Production of Aflatoxins B₁ and G₁ by *Aspergillus flavus* and *Aspergillus parasiticus* Isolated from Market Pecans

P. E. KOEHLER,* R. T. HANLIN, and L. BERAHA

Departments of Food Science* and Plant Pathology, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia 30602, and United States Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Research Service, Chicago, Illinois 60605

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One hundred and forty-eight isolates of *Aspergillus flavus* and *A. parasiticus* were isolated from 5,608 pecans obtained from Chicago and Georgia markets. The percentage of internal contamination by these species was 7.3% in the Chicago market pecans and 1.7% in those from markets in Georgia. Of the 148 isolates, 93% of the *A. parasiticus*, but only 54% of the *A. flavus*, were capable of producing aflatoxin. Overall, 57% of the isolates were potentially aflatoxinogenic. *A. parasiticus* isolates generally produced a greater amount of aflatoxins than *A. flavus*.

The production of aflatoxin appears to be limited primarily, if not exclusively, to strains of *Aspergillus flavus* and *Aspergillus parasiticus* (4). Investigators have noted differences in both the types (B₁, B₂, G₁, G₂, etc.) and quantities of aflatoxins produced by *A. flavus* and *A. parasiticus* species. It has been reported (4) that 82% of *A. parasiticus* isolates produced both aflatoxins B₁ and G₁. Among the *A. flavus* strains, the largest group produced only aflatoxin B₁, but a number also formed both B₁ and G₁. Several other reports have suggested that *A. parasiticus* are the most active aflatoxin producers (2, 5).

Numerous instances of isolations of both *A. flavus* and *A. parasiticus* from many agricultural commodities have been reported (4). Aflatoxigenic isolates of *A. flavus* in pecans were first reported in 1970 (7). Escher et al. (3) surveyed mold and aflatoxin contaminations in pecans during the commercial shelling process. These investigators reported that *A. flavus* isolates out-numbered *A. parasiticus* by four to one, but they did not determine the aflatoxin-producing potential of the isolates.

In this study, 148 isolates of *A. flavus* and *A. parasiticus* from 5,608 pecans sampled in Georgia and Chicago markets were identified, and aflatoxin production was quantitatively determined.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Isolation and identification. Pecan halves or pieces were disinfected before plating by immersion for 2 min in a solution consisting of 20 ml of 5% sodium hypochlorite and 20 ml of 95% ethanol in 60 ml of water. Georgia pecans were plated on rose bengal-streptomycin agar prepared as described by Tsao (8), except that streptomycin sulfate was added at the level of 0.06 g/liter. All of the other pecans were plated on the Botran modification of Martin's rose bengal-streptomycin medium devised by Bell and Crawford (1). All plates were incubated at room temperature and examined periodically for 2 to 3 weeks for the presence of members of the *A. flavus* group. Species of that group were transferred to malt extract agar slants for storage and subsequent identification.

**Assay for aflatoxin production.** All isolates identified as *A. flavus* or *A. parasiticus* were assayed for ability to produce aflatoxins by inoculating 10⁶ conidia of each isolate into 250-ml Erlenmeyer flasks containing 50 ml of yeast extract (2%-sucrose (20%) (YES) media and incubating at 25 C for 7 days. Aflatoxin was extracted by adding 50 ml of chloroform to each flask and shaking for 15 min in a gyroratory shaker. After separation in a 250-ml separatory funnel, the lower (chloroform) layer was drained through Whatman no. 1 filter paper into a 500-ml boiling flask, and the upper (media) layer was returned to the original 250-ml Erlenmeyer flask. This extraction procedure was repeated three times. The combined chloroform extracts were evaporated to a small volume on a rotary vacuum evaporator, quantitatively transferred to a volumetric flask, and adjusted to exactly 10 ml for quantitation by thin-layer chromatography. The concentrated extracts or appropriate dilutions were spotted on Adsorbosil-1 (0.25 mm thick; Applied Science Laboratories, State College, Pa.) thin-layer chromatographic plates along with standard aflatoxin solutions of known concentrations (Southern Utilization Research and Development Laboratories, U.S. Department of Agriculture, New Orleans, La.) and developed in chloroform-acetone (88:12). Aflatoxins were estimated by comparing the intensity of the fluorescence of sample spots with standards with a fluorodensitometer (365-nm excitation filter, 425-nm emission filter).

