.0)	10.6 (0.1)
Total available N, mg kg^{-1}	43.1	n.d. (n.d.)†	403.8 (7.1)
CEC‡, cmol kg^{-1}	21.0	8.0 (0.2)	17.1 (0.6)
total base saturation, %BS	55.0	76.2 (0.8)	86.3 (3.0)
C, % w/w	6.5	47.7 (0.1)	27.1 (0.7)
N, % w/w	0.5	3.1 (0.0)	2.5 (0.5)
P, % w/w	0.05 (0.00)	n.d. (n.d.)	0.59 (0.00)
K, % w/w	0.19 (0.00)	0.05 (0.00)	0.37 (0.00)
S, % w/w	0.04 (0.00)	0.01 (0.00)	0.87 (0.01)
Ca, % w/w	0.41 (0.01)	0.06 (0.00)	0.65 (0.01)
Mg, % w/w	0.20 (0.00)	0.02 (0.00)	0.30 (0.00)
B, mg kg^{-1}	29.0 (0.3)	1.9 (0.2)	26.7 (0.1)
Cu, mg kg^{-1}	4.2 (0.0)	0.8 (0.0)	891.0 (18.9)
Zn, mg kg^{-1}	29 (0)	0 (0)	1073 (27)
Mn, mg kg^{-1}	133.5 (2.9)	47.2 (0.8)	184.9 (4.5)
Fe, mg kg^{-1}	15,461 (109)	116 (6)	14,534 (92)
Cd, mg kg^{-1}	0.05 (0.00)	n.d. (n.d.)	3.97 (0.07)

† n.d. = not detected.

‡ CEC = cation exchange capacity.

Table 2. Plant available [Ca(NO₃)₂] nutrient and trace element concentrations in biosolids and sawdust at start of the experiment. Values in parentheses represent standard error of n = 5 replicates.

	Sawdust	Biosolids
	mg kg ⁻¹	
P	13 (1)	49 (1)
K	295 (6)	170 (5)
S	5 (2)	1193 (64)
Mg	n.d. (n.d.)†	349 (14)
B	n.d. (n.d.)†	n.d. (n.d.)
Cu	0.06 (0.02)	8.90 (0.32)
Zn	6.1 (1.0)	530.7 (12.0)
Mn	53.2 (1.3)	74.0 (2.9)
Fe	0.5 (0.1)	77.6 (1.2)
Cd	0.01 (0.00)	1.32 (0.02)

† n.d. = not detected.

application rate of biosolids equivalent to 50 t ha⁻¹ dry weight. The biosolids and biosolids + sawdust mixtures were applied to the surface of the pots before sowing. Urea (50 kg ha⁻¹ equivalent) was applied four times during the experimental period. Pots were arranged in a randomized block design.

In September 2013, 2 g of *L. multiflorum* ('Feast II' tetraploid Italian ryegrass) seeds were sown in all pots immediately after treatment application. An automated irrigation system applied a total of 1060 mm of water to each pot over the experimental period of 18 wk to ensure optimal plant growth at conditions near field capacity. The temperature in the greenhouse ranged from 9 to 20°C during the night (10 pm until 6 am) and from 14°C to 28°C during the day. The plant biomass was repeatedly cut back to 2 cm above the soil to simulate grazing. Harvesting occurred fortnightly over the summer (southern-hemisphere) starting from 16 Oct. 2013 to 29 Jan. 2014.

Analyses and Statistical Evaluation

At the end of the experiment, soil and plant samples were dried at 70°C until constant weight was obtained, then ground using a Retch ZM200 grinder. Soil samples were collected and passed through a 5-mm stainless steel sieve prior to chemical analyses. Soil and plant C and N concentrations were measured using an Elementar Vario MAX CN analyzer. Soil pH was determined with pH meter (Mettler Toledo Seven Easy) 24 h after shaking 10 g of soil in 25 mL deionized water. Plant-available elements was estimated with 4.0 M Ca(NO₃)₂ extraction following Black et al. (2012), who reported that this extraction was the most effective procedure for determining the plant-availability of metals in biosolids-amended soil. In brief, 5 g soil was weighed into 50-mL centrifuge tubes and extracted with 30 mL of 0.05 M Ca(NO₃)₂ after 2 h of end-over-end shaking and centrifuging at 3200 rpm for 15 min (Whatman 52 filter paper). Extracts were stored in sealed containers until chemical analyses.

