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**STUDIES ON THE ORIGIN, DISTRIBUTION AND MOBILITY OF  
CADMIUM IN PASTORAL SOILS**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in Soil Science at Massey University

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## ABSTRACT

Cadmium (Cd) is a toxic heavy metal with no known biological function. Exposure of the human population to Cd is predominantly through cigarette smoke and Cd-containing foodstuffs. Many phosphatic fertilizers contain Cd and their application to land used for food production results in increased concentrations of Cd in the soil. The fate of this Cd in soils is poorly understood. In this study, factors influencing the concentration and residence time of Cd in pastoral soils were investigated.

Total Cd concentrations in topsoil samples (0 - 7.5 cm) from a regularly fertilized farm were found to range between 0.07 and 0.91 mg Cd kg<sup>-1</sup> (arithmetic mean of 0.36 mg Cd kg<sup>-1</sup>). The top soil Cd concentration was unrelated to soil type or parent material but correlated well with total phosphorus and total carbon. In a study of the distribution of total Cd throughout the profiles of 17 soil types on the farm, Cd concentrations generally decreased with depth and soil parent material contributed little to topsoil Cd loads.

A comparison of pedologically matched fertilized and unfertilized soils on the same farm confirmed that phosphatic fertilizer was the dominant source of Cd. Fertilized sites showed a 3- to 20-fold increase in soil Cd loading. Increased Cd concentrations were detectable to 15 cm. These increased Cd loads were easily accounted for by an estimated phosphatic fertilizer input of 6 g Cd ha<sup>-1</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup> over 7 decades.

Soil Cd concentrations were also influenced by stock camping behaviour, although the magnitude of this effect was much less than that due to fertilizer.

To investigate conditions under which Cd may move deeper in the soil profile, laboratory-based leaching studies on repacked soil columns using various electrolyte leaching solutions were conducted. Columns leached with 2.5 mM CaCl<sub>2</sub>, CaSO<sub>4</sub> and Ca(NO<sub>3</sub>)<sub>2</sub> showed some limited movement of Cd, but columns leached with 2.5 to 7.5 mM KCl showed no significant redistribution of the added Cd. Under the soil conditions studied (pH<sub>H2O</sub> 5.45), cation exchange appeared the predominant driving force behind Cd mobility, not anion complexation. On the same soil, Cd mobility increased linearly

as leachate  $\text{CaCl}_2$  concentration increased. By 50 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$  most Cd was leached from the column. In view of the dominance of  $\text{Cl}^-$  in coastal soil solutions, this mobility under the influence of  $\text{CaCl}_2$  may be important.

In a further experiment, four soils differing in physical and chemical properties were leached with 2.5 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$ . The wide range of Cd mobility seen, could be explained by differences in soil pH ( $\text{pH}_{\text{H}_2\text{O}}$  4.95 - 6.02). The movement observed in these columns was adequately modelled using a simple convection-dispersion equation and adsorption isotherms. The movement of Cd observed and modelled in these laboratory studies suggests that leaching is likely to be a much more important mechanism of Cd loss from the soil profile than removal of animal products. This work was supported by findings from a field-based mass balance study of Cd inputs and accumulation in soil developed under pasture on a Wharekohe podzol. Despite clear accumulation of fertilizer-derived Cd in the surface of these pastoral soils, up to 44% of the applied Cd remained unaccounted for. The most likely reason for this was leaching.

Accurate modelling of the residence time and plant availability of Cd in soils will rely on a quantitative understanding of the factors influencing Cd mobility in soils. This is an area requiring further research.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES .....</b>	<b>xiii</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES .....</b>	<b>xvii</b>
<b>LIST OF MAPS.....</b>	<b>xxv</b>
<b>LIST OF SYMBOLS .....</b>	<b>xxvii</b>

### **CHAPTER 1:                      INTRODUCTION AND STRUCTURE OF STUDY**

<b>1.1      Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2      Structure of the study .....</b>	<b>3</b>

### **CHAPTER 2:                      A GENERAL REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON CADMIUM IN THE ENVIRONMENT**

