**QTL x environment interactions underlie ionome divergence in switchgrass**

Li Zhang1\*, Alice MacQueen1\*, Jason Bonnette1, Felix B. Fritschi2, David B. Lowry3, Thomas E. Juenger1

1Department of Integrative Biology, University of Texas at Austin, Austin TX 78712; 2Division of Plant Sciences, University of Missouri, Columbia MO 65211; 3Department of Plant Biology and DOE Great Lakes Bioenergy Research Center, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824

\*corresponding authors. Email: lz5943@utexas.edu or alice.macqueen@utexas.edu

Target Journal: New Phytologist or PCE

### Suggested reviewers: Michael Udvardi (or his postdocs), Gautum Sarath, Geoff Morris, Brian Dilkes, Jian Feng Ma or Marinus Pilon as possible editors.

Total word count: (5912 Intro, M&M, Results, Discussion – needs to be <6500).

Word count for Introduction: 1062

Word count for Materials and Methods: 1165

Word count of Results: 2367

Word count of Discussion: 1312

Number of Figures: 3

Number of Tables: 2

Number of Supporting Documents: 4

**Summary**

* Ionomics provides a snapshot of the functional status of a biological organism and captures information about its physiological status under different conditions. We evaluate genetic variation in the ionome in outbred, perennial switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*) in three environments across the species’ native range, and explore patterns of genotype-by-environment interactions (GxE).
* 725 clonally replicated genotypes of an outbred F2 mapping population, created from deeply diverged upland and lowland switchgrass ecotypes, were grown at three common gardens. Concentrations of 18 mineral elements were determined in whole post-anthesis tillers using ICP-MS. These abundances were used to identify quantitative trait loci (QTL) with and without QTL-by-environment interactions (QTLxE) using a multi-environment QTL mapping approach.
* Element concentrations varied significantly both within and between switchgrass ecotypes, and GxE was present at both the trait and QTL level. Concentrations of 14 of the 18 elements were under some genetic control, and 77 QTL were detected for these elements. 74% of QTL colocalized multiple elements, half of QTL exhibited significant QTLxE, and roughly equal numbers of QTL had significant differences in magnitude and sign of their effects across environments.
* The switchgrass ionome is under moderate genetic control and is controlled by loci with highly variable effects across environments.

Key words: GxE, QTLxE, conditional neutrality, antagonistic pleiotropy, bioenergy, reaction norm

**Introduction**

Plants take up most of the elements of the ionome from soil, which is highly heterogeneous across multiple spatial scales (Huang & Salt, 2016). Studies in many plant species have examined the genetic architecture of the ionome and discovered strong genetic effects underlying divergence in elemental composition, and many quantitative trait loci (QTL) in genetic mapping experiments (Buescher *et al.*, 2010; Lowry *et al.*, 2012; Zhang *et al.*, 2014; Shakoor *et al.*, 2016). Studies in *A. thaliana*, where transgenic manipulation is possible, have identified several causal genes controlling elemental variations (Rus *et al.*, 2006; Morrissey *et al.*, 2009; Chao *et al.*, 2014). Recent work in *A. thaliana* has also shown signals of local adaptation to soil salinity, which could be driven by genetic loci that affect the ionome (Busoms *et al.*, 2015). Regardless of plant species, studying genetic variation in the ionome can provide insights into how plants adapt to the highly variable soils that comprise the natural landscape, and can lead to the discovery of genes involved in elemental accumulation, including transporters, transcription factors, and metal binding proteins (Rus *et al.*, 2006; Baxter *et al.*, 2008; Baxter *et al.*, 2010; Baxter & Dilkes, 2012). However, the ionome of an individual depends not only on its genetic makeup, but also on the environment it experiences. Genetic variation in the makeup of the ionome between environments is a type of GxE.

The pattern of phenotypic expression of a single genotype across a range of environments is known as a *reaction norm*. Reaction norms make two important points about GxE explicit: first, that the phenotype expressed by a given genotype depends on the environmental context, and second, that the phenotypic effect in a given environment depends on the genotype in question (Gomulkiewicz & Kirkpatrick, 1992). The reaction norm of a particular genotype and its underlying genetic architecture are heritable properties of the genome and can evolve. Alleles of a gene that affect a reaction norm can do so, and thus exhibit GxE, in multiple ways (Des Marais *et al.*, 2013). For continuous phenotypes like elemental abundances, which have a given mean and standard deviation in two environments for a reference allele, the alternate allele of that gene can affect the magnitude or the sign of the phenotypic effect in one environment relative to the second. *Differential sensitivity* occurs when the magnitude of the phenotypic effect of an allele depends on the environment. *Conditional neutrality* is the most extreme case of differential sensitivity, which occurs when an allele affects the magnitude of the phenotype in one environment and not in another. *Antagonistic pleiotropy* occurs when the sign of the phenotypic effect of an allele depends on the environment. Studies of several biological systems in their natural environments have found that local adaptation is more often caused by conditional neutrality than antagonistic pleiotropy at the level of the QTL (Des Marais *et al.*, 2013; Wadgymar *et al.*, 2017). When alleles have been identified for ionomic traits, transcription factors and transporters are often involved (Mickelbart *et al.*, 2015).

Identifying molecular mechanisms causing GxE in the plant ionome has been difficult. GxE could not be examined in the many previous studies that identified ionomic QTL in a single environment (Loudet *et al.*, 2007; Norton *et al.*, 2010; Baxter *et al.*, 2014; Zhang *et al.*, 2014; Gu *et al.*, 2015). These studies have largely focused on characterizing the elemental accumulation of various plant tissues or species, and have led to valuable knowledge on the genetic control of element accumulation in plants. However, they offered limited insights into how the ionome interacts with environment. More recently, studies have begun to identify GxE and QTL-by-environment interactions (QTLxE) for the plant ionome (Phuke *et al.*, 2017; Veley *et al.*, 2017; Ziegler *et al.*, 2017; Fikas *et al.*, 2019). Thus far, these studies have been limited to biparental crosses or diversity panels with limited numbers of genotypes, particularly in short-lived, inbred crop species such as rice (*Oryza sativa*) and maize (*Zea mays*). Studies of GxE in the ionome in outbred, perennial systems may reflect different patterns of GxE, as these plants must cope with heterogenous environments, including non-optimal abundances of essential and non-essential elements, over their longer lifespans.

Switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*) is an outbred, perennial species with wide environmental adaptation across the eastern half of North America and high biomass productivity across a large geographic range (Casler *et al.*, 2007). Switchgrass was selected as a model bioenergy species by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) in 1991 (Wright & Turhollow, 2010), not only because of its high productivity across environments, but also its ecosystem services associated with carbon sequestration, soil erosion and wildlife biodiversity (McBride *et al.*, 2011). Switchgrass has substantial morphological diversity over its native range, including highly divergent southern lowland and northern upland ecotypes. The southern lowland ecotype of switchgrass is typically adapted to wet and riparian areas of the southern United States, tends to be more biomass-productive, nutrient-use-efficient, heat-tolerant, and pathogen-resistant than the northern upland ecotype (Porter Jr, 1966; Aspinwall *et al.*, 2013; Uppalapati *et al.*, 2013; Lowry *et al.*, 2014), while the northern upland ecotype is often adapted to dry areas of mid and northern latitudes, and tends to be more freezing-tolerant (Hultquist *et al.*, 1997; Casler, 2012; Peixoto & Sage, 2016).

In this study, we expand the scope of GxE research in ionomics by evaluating the genetic architecture and reaction norms of the ionome in switchgrass. We use an outbred, F2 mapping population derived from a four-parent cross of lowland and upland ecotypes (Milano *et al.*, 2016). We clonally propagated and planted the four parents, the two F1 genotypes, and approximately 750 F2 individuals at three common gardens, then quantified the accumulation of 18 elements. The 18 elements included macronutrients (Mg, P, K, Ca), analogues of macronutrients (Rb, Sr), micronutrients (B, Mn, Fe, Co, Cu, Zn, Se, Mo), and elements that can be harmful to plant growth (Na, Al, As, Cd). With these data, we evaluated the reaction norms of particular QTL for elements in the ionome. Our results allow us to address the following questions: 1) What is the genomic basis for variation in elemental abundances in the switchgrass ionome? 2) What fraction of QTL for distinct elements co-localize, suggesting possible common genetic architectures underlying their abundances? 3) How frequently do ionomic QTL show GxE? 4) Which QTL colocalize with candidate genes, suggesting avenues for future molecular characterization of the switchgrass ionome?

