Land use change in the Atlantic Forest affects carbon and nitrogen sources of streams as revealed by the isotopic composition of terrestrial invertebrates

Fernanda Gaudio Augusto1,4, Mauricio Tassoni Filho3, Anderson Ferreira2, Alexandre Leandro Pereira1, Plínio Barbosa de Camargo1 & Luiz Antonio Martinelli1

1 Universidade de São Paulo, Centro de Energia Nuclear na Agricultura, Laboratório de Ecologia Isotópica, Piracicaba, SP, Brazil.
2 Universidade Federal da Grande Dourados, Faculdade de Ciências Biológicas e Ambientais, Dourados, MS, Brazil.
3 Universidade Federal do Paraná, Departamento de Biodiversidade, Laboratório de Ecologia, Pesca e Ictiologia, Palotina, PR, Brazil.
4 Corresponding author: Fernanda Gaudio Augusto, e-mail: fernandagaudio@gmail.com


Abstract: Terrestrial invertebrates link terrestrial systems to aquatic ones, making vegetal material produced in the watershed available to aquatic food webs. In this study, using carbon and nitrogen stable isotopes, we evaluated the importance of introduced C4 grasses as a source of carbon in aquatic food webs of headwater streams of the coastal Atlantic Forest located on the north coast of the State of São Paulo, in the southeastern region of Brazil. Terrestrial invertebrates were collected in two streams: one where the main land cover was pristine montane Atlantic Forest (forest stream) and another where the main land cover was introduced C4 forage grasses for livestock (pasture stream). The average δ13C of terrestrial invertebrates collected in the forest stream (−26.3 ± 2.1‰) was significantly (p<0.01) smaller than the average δ13C of terrestrial invertebrates collected in the pasture stream (−15.7 ± 4.7‰), denoting a larger contribution of C4 grasses to terrestrial invertebrates of the pasture stream. The average δ15N of terrestrial invertebrates of the forest stream (4.1 ± 2.4‰) was significantly (p<0.01) lower than the average δ15N of terrestrial invertebrates of the pasture stream (9.5 ± 2.7‰). The relative contribution of C3 and C4 plants to terrestrial invertebrates was estimated using SIAR. In the forest stream, the C3 contribution was on average 0.75 (0.72 minimum to 0.79 maximum), and the C4 contribution was on average 0.25 (0.21 minimum to 0.28 maximum). In the pasture stream, the C3 contribution decreased to 0.20 (0.14 minimum to 0.26 maximum), and the C4 contribution increased to 0.80 (0.74 minimum to 0.86 maximum). These results have several implications for the ecosystem functioning as well as for recent changes in environmental policies of Brazil. The lower nutritional value of C4 grasses may not only decrease invertebrate performance, but also alter the stoichiometry of several components of the aquatic food webs with potential consequence for the whole ecosystem functioning. On the public policy side, recent changes in the Brazilian Forest Act, a series of laws that regulate land cover at the property level, reduced the width of the forested riparian area with potentially dangerous consequences for aquatic ecosystems.

Keywords: Atlantic Forest, land use, streams, stable isotopes, terrestrial invertebrate.


Resumo: Os invertebrados terrestres constituem uma importante ligação entre os sistemas aquáticos e terrestres, disponibilizando o material vegetal produzido no entorno de riachos para as cadeias aquáticas. Nesse estudo, usando isótopos estáveis de carbono e nitrogênio, investigamos a introdução de plantas C4 como fonte de energia em cadeias alimentares aquáticas em riachos de cabeceira da Mata Atlântica, na costa norte do Estado de São Paulo, região sudeste do Brasil. Os invertebrados foram amostrados em dois riachos: um com cobertura de solo predominante de Floresta Atlântica Montana (rio da floresta) e outro em que foram introduzidas gramíneas forrageiras para criação de gado (rio da pastagem). A média dos valores de δ13C para os invertebrados terrestres coletados no rio da floresta (−26.3 ± 2.1‰) foi significativamente

Introduction

The coastal Atlantic Forest of Brazil is concentrated mainly in the Serra do Mar, and runs parallel to the Brazilian coast for almost 1,000 km from Rio de Janeiro State in the north to Santa Catarina State in the south (Myers et al. 2000, Oyakawa et al. 2006). This biome is one of the richest in terms of number of plants and animals species, considered a hotspot of biodiversity (Myers et al. 2000).

