

SUSTAINABLE REUSE AND RECYCLING OF AGRO-INDUSTRIAL EFFLUENT

Edited by ABU ZAHRIM YASER,
PRAMILA TAMUNAIDU AND JUNIDAH LAMAMING



Sustainable Reuse and Recycling of Agro-Industrial Effluent

Combating climate change and securing water for future generations require rethinking waste as opportunity. This book presents a timely and accessible roadmap for transforming agro-industrial effluent from an environmental liability into a suite of value-added, sustainable resources.

At its core, the volume systematically covers the science and technology of effluent valorization: recovering inherent energy for bioenergy, extracting phosphorus for cleaner fertilizer production, and purifying water to standards suitable for irrigation or non-potable reuse. It goes further, detailing the conversion of effluent into biofertilizers, liquid nutrient formulations, and microalgae biomass, and exploring its use as a plant growth stimulant. Each pathway is framed within a circular water economy, emphasizing operational efficiency, alignment with SDG 6, 7, and 12, and the integration of environmental, societal, and economic impact assessments. Practical processing methods, resource recovery strategies, and quality upgrading techniques are presented so that reuse is both technically viable and environmentally responsible.

Original and actionable, this book offers an integrated framework that reframes effluent as a multipurpose resource rather than waste. It demonstrates advantages like phosphorus retrieval without relying on sewage sludge, and provides clear guidance for researchers, engineers, technologists, policymakers, and agro-industry stakeholders seeking to implement sustainable effluent management at scale.

Salient features to stress in promotion include:

This book's uniqueness lies in its holistic and practical reframing of agro-industrial effluent, from environmental burden to a diversified resource portfolio. It integrates cutting-edge recovery technologies including energy, nutrients, and biomass with water purification, framed explicitly against global sustainability goals (SDG 6, 7, and 12), and evaluates outcomes across environmental, societal, and economic dimensions. Promotion should stress its interdisciplinary utility (researchers, engineers, industry, policy), its real-world applicability with actionable processing pathways, and its novel comparison of resource recovery strategies within a circular economy paradigm.



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Abu Zahrim Yaser, Pramila Tamunaidu and Junidah Lamaming



CRC Press

Taylor & Francis Group

Boca Raton London New York

CRC Press is an imprint of the
Taylor & Francis Group, an **informa** business

Designed cover image: The cover image credit goes to Dr. Pramila Tamunaidu, one of the Editor for this book.

First edition published 2026
by CRC Press
2385 NW Executive Center Drive, Suite 320, Boca Raton FL 33431

and by CRC Press
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

CRC Press is an imprint of Taylor & Francis Group, LLC

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ISBN: 978-1-032-99293-8 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-032-99460-4 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-60427-3 (ebk)

DOI: 10.1201/9781003604273

Typeset in Times
by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India

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Preface

The accelerating growth of agro-industrial activities, while vital for economic development and food security, presents escalating challenges in the management of effluent and waste streams. In particular, the environmental impact of improperly treated or disposed agro-industrial effluents necessitates urgent, sustainable, and scientifically grounded interventions. This book, *Sustainable Reuse and Recycling of Agro-Industrial Effluent*, aims to serve as a comprehensive reference that addresses these challenges through interdisciplinary perspectives and practical innovations.

This book brings together research and case studies that explore the recovery and reuse of valuable resources from effluents, with a strong emphasis on environmental protection, socioeconomic development, and the transition towards a circular economy. Various chapters investigate the potential of palm oil mill effluent (POME) as a substrate for the production of biogas, the cultivation of microalgae, and the generation of struvite as a slow-release fertilizer, demonstrating a closed-loop system that benefits both industry and the environment.

Technologies such as membrane filtration, constructed wetlands, and aquaponics are explored as viable treatment and reuse strategies. These systems not only reduce the pollutant load in agro-industrial effluents but also enhance water and nutrient recovery, aligning with the principles of the blue-green economic model. In addition, the use of cellulose-based materials from agricultural waste for effluent treatment reflects an innovative and biodegradable alternative to conventional methods.

The book also addresses the complex interactions between agricultural and socioeconomic factors,

emphasizing community involvement, policy integration, and economic incentives in achieving sustainable wastewater management. The role of leachate control and nutrient recycling in both rural and industrial contexts is discussed, showcasing scalable models that can be adopted globally.