**Materials and Methods**

**Experimental Design and Phenotyping**

The details of the creation of the mapping population can be found in Milano *et al*. (2016). In brief, the genetic mapping population was produced from two initial crosses of two pairs of highly divergent southern lowland and northern upland ecotypes: lowland AP13 (A) x upland DAC6 (B), and lowland WBC3 (C) x upland VS16 (D). The F1 hybrids (A x B, C x D) were then intercrossed reciprocally to create the outbred four-way mapping population (F2).

The details of experimental design are described in Lowry *et al*. (2019). Briefly, the grandparents, F1 hybrids, and the F2 progeny were propagated clonally in 3.8-L pots at the Brackenridge Field Laboratory, Austin, TX in 2013-2015, and then transported to and planted at three field sites in May-July of 2015. Woven ground cover (Sunbelt 3.2 OZ, Dewitt Company)was used to suppress weeds, and holes were cut in a honeycomb fashion for planting of the experimental plants. Edge effects were prevented with a row of border plants. Plants were hand-watered as needed through the summer of 2015 to facilitate establishment, with no further supplemental irrigation after this point. The three sites (Austin, Texas, hereafter TX; Columbia, Missouri, hereafter MO; and Hickory Corners, Michigan, hereafter MI) have distinct soil and climatic conditions. TX site (30.384°N, -97.73°W) has clay soil, MO (38.897°N, -92.22°W) common garden is located on a silt loam soil, and MI (42.420°N, -85.37°W) site has a loam soil. The contents of mineral P, K, Ca, Mg and Na at each of the three sites were measured on a soil sample consisting of equally mixed proportions of soil samples (0-15 cm depth) from three locations spanning the entire garden on the diagonal. Soil samples were analyzed by the Soil, Water, and Forage Testing Laboratory at Texas A&M University. The concentrations of P, K, Ca, Mg, and Na were 8, 285, 16865, 222 and 11 ppm at TX site; 19, 106, 2351, 332 and 12 ppm at MO site; and 32, 41, 2154, 108 and 10 ppm at MI site (see also Table 2). The average temperatures in 2016 for TX, MO, and MI sites were 21.9, 13.6, 10.4 °C, respectively. The annual rain fall in 2016 for TX, MO and MI sites were 829, 928, and 975 mm, respectively.

Samples of whole post-anthesis tillers of approximately 700 plants were collected at each of the three sites at the end of the 2016 growing season. Tiller samples were first ground with a knife mill (Wiley Model 4, Thomas Scientific) to pass through a screen size of 2 mm and subsequently ground with an inducted air abrasion mill (Cyclone Mill, UDY corporation) to pass through a 1 mm screen. The milled samples were homogenized and aliquots were sent to the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center to determine tissue concentrations of 18 elements (P, K, Ca, Mg, Rb, Sr, Mn, Zn, Cu, Co, Fe, Mo, B, Se, Al, Na, Cd, and As). Details of the process can be found in Ziegler *et al*. (2013). Briefly, tissue samples were weighed and digested in nitric acid at room temperature overnight, and then heated at 100 °C for 3 hours. Elemental concentrations were measured by ICP-MS (Perkin Elmer NexION 350D). Measurements were corrected for potential variation in sample preparation and instrument drift using both internal standards and matrix matched controls as described in Ziegler *et al*. (2013). Outliers and negative values yielded due to machine error were further excluded from analysis.

**Genotyping and Map Construction**

Details on the genetic map construction can be accessed on https://datadryad.org/stash/dataset/doi:10.5061/dryad.ghx3ffbjv (Lovell *et al.*, 2020) and in Bragg *et al.* (2020). In brief, Illumina fragment paired end libraries from each of the four grandparents were aligned to the *P. virgatum* reference genome v5 via bwa *mem* (Li & Durbin, 2009) and used for single-nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) calling. Then a kmer-based approach was used to capture multiple variant and distinguish each grandparent when genotyping the progeny. The resulting genotype matrix was polished via sliding windows across the physical V5 switchgrass genome position and markers were re-ordered within linkage groups (Lowry *et al.*, 2019; Lovell *et al.*, 2020).

**Heritability Estimates and Genetic Correlation**

Narrow-sense heritability (*h2*) was estimated as *Va/Vp*, where *Va* is the additive variance attributable to genetic relatedness, and *Vp*is the total phenotypic variance. *h2* was estimated for each element at each site using the additive kinship matrix, which was obtained based on marker genotypic information. Genetic correlations between sites for each element were also estimated using the kinship matrix in a similar way. These two processes were implemented via the Sommer package (Covarrubias-Pazaran, 2016) in R (2020). Details on the implementation of the Sommer, particularly the multivariate mixed model (i.e., mmer) can be found in Lowry *et al*. (2019). Briefly, for *h2* estimation, ionomic phenotypes at each site were used as response variables in a linear mixed model with the kinship matrix modeled as a random effect to estimate the additive genetic variance for each genotype. For genetic correlation estimation, multivariate combinations of ionomic phenotypes from the three sites were used as response variables, and similarly the kinship matrix was modeled as a random effect and used to estimate the additive genetic covariance among phenotypes. We further tested for GxE on the trait level using the same multivariate mixed model. In other words, we tested whether *Va* differed by site for each element. Specifically, we used a likelihood-ratio test to compete two models. The first model (i.e., main effect model) assumed that there is no GxE and that a single additive genetic variance plus the fixed effect for environment is sufficient for modeling the data. The alternative model (i.e., unstructured model) assumed that GxE exists and freely estimates a unique additive genetic variance and covariance (an unstructured variance-covariance matrix) within and across environments. Significance of the likelihood-ratio test for GxE was assessed at the level of *α* = 0.05.

**Multi-environment QTL Mapping**

Details of the mapping procedures and implementation for the four-way population are described in Malosetti *et al*. (2013), Lowry *et al*. (2019), and Bragg *et al*. (2020). In brief, a multienvironment mixed model implemented in Genstat v.19 (2020) was fit for each ionomic element to identify QTL and potential QTL x E interactions:

where *μ* represents the population mean; *E* represents the environment effect; , represents the total effect from the additive effect from the first grandparent (i.e., the difference between *A* (AP13) and *B* (DAC) alleles, , the second grandparent (i.e., the difference between *C* (WBC) and *D* (VS16) alleles, , and the dominance effect (i.e., the intralocus interaction, ; represents the QTL × environment interactions; and *e* represents the error term. Genome-wide QTL and QTL x E significance was assessed at *α* = 0.05 with a Bonferroni correction (Li & Ji, 2005).

**Candidate Gene Search and GO Enrichment Analyses**

We consider the genes located in the 1.5-LOD confidence intervals around the detected significant QTL as candidate genes. We then determined if homologs from rice (v7), *A. thaliana* (TAIR 10), and a curated list of genes that affect the plant ionome (Whitt *et al.*, 2020) were overrepresented in our QTL regions. The annotation file for switchgrass was accessed on JGI (Joint Genome Institute) Phytozome 13 website: https://njp-spin.jgi.doe.gov/. The Gene Ontology (GO) enrichment analysis was conducted using Fisher’s exact test for each GO term via R package ‘topGO’ (Alexa. & Rahnenfuhrer., 2020). GOs with adjusted *p* < 0.05 were considered significant.

**Results**

**The genetic basis of elemental concentration variation and covariation at three common gardens**

To understand the genetic component of ionomic variation in switchgrass, we determined concentrations of 18 elements for both the F0 ‘grandparent’ genotypes and for the clonally replicated, outbred F2 genotypes at three common gardens. Average element concentration varied over six orders of magnitude: Co, Se, Mo, and Cd had the lowest concentrations (~1x10-2 µg g-1 dry weight) and K had the highest concentration (~1x104 µg g-1 dry weight). After correction for multiple testing, concentrations of 11 of the 18 elements differed significantly between the four grandparents (AP13, DAC6, WBC, and VS16) at one or more garden (Table 1). Concentrations of three elements (Ca, P, Na) differed significantly between the four grandparents at every garden after correction for multiple testing, and Sr and Mg concentrations also differed at every garden before this correction (Table 1). Interestingly, there were just as many significant differences in element\*garden concentrations (16) between the two lowland genotypes, AP13 and WBC, as there were between the upland and lowland parents. In contrast, there were only two significant differences in element\*garden content between the two upland parents.