Such richness of life did not prevent its displacement by croplands nor did it prevent unplanned urban sprawl (Monteiro & Kaz 1991/92, Oyakawa et al. 2006, Ribeiro et al. 2009). Currently, only 12% of the 1.5 million km² of the original Atlantic Forest remains intact (Ribeiro et al. 2009). Such changes in land use affect not only the structure and functioning of terrestrial ecosystems (Allan 2004), but also affects such characteristics of streams and rivers (Villela et al. 2002, Vanni 2002, Cross et al. 2005, Bukovinszky et al. 2008). There are several studies showing how land use changes affects the whole food web, from insects and benthonic macroinvertebrates (Ometto et al. 2000, Suriano et al. 2011, Colzani et al. 2013, Ligeiro et al. 2013) to fish species (Casatti et al. 2009, Alexandre et al. 2010).

Among lotic systems, the first order streams located in headwaters are the first link between the aquatic and terrestrial environments (Peterson et al. 2001). In these streams the food web encompasses a mixture of autochthonous and allochthonous sources (Pusey & Arthington 2003). In such conditions, Riparian terrestrial ecosystem is an important source of organic matter (e.g. plant material, terrestrial invertebrates) for aquatic communities (Kawaguchi & Nakano 2001, Pusey & Arthington 2003, Barreto & Aranha 2006, Casatti et al. 2009, Teresa & Casatti 2013).

In watersheds, riparian areas assume a very important role as a source of food to lotic systems, especially in headwater streams (Naiman & De’ camps 1997, Ward 1998, Fisher et al. 1998, Helfield & Naiman 2001, Pusey & Arthington 2003, Casatti et al. 2012). Despite this importance, the displacement of riparian forests by monoculture and pasture for cattle is one of the main environmental problems in the Atlantic Forest biome (Silva et al. 2007). In Brazil, cultivated C₄-grasses cover approximately 200 million ha (Lapola et al. 2013), and in São Paulo State more than 70% of riparian forests were replaced by C₃-grasses (Silva et al. 2007).

Catford et al. (2013) suggested that climate change would facilitate the invasion of non-indigenous C₄ plants in tropical areas. Dominance of C₄ plants in future land use scenarios is especially important because it can have several ecological effects on tropical ecosystems (see Williams & Baruch 2000 for a review). Particularly important to this study is the lower nutritional quality of C₄ grasses compared with C₃ plants due to the lower level of nutrients, higher fiber contents, and higher leaf toughness (Scheirs et al. 2001, Ehleringer et al. 2002, Clapcott & Bunn 2003, Barbehenn et al. 2004). However, despite these nutritional limitations, it was shown that some insect species are well adapted to grass feeding (Barbehenn 2005). In aquatic food webs, it has been shown that the importance of C₄ grasses seems to depend on the local conditions. For instance, C₄ grass was an important component in small river food webs of the Piracicaba River Basin, located in the southeastern region of Brazil (Ferreira et al. 2012). On the other hand, it seems that C₄ grasses were less important as energy source in large tropical and sub-tropical watersheds of the Paraná River (Manetta et al. 2003, Hoeinghaus et al. 2007), and Amazon River (Araújo-Lima et al. 1986, Forsberg et al. 1993, Oliveira et al. 2006), nor were they important in sub-tropical and tropical watersheds of Australia (Clapcott & Bunn 2003, Bunn et al. 2007).

Based on the discussion above, the main objective of this study was to evaluate the transport of exotic C₄ forage grasses by terrestrial invertebrate to aquatic food webs of headwater streams of the coastal Atlantic Forest. In order to achieve this objective we collected terrestrial invertebrates from two watersheds; one where the dominant cover was Montane Atlantic Forest, and other where the dominant cover, especially in the riparian zone, was C₄ forage grasses.

We analyzed the carbon and nitrogen stable isotopic composition of the terrestrial invertebrates to determine the contribution of C₄ grasses to the aquatic food web. The carbon stable isotopic composition of C₄ grasses is distinct from plants that follow the C₃ photosynthetic pathway (Farquhar et al. 1989). This fact opens up the possibility of using carbon stable isotopic composition to track the fate of terrestrial C₄ grasses in aquatic food webs (Bunn et al. 1997).

