

1    **Characterization of soil organic matter by near infrared**  
2    **spectroscopy - determination of glomalin in different soils**

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7

8    **Abstract**

9    Determining and characterizing soil organic matter (SOM) cheaply and reliably can help to support  
10 decisions concerning sustainable land management and climate policy. Glomalin, a glycoprotein  
11 produced by arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi, was recommended as a promising possible indicator of SOM  
12 quality. Characterization of glomalin as an individual constituent of SOM was found to be difficult  
13 therefore glomalin-related soil protein (GRSP) was proposed as an operationally defined parameter. But  
14 eExtracting glomalin-GRSP from and determining glomalin-GRSP in soils using classical chemical  
15 methods is too complicated and time consuming and therefore limits the use of this parameter in large  
16 scale surveys. Near infrared spectroscopy (NIRS) is a very rapid, non-destructive analytical technique  
17 that can be used to determine many constituents of soil organic matter including glomalin.

18    Representative sets of 84 different soil samples from arable land and grasslands and 75 forest soils were  
19 used to develop reliable NIRS calibration models for glomalin. One calibration model was developed for  
20 samples with a low content of glomalin-GRSP (arable land and grasslands), the second for soils with a  
21 high content of glomalin-GRSP (forest soils), and the third calibration model for all combined soil  
22 samples. Calibrations were validated and optimized by leave-one-sample-out-cross-validation  
23 (LOSOCV) and by the external validation using eight soil samples (arable land and grassland), and six  
24 soil samples (forest soils) not included in the calibration models.

1 Two different calibration models were recommended. One model for arable and grassland soils and the  
2 second for forest soils. No statistically significant differences were found between the reference and the  
3 NIRS method for both calibration models. The parameters of the NIRS calibration model (RMSECV =  
4 0,70 and R = 0,90 for soils from arable land and grasslands and RMSECV = 3,8 and R = 0,94 for forest  
5 soils) proved that glomalin-GRSP can be determined directly in air-dried soils by NIRS with adequate  
6 trueness and precision.

7 **1. Introduction**

8 Glomalin, a glycoprotein produced by arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi, was discovered and partially  
9 characterized in 1996 (Wright and Upadhyaya, 1996; Wright et al., 1996). It is assumed that the first  
10 function of glomalin is to protect hyphae from water and nutrient loss. But glomalin is also one of the  
11 factors that plays an important role in the formation and stabilization of soil aggregates (Wright and  
12 Upadhyaya, 1998; Rillig, 2004; Purin and Rillig, 2007). Glomalin presence increases water retention,  
13 nutrient cycling and reduces soil erosion. Glomalin also contributes to the improvement of soil porosity,  
14 development of root systems, relevant soil enzyme activities and plant growth (Wang et al., 2015).  
15 Glomalin contains approximately 37 % carbon and, in the soil environment, is characterized by  
16 persistence ranging from several months to years (Rillig et al., 2001; Rillig, 2004). Therefore glomalin is  
17 supposed to be an important part of the terrestrial carbon pool reducing atmospheric carbon dioxide levels.  
18 The role of glomalin in ecosystems and the influence of land use on its content and stability was studied  
19 by Treseder and Turner (2007) and Bedini et al. (2007), among others. It was found that glomalin can be  
20 used as an effective indicator of soil quality (Fokom et al., 2012, Vasconcellos et al., 2013) and as one of  
21 the criteria to define agricultural management strategies (Fokom et al., 2013). Glomalin was assumed to  
22 be a sensitive indicator of soil carbon changes (Rillig et al., 2003).

23 Characterizing glomalin as a separate and unique fraction of soil organic matter is a complicated task  
24 (Nichols, 2003; Nichols and Wright, 2005; Schindler et al., 2007). The link between glomalin and various  
25 protein fractions in soil is not clearly defined. Co-extraction of non-glamalin proteins cannot be avoided  
26 and glomalin-related soil protein (GRSP) was proposed as an operationally defined parameter correlating  
27 with the ecosystem parameters of interest (Rillig, 2004). Although GRSP is only operationally defined

1 and influenced by the extraction procedure and the method of determination, it can be used as a parameter  
2 relating ~~closely~~ to soil quality.