<b>2.1      Introduction.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2.2      Cadmium chemistry and industrial use.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2.3      Cadmium in the biosphere.....</b>	<b>9</b>
2.3.1      Pasture plants and horticultural crops .....	9
2.3.2      Farm animals.....	11
2.3.3      Humans .....	12
<b>2.4      Sources of cadmium to agricultural soil .....</b>	<b>14</b>
2.4.1      Soil parent material .....	15
2.4.2      Soil amendments.....	17
2.4.3      Atmospheric cadmium of anthropogenic origins.....	21
2.4.4      Atmospheric cadmium of natural origins .....	21
<b>2.5      Cadmium distributions down the soil profile.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>2.6      Cadmium concentrations in surface soils .....</b>	<b>23</b>
2.6.1      Unpolluted soils .....	24
2.6.2      Contaminated soils.....	26



<b>2.7</b>	<b>Cadmium accumulation in topsoil .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>2.8</b>	<b>Control policies to minimize the cadmium threat .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>2.9</b>	<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>29</b>

### **CHAPTER 3: MATERIALS AND METHODS FOR THE PREPARATION AND ANALYSIS OF SOIL AND HERBAGE SAMPLES**

<b>3.1</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>3.2</b>	<b>Trace cadmium analysis.....</b>	<b>31</b>
3.2.1	Contamination control .....	31
3.2.2	Loss of cadmium from samples.....	33
<b>3.3</b>	<b>Soil sample preparation and analysis .....</b>	<b>33</b>
3.3.1	Extractable cadmium .....	34
3.3.2	Total cadmium.....	35
3.3.3	Comparison of cadmium extraction efficiencies .....	37
3.3.4	Quality assurance for soil analysis.....	39
<b>3.4</b>	<b>Plant sample preparation and analysis.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>3.5</b>	<b>Analysis by graphite furnace atomic absorption spectrometry (GFAAS) .....</b>	<b>41</b>
3.5.1	Instrumentation .....	42
3.5.2	Furnace programmes.....	43
3.5.3	Standard solutions.....	44
3.5.4	Modifiers and dealing with difficult samples .....	44
<b>3.6</b>	<b>Miscellaneous analyses .....</b>	<b>46</b>
3.6.1	Phosphorus.....	46
3.6.2	Zinc .....	46
3.6.3	Cation exchange capacity .....	47
3.6.4	Total soil carbon .....	47
3.6.5	Soil pH .....	47
3.6.6	Multi-element analysis by ICAP-OES.....	48

CHAPTER 4:

THE DISTRIBUTION AND ORIGIN OF TOPSOIL  
CADMIUM IN SOILS ON A REGULARLY FERTILIZED  
HILL-COUNTRY FARM

4.1	Introduction.....	49
4.2	Study location: Limestone Downs – the farm .....	51
4.3	Materials and methods .....	53
4.3.1	Variability of cadmium and other related soil properties in topsoils under pasture .....	54
4.3.2	Parent material as a source of cadmium and a cause of cadmium variability in topsoils .....	54
4.3.3	Cadmium variability as a function of topography and animal transfer.....	55
4.4	Results and discussion .....	55
4.4.1	Summary statistics for cadmium and other soil properties in topsoils under pasture .....	55
4.4.2	Parent material as a source of cadmium and a cause of cadmium variability in topsoils .....	56
4.4.3	Soil properties relating to variations in cadmium concentration.....	61
4.4.4	Cadmium variability as a function of topography and animal transfer.....	64
4.5	Conclusions.....	71

CHAPTER 5:

ANTHROPOGENIC INPUTS OF CADMIUM TO SOILS ON  
A REGULARLY FERTILIZED HILL-COUNTRY FARM

5.1	Introduction.....	73
5.2	Materials and methods .....	73
5.3	Results and discussion .....	75
5.3.1	Comparison of soil properties between sites .....	75
5.3.2	Impact of fertilizer application on soil cadmium concentrations .....	78
5.3.3	Atmospheric pollution .....	80



