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Soil and Water Conservation in Cropping Systems: Physical Resource Assessment and Management

*Ranbaj Tusharsen Mallik and Santosh Korav

Department of Agronomy, School of Agriculture, Lovely Professional University,
(Phagwara) Jalandhar- 144411, Punjab, India

*Corresponding Author's email: ranbajmallik60@gmail.com

Water and soil are the most important natural resources for growing crops in a way that is good for the environment. But intensive farming has caused soil degradation, erosion, and wasteful water use. This article talks about how important it is to protect soil and water in farming systems, focusing on how to assess and manage physical resources. Minimum tillage, keeping crop residue, and growing a variety of crops are all examples of conservation agriculture practices that are very important for improving soil structure, water infiltration, and moisture retention. Soil type, climate, and how crops are taken care of also affect how efficiently water is used (WUE). Integrated methods that combine soil conservation with good water management can boost productivity, make better use of resources, and make sure that agroecosystems last for a long time.

Keywords: Conservation agriculture, soil water holding capacity, water use efficiency, soil health, cropping systems

Introduction

The foundation of agricultural productivity and food security is soil and water resources. Conventional farming methods, on the other hand, have caused serious damage to the soil, such as erosion, compaction, nutrient loss, and loss of organic matter. These changes make the soil structure worse, make it hold less water, and make crops less productive. To keep agriculture productive over the long term, these resources must be managed in a way that is good for the environment. Conservation agriculture (CA) has become a long-term way to stop soil degradation and better manage water. It combines minimal soil disturbance, permanent soil cover, and crop diversification to improve soil health and make better use of resources.

Soil Physical Resource Assessment

To understand soil quality and how well it can support crop growth, it is important to measure its physical properties. Some important factors are bulk density, porosity, soil structure, infiltration rate, and water holding capacity (WHC). The amount of water that plants can take up is determined by the soil's water holding capacity, which is an important factor in crop growth. Better WHC makes soil more resistant to drought and lessens the amount of water that runs off and deep percolates. Adding organic carbon to soil is very important for increasing WHC because it helps the soil stick together and makes the pore structure better.

Water resource assessment and use efficiency

Water use efficiency (WUE) is the amount of water used compared to the number of crops grown. It is an important sign of how well crops use water. WUE is affected by a number of things, such as the type of crop, the soil's properties, the weather, and how the crop is managed. Research indicates that crops like maize demonstrate superior WUE in comparison to wheat and legumes. Soil organic carbon is strongly linked to WUE in a good way, while

soil compaction makes water use less efficient. Drip irrigation, good nutrient management, and mulching are all examples of efficient irrigation methods that can greatly improve WUE by cutting down on water loss and boosting crop productivity.

Soil and water conservation practices

Practices in conservation agriculture are very important for keeping soil healthy and saving water. Some important things to do are (Figure 1): - Minimum tillage: This keeps the soil structure and reduces disturbance. Keeping crop residue on the ground protects the soil surface and cuts down on evaporation. Different kinds of crops: Improves the health of the soil and the environment. These methods help water soak into the ground, stop soil erosion, and keep the soil moist. Residue mulching protects the soil by keeping the temperature stable and lowering the amount of water that evaporates.

