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## Modeling water needs and total irrigation depths of maize crop in the south west of France using high spatial and temporal resolution satellite imagery

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### ► To cite this version:

Marjorie Battude, Ahmad Al Bitar, Aurore Brut, Tiphaine Tallec, Mireille Huc, et al.. Modeling water needs and total irrigation depths of maize crop in the south west of France using high spatial and temporal resolution satellite imagery. *Agricultural Water Management*, 2017, 189, pp.123-136. 10.1016/j.agwat.2017.04.018 . ird-04351710

**HAL Id: ird-04351710**

**<https://ird.hal.science/ird-04351710>**

Submitted on 18 Dec 2023

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1       **Modeling water needs and total irrigation depths of maize crop in the south**  
2       **west of France using high spatial and temporal resolution satellite imagery**

3

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15

16       **Keywords**

17       *Evapotranspiration*

18       *Irrigation management*

19       *Crop Model*

20       *Maize*

21       *Remote sensing*

22

## 23        **ABSTRACT**

24        Climate change is projected to increase water resources limitation and to impact significantly  
25        agricultural production. A big challenge for agriculture will be to reduce the amount of water used to fit  
26        the environmental constraints, while maintaining a level of production that ensure food security. In this  
27        context, we propose a methodology based on high spatial and temporal resolution remote sensing data  
28        combined with a semi-empirical crop model coupling the Simple Algorithm For Yield estimates (SAFY,  
29        [Duchemin et al., 2008, 2015](#); [Battude et al., 2016](#)) and a water balance model adapted from the FAO-56  
30        method ([Allen et al., 1998](#)). A module was added to automatically simulate irrigation. The model was  
31        used to assess the dynamics of actual Evapotranspiration (ETca) and water supplies of maize crop over  
32        large areas and during contrasted climatic years in the south west of France. The model was first  
33        calibrated and evaluated over an experimental field using four years of ETca measurements. The  
34        validation was done over 18 maize fields and larger irrigated zones (135 ha to 450 ha) using total  
35        irrigation depths. This work permitted to quantify the ability of different methods to estimate the  
36        storage capacity (soil map vs *in situ* data) and the basal crop coefficient Kcb (standard vs remotely  
37        sensed values) and their impact on total irrigation depths. Good estimations were obtained for ETca (R =  
38        0.88; RRMSE = 20%). The model also reproduced correctly the total irrigation depth over the 18 maize  
39        fields (R = 0.79; RRMSE = 18.8%) and three larger irrigated zones (R = 0.8; RRMSE = 42%). The  
40        underestimation (Bias = -93 mm) may be due to different reasons such as errors in soil water storage  
41        capacity estimates, but also to an overestimation of water needs by water managers or a potential over-  
42        irrigation carried out by farmers. Finally, the work demonstrates the high potential of combining a  
43        simple agro-meteorological model using only few parameters with satellite imagery for a large-scale  
44        monitoring of total irrigation depth.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is by far the main consumer of fresh water with about 70% of all withdrawals devoted to irrigation (UNESCO, 2015). With the multiplication of extreme weather events, irrigation has become essential to ensure a reliable, stable and profitable production. In a world where population is constantly increasing and with high climate extremes, a big challenge for agriculture will be to maintain a sufficient level of crop production while reducing the amount of water used, and therefore to increase its use efficiency (Kijne et al., 2003). Indeed, an important amount of water allotted to irrigation is not efficiently used by crop (Smith et al., 1992). This naturally leads the scientific community to work on management tools to both ensure food security and meet environmental issues.

The present study was conducted in the south west of France on irrigated maize fields. In this region, maize crop (*Zea mays*) represents 60% of irrigated lands, consuming 70 to 80% of whole irrigation water (around  $250.10^6 \text{ m}^3/\text{year}$ ).

Several agronomical crop models are developed to assess specific agronomical needs like grain yield or irrigation demand prediction (e.g. DSSAT (Jones et al., 2003), STICS (Brisson et al., 2003)). However, if such crop models are quite suitable for monitoring plant development at the field scale, their implementation over larger areas is often limited by the availability of input data. To overcome these difficulties, a widely used solution is to integrate satellite observations into semi-empirical crop models (see Dorigo et al., 2007 for review). Halfway between complex and empirical approaches, these models combine the descriptions of the main biophysical processes and simple empirical parameterizations (e.g., AquaCrop (Steduto et al., 2009), AqYield (Constantin et al., 2015), GRAMI (Maas, 1992), Pilote (Mailhol et al., 1997), PolyCrop (Nana et al., 2014), SAFY (Duchemin et al., 2008; Battude et al., 2016)).

This approach combining remote sensing data and crop models has been made possible by the development of new sensors providing high resolution images, necessary to an accurate vegetation

69 monitoring, and has been particularly popular for the monitoring of water resources and irrigation water  
70 supplies at the regional scale (Duchemin et al., 2006; Zwart et al., 2010; Droogers et al., 2010; Saadi et  
71 al., 2015; Toureiro et al., 2016). Most of the models among the previously cited studies did not allow to  
72 estimate both the water needs and supplies, the biomass production and yields. In a previous study,  
73 Battude et al. (2016) proposed a remote sensing driven approach to estimate the maize biomass  
74 production and yield for both irrigated and rainfed fields. An original methodology was developed  
75 specifically for large areas with a limited use of *in situ* information. In that purpose, we used a quite  
76 simple semi-empirical model, the SAFY (i.e. Simple Algorithm For Yield estimates) model (Duchemin et  
77 al., 2008) driven by high spatial and temporal resolution images, which is able to take into account the  
78 dynamic of vegetation without requiring information about soil characteristics. This last study led to a  
79 new formalism of the Effective Light Use Efficiency (*ELUE*) and the Specific Leaf Area (*SLA*) that was  
80 implemented in the original version of the SAFY model. Results revealed that the new version of the  
81 model improves yield estimates both at field scale (RRMSE = 13.7%) and at regional scale (RRMSE = 5%).  
82 However, this new version of the model did not include a water balance module and, thus, did not give  
83 access to the crop water needs and supplies which knowledge is essential in a context of water  
84 management. The original version of the SAFY model had already been coupled with FAO methods on  
85 rainfed wheat crops (Duchemin et al., 2015) and had led to good estimates of biomass, ETca and soil  
86 water content. We thus coupled the new version of the SAFY model with the FAO-56 method and a sub-  
87 module simulating irrigation in which irrigation events are triggered according to the water stress level  
88 of the crop, in order to simulate both biomass production and water needs and supplies.

89 Even though the FAO-56 methods are sometimes questioned, they remain the most commonly  
90 approach used for the estimation of crop evapotranspiration from field to global scales (Pereira et al.,  
91 2015) due to their relative simplicity. Indeed, the method allows estimating optimal crop  
92 Evapotranspiration (*ETc*) with a crop coefficient (*Kc*) applied to the reference evapotranspiration (*ET<sub>0</sub>*).

93 Such approach overcomes the difficulties encountered with direct measurements (e.g. *Eddy-Covariance*,  
94 *Bowen ratio energy balance*, *lysimeters*) for which applications are restrained to field scale because of  
95 the heavy and costly needed investment. The accurate estimation of actual crop Evapotranspiration  
96 (*ETca*) over large areas is essential to improve water resource management. Given their strong impact  
97 on *ETca*, the crop coefficient and the plant water availability must be correctly estimated which is one of  
98 the major difficulties of the application of the FAO approach over large areas. Indeed, the standard crop  
99 coefficient method based on tabulated values implies “standard conditions” that do not vary from field  
100 to field and that are not actual most of the time. As crop characteristics correlate well with spectral  
101 reflectances, numerous studies aimed at developing empirical relationships between *Kc* and remote  
102 sensing data that allowed improving *ETca* estimates and irrigation scheduling (Bausch et al., 1987; Neale  
103 et al., 1989; Hunsaker et al., 2003; Glenn et al., 2011).

104 Beside the importance of an accurate estimation of *Kc*, the knowledge of the Storage Capacity (*SC*)  
105 of the soil is also useful as it is a widely used concept for a large panel of models. This integrative value  
106 relies on the knowledge of soil properties that are rarely available over large areas. Moreover, some  
107 sensitivity analyses have demonstrated the large impact of uncertainty of the *SC* values on yield  
108 estimates (Pachepsky and Acock, 1998; Lawless et al., 2008) or on the soil hydraulic characteristics  
109 (Baroni et al., 2010).

110 The objectives of this study were twofold. First, we aimed at reproducing the seasonal dynamics of  
111 *ETca* and total irrigation depth over large areas and various contrasted climatic years. For that, we used  
112 a water balance crop model combined with high spatial and temporal resolution remote sensing data.  
113 Second, we aimed at evaluating the impact on simulated *ETca* and total irrigation depths of various  
114 methods used to determine the soil water storage capacity (*SC*) and the crop coefficient (*Kc*).

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116

117

## 2. MATERIAL & METHODS

### 118 2.1. Model description

119 In this study, we used the SAFY-FAO model. This model combines the SAFY crop model (Duchemin  
120 et al., 2008; Battude et al., 2016) with a water balance model proposed by the FAO-56 method (Allen et  
121 al., 1998) and a sub-module simulating irrigation events, hereafter referred to as “automatic irrigation  
122 module”. The SAFY-FAO model simulates the dynamics of Green Area Index ( $GAI$  in  $m^2.m^{-2}$ , ratio of the  
123 photosynthetically active plant area, without organ distinction, per meter square ground; Baret et al.,  
124 2010), Dry Aboveground Mass ( $DAM$  in  $g.m^{-2}$ ), actual crop Evapotranspiration ( $ET_{ca}$  in  $mm.day^{-1}$ ) and  
125 Current Available Water ( $CAW$  in  $mm$ ) in three soil layers (i.e. top, intermediate and deep) at a daily time  
126 step from a date of plant emergence ( $D_0$ ). It can be run in two different ways: using the real irrigation  
127 supplies (forced mode) or activating the automatic irrigation module (automatic mode). Remotely  
128 sensed GAI and green cover fraction ( $FCOVER$ ), incoming global radiation ( $R_g$  in  $MJ.m^{-2}$ ), air temperature  
129 ( $T_a$  in  $^{\circ}C$ ), reference evapotranspiration ( $ET_0$  in  $mm.day^{-1}$ ), precipitation and irrigation (in the forced  
130 mode case) are used as inputs.  $ET_0$  is derived from climatic parameters according to the Penman-  
131 Monteith equation recommended by FAO (Allen et al., 1998), which is adapted for a hypothetical grass  
132 reference surface.

