

Defining Mycotoxins Associated with Wheat Grains in Mosul Silo by ELISA

Hadeel A. Al-Ameri

Biology Department, College of Sciences, Mosul University, Mosul, Iraq

Abstract: The study aimed to identify fungi-contaminated with some varieties of wheat grains locals, as well as isolate fungi-contaminated with grains imported wheat in Silo of Mosul city, and estimate the level of mycotoxins ochratoxin, zearalenone, and aflatoxin in them by ELISA method. Results showed that the local wheat variety, Ebaa 99, showed the highest percentage of appearance in *Aspergillus flavus*, was 63.15%, while the lowest appearance of fungi was *Mucor* spp. With a percentage of 2.47%, the variety Rasheed showed the highest percentage of *A. flavus*, which was 49.12%, while the lowest appearance was of *Rhizopus* spp. With a percentage of 2.29%, As well as in the variety Al-Baraka *A. flavus* showed the highest percentage, which was 5.453%, and the lowest percentage was *Cladosporium* spp by 9.43%. The contaminated fungi differed from the imported varieties and the percentage of their appearance. In the Canadian variety, the highest appearance of *A. flavus* was 63.72%, and *A. dematatus* was the least appearance with 5.42%. The fungus *A. flavus* also appeared in the American variety, with the highest appearance of 43.17%. The least appearance was *Fusarium oxysporum* at 5.34%. In the Australian variety, the highest appearance was found in *A. flavus*, at 54.03%, and the fungus *Fusarium* spp. was the least appeared fungi, at 1.96%. Estimation of mycotoxins indicates that the aflatoxin amount in the variety Ebaa 99 samples was 34.55 ppm, while its amount of ochratoxin and zearalenone was 21.75 ppm and 0.23 ppm, respectively. Canadian variety grains had the lowest aflatoxin content, with the highest ochratoxin. Australian variety grains had the lowest content of aflatoxin, ochratoxin, and zearalenone amount 12.29 ppm, 0.82 ppm, and 11.51 ppm, respectively.

Keywords: *Fusarium oxysporum*, *Aspergillus flavus*, mycotoxins, aflatoxin, zearalenone.

通过酶联免疫吸附测定法确定摩苏尔筒仓中与小麦谷物相关的霉菌毒素

摘要: 该研究旨在鉴定当地部分小麦谷物品种的真菌污染, 以及分离受谷物污染的真菌摩苏尔市筒仓的进口小麦, 并通过酶法估算其中的真菌毒素赭曲霉毒素、玉米赤霉烯酮和黄曲霉毒素水平。联免疫吸附测定法。结果表明, 当地小麦品种埃巴99在黄曲霉中的出现率最高, 为63.15%, 而真菌的出现率最低的是毛霉属。以2.47%的百分比显示, 品种拉希德的黄曲霉百分比最高, 为49.12%, 而出现率最低的是根霉属。百分比为2.29%, 在品种祝福黄曲霉中百分比最高, 为5.453%, 最低百分比是枝孢菌属, 为9.43%。受污染的真菌与进口品种及其出现的百分比不同。在加拿大品种中, 黄曲霉的出现率最高, 为63.72%, 德马图斯的出现率最低, 为5.42%。真菌黄曲霉也出现在美国品种中, 最高出现率为43.17%。最少出现的是尖孢镰刀菌, 占5.34%。在澳大利亚品种中, 黄曲霉的出现率最高, 为54.03%, 而真菌镰刀菌。是最少出现的真菌, 为1.96%。霉菌毒素的估算表明, 埃巴99品种样品中的黄曲霉毒素含量为34.55百万分之几, 而其赭曲霉毒素和玉米赤霉烯酮的含量分别为21.75百万分之几和0.23ppm。加拿大品种谷物的黄曲霉毒素含量最低, 赭曲霉毒素含量最高。澳大利亚品种谷物的黄曲霉毒素、赭曲霉毒素和玉米赤霉烯酮含量最低, 分别为12.29百万分之几、0.82百万分之几和11.51百万分之几。

