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Microwave assisted saponification (MAS) followed by on-line liquid chromatography (LC)-gas chromatography (GC) for high-throughput and high-

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Title: Microwave assisted saponification (MAS) followed by on-line liquid chromatography (LC)-gas chromatography (GC) for high-throughput and high-sensitivity determination of mineral oil in different cereal-based foodstuffs

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Abstract: A high throughput, high-sensitivity procedure, involving simultaneous microwave assisted extraction (MAS) and unsaponifiable extraction, followed by on-line liquid chromatography (LC)-gas chromatography (GC), has been optimised for rapid and efficient extraction and analytical determination of MOSH and MOAH in cereal-based products of different composition. MAS has the advantage of eliminating fat before LC-GC analysis, allowing to increase the amount of sample extract injected, and hence its sensitivity. The proposed method gave practically quantitative recoveries and good repeatability (relative standard deviation lower than 10). Among the different cereal-based products analysed (dry semolina and egg pasta, bread, biscuits, and cakes), egg pasta packed in direct contact with recycled paperboard had on average the highest total MOSH level (15.9 mg kg⁻¹), followed by cakes (10.4 mg kg⁻¹) and bread (7.5 mg kg⁻¹). About 50% of the pasta and bread samples and 20% of the biscuits and cake samples had detectable MOAH amounts. The highest concentrations were found in an egg pasta in direct contact with recycled paperboard (3.6 mg kg⁻¹) and in a milk bread (3.6 mg kg⁻¹).



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Editorial Office

Food Chemistry

Dear Editor,

here enclosed the revised manuscript: “Microwave assisted saponification (MAS) followed by on-line liquid chromatography (LC)- gas chromatography (GC) for high-throughput and high-sensitivity determination of mineral oil in different cereal-based foodstuffs” by Sabrina Moret, Marianna Scolaro, Laura Barp, Giorgia Purcaro, Lanfranco S. Conte. The paper has been revised following reviewer suggestions.

The authors confirm that the paper is unpublished and has not been submitted for publication elsewhere. Also, the authors confirm that the institutions where they work agree to the submission of this paper to the journal.

Udine, August 31, 2015

Sincerely,

Sabrina Moret

Replies to reviewers' comments:

Reviewer #1: The study proposes a new method to determine mineral oil in some types of foods allowing to achieve lower quantification and detection limits, making use of microwave assisted saponification, never used before to this purpose. The optimization and validation of the method have been performed and explained clearly in the manuscript. In my opinion there are only some minor changes and amendments to be done to make the manuscript acceptable for publication.

1) One of the strength points of the proposed method regards the improved sensitivity allowed, thus it could be interesting to show to the readers a comparison (and a related discussion) with values of LOD and LOD obtained in other methods proposed in literature for the determination of mineral oil;

Information about LOD and LOQ values reported by other authors by applying direct on-line LC-GC have been added in the introduction. As already reported, and now better evidenced in the discussion, the sensitivity improvement depends on the sample fat content. MAS eliminates the fat so higher concentration factors can be applied.

2) Terms use for explaining RSD are not homogeneous: e.g. in the abstract (line 32) it is used "...relative standard deviation (RSD)..." while in the text (e.g. line 291), "...residual standard deviation (RSD)...". Please check and correct in all the text and tables.

"Residual standard deviation" has been corrected in "relative standard deviation"

3) Line 324: The paragraph number should be 3.3. This paragraph discusses results on comparison between methods; the discussed data should be reported in a table or in a chart (figure 3 only shows chromatograms).

The paragraph number has been corrected. A comment on data obtained for unspiked bread sample of figure 3, extracted using both overnight extraction with hexane and MAS, has been added in the text. Other results concerning method comparison are commented.

4) Lines 337: please substitute "weekend" with the number of hours (or insert it after "weekend" in brackets).

The number of hours has been added in the text for both "over-weekend" and "overnight"

5) Lines 370-373: please reformulate the sentence (Currently it is: "Figure 4 shows... while figure 4 shows...").

The sentence has been reformulated.

6) Line 375: The paragraph number should be 3.4.

The paragraph number has been corrected.

7) Lines 440-441: please cite the reference for the mentioned ordinance (even if previously cited).

The reference to the German ordinance has been inserted.

8) Please use italics "n" in "n-Cx" (when indicating linear alkanes) also in figures, figure legends and tables.

"n-Cx" has been corrected in "n-Cx" also in figures and tables.

9) In the legend of Figure 5 the explanation for "RVP" is not reported.
The explanation of "RPV" has been added in the legend of figure 5.

10) Table 1: There are some lacks of homogeneity: in the decimal data sometimes is used the dot, sometimes the comma; please uniform it with dot (also in the y-axis of figure 5).
Wrong decimal data have been corrected replacing the comma with the dot.

11) Fig.2 is not so clear: maybe instead of reporting overlaid chromatograms it could be better to report them aligned.
We tried to remake the figure by reporting the 5 chromatograms aligned but we personally prefer to leave it as it is. The enlargement on the right side of the figure help the reader to see that for each fortification levels there are 2 overlapped traces: one concerning the added standard, and the other one concerning the fortified sample. To be more clear, some labels on the figure have been modified.

Reviewer #2: A well described and improved method for the determination of MOSH and MOAH. You may wish to consider the following comments:

It would be useful to include the MOAH data in the abstract as well as the MOSH.
A paragraph, which reassumes MOAH results, has been added at the end of the abstract.

For the samples section it would be useful to indicate here how long the products have been in the packaging.
The products purchased from the supermarket had variable lifetime, not exceeding their shelf life: on average 6 months for pasta, 1-2 days for fresh bread and 2-6 months for biscuits and bakery products. This information has been added in the text.

How was the homogeneity of the samples demonstrated? Line 152 says the samples were "accurately homogenised".
The homogeneity of the samples was demonstrated by replicate analyses (n= 4-6) of the same sample, which, as reported in the text (paragraph 3.2 on "Method performance"), gave always RSD < 10%

In line 250 it is said that loss of CyCy occurs, could you explain why only this substance is lost
We have no solid explanation for this behavior, so we did not comment it in the text. Probably some matrices contain compounds possibly reacting with CyCy. We know from literature that similar reactions have been observed for other analytes in the presence of the matrix, when using microwave extraction.

Looking at Figure 5 many of the samples contained MOSH at levels below the spiking concentrations used in the validation. What confidence do you have that the method performance was equally satisfactory at the concentrations measured. How have you accounted for the uncertainty in the integration of the "hump" and removal of the areas of the interferences and their effect on the uncertainty.

If we consider both MOSH and MOAH, spiking concentrations used for method validation range from 0.36 to 25 mg/kg. Some of the samples have contamination levels below the spiking level, but most of them have concentrations close to the fortification levels.

Due to the particularity of this analysis (we measure the area of a hump and not of a single peak), it is difficult to evaluate the confidence of the method at low concentration, because it strongly depends on the sample type, sources of contamination (enlarged humps give more problem), presence of interfering compounds. Of course the lower the measured concentration, the higher the uncertainty.