Pseudo-total elemental analysis was performed using microwave digestion in 8 mL of nitric acid (Aristar; ±69%), filtered through Whatman 52 filter paper, and diluted with filtered (MilliQ) water to a volume of 25 mL. Concentrations of B, Ca, Cd, Cu, Fe, K, Mg, Mn, P, S, and Zn were determined using inductively coupled plasma optical emission spectrometry (ICP-OES Varian 720 ES). For quality assurance, reference soil and plant material from Wageningen University, the

Netherlands (International Soil analytical Exchange 921 and International Plant analytical Exchange 100) was analyzed with the samples. Recoverable concentrations were 81–112% of the certified values.

Significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) between control soil, urea, biosolids, and biosolids + sawdust treatments were determined by analysis of variance (Trillis et al., 2006), followed by Duncan post-hoc tests at $p \leq 0.05$. The analyses were performed using SPSS v.22 (IBM, 2013). Correlation analyses between dry biomass production and element concentrations were performed in Microsoft Excel 2013 (Microsoft Office, 2013).

Results

Figure 1 shows the cumulative pasture biomass production over the 18 wk experimental period. Control treatments showed a total average of 10.56 g biomass dry weight per pot, equivalent to 2.15 t ha⁻¹. Urea fertilization increased the cumulative biomass to 24.19 g, equivalent to 4.93 t ha⁻¹. Biosolids application also resulted in a significant biomass response (20.32 g, equivalent to 4.14 t ha⁻¹), while mixing sawdust with biosolids lowered the biomass growth of *L. multiflorum* compared to biosolids alone (14.72 g, equivalent to 3.00 t ha⁻¹). Six weeks after sowing, significant differences were detected in the growth response of *L. multiflorum* as a result of different treatments ranking in order of urea > biosolids > biosolids + sawdust > control, which remained unchanged throughout the duration of the experiment.

Table 3 shows that there were significant differences macro-nutrient uptake between untreated control and the treatments. Biosolids addition significantly increased the concentrations of P and S, but surprisingly not N, relative to the control. Biosolids decreased plant K concentration. Biosolids + sawdust increased both N and P. Urea application only caused a significant increase in N and caused significant decreases in P, K and S.

Within treatments, there were significant differences in the uptake of K, P, and S over the experimental period (Fig. 2). Whereas K concentration in the plant biomass showed a decreasing trend in all treatments (Fig. 2b), the highest concentrations of P and S were detected in plant biomass harvested 10 and 12 wk after sowing, as well as at the end of the experiment (Fig. 2c and 2d). For the control, biosolids, and biosolids + sawdust treatments, the N concentration varied between 2 and 3% throughout the experimental period. Concentrations of N were between 3 and 5% during the experiment in urea treatments, with distinct peaks in the initial harvest and at the 10-wk harvest, whereas N concentrations in control, biosolids and biosolids + sawdust treatments ranged between 2 and 3% (Fig. 2a). Plant P at individual harvest time points was negatively correlated with the corresponding biomass in the biosolids and biosolids + sawdust treatments ($r = -0.97, p \leq 0.001$; $r = -0.89, p \leq 0.01$), as well as plant S ($r = -0.88, p \leq 0.01$; $r = -0.78, p \leq 0.05$, data not shown).

