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Protein chips for detection of mite allergens using Kunitz-type protease inhibitors

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11 Poltronieri Palmiro^[a] *, Cimaglia Fabio^[a], Santino Angelo^[a], Marialuce Daniela De Blasi^[a], Iva
12 Krizkova-Kudlikova^[b], Shaoyang Liu^[c], Yuhong Wang^[d], and Yifen Wang^[c]
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18
19
20
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22 a- CNR-ISPA section in Lecce, Italy

23
24 b- RICP, VURV, Crop Research Institute, Prague, Czech Republic

25
26 c- Department of Biosystems Engineering, Auburn University, AL, USA

27
28 d- Department of Nutrition and Food Sciences, Auburn University, AL, USA
29
30
31
32
33
34
35

36 *Corresponding Author

37
38 Palmiro Poltroneri, CNR-ISPA, via Monteroni km 7, 73100 Lecce, Italy

39
40 Tel. +390832422609. Fax +390832422620
41
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50 Abbreviations: Kunitz-type protease inhibitor (KPI); Soybean Bowman-Birk protease inhibitor (S-
51 BBI).
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Abstract

Stored food and house dust arthropods include many species of mites and beetles affecting human health. For diagnostic tests proteases such as trypsin are utilized as they are indicators of the presence of allergen contaminants in food. We recently characterized Kunitz-type protease inhibitors (KPIs) from *Solanum palustre*. Here we studied biotechnological applications of KPI-B1 and B4. We manufactured a protein chip with immobilized KPI-B1 and B4 and showed trypsin/chymotrypsin-binding specificity indicating that the recombinant proteins have protease selectivity. We employed the protein chip to capture mite proteins belonging to the protease family with polyclonal anti-mite antibodies. The mite diagnostic chip can be useful for detecting mite allergens.

Introduction

Kunitz-type protease inhibitors (KPIs), with size 22-24 kDa, are a class of plant protease inhibitors that play an important role in plant defence against pathogens and insects [1]. The Kunitz-type inhibitors found in potato and other *Solanum* species are divided into three homology groups, A, B and C. KPI-A group includes inhibitors of aspartic proteases such as cathepsin D [2, 3]. Group KPI-B contains inhibitors of serine proteases [2, 3], e.g., trypsin and chymotrypsin. KPI-C group includes inhibitors of plant cysteine proteases as well as some non-protease hydrolytic enzymes such as α -amylase [4].

In a previous work, we characterized the inhibitory activity of KPI group B proteins [3]. KPI-B1 and B4 were the most active inhibitors of trypsin at nanomolar concentration (84.8 nM for B4 and 345.5 nM for KPI-B1). Recombinant KPI-B proteins were tested on a panel of model proteases isolated from vertebrates, invertebrates and fungi. The assays revealed that the protease inhibitory activity is not only limited to bovine trypsin but also to red king crab (*Paralithodes camtschaticus*) trypsin which is structurally close to trypsin from beetle and butterfly larvae (data not shown). Thus, KPI groups contain protease inhibitors with large feasibility to trypsins from different origins.

In the present work, recombinant KPI-B1 and B4 were tested together with a known protease inhibitor in a protein chip to study the interaction with trypsin, and, together with two KPIs of group A, the interaction with three different proteases.

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3 Mites and beetles are often found in contaminated stored products and farming
4 environments. The contamination of stored food by arthropods may seriously endanger human
5 health [5], as they can cause allergies [6-8] and serve as vectors of fungal allergens and mycotoxins
6 producing fungi [9]. More than twenty classes of major allergens are caused by house dust or stored
7 product mites (Table 1). Six of these allergens are proteases and related hydrolytic enzymes [5-8].
8 Mites and beetles contain digestive enzymes including serine-type proteases (chymotrypsin, trypsin
9 and a collagenolytic protease), a cysteine protease and an aspartic protease, and different proteases
10 are abundantly present in mites' faeces.
11