133 The GAI (in  $m^2.m^{-2}$ ) is simulated by the SAFY crop model (Duchemin et al., 2008). In the present  
134 study, we used the new formulation of vegetation dynamics proposed in Battude et al. (2016). This new  
135 version of the SAFY model includes sixteen parameters (Table 1) allowing the seasonal variation of the  
136 Specific Leaf Area (SLA in  $m^2.g^{-1}$ ) and the Effective Light Use Efficiency (ELUE in  $g.MJ^{-1}$ ) (see Battude et  
137 al., 2016 for details). The SLA is defined as the ratio of leaf area to dry mass and it allows converting  
138 daily leaf mass production into daily leaf area growth. The SLA increase with time is due to the  
139 increasing leaves thickness during the plant growth. The ELUE corresponds to the plant efficiency to

140 convert radiation into aboveground biomass. The rise of ELUE during the plant growth may be due to  
 141 several processes, among them the variation of the root-shoot ratio (Amos and Walters, 2006). The  
 142 biomass production ( $\Delta_{DAM}$ , [Eq. 1]) is based on the Monteith's light-use efficiency theory (Monteith,  
 143 1972). It depends on the effective light-use efficiency (*ELUE*), on a stress factor ( $F_T$ ) being function of the  
 144 daily air temperature ( $Ta$ ) and on the daily photosynthetically active radiation absorbed by canopy  
 145 (*APAR* in  $\text{MJ}\cdot\text{m}^{-2}$ ), and is limited by the water stress coefficient (*Ks*). The *Ks* ([Eq. 2]) daily value varies  
 146 from 0 (complete stress) to 1 (no stress) and depends on a critical humidity parameter (*Dft*, for  
 147 "Transpiration reduction coefficient") and on the soil maximal relative humidity (*RHtot*). The *RHtot* ([Eq.  
 148 3]) depends on the relative humidity of the two first layers ( $RH_1$  and  $RH_2$ ), those in which the roots  
 149 develop. The relative humidity of a soil layer ( $RH_x$ , [Eq. 4]) corresponds to the ratio between the current  
 150 available water in the soil layer (*CAW* in mm) and its water storage capacity (*SC* in mm). *SC* ([Eq. 5])  
 151 depends on the soil layer thickness ( $SLT_x$  in mm) and on the water content at field capacity ( $H_{fc}$  in  $\text{m}^3\cdot\text{m}^{-3}$ )  
 152 and at wilting point ( $H_{wp}$  in  $\text{m}^3\cdot\text{m}^{-3}$ ). The *SLT* of the intermediate layer ( $SLT_2$  in mm) increases with the  
 153 root depth (*RD* in mm, [Eq. 6]), constrained by the soil maximal depth (*SD* in mm) and depending on the  
 154 air temperature ( $Ta$  in  $^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), the minimal temperature for growth ( $Tmin$  in  $^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), the *Ks* coefficient and the  
 155 root growth rate (*Vpr* in  $\text{mm}\cdot^{\circ}\text{C}$ ).

$$156 \quad \Delta_{DAM} = ELUE * F_T(Ta) * Ks * APAR \quad [\text{Eq. 1}]$$

$$157 \quad Ks = \min\left\{1 - \frac{RH_{tot} - Dft}{-Dft}, 1\right\} \quad [\text{Eq. 2}]$$

$$158 \quad RH_{tot} = \max\{RH_1, RH_2\} \quad [\text{Eq. 3}]$$

$$159 \quad RH_x = CAW_x / SC_x \quad [\text{Eq. 4}]$$

$$160 \quad SC_x = (H_{fc} - H_{wp}) * SLT_x \quad [\text{Eq. 5}]$$

$$161 \quad RD_{(j)} = \min\{RD_{(j-1)} + \max\{Ta - Tmin, 0\} * Ks * Vpr, SD * 0.9\} \quad [\text{Eq. 6}]$$

162 The water balance model includes nine parameters that can be related to soil characteristics ( $H_{fc}$ ,  
 163  $H_{wp}$ , *SD*,  $SLT_1$ ,  $\beta$ ) or vegetation characteristics (*Vpr*,  $Kcb_{max}$ ,  $E_{trp}$ , *Dft*) (Table 1). Only vertical water



164 transfers are taken into account and surface runoff is neglected. ETca calculation is based on the dual-  
 165 crop coefficient FAO-56 method, splitting the Kc parameter into Ke (i.e. soil water evaporation  
 166 coefficient) and Kcb (i.e. basal crop coefficient) [Eq. 7 and Eq. 9] (Allen et al., 1998), the Ks being as  
 167 defined previously. Soil evaporation (E, [Eq. 7]) depends on the reference evapotranspiration (ET<sub>0</sub>) and  
 168 on the Ke coefficient. The Ke ([Eq. 8]) is function of the green cover fraction (FCOVER), the top soil layer  
 169 relative humidity (RH<sub>1</sub>) and limited by a β function. Unlike Duchemin et al. (2015), the FCOVER, useful  
 170 for the calculation of evaporation [Eq. 8], is estimated with the BVNet tool (see section 2.5. “Remote  
 171 sensing GAI and FCOVER”). Plant transpiration (T, [Eq. 9]) depends on the Kcb, the ET<sub>0</sub> and the Ks as  
 172 defined previously. The Kcb ([Eq. 10]) involved in the transpiration process is related to the GAI; the  
 173  $Kcb_{max}$  corresponding to the maximal transpiration coefficient and the  $E_{trp}$  being the exponent of the  
 174 transpiration. Soil evaporation (E) is calculated according to the relative humidity of the top soil layer  
 175 (RH<sub>1</sub>) [Eq. 7 and Eq. 8], whereas both top and intermediate layers are used for the computation of the  
 176 plant transpiration (T) [Eq. 9, Eq. 2 and Eq. 3]. Soil diffusive fluxes are simulated with [Eq. 11].

$$177 \quad E = ET_0 * Ke \quad [Eq. 7]$$

$$178 \quad Ke = (1 - FCOVER) * (1 - (1 - RH_1)^\beta) \quad [Eq. 8]$$

$$179 \quad T = ET_0 * Kcb * Ks \quad [Eq. 9]$$

$$180 \quad Kcb = Kcb_{max} (1 - e^{-E_{trp} * GAI}) \quad [Eq. 10]$$

$$181 \quad \Phi_{xy} = K_{dif} * \left( \frac{H_x - H_y}{H_{fc}} \right)^{E_{dif}} \quad [Eq. 11]$$

182 When activated, the automatic irrigation module triggers an irrigation event at a fixed depth  
 183 determined by the D<sub>i</sub> parameter, when the Ks coefficient is lower than 1. This happens when the relative  
 184 humidity (RH<sub>tot</sub>) reaches a defined threshold (Dft) [Eq. 2]. The simulated irrigation is then used as an  
 185 input into the SAFY-FAO model. The period when irrigation can be triggered ranges from the plant  
 186 emergence until the beginning of the senescence phase (i.e. when the sum of temperature reaches a  
 187 growing degree day threshold called S<sub>TT</sub>, in °C). After that day, irrigations are allowed only if the time

188 before harvest is higher than a specific number of days defined by  $l_{end}$  parameter.

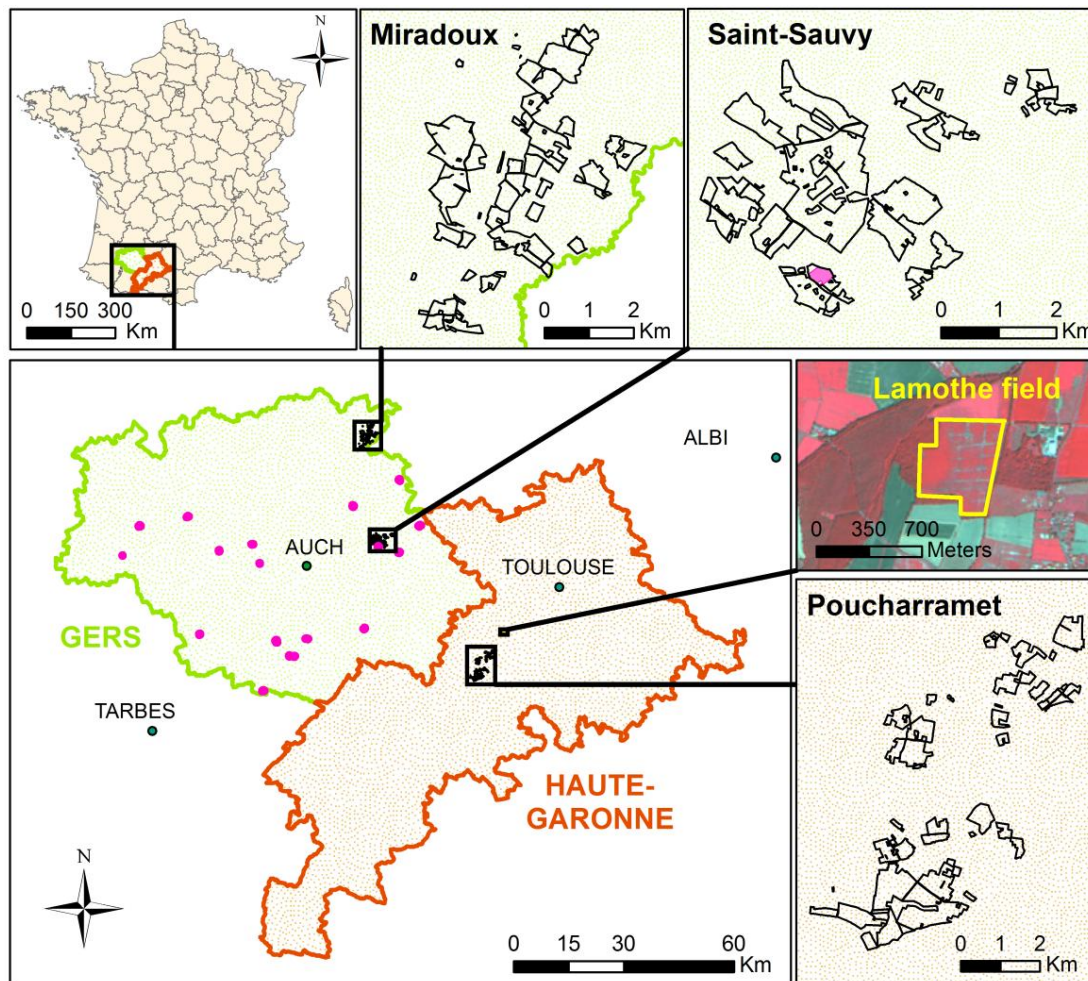
	Name	Notation	Unit	Value	Data Sources
SAFY MODEL PARAMETERS	Climatic efficiency	$\epsilon_c$	-	0.48	Literature (Varlet Grancher et al., 1982)
	Temperature for growth	$T_{min}, T_{opt}, T_{max}$	°C	8-30-45	Literature (Drouet and Pages, 2003)
	Polynomial degree	$\beta_0$	-	2	Literature (Drouet and Pages, 2003)
	Light-interception coefficient	$K_{ext}$	-	0.65	Literature (Cavero et al., 2000)
	Harvest index	HI	-	0.5	Literature (Steduto et al., 2012)
	Initial specific leaf area	$SLA_0$	$m^2 \cdot g^{-1}$	[0.024 ; 0.032]	Optimized using GAI (Battude et al., 2016)
	Leaf thickness coefficient	LTC	-	[-1.3e-05 ; -9e-06]	Optimized using GAI (Battude et al., 2016)
	Potential effective light-use efficiency	$ELUE_p$	$g \cdot MJ^{-1}$	[7 ; 11]	Optimized using GAI (Battude et al., 2016)
	Plant maturation index	PMI	-	[-260 ; -300]	Optimized using GAI (Battude et al., 2016)
	Day of plant emergence	$D_0$	day of year	$L1 + /20j$	Logistic function (Battude et al., 2016)
	Sum of temperature for senescence	$S_{TT}$	°C	$SMT(L3 + /20j)$	Logistic function (Battude et al., 2016)
	Partition-to-leaf function : par a	$Pl_a$	-	[0.05 - 0.5]	Literature (Claverie et al., 2012)

