

# Anaerobic digestion of food waste: Effect of autoclave pre-treatment on $\text{NH}_4\text{-N}$

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## Introduction

Anaerobic digestion of food (FW) waste may be difficult due to the high protein content leading to a high ammonium ( $\text{NH}_4\text{-N}$ ) concentration during digestion. In this study the effect of autoclaving on the ammonium formation during anaerobic digestion of FW was studied at different organic loading rates (OLRs).

## Materials and methods

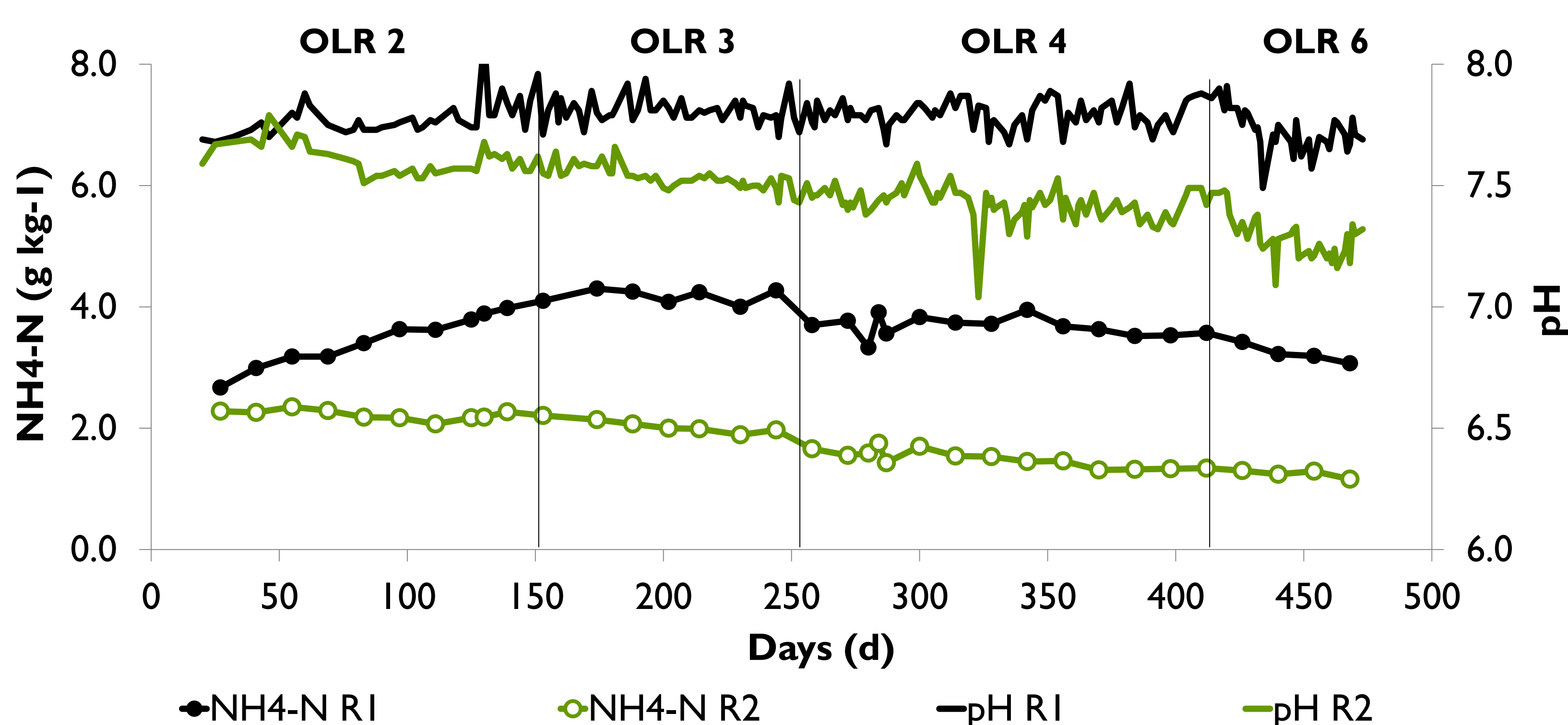
11-litre semi-continuously stirred tank reactors, R1 and R2, were operating at 37 °C. R1 was fed with control FW ( $\text{NH}_4\text{-N}$   $0.3 \pm 0.1 \text{ g kg}^{-1}$ , Total Kjeldahl Nitrogen  $7.4 \pm 0.3 \text{ g kg}^{-1}$ ) and R2 with autoclaved FW ( $160 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ , 6.2 bar) ( $\text{NH}_4\text{-N}$   $0.4 \pm 0.1 \text{ g kg}^{-1}$ , Total Kjeldahl Nitrogen  $6.8 \pm 0.3 \text{ g kg}^{-1}$ ). Both digesters were supplemented with trace element solutions from day 199 onwards (Banks et al. 2012). The OLRs and hydraulic retention times (HRTs) during the study period are presented in Table 1. The initial inoculum  $\text{NH}_4\text{-N}$  concentration was  $2.4 \text{ g kg}^{-1}$ .

**Table 1.** OLRs and HRTs applied to the reactors (R1 control, R2 autoclaved).

OLR (kg VS m <sup>-3</sup> day <sup>-1</sup> )	Days	Reactor	HRT (d)
2	19-150	R1	117
		R2	94
3	151-255	R1	78
		R2	63
4	256-417	R1	58
		R2	47
6	418-439	R1	39
		R2	31

## Results and discussion

$\text{NH}_4\text{-N}$  formation during anaerobic digestion was observed to decrease as a result of the autoclave treatment from 2.4 to  $1.2 \text{ g kg}^{-1}$  as the OLR was increased from 2 to  $6 \text{ kg VS m}^{-3} \text{ day}^{-1}$  (Figure 1). In contrast  $\text{NH}_4\text{-N}$  in the control reactor increased to  $4 \text{ g kg}^{-1}$  over the same OLR increases after which the concentration stabilized at around  $3.5 \text{ g kg}^{-1}$ . The different  $\text{NH}_4\text{-N}$  concentrations affected the pH value and stability of the reactors.



**Figure 1.**  $\text{NH}_4\text{-N}$  and pH during organic loading rates 2, 3, 4 and  $6 \text{ kg VS m}^{-3} \text{ day}^{-1}$  in control (R1) and autoclaved (R2) reactors. OLR increase is presented with vertical lines.

## Conclusions

Autoclave treatment of FW decreased  $\text{NH}_4\text{-N}$  concentration during anaerobic digestion which may reduce the risk of ammonia inhibition, but will also affect the overall conversion efficiency.

## References

Banks, C.J., Zhang, Y., Jiang, Y., Heaven, S., 2012. Trace element requirements for stable food waste digestion at elevated ammonia concentrations. *Bioresour. Technol.* 104, 127-135.

## Acknowledgements

This work was funded by EU FP7 VALORGAS project (241334). The authors are grateful to Aerothermal Group for autoclaving and MTT laboratory staff for their excellent work.