

 ISSN (O): 2320-5407 ISSN (P): 3107-4928	Journal Homepage: www.journalijar.com INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR) Article DOI:10.21474/IJAR01/24253 DOI URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/24253	 INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR) ISSN 2320-5407 Journal Homepage: http://www.journalijar.com Journal DOI:10.21474/IJAR01
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CONFERENCE PAPER

PERFORMANCE AND ANALYSIS OF AGRICULTURAL FEEDSTOCKS, PRETREATMENT AND CO-DIGESTION FOR ANAEROBIC BIOENERGY PRODUCTION

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Manuscript Info

Manuscript History

Received: 8 February 2026

Final Accepted: 10 March 2026

Published: April 2026

Key words:-

agricultural feedstock; agricultural waste; anaerobic digestion; pretreatment; co-digestion; lignocellulosic biomass; biogas; methane; C/N ratio

Abstract

Agricultural residues and livestock wastes represent important feedstocks for anaerobic digestion and renewable bioenergy production. This paper examines the feedstock characteristics, pretreatment approaches, and co-digestion strategies described in the thesis for conversion of agricultural waste into biogas. The reviewed feedstocks include rice straw and rice husk, wheat straw, corn stalks, sugarcane bagasse and press mud, banana pseudo-stem, vegetable waste, cattle dung and dairy effluent. Their suitability for digestion is influenced by physicochemical characteristics including volatile solids, moisture, pH, lignocellulosic composition and carbon-to-nitrogen ratio. Lignocellulosic residues present a hydrolysis limitation because cellulose and hemicellulose are protected within a lignin-hemicellulose structure. The thesis considers physical, chemical and biological pretreatment approaches to improve substrate accessibility. Co digestion is presented as a means of combining complementary feedstocks, improving nutrient balance and process stability. In the reported experimental results, mechanical shredding below 2 mm followed by 2% sodium hydroxide treatment at 70°C for 60 minutes reduced lignin content by 24.5%, increased biogas yield by 42%, and reduced digestion time by 15 days. The reported feedstock analysis and pretreatment results support the use of agricultural waste mixtures and pretreatment as important components of anaerobic bioenergy production.

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Introduction:-

Agricultural production generates substantial quantities of organic residues and by-products, including crop straws and stalks, husks and shells, bagasse, animal manures and processing effluents. The thesis describes these materials as both an environmental management challenge and an underutilized resource for bioenergy generation. Anaerobic digestion provides a biological pathway for converting organic materials into biogas and digestate. Biogas is described in the thesis as a combustible gaseous mixture comprising primarily methane and carbon dioxide, while digestate retains mineralized nutrients from the original feedstock. The ability of anaerobic digestion systems to accommodate single substrates and mixtures of agricultural, municipal and industrial organic wastes makes feedstock selection and preparation important elements of system performance. Feedstock characteristics influence microbial degradation and methane generation. The thesis identifies moisture content, total solids, volatile solids, pH, carbon-to-nitrogen ratio and biodegradability as important physicochemical characteristics. Lignocellulosic materials such as rice straw, wheat straw, corn stover and sugarcane bagasse present particular challenges because their cellulose and hemicellulose are protected by lignin structures that limit microbial hydrolysis.

Agricultural Feedstocks for Anaerobic Digestion:-

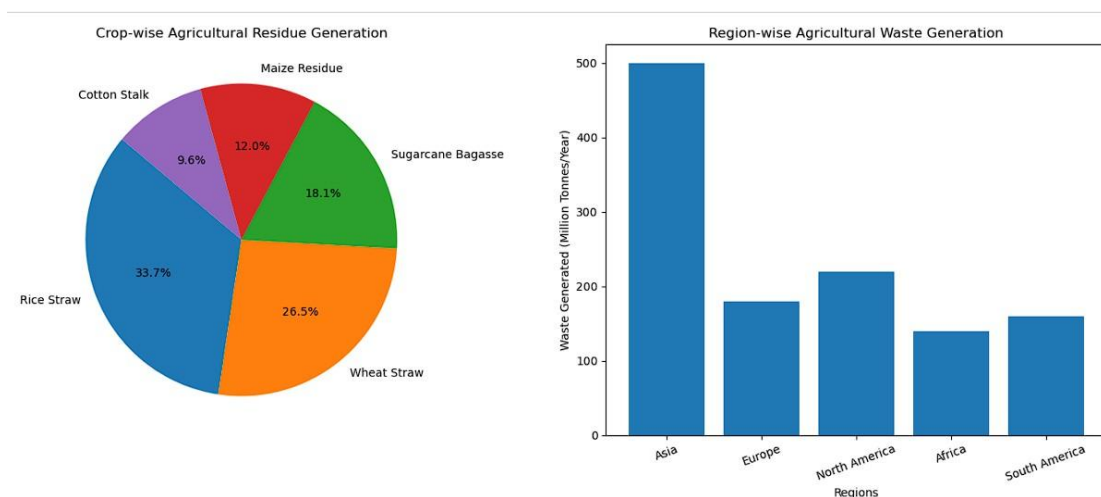


Figure 1. Distribution of agricultural residue generation across crops and global regions.

Livestock and Agricultural Residues:-

The literature reviewed in the thesis identifies cattle dung as a suitable substrate for stable biogas production because of its buffering capacity, balanced C/N ratio and microbial population. The reported literature places specific methane yields from cattle dung typically in the range of 150–250 mL CH₄/g VS. Lignocellulosic crop residues including rice straw, wheat straw, corn stover, sugarcane bagasse and cotton stalks have attracted considerable research attention because of their availability and underutilization. Untreated rice straw is reported in the thesis to yield approximately 100–150 mL CH₄/g VS under mesophilic conditions. The thesis methodology identifies rice straw, sugarcane press mud, banana pseudo-stem, cattle dung and dairy effluent as proposed feedstocks. The reported results additionally characterize rice husk, sugarcane bagasse, corn stalks, vegetable waste and cattle manure.

Reported Feedstock Characteristics:-

Various feedstocks were evaluated to determine initial physicochemical properties. Agricultural wastes such as Rice husk, Sugarcane bagasse, Corn stalks, and Vegetable waste were utilized. Animal manure (cattle dung) served as a co-substrate and inoculum source.

FEEDSTOCK	C/N RATIO	VS %	PH
Rice Husk	45:1	78.2	6.8
Sugarcane Bagasse	120:1	82.5	5.5
Corn Stalks	35:1	88.4	6.5
Vegetable Waste	15:1	65.0	5.2
Cattle Manure	18:1	70.5	7.4

Figure 2. Feedstock characteristics reported in the thesis.

The reported experimental characterization gives rice husk a C/N ratio of 45:1, volatile solids of 78.2%, and pH of 6.8. Sugarcane bagasse is reported to have a C/N ratio of 120:1. Corn stalks show a C/N ratio of 35:1 and volatile solids of 88.4%. Vegetable waste has a C/N ratio of 15:1 and high moisture content, while cattle manure has a reported pH of 7.4. The thesis interprets these differences as important for digestion performance. Carbon-rich residues can require nitrogen balancing, while materials with lower C/N ratios can contribute nitrogen. Cattle manure is described as a co-substrate and inoculum source that can improve microbial stability.

Pretreatment of Agricultural Residues:-**Rationale for Pretreatment:-**

Hydrolysis is described as the first and frequently rate-limiting stage of anaerobic digestion. Lignocellulosic agricultural residues contain cellulose microfibrils embedded within a lignin-hemicellulose matrix, making the organic material less accessible to hydrolytic microorganisms. Pretreatment is therefore considered to improve accessibility of fermentable components and enhance digestion.

Physical Pretreatment:-

The thesis reviews mechanical size reduction, steam explosion, ultrasonic irradiation and microwave treatment as physical pretreatment methods. Mechanical treatment reduces particle size and increases specific surface area. The reported literature indicates that mechanical milling below 1 mm has improved biogas yield by 10–25% for various lignocellulosic substrates, although energy requirements can offset some of the additional energy obtained. The experimental methodology specifies hammer-mill treatment of lignocellulosic feedstocks to target particle sizes of 1–2 mm and 2–5 mm, with blender grinding for softer substrates. Energy consumption was to be measured using a calibrated power meter.

Chemical Pretreatment:-

Chemical pretreatment in the thesis includes alkaline, acidic and oxidative approaches. Alkaline pretreatment using sodium hydroxide is described as a method for delignification and cellulose swelling. The methodology specifies NaOH concentrations of 1%, 2%, 4% and 6%, temperatures of 50°C, 70°C and 90°C, and contact durations of 30, 60 and 90 minutes. The reported experimental result selected 2% NaOH at 70°C for 60 minutes. The thesis reports a 24.5% reduction in lignin content, a 42% increase in biogas yield, and a 15-day reduction in digestion time following pretreatment.

Biological Pretreatment:-

Biological pretreatment is described using white-rot fungi including *Pleurotus ostreatus* and *Trametes versicolor*. The methodology specifies fungal inoculation of rice and wheat straw at 10% inoculum-to-substrate ratio and incubation periods of 7, 14, 21 and 30 days. The effectiveness is to be assessed through lignin degradation, cellulose crystallinity and enzymatic activities. The reviewed literature reports that *Pleurotus ostreatus* pretreatment of rice straw for 30 days increased methane yield by 53% relative to untreated straw, while the extended treatment duration remains a limitation.

Co-Digestion of Agricultural Feedstocks:-

Co-digestion is defined in the thesis as the simultaneous anaerobic digestion of two or more feedstocks. Its reported benefits include nutrient complementarity, dilution of inhibitory compounds, supply of trace elements, provision of alkalinity, and increased microbial diversity and activity. The co-digestion of carbon-rich crop residues with nitrogen-rich livestock manures is described as a strategy for achieving a suitable C/N ratio. The thesis identifies an optimum C/N range of 20–30:1 for robust microbial growth and adequate buffering capacity.

The reviewed study by Hagos et al. is reported to have obtained a 40% improvement in methane yield from cattle manure and crop residue co-digestion at a 50:50 mixing ratio on a VS basis. Achinas et al. reported the highest specific methane production at a C/N ratio of 25:1 for grass clippings and food waste. Pramanik et al. reported that a 60% cattle dung and 40% kitchen waste mixture achieved the highest biogas yield while maintaining stable process conditions. Kafle and Chen reported 421 mL CH₄/g VS for food waste and dairy manure co-digestion at an optimized inoculum-to-substrate ratio of 0.5 using RSM.

Experimental Framework:-

The thesis describes a multi-phase framework beginning with feedstock characterization and progressing through pretreatment, co-digestion, process optimization and techno-economic evaluation. Feedstocks are to be sampled in triplicate and characterized for total solids, volatile solids, moisture, ash, CHNS/O, COD, TKN, phosphorus, cellulose, hemicellulose, lignin and C/N ratio. Batch and semi-continuous digestion experiments are described using 1 L and 5 L reactors. The experimental program includes BMP assays, batch experiments evaluating pretreatment and co-digestion ratio, and semi-continuous experiments evaluating organic loading rate and hydraulic retention time.

Results and Discussion:-**Feedstock Suitability:-**

The reported characterization demonstrates substantial variation among the agricultural materials. Rice husk is described as having moderate biodegradability but limited digestion efficiency because of high lignin content. Sugarcane bagasse is carbon-rich and nitrogen-deficient. Corn stalks are reported to have comparatively balanced characteristics and high volatile solids. Vegetable waste has high moisture and relatively rapid biodegradation. Cattle manure is described as improving microbial stability when used as a co-substrate. The thesis concludes from these observations that combining feedstocks can help maintain nutrient balance and improve methane productivity compared with individual substrates.

Pretreatment Results:-

Mechanical shredding reduced particle size to <2mm. Alkali treatment (2% NaOH at 70°C for 60 min) disrupted lignocellulosic bonds, vastly improving cellulose accessibility for hydrolysis.

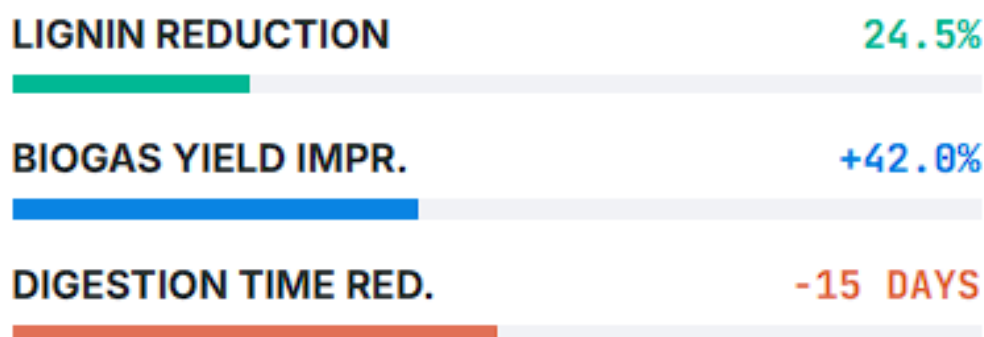


Figure 3. Pretreatment results: lignin reduction, biogas-yield improvement and digestion-time reduction.

Mechanical shredding reduced particle size below 2 mm, increasing surface accessibility for microbial activity. The subsequent 2% NaOH treatment at 70°C for 60 minutes was reported to reduce lignin content by 24.5%. The thesis reports that biogas yield increased by 42% and digestion time decreased by 15 days. These results are presented as evidence of improved substrate conversion and biodegradability following pretreatment.

Table 1. Feedstock Suitability and Pretreatment Results

Parameter	Result
Rice husk	Moderate biodegradability; limited digestion efficiency due to high lignin content
Sugarcane bagasse	Carbon-rich and nitrogen-deficient
Corn stalks	Comparatively balanced characteristics; high volatile solids
Vegetable waste	High moisture content; relatively rapid biodegradation
Cattle manure	Improves microbial stability when used as a co-substrate
Feedstock combination	Helps maintain nutrient balance and improve methane productivity
Mechanical shredding	Particle size reduced to <2 mm
Alkaline pretreatment	2% NaOH at 70°C for 60 minutes
Lignin reduction	24.5%
Increase in biogas yield	42%

Parameter	Result
Reduction in digestion time	15 days
Overall pretreatment effect	Improved substrate conversion and biodegradability

Discussion:-

The thesis literature and reported results collectively emphasize that feedstock composition is closely associated with anaerobic digestion performance. High-lignin residues require improved accessibility before efficient microbial degradation can occur, while differences in C/N ratio and moisture can influence process stability. Pretreatment addresses structural limitations, whereas co-digestion combines complementary feedstock properties. The literature review also identifies limitations in existing work, including insufficient integrated optimization of pretreatment, co-digestion ratios and operating parameters; limited validation under tropical and subtropical conditions; and insufficient economic evaluation. These gaps form the basis for the broader integrated framework described in the thesis.

Conclusion:-

Agricultural residues and livestock wastes provide diverse feedstock resources for anaerobic bioenergy production. Their performance depends on physicochemical properties including volatile solids, moisture, pH, lignocellulosic composition and C/N ratio. The thesis identifies pretreatment and co-digestion as important strategies for improving the conversion of difficult agricultural residues. The reported experimental results show that mechanical shredding followed by alkaline pretreatment using 2% NaOH at 70°C for 60 minutes reduced lignin content by 24.5%, increased biogas yield by 42%, and reduced digestion time by 15 days. The thesis also reports that combining different feedstocks can improve nutrient balance and methane productivity. These findings support the role of feedstock characterization, pretreatment and co-digestion within an integrated agricultural-waste-to-bioenergy system.

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