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change mitigation

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This discussion paper is/has been under review for the journal Earth System Dynamics (ESD). Please refer to the corresponding final paper in ESD if available.

Carbon farming in hot, dry coastal areas: an option for climate change mitigation

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Received: 23 September 2012 – Accepted: 28 September 2012 – Published: 10 October 2012

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Published by Copernicus Publications on behalf of the European Geosciences Union.

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Abstract

We present a comprehensive, interdisciplinary project which demonstrates that large-scale plantations of *Jatropha curcas* – if established in hot, dry coastal areas around the world – could capture 17–25 tonnes of carbon dioxide per hectare per year from the atmosphere (averaged over 20 yr). Based on recent farming results it is confirmed that the *Jatropha curcas* plant is well adapted to harsh environments and is capable of growing alone or in combination with other tree and shrub species with minimal irrigation in hot deserts where rain occurs only sporadically. Our investigations indicate that there is sufficient unused and marginal land for the widespread cultivation of *Jatropha curcas* to reduce significantly the current upward trend in atmospheric CO₂ levels.

In a system in which desalinated seawater is used for irrigation and for delivery of mineral nutrients, the sequestration costs were estimated to range from 42–63 € per tonne CO₂. This result makes carbon farming a technology that is competitive with carbon capture and storage (CCS). In addition, high-resolution simulations using an advanced land-surface-atmosphere model indicate that a 10 000 km² plantation could produce a reduction in mean surface temperature and an onset or increase in rain and dew fall at a regional level.

1 Introduction

It is now widely accepted that anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions are causing an increase in global mean temperature and an acceleration of the global water cycle (IPCC, 2007). Unfortunately, in spite of the great threat posed by climate change to the Earth's environment and mankind, global agreements on greenhouse gas reduction have so far been largely ineffective. During the last decade, the emission rate of CO₂ compared with the period 1990–2000 has even accelerated (Le Quéré et al., 2009). Consequently, a variety of geoengineering approaches have been suggested for mitigating climate change. These options may be separated into purely technological

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approaches such as sun shading, increase of surface albedo by whitening of buildings, and carbon capture and storage (CCS) (Boyd, 2008) or bio-geoengineering options (see, e.g. Betts, 2007). A comparison of the effectiveness of different proposals can be found in Lenton and Vaughan (2009). However, this analysis disregards feedbacks in the water cycle.

Recently, technological approaches such as CCS have become of great interest, as this technology may permit the reduction of CO₂ emission rates by power plants (IPCC, 2005). However, CCS has also been strongly questioned because of the large amounts of energy needed for its implementation, which reduces the efficiency of power plants, and the huge financial investments that this technology requires. As a matter of fact, CCS has only the potential to reduce emissions from power plants but not from other sources. Furthermore, it is not clear yet whether the long-term storage of carbon can really be guaranteed without leakage into the environment.

Therefore, it is reasonable to explore bio-geoengineering approaches designed to change land-surface properties using the natural properties of vegetation. These include either modifications of energy partitioning by different types of vegetation or afforestation measures leading to a reduction in the levels of atmospheric CO₂ and land-surface temperature. Both are options extensively investigated within IPCC (Metz et al., 2007). For instance, Ridgwell et al. (2009) and Doughty et al. (2010) studied the impact of an increase of agricultural crop albedo using global climate models. In mid-latitudes, a consistent reduction of regional temperature of about 0.25 degrees per 0.01 increase in albedo was predicted. Different relationships between these two parameters occur in other regions such as the tropics. However, global climate models are limited with respect to the correct quantitative simulation of land-surface atmosphere feedback and also to the response of the water cycle including precipitation (e.g. Hohenegger et al., 2009). These aspects call for further studies using high-resolution climate models that avoid the parameterisation of convection and that improve the interaction between land-surface heterogeneities and orography with the atmosphere.

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A particularly attractive option is afforestation because this intervention can have several positive effects simultaneously. First, carbon sequestration in biomass both above and below ground is a possible mitigation strategy (Metz et al., 2007). In the following discussion, we define this bio-geoengineering option as *Carbon Farming*. Secondly, daily surface temperatures may be reduced in subtropical regions due to changes in the surface energy balance. This depends critically on the partitioning of the energy balance into sensible and latent heat fluxes and its feedback to the atmospheric boundary layer (ABL), clouds, and precipitation. Thirdly, a variety of additional positive effects may be achieved such as the production of bio fuel and nutrients as well as a healthier environment. However, carbon farming must not compete with food production so that afforestation measures should concentrate on already degraded land areas.

Recently, Ornstein et al. (2009) investigated this idea in desert regions on a global scale. Using a global climate model, they simulated large-scale reductions of surface temperature in the Sahara and the Australian desert. They also studied large-scale feedback processes such as teleconnection. Focusing on *Eucalyptus sp.* plantations, they stated that a significant mitigation of global carbon emission may be achieved if the Saharan or Australian deserts are cultivated. Furthermore, they found a strong increase of precipitation in desert regions and related this to the Charney effect (Charney, 1975). With respect to irrigation, Ornstein et al. (2009) stated that the extremely valuable aquifers, which are available in some desert regions, should not be further exploited but considered instead the application of recent advances in desalination technology such as reverse osmosis. They discussed the costs and technological requirements to realise such a large-scale, international project covering areas of the order of 10^9 ha.

These results are encouraging. However, several caveats remain with respect to technological and scientific aspects: the technologies for realising huge afforestation efforts such as irrigation with desalination plants are still in their infancy. It is not clear whether the carbon binding potential of suitable plants such as *Eucalyptus sp.* and

Jatropha curcas can be maintained over large plantation areas, but ultimately the only way to find out will be to try.

Furthermore, it is well known that coarse-scale global climate models have severe deficiencies simulating land-surface-cloud-precipitation feedback. For instance, Hohenegger et al. (2009) demonstrated that coarse-scale models, which require a convection parameterisation, and convection-permitting models (grid resolution < 4 km) even give feedbacks between soil moisture and precipitation *of different sign*. This is a critical issue for the credibility of climate simulations. These results have been refined by Rotach et al. (2009a, b) and Wulfmeyer et al. (2008, 2011) who demonstrated severe deficiencies in models with convection parameterisation in regions with strong land-surface heterogeneity and orography. This is also the case in most desert regions. Therefore, it is highly questionable whether resilient quantitative results concerning land-surface feedback and precipitation can be achieved with models that use convection parameterisation.

