

CrossMark
click for updates

Research

Cite this article: Ponisio LC, M'Gonigle LK, Mace KC, Palomino J, de Valpine P, Kremen C. 2015 Diversification practices reduce organic to conventional yield gap. *Proc. R. Soc. B* **282**: 20141396.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2014.1396>

Received: 6 June 2014

Accepted: 12 November 2014

Subject Areas:

environmental science

Keywords:

organic yield, conventional yield, meta-analysis

Author for correspondence:

Lauren C. Ponisio

e-mail: lponisio@berkeley.edu

Electronic supplementary material is available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2014.1396> or via <http://rspb.royalsocietypublishing.org>.

Diversification practices reduce organic to conventional yield gap

Lauren C. Ponisio¹, Leithen K. M'Gonigle^{1,2}, Kevi C. Mace¹, Jenny Palomino¹, Perry de Valpine¹ and Claire Kremen¹

¹Department of Environmental Science, Policy, and Management, University of California, Berkeley, 130 Mulford Hall, Berkeley, CA 94720, USA

²Department of Biological Science, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306, USA

Agriculture today places great strains on biodiversity, soils, water and the atmosphere, and these strains will be exacerbated if current trends in population growth, meat and energy consumption, and food waste continue. Thus, farming systems that are both highly productive and minimize environmental harms are critically needed. How organic agriculture may contribute to world food production has been subject to vigorous debate over the past decade. Here, we revisit this topic comparing organic and conventional yields with a new meta-dataset three times larger than previously used (115 studies containing more than 1000 observations) and a new hierarchical analytical framework that can better account for the heterogeneity and structure in the data. We find organic yields are only 19.2% ($\pm 3.7\%$) lower than conventional yields, a smaller yield gap than previous estimates. More importantly, we find entirely different effects of crop types and management practices on the yield gap compared with previous studies. For example, we found no significant differences in yields for leguminous versus non-leguminous crops, perennials versus annuals or developed versus developing countries. Instead, we found the novel result that two agricultural diversification practices, multi-cropping and crop rotations, substantially reduce the yield gap (to $9 \pm 4\%$ and $8 \pm 5\%$, respectively) when the methods were applied in only organic systems. These promising results, based on robust analysis of a larger meta-dataset, suggest that appropriate investment in agroecological research to improve organic management systems could greatly reduce or eliminate the yield gap for some crops or regions.

1. Introduction

While tremendously productive, our current agricultural food system causes many environmental problems, often trading off long-term maintenance of ecosystem services for short-term agricultural production [1,2]. Resultant problems include biodiversity loss, massive soil erosion and degradation, eutrophication and oceanic dead zones, pesticide effects on humans and wildlife, greenhouse gas emissions, and regime shifts in hydrological cycling [3–12]. Furthermore, although agriculture produces a food surplus at the global scale, over 1 billion people are chronically hungry. These problems of hunger, food insecurity and environmental harms will only be exacerbated if current trends in population growth, food and energy consumption, and food waste continue [13–15]. To maintain the Earth's capacity to produce food, it is imperative that we adopt sustainable and resilient agricultural practices as soon as possible [16,17]. Yet it is also broadly perceived that such practices will produce lower yields [17–19], leading to a conundrum—how do we maintain or increase food production without sacrificing sustainability and resilience? Previous analyses have concluded that improving the distribution of food while also reducing waste and meat consumption will greatly contribute to sustainably meeting future global demands [9,15], although how these goals are to be achieved is not yet clear.

Advocates of ‘sustainable intensification’ have focused on increasing production efficiency while minimizing economic and environmental costs. An emphasis on efficiency, however, may not necessarily lead to development of sustainable, resilient production systems that can buffer unexpected changes resulting from the complex socio-ecological interactions that influence agriculture [17,19,20]. To achieve environmental sustainability, we must grow food in a manner that protects, uses and regenerates ecosystem services (e.g. favours natural pest control over the use of synthetic pesticides), rather than replacing them [19,21,22]. Replacing ecosystem services often has unintended, negative consequences (e.g. lethal or sub-lethal effects of pesticides on humans, beneficial insects and wildlife [7,10,12,23]). Broad adoption of sustainable agricultural methods is unlikely, however, unless such methods are similarly productive and/or cost-effective, such that they improve livelihoods. Hence, there is much incentive to determine whether a yield gap exists between ‘conventional’ agriculture (i.e. chemically intensive and biologically simplified) and alternative, more sustainable forms of agriculture, and if so, how it can be reduced or eliminated.

