Performance characteristics of a deep tilling rotavator

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Philosophiae Doctor

in the

Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology

University of Pretoria

Pretoria

September, 2009

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SUMMARY

Performance characteristics of a deep tilling rotavator

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**Department:** Civil and Biosystems Engineering  
**Degree:** Philosophiae Doctor

The continued increase in the price of fossil-based fuels and lubricants has resulted in tremendous increase in the cost of land preparation. This has resulted in considerable increase in the cost of food. The situation is worsened by the prevalent use of the conventional tillage system in the preparation of seedbeds; particularly for deep tillage. This system of tillage escalates land preparation costs because it requires a series of operations using passive tillage tools to realise an acceptable tilth quality. It also ties down capital in the form of additional machinery and tillage tools; thus increasing significantly the cost of land preparation. Therefore, it is necessary to design better tillage tools that are capable of reducing the number of tillage operations required for the realization of seedbeds of acceptable tilth quality.

The rotavator is one of the tillage tools with the capability for realizing the desired soil tilth quality with significantly reduced number of tillage passes. In comparison to passive tools, the rotavator has a superior soil mixing and pulverisation capability. When rotated in the down-cut direction, it generates a forward thrust that aids traction under difficult field conditions. However, no documented analytical models capable of predicting the performance of rotavators fitted with commercially available blades was found in literature. In addition, there is dearth of information on the behaviour of the magnitude of the horizontal thrust forces generated for a down-cut rotavator for different set tillage depths.

This study was undertaken to develop an analytical model that is capable of predicting the torque requirements of a rotavator fitted with commercially available L-shaped blades. In developing the proposed model, an analytical approach based on the limit equilibrium
analysis was used. An interactive computer program was developed, in MATLAB (Version 7, Mathworks Inc., USA), to solve the proposed model. The proposed model was verified by comparing the model and measured torque requirement at predetermined rotavator blade angular positions from the horizontal for a down-cut rotavator.

Field experiments were conducted in a sandy loam soil, using two instrumented research equipment. The research equipment were calibrated in a laboratory and field-tested prior to conducting the field experiments. A torsional shearing apparatus was used to characterize the soil by determining the soil shear strength and soil-metal friction parameters. The rotavator operational parameters, necessary for analyzing its performance, were recorded using an instrumented tool-frame carrier. The experiments were conducted in the down-cut direction of rotation, in the 200 mm – 500 mm set tillage depth range.

The study findings indicated that there was an optimum set tillage depth for each rotavator configuration and operational conditions at which the resultant horizontal thrust generated was greatest. This unique depth was influenced by the bite length. The validation of the proposed model showed that the predicted and measured torque requirements, at different angular blade positions from the horizontal, correlated reasonably well for all the set tillage depths. As the depth of tillage increased, however, the curve for the measured torque requirements exhibited a cyclic behaviour after the peak torque requirements value had been recorded. The cyclic behaviour was probably due to the re-tilling and the instability of the tool-frame carrier, which increased with the set tillage depth.

The knowledge contributed by this research will afford the designers of active tillage tools a better understanding of the operations of the rotavator, particularly in deep tillage. The modelling approach, and instrumentation technique used in this research, can be extended to analyze the performance of rotavators fitted with other types of commercial blades.

**Key terms:** rotavator, deep-tilling, soil-failure modelling, tillage performance, soil shear strength, soil-metal friction, bite length, kinematic parameter, down-cut rotavator, power, specific energy
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the following organizations and individuals who made the realization of the work reported in this thesis possible.

- The University of Nairobi, Kenya, for giving me a study leave to pursue these studies.
- Log Associates, a firm of consulting engineers, based in Nairobi, Kenya and her staff. The financial and moral support you accorded me during my extended absence from the office is greatly appreciated.
- The Department of Civil and Biosystems Engineering, University of Pretoria for funding the research. This support is gratefully acknowledged and appreciated.
- The following persons are gratefully acknowledged for their assistance during the course of this study.
  
a) Prof H. L. M. du Plessis, my supervisor for his guidance, support and availing the funds for the research component of this study.

  b) Mr. D. Gouws, formerly the Workshop Manager, Agricultural Engineering Workshop, Department of Civil and Biosystems Engineering, University of Pretoria. His role in the instrumentation of the research equipment, used in this study, was vital.

