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► **To cite this version:**

Emmanuel Kossi Tangni, Luc Pussemier, Yvan Larondelle, Jean Claude Motte. Development and application of analytical methods adapted to the determination of mycotoxins in organic and conventional wheat. *Food Additives and Contaminants*, 2006, 23 (11), pp.1208-1218. 10.1080/02652030600699312 . hal-00577479

HAL Id: hal-00577479

<https://hal.science/hal-00577479>

Submitted on 17 Mar 2011

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Journal:	<i>Food Additives and Contaminants</i>
Manuscript ID:	TFAC-2005-361.R1
Manuscript Type:	Original Research Paper
Date Submitted by the Author:	14-Mar-2006
Complete List of Authors:	TANGNI, Emmanuel; Veterinary and Agrochemical Research Center, Quality and Safety Pussemier, Luc; Veterinary and Agrochemical Research Center, Quality and Safety Larondelle, Yvan; Université catholique de Louvain, Unité de biochimie de la nutrition Motte, Jean Claude; Veterinary and Agrochemical Research Center, Quality and Safety
Methods/Techniques:	Chromatography - HPLC, Chromatographic analysis, Clean-up, In-house validation
Additives/Contaminants:	Mycotoxins, Mycotoxins - trichothecenes, Mycotoxins - ochratoxin A, Mycotoxins - zearalenone
Food Types:	Cereals and grain, Organic foods, Cereals

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Development and application of analytical methods for the determination of mycotoxins in organic and conventional wheat

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Running Head : Mycotoxins determination in wheat

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to develop a multi-component analytical method for the determination of deoxynivalenol (DON), ochratoxin A (OTA) and zearalenone (ZEN), nivalenol (NIV), 3-acetyl-DON (3-acDON), 15-acetyl-DON (15-acDON), zearalenol (ZOL) and citrinin (CIT) in wheat. It also aimed to survey the presence and amounts of DON, OTA and ZEN in Belgian conventionally and organically produced wheat grain and wholemeal wheat flours. After solvent extraction, an anion-exchange column (SAX) was used to fix the acidic mycotoxins (OTA, CIT) whilst the neutral mycotoxins flowing through the SAX column were further purified by filtration on a MycoSep cartridge. OTA and CIT were then analysed by HPLC using an isocratic flow and the fluorescence detection while the neutral mycotoxins were separated by a linear gradient and detected by double mode (UV-Fluorescence) detection. The average DON, ZEN and OTA recoveries from spiked blank wheat flour were 92, 83 and 73 % ($RSD_R = 12, 10$ and 9%), respectively. Moreover, this method offered the respective detection limits of 50, 1.5 and $0.05 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$ and good agreement with reference methods and inter-laboratory comparison exercises.

Organic and conventional wheat samples harvested in 2002 and 2003 in Belgium were analysed for DON, OTA and ZEN while wholemeal wheat flour samples were taken from Belgian retail shops and analysed for OTA and DON. Conventional wheat tended to be more frequently contaminated with DON and ZEN than organic samples, the difference being more significant for ZEN in samples harvested in 2002. The mean OTA, DON and ZEA concentrations were 0.067, 675 and $75 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$ in conventional samples against 0.063, 285 and $19 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$ in organically produced wheat in 2002. Wheat samples collected in 2003 were less affected by DON and ZEN than the 2002 harvest. Organic wholemeal wheat flours were more frequently contaminated by OTA than conventional samples ($p < 0.10$). The opposite pattern was shown for DON, organic samples being more frequently contaminated than conventional flours ($p < 0.10$).

Keywords: *Mycotoxins, Deoxynivalenol, Ochratoxin A, Zearalenone, Analytical method, wheat, Organic, Conventional, Belgium*

Introduction

Organic farming does not permit the use of synthetic pesticides and relies on the use of resistant varieties of seeds as well as the use of some agricultural techniques including crop rotation, manure and compost fertilization. In contrast to this mode of cultivation, conventional farms use mineral fertilization and pesticides in the vegetation period. The use of pesticides to reduce microbial contamination during cereal production and storage, as well as the addition of preservatives at different stages of foodstuffs production and distribution, may lead to the presence of residues in the final products. In contrast, the non-use of pesticides or preservatives may result in increasing fungal contamination and consequently in increased levels of mycotoxins in the final products. So, there is evidence that organic food often contains relatively high amounts of natural toxic compounds produced by fungi or plants, whereas corresponding conventional food tends to contain more synthetic toxins such as pesticide residues (Finamore et al. 2004). Moreover, the use of pesticides or preservatives in insufficient amounts could lead to an even worse situation since the stress imposed on the moulds is thought to stimulate mycotoxin production.

In principle, although the foodstuffs resulting from conventional production are not free of mycotoxins, the organic foodstuffs may present in some circumstances a greater risk of contamination (Pussemier et al. 2006). Moreover, as there is a greater number of micro-organism species able to develop during the organic production (in contrast to the conventional counterpart), a wider spectrum of mycotoxins may potentially be detected in the organic foodstuffs than in the conventional counterparts. So, there is a need for information related to food safety, to inform consumers of the health benefits and/or

1 hazards of food products of both origins, in order to optimize the impact on health and
2 minimize the risks. Identification and quantitative assessment of mycotoxins present in
3 specific raw materials, feed and foodstuffs as well as in manufactured food deserves thus
4 further safety evaluation for public health concerns.
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15 So far, most mycotoxin analyses of foodstuffs have usually been conducted using single
16 toxin methods validated according to the criteria established by the European Union. These
17 methods although sensitive, are time-consuming and thus not applicable for monitoring a
18 large panel of mycotoxins. In fact, it is well known that some fungi species are able to
19 produce several mycotoxins and that the co-existence of two or more toxins in cereals has
20 frequently been documented in the literature, e.g. barley, malt, maize and wheat
21 contaminated with deoxynivalenol (DON), nivalenol (NIV) and zearalenone (ZEN) (Lee et
22 al. 1985, 1986, Park et al. 1992, Tanaka et al. 1990, 2000), maize contaminated with
23 fumonisin B₁ (FB₁), DON, T-2 toxin, NIV and ZEN (Ali et al. 1998), wheat contaminated
24 with DON and ochratoxin A (OTA) (Birzele et al. 2000), barley contaminated with OTA
25 and DON (Olsson et al. 2002), wheat, rye, barley and several cereal-based commodities
26 contaminated with DON and T-2 toxin (Biselli and Hummert 2005). Consequently, if
27 contaminated raw materials are used for their production, manufactured products (such as
28 cornflakes, meal flour, beer) can also be contaminated by all key cereal mycotoxins, except
29 perhaps citrinin (CIT), which does not seem to survive the mashing step (Galvano et al.
30 2005).
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53 The wide extent of mycotoxin co-occurrence requires an analytical method for their
54 simultaneous detection and quantification in food and feed. Most common methods for
55 simultaneous determination of A and B-trichothecenes require GC-ECD, GC-MS or LC
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1
2 with post-column derivatization and fluorescence detection (Krska 2001). Recently,
3
4 LC/MS/MS has been increasingly applied for such purposes (Biselli and Hummert 2005).
5
6