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Ninety percent of the 148 isolates of *A. flavus* and *A. parasiticus* collected from market pe-
cans were A. flavus, whereas only 10% were A. parasiticus. A total of 5,608 pecan halves were plated, 2,758 from Chicago markets and 2,850 from Georgia markets. Of the 148 isolates of A. flavus and A. parasiticus found, 47 were from samples collected from Georgia markets, whereas 101 isolates were from Chicago market pecans. The percentage of internal invasion by these species was 7.3% in pecans from Chicago markets and 1.7% in those from Georgia markets. Growth and aflatoxin production of all 47 Georgia isolates and 101 Chicago isolates were determined in YES media. No significant differences in growth were observed (Table 1). The average dry weight of the mycelia differed less than 0.1 g between the two species. In addition, the average weight of all the nonproducing isolates (1.53 g) was identical to the producing isolates (1.47 g). Of the 148 A. flavus and A. parasiticus isolated from pecans, 57% produced one or more aflatoxins when grown 7 days in YES media.

All aflatoxin-producing isolates produced primarily aflatoxins B1, and G1. Aflatoxin G1 production was always associated with the production of aflatoxin B1 (Table 2). In no case did aflatoxin B2 or G2 contribute significantly to the total toxin produced.

Overall, 57% of the isolates produced some aflatoxin on YES media. Over 93% of A. parasiticus strains isolated from pecans were capable of aflatoxin production, whereas only 54% of A. flavus isolates produced aflatoxin under the same conditions. Aflatoxin G1 production occurred in a much higher percentage of A. parasiticus isolates than A. flavus. Eighty-seven percent of A. parasiticus isolates produced aflatoxin G1, whereas only 10% of A. flavus did so.

The average amount of aflatoxin B1 produced by toxigenic A. parasiticus isolates was over twice that produced by aflatoxin-producing strains of A. flavus. A. parasiticus produced larger amounts of aflatoxin G1, but the difference (1.3x) was not as great as for aflatoxin B1. The average ratio of aflatoxin B1 to G1 production by A. flavus (0.3) and A. parasiticus (0.5) did not differ significantly due to the wide variation occurring in this ratio. The B1-G1 ratio in A. flavus species varied from a maximum of 2.8 to a low of 0.1, whereas the ratio in A. parasiticus ranged from 1.9 to 0.2.

Although the origins of all of the pecans collected in the Chicago market area were known, the majority of the samples were from only three states, Georgia, Alabama, and Oklahoma. Insufficient numbers of isolates were available from other areas to make any valid comparisons. Pecans originating from Georgia yielded a considerably lower proportion of isolates capable of aflatoxin production than those from the other regions (Table 3). In addition, those Georgia isolates that were aflatoxigenic produced lower average quantities of aflatoxin B1 (1.7 mg/50 ml) than isolates from the other regions. Oklahoma pecans, whose toxigenic isolates had the highest overall yields of aflatoxin B1 (3.4 mg/50 ml), included an unusually high percentage of A. parasiticus isolates. The 17% rate of isolation of A. parasiticus was over three to four times that of other regions. This in itself would tend to cause higher average aflatoxin production, since, generally, A. parasiticus isolates are stronger producers than A. flavus (Table 1).

Six isolates of Aspergillus tamarii, another member of the A. flavus group, were isolated from market pecans but none of these produced aflatoxin.

### Table 1. Growth and aflatoxin production characteristics of A. flavus and A. parasiticus from market pecans

| Isolate     | No. | Wt* (g) | No. of producers | Aflatoxin B1 (mg)* | G1 (mg)* |
|-------------|-----|---------|------------------|-------------------|---------|
| A. flavus   | 133 | 1.48    | 72               | 2.16              | 7.28    |
| A. parasiticus | 15  | 1.57    | 14               | 4.54              | 9.24    |
| All isolates| 148 | 1.50    | 86               |                   |         |

* Average of all isolates.

### Table 2. Production of aflatoxins B1 and G1 by A. flavus and A. parasiticus from market pecans

| Isolate     | % Producing |
|-------------|-------------|
| A. flavus   | B1, only G1 | 0, 10        |
| A. parasiticus | 93       | 7, 87        |
| All isolates| 57          | 39, 18       |

### Table 3. Aflatoxin production by A. flavus and A. parasiticus from market pecans of different origin

| Origin      | No. | % Producers | % A. flavus | % A. parasiticus | B1 (mg)* |
|-------------|-----|-------------|-------------|-----------------|---------|
| Georgia     | 43  | 56          | 95          | 5               | 1.7     |
| Alabama     | 23  | 74          | 96          | 4               | 2.1     |
| Oklahoma    | 29  | 72          | 83          | 17              | 3.4     |
| All isolates| 148 | 58          | 90          | 10              | 2.4     |

* Average of all producing strains.
any aflatoxins when grown on YES media. An Aspergillus oryzae strain isolated from pecans also failed to produce any aflatoxins.

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