12
13 Diagnostic tests have been developed with fixed antibodies on strips or microplates as
14 capture probes to detect allergens, i.e., using trypsin to detect soybean allergens as STI, a marker of
15 the presence of soybean contaminants in food [10, 11]. The KPI chips were tested in the detection
16 of mite proteins supposed to be proteases. Protein visualization anti-mite antibodies allows relative
17 quantification of mite proteases bound to each KPI group in each individual experiment, but is not
18 feasible for comparison between different experiments, due to the laser scanner used.
19

20
21 The ultimate goal is the application of KPI proteins in the detection of mite hazards. The
22 miniaturization of these assays will enable the creation of high-throughput tools and new
23 diagnostics.
24

25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 **2. Materials and Methods**

36 37 38 39 *2.1. Proteins used in this work*

40
41 Recombinant protein production and purification were carried out as previously described
42 [3] and checked by western blot using a polyclonal antibody against a potato KPI-B10 protein
43 (kindly provided by Dr. A. Shevelev). Four His-tagged KPIs, two of group B, KPI-B1 (AY945740)
44 and KPI-B4 (AY945743), and two of group A, KPI-A1 (FJ969213) and KPI-A2 (FJ969214), were
45 produced and used for subsequent biotechnological characterizations. Proteases (trypsin,
46 chymotrypsin and cathepsin B), the protein controls and reagents were from Sigma (Sigma-Aldrich,
47 Milwaukee, WI, USA).
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49 50 51 52 53 *2.2. Protein chip preparation*

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56 All recombinant protease inhibitors were desalted with Zeba desalt spin columns (Pierce, Rockford,
57 IL, USA). The Kunitz-type protease inhibitors and the positive control, soybean Bowman-Birk
58 inhibitor, were prepared at different concentrations (0.1, 0.2, and 0.4 mg/ml) in a NaHCO₃ buffer
59 (0.1 M, pH 9) with glycerol (40% w/v) and arrayed on epoxysilane-coated Nexterion slides (Schott,
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2
3 Jena, Germany) with a robotic printing SpotArray 24 system (Perkin Elmer, Waltham, MA, USA).
4
5 The SpotArray 24 was employed to print in the miniaturized protein chips. Each spot printed with
6
7 SpotArray 24 contained 50-70 nl of 0.1, 0.2 and 0.4 ng/nl KPI. The printing was performed in
8
9 triplicate for each protein at 4° C and about 60% humidity using to the SpotArray humidity control.
10
11 The printed slides were incubated at room temperature for two hours at 60% humidity in a dark
12
13 room to allow the reaction between epoxy groups and water. Then, the printed slides were kept
14
15 dried in the dark for later use, or immediately used. The protein chips ready for use were incubated
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17 for one hour on a shaker at room temperature in a phosphate-buffered saline (PBS) containing
18
19 glycine (0.5 M) and bovine serum albumin (BSA; 1% w/v) to block non-specific binding. After that,
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21 the slides were washed with PBS + BSA (0.1% w/v) and dried in a centrifuge at 500 g x 2 min.
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24 25 *2.3. Protein chip assays*

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28 Each protease (trypsin, chymotrypsin and cathepsin B) was labelled with an Alexa-555
29
30 protein labelling kit (Molecular Probes, Life Technologies, Carlsbad, CA, USA) and purified with
31
32 gel-filtration biogel P-6 (Bio-Rad, Hercules, CA, USA) to remove free dye according to the
33
34 manufacturer's protocols. The probe was then applied as follows: 50 µl of labelled, purified
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36 protease (1 mg/ml of trypsin and chymotrypsin in Tris-hydroxymethylammonomethane (TRIS) buffer
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38 0.1 M, pH 7.5; and 1 mg/ml cathepsin B dissolved in phosphate buffer 0.1 M, pH 6.5) was applied
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40 with the hybridization buffer onto the slide, using the coverslip method [12-14] and incubated for
41
42 one hour in the dark at room temperature in a humidity chamber (70% humidity). After incubation,
43
44 the slides were washed with PBS containing Tween-20 (0.2% w/v) and BSA (0.1% w/v) for 15
45
46 minutes on a shaker at 4° C. Next, the slides were washed twice with PBS + BSA (0.05% w/v) for
47
48 five minutes on a shaker at 4° C and dried in a centrifuge at 500 g x 2 min. Then, the slide was
49
50 scanned with a Laser Scanner 428 (Affymetrix, CA, USA).

