



Human and animal wastes: Implications for atmospheric N₂O and NO_x

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Human and animal wastes: Implications for atmospheric N_2O and NO_x

Michael B. McElroy and Yuxuan X. Wang

Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences, Division of Engineering and Applied Sciences, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

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[1] More than 220 Tg N are processed annually through the global agriculture/animal/human food chain. It is suggested that aerobic denitrification, reduction of nitrite formed in the first stage of nitrification, is an important source not only of global N_2O but also of NO_x . A simple top-down method indicates a globally averaged yield of 2% for N_2O emitted as a consequence of human disturbances to the global nitrogen cycle. This yield can account not only for the contemporary budget of atmospheric N_2O but also for trends observed over the past 1000 years. The associated microbial source of NO_x is estimated assuming a $\text{NO}_x/\text{N}_2\text{O}$ ratio of 3, consistent with results from a variety of laboratory and field studies. This source is significant, particularly for large developing countries such as China and India for which its contribution is comparable to that from fossil fuel.

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1. Introduction

[2] World population is now 6.4 billion, projected to rise to more than 8 billion over the next 25 years [United Nations, 2003]. As we shall show, our species is responsible for mobilization of more than 220 TgN yr^{-1} today of which approximately 25 TgN yr^{-1} are ingested directly by humans with 120 TgN yr^{-1} processed by domestic animals and an additional 82 TgN yr^{-1} introduced to the environment in the form of chemical fertilizer. The inexorable rise in the abundance of atmospheric N_2O attests to the importance of the human influence on the global nitrogen cycle. We shall argue that bacterially mediated oxidation of ammonium processed through the agriculture/animal/human food chain is a major source not only of global N_2O but also of NO_x . The NO_x source is particularly significant for developing countries, comparable in magnitude to the source from fossil fuel combustion for China and India.

[3] This NO_x source, we shall argue, is large enough to resolve the discrepancy between bottom-up estimates for emissions of NO_x from China reported by Streets *et al.* [2003] and values derived on the basis of inverse, top-down, methods by Wang *et al.* [2004a]. Streets *et al.* [2003] using the bottom-up approach, calculated a source of NO_x in 2000 for China of 3.3 TgN yr^{-1} , contributed mainly by combustion of fossil and biofuels. Wang *et al.* [2004a] used a nested grid version of a global chemical transport model to analyze observations of CO and NO_y from a series of aircraft missions conducted over the western Pacific during the

spring of 2001 [Jacob *et al.*, 2003], in conjunction with ground based measurements from two stations in China, Hong Kong [Wang *et al.*, 2003], and Lin An [Wang *et al.*, 2004b]. Employing an optimal estimation inverse model, they concluded that emissions of CO and NO_x were underestimated in the Streets *et al.* [2003] inventory by 75% and 189%, respectively, for Central China [Wang *et al.*, 2004a]. The discrepancy for CO has since been attributed to neglect of specific industrial sources in the original Streets *et al.* inventory (D. G. Streets *et al.*, Revisiting China's CO emissions after TRACE-P: Synthesis of inventories, atmospheric modeling, and observations, manuscript in preparation, 2005). The discrepancy for NO_x , however, cannot be resolved by any reasonable adjustment of combustion sources given constraints imposed by simultaneous measurements of CO and NO_y .

[4] A brief review of in situ and laboratory studies of microbial processes contributing to emissions of N_2O and NO_x is presented in section 2. Emissions of N_2O and NO_x associated with the agriculture/animal/human food chain are evaluated in section 3. We show that we can account for the contemporary rise in the abundance of atmospheric N_2O if 2% of nitrogen involved in this chain is converted to N_2O . Assuming a yield of 6% for conversion of N to NO_x , consistent with the laboratory and field data, we show that we can resolve the discrepancy between top-down and bottom-up estimates for emissions of NO_x from China highlighted by Wang *et al.* [2004a]. Trends in N_2O observed over the past 1000 years are discussed in section 4. Assuming a yield for conversion of N to N_2O identical to that adopted for the analysis of the contemporary budget, we show that we can account also for the long-term rise in

N₂O observed over the past 300 years. This lends support to the validity of the simple approach adopted here. Summary remarks are presented in section 5.