7 The present contribution describes methods for the simultaneous determination of several
8
9 mycotoxins in wheat using high performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) coupled with
10
11 photodiode array-UV and fluorescence detectors. Emphasis is put on the clean-up
12
13 procedures that combine in series an anion exchange (SAX) column and a MycoSep 226
14
15 column for the determination of NIV, DON, 15- and 3-acetyl deoxynivalenol (15-AcDON
16
17 and 3-AcDON), zearalenol (ZOL), ZEN, CIT and OTA in wheat grains and wheat derived
18
19 products. The validation of the method to determine the major mycotoxins DON, ZEN and
20
21 OTA in wheat is first reported whilst further work is in progress in order to improve the
22
23 analytical performances regarding the other toxins. To date, there is not enough information
24
25 available regarding possible co-occurrence of these toxins taking into account the various
26
27 contamination sources. A survey was therefore performed on wheat samples taken from
28
29 organic and conventional farms in Belgium as well as on organic and conventional whole
30
31 meal flour samples taken from the retail market.
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39 **Materials and methods**

40 *Reagents and standards*

41
42
43 Pure crystalline form of NIV, DON, 3-AcDON, 15-AcDON, ZEN, ZOL, CIT and OTA
44
45 were purchased from Sigma Chemical Co. (St Louis, MO, USA). Single standards were
46
47 prepared in acetonitrile and composite working standard solutions were prepared mixing
48
49 aliquots of stock solution in methanol:water (50:50).
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2 HPLC grade acetonitrile (AcN), methanol (MeOH) and toluene were obtained from
3
4 Biosolve (Valkenswaard, The Netherlands). Acetic acid (AcOH), trifluoroacetic acid (TFA)
5
6 and benzene were provided by Acros (New Jersey, NY, USA). Phosphoric acid was
7
8 supplied by Sigma (St Louis, MO, USA). HPLC grade water was obtained using a ELIX3-
9
10 Milli-Q combined system from Millipore (Molsheim, France).
11

12
13
14 SPE-SAX Extract Clean up columns (500 mg/4ml) were obtained from Alltech (Deerfield,
15
16 IL, USA). Romer-MycoSep[®] cartridges 226 were provided by Coring Systems Diagnostix
17
18 GmbH (Gernsheim, Germany). OTA immunoaffinity columns (OchraTest[®]) were obtained
19
20 from Vicam (Watertown, MA, USA)
21

22 *Sample collection and handling*

23
24
25
26
27 Wheat grains and wholemeal wheat flour samples were tested in this study.
28

29
30 Wheat grains, harvested in August 2002 and in August 2003, were obtained directly from
31
32 the organic and conventional producers. Taking into account the geographical (climatic and
33
34 pedological factors) variability, samples were taken from different parts of Belgium with
35
36 the minimum target sample size of 10 per mode of production and per region : Wallonia (20
37
38 samples) and Flanders (20 samples). Based on this size, volunteer farmers who were
39
40 available to participate adhered to the study group. Thus, 20 conventional and 25 organic
41
42 wheat producers were registered in 2002. In 2003, an additional 2 and 1 other farmers were
43
44 enrolled in the conventional and organic farming groups, respectively. The sampling was
45
46 performed by the farmers themselves according to our recommendations. They were asked
47
48 to sample one kilogram of grains in 5 different buckets or at 5 different places in the heap
49
50 of grains, in order to obtain a 5-kg sample representative of the parcel of land. The organic
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52 route of production was assured thanks to these collaborations. In the case of OTA
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1
2 analyses, all 20 conventional and 20 organic wheat samples were chosen at random from
3
4 the 2002 sample set.
5

6
7 Samples were ground in a Retsch centrifugal mill to pass a 1 mm sieve and stored at room
8
9 temperature.
10

11
12 As for flour, eighty samples of wholemeal wheat flours were obtained from retail shops in
13
14 Belgium. Forty conventionally produced samples (representing 10 brands) and forty
15
16 organically produced flours (representing 10 brands) were assayed. To check the variation
17
18 in batches and brands of the sampled materials, two batches per brand and two samples per
19
20 batch were used in this study. All samples were stored at room temperature before analyses.
21
22
23

24 25 *Sample preparation*

26
27 A 25 g-portion of flour (ground and homogenized) sample was transferred into a 300 ml
28
29 PTFE centrifuge vessel and mixed with 125 ml of extraction solvent (acetonitrile:water
30
31 84:16, v:v). The mixture was triturated for 3 min with the IKA Ultra-Turrax mixer
32
33 (Stauffen, Germany) fitted with a T17-V shaft at 13500 rpm to produce slurry and then
34
35 centrifuged for 10 min at 15300xg. An aliquot (10 ml) of the supernatant was then
36
37 submitted to the following purification steps.
38
39
40

41
42 Because acidic and neutral mycotoxins could not be simultaneously purified on the
43
44 MycoSep column, an anion exchange column (SAX) was used prior to the MycoSep
45
46 column in order to fix the acidic mycotoxins on the SAX column. Before loading the
47
48 extract, the SAX column was conditioned with methanol (5 ml) and water (5 ml). The
49
50 centrifuged extract (10 ml) were poured on the column. After flowing through the SAX
51
52 column, the neutral mycotoxins were further purified by filtration on the MycoSep
53
54 cartridge. The SAX column was successively washed thereafter with water (5 ml),
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1
2 methanol (5 ml) and mixture (4 ml) of methanol:acetic acid (99:1, v:v). OTA and CIT were
3
4 eluted with mixture (10 ml) of methanol:trifluoroacetic acid (99:1, v:v). Atmospheric air
5
6 (about 10 ml) was passed through the column to collect all the acidic eluate which was then
7
8 evaporated to dryness at $45 \pm 5^\circ\text{C}$ using a rotavapor. The residue was dissolved with 1 ml
9
10 of methanol:water (50:50).
11
12

