

New spectroscopic insights for the identification of mycotoxins in cereals

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Mycotoxins are toxic fungal metabolites that may contaminate primary food products such as cereals, nuts and fruits. The most predominant mycotoxins in Europe among others are the *Aflatoxins* and *Ochratoxins* produced by storage fungus, such as *Aspergillus* and *Penicillium* species, and Toxins from field-borne *Fusarium* species, for example *Zearalenone* and *Deoxynivalenol*.^[1]

Because of the potential health hazards for humans, the monitoring of food and feed for the presence of these toxins are highly important with respect to the food safety aspects. Therefore, an urgent need exists for reliable, low-cost and easy-to-use experimental setups for the detection of fungi contamination and the measurement of the mycotoxin content in-situ especially in the raw materials at the beginning of the food production chain. Legislations regarding the allowed levels of mycotoxins present in food and feed products as well as in raw materials are presented by the FAO, updated in 2003.^[2]

The use of spectroscopic methods in the food research is increasing, in particular in combination with chemometric tools. Non-destructive methods, such as absorption, fluorescence and reflection spectroscopy, are powerful methods for the detection of mycotoxins in solution and on the surface of grains and flour. The introduction of fiber-based chemical sensors (FOCS) might further accelerate the application of spectroscopic methods in the field of feed and food control.^[3]

Because of its outstanding sensitivity fluorescence spectroscopy based techniques are especially suited for the in-situ detection of mycotoxins such as *Ochratoxins*, *Aflatoxins* as well as *Zearalenone*. These mycotoxins can be monitored with an excitation in the spectral range of $200 \text{ nm} < \lambda_{\text{ex}} < 400 \text{ nm}$ and a detection wavelength $\lambda_{\text{em}} > 420 \text{ nm}$. In combination with absorption and reflection measurements, qualitative and quantitative information on the mycotoxins present can be obtained. In addition, the NIR reflection spectra yield further information on the ingredients, the moisture content, and the presence (or absence) of fungi in the sample.^[4, 5]

Acknowledgement

This study is financially supported within the joint research project „ProSenso.net²“ (PSn²) which is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

[1] EMAN - European Mycotoxin Awareness Network (www.mycotoxin.org)

[2] FAO, Worldwide regulations for mycotoxins in food and feed in 2003; *FAO Food and Nutrition Paper 81*, **2004**

[3] S. Panigrahi; G. Zhang, U.S. Patent 6 845 326, **2005**

[4] G.M. Strasburg, *Trends in Food Science & Technology*, **1995**, 6, 69-75

[5] (a) Williams, P.; *Handbook of Vibrational Spectroscopy* (edited by P. Griffiths, J.M. Chalmers), Wiley & Sons, New York **2006**; (b) G. Downey, *Journal of Near Infrared Spectroscopy*, **1996**, 4, 47-61