	Partition-to-leaf function : par b	$Pl_b$	-	-	linked to $Pl_a$ (Battude et al., 2016)
	Rate of senescence	RS	$^{\circ}\text{C}\cdot\text{day}^{-1}$	-	linked to $S_{TT}$ (Battude et al., 2016)
SOIL	Soil top layer thickness	$SLT_1$	m	0.1	Literature (FAO-56 Allen et al., 1998)
	Soil maximal depth	SD	m	Measured	Measurements or Soil Map
	Humidity at field capacity	$H_{fc}$	$\text{m}^3\cdot\text{m}^{-3}$	Measured	Measurements or Soil Map
	Humidity at wilting point	$H_{wp}$	$\text{m}^3\cdot\text{m}^{-3}$	Measured	Measurements or Soil Map
	Evaporative reduction coefficient	$\beta$	-	0.94	Calibrated (ETca meas.; bare soil period)
VEGETATION	Maximal transpiration coefficient	$Kcb_{max}$	-	1.15	Literature (FAO-56 Allen et al., 1998)
	Exponent of the transpiration	$E_{trp}$	-	0.34	Calibrated (ETca meas.; non-stressed vegetation period)
	Transpiration reduction coefficient	Dft	-	0.45	Literature (FAO-56 Allen et al., 1998)
	Root growth rate	Vpr	$\text{m}\cdot^{\circ}\text{C}$	0.0015	Literature (STICS Brisson et al., 2003)
IRRIGATION	Irrigation depth	$D_i$	mm	30	Agricultural practices
	Number of days before harvest for irrigation ending	$l_{end}$	day of year	45	Agricultural practices

189 *Table 1: List of the 27 parameters of the crop model (i.e. 16 for the SAFY model, 9 for the water balance*  
190 *model and 2 for the automatic irrigation module) with their initial value or range and the source of data.*

191 **2.2. Study area**

192 The study was carried out in the south west of France, near Toulouse (*Figure 1*). We focused on two  
193 departments (i.e. *division of the French territory according to administrative boundaries*): Haute-  
194 Garonne and Gers. The climate is temperate mild, with rainy springs and warm and dry summers  
195 (temperature often exceeding 35°C). The Haute-Garonne department is characterized by a wide plain  
196 stretching across the north and a mountainous region in the south that is a part of the Pyrenean range.  
197 The Gers department is characterized by hilly landscapes. Half of Haute-Garonne and up to 70% of Gers  
198 are covered by agricultural land. Haute-Garonne and Gers are respectively covered by about 20 000 ha  
199 and 48 000 ha of irrigated maize. In the study area, maize fields are sown from mid-April to early June,  
200 and harvest takes place from mid-August (mainly for silage maize) to late October.



201

202 *Figure 1: Location of the study area. Haute-Garonne and Gers departments are in orange and green,*  
203 *respectively. The “Lamothe” (LAM) experimental field is in yellow. Pink points represent the 18 maize*  
204 *fields and black region of interest represent the three irrigated zones (Miradoux, Saint-Sauvy and*  
205 *Poucharramet).*

## 206 **2.3. Dataset over the LAM field**

### 207 **2.3.1. Site description**

208 The “Lamothe” experimental field (referred to as “LAM field”) was instrumented in 2005 to monitor  
209 vegetation growth, soil water dynamics, turbulent energy, water and CO<sub>2</sub> fluxes. This 32.2 ha site is  
210 located close to a river in a large valley (*Figure 1*). It belongs to an experimental farm managed by the  
211 Purpan Engineering School and takes part of the European research infrastructure “Integrated Carbon  
212 Observation System” (ICOS, [<https://icos-eco.fr/>]) and of the “Regional Spatial Observatory” (OSR,  
213 [<http://www.cesbio.ups-tlse.fr/fr/osr.html>]). The LAM field is characterized by an irrigated silage  
214 maize/rainfed winter wheat rotation. We used four years of data over maize in 2006, 2008, 2010 and  
215 2012, which correspond to years when maize was sown. The LAM field has a homogenous clay (around  
216 50% clay, 36% loam and 14% sand) deep soil (around 1.5 m), presenting a large water storage capacity.  
217 We used a mean value of 0.36 m<sup>3</sup>.m<sup>-3</sup> for the volumetric water content at field capacity ( $H_{fc}$ ) and 0.17  
218 m<sup>3</sup>.m<sup>-3</sup> for the wilting point ( $H_{wp}$ ). We did not evaluate the automatic irrigation module over this field as  
219 irrigation practices were not representative of those usually done in the south west of France. Actual  
220 irrigation data were forced in the model instead.

### 221 **2.3.2. Flux data**

222 Turbulent fluxes of water vapour (actual crop Evapotranspiration,  $ET_{ca}$ ) are measured continuously  
223 according to the Eddy-Covariance method (Moncrieff et al., 1997; Baldocchi, 2003; Aubinet et al., 2012).  
224 The flux tower was installed in the middle of the field and the Eddy-Covariance system set-up was  
225 designed in order to catch the turbulent fluxes from a representative area (*footprint*) of the whole crop

226 plot. The height of the instruments (3.65 m) was chosen to be higher than crops at their maximum  
227 development and optimize the footprint area (Béziat et al., 2009). The Eddy-Covariance system  
228 combined a 3D sonic anemometer (CSAT3) with a high frequency infrared gas analyzer (LI-7500, 20 Hz).  
229 Flux calculation, filtering, quality controls and gap filling were performed following the CarboEurope-IP  
230 recommendations (Aubinet et al., 2012).

### 231 **2.3.3. Meteorological data**

232 The LAM field is equipped with a standard weather station. It provides measurements of air  
233 temperature, relative humidity, global and net radiations, wind speed and direction at 3.65 m height,  
234 precipitation and atmospheric pressure. The total precipitation during the four experimental maize  
235 seasons (*i.e. from date of emergence to harvest in 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012*) was 118, 188, 173 and  
236 125 mm, respectively. All flux and meteorological data were originally recorded and processed at half-  
237 hourly time step. The data were thus integrated or averaged to obtain daily time scale estimates  
238 allowing the comparison with the model outputs.

### 239 **2.3.4. Biomass destructive measurements**

240 Dry Aboveground Mass (*DAM*) data were collected from LAM field with a destructive method  
241 during four maize growing seasons between 2006 and 2012 at the rate of five times a year. Each time,  
242 twenty plants were harvested within the footprint, dried at 55°C, during at least 72h, and then weighed.

## 243 **2.4. Validation datasets: the 18 fields and 3 irrigated zones**

244 A validation set of 18 maize fields (0.5 ha to 24 ha) have been monitored by the water manager  
245 (CACG, *i.e.* Compagnie d'Aménagement des Coteaux de Gascogne) during the 2013 growing season. The  
246 CACG is in charge of irrigation recommendations to the farmers. All fields were located in the Gers  
247 department (*Figure 1*). The irrigation practices including dates and applied water depth (in mm) were  
248 recorded and provided by farmers. The total irrigation depth applied during the growing season (in mm)  
249 was calculated for each field and compared with the simulations (automatic irrigation module). Water is

250 applied to all these fields with sprinkler irrigation systems.

251 Three irrigated zones (Miradoux, Saint-Sauvy and Poucharramet) ([Figure 1](#)) also monitored by the  
252 CACG have been used for the validation of the total irrigation depth. They correspond to associations of  
253 farmers sharing a global irrigation plan (hereafter referred to as “ASA” for “Authorised Syndical  
254 Association”). Poucharramet ASA’s irrigated water supplies have been studied since 2006. Miradoux and  
255 Saint-Sauvy ASA’s irrigated water supplies were studied for 2013 and 2014 growing seasons.  
256 Poucharramet, Miradoux and Saint-Sauvy ASA are respectively covered by about 450 ha, 165 ha and 135  
257 ha of irrigated grain maize. For these three ASA, applied irrigation water comes from surface resource  
258 (rivers recharged either by lakes, canals or mountains’ reservoirs depending on location). The water is  
259 collected in the river with a pumping station and then conveyed throughout the fields using a pipe  
260 network. Sprinkler irrigation systems are used in the three ASA. Meteorological data over the area have  
261 been estimated by Météo-France using the mesoscale atmospheric analysis system SAFRAN (i.e.  
262 Système d’Analyse Fournissant des Renseignements Adaptés à la Nivologie ; [Durand et al., 1993](#)). This  
263 dataset includes air temperature at 2m above the ground ( $T_a$ ), incoming global radiation ( $R_g$ ), reference  
264 evapotranspiration ( $ET_0$ ) and precipitation ( $P$ ).  $ET_0$  is derived from climatic parameters according to the  
265 Penman-Monteith equation recommended by FAO ([Allen et al., 1998](#)).

266 The data are available every 6h over a 8 km spatial resolution grid. [Vidal et al. \(2010\)](#) performed an  
267 evaluation of SAFRAN data all over the French territory and found an RMSE  $\approx 40$  W/m<sup>2</sup> for  $R_g$  and an  
268 RMSE  $\approx 0.6$  °C for  $T_a$ . Data used to force the model (daily mean  $T_a$ , daily mean  $R_g$ , daily  $ET_0$  and  
269 cumulated daily  $P$ ) were calculated for each field over the study area, by using the nearest grid point.

270 Soil characteristics of the fields ( $H_{fc}$ ,  $H_{wp}$  and  $SD$ ; see [Table 1](#)) have been extracted from a soil map  
271 covering the two departments. This map (1/ 250 000) results from the IGCS (i.e. Inventaire, Gestion et  
272 Conservation des Sols) program, provided by GisSol (i.e. Groupement d’intérêt scientifique Sol) group  
273 [<https://www.gissol.fr/le-gis/programmes/inventaire-gestion-et-conservation-des-sols-igcs-67>], and

274 reports the main structural units of the area. The database related to the map provides for each class  
275 the soil depth and the percentage of clay, silt and sand. Soil texture was found using the French “Aisne”  
276 soil texture triangle (Jamagne et al., 1977; Baize and Jabiol, 1995). The volumetric water contents at field  
277 capacity ( $H_{fc}$ ) and at wilting point ( $H_{wp}$ ) were retrieved through the use of a class pedotransfer function  
278 (Bruand et al., 2003). For the 18 maize fields, the soil depth ( $SD$ ) extracted from the map was compared  
279 to those provided by farmers. The impact of  $SD$  on the simulated total irrigation depth is presented in  
280 the results section.