2. Microbial Processes

[5] N₂O and NO_x (mainly NO) are produced both by nitrification and denitrification. The weight of the evidence suggests that nitrification dominates emissions of N₂O both for natural and perturbed environments. *Elkins et al.* [1978], using measurements of dissolved N₂O and O₂, inferred a yield of 0.3% N for N₂O (mol N-N₂O per mol N-NH₄⁺) produced by nitrification in the ocean under conditions where O₂ was close to equilibrium with the atmosphere. A similar yield was observed under high flow, high O₂, conditions in 1978 for a region of the Potomac River receiving large concentrations of N as NH₄⁺ from the sewage treatment plant at Blue Plains [*McElroy et al.*, 1978]. In 1977, when flow rates were significantly lower and levels of O₂ notably depressed, the yield of N₂O was much higher, approaching 5% [*McElroy et al.*, 1978]. The increase in production of N₂O by nitrifying organisms at low O₂ inferred from the Potomac data was confirmed subsequently by laboratory studies involving pure cultures of marine nitrifying bacteria. *Goreau et al.* [1980] measured a yield of N₂O of 0.3% at high O₂, rising to 10% when the concentration of O₂ was reduced to 0.5%. *Lipschultz et al.* [1981], studying cultures of the soil bacterium *N. europaea*, found evidence for production of not only N₂O but also NO during nitrification. Sources of both N₂O and NO increased at lower levels of O₂ with the ratio NO to N₂O (mol N to mol N) rising from 1.15 ± 0.15 to 5.1 ± 3 as the concentration of O₂ was reduced from 21% to 0.5% (v/v). Denitrification (reduction of NO₃⁻) can also contribute to production of N₂O. Net release to the atmosphere by this process is most likely minor, however, limited by the fact that denitrification can represent both a source and sink for N₂O. *Elkins et al.* [1978] observed high concentrations of N₂O in waters on the periphery of the anoxic zone associated with the major upwelling system in the eastern tropical Pacific off the coast of Peru. The concentration of N₂O was observed to drop to zero in the core of the anoxic zone. The principle end product of denitrification is N₂ rather than N₂O. Under conditions where N₂O may be produced by denitrification, it can also be consumed and net release to the atmosphere is most likely small in this case compared with the source from nitrification.

[6] The first stage of nitrification involves oxidation of NH₄⁺ to NO₂⁻ with NH₂OH formed as an intermediate. *Remde and Conrad* [1990] and *Anderson et al.* [1993] showed that N₂O and NO are produced by reduction of NO₂⁻ rather than as intermediates in the oxidation of either NH₄⁺ or NH₂OH, a process referred to as aerobic denitrification (or nitrifier denitrification) [*Colliver and Stephenson*, 2000; *Wrage et al.*, 2001]. *Bock et al.* [1995], studying batch cultures of *N. europaea* and *N. eutropha*, demonstrated that both isolates use NH₄⁺ as an electron donor and that either O₂ or NO₂⁻ may be employed as an electron acceptor. The importance of NO₂⁻ in this context was shown to increase with reduction in O₂, providing a ready explanation

for the enhanced yields of N₂O and NO observed at low levels of O₂ [*Goreau et al.*, 1980; *Lipschultz et al.*, 1981]. The ratio of NO to N₂O (mole N/mole N) is typically greater than 1 for aerobic denitrification and increases with decreasing levels of O₂, ranging from 1.15 to as high as 100 [*Lipschultz et al.*, 1981; *Remde and Conrad*, 1990; *Anderson and Levine*, 1986; *Kester et al.*, 1997].

3. Top-Down Budget of N₂O and NO_x

[7] The concentration of atmospheric N₂O has risen over the past several centuries from about 270 ppb to 314 ppb [*Butler et al.*, 1998]. Photolytic processes in the stratosphere provide the major sink for N₂O and the loss rate, corresponding to a lifetime of about 120 years, can be defined with considerable confidence [*Volk et al.*, 1997]. Assuming a steady state balance of production and loss of N₂O in the pre-anthropogenic environment since the last interglacial period, as suggested by the ice core measurements [*Sowers*, 2001], the pre-anthropogenic source is estimated at 10.9 TgN yr⁻¹.

[8] Accounting for the observed contemporary increase in the abundance of atmospheric N₂O (3.9 ± 0.9 TgN yr⁻¹) [*Butler et al.*, 1998] and the enhanced rate for removal at the higher concentrations of the gas prevailing today (12.7 TgN yr⁻¹), we conclude that the global source of N₂O has risen now to a level of 16.6 TgN yr⁻¹, an increase in emissions over the pre-anthropogenic background by as much as 52% or 5.7 Tg N yr⁻¹. A relatively small fraction of the additional N₂O can be attributed to industrial processes, about 1.3 ± 0.5 TgN yr⁻¹ [*Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)*, 2001]. The balance, 4.4 TgN yr⁻¹, is due most likely to bacterially mediated processes associated with disposal of N mobilized through the agriculture/animal/human food chain.