  c) Messrs J. Nkosi, W. Morake and D. Sithole; Technical Assistants in the Agricultural Engineering Workshop, University of Pretoria. They all played important roles during field work undertaken for data collection.

  d) Dr. T. Yu; for introducing me to MS Visio and MATLAB software packages that were used extensively in this work.

  e) My family, children, relatives and friends for their support, encouragements; and for enduring my absence from their lives for such a long period of time.
In memory of my dear mother, the late Mama Meresia Odundo Orony-Marenya (Nyar AoI)
# Table of Contents

**CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION** ......................................................................................................................... 1

  1.1 Background ................................................................................................................................................. 1

  1.2 General hypothesis and model .................................................................................................................. 4

**CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW** .............................................................................................................. 7

  2.1 Soil parameters ........................................................................................................................................... 7

    2.1.1 Soil physical properties ....................................................................................................................... 7

    2.1.2 Soil shear strength and soil failure .................................................................................................... 9

    2.1.3 Soil-metal friction ............................................................................................................................... 12

    2.1.4 Dynamic soil strength components ................................................................................................. 14

  2.2 Tillage tool parameters ............................................................................................................................. 16

    2.2.1 Blade configuration ............................................................................................................................ 16

    2.2.2 Direction of rotation .......................................................................................................................... 19

    2.2.3 Depth of tillage ..................................................................................................................................... 21

    2.2.4 The rotavator kinematic parameter, \( \lambda \) .................................................................................... 22

  2.3 Modeling energy requirements of tillage tools ......................................................................................... 24

  2.4 Analytical soil failure models ..................................................................................................................... 26

    2.4.1 Two-dimensional models ..................................................................................................................... 26

    2.4.2 Static three-dimensional models ....................................................................................................... 28

    2.4.3 Dynamic three dimensional models ................................................................................................. 36

  2.5 Rotavator performance prediction models ................................................................................................. 40

    2.5.1 Empirical models ............................................................................................................................... 40

    2.5.2 Analytical models ............................................................................................................................... 40

  2.6 Summary and conclusion from the reviewed literature ............................................................................. 42

  2.7 Justification .................................................................................................................................................. 43

  2.8 Hypotheses .................................................................................................................................................. 44

  2.9 Objectives .................................................................................................................................................. 45
CHAPTER 3: MODELING ROTAVATOR TORQUE AND POWER REQUIREMENTS ............... 46
3.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................... 46
3.2 Rotavator kinematics .......................................................................................... 47
  3.2.1 Equation of motion and the cutting trajectory of the tiller blade ................. 47
  3.2.2 The bite length ............................................................................................... 50
  3.2.3 Furrow bottoms produced by rotavators ..................................................... 52
  3.2.4 Side surface area of the soil chip ................................................................. 55
  3.2.5 Chip thickness ............................................................................................... 56
  3.2.6 Volume of the soil chip ................................................................................ 59
  3.2.7 Length of the tilling route ............................................................................ 60
3.3 Identification of torque requirement sources ..................................................... 62
3.4 Proposed analytical model for rotavator torque requirements ......................... 63
  3.4.1 Length of the blade in contact with the soil .................................................. 64
  3.4.2 Torque requirements due to the span of the blade ....................................... 66
  3.4.3 Penetration resistance .................................................................................. 78
  3.4.5 Determination of the total torque requirements ............................................ 82
3.5 Performance of the experimental tiller .............................................................. 83
3.6 Chapter summary ............................................................................................... 85