In the F2 genotypes, variation in the concentration of each element followed a continuous, unimodal distribution within each garden (Figure 1a). Within gardens, the majority of the element concentrations were not strongly phenotypically correlated (r < 0.5); fewer than 3% of element pairs had positive correlations greater than 0.5 (Supplemental Table S1). Among these, Ca concentration was positively correlated with Sr concentration at each site (0.8-0.9), and Al concentration was positively correlated with Fe concentration at MI (0.8) and TX (0.5).

All element concentrations had low to moderate heritabilities (0 < *h2* < 0.6, Figure 1b). The majority of the elements (Na, Mg, Al, P, K, Ca, Mn, Fe, Cu, Zn, Se, Rb, Sr, Mo, and Cd) had moderate heritabilities (0.2 < *h2* < 0.6) for at least one garden, while B, Co, and As had low heritabilities (*h2* < 0.2) everywhere. There were moderate heritabilities for 8 elements in the TX garden (none unique to TX), 12 elements at the MO garden (Na and Al content were moderately heritable only at MO), and 15 elements at the MI garden (K, Zn, Se and Cd content were moderately heritable only at MI). The low heritabilities of some elements at certain sites (B, K, Co, As, and Se) were due to both the large error variance (*Ve*) and the near zero additive genetic variance (*Va*) for the concentrations of these elements (Supplemental Table S2). Likelihood-ratio tests between models with genetic effects only and models with genetic and GxE effects indicated that GxE existed for 16 of the 18 elements (all but B and Se) at the trait level (*p* < 0.05). Thus, switchgrass exerted genetic control of elemental accumulation in an environmentally-sensitive fashion for the majority of the elements of the ionome.

The distributions of all 18 element concentrations also differed significantly among gardens (all *p* < 0.002, Welch one-way tests, Table 2). These distinct phenotypic distributions were undoubtedly affected by soil element concentrations and availability, which varied in ways that affected plant element concentrations in both intuitive (Ca, K) and non-intuitive (Mg, P, Na) fashions (Table 2). They were also underlain by moderate to strong positive genetic correlations for the majority of the elements among gardens (Supplemental Table S3). Positive genetic correlations less than one indicate the presence of GxE at the trait level, and likely magnitude-changing instead of sign-changing patterns of GxE at the level of QTL across the common gardens for the elemental concentrations. Only one negative genetic correlation was observed, for B concentration in the TX and MO gardens (-0.46). Negative correlations indicate a possible trade-off in loci controlling B concentration. It should be noted, however, that B concentration heritabilities were low at both of these gardens, reducing our power to identify QTL. The genetic correlations for two elements (As and Se) could not be determined because the concentrations of these elements had close to zero genetic variance.

We next identified QTL and QTLxE interactions using independent multi-environment mixed models for each of the 18 elements. We detected 77 significant QTL with LOD thresholds above 3.5 for concentrations of 14 elements (Figure 2a, and Supplemental Table S4). Thirty-eight (49%) of these QTL exhibited QTLxE (Supplemental Table S4). No significant QTL were detected for B, As, Co and Se, almost certainly because of the low heritabilities of the tissue concentrations of these four elements (Figure 1b). The remaining elements had between two (Na, Fe, Mo, Cd) and 14 (P) significant QTL. We divided the 18 elements into four types: macronutrients, micronutrients, non-essential analogues to nutrients, and potentially harmful elements. If QTL had been equally distributed across the elements, we would have expected 17, 34, 8, and 17 QTL in these classes, respectively. However, there was an over-enrichment for QTL for macronutrients (2.05x, binomial test *p* < 0.001) and non-essential analogues (1.99x, binomial test *p* = 0.002) relative to this expectation, and an under enrichment for micronutrients (0.50x, binomial test *p* < 0.001) and potentially harmful elements (0.47x, binomial test *p* = 0.013).

**QTL colocalization across elements of the ionome**

Using our 77 QTL, we nextidentified QTL where distinct elements colocalized. Co-localization suggests either linked genes affecting element accumulation, or co-transport of elements using the same genetic architecture. The latter is more plausible for elements that are most commonly bioavailable in the soil as similar ions. We considered QTL colocalizing if there was any overlap in the genomic region with LODs within 1.5-LOD of the maximum LOD score. Twenty-one sets of QTL colocalized, and 20 QTL (26.0%) did not overlap another ionomic QTL, and hence were singletons (Figure 2b). Mg was the only element with a majority of singleton QTL, with both more non-colocalizing and fewer colocalizing QTL than expected (chi-square test, *p* = 0.005). P had the most colocalizing QTL. Colocalizing P QTL always colocalized with elements which are most abundant in soil as cations with 1+ or 2+ charge. Ca QTL always colocalized, either with P (2 QTL) or with elements most abundant in soil as 2+ or 3+ cations (3 QTL). Al QTL also always colocalized, with Sr in 3 of 4 QTL, and with Fe for both Fe QTL. The partial colocalization of QTL between Ca and Sr, and between Al and Fe, may underlie some of the high phenotypic correlation in these traits in the F2 genotypes (Supplemental Table S1). Three QTL sets colocalized four or more elements. One of these sets was located at 6.63Mb – 33.56Mb on Chr02N with Ca, Zn, Rb and Sr QTL, one at 0.97Mb – 41.75Mb on Chr04N that included Mg, K, Fe, and Al QTL, and the third at 33.91Mb – 51.66Mb on Chr07K that included Al, Ca, Mn, Fe, Zn, and Sr QTL (Figure 2a).

**Ionomic QTLxE frequencies and QTL reaction norms**

We next explored patterns of effect sizes, and types of QTLxE, in the 77 QTL, particularly the 38 QTL exhibiting QTLxE (Figure 3, and Supplemental Figure S1). The design of the crosses that generated the four-way population also allowed quantification of differences in allelic effects for two distinct lowland vs. upland crosses, AP13 vs. DAC (A x B) and WBC vs. VS16 (C x D). In addition to looking at patterns of GxE within these crosses, we could also determine if we had captured variation in effects between these crosses, for both QTL with and without QTLxE effects. For the 39 QTL without QTLxE, most effects (75%) had the same direction in both lowland vs. upland contrasts (Supplemental Figure S1). Thus, most QTL without QTLxE exhibited differences in QTL effects between the upland and lowland sets of parents, and few exhibited differences in QTL effects between the two upland or the two lowland parents. Of the ten QTL without QTLxE but with within-ecotype variation, two QTL were singletons, and four colocalized with elements which had no significant QTLxE. The remaining four QTL colocalized with elements which did have QTLxE. If these four colocalizing QTL are due to loci that affect the concentration of multiple elements, then these QTL represent an interesting case of GxE caused by changes in pleiotropy at that locus.

For the 38 QTL (i.e., 76 allelic contrasts) with QTLxE, 35 contrasts (46%) had differential sensitivity in effects (i.e., a magnitude change) across gardens, and 15 of these contrasts were statistically significant after a multiple testing correction (*t*-test, *p* < 0.000198, Supplemental Figure S1). These differentially sensitive effects were present both in one or two lowland vs. upland allelic contrasts. For instance, the effect of QTL 5K@51.99 for Na content was differentially sensitive in both allelic contrasts (Figure 3a), while the effect of QTL 2N@10.06 for Mn content, a micronutrient, was differentially sensitive only in the A x B contrast (Figure 3b). The other 41 allelic contrasts (54%) exhibited antagonistic pleiotropic effects (i.e., a sign change) across gardens, and 13 of them were statistically significant after a multiple testing correction (*t*-test, *p* < 0.000198, Supplemental Figure S1). The majority of the antagonistic effects were present in only one contrast. For example, the effects of QTL 2N@72.03, and 9N@24.08 for Rb, a macronutrient analog, were antagonistic for the A x B contrast, but not the C x D contrast (Figure 3c). Overall, element QTL with QTLxE did not have consistent patterns across environments. For example, the QTL 2N@78.05 and 3K@26.18 for P, a macronutrient, had the largest effects in TX, while the other two QTL 3N@56.03 and 4K@6.08 for P had the largest effect in MO (Figure 3d).