51
52 In the detection of mite extracts, protease inhibitors (KPI-A1, KPI-A2, KPI-B1, KPI-B4 and
53
54 S-BBI) were spotted on slides at serial dilutions, 0.1, 0.2 and 0.4 ng/nl using the manual
55
56 MicroCaster (Whatman, Brentford, UK) producing spots with greater size, around 500 nl. After
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58 protein immobilisation and slide desiccation, the chips were used the following day.
59

60 *2.4. Preparation of mite/insect allergenic proteases and detection on the protease inhibitor chip*

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3 Mite cultures (*Acarus siro*, *Aleuroglyphus ovatus*, *Lepidoglyphus destructor*, *Tyrophagus*
4 *putrescentiae*), and red flour beetle (*Tribolium castaneum*) culture and rabbit immunization for
5 producing polyclonal antibodies were carried out at VURV in Prague. Protein extracts of frozen
6 adults were obtained from starved, washed mites. Frozen adults were weighed and homogenised in
7 phosphate buffer saline (PBS, 20 mM Na₂HPO₄, 20 mM NaH₂PO₄, 150 mM NaCl, pH 7) and 0.1%
8 Triton X-100. A protein concentration was determined using the Bradford method (Bio-Rad, USA).
9 Protein concentrations were: *A. ovatus* extract, 3,5 µg/µl; *A. siro* extract, 2,9 µg/µl; *L. destructor*
10 extract, 3.2 µg/µl; *T. putrescentiae* extract, 2,8 µg/µl; and *T. castaneum* extract, 2 µg/µl. The
11 protein extract (2-2.5 µg/µl) was diluted with PBS. Twenty µl of hybridization solution, containing
12 one µl of 1:10 dilution, was used, so that final concentration of proteins was between 0.2 and 0.3
13 µg/µl. The slides were hybridised under dark, at room temperature on a microplate shaker, then
14 washed with TRIS buffer saline pH 7.5 plus 0.1% Tween-20 (TBS-T). To visualize protease
15 inhibitor-mite protein interactions, the chips were incubated with species-specific polyclonal
16 antibodies, diluted 1:20 (1 µg/ml). After removal of aspecific interactions with TBS-T washes, the
17 slides were incubated with Alexa-555-labelled protein A for the antibody detection (Figure 3).
18 Slides were analysed with a 428 Laser Scanner (Affymetrix, USA), and images were visualised
19 with ScanAnalyse. The sensitivity of antigen detection on protein chips was compared to results
20 obtained using dot blot and sandwich ELISA assays probed with the same polyclonal antibodies
21 [15-17].
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39 **3. Results and discussion**

40 41 42 *3.1. Characterization of the protein chip*

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44 Protein chips were tested comparing trypsin binding to S-BBI, KPI-B1 and KPI-B4
45 recombinant proteins [4] in order to verify their performance in conditions of limited movement and
46 orientation constrains (figure 1), Miniaturization of the protein chip was achieved using a robotic
47 spot-arrayer, depositing 70 nl volumes on the glass. KPI-B1 and B4 at serial dilutions showed
48 affinity for trypsin (10 ng/µl) even at 0.1 ng/nl (Figure 1). High KPI-B1 sensitivity for trypsin was
49 put in relation to a higher stability/freedom of movement of KPI-B1 bound to the glass as compared
50 to KPI-B4, since KPI-B1 *K_i* is higher (345.5 for KPI-B1 and 84.8 for KPI-B4). This result shows
51 the feasibility of KPI-B1 use in biotechnological applications.
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58 The stability of KPI protein chips was investigated. A set of printed slides was stored for
59 one month at 4° C and their performance was tested. No evident differences were detected
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3 compared to a freshly-printed chip. KPI proteinase inhibitors were stable for a long time without
4 loss of activity.
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8 9 3.2. Differential KPI binding and protease specificity