3 Glomalin GRSP is usually extracted from soils using 50 mM sodium citrate at pH 8 at 121°C in several  
4 one hour cycles. Comparison of the efficacy of three different extractants was studied by Wright et al.  
5 (2006). The authors found that sodium pyrophosphate or sodium borate were more effective at extracting  
6 glomalin than sodium citrate. Rosier et al. (2006) showed that the extraction process cannot eliminate all  
7 non-glamalin protein sources also determined by the Bradford assay (Bradford, 1976) because the  
8 Bradford assay detects all peptides larger than 3 kDa. Janos et al. (2007) studied autoclaving duration and  
9 delayed centrifugation, extraction ratio, spike recovery and denaturation of proteins during autoclaving.  
10 The authors concluded that although glomalin is partially denatured by heat and pressure during  
11 extraction, autoclaving is necessary to efficiently remove glomalin from soils. They suggest paying  
12 attention to the extraction procedure (extraction volume, autoclaving time) and to the contact of soil with  
13 the extract after extraction (they recommend immediate centrifugation). On the contrary to these results  
14 Lu et al. (2011) found that for the total glomalin content there is no significance difference between  
15 centrifugation delays of up to two hours. Pérez et al. (2012) compared two extractants with different  
16 extraction effectiveness for glomalin. They concluded that more aggressive extractants than citrate and  
17 extractants with a higher concentration are more likely to remove some additional fractions of humic  
18 substances.

19 Interferences in the Bradford assay caused by co-extracted humic substances for forest soils were studied  
20 by Jorge-Araújo et al. (2014). The authors concluded that the exact quantification of soil protein is  
21 complicated by the positive interference of non-proteins and the negative interference in the Bradford  
22 assay by co-extracted humic substances even though determination of GRSP can be useful for comparison  
23 of soil protein in different soils or for studies of variations for a given soil due to season, climate or land  
24 use.

25 Soil extraction followed by the Bradford assay determination has been studied also by Koide and Peoples  
26 (2013). The authors found that even if the Bradford assay suffers from many technical difficulties

1 (quantification of non-glamalin soil proteins, interferences from co-extracted phenolic substances) the  
2 method can effectively predict glomalin-GRSP content in hot citrate soil extracts in mineral soils.

3 Near infrared reflectance spectroscopy (NIRS) is a very fast non-destructive and environmentally friendly  
4 analytical technique. This method is mainly used to analyse food, feed, pharmaceuticals etc. but it has  
5 proved to be a very effective method for the basic characterization of some soil constituents (Shepherd et  
6 al., 2005; McCarty and Reeves, 2006; Cheng-Wen Chang and Laird, 2002; Jia et al., 2014), for the  
7 prediction of some chemical and biological soil properties (Heinze et al., 2013), and for a rapid and cost-  
8 effective quantification of some soil quality indices (Askari et al., 2015). Calibration equations reflect the  
9 relationship between the constituents of the sample and the NIRS spectral information (Martens and Nas,  
10 1989; Nas et al., 2002; Barnes et al., 1989; Stone, 1974; Williams and Norris, 2001). Central Institute for  
11 Supervising and Testing in Agriculture (UKZUZ) has developed and optimized the NIRS method for  
12 determining carbon and nitrogen in soils and prepared this method for international standardization in  
13 ISO TC 190 Soil quality (ISO, 2014). It was assumed that more information, including information about  
14 GRSP content, could be retrieved from the same NIRS soil spectra simultaneously.

15 We decided to focus our research mostly on these questions:

16 Can the measurement and calibration procedure described in the ISO standard for carbon and nitrogen  
17 determination by NIRS also be applied for the determination of GRSP?

18 Is the reference method and the NIRS method applicable for the whole range of agriculture and forest  
19 soils and contents of GRSP?

20

## 21 **2. Materials and methods**

### 22 **2.1. Soil samples**

23 Soil samples from the UKZUZ regular monitoring plots, 68 on arable land and 24 on grasslands, were  
24 used for the study (soil types: albeluvisol-Albeluvisol 6 samples, eambisol-Cambisol 26 samples,  
25 chernozem-Chernozem 8 samples, fluvisol-Fluvisol 1 sample, gleysol-Gleysol 6 samples, haplic-Haplic

1 luvisol Luvisol 25 samples, leptosol Leptosol 3 samples, phaeozem Phaeozem 1 sample, planosol  
2 Planosol 6 samples, regosol Regosol 1 sample, technosol Technosol 1 sample; IUSS Working Group WRB,  
3 2006). The soils covered a wide range of soils with different content of organic matter (Table 1). Air-  
4 dried soil samples, fraction < 2 mm, were used for the study. Eighty four samples were used for calibration  
5 and eight soil samples were used for external validation (Table 2).