13
14 The eluate (9 ml) from SAX column were filled into Mycosep tube and then pushed
15
16 through the Mycosep column. An aliquot of the purified eluate (4 ml) was taken from the
17
18 flow-through and then evaporated to dryness at $45 \pm 5^\circ\text{C}$ using a rotavapor. The dry residue
19
20 containing the neutral mycotoxins (DON, NIV, 3-AcDON, 15-AcDON, ZOL and ZEN)
21
22 was dissolved with 1ml of methanol:water (50:50, v:v).
23
24

25 26 27 *HPLC analysis*

28
29 Identification and quantification of mycotoxins were performed by HPLC analysis. The
30
31 chromatographic system consisted of a system of two Waters 510 pumps (Milford, MA,
32
33 USA) equipped with an automatic WISP model 712 injector (Waters, Milford, MA, USA),
34
35 a 2996 Diode array UV detector (DAD) and a 2474 fluorescence detector, all from Waters
36
37 (Milford, MA, USA). Computer using the Millennium Empower software was used to
38
39 process the signals of the detector and for data management. The reversed-phase analytical
40
41 column, Alltima RP-C18 (100 x 4.6 mm id, 3 μm particles) obtained from Alltech
42
43 (Deerfield, IL, USA) was thermostatically maintained at 35°C by a temperature controller
44
45 Model 7990 (Jones Chromatography, Hengoed, UK) during HPLC analyses.
46
47
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49

50
51 The analytical method used a linear gradient of two mobile phases eluted at 1 ml min^{-1} . The
52
53 mobile phase A was a mixture of acetonitrile:water (2:98, v:v) whereas the mobile phase B
54
55 was a mixture of acetonitrile:water (25:75, v:v). Water of both mobile phases contained 1
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57
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60

1 mM phosphoric acid. The mobile phases were filtered and degassed on a 0.22 μm Durapore filter (Millipore, Molsheim, France).

Neutral mycotoxins were separated by a linear gradient, starting from 5 % to 100 % of phase B in 20 min. UV detector wavelengths were set at 225 and 236 nm whilst the fluorescence detection was performed at $\lambda_{\text{excitation}} = 280 \text{ nm}$ and $\lambda_{\text{emission}} = 465 \text{ nm}$ for ZEN. OTA and CIT were analysed using an isocratic flow of 48 % phase A and 52 % phase B. The detection was performed with the fluorescence detector set at $\lambda_{\text{excitation}} = 332 \text{ nm}$ and $\lambda_{\text{emission}} = 462 \text{ nm}$). The injection volume was 25 μl of the eluates.

Validation

Analytical method for multi-mycotoxin determination in wheat was validated in-house and within inter-laboratory ring tests.

A set of nine wheat flour was spiked by adding mixture of standards at 4 different levels ranged from 200 to 2000 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$ for DON, 20 to 200 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$ for ZEN and 0.5 to 10 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$ for OTA. The initial concentration of each toxin in the wheat samples before spiking was determined and taken into account in the recovery calculations. Recovery and repeatability experiments were performed with these spiked samples. The detection and quantification limits (limit of detection (LOD) and limit of quantification (LOQ)) of the chromatographic procedure were determined by the signal-to-noise ratio of 3:1 and 10:1, respectively.

Inter-laboratory (FAPAS[®] CSL, UK) proficiency tests (series 17 round 32 of May - July 2004 and series 22 round 14 of April - June 2004) were also used to evaluate the method for the determination of OTA (FAPAS 2004a) and DON (FAPAS 2004b).

1
2 Qualitative and quantitative confirmation of DON and OTA was done by comparing the
3
4 concentrations obtained with the multi-mycotoxin method with those obtained with
5
6 reference methods.
7

8
9
10 *Analytical methods targeting OTA or DON (single mycotoxin) determination*
11

12
13 OTA was extracted by using an adaptation of the extraction procedure of the Technical
14
15 Committee for Standardisation (CEN/TC 275 1998). The method was described by
16
17 Thirumala-Devi et al. (2001). Whole wheat flour samples (50 g) were mixed with
18
19 chloroform (200 ml) and 0.1 M H₃PO₄ (20 ml). This mixture was triturated for 3 min with
20
21 the Ultra-Turrax CAT x 620 shaft at 13500 rpm to produce a slurry. After centrifugation for
22
23 10 min under 820xg at 8 ± 2°C, the chloroform phase was transferred into a beaker. The
24
25 remaining part was again extracted with chloroform (200 ml) and 0.1 M H₃PO₄ (20 ml).
26
27 The combined chloroform phases (300 ml) were evaporated to dryness using a rotary
28
29 evaporator at 35 ± 5°C. The residue was dissolved in 0.5 M NaHCO₃ (100 ml). After 10
30
31 min centrifugation under 820xg at 8 ± 2°C, 20 ml of the sample were passed through an
32
33 Ochratest[®] immunoaffinity column. This column was fitted with a 20 ml-syringe reservoir
34
35 and placed on a vacuum manifold. Before loading the extract, the Ochratest[®] column was
36
37 conditioned with Phosphate Buffered Saline (PBS, pH 7.4) solution (20 ml). The OTA
38
39 extract was passed through the column at about 1-2 ml min⁻¹. De-ionized water (20 ml)
40
41 were used to wash the loaded Ochratest[®] and OTA was eluted with methanol (2 ml) and de-
42
43 ionized water (2 ml). Atmospheric air (ca 20 ml) was passed through the column to collect
44
45 all the eluate. This solution was stored at -20°C. Prior to HPLC analysis (fluorescence
46
47 spectrophotometer detector; λ_{excitation}=332 nm, λ_{emission}=462 nm), it was brought to room
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49 temperature and then filtered with a 0.45 μm microfilter prior to HPLC analysis.
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5 Samples were analysed for DON by a method adapted from the extraction procedure
6
7 proposed by Romer (1986). Twenty five grams of the milled and well mixed sample were
8
9 transferred into a 300-ml centrifuge beaker and added with 125 ml of extraction solvent
10
11 (acetonitrile:water, 84:16). The mixture was triturated for 3 min with the Ultra-Turrax
12
13 device CAT x 620 shaft at 13500 rpm to produce a slurry. The solvent phase was isolated
14
15 by centrifugation at 1835xg during 10 min at $8 \pm 2^\circ\text{C}$. The resulting supernatant (10 ml)
16
17 was placed in the MycoSep[®] test tube (Romer Labs, Coring system Diagnostix GmbH,
18
19 Gernsheim, Germany) for purification. Four ml of the cleaned extract were evaporated to
20
21 dryness, using a rotary evaporator at $45 \pm 5^\circ\text{C}$. The residue was dissolved in 2 ml of
22
23 methanol:water (10:90) and was stored at -20°C . Prior to HPLC analysis (UV detection at
24
25 218 nm), it was brought to room temperature and then filtered with a $0.45 \mu\text{m}$ microfilter.
26
27
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30