Did you investigate in-house reproducibility of the method, i.e. using a second analyst? If so what was the performance?

We investigated repeatability using the same apparatus and the same analysts. Anyways, based on our experience on other samples, no appreciable differences have been noted when changing the analyst.

It would also be useful to add whether or not the levels found in the samples are toxicologically significant in terms of exposure related to food consumption data as well as comparison with the BFR limits.

A comment on the toxicological relevance of reported data has been added in the text (section 3.4)

Highlights

- MOSH and MOAH determination in cereal-based products.
- Microwave assisted saponification and extraction followed by on-line LC-GC.
- Method performance and recovery tests on different matrices.
- Comparison with other extraction methods.
- Applications to dry pasta, bread, biscuits and cakes.

1 **Microwave assisted saponification (MAS) followed by on-line liquid chromatography (LC)-**
2 **gas chromatography (GC) for high-throughput and high-sensitivity determination of mineral**
3 **oil in different cereal-based foodstuffs**

4

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24 **Abstract**

25

26 A high throughput, high-sensitivity procedure, involving simultaneous microwave assisted
27 extraction (MAS) and unsaponifiable extraction, followed by on-line liquid chromatography (LC)-
28 gas chromatography (GC), has been optimised for rapid and efficient extraction and analytical
29 determination of MOSH and MOAH in cereal-based products of different composition. MAS has
30 the advantage of eliminating fat before LC-GC analysis, allowing to increase the amount of sample
31 extract injected, and hence its sensitivity. The proposed method gave practically quantitative
32 recoveries and good repeatability (relative standard deviation lower than 10). Among the different
33 cereal-based products analysed (dry semolina and egg pasta, bread, biscuits, and cakes), egg pasta
34 packed in direct contact with recycled paperboard had on average the highest total MOSH level
35 (15.9 mg kg^{-1}), followed by cakes (10.4 mg kg^{-1}) and bread (7.5 mg kg^{-1}). About 50% of the pasta
36 and bread samples and 20% of the biscuits and cake samples had detectable MOAH amounts. The
37 highest concentrations were found in an egg pasta in direct contact with recycled paperboard (3.6
38 mg kg^{-1}) and in a milk bread (3.6 mg kg^{-1}).

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47 **Keywords:** Microwave assisted saponification (MAS), mineral oil saturated hydrocarbons (MOSH),
48 mineral oil aromatic hydrocarbons (MOAH), cereal-based products, food contamination, on-line
49 LC-GC.

50

51 **1. Introduction**

52

53 Mineral oils are complex mixtures of hydrocarbons of petrogenic origin comprising two major
54 classes of compounds of different toxicological relevance: mineral oil saturated hydrocarbons
55 (MOSH) and mineral oil aromatic hydrocarbons (MOAH).

56 MOAH comprise carcinogenic compounds for whom it is not possible to establish an acceptable
57 daily intake (ADI) and, therefore, should be not present in foods (EFSA, 2012). The toxicity of
58 MOSH has not been fully elucidated and data supporting the establishment of ADIs covering the
59 different molecular weight (MW) ranges of MOSH possibly contaminating food is still lacking.
60 Based on bioaccumulation data on animals, the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR)
61 recommended temporary limits of 12 mg kg⁻¹ food for the hydrocarbons C10-C16 and of 4 mg kg⁻¹
62 for the adjacent fraction *n*-C17-C20 (BfR, 2013). The German Federal Ministry of Food,
63 Agriculture and Consumers has recently presented a new draft ordinance (22nd ordinance amending
64 the food contact material regulation for paperboard made of recycled fibres) establishing a specific
65 migration limit of 2 mg kg⁻¹ for MOSH from *n*-C20 up to *n*-C25 (or *n*-C35 in the case of wet
66 contact), and a limit of 0.5 mg kg⁻¹ for MOAH *n*-C16-C35. Barp *et al.* (2014) have recently
67 demonstrated how the use of animal data may underestimate accumulation in humans, and they
68 found strong accumulation in different human tissues, mainly in the range above *n*-C21.

69 Mineral oils occur in food at various concentrations depending on the food nature and the source of
70 contamination. Environmental contamination (Neukom, Grob, Biedermann and Noti, 2002; Moret,
71 Populin, Conte, Grob, and Neukom, 2003), food grade mineral oils widely used for different
72 purposes in many processed foods (Tennant, 2004), and food contact materials (Moret, Grob and
73 Conte, 1997; Droz and Grob, 1997; Biedermann and Grob, 2012) represent important sources of
74 contamination. Special attention has been paid over the last years on contamination from printing
75 inks and packaging made of recycled fibres, responsible for the high contamination levels found in

76 many dry foods packaged in direct contact or with an inner barrier bag (Vollmer *et al.*, 2011; EFSA,
77 2012).

78 According to the EFSA Opinion (EFSA, 2012), cereal-based products such as bread, rolls and fine
79 bakery wares, are among the most important contributors to dietary MOSH exposure, mainly due
80 to the use of food grade mineral oils as release or spraying agents.

81 Different methods based on off-line solid phase extraction (SPE)- gas chromatography (GC)- flame
82 ionisation detector (FID) (Moret, Barp, Grob and Conte, 2011; Moret, Barp, Purcaro and Conte,
83 2012; Fiselier *et al.*, 2013) and on-line liquid chromatography (LC)-GC-FID (Biedermann, Fieseler
84 and Grob, 2009; Tranchida *et al.*, 2011; Barp, Purcaro, Moret and Conte, 2013) are currently
85 available for mineral oil determination in foods. Direct on-line LC-GC has the advantage to reduce
86 sample manipulation and solvent consumption thus enhancing reproducibility of the method, but
87 has the disadvantage to not allow for fat removal before GC analysis, which is mandatory to lower
88 the detection limit. Detection (LOD) and quantification (LOQ) limits around 3 and 8 mg kg⁻¹ were
89 reported for oil samples by employing direct on-line LC-GC (Biedermann, Fiselier and Grob,
90 2009). Lower detection limits were obtained for other food items, depending on their fat content, by
91 concentrating the sample without exceeding the capacity of the LC-column (20 mg of fat). A slight
92 sensitivity increase was later also obtained by Barp, Purcaro, Moret and Conte (2013) by applying a
93 rapid temperature increase during GC analysis.

94 Depending on the food composition, different extraction procedures, mainly based on classical
95 solvent extraction (EFSA, 2012), have been applied in mineral oils extraction from cereal and
96 cereal-based products. In the case of dry foods with a low fat content, solvent extraction with
97 hexane was first applied in extraction of superficial contamination, such as that migrated from the
98 packaging (Vollmer *et al.*, 2011). In the case of wet samples, solvent extraction (with hexane
99 overnight) was preceded by a dehydration step (preferably carried out with anhydrous sodium
100 sulphate). Later, it was recognized that overnight extraction with hexane did not allow for complete
101 extraction of the mineral oil, also in some dry foods. In 2011, Biedermann-Brem and Grob

102 described a solvent-based approach for exhaustive extraction of mineral oil from wet samples. It
103 involved sample equilibration (1 h) with ethanol (added in amount at least 10-fold that of the water
104 present in the sample), followed by overnight extraction with hexane after ethanol removal. As the
105 ethanol extract contains some mineral hydrocarbons, it was then recombined with the hexane
106 extract and added with water (twice the hexane volume) to separate the hexane from the ethanol-
107 water mixture.