6 Eighty one forest soil samples from the F+H horizons represented the variability of forest ecosystems  
7 across the Czech Republic (soil types: fluvisol Fluvisol 28 samples, cambisol Cambisol 28 samples, albic  
8 Albic pedzol Podzol 20 samples, and stagnosol Stagnosol 5 samples). Tree species forest composition  
9 and elevation, soil type, distance from cities and distance from the forest edge were the main criteria of  
10 the sampling sites for the study (Borůvka et al., 2015). Seventy five soil samples were used for the  
11 calibration model (Table 1) and six for external validation (Table 3).

## 12 **2.2. Reference method - Soil extraction and protein determination**

13 The soil samples were extracted following the procedure described by Wright and Upadhyaya (1996).  
14 Eight millilitres of a 50 mmol l<sup>-1</sup> sodium citrate solution (pH = 8.00) were added to 1.00 g of soil sample  
15 in a 30ml plastic autoclavable tube and extracted by autoclaving at 121 °C and 1.4 kg cm<sup>-2</sup> for 60 min. A  
16 steam sterilizer (75 S, H + P Labortechnik, Germany) was used for the extraction. Centrifugation at 3700  
17 g for 15 min was started immediately after autoclaving. The supernatant was decanted and stored at 4 °C  
18 until analysis but not more than three weeks. The soil was re-suspended and the extraction step repeated  
19 until only a light yellow colour of the supernatant was reached. Not more than 10 extraction cycles were  
20 used.

21 The protein content in the extract was determined by the Bradford method (Bradford, 1976) using the  
22 commercially available Bio-Rad Protein Assay kit (Bio-Rad Laboratories, USA). The analysis was  
23 performed according to the instructions provided by the manufacturer. Precipitation after addition of the  
24 Bradford reagent was observed for forest soils (not detected for soils with low content of organic matter)  
25 and the method had to be optimized. Dilution of one volume of the soil extract with two volumes of the  
26 extraction solution was finally found suitable for preventing precipitation. After this change of the

1 procedure the spectrophotometric determination was possible. The standard curve was prepared with  
2 bovine serum albumin as a standard (0 – 300 µg ml<sup>-1</sup>). Standard solutions or soil extracts diluted in  
3 phosphate-buffered saline (10 µl) in three replicates were mixed with 200 µl of diluted dye reagent in  
4 wells of a 96-well flat-bottomed microplates using a shaker (30 s, 600 min<sup>-1</sup>). The mixture was incubated  
5 for 15 min. The absorbance was measured at 595 nm on a microplate reader (Versamax, Molecular  
6 Devices, USA). The dye reagent was prepared by diluting one part Dye Reagent Concentrate with four  
7 parts water and filtering through a Whatman #1 filter.

8 All selected samples were extracted and determined by the reference method in triplicate and the mean  
9 was used as a reference value.

10 **2.3. NIRS determination**

11 The NIRS spectra were recorded on a Nicolet Antaris II (Thermo Fisher Scientific, U.S.A.). The  
12 reflectance spectra were measured from 1000 to 2 500 nm, resolution 0,5 nm. The soil samples were  
13 transferred to the sample compressed cells with 3 cm diameter and the surface was levelled. The spectra  
14 of the samples were scanned in 120 scans under continuous sample rotation. Windows of the sample cups  
15 were carefully cleaned by a gentle stream of -compressed air between the individual measurements. The  
16 spectra were processed using TQ Analyst 8 instrument software (Thermo Electron Corp., USA). The  
17 spectra were transformed in two ways:

18 (1) using the Savitzky-Golay algorithm with a 3rd order polynomial (Savitzky and Golay, 1964) and  
19 smoothed to reduce baseline variations and to enhance spectral features (Reeves et al.,2002)  
20 (2) using a standard normal variate (SNV) to correct a light scattering for different particle sizes.