- 6.4.6 Experiment 4: Cadmium movement in soils of differing chemical and physical properties when leached with 2.5 mM CaCl<sub>2</sub> .....114
- 6.5 Results and discussion .....115
  - 6.5.1 Analysis of soil solution from Limestone Downs .....116
  - 6.5.2 Experiment 1: Cadmium movement in columns of Manawatu soil as influenced by the presence of anions and cations .....117
  - 6.5.3 Experiment 2: Effect of increasing CaCl<sub>2</sub> concentration on cadmium movement in columns of Manawatu soil.....123
  - 6.5.4 Experiment 3: Response of leachate cadmium concentrations to wetting-drying cycles in columns of Manawatu soil.....131
  - 6.5.5 Experiment 4: Cadmium movement in soils of differing chemical and physical properties when leached with 2.5 mM CaCl<sub>2</sub> .....136
- 6.6 Summary .....139
- 6.7 Concluding discussion .....141

**CHAPTER 7: CADMIUM REDISTRIBUTION IN SOIL - MODELLING**

- 7.1 Introduction.....143
- 7.2 The solute transport model .....143
  - 7.2.1 Theory behind the convection-dispersion equation .....144
  - 7.2.2 The retardation coefficient.....146
  - 7.2.3 Translating the theoretical CDE into a computational model.....147
  - 7.2.4 Estimating parameters in the CDE.....147
- 7.3 Results and discussion .....152
- 7.4 Concluding discussion .....162

**CHAPTER 8: FATE OF CADMIUM IN A WHAREKOHE SILT LOAM  
CHRONOSEQUENCE**

<b>8.1</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>165</b>
<b>8.2</b>	<b>Background .....</b>	<b>166</b>
<b>8.3</b>	<b>Materials and methods .....</b>	<b>169</b>
8.3.1	Chemical analyses.....	169
8.3.2	Cadmium mass balance calculations .....	169
<b>8.4</b>	<b>Results and discussion .....</b>	<b>171</b>
8.4.1	Cadmium accumulation in the Wharekohe silt loam...	171
8.4.2	Cadmium mass balance .....	175
8.4.3	Cadmium loss through leaching .....	178
<b>8.5</b>	<b>Concluding discussion .....</b>	<b>179</b>

**CHAPTER 9: SUMMARY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE  
RESEARCH**

<b>9.1</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>181</b>
<b>9.2</b>	<b>Aims of study.....</b>	<b>182</b>
<b>9.3</b>	<b>Cadmium distribution and origin in pastoral soils .....</b>	<b>183</b>
<b>9.4</b>	<b>Cadmium mobility in soils .....</b>	<b>185</b>
<b>9.5</b>	<b>Concluding comments and areas for future research .....</b>	<b>187</b>

<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>189</b>
------------------------	------------

**APPENDICES**

<b>Appendix 1 .....</b>	<b>215</b>
<b>Appendix 2 .....</b>	<b>217</b>
<b>Appendix 3 .....</b>	<b>235</b>
<b>Appendix 4 .....</b>	<b>241</b>
<b>Appendix 5 .....</b>	<b>245</b>
<b>Appendix 6 .....</b>	<b>253</b>
<b>Appendix 7 .....</b>	<b>259</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
<b>Table 2.1</b>	Estimated annual atmospheric emissions of Cd world-wide..... 15
<b>Table 2.2</b>	Cadmium concentrations in some common crustal rocks. .... 16
<b>Table 2.3</b>	Cadmium and phosphorus contents of phosphate rock used in New Zealand to manufacture superphosphate..... 19
<b>Table 2.4</b>	Mean total Cd concentrations in surface soils from around the world. The range for each survey is given in parentheses..... 25
<b>Table 3.1</b>	Results from repeated analysis of standard soil and herbage reference materials for total Cd. A 95% confidence interval for the average Cd concentration and the accepted values are also shown. .... 40
<b>Table 4.1</b>	Soil series present on the hill country farm of Limestone Downs, their soil groups and parent materials (MacKay <i>et al.</i> , 1985). Detailed soil profile descriptions are contained in Appendix 2. .... 52
<b>Table 4.2</b>	Cadmium concentrations and other soil parameters for topsoils (0 - 7.5 cm) sampled across Limestone Downs. .... 55
<b>Table 4.3</b>	Analytical data for the four soil profiles which showed significant levels of Cd in their parent materials. .... 59
<b>Table 4.4</b>	Correlation coefficients (r) between soil Cd, soil P and other soil properties in 53 surface soils sampled from across Limestone Downs. .... 63