The application of biosolids and biosolids + sawdust increased the average plant Zn concentrations up to nine- and sixfold, respectively. Foliar Cu concentrations were increased by up to 50% in the biosolids, and 70% in the biosolids + sawdust treatments (Table 4). Average concentrations of Mn were increased by approximately 50% after biosolids application compared to control treatments. Plant Cd concentrations in the biosolids treatment were approximately eightfold higher than the control

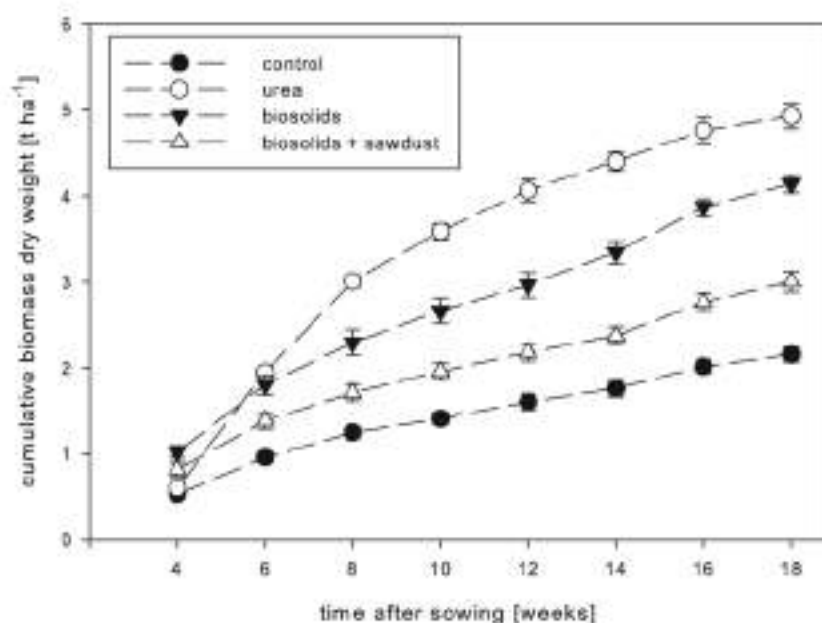


Fig. 1. Cumulative biomass (dry weight) in $t\ ha^{-1}$ equivalent during the 18-wk experimental period. Each point is the average of six replicates with bars representing the standard error of the mean. Non-overlapping bars indicate significant differences ($p < 0.05$).

and urea treatments. This increase was only a fivefold increase in the biosolids + sawdust treatment. Urea application did not cause significant differences in average foliar concentration of any trace element.

As with the macronutrients, there was significant variation in the uptake of trace elements over the 18-wk experimental period (Fig. 3). In the biosolids and biosolids + sawdust treatments, the concentrations of Zn, Cd and Cu increased throughout the experimental period (Fig. 3b, 3c, and 3c). In contrast, there was little difference in the Cu concentration between biosolids and biosolids + sawdust treatments (Fig. 3c). For Cd and Zn, the difference between the biosolids and the biosolids + sawdust treatment increased over time (Fig. 3b and 3c). Between the 6- and 8-wk harvests, the results showed a pronounced increase in the elemental concentrations of Fe, Cd, Mn and Cu, especially in biosolids treatments.

Discussion

The total biomass production ($2\text{--}5\ t\ ha^{-1}$ equivalent) of *L. multiflorum* over 18 spring and summer weeks under biosolids and biosolids + sawdust treatments is comparable to the average

Table 3. Average concentration of trace elements in *L. multiflorum* over the experimental period. Values in parentheses represent the standard error of the average concentration per pot ($n = 6$) throughout the experiment ($n = 8$).

	Control	Urea	Biosolids	Biosolids + sawdust
	-% w/w			
N	2.39 (0.04) a†	3.35 (0.09) c	2.56 (0.05) ab	2.63 (0.12) b
P	0.30 (0.01) b	0.17 (0.00) a	0.43 (0.02) d	0.35 (0.02) c
K	3.21 (0.03) c	1.93 (0.02) a	2.73 (0.06) b	3.00 (0.12) c
S	0.38 (0.01) bc	0.26 (0.00) a	0.40 (0.01) c	0.35 (0.00) b
Ca	0.80 (0.01) c	0.77 (0.02) bc	0.73 (0.01) b	0.66 (0.02) a
Mg	0.23 (0.00) a	0.24 (0.01) bc	0.23 (0.00) b	0.21 (0.01) a