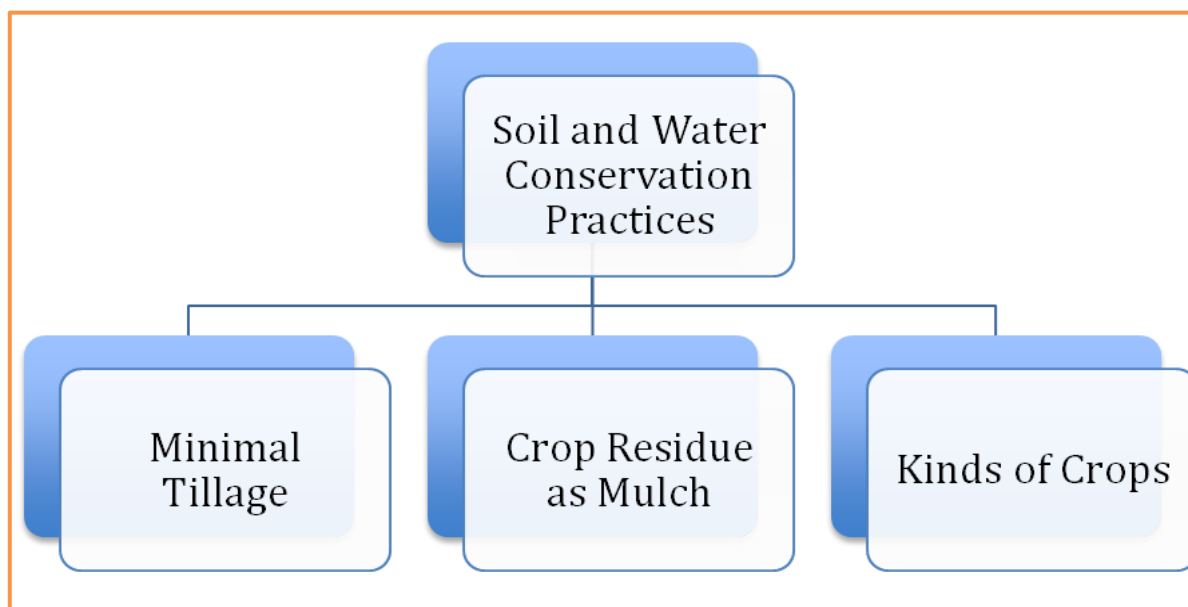


Figure 1: Soil and water conservation practices

Cropping system approaches for resource management

Cropping systems have a big effect on how water and soil move around. Crop rotation, intercropping (Table.1), and integrated farming systems make the soil better and help it use water better. Cropping systems those include a variety of crops add organic matter to the soil and improve nutrient cycling, which helps the soil hold more water. Precision agriculture and modern technologies, like IoT-based soil moisture monitoring systems, make resource management even better by making irrigation and input use more efficient.

Table 1: Intercropping in different seasons

Seasons	Common Intercropping systems
Kharif	Maize + Soybean
	Maize + Cowpea
	Cotton + Pigeon pea (Arhar)
	Sorghum (Jowar) + Pigeon pea
Rabi	Wheat + Mustard
	Wheat + Chickpea
	Barley + Chickpea
	Linseed + Lentil
Zaid	Watermelon + Cowpea
	Cucumber + Maize
	Summer Moong (Green gram) + Maize
	Fodder Maize + Cowpea

Climate change and resource conservation

Climate change makes farming much harder by making droughts, floods, and extreme temperatures happen more often. Conservation agriculture methods make soil more resilient by keeping more water in it and cutting down on evaporation losses. Better soil structure and more organic carbon help crops stay healthy even when the weather changes. To keep growing crops in a way that is good for the environment, you need to use water wisely and adapt to changing weather.

Indian perspective and future prospects

In India, especially in places like Punjab and Haryana, taking too much water from the ground and using intensive cropping systems have caused the water tables to drop and the soil to get worse. Using conservation agriculture techniques like zero tillage and residue management in the Indo-Gangetic plains has shown that they can help make soil healthier and use water more efficiently. Government programs that encourage sustainable farming and saving water can help even more people adopt these practices. Future research ought to concentrate on the integration of advanced technologies, including remote sensing, GIS, and precision irrigation systems, to enhance resource management efficiency.

Conclusion

To keep farming going for a long time, it is important to protect soil and water. Practices in conservation agriculture make the soil better, help it hold more water, and make better use of water. Managing soil and water resources together in cropping systems can make them last longer, boost productivity, and lessen the effects of climate change. For food security and environmental sustainability, it is very important to use these methods on a larger scale.

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