Interactive comment on “The soil fertility and leaf nutrient status in enset gardens in different altitude zones of the Gamo highlands, Ethiopia and inferences for Xanthomonas wilt prevalence” by Sabura Shara et al.

Anonymous Referee #1

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Comments on MS No.: soil-2019-78 The soil fertility and leaf nutrient status in enset gardens in different altitude zones of the Gamo highlands, Ethiopia and inferences for Xanthomonas wilt prevalence Sabura Shara et al.

General The manuscript represented an interesting study about trying to determine how soil physicochemical properties in the Gamo highlands of Ethiopia influenced the development of Xanthomonas wilt of enset (EXM). The study was a survey-based investigation, where it is difficult to control all the variables to know what is exactly happening. The authors in their introduction outlines some ambitious aims from a survey-based study about determining optimum regimes for enset and how this may impact on EXM. The study included three different elevation categories determined by the authors of 2000-2300, 2300-2600 and 2600-3000 masl. The authors also divided enset gardens into zones based on proximity to houses, having an inner and outer garden zone and an outer cropping zone. Soil measurements were made in each of these areas for soil physiochemical properties, leaf samples made of enset plants and the assessments made on the presence or absence of EXM. The results indicated that there was little difference in soil physicochemical properties between the different elevation zones. However, differences were observed with proximity from the houses, with changes in soil chemical properties indicating greater soil fertility closer to the houses. There was some suggestion that EXW prevalence was greater at lower elevation than higher elevations. The study used visual assessments as well as historical recollections from growers. The authors concluded that EXW was lower at higher elevations. They also suggest that there is less EXW with lower soil pH, available P, K, and Ca. Unfortunately, there appears to be many confounding effects, which impact on the results and the conclusions made by the authors. While the authors surveyed 276 enset gardens, they based their conclusions on the results from 11 sites, those at lower elevations that had corresponding disease assessment and soil physicochemical data. The authors had suggested in their description of the sites that “organic fertilisers” were used close to the house. Would it be possible that these organic fertilisers were also sources of EXW inoculum adding to reinfection of plants? The manuscript requires major revaluation of the results before it is acceptable. Much of the physicochemical data is not significantly different from one another, there is no clear discrimination between sites and there is insufficient statistical power to agree with the conclusions made by the authors. The manuscript requires major revision to improve the clarity and conciseness of what is presented. Currently the manuscript is confusing with some terms like “inner-outer”, which are difficult for the reader to follow. Furthermore, there is inconsistent use of tense, with the manuscript changing between past and present tense. This should be revised so that there is consistent
use of past tense English. The inclusion of commas needs to be reviewed throughout
the manuscript. Specific comments Abstract â€“ This is a summary of what was done
and therefore should be in past tense. e.g. increase → increased, are → were etc.
â€“ L28 The authors make a “throw-away” statement that, “enset gardens should be
optimized in relation to agro-ecological conditions and that both elevation and soil
nutrient status need to be considered……...”. It would be better if the authors were
able to elucidate what these optimum conditions were to reduce EXW and not leave
the readers wondering what these conditions were? Introduction â€“ The introduction
needs to be reviewed to make it more concise with information relevant to the study.
Currently there is a lot of superfluous information which does not add to the argument
being developed in the manuscript. â€“ L37 Food security is a main target or is a
target? â€“ L50 fibre not fiber â€“ L53 greater of higher? â€“ L55-56 How does the
dense leaf canopy reduce land degradation and sequester carbon? â€“ L58 Remove
Due to limited genetic research â€“ L62-64 These sentenced should be reviewed to
be more concise. â€“ L72 Remove wreaking havoc â€“ L82-85 Is this sentence
necessary, does it add anything to the argument being developed? â€“ L88-100 The
paragraph outlining the aims and hypothesis needs to be reviewed to make both the
Is the description of bedrock required? â€“ L153-154 Dates are confusing