Consequently, we are convinced that an analysis of afforestation measures should be based on a thorough transdisciplinary scientific study on a local scale combining an analysis of the costs, the carbon binding potential, and the economic efficiency of these plantations in connection with the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). Here, the technological challenges can be studied in more detail and may be complemented and verified by results from plantations. Furthermore, land-surface-atmosphere feedback processes can be studied more realistically with high-resolution models.

This work is intended to extend previous work in this respect and to close an important gap in the analysis of afforestation projects in dry coastal areas. We focus on *Jatropha curcas* because we consider this plant to be one of the more promising and robust plants suitable for desert regions. Also, the authors of this paper have much specialised knowledge of and relevant data for this plant, its potentialities and requirements. That said, we are also well aware that other tree crops, especially *Eucalyptus* sp. or mixtures of various species, may be more suitable in many cases. Mixed crops can include food and fodder crops and also have the advantage they produce more

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diverse ecosystems and reduce the danger of epidemics and large scale attack by pests. However the methodology and analysis that we apply here to *Jatropha curcas* could, with suitable raw data, be adapted to these other species and mixtures.

This paper is organised as follows: in Sect. 2 we introduce the project strategy and explain the goals and the interaction of the project partners. In Sect. 3, the results of the study are presented. The biomass production and carbon sequestration potential of *Jatropha curcas* plantations is presented in Sect. 3.1; the irrigation, desalination, and energy supply costs in Sect. 3.2; and the impact on the regional climate in Sect. 3.3. An overview on other expected impacts is presented in Sect. 4 followed by some conclusions in Sect. 5.

2 Project strategy

An extensive, transdisciplinary study was performed to explore the interwoven local technological, economical, and climatological impacts of carbon farming. In particular, the economic potential of this approach with respect to the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) was studied. First of all, an important condition was laid down namely that carbon farming must not compete with food production, as cropland is becoming increasingly scarce. According to Costanza et al. (1997), only 1.4 billion ha of the approximately 15 billion ha of earth's land area is currently usable for crops. Extrapolating recent trends in population growth and land degradation, this would leave no more than 1100 m² to nourish each of the 9 billion inhabitants expected by 2050. At present, 1.9 billion ha of former crop land are degraded and unusable or barren. There are also about 1 billion ha of desert land in dry coastal areas with minimum night-time temperatures that seldom, if ever, fall below 12 °C. Both types of land are potential areas for carbon farming. Table 1 shows their extent in a few selected countries.

Decisions regarding the economic and ecological value of carbon farming are possible only if they are based on a comprehensive assessment of the potential benefits and

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costs. Before large-scale projects can be established in hot dry coastal areas, in-depth plans for their implementation will need to be drawn up.

Figure 1 depicts the carbon farming concept and shows the key processes involved. Our new evaluation of carbon farming takes the following key factors into account:

- the growth of robust plants under extreme weather conditions,
- technical advances in seawater desalination, and
- an understanding of the impact of greening deserts on weather and climate.

Power and desalination plants are located at the coast line of a dry desert. The output of the desalination plant is used for irrigation of the plantations. The operation of the power plant can be supported by burning part of the biomass produced. If the plantation is large enough, onset of dew and rainfall is expected due to the modification of processes associated with the atmospheric boundary layer (ABL). The ABL top is indicated by the blue hyper surface. These effects can reduce the amount of water needed for irrigation and improve the local climate.

Our analysis of the environmental impacts was made using a hierarchy of computer models supported by extensive research on the input parameters. We applied the derived climate models to two proposed pilot sites in Oman and Mexico using results from a plantation of *Jatropha curcas* in Egypt. We used primary and secondary data for technical analyses, and created simulations of irrigation requirements and regional land-vegetation-atmosphere feedbacks. The study is complemented by a description of some non-technical constraints and suggestions as to how such a project may be set up and implemented.

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3 Results

3.1 Biomass production and carbon sequestration

Many extended coastal desert areas could be cultivated with robust perennial plants, using desalinated sea water. These include trees such as *Acacia saligna*, *Azadirachta indica*, *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*, *Eucalyptus microtheca*, *Moringa oleifera*, *Pongamia pinnata* and *Jatropha curcas*, shrubs such as *Prosopis cineraria*, *Ricinus communis*, and *Simmondsia chinensis*, and reeds and grasses such as *Arundo donax* L., *LHD-prairie grasses* and *Miscanthus x giganteus*. The trees in this list have been reported to produce an above ground biomass of between 5–25 t dry mass per ha per year equivalent to 2.4–12 t of carbon per ha per year (Steen and Reed, 2004) and the perennial grasses up to 51 t above ground biomass per ha per year (Angelini et al., 2008). Suitably deployed, these plants could transform unused, barren lands into long-term carbon sinks (Fairless, 2007). The carbon efficiency of this bio-ecosystem would compare favourably with all other existing processes for carbon storage and sequestration, including the cultivation of bio fuels (Righelato et al., 2007).

Jatropha curcas is a member of the family *Euphorbiaceae*, genus *Jatropha*. The plant is very well adapted to harsh tropical and sub-tropical environments and is capable of growing in hot, hyperarid deserts (Fairless, 2007) but, like most plants, optimum growth requires regular, if minimal, irrigation. Unlike many annual crops that have been the subject of centuries of domestication, *Jatropha curcas* is a wild, perennial plant that has received little scientific attention to date. For this reason, performance parameters vary considerably among different provenances, a fact which is of great significance for future domestication programs (Popluechai et al., 2009).

Long term (> 3 yr) empirical data on the growth of *Jatropha curcas* from dry coastal areas are not yet available. We therefore estimated biomass production and carbon sequestration from measurements taken on a 100 ha *Jatropha curcas* plantation in Luxor, Egypt (Fig. 2) containing 940 plants/ha. Although the plants in this location are

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still slightly less than 3 yr old, the site is comparable to a hot, dry coastal area in other respects because day temperatures exceed 40 °C for 260 days of the year and precipitation is very sporadic with a long-term average of only 0.3 mm per year. Sewage water from the city of Luxor was used for irrigation – not desalinated sea water. The use of such waste water would also be a possibility in some hot, dry coastal areas, but cities of any size are comparatively rare in these places and the amount of water available would not be nearly enough to support the scale of plantations envisaged.