**Ionomic QTL colocalization with candidate genes**

To explore avenues for future molecular characterization of the switchgrass ionome, we determined the genetic content of the 77 QTL intervals for genes and gene ontology (GO) terms. We first examined QTL colocalization with candidate genes from ionomic mapping studies in other plant species, and found six important candidate genes (Supplemental Table S5) in the QTL intervals affecting element concentration in switchgrass. For example, *Pavir.9NG231800*, a homolog of *MOT1*, is located within the 1.5-LOD interval of the largest Mo concentration QTL (Chr09N@43.81). *MOT1*, which encodes a molybdate transporter, is responsible for the natural variation in Mo accumulation in *A. thaliana* and in rice (Baxter *et al.*, 2008; Huang *et al.*, 2019), and may play an important role in adaptation to acidic soils (Poormohammad Kiani *et al.*, 2012). *Pavir.7kg416470*, a homolog of *HKT1*, was a candidate gene in the QTL interval on Chr07K which colocalized for six elements. *HKT1* encodes a Na transporter, and is responsible for the variation of Na content in *A. thaliana* (Rus *et al.*, 2006; Baxter *et al.*, 2010), rice (Ren *et al.*, 2005), and wheat (Munns *et al.*, 2012). Interestingly, this candidate gene was in the QTL interval for Al, Ca, Fe, Mn, Sr, and Zn, and did not contain a QTL for Na concentration in our mapping population. Candidate genes for heavy metal-associated ATPases, which are homologs of *HMA* in *A. thaliana* and rice, were found in Cu (Chr01K@14.42 and Chr07K@26.27), Cd (Chr02N@85.72), and Zn (Chr02N@71.96) content QTL intervals. These genes are responsible for Cu, Cd and Zn, and Zn and Cd transport, respectively. A sixth candidate gene, *Pavir.9KG014451*, was associated with the homolog of *A. thaliana* *MYB36*. *MYB36* is aMYB domain transcription factor that regulates the expression of genes involved in the formation of the Casparian strip. The absence of the Casparian strip results in changes in leaf concentrations of Na, Mg, Zn, Ca, Mn, and Fe in *A. thaliana* (Kamiya *et al.*, 2015). This candidate gene was in the QTL colocalizing Ca (Chr09K@20.05), Mg (Chr09K@18.15), and Mn (Chr09K@20.05) concentrations.

To elucidate the cellular pathways associated with ion concentrations in switchgrass, we also looked at GO term enrichment based on the gene content in the 77 QTL. We identified 405 unique enriched GO terms across the ionomic traits (*p* < 0.05). Overall, these QTL regions were enriched for GO terms of DNA-binding transcription factor activity, heme binding, and oxidoreductase activity (Supplemental Table S6). Among the macronutrients and analogs of macronutrients, the QTL regions of Mg were significantly enriched for GO terms of carbohydrate binding, protein transport, cell wall biogenesis, and signal peptide processing, among the 34 ontologies. Mg is involved in protein synthesis (approximately 75% of leaf Mg), is associated with chlorophyll (15-20% of total Mg), and functions as a cofactor for a series of enzymes involved in photosynthetic carbon fixation and metabolism (Cakmak & Kirkby, 2008; White & Broadley, 2009). K QTL regions were significantly enriched for GO ontologies of oxidoreductase activity, calcium and iron ion binding, and in particular, antioxidant activity. K has a regulatory function in several biochemical processes related to protein synthesis, carbohydrate metabolism, and enzyme activation. K can enhance antioxidant defense in plants, which protects plants from oxidative stress in adverse environments (Hasanuzzaman *et al.*, 2018).

Among the micronutrients, Mn concentration QTL intervals were significantly enriched for GO ontologies of photosynthesis, mitochondria, carbohydrate binding, the photosystem I reaction center, and electron transfer activity. Mn functions as a major contributor to various biological systems including photosynthesis, respiration, and nitrogen assimilation in plants among other functions (Andresen *et al.*, 2018; Alejandro *et al.*, 2020). Cu content QTL regions were significantly enriched for GO ontologies of cell wall macromolecular catabolic process, oxidoreductase activity, calcium ion binding, and regulation of transcription among the 36 ontologies. Cu is an essential cofactor for numerous proteins, an essential player in electron transport, and involved in chloroplastic and mitochondrial Cu transport and homeostasis. Cu is also involved in the control of cellular redox state (a major Cu-binding protein is the Cu/Zn superoxide dismutase) and remodeling of the cell wall (Cohu & Pilon, 2010; Andresen *et al.*, 2018). Among the elements potentially harmful to plant growth, Cd QTL regions were significantly enriched for GO ontologies of metal ion binding, photosynthesis (light harvesting), and cell growth among others. Cd, as one of the most toxic and non-essential heavy metals for plants, can displace essential metals (such as Zn, Fe and Ca) from a wealth of metalloproteins and disturb normal physiological processes. It can also cause severe developmental aberrance such as chloroplast structure change, reactive oxygen species (ROS) production and cell death (Wan & Zhang, 2012).

**Discussion**

Ionomics has been a powerful tool for determining the elemental status of plants, assessing homeostasis, and evaluating the genetic architecture responsible for variation in elemental composition. With its unprecedented scale, our study on switchgrass not only examined the genetic basis of the ionome but also how individual ionomic loci responded to different environments (i.e., expressed GxE) in a perennial grass. We detected 77 significant QTL across the 18 elements, half of which had significant QTLxE effects. This indicated the importance of the environmental context in elemental concentration variation at the QTL level. We observed common QTL colocalization between elements, which supports a partially shared regulatory network for element uptake, transportation, or accumulation. Understanding the genetic architecture of elemental accumulation in our outbred population is the first step in uncovering the potential for ionomic adaptation in switchgrass in response to divergent environmental conditions.

Genotype by environment interactions are common across many different phenotypes, species, and environments. Previous work has found that GxE is often caused by differential sensitivity in response to the environment, and that antagonistic pleiotropy (or trade-offs) at the whole-genome level are relatively rare or weak (Des Marais *et al.*, 2013; Wadgymar *et al.*, 2017; Lowry *et al.*, 2019). Our study found not only conditional neutral effects, but substantial antagonistic pleiotropy (54%) across the ionomic QTL with QTLxE, indicating that alleles had opposing effects on element concentrations in different environments. This result suggests that the plant ionome may play an important role in local adaptation, as both model and empirical work have suggested that there should be strong trade-offs involved in local adaptation at the level of QTL (Felsenstein, 1976; Bradshaw & Schemske, 2003; Kawecki & Ebert, 2004). Our cross design also allowed us to compare allelic effects for two distinct lowland vs. upland crosses and determine if there was variation in effects between these crosses. Interestingly, some ionomic QTL showed differential sensitivity in one cross but antagonistic pleiotropy in the other. This suggests that the same set of loci may not be consistently responsible for divergence between lowland and upland switchgrass ecotypes, and implies that substantial ionomic variation also exists within upland and lowland ecotypes. In essence, these results suggest that different loci contribute to ionomic variation across the range of the species, and that ionomic divergence among ecotypes was not based on fixed differences between the ecotypes.

QTL for multiple elements typically colocalized in our study. This may not be surprising, as maintaining ion homeostasis requires a network of ion uptake, transportation, trafficking, and sequestration mechanisms, and not all genes in this regulatory network will be ion-specific (Clemens, 2001).We found substantial colocalization of P QTL with cation QTL, always with elements most abundant in soil as cations with 1+ or 2+ charge. Phosphorus is a component of key molecules of plants such as ATP, nucleic acids, and the form of P most readily accessed by plants, inorganic P, is likely co-transported with positively charged ions (Schachtman *et al.*, 1998). Colocalization of P QTL with cation QTL in our study might thus reflect co-transport of P and cations at the gene level. Indeed, we found a few cation transporters annotated for *A. thaliana* in the P QTL intervals, including high-affinity K+ transporter, ZIP metal ion transporter family, and Ctr copper transporter family. P QTL colocalized with K and/or Ca QTL at three positions (8K@10.7, 9K@60.9, and 9N@2.4). P, K, and Ca are all macronutrients, which plants need in large quantities. Although different populations may have adapted to soil types with different quantities of these elements, the need for these macronutrients in large quantities could have facilitated the evolution of similar or shared mechanisms or networks to take up these elements from soils, thus yielding colocalizing QTL. Alternatively, colocalization could be coincidental and/or simply due to multiple linked genes. In support of this view, P also had many QTL that were singletons (5 non-colocalizing QTL out of 14), as did the macronutrient Mg (6 non-colocalizing QTL out of 9). P and Mg deficiencies in soils are often widespread (Maathuis, 2009); thus, a potential adaptive scenario is that switchgrass plants were under stronger selection to increase uptake or tolerate lower levels of accumulation of these two macronutrients, the segregation of which drove the increase in variation for concentrations of these elements and led to ion-specific QTL. Indeed, our study identified significantly more QTL for macronutrients than expected (2.05x enrichment, binomial test *p* < 0.001). Identification of these QTL and their reaction norms is the first step in testing hypotheses of local adaptation in natural environments.