† Different lowercase letters indicate significant differences between treatments at $p < 0.05$.

biomass production of 2.2 and $8.7\ t\ ha^{-1}$, depending on the growth period, reported for 'Feast II' (Hanson et al., 2006; Moir et al., 2013). Smith and Tibbett (2004) reported annual biomass production of 1.7 , 2.0 , and $2.4\ t\ ha^{-1}$ in pastures receiving 4 , 8 , and $16\ t\ ha^{-1}$ of dried biosolids, which is somewhat lower than our study equating to approximately $50\ t\ ha^{-1}$ of dried biosolids. Biosolids and biosolids + sawdust hence were effective in increasing plant growth on a low-fertility soil. The results indicate that mixing sawdust with biosolids significantly reduced the growth increase compared to biosolids alone and that neither biosolids nor biosolids + sawdust was as effective as urea in increasing biomass. The lower biomass production of the biosolids + sawdust treatment compared to the biosolids-alone treatment is consistent with sawdust immobilizing N. While the average N concentration in the biosolids + sawdust was not significantly lower than the biosolids-alone treatment (Table 3), the mass that was extracted (biomass \times N concentration) was significantly higher for the biosolids alone treatment.

In the control treatment, the N concentration in our study was in a similar range of the value reported for annual ryegrass (*L. multiflorum*) in a study comparing different grass species under different rates of N loading (Moir et al., 2013). That the urea treatment (N) resulted in a greater increase in biomass than either of the biosolids treatments (N plus a suite of other plant nutrients) indicates that other components in the biosolids, such as heavy metals, reduced the effectiveness of the added N. In the biosolids and biosolids + sawdust treatments, only a limited amount of the total N applied with biosolids ($1250\ kg\ ha^{-1}$) was immediately plant available. Most of the N in biosolids is locked up in organic compounds which need to undergo (microbial) transformation processes to become available (Sommer, 1977).

With the exception of N, the concentrations of macronutrients in our study were similar to those reported for perennial ryegrass (Harrington et al., 2006). Even though urea significantly increased the biomass, the concentrations of other essential

