BUKTI KORESPONDENSI
ARTIKEL JURNAL

JUDUL ARTIKEL :
Physical Properties of Briquette Fertilizers Made from Urea and Fly Ash-Azolla

JURNAL :
J Trop Soils, Vol. 23, No. 3, 2018: 143-150. Available online at:
https://journal.unila.ac.id/index.php/tropicalsoil/issue/view/31/showToc.
https://10.5400/jts.2018.v23i3.143

PENULIS :
Agus Hermawan, Adipati Napoleon and Bakri

1	Submission Acknowledgement	10 Desember 2017
2	KOREKSI DARI REVIEWER	12 Mei 2017
3	Statement Letter of Originality of Manuscript	01 November 2018
4	KOreksi naskah dan penggantian biaya penerbitan JTS	09 Februari 2019
5	Vol 23, No 3	23 Maret 2019

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[JTS] Submission Acknowledgement

1 pesan

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Jurnal TANAH TROPIKA (Journal of Tropical Soils)
Jurnal TANAH TROPIKA (Journal of Tropical Soils)
http://journal.unila.ac.id/index.php/tropicalsoil/
DOI: 10.5400

ISSN 0852-257X

JURNAL TANAH TROPIKA

(JOURNAL OF TROPICAL SOILS)

Akreditasi Dirjen Dikti No: 108/DIKTI/Kep/2007

Jurusan Ilmu Tanah, Fakultas Pertanian, Universitas Lampung, Bandar Lampung 35145

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PHYSICAL PROPERTIES OF FLY ASH-AZOLLA-UREA COMPOSITE AS A FERTILIZING MATERIAL

ABSTRACT

Fly ash has a vast potential for use as a soil ameliorant that may improve soils physical, chemical and biological properties.The addition of biomassa of azolla as an organic manure and granulation of fly ash is necessary to make the ash applicable to fertilization and to improve its handling and storage characteristics.The objective of current research was to determine the physical properties of fly ash-Azolla biomass-urea composite as a fertilizing material.The research were arranged according to Factorial Completely Randomized Design with three replicates. The composite treatments tested weremade from fly ash-Azolla biomass FAZ(w/w of 40:60, 50:50, 60:40; 21 days incubation) and urea (46% N) at the rates of90:10, 80:20, and 70:30(w/w basis).Results of current research showed thatthe coal fly ash and Azolla biomass potentially to be use as a fertilizing material. The formulation of FAZ-U (60:40)70:20 and (60:40)70:30 tend to have the compressive strength, bulk density, porosity and water holding capacity better than the other formulation and indicated can release nutrient from urea slowly.

Keywords: Azolla biomass, Coal fly ash, composite, fertilizing material

INTRODUCTION

Coal fly ash, a by-product of coal combustion, is an amorphous aluminosilicate material and composed of particulate matter collected from flue gas stream. The use of coal produces about 5% ash (fly ash and bottom ash), and about 10-20% is bottom ash and 80-90% is fly ash (Kishor *et al.*, 2010).The increasing use of coal for electric power generation will generate large quantities of ash.The fly ash, which is a resource material, if not managed well, may pose environmental challenges.Therefore, efforts are being made to recycle these materials to prevent further environmental problems.

Fly ash is a heterogeneous mixture of an amorphous aluminosilicate material (Carlson and Adriano, 1993; Kishor *et al.*, 2010). Chemically, fly ash contains oxides, hydroxides, carbonates, silicates, and sulfates of calcium, iron, aluminum, and other metals in trace amount i.e. almost all the nutrients present in the soil. Fly ash was also found to have high pH value, and high cation exchange capacity (Carlson and Adriano, 1993; Kishor *et al.*, 2010). Physically, fly ash is a material containing granules which are fine in size (0,01 – 100 μm). It comprised of about 69 percent silt and clay size fractions (Singh *et al.*, 2011). Fly ash materials are pozzolanic, exhibiting cementitious properties when exposed to water and an activator (Adriano *et al.*, 1980; Singh *et al.*, 2011). Because of its physico-chemical characteristics, fly ash has a vast potential for use as a soil ameliorant that may improve soils physical, chemical and biological properties.

The chemical constituents of coal ash are commonly found in soil, rock and other parts of the earth's crust. Therefore, coalflyashis relativelysafetouse asameliorantonagricultural landandis knownincreased crop production(Mitra *et al.*, 2003;Aggarwal *et al.*, 2009; Kishor *et al.*, 2010; Pandey and Singh, 2010). It was also realized that fly ash addition could also decrease the bulk density of soils, which, in turn, improved soil porosity and workability and enhanced water retention capacity (Kishor *et al.*, 2010). Pandey and Singh (2010) found that incorporating of fly ash into the soil modifies the physico-chemical, biological and nutritional quality of the soil. Sajwan *et al.* (2006) described that the use of fly ash as a soil ameliorant can be enhanced by blending it with organic matter. The benefits may include better nutrient balance, reduction in toxins or contaminants, improved moisture content, and improved soil conditioning effects (Hanani *et al.*, 2010).

That kind of fly ash is very dusty and contains no N, and the amounts of C are minor. Therefore, addition of biomassa of azollaas an organic manure and granulation of fly ash is necessary to make the ash applicable to fertilization and to improve its handling and storage characteristics (Trenkel, 2010; Teixeiraet *al.*, 2016).The aim of this study was to determine the possibilities to improve the handling and fertilization characteristics of fly ash through addition of organic manure as an composite.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Coalflyashobtainedfrom a coal-fired thermal power station inMuaraEnim District, SouthSumatra. Biomassa of azollatakenfrom theazolla cultured pondSoil Science Department Sriwijaya University. Coalflyashandbiomassa of azollawas air dried and sieved with 0,05 mm and 2.0 mm size, respectively.The coal fly ash-azolla mixture (FAZ) with composition of 40:60, 50:50, 60:40 (w/w basis) were mixed thoroughly, weighed to 5 kg on dry-weight basis, potted, and incubated for 21 days.During theincubationperiod, the water content ofthe mixture was maintained at field capacity by adding deionized water based on water losses.After incubation, FAZ was air dried and sieved with 2.0 mm size.

The research were arranged according to Factorial Completely Randomized Design with three replicates.The composite treatments tested weremade from fly ash-Azolla biomass FAZ(w/w of 40:60, 50:50, 60:40; 21 days incubation) and urea (46% N) at the rates of90:10, 80:20, and 70:30(w/w basis). The FAZ-Urea mixture (FAZU) foreach composition were mixed thoroughly with 5% starch as a binder.Ionic free water were added to the mixture to form a paste and then fed into the mold and compacted. The composite mold is made using a paralon pipe with diameter1,90 cmand cut along 4 cm.The produced compocite were dried at a temperature of ± 50^0C for 24 hours.

