

CROP RESIDUES STIMULATE YIELD-SCALED GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IN MAIZE-WHEAT CROPPING ROTATION IN A SEMI-ARID CLIMATE

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ABSTRACT. Mitigating yield-scaled greenhouse gas emissions (YSE) is beneficial for enhancing crop yield, reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and advancing climate-smart agronomic management practices. This study aims to evaluate the impact of different crop residue rates— 100% (R_{100}), 50% (R_{50}), and residue removal (R_0) – on the YSE indicator within a maize-wheat cropping rotation under both conventional tillage (CT) and no-tillage (NT) systems in a semi-arid region. In the NT system, crop residues had a notable effect on the YSE indicator for wheat. Specifically, R_0 exhibited a 39% and 20% decrease in YSE for wheat compared to R_{100} and R_{50} , respectively. Interestingly, crop residue did not significantly influence YSE for maize under the NT system. On the other hand, in the CT system, YSE for maize in R_0 was 33% and 25% lower than that in R_{100} and R_{50} , respectively. Additionally, compared to R_0 , there were observed increases of 28% and 20% in YSE for wheat in R_{100} and R_{50} under the CT system, respectively. Our findings show that crop residue removal decreases YSE under both CT and NT systems. However, given that this practice degrades soil quality and results in lower yields, it is not considered a sustainable management practice compared to residue retention options. This research highlights the importance of evaluating GHG mitigation strategies by concurrently considering both emissions and crop production. Nevertheless, it is essential to conduct off-site assessments of GHG emissions from crop residue application and also engage in long-term studies to comprehend the full potential of crop residue management on YSE.

KEYWORDS: oil health, cropping system, food security, conservation agriculture, soil management, climate change, greenhouse gas emissions

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INTRODUCTION

Due to anthropogenic activities, global concentrations of greenhouse gases (GHG), such as carbon dioxide (CO₂), nitrous oxide (N₂O), and methane (CH₄), have increased (O'Neill et al. 2021; IPCC, 2021). Enhancing agricultural productivity through strategic management techniques, such as reduced use of conventional agronomic practices, may mitigate GHG emissions (Ceschia et al. 2010; Radicetti et al. 2020; Mohammed et al. 2022; Mirzaei et al. 2022a, 2022b). Land management practices often determine whether cropland soils act as net sinks or sources of GHG emissions (Ceschia et al. 2010; Radicetti et al. 2019; Bossio et al. 2020).

Mitigating GHG emissions and increasing soil organic carbon sequestration are achievable through improved management practices (Paustian et al. 2016; Minasny et al. 2017; Ogle et al. 2019; Lal et al. 2021). Agricultural practices, including crop residue management, significantly influence soil C and GHG emissions, and crop productivity by impacting dynamic changes in carbon and nitrogen in soil, nutrient availability, and factors influencing GHG emissions such as soil moisture, temperature, and microbial activity (Yao et al. 2013; Jin et al. 2014; Cherubin et al. 2018; Vasconcelos et al. 2018; Battaglia et al. 2021; Drury et al. 2021; Mirzaei et al. 2021; Tenelli et al. 2021; Liu et al. 2022; Mancinelli et al. 2023). Therefore, evaluating the effect of agricultural practices is crucial for developing more sustainable approaches with high crop yields, lower potential for GHG emissions, and reduced global warming impact (Pratibha et al. 2016; Mancinelli et al. 2020; Mirzaei et al. 2023).

Metrics such as greenhouse gas intensity (GHGI) or yield-scaled metrics assess GHG emissions per unit of crop yield, considering both food production and climate change concerns (Mosier et al. 2006; Van Groenigen et al. 2010; Pratibha et al. 2016; Li et al. 2022). The yield-scaled emissions (YSE) approach is an effective integrated assessment method for evaluating changes in crop management operations destined to optimize cropping practices, achieve food security, and simultaneously reduce the impacts of climate change (Van Groenigen et al. 2010; Abalos et al. 2016).