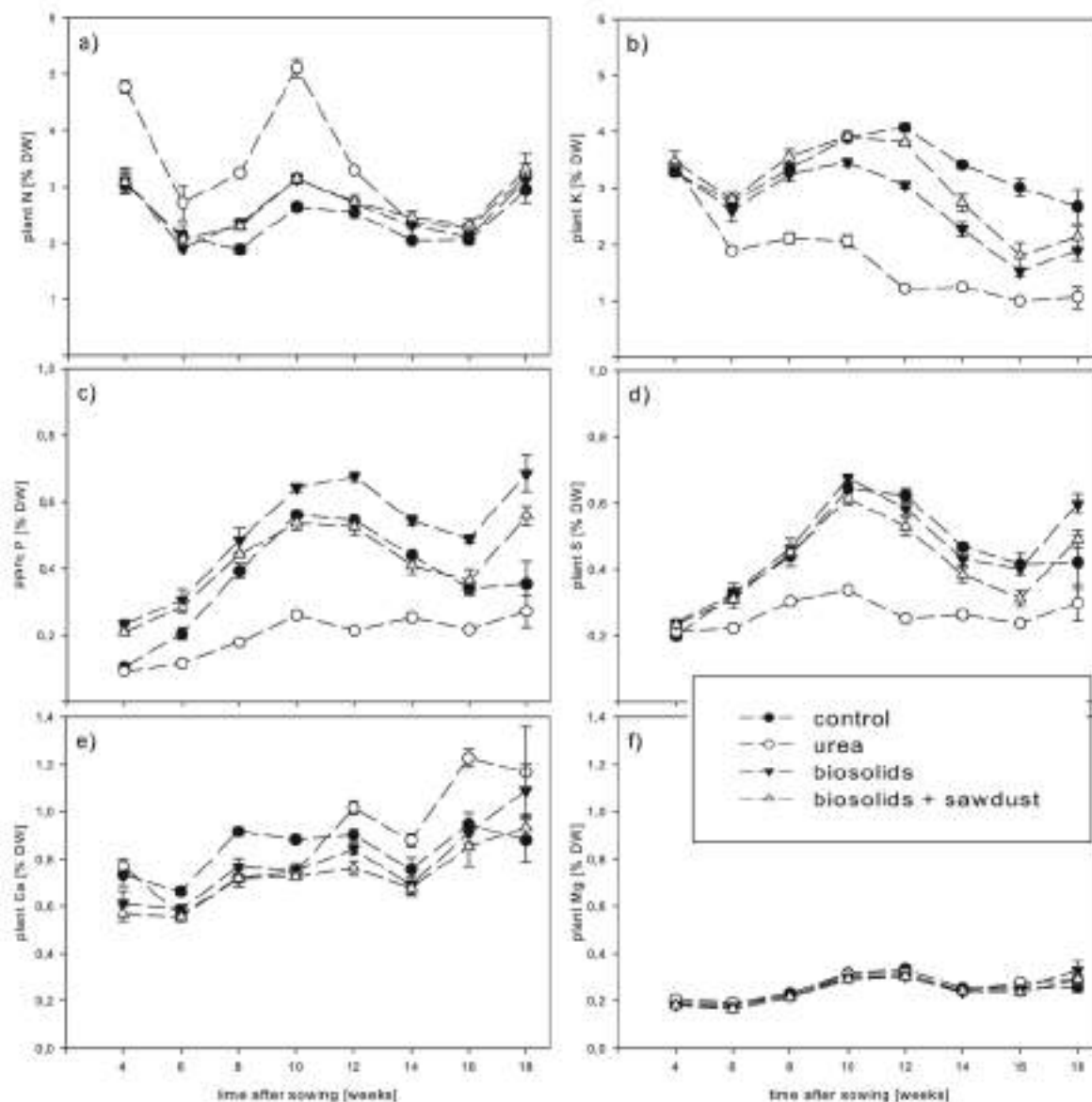


Fig. 2. Average concentrations of macronutrients over the experimental period ($n = 6$). Error bars represent the standard error of the mean. Non-overlapping error bars indicate significant difference between means ($p < 0.05$).

Table 4. Average concentration of trace elements in *L. muliformis* over the experimental period. Values in parentheses represent the standard error of the average concentration per pot ($n = 6$) throughout the experiment ($n = 8$).

	Control	Urea	Biosolids	Biosolids + sawdust
	mg kg ⁻¹ dry wt.			
B	11.4 (1.0) b†	8.9 (0.3) a	10.5 (0.3) ab	9.9 (0.8) ab
Cu	5.9 (0.1) a	6.0 (0.2) a	10.3 (0.6) c	8.7 (0.4) b
Zn	21.6 (2.3) a	19.8 (0.7) a	190.4 (8.3) c	91.7 (3.7) b
Mn	37.4 (1.0) a	35.2 (0.8) a	60.2 (1.7) c	51.0 (2.4) b
Fe	96.0 (3.9) a	105.8 (13.6) a	118.7 (14.4) a	105.5 (7.1) a
Cd	0.03 (0.01) ab	0.02 (0.00) a	0.26 (0.06) c	0.13 (0.00) b

† Different lowercase letters indicate significant differences between treatments at $p \leq 0.05$.

macronutrients, namely P, S and K were significantly lower in the urea treatment, indicating that these elements were not limiting in the control soil. These elements dropped to near-deficient concentrations (McNaught, 1970) in the urea treatment, possible due to a dilution-by-growth effect. The biosolids + sawdust treatment (Table 3) showed that the concentrations of K, P, and S were higher than the critical deficiency threshold concentrations (28, 2.1, and 1.8 g kg⁻¹, respectively) reported for perennial ryegrass (*L. perenne*) (McNaught, 1970; Smith et al., 1985). This is consistent with using biosolids and biosolids + sawdust not only to improve plant growth, but also to enhance plant nutrient uptake in a low fertility environment. The concentration of plant K decreased throughout the experimental period, which could