关键词: 尖孢镰刀菌、黄曲霉、霉菌毒素、黄曲霉毒素、玉米赤霉烯酮。

1. Introduction

Fungi contaminate large numbers of crops worldwide, including wheat, barley, rice, yellow corn, cotton seeds, pistachio, and many derivative and manufactured products included in human and animal food [1]. Wheat is one of the oldest crops known to man, and it is one of the most important crops in terms of food and economy; and more than a third of the world's population depends on it as a staple food [2]. Wheat grains are exposed to many pathogens, whether in the field or during transportation or storage, especially fungi, as they cause damage to the seeds during the storage period. The damages that accompany the storage and transportation conditions that affect the seed coat may lead to the formation of cracks from which the fungi enter the seed's body and work to grow inside rapidly. The fungi carried by wheat grains are among the most important pathogens because they reduce the rate of germination and poor quality. Their ability to produce compounds toxic to humans and animals that cause allergies and cancerous diseases called mycotoxins [3]. These fungi are divided into Field fungi and Storage fungi. Field fungi invade seeds before harvest while the crop is still in the field. While field fungi may affect the appearance and quality of seeds or grains, damage from field fungi usually occurs before harvest can be detected by routine inspection and does not continue over storage if the grain is stored at the appropriate moisture content temperature. Most field fungi are more prevalent when rainfall is higher than normal during grain packing and harvesting. Field fungal invasion may be more severe where insects, birds, or hail have damaged the crop. Common field fungi in corn in Missouri include Genera of *Alternaria*, *Cladosporium*, *Aspergillus*, *Penicillium*, *Fusarium*, and *Gibberella* [4].

Storage Fungi (also called storage molds) are fungi that invade grains or seeds during storage. Storage fungi are not usually found to any extent dangerous before harvest. However, small amounts of storage fungi spores may be present on grain entering storage or on spilled grain in harvesting, handling, and storage equipment or structures. Under improper storage conditions, this small amount of spores can rapidly increase, which leads to major problems. The development of storage fungi in stored grain is influenced by the content of moisture in stored grain, temperature of stored grain, condition of stored grain, the length of time the grain is stored, and the number of insects and moths in cereals [5]. Grain damage caused by storage fungi takes many forms, including biochemical changes. For example, there are contamination of oilseeds with fungi accelerating the

segregation of fatty acids (rancidity) [6]; the color change of the embryo or the whole grain; its acquisition of an unpleasant taste [7]; reduced germination strength; heat and rotting of grains; loss of weight per grain; secretion of toxic substances to humans and animals known as mycotoxins, mainly during consumption of contaminated food [8].

The water content of the grain is one of the conditions predisposing to infection with fungi. It affects the quality and number of fungi that grow on it, as wheat, barley, and corn grains are capable of invading certain types of fungi. The number of mushroom colonies increases as the water content of the grain rises. Storage fungi grow on the water content of grains balanced with the degree of relative humidity of the atmosphere [9]. Therefore, there may be clear differences in the moisture content within a stack of stored grain. It is absurd to know the average moisture content of the mass of grains inside a silo if there is a focus or more in which the water content is much higher than the average. In the case of overheating and rotting, the problem of heterogeneity in moisture distribution in the grain mass remains in the silos unless there is a ventilation system [10].

Some types of *Aspergillus* fungus need to grow in wet grains to an optimum high temperature ranging between 35-40°C and at a moisture content of the grains between 15-16°C. However, most storage fungi grow very slowly in the cereal grains at 12-15°C; some grow at 5-8°C [3, 11]. Therefore, it was possible to keep wheat and corn grains uninfected after harvesting for two years at a temperature of 5°C; the grains retained their germination vitality by 100% and were completely free of storage fungi. However, suppose the grains were infected with fungi from stores, even to a moderate degree. In that case, they continue to grow at high temperatures the low temperature, even if it is at 0°C or less [8, 12, 13]. In addition, mechanical damage to grains represented by cracks, scratches, and fractures in the pod or seed coat of grain affects the incidence of storage fungi [12].