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11 KPI-B1 and KPI-B4, together with two other Kunitz-type protease inhibitors (KPI-A1 and
12 A2) were used on KPI protein chips to investigate different binding specificity of trypsin,
13 chymotrypsin and cathepsin B (Figure 2A, B, and C). The protein chips showed that KPI-B1, KPI-
14 B4 and S-BBI as positive control (Figure 2A) were good binding partners for trypsin, while KPI-A1
15 partially interacted with trypsin. The analysis of chymotrypsin binding (Figure 2B) showed
16 fluorescent signals only for serine protease inhibitors, KPI-B1 and KPI-B4 (as previously described
17 using in vitro assay) [4], and S-BBI. The cathepsin-B analysis (Fig. 2C) indicated that recombinant
18 KPI-A1 partially bound to cathepsin B, while Lactoferrin, with an affinity for cathepsin B, shows
19 the strongest fluorescence signal.
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32 3.3. Anti-mite protein chips. Detection of mite allergen candidate proteins

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34 In this work the application of KPIs to detect mite [15, 16] or insect [17] proteases as
35 potential allergens [18, 19] was proposed. Protein chips were used for capturing mite candidate
36 proteases, detected with polyclonal antibodies specific to mite species [15-17] i.e. *A. ovatus*, *A. siro*,
37 *L. destructor*, *T. putrescentiae* and *T. castaneum*, respectively (figures 3A, 3B, 3C, 3D, 3E).
38 Optimum resolution shown in figure 3 was achieved with 1:10 extract dilution, corresponding to
39 0.2 µg of total proteins, but positive results were obtained even with extract dilutions as low as 1:20
40 (corresponding to 100 ng of total proteins, not shown). Faint signals present in positive control
41 might have been caused either by the manual spotting or by very low amounts of trypsin-like
42 proteases in the sample. Possible errors in the transfer of the samples from the microplates to the
43 glass slide could be overcome using the Robotic SpotArray. Total protein extracts (1.5 mg/ml) did
44 not produce good signals, probably due to the presence of lipids, polysaccharides and chitins that
45 may block the protein interactions on the chip.
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55 In the protein chip method, the sensitivity of the assay was higher, compared to the currently
56 used sandwich-ELISA method [15]. The detection limit of the protein chip method was 0,1 µg of
57 total mite extract, while the detection limit for sandwich ELISA method is 1 µg of mite proteins
58 using 1 ml solutions. An advantage of the proposed method is the limited hybridisation volume with
59 lower amounts of proteins, due to the very small surface of protein chips. However, considering that
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3 proteases represent only a small fraction of body proteins, assuming this to be lesser than one
4 hundredth of total proteins in mite bodies, the sensitivity of the chip method is one thousand times
5 higher. This can be explained by the high background caused by antibody binding to membranes,
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7 whereas the glass slide showed low signal-to-noise ratios.
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10 11 12 13 14 **4. Concluding Remarks**

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17 In this work, the protein chip was used to detect mite proteins. Using this tool, KPI-B1 and
18 B4 were capable of screening mite proteases that could represent potential allergens. Presently
19 protein chips are produced only for the determination of reactivity of IgEs toward known antigens
20 and allergens. The development of KPI chips and assays in solution as lateral flow tests (LFT) will
21 allow the detection of mite contamination in stored food products and in environment.
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Figure captions

Figure 1. Miniaturized protein chips in detection of fluorescent trypsin. Upper lane: KPI-B1 (left), KPI-B4 (right). Lower lane: BSA, S-BBI.

For Peer Review

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5 Figure 2. Detection of three fluorescent proteases on KPI chips. Protein concentrations: 0.1, 0.2 and
6 0.4 ng/ml (left to right).

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9 2-A. Selective binding of trypsin.