Material and Methods

1. Study area

Two headwater streams were selected for this study. The Ombrophillus Dense Montane Forest (Velloso et al. 1991) dominates the watershed of the stream located in the branch...
Santa Virginia of the State Park of Serra do Mar, hereafter referred to as “forested stream” (Figure 1). The other stream is dominated by pastures composed mainly of C4 grasses of the genus Brachiaria and is located approximately 30 km from the forested stream, hereafter referred to as “pasture stream” (Figure 1). The annual precipitation of the area is approximately 2,300 mm and the average annual temperature is 16°C. This low average temperature for a sub-tropical area is due to the high elevation of the watersheds, approximately 1,000 m above sea level (Sousa Neto et al. 2008).

2. Sampling

Terrestrial invertebrates were collected in the beginning of the dry season (April of 2009) after the end of the heavy summer rains. Twenty-five floating plastic trays (pan traps) were randomly deployed on the water surface of the streams along a 150 m reach. The pan traps were filled with a mixture of water and 70% alcohol. The sampled invertebrates were fixed in 70% alcohol and transported to the laboratory where they were identified according to order and morph types. After identification, samples were dried at 60°C for 48 hours and sent to analysis. Aquatic insect adults (Ephemeroptera and Trichoptera) were excluded from analyses of the pan trap samples, since our primary focus was on terrestrial invertebrates as allochthonous sources to the streams. Odonatas were included because according to Corbet (1962) the adults phases vary from a few days to months, therefore due to this extended living period it is possible that Odonatas contributes to river and streams trophic chains by transferring carbon from the terrestrial to aquatic systems.

We are aware that the use of alcohol to fix the invertebrates may alter their stable carbon isotopic composition (Ruiz-Cooley et al. 2011, Syväranta et al. 2011, Xu et al. 2011). Additionally, it is difficult to make any correction in this alteration due to its variability; some studies show an increase in the stable carbon isotopic composition, while others show the opposite. However, in general these changes due to the alcohol use are minor, on the order of less than 1‰ (Ruiz-Cooley et al. 2011, Syväranta et al. 2011, Xu et al. 2011), and since in this study we are investigating the use of C4 and C3 plants by these animals that have great differences in their stable carbon isotopic composition (more than 10‰) we believe that any alteration due to the alcohol will not affect the main conclusions of this study.

3. Isotopic analysis

Dried samples were crushed to a fine powder and homogenized. Depending on the sample, 0.8 to 2.5 mg of material was encapsulated, and carbon and nitrogen content as well their isotopic composition were determined by combustion an Elemental Analyzer (Carlo Erba, CHN-1100) coupled with a mass spectrometer Thermo Finningan Delta Plus at the Laboratory of Isotope Ecology of CENA-University of São Paulo. The analytical error obtained by the analysis of internal standards was 0.3‰ and 0.5‰ for carbon and nitrogen, respectively. Results were expressed in the classical delta (δ) per mil notation defined as:

$$\delta = (R_{sample}/R_{standard} - 1) \times 1000$$

Where $R_{sample}$ and $R_{standard}$ is the ratio of $^{13}$C/$^{12}$C or $^{15}$N/$^{14}$N of the sample and standard, respectively. The standard for carbon is the Vienna PDB and for nitrogen, the standard is the atmospheric air.
4. Sources contribution

The relative contribution of C₄ and C₃ plants to terrestrial invertebrates was estimated using the computational package Stable Isotope Analysis in R (SIAR; Parnell et al. 2010). Terrestrial invertebrates were considered consumers, and C₃ and C₄ plants their food sources. In order to run SIAR, the carbon and nitrogen isotopic composition of the sources, and the isotopic fractionation values between diet-consumer have to be assigned. We assumed the average foliar δ¹³C (−31.9 ± 1.6‰) and δ¹⁵N (2.3 ± 2.0‰) values found among 184 tree specimens collected in the Montane Atlantic Forest a few kilometers from the forest stream (Martellini LA, non published data). The average δ¹³C and δ¹⁵N for the pasture watershed was assumed to be the average of 28 C₃ plant specimens collected along the pasture stream banks, which were equal to −28.6 ± 1.5‰ and 6.7 ± 1.6‰, respectively (Pereira 2011). For C₄ plants, the δ¹³C and δ¹⁵N were assumed to be the average of six C₄ plant specimens collected along the pasture stream banks, which were equal to −11.9 ± 0.2‰ and 7.8 ± 1.5‰, respectively (Pereira 2011). Finally, the Δ¹³C and Δ¹⁵N was assumed to be +0.5 ± 1.2‰ and +2.3 ± 1.6‰, according to McCutchan et al. (2003).