108 The same method, preceded by soaking in hot water to make the matrix swell, was also applied in
109 exhaustive extraction of mineral oil from dry pasta samples. As an alternative, pressurized liquid
110 extraction (PLE) has been recently proposed for complete extraction of mineral oil from dry pasta
111 and grain cereals (Moret, Scolaro, Barp, Purcaro, Sander and Conte, 2014), and later applied for
112 MOH determination in dry pasta stored in different packaging material over the shelf life (Barp,
113 Suman, Lambertini and Moret, 2015a; Barp, Suman, Lambertini and Moret, 2015b).

114 When processing high-fat content foods with non polar solvents, mineral oils are co-extracted with
115 the fat. Since the LC column has a limited capacity to retain fat (20 mg), an additional purification
116 step aiming at reducing or eliminating fat (passage through a bed of activated silica) is therefore
117 required to reach higher sensitivity. As an alternative, to eliminate high amounts of fat before LC-
118 GC analysis, the sample can be saponified. Traditional saponification followed by unsaponifiable
119 extraction has been previously applied for determination of mineral oil or endogenous *n*-alkanes in
120 different food samples (Castle, Kelly and Gilbert, 1993; Koprivniak, Procida and Favretto, 1997).
121 Traditional saponification has the advantage that it can be applied to all food types, avoiding the
122 need to remove water before the extraction step, but it has the disadvantage of being solvent- and
123 time-consuming.

124 Microwave assisted saponification (MAS), applied by different authors for extraction of polycyclic
125 aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) from different food matrices (García Falcón, Simal Gándara, Carril
126 González and Barros 2000; Hernández-Borges, Rodríguez-Delgado and Garcia- Montelongo., 2006;
127 Pena, Pensado, Casais, Mejuto, Phan-Tan-Luu and Cela., 2006, Akpambang, Purcaro, Lajide,

128 Amoo, Conte and Moret., 2009, Moret Purcaro and Conte, 2010) represents an interesting
129 alternative to conventional saponification. It allows for rapid extractions on a large number of
130 samples, depending on the kind of apparatus.

131 The aim of this work was to explore the applicability of the MAS for high-throughput and high-
132 sensitivity determination of mineral oil in cereal-based products with different fat and water
133 content. Performance characteristics of the optimized procedure have been evaluated and the
134 obtained results on selected samples were compared to those obtained by applying solvent-based
135 extraction procedures. Finally, the optimised method was applied on a wide number of different
136 cereal based products from the Italian market.

137

138 **2. Materials and methods**

139

140 *2.1. Reagents and standards*

141

142 All the solvents were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (Milan, Italy). Hexane, acetone and
143 dichloromethane were distilled before use. Ethanol was of HPLC grade. Water was purified with a
144 Milli-Q System (Millipore, Bedford, MA, USA).

145 Internal standards were purchased from Supelco (Milan, Italy). The working standard solution was
146 prepared by mixing 5- α -cholestane (Cho, 0.6 mg mL⁻¹), *n*-C11 (0.3 mg mL⁻¹), *n*-C13 (0.15 mg mL⁻¹),
147 cyclohexyl cyclohexane (CyCy, 0.3 mg mL⁻¹), *n*-pentyl benzene (5B, 0.30 mg mL⁻¹), 1-methyl
148 naphthalene (1-MN, 0.30 mg mL⁻¹), 2-methylnaphthalene (2-MN, 0.30 mg mL⁻¹), tri-tert-butyl
149 benzene (TBB, 0.3 mg mL⁻¹) and perylene (Per, 0.6 mg mL⁻¹) in toluene.

150 The standard mixture of *n*-alkane C10-C40 (50 mg L⁻¹ each) and the paraffin oil used for recovery
151 tests were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (Milan, Italy), while the printing ink solvent containing
152 9% of MOAH was kindly provided by a producer.

153 All the glassware was carefully washed and rinsed with distilled solvents (acetone and hexane)
154 before use.

155

156 2.2. *Samples*

157 Different cereal-based foodstuffs were selected and analyzed with the proposed method: dry
158 semolina, egg pasta, and various bakery products with different fat and moisture content (bread,
159 biscuits and cakes). The products purchased from the supermarket had variable life time (not exceeding
160 their shelf life): on average 6 months for pasta, 1-2 days for fresh bread and 2-6 months for biscuits and
161 bakery products.

162

163 2.3. *Microwave assisted saponification (MAS)*

164 A microwave extractor (Mars, CEM Corporation, Matthews, NC, USA) able to process up to 14
165 samples simultaneously, was used to extract mineral oil from different cereal-based products.

166 The samples were accurately homogenized and finely ground with a laboratory mill (IKA A10
167 analytical mill). The extraction was carried out by applying the method described for PAH
168 extraction from fish tissue (Akpambang et al., 2009) and propolis samples (Moret et al. 2010), with
169 few modifications. Briefly, 5 g of the sample were weighed in a Teflon-lined vessel (Green Chem
170 plus, CEM Corporation), added with 5 μ L of the internal standard solution, 10 mL of saturated
171 methanolic potassium hydroxide (KOH), and 10 ml of n-hexane. For high-fat content samples
172 (more than 25% of fat), the amount of saturated methanolic KOH was increased to 20 mL.
173 Microwave assisted saponification and simultaneous extraction was carried out at 120 °C for 20
174 min. Since microwave heating is sample dependent and the microwave instrument allowed pressure
175 and temperature control only in a pilot vessel, to ensure uniform extraction conditions, only samples
176 of the same type were processed together within each extraction cycle.

177 Depending on the food type, a sample post-treatment was sometimes required after MAS. The pasta
178 and bread samples did not require any sample post-treatment and were injected directly into the LC-

179 GC system (after reconcentration of the hexane extract). On the other hand, the biscuits and cakes
180 required a sample post-treatment and, after MAS, the sample extract was transferred into a
181 separatory funnel, washed with successive aliquots of water and little amounts of methanol
182 (avoiding agitation of the sample during the first wash in order to prevent formation of stable
183 emulsions) until obtaining clear extracts and good phase separation. As an alternative, once cooled,
184 the vessels were opened and added with about 20 mL of water and 3-4 mL of methanol (without
185 mixing), and left to rest for about 20 min at -20 °C. An aliquot of the hexane extract was then
186 washed with a double volume of water in a screw-cap vial (vortex 1 min). The hexane extract was
187 directly used for LC-GC injection or an aliquot (5 mL) was concentrated to 1 mL before injection,
188 using an evaporation system consisting of a centrifuge (Univapo 100 H, Uniequip System;
189 Martinsrieder, Munich, Germany) and a vacuum pump.

190 To remove interfering olefins (eluting in the MOAH fraction) some biscuits and cake samples were
191 epoxidized prior to LC-GC determination. After MAS and wash with water, an aliquot of the
192 sample was added with 100 mg of a clean vegetable oil and it underwent epoxidation according to
193 the procedure described by Biedermann *et al.* in 2009.