<b>Table 4.5</b>	Summary statistics for Cd, P and other measured parameters in 120 surface soils (0 - 7.5 cm) taken from a 25 x 25 m <sup>2</sup> area on Limestone Downs. The topography encompassed low and medium to steep slopes.....	65
<b>Table 4.6</b>	Correlation coefficients (r) between total Cd concentrations and other soil parameters in 120 surface soils from the 625 m <sup>2</sup> area encompassing campsite, medium and steep slopes. ....	65
<b>Table 4.7</b>	Mean Cd and P concentrations, carbon content and soil pH for data when separated into low slope (campsite) and steep slope categories. ....	68
<b>Table 5.1</b>	Selected properties for soil sampled from paired sites, one fertilized (pasture) and one unfertilized (native bush - with separate profiles collected from under two tree types: broadleaf and podocarp), for two soil groups on Limestone Downs.....	77
<b>Table 5.2</b>	Cadmium loadings in forest soils and forest biomass from other countries. ....	82
<b>Table 5.3</b>	Estimating the store of Cd in the above-ground biomass of native bush on Limestone Downs. ....	83
<b>Table 5.4</b>	Accumulated Cd and P in fertilized (pasture) and unfertilized (native bush: Broadleaf and Podocarp) soils of a yellow-brown loam and a yellow-brown earth compared with estimates of Cd inputs from phosphatic fertilizer. ....	85
<b>Table 6.1.</b>	Stability constants for nitrate, sulphate and chloride complexes with Cd (Lindsay, 1979).....	98

**Table 6.2** Selected characteristics for four soils used to study Cd redistribution in columns of soil leached under laboratory conditions with a range of electrolyte compositions and concentrations.....104

**Table 6.3** Data summarizing the make-up of the top and bottom soil layers of the Cd-amended columns for each soil type used in subsequent leaching studies, and main parameters for both Cd-amended and control columns. .... 109

**Table 6.4** Leaching solutions and soils used to study Cd redistribution in re-packed soil columns under laboratory conditions..... 112

**Table 6.5** Anion composition of soil solution samples taken from the coastal property of Limestone Downs during the winter of 1995. Exposure of the sampling sites to coastal breezes are also indicated. .... 116

**Table 6.6** Amount of Cd recovered in the leachate and that remaining in columns of Manawatu soil (Cd-amended) leached with 1000 mL (630 mm) of salt solution..... 120

**Table 6.7** Amount of Cd recovered in the leachate and that remaining in columns of Manawatu soil leached with 1000 mL (630 mm) of CaCl<sub>2</sub> solution. .... 123

**Table 6.8** Amount of Cd recovered in the leachate and that remaining in the soil column when four different soils were leached with 1000 mL (630 mm) of 2.5 mM CaCl<sub>2</sub> solution. .... 137

**Table 7.1** Physical parameters measured from the experimental soil columns studied in section 6.5.5 which acted as input data for



	the CDE model (Appendix 5) used to predict Cd movement in columns of each soil.....	148
<b>Table 7.2</b>	Adsorption isotherm equations for sorption of Cd on four soils in 2.5 mM CaCl <sub>2</sub> . ....	153
<b>Table 7.3</b>	Comparison of Cd loss from the Cd-amended topsoil predicted using the CDE model with a distribution coefficient determined from adsorption isotherms, and measured Cd loss from the experimental soil columns. ....	157
<b>Table 7.4</b>	Estimated Cd loss from topsoil through grazing and leaching (predicted using the CDE model and parameters discussed previously).....	161
<b>Table 8.1</b>	Age, profile depth and bulk density data for soil sampling sites in the Wharekohe chronosequence. ....	167
<b>Table 8.2</b>	Soil pH at the time of sampling and recorded lime applications for each site following initial pasture development and over the 10 years prior to soil sampling.....	168
<b>Table 8.3</b>	Proposed phosphate rock mixes used to manufacture superphosphate in New Zealand from 1958 to 1990 and the estimated Cd contents of the resulting SSP.....	169
<b>Table 8.4</b>	Cadmium mass balance for each site showing the amount of Cd accumulated in the soil at time of sampling, likely additions from phosphatic fertilizer and estimated losses through leaching. ....	177