One issue may be environmental safety, as concerns have been raised in the literature about the invasiveness of the *Jatropha* species. But this is actually only a problem with *Jatropha gossypifolia* (Achten, 2007). Based on our observations in Luxor, Egypt, we do not expect major problems in this respect, as the proliferation of *Jatropha curcas* is confined to the area under irrigation by the neighbouring hot desert areas. Growing *Jatropha curcas* in large-scale monoculture may also involve risks related to plant health. *Jatropha curcas* is largely immune to diseases and pests but insect infestations such as flea beetle (*Aphthona* species) (Holl et al., 2007), whitefly (*B. tabaci*), the leaf and capsule borer (*Pampelia morosalis*) and bugs such as *Scutellera nobilis* and *Chrysocoris purpureus* have been reported in a few cases. It is also susceptible to a number of viral diseases, e.g. the *Jatropha* Mosaic Virus (www.nri.org/projects/Jatropha). Since only limited empirical data exist concerning the toxicity of *Jatropha curcas* fruits consumed by humans – with the exception of the two edible, non-toxic genotypes, *Jatropha curcas* (Makkar et al., 1998) and *Jatropha platyphylla* (Makkar et al., 2010) – Achten et al. (2007) recommend precautionary measures. The main toxic components of *Jatropha curcas* are the phorbol esters. These are found in all plant parts and act as a protection mechanism against browsing by animals.

From the plantation in Luxor, fifty, 32 month old *Jatropha curcas* bushes were chosen at random from among 94 000. Trunk circumference at ground level and height of each bush were measured to ± 1 cm, and the bushes were dug up. Care was taken to include as many of the roots as possible, but very fine root systems were discarded. The bushes were separated into their main morphological components (roots, trunk, and

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branches). The roots were washed to remove sand and dried and then all components were weighed to ± 0.1 kg. After chopping and homogenising the three fractions, samples were taken, placed in sealed plastic bags and sent to Germany where dry mass was determined by heating to constant weight at 105°C over 3–4 days. Carbon content was calculated as 50 % of dry mass (see Table 2).

The problem of obtaining longer-term biomass data for *Jatropha curcas* has already been mentioned. To get what we hoped were reasonable estimates, we used data on the diameter of *Jatropha curcas* trees quoted by Holl et al. (2007) from trees up to 12 yr old and fitted several curves to a graph of age versus diameter at ground level (DGL). The most conservative of these gave a 20 yr value for DGL of 412 mm equivalent to an average rate of growth of DGL of 4 mm per year from age 12. We then used an allometric equation of Sampaio and Silva (2005) for *Jatropha mollissima* in Brazil to calculate the most likely biomass at 20 yr. This equation predicted that the average dry biomass would be 140 kg per tree above ground and 55 kg below ground. At a planting density of 940 trees per hectare this gives a total dry biomass production of 183.3 t over 20 yr. Without including the leaves and fruits which, in a hot desert climate accumulate as litter under the trees, this would translate into a total of 91.7 t ha^{-1} of carbon. If we include the fruits and the leaf litter then the figure for carbon sequestration by a *Jatropha curcas* plantation could be up to 50 % higher reaching about 137.6 t ha^{-1} of carbon by year 20. Even this estimate is quite conservative since sequestration in the soil has not been considered and the yearly average range of $4.9\text{--}6.9\text{ t ha}^{-1}\text{ yr}^{-1}$ is well within the range of $2.4\text{--}12\text{ t ha}^{-1}\text{ yr}^{-1}$ reported above for a variety of perennial desert trees.

In terms of CO_2 sequestration, a range of $4.9\text{--}6.9\text{ t ha}^{-1}\text{ yr}^{-1}$ of carbon translates into an average of $21.6\text{ t ha}^{-1}\text{ yr}^{-1}$ of CO_2 or $2.16\text{ kg m}^{-2}\text{ yr}^{-1}$. We can use this value to estimate the amount of anthropogenic CO_2 that could be removed by the establishment of large-scale *Jatropha curcas* plantations.

Given the total mass of the atmosphere $m_{\text{atm}} \approx 5.13 \times 10^{18}$ kg, the molecular weight of dry air $M_{\text{D}} = 28.96\text{ g mol}^{-1}$, and the molecular weight of CO_2 $M_{\text{CO}_2} = 44.01\text{ g mol}^{-1}$

then the relationship between the mass of CO₂ in the atmosphere (m_{CO_2}) and the volume mixing ratio of CO₂ in dry air (V_{CO_2}) is:

$$m_{\text{CO}_2} \cong m_{\text{atm}} \frac{M_{\text{CO}_2}}{M_{\text{D}}} V_{\text{CO}_2} \cong V_{\text{CO}_2} 7.8 \cdot 10^{18} \text{ kg} \quad (1)$$

Table 3 gives values of V_{CO_2} , m_{CO_2} , and the corresponding mass of carbon, m_{C} ($m_{\text{C}} = m_{\text{CO}_2}/3.67$) today and prior to the industrial revolution. From these values we can see that the increase in V_{CO_2} over this period was around 105 ppm, which is equivalent to 819 Gt of CO₂.

Using Eq. (1) and the average value for the amount of CO₂ likely to be sequestered by planting *Jatropha curcas* (2.16 kg m⁻² yr⁻¹), simple calculations allow several interesting and important conclusions to be drawn.

- a. Since the present rate of increase of V_{CO_2} is around 2 ppm per year, stabilising V_{CO_2} at its present level would require the planting of 0.73×10^9 ha of *Jatropha curcas* which is just under three quarters of the 10^9 ha of desert and marginal land we estimate to be suitable for *Jatropha curcas* cultivation.
- b. If the remaining 0.28×10^9 ha were also planted, this area would, over a 20 yr period, reduce V_{CO_2} by 17.5 ppm or 16.6 % of the total increase in CO₂ since the industrial revolution.
- c. Around 2400 km² of *Jatropha curcas* would be required to remove the 5 Mt of CO₂ produced annually by a typical, modern, coal fired power station (1000 MW, 5000 full load hours, 45 % net electrical efficiency) and 69 400 km² would absorb all the CO₂ produced by motor vehicles in Germany (about 150 Mt per year).

3.2 Irrigation, desalination, energy supply and associated costs

The plants in Luxor were irrigated with an open-line sub-surface irrigation system that delivered 20 l of water per plant every 7 days during the hot season (240 days) and

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every 10 days during the cold season (125 days) which was enough for optimum plant growth. This translates into roughly $880 \text{ m}^3 \text{ ha}^{-1} \text{ yr}^{-1}$ for $940 \text{ plants ha}^{-1}$. The root system of the plants that were harvested at 32 months typically covered an area of less than 1 m^2 so this type and level of irrigation was equivalent to 880 mm yr^{-1} over this area.