While previous studies have assessed the effect and mitigation potential of agronomic practices on GHG emissions (Six et al. 2004; Zhao et al. 2016; Xia et al. 2017), few studies have been linked to crop yield (Van Groenigen et al. 2010; Linnquist et al. 2012; Feng et al. 2013; Van Kessel et al. 2013; Zhang et al. 2015). Comprehensive assessments of cropping practices per unit yield (yield-scaled) are suggested to benefit food security and GHG mitigation goals (Van Groenigen et al. 2010; Linnquist et al. 2012; IPCC, 2014). Therefore, the integrated evaluation of

both crop yield and GHG emissions is crucial for optimizing cropping system practices.

The maize-wheat rotation is one of the most common grain production cropping systems (Pooniya et al. 2022), producing a substantial amount of crop residues annually (Bao et al. 2022). However, a significant portion of these residues is removed for fodder, energy production, or other purposes, or burned (Mirzaei et al. 2021). To date, there is no information about the effects of crop residue management practices on GHG emissions, especially yield-scaled GHG emissions from agricultural soil in Iran. We hypothesized that total residue removal treatment would lead to large yield-scaled GHG emissions. The objective of this study is to assess the effects of different crop residue rates (100 %, 50 %, and total residue removal) on wheat and maize yield-scaled GHG emissions under conventional tillage (CT) and no-tillage (NT) systems in a semi-arid region in Iran.

Materials and methods

Site description and experimental layout

The study took place at the Agriculture Research Station of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Tehran, Karaj, Iran (35° 48' 32" N, 50° 58' 06" E, 1308-m a.s.l.) in 2018 (Fig.1). This region has semi-arid climate conditions, with an annual precipitation of 245 mm and an annual mean temperature of 13.7 °C (Tabari and Taleae, 2011). For the experiment, two fields with a wheat (*Triticum aestivum* L.) - maize (*Zea mays* L.) cropping rotation background were chosen, managed under CT and NT practices. The soil in the CT field was classified as sandy loam with 57% sand, 24.4% silt, and 18.6% clay. In the NT field, soil was classified as clay loam with 52.5% sand, 28.1% silt, and 19.4% clay. Both fields had a soil pH of 7.7 and no salinity issues. Organic carbon content was 8.9 g kg⁻¹ under CT and 11.3 g kg⁻¹ under NT. Total nitrogen (TN), available phosphorus (AP), and available potassium (AK) under CT were 0.8 mg kg⁻¹, 13.5 mg kg⁻¹, and 150.6 mg kg⁻¹ respectively. Under the NT system, these values were 1.0 mg kg⁻¹, 15.2 mg kg⁻¹, and 258.2 mg kg⁻¹ for TN, AP, and AK respectively. The experiment was set up as a randomized complete block with three replicates. In total, 18 plots (3×4 m) were designated for both fields. In this research, in order to facilitate the application of crop residue treatments and planting operations, the residue treatments were first applied to the designated plots, followed by the planting of crops. Finally, the plots were separated based on the specific dimensions.