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
<b>Figure 3.1</b>	
A comparison of pseudo-total Cd concentrations in samples taken from various soil profiles with the total Cd concentrations determined using HF acid digestion. The regression line has the equation: pseudo-total Cd = 0.86 * total Cd ( $R^2 = 0.95$ ).....	
	38
<b>Figure 3.2</b>	
A comparison between extractable Cd concentrations and total Cd concentrations (determined using HF digestion) in surface soils (○) and soil material sampled by horizon from the A horizon down to the parent material (Δ). The regression line has the equation: extractable Cd = 0.78 * total Cd ( $R^2 = 0.91$ ).....	
	39
<b>Figure 4.1</b>	
Frequency distribution of cadmium concentrations in the topsoil (0 - 7.5 cm) of pasture soils on Limestone Downs. ....	
	56
<b>Figure 4.2</b>	
Variation in the cadmium concentrations of topsoils (0 - 7.5 cm) on Limestone Downs when grouped according to their parent material. Bars (   ) represent the median value for each category. ....	
	57
<b>Figure 4.3</b>	
Horizon descriptions and vertical profiles of: total Cd (—) and 0.1 M HCl extractable Cd (---); soil pH (●); and total carbon (▲) for two soils found on Limestone Downs. (a) Dunmore silt loam and (b) Waingaro steepland soil. ....	
	58
<b>Figure 4.4.</b>	
Cadmium distribution with depth in the Tuahu Sandy loam profile as determined by three extracting reagents ranging in strength from severe (HF:HNO <sub>3</sub> ) to mild (0.1 M HCl). ....	
	60

<b>Figure 4.5</b>	Variation in the cadmium concentrations of topsoils (0 - 7.5 cm) on Limestone Downs when separated into soil groups according to the New Zealand Genetic Soil Classification system. Bars (   ) represent the median value for each category. ....	62
<b>Figure 4.6</b>	Total Cd concentrations in surface soils from across Limestone Downs plotted against their total P concentrations. The correlation coefficient (r) is 0.84 (P < 0.001).....	62
<b>Figure 4.7</b>	The relationship between total Cd and total soil carbon for surface soils from across Limestone Downs (○; r = 0.79, P < 0.001) excluding soils belonging to the gley recent soil group (▲; r = -0.54, P < 0.1). ....	63
<b>Figure 4.8</b>	Representative plots of sample to sample fluctuations in the west-east direction across a 25m x 25m study area encompassing campsites, medium and steep slopes: total Cd (▲); total P (○); and total soil carbon (+). (a) 0 m south (S); (b) 7.5 m S; and (c) 20 m S. Directions correspond to orientation of the grid in Figure 4.9. ....	66
<b>Figure 4.9</b>	Three-dimensional plot of: (a) total P concentrations; and (b) total Cd concentrations in soil from a 25m x 25 m study area encompassing campsites, and medium and steep slopes. The campsite is located in the north-west corner (0,0) and land slope generally increases in both the easterly and southerly directions. Divisions in the colour range are based on the median, and the lower and upper quartiles of each data set .....	67
<b>Figure 4.10</b>	The relationship between total Cd and total P for soil samples taken from a 25m x 25m study area encompassing campsites, medium and steep slopes. The 121 sample points have been	

categorized into two slope classes: low slope (○;  $r = 0.46$ )  
and medium to steep slope (▲;  $r = 0.86$ ). .....69

**Figure 5.1** Sampling scheme for comparison of pedologically matched  
fertilized and unfertilized sites from two soil groups on  
Limestone Downs farm. ....75

**Figure 5.2** Soil profiles of: (a) a Yellow-brown loam and (b) a Yellow-  
brown earth showing the difference in Cd concentration  
between sites fertilized with phosphatic fertilizer (pasture)  
and unfertilized sites under two tree species (broadleaf,  
podocarp) in undisturbed native bush.....79

**Figure 6.1.** Geographical location of (North Island, New Zealand), and  
sample site information on soils studied in the column  
leaching experiments. ....103

**Figure 6.2.** Schematic diagram of the permeameter design and soil  
arrangement used for studying Cd movement. ....107

**Figure 6.3.** Concentrations of Cd in leachate from columns of Manawatu  
soil leached with 1000 mL of: (a) deionized water; (b) 2.5  
mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$ ; (c) 2.5 mM  $\text{Ca}(\text{NO}_3)_2$ ; or (d) 2.5 mM  $\text{CaSO}_4$ . Cd-  
amended columns which contained added-Cd in the top soil  
layer are indicated by closed symbols; control columns are  
indicated by open symbols. ....118