Such systems (e.g. agroecological, ecologically intensive, biologically diversified or regenerative farming systems) use cultivation techniques that, through plot- to landscape-scale diversification, specifically encourage ecological interactions that generate soil fertility, nutrient cycling and retention, water storage, pest/disease control, pollination, and other essential agricultural inputs/ecosystem services [22]. The most widely practised and studied alternative to conventional agriculture is organic, which now takes place on 0.9% of agricultural lands [24]. Organic agriculture is defined as having no synthetic inputs, but organic farms may or may not practise the full suite of cultivation techniques characterizing sustainable agriculture [21,25]. Although the terms ‘organic’ and ‘sustainable’ agriculture are not equivalent, studies of organic agriculture have revealed better performance than conventional systems on some (but not all) sustainability metrics, including species richness and abundance, soil fertility, nitrogen uptake by crops, water infiltration and holding capacity, and energy use and efficiency [26–32]. Here, we provide the most comprehensive calculation of the yield gap between organic and conventional agriculture, building on the work of others [33–36].

Early reviews comparing organic to conventional agriculture found yield gaps of 8–9% in developed countries [33,34], but yield gains of as much as 180% in developing countries. Two recent meta-analyses, however, found organic yields to be 20–25% lower than conventional yields [35,36]. That these studies differed so much in their conclusions can probably be attributed to two factors. First, each study used different criteria for selecting the data to be included in its review or meta-analysis. For example, for developing countries, Badgley *et al.* [34] focused primarily on comparing sites using techniques of sustainable agriculture with ‘resource-poor’ sites, rather than strict organic versus conventional comparisons, accounting for the yield gains they found for ‘organic management’ in developing countries [18,21,37]. Second, each of the above studies used different analytical methods to combine the data across the different sub-studies. For example, the reviews of de Ponti *et al.* [35], Stanhill [33] and Badgley *et al.* [34] did not account for the sampling variance within studies, which is the recommended practice to deal with heteroscedasticity in the sample of

studies [38]. Seufert *et al.*’s [36] meta-analysis, while accounting for sampling variance, combined nested data (e.g. several experiments reported within the same study) without accounting for the hierarchy (electronic supplementary material, S51). This introduced pseudo-replication that effectively understated the Type I error rate of their analysis by an order of magnitude (electronic supplementary material, figure S1), and biased estimates of the yield gap and its statistical uncertainty (electronic supplementary material, figure S2). Given these methodological and data-related critiques, a new study is needed to produce a more robust estimate of the gap between organic and conventional yields.

Here, we develop a hierarchical meta-analytic framework that overcomes the methodological pitfalls of previous studies by accounting for both the multi-level nature of the data and the yield variation within studies. Furthermore, via a literature search we compiled a more extensive and up-to-date meta-dataset, comprising 1071 organic versus conventional yield comparisons from 115 studies—over three times the number of observations of any of the previous analyses. Our meta-dataset includes studies from 38 countries and 52 crop species over a span of 35 years.

2. Material and methods

(a) Search details

In our search, we used similar terms to those employed by Seufert *et al.* [36] and de Ponti *et al.* [35]. The search term used was a complex Boolean search containing (i) the term ‘organic’ or ‘ecological’ and (ii) the term ‘agriculture’, ‘farming’, ‘production’ or ‘cropping’ in combination with (iii) terms equal or similar to the terms ‘yield’ and ‘compare’. We used the search engines Academic Compete Search, Google Scholar and Web of Science. The last search was conducted in January 2013. The complete list of studies and yield data are provided in the electronic supplementary material, table S5.

(b) Inclusion criteria

We adopted Seufert *et al.*’s [36] rigorous inclusion criteria, except we excluded (i) comparisons of subsistence yields (unimproved agriculture) against improved agricultural methods (e.g. [34,39]) and (ii) comparisons of yields taken from different years. Additionally, in cases where the means of organic and conventional yields were reported but the variance of those means were not (a necessary component for inclusion in meta-analysis), we obtained an estimate of the variance directly from the original authors, whenever possible. Of the 99 studies lacking variance estimates, we obtained variance estimates or original data from the authors of 28 of them. In cases where the authors did not reply and there were multiple years of data reported, we took the mean and variance across years (59 studies, 232 organic to conventional comparisons), as did Seufert *et al.* [36]. Because the variance across years is not a perfect estimate of the within-year variation, however, we also conducted analyses excluding these studies (electronic supplementary material, S2.5 and figure S2). Together, the search and data request yielded 115 studies from which we extracted 1071 organic versus conventional comparisons.

(c) Meta-analytic model

We built a hierarchical meta-analytic model to generate an estimate of the yield gap (see the electronic supplementary material, S2, for details). Following standard practice, we compared the natural log of the ratios between organic and conventional yields (the

'response ratio') across studies [36,40]. The response ratio is more normally distributed than the raw ratio and independent of the units of measurement used within a study, and thus is comparable across studies [40].

To analyse the yield data, which contained several levels of hierarchy, we employed two methods. First, for studies that compare multiple treatments (usually organic) with one control treatment (usually conventional), and are thus not independent [41,42], we calculated a combined response ratio and corresponding standard error for the entire study using the method presented in eqn 3 and 8 in [41], and then used these combined response ratios in the nested analysis.

Next, we constructed a hierarchical regression model in a Bayesian framework to account for the dependencies in the yield data. We expanded on the traditional random effects model [43] by considering three additional sources of random variation (i.e. random effects): (1) between studies, (2) within a study between years and (3) within a year between response ratios (e.g. across replicated trials of a crop planted at different times in the season). We also considered whether the variances of the random effect distributions for (2) and (3) were shared across studies, or study-specific.