21 Principal component analysis (PCA) was then performed to check the spectral homogeneity of the dataset.

22

1    **3. Results and Discussion**

2    **3.1. Calibration**

3    The spectra and the results of the GRSP content determined by the reference method (2.2) were used to  
4    calculate the NIRS calibration model. A scatter plot of reference values and NIRS predicted values for  
5    arable and grassland soils is given in Fig. 1 and for forest soils in Fig. 2.

6    Two calibration sample sets (84 soil samples from arable land and grassland and 75 forest soil samples)  
7    were selected to gain an evenly distributed coverage of the basic soil properties (Table 1) and most of the  
8    possible spectral variability. Calibrations were performed by partial least square (PLS) regression. Leave-  
9    one-sample-out-cross-validation (LOSOCV) was used to determine the optimum number of PLS  
10   components required to calibrate the models and then calculate the predicted values of the calibration  
11   subset in order to assess the robustness of the models. Eight PLS components were found to be an  
12   optimum for our calibration model. One sample was left-out from the calibration set, and a model was  
13   built with the remaining samples. The left-out sample was predicted by this model, and the whole  
14   procedure was repeated by leaving out each sample in the calibration set (ISO, 2014; Centner et al., 1998).  
15   The residuals of cross-validation predictions were pooled to calculate the root mean square error of cross  
16   validation (RMSECV). The RMSECV were calculated as:

$$17 \quad RMSECV = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n_c} (\hat{y}_{ci} - y_{ci})^2}{n_c}} \quad (1)$$

18   where  $n_c$  is the number of samples in calibration set,  $y_{ci}$  is the reference measurement value of sample  $i$ ,  
19   and  $\hat{y}_{ci}$  is the estimated value for sample  $i$  by the model constructed when the sample  $i$  is left out;

20   The final calibration model was chosen according to the global lowest RMSECV = 0,70 and R = 0,90 for  
21   soils from arable land and grassland and RMSECV = 3,8 and R = 0,94 for forest soils. A calibration model  
22   covering all soils can be also derived by the same procedure and the results are acceptable but the spectral  
23   properties of forest soils and agriculture soils were substantially different (Fig. 3) and therefore we finally  
24   decided to use two separate calibration models - one for soils from arable land and grassland with the  
25   content of glomalin-GRSP up to 12 mg g<sup>-1</sup> and the second for forest soils with the content of glomalin

1 GRSP up to 60 mg g<sup>-1</sup>. It can be seen in the Figure 1 that the soil sample set for arable land and grasslands  
2 consisted mostly from samples with the GRSP content lower than 8 mg g<sup>-1</sup> and only two samples had the  
3 GRSP content around 10 mg g<sup>-1</sup>. Therefore a separate calibration model was developed to check the  
4 influence of these two samples on the regression curve and RMSECV. The calibration model was only  
5 slightly worse (RMSECV = 0,71 and R = 0,87) if compared with the calibration model for all samples  
6 (RMSECV = 0,70 and R = 0,90) and the results of GRSP determination in samples used for external  
7 validation were practically identical for both calibration models (Table 3).

### 8 **3.2. Validation of the calibration models**

9 The prediction ability of both calibration models was tested on independent sample sets (eight different  
10 soil samples for arable land and grasslands and six samples for forest soils) by external validation. The  
11 main characterization of the samples used for external validation and the results of the estimation of  
12 glomalin GRSP content are given in Table 2 and Table 3. The content of GRSP was determined using a  
13 reference method (2.2) and NIRS (2.3) in triplicate. The results were compared using R 3.0.2 software by  
14 paired t-test. The analysis did not show any statistically significant difference between the reference  
15 method and the NIRS method (p=0,55 for arable soils and grasslands, p=0,54 for forest soils).

### 16 **3.3. Routine measurement of GRSP by NIRS**

17 In a routine measurement, a principal component analysis (PCA) and a cluster analysis are applied to  
18 prove that the developed calibration model is valid for each individual soil sample. Samples that do not  
19 fulfil the statistical criteria are analysed by a reference method and the results are used to improve the  
20 calibration model. Other soil parameters such as the content of oxidizable carbon (Cox), total carbon and  
21 total nitrogen are determined simultaneously from the same NIRS measurement (ISO, 2014).