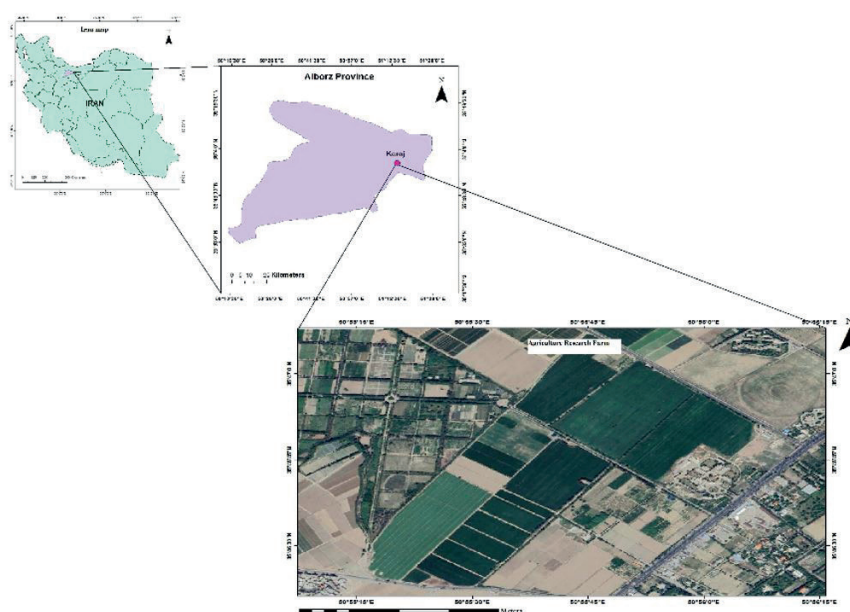


Fig. 1. Geographical location of the study area

Treatment implementation and cultivation practices

Wheat residue rates and maize planting

After harvesting wheat on July 6, 2018, three wheat residue rates – 100 % (R_{100}), 50 % (R_{50}), and no residue (R_0) – were applied to both CT and NT fields on July 11, 2018. The residue rates were achieved by weighing post-harvest crop residue samples collected across the farm at several locations using a wooden quadrat (1m×1m). The average weight per square meter was then scaled up to a hectare. For the R_{100} and R_{50} treatments, the residue was distributed over the soil surface, while for the R_0 treatment the residue was completely removed from the plots. Next, maize seeds were planted. In the NT field, sowing was carried out using a planter with a single colter. In the CT, before seed placement with a row crop planter, the soil was cultivated with a moldboard plow to a depth of 35 cm, followed by disking and leveling. Basal NPK fertilizers were applied: 23, 36, and 68 kg ha⁻¹ of N, K₂O, and P₂O₅ respectively, with additional top-dressing of 37 and 125 kg ha⁻¹ N at eight and ten leaves stages, post-cultivation. Plots were irrigated at 7–10 days intervals.

Maize residue rates and wheat planting

In October 2018, Maize was harvested, and three maize residue rates (R_{100} , R_{50} , and R_0) were applied to the same plots. The residue application process mirrored that of wheat residues. Winter wheat was planted in November 2018 using a drilling machine, with basal fertilization of 23, 80, and 90 kg ha⁻¹ N, K₂O, and P₂O₅. Additional fertilizers of 50, 50, and 23 kg ha⁻¹ N were applied during late tillering, stem elongation, and spiking, respectively.

Greenhouse gas sampling and analysis

Flux measurements were performed every 7–10 days in summer, and every 14 days in winter using the static closed chamber method (De Klein and Harvey, 2013). This method is one of the most popular tools for flux measurements from agricultural soil (De Klein and Harvey, 2013). A polyvinyl chloride (PVC) chamber measured carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), and nitrous oxide (N₂O) efflux. Gas sampling was conducted at 9–10 am at 0, 30, and 60 min time points. At each time point, a 20 ml gas sample was taken by inserting a needle attached to a 20 ml syringe in the sampling port and transferred into 12-ml pre-vacuumed vials sealed with butyl rubber septa (Glass vials (e.g. Exetainer®, Labco Limited, High Wycombe, UK)).

Gas chromatography (Teif Gostar Faraz, TG 2552, Iran; Brucker, Germany) was used for the analysis, with concentrations of N₂O, CH₄, and CO₂ measured using an electron capture detector (ECD), a flame ionization detector (FID), and a thermal conductivity detector (TCD), respectively (Al-Shammmary et al. 2022). The fluxes were calculated based on changes in linear concentration gradient over time and on the ratio between chamber volume and soil surface area (Liebig et al. 2010; De Klein and Harvey, 2013; Bayer et al. 2014). Linear interpolation of data points and the integration of the underlying area were used to calculate the cumulative rate of GHG fluxes (Sainju et al. 2012; Wegner et al. 2018).