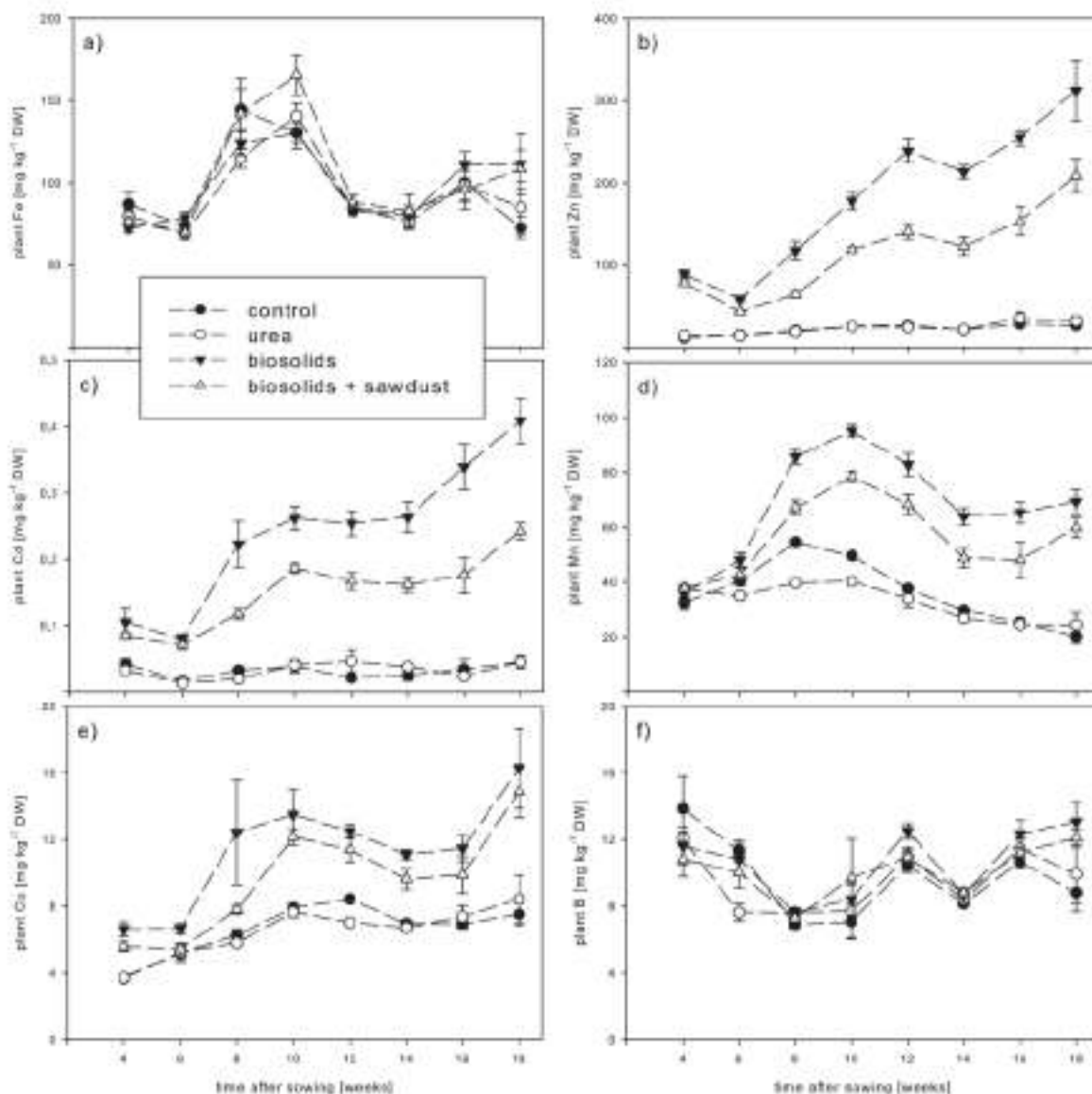


Fig. 3. Average ($n = 6$) concentrations of trace elements over the experimental period. Error bars represent the standard error of the mean. Non-overlapping error bars indicate significant difference between means ($p < 0.05$).

be attributed to a limited supply of K from the initial soil, as well as biosolids and biosolids + sawdust treatments (Table 2).