This level of irrigation is rather more than that recommended for *Jatropha curcas* by Gebel and Yüce (2008) who suggest using $17\,500 \text{ m}^3 \text{ d}^{-1}$ for a $10\,000 \text{ ha}$ plantation which works out at $639 \text{ m}^3 \text{ ha}^{-1} \text{ yr}^{-1}$. Application of the FAO simulation model FAO56 using data from Holl et al. (2007) also gave similar results. This model takes into account local temperatures and rainfall. It gave results that were 10% higher than our Luxor data for a proposed site in Oman and 50% less for a proposed site in Mexico where annual rainfall was appreciably higher than that in either Oman or Luxor.

The harvested trees had no discernible tap roots, and the soil outside the area watered by the irrigation system was dry indicating that no other source of water such as ground water was available to the plants.

Sewage water as used in the Luxor project will also provide the plants with nutrients. According to the analyses quoted by Hussein et al. (2004) the treated effluent contains 22.0, 3.8 and 22.4 ppm of N, P and K respectively. Given the quantity of water applied to the plants would provide 18.6, 3.8 and 22.4 g of N, P, and K respectively to each plant per year. These amounts plus the nutrients available from the soil were enough to promote healthy plant growth. In our proposed system using desalinated water, these and other essential minerals would have to be provided dissolved in the irrigation water.

Over recent decades, seawater desalination has become technically and economically feasible. The two main techniques currently used in large scale plants are illustrated in Fig. 3. The essential difference between the two desalination methods is the form of energy needed for the separation of water from salt. While thermal desalination (TD) processes need both heat to evaporate the water and electricity to pump it, reverse osmosis (RO) only uses electricity for the high pressure pumps that overcome the osmotic pressure of seawater. Based on the experiences gained in Luxor we could

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assume that, after an initial growth phase of about three years, biomass would begin to accumulate in the form of trimmings, withered leaves and nuts. This biomass can be used as an energy source. According to Gebel and Yüce (2008), 5 metric tons of dry biomass with a heat of combustion of 18.5 MJ kg^{-1} becomes available per hectare per year. The trimmings from a 10 000 ha plantation could therefore be burnt to produce a continuous heat output of 30 000 kW. This is enough energy to produce steam either as the first stage in a thermal desalination plant or to drive a turbine to generate electricity for a RO plant.

Several thousand desalination plants of various capacities presently operate worldwide producing more than 50 million m^3 of desalinated water per day. The largest plants are usually coupled directly to a power station for their energy supply and deliver around $50\,000 \text{ m}^3 \text{ d}^{-1}$ per unit. The total energy needed to desalinate sea water can be as little as 5 kWh m^{-3} for a large state-of-the-art reverse osmosis desalination plant (Shannon et al., 2008). The fresh water produced is used in industry, agriculture and the home.

To estimate the costs of the carbon farming method proposed above, we consider a *Jatropha curcas* plantation of 10 000 ha. It is assumed that the plantation is started on virgin desert land and cultivated over a period of 20 yr. For the climate simulations the locations of the plantation are arbitrarily chosen to be in Oman and Mexico. Based on data from the plantation in Luxor, Egypt, the annual water demand by *Jatropha curcas* planted at 940 plants ha^{-1} is $880 \text{ m}^3 \text{ ha}^{-1} \text{ yr}^{-1}$. For a plantation of 10 000 ha practising placed irrigation, this would mean $24\,109 \text{ m}^3 \text{ d}^{-1}$. The nominal capacity of a suitable desalination plant should therefore be around $25\,000 \text{ m}^3 \text{ d}^{-1}$.

There are many and varied estimates of the cost of desalinated water. Yerimiyahu et al. (2007) gives a figure of 0.55 US\$ (0.42 €) per m^3 of drinking water and Methnani (2007) states that most estimates for the cost of water in “mega projects” are of the order of 0.5 € per m^3 . Methnani’s own calculations using the DEEP program of the International Atomic Energy Authority give values of 0.53–0.72 € m^{-3} and 0.85–1.28 € m^{-3} for RO and TD plants respectively when the energy source is a combined heat and

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power plant (CC) fuelled by fossil fuel. Corresponding figures when the energy source is an (atomic) high temperature gas reactor (HTGR) are 0.42–0.52 € m⁻³ for RO and 0.44–0.54 € m⁻³ for TD. These figures show that the cost of producing desalinated water depends very much on the cost of the energy source and is particularly vulnerable to changes in the price of fossil fuel if a CC plant is used. One of the major advantages of the kind of carbon farming proposed here is that the project produces its own fuel after the third year in the form of tree trimmings and is thus relatively immune to the escalating price increases that will become inevitable as fossil fuels become rarer and more costly to extract. In our analysis, producing the fuel comes under the operational costs for the plantation so the cost of the desalinated water is mostly incurred for building, running and maintaining the machinery. This cost is therefore likely to be much closer to Methnani's HGRT estimates than those for CC and probably even lower since an atomic reactor is not required. We therefore use a global figure of 0.5 € m⁻³ in all subsequent calculations.

The carbon farming costs are estimated using the results from the Luxor plantation and other pilot *Jatropha curcas* plantations in India and Madagascar. The costs include land lease (10 € ha⁻¹ yr⁻¹), running the plantation including establishment and cultivation (200 € ha⁻¹ yr⁻¹), erecting and running the irrigation system (100 € ha⁻¹ yr⁻¹) and other running costs not connected with water (310 € ha⁻¹ yr⁻¹). With an annual water demand of 880 m³ ha⁻¹ yr⁻¹, the total running costs would be 1060 € ha⁻¹ yr⁻¹. In the coming 20 yr, 92–138 t C ha⁻¹ can be sequestered equivalent to capturing 338–506 t CO₂ ha⁻¹ from the atmosphere. Thus, the total costs for carbon farming would be 42–63 € t⁻¹ CO₂, which compares well with the cost estimates of conventional CCS technology which are around 54 € t⁻¹ CO₂ (IPCC, 2005).

We estimate that it would take around 3 yr before the plantation could provide enough spare biomass in the form of trimmings to produce the necessary heat to run the desalination plant (either directly in the case of TD or indirectly to run a generator for a RO plant). Until that time, the shortfall in energy would have to come from older, more mature plantations, from the electricity grid or from other sources. The biomass burned

would release carbon as CO₂, but this would be a small amount compared with the total carbon sequestered as biomass. Another obvious option would be the use of solar power plants.

