



Characterization of soil fungal communities in lavender and oil-bearing rose plantations using DNA metabarcoding



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Soil fungi are key component of belowground biota characterized by great diversity and complex structure. They have different functional roles (e.g. decomposers, mutualists, pathogens, etc.) and can significantly affect plant and soil health. They are involved in all ecosystem processes and services but factors that influence their functioning are not well understood. The lack of knowledge is mainly related to their high diversity, hidden life mode and difficulty to culture. Therefore, culture-independent DNA-based identification methods for soil surveys are widely used. Recent studies use a high-throughput-sequencing (HTS) that allow an in-depth analysis of the entire fungal community composition in various environmental samples.

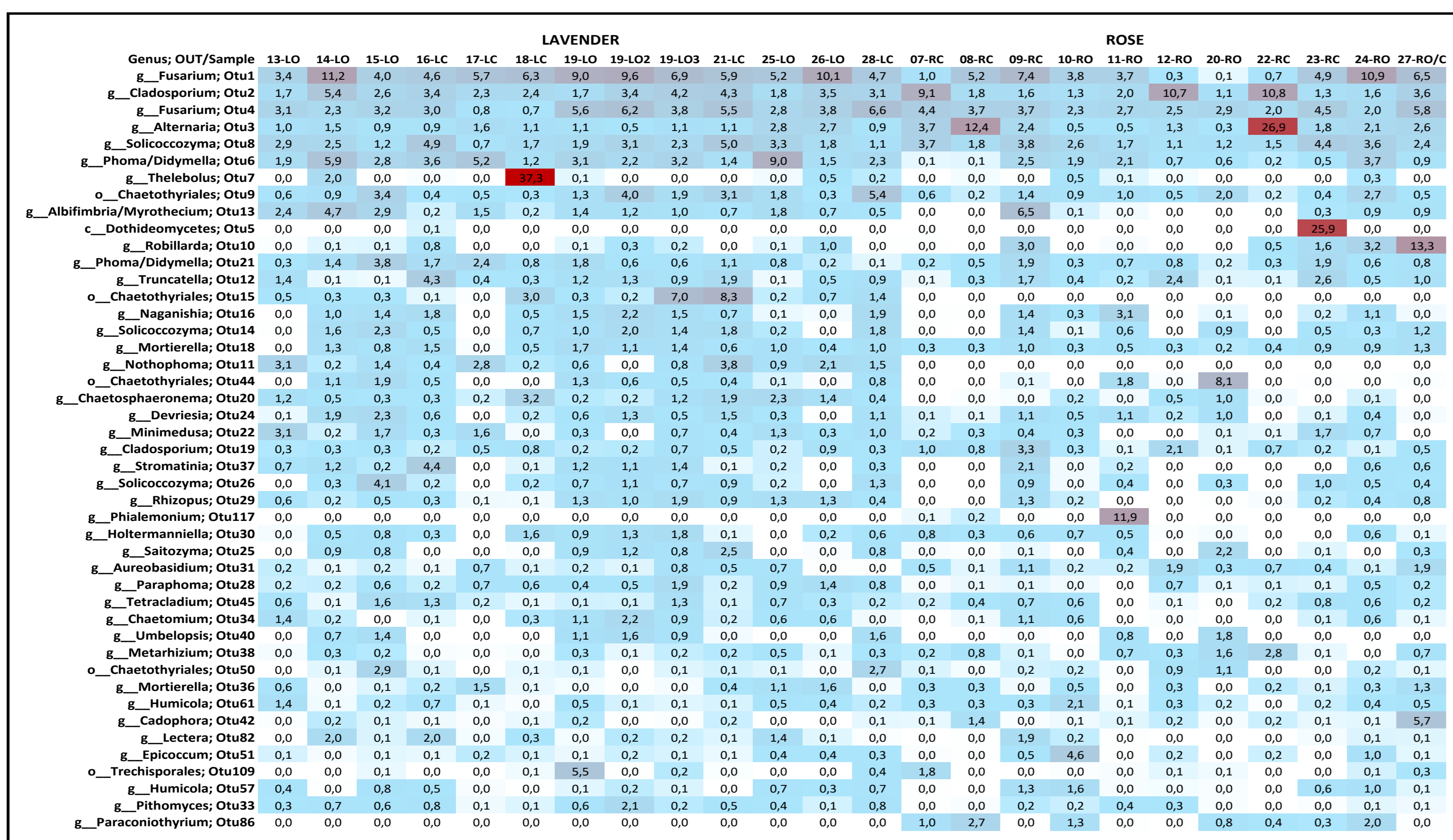


In the frame of the National Research Program "Healthy Foods for a Strong Bio-Economy and Quality of Life" we are studying the fungal diversity and composition in soils of lavender and oil-bearing roses managed by conventional and organic farming by applying DNA metabarcoding. We have two general objectives: 1) to examine the impact of cropping systems on soil fungal communities and 2) to propose management measures and agronomic practices for improving soil and plant health.