194

195 2.4. Standard addition for recovery tests

196 A printing ink solvent (containing 91% of MOSH and 9% of MOAH in the *n*-C14-C20 range)
197 and/or a paraffin oil (100% MOSH in the *n*-C24-C40 range) were used for recovery tests. The
198 recoveries were calculated by comparing the chromatographic area of the spiked sample subtracted
199 from the area obtained for the unspiked sample (with no detectable contamination or with low
200 contamination levels), with that of the same amount of standard used to spike the sample.

201 The pasta samples as well as biscuits and plum-cakes were finely ground, weighed directly into the
202 extraction vessel (5 g), added with mineral oil standards dissolved in 5-10 mL of pentane, and
203 gently stirred for 30 min to uniformly distribute the added mineral oil (the added solvent evaporated
204 during stirring) and was left to age for 3 days before MAS.

205 The bread samples for recovery tests were prepared using a bread machine (Severin, mod. BM
206 3981) to knead 400 g of flour type “0”, 280 g of tap water, 16 g of extra virgin olive oil and 4 g of
207 yeast. The mineral oil standard was added to the extra virgin olive oil used to make the bread. After
208 kneading and leavening, the dough was baked according to the machine program. Two bread
209 samples were prepared: one prepared with the unspiked extra virgin olive oil and the other with the
210 same oil spiked with a known amount of printing ink solvent and paraffin oil.

211

212 2.5. LC-GC determination

213

214 The on-line LC-GC instrument (LC-GC 9000, Brechbühler, Zurich, Switzerland) consisted of a
215 Phoenix 40 with three syringe LC pumps and four switching valves and an UV/VIS detector (UV-
216 2070 Plus, Jasco, Japan). The autosampler was a PAL LHS2-xt Combi PAL (Zwingen,
217 Switzerland). The LC column was a 25 cm × 2.1 mm i.d Lichrospher Si 60, 5 µm (DGB,
218 Schlossboeckelheim, Germany). The GC was a Trace GC Ultra from Thermo Scientific (Milan,
219 Italy).

220 A gradient, starting with hexane (0.1 min) and reaching 30% of dichloromethane (at 300 µL/min) in
221 0.5 min, was used to elute the MOSH (from 2.0 to 3.5 min) and the MOAH (from 4 to 5.5 min) as
222 described by Biedermann *et al.* (2009).

223 LC-GC transfer occurred through the Y-interface based on the retention gap technique and partially
224 concurrent eluent evaporation. A 10 m × 0.53 mm i.d. uncoated, deactivated precolumn was
225 connected by a steel T-piece union to the solvent vapor exit (SVE) and a 15 m × 0.25 mm i.d.
226 separation column coated with a 0.15 µm film of PS-255 (1% Vinyl, 99% Methyl Polysiloxane)
227 (Mega, Italy). A rapid oven gradient (40 °C min⁻¹) starting from 55 °C up to 350 °C was used for
228 GC analysis (Barp *et al.*, 2013). The FID and the SVE were heated at 360 °C and 140 °C,
229 respectively. After the transfer, the LC column was backflushed (dichloromethane) and
230 reconditioned prior to the subsequent injection.

231 The data were acquired and processed by the ExaChrom software (Brechtbühler, Switzerland). The
232 MOSH area was determined by the integration of the whole hump of largely unresolved peaks,
233 subtracted from the endogenous *n*-alkanes. All sharp peaks standing at the top of the MOAH hump
234 were subtracted from the total area. Quantification was based on internal standards or on external
235 standard, when the presence on sample components co-eluting with the standards was suspected.

236

237 **3. Results and discussion**

238

239 *3.1. MAS procedure*

240 Simultaneous microwave assisted saponification and unsaponifiable extraction was first applied to
241 pasta samples and later to other cereal-based products with different moisture and fat content.

242 With respect to the conditions used by Akpambang *et al.* (2009) for PAH extraction from fish and
243 meat tissues (400 mg of lyophilized sample added with 1.6 mL of water, 8 mL of saturated
244 methanolic KOH and 20 mL of *n*-hexane), a higher amount of sample (5 g) was processed in order
245 to achieve higher sensitivity. The amount of saturated methanolic KOH was slightly increased to 10
246 mL, while the amount of *n*-hexane used was reduced from 20 to 10 mL to limit organic solvent
247 consumption and to obtain a more concentrated extract. Since an excess of KOH is required to
248 ensure complete fat hydrolysis (Pena *et al.* 2006), when processing samples with more than 25% of
249 fat, the volume of the saturated methanolic KOH solution was increased to 20 mL. Under these
250 conditions fat hydrolysis was complete (no fat traces were found in the residue obtained after
251 evaporation of the hexane extract), and an excess of KOH remained in the aqueous extract.

252 Comparative trials carried out in triplicate on different aliquots of the same dry sample (semolina
253 pasta) added and not with water (2 mL) before the MAS, demonstrated that the water content of the
254 sample does not significantly affect the results. Nevertheless, to obtain similar water content and
255 uniform extraction conditions, dry foods, such as pasta and biscuits, were added with 2 mL of
256 water. For what concerns extraction temperature and time, the same conditions (120 °C for 20 min)

257 previously used for PAH determination in fish and meat tissue (Akpambang *et al.*, 2009) and later
258 for propolis samples (Moret *et al.*, 2010) were utilised.

259 The effect of the MAS treatment was preliminary investigated on C10-40 *n*-alkanes mixture,
260 internal standard mixture, paraffin oil and printing ink solvent, which were analysed in duplicate.
261 No appreciable differences in the chromatographic areas were observed with respect to the same
262 standards which did not underwent the MAS procedure, demonstrating that MAS does not
263 determine analyte losses or artefacts formation in absence of the matrix. The same results were
264 obtained in the presence of the matrix, with the exception of CyCy (the internal standard usually
265 used for MOSH quantification), for which some losses were sometimes noticed, especially when
266 processing pasta samples, indicating a possible interaction with some food components. For this
267 reason, quantification of the MOSH for these samples was based on C13 and/or on the external
268 standard.

269 The pasta and bread samples did not require any sample post-treatment before LC-GC injection
270 (except for reconcentration, depending on the sensitivity required). The alkalinity of the sample
271 extract so obtained did not seem to affect column performance even after a number of analyses.
272 Nevertheless, a rapid wash with water, which takes less than 4 min per sample, was performed
273 during routine analysis to eliminate residual alkalinity (6 mL of the extract were washed with 12
274 mL of water). For the samples such as biscuits and cakes, a washing step was mandatory to avoid
275 formation of emulsion and gels. It was performed in a separatory funnel as described in 2.3, but
276 later it was found that the sample can be more conveniently added with water directly in the MAS
277 extraction tube and left at -20 °C for 20 min, before concentration and LC-GC analysis.

278

279 3.2. Method performance

280 The method performance was assessed by checking linearity in a matrix-matched calibration curve,
281 by evaluating LOD and LOQ, as well as selectivity, accuracy and precision.