The traditional random effects meta-analytic model includes a random effect of study (electronic supplementary material, equation S1), but individual response ratios must be nested within study so that studies, rather than individual organic to conventional yield comparisons, are treated as replicates. This avoids the pseudo-replication and resulting Type I error inflation of previous studies (electronic supplementary material, figure S1). We then added the additional random effects sequentially and determined whether the posterior distribution of the added parameter was clearly differentiated from zero (electronic supplementary material, Section S2). If it was, we concluded that the data supported adding that layer of hierarchy. We confirmed our model selection using the deviance information criterion, which can be problematic but agreed in this case [44,45]. The full possible model, prior to model selection, with all sources of random variation is

$$\left. \begin{aligned} y_{ijk} &= \mu + \alpha_i + \beta_{ij} + \eta_{ijk} + \epsilon_{ijk}, \\ \alpha_i &\sim N(0, \sigma_\alpha^2), \\ \beta_{ij} &\sim N(0, \sigma_\beta^2[i]), \\ \eta_{ijk} &\sim N(0, \sigma_\eta^2[i]), \\ \epsilon_{ijk} &\sim N(0, S_{ijk}), \\ \sigma_\beta^2[i] &\sim \Gamma(\text{CV}_\beta, \text{scale}_\beta) \\ \text{and } \sigma_\eta^2[i] &\sim \Gamma(\text{CV}_\eta, \text{scale}_\eta), \end{aligned} \right\} \quad (2.1)$$

where y_{ijk} is the observed magnitude of the k th response ratio from the j th year of the i th study, μ is the mean response ratio across studies, α_i is the effect of i th study, β_{ij} is the effect of j th year of the i th study, η_{ijk} is the effect of the k th response ratio of the j th year of i th study and ϵ_{ijk} is the residual. σ_α^2 is the between-study variance, $\sigma_\beta^2[i]$ is the between-year variance of study i , $\sigma_\eta^2[i]$ is the within-year, between-response ratio variance of study i , and S_{ijk} is the variance of response ratio y_{ijk} as reported by its study. CV_β and CV_η and scale_β and scale_η are the coefficient of variation and scale parameters of the gamma distributions of the study-specific between- and within-year variances. When response ratios that shared a common control were combined, y_{ijk} corresponds to the aggregate within-study response ratio (eqn 3 in [41]) and S_{ijk} is its pooled variance (eqn 8 in [41]).

We also extended this model in order to accommodate analyses of study characteristics such as crop type and management practices. We analyse these additional explanatory variables one at a time because not all studies reported all explanatory variables. In these analyses, for cases where multiple organic treatments represented different categories for a specific explanatory variable,

they could not be combined using Lajeunesse's method [41]. The potential bias resulting from non-independence of the response ratios in these cases, however, would be minimized by the fact that they are not pooled together in the analysis [41].

Letting h index the categories for a particular explanatory variable (e.g. crop species), we then have

$$y_{hijk} = \mu + \gamma_h + \alpha_i + \beta_{ij} + \eta_{ijk} + \epsilon_{ijk}, \quad (2.2)$$

where γ_h is the effect of the h th category, and the rest of the model parallels that given in equation (2.1).

In order to facilitate comparison between our results and those of previous analyses, we used the same categories as those defined by Seufert *et al.* [36]. We also examined the sensitivity of our results to explanatory variables related to study quality, again using the study quality categories defined by Seufert *et al.* [36]. The coefficients of explanatory variables were considered to be different from each other if the posterior of the difference between the 95% credibility intervals around the group means did not overlap zero.

We used JAGS through the R package `rjags` interface [46,47] to implement Markov chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) sampling. Inference was made from three chains each with 10^3 samples of the posterior distribution after a burn-in of 10^4 and with a thin rate of 10^3 . We used Gaussians with large variances to define priors, except for variance terms, where we used a uniform (0, 100) prior on the standard deviation. Initial values were chosen randomly. Convergence was assessed by visual assessment of MCMC chains and using the Gelman–Rubin statistic ('Rhat' in R package `R2JAGS`, with values less than 1.1 indicating convergence [48]). Credible intervals around parameter estimates were calculated as the 2.5% and 97.5% quantiles of the posterior. We also checked for bias in our meta-dataset using a funnel plot and QQ-plot (electronic supplementary material, §S3 [49]).

3. Results

We found the data supported including random variation between studies and study-specific variation with a year, but not random variation between years of a study (electronic supplementary material, table S1 and figure S6). Using the selected hierarchical model, we found a smaller yield gap between conventional and organic cropping systems than that reported in recent meta-analyses [35,36]. We found that organic yields were 19.2% lower than conventional yields, with a 95% credible interval ranging from 15.5% to 22.9% (figure 1). Conventional yields were significantly higher than organic for all crop types and the yield ratios of most crop types did not vary significantly from one another (figure 1). At the finer scale of crop species, however, yield ratios differed significantly between some pairs of species (electronic supplementary material, figure S3).