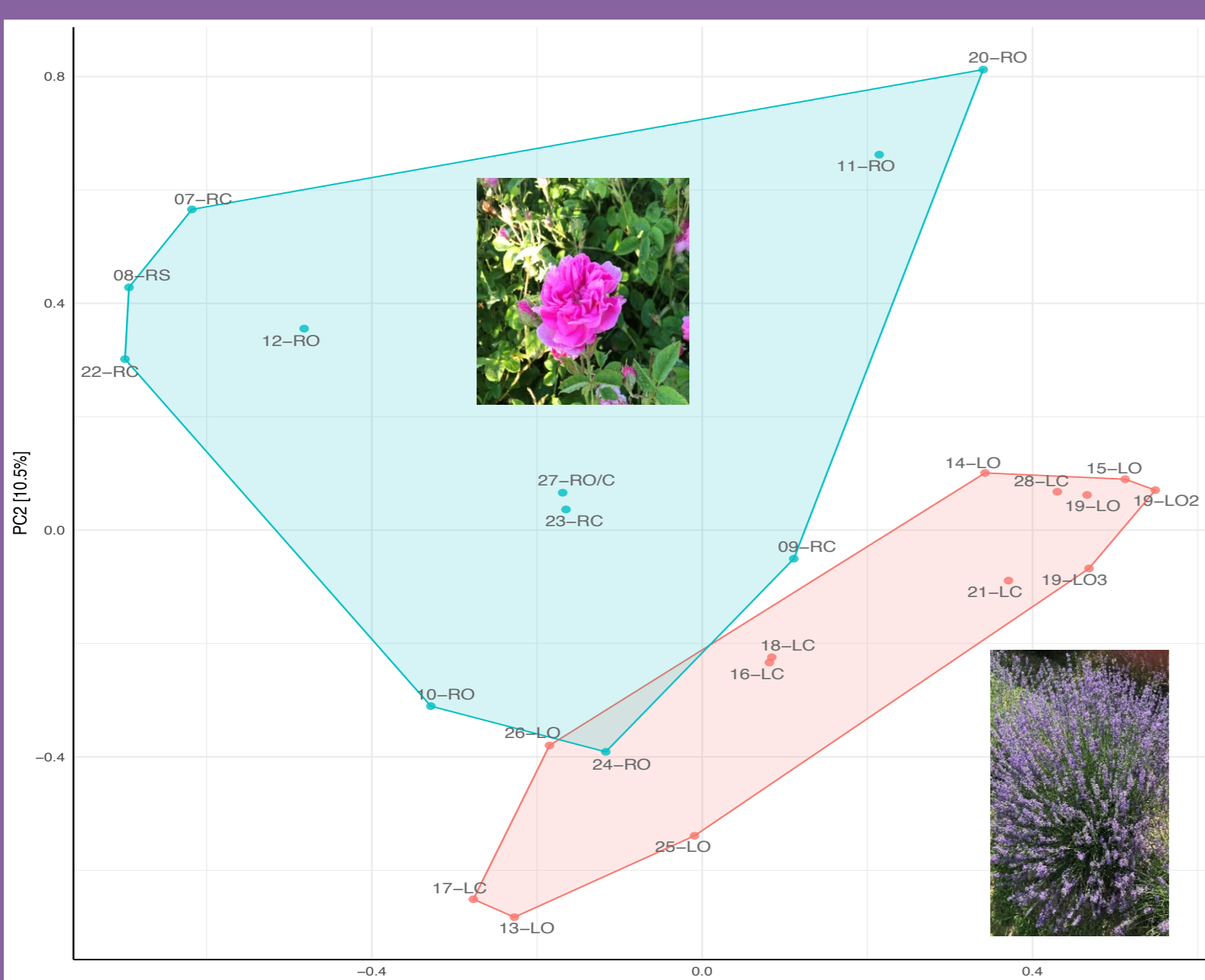


The study was conducted in 20 plantations located in the region of Kazanlak. Ten plots from each crop, managed by conventional and organic farming (2 x 5), were selected and sampled in the period of 2019-2020. Each soil sample is composed of 10 sub-samples collected from the plant rhizosphere at 0–5 cm depth. Soil was thoroughly mixed to homogenize and 5-10 g were stored for processing. Soil fungal composition was studied by sequencing the internal transcribed spacer 2 (ITS2) rDNA region. Fungal ITS2 amplicon library preparation and the sequencing were carried out using by the DNASense laboratory based on an Illumina protocol. Reads processing and classification were assigned to taxa using SINTAX algorithm and UNITE reference database v. 8.0 (Nilsson et al., 2018). The diversity and community structure were analysed at operational taxonomic units (OTUs) level using DNASense data analysis app.

