

28 March 2016

King Saud University
College of Food and Agric. Sciences
Soil Science Department

Fundamentals of Soil Science

4.3. Cation Exchange in Soils

Clay and humus are of utmost importance in soils. Because they are in colloidal state, they expose a relatively large amount of surface area for adsorption of water and ions. Nutrients set free in solution during weathering tend to be absorbed on the humus and clay surfaces.

4.3.1. The Nature of Cation Exchange in Soils

The adsorption of a cation by a colloidal nucleus or micelle and the accompanying release of one or more ions held by the micelle are termed **cation exchange**. For example, assume that the micelle has one half of its capacity satisfied with Ca ions, one quarter with K ions, and one quarter with H ions. This situation would be explained in the

K Ca
.H

blackboard. Now Suppose that the colloidal material is treated with a solution of strong KCl. In time, the K ions from the KCl will replace virtually all the cations on the micelle, creating a micelle that is entirely potassium saturated, and the adsorbed calcium and hydrogen will exist in solution as chlorides.

The efficiency with which ions will replace each other is determined by factors such as (a) relative concentration or numbers of the ions, (b) the number of charges on the ions, and (c) the speed of movement or activity of the different ions. ... The speed or activity of an ion is primarily a function of its size, but the degree of hydration must also be considered. ... The Na ion (radii of dehydrated ion in Angstrom (10^{-8} cm) = 0.98) is more highly hydrated than the K ion (radii of dehydrated ion in Angstrom (10^{-8} cm) = 1.33). ... Considering some of the most common cations in soils, the replaceability series is usually $\text{Al} > \text{Ca} > \text{Mg} > \text{K} > \text{Na}$. Exchangeable H is difficult to put in the series because of the uncertainty of its hydration properties. It is usually considered quite easily replaced, as are the other movement ions.

.KCl

KCl K

()

()

()

... .

)

(, = (-)

)

= (-)

... .(.

.Al>Ca>Mg>K>Na

H

4.3.2. Cation Exchange Capacity

The colloidal fraction carries a positive as well as a negative charge. The negative charge, however, is of much greater magnitude and of greater significance for plant growth in most soils. The cation exchange capacity is an expression of the **number** of cation adsorption sites per unit weight of soil. It is defined as the sum total of exchangeable cations adsorbed, expressed in **milliequivalents per 100 grams of oven dry soil**.

... The amounts of the exchangeable cations for the horizons of a typical prairie soil are given in Table 1. For practical purposes, the sum of the cations shown in the table is considered synonymous with cation-exchange capacity, recognize that very small but important amounts of exchangeable iron, copper, manganese, and other cations are present.

4.3.3. Percent Base Saturation

The exchangeable bases include Ca, Mg, K, and Na. ... The percentage base saturation is the percentage of the cation-exchange capacity saturated by these cations (Table 1).

.Na K Mg Ca

.()

For more information, see the
blackboard.

References

Foth, H. D. 1978. Fundamentals of
Soil Science. John Wiley & Sons,
New York, USA

Table 1 Exchangeable cations, cation exchange capacity, percent base saturation and pH of horizons of Tama silty clay loam (Source: Foth, 1978).

.(:)

Depth, in.	Horizon	Exchangeable Cations, Me/100 g					Cation- Exchange Capacity	Percent Base Saturation	pH
		Ca	Mg	K	Na	H			
0-6	Ap	13.9	3.4	0.5	0.1	9.3	27.2	66	5.7
6-11	Al2	13.8	4.2	0.4	0.1	11.4	29.9	62	5.8
11-20	AB	14.5	6.1	0.4	0.1	9.0	30.1	70	5.8
20-35	B2t	14.7	6.7	0.3	0.1	7.5	29.3	74	5.7
35-51	B3	14.8	5.7	0.3	0.1	5.6	26.5	79	6.0
51-61	C	16.1	5.6	0.4	0.2	4.1	26.4	84	6.5