1.1. Aim of the Study

The stated problems are the contamination of wheat grains and food products with mycotoxins, which negatively affect human health and the occurrence of large economic losses, and because our country imports wheat from different origins that differ in the possibilities of controlling pathogenic pathogens. Therefore, the study aimed to isolate and identify fungi-contaminated varieties of local wheat grains and imported wheat in the silo of Mosul city and estimate the level of mycotoxins ochratoxin, zearalenone, and aflatoxin in them by the ELISA method.

2. Methods of Work and Materials

2.1. Collection of Samples

The samples of grains of wheat varieties were collected from Silo at Mosul City/ Iraq. These samples are submitted for examination in the quality control laboratory in the silo, which includes three varieties of local wheat grains (Ebaa 99, Al-Baraka, Rasheed) and three varieties of imported wheat grains, which are American, Canadian, and Australian. Randomly, 3 kg of each type were placed in polyethylene bags and sealed with holes for ventilation to avoid the death of the embryos. Then they were transferred to the laboratory for isolation.

2.2. Isolation

Surface sterilization of the seeds was carried out by immersing them in ethanol for 3 minutes and then washing them by placing them in distilled water for another 3 minutes and drying them using a No. 1 type filter paper. Whatman, 10 seeds of each variety were planted in a 9 cm diameter Petri dish container on medium Potato Dextrose Agar (PDA), with antibiotic Chloramphenicol, at a 0.05 mg/liter concentration, in three replications. The dishes were incubated upside down in an incubator at 28°C for a week [14].

2.6. Mycotoxins Analyses of Wheat Grains Varieties

Surface sterilization of the seeds was done by immersing them in ethyl alcohol with 70% alcohol. For mycotoxins analysis, 20 g. of wheat grains were pulverized and extracted. Zearalenone, ochratoxin, and aflatoxins were all investigated using ELISA in a veterinary/ Erbil/Iraq laboratory.

2.7. The Technique of Mycotoxins Extraction

5 g. of wheat grains samples were poured into conical flasks. 25 ml of methanol were added at 70% concentration (extraction of zearalenone and aflatoxin) and 50% concentration (extraction of ochratoxin). After three minutes of shaking, the samples were filtered through filter paper (No.1). A test tube was filled with 5 ml of filtrate. However, 1 ml of the filtrate was diluted four times with sterile distilled water in the case of zearalenone (1:4). All samples were kept refrigerated before being analyzed.

The study used kits of Neogene to analyze samples by ELISA technique the following processes: In the red plate wells, 100 µl of samples and control were pipetted, followed by 100 µl of Enzyme conjugate, then mixed 2-3 times for homogenization. Next, the mixtures were transferred to white wells in another

2.3. Identification

After the growth of the fungal cultures isolated from wheat grains from the varieties of study, they were examined microscopically by taking part in the fungal growth with a sterile inoculation needle and placing it on a glass slide containing a drop of Lactophenol. The sample was spread in the loading drop and then put on the cover of the slide and examined microscopically to identify the characteristics of mycelium and conidia, according to the approved classification keys [15-19].

2.4. Purification of Fungi by Single Spore Technique

By mixing a sample of 0.5 cm in diameter from the fungal colony with 10 ml of sterile distilled water and continuing the dilution until the number of spores ranged between 1 - 10 spore/microscopic field (at 10 X). Then 0.5 ml of the spore suspension was taken and spread on the surface of a plate containing a medium consisting of 2% agar and water. Next, the dishes inoculated with the fungi were incubated at 28° C for 48 hours in the incubator. Finally, the fungal colonies resulting from the growth of the single spore were transferred to a new PDA medium by sterile needle [17].

2.5. Calculating the Percentage of Fungi Appearing

The percentage of fungi appearance was calculated as follows:

$$\text{Percentage of fungi appearing} = \frac{\text{How often does the fungus appear in the samples}}{\text{The number of replications}} \times 100 \quad (1)$$

plate and kept for 10-20 seconds at room temperature. Next, the plate was washed five times with distilled water. Then 100 µl of the substrate was added and stirred for 10-20 seconds before being kept at room temperature for 3 minutes. Finally, 100µl of stop solution was added. By using Neogen Vertex software, Vera tax ELISA Reader obtained the results.