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH EQUIPMENT, INSTRUMENTATION AND CALIBRATION .......... 87
4.1 The instrumented experimental deep tilling rotavator ....................................... 87
  4.1.1 Functional components ............................................................................... 87
  4.1.2 Instrumentation of the experimental deep tilling rotavator ....................... 91
4.2 Soil characterisation apparatus ......................................................................... 95
  4.2.1 Functional components ............................................................................... 95
  4.2.2 Instrumentation ............................................................................................ 99
4.3 The data acquisition system ............................................................................. 99
4.4 Calibration .......................................................................................................... 101
  4.4.1 Calibration of strain-gauge force transducers and load cells .................... 101
  4.4.2 Other transducers ....................................................................................... 107
4.5 Preliminary field testing of the apparatus .......................................................... 109
  4.5.1 The experimental deep tilling rotavator ....................................................... 109
  4.5.2 The soil strength characterisation apparatus ............................................. 113
CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ................................................................. 116
  5.1 Determination of soil properties .................................................................. 116
    5.1.1 Soil textural classification ..................................................................... 116
    5.1.2 Soil water content ................................................................................. 116
    5.1.3 Soil bulk density .................................................................................... 117
    5.1.4 Soil shear strength ................................................................................ 117
    5.1.5 Soil-metal friction ................................................................................. 120
  5.2 Field experiments ......................................................................................... 120
    5.2.1 Experimental layout .............................................................................. 120
    5.2.2 Effect of tillage depth ............................................................................ 123
    5.2.3 Effect of bite length .............................................................................. 124
  5.3 Calculating the bite length and the blade angular position ......................... 124
  5.4 Data processing and analysis ...................................................................... 125
    5.4.1 Experimental data processing .............................................................. 125
    5.4.2 Statistical data analyses ....................................................................... 126

CHAPTER 6: RESULTS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION ........................................ 128
  6.1 Introduction .................................................................................................. 128
  6.2 Experimental site soil characteristics ......................................................... 128
    6.2.1 Soil shear strength parameters .............................................................. 128
    6.2.2 Soil-metal friction parameters ............................................................... 130
    6.2.3 Soil texture and bulk density ................................................................. 131
  6.3 Measured forces and torque requirements .................................................. 133
  6.4 Performance evaluation of the experimental rotavator ............................... 137
    6.4.1 Effect of set tillage depth at constant kinematic parameter, λ............... 138
    6.4.2 Effect of the bite length ....................................................................... 140
    6.4.3 The generated resultant horizontal force ............................................. 142
    6.4.4 Analysis of torque and power requirements ......................................... 144
  6.5 Model verification and validation ................................................................. 147
    6.5.1 Model inputs ....................................................................................... 148
    6.5.2 Model and computer program verification .......................................... 151
    6.5.3 Model validation and evaluation ......................................................... 154
    6.5.3.1 Measured and predicted torque at 250 mm set tillage depth ............ 155
6.5.3.2 Measured and predicted torque at 350 mm set tillage depth ......................... 158
6.5.3.3 Measured and predicted torque at 500 mm set tillage depth ....................... 161
6.6 Chapter Summary .................................................................................................................. 165

CHAPTER 7: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ....................... 167

7.1 Summary .............................................................................................................................. 167
7.2 Conclusions ......................................................................................................................... 169
7.3 Recommendations .............................................................................................................. 171
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Illustrations of horizontal and vertical axis rotavators (Bernacki et al., 1972) ...... 2

Figure 1.2: Proposed block diagram for the rotavator tillage process model.......................... 6

Figure 2.1: Logarithmic spiral failure zone .................................................................................. 27

Figure 2.2: Schematic illustration of the crescent and lateral failure zones observed by O’Callaghan and Farrelly (1964) .................................................................................................................. 29

Figure 2.3: Failure zone of the Hettiaratchi and Reece model (Hettiaratchi & Reece, 1967). 30

Figure 2.4: Failure zone of the Godwin and Spoor model (Godwin & Spoor, 1977)........... 32

Figure 2.5: Single wedge failure zone of the McKyes and Ali model (McKyes & Ali, 1977).... 33

Figure 2.6: Failure zone of Perumpral et al model (Perumpral et al., 1983).......................... 35

Figure 2.7: Failure zone of the Swick and Perumpral model (Swick & Perumpral, 1988).... 37

Figure 2.8: A side portion of the idealized failure wedge considered for the model and failure forces (Swick & Perumpral, 1988) .................................................................................................................. 38

Figure 2.9: Failure zone of the Zeng and Yao model (Zeng & Yao, 1992) ......................... 39

Figure 3.1: Diagram for the determination of the equation of motion (Sineokov & Panov, 1978). ................................................................................................................................................. 47

Figure 3.2: Trajectories of working elements and thickness of shapes of the soil slices cut by rotavator blades during up- and down-cut tillage (Hendrick & Gill, 1971a) ......................... 49