## 281 **2.5. Remotely sensed GAI and FCOVER**

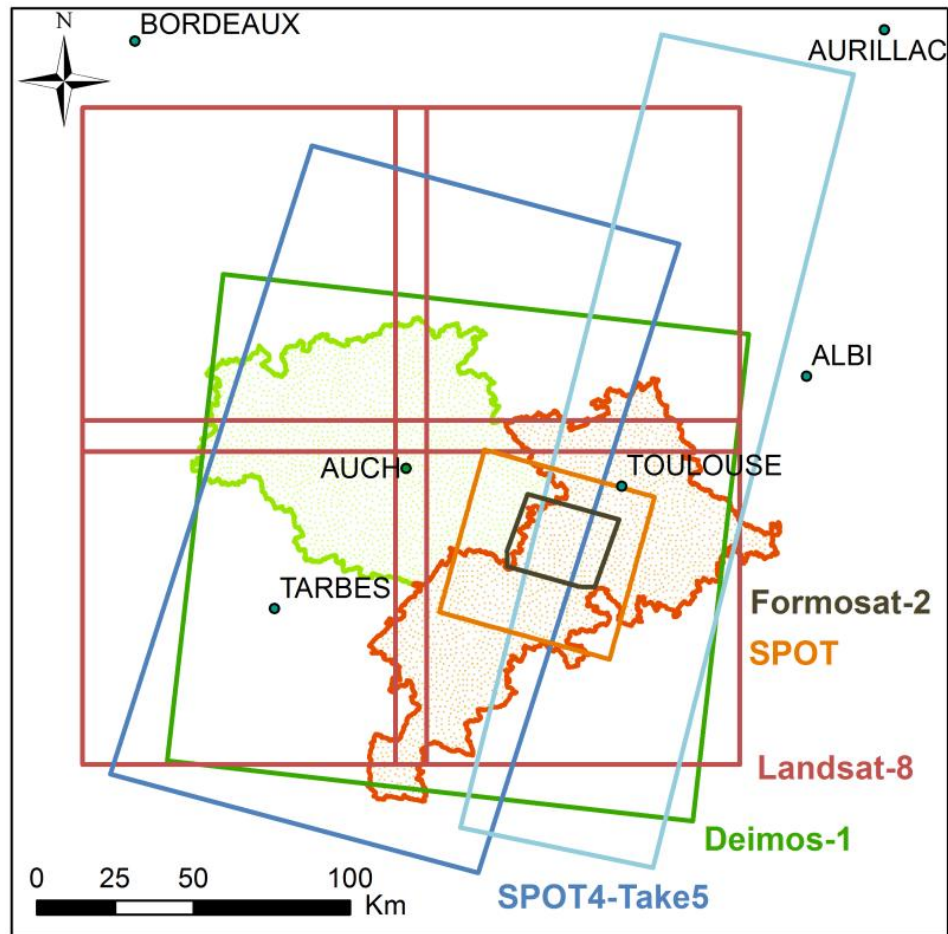
282 The Green Area Index ( $GAI$  in  $m^2 \cdot m^{-2}$ ) and green cover fraction ( $FCOVER$ ) time series were estimated  
283 from several high spatial and temporal resolution optical images (Figures 2 and 3) using the BVNet tool  
284 (i.e. Biophysical Variables neural NETWORK, Weiss and Baret, 1999; Weiss et al., 2002). BVNet enables  
285 the estimation of biophysical variables ( $GAI$ ,  $FAPAR$  and  $FCOVER$ ) from the inversion of the radiative  
286 transfer model PROSAIL (Baret et al., 1992) using artificial neural network. The BVNet tool uses the  
287 Green, Red and NIR spectral bands, and the SWIR band whenever available. It computes  $GAI$  taking into  
288 account the spectral and directional characteristics (illumination and viewing angles) of the remote  
289 sensing data.

290 Formosat-2 (8 m resolution, daily revisit) and SPOT (20 m, monthly revisit) data have been available  
291 since 2006 over the LAM field and Poucharramet ASA. In addition, other satellite datasets covering a  
292 larger area including the 18 fields, Miradoux ASA and Saint-Sauvy ASA have been available since 2013.  
293 We thus combined Landsat-8 (30 m, 16-day revisit), Deimos-1 (22 m, 3-day revisit) and the SPOT4-Take5  
294 experiment (20 m, 5-day revisit) [<http://www.cesbio.ups-tlse.fr/multitemp/>] datasets. The combination  
295 of datasets permits to observe the whole maize growing seasons with a temporal resolution close to  
296 that provided by the Sentinel-2 data (A and B). The satellites have also been chosen for their high spatial  
297 resolution (30 m or less) which is an important criteria given the mean size of agricultural fields in the

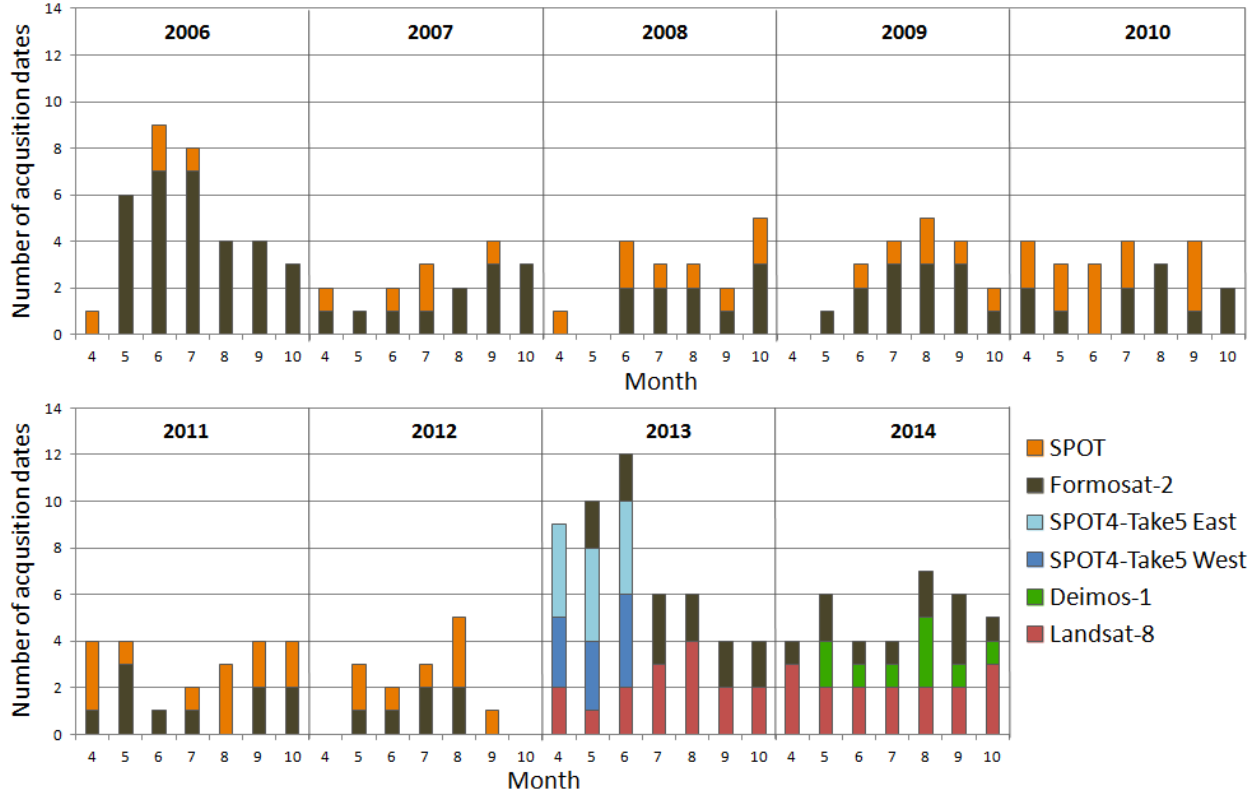


298 study area (approximately 20 ha).

299 The remotely sensed GAI time series were used in the previous study (Battude et al., 2016) to  
300 calibrate the SAFY model in order to provide daily GAI and biomass production estimates. The GAI and  
301 FCOVER were interpolated with a double logistic function (see Battude et al., 2016) providing daily time  
302 series used as inputs in the water balance module.



303  
304 *Figure 2: Location of the various image scenes (Formosat-2 in grey; SPOT in orange; SPOT4-Take5 in blue;*  
305 *Landsat-8 in red; Deimos-1 in green).*



306

307 *Figure 3: Schedule of images acquisitions for the different sensors. Only the maize growing periods (April*  
 308 *to October) are displayed.*

## 309 2.6. Calibration of model parameters

### 310 2.6.1. SAFY model parameters

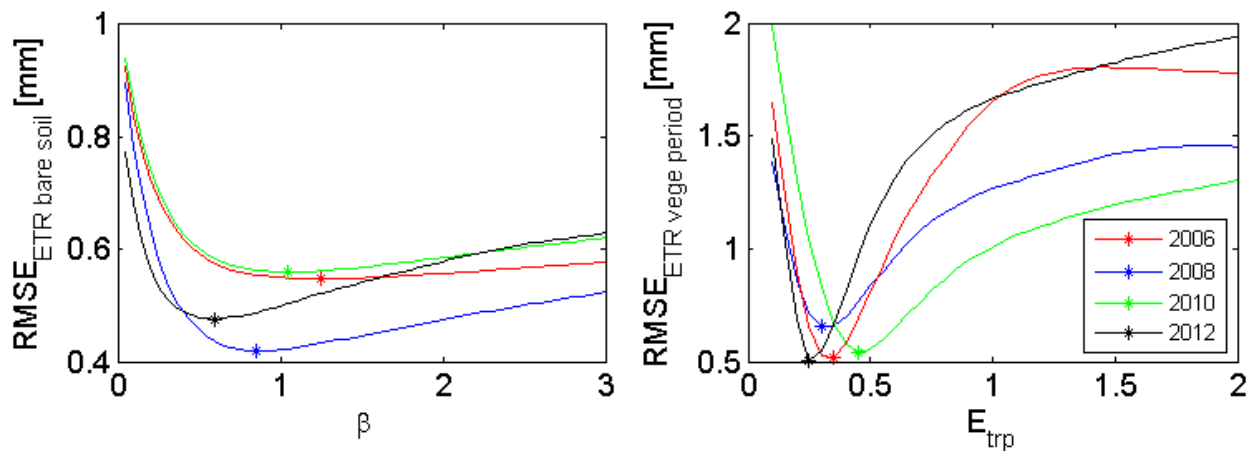
311 We use the sixteen SAFY model parameters (*Table 1*) calibrated in the previous study (see [Battude](#)  
 312 [et al., 2016](#)). Some parameters were fixed according to a literature review ( $\epsilon_C$ ,  $T_{min}$ ,  $T_{opt}$ ,  $T_{max}$ ,  $\beta_D$ ,  $K_{ext}$ ,  $HI$ )  
 313 and the remaining ones ( $D_0$ ,  $Pl_a$ ,  $Pl_b$ ,  $RS$ ,  $S_{TT}$ ,  $SLA_0$ ,  $LTC$ ,  $ELUE_p$  and  $PMI$ ) were optimized using the remotely  
 314 sensed GAI time series. This calibration leads to daily simulated GAI and biomass.