Yield-scaled CO₂ equivalent GHG fluxes were determined by dividing the global warming potential (GWP) of GHG fluxes in CO₂ equivalents by dry yield, with CH₄ concentration assumed to be zero, as it constantly was below the detection level (Johnson et al. 2012; Bayer et al. 2014; Hurisso et al. 2016). Equations (1) and (2) were used for calculations.

$$\text{Yield-scaled emission (MgCO}_{2\text{-eq}} \cdot \text{Mg dry yield}^{-1}) = \frac{\text{GWP (MgCO}_{2\text{-eq}})}{\text{Dry yield (Mg)}} \quad (1)$$

$$\text{GWP} = (CO_2 \times 1) + (N_2O \times 298) + (CH_4 \times 25) \quad (2)$$

Yield Measurement

Maize and wheat yields within each plot were determined using a 1m×1m quadrat. The entire harvested plants were dry-weighted for each plot, and the mean was calculated as yield.

Statistical analysis

The general linear models (GLM) procedure in SAS 9.4 software (SAS Institute Inc., Cary, NC, USA) was used for data analysis. A mean comparison was performed by using the Duncan method at the 0.05 statistical significance level.

Results and discussion

Crop yield and GWP of GHG emissions in maize-wheat cropping rotation under NT and CT systems

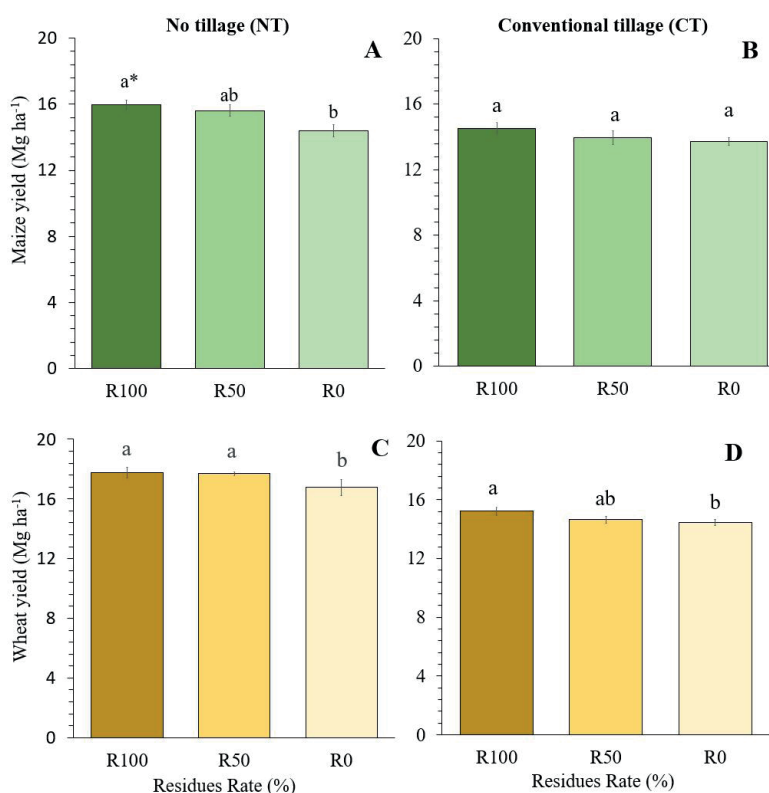
In the NT system, the addition of crop residue positively impacted maize yield, with significant increases observed in full residue retention (R_{100}) compared to residue removal (R_0). However, no significant differences were observed between R_{50} and R_0 (Fig. 2A). Conversely, In the CT system, residue had no significant impact on maize yield (Fig. 2B). Wheat yield in the NT system increased with rising residue amounts in R_{100} and R_{50} compared to R_0 (Fig. 2C). In the CT system, wheat yield significantly increased in R_{100} compared to R_0 , but no significant differences were noted between R_{50} and R_0 treatments (Fig. 2D). The enhanced crop yield attributed to crop residue can be influenced by improved soil quality, regulated soil temperature, increased soil organic matter, and higher nutrient availability (Choudhury et al. 2014; Mu et al. 2016; Pant et al. 2017; Maw et al. 2019). Conversely, the decreased crop yield in residue removal can be linked to reduced water availability, high daily soil temperature fluctuations, increased soil compaction, augmented surface runoff, and lower nutrient intake (Blanco-Canqui and Lal, 2009; Cherubin et al. 2018; Carvalho et al. 2019; Cherubin et al. 2021). For a more in-depth discussion on the crop yield response to crop residue management in this experiment, refer to Mirzaei et al. (2021).