22

## 23 **4. CONCLUSIONS**

24 NIRS proved to be a very powerful technique to reliably and quickly determine GRSP. The method can  
25 substitute the relatively difficult and laborious determination of GRSP in soils by high-pressure extraction

1 followed by Bradford protein determination. Our results support the results of many authors who used  
2 NIRS to determine a wide range of soil properties with this method (e.g. Peltre et al., 2011; Heinze et al.,  
3 2013). The NIRS method has been tested in a large scale in the national soil testing survey ~~where, among  
4 others, the determination of the GRSP/Cox ratio was calculated as one of the possible markers of soil  
5 organic matter (SOM) quality~~. Our future work will focus on the improvement of the interpretation of the  
6 NIRS results as well as widening the scope of the NIRS calibration for other SOM quality markers.  
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5

1 Table 1. Physico-chemical soil properties of samples used for calibration (arable soils and grasslands,  
2 84 samples; forest soils, 75 samples)

Arable and grassland soils			Forest soils			
	pH	Cox (%)	GRSP (mg g <sup>-1</sup> )	pH	Cox (%)	GRSP (mg g <sup>-1</sup> )
Minimum	3.6	1.1	1.1	3.3	3.7	6.6
1st quartile	5.0	1.5	2.4	3.6	7.8	13.2
Median	5.6	1.9	3.2	4.0	13.3	17.8
Mean	5.6	2.2	3.6	4.2	16.2	21.0
3rd quartile	6.2	2.5	4.6	4.5	25.7	25.9
Maximum	7.5	6.1	10.5	6.6	35.3	55.1

3 CEC – cation exchange capacity, Cox – oxidisable carbon, GRSP – content of glomalin

Naformátová tabuľka

1 Table 2. Physico-chemical soil properties and the content of glomalin-GRSP in samples used for  
 2 external validation – arable land and grasslands

	pH	Cox (%)	GRSP (mg g <sup>-1</sup> )	<u>NIRS (mg g<sup>-1</sup>)<sup>a</sup></u>	<u>NIRS (mg g<sup>-1</sup>)<sup>b</sup></u>
Soil 1	6.8	1.4	1.9	<u>1.9</u>	<u>2.14.9</u>
Soil 2	7.3	1.9	3.9	<u>4.2</u>	<u>4.24.2</u>
Soil 3	5.9	2.0	3.5	<u>3.2</u>	<u>2.93.2</u>
Soil 4	6.7	3.0	3.7	<u>3.7</u>	<u>4.43.7</u>
Soil 5	5.7	1.7	2.5	<u>3.3</u>	<u>3.03.3</u>
Soil 6	6.6	1.5	2.8	<u>3.1</u>	<u>3.03.1</u>
Soil 7	5.2	1.9	3.1	<u>2.8</u>	<u>2.72.8</u>
Soil 8	6.1	1.8	2.9	<u>2.9</u>	<u>3.22.9</u>

Naformátována tabuľka

Naformátováno: horní index

Naformátováno: horní index

3 CEC – cation exchange capacity, Cox – oxidisable carbon, GRSP – content of glomalin determined by  
 4 high-pressure extraction and Bradford assay: [NIRS - content of GRSP determined by NIRS method](#)

5 [\(NIRS<sup>a</sup> calibration model for all samples, content of GRSP < 12 mg g<sup>-1</sup>;](#) NIRS<sup>b</sup> calibration model

6 [without two high samples, content of GRSP < 8 mg g<sup>-1</sup>\).](#) NIRS – content of glomalin determined by

7 [NIRS method](#)

1 Table 3. Physico-chemical soil properties and the content of glomalin-GRSP in samples used for  
2 external validation – forest soils

	pH	Cox (%)	GRSP (mg g <sup>-1</sup> )	NIRS (mg g <sup>-1</sup> )
Soil 1	4.3	10.2	13.7	12.3
Soil 2	3.9	15.6	19.4	16.8
Soil 3	5.3	26.3	25.8	23.1
Soil 4	4.7	23.8	31.3	32.1
Soil 5	5.7	41.9	32.8	33.0
Soil 6	4.4	34.4	35.9	38.3

Naformátována tabuľka

3 Cox – oxidisable carbon, Ctot – total carbon, GRSP – content of glomalin determined by high-pressure  
4 extraction and Bradford assay, NIRS – content of glomalin determined by NIRS method.