The most dramatic difference between our findings and earlier work is an almost complete lack of significant differences between groups for all of the explanatory variables investigated. Unlike Seufert *et al.* [36], we did not find significant differences in yields for leguminous and non-leguminous crops nor for perennials and annuals (figure 1). Nor did we find a difference between the yield gaps for studies conducted in developed versus developing countries (electronic supplementary material, table S2; see also [34]). Our results were robust to including a between-year random effect (though including this parameter was not supported by the data; electronic supplementary material, table S1 and figure S6).

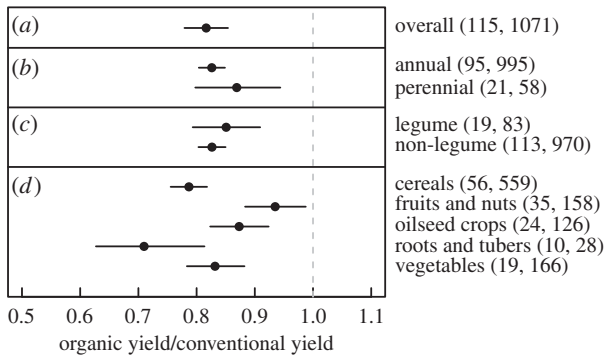


Figure 1. The organic-to-conventional yield ratio of (a) all crops, (b,c) plant types and (d) different crop types. Values are mean effect sizes with 95% credible intervals (i.e. 95% of the posterior distribution). The number of studies and observations in each category are shown in parentheses. Only categories with at least 10 yield comparisons from greater than five studies are shown. Organic and conventional yields were deemed significantly different from each other if the 95% credible interval of the yield ratio did not overlap one. Different levels of explanatory variables were considered to be significantly different if the posterior of the difference between the group means did not overlap zero.

A likely explanation for the completely different outcomes for the majority of the explanatory variables between our study and that of Seufert *et al.* [36] (see electronic supplementary material, tables S2–S4, for a summary of the differences) is that Seufert *et al.* [36] did not account for all sources of shared variation in their analyses, which resulted in an inflated Type 1 error (electronic supplementary material, figure S1). This would increase the probability of accepting non-significant relationships as significant.

Our analysis also differs from that of Seufert *et al.* [36] in that the latter concluded that a number of management practices might minimize the differences between organic and conventional yields. For example, Seufert *et al.* [36] found significant differences in yield gaps related to irrigation practices, time since conversion from conventional to organic, and whether best management practices were used in the organic system. We found, however, no such differences between treatments within any of these categories (electronic supplementary material, table S3). We also included a new explanatory variable, phosphorus input, but again found no significant differences in yield when phosphorus input in the organic treatment was higher or lower than in the conventional treatment (electronic supplementary material, figure S4).

Seufert *et al.* [36] also found significantly larger yield gaps when levels of nitrogen input were similar in the organic and conventional treatments or greater in the conventional treatment, compared with cases where nitrogen input was higher in the organic treatment (electronic supplementary material, table S3). Our findings differed: we found a significantly smaller yield gap when N inputs were similar between treatments ($9 \pm 4\%$), compared with when N inputs were greater in conventional treatments ($30 \pm 4\%$). When N inputs were higher in organic treatments, the yield gap was intermediate and more variable ($17 \pm 6\%$), and marginally significantly different from the yield ratio with similar N input (figure 2). Similarly, low-input conventional systems have a smaller yield gap than high-input (electronic supplementary material, figure S4), a result also found by Seufert *et al.* [36].

We found that two management practices that diversify crop fields in space or over time, multi-cropping and crop

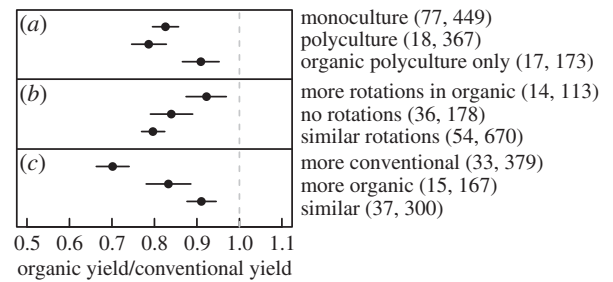


Figure 2. The influence of (a) cropping system, (b) rotation and (c) nitrogen input on the organic-to-conventional yield ratio. Values are mean effect sizes with 95% credible intervals. The number of studies and observations in each category are shown in parentheses.

rotations, can improve yields in organic systems. The yield gap between organic polycultures and conventional monocultures ($9 \pm 4\%$) was significantly smaller than when both treatments were monocultures ($17 \pm 3\%$) or both polycultures ($21 \pm 6\%$). We found a similar result with crop rotations. The yield gap was smaller when the organic system had more rotations ($8 \pm 5\%$) compared with when both treatments had a similar number of rotations ($20 \pm 2\%$) or did not have crop rotations at all ($16 \pm 5\%$). These results also suggest that polyculture and crop rotations increase yields in both organic and conventional cropping systems (figure 2). Seufert *et al.* [36] found no such differences between cropping or rotation systems. There is some overlap between studies that reported the yields of organic polycultures with more rotations, so these practices could work synergistically to close the yield gap, or one of the practices could be producing the majority of the effect.