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12 2-B. Selective binding of Chymotrypsin

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16 2-C. Selective binding of cathepsin B

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19 2-D. A scheme of spotted proteins. Upper lane: KPI-A1, KPI-A2 and KPI-B1

20 Lower lane: negative control (BSA), KPI-B4, positive control (S-BBI in 2A, 2B; Lactoferrin in 2C)

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3 Figure 3.

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5 Detection of mite proteases using KPI chips.

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9 3A. Detection of *Aleuroglyphus ovatus* using anti-*A. ovatus* antibodies

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12 3B. Detection of *Acarus siro* using anti-*A. siro* antibodies

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16 3C. Detection of *Lepidoglyphus destructor* using anti-*L. destructor* antibodies

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19 3D. Detection of *Tyrophagus putrescentiae* using anti-*T. putrescentiae* antibodies

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23 3E. Detection of *Tribolium castaneum*. using anti-*T. castaneum* antibodies

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26 3F Scheme of protein spots (0,4 ng/nl, upper lane; 0,2 ng/nl, middle lane; 0,1 ng/nl, lower lane).

Table 1: The major allergen classes in house dust mites and storage product mites [20, 21] according to websites and to the International Union of Immunological Societies' (IUIS) rules for allergen nomenclatures.

Legends: ??? unknown function

+ suggested allergens according to their amino acid sequences and homology to known allergens

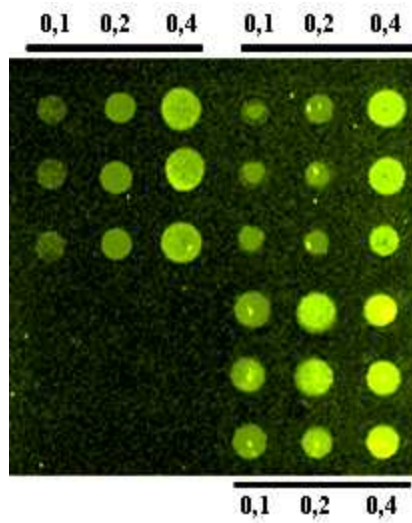
• enzymatic activity proved

Class	Biochemical function	Stored product species					Dust species			
		<i>Acarus</i>	<i>Glyciphagus</i>	<i>Lepidoglyphus</i>	<i>Tyrophagus</i>	<i>Aleuroglyphus</i>	<i>Blomia</i>	<i>Dermatoph.</i>	<i>Derrmatoph.</i>	
		<i>siro</i>	<i>domesticus</i>	<i>destructor</i>	<i>putrescentiae</i>	<i>ovatus</i>	<i>Tropicalis</i>	<i>farinae</i>	<i>Pteronyssinus</i>	
1	Cysteine protease				+	+	Blo t 1	Der f 1	Der p 1	
2	NPC2 family		Gly d 2	Lep d 2	Tyr p 2		Blo t 2	Der f 2	Der p 2	
3	Trypsin	+		+	+	+	Blo t 3	Der f 3	Der p 3	
4	A-amylase	•		•	•	•	Blo t 4	•	Der p 4	
5	???			Lep d 5			Blo t 5		Der p 5	
6	Chymotrypsin	•		•	•	•	Blo t 6	Der f 6	Der p 6	
7	???			Lep d 7				Der f 7	Der p 7	
8	Glutathione S-transferase								Der p 8	
9	Collagenolytic serine prot.	•		•	•	•		•	Der p 9	
10	Tropomyosin			Lep d 10	Tyr p 10		Blo t 10	Der f 10	Der p 10	
11	Paramyosin						Blo t 11	Der f 11	Der p 11	
12	???						Blo t 12			
13	Fatty acid binding protein	Aca s 13		Lep d 13	Tyr p 13		Blo t 13	Der f 13		
14	Apolipoporphin							Der f 14	Der p 14	
15	Chitinase							Der f 15		
16	Gelsolin/villin							Der f 16		
17	Ca binding protein							Der f 17		