31 *Data handling and statistical analyses*

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33
34 The SAS Enterprise Guide software (SAS Institute, Inc., Cary, USA, version 3.0.0.369)
35
36 was used for statistical studies. Differences in contamination frequency at level over the
37
38 limit of quantification between conventional and organic samples were evaluated using
39
40 Chi-square test performed by the procedure "PROC FREQ" of SAS. Variance analyses
41
42 were performed on quantifiable concentrations using the GLM procedure of SAS.
43
44 Statements of significance were based on probability of $p < 0.10$.
45
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48

49 **Results**

50 *Analytical method performance*

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54
55 *Importance of SAX column.* Extract clarification with SAX column (figure 1B) allows to
56
57 eliminate the impurities or undesirable substances which may interfere with mycotoxin
58
59
60

1
2 peaks (figure 1 A). As for acidic mycotoxins, the clean up of the extract with SAX column
3
4 allows the specificity of the peaks of OTA and CIT in the chromatograms.
5
6

7 [Insert figure 1 A and B about here]
8
9

10 *Performance characteristics.* Taking the whole analytical procedure of sample extraction,
11
12 clean-up and HPLC analysis into account, the overall recoveries, RSD_R , LOD and LOQ
13
14 determined with spiked wheat samples are shown in Table I.
15
16

17 [Insert table I about here]
18
19

20 For DON, OTA and ZEN, the current multi-mycotoxin method fulfills the guidelines of the
21
22 European Committee of standardization (CEN, CR 13505, 1999).
23
24

25 *Comparison with reference method.* Figure 2 shows the agreement between the DON
26
27 concentrations determined on wheat using the multi-mycotoxin and the reference methods.
28
29

30 [Insert figure 2 about here]
31
32

33 The fit between both methods is rather satisfying taking into account the quite drastic
34
35 differences in the clean-up of the samples with both methods and the non-significant
36
37 deviation between the regression line ($r = +0.978$) and the identity one ($r = +1$).
38
39

40 *Inter-laboratory performances.* The accuracy of the present multicomponent method was
41
42 checked against the analysis of DON and OTA in test materials within the frame of the
43
44 inter-laboratory ring-tests organized by Food Analysis Performance Assessment Scheme
45
46 (FAPAS[®] CSL, UK). Proficiency testing gave the respective Z-scores of -0.3 and 0.8 for
47
48 DON (assigned value = $898.5 \mu\text{g. kg}^{-1}$) and OTA (assigned value = $5.6 \mu\text{g. kg}^{-1}$)
49
50 determination in naturally contaminated wheat samples..
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1
2 One must note that the results show that the developed method is reliable and exact in
3
4 quantifying DON and OTA in wheat samples since Z-scores are ranged between -2 and 2.
5
6

7 *Applications of the analytical methods to Belgian wheat*
8

9
10 Wheat grains and whole meal wheat flour samples were tested in this study taking into
11
12 account their organic route of production. OTA determination was carried out in the 2002-
13
14 harvests whereas DON and ZEN were studied in wheat collected in 2002 and 2003.
15

16
17 *OTA in wheat grains and wholemeal wheat flour.* The results of the analysis of 40 samples
18
19 of wheat harvested in 2002 are summarized in Table II.
20
21

22
23 [Insert table II about here]
24

25
26 OTA was quantified in 4 conventional and 10 organic samples. Moreover, trace level of
27
28 OTA was found in one conventional and one organic sample, leading thus to 25 and 55 %
29
30 as the overall incidence rates of OTA occurrence in conventional and organic wheat
31
32 samples. Chi-square test revealed a significant difference between these two ratios ($p =$
33
34 0.047). In contrast, the mean OTA concentrations in conventional ($0.067 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$) and
35
36 organic ($0.063 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$) samples were comparable. The highest OTA contamination (1.097
37
38 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$) was recorded in a conventional sample. One must note that all contaminated
39
40 samples had an OTA concentration of $< 5 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$.
41
42
43

44
45 As for the OTA occurrence in wholemeal wheat flour sampled in the Belgian retail market,
46
47 data are summarized in Table III.
48

49
50 [Insert table III about here]
51
52

53
54 All organic wheat flour samples were contaminated against 95 % of the conventional ones,
55
56 with concentrations ranging from 0.141 to $2.199 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$ and from 0.064 to $1.035 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$,
57
58
59

1
2 respectively. Among positive samples, analysis of variance revealed homogeneous
3
4 contamination levels between different brands ($p = 0.678$) whatever the mode of production
5
6 ($p = 0.375$). In contrast, some indication of significant contamination differences between
7
8 samples of the same batch were observed ($p = 0.081$), showing thus the heterogeneity
9
10 (large range of OTA concentrations) in the collected samples.
11
12

13
14 *DON in wheat grains.* The spreads of DON contents in wheat harvested in 2002 (45
15
16 samples) and in 2003 (48 samples) are summarized in Table IV according to their mode of
17
18 production.
19
20

21
22 [Insert table IV about here]
23
24

25 In 2002, DON contamination was most frequently ($p = 0.078$) quantified in conventional
26
27 wheat (90 % of the samples), compared to their organic counterparts (68 %). Analysis of
28
29 variance indicated that the mean concentration ($675 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$) in conventional samples was
30
31 significantly higher ($p = 0.074$) than the one observed in organic wheat ($285 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$).
32
33 Moreover, none of the organic samples was found to be contaminated above $1250 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$
34
35 while 3 conventional samples had DON contamination above this limit. One must note that
36
37 two conventional samples were severely contaminated (1991 and $2842 \mu\text{g DON kg}^{-1}$). In
38
39 2003, DON was quantified in 73 % of organic samples and in 86 % of conventional wheat.
40
41 Proportions of contaminated wheat ($>\text{LOQ}$) of conventional and organic origin are
42
43 statistically equivalent ($p = 0.259$). Among samples contaminated at a level over LOQ,
44
45 conventional wheat were statistically more contaminated compared to organic wheat ($p =$
46
47 0.008). Note that only one of the tested wheat samples was contaminated at a concentration
48
49 above $750 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$.
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1
2 *DON in wholemeal wheat flour.* Occurrence data in wholemeal wheat flour are shown in
3
4 Table V.
5