We found evidence of bias in the meta-dataset towards studies reporting higher conventional yields relative to organic (electronic supplementary material, Section S3). We also detected a trend towards larger yield gaps in more recent studies, though it is difficult to determine the causal mechanism for this trend (electronic supplementary material, Section S3). Our results should therefore be interpreted as presenting an estimate of the yield gap from the available literature that is likely favouring studies reporting higher conventional yields than organic.

4. Discussion

Our extensive dataset including over three times more yield comparisons than previous studies [35,36] and our hierarchical analytical framework, provides the most up-to-date estimate of the yield gap between organic and conventional agriculture, and how this yield gap is influenced, or not, by management practices and crop types. The lower bound of our credible interval around the yield ratio overlaps the upper bounds of the two previous meta-analyses [35,36], but because these analyses did not account for the hierarchy of their data and/or the sampling variance within studies, these prior estimates are subject to high levels of Type 1 error (underestimated uncertainty), which likely results in inaccuracy in estimating the yield gap and its statistical uncertainty. Further, we found entirely different effects of crop types and management practices on the yield gap than previous studies [36].

The results of our analysis are limited by modelling considerations and the studies available for inclusion. We modelled

as many layers of non-independence in our meta-dataset as the data supported, but others may exist. In addition, we found a bias towards reporting of higher conventional to organic yield ratios in the literature; therefore, even though our estimate of the yield gap is more robust and smaller than previous analyses, it may still be an overestimate.

The estimate of the organic-to-conventional yield ratio is an average over many disparate systems and crop types. The over-representation of specific practices or crops in the dataset may therefore excessively influence the estimate of the yield gap. For example, cereal crops, which exhibit the greatest difference in yield of the crop types between organic and conventional systems, were greatly over-represented (53% of comparisons). The finding that cereal productivity (including wheat, barley, rice and maize) is lower in organic systems is of interest because of its central importance in the human diet and predominance in cultivated land area. This larger difference, however, is not surprising, given the extensive efforts since the Green Revolution to increase cereal yields by breeding high-yielding cereal varieties adapted to work well with conventional inputs [50,51].

Given that there is such a diversity of management practices used in both organic and conventional farming, a broad-scale comparison of organic and conventional production may not provide the most useful insights for improving management of organic systems. Instead, it might be more productive to investigate explicitly and systematically how specific management practices (e.g. intercrop combinations, crop rotation sequences, composting, biological control, etc.) could be altered in different cropping systems to mitigate yield gaps between organic and conventional production. Historically, research and development of organic cropping systems has been extensively underfunded relative to conventional systems [16,52,53]; thus, research priorities would need to shift to provide for this needed work. Our meta-analyses found relatively small, and potentially overestimated, differences in yield between organic and conventional agriculture (i.e. between 15.5 and 22.9%), despite historically low rates of investment in organic cropping systems. These yield differences dropped to $9 \pm 4\%$ and $8 \pm 5\%$ when diversification techniques (multi-cropping and crop rotations, respectively) were used. We therefore suggest that further investment in agroecological research has the potential to improve productivity of sustainable agricultural methods to equal or better conventional yields in various cropping systems, as has indeed been demonstrated through long-term studies (e.g. [54,55]).

Further, many comparisons between organic and conventional agriculture use modern crop varieties selected for their ability to produce under high-input (conventional) systems. Such varieties are known to lack important traits needed for productivity in low-input systems, potentially biasing towards finding lower yields in organic versus conventional

comparisons. By contrast, few modern varieties have yet been developed to produce high yields under organic conditions [50,56]; generating such breeds would be an important first step towards reducing yield gaps when they occur. Finally, reducing the yield gap between organic and conventional agriculture (or, more accurately, between biologically diversified versus chemically intensive farming systems) has the potential benefit of reducing the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services often associated with conventional agricultural methods [1,2], and thus promoting a high-yielding agriculture that is relatively environmentally beneficial and wildlife-friendly compared with conventional systems [21,28,57,58]. There is some evidence that biodiversity decreases with increased yields on organic farms [59], but this might not apply to yield increases on biologically diversified farming systems.

As others have pointed out, agricultural yields, in and of themselves, are not sufficient to address the twin crises of hunger and obesity, both associated with poverty, that are seen in the world today. Current global caloric production greatly exceeds that needed to supply the world's population, yet social, political and economic factors prevent many people from accessing sufficient food for a healthy life [15,16,60,61]. A focus solely on increased yields will not solve the problem of world hunger. Increased production is, however, critical for meeting the economic needs of poor farmers who make up the largest portion of the world's chronically hungry people [21,39,60], and agroecological methods provide low-cost methods for doing so (e.g. [54]). Further, environmentally sustainable, resilient production systems will become an increasingly urgent necessity in a world where many planetary boundaries have already been reached or exceeded [19,62,63]. We believe it is time to invest in analytically rigorous, agroecological and socio-economic research oriented at eliminating yield gaps between sustainable and conventional agriculture (when they occur), identifying barriers to adoption of sustainable techniques and improving livelihoods of the rural poor.

