THE FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE OF AFLATOXIN M1 IN MILK ON THE TERRITORY OF VOJVODINA

ABSTRACT: Aflatoxin is one of the most common mycotoxins which can be found in milk. It represents a natural metabolite of aflatoxin B1 that occurs as a result of animal metabolism and the body’s attempt to detoxificate it. It is excreted in milk, feces and urine of animals that consumed contaminated feed with aflatoxin B1. The carry-over from feed to milk depends on many factors, ranging from 0.3 to 6.2%. Aflatoxin M1 is in the first group of carcinogens according to the IRAC classification from 2002, but it is considered to have only 10% of carcinogenicity from its precursor aflatoxin B1. Legislation in member countries of European Union for this mycotoxin in milk intended for people is 0.05 μg/l, while the rest of the countries that also have legislation for this mycotoxin allow the concentration that is ten times higher, and that is 0.5 μg/l.

In this paper, we have tried to provide on insight into the quality of milk, food often consumed by children, from the standpoint of mycotoxicology, and to compare the obtained data with data available from literature, from countries in the region that have similar climatic and agricultural conditions. From a total of 65 samples of processed milk, aflatoxin M1 was found in 18 samples and none of the samples exceeded the level of 0.05 μg/l, which is allowed by the legislation of the European Union.

KEY WORDS: aflatoxin M1, milk

INTRODUCTION

Mycotoxins are large group of compounds, secondary metabolites of fungi, in which aflatoxins are one of the most frequent and most toxic. The first time aflatoxins were heard about was in 1961, when Blount described Turkey “X” disease (B l o u n t, 1961), which is now known to be caused by aflatoxin B1 and most likely cyclopiazonic acids. Since that time, a golden era studies of mycotoxins as possible contaminants of food for people and animals begins. Mycotoxins rarely act acutely as toxins, and are usually found in small quantities in food for people or animals. Since their action chronic in character, they are often called the silent killers.

Aflatoxins usually generate fungi from the genus Aspergillus, most often A. flavus and A. parasiticus. Aflatoxin M1 is 4-hydroxy derivative of aflatoxin
B₁, which occurs in the body of animals during metabolism in the liver. Cytochrome responsible for this biotransformation is the CYP450, which is accompanied with two dominantly present isoforms, CYP3A4 and CYP1A2. Both isoforms of enzyme catalyse biotransformation of aflatoxin B₁ in high reactive form of exo-aflatoxin B₁ 8,9-epoxide (Güengerich, 1998), and later in aflatoxin M₁. Aflatoxin M₁, according to the classification of IRAC (IRAC, 1993), was first classified in the second group of carcinogens (2B), but in the year 2002, the same organization classified it in the first group of carcinogens (IRAC, 2002). All aflatoxins, as well as aflatoxin M₁, are very stable compounds during processing and do not reduce significantly. Even more, during the production of cheese and other milk products it comes to the multiple increase of the amount of aflatoxin M₁ (depending on the type of cheese coefficient the increase ranges for soft cheeses from 2.5 to 3.3, and from 3.9 to 5.8 for hard cheeses). Average consumption of milk and milk products in the European Union per day is about 340 g per person, while the average consumption of milk is 290 g (Henry S. H. et al., 2004).

It is believed that the rate of samples with aflatoxin B₁, and the aflatoxin M₁ in Europe, due to climate conditions (for fungi of the genus Aspergillus, the most appropriate regions with subtropical and tropical climate) are relatively poorly represented, and that aflatoxin B₁, found in food for people and animals, comes mainly from food imported in the European countries from the subtropical and tropical regions. However, recent data from the EFSA (European Food Safety Authority) publications (EFSA, 2004) raised serious doubts. In the area of North Italy, due to unfavourable climate factors (rotation of drought and rainy interval) and insect damage caused contamination of corn with significant concentration of aflatoxin B₁, which resulted in increased aflatoxin M₁ in milk in the amount which exceeds allowed level of 6%, and that percentage increased to 7.3% at the end of the same year. The usual practice in the countries of the European Union is monitoring of milk and milk products for the presence of aflatoxins M₁. Legislation of this toxin in the European Union is one of the most restrained legal regulations in the world and is 0.05 mg/l (Commission Regulation (EC) N. 466/2001), while other countries that also have legislation for this mycotoxin (including Serbia) allow the value that is ten times higher and amounts 0.5 μg/l.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

All 65 samples were taken from September to December 2008. Method used to determine aflatoxin M₁ combined clean up process with immunoaffinity columns and TLC determination (Grosso et al., 2004; Shundo L. and Sabino M., 2006). The milk samples were centrifuged for 15 min and the upper fat layer was discarded. The skimmed milk (100 ml) was passed throng an immunoaffinity column (AFLAPREPM1, R-Biopham, Rhone Ltd). Column was washed with distilled water (40 ml). Bound aflatoxin M₁ in the immunoaffinity column was released by the elution with 2.5 ml acetonitrile-methanol (3:2; v/v) and 2.5 ml methanol, the elute was evaporated to dryness.
using rotary evaporator. Concentrate of AFM$_1$ was resuspended in 1 ml acetonitrile and evaporated again. The last concentrate was resuspended in 200 ml toluene acetonitrile (9:1; v/v).

In accordance with the TLC procedure, concentrate samples from 50 and 100 ml were used and TLC plate samples were applied (TLC aluminum sheets. 20x20 cm, Silica gel 60). The plates were developed in chlorophorm: acetone:isopropanol (87:10:3; v/v). After the plate had dried, it was read under long wave (366nm) light. The concentration of AFM$_1$ was determined by taking into account the spots of samples and spots of standards.