[9] The IPCC [1997] [see also *Mosier et al.*, 1998] presented a detailed empirical methodology that could be employed to estimate agricultural emissions of N₂O. Their approach distinguishes between direct (induced by N input) and indirect (caused by leaching and running off of N) emissions of N₂O and suggests “default” yields for N₂O associated with various types of N inputs (e.g., synthesis fertilizer versus animal manures) and different animal waste management systems (e.g., anaerobic lagoon versus pasture range). Alternatively, process-oriented agroecosystems models driven by various basic environmental factors (such as temperature, soil moisture, pH, etc.) have been employed to simulate the nitrogen cycle and generate yield data [*Li et al.*, 1992; *Schmid et al.*, 2001]. The discrepancy between the two approaches [*Li et al.*, 1996, 2001; *Schmid et al.*, 2001] raises questions as to whether emission factors are known to a precision adequate to justify the level of complexity implicit in either method. Current understanding of aerobic denitrification suggests an important sensitivity of yields of N₂O and NO to environmental conditions, specifically to levels of ambient O₂. Yields are small for distributed wastes and large for concentrated wastes. Other variables and soil characteristics must also play an important role in determining the yield [*Hall et al.*, 1996]. To circumvent lack of yield data for most of the world, we opt

Table 1. Sources of Nitrogen in the Agriculture/Animal/Human Food Chain for Year 2001 and Associated Emissions of N₂O and NO_x^a

	Nitrogen Sources, ^b TgN/yr				Biological Sources of N ₂ O		Biological Sources of NO _x , TgN/yr	Industrial Sources of NO _x , TgN/yr
	Chemical Fertilizer	Human Wastes	Animal Wastes	Total Nitrogen	TgN/yr	TgCO ₂ equation /yr		
Global	82.3	24.6	119.5	226.4	4.53	2107.10	13.58	32.6
China	22.4	5.1	20	47.5	0.95	441.89	2.85	3.3
India	11.3	4	17.2	32.5	0.65	302.34	1.95	1.7
United States	10.9	1.4	9.9	22.2	0.44	204.66	1.33	6.1
European Union	9.1	1.9	11.2	22.2	0.44	204.66	1.33	2.9
Russia	1.1	0.7	2.3	4.1	0.08	37.21	0.25	1.49
Australia	1.1	0.1	4.2	5.4	0.11	51.17	0.32	0.5
Brazil	1.6	0.7	9.7	12	0.24	111.63	0.72	1.2
Indonesia	2	0.9	1.6	4.4	0.09	41.86	0.26	0.42

^aIndustrial sources of NO_x associated largely with transportation and power generation are shown for comparison. The industrial sources of NO_x are taken from *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [2001], *U.S. EPA* [2004], Pacific Northwest National Laboratory Center for Energy Efficiency (National inventory of energy-related emissions of greenhouse gases in Russia, 2004, available at <http://www.cenef.ru/info/Climate/natinventory.pdf>), *Streets et al.* [2003], and *Gugele and Ritter* [2002]. Additional emissions of NO_x are associated with seasonal burning of biomass, and this source may be particularly important for India, Russia, Brazil, and Indonesia.

^bThe quantity of N processed annually through human and animal wastes is evaluated as the product of populations [FAO, 2004] and per capita excretion rate for N [IPCC, 1997]. Application rates of chemical fertilizer were taken from FAO [2004]. Refer to the text (section 3) for a detailed description of the data sources.

here for a simple, global, “top-down” approach to calculate the average yield for N₂O associated with the global source of N mobilized through the agriculture/animal/human food chain.

[10] Human and animal sources of N are summarized for a number of countries and regions for 2001 in Table 1. The quantity of N processed annually through human and animal wastes is evaluated as the product of populations and per capita excretion rate for N. Populations of humans and animals and fertilizer use were taken from the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) databases [FAO, 2004]. Excretion rates for N contributed by different animal types were selected based on recommendations by IPCC [1997]. Humans in the developed world consume and excrete N at an average rate of about 5.4 kg N per person per year [National Research Council Committee on Nitrate Accumulation, 1972]. For persons in the less developed world, we adopt a lower value of 4 kg N per person per year. The agriculture/animal/human food chain is responsible for mobilization of a global source of 145 TgN yr⁻¹ with an additional 82 TgN yr⁻¹ introduced to the environment in the form of chemical fertilizer [FAO, 2004]. Although some portion of the N mobilized through human and animal wastes has come from previous applications of chemical

fertilizer, the reentry of this N back to the soil system makes it susceptible again to microbial processes that produce N₂O and NO_x. A breakdown of animal populations and corresponding sources of N for the United States, the European Union (EU) (the European Union as referenced in this paper refers to the 15 countries included in the Union in 2001 with a combined population of 378 million), China, and India is presented in Table 2. Cattle provide the dominant source of animal N for the United States (74% of the total), the EU (55%), and India (82%). Pigs are relatively more important for China (36% of the animal total).