3. Results

The isolation results showed that fungi had contaminated all studied samples. The percentage of appearance of the contaminated fungi differed in the instances according to the local and imported wheat varieties. Fig. 1 for the local grains wheat variety Ebaa 99 indicated that the highest percentage of appearance of *Aspergillus flavus* was 63.15%, followed by *Aspergillus niger* with an incidence of 10.18%. Then *A. fumigatus*, which recorded 17.96% appearance, while *Cladosporums* pp. 3.24% and *Fusarium solani* 3.00%, respectively, was *Mucor* spp. The least percentage of formation was 2.47%.

The local variety Rasheed of grain wheat showed different percentages of appearance of the fungi, as shown in Fig. 2. *Aspergillus flavus* showed the highest appearance was 49.12%, followed by *A. niger* with

22.70%, *A. fumigatus* with 22.48%, and *Mucor* spp. The less growth rate was 3.41%, while the least growing fungus was *Rhizopus* spp. and 2.29%.

The local cultivar Al-Baraka showed different incidence rates of fungi, as shown in Fig. 3. The highest incidence of *A. flavus* was 35.45%, followed by *A. niger* with an appearance rate of 28.37%, and *A. candidus* at 15.91%. The *Fusarium solani* appeared with a percentage of 10.84%, while the lowest percentage of appearance was for *Cladosporium* spp. by 9.43%.

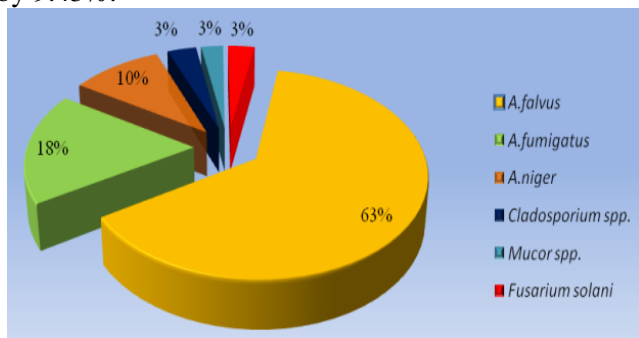


Fig. 1 Fungi isolated from the grains of local wheat variety Ebaa 99, and their appearance percentage

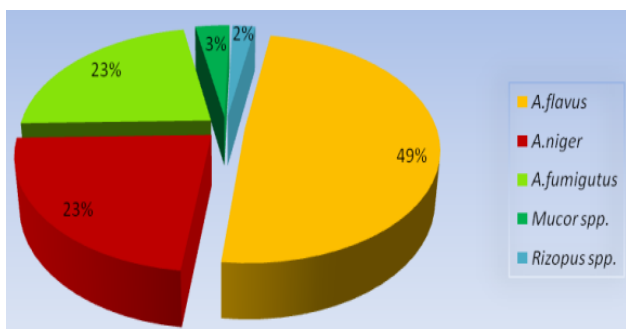


Fig. 2 Fungi isolated from the grains of local wheat variety Rasheed, and their percentage of appearance

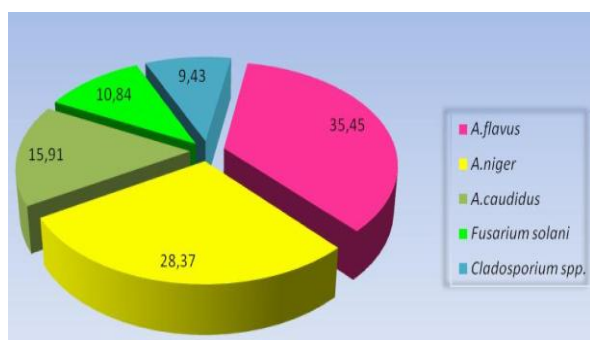


Fig. 3 Fungi isolated from the grains of local wheat variety Al-Baraka, and their percentage of appearance

Fungi isolated from imported wheat grains differed from local wheat varieties in their appearance percentages. In the Canadian imported wheat, the fungi are shown in Fig. 4; the highest incidence was for *A. flavus* with a rate of 63.72%, followed by *A. niger* with a rate of 17.35%, and it appeared The fungus *A. dematatus* with 5.42% was the least appearance, and *Cladosporium* spp. also appeared in percentage 13.51%.