We detected fewer QTL than expected for micronutrients (0.5x, binomial test *p* < 0.001), and most micronutrient QTL colocalized with QTL of other elements. Taken together, these results suggest that there may have been only weak selection on accumulation of micronutrients in the grandparents of this population. It is possible that switchgrass obtains sufficient quantities of these micronutrients from any soil. We also found little variation in content of harmful elements, and fewer QTL than expected for harmful elements (0.47x, binomial test *p* = 0.013). It may be that harmful elements impose such strong selection that beneficial alleles have been fixed, and deleterious alleles purged, at least in the populations from which the four grandparents were sampled. Alternatively, harmful elements may not be present in sufficient quantities in the commonly encountered soils for the four grandparents, and thus there may have been only weak selection against specific or non-specific accumulation of these elements. We also found more QTL than expected for non-essential analogues (1.99x, binomial test *p* = 0.002). The non-essential analogue Sr was phenotypically correlated with its chemical analog Ca at every garden, and they shared colocalized QTL at the two large clusters on Chr02N and Chr07K in our cross. Strong correlations between Sr and Ca have been reported in other species (Broadley & White, 2012; Shakoor *et al.*, 2016). The colocalization of QTL of Sr with other elements also likely reflects its non-essential nature, in that it is seldom the target of uptake by plants, and instead only accumulates via non-ion-specific mechanisms.

We found multiple candidate genes which may affect ionome content in our QTL regions and provide targets for future fine-mapping research in switchgrass. Among these, we found a homolog of *HKT1*, *Pavir.7kg416470*, in the QTL on Chr07K. This candidate gene was in the QTL interval for the six elements, Al, Ca, Fe, Mn, Sr, and Zn, but not in either of the two Na accumulation QTL intervals. *HKT1*, which encodes Na transporter, was responsible for the variation in Na accumulation in *A. thaliana* (Rus *et al.*, 2006; Baxter *et al.*, 2010), rice (Ren *et al.*, 2005; Kobayashi *et al.*, 2017), wheat (Munns *et al.*, 2012), and maize (Zhang *et al.*, 2018). However, Na accumulation in these studies were assayed in plant leaves, while Na accumulation in our study was assayed from whole tillers, which included both leaves and shoots. It seems likely that different tissues could accumulate elements at different levels, but our data represents a composite picture of several tissues. In addition, soil Na was not particularly variable in our gardens (i.e., 11, 12, and 10 ppm for TX, MO and MI, respectively), and some of these elements do compete with Na uptake from soil (Mass *et al.*, 1972; Cramer *et al.*, 1989; Tuna *et al.*, 2007). It is also possible that the lack of variability of soil Na relative to these other elements masked a QTL effect for Na but allowed detection of this QTL for other elements.

Overall, our results suggest that ionomic variation, and ionomic variation across environments, is common in switchgrass. This variation, controlled by a combination of genes and the environment, offers critical material for adaptation of switchgrass metabolism and development across different environments. Future work should explore if ionomic variation is locally adaptive in switchgrass, which will help realize the potential of ionomics in studying adaptation to varying environments.

**Acknowledgements**

We thank the numerous technicians and postdocs for helping with data collection in the field sites. Special thanks go to the technician in Lincoln, NE, John Sanley, who helped weigh and handle the samples. We also thank the Ivan Baxter lab, particularly Dr. Baxter, at the Danforth Center for the ionomic assay we used, and the advice he provided. This research was supported and funded by the National Science Foundation Plant Genome Research Program (IOS-1444533) and by the US Department of Energy, Office of Science, Office of Biological and Environmental Research Award DESC0014156 to T.E.J and F.B.F. This material is based upon work supported in part by the Great Lakes Bioenergy Research Center, U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Science, Office of Biological and Environmental Research under Award Numbers DE-SC0018409 and DE-FC02-07ER64494. Support for this research was provided by the National Science Foundation Long-term Ecological Research Program (DEB 1832042) at the Kellogg Biological Station and by Michigan State University AgBioResearch. We thank the Joint Genome Institute and collaborators for prepublication access to the *Panicum virgatum* v5 AP13 genome reference.

**Author contributions**

F.B.F., T.E.J., and D.B.L. designed research; J.B., F.B.F., D.B.L., and T.E.J. performed research; L.Z. and A.M. analyzed data; L.Z. and A.M. wrote the paper with comments and editing by all co-authors.

**Data Availability**

The data, R scripts, Genstat outputs, and other outputs can be found on Github: https://github.com/Alice-MacQueen/fourway-ionomics. The phenotypic correlation between elements at each garden is presented in Supplemental Table S1. The variance partitioning between additive genetic variance and environmental variance in heritability estimation for each element at each garden is presented in Supplemental Table S2. The genetic correlation among sites for each element is presented in Supplemental Table S3. The identified QTL with confidence intervals are presented in Supplemental Table S4. The candidate genes are listed in Supplemental Table S5 (in a separate Excel), and the significant GO terms are included in Supplemental Table S6 (in a separate Excel). The effects of QTL identified for each element across gardens is presented in Supplemental Figure S1.

**References**

**Alejandro S, Höller S, Meier B, Peiter E. 2020.** Manganese in Plants: From Acquisition to Subcellular Allocation. *Frontiers in Plant Science* **11**(300).

**Alexa. A, Rahnenfuhrer. J. 2020.** topGO: Enrichment Analysis for Gene Ontolog. *R package version 2.42.0.*

**Andresen E, Peiter E, Küpper H. 2018.** Trace metal metabolism in plants. *Journal of Experimental Botany* **69**(5): 909-954.

**Aspinwall MJ, Lowry DB, Taylor SH, Juenger TE, Hawkes CV, Johnson M-VV, Kiniry JR, Fay PA. 2013.** Genotypic variation in traits linked to climate and aboveground productivity in a widespread C4 grass: evidence for a functional trait syndrome. *New Phytologist* **199**(4): 966-980.

**Baxter I, Brazelton JN, Yu D, Huang YS, Lahner B, Yakubova E, Li Y, Bergelson J, Borevitz JO, Nordborg M, et al. 2010.** A Coastal Cline in Sodium Accumulation in Arabidopsis thaliana Is Driven by Natural Variation of the Sodium Transporter AtHKT1;1. *PLOS Genetics* **6**(11): e1001193.

**Baxter I, Dilkes BP. 2012.** Elemental Profiles Reflect Plant Adaptations to the Environment. *Science* **336**(6089): 1661.

**Baxter I, Muthukumar B, Park HC, Buchner P, Lahner B, Danku J, Zhao K, Lee J, Hawkesford MJ, Guerinot ML, et al. 2008.** Variation in Molybdenum Content Across Broadly Distributed Populations of Arabidopsis thaliana Is Controlled by a Mitochondrial Molybdenum Transporter (MOT1). *PLOS Genetics* **4**(2): e1000004.

**Baxter IR, Ziegler G, Lahner B, Mickelbart MV, Foley R, Danku J, Armstrong P, Salt DE, Hoekenga OA. 2014.** Single-Kernel Ionomic Profiles Are Highly Heritable Indicators of Genetic and Environmental Influences on Elemental Accumulation in Maize Grain (Zea mays). *PLoS One* **9**(1): e87628.

**Bradshaw HD, Schemske DW. 2003.** Allele substitution at a flower colour locus produces a pollinator shift in monkeyflowers. *Nature* **426**(6963): 176-178.

**Bragg J, Tomasi P, Zhang L, Williams T, Wood D, Lovell JT, Healey A, Schmutz J, Bonnette JE, Cheng P, et al. 2020.** Environmentally responsive QTL controlling surface wax load in switchgrass. *Theoretical and Applied Genetics* **133**(11): 3119-3137.

**Broadley MR, White PJ. 2012.** Some elements are more equal than others: soil-to-plant transfer of radiocaesium and radiostrontium, revisited. *Plant and Soil* **355**(1): 23-27.

**Buescher E, Achberger T, Amusan I, Giannini A, Ochsenfeld C, Rus A, Lahner B, Hoekenga O, Yakubova E, Harper JF, et al. 2010.** Natural Genetic Variation in Selected Populations of Arabidopsis thaliana Is Associated with Ionomic Differences. *PLoS One* **5**(6): e11081.

**Busoms S, Teres J, Huang X-Y, Bomblies K, Danku J, Douglas A, Weigel D, Poschenrieder C, Salt DE. 2015.** Salinity Is an Agent of Divergent Selection Driving Local Adaptation of Arabidopsis to Coastal Habitats. *Plant Physiology* **168**(3): 915.