[11] We can account for the magnitude of the contemporary increase in emissions of N₂O by assigning a value for the average yield of N₂O emitted as a consequence of the disturbance to the global nitrogen cycle associated with the agriculture/animal/human food chain. The extra (microbial) source of N₂O inferred above, 4.4 TgN yr⁻¹, can be accommodated if we assume a globally averaged yield of 2% for N₂O produced by oxidation of the additional N (227 TgN yr⁻¹) introduced by this pathway. As noted earlier, this yield is consistent with results from a variety of field and laboratory data [McElroy et al., 1978; Goreau et al., 1980; Lipschultz et al., 1981; Czepiel et al., 1996;

Table 2. Animal Populations and Corresponding Sources of Nitrogen for China, India, the United States, and the European Union in 2001^a

Regions	Population/N Source	Cattle	Pig	Sheep and Goat	Poultry	Others	Total
China	Population	128	450	280	4611	22	5491
	N sources	5.8	7.2	3.4	2.8	0.9	20.0
India	Population	314	17	182	743	3	1259
	N sources	14.1	0.3	2.2	0.4	0.1	17.2
United States	Population	97	59	8	1993	5	2162
	N sources	7.3	1.2	0.1	1.2	0.1	9.9
European Union	Population	82	122	115	1191	3	1513
	N sources	6.2	2.4	1.8	0.7	0.1	11.2

^aUnits are millions for population and TgN yr⁻¹ for N sources.

Sherlock *et al.*, 2002; Chang *et al.*, 1998; Velthof *et al.*, 2003], although the specific value adopted for this analysis is clearly not required by these data. As we shall see, this simple approach implies a source of 0.44 TgN-N₂O yr⁻¹ for the United States, slightly larger than the value estimated following the IPCC methodology by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) [2004] for direct emissions associated with the application of commercial and organic fertilizer to fields in the United States (0.33 TgN-N₂O yr⁻¹) but less than the value reported for the overall contribution of U.S. agriculture to emissions of N₂O (0.65 TgN-N₂O yr⁻¹). The composite EPA result accounts not only for emissions prompted directly by the application of fertilizers to agricultural systems but also for emissions stimulated more indirectly by influences such as the cultivation of legumes, the disposal of crop residues and leaching of excess N from soils. Under the circumstances, the agreement between the simple, global, top-down, approach adopted here and the more complex, bottom-up, procedure followed by the EPA is reassuring. Berges and Crutzen [1996], using lower and upper quartiles of measured molar emission ratios of N₂O to NH₃, derived the global source in the range of 0.2~2.5 Tg N/yr for N₂O emitted from cattle and pig manure stored in or at animal housings, corresponding to a yield of 0.5~5.4% from the total nitrogen in the manure. Their study did not account for N₂O emissions from grazing cattle, goats, and sheep, and application of the manure to agricultural soils. The 2% yield for N₂O adopted in our analysis lies roughly in the median of the range reached independently by Berges and Crutzen [1996] using measured ratio of N₂O to NH₃. Bouwman *et al.* [2002a, 2002b] summarized measurement data from the literature and derived an empirical relationship with the residual maximum likelihood procedure to describe the influence of environmental and management factors on N₂O and NO emissions from agricultural soils. Measurement data were log-transformed in their analysis to reduce the effect of extreme values and data from grazing systems were excluded due to lack of information on the N inputs from animal excreta. Their study suggested that the global aggregated yield for fertilizer-induced emissions was only 0.9% for N₂O and 0.7% for NO, significantly lower than results obtained from our study.