3.3 Impacts on regional climate

3.3.1 Feedback processes in desert regions

Charney (1975) proposed self-stabilization effects in subtropical deserts related to feedback processes between surface albedo and precipitation. Prentice et al. (1992) extended this research by considering the feedback processes between vegetation and the hydrological cycle. By coupling a climate model to a dynamical vegetation model (Claussen, 1994) as well as through conceptual models (Brovkin et al., 1998), two stable regimes were found in the Sahara: a desert equilibrium with low precipitation and absent vegetation and a green equilibrium with moderate precipitation and permanent vegetation cover. The impact of greening the planet on global temperature was studied by Kleidon et al. (1999). They demonstrated that greening the planet would result in a reduction of global mean surface temperature mainly due to enhanced surface evapotranspiration in combination with a modification of the global water cycle.

In the subtropical regions, which are under consideration in this work, a change of weather conditions can also be expected, as large-scale effects are produced by subsidence caused by the Hadley circulation while significant horizontal moisture transport is present at least in the summer season. In Oman, these effects are due to humid air advected from the south over the Arabian Sea whereas in Mexico, moist air is transported from the Gulf of Mexico to the Sonora desert. These events are a prerequisite for the induction of precipitation processes. However, the greening of the desert by a plantation with low levels of irrigation has more influence on the sensible heat flux and on changes of the atmospheric flow rather than a change of evapotranspiration in the region of the plantation. Consequently, greening dry coastal areas has the potential to

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mitigate climate change, promote rural development, curb desertification, and localise regional water cycles.

3.3.2 Model Set up

To investigate whether this was likely to occur in large-scale *Jatropha curcas* plantations, we used a specially adapted land-surface-vegetation-atmosphere model and applied it to two proposed pilot sites in Oman and Mexico. The study was executed with the Weather Research and Forecasting (WRF) model version 3.1 coupled to the NOAH¹ land surface model (LSM) (Chen and Dudhia, 2001). In order to minimize systematic errors due to large-scale conditions, WRF-NOAH was driven by European Centre for medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF) analyses with a resolution of T799 (about 12.5 km grid resolution in the domains of interest). The nested domain was chosen to be a few tens of km larger than the planted region in the centre of the high-resolution domain. At the boundaries, one-way nesting was applied because we assumed that the scale of the planted region was still too small to induce large-scale feedback processes to the exterior domain.

As far as possible, the physics of WRF-NOAH was adapted to the physics of the ECMWF model for minimizing inconsistencies at the boundaries and the interior of the nested regions. The WRF physics included the short-wave and the long-wave radiation schemes of Dudhia (1989) and Mlawer et al. (1997), respectively, the Yonsei University boundary layer parameterisation (Hong et al., 2006), and the two-moment cloud microphysics of Morrison et al. (2009). Deep and shallow convection were not parameterised.

To obtain simulations with optimal performance, WRF was operated with a convection permitting grid resolution of about 4 km. This scale was chosen in order to simulate

¹NOAH: joint land-surface model of N = National Center for Environmental Prediction (NCEP); O = Oregon State University (Dept of Atmospheric Sciences); A = Air Force; and H = Hydrologic Research Lab – NWS (National Weather Service) (now Office of Hydrologic Division)

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5 feedback processes between areas with different land-surface properties, atmospheric boundary layer (ABL), convection initiation, clouds and precipitation as realistically as possible. Recent results of convection-permitting simulations confirm their superior performance compared to models with convection parameterisation with respect to the resolution of land-surface heterogeneity and orography (Schwitalla et al., 2008; Wulfmeyer et al., 2008, 2011; Rotach et al., 2009a, b) and to enhanced forecast skills (Schwitalla et al., 2011; Bauer et al., 2011). Convection-permitting resolution is essential in this study, particularly considering the relatively small spatial domain of the *Jatropha curcas* plantation. This was set to about 100 km × 100 km oriented along the coast lines in both regions, Oman and Sonora (see Table 4).

10 A key accomplishment of this study was the optimization of an advanced land-surface model (LSM), in this case that of NOAH, in the regions of interest. This required an accurate description of sub-surface and surface soil properties and vegetation which we achieved by applying the advanced 20-category vegetation-land-use data set (Friedl et al., 2002). Several improvements were implemented in the LSM in order to achieve most realistic results. These included modification of the vegetation parameters to make them appropriate for *Jatropha curcas* and simulation of constant irrigation. At the date of this study, a detailed parameter table for *Jatropha curcas* was not available. However, as the vegetation properties of *Jatropha curcas* are close to *Evergreen Broadleaf Forest* (land-use category 2), we started with this data set and optimized all parameters by a thorough study of recent published vegetation properties of *Jatropha curcas* (Gupta et al., 2002; Holl et al., 2007; Viña et al., 2004). The main differences from land-use category 2 are the maximum leaf-area index (3.2 instead of 6.48) and the minimum stomatal resistance (130 s m^{-1} instead of 150 s m^{-1}). The main difference between the vegetation and desert is the decrease of albedo from 0.38 to 0.12, but the increase of the roughness length from 0.01 m to 0.5 m can also play a role in the development of convection in the target regions. This translates into different energy partitioning over the plantations. The remaining differences were not considered critical

for this study, as these were expected to affect the resulting impact of the vegetation cover on atmospheric variables only at a secondary level.

Another special requirement was a reasonable estimate of the effect of irrigation. It turns out that irrigation has a negligible effect on the evapotranspiration. This is due to the fact that an irrigation of about $90 \text{ mm yr}^{-1} = 0.24 \text{ mm day}^{-1}$ (see Sect. 3.2) translates into a very low upper limit of transpiration during daytime: $0.24 \text{ mm day}^{-1} = 0.24 \text{ mm} / (12 \times 60 \times 60 \text{ s}) \cong 14 \text{ W m}^{-2}$. Consequently, area averaged irrigation of the soil in the grid cell could be neglected so that the soil moisture was kept the same as the initial values of the ECMWF driving data. It is also worthwhile to point out that during our simulations the soil moisture remained very low but was still, with values of about 0.08, higher than the wilting point of loam (0.06) or sandy loam (0.047) which are the dominant soil types in the regions of interest. This demonstrates once again the consistency and reality of our results. Finally, care had to be taken to ensure the correct simulation of the vegetation in each grid cell of interest. A corresponding vegetation mask was developed and carefully tested in order to make sure that changes in land surface properties implemented in the model system exactly matched those in the regions selected in Oman and Sonora (Mexico).