As for the American imported wheat grains, isolation of the fungi shown in Fig. 5 appeared. *A. flavus* appeared with the highest growth rate of 43.17%, followed by *A. niger* with an emergence rate of 30.13%, *Fusarium solani* With a percentage of 15.90%, the fungus *Aspergillus* spp. By 5.46%, the least growing fungus was *Fusarium oxysporum*, 5.34%.

As for the Australian imported wheat grains, the percentage of appearance of the fungus was as shown in Fig. 6. The highest percentage showed the fungi *A. flavus* at 54.03%, followed by the fungus *A. niger* with a percentage of 28.37%, then the fungus *A. candidus* with an appearance rate of 15.91%, and the fungus *Fusarium* spp. with 10.84%, and *Cladosporium* spp. was the least growing fungus, as it appeared with a percentage of 9.43%.

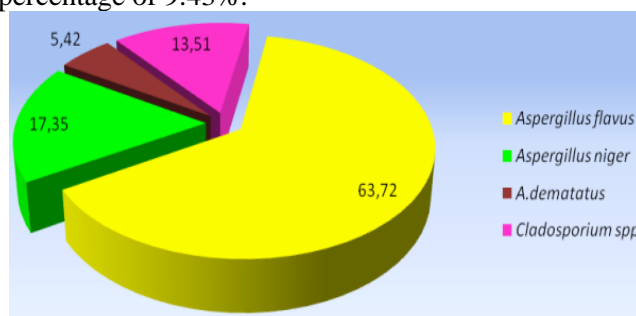


Fig. 4 Fungi isolated from imported Canadian wheat grains and their percentage

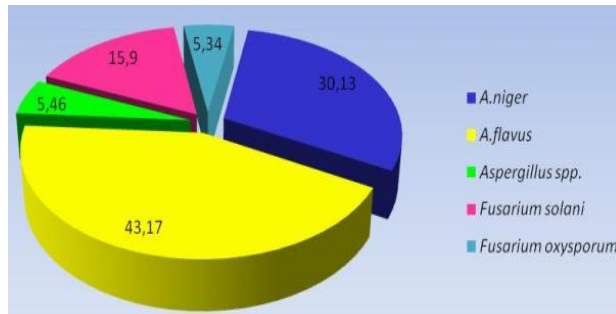


Fig. 5 Fungi isolated from American imported wheat grains and their percentage of appearance

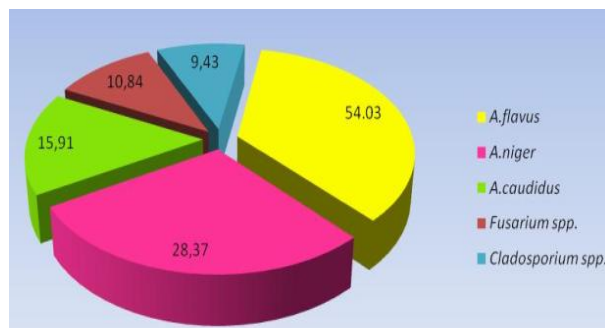


Fig. 6 Fungi isolated from Australian imported wheat grains and their percentage of appearance

3.1. Determination of Mycotoxins Associated with Difference Wheat Grains

The results of estimation of mycotoxins in Fig. 7 indicate that the aflatoxin amount in the grains of the variety Ebaa 99 was 34.55 ppm. In comparison, the

amount of ochratoxin and zearalenone was 21.75 ppm and 0.23 ppm, respectively, while the aflatoxin amount in the American variety was 33.10 ppm, and its amount of ochratoxin was 35.14 ppm, and zearalenone was 9.14 ppm. The variety Canadian had the lowest variety amount reaching 11.9 ppm.