5. Statistical analysis

The δ¹³C values did not follow a normal distribution and could not be normalized by transformation. Therefore, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney test was used to compare δ¹³C and δ¹⁵N values of invertebrates collected in the forest and pasture streams. The statistical tests were applied by using STATISTICA12 software and differences were accepted as significant at a 5% level of probability.

Results

The carbon and nitrogen isotopic compositions of 64 and 86 invertebrates were determined in the forest and pasture streams, respectively. Results of these analyses were grouped by order and are shown in Table 1 and 2. The δ¹³C values of invertebrates in the forest stream varied from −27.6 ± 0.3‰ (Isopoda) to −24.6‰ ± 1.1 (Orthoptera), being the mean equal to −26.3 ± 2.1‰ (Table 1). The δ¹³C values of invertebrates in the pasture stream varied from −19.2 ± 5.5‰ (Lepidoptera) to −11.6 ± 2.3‰ (Hemiptera), being the mean equal to −15.7 ± 4.7‰ (Table 2), which was significantly higher than the mean value of invertebrates of the forest stream (p < 0.05).

The δ¹⁵N values of invertebrates in the forest stream varied from 0.3 ± 0.1‰ (Isopoda) to 4.7 ± 2.3‰ (Lepidoptera), and the mean value was equal to 4.1 ± 2.4‰ (Table 1). The δ¹⁵N values of invertebrates of the pasture stream varied from 7.0 ± 0.4‰ (Odonata) to 12.4 ± 1.8‰ (Lepidoptera), and the mean value, equal to 9.5 ± 2.7‰, was significantly higher (p < 0.05) than the mean δ¹⁵N of invertebrates in the forest stream (Table 2).

In the Figure 2, the δ¹³C values of invertebrates and plant sources are plotted versus the δ¹⁵N values in the so-called δ-space (Newsome et al. 2009). In general, the δ¹³C and δ¹⁵N values of invertebrates of the forest stream were less variable than the pasture stream, and plotted near the C₃ sources in the δ-space (Figure 2). On the other hand, invertebrates of the pasture stream plotted between the C₃ and C₄ sources showed that both types of plant might be contributing to their diets.

The relative proportion of C₃ and C₄ sources to terrestrial invertebrates was estimated using SIAR (Parnell et al. 2010). As expected, in the forest stream, C₃ plants predominate as the main food source of terrestrial invertebrates, the average

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>δ¹³C Mean Stdev</th>
<th>δ¹⁵N Mean Stdev</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Araneae</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>−26.2 4.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coleoptera</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>−25.3 1.7</td>
<td>3.8 1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collembola</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>−25.7 0.8</td>
<td>2.0 0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diptera</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>−26.5 2.4</td>
<td>4.7 2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemiptera</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>−25.5 1.1</td>
<td>3.0 3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hymenoptera</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>−26.1 1.0</td>
<td>3.8 2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isopoda</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>−27.6 0.3</td>
<td>0.3 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthoptera</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>−24.6 1.1</td>
<td>0.8 1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>−26.3 2.1</td>
<td>4.1 2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation (Stdev) of δ¹³C and δ¹⁵N values of order of terrestrial invertebrates collected from floating trays on a forest stream. N denotes the number of samples, and Total denotes the overall mean and standard deviation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>δ¹³C Mean Stdev</th>
<th>δ¹⁵N Mean Stdev</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coleoptera</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>−16.3 3.2</td>
<td>11.0 2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collembola</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>−19.0 7.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diptera</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>−18.9 4.3</td>
<td>9.4 2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemiptera</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>−11.6 2.3</td>
<td>8.6 2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hymenoptera</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>−16.5 3.7</td>
<td>11.7 1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lepidoptera</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>−19.2 5.5</td>
<td>12.4 1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odonata</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>−16.0 1.3</td>
<td>7.0 0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthoptera</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>−18.4 3.1</td>
<td>8.8 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>−15.7 4.7</td>
<td>9.5 2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation (Stdev) of δ¹³C and δ¹⁵N values of order of terrestrial invertebrates collected from floating trays on pasture stream. N denotes the number of samples, and Total denotes the overall mean and standard deviation.