282 Linearity of the analytical method, previously verified by Barp *et al.* (2013) for a mixture of
283 paraffin oil and offset printing ink in *n*-hexane (in the range 1-50 $\mu\text{g mL}^{-1}$ each), was confirmed
284 also in the presence of the food matrix. To this purpose a blank pasta sample (with no detectable
285 mineral oil) was spiked with increasing amounts of printing ink solvent (9% of MOAH) in the
286 range between 0.20 and 25.0 mg kg^{-1} food (corresponding to 0.18-22.75 mg kg^{-1} of MOSH and
287 0.02-2.25 mg kg^{-1} of MOAH). The analyses were performed in duplicate at 4 different fortification
288 levels. The slopes of the calibration curves built using the printing ink standard in *n*-hexane and the
289 one built analyzing the fortified pasta sample were compared running a *t*-test at the 5% significance
290 level to confirm the absence of any matrix effect ($p>0.05$). The least squares method was used to
291 estimate the regression line and linearity and the goodness of the curve was confirmed using lack-
292 of-fit and Mandel's fitting tests ($F_{\text{calc}} < F_{\text{tab}}$) (Draper and Smith, 1981).

293 The matrix-matched calibration curve was linear within the concentration range tested ($R^2>0.997$)
294 Although detection and quantification limits in mineral oil analysis are closely related to the
295 molecular weight distribution of the contamination (width of the “hump”), an approximate
296 estimation of these limits was made by considering 3 and 10 times the signal to noise ratio,
297 respectively. A LOD of 0.03 mg kg^{-1} and a LOQ of 0.1 mg kg^{-1} of food sample was obtained when
298 processing 5 g of sample with 10 mL of hexane and concentrating 5 mL of the extract to 1 mL
299 before injection (100 μL).

300 Method selectivity was verified by analysing uncontaminated samples with MAS and verifying the
301 absence of artefacts with respect to the traces obtained for the same sample by applying classical
302 solvent extraction or PLE.

303 Method repeatability for different food types was tested by replicate analyses of the same spiked or
304 unspiked sample ($n = 4-6$). Good repeatability with relative standard deviation (RSD) always lower
305 than 9 was found for all the product types.

306 Since no certified reference material (with known amount of mineral oil) is commercially available,
307 method accuracy was assessed with recovery tests performed on 4 different cereal-based foodstuffs

308 of different composition (dry pasta, bread, biscuits and plum cake), using the standard addition
309 procedure described in 2.4.

310 Table 1 reports the amounts of MOSH and MOAH added, average MOSH and MOAH recoveries,
311 and RSD. The average recoveries ranged from 89 to 104 for the MOSH and from 85 to 108% for
312 the MOAH with RSD lower than 10.

313 More in detail, for the semolina pasta recoveries obtained (4 replicate analyses) for MOSH and
314 MOAH at 2 different fortification levels were practically quantitative, with RSD lower than 8.

315 Concerning the bread samples, the standard addition was performed on the extra virgin olive oil
316 used to prepare the bread as described in 2.4. The amount added is expressed on the whole product
317 (before cooking). For recovery calculation, the loss of water occurred during cooking was also
318 considered. The sample prepared with the unspiked oil presented a little contamination coming from
319 the flour which, for recovery calculation (3 replicates), was subtracted from the contamination of
320 the spiked sample. Extraction yields over 90% were obtained also in this case.

321 The biscuit sample used for recovery test was a baby food product containing 8% of fat (extra
322 virgin olive oil). Figure 1 reports MOSH and MOAH traces of the unspiked and spiked samples,
323 and of the printing ink solvent and paraffin oil standards used for the fortification. As is visible from
324 the figure, the unspiked sample had no detectable contamination (natural *n*-alkanes are visible in the
325 trace). The MOAH trace evidenced the presence of squalene as typical for extra virgin olive oil.
326 Average recoveries, calculated on 5 replicate analyses, ranged from 97 to 103% with RSD \leq 5.

327 Figure 2 shows MOSH and MOAH overlays of the LC-GC-FID traces obtained for the plum-cake
328 sample before and after fortification with the printing ink solvent standard (two different
329 fortification levels) and for the added printing ink standard directly injected. Since the unspiked
330 sample was contaminated with MOSH in the same molecular mass range of the paraffin oil, it was
331 not fortified with this kind of standard for the recovery test. As is visible from the MOAH traces,
332 the presence of olefins from palm oil interfered slightly with MOAH detection in the fortified
333 samples, but did not prevent recovery calculation.

334 Method accuracy was also confirmed comparing the LC-GC traces obtained for some selected
335 samples by applying other extraction methods, as described in 3.3.

336

337 *3.3. Comparison with other extraction methods*

338 Concerning semolina pasta, previous tests demonstrated how overnight extraction with *n*-hexane
339 allows for complete extraction of superficial contamination such as that migrated from the
340 packaging, but does not lead to a complete extraction of deep contamination from different sources,
341 which, instead, can be achieved using PLE as described by Moret et al. (2014) or the procedure
342 described by Biedermann-Brem and Grob (2011). Complete extraction was also achieved when
343 applying MAS on selected samples with different contamination profiles, as confirmed by the
344 perfect overlay of the LC-GC traces with those obtained by applying the procedure described by
345 Biedermann-Brem and Grob (2011) or PLE.

346 In the case of egg pasta, mineral oil migrated from the packaging rapidly diffuses into the whole
347 matrix (Barp et al., 2015), and “overnight” extraction (16 h) with hexane allows for an almost
348 complete mineral oil extraction, independently of the contamination sources. Complete extraction,
349 comparable to that obtained using MAS, was also obtained by prolonging solvent extraction over
350 the “weekend” (62 h) or using PLE and extracting the unground sample with hexane at 100 °C for 1
351 hour. LC-GC-FID traces obtained for different samples under these different extraction conditions
352 overlaid perfectly with those obtained with MAS. When applying solvent extraction, mineral oil
353 was co-extracted with the fat, which in the case of dry egg pasta required relatively long time to
354 diffuse from the whole product into the solvent: lower extraction times gave lower fat extraction
355 yields and hence incomplete mineral oil extraction. MAS has also the advantage of avoiding fat co-
356 extraction, which, although present in little amount (egg pasta contains approximately 4% of fat)
357 can rapidly overload the LC column, negatively affecting its performance and making frequent
358 washing necessary to restore it.

359 The results obtained for bread samples evidenced how overnight extraction with *n*-hexane often
360 underestimates the total mineral oil contamination present in the product (also when adding
361 anhydrous sodium sulphate to remove the water before extraction). Particularly, it was found that
362 after cooking, part of the contamination present in the ingredients becomes less easily extractable
363 with *n*-hexane, but can be quantitatively extracted with MAS. Figure 3 displays an overlay of the
364 LC-GC traces obtained by applying MAS and overnight extraction with *n*-hexane in both the spiked
365 and the unspiked bread. Concerning the unspiked sample, overnight extraction with hexane enabled
366 extraction of 40% of the MOSH extracted with MAS (1.0 mg kg^{-1}). This behaviour, already
367 observed in Melba toast (unpublished data), seems to indicate that after cooking, part of the
368 contamination remains firmly enclosed into the product and cannot be easily extracted with *n*-
369 hexane overnight, but can be completely extracted after MAS.