6
7 [Insert table V about here]
8
9

10 In contrast to the OTA occurrence in the wheat flour samples, the frequency of DON
11 contamination (>LOQ) was significantly ($p < 0.0001$) higher in conventional flours
12 (87.5%) than in the organic ones (30.0 %). Among the positive samples (concentrations >
13 LOQ), conventional flours were more DON contaminated than the organic samples, but the
14 magnitude of the difference was not statistically significant ($p = 0.232$). None of the
15 organic samples exceeded $250 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$ while four conventional samples (10 % total
16 conventional samples) were contaminated at a concentration above $500 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$ but
17 remained below $750 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$, the future maximum level in wheat flour to be set by
18 European regulations.
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32 *ZEN in wheat grains.* Table VI presents the results of ZEN contamination in the organic
33 and conventional samples collected in 2002 and 2003.
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37 [Insert table VI about here]
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39

40 Occurrence of ZEN at levels exceeding the LOQ was statistically higher ($p = 0.020$). in
41 conventional samples (85 %) than in organic samples (52 %). A statistical comparison
42 between quantified ZEN concentrations in conventional and organic samples indicated that
43 the organic mode of production influenced the level of contamination ($p = 0.013$). None of
44 the organic samples showed a contamination level above the proposed limit of $100 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$
45 to be set by the European Commission for unprocessed cereals. In contrast, 6 out of 20
46 conventional samples had a ZEN value above that limit. In addition, nine samples (either
47 organic or conventional) had a ZEN value between 50 and $100 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$ and have therefore
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2 to be considered as not acceptable as bread and breakfast cereals (proposed limit set at 50
3 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$). As for the 2003 harvest, ZEN concentrations were found to be mostly below the
4 detection limit (LOD = 1.5 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$) or the quantification limit (LOQ = 4 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$). Only 3
5
6 samples were found to contain trace levels of ZEN. Because of the high number of non-
7
8 detected samples, the mean, SD and median calculations are not representative. This
9
10 finding is in deep contrast with the results obtained in 2002. In fact, the incidence of
11
12 contamination was found as low as of 4 and 9 % for organic and conventional samples,
13
14 respectively. The dry weather during June 2003 (flowering period for wheat) may likely
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16 explain these differences since a dry period at flowering is not favourable to the growth of
17
18 *Fusarium*.
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26 *Co-occurrence of DON and ZEN in wheat grains.* A significant correlation coefficient ($r =$
27
28 +0.8239) was found between DON and ZEN contents in wheat grains harvested in 2002
29
30 (Figure 3), showing that a linear relationship exists between the concentrations of these two
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32 toxins. ZEN and DON were thus simultaneously found in the wheat samples harvested in
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34 2002.
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38 [Insert figure 3 about here]
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41 Discussion

42 *Mycotoxins in harvested grains*

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45 Incidence and levels of OTA contamination in the 2002 harvest were quite low. So far,
46
47 contamination at levels above the LOQ was frequently found in organic samples than in
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49 conventional ones (10 *versus* 4 samples). The highest OTA level (1.097 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$) was
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51 recorded in a conventional sample. One must note that all contaminated samples had an
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53 OTA concentration < 5 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$, the maximum contamination level fixed by the European
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2 Commission Regulation (EC N° 123/2005). Within the framework of this study, OTA
3
4 analysis was not performed in wheat samples harvested in 2003, since it was observed in
5
6 2002 samples that low OTA levels can be associated with fungal (pre-harvest)
7
8 contamination, while extremely high (but not often) occurring levels of OTA are thought to
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10 be associated with post-harvest (storage) contamination.
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14 A study carried out in 1997 on wheat samples collected in Poland after harvest detected
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16 OTA in none of the 32 samples from conventional farms (LOD = 0.2 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$) while wheat
17
18 samples from ecological farming showed contamination of almost 8% within the range
19
20 0.48-1.2 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$ (mean = 0.83 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$) (Czerwiecki et al. 2002a). These results are in
21
22 accordance with the present study as far as the frequencies of contamination are concerned
23
24 but not in terms of the concentration levels. Conversely, results of the same study
25
26 performed one year later contrast with our results in terms of frequency. In wheat from
27
28 conventional farms, OTA concentrations reached extremely high levels since the range
29
30 stretched from 0.6 to 1024.0 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$ (mean = 267 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$) and the frequency of
31
32 contamination was of about 48 %. In contrast, in wheat from ecological farming, OTA was
33
34 detected in only 23 % of samples (range: 0.8 to 1.6 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$ and mean = 1.2 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$). This
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36 finding which is different from the previous one may be due to the change in weather
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38 conditions observed within these 2 years (Czerwiecki et al. 2002b). Jorgensen & Jacobsen
39
40 (2002) analysed conventionally (n = 405) and organically (n=14) grown wheat kernels from
41
42 1992 to 1999 and found that there was no difference in multiyear means between these two
43
44 modes of production. OTA mean concentration (3.0 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$) was much higher than the
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46 level obtained in Belgian wheat grains harvested in 2002.
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55 As far as DON contamination is concerned, this toxin was detected in almost all the
56
57 conventional and organic samples harvested in 2002. The incidence at a level above LOQ
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1
2 was of 90 and 68 %, respectively. Statistical analysis indicates a tendency to more frequent
3
4 quantifiable amounts of DON in conventional samples than in organic ones. When
5
6 contamination over LOQ occurred, it tended to be higher in conventionally produced wheat
7
8 (p = 0.077). According to the last European proposal concerning mycotoxins in
9
10 unprocessed wheat cereals, most of the samples had an acceptable level of contamination
11
12 (< 1250 µg kg⁻¹). Concentrations were below this proposed limit in organically produced
13
14 wheat while 3 conventional samples were contaminated at levels above 1250 µg kg⁻¹. High
15
16 levels of DON (up to 2842 µg kg⁻¹) in grains collected at harvest in 2002 were observed
17
18 because of the rainy weather recorded in June 2002. The climatic conditions were indeed
19
20 favourable to the growth of *Fusarium* species. At harvest in 2003, DON concentration was
21
22 found to be very low and may be explained by the dry weather observed in June 2003 over
23
24 the flowering period. The mean (median) contamination levels in conventional and organic
25
26 samples were of 311 (248) and of 123 (129) µg kg⁻¹, respectively. Similar variations in
27
28 DON contamination in samples from two consecutive years of harvests carried out in 1997
29
30 and 1998 were previously attributed to different weather conditions during and after the
31
32 flowering time (Birzele et al. 2000).
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40 ZEN Contamination at a level above LOQ was frequently observed in conventional than in
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42 organic samples. Comparison of contaminated samples showed that the conventional ones
43
44 contained higher levels of ZEN (p = 0.013). Wheat grains collected in 2003 were less
45
46 affected by DON and ZEN than those harvested in 2002, due to a less favourable weather
47
48 to contamination. In 2003, DON contamination occurred as frequently as in 2002, but at
49
50 much lower levels (210 against 460. µg kg⁻¹). DON contamination higher than the LOQ
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52 occurred nearly as frequently in organic as in conventional wheat but the levels were higher
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54 in conventionally produced samples (p = 0.008). In 2003, none of the samples contained
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1
2 ZEN at a level above the LOQ value. These results confirmed once more that the
3
4 contamination by *Fusarium* mycotoxins is weather dependent.
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7 *Mycotoxins in wheat flour from the retail market*