### 315 2.6.2. Water balance model parameters

316 The nine water balance model parameters (*Table 1*) include five soil parameters ( $SLT_1$ ,  $SD$ ,  $H_{fc}$ ,  $H_{wp}$   
 317 and  $\theta$ ) and four vegetation parameters ( $Kcb_{max}$ ,  $E_{trp}$ ,  $Dft$  and  $Vpr$ ). Except for the surface layer thickness  
 318 ( $SLT_1$ ), the soil parameters needed for the definition of the storage capacity ( $H_{fc}$ ,  $H_{wp}$  and  $SD$ ) are field

319 specific. They vary spatially and depend on the soil type. Their values are determined with *in situ*  
 320 measurements or information extracted from the soil map (see section 2.4).  $Kcb_{max}$  and  $Dft$  are fixed  
 321 according to the FAO recommendations (Allen et al., 1998). The  $Vpr$  parameter is set according to the  
 322 value used for maize crop in the STICS model (Brisson et al., 2003).

323 The remaining two parameters ( $\beta$  and  $E_{trp}$ ) were calibrated using ETca measured by the Eddy-  
 324 Covariance method. The calibration procedure was performed in two successive steps with a cost  
 325 function based on the Root Mean Square Error (RMSE) computation (Figure 4). We firstly calibrated  $\beta$   
 326 over the bare soil period. Then, we calibrated  $E_{trp}$  over the non-stressed vegetation period (based on the  
 327 calculation of the relative humidity (RH) of the two first soil layers). The calibration was done for each  
 328 year. As the values of each parameter were quite similar whatever the year, we decided to use the four-  
 329 year averaged value for each parameter. As simulation begins at 1<sup>st</sup> January, the soil water storage  
 330 capacity is regarded as full at this date. Soil diffusive fluxes have not been taken into consideration.



331  
 332 *Figure 4: Calibration of  $\beta$  and  $E_{trp}$  parameters for the four studied years. The  $\beta$  parameter is calibrated on*  
 333 *bare soil period measurements of ETca and the  $E_{trp}$  parameter is calibrated on non-stressed vegetation*  
 334 *period ETca measurements.*

### 335 2.6.3. Automatic irrigation module parameters

336 The irrigation parameters ( $D_i$ ,  $l_{end}$ ) values are set according to mean agricultural practices. When the

337 “automatic mode” is activated, a 30 mm irrigation depth ( $D_i$ ) is applied at each irrigation event. 45-day  
338 delay before harvest ( $I_{end}$ ) is set for irrigation ending. If the irrigation depth exceeds the total soil water  
339 storage capacity, the excess water is removed from the original 30 mm amount and a lower irrigation  
340 depth is simulated by the model.

## 341 **2.7. Model evaluation**

342 A four-year dataset of ETca was used to calibrate the model (i.e. calibration of  $\beta$  and  $E_{trp}$   
343 parameters) and DAM destructive measurements were used for the validation. The 18 maize fields and  
344 three irrigated zones (ASA) were used to evaluate the automatic irrigation module, comparing the water  
345 supplies provided by the farmers with those simulated by the model. For the three ASA, the model was  
346 run over all maize fields located into the irrigated zone; irrigation depths were cumulated and the total  
347 depth for the growing season was thus compared to the data given by the water manager.

348 In this study, we compared ETca and total irrigation depths simulated using the standard crop  
349 coefficient method and those obtained using the remotely sensed Kcb (i.e. the Kcb estimated from the  
350 daily GAI simulated by SAFY, optimized using the remotely sensed GAI). We also used a soil map that  
351 provides the soil depth and the soil water content limits (field capacity and wilting point). Root depth is  
352 closely linked to soil depth and depth of water infiltration. This value affects the amount of water  
353 available and the number of irrigation events needed to reach the crop needs. Thus we evaluated the  
354 impact of the use of soil properties estimated from the soil map on ETca estimates and on total  
355 irrigation depths, comparing to results obtained using *in situ* estimates of the SC.

356 The model was run using the interpolated GAI estimated for each sampled area (i.e. *LAM field, 18*  
357 *fields or ASA*) using the methodology presented in the previous study (Battude et al., 2016). The model  
358 evaluation was performed using several statistical criteria including correlation coefficient ( $R$ ), bias,  
359 Root Mean Square Error ( $RMSE$ ) and Relative Root Mean Square Error ( $RRMSE$ ), calculated by dividing  
360 the  $RMSE$  by the mean of the observed data.

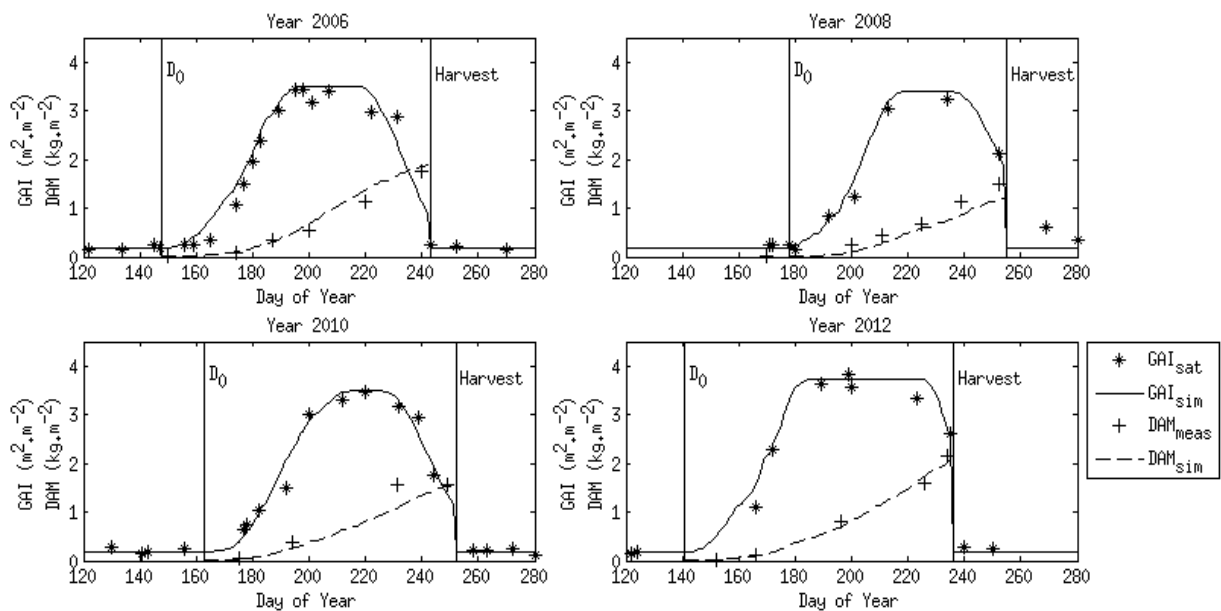
### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Results over the LAM field : Evapotranspiration and Biomass

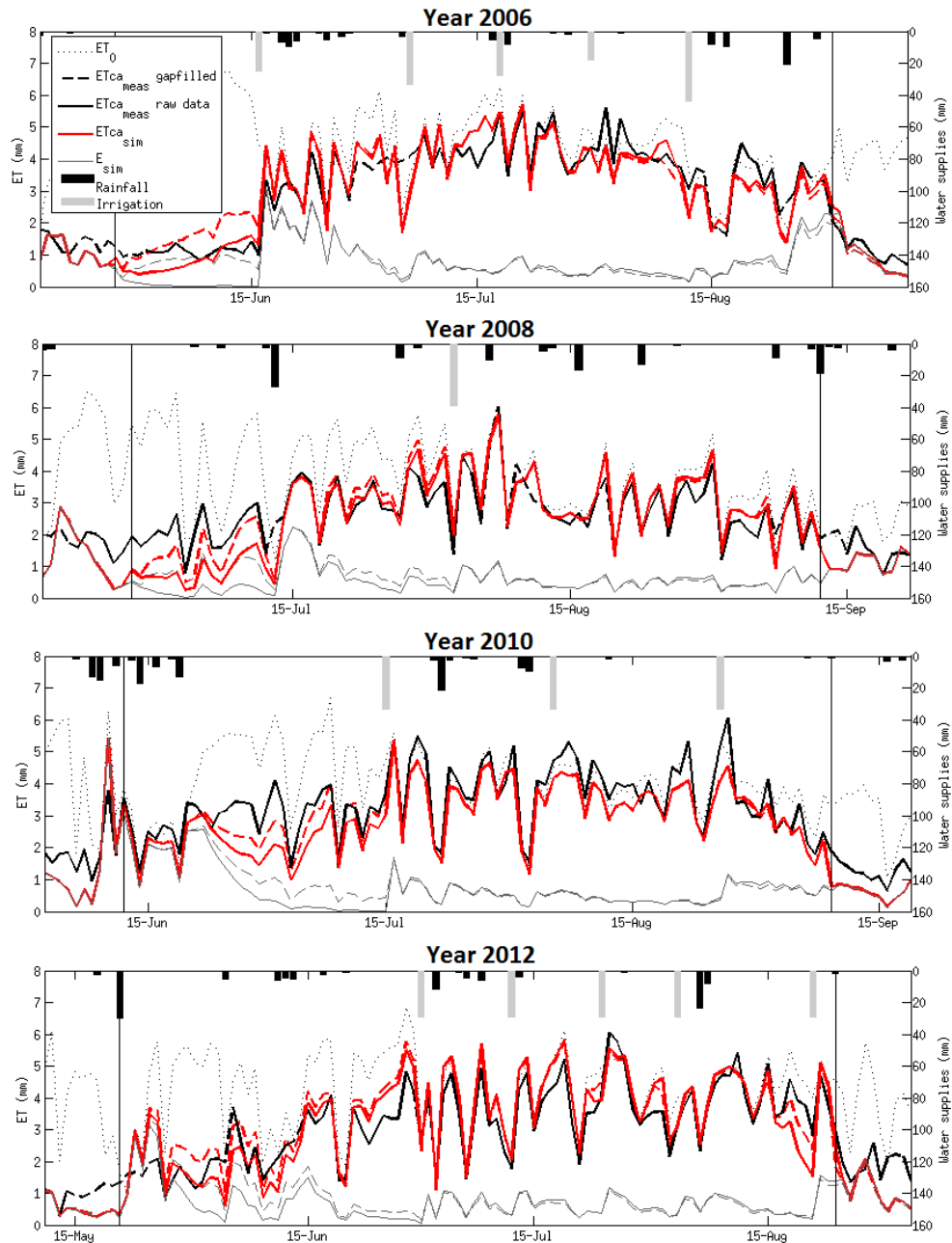
The dynamics of daily simulated GAI and DAM over the four maize growing seasons were respectively compared to remotely sensed GAI and *in situ* measurements of DAM performed over the LAM field. Results are presented in [Figure 5](#). In this section, the model was run with the forced mode (i.e. using the total water supplies: rainfall and real irrigation). Results show an overall good adequacy of the GAI and DAM from the emergence date to the harvest for the four years. The DAM dynamics of the four years is correctly reproduced by the model ( $R = 0.97$ ;  $RRMSE = 23\%$ ).