[12] Estimates for the associated emissions of N₂O and NO_x are included in Table 1. For N₂O, we adopted the yield of 2% inferred from consideration of the global budget, as discussed above. For NO_x we assumed a yield of 6% (i.e., NO/N₂O ratio of 3) consistent with the laboratory studies cited earlier for low oxygen conditions, in accord also with results from a variety of field studies [Clough *et al.*, 2003; Shepherd *et al.*, 1991; Slemr and Seiler, 1984; Gasche and Pape, 1999]. This choice was made on the grounds that O₂ concentrations are likely to be low in environments receiving large inputs of concentrated animal waste and fertilizers and that they are likely also to be depressed under conditions applying to disposal of human waste in the developing world. Specifically, the yield of 6% for NO_x is large enough to resolve the discrepancy between bottom-up estimates for emissions of NO_x from Central China reported by Streets *et al.* [2003] and values derived using inverse,

top-down, methods by Wang *et al.* [2004a]. The missing source of NO_y identified by Wang *et al.* [2004a] for Central China was estimated at 1.1 TgN yr⁻¹. Central China, as identified in their study, accounts for 30% of the Chinese population and approximately 30% of the country's domestic animals. Using the yield of 6% for NO_x, we would attribute a source of 0.9 TgN yr⁻¹ to the agriculture/animal/human food chain in Central China, offering a plausible resolution to the discrepancy highlighted by Wang *et al.* [2004a].

[13] The data in Table 1 suggest that China may be responsible for as much as 20% of the total global sources of N₂O and NO_x associated with processing of N through the agriculture/animal/human food chain with an additional 14% attributable to India. Corresponding emissions from the United States and EU are somewhat less, about 10% of the global total, reflecting the smaller human populations of these regions. The greenhouse warming potential of N₂O on a per molecule basis exceeds that of CO₂ by a factor of 296 [IPCC, 2001]. Combustion of fossil fuel was responsible for emission of 2794 Tg CO₂ for China, 1072 Tg CO₂ for India, 5606 Tg CO₂ for the United States, and 3392 Tg CO₂ for the EU in 2000 [Marland *et al.*, 2003]. The results in Table 1 imply therefore that radiative forcing attributed to CO₂ should be enhanced by 16%, 28%, 4%, and 6% for China, India, the United States, and the EU, respectively, to allow for the additional contribution from N₂O.

[14] The biological source of NO_x from the agriculture/animal/human food chain is especially significant for developing countries, comparable in magnitude to the source from fossil fuel combustion for China and India. It is less important for developed regions such as the United States where contributions from fossil fuel combustion dominate. However, as efforts are made to reduce NO_x emissions from combustion processes (including biomass burning) to mitigate problems associated with acid rain and ozone pollution, the biological source of NO_x will inevitably grow in relative importance. Accounting for sources of NO_x associated with combustion of fossil fuels, aggregated emissions of NO_x from the United States and the EU in 2000–2001 amount to 7.4 TgN yr⁻¹ and 4.3 TgN yr⁻¹, which may be compared with emissions from China and India (including combustion sources) for which we compute values of 6 TgN yr⁻¹ and 3.7 TgN yr⁻¹, respectively.

[15] Estimates in the literature for the global source of NO_x emitted from soils, including contributions from non-agricultural soils, range from 4 to 21 TgN/yr [Holland *et al.*, 1999, and references therein]. Our estimate for the biological source of NO_x associated with the agriculture/animal/human food chain lies within this range but is significantly higher than values suggested by some studies [Lee *et al.*, 1997; IPCC, 2001]. Yienger and Levy [1995], for example, using an empirical model incorporating temperature and precipitation outputs from a general circulation model, estimated a global source of 3 TgN/yr for NO_x emitted from agricultural soils in the absence of vegetation cover. In the presence of vegetation cover, emission rates in this model were reduced to 2.25 TgN/yr. Their analysis did not allow for contributions from animal wastes and may be expected therefore to underestimate overall emissions of