**Figure 6.4.** Final distribution of Cd in columns of Manawatu soil leached  
with 1000 mL of: (a) deionized water; (b) 2.5 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$ ; (c)  
2.5 mM  $\text{Ca}(\text{NO}_3)_2$ ; or (d) 2.5 mM  $\text{CaSO}_4$ . Cd-amended  
columns which contained added-Cd in the top soil layer are  
shown as a solid line; control columns are shown as a dashed  
line. Arrow indicates initial Cd concentration in the Cd-  
amended soil of the top layer.....119

- Figure 6.5.** Trends in leachate pH for trial columns of Manawatu soil leached with 1000 mL of: deionized water ( $\Delta$ ); 2.5 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$  ( $\square$ ); and 2.5 mM  $\text{Ca}(\text{NO}_3)_2$  ( $\bullet$ )..... 121
- Figure 6.6.** A comparison of the Cd distribution in trial columns of Manawatu soil leached with 1000 mL of: 2.5 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$  (dashed line) and 2.5 mM KCl (solid line). The top depth in the 2.5 mM KCl column has been omitted because of untraceable contamination. Arrow indicates initial Cd concentration in the Cd-amended soil of the top layer..... 122
- Figure 6.7** Concentrations of Cd in leachate from columns of Manawatu soil leached with 1000 mL of: (a) 5 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$ ; (b) 10 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$ ; (c) 20 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$ ; (d) 35 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$ ; and (e) 50 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$ . Cd-amended columns which contained added-Cd in the top soil layer are shown as closed symbols; control columns are shown as open symbols. Note the change in scale of one order of magnitude from (a)-(b) to (c), and (c) to (d)-(e)..... 124
- Figure 6.8** Distribution of Cd in columns of Manawatu soil leached with 1000 mL of: (a) 5 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$ ; (b) 10 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$ ; (c) 20 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$ ; (d) 35 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$ ; and (e) 50 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$ . Cd-amended columns which contained added-Cd in the top soil layer are shown as a solid line; control columns are shown as a dashed line. Arrow indicates initial Cd concentration in the Cd-amended soil of the top layer. .... 125
- Figure 6.9.** Trends in leachate pH for Cd-amended columns of Manawatu soil leached with 1000 mL of: 5 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$  ( $\blacktriangle$ ); 10 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$  ( $\bullet$ ); 20 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$  ( $\Delta$ ); and 35 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$  ( $\circ$ ). .... 126

- Figure 6.10.** Comparison of Cd loss in columns of Manawatu soil with increasing concentrations of  $\text{CaCl}_2$ : (a) Cd loss from the Cd-amended top soil layer of Cd-amended columns ( $\blacktriangle$ ); (b) total Cd loss from control columns, i.e. percentage of Cd recovered in the leachate ( $\square$ ). ..... 127
- Figure 6.11.** Concentrations of Cd in leachate during an initial leaching phase (open symbols) and during rewetting following a drying period (closed symbols) for: (a) Cd-amended columns of Manawatu soil leached with 2.5 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$  ( $\Delta$ ) and 50 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$  ( $\square$ ); and (b) - (d) Cd-amended ( $\square$ ) and control columns ( $\Delta$ ) of Manawatu soil leached with increasing concentrations of KCl. .... 132
- Figure 6.12.** Concentrations of Cd in leachate from columns of soil leached with 1000 mL of 2.5 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$ : (a) Manawatu; (b) Kohemarerere; (c) Wharekohe [Undeveloped]; (d) Wharekohe [Developed]. Cd-amended columns which contained added-Cd in the top soil layer are indicated by closed symbols; control columns are indicated by open symbols. .... 134
- Figure 6.13.** Distribution of Cd in columns of soil after leaching with 1000 mL of 2.5 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$ : (a) Manawatu; (b) Kohemarerere; (c) Wharekohe [Undeveloped]; (d) Wharekohe [Developed]. Cd-amended columns which contained added-Cd in the top soil layer are shown as a solid line; control columns are shown as a dashed line. Arrow indicates initial Cd concentration in the Cd-amended soil of the top layer. .... 135
- Figure 6.14.** Trends in pH of leachate collected from Cd-amended columns of Manawatu ( $\square$ ); Kohemarerere ( $\circ$ ); Wharekohe [Undeveloped] ( $\Delta$ ); and Wharekohe [Developed] ( $\blacktriangle$ ) soil when leached with 2.5 mM  $\text{CaCl}_2$ . .... 138