Full retention of crop residue resulted in higher GHG emissions during the maize season under the NT system, with R_{100} showing a significant increase compared to R_0 . However, no significant differences were observed between R_{100} and R_{50} treatments (Fig. 3A). In the CT system, the GWP of GHG in maize showed a significant increase in R_{100} and R_{50} compared to R_0 (Fig. 3B). The GWP index for the wheat crop, under both systems, also increased with rising residue amounts, and R_{100} and R_{50} both showed a significant increase compared to R_0 (Figs. 3C and 3D). In line with our findings, Dendooven et al. (2012) reported that, under semi-arid conditions in Mexico, removing crop residue reduced the GWP of GHG 1.3 times in a wheat-maize rotation. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2014) found that residue treatments significantly increased GWP by 9–30% relative to no residue treatment during a rice-growing season in China. Enhanced GWP in crop residue treatment is attributed to both crop residue and GHG emissions from the soil. Crop residue plays a crucial role in GHG emissions by altering carbon (C) and nitrogen (N) dynamics (Guzman et al. 2015; Nawaz et al. 2017; Seiz et al. 2019; Essich et al. 2020; Al-Shammmary et al. 2023), and indirectly influencing the soil environment (Baggs et al. 2006; Taghizadeh-Toosi et al. 2021). The lower GWP of GHG in plant residue removal treatment may be due to reduced C and N uptake into

the soil, along with microclimatic variations related to changes in soil cover (Jin et al. 2014). In Brazil, Gonzaga et al. (2019) also found a reduction in N₂O emissions under total sugarcane straw removal. However, indiscriminate sugarcane straw removal led to reduced crop yields (Carvalho et al. 2019), soil C stocks (Tenelli et al. 2021), and soil health (Cherubin et al. 2021).

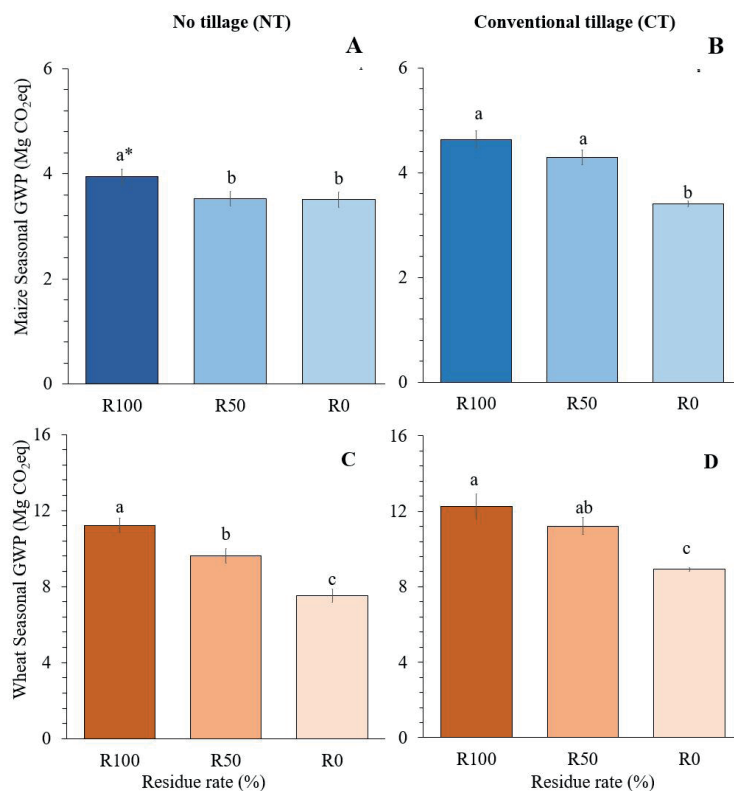
The effect of crop residue on YSE in maize-wheat cropping rotation under NT and CT systems