Lolium multiflorum growing in the biosolids and biosolids + sawdust treatments had significantly higher concentrations of Cd, Cu and Zn compared to control and urea treatments. Mixing sawdust with biosolids significantly decreased the Cd and Zn concentrations compared to the biosolids treatment. Clearly, this is beneficial in the case of Cd; sawdust addition can reduce the entry of this toxic element into fodder and food plants. In our study, Cd concentrations were within the range of acceptable daily intake of Cd concentration based on both food standards of New Zealand ($\leq 1.25 \text{ mg kg}^{-1}$ for kidney and $\leq 2.5 \text{ mg kg}^{-1}$ for liver) and the European Union ($\leq 1.0 \text{ mg kg}^{-1}$ for kidney and $\leq 0.5 \text{ mg kg}^{-1}$ for liver) (Reiser et al., 2014). The

average Cd concentrations in our study (Table 3) were lower compared to others studies where biosolids had been used as a soil conditioner at similar rates (Antoniadis and Alloway, 2001; Black et al., 2012).

Some of the negative effects of elevated Cd may be offset by the elevated Zn concentrations (Oliver et al., 1994; Khoshgoftar et al., 2004; Reiser et al., 2014). Since Cd is absorbed by the root Zn transporter, a low supply of plant available Zn promotes Cd accumulation by plants (Khoshgoftar et al., 2004). Applying Zn fertilizer inhibits Cd uptake and translocation, especially in soils with low plant available Zn (Oliver et al., 1994). Khoshgoftar et al. (2004) reported that when Zn fertilizer was applied in a greenhouse experiment, Zn concentration in wheat shoot increased from 26 to 56 mg kg⁻¹, and Cd concentration was reduced from

0.90 to 0.09 mg kg⁻¹. In our study, foliar Zn concentrations were similar to the 129 to 390 mg kg⁻¹ range reported by Santibanez et al. (2008) and Torn and Lavado (2009), who used higher rates of biosolids addition (150–400 t ha⁻¹) for perennial ryegrass. Biomass Zn concentrations in *L. multiflorum* in this study were higher than those reported for similar or lower rates of biosolids addition in combination with *L. perenne* (Antoniadis and Alloway, 2001; Ahumada et al., 2009; Black et al., 2012), hence they could have offset Cd uptake into plant biomass. The high Zn concentrations in our study can be explained by the relatively high Zn content in the used biosolids, as well as the mildly to moderately acidic nature of the soil and biosolids respectively (Table 1). The Zn concentrations in *L. multiflorum* in the biosolids treatment were within the range that Anderson et al. (2012) reported to cause a beneficial increase in blood Zn concentrations in sheep.

Although Cd and Zn were significantly higher in biosolids compared to biosolids + sawdust, plant Cu concentrations in plant biomass increased after mixing biosolids with sawdust compared to pure biosolids application. Copper deficiency is a widespread problem in all agricultural systems (Sinclair and Edwards, 2008; White and Broadley, 2009); thus increasing Cu uptake by plants by mixing biosolids with sawdust can provide agricultural benefits. However, the Cu concentration in our study were generally lower than those reported for *L. perenne* (Antoniadis and Alloway, 2001; Ahumada et al., 2009; Black et al., 2012). Urea application caused significant differences in uptake of B, Ca, and Zn, however, the differences were small and unlikely to be of agricultural significance.