370 Differently from semolina pasta and bread, complete extraction of mineral oil from the biscuit
371 samples proved to be less difficult and was achieved also when using overnight extraction. During
372 routine analysis a large number of biscuits with different fat content was analysed in duplicate by
373 applying both MAS and overnight extraction with *n*-hexane (not all data are reported in this work).
374 In all cases the results obtained were comparable, indicating that quantitative mineral oil extraction
375 does not represent a difficult task for this type of samples characterized by a high fat content
376 (typically ranging from 8 up to 25%) and a low moisture content (1-5%).

377 With respect to solvent extraction which co-extracts also the fat, MAS allows to eliminate the fat
378 before LC-GC analysis, with the advantage that higher sensitivity can be reached because the
379 sample extract can be concentrated before injection without exceeding the capacity of the LC
380 column (20 mg). The higher the fat content of the sample, the higher the sensitivity increase reached
381 by using MAS prior to on-line LC-GC. Furthermore, co-extracted fat injected into the LC column is
382 not completely eliminated during the backflush with dichloromethane and slowly accumulates into
383 the column decreasing progressively its capacity. For this reason, after a number of fat injections, an

384 intense wash of the LC column with isopropanol and/or methyl tert buthyl ether is required, which
385 can be performed less frequently when using MAS.

386 Figure 4 shows the LC-GC trace of a biscuit sample (5 g) with 25% of fat, extracted overnight with
387 hexane (10 mL) and directly injected (100 μ L), without previous reconcentration to not exceed the
388 column capacity. It also displays the trace of the same biscuit sample processed with MAS and
389 injected after a 5-fold reconcentration to reach higher sensitivity (LOQ around 0.1 mg kg⁻¹).

390

391

392 3.4. Mineral oil content in the analysed samples

393 Figure 5 summarises the total mineral oil contamination found in a number of cereal-based products
394 from the Italian market, such as dry egg and semolina pasta, and different bakery products (bread,
395 biscuits, cakes) with different fat, sugar and moisture content. MOSH data were divided into three
396 ranges of volatility: MOSH from *n*-C10 to *n*-C16, from *n*-C16 to *n*-C25, and from *n*-C25 to *n*-C35,
397 while MOAH were quantified in the range *n*-C10-C35. MOSH from *n*-C16 to *n*-C35 are the most
398 relevant from a toxicological point of view since they accumulate in human tissues, while MOSH
399 and MOAH up to *n*-C25 are often an index of the presence of mineral oil migrated via gas-phase
400 from recycled paperboard packaging (EFSA, 2012).

401 The dry semolina and egg pasta in direct contact with recycled paperboard presented always a
402 MOSH contamination in the range *n*-C10-C25, generally centred on *n*-C17-18 and accompanied by
403 10-25% of MOAH in the same range of volatility, as is typical for products contaminated with
404 mineral oils (from printing ink residues present in recycled fibres) and migrated to food via gas-
405 phase. The highest contamination levels were found in an egg pasta packed in direct contact with
406 recycled paperboard (23.4 and 3.6 mg kg⁻¹ of MOSH and MOAH up to *n*-C25, respectively) and in
407 an egg pasta packed in a paperboard tray made of recycled fibres covered with a thin layer of virgin
408 paper and wrapped with a plastic film (14.6 and 2.0 mg kg⁻¹ of MOSH and MOAH up to *n*-C25,
409 respectively), while the lowest concentrations were found in semolina pasta packed in plastic film:

410 0.1 - 2.8 mg kg⁻¹ of saturated hydrocarbons up to *n*-C25, mainly due to migration of polyolefin
411 oligomeric saturated hydrocarbons (POSH) from the plastic packaging. The egg pasta packed in
412 virgin paperboard boxes or in trays made of virgin paperboard and wrapped in a plastic film had
413 intermediate contamination levels (MOSH up to *n*-C25 comprised between 1.0 and 3.0 mg kg⁻¹). As
414 previously reported by Barp, Suman, Lambertini and Moret (2015), due to its lower fat content,
415 semolina pasta is less subject to hydrocarbons migration and hence had maximum MOSH amounts
416 around 4.0 mg kg⁻¹ even when packed in direct contact with recycled paperboard. The GC profile of
417 some of the egg and semolina pasta revealed the presence of further contamination sources giving
418 “humps” centred on higher molecular weights, generally not accompanied by the presence of
419 MOAH. Contamination in the range from *n*-C25 to C35 varied from 0.1 to 2.7 mg kg⁻¹.

420 Bread samples were purchased from different supermarkets with their own bakery and were
421 packaged mainly in paperboard bags (sometimes with a plastic window) or in plastic film. The
422 analysed samples presented variable contamination levels (MOSH up to *n*-C35 ranged from 0.7 to
423 26.4 mg kg⁻¹) from different sources, as confirmed by the LC-GC traces, characterized by the
424 presence of one or more humps comprising hydrocarbons of different molecular weight, centred on
425 *n*-C17-C19, *n*-C28, *n*-C30 and *n*-C33. Particularly, the most contaminated was a sample whose LC-
426 GC profile evidenced a POSH contamination up to *n*-C25 (5.7 mg kg⁻¹) and a MOSH contamination
427 in the range from about *n*-C25 to about *n*-C45, centred on *n*-C33 (20.7 mg kg⁻¹ of MOSH from *n*-
428 C25 to C35) with no detectable MOAH. About half of the samples contained detectable amounts of
429 MOAH in the same range of hump volatility centred around *n*-C18 as typical for mineral oil
430 migrated from packaging made with recycled fibres. The most contaminated one was a sample of
431 milk bread with 2.2 mg kg⁻¹ di MOAH in the range *n*-C10-35.

432 Most of the biscuit samples were packed in contact with plastic film or an aluminium layer. The
433 analysed samples had contamination levels ranging from 0.9 to 10.5 mg kg⁻¹ of MOSH up to *n*-C35
434 (on average 3.6 mg kg⁻¹), but only the most contaminated sample (packed in plastic film with a
435 secondary packaging made of recycled paperboard) had detectable amounts of MOAH (0.3 mg kg⁻¹

436 ¹). The LC-GC traces of many biscuits revealed the presence of palm oil used as an ingredient,
437 which was probably responsible for most of the MOSH contamination observed in these samples,
438 characterized by a large hump centred on *n*-C36, without MOAH.

439 The cake samples comprised plum cakes, brioches and typical Italian Christmas cakes (Panettone
440 and Pandoro) having 15-30% of moisture and a fat content comprised between 10 and 25%. With
441 the exception of traditional Christmas cakes, packed in plastic film and recycled paperboard
442 (secondary packaging), the other products were packed in plastic film only. MOSH contamination
443 up to *n*-C35 ranged from 1.0 to 19.9 mg kg⁻¹ (on average 10.4 mg kg⁻¹) and was mainly centred on
444 *n*-C33 and *n*-C36.