Figure 2. Carbon (δ¹³C) and nitrogen (δ¹⁵N) stable isotope signatures of terrestrial invertebrates collected from floating trays placed in forested (empty circles) and pasture (filled circles) streams and mean isotopic values of C₃ and C₄ plants of pasture and C₃ plants of forest. Bars are standard deviations.
Caswell et al. (1973) hypothesized that C₄ plants are avoided by herbivores, especially insects, due to their lower nutritional content compared to C₃ plants. More recently, Barbehenn (2005) showed that leaf-chewing grass-feeding insects such as the grasshopper *Camnula pellucid* and *Melanoplus sanguinipes* are capable of crushing and extracting nutrients from the bundle sheath cells of C₄ grasses, suggesting that these insects may take advantage of the presence of C₄ grasses in the landscape.

We found in this study that the conversion of forest to pasture lands in the coastal Atlantic Forest of Southeastern Brazil influenced the diet composition of terrestrial invertebrates collected on stream surfaces. The contribution of terrestrial C₄ plants to these invertebrates was significantly higher in the pasture than in the forest stream (Figure 3). According to our estimates an average of approximately 78% of the carbon of these invertebrates had a C₄ origin (Figure 3).

It is important to mention that such an estimate has a degree of uncertainty associated with several factors. First, due to logistical constraints our samples of invertebrates were fixed in alcohol, which may especially alter δ¹³C values, although this difference seems to be minor, generally between 0.8‰ and 2.5‰ (Ruiz-Cooley et al. 2011, Syväranta et al. 2011, Xu et al. 2011). Regarding this change, it is important to emphasize that in this study, we are evaluating differences in contribution of C₃ and C₄ plants that have a significant differences in their δ¹³C value, approximately 17‰ and 19‰ for pasture and forest plants, respectively. Therefore, minor changes in the isotopic composition due to alcohol probably had a minor effect on our results.

Second, we consider constant values for the isotopic fractionation between diet-consumer (∆¹³C = +0.5‰ and ∆¹³C = +2.3‰) according to McCutchan et al. (2003). There are several studies showing that the ∆¹³C and ∆¹⁵N may vary due to consumer, and diet characteristics and composition (McCutchan et al. 2003, Codron et al. 2011). As we previously mentioned, the composition and nutritional value of C₃ and C₄ grasses are different (Ehleringer et al. 2002, Barbehenn 2005); this may lead to differences in the ∆¹³C and the ∆¹⁵N values for C₃ and C₄ plants; and in this study we assumed the same isotopic fractionation for both types of plants.

In the Neotropics the contribution of C₄ plants to terrestrial invertebrates appears to be a common in large rivers as well as streams. For instance, Adis & Victoria (2001) showed that species of *Tucayaca gracilis* (Orthoptera), *Stenacris f. fissicauda* (Orthoptera), and *Mesostoma hylaeurn* (Polydesmida) living in the Marchantaria Island, in the Solimões River floodplains had δ¹³C values ranging from approximately −14‰ to −11‰, showing the importance of C₄ grasses *Paspalum repens* and *Echinocloa polystachya*, two naturally occurring grasses in the region. Oliveira et al. (2006) working on Camaleão Lake in the same island found that δ¹³C values of terrestrial insects collected on C₄ vegetation varied from approximately −13‰ to −17‰, confirming the importance of these plants to the local fauna of insects. Finally, Ferreira et al. (2012), studying watersheds of southeastern Brazil where the original forest was replaced by C₄ forage grasses, also found that that these plants were the most important components of the terrestrial invertebrate diets.

If the C₄ material carried by terrestrial insects enters in aquatic food webs appears to be a function of watershed physical characteristics and the food habits of fish species. For instance, in large watersheds, like those in the Solimões and upper Amazon rivers, Forsberg et al. (1993) found that for most fish species, the contribution of C₄ carbon was low. However, for some species (*Pterygoplichthys daturus*, *Hydrolycus scomeroides*, *Heros* sp., *Hypostomus plecostomus* and *Schizodon...*
fasciatus), the C₄ contribution was at least 40%. Likewise, Munetta et al. (2003) found that most fish species had a low contribution of C₃ carbon in lagoons of the Upper Paraná River floodplains; however, two fish species (Schizodon borellii, and Leporinus lacustris) had a significant contribution from C₄ plants. Also in the Upper Paraná River Basin, Hoenghaus et al. (2007) showed that only in high-gradient rivers (1.3 m.km⁻¹), C₄ carbon made a significant contribution, especially to the species Schizodon nasutus. On the other hand, in a small watershed (0.1 to 1 km²) of southeastern Brazil where the original vegetation was displaced mainly by pastures, the contribution of C₄ carbon for the fish species Astyanax paranae and Bryconamericus therigi was higher (60%) than in large tropical watersheds (Ferreira et al. 2012).