The produced of the FAZU compositewere analysed of the physical characteristics include: porosity, bulk density, water holding capacity, compressive strength, and dissolution rate.Statistical analysisforallobservedparameterswasconductedbyusingAnalysis of Variance (ANOVA) followed by Least Significance Difference (LSD) test at level of P<0.05.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Coal Fly Ash and Azolla Biomass

Coal fly ash used in this study is classified as base.The total P and Kcontent of this material is low. The levels of C-organic and N-total are also very low (Table 1).Low content of organic C and total-N is caused by the burning processes of coal at high temperatures (Singh *et al*., 2011; Mupambwa*et al*., 2015).In addition, the used of coal fly ash is dominated by silt and clay-sized particles (713.20 gkg^{-1}) (Table 1), suggesting that they easily react with the organic manures.Coal fly ash is a complex material dominated by fero-aluminosilicate minerals, has pozzolan properties (like cement) and contains Ca as dominant cations(Adriano *et al*., 1980; Kishor *et al*., 2010;Singh *et al*., 2011).The characteristics of this material indicate its potential as a fertilizer coating material (Qiu et al., 2011).

The results of the analysis of some of the chemical characteristics of azolla biomass used in this study (Table 1) show that this organic fertilizer has a slightly acidic pH, with a high total N, P and K content.Meanwhile, the total P-content of this material is relatively low. The C / N biomass of azolla is very low which indicates that this biomass can decompose to form organic compounds, such as humic acid.Organic acids can play a role in binding nutrients, so it is not easily soluble and washed (Nainggolan *et al*., 2009).Organic matter is known to play a role in the retention of nutrients such as ammonium into the structure of organic compounds either directly or indirectly through microbiological activity (Tan, 2003; Havlin *et al*., 2005).

Characteristics of Coal Fly Ash-Azolla Biomass and Urea Composite

a. Compressive strength

The results of analysis of variance (Table 2) showed that the proportion of coal fly ash, azola biomass and both interaction have a very significantly effect on the compressive strengthof the composite produced.Table 3 shows that the level of compressive strengthof the compositewith the composition of coal fly ash:azola biomass:urea ((60:40)70:30) not significantly different when compared to composition of(60:40)80:20, (60:40)90:10, (50:50)90:10, and (50:50)80:20, but significantly higher than other compositions.

Table 3 also shows that the increased proportion of coal fly ash will increase compressive strengthof the composite significantly.Meanwhile, the increased percentage of added urea will decrease the level of compressive strengthof the composite.Figure 1 also shows that the level of compressive strengthof the composite tend to decrease by increasing the proportion of urea addition.

The compressive strengthof the composite in the various compositions of coal fly ash and azolla biomass varied between 1.13 and 1.87 kg / cm 2 (Table 3). The level of compressive strength is influenced by water content, organic matter content, and mineral content (Kurnia *et al.*, 2006).Water content (Table 5) and higher organic content tends to decrease the level of compressive strength, and increased mineral content tends to increase the compressive strengthof the composite.In this case,the composites with higher compressive strength are considered better, as they are less easily destroyed and the ease of transport of composite fertilizer produced.

b. Bulk Density

The results of the analysis of variance (Table 2) showed that the proportion of coal fly ash and azolla biomass have a very significantly effect and their interaction has significantly effect on the bulk densityof the composite produced.Table 4 shows that bulk density of the composite with the composition of coal fly ash: azola biomass: urea ((60:40)70:30) is not significantly different when compared to (60:40):90:10, and (60:40)80:20, but significantly higher than other compositions.Table 4 and Figure 2 also show that the increased proportion of coal fly ash significantly increases the bulk density of the composites or the increased proportion of azolla biomass significantly decreases the bulk densityof the composite produced.Meanwhile, changes in urea percentages addition were relatively variable and there was a tendency to increase the composite bulk density by increasing the percentage of urea added.

Bulk density describes the weight of the composite per total composite volume, so that the high value of bulk density characterizes the solids contained in the composite will be higher, the lower the pore space and the higher of the compressive strength.Table 4 and Figure 2 show that the composite compressive strength level is getting higher with the increase in the proportion of coal fly ash on the composite.This condition also reflects the porosity of composites, where low bulk density will tend to have higher porosity than composites with higher bulk density values (Table 6).

The bulk density of the composites produced in this study varied between 0.66 - 1.09 gram / cm3.Kurnia *et al.* (2006) suggests that mineral soil bulk density varies between 0.80 to 1.40 g/cm^3) and peat soils vary between 0.60 to 0.80 g/cm^3.Bulk density composites with a higher proportion of organic matter (biomass azolla) were significantly lower than in composites with a lower proportion of organic matter.It appears that increased composite bulk density is also followed by increased the compressive strengthof the composite(Table 3).

c. Water Content

The water content of the composite was measured after the composite was dried in an oven with a temperature of 50^{0}C for 24 hours.The results of the analysis of variance (Table 2) showed that the proportion of coal fly ash, azola biomass and their interaction has a very significantly effect on the water content of the composite produced.Table 5 shows that the water content of the composite in the coal fly ash composition - azolla biomass in the ratio of 40:60 and 50:50 is significantly higher than that of composites in compositions with a higher proportion of coal fly ash.

In addition, the composites in treatment with higher fly ash compositions (50:60) had significantly lower water content than other compositions (Table 5). Figure 2 also shows that the organic matter content of the composite appears to have a significantly effect on the water content of the composite produced (Table 5).Organic matter is known to have high water holding capacity (Stevenson, 1994), so that water content will increase as the proportion of azolla biomass in the composite increases.

d. Water Holding Capacity

The treatment of coal fly ash and azolla biomass composition significantly affected the water holding capacity of the composite (Table 2).The least significance difference (LSD) test result (Table 6) shows thatthe WHC of the composite with the composition of coal fly ash: azola biomass: urea ((40-60)90:10) is not significantly different when compared to (40-60) 70:30, but significantly higher than other compositions.