Data accessibility. The full meta-dataset is available at Dryad data repository, doi:10.5061/dryad.hf305.

Acknowledgements. We thank the authors who conducted the studies included in our meta-dataset, especially those supplying original data. All references are included as an appendix. We appreciate the correspondence between our group and Verena Seufert, Jonathan Foley and Navin Ramankutty. Laura Driscoll, Kelly Garbach, Lisa Kelley, Andrew Rominger and Nathan Van Schmidt assisted with data management and discussion. We also appreciate our correspondence with John Vandermeer regarding publication bias. We would like to thank Jonathan Foley and two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and revisions; one reviewer, in particular, provided statistical feedback that proved extraordinarily helpful.

Funding statement. Funding for L.C.P. was provided by an NSF Graduate Research Fellowship and for L.K.M. by an NSERC Postdoctoral Fellowship.

References

1. Raudsepp-Hearne C, Peterson GD, Tengö M, Bennett EM, Holland T, Benessaiah K, MacDonald GK, Pfeifer L. 2010 Untangling the environmentalist's paradox: why is human well-being increasing as ecosystem services degrade? *BioScience* **60**, 576–589. (doi:10.1525/bio.2010.60.8.4)
2. Foley JA *et al.* 2005 Global consequences of land use. *Science* **309**, 570–574. (doi:10.1126/science.1111772)
3. Lal R. 2004 Soil carbon sequestration impacts on global climate change and food security. *Science* **304**, 1623–1627. (doi:10.1126/science.1097396)
4. Gordon LJ, Peterson GD, Bennett EM. 2008 Agricultural modifications of hydrological flows create ecological surprises. *Trends Ecol. Evol.* **23**, 211–219. (doi:10.1016/j.tree.2007.11.011)
5. Gibbs HK, Ruesch AS, Achard F, Clayton MK, Holmgren P, Ramankutty N, Foley JA. 2010 Tropical