18	Chitinase							Der f 18	
19	Anti-microbial peptide						Blo t 19		
20	Arginine kinase								Der p 20
21	???						Blo t 21		Der p 21
22	???							Der f 22	
23	???								Der p 23
24	Troponin C					Tyr p 24			

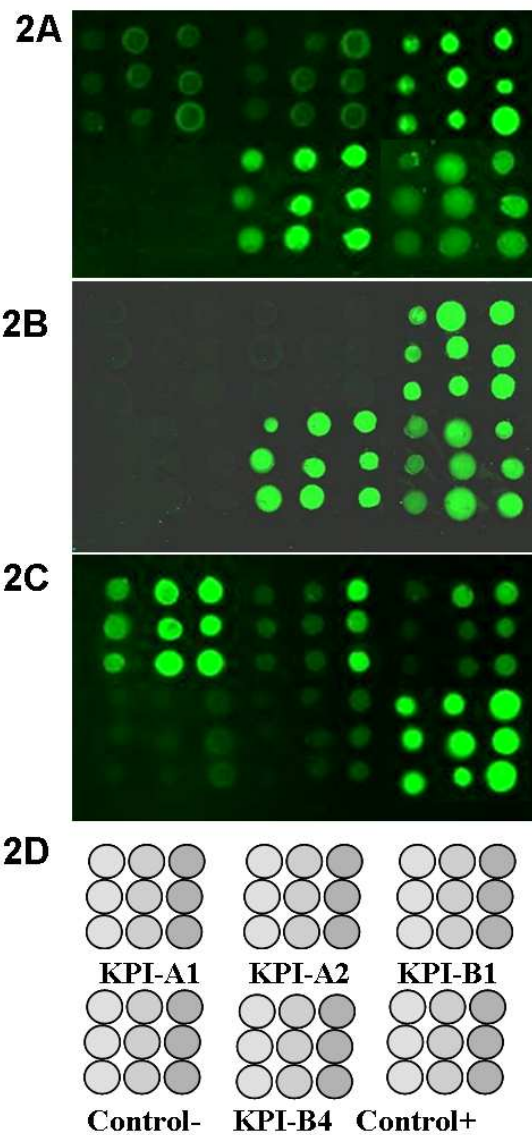
For Peer Review

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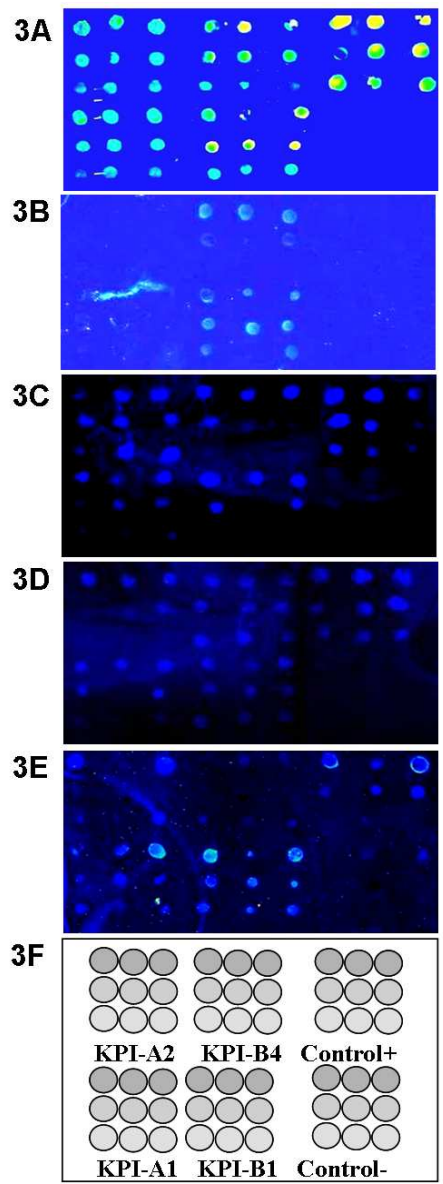
77x98mm (68 x 68 DPI)

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86x179mm (150 x 150 DPI)

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90x224mm (150 x 150 DPI)