An unexpected result was the average contribution of 0.23 (up to 0.27) of C₄ plants to the terrestrial invertebrates of the forest stream. This fact was unexpected because we did not see any C₄ plants along the forest stream banks near the sampling site. Therefore, there are two possibilities to explain the C₄ signal in the terrestrial invertebrates of the forest stream: one is that there are C₄ plants along the forest stream banks that were not observed in our visual inspection or they were located in a distant stream in relation to the sampling site; or a second possibility is that terrestrial invertebrates are feeding on C₄ grasses located on the side of a back road located in the vicinity of our sampling site.

The δ¹⁵N values of terrestrial invertebrates were also significantly higher in the pasture streams compared to forest streams (Figure 2). The main cause of such differences may be due to the higher δ¹⁵N values observed in plants of the pasture stream watershed. However, it is also possible that the trophic position between terrestrial invertebrates of forest and pasture streams are different, since it is well established that δ¹⁵N values increase toward higher trophic levels due to a preferential loss of ¹⁴N along the food chain (Post et al. 2000, McCutchan et al. 2003, Martinez del Rio et al. 2009). As we had classified terrestrial invertebrates only to the order level, it is difficult to determine a trophic isotopic fractionation for invertebrates captured in the forest and pasture-streams. Therefore, we cannot provide a more precise cause for the higher δ¹⁵N values observed in invertebrates of the pasture stream.

It is also worth speculating about the ecological implications caused by the entrance of C₄ carbon in aquatic food webs. There are two main aspects to be considered, one is the consequence for terrestrial invertebrates and the other is the consequence for the ecosystem functioning itself. Regarding the first aspect, the plant quality (elemental composition and defense substances) affects the performance of herbivorous insects, including fecundity (Awmack & Leather 2002). Barbehenn et al. (2004) showed that the growth rate of grasshoppers (Melanoplus sanguinipes) was approximately 70% higher in C₄-feeding than in C₃-feeding animals. Therefore, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the performance of terrestrial invertebrates may be different in pasture-dominated compared to forest-dominated watersheds. Such differences in performance may be effective not only at the individual but also at population level (Awmack & Leather 2002). Secondly, despite the apparent poor invertebrate performance in C₃-dominated landscapes, it is also important to consider that nutrient ratios (C:N, C:P or N:P) of consumers may change in accordance with the substrate quality, and such changes may affect the whole food chain and ecosystem functioning (Cross et al. 2005, Bukovinsky et al. 2008), since animals, including invertebrates, may greatly affect nutrient dynamics in freshwater systems (Vanni 2002).

Finally, our findings also have important policy implications. The Brazilian Forest Act that regulates land cover at the rural property level was recently changed by the Brazilian Congress. Although there are still pending issues on the final bill, there will be probably a reduction of the extent of the riparian area that has to remain forested. The 30m forested buffer zone established in a longstanding version of the Forest Act will probably be significantly reduced. As we saw in this study, the lack of riparian forest and the implementation of feeding C₄ grasslands to livestock (the largest land use in Brazil) will change the quality of the vegetal material transferred from the terrestrial to aquatic systems by terrestrial invertebrates. As previously mentioned, this change in the substrate quality has the potential to alter not only the performance of terrestrial invertebrates as well as modify the entire food web with consequences for the ecosystem functioning. The maintenance of a 30m-riparian buffer zone would definitely help minimize the effect of upland cropped areas on streams (Ferreira et al. 2012).

There was a major shift from C₃-dominated to C₄-dominated plants in the diet of terrestrial invertebrates of pristine forest to disturbed pasture streams. These major changes in food web fuels may affect not only the performance of terrestrial invertebrates but also may lead to important alterations of the aquatic ecosystem functioning of pasture streams compared to forest streams. These changes may be exacerbated by recent changes in the Brazilian Forest Act, namely a decrease of the riparian buffer zone, one of the most important changes due to its ecological implications.

Acknowledgements

FAPESP (Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo) for first author fellowship, José Gilberto de Moraes for use of Laboratory of Acarology Agricultural (Esalq / USP), Alessandra Svonka Palmeiro for the maps and Jim Hesson for their help in reviewing language.

References


http://www.scielo.br/bn

http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1676-06032015018814


Received 11/12/2014
Accepted 11/12/2015