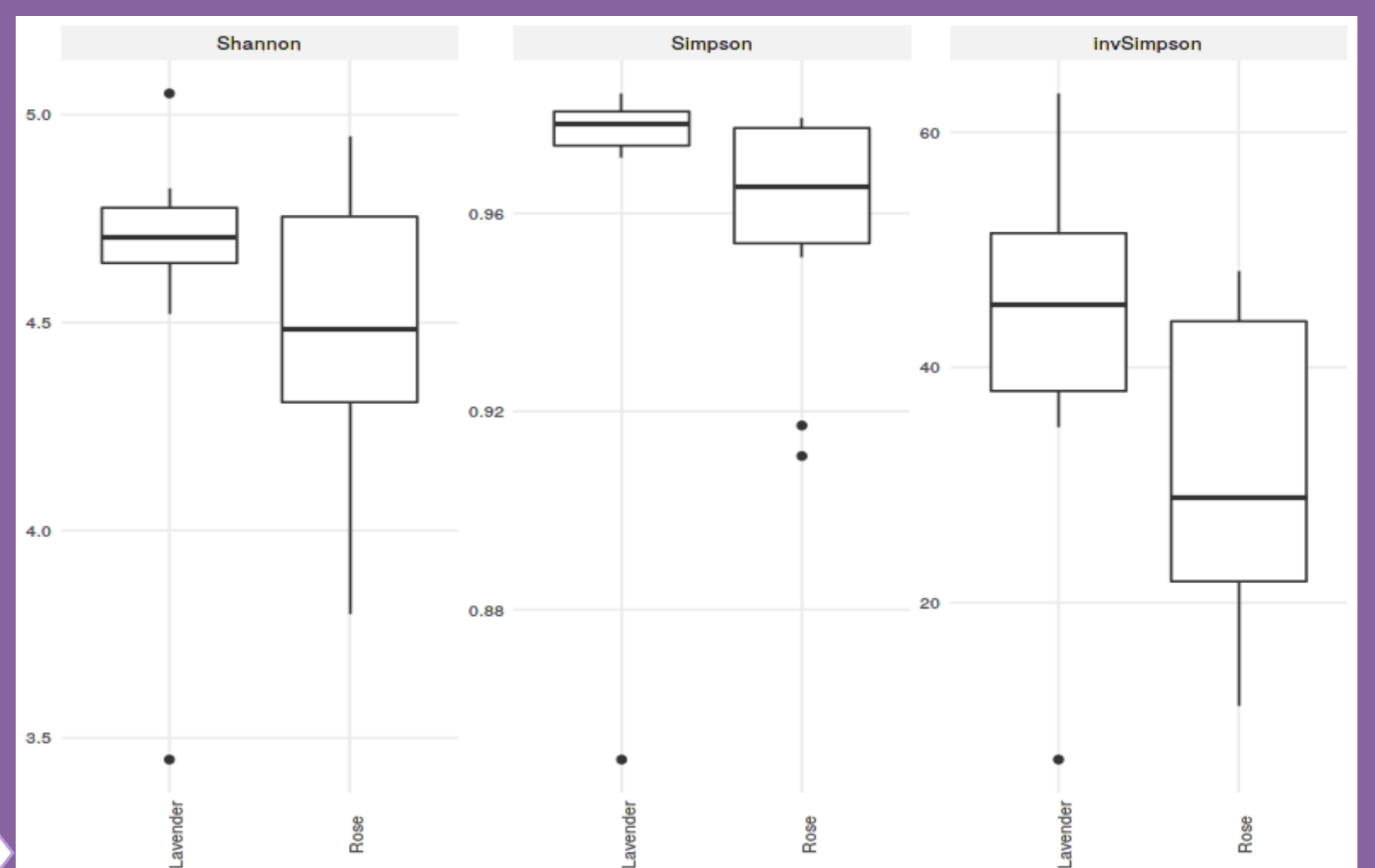
Heatmap of the most abundant fungal OTUs and genera



- The 50 Most abundant fungal OTUs found in the lavender and rose soil samples are presented with their relative abundances. If no genus level classification was obtained, the lowest assigned taxonomic classification is given.
- In both crops most abundant and frequent OTUs belong to three genera – *Fusarium*, *Cladosporium* and *Alternaria*. Some species of these genera are known as economically important plant pathogens.
- A few host-specific OTUs with high occurrence corresponding to the genera *Chaetosphaeronema* and *Nothophoma*, and order Chaetothyriales were present in the samples from lavender fields.



- The PCA revealed clusters linked to the planted crop rather than to the management type.
- The fungal communities of lavender were more similar than those of roses.
- The number of observed OTUs were slightly higher in soils of lavender [ranges (483-817) vs (459-685)].
- The comparison of alpha-diversity values between both plant species revealed statistical differences in Simpson and invSimpson indices (MW U test: U=35, p=0.037).



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