Figure 4 demonstrates the successful implementation of the modified land-use parameters in the LSM. The soil type in both Oman and Mexico was similar across the respective regions but the locations of the plantations at the coasts are easily detected due to changes in albedo.

3.3.3 Results

The model system was operated for a full year (2007) in order to detect feedback processes with high statistical confidence during all seasons. Four simulations were performed for the whole of 2007: Oman CONTROL (no changes of vegetation properties), Oman IMPACT (modification of land-surface properties by planting with *Jatropha curcas* in selected region), Sonora CONTROL, and Sonora IMPACT. The year 2007 was chosen, as typical weather prevailed and the most advanced and recent driving

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data could be used. For each simulation, seasonal averages and mean diurnal cycles with their corresponding standard deviations were determined for surface flux and atmospheric variables. The boundary layer depth, the cloud coverage, the rain rate, and the formation of dew were also analysed.

5 The differences in albedo and transpiration between CONTROL and IMPACT lead to substantial changes in surface variables and atmospheric boundary layer (ABL) development. The diurnal cycles of the surface heat and the latent heat fluxes were substantially enhanced, particularly in summer. Whereas the latent heat flux was almost positive throughout the day, it became negative during night time in spring, fall, and winter. This effect led to the formation of dew. For instance, in Oman, the formation of dew amounted to 46 g m^{-2} per night. Dew can be used by plants thus reducing the amount of water that has to be provided by irrigation. The exact amount, however, will be subject of future experiments and investigations.

15 The mean average surface temperatures over the *Jatropha curcas* plantations in both Oman and Mexico fell by more than 1°C during all seasons. This effect was due to a nonlinear modification of the diurnal cycle of the sensible heat flux. We attribute the stronger cooling during night time to the high emissivity of the plants. The increase of surface temperature during daytime was overcompensated by a reduction of temperature during night time resulting in a negative change of mean temperature.

20 Another substantial effect was an increase of the atmospheric boundary layer (ABL) depth, particularly during summer time. This is demonstrated in Fig. 5, which shows the spatially resolved difference between the IMPACT and CONTROL planetary boundary layer depth (PBLH) over Oman and the Sonora. The mean PBLH over the plantations rose by more than 250 m. Wake effects are found downstream of the plantations. Simultaneously, the increased latent heat flux caused more moisture to be mixed vertically in the ABL. In combination with the enhanced ABL depth, this led to an increased likelihood reaching the lifting condensation level in the ABL. Consequently, vertical stability was reduced increasing the probability of deep convection during summer time both in Oman and Sonora.

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Figure 6 shows the predicted changes in precipitation over 100 km × 100 km *Jatropha curcas* plantations in both regions. Changes in rainfall were complex and tended to occur in streaks due to several events where convection was initiated. The increase in rainfall is substantial in summer and can amount to 160 mm along the streaks. This localization of the water cycle would be very beneficial for the biosphere in this region. Overall, summer time precipitation increased on average by approximately 11 mm and 30 mm in Oman and the Sonora, respectively.

Compared with previous studies of land-surface-vegetation-atmosphere feedback processes with respect to precipitation (Charney, 1975; Claussen, 1994; Brovkin et al., 1998; Ornstein et al., 2009) our model had a much finer resolution. This gave a much deeper insight into the complex chain of processes leading to a positive precipitation feedback over the plantations and, more generally, to a greening of desert regions. The processes simulated in Oman and Sonora leading to precipitation are highly reliable and reasonable. To our knowledge, this study is the first to simulate the effect of the development of substantial plant cover in a tropical desert region with a specially adapted land-surface-vegetation-atmosphere model at such a fine resolution.

In the future, it is essential that this process chain is studied in more detail and related to the size, shape, and orientation of plantations as well as to the mean flow. Particularly, it needs to be investigated whether, at a certain size of plantation, a point of self-stability can be reached where the precipitation enhancement is large enough for artificial irrigation to be no longer necessary. The GMC model of Ornstein et al. (2009) proposed increases in precipitation of up to 1400 mm per year for greening the Sahara. However, based on our research and experience with quantitative precipitation simulations, it is essential to confirm this with the new generation of convection-permitting models. In plantations of up to 100 km × 100 km, the predictions of our model are much more modest, so *Jatropha curcas* would always require water from desalination. It is for this reason that we have postulated the use of only those desert areas which are near the coast in order to minimise the costs of transporting water to the plants both vertically and horizontally.

4 Other expected impacts

The oil in *Jatropha curcas* nuts is a viable and valuable source of biofuel (Devappa et al., 2010). Harvesting the nuts would reduce the amount of carbon sequestered by the plantation as a whole by about a third but in some situations this would be worthwhile in order to provide local employment and as an additional source of income for the plantation owners.

In some situations, one of the sources of “income” would be the increase in value of the land on which the *Jatropha curcas* was grown. The provision of a source of water and roads and the growth of vegetation would turn some desert coastal areas into desirable locations for the establishment of towns and villages.

On any proposed site, current land use rights and systems must be carefully checked and respected. Land may be used for occasional grazing, collection of desert fruits and flowers, extraction of minerals and other natural resources, hunting, tourism, cultural and religious uses, military training etc.

Regarding desalination plants, environmental impacts will have to be considered at each specific location. Issues include the topography of the site, off-shore bathymetry, geology/seismology, and environmental concerns especially where brine from the desalination process is returned to the sea.

As mentioned previously, we expect soil carbon stocks to increase as plantations mature. Also, as forests and plantations mature, large amounts of carbon are also sequestered in the soil. Mueller-Landau (2009) states that in African tropical forests the soil holds as much carbon as the trees. Ferric Acrisols in the semi-arid coastal savanna zone of Ghana which is part of the extensive savanna belt of West Africa were found to contain 16–53 t of carbon ha⁻¹ under different types of cultivation (Dowuona1a GNN, Adjetey ET (2010). These figures give an idea of the potential for soil carbon storage if one were to start irrigating desert soils from scratch. Although decomposition will tend to reduce soil carbon stocks on a time scale of decades to centuries (Bird et al., 1999),

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we assume that in a hot, dry desert climate an appreciable portion will not be returned to the atmosphere (Lewis et al., 2009).