Table 6 also shows that the increased proportion of azola biomass will increase WHC significantly or an increase in the proportion of coal fly ash on composites will significantly lowering WHC of the composite.Meanwhile, the increasing percentage of urea fertilizer added tends to vary.Organic materials with a high water holding capacity cause WHC of the composite will increase.Water holding capacity is related to the content of organic materials and mineral materials in a material.Organic matter is known to have a high water retention (Stevenson, 1994), and coal fly ash which is a mineral material known to have lower water retention (Carlson and Adriano, 1993).

e. Porosity

Porosity or total pore space is the volume of all pores in a volume of a material expressed in percent.Porosity reflects the degree of the passage of water mass flow (permability) or the velocity of water flow to pass through the mass of a material.Porosity determines the value of the bulk density.The greater the number of pores, the lower the density of the mass or the higher porosity and the lower the number of pores, the higher the density of the mass or the porosity is lower (Hardjowigeno, 1993).

Table 7 showed that the composite with the composition of coal fly ash:azola biomass:urea (60-40)70:30 is not significantly different than other compositions.However, there is a tendency to increase the composite porosity by increasing the proportion of azolla biomass.Higher organic content (biomass azolla) can cause the amount of pores in the composite to increase, so that the composite porosity tends to increase.Soil porosity is influenced by organic matter content, soil structure, and soil texture. Soil porosity is high when organic matter is high (Hardjowigeno, 1993).

Meanwhile, Figure 2 shows that an increase in the percentage of urea added to the coal fly ash-azolla biomas composition (40:60) tends to increase the composite porosity.but on the lower azolla biomass composition ((50-50) and 60:40)), the composite porosity tends to decrease with increasing percentage of added urea fertilizer.This is thought to be due to the increased proportion of coal fly ash will decrease the amount of pores in the composite and cause the porosity to decrease.The size of coal fly ash particles dominated by silt and clay particles (<50μm) (Hermawan *et al.*, 2014) causes the composite become denser.The reduced of pore amount causes the bulk density of the composite to be higher (Table 4) and is associated with increased the compressive strength (Table 3).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The coal fly ash and Azolla biomass potentially to be use as a fertilizing material. The formulation of FAZ-U (60:40)70:20 and (60:40)70:30 tend to have the compressive strength, bulk density, porosity and water holding capacity better than the other formulation and indicated can release nutrient from urea slowly.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The data presented at the this paper is a subset of the data from the research activities funded by the Competitive Research Featured, Sriwijaya University for Fiscal Year 2017, for that we say thank you. Thanks are also extended to Mr.Wahyu Anggono, Mr. Febri Saputra and Miss Kartika Fatima, a graduate student in the Department of Soil Science, Agricultural Faculty Sriwijaya University, who have helped and are directly involved in the implementation of this study.

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Tables and Figures:

Table 1. Characteristics of Coal Fly Ash and Azolla Biomass

Parameters	Unit	Results	
		Coal Fly Ash	Azolla Biomass
pH H_2O	-	8,74	5.75
Organic-C	g kg^{-1}	1,10	33,80
Total-N	g kg^{-1}	0,10	18,50
Total-P	g kg^{-1}	0,60	0,60
Total-K	g kg^{-1}	0,60	18,70
Fraction:			
Sand	g kg^{-1}	285,90	
Silt	g kg^{-1}	552,50	
Clay	g kg^{-1}	160,70	

Table2. Summary of analysis of variance (ANOVA) the effect of coal fly ash-azolla and urea fertilizer formulation on some physical characteristics of the composite

Parameters	Effect of Treatment		
	FAZ	Urea	Interaction
Compressive Strength	**	**	**
Bulk Density	**	**	*
Water Content	**	**	**
Water Holding Capacity	**	**	ns
Porosity	ns	ns	**

Remarks: ns/ */ ** = not significantly/ signifincant/ very significant

Table3. The effect of coal fly ash-azolla and urea fertilizer formulation on compressive strength (kg/cm^2) of the composite

FAZ Compossition	Urea			Effect of FAZ
	10	20	30	
(40:60)90,80,70	1,30ab	1,23a	1,13a	1,22a
(50:50)90,80,70	1,77cd	1,80cd	1,57bc	1,71b
(60:40)90,80,70	1,87d	1,83cd	1,63cd	1,78c
Effect of Urea (U)	1,64b	1,62 b	1,44a	

$BNT_{(0,05)Comb} = 0,28$; $BNT_{(0,05)FAZ\ and\ Urea} = 0,20$

Remarks : Numbers followed by the same letter are not significantly different (P<0.05)

Table4. The effect of coal fly ash-azolla and urea fertilizer formulation on bulk density ($gram/cm^3$) of the composite

FAZ Compossition	Urea (%)			Effect of FAZ
	10	20	30	
(40:60)90,80,70	0,66a	0,83b	0,84b	0,78 a
(50:50)90,80,70	0,83b	0,93c	0,82b	0,86b
(60:40)90,80,70	0,96c	1,09d	0,95c	1,00c
Effect of Urea (U)	0,82a	0,95b	0,87a	

$BNT_{(0,05)Comb} = 0,08$; $BNT_{(0,05)FAZ\ and\ Urea} = 0,06$

Remarks : Numbers followed by the same letter are not significantly different (P<0.05)

Table5. The effect of coal fly ash-azolla and urea fertilizer formulation on water content (%) of the composite

FAZ Compossition	Urea (%)			Effect of FAZ
	10	20	30	
(40:60)90,80,70	46,07f	30,03cd	33,78cd	36,63b
(50:50)90,80,70	34,29d	33,96d	41,36e	36,54b
(60:40)90,80,70	22,53a	29,23bc	30,91cd	27,56a
Effect of Urea (U)	34,30ab	31,08a	35,35b	

$BNT_{(0,05)Comb} = 4,56$; $BNT_{(0,05)FAZ\ and\ Urea} = 3,23$

Remarks : Numbers followed by the same letter are not significantly different (P<0.05)