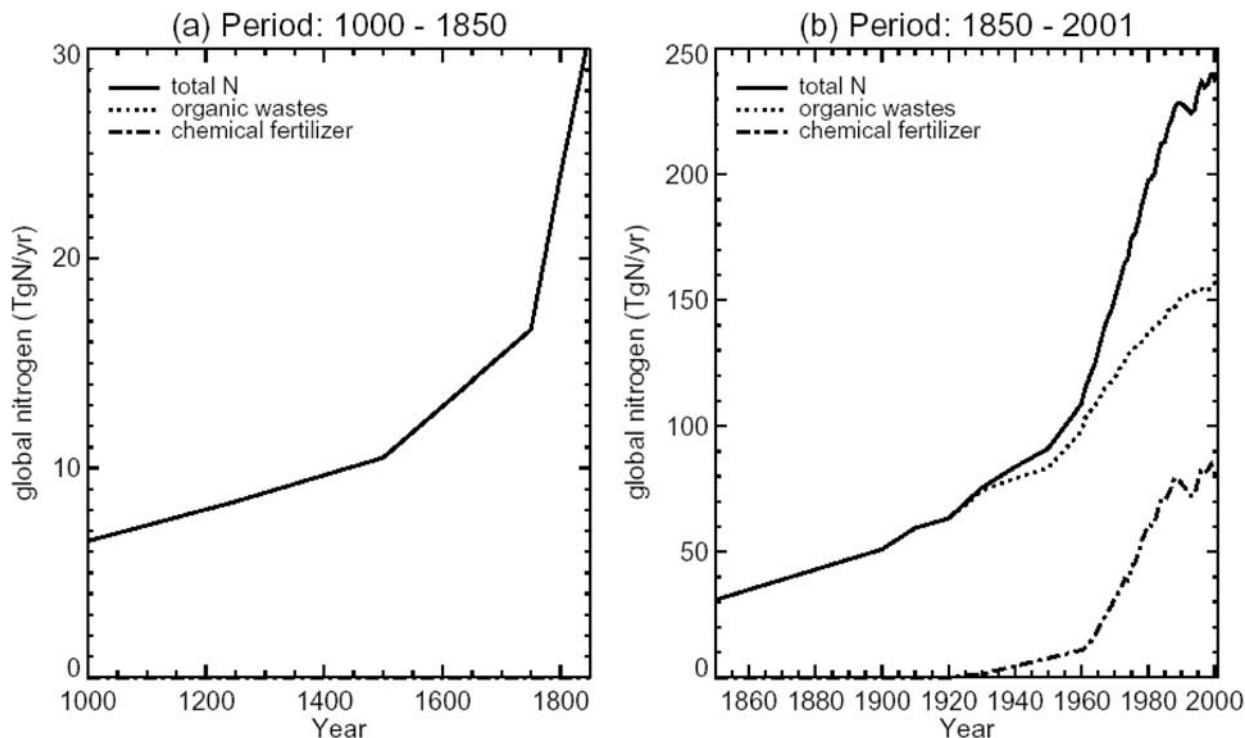


Figure 1. Amount of N processed through the agriculture/animal/human food chain for the periods (a) 1000–1850 and (b) 1850–2001.

NO_x . Whether applied to agricultural lands or left “as is” on fields, animal wastes are susceptible to microbial processes with potential for production of important quantities of both NO_x and N_2O . Davidson and Kinglerlee [1997], on the basis of a careful review of over 60 then-available papers reporting field measurements of soil NO_x emissions, estimated a global source of 21 Tg N/yr for NO_x emitted from soils. Their estimate suggested that tropical savanna was the largest contributor to this global budget, responsible for a source of 7.5 Tg N/yr as compared to their estimate of 5.4 Tg N/yr from cultivated land. Field measurements adopted in their study suggested large variation in fertility and hence NO_x emissions within the savanna biome. It is not clear whether organic wastes from animals have contributed to fertility for this biome. Galloway *et al.* [2004] constructed the global N budget for 1860 and the early 1990s. Their analysis did not evaluate the N mobilized by human and domestic animals as this N is not newly created by human activities. They estimated that agricultural soils were responsible for a global NO_x source of 2.6 Tg N in 1993 with zero contribution from animal and human wastes.

4. Trends in N_2O Emissions

[16] Trends in N processed through the global agriculture/animal/human food chain will be evaluated here and used to reconstruct trends for N_2O over the past 1000 years. Although agricultural practices began as early as 10,000 yr

B.P., the sparse spatial scale of early agriculture implies that its impact on atmospheric N_2O should be minimal. As we pointed out earlier, the yield of N_2O is large for concentrated wastes resulting from settled communities of humans and animals with sufficient density. Therefore we do not think the conclusions reached by Ruddiman [2003] on a much earlier impact of agriculture on CO_2 and CH_4 will apply to N_2O . The global source of N mobilized through the food chain between 1961 and 2001 was estimated directly using per capita annual excretion rates for humans and animals as described above adopting FAO databases [FAO, 2004] for human and animal populations and fertilizer use. For the period prior to 1961, not covered by the FAO databases, we adopted estimates of human population and fertilizer use for selected years as reported by the United Nations (UN) (The world at six billion, Table 1: World population from, 1999, available at <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/sixbillion/sixbilpart1.pdf>) and the International Fertilizer Industry Association (Production and international trade statistics, 2004, available at http://www.fertilizer.org/ifa/statistics/indicators/pocket_annexes.asp). Regional estimates of animal populations for the period 1850 to 1961 are taken from Mitchell [2003a, 2003b, 2003c]. Data were extrapolated linearly for years not covered by the sources listed above. Annual average per-capita excretion rates for humans were selected for different time intervals as follows: 3 kg N before 1800, 3.5 kg N between 1800 and 1900, and 4 kg N after 1900. These values were chosen somewhat arbitrarily to reflect the