RESULTS

A total of 65 samples of commercial milk brought into the local markets from different manufacturers (a dairy), and with different content of milk fat (fat content of milk varied from 0.9% to more than 3.2%, depending on the characteristics of the producer) were analysed. From a total of 65 analysed samples, 34 samples were pasteurized milk, while the 31 samples of milk were long-term UHT milk. In eighteen milk samples, different concentrations of aflatoxin M$_1$, were found while in other samples content was less than the limit of detection (0.01 mg/l). None of the samples exceeded the allowed concentration of 0.5 µg/l, but also a single sample is not exceed allowed level by the legislation of European Union (0.05 µg/l).

Tab. 1 — Overview of the analyzed samples of pasteurized and UHT milk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of milk</th>
<th>&lt; 0,01 µg/l</th>
<th>0,0125—0,05 µg/l</th>
<th>&gt; 0,05 µg/l</th>
<th>Σ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pasteurized</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UHT</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>72.31</td>
<td>29.69</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in Table 1, from a total of 65 samples of analyzed commercial milk, in 18 samples (269.69%) certain amount of aflatoxin M$_1$ was detected (ranging from 0.01 mg/l to 0.03 mg/l). The mean value for aflatoxin M$_1$ was 0.014 mg/l.

![Fig. 1 — Graphically presented results](image-url)
DISCUSSION

There are a lot of accessible data on the content of aflatoxin $M_1$ in milk and milk products from the countries of the European Union, because there are long-term monitoring on the presence of this mycotoxin, however, there is little or no data about this problem on the territory of Serbia or even beyond, in the territory of former Yugoslavia. From 11,831 processed samples from the territory of the European Union, 280 were from individual small farms, the concentration of aflatoxin $M_1$ in all the samples greater than 0.05 μg/l was detected in only 0.06% of samples, which indicates that the incidence of this mycotoxin are extremely low (EFSA, 2004). Countries in the region that are not members of the EU, which implemented some kind of monitoring, have higher values of concentration aflatoxin $M_1$ in milk and milk products then the member countries. In the study taken in Albania on samples of milk from individual farms, 42% of samples had lower value then 0.05 μg/l, while 58% of samples had higher concentrations of aflatoxin $M_1$. Maximum concentration found was 0.85 μg/l (Panariti, 2001). The study made in Turkey in the UHT milk showed that 47% of samples exceeded the allowed limit of the EU. The average value found was 0.108 μg/l (Unusan, 2006). We must also take into account the data taken from the EU before introduction the regulation that sets 0.05 μg/l as a limit in 2003. Data from work Dragacci & Frémy, 1993 in which results of 15-year observation was summarized, regarding milk quality in France over period 1978—1992, there were two periods of high contamination with aflatoxin $M_1$ in milk, the first was 1978—1984 and another in the winter 1988—1991 year. Very contaminated samples, were found, some of reached 5 mg/kg aflatoxin in M1 (in the period 1978—1983). In the north of Italy in the period of 2003 surprisingly high concentration of aflatoxin $B_1$ in food for feeding milk cows were found resulted in higher concentration of aflatoxin $M_1$ in milk (EFSA, 2004). As a result of the situation in the country, strategy of surveillance and control was erected which is already near timeframe and so far has given towards the good results reduction of the percentage of contaminated samples of food and milk (Decastelli et al., 2006). Also, in the analysis of the results from this work, it should be noted that the samples analyzed were commercially available milk products, which means that this milk was produced from merging milk from a large number of producers, thus the contribution of the singular manufactures to the aflatoxin burden of milk products was masked. It is not surprising to obtain such results, since our previous work showed that 28% of milk samples collected from individual forms, exceeded the maximum concentration allowed for aflatoxin $M_1$ (Polovinski et al., 2008).

CONCLUSION

Although the results presented in this paper are encouraging, from the standpoint of mycotoxicological quality of milk in our market, it is certainly of general interest to introduce system of regular monitoring in order to always
have available data. The variation in the content of aflatoxin B$_1$ and M$_1$ are large and depend on the year and even within one year there may be significant variations depending on many factors. As a country which is clearly aimed at joining, establishing systems of monitoring to achieve better food and feed quality is a significant determinant.

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УЧЕСТАЛОСТ ПОЈАВЉИВАЊА АФЛАТОКСИНА М1 У КОНЗУМНОМ МЛЕКУ НА ТЕРИТОРИЈИ ВОЈВОДИНЕ

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Резиме

Афлатоксин M1 је један од најопаснијих микотоксинса који може да се јави у млеку. Представља природни метаболит афлатоксинса B1 који настаје као последица метаболизма животиње и покушаља организма да детоксикује афлатоксин B1. Излучује се путем млека, фецеса и урина животиња које су конзумирале храну контаминирану афлатоксином B1, проценат преласка зависи од многобројних фактора и креће се од 0.3 до 6.2%. Афлатоксин М1 се убраја у прву группу карциногена према IARC класификацији из 2002. године, али се сматра да поседује само 10% од канцерогенности свог преуском афлатоксином B1. Законска регулатива у земљама чланицама Европске уније за овај микотоксин у конзумном млеку намењеном за исхрану људи износи 0.05 μg/l, док у осталом делу земаља које поседују законску регулативу за овај токсин (у које спада и Србија) дозвољена концентрација је десет пута већа и износи 0.5 μg/l.

У овом раду смо покушали да дамо увид у стање квалитете млека, као животне намирнице коју чешће конзумирају деца, са становишта микотоксинологије, и упоређивањем добијених података са подацима приступачним из литература, из земаља у окружењу са сличним климатским и пољопривреним условима. Од укупно 65 обратђених узорака млека, у 18 узорка је пронађен афлатоксин M1, и ни у једном узорку није премашила дозвољену количину по законској регулативи Европске Уније од 0.05 μg/l.