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10 Using the developed multi-mycotoxin method, the tested wholemeal wheat flours for bread
11
12 making showed that both OTA and DON contents were very low. OTA was quantified in
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14 42.5 and 87.5 % of the conventionally and organically produced flours, respectively. The
15
16 organic route of production did not influence the level of contamination. An accidental high
17
18 contamination may be observed since some indication of contamination differences
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20 between batches of a same brand was noticed.
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25 Of 156 samples of conventional wheat flour and 120 samples of organic wheat flour
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27 purchased in Denmark between 1993 and 1999, Jorgensen & Jacobsen. (2002) found little
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29 difference in multiyear means of OTA between conventional samples (mean concentration
30
31 of about 0.3 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$) and organic ones (mean concentration of 0.5 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$). These findings
32
33 are in accordance with the current study. Biffi et al. (2004) found that conventional wheat
34
35 flours were more OTA contaminated (0.134 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$, n = 14) than organic flours (0.053 μg
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37 kg^{-1} , n = 11), but the magnitude of the difference was not significant. OTA analyses were
38
39 performed on cereal-based baby food from Italy by Beretta et al. (2002). OTA occurred in 6
40
41 out of 10 batches of semolina from conventional agriculture with concentrations ranging
42
43 from 0.14 to 0.65 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$. Only one out of ten semolina batches from organically produced
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45 cereals contained a detectable amount of OTA (0.18 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$; LOD = 0.060 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$). In
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47 terms of frequency of contamination, these conclusions are opposed to those obtained in
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49 this study.
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2 As for DON contamination, the 80 samples analysed in the present study showed that
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4 concentration above LOQ occurred more frequently in conventional flours than in
5
6 organically produced ones, but levels of contamination were equivalent in the two types of
7
8 samples.
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10
11 Schollenberger et al. (2002) analyzed Fusariotoxins in wheat flour collected in Germany in
12
13 1999. The 36 conventional samples were DON contaminated at a mean level of $394 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$
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15 (incidence = 100 %) whereas the organic samples ($n = 24$) contained on average $131 \mu\text{g}$
16
17 DON kg^{-1} (incidence = 96 %). DON content in conventional samples was statistically
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19 higher than that in organic products. Globally, these results match with our findings. The
20
21 same authors analysed the DON content in conventionally and organically produced wheat
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23 bread and showed some indication of a significant influence of the organic mode of
24
25 production. Median DON levels in bread were higher for the conventional production
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27 mode.
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33 **Acknowledgments**

34
35 This research project has been carried out within the framework of the Scientific support
36
37 plan for a sustainable development policy (SPSD II) Part I “Sustainable production and
38
39 consumption patterns” (Project CP/30 Mycotoxin contamination of regular and “organic”
40
41 foodstuffs). The financial support of the Belgian Federal Public Planning Office (Science
42
43 Policy) is acknowledged here.
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List of figures

Figure 1: Representative HPLC separations of neutral mycotoxins (NIV (1),DON (2); 15-acDON (3), 3-acDON (4), ZOL (5), ZEN (6) in a wheat flour purified without (A) and with (B) SAX column.

Figure 2: DON concentrations determined by the multi-mycotoxin against the results obtained with the reference method on the same wheat samples

Figure 3: Correlation between DON and ZEN contents in wheat grains.

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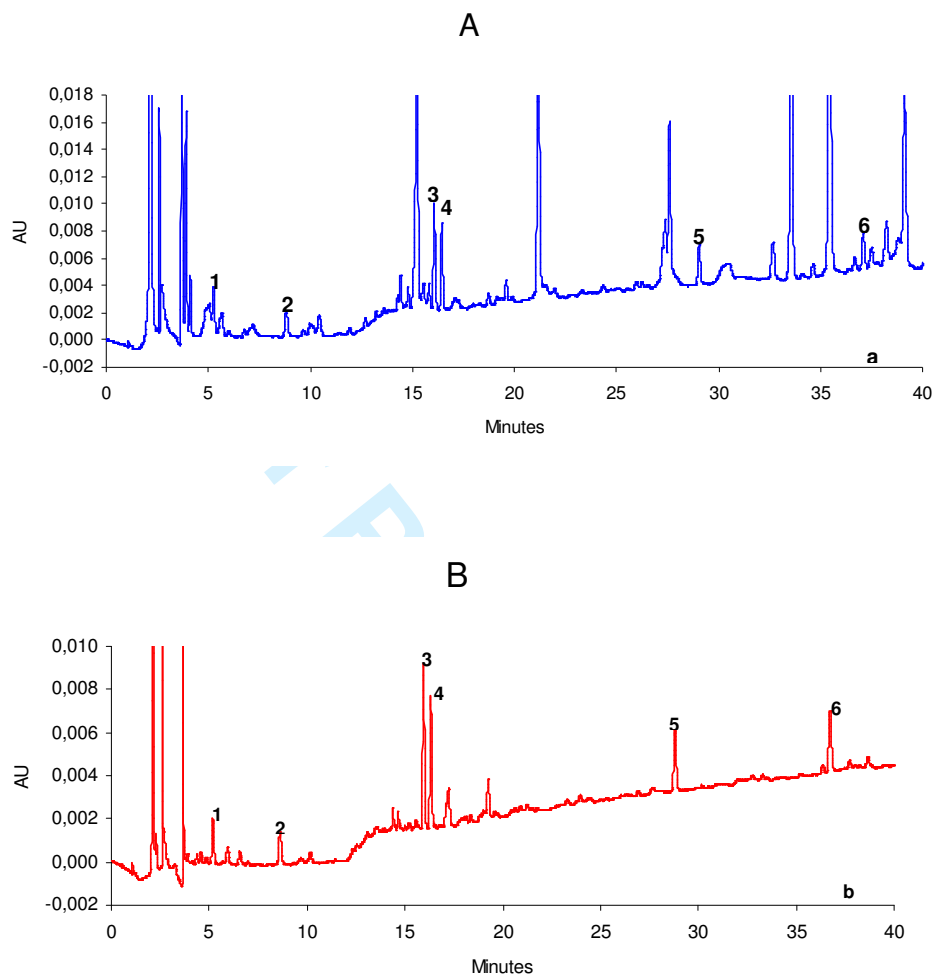