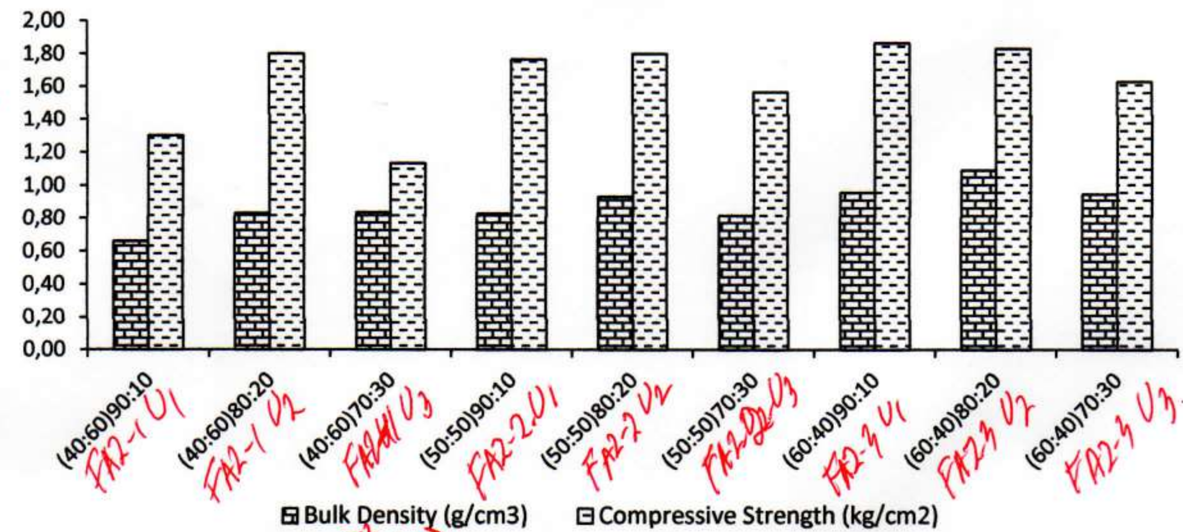

Figure 1. Compressive strength and bulk density of the composite with various formulation of coal fly ash, azolla biomass and urea

Table6. The effect of coal fly ash-azolla and urea fertilizer formulation on water holding capacity (%) of the composite

FAZ Compossition	Urea (%)			Effect of FAZ
	10	20	30	
(40:60)90,80,70	61,12d	53,25bc	63,82d	59,40 c
(50:50)90,80,70	55,60c	51,27b	55,28c	54,05 b
(60:40)90,80,70	49,32b	44,25a	51,16b	48,24a
Effect of Urea (U)	55,35c	49,59a	56,75c	

$BNT_{(0,05)Comb} = 4,29$; $BNT_{(0,05)FAZ\ and\ Urea} = 3,03$

Remarks : Numbers followed by the same letter are not significantly different (P<0.05)

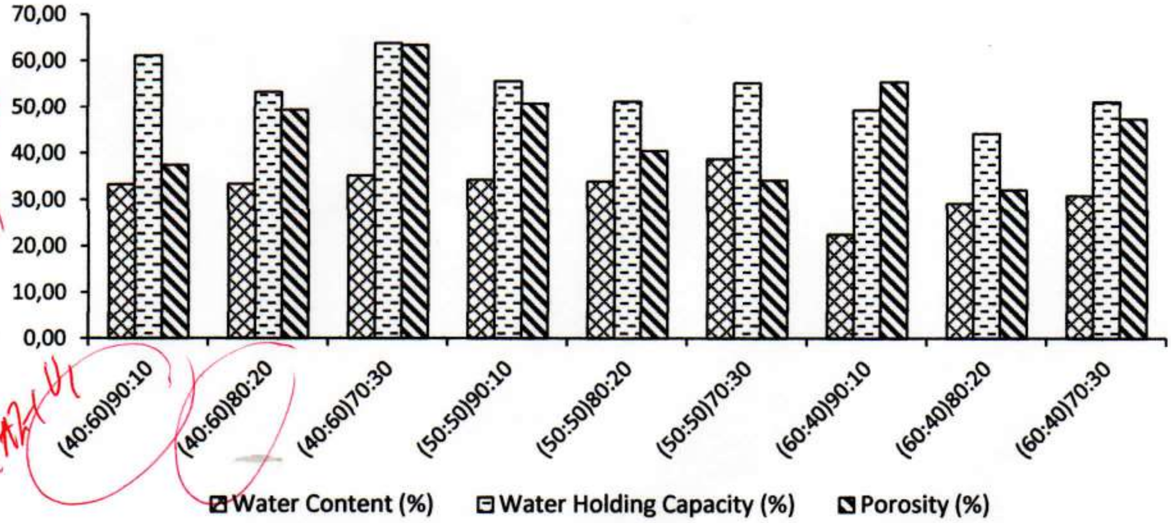

Figure 2. Water content (%), water holding capacity and porosity of the composite with various formulation of coal fly ash, azolla biomass and urea

Table7. The effect of coal fly ash-azolla and urea fertilizer formulation on porosity (%) of the composite

FAZ Compossition	Urea (%)			Effect of FAZ
	10	20	30	
(40:60)90,80,70	37,47ab	49,29bcd	63,39d	50,05a
(50:50)90,80,70	50,78bcd	40,49abc	34,17ab	41,81a
(60:40)90,80,70	55,49cd	32,15a	47,36abcd	44,00a
Effect of Urea (U)	47,92a	40,64a	48,31a	

$BNT_{(0,05)Comb} = 17,06$; $BNT_{(0,05)FAZ\ and\ Urea} = 12,06$

Remarks : Numbers followed by the same letter are not significantly different (P<0.05)

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Treatments code

Parameters

1. FAZ-1 U_1
2. FAZ-1 U_2
3. FAZ-1 U_3
4. FAZ-2 U_1
5. FAZ-2 U_2
6. FAZ-2 U_3
7. FAZ-3 U_1
8. FAZ-3 U_2
9. FAZ-3 U_3

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JOURNAL OF TROPICAL SOILS
ISSN 0852-257X e-ISSN 2086-6682

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Vol 23, No 3

September 2018

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.5400/jts.v23i3

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By Agus Hermawan

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DOI: 10.5400/jts.2018.v23i3.143

Physical Properties of Briquette Fertilizers Made from Urea and Fly Ash-Azolla

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Received 13 February 2018/ accepted 29 August 2018

ABSTRACT

Coal fly ash and Azolla biomass are potential materials to be used as raw materials for the manufacture of briquette fertilizers. In this study, the coal fly ash, azolla and urea in various compositions were mixtured to make briquette fertilizers. The study was conducted to evaluate the physical properties of briquette fertilizers, *i.e* bulk density, compressive strength, porosity, and water holding capacity on various compositions of fly ash-azolla and urea. The research was arranged in a Completely Randomized Design with three replicates. The formulation of briquette fertilizers as treatments was made with the compossition (w/w, dry-weight basis) of (fly ash : azolla) + urea as follows: (40:60)90+10; (40:60)80+20; (40:60)70+30; (50:50)90+10; (50:50)80+20; (50:50)70+30; (60:40)90+10; (60:40)80+20 and (60:40)70+30. The results showed that the variation in composition of coal fly ash-azolla and urea significantly affected the compressive strength, bulk density, water holding capacity and porosity of briquette fertilizers produced. The increase in the proportion of fly ash or the decrease of azolla biomass proportion tends to increase compressive strength and bulk density, and tends to decrease the water holding capacity and porosity of briquette fertilizers produced.