ETca measurements performed over the LAM field during the four years according to the Eddy-Covariance method have been used for the calibration of two model parameters ( $\beta$  and  $E_{trp}$ ). The daily simulated ETca was compared to these measurements. Results ([Figure 6](#)) show that the dynamics of ETca correlates well with measured values. The correlation analysis ([Figure 7a](#)) shows a good linear relationship between measured and estimated values of ETca during the growing period ( $R = 0.88$ ;  $RRMSE = 20\%$ ). We observe an overall underestimation of ETca before plant emergence and after harvest. These two periods correspond to bare soil in the model. However, if the model considers a total absence of vegetation, it may be actually different. Indeed, we found a delay between the actual emergence date and that observed by the remote sensors. Furthermore, some crop residues still cover the soil after harvest and they are not simulated by the model. This can explain the observed underestimation of simulated ETca. However, the main goal is to accurately reproduce the ETca during the growing period in order to have good estimates of the plant water needs. Focusing on the growing season, some discrepancies are observed, such as at the beginnings of the years 2008 and 2010, when the model underestimates the ETca. In both cases, it happens when FCOVER is lower than 0.5 and when no significant water supply (neither rain nor irrigation event) occurs for a long time (up to 1 month).

384 During these periods, the simulated soil evaporation is underestimated. The activation of the diffusive  
 385 fluxes [Eq. 11 with  $Edif = 1$  and  $Kdif = 3.5$ ] helped to reduce the water scarcity in the top and  
 386 intermediate soil layers and to increase ETca during these periods (see [Figure 6](#)). However, as the ratio  
 387 between evaporation and transpiration decreases while the vegetation grows, the activation of diffusive  
 388 fluxes did not change significantly the ETca estimates for the whole growing season. Given that the  
 389 activation of diffusive fluxes would imply the calibration of two more parameters and that it did not  
 390 bring significant improvement of the cumulative ETca values, we chose not to activate it for the  
 391 following work.



392  
 393 *Figure 5: Dry Aboveground Mass (DAM) and Green Area Index (GAI) dynamics for the four maize growing*  
 394 *seasons over the LAM field using the forced mode. Simulated GAI is compared to remotely sensed GAI*  
 395 *(used for the model calibration) and simulated DAM is compared to in situ measurements.*



396

397 *Figure 6: Comparison of measured (black line) and simulated (red line) actual crop Evapotranspiration*

398 *(ETca) dynamics for the four maize growing seasons over the LAM field using the forced mode Dotted*

399 *line represents reference evapotranspiration (ET<sub>0</sub>). Grey line is the simulated evaporation (E). Dashed red*

400 *and grey lines represent the simulated ETca and E when activating the diffusive fluxes. The two vertical*

401 *black lines correspond to the simulated emergence date and to the actual harvest date, respectively.*

402 *ETca measurements have been used for the calibration of two model parameters ( $\beta$  and  $E_{trp}$ ).*

### 403 **3.2. Effect of the use of the soil map and standard Kcb values on ETca** 404 **estimates over the LAM field**

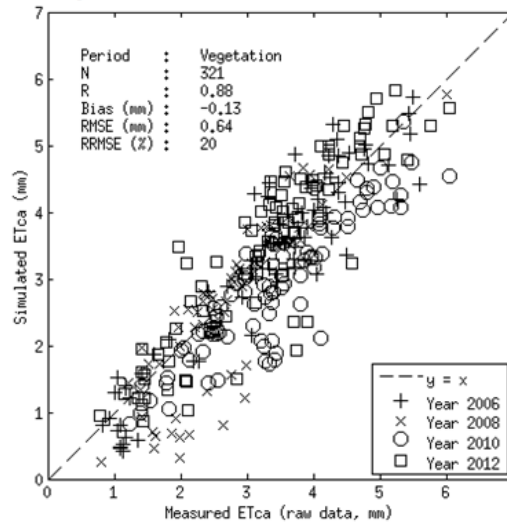
405 Since measurements of soil characteristics ( $H_{fc}$ ,  $H_{wp}$  and  $SD$ ) are rarely available over large areas, we  
406 used a 1/250 000 soil map that was available over the whole study area. Its coarse resolution implies  
407 that the soil characteristics estimated from the map differ from local conditions. To evaluate the  
408 potential effects of this difference on ETca estimates, we ran the model over the LAM field using the soil  
409 characteristics provided by both the soil map and *in situ* data. The soil water storage capacity ( $SC$ ) is  
410 equal to 285 mm using *in situ* measurements and 172.5 mm using the soil map. This difference led to a  
411 slight decrease and larger dispersion of ETca estimates when using the soil map (*Figure 7b*) compared to  
412 the use of local soil measurements (*Figures 7a*).

413 To estimate crop water needs, the CACG uses standard Kcb (i.e. basal crop coefficient) values based  
414 on the knowledge of the phenological stages of the crop under standard conditions (i.e. tables proposed  
415 by Arvalis - Institut du Végétal). This method presents two major limitations: the phenological stages are  
416 not accessible over large areas and “standard conditions” do not mean “actual conditions”. As an  
417 alternative, we propose to estimate the Kcb from the daily GAI simulated by SAFY [Eq. 10] optimized  
418 using the remotely sensed (RS) GAI. The use of remotely sensed Kcb, hereafter referred to as “RS Kcb”,  
419 permits to access differences that might occur between fields as demonstrated by several studies  
420 (*Bausch et al., 1987; Neale et al., 1989; Hunsaker et al., 2003; Glenn et al., 2011*). We compared ETca  
421 estimates over the LAM field using both methods. Results (*Figures 7a and 7c*) show that the use of the  
422 standard Kcb leads to poorer ETca estimates ( $R = 0.77$  instead of 0.88;  $RRMSE = 28\%$  instead of 20%).

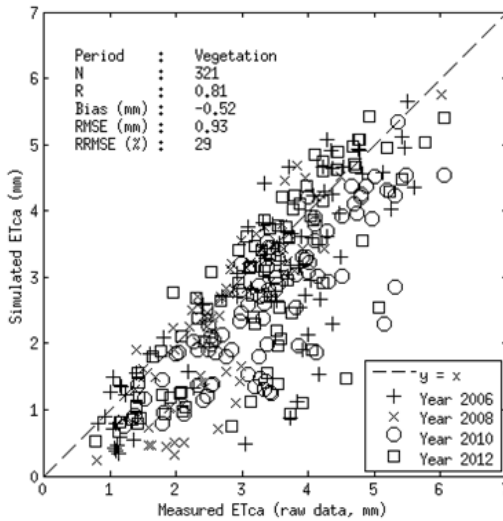
423



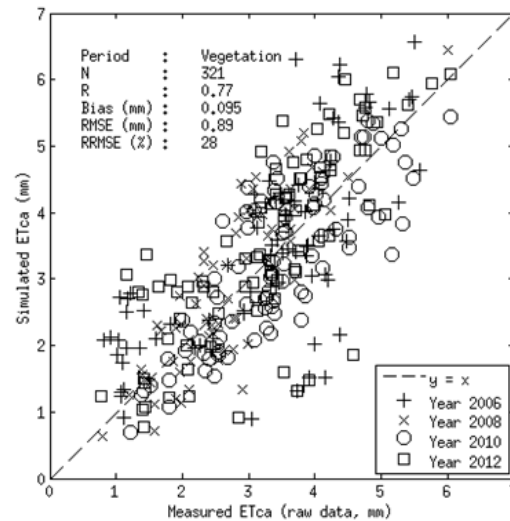
a) RS Kcb and soil measurements



b) RS Kcb and soil map



c) Standard Kcb and soil measurements



424

425 *Figure 7: Comparison of measured and simulated daily ETca [mm] of maize for the four growing seasons*

426 *(vegetation period) over the LAM field with the forced mode, when using a) the in situ soil depth and the*

427 *remotely sensed (RS) Kcb, b) the map soil depth and the RS Kcb and c) the in situ soil depth and the*

428 *standard Kcb.*

429 **3.3. Validation over 18 maize fields : total irrigation depth**

430 The model was run by activating the automatic irrigation module over a set of 18 maize fields to

431 evaluate its ability to trigger irrigations events according to the water stress level assessment. We used

432 the RS Kcb and the maximal soil depth (*SD*). *SD* was initialized using values provided by farmers.  $H_{fc}$  and  
433  $H_{wp}$  parameters were extracted from the soil map.

434 *Figure 8a* shows the comparison between the total irrigation depths provided by farmers during the  
435 growing season and those recommended by the model. Overall, despite an observed bias of 20 mm, the  
436 activation of the automatic mode resulted in a good reproduction of the farmers' practices in terms of  
437 total water amount ( $R = 0.79$ ;  $RRMSE = 18.8\%$ ). The negative bias can be explained by the fact that the  
438 model triggers irrigation when crop water stress occurs, while farmers are more careful and tend to  
439 irrigate before water stress occurs. In addition, farmers follow the advice of the water manager who  
440 calculates the crop water requirement using the standard Kcb and this method can potentially  
441 overestimate the water need.

