AOAC SMPR 2021.XXX; DRAFT Version 7; October 29, 2021

Method Name: Determination of biological spices and botanicals, and relevant (common) biological adulterants

Approved by: Working Group on Food Authenticity Methods
Final version date:
Effective date:

Intended Use:

AOAC *SMPRs*® describe the minimum recommended performance characteristics to be used during the evaluation of a method. The evaluation may be an on-site verification, a single-laboratory validation, or a multi-site collaborative study.

SMPRs are written and adopted by AOAC using the consensus of stakeholder panel composed of representatives from industry, regulatory organizations, academic and/or research institutions, service laboratories and method developers. AOAC SMPRs are used by AOAC expert review panels (ERPs) in their evaluation of validation study data for method being considered for AOAC *Performance Tested Methods*SM or AOAC *Official Methods of Analysis*SM and can be used as acceptance criteria for verification at user laboratories.

1. Applicability

This SMPR contains assessment parameters on the performance of Molecular Applications to monitor spices and botanicals for the probable presence of Economically Motivated Biological Adulterants (EMBA).

This SMPR is designed to evaluate Next Generation Sequencing methods (NGS) developed to assess potential economic adulteration in defined commodities. The SMPR is purposely designed with general descriptions to be applicable to a broad range of innovative sequencing platforms and concepts. Qualitative analytical results of identified species on defined samples will be used to perform the evaluations of the method's performances by the Expert Review Panel.

The analytical results gather all the parts/tissues of a plant that share the same DNA. Therefore, specific parts of plants used for botanicals and spices (e.g. bark, bud, stigma, seed, fruit, leaf) cannot be differentiated based on DNA sequences. By definition a spice/botanical is a single specific part of a plant and economically motivated biological adulterants may be both endogenous or exogenous materials.

Note: The endogenous material corresponds to the floral/plant waste belonging to the plant which spice/botanical belongs to. Regarding economically motivated adulteration, endogenous adulterants can be raw plant (e.g. saffron' s stamen/petal, sticks, stems) or processed plant material (e.g. exhausted/spent spice). The exogenous material corresponds to all materials that is not part of the plant to which the spice belongs to.

In that respect, only exogenous adulterants can be detected using DNA methods. The I certificates of analysis should not mention any spice or botanical name, but only the Latin

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name of the detected plant. When a species name is not obtained, the result can be displayed using other taxonomic levels (e.g. family, genus, species).

Complete documentation of the authentic samples used to build the database, the target genes, primers and DNA data analysis is to be supplied by the method authors. The scope of the method is defined by the applicable database of the NGS solution, the matrixes and concentration range of applicable operation (e.g. spices, botanicals); expansion of the scope is possible with the inclusion of additional authentic samples into the database, and validation using the performance characteristics described in this SMPR.

2. Analytical Technique:

The identification method is based on DNA sequencing to evaluate spices and botanicals for possible EMBAs. Any NGS method, with appropriate database and data analysis concept, that will identify the species content of defined samples is considered. The analysis report should provide the list of identified taxonomic species of the analyzed samples. The method shall demonstrate reliability using the requirements listed in this SMPR.

For single lab validation studies, the method will be evaluated using an *in silico* analysis and testing on prescribed authentic and adulterated materials. Methods approved at this level will proceed to a second level of evaluation: blinded samples containing unknown adulterants will be sent to laboratories participating in a multi-laboratory validation study/proficiency testing/or innovative approach that could be proposed.

The performance characteristics of the DNA sequencing method are defined by the content of the database, the defined primers, the selectivity (specificity), the ability to distinguish the taxonomic species in a mix of species, and the reliability of the identification results.

3. Definitions:

Applicability statement – A general statement about the intended purpose and scope of the method entailing key aspects of expected achievements for the specific situation and circumstances. Key points to cover are the intended scope, the purpose, and an indication of probability of identification.

Authentic samples – Samples representative of the genuine commodity. These samples should represent the spices or botanicals variability seen naturally in the commodity. The authentic samples will be used to properly define the method testing scope.

Botanical and spices – Refer to plants or botany. May refer to the whole plant, a part of the plant (e.g., bark, woods, leaves, stems, roots, rhizomes, flowers, fruits, seeds, etc.), or an extract of the parts.

Economically motivated biological adulteration (EMBA) – The fraudulent addition of non-authentic (non-declared) substances or removal or replacement of authentic (declared) substances without the purchaser's knowledge for economic gain of the seller.

Exclusivity – Ability of an identification method to correctly reject non-target materials.