In the NT system, maize YSE was not significantly affected by crop residues (Fig. 4A), potentially due to the short-term duration of the corn season, insufficient for crop residue to show their true effect. However, crop residue



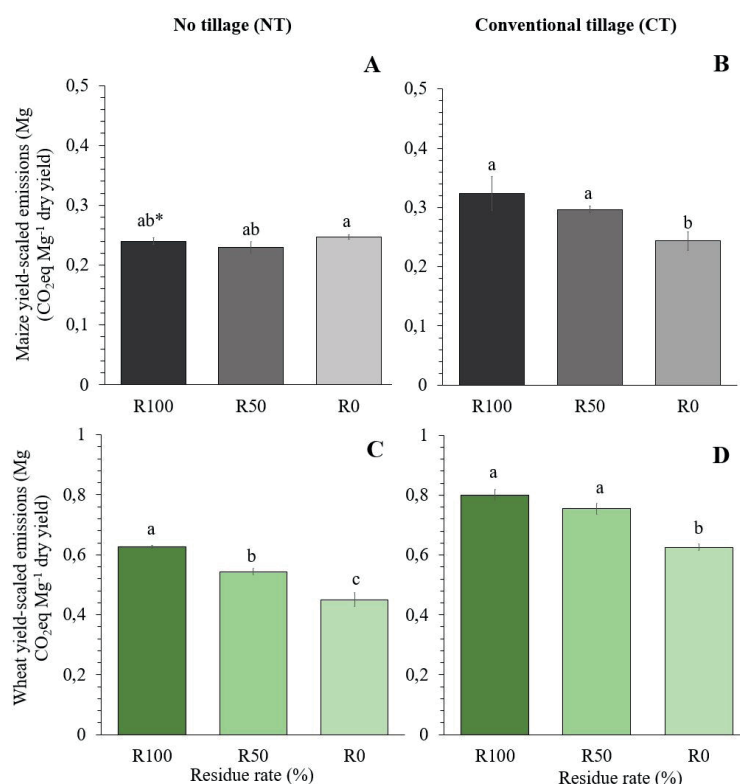
*. Similar letters indicate no significant difference. Whiskers represent standard error (n=3).

Fig. 2. Impact of residue rate on seasonal maize (A and B) and wheat (C and D) yield under NT (left) and CT (right) systems



* Similar letters indicate no significant difference. Whiskers represent standard error (n=3).

Fig. 3. Impact of residue rate on maize (A and B) and wheat (C and D) seasonal GWP of GHG fluxes under NT (left) and CT (right) systems



* Similar letters indicate no significant difference. Whiskers represent standard error (n=3).

Fig. 4. Impact of residue rate on maize (A and B) and wheat (C and D) YSE under NT (left) and CT (right) systems

rates significantly impacted ($p < 0.05$) YSE for wheat (Fig. 4B). The highest amount of YSE for wheat (0.62 Mg CO₂eq Mg⁻¹ dry yield) was obtained from the R₁₀₀ treatment, 39 % higher compared to the R₀ treatment (0.45 Mg CO₂eq Mg⁻¹ dry yield). Additionally, R₅₀ (0.54 Mg CO₂eq Mg⁻¹ dry yield) resulted in a 20 % increase over R₀.