Figure 1: Representative HPLC separations of neutral mycotoxins (NIV (1),DON (2); 15-acDON (3), 3-acDON (4), ZOL (5), ZEN (6) in a wheat flour spiked at $500 \mu\text{g NIV kg}^{-1}$, $500 \mu\text{g DON kg}^{-1}$, $500 \mu\text{g 15-acDON kg}^{-1}$, $500 \mu\text{g 3-acDON kg}^{-1}$, $50 \mu\text{g ZOL kg}^{-1}$, $50 \mu\text{g ZEN kg}^{-1}$ and purified without (A) and with (B) SAX column.

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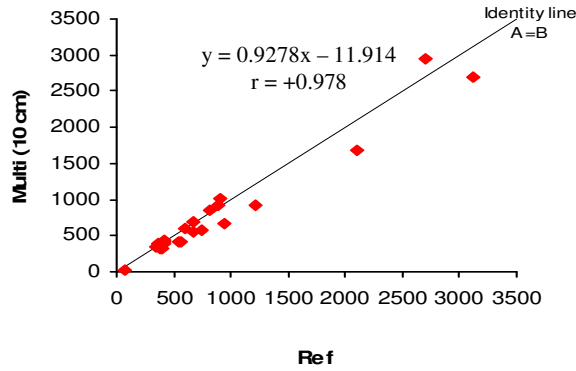


Figure 2: DON concentrations determined by the multi-mycotoxin against the results obtained with the reference method on the same wheat samples

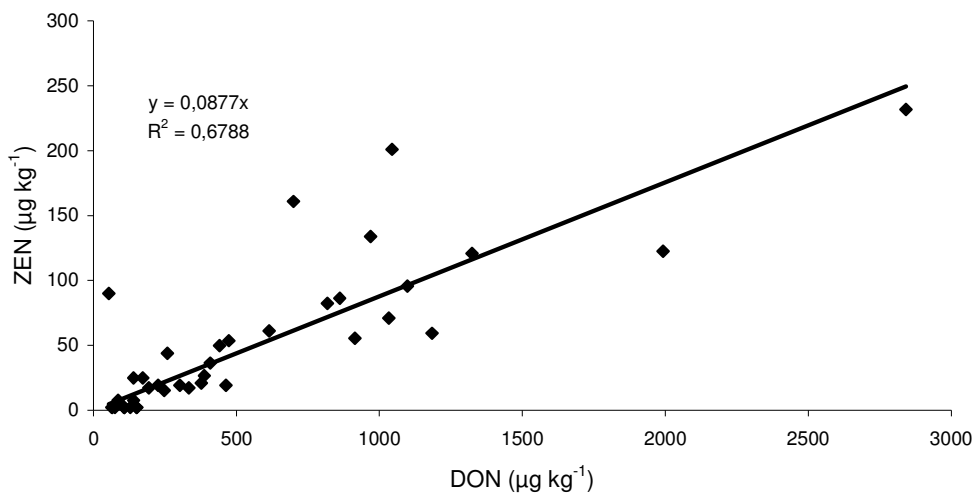


Figure 3: Correlation between DON and ZEN contents in wheat grains,

Deleted: cereals

Table I. Overall recoveries, reproducibility, detection limit and quantification limit of the multi-mycotoxin method.

Mycotoxins (spiking levels)	Recovery (%)	RSD _R ^b (%)	LOD ^c (µg kg ⁻¹)	LOQ ^d (µg kg ⁻¹)
DON (50-1500 µg kg ⁻¹)	92	12	50	150
ZEN ^a (2-500 µg kg ⁻¹)	83	10	1.5	4
OTA ^a (0.5-10 µg kg ⁻¹)	73	9	0.050	0.150

^a : Detected by fluorescence

^b : RSD_R, intra-laboratory reproducibility

^c : LOD, limit of detection (signal/noise = 3)

^d : LOQ, limit of quantification (signal/noise = 10)

Table II. Occurrence of OTA in wheat grains harvested in 2002.

Occurrence	Conventional	Organic	Total
Number of samples	20	20	40
n.d. ^a	15 (75%)	9 (45%)	24 (60)
trace ^b	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	2 (5)
LOQ-5 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$	4 (20%)	10 (50%)	14 (35)
> 5 $\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$	0	0	0
Incidence	25%	55%	40%
Levels of contamination ($\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$)			
Mean ^c \pm SD	0.067 \pm 0.243	0.063 \pm 0.082	0.065 \pm 0.179
Median ^c	0.005	0.030	0.005
Range ^d	0.045 – 1.097	0.037 – 0.0303	0.037 – 1.097

^a: n.d., not detected (OTA concentration in sample $<0.01 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$)

^b: traces means that the concentration of OTA is between the limit of detection (LOD = $0.01 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$) and the limit of quantification (LOQ = $0.035 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$).

^c: mean and median are computed assuming that non-detected samples contain half the LOD while samples with traces levels of OTA contain half the LOD+LOQ.