**Cakmak I, Kirkby EA. 2008.** Role of magnesium in carbon partitioning and alleviating photooxidative damage. *Physiol Plant* **133**(4): 692-704.

**Casler MD 2012.** Switchgrass Breeding, Genetics, and Genomics. In: Monti A ed. *Switchgrass: A Valuable Biomass Crop for Energy*. London: Springer London,29-53.

**Casler MD, Vogel KP, Taliaferro CM, Ehlke NJ, Berdahl JD, Brummer EC, Kallenbach RL, West CP, Mitchell RB. 2007.** Latitudinal and Longitudinal Adaptation of Switchgrass Populations. *Crop Science* **47**(6): 2249-2260.

**Chao D-Y, Chen Y, Chen J, Shi S, Chen Z, Wang C, Danku JM, Zhao F-J, Salt DE. 2014.** Genome-wide Association Mapping Identifies a New Arsenate Reductase Enzyme Critical for Limiting Arsenic Accumulation in Plants. *PLOS Biology* **12**(12): e1002009.

**Clemens S. 2001.** Molecular mechanisms of plant metal tolerance and homeostasis. *Planta* **212**(4): 475-486.

**Cohu CM, Pilon M 2010.** Cell Biology of Copper. In: Hell R, Mendel R-R eds. *Cell Biology of Metals and Nutrients*. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg,55-74.

**Covarrubias-Pazaran G. 2016.** Genome-Assisted Prediction of Quantitative Traits Using the R Package sommer. *PLoS One* **11**(6): e0156744.

**Cramer G, Epstein E, LÄUchli A. 1989.** Na-Ca interactions in barley seedlings: relationship to ion transport and growth. *Plant, Cell & Environment* **12**(5): 551-558.

**Des Marais DL, Hernandez KM, Juenger TE. 2013.** Genotype-by-Environment Interaction and Plasticity: Exploring Genomic Responses of Plants to the Abiotic Environment. *Annual Review of Ecology, Evolution, and Systematics* **44**(1): 5-29.

**Felsenstein J. 1976.** THE THEORETICAL POPULATION GENETICS OF VARIABLE SELECTION AND MIGRATION. *Annual Review of Genetics* **10**(1): 253-280.

**Fikas AA, Dilkes BP, Baxter I. 2019.** Multivariate analysis reveals environmental and genetic determinants of element covariation in the maize grain ionome. *Plant Direct* **3**(5): e00139.

**Gomulkiewicz R, Kirkpatrick M. 1992.** QUANTITATIVE GENETICS AND THE EVOLUTION OF REACTION NORMS. *Evolution* **46**(2): 390-411.

**Gu R, Chen F, Liu B, Wang X, Liu J, Li P, Pan Q, Pace J, Soomro A-A, Lübberstedt T, et al. 2015.** Comprehensive phenotypic analysis and quantitative trait locus identification for grain mineral concentration, content, and yield in maize (Zea mays L.). *Theoretical and Applied Genetics* **128**(9): 1777-1789.

**Hasanuzzaman M, Bhuyan MHMB, Nahar K, Hossain MS, Mahmud JA, Hossen MS, Masud AA, Moumita, Fujita M. 2018.** Potassium: A Vital Regulator of Plant Responses and Tolerance to Abiotic Stresses. *Agronomy* **8**(3).

**Huang XY, Liu H, Zhu YF, Pinson SRM, Lin HX, Guerinot ML, Zhao FJ, Salt DE. 2019.** Natural variation in a molybdate transporter controls grain molybdenum concentration in rice. *New Phytol* **221**(4): 1983-1997.

**Huang XY, Salt DE. 2016.** Plant Ionomics: From Elemental Profiling to Environmental Adaptation. *Mol Plant* **9**(6): 787-797.

**Hultquist SJ, Vogel KP, Lee DJ, Arumuganathan K, Kaeppler S. 1997.** DNA Content and Chloroplast DNA Polymorphisms among Switchgrasses from Remnant Midwestern Prairies. *Crop Science* **37**(2): cropsci1997.0011183X003700020047x.

**Kamiya T, Borghi M, Wang P, Danku JMC, Kalmbach L, Hosmani PS, Naseer S, Fujiwara T, Geldner N, Salt DE. 2015.** The MYB36 transcription factor orchestrates Casparian strip formation. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* **112**(33): 10533.

**Kawecki TJ, Ebert D. 2004.** Conceptual issues in local adaptation. *Ecology Letters* **7**(12): 1225-1241.

**Kobayashi NI, Yamaji N, Yamamoto H, Okubo K, Ueno H, Costa A, Tanoi K, Matsumura H, Fujii-Kashino M, Horiuchi T, et al. 2017.** OsHKT1;5 mediates Na+ exclusion in the vasculature to protect leaf blades and reproductive tissues from salt toxicity in rice. *The Plant Journal* **91**(4): 657-670.

**Li H, Durbin R. 2009.** Fast and accurate short read alignment with Burrows–Wheeler transform. *Bioinformatics* **25**(14): 1754-1760.

**Li J, Ji L. 2005.** Adjusting multiple testing in multilocus analyses using the eigenvalues of a correlation matrix. *Heredity* **95**(3): 221-227.

**Loudet O, Saliba-Colombani V, Camilleri C, Calenge F, Gaudon V, Koprivova A, North KA, Kopriva S, Daniel-Vedele F. 2007.** Natural variation for sulfate content in Arabidopsis thaliana is highly controlled by APR2. *Nature Genetics* **39**(7): 896-900.

**Lovell JT, Healey A, Schmutz J, Juenger T 2020**. Switchgrass v5 4-way (AP13 x DAC, WBC x VS16) genetic map: Dryad, Dataset, <https://doi.org/10.5061/dryad.ghx3ffbjv>.

**Lowry DB, Behrman KD, Grabowski P, Morris GP, Kiniry JR, Juenger TE. 2014.** Adaptations between ecotypes and along environmental gradients in Panicum virgatum. *Am Nat* **183**(5): 682-692.

**Lowry DB, Lovell JT, Zhang L, Bonnette J, Fay PA, Mitchell RB, Lloyd-Reilley J, Boe AR, Wu Y, Rouquette FM, et al. 2019.** QTL × environment interactions underlie adaptive divergence in switchgrass across a large latitudinal gradient. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* **116**(26): 12933.

**Lowry DB, Sheng CC, Zhu Z, Juenger TE, Lahner B, Salt DE, Willis JH. 2012.** Mapping of Ionomic Traits in Mimulus guttatus Reveals Mo and Cd QTLs That Colocalize with MOT1 Homologues. *PLoS One* **7**(1): e30730.

**Maathuis FJM. 2009.** Physiological functions of mineral macronutrients. *Current Opinion in Plant Biology* **12**(3): 250-258.

**Malosetti M, Ribaut J-M, van Eeuwijk FA. 2013.** The statistical analysis of multi-environment data: modeling genotype-by-environment interaction and its genetic basis. *Frontiers in Physiology* **4**(44).

**Mass EV, Ogata G, Garber MJ. 1972.** Influence of Salinity on Fe, Mn, and Zn Uptake by Plants1. *Agronomy Journal* **64**(6): 793-795.

**McBride AC, Dale VH, Baskaran LM, Downing ME, Eaton LM, Efroymson RA, Garten CT, Kline KL, Jager HI, Mulholland PJ, et al. 2011.** Indicators to support environmental sustainability of bioenergy systems. *Ecological Indicators* **11**(5): 1277-1289.

**Mickelbart MV, Hasegawa PM, Bailey-Serres J. 2015.** Genetic mechanisms of abiotic stress tolerance that translate to crop yield stability. *Nature Reviews Genetics* **16**(4): 237-251.

**Milano ER, Lowry DB, Juenger TE. 2016.** The Genetic Basis of Upland/Lowland Ecotype Divergence in Switchgrass (Panicum virgatum). *G3 (Bethesda, Md.)* **6**(11): 3561-3570.

**Morrissey J, Baxter IR, Lee J, Li L, Lahner B, Grotz N, Kaplan J, Salt DE, Guerinot ML. 2009.** The Ferroportin Metal Efflux Proteins Function in Iron and Cobalt Homeostasis in &lt;em&gt;Arabidopsis&lt;/em&gt. *The Plant cell* **21**(10): 3326.

**Munns R, James RA, Xu B, Athman A, Conn SJ, Jordans C, Byrt CS, Hare RA, Tyerman SD, Tester M, et al. 2012.** Wheat grain yield on saline soils is improved by an ancestral Na+ transporter gene. *Nature Biotechnology* **30**(4): 360-364.

