

## Do maize crop models catch the impact of future [CO<sub>2</sub>] on maize yield and water use ?

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### Introduction

Maize is a major crop in the world. The ability of crop models to predict the complexity of the interactions behind the yield response to climate and especially to air CO<sub>2</sub> concentration [CO<sub>2</sub>] needs to be tested (Bassu *et al.* 2012). Furthermore, the water use is a key issue for assessing our ability to sustain maize yields under future climate, since hotter and dryer conditions may become more frequent. In the study reported here, a Free Air CO<sub>2</sub> Enrichment

(FACE) showing a very large impact of [CO<sub>2</sub>] on yield under drought (Manderscheid et al 2014) was used to test the ability of 20 maize models to simulate the observed responses of yield and water use.

### Materials and Methods

The Experiment combined two [CO<sub>2</sub>] air concentrations: ambient and 550 ppm, approximately, crossed with two irrigation regimes bringing about contrasted soil water contents. Yield, water use, leaf area index, soil water content and [CO<sub>2</sub>] levels were recorded in 2007 and 2008. However, only 2008 exhibited a significant water deficit. On that year a 40 % increase of yield, approximately, was observed under 550 ppm [CO<sub>2</sub>], the crop water use remaining unaltered. 20 modelling groups using different crop models were given the same instructions and input data. Following a preliminary calibration (cultivar parameters) based on non-limiting water conditions and under ambient [CO<sub>2</sub>] treatments of both years, a simulation was undertaken for the other treatments: High [CO<sub>2</sub>] (550 ppm) 2007 and 2008, both irrigation regimes, and DRY AMBIENT 2007 and 2008.

### Results and Discussion

As in the experiment, simulations showed virtually no yield responses to [CO<sub>2</sub>] under non-limiting water conditions. Only under severe water deficits did models simulate an increase in yield for CO<sub>2</sub> enrichment, which was related to a higher harvest index and, for those models which simulated it, a higher grain number. However, the CO<sub>2</sub> enhancement under water deficit simulated by the 20 models was 20 % at most and 10 % on average only. As in the experiment, the simulated impact of [CO<sub>2</sub>] on water use was negligible, with a general displacement of the water deficit toward later phases of the crop along with a longer green leaf area duration.

The very large impact of CO<sub>2</sub> reported in that experiment was mainly due to the coincidence of a strong water stress with anthesis, a short and sensitive phase of the growth cycle bringing about a large decrease in grain number. This was not detected properly by models which simulated a maximum water stress in later phase of the growing cycle. Both the ability of current models to catch the water use induced positive impact of CO<sub>2</sub> on yield and their difficulty to match the actual increase will be discussed.

### References

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