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101 *Identification:* Taxonomical assessment of the species content of the product being
102 analyzed.
103
104 *Identification method* – An identification method is any qualitative method that reliably
105 identifies a botanical or species material and returns a taxonomical identification.
106
107 *Inclusivity* – Ability of an identification method to correctly identify variants species of the
108 target group(s) that meet the identity specification.
109
110 In silico *analysis* – The use of computer simulation to evaluate target and non-target
111 sequences for molecular methods.
112
113 *Multi-laboratory validation* – Demonstration between laboratories using adulterated samples
114 created by a third-party group and supplied blindly to the participating laboratories.
115
116 *Next generation sequencing (NGS)* – Analytical technology using specific DNA sequencers to
117 obtain sequencing data. The data are usually composed by multiple sequences obtained by
118 parallel sequencing and the output is a file containing all sequences.
119
120 *Single laboratory validation* – Demonstration by one laboratory of method performance on the
121 validation samples.
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123
124 **4. Method Performance Requirements:**
125
126 4.1. *In silico* analysis
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128 The performance requirements are described for the *in silico* analysis (Table1).
129
130 **Table 1: Performance requirements for *in silico* analysis**

Target DNA region(s)	The universality of the target DNA region(s) should be restricted as much as possible to the taxonomic species included in the database. The region(s) and length(s) of the target DNA region should be appropriate and evaluated to avoid non-amplification event.
Primer selection and design	The quality of the selected primers should be assessed regardless their universality, secondary structures, unimolecular folding, partial match and mismatch, hairpins, GC content, number of degenerations. Note: limitations should be highlighted to the end-users
Database content	The DNA database content defines the scope of the identification method. The sequences available in the database shall come from authentic samples, and the origin of the entries should be available. It is advised to get several representatives (entries) per species as much as possible. Therefore, the database should provide the following information: — the database version, — the list of genera and species,

	— the number of different entries for each species, — the origin of the entries, — the description of the types of DNA sequences, e.g. one unique sequence issued from the average of various sequences of the same species or several sequences of various entries, — the list of the closely related species and/or variants that are not differentiated by the identification method; — the list of species which target region has less than 100% DNA homology with the selected primers[a]. The database content should be available to the end-users.
Algorithm concept	The algorithm concept should be described, and the version should be provided.
Evaluation of non-target DNA sequences	DNA sequences from non-target species (plants or possible other adulterants) that could be used for the end-product should be assessed. Two types on non-target DNA sequences should be evaluated: (i) close species and relevant, (ii) excipients A minimum number of mismatches should be defined as acceptable for the exclusivity[b].
Limitations	Highlight any possible restrictions, e.g. possible treatments of spices and botanicals that might impact the analysis and quality of the botanicals, spices or botanicals format that might be challenging to analyze, lack of appropriate entries for some species, etc... The information about the limitations shall be included in the submission and made available to the end-users.

131 [a]In case of doubt regarding the efficiency of the amplification (amplificability) for these
132 species, an inclusivity testing with relevant variants might be required.
133 [b]In case of doubt for some non-target species, an exclusivity with relevant variants testing
134 might be required.
135
136 The report should assess all the performance characteristics as a whole, and a final
137 conclusion should be provided together with the limitations.
138
139 4.2. Requirements for matrix study
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141 As already mentioned, qualitative analytical results of identified species on defined samples
142 are only taken into considerations. The proposed approach is taking into account pragmatic
143 considerations to find the right balance between the costs of the study and appropriate
144 performances assessment of the qualitative NGS method. The matrix study enables to
145 assess the performances of the sample prep and analytical workflow; this part can only be
146 conducted after a successful *in silico* analysis. Various mixes of adulterants and authentic
147 samples will be tested for a given species of authentic samples.
148
149 For a single species of spices or botanicals claim, 5 variants of the authentic samples shall be
150 run to ensure the required quality controls and make sure the method is able to identify
151 correctly these 5 variants. No other species shall be identified in the authentic samples as
152 these materials will be used to prepare the mixes of authentic sample and adulterant. In
153 addition, multiple different relevant mixes of plant adulterant and authentic samples shall

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be tested. Usually, no more than 10 possible relevant plant adulterants are expected per tested authentic sample. The mixes should be done in most of the cases with at least 10% adulterant and 90% of authentic samples. However, if relevant and realistic, it is possible to decrease the ratio of adulterant in a tested mix, e.g. 5 % adulterant and 95% authentic sample; a modification of this ratio should be motivated with a proper rationale. Whenever possible, use adulterants from different regions (origin) to produce the mixes replicates. Whenever possible and relevant, assess in priority the closely related taxa that could be used as adulterants. Ensure to have a documented and reproducible mixture procedure. A minimum of 25 test results is recommended to be generated with equally distributed replicates among the various mixes. Together with pure authentic samples, a total of 30 test results shall be produced.

It is recommended to use in priority the authentic samples and related plant adulterants defined within the AOAC *SMPRs*® on Non-Targeted Testing (NTT).

Illustrations of the study design are given in

- Table 2a using respectively *Curcuma longa*, i.e. turmeric, as authentic sample together with its relevant plant adulterants;
- Table 2b using respectively *Crocus sativus*, i.e. saffron, as authentic sample together with its relevant plant adulterants.