The Canadian wheat grains variety had the lowest aflatoxin content, with an amount of 11.9, while the highest amount of ochratoxin was in the Canadian variety, which amounted to 41.32. Without any content of 0.0 in the Baraka variety, which recorded the highest range in zearalenone, with an amount of 21.03 ppm, while the variety Ebaa 99 had the lowest amount of zearalenone, with an amount of 0.21 ppm, and in general, the Australian type had the lowest content of aflatoxin, ochratoxin, and zearalenone, as it amounts 12.29 ppm, 0.82 ppm and 11.51 ppm, respectively.

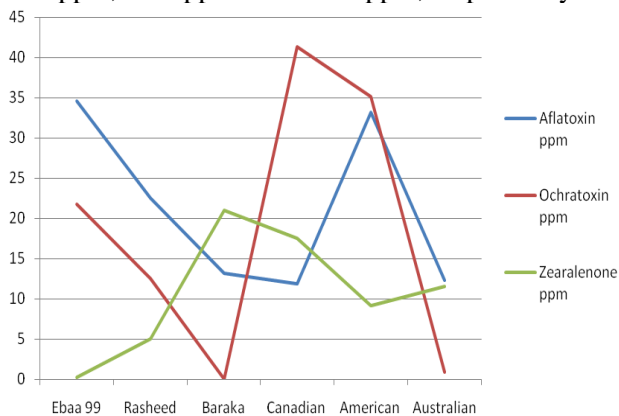


Fig. 7 Determination of mycotoxins associated with difference wheat grains

4. Discussion

Most of the storage fungi can grow in the absence of free water. For example, 85 storage fungi of wheat, barley, sorghum, and maize follow the following eight genera arranged according to the most common being *Curvularia*, *Alternaria*, *Mucor*, *Fusarium*, *Rhizopus*, *Penicillium*, *Aspergillus*. There are no accurate statistics on global losses in food grains and others due to storage fungi. However, according to the estimates of the FAO in 1973, this loss is at least 5%. This loss in some countries such as India, some African countries, and South America may reach 30% of the annual crop. It has been shown that storage fungi get large rates in grains with high water content. They do not usually infect before harvest, but they may be found on seeds in small numbers, and they may exist as a dormant fungus spinning inside short-grain tissues [3].

There are several stages of development of different fungi in stored grain. In the first stage, the field fungi of *Fusarium*, *Cladosporium*, and *Alternaria*. In the second stage, the number of fungi decreases. The yeast fungi replace the field fungi with *Penicillium* in the third stage. Storage fungi appear in the fourth stage, and heat-tolerant organisms flourish with the heating of the grain itself (30-60°C). The control of storehouse

fungi increases with the increase in grain temperature and the length of the storage period, which is the fifth stage [20]. Mohammed and Hamid [21] analyzed the isolated stored grains of wheat with the fungus *Cladosporium* sp., *Rhizopus* sp., *Aspergillus terreus* and *Diplodia* sp. and three different isolated fungus *Aspergillus* sp. with less frequency. *Aspergillus parasiticus* topped the list with a frequency of 60.83%, followed by *Aspergillus niger* with 20%. Also, Srpska and Sad [22] found that *A. niger*, *A. flavus*, and *Alternaria alternata* were the most dominant in the wheat grain samples. At the same time, Enyisi [23] found that *A. paraciticus* is most dominant in the stored grain of wheat. Chauhan et al. [3] found that *Penicillium verrucosum* is the most polluting fungus for wheat seeds, variety Gamiza11 in Egypt. In a study aimed at knowing the quality of the storing process for wheat and corn grains marketed in the markets of Misurata, the fungi *Penicillium* spp., *Fusarium* spp., *Aspergillus* spp., *Mucor raceuogenum*, *Trichoderma* spp., *Curvularia* spp., *Rhizopus* spp., *Ulocladium sporatpp*, *A. flavus* recorded the highest incidence in wheat, reaching 67.6% [24].