- forests were the primary sources of new agricultural land in the 1980s and 1990s. *Proc. Natl Acad. Sci. USA* **107**, 16 732–16 737. (doi:10.1073/pnas.0910275107)
6. Wilcove DS, Koh LP. 2010 Addressing the threats to biodiversity from oil-palm agriculture. *Biodivers. Conserv.* **19**, 999–1007. (doi:10.1007/s10531-009-9760-x)
 7. Eskenazi B, Marks AR, Bradman A, Harley K, Barr DB, Johnson C, Morga N, Jewell NP. 2007 Organophosphate pesticide exposure and neurodevelopment in young Mexican–American children. *Environ. Health Perspect.* **115**, 792–798. (doi:10.1289/ehp.9828)
 8. Diaz RJ, Rosenberg R. 2008 Spreading dead zones and consequences for marine ecosystems. *Science* **321**, 926–929. (doi:10.1126/science.1156401)
 9. Foley JA *et al.* 2011 Solutions for a cultivated planet. *Nature* **478**, 337–342. (doi:10.1038/nature10452)
 10. Hayes TB *et al.* 2010 Atrazine induces complete feminization and chemical castration in male African clawed frogs (*Xenopus laevis*). *Proc. Natl Acad. Sci. USA* **107**, 4612–4617. (doi:10.1073/pnas.0909519107)
 11. Grosso SJD, Cavigelli MA. 2012 Climate stabilization wedges revisited: can agricultural production and greenhouse-gas reduction goals be accomplished? *Front. Ecol. Environ.* **10**, 571–578. (doi:10.1890/120058)
 12. Gill RJ, Ramos-Rodriguez O, Raine NE. 2012 Combined pesticide exposure severely affects individual-and colony-level traits in bees. *Nature* **491**, 105–108. (doi:10.1038/nature11585)
 13. Tilman D, Balzer C, Hill J, Belfort BL. 2011 Global food demand and the sustainable intensification of agriculture. *Proc. Natl Acad. Sci. USA* **108**, 20 260–20 264. (doi:10.1073/pnas.1116437108)
 14. FAO. 2009 *How to feed the world in 2050*. Rome, Italy: Food and Agriculture Organization.
 15. Tomlinson I. 2013 Doubling food production to feed the 9 billion: a critical perspective on a key discourse of food security in the UK. *J. Rural Stud.* **29**, 81–90.
 16. McIntyre BD. 2009 *IAASTD international assessment of agricultural knowledge, science and technology for development: global report*. Washington, DC: Island Press.
 17. Garnett T *et al.* 2013 Sustainable intensification in agriculture: premises and policies. *Science* **341**, 33–34. (doi:10.1126/science.1234485)
 18. Connor D. 2008 Organic agriculture cannot feed the world. *Field Crops Res.* **106**, 187–190. (doi:10.1016/j.fcr.2007.11.010)
 19. Bennett E *et al.* 2014. Toward a more resilient agriculture. *Solutions* **5**, 65–75.
 20. Loos J, Abson DJ, Chappell MJ, Hanspach J, Mikulcak F, Tichit M, Fischer J. 2014 Putting meaning back into ‘sustainable intensification’. *Front. Ecol. Environ.* **12**, 356–361. (doi:10.1890/130157)
 21. Kremen C, Miles A. 2012 Ecosystem services in biologically diversified versus conventional farming systems: benefits, externalities, and trade-offs. *Ecol. Soc.* **17**, 40.
 22. Kremen C, Iles A, Bacon C. 2012 Diversified farming systems: an agroecological, systems-based alternative to modern industrial agriculture. *Ecol. Soc.* **17**, 44.
 23. Henry M, Beguin M, Requier F, Rollin O, Odoux J-F, Aupinel P, Aptel J, Tchamitchian S, Decourtye A. 2012 A common pesticide decreases foraging success and survival in honey bees. *Science* **336**, 348–350. (doi:10.1126/science.1215039)
 24. Willer H, Kilcher L. 2011 *The world of organic agriculture, statistics and emerging trends*. Bonn, Germany: International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM).
 25. Guthman J. 2000 Raising organic: An agro-ecological assessment of grower practices in California. *Agric. Hum. Values* **17**, 257–266. (doi:10.1023/A:1007688216321)
 26. Bengtsson J, Ahnström J, Weibull A-C. 2005 The effects of organic agriculture on biodiversity and abundance: a meta-analysis. *J. Appl. Ecol.* **42**, 261–269. (doi:10.1111/j.1365-2664.2005.01005.x)
 27. Mäder P, Fliessbach A, Dubois D, Gunst L, Fried P, Niggli U. 2002 Soil fertility and biodiversity in organic farming. *Science* **296**, 1694–1697. (doi:10.1126/science.1071148)
 28. Hole D, Perkins A, Wilson J, Alexander I, Grice P, Evans A. 2005 Does organic farming benefit biodiversity? *Biol. Conserv.* **122**, 113–130. (doi:10.1016/j.biocon.2004.07.018)
 29. Lotter D, Seidel R, Liebhardt W. 2003 The performance of organic and conventional cropping systems in an extreme climate year. *Am. J. Altern. Agric.* **18**, 146–154. (doi:10.1079/AJAA200345)
 30. Lynch DH, MacRae R, Martin RC. 2011 The carbon and global warming potential impacts of organic farming: does it have a significant role in an energy constrained world? *Sustainability* **3**, 322–362. (doi:10.3390/su3020322)
 31. Nissen TM, Wander MM. 2003 Management and soil-quality effects on fertilizer-use efficiency and leaching. *Soil Sci. Soc. Am. J.* **67**, 1524–1532. (doi:10.2136/sssaj2003.1524)
 32. Tuck SL, Winqvist C, Mota F, Ahnström J, Turnbull LA, Bengtsson J. 2014 Land-use intensity and the effects of organic farming on biodiversity: a hierarchical meta-analysis. *J. Appl. Ecol.* **51**, 746–755.
 33. Stanhill G. 1990 The comparative productivity of organic agriculture. *Agric. Ecosyst. Environ.* **30**, 1–26. (doi:10.1016/0167-8809(90)90179-H)
 34. Badgley C, Moghtader J, Quintero E, Zakem E, Chappell MJ, Aviles-Vazquez K, Samulon A, Perfecto I. 2007 Organic agriculture and the global food supply. *Renew. Agric. Food Syst.* **22**, 86–108. (doi:10.1017/S1742170507001640)
 35. de Ponti T, Rijk B, van Ittersum M. 2012 The crop yield gap between organic and conventional agriculture. *Agric. Syst.* **108**, 1–9. (doi:10.1016/j.agsy.2011.12.004)
 36. Seufert V, Ramankutty N, Foley JA. 2012 Comparing the yields of organic and conventional agriculture. *Nature* **485**, 229–232. (doi:10.1038/nature11069)
 37. Cassman K. 2007 Editorial response by Kenneth Cassman: can organic agriculture feed the world-science to the rescue? *Renew. Agric. Food Syst.* **22**, 83–84.
 38. Gurevitch J, Hedges LV. 1999 Statistical issues in ecological meta-analyses. *Ecology* **80**, 1142–1149. (doi:10.1890/0012-9658(1999)080[1142:SIEMA]2.0.CO;2)
 39. Pretty JN, Hine R. 2001 *Reducing food poverty with sustainable agriculture: a summary of new evidence*. Colchester, UK: University of Essex.
 40. Hedges L, Gurevitch J, Curtis P. 1999 The meta-analysis of response ratios in experimental ecology. *Ecology* **80**, 1150–1156. (doi:10.1890/0012-9658(1999)080[1150:TMAORR]2.0.CO;2)
 41. Lajeunesse MJ. 2011 On the meta-analysis of response ratios for studies with correlated and multi-group designs. *Ecology* **92**, 2049–2055. (doi:10.1890/11-0423.1)
 42. Gleser LJ, Olkin I. 1994 Stochastically dependent effect sizes. In *The handbook of research synthesis* (eds H Cooper, LV Hedges), pp. 339–355. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
 43. Hedges LV, Olkin I. 1985 *Statistical methods for meta-analysis*. New York, NY: Academic Press.
 44. Gelman A, Hill J. 2006 *Data analysis using regression and multilevel/hierarchical models*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
 45. Kéry M, Schaub M. 2012 *Bayesian population analysis using WinBUGS: a hierarchical perspective*. New York, NY: Academic Press.
 46. Plummer M. 2013 rjags: Bayesian graphical models using MCMC. R package v. 3–10. See <http://CRAN.R-project.org/package=rjags>.
 47. Plummer M. 2003 Jags: a program for analysis of Bayesian graphical models using Gibbs sampling. In *Proceedings of the 3rd International Workshop on Distributed Statistical Computing, 20–22 March, Vienna, Austria*. See www.r-project.org/conferences/DSC-2003/Proceedings/Plummer.pdf.
 48. Kery M. 2010 *Introduction to WinBUGS for ecologists: Bayesian approach to regression, ANOVA, mixed models and related analyses*. New York, NY: Academic Press.
 49. Rothstein HR, Sutton AJ, Borenstein M. 2006 *Publication bias in meta-analysis: prevention, assessment and adjustments*. New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons.
 50. Lammerts van Bueren E, Jones S, Tamm L, Murphy K, Myers J, Leifert C, Messmer M. 2011 The need to breed crop varieties suitable for organic farming, using wheat, tomato and broccoli as examples: a review. *NJAS Wageningen J. Life Sci.* **58**, 193–205. (doi:10.1016/j.njas.2010.04.001)
 51. Evenson RE, Gollin D. 2003 Assessing the impact of the Green Revolution, 1960 to 2000. *Science* **300**, 758–762. (doi:10.1126/science.1078710)