<b>Figure 7.1.</b>	Adsorption isotherms for each soil determined in a background matrix of 2.5 mM $\text{CaCl}_2$ and at the soil's natural pH. Solution pH values and equations for the fitted linear isotherms are presented in Table 7.2. ....	151
<b>Figure 7.2.</b>	Concentrations of Cd in leachate from columns of soil leached with 2.5 mM $\text{CaCl}_2$ : measured (symbols) from experimental soil columns; and predicted (—) using a simple convection-dispersion equation and assuming sorption equilibrium. Model constants are given in Table 7.1 and 7.2. ....	154
<b>Figure 7.3.</b>	Concentrations of Cd in soil columns after leaching with 1000 mL of 2.5 mM $\text{CaCl}_2$ : measured (symbols) from experimental soil columns; and predicted (—) using a simple convection-dispersion equation and assuming sorption equilibrium. Model constants are given in Table 7.1 and 7.2. Arrow indicates starting Cd concentration for the high-Cd, top layer. ....	155
<b>Figure 7.4.</b>	Sorption-desorption isotherms ( $\square$ ) and the adsorption isotherms ( $\blacksquare$ ) from Figure 7.1 determined for each soil in a background matrix of 2.5 mM $\text{CaCl}_2$ and at the soil's natural pH. ....	159
<b>Figure 8.1</b>	Schematic diagram of the position of the four pits at each of the 7 sites, and the depth intervals from which soil was sampled.....	166
<b>Figure 8.2</b>	Distribution profiles of Cd in soil for each development age as determined from an average of, in most cases, four pits. Error bars denote the standard error of the mean value.....	172 - 173

**Figure 8.3**    Total P and total Cd concentrations in soil samples from depths of 0 - 3 cm; 3 - 7.5 cm; and 7.5 cm - E horizon ( $r = 0.95$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ) .....174

**Figure 8.4**    Ratios of Zn/Cd concentrations in the soil: 0 - 3 cm; 3 - 7.5 cm; and 7.5 cm - E horizon, plotted as a function of total P concentration (an indicator of phosphatic fertilizer input) .....175

**Figure 8.5**    Diagrammatic representation of the Cd mass balance calculated for each site. Bars represent: total amount of Cd estimated to have been applied to each site with fertilizer; total amount of Cd accumulated in the soil above the E horizon at each site – error bars denote the standard error of the mean value for at least four pits; and the amount of Cd unaccounted for at each site. See also Table 8.4. ....176





## LIST OF MAPS

### Maps enclosed in back pocket

**Map 1** Reconnaissance soil map of Limestone Downs showing the positions of soil profiles.

Soil profiles studied in Chapter 4, section 4.3.2, are shown by white labels. Detailed soil profile descriptions are given in Appendix 2.

Soil profiles studied in Chapter 5, section 5.2, are shown by pink labels. Detailed soil profile descriptions are given in Appendix 3.



## LIST OF SYMBOLS

(Chapter 7)

$C$	= solute concentration ( $M L^{-3}$ )
$C_{tot}$	= total concentration of solute in unit soil volume ( $M L^{-3}$ )
$D$	= dispersion coefficient ( $L^2 T^{-1}$ )
$D_s$	= molecular diffusion coefficient in soil ( $L^2 T^{-1}$ )
$K_d$	= distribution coefficient ( $L^3 M^{-1}$ )
$q_s$	= solute flux density ( $M L^{-2} T^{-1}$ )
$q_w$	= Darcy flux density ( $L T^{-1}$ )
$R$	= retardation coefficient (dimensionless)
$S$	= amount of solute adsorbed by the soil matrix ( $M M^{-1}$ )
$t$	= time (T)
$V$	= average pore water velocity ( $L T^{-1}$ )
$z$	= diffusion distance (L)
$\theta$	= volumetric water content ( $L^3 L^{-3}$ )
$\lambda$	= dispersivity (L)
$\rho_b$	= soil bulk density ( $M L^{-3}$ )