Figure 3.3: Shapes of slices for down-cut and up-cut rotation as a function of the ratio of the peripheral speed to forward speed. $R_nV_f=\lambda$. Number of blades operating in one plane $z = 3$ (Bernacki et al., 1972) ........................................................................................................................................ 50

Figure 3.4: Determination of the bite length and the undisturbed peak crest heights (Sineokov & Panov, 1978) ....................................................................................................................................... 51

Figure 3.6: An illustration for determination of the soil chip thickness (Sineokov & Panov, 1978) ................................................................................................................................................. 57

Figure 3.7: The main dimensions of a soil chip cut by a down-cutting rotary blade (Hendrick & Gill, 1971a) ....................................................................................................................................... 59
Figure 3.8: Determination of the start and end angles of soil cutting by a blade in a down-cut operation

Figure 3.9: Line drawing of the standard ‘L-shaped’ blade

Figure 3.10: The soil-tool interaction for a down-cutting rotavator fitted with an L-shaped blade

Figure 3.11: Theoretical shear planes in a soil slice at different positions for a down-cutting blade

Figure 3.12: The assumed instantaneous time moment soil failure wedge in front the span

Figure 3.13: Outlines of soil failure shapes of McKyes and Perumpral-Grisso-Desai models for inclined blades

Figure 3.14: Geometric boundaries of the idealised separation failure wedge within the soil slice cut by the span of an L-shaped blade at an instantaneous depth for a down-cutting blade

Figure 3.15: Breakdown of the soil-tool interaction forces on an idealised soil wedge for the span at an instantaneous time moment for a down-cutting rotavator tillage operation

Figure 3.16: Dimensions of the soil failure wedge for calculating the force components

Figure 3.17: Idealised soil pressure distribution on the backside of the leg of the L-shaped blade

Figure 3.18: 2–D breakdown of the forces on the failed soil wedge

Figure 3.19: Idealized system of force acting on the tip of a wire

Figure 3.20: Relationship between bearing capacity factors and angle of internal friction for deep wedge shaped footing with included tip angle of 90°

Figure 3.21: Soil reaction with constant tip force $F_t$ and varying soil resistance $P_{sf}$ for different positions of the wire in cutting a full soil slice

Figure 4.1: Side view of the instrumented experimental deep rotavator

Figure 4.2: The fabricated experimental deep rotavators showing some of the key functional components

Figure 4.3: The strain gauge force transducers

Figure 4.4: An illustration of a 20 kΩ ten-turn cable-extension potentiometer transducer used for measuring the depth of tillage
Figure 4.5: The magnetic pick-up proximity probe for the measurement of the rotor speed and the angle turned by the rotor ........................................................................................................ 94

Figure 4.6: The assembled ground distance measurement system showing its various components ........................................................................................................................................ 95

Figure 4.7: Cross-section of the torsional shearing device for the determination of the soil shear strength and soil/steel frictional parameters .............................................................................. 96

Figure 4.8: The fabricated torsional shearing device for determination of soil shear strength and soil-steel frictional parameters .................................................................................................. 97

Figure 4.9: The special hydraulic circuit for maintaining a constant normal load for the soil shear and frictional shear strength measurement apparatus during sinkage ..................... 98

Figure 4.10: Schematic diagram of the DAS .......................................................................................................................................................................................... 100

Figure 4.11: Calibrating a strain gauge force transducers for one of the tractor links .... 102

Figure 4.12: Calibrating load a cells in compression using a specially designed hanger ...... 103

Figure 4.13: Typical calibration output signal for strain gauge force transducers and load cell for the loading and unloading phases ........................................................................................................ 104

Figure 4.14a: Typical loading phase calibration curve for strain gauge force/torque transducers or force/torque load cell ........................................................................................................ 106

Figure 4.14b: Typical unloading phase calibration curve for strain gauge force/torque transducers or force/torque load cell ........................................................................................................ 106

Figure 4.16: Calibration curve for the twenty–turn 200kΩ cable-extension potentiometer displacement transducer for monitoring the depth of tillage ........................................................................ 108

Figure 4.17: Setting-up for a tillage test-run .................................................................................................................................................................................. 110

Figure 4.18: A typical plot showing the signal outputs obtained for the tiller strain gauge force transducers and the torque load cell during a down-cutting operation ..................................... 111