5 Conclusions

We have introduced a transdisciplinary project for simulating the technological, economic and climatological impacts of carbon farming by *Jatropha curcas* plantations in dry coastal areas as well as their usefulness with respect to the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). We have determined both by estimations and by field measurements that plantations of *Jatropha curcas* if established in hot, dry coastal areas around the world – should be capable of capturing 17–25 t of carbon dioxide per hectare per year from the atmosphere (averaged over 20 yr). We found that a project to implement these ideas is technically feasible using recent advances in desalination methods such as reverse osmosis. Economically, carbon farming is strongly competitive with carbon capture and storage (CCS) and would have fewer potential negative impacts on the environment. The total costs for carbon farming were estimated to be 42–63 € t⁻¹ CO₂, which compare favourably with that of CCS technology (54 € t⁻¹ CO₂ (IPCC, 2005)).

Climatologically, using a plantation size of 100 km × 100 km, for simulations with an advanced land-surface-vegetation-atmosphere model, we found a decrease of annual mean temperature over the plantations of the order of 1 °K and an occurrence and/or enhancement of precipitation by approximately 11 mm and 30 mm averaged over the plantations during summer time in Oman and the Sonora, respectively. Particularly in Oman, formation of dew was predicted during spring, fall, and winter.

Our *ex ante* assessment had to be based on many data sources and on simulation methods of different degrees of reliability. Particularly lacking were, information on the soil nutrients and water dynamics of *Jatropha curcas*, long term (up to 20 yr) comprehensive data on its growth and data that could lead to a complete life cycle analysis. We would therefore strongly recommend establishing a pilot project using sea-water desalination in order to gather more precise on-field data. This would help us to optimize

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irrigation, cultivation and carbon monitoring and improve the assessment of possible environmental risks. Reflecting on the urgent need to take action on climate change we strongly recommend including carbon farming in dry coastal areas in the portfolio of mitigation strategies.

Overall, we hope that we have demonstrated that carbon farming is a promising mitigation strategy with a variety of potential positive side effects deserving at least as much attention as many of the other geoengineering options, which are currently being discussed.

Acknowledgements. We thank Peter Lawrence and Frau Sabine Nugent of the Institute for Animal Production in the Tropics and Subtropics, University of Hohenheim, for their careful evaluation and for several major revisions of this manuscript. Furthermore, we thank Kirsten Warrach, Hans-Stefan Bauer, and Thomas Schwitalla of the Institute of Physics and Meteorology, University of Hohenheim, for their contributions to the set up and simulations of the WRF-NOAH model system.

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Table 1. Selected countries having hot dry coastal areas.

Country	Surface area (km ²)	Land use			Coast line (km)	Climate data for	Daily average temp. (°C)	
		Arable land (%)	Permanent crops (%)	Other (%)			Min. winter	Max. summer
Angola	1 246 700	2.7	0.2	97.1	1600	Luanda	20	27
Egypt	1 000 000	2.9	0.5	96.6	2450	Hurghada	16	30
Gabon	267 600	1.2	0.6	98.2	885	Libreville	25	27
Mauretania	1 030 000	0.2	0.01	99.8	745	Nouakchott	21	30
Mexico	1 958 201	12.7	1.3	86.1	9330	Mazatlan	20	28
Namibia	824 292	1.0	0.01	99.0	1572	Lüderitz	12	21
Oman	309 500	0.1	0.1	99.7	2 092	Sur	22	34
Saudi-Arabia	2 150 000	1.7	0.9	98.2	2640	Jedda	24	32
Senegal	196 190	12.5	0.2	87.3	531	Dakar	21	28
Yemen	ca. 500 000	2.9	0.3	96.8	1906	Aden Khom.	25	32

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Table 2. Dry matter content and calculated carbon content of the twigs, stems and roots of 32 months old *Jatropha curcas* trees from a plantation in the desert of Luxor, Upper Egypt.

Number of trees	Plant height (m)	Kg dry matter per tree				
		Twigs	Stem	Root	Total dry matter	Total carbon
50	3.25 ± 0.6	4.5 ± 2.3	12.4 ± 4.3	4.1 ± 1.6	21.0	10.5

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Table 3. The volume (V_{CO_2}) and mass mixing ratios (m_{CO_2}) of CO_2 , respectively, as well as the derived mass of carbon (m_c) in the atmosphere.

	V_{CO_2} , ppm	m_{CO_2} , Gt	m_c , Gt
Preindustrial	280	2182.9	596.4
Present day	385	3001.4	820.1
Annual increase	1.0–2.0	7.8–15.6	2.2–4.4

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Table 4. Configuration of the WRF model.

Properties	Oman	Mexico
Model domain (horizontal)	80 × 80 grid points 18.96° N, 55.88° E –21.63° N, 58.72° E	75 × 75 grid points (rotated) 30.19° N, 114.89° W –32.73° N, 111.92° W
Coordinates of <i>Jatropha curcas</i> plantations	NE: 20.45° N, 57.98° E SE: 19.7° N, 57.65° E SW: 20.05° N, 56.75° E NW: 20.9° N, 57.22° E	NE: 31.92° N, 112.97° W SE: 31.33° N, 113.25° W SW: 31.9° N, 114.7° W NW: 32.37° N, 114.45° W
Number of vertical layers	45	45
Horizontal resolution	4 km	4 km
Time step	24 s	24 s

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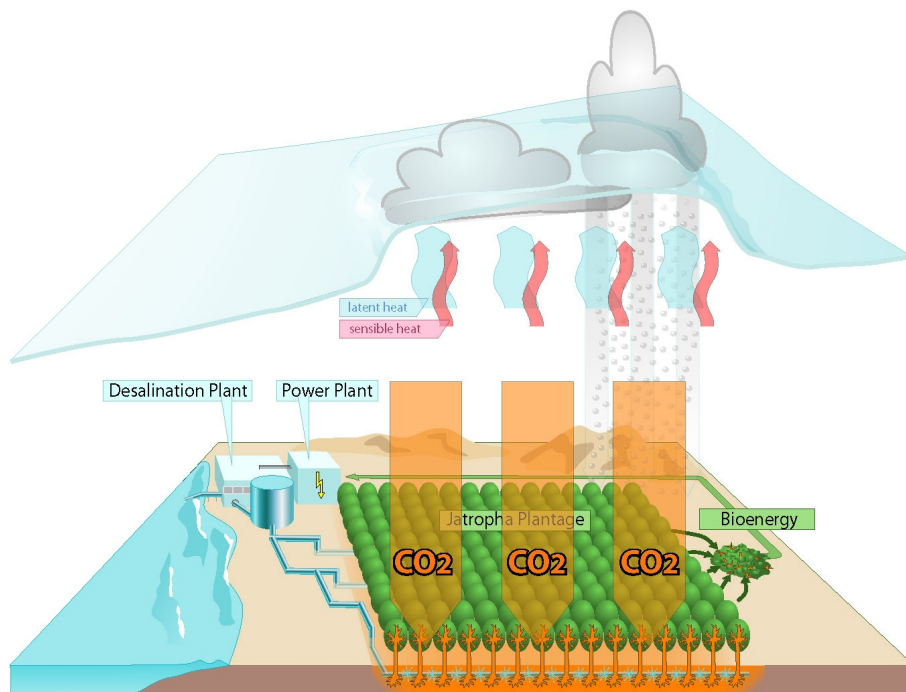


Fig. 1. Outline of the carbon farming project. The top of the atmospheric boundary layer is indicated by the blue hyper surface.