^d: range of samples with OTA contents \geq LOQ.

Table III. Occurrence of OTA in wholemeal wheat flour.

Occurrence	Conventional	Organic	Total
Number of samples	40	40	80
n.d. ^a	2 (5%)	0	2 (2.5%)
traces ^b	21 (52.5%)	5 (12.5%)	26 (32.5%)
LOQ-1.0 µg kg ⁻¹	16 (40.0%)	34 (85.0%)	50 (62.5%)
> 1.0 µg kg ⁻¹	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)	2 (2.5%)
Incidence	38 (95%)	40 (100%)	78 (97.5 %)
Levels of contamination (µg kg⁻¹)			
Mean ^c ± SD	0.228 ± 0.262	0.480 ± 0.530	0.354 ± 0.434
Median ^c	0.100	0.378	0.214
Range ^d	0.064-1.035	0.141 – 2.199	0.064– 2.199

^a: n.d., not detected (DON concentration in sample < 0.050 µg kg⁻¹)

^b: traces means that the concentration of OTA is between the limit of detection (LOD = 0.050 µg kg⁻¹) and the limit of quantification (LOQ = 0.150 µg kg⁻¹)

^c: mean and median are computed assuming that non-detected samples contain half the LOD while samples with traces levels of OTA contain half the LOD+LOQ

^d: range of samples with OTA contents ≥ LOQ

Table IV. Occurrence of DON in wheat grains collected during harvest 2002 and 2003

Occurrence	Conventional		Organic		Total samples	
	2002	2003	2002	2003	2002	2003
Number of samples	20	22	25	26	45	48
n.d. ^a	0	0	1(4%)	1 (4%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
traces ^b	2 (10%)	3 (14%)	7 (28%)	6 (23%)	10 (22%)	9 (19%)
LOQ – 250 µg kg ⁻¹	6 (30%)	8 (36%)	8 (32%)	19 (73%)	13 (29%)	27 (56%)
250 – 500 µg kg ⁻¹	4 (20%)	9 (40%)	5 (20%)	0	9 (20%)	9 (19%)
500 – 750 µg kg ⁻¹	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	1 (4%)	0	2 (5%)	1 (2%)
750 – 1250 µg kg ⁻¹	4 (20%)	0	3 (12%)	0	7 (16%)	0
1250 – 1750 µg kg ⁻¹	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	0	0	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
> 1750 µg kg ⁻¹	2 (10%)	0	0	0	2 (4%)	0
Incidence	20 (100%)	22 (100%)	24 (96%)	25 (96%)	44 (98%)	47 (98%)
Levels of contamination (µg kg⁻¹)						
Mean ^c ± SD	675 ± 579	311 ± 303	285 ± 305	123 ± 47	460 ± 562	210 ± 226
Median ^c	425	248	151	129	226	138
Range ^d	100 - 2842	79 - 1503	100 -1184	10- 226	100 - 2842	10 - 1503

^a : n.d., not detected (DON concentration in sample <30 µg kg⁻¹)

^b : traces means that the concentration of DON is between the limit of detection (LOD = 30 µg kg⁻¹) and the limit of quantification (LOQ = 100 µg kg⁻¹).

^c : mean and median are computed assuming that non-detected samples contain half the LOD while samples with traces levels of DON contain half the LOD+LOQ.

^d : range of samples with DON contents ≥ LOQ.

Table V: Occurrence and levels of DON in wholemeal wheat flour.

Occurrence	Conventional	Organic	Total samples
Number of samples	40	40	80
n.d. ($< 30 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$) ^a	0	12 (30%)	12 (15%)
Traces ($< 100 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$) ^b	5 (12.5%)	16 (40%)	21 (26%)
LOQ – $250 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$	22 (55%)	12 (30%)	34 (43%)
250 – $500 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$	9 (22.5%)	0	9 (11%)
500 – $750 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$	4 (10%)	0	4 (5%)
$> 750 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$	0	0	0
Incidence	40 (100%)	28 (70%)	68 (85%)
Level of contamination ($\mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$)			
Mean ^c ± SD	249 ± 148	92 ± 54	170 ± 136
Median ^c	211	100	100
Range ^d	153 - 661	157 - 210	153 - 661

^a: n.d., not detected (DON concentration in sample $< 50 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$)

^b: traces means that the concentration of DON is between the limit of detection (LOD = $50 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$) and the limit of quantification (LOQ = $150 \mu\text{g kg}^{-1}$).

^c: mean and median are computed assuming that non-detected samples contain half the LOD while samples with traces levels of DON contain half the LOD+LOQ.

^d: range of samples with DON contents \geq LOQ.

Table VI. Occurrence of ZEN in wheat grains collected in Belgium during harvest 2002 and 2003

Occurrence	Conventional		Organic		Total samples	
	2002	2003	2002	2003	2002	2003
Number of samples	20	22	25	26	45	48
n.d. ^a	3 (15%)	20 (91%)	12 (48%)	25 (96%)	15 (33%)	45 (94%)
traces ^b	0	2 (9%)	0	1 (4%)	0	3 (6%)
LOQ – 50 µg kg ⁻¹	7 (35%)	0	8 (32%)	0	15 (33%)	0
50 – 75 µg kg	2 (10%)	0	3 (12%)	0	5 (11%)	0
75 – 100 µg kg ⁻¹	2 (10%)	0	2 (8%)	0	4 (9%)	0
> 100 µg kg ⁻¹	6 (30%)	0	0 -	0	6 (13%)	0
Incidence	17 (85%)	2 (9%)	13 (52%)	1 (4%)	30 (67%)	3 (6%)
Levels of contamination (µg kg⁻¹)						
Mean ^c ± SD	75 ± 68	2 ± 1	19 ± 27	1 ± 1	44 ± 67	1 ± 1
Median ^c	53	1	8	1	19	1
Range ^d	4 - 86	0.75 - 4	4 - 232	0.75 - 4	4 - 232	0.75 - 4

^a: n.d., not detected (ZEN concentration in sample <1.5 µg kg⁻¹)

^b: traces means that the concentration of ZEN is between the limit of detection (LOD = 1.5 µg kg⁻¹) and the limit of quantification (LOQ = 4 µg kg⁻¹)

^c: mean and median are computed assuming that non-detected samples contain half the LOD while samples with traces levels of ZEN contain half the LOD+LOQ

^d: range of samples with ZEN contents ≥ LOQ