Keywords: Azolla, briquette fertilizer, fly ash, urea

ABSTRAK

Abu terbang batubara dan biomassa Azolla merupakan bahan yang potensial untuk digunakan sebagai bahan baku pembuatan pupuk briket. Pada penelitian ini dilakukan pencampuran abu terbang batubara, azolla dan urea dengan berbagai komposisi untuk membuat pupuk dalam bentuk briket. Penelitian ini dilakukan untuk mengevaluasi beberapa karakteristik fisika pupuk briket pada berbagai komposisi abu terbang batubara-azolla dan urea, yang meliputi kerapatan isi, kuat tekan, porositas, dan kapasitas menahan air. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan menggunakan Rancangan Acak Lengkap dengan tiga ulangan. Perlakuan yang diterapkan adalah formulasi pupuk briket yang dibuat dari campuran (abu terbang batubara:Azolla) + Urea dengan komposisi (b/ b, berat kering) sebagai berikut: (40:60)90+10; (40:60)80+20; (40:60)70+30; (50:50)90+10; (50:50)80+20; (50:50)70+30; (60:40)90+10; (60:40)80+20 and (60:40)70+30. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa variasi komposisi abu terbang batubara-azolla dan urea berpengaruh nyata terhadap kuat tekan, kerapatan isi, kapasitas menahan air dan porositas pupuk briket yang dihasilkan. Peningkatan proporsi abu terbang batubara atau penurunan proporsi biomassa Azolla cenderung meningkatkan kuat tekan dan kerapatan isi, dan cenderung menurunkan kapasitas menahan air dan porositas pupuk briket yang dihasilkan.

Kata kunci: Abu terbang batubara, Azolla, pupuk briket, urea

INTRODUCTION

Fertilization efficiency is known to be very low, in which around 40-70% N, 80-90% P, and 50-70% K applied in the form of fertilizers are lost to the environment and can not be taken up by plants (Trenkel 2010; Lubkowski 2014). One way to improve fertilizer use efficiency is by coating artificial fertilizers using a material that can slow down the release of nutrients from fertilizers, which is called as slow release fertilizer (Trenkel 2010; Lubkowski 2014).

The release of nutrients from coated fertilizers basically occurs through a diffusion process that passes through permeable or semi-permeable coatings (Shaviv 2005; Trenkel 2010). In general, thin and porous layers have a high release rate, while smooth, uniform and thicker layers indicate more control over nutrient release and can substantially withstand nutrient release rates. Physical characteristics of coating materials such as size, shape and surface also affect nutrient release patterns (Trenkel 2010; Ali and Danafar 2015). Therefore, the rate of release of nutrients can be controlled through characteristic manipulation of coating materials, such as thickness or physical-chemical composition.

A good fertilizer coating material must have at least 4 characteristics, namely low prices, biodegradable, non-toxic, and abundant availability (Trenkel 2010; Ali and Danafar 2015). Some inorganic minerals and organic materials have been reported to be used in the manufacture of slow release fertilizers, including silicate compounds, sulfur, gypsum, lime, cement, zeolite, fly ash, lignin, organic acids, chitosan and humic (Nainggolan *et al*. 2009; Sulakhudin *et al*. 2011; Qiu *et al*. 2011; Hou *et al*. 2014; Lubkowski 2014; Behin and Sadeghi 2016; Teixeira *et al*. 2016). Nevertheless, the process of making slow release fertilizers is still relatively complicated and relatively more expensive than conventional fertilizers, making it difficult to be accepted at the farm level (Qiu *et al*. 2011; Dong *et al*. 2016).

Coal fly ash and Azolla biomass are potential materials to be used as raw materials for the manufacture of slow release fertilizers. Coal fly ash, a by-product of coal combustion, is an amorphous aluminosilicate material and composed of particulate matter collected from flue gas stream (Singh *et al*. 2011). Coal fly ash is dominated by fine-sized particles (0.01-100 ìm) and has podzolanic properties (like cement), so it can act as an adhesive and fertilizer coating. Coal fly ash contains Ca cations as the dominant cation followed by Mg, Na and K (Kishor *et al*. 2010; Singh *et al*. 2011; Yao *et al*. 2015), which can play a role in cation exchange. In addition, this material also contains other plant nutrients, such as P, S, B, Fe, Cu, Zn, Mn and Mo, so it will enrich the nutrient content of fertilizer (Kishor *et al*. 2010; Singh *et al*. 2011; Srinavas *et al*. 2017).

Organic materials also have characteristics that are very potential to be used as a fertilizer coating material. Decomposition of organic matter will produce organic acids such as humic and fulvic acids, which are dominated by negative charges (Sposito 2008). Therefore, organic acids can bind nutrients from fertilizers through chemical reactions directly or indirectly through microbiological activity and decomposition of microbial biomass (Havlin *et al*. 2005; Sulakhudin *et al*. 2011; Teixeira *et al*. 2016). One potential source of organic material is azolla (*Azolla sp*.). Azolla is a water fern. Symbiosis of Azolla with cyanobacteria *Anabaena azollae* is able to fix nitrogen from the atmosphere around 30-60 kg N ha^{-1} (Kollah *et al*. 2015; Roy *et al*. 2016). The low C/N ratio of Azolla biomass (between 9-10) indicates that the biomass will rapidly decompose and produce available nutrients and organic acids as decomposition products (Bhuvaneshwari and Kumar 2013; Roy *et al*. 2016). The use of coal fly ash and organic matter mixtures is known to increase the efficiency of using N, P, and K fertilizers by 45.8%, 33.5% and 69.6%, respectively compared to the use of chemical fertilizers or a combination of chemical fertilizers and organic matter (Mitra *et al*. 2003; Kishor *et al*. 2010). Hermawan *et al*. (2014) also reported that the use of a mixture of coal fly ash and organic fertilizer in bulk form could increase the efficiency of fertilizer use by 42.4%.