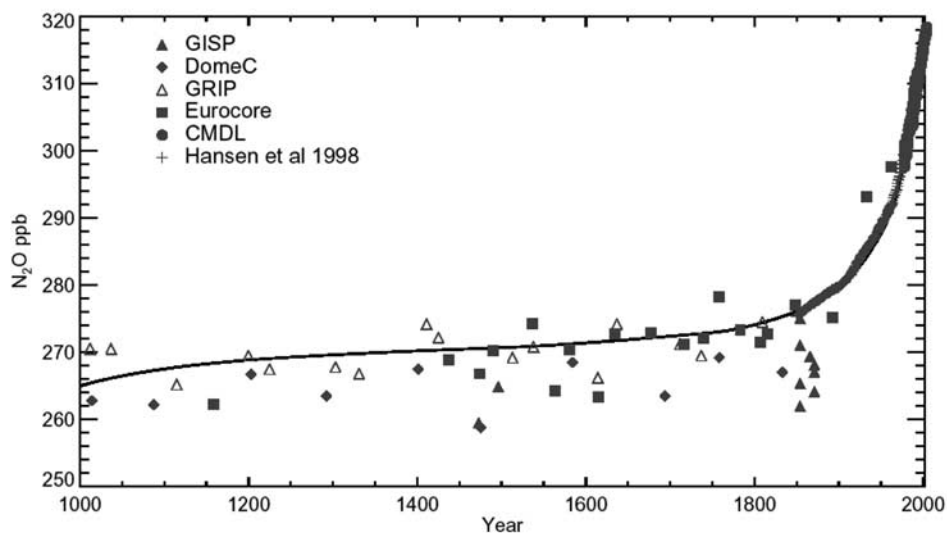


Figure 2. Comparison between observed (red symbols) and simulated (black line) atmospheric concentrations of N₂O for the period 1000–2001. Observations are taken from ice core measurements from GISP II [Sowers *et al.*, 2003], Dome C [Flückiger *et al.*, 2002], Eurocore and GRIP [Flückiger *et al.*, 2000], the Climate Monitoring and Diagnostics Laboratory (CMDL), and composite data set from Hansen *et al.* [1998]. See color version of this figure at back of this issue.

impact of the Industrial Revolution on worldwide human welfare. Excretion rates for different types of animals were scaled accordingly for the three time intervals. Lacking historical data on populations of different animal types for the period prior to 1850, animal wastes were evaluated indirectly by scaling contributions from humans as described below. Direct evaluations of animal wastes for the period 1850–1900 indicate that the scaling factor (i.e., the ratio of N in animal wastes to those in human wastes) has been relatively stable, ranging from 6.5 to 7.5. We assume that the scaling factor for the period prior to 1850 is close to the lower bound of this range. Accordingly, we adopt a scaling factor of 6 for the period prior to 1850.

[17] Figure 1 presents a summary of the contributions to N processed through the global agriculture/animal/human food chain as estimated here for the past 1000 years. Chemical fertilizer was significant only after 1920. The source of N mobilized by the global food chain increases from 6.5 TgN/yr in 1000 to 31 TgN/yr in 1850, rising to 227 TgN/yr in 2001. Our analysis here does not include the contribution from the cultivation of legumes. The increase over the past 100 years is close to exponential. Associated emissions of N₂O for the past 1000 years were estimated using the yield of 2% for N₂O inferred from the contemporary global budget. Anthropogenic emissions of N₂O increase from less than 0.5 TgN/yr before 1850 to 4.5 TgN/yr in 2001.

[18] Estimates of emissions were adopted to calculate concentrations of atmospheric N₂O using a one-box atmospheric model [Kroeze *et al.*, 1999],

$$dC/dt = S/4.8 - C/\tau,$$

where C defines the concentration of N₂O (ppb), t is time (years), S defines emissions (Tg N/yr; 4.8 Tg N = 1 ppbv

N₂O), and τ represents the lifetime for N₂O (years), fixed here at 120 years. Emissions (S) allow for both natural and anthropogenic sources of N₂O. We assumed a time-independent natural source of 10.9 TgN yr⁻¹ for N₂O (see section 3). The industrial source of N₂O reflects contributions from adipic acid and nitric acid production, fossil fuel fired power plants, and mobile combustion, adding up to about 1.3 TgN yr⁻¹ in 2000. The trend in the industrial source with time was assumed to be the same as that for fertilizer. Results are relatively insensitive to this assumption.

