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Modeling nitrous oxide emissions from tile-drained winter wheat fields in Central France

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The process-based DeNitrification-DeComposition (DNDC) model has been validated for nitrous oxide (N₂O) emission and regulated variables in a broad range of agroecosystems but rarely under tile-drained condition. In this study, we tested DNDC (version 9.5) at seventeen sites cropped with winter wheat across a tile-drained landscape (around 30-km²) in Central France. To compare the ability of simulating N₂O flux between models, we applied the outputs of DNDC such as soil temperature, water-filled pore space (WFPS) and inorganic nitrogen (NH₄⁺ and NO₃⁻) content in topsoil (0-20 cm) to a simplified process model, Nitrous Oxide Emission (NOE), and a developed version of NOE by incorporating effects of soil WFPS and clay content on N₂O reduction (NOEred). Sharing the same algorithm of nitrification and denitrification with NOE, NOEred accounts the N₂O loss as a dynamic proportion to each process rather than fixed ratio as NOE does. With modification on soil field capacity and wilting point and crop growth parameters according to the field measurement, DNDC predicted the soil WFPS and crop yields with reasonable accuracy. As compared to the observation, the DNDC-predicted NH₄⁺ and NO₃⁻ content declined much slower during the post-fertilization period at all sites, indicating the underestimation of their consumption. As a result of the overestimation of NH₄⁺, the NOE-predicted cumulative nitrification rate was averagely 4.9 (ranging from 3.9 to 6.6) times greater than the prediction of DNDC. Despite the overestimation of NO₃⁻, DNDC and NOE generated similar cumulative denitrification rate at most sites. All three models were capable of simulating the fertilizer-induced N₂O emission peaks, in which NOEred captured 34% of the variations in daily N₂O flux across space and time (p<0.001, n=256) with positive model efficiency (0.31) and moderate underestimation (5%). Only the prediction of NOEred yielded positive model efficiency (0.03) for cumulative N₂O emissions, explaining 53% of the variations (p<0.001, n=17) with neutral bias (1%). Our validation indicates that the prediction of DNDC for nitrogen biogeochemistry (N₂O flux and soil NH₄⁺ and NO₃⁻ content) was not optimal in the studied soils. We suggest dynamic proportions of N₂O emitted through nitrification and denitrification replacing the fixed ratios in NOE in future simulation.