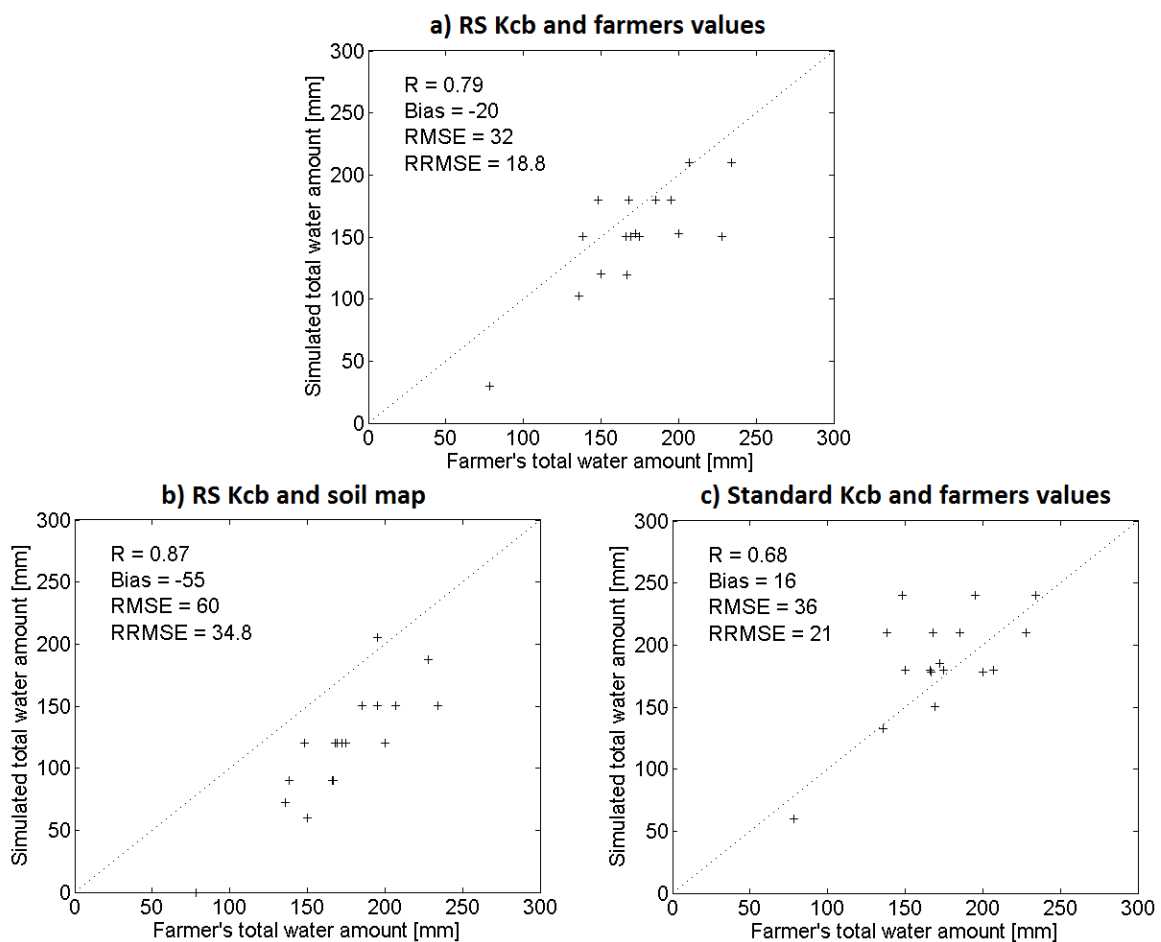
### 442 **3.3.1. Effect of the use of the soil map on the total irrigation depth**

443 We then evaluated the impact of the use of the soil map on the simulated total irrigation depth  
444 over the 18 fields using the soil depth (*SD*) provided by the soil map and that provided by farmers.  
445 *Figure 8b* shows an overall decrease of the amount of total irrigation depths when using the soil map  
446 compared to the use of local farmer-provided soil depth values (*Figure 8a*) (bias of -55 mm instead of -  
447 20 mm). This occurs because the value of soil water storage capacity (*SC*) [Eq. 5] was larger using soil  
448 map: 150 mm on average vs. 80 mm using farmers' data. As the *SC* is almost full at the plant emergence  
449 (only the first layer can be incomplete since evaporation occurs), the use of a higher value for *SC* leads  
450 to less water supplies.

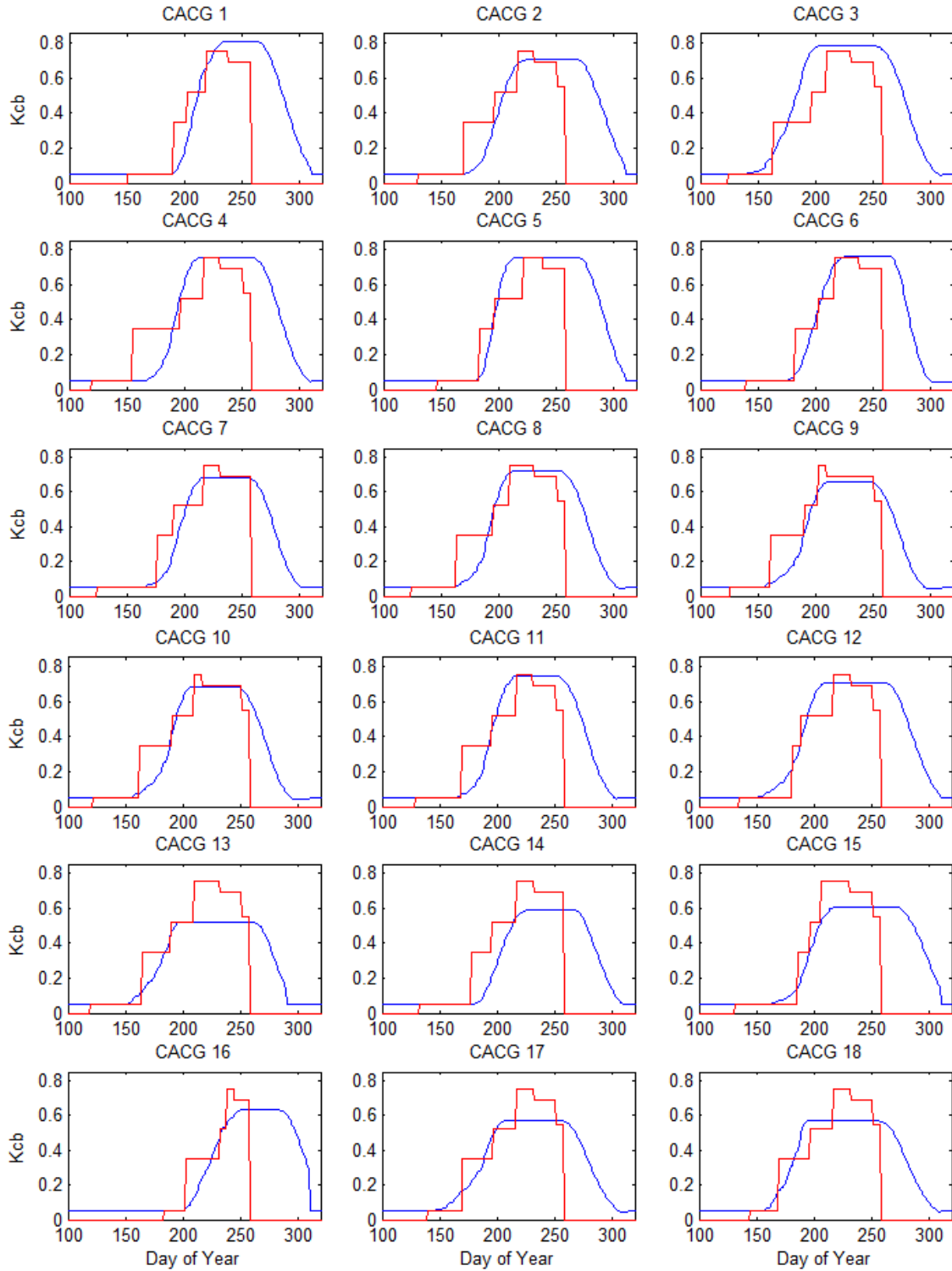
### 451 **3.3.2. Effect of the use of the standard Kcb values on the total irrigation depth**

452 Finally, we looked at the total irrigation water supplies simulated over the 18 maize fields using the  
453 standard Kcb values. *Figure 8c* shows that the use of the standard Kcb values led to a larger dispersion of  
454 the total irrigation depths compared to those obtained with RS Kcb (*Figure 8a*) ( $R = 0.68$  with standard  
455 Kcb instead of  $R = 0.79$  with RS Kcb). *Figure 9* shows the comparison of standard and RS Kcb time series

456 for the 18 maize fields: the RS Kcb evolves in the same way as the simulated GAI, whereas the standard  
 457 Kcb evolves gradually according to the phenological stages. Furthermore, we can see for some fields  
 458 that the standard Kcb value is higher than the RS Kcb at the beginning of the growing season. This can  
 459 lead to a higher estimation of crop water needs and thus increase the number of simulated irrigation  
 460 events. *Figure 10* shows the effect of the different Kcb estimates: standard Kcb values higher than RS  
 461 Kcb (near day 200 and day 220) led to an increase of simulated water needs followed by two additional  
 462 irrigations.



463  
 464 *Figure 8: Comparison of total irrigation depth [mm] applied by farmers over 18 maize fields and the*  
 465 *recommended irrigation of the combined SAFY-FAO model. For modeling we used a) in situ soil depth*  
 466 *provided by farmers and RS Kcb, b) soil depth provided by the soil map and RS Kcb and c) in situ soil*  
 467 *depth provided by farmers and standard Kcb.*

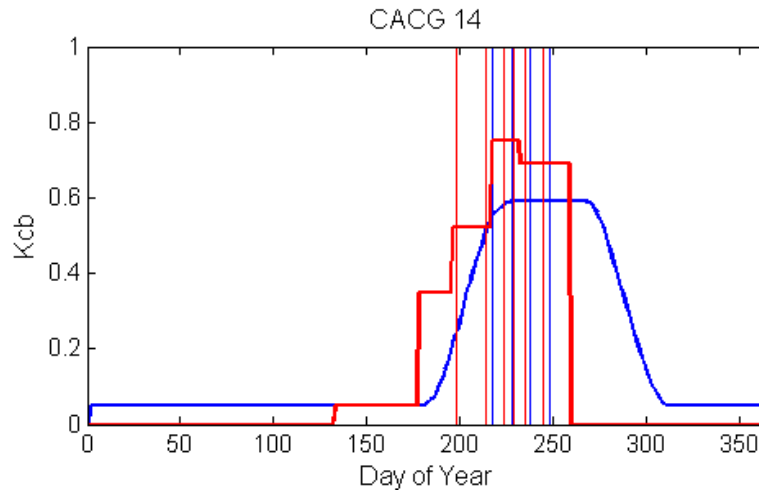


468

469 *Figure 9: Comparison of standard Kcb (in red) and remotely sensed Kcb (in blue) for the 18 maize fields in*

470 *year 2013. Standard Kcb ends in the middle of September, when the irrigation period ends (several weeks*

471 *before harvest).*



472

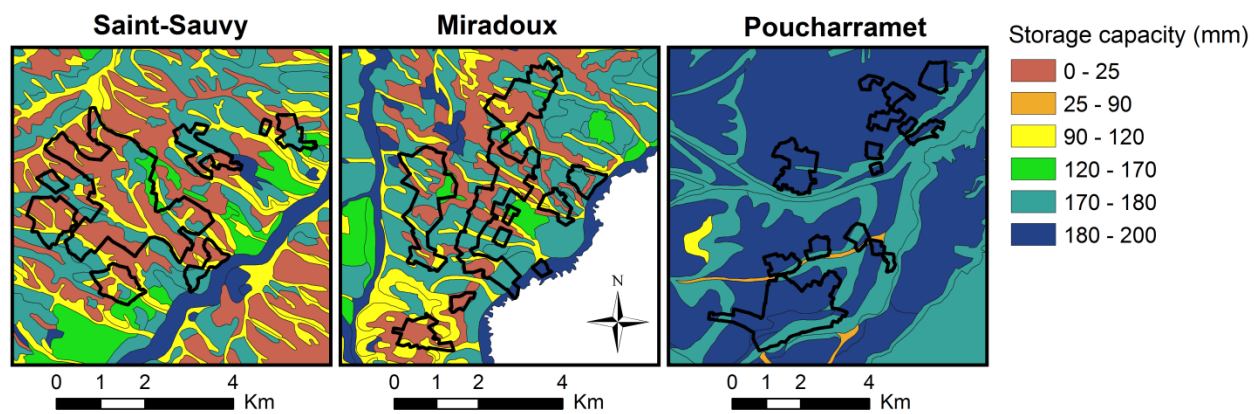
473 *Figure 10: Comparison of standard Kcb (in red) and remotely sensed Kcb (in blue) for a maize field in year*  
 474 *2013. Vertical red and blue lines represent the irrigation events simulated for the two cases (6 irrigation*  
 475 *events in case of standard Kcb and 4 irrigation events when using the RS Kcb). Standard Kcb ends in the*  
 476 *middle of September, when the irrigation period ends (several weeks before harvest).*