By compiling advanced research, field applications, and policy insights, this book contributes to a deeper understanding of how agro-industrial effluents can be transformed from environmental burdens into resources of value. It is our hope that this work will inspire further innovation and collaboration among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers striving for a sustainable and resilient agro-industrial future.

The editors gratefully acknowledge the following individuals for their time and efforts in assisting the editors with the reviewing of the manuscript. This book would not have been possible without the commitment of the reviewers: Shaierah Gulabdin, Rachmawati Sugihhartati Dj, S.M. Anisuzzaman, Rasid Mail, Hafiza Shukor, Fathurrahman, Siti Rozaimah Sheikh Abdullah, Kelvin Yong, Fazilah Arifin, Wipawee Dejtisakdi, Sariah Saalah, Kushairi Mohd Salleh, Santhana Krishnan, Ahlam Inayahtullah, Mugunthan Perumal, Siti Noorbaini Sarmin, Nurjannah Salim, Azreen Ibrahim, Masafumi Goto, Hisashi Miyafuji, Takashi Hosoya, Farah Liana Mohd Redzuan, and Shazwin Mat Taib.

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1 Introduction

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The agro-industrial sector produces huge amounts of effluent as a result of activities including palm oil milling, rubber processing, dairy production, pulp and paper industry, and fruit canning. Traditionally regarded as waste, these effluents offer major risks to the environment if not appropriately treated, such as water contamination, greenhouse gas emissions, and land degradation (Musa et al., 2019; Zahrim et al., 2007). However, increasing environmental awareness and the push for circular economy practices have sparked interest in the long-term reuse and recycling of agro-industrial effluents. This approach not only mitigates the environmental effect, but also allows for resource recovery, such as energy, nutrients, and water (Bhatia et al., 2021).

The improper disposal of agro-industrial effluents presents considerable environmental challenges, such as soil degradation, water contamination, and loss of biodiversity. These effluents, rich in organic matter and chemicals, can lead to eutrophication in aquatic systems and disrupt ecological balances (Smith et al., 2023). These effluents frequently contain harmful elements, including heavy metals and emerging contaminants (ECs), which may remain in the environment and infiltrate the food chain. Recent studies have found a diverse range of emerging contaminants in many environmental matrices highlighting the difficulties of addressing such pollutants (Smith et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2024). The existence of these contaminants hinders water reuse initiatives, as traditional treatment methods may inadequately eliminate them, necessitating advanced treatment technology.

To address these challenges, innovative treatment technologies have been developed. Membrane technologies, such as ultrafiltration and nanofiltration, have shown promise in removing contaminants from agro-industrial effluents, enabling water reuse and resource recovery (Zahrim et al., 2011). These systems can remove a wide range of pollutants, enabling water reuse and reducing environmental discharge (Patel et al., 2022). Additionally, the use of magnetic cellulose aerogels has emerged as an effective method for oil spill remediation in effluents, offering a sustainable and biodegradable solution (Kumar & Li, 2021; Muharja et al., 2023). Their high porosity and magnetic properties allow for efficient oil adsorption and easy recovery, offering an eco-friendly alternative to traditional sorbents. Constructed wetlands also provide a cost-effective and environmentally friendly approach for treating agro-industrial wastewater, utilizing natural processes to remove pollutants. They utilize vegetation, soil, and microbial activity to remove contaminants, offering a sustainable and cost-effective

treatment method. Their adaptability to various waste types makes them suitable for diverse agro-industrial applications (Thompson et al., 2020).

Beyond treatment, the sustainable reuse of agro-industrial effluents presents opportunities for environmental, agricultural, and socioeconomic benefits (Ahmed & Chen, 2023). For instance, oil palm by-products have been utilized as carrier materials in expanded bed processes to polish palm oil mill effluent (POME), enhancing treatment efficiency (Tan et al., 2022). Additionally, nutrient-dense POME has been investigated as a substrate for increased biogas production via co-digestion methods, aiding in sustainable energy generation and waste minimization (Zhang & Kumar, 2020; Rahman & Singh, 2021). Implementing co-digestion strategies can improve energy recovery from agro-industrial waste streams (Rosly et al., 2024). These methodologies conform to circular economy concepts, converting trash into valuable resources.