[19] Concentrations of N₂O calculated using the one-box model are compared with observations in Figure 2. The concentration of N₂O was set equal to 265 ppbv in 1000, as suggested by ice core measurements [Sowers *et al.*, 2002]. Concentrations simulated for the entire period are in good agreement with observed trends, offering support for the simple approach adopted here to estimate the source of N₂O associated with the agriculture/animal/human food chain.

5. Concluding Remarks

[20] The agriculture/animal/human food chain processed approximately 227 Tg N in 2001, with over 50% contributed by animals. We assumed that reduction of nitrite by nitrifying organisms under low oxygen conditions provided the dominant anthropogenic source of N₂O. We presented a simple, global, top-down model which implied a global average yield of 2% for N₂O produced from N processed through the global food chain. We showed that this simple model can account not only for the contemporary budget of atmospheric N₂O but also for trends observed over the past 1000 years.

[21] Microbial reduction of NO₂⁻ is responsible also for an important source of NO_x. We assumed a yield of 6% for NO_x formed by this path, 3 times larger than that inferred for N₂O, consistent with both laboratory and in situ field observations under low oxygen conditions. The yield for NO_x was selected specifically to resolve the discrepancy between “bottom-up” and “top-down” estimates for the source of NO_x over Central China, as highlighted by Wang *et al.* [2004a].

[22] It is clear that further work will be required to refine our understanding of global sources of N₂O and NO_x. The yield for NO_x adopted here was selected specifically to account for observations taken in and near China over the March–April time frame in 2001. Rates for nitrification might be expected to increase with temperature. The response of N₂O and NO_x production to a change in temperature is however less clear. As indicated above, the yield of N₂O and NO_x from nitrification is expected to depend on the relative abundances of NO₂⁻ and O₂ for the medium in which decomposition is taking place. It is difficult to predict how this ratio should vary with temperature. Further work, both in the laboratory and field, should help clarify this issue.

[23] There can be little doubt, however, that emissions of N₂O and NO_x are significant both regionally and globally and that they may be expected to increase in the future. Humans have evolved from relatively passive participants on the stage of life to a position of dominance in the global nitrogen cycle, as is the case also for the carbon cycle and arguably further for S and P. It is unlikely that our influence will soon be diminished.

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M. B. McElroy and Y. X. Wang, Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences, Division of Engineering and Applied Sciences, Harvard University, 29 Oxford Street, Pierce Hall, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA. (mbm@io.harvard.edu)

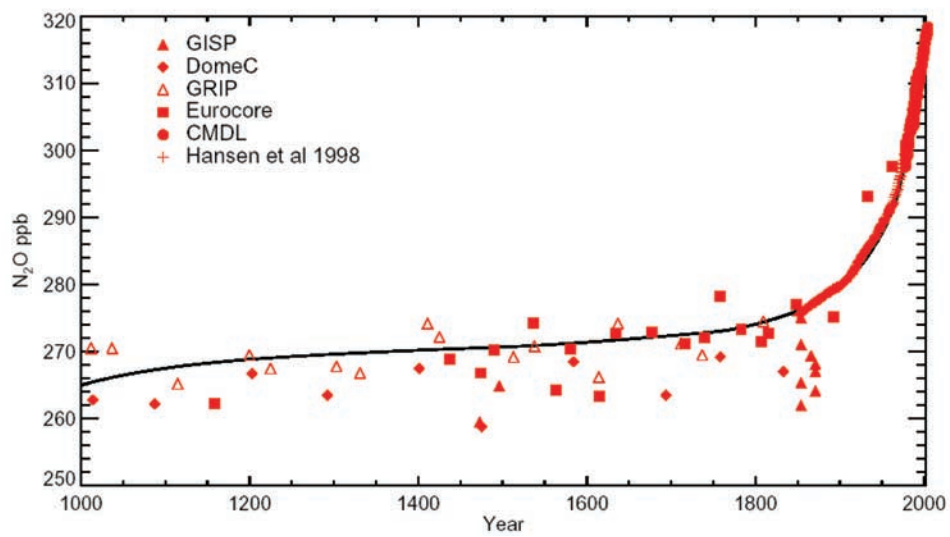


Figure 2. Comparison between observed (red symbols) and simulated (black line) atmospheric concentrations of N_2O for the period 1000–2001. Observations are taken from ice core measurements from GISP II [Sowers *et al.*, 2003], Eurocore and GRIP [Flückiger *et al.*, 2000], the Climate Monitoring and Diagnostics Laboratory (CMDL), and composite data set from Hansen *et al.* [1998].