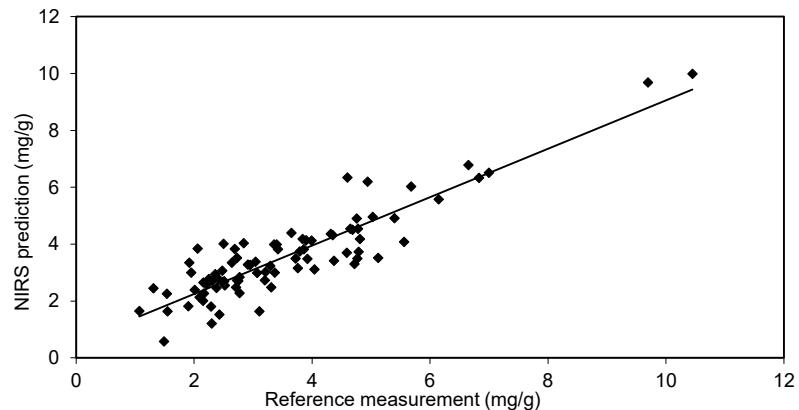
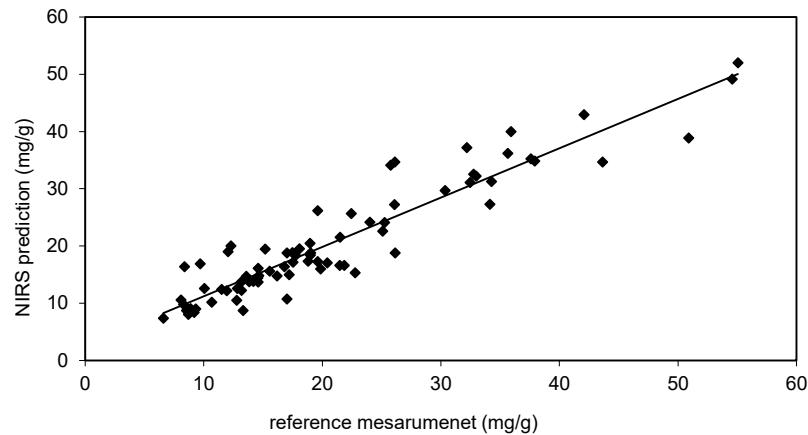


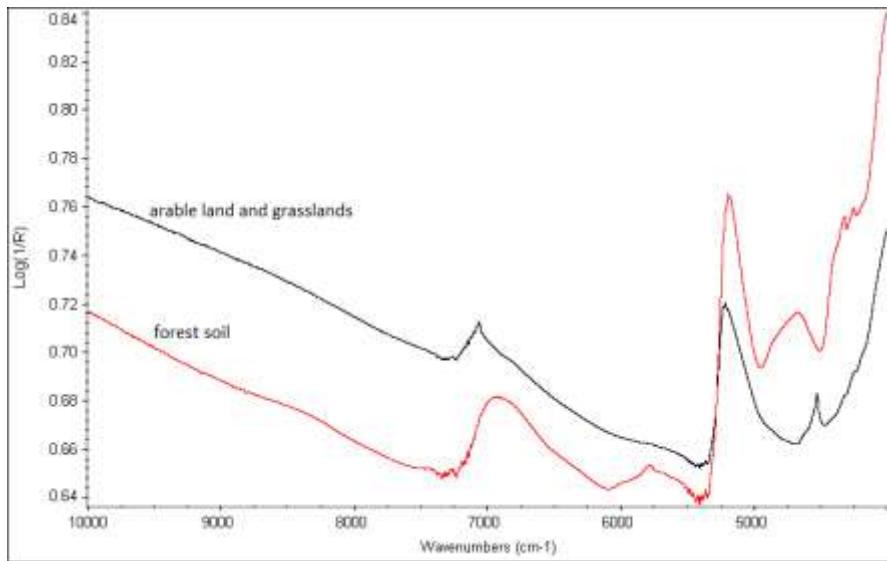
Figure 1. Scatter plot and regression curve for arable soils and grasslands.  $R = 0.90$ .



1

2 Figure 2. Scatter plot and rRegression curve for organic horizon of forest soils. R = 0.94.

3



1

2 Figure 3. Example of ~~typical~~ NIRS spectra for a typical forest soils and ~~for an~~ arable and grasslands  
3 ~~soils~~.soil.

4

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