Figure 4.19: Expanded view of the output responses of the three point force transducers and the torque load cell for a down-cutting tillage test run ........................................................................ 112

Figure 4.20: A typical plot of the output voltage responses of the shear apparatus showing the variation of the normal and torque loads with time ........................................................................ 114

Figure 5.1: Experimental layout .................................................................................................................................................................... 121

Figure 5.3: Initial and field test-run depth settings during experimentation ................ 122
Figure 6.1: A typical graph of the average maximum shear stress versus the normal stress values at the soil-soil failure plane for the determination of soil shear strength parameters .................................................. 129

Figure 6.2: A typical plot of the average maximum frictional stress versus normal stress at the soil-metal failure plane ............................................................................................................ 130

Figure 6.3: A section of the measured torque and horizontal forces on the top and lower links .................................................................................................................................................. 134

Figure 6.4: Typical variation of torque requirements with rotational angle for a single blade between the start and end of soil cutting process ............................................................................................................ 135

Figure 6.5: A section of a graph showing the variation of the horizontal forces recorded on the three links, the sum of the lower link forces and the resultant horizontal thrust force 136

Figure 6.7: Effect of bite length on torque requirements ................................................................................................................................. 141

Figure 6.8: Variation of the resultant horizontal thrust forces generated at different tillage depths and different bite lengths at a constant soil condition ............................................................................................................ 143

Figure 6.9: Graph used for the determination of dimensionless N-factors for lateral soil failure .................................................................................................................................................. 149

Figure 6.10: A typical graphical output of the path followed by tip of the span of the blade produced by the computer program for a set tillage depth ............................................................................................................ 152

Figure 6.11 Model generated torque requirement values at different angular positions of the tip of the blade during soil processing at set tillage depth of 350 mm ......................................................................................... 153

Figure 6.12: Comparison of predicted and measured torque requirement at 250 mm set tillage depth .................................................................................................................................................. 155

Figure 6.13: Results of the least squares linear regression of the model and measured torque requirements at different angular blade positions for 250 mm set tillage depth .... 156

Figure 6.14: Comparison of the predicted and measured torque requirement at 350 mm set tillage depth .................................................................................................................................................. 159

Figure 6.15: Results of the least squares linear regression of the model and measured torque requirements at different angular blade positions for 350 mm set tillage depth .... 161

Figure 6.16: Comparison of the predicted and measured torque requirement at 500 mm set tillage depth .................................................................................................................................................. 162
Figure 6.17: Results of the least squares linear regression of the predicted and measured torque requirements at different angular rotavator blade positions for 500 mm set tillage depth.
**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 4.1: Summary of the calibration results for the force strain gauge transducers and load cell .............................................................................................................................................107

Table 6.1: Summary of the soil water content (swc) and soil bulk density results for different depth ranges at determined 48 hour intervals after stopping irrigation .................................132

Table 6.2: Summary of ANOVA test performed on the soil bulk density for the different depth ranges ..................................................................................................................................................132

Table 6.3: Summary of ANOVA test performed on the soil water content for the different depth ranges ..................................................................................................................................................133

Table 6.4: Comparison of the percentage increases in depth and mean torque requirements for a fixed rotavator configuration and operational conditions; and a fixed soil condition. 139

Table 6.5: Calculated bite lengths for different number of blades on the flange, z and the forward travel speeds, Vf ..................................................................................................................................................140

Table 6.6: Theoretical actual soil chip volumes processed by the experimental rotavator for different experimental setups ..................................................................................................................................................145

Table 6.7: Summary of average thrust, torque, power requirements, and specific energy requirements for down-cut deep rotary tillage test-runs (soil water content of 13.97 %) ..146

Table 6.8: Listing of the model input variables and their assigned values...............................150

Table 6.10: Paired t-test results for torque requirement for the 250 mm set tillage depth 157

Table 6.11: Results of the least squares regression of the model generated torque requirements on the measured torque for 250 mm set tillage depth ..............................................................157

Table 6.12: Paired t-test results for torque requirement for the 350 mm set tillage depth 159

Table 6.13: Results of the least squares regression for the predicted versus the measured torque requirements for 350 mm set tillage depth .......................................................................................160

Table 6.14: Paired t-test results for torque requirement for the 500 mm set tillage depth 163