During the experimental period, an accumulation of Zn, Cd and Cu was observed in *L. multiflorum* biomass. An increase of these elements at the end of the growing season may be related to decreased metabolic processes and smaller changes in the plant biomass, as suggested in studies investigating seasonal variations in trace metal uptake by *Phragmites australis* (Kastratović et al., 2013; Eid and Shalout, 2014). This is consistent with the results obtained from total biomass harvests (Fig. 1), which show only a small growth increase toward end of the experiment. In the biosolids + sawdust treatment, Cd and Zn concentrations increased at a lower rate compared to the biosolids treatments, indicating that sawdust reduced the mobility of these elements. It was likely that the sawdust started to decompose during the experiment, resulting in increased metal sorption. Kostov et al. (1991) showed that the C/N ratio of *Picea excelsa* sawdust decreased from 251 to 62 only 6 mo after treatment with nutrient solution. Sawdust decomposition could explain the greater difference between the biosolids + sawdust treatment and biosolids treatments at the end of the experiment compared to the harvests before 6 wk, where difference were minimal.

The application of biosolids and biosolids mixed with sawdust improved the growth of *L. multiflorum* on a low-fertility soil, while the biowaste mixture (biosolids + sawdust) was less effective in restoring fertility compared to biosolids alone. Although less growth promoting, the advantage of using sawdust was seen in a reduction of the Cd uptake by the plants. There were significant changes in the elemental composition of the pasture over time, with the differences between the biosolids and biosolids + sawdust treatments increasing over time to favorable agronomic

levels. Our results indicate that a single harvest of pasture can be insufficient to determine the effect of a soil treatment on element uptake, since results highly vary with environmental conditions, plant growth, and metabolism. Future work could involve a field study to reveal the effect of sawdust decomposition on the long-term fertility of soils amended with a mixture of biowastes.

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WASTE MANAGEMENT

Biowaste Mixtures Affecting the Growth and Elemental Composition of Italian Ryegrass (*Lolium multiflorum*)

Jürgen Esperschütz, Obed Lense, Craig Anderson, Simon Bulman, Jacqui Horswell, Nicholas Dickinson, and Brett Robinson*

Abstract
Biowaste (sewage sludge) can be beneficially applied to degraded lands to improve soil quality. Plants grown on biowaste-amended soils have distinct concentrations of macronutrients and trace elements, which can be beneficial or present a risk to humans and ecosystem. Potentially, biowastes could be blended with other biowastes, such as sawdust, to reduce the risks posed by rebalancing soils using biowaste alone. We sought to determine the effect of mixing biowaste and sawdust on the macronutrient and trace element concentration of ryegrass over a 5-mo period. Italian ryegrass was grown in a low fertility soil, typical for marginal farm areas, that was amended with biowaste (1250 kg N ha⁻¹), biowaste + sawdust (0.5:1) and urea (200 kg N ha⁻¹), as well as a control. Biowaste increased the growth of *L. multiflorum* from 2.93 to 4.14 t ha⁻¹. This increase was offset by blending the biowaste with sawdust (3.00 t ha⁻¹). Urea application increased growth to 4.93 t ha⁻¹. The biowaste treatments increased P, Cu, Mn, and Zn relative to the control, which may be beneficial for grazing animals. Although biowaste application caused elevated Cd concentrations (0.15–0.24 mg kg⁻¹) five- to eightfold higher than control and urea treatments, these were below levels that are likely to result in unacceptable concentrations in animal tissues. Mixing biowaste with sawdust reduced Cd uptake while still enabling increased macronutrient concentrations (P, S, Mn, Zn, Cu) in plants. There were significant changes in the elemental uptake during the experiment, which was attributed to the decomposition of the sawdust.

Core Ideas

- Biowaste (biowaste + sawdust) were effective in improving a low fertility soil.
- The biowaste mixture improved growth and quality of *Lolium multiflorum* over 5 months.
- The biowaste treatments increased N, P, Cu, Mn, and Zn.
- Mixing biowaste with sawdust reduced Cd uptake.
- Biowaste induced changes in elemental composition increased over the 5-month period.

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