Innovative applications of agro-industrial effluents include the cultivation of microalgae for wastewater treatment and resource recovery. Microalgae efficiently eliminate nutrients and pollutants from wastewater while generating biomass suitable for biofuels, animal feed, and bioactive chemicals (Silva & Torres, 2022). Marine microalgae provide a sustainable method for the production of bioactive chemicals for feed and food applications. Cultivating these microalgae using agro-industrial effluents as growth media offers a sustainable production method (Wang & Lee, 2023). Furthermore, the incorporation of effluent reuse in aquaponics systems has been investigated to enhance nutrient recycling and promote sustainable agriculture (Johnson & Patel, 2021). Innovations in system design and effluent treatment are crucial to ensure the safety and efficiency of such integrations. Moreover, chitosan, derived from agro-industrial waste, serves as an eco-friendly agricultural input with biostimulant and antimicrobial properties. Its application can enhance crop growth and resilience, contributing to sustainable farming practices. Developing efficient extraction methods is key to its broader adoption (Fernandez & Kim, 2020).

Recent advancements have demonstrated the potential for converting leachate, biomass waste, and agro-industrial effluents into valuable agricultural inputs. Research indicates that leachate can be converted into liquid organic fertilizers via approaches such as phytoremediation in wetland systems, which stabilize harmful constituents while enhancing the leachate with nutrients advantageous for plant growth (Ugya & Meguellati, 2022). Subcritical water treatment effectively breaks down agricultural biomass

waste, enabling the efficient extraction of bioactive compounds, nutrients and conversion into valuable products such as organic fertilizers, soil amendments (Asmadi et al., 2023), and animal feed (Huzir et al., 2024). The recovery of struvite, a crystalline compound abundant in phosphorus and nitrogen from agro-industrial wastewater, is acknowledged as an effective method for producing environmentally sustainable fertilizers. Struvite functions as a slow-release fertilizer, improving soil fertility and reducing environmental pollution. These methods are consistent with circular economy principles, converting waste into resources and fostering sustainable agricultural practices.

The application of treated agro-industrial effluents for irrigation has emerged as a sustainable method to improve soil fertility and increase crop productivity (Disciglio et al., 2015). Studies demonstrate that appropriately treated effluents can provide vital inorganic nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorus, thereby decreasing dependence on synthetic fertilizers. It is essential to monitor and manage the concentrations of these nutrients to prevent soil contamination and promote optimal plant growth. The implementation of controlled irrigation strategies utilizing nutrient-rich effluents can contribute to sustainable agriculture and resource conservation.

Energy efficiency in wastewater treatment processes is essential for sustainable environmental management. Comparative studies indicate that anaerobic treatment systems typically exhibit lower energy consumption compared to aerobic systems, largely due to the significant energy demands associated with aeration in the latter (Ranieri et al., 2021). Additionally, anaerobic processes yield biogas, which serves as a renewable energy source, reducing operational energy costs and contributing to lower greenhouse gas emissions. Hence, optimizing treatment methods is crucial for improving the sustainability of wastewater management facilities.

The integration of blue-green infrastructure (BGI) with circular economy principles offers a comprehensive strategy for sustainable wastewater management (Perrelet et al., 2024). BGI encompasses natural and semi-natural systems such as wetlands and green roofs, which effectively manage stormwater, enhance water quality, and offer supplementary ecosystem services. The integration of circular economy strategies focused on resource recovery and reuse, including nutrient extraction and water reclamation, can markedly diminish environmental impacts while generating economic opportunities. The implementation of integrated approaches is essential for tackling the multifaceted challenges associated with wastewater management in both urban and agricultural environments (Setiawan et al., 2024).

Sustainable effluent management involves converting waste streams into value-added products such as biogas, biofertilizers, irrigation water, or bio-based chemicals. Technologies like anaerobic digestion, constructed wetlands, membrane filtration, and advanced oxidation processes are increasingly being applied to enhance the reuse

potential of these effluents (Yacob et al., 2011; Sharma & Sanghi, 2012). By integrating eco-efficient treatment systems with production processes, industries can reduce their ecological footprint while contributing to sustainable agriculture and rural development. Thus, the reuse and recycling of agro-industrial effluents is not merely an environmental obligation but a strategic opportunity for sustainability, innovation, and economic resilience in agro-based industries.