Table 6.15: Results of the least squares regression of the model generated torque requirements on the measured torque for 500 mm set tillage depth ..............................................................164
NOMENCLATURE

\( \tau_{\text{max}} = \) maximum shear stress at soil-soil failure surface (kPa)
\( \rho = \) angle that the rupture surface makes with the horizontal (degrees)
\( \sigma_n = \) normal stress (kPa)
\( \phi = \) soil internal friction angle (degrees)
\( \psi = \) the angle formed by the positive direction of the tangent at the given point of the cycloid and the positive direction of the abscissa (degrees)
\( \gamma = \) unit weight (or bulk density) of the soil (kN/m\(^3\))
\( \beta = \) angle that the tool makes with the horizontal during an instantaneous time moment (degrees).
\( \overline{z_c} = \) depth from the top of the failed soil wedge (m)
\( N_y, N_c, N_q = \) factors dependent on soil frictional strength, soil geometry and tool to soil strength properties (dimensionless)
\( N_c = \) cohesion N-factor (dimensionless)
\( \tau_f = \) maximum frictional stress at the soil-tool interface (kPa)
\( V_{\text{cir}} = \) peripheral velocity of the rotor blades (m/s)
\( \tau_o = \) soil property related to static component of the static shear strength (kPa)
\( \tau_i = \) soil property related to the dynamic component of soil shear strength, proportional to the operating speed (kPa m\(^{-1}\) s\(^{-1}\))
\( N_q = \) surcharge N-factor (dimensionless)
\( \alpha_{\text{c}_z} = \) the angle at the second blade make with the maximum crest height (degrees)
\( \frac{2\pi}{z} = \) the angle between any two adjacent blades on a flange on the rotor (rad.)
\( \alpha_{\text{c}_1} = \) the angle the first blade makes with the maximum crest height, \( h_c \) (degrees)
\( \tau_{\text{max}} = \) maximum shear stress at failure (kPa)
\( A = \) effective area of the grouser head or the flat steel plate of the torsional shear apparatus in contact with the soil (m\(^2\))
\( a, b = \) regressions coefficients, which were all significant at 1 \% level (Stafford & Tanner, 1983a, 1983b)
$A_1 =$ area of the span in contact with the soil, ‘area abed, in Fig. 3.16’ (m$^2$),

$A_2 =$ area of the triangular rupture surface, ‘area abc or def in Fig. 3.16’ (m$^2$)

$A_3 =$ areas of the rectangular rupture surface ‘area bcfe in Fig. 3.16’ (m$^2$)

$C_a =$ soil metal adhesion factor (kN/m$^2$)

$C_c =$ soil cohesion (kN/m$^2$)

$d =$ depth of tillage (m)

$d_1 ... d_n =$ distance covered in respective plots during a test run

$d_c =$ critical tillage depth (m)

$d_e =$ effective depth of transverse failure (m)

$D_f =$ Resultant draft force (N)

$d_i =$ instantaneous depth of wire from soil surface

$d_s =$ average depth to the centroid of failure wedge (m)

$E_{rot} =$ power required for the rotary work (kW)

$f(v) =$ function containing the soil inertial term (kN)

$F_d =$ draft force under dynamic conditions (kN)

$F_n =$ the applied ‘constant’ normal load (kN)

$F_s =$ static draft force component (kN)

$g =$ gravitational acceleration, $\approx 9.81$ (m/s$^2$)

$h_c =$ the peak crescent height at the bottom of the cut furrow (m)

$H_{dc} =$ draft for a blade operated at deep tillage depth (kN)

$H_l =$ draft for the lateral soil failure (kN); Godwin and Spoor (1967) model

$H_s =$ draft for a blade operated at a shallow tillage depth (kN)

$H_t =$ draft for crescent above the critical depth (kN); Godwin and Spoor (1977) model

$k =$ ratio of critical depth to width (dimensionless)

$k_1, k_2, k_3 =$ constants for both soils at all soil water contents (Stafford & Tanner, 1983a)

$K_i =$ tine inclination factor (dimensionless, Hettiaratchi and Reece (1967) model)

$K_o =$ ratio of the horizontal and static vertical stress, $K_o = (1 - \sin \phi)$