Table 2a: Study design for a single species of spices or botanicals claim with 5 relevant plant adulterants *(Table from the AOAC SMPR 2021.XXX; Draft AOAC Standard Method Performance Requirements (SMPRs) for Non-Targeted Testing (NTT) of Ingredients for Food Authenticity/Fraud Evaluation of Turmeric*

Authentic samples, i.e. *Curcuma longa* (Turmeric)	**Adulterants**	**Tests (equally distributed among the adulterants as much as possible)**	**Test results**
100%	0%	5 replicates as quality controls	**5**
90%	10% *Curcuma xanthorrhoea*	N_1 (e.g. 5 replicates)	**25 mixes of authentic samples and adulterants**
90%	10% *Curcuma zedoaria*	N_2 (e.g. 5 replicates)	
90%	10% *Curcuma malabarica*	N_4 (e.g. 5 replicates)	
90%	10% *Curcuma aromatica*	N_5 (e.g. 5 replicates)	
90%	10% Cassava (*Manihot esculenta*)	N_6 (e.g. 4 replicates)	
		Total data sets	**30**

With N_x corresponding to number of replicates

181 **Table 2b: Study design for a single species of spices or botanicals claim with 7 relevant plant**
182 **adulterants** *(Table from the AOAC SMPR 2021.XXX; Draft AOAC Standard Method Performance*
183 *Requirements (SMPRs) for Non-Targeted Testing (NTT) of Ingredients for Food*
184 *Authenticity/Fraud Evaluation of Saffron*

Authentic samples, i.e. *Crocus sativus* (Saffron)	**Adulterants**	**Tests (equally distributed among the adulterants as much as possible)**	**Test results**
100%	0%	5 replicates as quality controls	**5**
90%	10% Safflower Stigmas	N_1 (e.g. 3 replicates)	**25 mixes of authentic samples and adulterants**
90%	10% Marigold Stigmas	N_2 (e.g. 3 replicates)	
90%	10% Dyed Corn Stigmas	N_3 (e.g. 3 replicates)	
90%	10% Sandalwood	N_4 (e.g. 4 replicates)	
90%	10% Campeche wood powder	N_5 (e.g. 4 replicates)	
90%	10% Gardenia fruit	N_6 (e.g. 4 replicates)	
90%	10% Curcuma	N_7 (e.g. 4 replicates)	
		Total data sets	**30**

185 With N_x corresponding to number of replicates
186
187 However, it is expected to cover broader claims, fitting with the database content and the *in*
188 *silico* analysis outcomes. The possible claims and the required testing are presented Table 3.
189 Again, the replicates shall be equally distributed using relevant mixes of authentic samples
190 and plant adulterants.
191
192 **Table 3: Possible scopes of the method and required testing**

Scope of the method	Number of spices or botanicals claim	Replicates of quality controls (authentic samples)	Replicates of mixes of authentic samples and adulterants	TOTAL data set
One species and related adulterants	1	5 variants	25 replicates	30
Selected species and their related adulterants	≥ 5	≥ 5 x 5 variants	≥ 5 x 25 replicates	≥ 150
Variety of species and their related adulterants	≥ 10	≥ 10 x 5 variants	≥ 10 x 25 replicates	≥ 300
Broad range of species and their related adulterants	≥ 20	≥ 20 x 5 variants	≥ 20 x 25 replicates	≥ 600

193
194 No failure of identifying an adulterant is expected for a claim restricted to one species and
195 related adulterants. Any outlying data should be explained with proper root cause analysis.

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For instance, repeat the testing to discard any possible sample preparation or operator error and/or run the appropriate *in silico* analysis linked to this outlier event.

No more than 5% failure is expected for the possible claims that are not restricted to one single authentic sample and related adulterants; i.e. (i) selected species and their related adulterants, (ii) variety of species and their related adulterants, (iii) broad range of species and their related adulterants. The observed unexpected results should be distributed among various species and should be explained with the support of the *in silico* analysis (see sub-clause 4.1).

5. System suitability tests and/or analytical quality control:

Suitable methods will include blanks, and appropriate check standards.

6. Method validation material(s) and required information prior starting the study:

Scope of the method.

For the *in silico* analysis (sub-clause 4.1): Target DNA region(s); Primer selection and design; Database content; Algorithm concept; Limitations.

For the matrix study (sub-clause 4.2): Protocols used to identify reference materials as authentic and to create adulterated samples; Study design with the list of tested authentic samples, the mixes with plant adulterants with the number of replicates.

7. Validation Guidance:

AOAC INTERNATIONAL Appendix D: Guidelines for Collaborative Study Procedures To Validate Characteristics of a Method of Analysis, version 2002

AOAC INTERNATIONAL Appendix K: AOAC Guidelines for Validation of Botanical Identification Methods, version 2013

AOAC INTERNATIONAL Appendix Q: Recommendations for Developing Molecular Assays for Microbial Pathogen Detection Using Modern In Silico Approaches, version 2020

ISO/CD 22949-1.3: 2020 — Molecular biomarker analysis — Methods of analysis for the detection and identification of animal species in foods and food products (nucleotide sequencing-based methods) — Part 1: General requirements

8. Maximum Time-To-Result:

No maximum time**.**

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