â€“ L159 A mixed soil sample… is a confusing sentence that requires reviewing.
â€“ L202 computed not compute â€“ L211 of is repeated â€“ L212-214 It is unclear
what this sentence is trying to explain. Needs revision. â€“ L211 The number of
points on a positive side of the PCA diagram is 64.7%, which means that 35.3% were
on the negative side, which does not give a lot of confidence that there is nothing
more than chance to where the points occur on the PCA biplot. The analysis and
presentation of the results used should be reviewed to develop a minimum data set
that discriminates between the sites and consider the use of box and whisker plots
to show how much overlap and variation there is between the different categories.
â€“ Fig 3 There are no obvious groupings in the PCA diagram. If 95% confidence
intervals were placed around elevation or symptomatic gardens there would be a lot of
overlap. â€“ Table 1 The table is difficult to read and understand as it is presented.
Consider using horizontal lines to separate each variable. There is inconsistent
placement of the soil property title either in the middle or in centre. Consider using
ns to denote non-significant difference between elevation categories. This applies to
all tables in the manuscript. â€“ L243 the description of the zones is very confusing.
This should be revised and consistently use throughout the manuscript. â€“ Table 2
Consider using ns to denote non-significant difference between elevation categories.
â€“ L258-266 This section is very confusing, and I am not sure what it is trying to
explain. Is it necessary for the data presented within the manuscript? â€“ Table 3
Consider using ns to denote non-significant difference between elevation categories.
Does the leaf data add much to the argument? â€“ L278-280 This sentence is unclear
and requires revision â€“ L288-289 This method is not convincing for discrimination
between symptomatic and asymptomatic gardens. â€“ Table 5 Consider using ns to
denote non-significant difference between elevation categories. â€“ Table 6 It would
appear that the entire sample size being used in this table is 11 gardens. How many
were symptomatic and how many asymptomatic of EXW? 11 gardens is not a large
enough sample size to be meaningful, when 276 were included in the original survey.
This would mean that the results are being extrapolated from only 4% of the gardens
included in the survey. â€“ Table 7 Consider using ns to denote non-significant
difference between elevation categories. â€“ Discussion â€“ Review the use of
tense throughout the discussion. E.g. are → were â€“ L342-343. The authors
suggest that “continual application of manure and organic waste …” is responsible for
changes in soil nutrient levels. Could the organic waste also be contributing to EXW?
If contaminated by-products are disposed into gardens in close proximity to houses
there may be an increasing amount of inoculum that is associated with increase in
nutrient levels? â€“ L352 The authors indicated that soil nutrients were greater than
anticipated. The differences in soil nutrients due to proximity from the house is the
main outcome from this study and could be expanded with greater analyses showing
differences in nutrients due to garden zones. The authors suggest that foliar nutrients were excessive based on limited literature? Was there any productivity measures that would support that productivity had plateaued with the increase in leaf nutrient levels or is this purely speculative due to lack of data? Conclusion It is hard to agree with the conclusion as some of the statements are misleading, such as 276 gardens used in the study. While 276 may have been used in the study the conclusions are based on 4% of these sites, only 11, which would appear to be insufficient to be a robust number to draw conclusion of the physicochemical properties that lead to EXW. The authors acknowledge there are many confounding effects in the study which could lead to differences in disease incidence and with only 11 sites on which the physiochemical results are based on, it does not give the reader a lot of confidence in the findings from the survey. Less instead of lower Suggestions There appears to be four elements to this study Disease incidence of EXW Nutrient status of enset gardens With elevation With distance from houses Leaf nutrient status of enset These could be analysed separately. To me, the most interesting aspect of this study is how soil nutrients levels change with distance from the houses. This could be teased out further and reanalysed to determine groups or trends across a gradient from the house? The manuscript needs to be revised to improve clarity and conciseness throughout. More care is required in the grammar, particularly the use of past tense and the use of commas.

Please also note the supplement to this comment: