

Conversion of Solid Biomass into Biochar: Act as a Green, Eco-Friendly Energy Source and a Substitute of Fossils Fuel Inputs [†]

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[†] Presented at the First World Energies Forum, 14 September–5 October 2020;

Available online: <https://wef.sciforum.net/>.

Published: 11 September 2020

Abstract: To meet the global demand of energy requires an alternative source preferably with less concern of climate change. Biochar production from agricultural biomass waste by pyrolysis, deals a unique solution for producing a useful source of green energy. Biochar is carbon rich product with high heating value which is comparable with our primary energy sources (fossils fuels). Biochar can be utilized for various purposes such as energy production, soil enhancement and etc. Biochar can be more suitable for steelmaking, in view of their chemical and thermo-chemical characteristics including low ash, higher heating values (HHV), high surface area, etc. Biochar also can be selectively utilised selectively for soil amelioration, C-sequestration, and waste water treatment, in view of the suitability of their characteristics (such as higher values of pH, mineral content and surface area, etc.) for meeting the requirements for a particular purpose. This study associates the characteristics of biochar produced by slow pyrolysis at 800 °C for two biomass residues: corn cob and coconut shell. These results can be used to establish ideal utilization means of biomass for energy and/or biochar production.

Keywords: agricultural biomass waste materials; biochar; slow pyrolysis; heating value; surface area

1. Introduction

Among the various renewable energy sources, biomass has the potential to be used as alternative source of energy [1] with CO₂ neutral [2]. There is a need to convert the biomass into such a form that will go beyond all these related aspects with potential of utilisation for various productive purposes, like energy production and climate change mitigation [3]. Pyrolysis is one of green technologies to produce energy from biomass [4]. Biochar is recognized as a very significant tool of environmental management [5]. Biochar is a newly built technical term. According to Lehmann and Joseph [5], it is defined as “a carbon (C)-rich product”. Shackley et al. [6] defined biochar more descriptively as “the porous carbonaceous solid product”. Verheijen et al. [7] also defined biochar as “biomass that has been pyrolyzed in a zero or low oxygen environment applied to soil at a specific site”. All of these definitions are directly or indirectly related to the biochar production and its potential application. The fast depletion of high-grade coking coal reserves and negative impact of fossil fuels on the environment gives the led to use of renewable and alternate clean source of energy. Biochars is a carbon rich product derived from pyrolysis of the solid biomass wastes and their utilisation potential increasing the interest in the beneficial application in carbon sequestration, soil fertility improvement,

pollution remediation, waste water treatments, thermal & metallurgical purposes, iron & steel industry etc.

Biomass is a green renewable source of carbon and using it to produce biochar can release energy with virtually no sulphur and very little amount of nitrogen [8]. Producing of biochar from biomass waste appears to be one promising method of achieving greater levels of inevitability and flexibility for integrating the enhancement of carbon and soil fertility [9]. The application of biochar is gives an attention for improvement of soil quality and carbon sequestration [10,11]. In the soil, biochar increases the soil holding water capacity and nutrients, reducing the need for fertilizers. Biochar contains carbon, which can directly store for a long time due to its strong resistance to biological decomposition [12,13]. Biochar has high energy and is rather comparable to the coal used in the industries as feed stocks for fuel [14,15].

Hence the objective of present study was to have an insight into the characteristics of the biochars and evaluate their potential of utilisation.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Sample Collection and Preparation

Corn Cob (CC) and Coconut Shell (CS) were composed from the local area of Dhanbad, Jharkhand, India. These samples were ground to below 0.5 mm and dried in an air-oven at 60 °C for 24 h and pyrolyzed [16] in muffle furnace at temperature 800°C @ 5–10 °C/min heating rate. The carbonized product were then grounded to particle size of below 212 micron (–72 mesh) and further characterized for the biochar properties.

2.2. Proximate and Ultimate Analysis

To determine the proximate analysis followed under standard method ASTM E871-82, E1755-01, and E872-82 [16] for CC and CS and standard method ASTM D1762-84 [16] for corn cob char (CC_{ch}) and coconut shell char (CS_{ch}). The fixed carbon (FC) content was calculated by difference.

ASTM E777, 778 and 775 standard test method was followed for ultimate analysis [17] in order to determine the basic elemental composition [18] of all the samples using (Vario EL III) CHNS analyser.

2.3. Gross Calorific Value (Heating Value) and Surface Area

The gross calorific values of all the samples were determined by bomb calorimeter (T-451, TESTMASTER, Kolkata, India) followed by standard method (ASTM D4809-00) [19].

The surface area was determined using N₂ sorption isotherms using the Brunauer–Emmett–Teller (ASA P2020 BET, Downers Grove, IL, USA) Surface Area Analyzer [20].

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Proximate and Ultimate Analyses CC, CS, CC_{ch} and CS_{ch}

Proximate and ultimate analyses of CC, CS, CC_{ch} and CS_{ch} are shown in Table 1. The volatile matter of CC and CS are found to be on higher side i.e., 76.18 and 79.23% respectively in comparison to their corresponding char. VM content of biomass decreases with pyrolysis because the presence of lignin in the biomass waste feedstocks cannot resist the pyrolytic decomposition at temperatures as high as 800 °C [21].

From ultimate analysis data it can be observed that the principal components [22] such as, C, H, N, S and O, differs in both cases (biomass and its corresponding biochars). Higher the content of VM and FC in CS, there is higher content of C and H in CS than in CC. The carbon contents of obtained biochars are 74.54 and 79.31% for CC_{ch} and CS_{ch} respectively. Among all these elements, the contribution of carbon is highest in most of the biochars [23] which is followed by oxygen, then

hydrogen and then rest components. Although the compositions of nitrogen and sulphur content in biochar materials are low or approximately same.

Table 1. Characterization of the samples.

* Characterization	Samples			
	CC	CS	CC _{ch}	CS _{ch}
M%	3.20	2.11	3.45	3.54
Ash %	4.66	1.09	5.67	3.77
VM%	76.18	79.23	12.33	13.45
FC%	15.96	17.57	78.55	81.24
C%	45.90	50.10	81.23	84.62
H%	5.58	6.74	3.24	2.11
N%	0.75	0.35	0.33	0.28
S%	0.06	0.07	0.03	0.05
O%	41.95	38.67	15.17	12.94
GCV (MJ/Kg)	18.24	20.40	23.56	28.63
Surface Area (m ² g ⁻¹)	-	-	297.76	434.66

* All parameters are on as received basis.

3.2. Gross Calorific Value (GCV) and Surface Area

Gross Calorific Value (GCV) and surface area of the bio-chars are shown in Table 1. The biochars i.e., CC_{ch} and CS_{ch} have higher heating value (Gross Calorific Value) than the raw biomass i.e., CC and CS [21]. It may be because of the carbon content increases in biochar with pyrolysis. Presence of these C, H and O elements in biomass leads to more char formation as well as to the higher heating value of the product. The GCV for CC, CS, CC_{ch} and CS_{ch} varies in the range 18.24, 20.40, 23.56 and 28.63 MJ/Kg, respectively. Similarly BET surface area varies in the range 297.76 and 434.66 m²g⁻¹, for CC_{ch} and CS_{ch} respectively, which is in conformity with the observations of others [21,24,25].

Biochars have pore blocking substances, which are driven off or thermally cracked, leading to enhancement in the surface area and its pore volume [26]. The biomass more typical of these biomass have high content of VM thereby the derived biochars have high specific surface area [27].

4. Utilization Potential for Green Energy and Enhancement of Soil Fertility

The potential of utilisation for Green Energy and Enhancement for Soil Fertility depends on the characteristics of the biochars. Accordingly obtained biochars of CC and CS with targeted physicochemical properties is essential [28,29].

As the result obtained an efforts needed to be made to obtain the biochar having a good relation between its properties and reducing environmental costs with relatively less energy consumption [28–32]. The conversion process appears to be a potential option to utilise these biomass wastes for sustainable purposes including as a substitute of green energy sources. In this structure, it is germane to mention that though the volatile matter content of most of these biochars at ≥650 °C falls within the range (10–40 wt %) used for steelmaking industry [33], and also considering the other various parameters like higher content of FC, C, GCV and surface area.

These biochar materials with significant surface area (297.76 and 434.66 m²g⁻¹) are also evocative of their better application potential in improving the cation exchange capacity (CEC) of soil-attributable, and treating the soil and water contaminated with toxic elements and organic pollutants [34–36].

5. Conclusions

Biochar produced from the pyrolysis of corn cob and coconut shell biomass samples at 800 °C had different physical and chemical properties. Obtained biochars from these wastes have higher content of volatile matter, fixed carbon, C, H, and higher heating value i.e., gross calorific value. This

conversion of wastes from pyrolysis to biochar can be a potential option to utilise these wastes as a substitute of fossil-derived fuel (coal, oil etc.) to green renewable energy sources such as; for steel making, as a soil ameliorant, enhance soil fertility, and C-sequestration and also in waste water handling.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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