$L =$ length of the span of the blade in contact with the soil (m)

$L_b =$ the bite length (m)

$L_{ps} =$ the length of the blade to the point of action of the soil-blade resistance force $P_s$ (m)

$L_{tr} =$ tilling route length (m)
\[ M = \] the maximum torque or the maximum resisting moment (kNm)
\[ z_n = \] number of blades of the rotavator that pass through the soil in time \( t \)
\[ N_a = \] an additional factor comprised in soil cutting forces, which accounts for the acceleration forces in the soil with varying tool speeds, but a fixed soil strength
\[ N_a = \] an additional factor comprised in the soil cutting force, which accounts for the acceleration forces in the soil for varying tools speed, but a fixed soil strength (dimensionless)
\[ N_{ca} = \] a dimension factor that dependent on the soil-metal adhesion
\[ N_{ca} = \] a dimensionless factor that depends on soil-metal adhesion
\[ N_p, N_c, N_q = \] a dimensionless factors depend on soil frictional strength, soil geometry, and tool to soil strength properties
\[ P = \] total force (kN)
\[ P_1 = \] force applied to the centre wedge (kN)
\[ P_2 = \] force applied to the side crescent of the soil (kN)
\[ P_o = \] geostatic stress (Pa)
\[ P_r = \] soil resistance force due to the penetration resistance (kN)
\[ P_{rot} = \] rotary power required to process the soil (kW)
\[ P_s = \] soil resistance force due to the span and leg of the L-shaped blade (kN)
\[ q = \] surcharge pressure vertically acting on the soil surface (kNm\(^2\))
\[ Q = \] the normal acting force on the soil-soil interface of the failed soil wedge (N)
\[ Q_s = \] force upon face of tip of the span (kN)
\[ R = \] rotor radius (m)
\[ R_{cr} = \] reaction force acting on the side of the centre wedge (kN)
\[ r_i = \] inner radius of the annulus shear ring head with grousers (m)
\[ r_o = \] outer radius of the annulus ring head with grousers (m)
\[ t = \] time of rotation of the rotor through angle \( \alpha \) (s).
\[ t_1 = \] time taken by the leading blade to turn through angle \( \alpha_{c1} \) (s)
\[ t_2 = \] time taken by the second blade to turn through angle \( \alpha_{c2} \) (s)
\[ t_b = \] time during which the blades rotate through an angle, equal to the angle between the adjacent blades on the same side of a flange (s)
\[ t_{bt} = \] thickness of the cutting edge of the span of the blade (m)
\[ t_i = \] time of rotation of a blade through angle, \( \alpha_i \) from the horizontal (s)
\[ T_{meas} = \] experimental torque requirement values at different angular position of the tip of the cutting blade during soil processing (kNm)
$T_{mod} =$ model generated torque requirements values at different angular positions of the tip of the cutting blade during soil processing (kNm)

$T_{pr} =$ instantaneous time moment torque requirement due to force $P_r$ (kNm)

$T_{ps} =$ instantaneous time moment torque requirement due to force $P_s$ (kNm)

$T_{total} =$ total instantaneous time moment torque requirement (kNm)

$V =$ instantaneous peripheral velocity of the tool along the cycloidal path, (m/s)

$V_{ac} =$ actual soil chip volume processed by a single blade (m$^3$)

$V_f =$ forward travel speed (m/s)

$V_f =$ forward travel speed of the tractor for rotary tillage or the speed of the tool for a passive tillage implement (m/s)

$V_i =$ the instantaneous peripheral velocity of the tool along the cycloidal path, (m/s.)

$V_s =$ sliding velocity of the blade (m/s)

$V_{swv} =$ total volume of the soil tilled in time, $t$ (m$^3$)

$w =$ tool width (m)

$\alpha =$ the angle of rotation of the blade from the horizontal position (degrees)

$\alpha_i =$ the angle the blade turns through in time, $t_i$ (rad)

$\alpha_r =$ the intercept on the vertical axis for predicted versus measured torque linear regression

$\beta =$ rake angle (degrees)

$\gamma =$ soil bulk density (kN/m$^3$)

$\delta =$ soil-metal friction angle (degrees)

$\theta =$ thickness of cross-section of the cut soil slice (m)

$\omega =$ rotor speed (rad/s)