445 About 50% of the pasta and bread samples had MOSH and MOAH levels above 2 and 0.5 mg kg⁻¹,
446 respectively (limits recently proposed in the 22nd ordinance amending the food contact material
447 regulation for paperboard made of recycled fibres). Considering food consumption data, these
448 results clearly indicate a toxicological concern towards cereal based products, particularly pasta
449 packaged in direct contact with recycled paperboard and bread.

450 All the samples in direct contact with a plastic packaging presented a POSH contamination, which
451 was higher in samples with higher fat content (biscuits and cakes).

452

453 **4. Conclusions**

454

455 A MAS procedure allowing for rapid extraction of mineral oil contamination present in cereal-
456 based products of different water and fat content, has been optimized and validated. The proposed
457 method allows to perform simultaneous saponification and extraction of up to 14 samples, with
458 minimal sample manipulation and solvent consumption. Since MAS eliminates the fat, it is
459 particularly advantageous for high-fat-content samples for which sensitivity is limited by the
460 maximum amount of fat than can be injected into the LC column. Furthermore, it allows to avoid
461 frequent washing of the LC column. Cereal-based products analysed with MAS showed relatively
462 high contamination levels, often exceeding the limits proposed in the 22nd ordinance amending the

463 food contact material regulation for paperboard made of recycled fibres for MOH migrated from
464 packaging.

465

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467

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546

547 Figure 1. LC-GC traces of a biscuit sample used for recovery calculation. The figure displays MOSH and
548 MOAH traces before and after fortification with a printing ink solvent and a paraffin oil.

549

550 Figure 2. LC-GC traces of a plum-cake sample used for recovery calculation. The figure displays MOSH and
551 MOAH traces before (unspiked plum-cake) and after (spiked plum-cake) fortification with a printing ink
552 solvent (added standard).

553

554 Figure 3. Comparison between MAS and overnight extraction. The figure displays MOSH traces of a sample
555 prepared with unspiked extra virgin olive oil (control bread) and of a sample prepared with the same extra
556 virgin olive oil spiked with printing ink solvent.

557

558 Figure 4. Comparison between MOSH traces of a biscuit sample, containing 25% of fat, analysed after
559 overnight extraction (injecting into the LC column an amount of extract corresponding to 50 mg of sample)
560 or after MAS and a 5-fold concentration (injecting an amount of extract corresponding to 250 mg of sample
561 containing more than 70 mg of fat).

562

563 Figure 5. MOSH and MOAH content (mg kg^{-1}) of cereal-based products analysed with MAS. MOSH data
564 are divided into 3 ranges of volatility (*n*-C10-C16, *n*-C16-25, *n*-C25-35). The type of packaging in contact
565 with the food is also indicated: Pl, plastic; VP, virgin paperboard; RP, recycled paperboard; RVP,
566 recycled/virgin paper; Al, aluminium.

567

Table 1.Recovery tests:amounts of MOSH and MOAH added, average MOSH and MOAH recoveries, and residual standard deviation (RSD)

Sample	Number of replicates	Added MOSH from paraffin oil (mg kg ⁻¹)	% Recovery (mean)	RSD	Added MOSH from printing ink solvent (mg kg ⁻¹)	% Recovery (mean)	RSD	Added MOAH from printing ink solvent (mg kg ⁻¹)	% Recovery (mean)	RSD
Dry pasta	4	5.0-25	94-103	5.2	3.6-18.2	93-104	6.7-4.9	0.36-1.8	92-108	7.7-4.3
Bread	3	20	90	8.5	14.6	94	9.3	1.4	89	7.9
Biscuit	5	20	99	5.0	14.6	103	4.6	1.4	97	3.8
Plum-cake	4				3.6-18.2	93-101	6.2-7.2	0.36-1.8	95	8.7-5.6