In the CT system, YSE for both maize and wheat crops increased with rising residue rates (Figs. 4C and 4D), although no significant differences were observed between R₁₀₀ and R₅₀. For maize, R₁₀₀ (0.32 Mg CO₂eq Mg⁻¹ dry yield) and R₅₀ (0.30 Mg CO₂eq Mg⁻¹ dry yield) led to 33% and 25% increases in YSE compared to R₀ (0.24 Mg CO₂eq Mg⁻¹ dry yield). Similarly, for wheat, 28% and 20% increases in YSE were noted in R₁₀₀ (0.8 Mg CO₂eq Mg⁻¹ dry yield) and R₅₀ (0.75 Mg CO₂eq Mg⁻¹ dry yield) compared to R₀ (0.62 Mg CO₂eq Mg⁻¹ dry yield).

Higher YSE for wheat and maize in residue treatments compared to residue removal could be attributed to the strong influence of residue on the GWP of GHG relative to crop yield. Compared to R₀, R₁₀₀ and R₅₀ led to 6% and ~2% increases in maize yield under the CT system, respectively (Fig. 2B), while the GWP of GHG for this crop showed 36% and 26% increases for R₁₀₀ and R₅₀ under the CT, respectively (Fig. 3B). Furthermore, under the NT system, wheat yields were 6% and 5.5% higher for R₁₀₀ and R₅₀ than R₀, respectively, whereas, in the CT system, R₁₀₀ and R₅₀ resulted in 5% and 1% higher yields than R₀ (Figs. 2C and 2D). In addition, the GWP of GHG for wheat was 50% and 28% higher in R₁₀₀ and R₅₀ than in R₀ under the NT system. These quantities were equivalent to 37% and 25% under the CT system (Figs. 3C and 3D).

In the CT system, there were no significant differences in YSE for both maize and wheat crops between R₁₀₀ and R₅₀ treatments (Figs. 4B and 4D) due to the lack of significant differences between GWP and crop yield in these two treatments (Figs. 2B and 2D; 3B and 3D). In both tillage systems, YSE was higher in wheat than in maize cultivation (Fig. 4). This difference is primarily driven by the higher GWP of GHG emissions in wheat than in maize (Fig. 3). Additionally, the longer crop season of wheat (November

2018 – July 2019) compared to maize (July 2018 – October 2018) contributes to higher emissions of GHG.

Our results, indicating higher YSE in areas with substantial crop residue maintenance, align with data reported in rice and rice-wheat cropping systems in China (e.g., Feng et al. 2013; Yao et al. 2013; Zhang et al. 2015). However, Pratibha et al. (2016) reported lower YSE with an increase in crop residue and a decrease in tillage intensity for both pigeon pea and castor crops in semi-arid regions of Southern India. Zhang et al. (2014) reported that residue mulching decreased YSE for rice by 35-72% relative to no residue treatment in China. These discrepancies with other studies highlight the importance of considering different residue management practices and their duration.

Conclusions

The assessment of cropping systems' effects on crop YSE is valuable for selecting innovative and promising management practices to balance higher yields and lower GHG emissions. Our findings demonstrate that crop residue removal mitigates wheat and maize YSE under both CT and NT systems. In addition, YSE was higher for both crops under CT compared to the NT system. Furthermore, wheat had higher YSE than maize under both tillage systems. Despite the lower YSE in crop residue removal, this practice negatively impacts crop productivity, C sequestration, soil health, and biodiversity. Additionally, residue removal accelerates soil quality degradation. Thus, considering all these aspects, retaining 50% of post-harvest crop residue in the field may be considered as a more sustainable crop residue management in the study area. Finally, considering the perspectives of farmers, particularly in terms of economic viability, is essential for the successful implementation of new management strategies.

Ethical approval statement

The authors declare no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

This research does not involve human or animal participants.

All authors consent to the submission of this manuscript to this journal.

Availability of data

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author [ACC] upon reasonable request. ■

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