**Norton GJ, Deacon CM, Xiong L, Huang S, Meharg AA, Price AH. 2010.** Genetic mapping of the rice ionome in leaves and grain: identification of QTLs for 17 elements including arsenic, cadmium, iron and selenium. *Plant and Soil* **329**(1): 139-153.

**Peixoto MdM, Sage RF. 2016.** Improved experimental protocols to evaluate cold tolerance thresholds in Miscanthus and switchgrass rhizomes. *GCB Bioenergy* **8**(2): 257-268.

**Phuke RM, Anuradha K, Radhika K, Jabeen F, Anuradha G, Ramesh T, Hariprasanna K, Mehtre SP, Deshpande SP, Anil G, et al. 2017.** Genetic Variability, Genotype × Environment Interaction, Correlation, and GGE Biplot Analysis for Grain Iron and Zinc Concentration and Other Agronomic Traits in RIL Population of Sorghum (Sorghum bicolor L. Moench). *Frontiers in Plant Science* **8**(712).

**Poormohammad Kiani S, Trontin C, Andreatta M, Simon M, Robert T, Salt DE, Loudet O. 2012.** Allelic Heterogeneity and Trade-Off Shape Natural Variation for Response to Soil Micronutrient. *PLOS Genetics* **8**(7): e1002814.

**Porter Jr CL. 1966.** An Analysis of Variation Between Upland and Lowland Switchgrass, Panicum Virgatum L., in Central Oklahoma. *Ecology* **47**(6): 980-992.

**R Core Team 2020**. R: A Language and Environment for Statistical Computing. Vienna, Austria: R Foundation for Statistical Computing. URL <https://www.R-project.org/>.

**Ren Z-H, Gao J-P, Li L-G, Cai X-L, Huang W, Chao D-Y, Zhu M-Z, Wang Z-Y, Luan S, Lin H-X. 2005.** A rice quantitative trait locus for salt tolerance encodes a sodium transporter. *Nature Genetics* **37**(10): 1141-1146.

**Rus A, Baxter I, Muthukumar B, Gustin J, Lahner B, Yakubova E, Salt DE. 2006.** Natural Variants of AtHKT1 Enhance Na+ Accumulation in Two Wild Populations of Arabidopsis. *PLOS Genetics* **2**(12): e210.

**Schachtman DP, Reid RJ, Ayling SM. 1998.** Phosphorus Uptake by Plants: From Soil to Cell. *Plant Physiology* **116**(2): 447.

**Shakoor N, Ziegler G, Dilkes BP, Brenton Z, Boyles R, Connolly EL, Kresovich S, Baxter I. 2016.** Integration of Experiments across Diverse Environments Identifies the Genetic Determinants of Variation in &lt;em&gt;Sorghum bicolor&lt;/em&gt; Seed Element Composition. *Plant Physiology* **170**(4): 1989.

**Tuna AL, Kaya C, Ashraf M, Altunlu H, Yokas I, Yagmur B. 2007.** The effects of calcium sulphate on growth, membrane stability and nutrient uptake of tomato plants grown under salt stress. *Environmental and Experimental Botany* **59**(2): 173-178.

**Uppalapati SR, Serba DD, Ishiga Y, Szabo LJ, Mittal S, Bhandari HS, Bouton JH, Mysore KS, Saha MC. 2013.** Characterization of the Rust Fungus, Puccinia emaculata, and Evaluation of Genetic Variability for Rust Resistance in Switchgrass Populations. *BioEnergy Research* **6**(2): 458-468.

**Veley KM, Berry JC, Fentress SJ, Schachtman DP, Baxter I, Bart R. 2017.** High-throughput profiling and analysis of plant responses over time to abiotic stress. *Plant Direct* **1**(4): e00023.

**VSN International 2020**. Genstat for Windows 21st Edition: VSN International, Hemel Hempstead, UK. Web page: Genstat.co.uk.

**Wadgymar SM, Lowry DB, Gould BA, Byron CN, Mactavish RM, Anderson JT. 2017.** Identifying targets and agents of selection: innovative methods to evaluate the processes that contribute to local adaptation. *Methods in Ecology and Evolution* **8**(6): 738-749.

**Wan L, Zhang H. 2012.** Cadmium toxicity. *Plant Signaling & Behavior* **7**(3): 345-348.

**White PJ, Broadley MR. 2009.** Biofortification of crops with seven mineral elements often lacking in human diets – iron, zinc, copper, calcium, magnesium, selenium and iodine. *New Phytologist* **182**(1): 49-84.

**Whitt L, Ricachenevsky FK, Ziegler GZ, Clemens S, Walker E, Maathuis FJM, Kear P, Baxter I. 2020.** A curated list of genes that affect the plant ionome. *Plant Direct* **4**(10): e00272.

**Wright L, Turhollow A. 2010.** Switchgrass selection as a “model” bioenergy crop: A history of the process. *Biomass and Bioenergy* **34**(6): 851-868.

**Zhang M, Cao Y, Wang Z, Wang Z-q, Shi J, Liang X, Song W, Chen Q, Lai J, Jiang C. 2018.** A retrotransposon in an HKT1 family sodium transporter causes variation of leaf Na+ exclusion and salt tolerance in maize. *New Phytologist* **217**(3): 1161-1176.

**Zhang M, Pinson SRM, Tarpley L, Huang X-Y, Lahner B, Yakubova E, Baxter I, Guerinot ML, Salt DE. 2014.** Mapping and validation of quantitative trait loci associated with concentrations of 16 elements in unmilled rice grain. *Theoretical and Applied Genetics* **127**(1): 137-165.

**Ziegler G, Kear PJ, Wu D, Ziyomo C, Lipka AE, Gore M, Hoekenga O, Baxter I. 2017.** Elemental Accumulation in Kernels of the Maize Nested Association Mapping Panel Reveals Signals of Gene by Environment Interactions. *bioRxiv*: 164962.

**Ziegler G, Terauchi A, Becker A, Armstrong P, Hudson K, Baxter I. 2013.** Ionomic Screening of Field-Grown Soybean Identifies Mutants with Altered Seed Elemental Composition. *The Plant Genome* **6**(2): plantgenome2012.2007.0012.