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5 Utilizing Magnetic Cellulose Aerogel for Oil-Based Spills in Agro-Industrial Effluents

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INTRODUCTION

Oil-based spills in agro-industrial effluents are a significant environmental and economic concern. Industries such as palm oil processing, dairy production, and meat processing generate large volumes of wastewater containing oils, fats, and other hydrophobic contaminants. These effluents, if not managed effectively, can lead to severe water pollution, soil degradation, and loss of biodiversity. Traditional methods for oil spill remediation, including mechanical skimmers and chemical dispersants, are often costly, inefficient, and environmentally harmful (He et al., 2024).

The environmental and economic challenges posed by these spills underscore the need for innovative and sustainable solutions. Advances in material science have seen the manufacture of cellulose aerogels with magnetic properties, which incorporate the environmental friendliness that cellulose affords with the functional properties provided by added magnetic nanoparticles. These materials are recognized as cost-effective, efficient, and environmentally sustainable alternatives to traditional oil spill cleanup methods (Nguyen et al., 2024). This chapter critically reviews the potential application of magnetic cellulose aerogels for oil-based spill remediation in agro-industrial effluents, with a particular emphasis on evaluating their efficiency in such applications.

Aerogels are a class of ultra-lightweight solid materials characterized by highly porous structures, formed through the transformation of hydrogels via a solvent exchange process. This technique preserves the porous network, preventing structural collapse during drying and resulting in aerogels with low density and high porosity (Shah et al., 2021). The first synthesis of silica aerogels was reported by Kistler, a researcher from the United States, in 1930, employing supercritical drying to remove liquid from wet gels. However, the complex and multistage preparation process initially hindered their widespread application. While silica-based aerogels marked a significant breakthrough, subsequent research has led to the emergence of second-generation aerogels, including clay-based aerogels, metal oxide aerogels, and graphene-based aerogels (Long et al., 2018). However, these aerogels often face challenges related to environmental concerns and high production costs. To

address these issues, natural polymer-based aerogels, such as cellulose aerogels, have gained attention as the latest generation of aerogels. Derived from renewable sources, cellulose aerogels are biodegradable, cost-effective, and non-toxic, with a highly porous 3D interconnected network, making them a promising sustainable alternative for absorbent materials (Zhang et al., 2024). While the advancement of cellulose aerogels represents a significant milestone, research has expanded to incorporate magnetic nanoparticles into cellulose aerogels, enhancing their potential for oil spill remediation.

THE ROLE OF CELLULOSE IN ENVIRONMENTAL REMEDIATION

Cellulose, the most abundant biopolymer on Earth, is a renewable and biodegradable material that has gained significant attention for environmental remediation applications. Its high surface area, porosity, and hydrophilicity make it a suitable candidate for adsorbing various contaminants, including oils (Alighanbari et al., 2025). Additionally, cellulose's eco-friendly nature aligns with global sustainability goals, making it an ideal material for oil spill cleanup.

One of the key properties of cellulose is its abundant hydroxyl groups (OH), which enable the formation of hydrogen bonds and facilitate the adsorption of both polar and nonpolar substances. As shown in Figure 5.1, the cellulose polymer structure is rich in hydroxyl groups located at the C2, C3, and C6 positions. These functional groups make cellulose one of the most versatile natural polymers, as they provide high reactivity and allow for chemical modifications, further enhancing its applicability in various fields (Heise et al., 2022). These OH groups on the cellulose backbones can be tailored for both polar and nonpolar absorbent applications by modifying the cellulose structures with the respective substance through simple reactions such as esterification and etherification reaction (Abushammala & Mao, 2019). This characteristic is particularly beneficial in treating effluents containing mixed contaminants. Moreover, cellulose can be sourced from agricultural and industrial waste, promoting circular economy practices and reducing the environmental impact of raw material extraction. Examples of cellulose-rich waste sources include plant residues, paper pulp, and even textile waste (Maia et al., 2023).