52. Vanloqueren G, Baret PV. 2009 How agricultural research systems shape a technological regime that develops genetic engineering but locks out agroecological innovations. *Res. Policy* **38**, 971–983. (doi:10.1016/j.respol.2009.02.008)
53. Carlisle L, Miles A. 2013 Closing the knowledge gap: how the USDA could tap the potential of biologically diversified farming systems. *J. Agric. Food Syst. Commun. Dev.* **3**, 219–225. (doi:10.5304/jafscd.2013.034.025)
54. Khan Z, Midega C, Pittchar J, Pickett J, Bruce T. 2011 Push–pull technology: a conservation agriculture approach for integrated management of insect pests, weeds and soil health in Africa: UK Government's foresight food and farming futures project. *Int. J. Agric. Sustain.* **9**, 162–170. (doi:10.3763/ijas.2010.0558)
55. Rodale Institute. 2012 Farming systems trial, 30-year report. Technical report, Rodale Institute, Kutztown, PA, USA.
56. Murphy KM, Campbell KG, Lyon SR, Jones SS. 2007 Evidence of varietal adaptation to organic farming systems. *Field Crops Res.* **102**, 172–177. (doi:10.1016/j.fcr.2007.03.011)
57. Batáry P, Báldi A, Kleijn D, Tschamtké T. 2011 Landscape-moderated biodiversity effects of agri-environmental management: a meta-analysis. *Proc. R. Soc. B* **278**, 1894–1902. (doi:10.1098/rspb.2010.1923)
58. Philpott SM *et al.* 2008 Biodiversity loss in Latin American coffee landscapes: review of the evidence on ants, birds, and trees. *Conserv. Biol.* **22**, 1093–1105. (doi:10.1111/j.1523-1739.2008.01029.x)
59. Gabriel D, Sait SM, Kunin WE, Benton TG. 2013 Food production versus biodiversity: comparing organic and conventional agriculture. *J. Appl. Ecol.* **50**, 355–364. (doi:10.1111/1365-2664.12035)
60. Holt-Giménez E, Shattuck A, Altieri M, Herren H, Gliessman S. 2012 We already grow enough food for 10 billion people. . . and still can't end hunger. *J. Sustain. Agric.* **36**, 595–598. (doi:10.1080/10440046.2012.695331)
61. Smil V. 2005 Feeding the world: how much more rice do we need? In *Rice is life: scientific perspectives for the 21st century* (ed. K Toriyama, KL Heong, B Hardy), pp. 21–23. Manila, PH: International Rice Research Institute.
62. Rockström J *et al.* 2009 A safe operating space for humanity. *Nature* **461**, 472–475. (doi:10.1038/461472a)
63. Godfray HJ *et al.* 2010 Food security: the challenge of feeding 9 billion people. *Science* **327**, 812–818. (doi:10.1126/science.1185383)