The coal fly ash that has podzolanic properties (like cement) with a high content of alkaline oxide, and azolla biomass that is rich in N and will produce organic acids show its potential as an alternative to urea fertilizer coatings. In this study, mixing of coal fly ash, azolla biomass and urea fertilizer in various compositions was carried out to make briquette fertilizers which are expected to be able to release nutrients slowly into the soil. Physical characteristics of briquette fertilizers are known to affect the rate of release of nutrients from fertilizers into the soil (Trenkel 2010; Ali and Danafar 2015). Therefore, a study was conducted to evaluate the physical characteristics of briquettes, such as bulk density, compressive strength, porosity, and water holding capacity of briquettes on various compositions of coal fly ash, azolla and urea.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Preparation of Briguette Fertilizer

Coal fly ash was obtained from a coal-fired thermal power station in Muara Enim District, South Sumatra. Biomass of azolla was taken from the azolla cultured pond at Department of Soil Science, Sriwijaya University. The coal fly ash is dominated by silt and clay-sized particles (713.20 g kg^{-1}), water content (21 g kg^{-1}), pH (8.74), organic-C (0.11 g kg^{-1}), total-N (0.01 g kg^{-1}), total-P (0.6 g kg^{-1}) and total-K (0.6 g kg^{-1}). The chemical characteristics of azolla biomass used in this study as follow: pH (5.75), organic-C (33.80 g kg^{-1}), total-N (18.5 g kg^{-1}), P (1.60 g kg^{-1}), and K (18.70 g kg^{-1}). Coal fly ash and biomass of azolla were air dried and sieved with 0.05 mm and 2.0 mm diameter size, respectively.

The experiment was conducted in the Laboratory of Chemistry, Biology and Soil Fertility, Department of Soil Science, Faculty of Agriculture, Sriwijaya University in September 2017 to January 2018. The research was arranged in a Completely Randomized Design with three replicates. The formulation of briquette fertilizers as treatments was made with the compossition (w/w, dry-weight basis) of (fly ash (F) : biomassa of azolla (AZ)) + urea (U) as follows: (40:60)90+10 (FAZ_1-U_1); (40:60)80+20 (FAZ_1-U_2); (40:60)70+30 (FAZ_1-U_3); (50:50)90+10 (FAZ_2-U_1); (50:50)80+20 (FAZ_2-U_2); (50:50)70+30 (FAZ_2-U_3); (60:40)90+10 (FAZ_3-U_1); (60:40)80+20 (FAZ_3-U_2) and (60:40)70+30 (FAZ_3-U_3). The coal fly ash-azolla mixture (FAZ) and urea of each composition were mixed thoroughly with 5% starch as a binder. Ionic free water was added to adjust the moisture content of about 25% and then the mixture was put into the mold and compacted. The briquette mold was made using a PVC pipe with a diameter of 1.90 cm and cut along 4 cm. The produced briquettes were dried at a temperature of ± 50°C for 24 hours.

Data Collection and Analysis

The briquette fertlizers were analysed for their physical properties including water retention capacity, porosity, bulk density, and the compressive stength. Water retention capacity of briquette fertilizer is the difference between initial weight and final weight of the briquette. Briquette fertilizer samples that have been known for their water content were weighed as initial weight. Then it was saturated with ion free water using a beakerglass for 1 hour. The samples of briquette fertilizer that were saturated with water were then weighed, as the final weight. Porosity was calculated by dividing the volume of water absorbed by the volume of briquette fertilizer. Bulk density of briquette fertilizer was calculated by dividing the dry weight of briquette fertilizer with the total volume of briquette fertilizer. The compressive strength test was carried out using the Hand Penetrometer to determine the strength of briquettes in holding the load with a certain pressure. The sample pressure was followed by the addition of the load until the sample had an initial crack. The initial crack is considered a failure, because the sample is considered to be unable to withstand the heavy load more than the load that causes the initial crack. Statistical analysis for all observed parameters was conducted by using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) followed by Least Significance Difference (LSD) test at level of $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Compressive Strength

The results of analysis of variance showed that the briquette fertilizers with the proportion of coal fly ash-azolla biomass and urea have a significant effect on the compressive strength of the briquette fertilizers produced. Table 1 shows that the level of compressive strength of the briquette

Table 1. The effect of coal fly ash-azolla and urea proportion on some physical properties of briquette fertilizers.

Treatments Code (Fly Ash:Azolla)+Urea	Parameters			
	Compressive Strength (kg m^{-2})	Bulk Density (g cm^{-3})	Water Retention Capacity (%)	Porosity (%)
FAZ_1-U_1 (40:60)90+10	1.50 ab	0.66 a	61.12 d	37.47 ab
FAZ_1-U_2 (40:60)80+20	1.43 a	0.83 b	53.25 bc	49.29 bcd
FAZ_1-U_3 (40:60)70+30	1.17 a	0.84 b	63.82 d	63.39 d
FAZ_2-U_1 (50:50)90+10	1.25 a	0.83 b	55.60 c	50.78 bcd
FAZ_2-U_2 (50:50)80+20	1.88 bc	0.93 c	51.27 b	40.49 abc
FAZ_2-U_3 (50:50)70+30	1.42 a	0.82 b	55.28 c	34.17 ab
FAZ_3-U_1 (60:40)90+10	1.90 bc	0.96 c	49.32 b	55.49 cd
FAZ_3-U_2 (60:40)80+20	2.08 c	1.09 d	44.25 a	32.15 a
FAZ_3-U_3 (60:40)70+30	1.53 ab	0.95 c	51.16 b	47.36 abcd
$LSD_{0,05}$	0.40	0.08	4.29	17.06

Note: The numbers followed by the same letters in the same column are not significantly different (p<0.05).

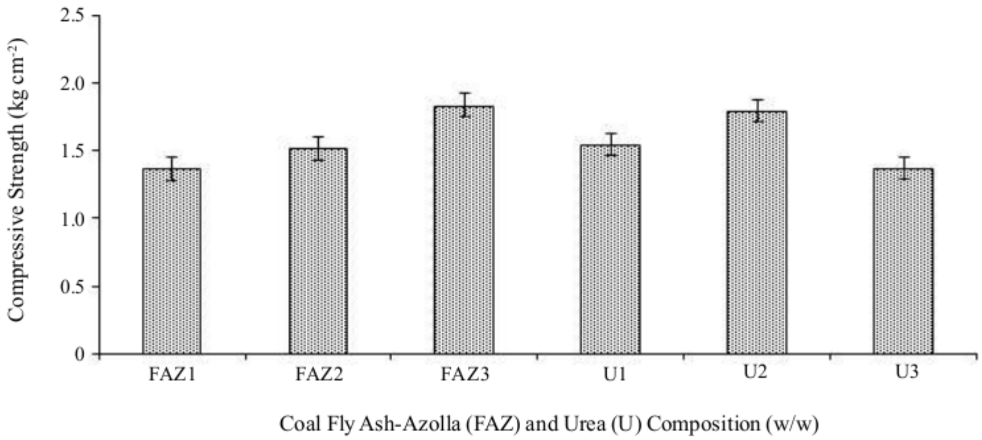

Figure 1. Compressive strength of the briquette fertilizers with various proportion of coal fly ash-azolla (FAZ) and urea (U).