Wheat seeds in stores in Bulgaria are infected with a group of fungi belonging to the genera *Alternaria*, *Aspergillus*, *Mucor*, *Fusarium*, *Rhizopus*, and *Penicillium*, and the most visible fungi belong to the genus *Aspergillus*, especially *A. restrictus* and *A. glaucus* [25]. Wheat seeds in the United States found that *A. glaucus* was dominant in the seeds of wheat samples, followed by *Penicillium* spp [26].

It's been over 60 years since the discovery of aflatoxins. Since then, numerous other mycotoxins (fungal metabolites toxic) have been discovered, many of which are causes of intoxications (mycotoxicoses). In contrast, others have remained as a laboratory curiosity, The total number of mycotoxins is unknown, but hazardous metabolites of fungi potentially number in the thousands. Studies on mycotoxins, including their detection, biosynthesis, toxicity, epidemiology, and control of the generating fungi, are crucial to maintaining a safe food supply. The mycotoxins number is known to cause disease is far smaller. However, even this figure is difficult to estimate due to the wide range of impacts these distinct substances have on animal systems. Not only are mycotoxins a source of concern for diseases for humans and animals, but many mycotoxin-producing fungi are also plant pathogenic, posing a significant economic threat to crops. Their plant pathogenic activities cause food safety concerns and impact grain trade and food and feed marketing [27].

When different fungi contaminate different foods, the production of mycotoxins varies depending on the fungus, the type of food being consumed, and the location in which it is consumed. Despite the difficulty of eliminating pollutants and mycotoxins and molds,

hard work is required to reduce the harmful effects of these toxins in the most efficient manner possible, whether chemical or physical [28]. The poisonous, mutagenic, and carcinogenic consequences of *Aspergillus* fungus in food are significant. The International Agency for Research on Cancer has been classified as a first-class carcinogen. Liver poisoning studies in India and Kenya have found that the risk of cancer may increase by hepatitis viral because of the residues of ochratoxin presence in wheat grain samples produced by fungi *Aspergillus* and *Penicillium*. Luckily, ochratoxin level was less than 20 ppb in food and less than 5 ppb per Kg of body weight daily. According to data published by the European Commission, the consumption of ochratoxin daily varies from 0.02 to 1.9 ppb /kg weight of body daily [29].

Some *Fusarium* species (such as *F. graminearum*, which produces zearalenone) are soil dwellers. However, they have also termed storage fungi since growth and toxin generation can occur under various storage conditions. Therefore, corn and wheat are the most vulnerable to this fungus attack [30].

Various chemical, physical, and biological processing methods have lowered zearalenone levels. Food experienced physical heat treatment procedures in this investigation. Zearalenone's fate is determined by its chemical qualities, such as heat stability and its dispersion in the food matrix [31, 32].

All of the tested residual mycotoxins (ochratoxin, zearalenone, and aflatoxin) were within new regulations specifying that products intended for human consumption or as an ingredient in food must meet the allowed levels for certain toxins in food commodities intended for human consumption. Total aflatoxin, ochratoxin, and zearalenone limit of 4 ppb must comply. The best way to manage the risks associated with mycotoxins contamination is to prevent mycotoxins from forming. In addition, a successful food safety management program must involve preventive, regulatory restrictions, monitoring programs, appropriate agricultural practices, and producer education and consumer [33].

5. Conclusion

All samples of wheat grains studied were contaminated with fungi and mycotoxins, especially variety (Ebaa 99) which showed the highest percentage of appearance in *Aspergillus flavus*, was 63.15%, and some other fungi. In the Canadian variety, the most elevated appearance of *A. flavus* was 63.72%, in addition to some other fungi. Also, the study concluded that estimation of mycotoxins indicates that the aflatoxin amount in the samples of the variety Ebaa 99 was 34.55 ppm. In comparison, its amount of ochratoxin and zearalenone was 21.75 ppm and 0.23 ppm, respectively.

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