### 477 **3.4. Validation over 3 irrigated zones: total irrigation depth**

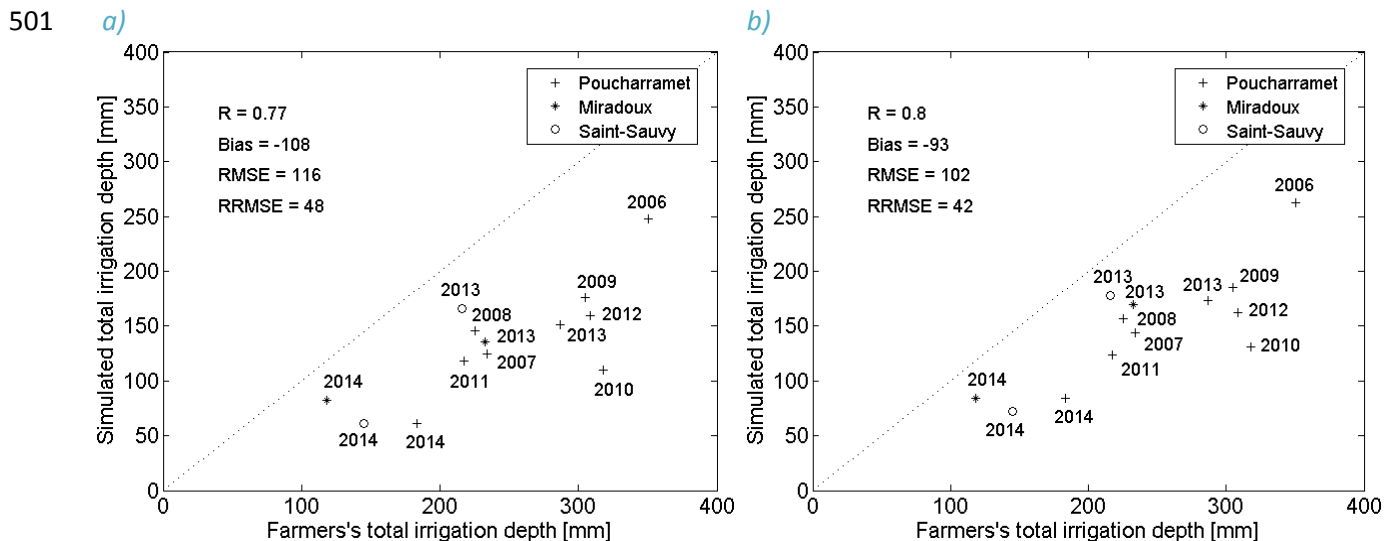
478 We ran the model over three irrigated zones (ASA) and compared the total irrigation depth  
 479 simulated (in mm) to the actual total irrigation depth (in mm). Water managers estimate there is an  
 480 average water loss of 12% due either to leaks during the transport of the water in the pipes (around 1-  
 481 2%) or to the sprinkler irrigation system (around 3-10%). We thus removed 12% from the recorded  
 482 annual irrigation depths.

483 In this section, we ran the model with the soil data provided by the soil map. For Miradoux and  
 484 Saint-Sauvy ASA, the soil water storage capacity (SC) extracted from the soil map varies from 24 mm to  
 485 195 mm (*Figure 11*). For all the fields of the ASA of Poucharramet, the map provides a SC value higher  
 486 than 170 mm. A high underestimation of the irrigation water amount by the model is observed in this  
 487 ASA (*Figure 12a*). Simulated total irrigation depths for the two other irrigated zones (Miradoux and  
 488 Saint-Sauvy) are closer to the observed depths. Given the results obtained over the 18 maize fields in  
 489 the previous section and the impact of the SC, we chose to limit the soil depth and thus the root depth

490 [Eq. 6] at a maximum value of 80 cm considered as more likely by farmers. For the ASA of Miradoux and  
 491 Saint-Sauvy, many of the fields are located on shallow soils (<80 cm) with low SC. For this reason, the  
 492 limitation of the soil depth (*SD*) had a lower impact on the estimated total irrigation depth. For the ASA  
 493 of Poucharramet, the modeled total irrigation depths are still lower than the observed values, but the  
 494 mean bias is a bit reduced using lower SC (-93 mm instead of -108 mm; *Figure 12b*). Part of the negative  
 495 bias may be explained by the SC that may remain too high for some fields despite the applied reduction.  
 496 The underestimation may also be partly due to over-irrigation practices carried out by farmers, linked  
 497 with an overestimation of water needs by water managers that use the standard Kcb. Despite this bias,  
 498 the model reproduces correctly the inter-annual variability observed across years and ASA ( $R = 0.8$ ).



499  
 500 *Figure 11: Soil water storage capacity of the three ASA (black polygons) extracted from the soil map.*



502 *Figure 12: Comparison of total irrigation depth [mm] applied by farmers and the recommended irrigation*  
503 *of the combined SAFY-FAO model over irrigated maize fields of the three ASA for different years using a)*  
504 *the soil depth provided by the soil map b) a maximum soil depth of 80 cm.*

## 505 **4. CONCLUSION**

506 One main objective of this study was to evaluate the potential of the SAFY-FAO model combined  
507 with remote sensing optical imagery to provide reliable estimations of water needs and total irrigation  
508 depths of irrigated maize crop over large areas. For that purpose, we used a new version of the SAFY  
509 model proposed by Battude et al. (2016) coupled with a water balance module adapted from FAO-56  
510 method (Allen et al., 1998). The SAFY-FAO model was chosen for its suitability for spatial approaches  
511 through the use of remotely sensed GAI time series. Another objective was to evaluate the impact of  
512 different methods used to determine the soil water storage capacity (SC) and the basal crop coefficient  
513 (Kcb) on simulated ETca and total irrigation depths.

514 After calibration over the experimental field using a four-year *in situ* ETca dataset, the model  
515 outputs were evaluated over 18 maize fields and three irrigated zones (ASA) for which the total  
516 irrigation depth applied during the growing season were known. Overall, good results were obtained for  
517 biomass production ( $R = 0.97$ ; RRMSE = 23%) and ETca estimates ( $R = 0.88$ ; RRMSE = 20%) after  
518 calibration over the experimental field. The model also reproduced well the total irrigation depths over  
519 the 18 maize fields ( $R = 0.79$ ; RRMSE = 18.8%). We observed an underestimation of the total irrigation  
520 depth (-93 mm) for the three ASA. This might be explained by either the use of the standard Kcb by  
521 water managers (leading to an overestimation of water needs), over-irrigation practices or even the SC  
522 values that might be too high when using the soil map. Despite this, the model reproduces correctly the  
523 trends observed between years and ASA ( $R = 0.8$ ).

524 This work permitted to highlight the impact of different methods to estimate the SC and the Kcb on  
525 ETca and on the total irrigation depth over large areas. The use of a standard Kcb led to a larger

526 dispersion on ETca compared to results found using a remotely sensed (RS) Kcb ( $R = 0.77$  with standard  
527 Kcb and  $R = 0.88$  with RS Kcb). Same conclusions were drawn for the total irrigation depth over the 18  
528 maize fields ( $R = 0.68$  with standard Kcb and  $R = 0.79-0.87$  with RS Kcb). Furthermore, the standard Kcb  
529 requires the knowledge of the phenological stages of the crop that are not available over large areas and  
530 even difficult to accurately obtain at field scale. Such results highlight the potential of the RS Kcb to  
531 improve irrigation water management.

532 The impact of various SC estimations (soil map vs *in situ* measurements or farmers' values) on ETca  
533 and total irrigation depths was also investigated. Results highlighted that the soil depth (SD) provided by  
534 the soil map induced negative bias on simulated ETca and total irrigation depth because of a high  
535 imprecision on soil properties (SD,  $H_{fc}$  and  $H_{wp}$ ) partly due to its coarse spatial resolution. Future work  
536 will investigate ways to retrieve SD, for example using the future Global Soil Map given at 90 m spatial  
537 resolution (<http://www.globalsoilmap.net/>).

538 This work also points out some limitations that should be investigated in future work. We chose to  
539 calibrate the water module using four-year averaged parameters based on ETca measurements. The  
540 validation using ETca measurements over other fields or years may allow evaluating the robustness of  
541 the calibrated parameters and the associated error.

542 We also chose to disable the diffusive fluxes in soils as results showed minor improvement on  
543 simulated ETca during the whole growing season. However, this process should be taken into account  
544 when simulating annual soil water budget.

545 The model was used on irrigated crops with a diagnostic approach. In the future, we planned to  
546 investigate its prognostic potential and enlarge its application on rainfed crops. This study demonstrates  
547 the high potential of an agro-meteorological crop model combined with high spatial and temporal  
548 resolution remote sensing data for a large-scale monitoring of total irrigation depths over maize fields. It  
549 offers encouraging perspectives when using Sentinel-2 images in the near future. The Sentinel-2 dataset,



550 available since May 2015, covering the whole globe and freely available, will be really interesting for  
551 future applications over large areas.

## 552 **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

553 This work is part of the MAISEO project (four-year FUI program, 2012-2016 financed by FEDER and  
554 BPI France). Observation data were collected at the Regional Spatial Observatory (OSR). OSR facilities  
555 and staff are funded and supported by the Observatory Midi-Pyrenean, the University Paul Sabatier of  
556 Toulouse (UPS) and CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique), CNES (Centre National  
557 d'Etudes Spatiales), IRD (Institut de Recherche pour le Développement). We are grateful to the team of  
558 the Lamothe experimental farm for facilitating access to their field. Thanks to Météo France and  
559 specially François Besson and Sébastien Prats for the supply of SAFRAN meteorological data covering the  
560 study area. We are also grateful to the members of the IGCS program and ENSAT (particularly Maritxu  
561 Guiresse) providing the soil map and Laurent Rigou (A.S.U.P.) for his support. Thank to Richard Escadafal  
562 for proofreading the paper. Special thank to the CESBIO team (Claire Marais Sicre, Bartosz Zawilski,  
563 Nicole Ferroni and Jean-François Dejoux) and CACG team (Mathieu Lasserre, Nicolas Laborde and Céline  
564 Joandet-Pérait) and all the persons who participated in the collection of data.

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