fertilizers with the composition of (coal fly ash:azolla biomass) + urea (60:40)80+20 (FAZ_3-U_2) is not significantly different from FAZ_3-U_1 and FAZ_2-U_2, but significantly higher than other compositions. Table 1 also shows that the increased proportion of coal fly ash-azolla will increase the compressive strength of the briquette fertilizers. Meanwhile, the increased percentage of added urea will decrease the level of compressive strength of the briquette fertilizers.

Figure 1 shows that the composition of coal fly ash and azolla tends to affect the compressive strength of the briquette fertilizers produced. The increasing proportion of coal fly ash tends to cause the briquette fertilizers produced to be harder, and vice versa an increase in the proportion of azolla tends to reduce the compressive strength of the briquette fertilizers produced. Coal fly ash is generally podzolanic (such as cement) (Yao *et al*. 2015; Ma *et al*. 2017), so the increase in proportion will cause the compressive strength of briquette fertilizers to be increased. Meanwhile, an increase in the proportion of urea in briquette fertilizers tends to reduce the compressive strength of briquette fertilizers produced.

The compressive strength of the briquette fertilizers in the various compositions of coal fly ash and azolla biomass varies between 1.17 and 2.08 kg cm^{-2} (Table 1). Figure 1 also showed that the higher azolla biomass proportion (FAZ-1) tends to decrease the level of compressive strength, while the increased of mineral content (fly ash proportion) tends to increase the compressive strength of the briquette fertilizers. The level of compressive strength is influenced by water content, organic matter content, and mineral content (Kurnia *et al*. 2006). In this case, the composites with higher compressive strength are considered better, as they are less easily destroyed and the easily to transport of the briquette fertilizers produced.

Bulk Density

The results of the analysis of variance showed that the proportion of coal fly ash-azolla biomass and urea have a very significant effect on the bulk density of the briquette fertilizers produced. Table 1 shows that bulk density of the briquette with the composition of (coal fly ash:azolla biomass) + urea (60:40)80+20 (FAZ_3U_2) is significantly higher than other compositions of the briquette fertilizers produced. Figure 2 shows that the increased proportion of coal fly ash tends to increase the bulk density of the briquette fertilizers or the increased proportion of azolla biomass tends to decrease the bulk density of the briquette fertilizers produced. Meanwhile, changes in urea percentage addition are relatively variable and there is a tendency to increase the briquette bulk density by increasing the proportion of urea added.

Bulk density describes as the weight of the briquette fertilizers per total of the briquette volume, so that the high value of bulk density characterizes the solids contained in the briquette will be higher, the lower of the pore space and the higher of the compressive strength. The bulk density of the briquette fertilizers produced in this study varies between 0.66 - 1.09 g cm^{-3} (Table 1). The bulk density of briquette fertilizers produced is still relatively low when compared to the general bulk density of soil. Kurnia *et al*. (2006) suggest that mineral soil bulk density

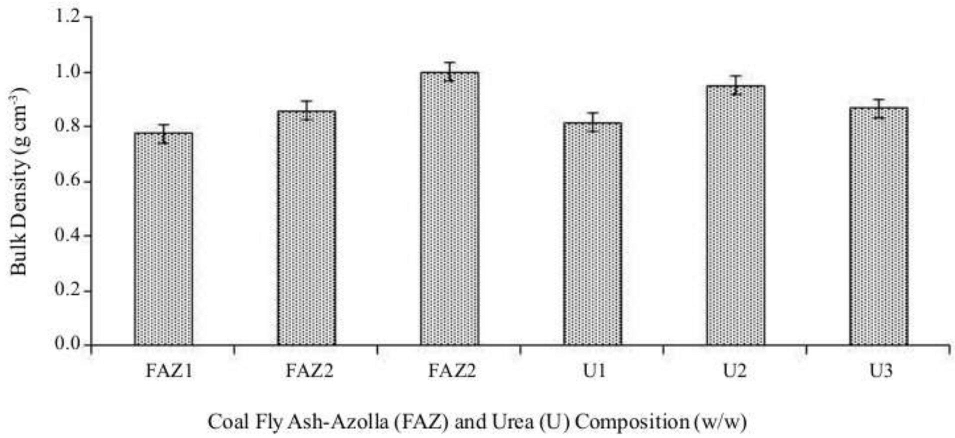

Figure 2. Bulk density of the briquette fertilizers with various proportion of coal fly ash-azolla (FAZ) and urea (U).

varies between 0.80 to 1.40 g cm^{-3}, and peat soil bulk density vary between 0.60 to 0.80 g cm^{-3}.

Figure 1 and 2 showed that the compressive strength and the bulk density level are getting higher with the increase in the proportion of coal fly ash on the briquette fertilizers produced. This condition also reflects on the porosity of briquette fertilizers, in which low bulk density will tend to have higher porosity than composites with higher bulk density (Table 1). Coal fly ash is dominated by silt and clay sized particles and has podzolanic properties (like cement) because it is dominated by aluminosilicate and calcium compounds (Singh *et al.* 2011; Yao *et al.* 2015). Therefore, an increase in the proportion of coal fly ash will result in more dense briquette fertilizer which is characterized by higher bulk density and compressive strength.