Table 1. Element concentration (µg g-1) means, standard errors, and comparisons by Welch one-way test of the four F0 ‘grandparent’ individuals at the TX, MO, and MI gardens.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Element | Site | AP13 | DAC | VS16 | WBC | P-Valuea |
| macronutrient |  | MI | 1614±48 | 2046±102 | 1163±48 | 1454±123 | <0.0001\* |
| Ca | MO | 1445±47 | 1395±80 | 1101±24 | 1736±155 | 0.0002\* |
|  | TX | 2947±149 | 5293±362 | 3953±156 | 2168±82 | <0.0001\* |
|  | MI | 72581±3741 | 46184±1711 | 31615±3024 | 66643±12666 | <0.0001\* |
| K | MO | 54865±5417 | 44609±11478 | 24143±8032 | 83190±10820 | 0.0419 |
|  | TX | 54414±5221 | 59728±13856 | 39167±5242 | 67527±7067 | 0.0525 |
|  | MI | 1367±50 | 1011±73 | 1059±50 | 1686±112 | <0.0001\* |
| Mg | MO | 857±25 | 767±47 | 784±50 | 1497±117 | 0.0175 |
|  | TX | 949±55 | 1333±101 | 1154±42 | 1027±52 | 0.0182 |
|  | MI | 296±10 | 391±21 | 386±18 | 441±24 | <0.0001\* |
| P | MO | 615±41 | 378±43 | 346±5 | 851±39 | <0.0001\* |
|  | TX | 316±12 | 758±53 | 650±41 | 300±16 | <0.0001\* |
| analogue |  | MI | 1.509±0.084 | 0.966±0.112 | 0.728±0.07 | 3.026±0.284 | <0.0001\* |
| Rb | MO | 2.923±0.162 | 1.245±0.129 | 0.94±0.036 | 3.719±0.222 | <0.0001\* |
|  | TX | 1.565±0.123 | 1.5±0.305 | 1.451±0.21 | 2.079±0.203 | 0.1951 |
|  | MI | 3.831±0.14 | 5.834±0.977 | 3.258±0.201 | 3.709±0.333 | 0.0418 |
| Sr | MO | 9.093±0.575 | 8.81±0.768 | 6.27±0.221 | 9.684±0.899 | 0.0011 |
|  | TX | 6.362±0.263 | 8.866±0.287 | 9.502±0.482 | 5.601±0.231 | <0.0001\* |
| micronutrient |  | MI | 3.417±0.247 | 4.12±1.188 | 3.294±0.431 | 3.32±0.502 | 0.9330 |
| B | MO | 3.402±0.704 | 3.196±0.673 | 3.319±2.247 | 2.476±0.273 | 0.6658 |
|  | TX | 4.925±0.421 | 7.211±0.432 | 6.852±0.537 | 4.402±0.319 | 0.0005\* |
|  | MI | 0.029±0.002 | 0.066±0.016 | 0.046±0.007 | 0.026±0.004 | 0.0356 |
| Co | MO | 0.219±0.057 | 0.321±0.186 | 0.145±0.025 | 0.168±0.036 | 0.6059 |
|  | TX | 0.082±0.008 | 0.149±0.047 | 0.189±0.122 | 0.11±0.033 | 0.4476 |
|  | MI | 3.223±0.144 | 5.333±0.261 | 4.919±0.125 | 3.332±0.164 | <0.0001\* |
| Cu | MO | 8.715±0.538 | 12.848±4.019 | 8.03±0.291 | 9.919±0.836 | 0.1985 |
|  | TX | 4.205±0.229 | 6.152±0.727 | 4.141±0.403 | 5.094±0.378 | 0.0729 |
|  | MI | 32.33±1.21 | 41.7±3.58 | 34.27±1.84 | 30.199±1.448 | 0.0458 |
| Fe | MO | 39.64±2.4 | 83.06±52.69 | 32.4±1.78 | 45.761±6.237 | 0.1069 |
|  | TX | 51.5±2.75 | 78.42±12.89 | 50.78±7 | 44.089±4.489 | 0.1662 |
|  | MI | 47.3±2.14 | 52.22±3.88 | 53.39±3.76 | 33.605±2.882 | 0.0009 |
| Mn | MO | 67.04±3.74 | 70.9±7.88 | 101.45±24.06 | 76.523±7.952 | 0.5783 |
|  | TX | 25.56±1.49 | 39.85±3.61 | 38.86±3.17 | 14.212±1.221 | <0.0001\* |
|  | MI | 0.046±0.002 | 0.039±0.003 | 0.051±0.003 | 0.041±0.003 | 0.0603 |
| Mo | MO | 0.087±0.004 | 0.056±0.005 | 0.053±0.015 | 0.122±0.009 | 0.0143 |
|  | TX | 0.092±0.011 | 0.044±0.005 | 0.053±0.007 | 0.117±0.018 | 0.0004\* |
|  | MI | 0.01±0.004 | 0.012±0.004 | 0.007±0.002 | 0.041±0.003 | 0.1384 |
| Se | MO | 0.042±0.003 | 0.05±0.017 | NA | 0.122±0.009 | 0.1384 |
|  | TX | 0.044±0.004 | 0.048±0.01 | 0.038±0.006 | 0.117±0.018 | 0.1384 |
|  | MI | 7.51±0.934 | 7.54±0.406 | 11.39±2.796 | 8.136±1.636 | 0.6080 |
| Zn | MO | 22.43±3.802 | 11.36±0.912 | 11.58±0.898 | 28.504±10.996 | 0.0754 |
|  | TX | 49.34±13.966 | 110.91±86.947 | 15.75±2.458 | 18.849±1.185 | 0.1489 |
| harmful |  | MI | 48.79±2.46 | 69.19±14.38 | 59.73±5.04 | 49.204±3.266 | 0.1845 |
| Al | MO | 102.17±10.24 | 95.78±30.36 | 77.56±10.51 | 84.231±5.996 | 0.5187 |
|  | TX | 68.36±5.2 | 100.48±16.74 | 77.55±7.45 | 56.923±4.699 | 0.0656 |
|  | MI | 0.01±0.001 | 0.019±0.004 | 0.012±0.001 | 0.011±0.001 | 0.1384 |
| As | MO | 0.016±0.003 | 0.022±0.017 | NA | 0.022±0.003 | 0.1384 |
|  | TX | 0.011±0.001 | 0.017±0.005 | 0.012±0.001 | 0.01±0.001 | 0.1384 |
|  | MI | 0.016±0.001 | 0.022±0.002 | 0.012±0.001 | 0.013±0.002 | 0.0027 |
| Cd | MO | 0.03±0.011 | 0.028±0.01 | 0.015±0.006 | 0.017±0.002 | 0.6142 |
|  | TX | 0.002±0 | 0.003±0 | 0.002±0 | 0.002±0 | 0.0216 |
|  | MI | 50.5±3.48 | 8.67±1.64 | 12.71±4.98 | 47.892±6.147 | <0.0001\* |
| Na | MO | 160.83±7.53 | 11.87±1.43 | 10.08±1.31 | 59.685±7.239 | <0.0001\* |
|  | TX | 122.87±12.37 | 35.46±5.04 | 65.56±14.28 | 124.885±15.271 | <0.0001\* |

aStars in this column indicate p-values that are significant after a Bonferroni correction for 54 independent Welch one-way tests.

Table 2. Element concentration (µg g-1) means ± standard errors of the outbred F2 mapping population, and comparisons by Welch one-way test at the three common gardens.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Elementa | TX garden | MO garden | MI garden | P-valueb |
|  | Ca | 3768±35 | 1420±12 | 1408±15 | <0.001\* |
|  | Soil Ca | 16865 | 2351 | 2154 | CL: 180c |
|  | K | 60162±882 | 60032±1010 | 55912±958 | 0.002\* |
|  | Soil K | 285 | 106 | 41 | CL: 125c |
| macronutrient | Mg  Soil Mg | 1530±14  222 | 1144±8  332 | 1309±11  108 | <0.001\*  CL: 50c |
| P  Soil P | 421±4  8 | 485±7  19 | 294±3  32 | <0.001\*  CL: 50c |
| macronutrient  analogue | Rb | 1.788±0.027 | 2.436±0.026 | 1.087±0.019 | <0.001\* |
| Sr | 8.459±0.073 | 8.534±0.078 | 3.846±0.04 | <0.001\* |
| micronutrient | B | 5.565±0.059 | 2.645±0.046 | 3.233±0.06 | <0.001\* |
| Co | 0.065±0.001 | 0.14±0.004 | 0.028±0 | <0.001\* |
| Cu | 4.926±0.058 | 8.325±0.117 | 3.801±0.036 | <0.001\* |
| Fe | 43.48±0.4 | 32.88±0.41 | 27.69±0.25 | <0.001\* |
| Mn | 27.46±0.31 | 80.63±0.97 | 48.27±0.58 | <0.001\* |
| Mo | 0.053±0.001 | 0.059±0.001 | 0.032±0 | <0.001\* |
| Se | 0.047±0.001 | 0.039±0.001 | 0.009±0.001 | <0.001\* |
| Zn | 18.819±0.349 | 10.995±0.147 | 6.509±0.096 | <0.001\* |
| Al | 58.96±0.73 | 76.17±0.71 | 41.06±0.5 | <0.001\* |
| potentially  harmful | As | 0.01±0 | 0.013±0 | 0.01±0 | <0.001\* |
| Cd | 0.003±0 | 0.024±0.001 | 0.03±0.001 | <0.001\* |
| Na  Soil Na | 70.46±1.47  11 | 25.56±0.53  12 | 9.72±0.17  10 | <0.001\* |

aWhen the element indicated is prefaced by the word ‘Soil’ the row contains average soil elemental concentration at this garden.

bStars in this column indicate p-values that are significant after a Bonferroni correction for 18 independent Welch one-way tests.

cCL: Critical level. The point at which the Soil, Water, and Forage Testing Laboratory of Texas A&M University recommends no additional nutrient input.

**List of figures**

**A picture containing diagram

Description automatically generated**

Figure 1. The genetic component of phenotypic variation in element concentrations across three common gardens (TX: orange; MO: green; MI: blue) (a) Phenotypic variation in element concentrations for the mapping population (F2). (b) Heritability of each element concentration.

A picture containing engineering drawing

Description automatically generated

Figure 2. (a) QTL with 1.5-LOD supportive intervals for each ionomic trait using the multi-environment QTL model from Genstat. (b) UpSet plot showing patterns in elemental concentration QTL colocalization between elements.

Timeline

Description automatically generated

Figure 3. QTL effects (reaction norms) across the three field sites (TX, MO, and MI) for a sample of representative elements: (a) Na (potentially harmful element), (b) Mn (micronutrient), (c) Rb (macronutrient analog), and (d) P (macronutrient). A x B represents the lowland AP13 x upland DAC cross, C x D represents the lowland WBC x upland VS16 cross.