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Fig. 2. Scenes from the *Jatropha curcas* plantation at Luxor, Egypt.

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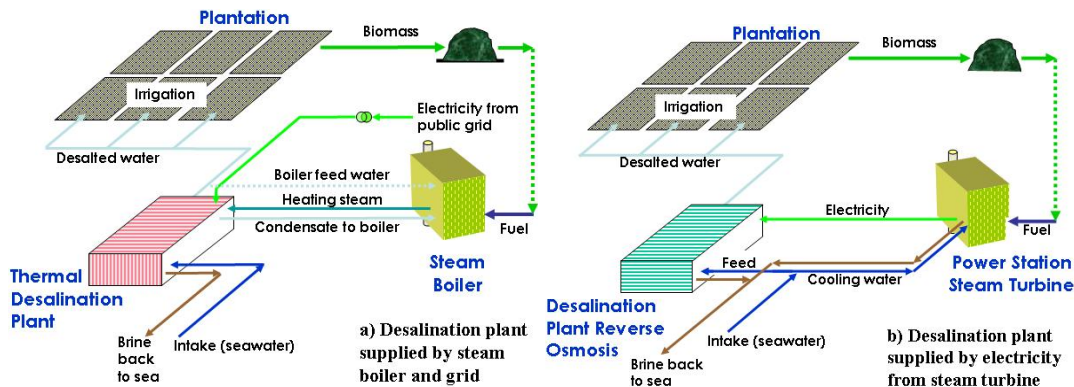


Fig. 3. Two methods for removing salt from seawater.

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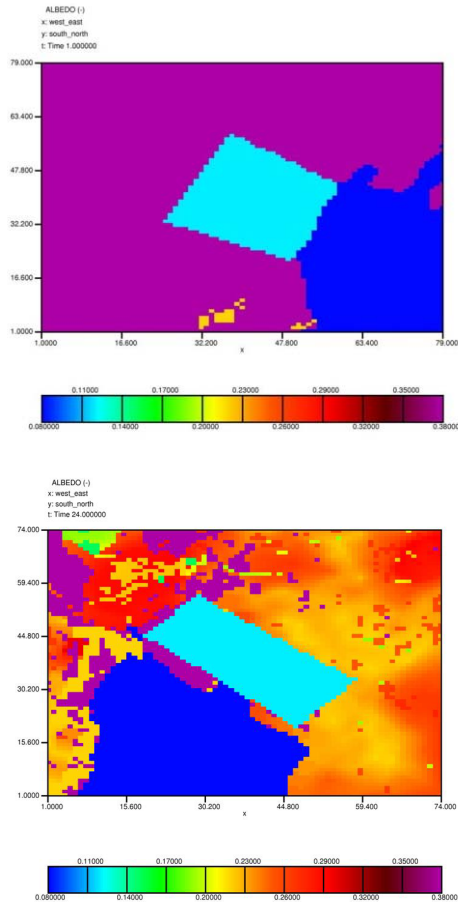


Fig. 4. 2-D plots of the reduction in albedo caused by *Jatropha curcas* plantations in Oman (upper panel) and Sonora (bottom panel).



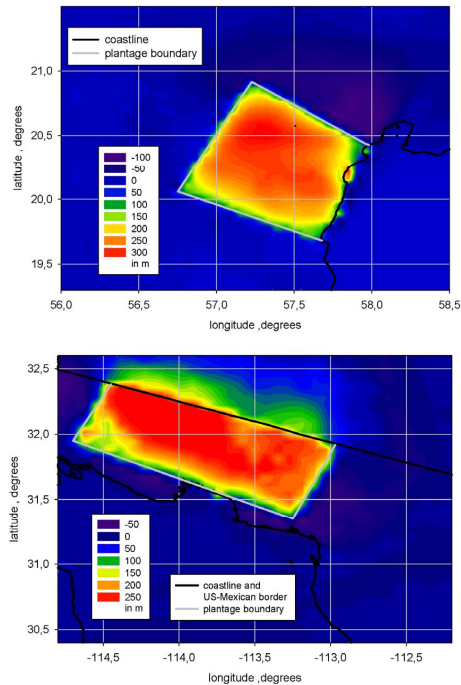


Fig. 5. Mean difference between IMPACT and CONTROL ABL top in summer over Oman (upper panel) and Sonora (bottom panel).

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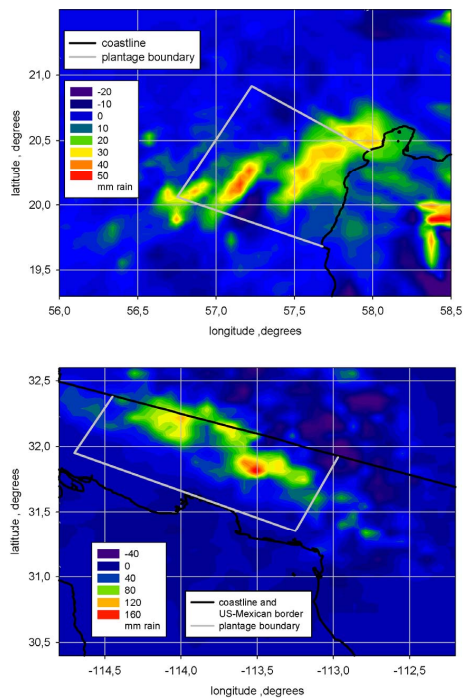


Fig. 6. Predicted differences in precipitation between planted and desert regions in Oman (upper panel) and Sonora (bottom panel) in summer 2007.

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