Water Retention Capacity (WRC)

The results of the analysis of variance showed that the treatment of coal fly ash-azolla biomass and urea composition significantly affected the water retention capacity of the briquette fertilizers produced. The results of the Least Significance Difference (LSD) test (Table 1) show that the WRC of the briquette fertilizers with the composition of (coal fly ash: azolla biomass) + urea (60:40)80+20 (FAZ_3U_2) is significantly lower compared to the

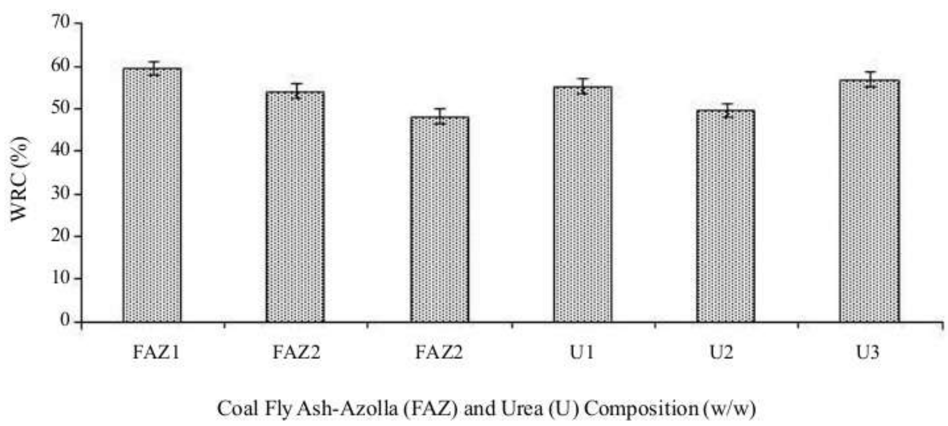

Figure 3. Water retention capacity of the briquette fertilizers with various proportion of coal fly ash-azolla (FAZ) and urea (U).

other compositions of the briquette fertilizers produced.

Figure 3 also shows that the increased proportion of azolla biomass will significantly increase WRC or an increase in the proportion of coal fly ash on briquette fertilizers will significantly lower WRC of the briquette fertilizers. Meanwhile, the increasing percentage of urea fertilizer added tends to vary. Organic materials with high water holding capacity cause WRC of the composites to increase. Water holding capacity is related to the content of organic materials and mineral materials in a material. Organic matter is known to have high water retention (Havlin *et al.* 2005; Obour *et al.* 2018), and coal fly ash which is a mineral is known to have lower water retention capacity (Carlson and Adriano 1993; Singh *et al.* 2011).

Water holding capacity is related to the ability to bind and then release water to the soil solution (Obour *et al.* 2018). Therefore, the greater the ability of the briquette to retain water, the ability to release water along with the element of fertilizer into the soil solution will also increase. Nevertheless, the briquette fertilizer with high water holding capacity tends to have a lower level of the compressive strength (Table 1), so it will be more easily destroyed and will be difficult when transporting and applying the fertilizer in the field.

Porosity

Porosity or total pore space is the volume of all pores in a volume of a material expressed in percent. Porosity reflects the degree of the passage of water mass flow (permeability) or the velocity of water flow to pass through the mass of a material. Porosity determines the value of the bulk density. The greater the number of pores, the lower the density of the mass or the higher porosity; and the lower the number of pores, the higher the density of the mass or the porosity is lower (Nimmo *et al.* 2004; Obour *et al.* 2018)

Table 1 showed that the porosity of the briquette fertilizer with the composition of (coal fly ash : azolla biomass) + urea (60:40)70+30 (FAZ_3U_3) is not significantly different from the porosity of other compositions. However, there is a tendency to increase the composite porosity by increasing the proportion of azolla biomass. Higher organic content (azolla biomass) can cause the amount of pores in the composite to increase. Soil porosity is influenced by organic matter content, soil structure, and soil texture. Soil porosity is high when organic matter is high (Nimmo *et al.* 2004; Havlin *et al.* 2005).

Figure 4 shows that the increase in the proportion of coal fly ash tends to cause the porosity of briquette fertilizers to decrease, or conversely an increase in the proportion of azolla tends to cause porosity of briquette fertilizers to increase. Meanwhile, changes in the proportion of urea tend to fluctuate the porosity of briquette fertilizer. This is probably due to the increased proportion of coal fly ash will decrease the amount of pores in the composite and cause the porosity to decrease. The size of coal fly ash particles dominated by silt and clay particles (<50 ìm) causes the composite becomes denser (Singh *et al.* 2011; Yao *et al.* 2015). The reduced number of pore causes the bulk density of the composite to be higher and is associated with

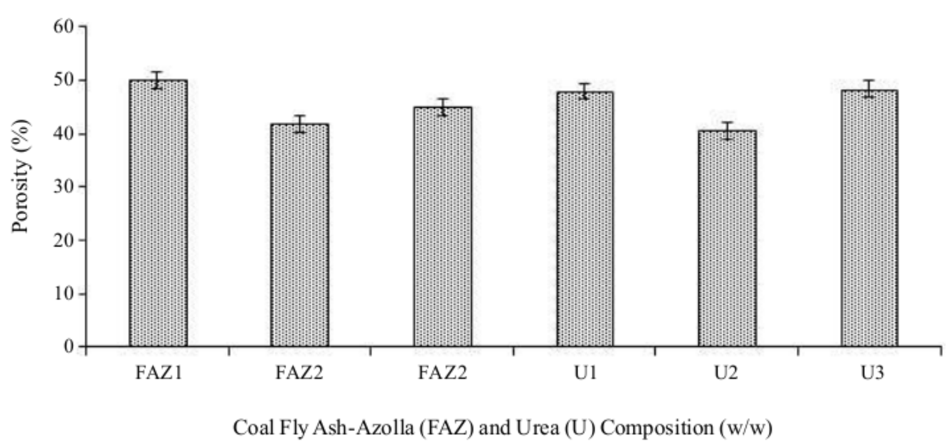

Figure 4. Porosity of the briquette fertilizers with various proportion of coal fly ash-azolla (FAZ) and urea (U).

the increased compressive strength (Table 1). As explained previously, the porosity of briquette fertilizer illustrates the speed of release of water from fertilizer ingredients to the surrounding soil. The greater the porosity, the water will be absorbed more quickly and released back to the soil solution. In relation to the release of nutrients from fertilizers, the lower porosity of briquette fertilizer can be expected to release water with nutrients from fertilizer to be slower.

CONCLUSIONS

Variation in composition of coal fly ash-azolla and urea significantly affected the compressive strength, bulk density, water holding capacity and porosity of briquette fertilizers produced. The increase in the proportion of fly ash or the decrease of azolla biomass proportion tends to increase compressive strength and bulk density, and tends to decrease the water holding capacity and porosity of the produced briquette fertilizers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge the financial support from the Competitive Research Featured, Sriwijaya University by the grant No 1012/UN9.3.1/PP2017. Thanks are also extended to Mr. Wahyu Anggono, Mr. Febri Saputra and Miss Kartika Fatima, graduate students in the Department of Soil Science, Faculty of Agriculture, Sriwijaya University, who have directly involved and helped in the implementation of this study.

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