Fig.1

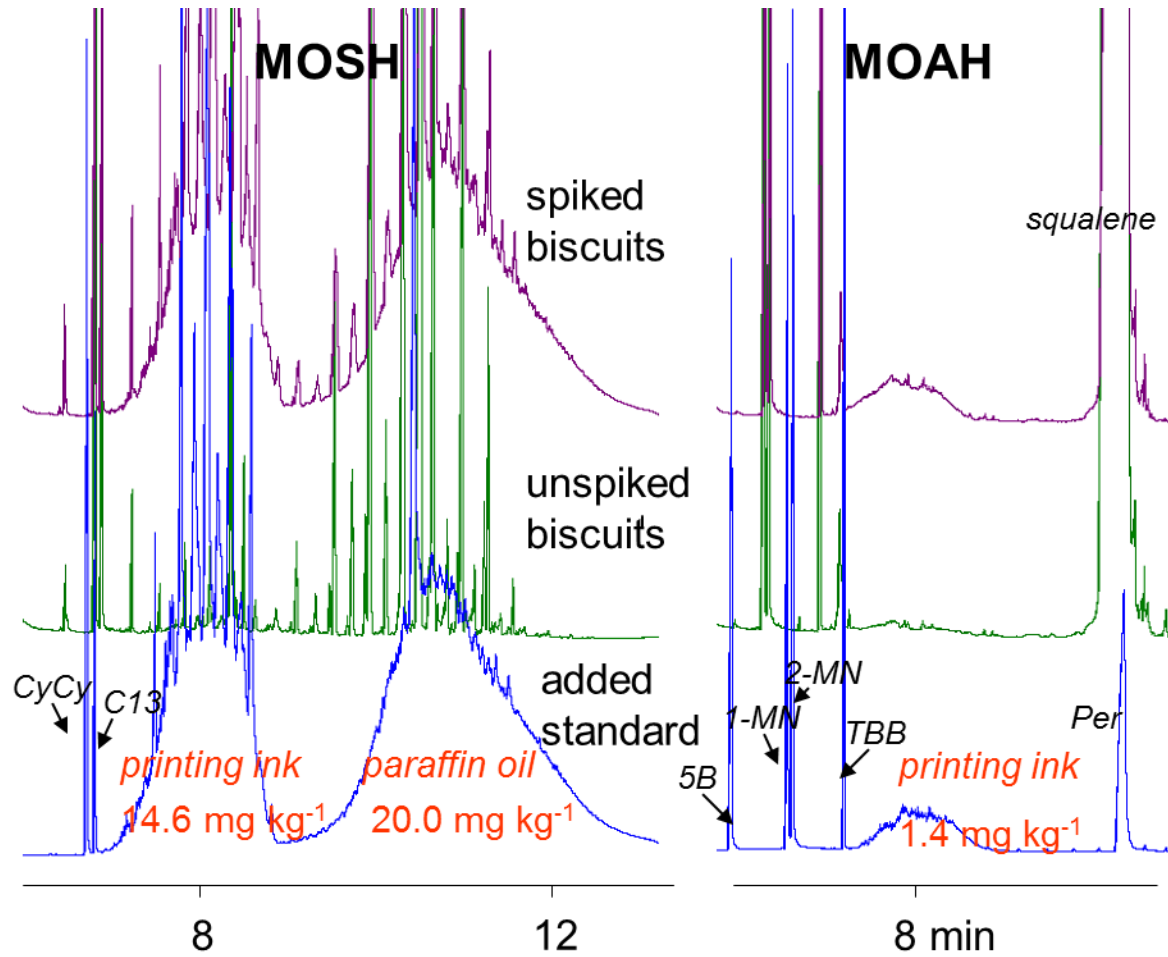


Fig. 2

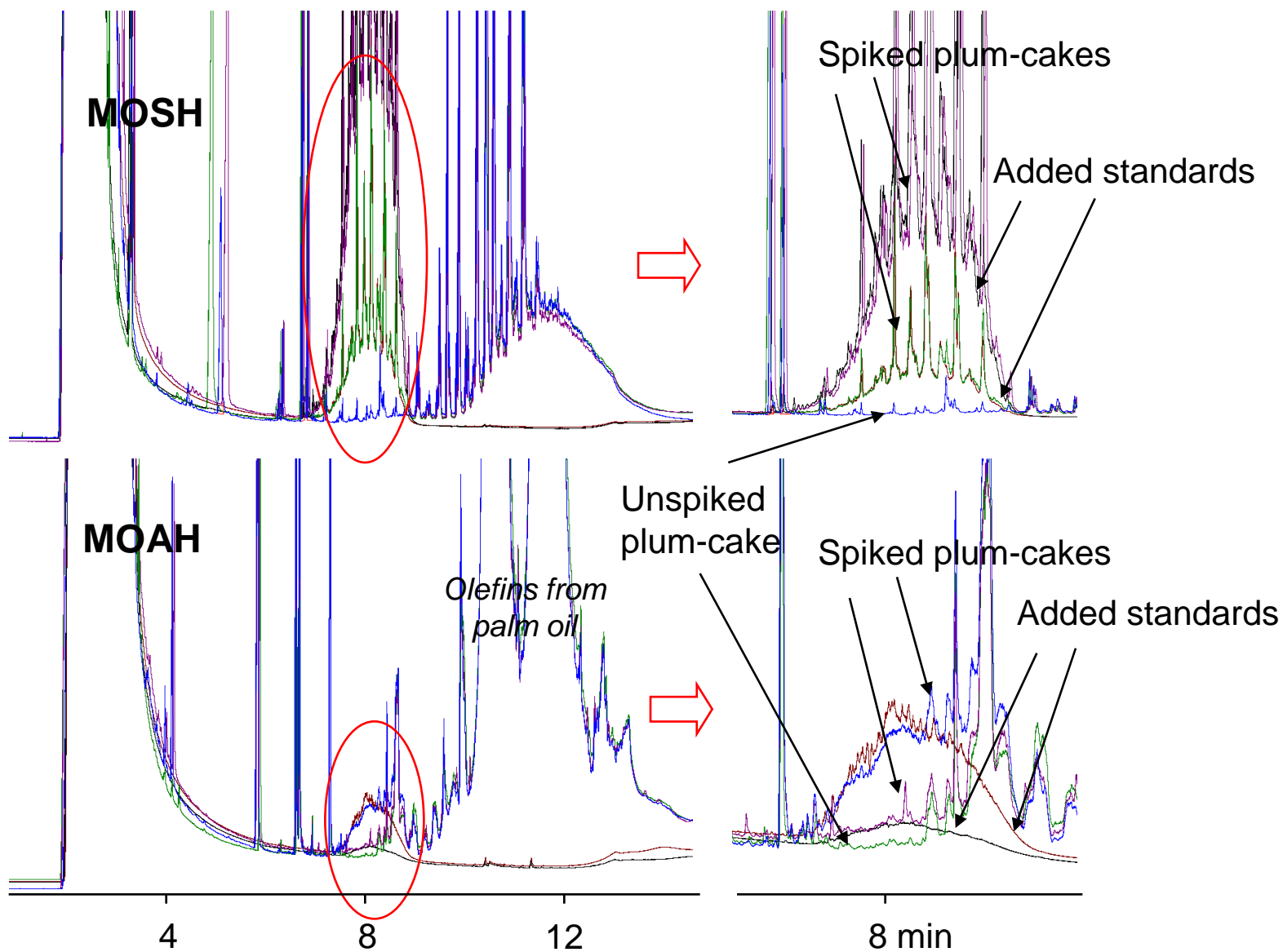


Fig. 3

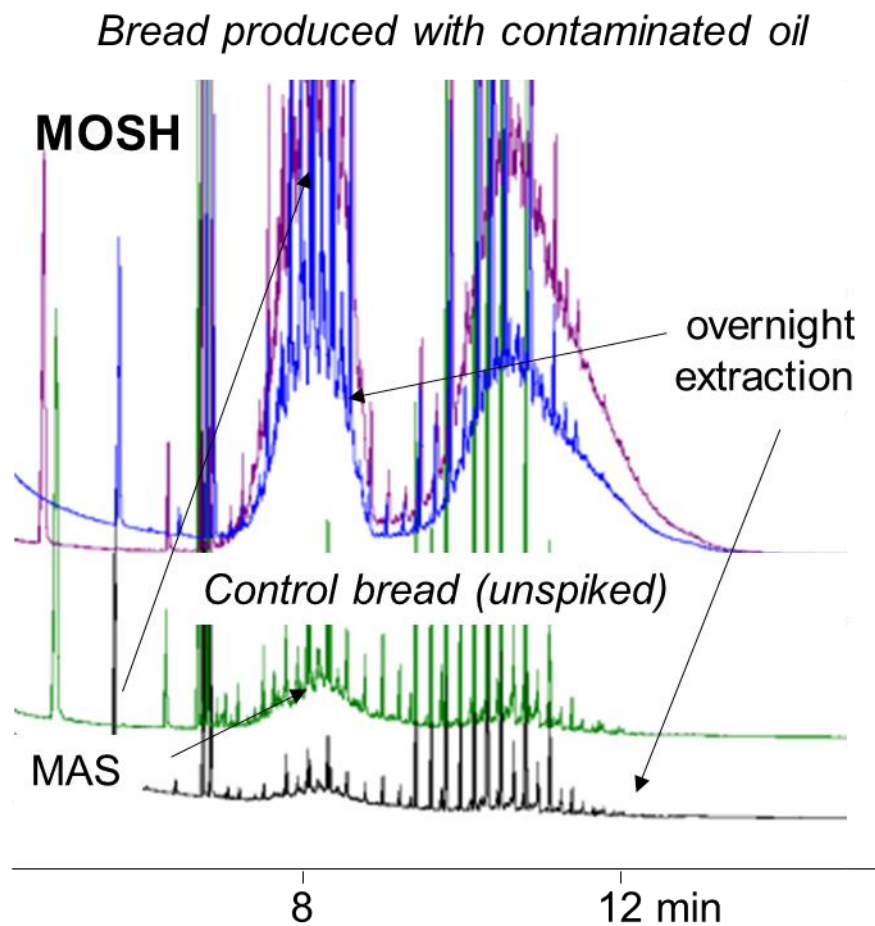


Fig. 4

