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Table of contents

Session 1. Pest prevention during storage and transportation

| | |
|---|-------|
| Molecular methods for the detection and identification of pest insects in stored grain <i>Nuria Agustí, Lidia del Arco, Cristina Castañé and Jordi Riudavets</i> | 1-5 |
| Advances in remote monitoring for stored product pests <i>James Feston, Samantha Kiever, Pat Kelley, Ethan Estabrook</i> | 6-11 |
| Large-scale acoustic detection of beetles in grain storage using the “Beetle Sound Tube”-System <i>Christina Müller-Blenkle, Ulrich Simon, Isabell Szallies, Sabine Prozell, Matthias Schöller, Cornel S. Adler</i> | 12-17 |
| Parameters for appraising the storage quality of paddy rice <i>Shlomo Navarro, Hagit Navarro, Nadav Inbari</i> | 18-23 |
| Pilot project for monitoring stored-product pest insects inside and outside grain storages in Germany <i>Benjamin Fürstenau</i> | 24-28 |
| Navel orangeworm <i>Amyelois transitella</i> (Walker) (Lepidoptera, Pyralidae) found in Europe, a potential Union quarantine pest <i>Pasquale Trematerra</i> | 29-30 |
| Detection of khapra beetle (<i>Trogoderma granarium</i> Everts) and other insects associated with stored grains in Portugal – preliminary studies <i>Sonia Duarte, Graça Barros, Luísa Carvalho, Miguel Mourato, Maria Otília Carvalho</i> | 31-33 |
| Connected monitoring of beetles during grain storage to prevent proliferation <i>Marine Cabacos, Katell Crépon</i> | 34-40 |
| Seasonal visualization of insect behavior in a feed mill <i>Paraskevi Agrafioti, Evagelia Lampiri, Stathis Kaloudis, Philippos M. Ioannidis, Vasilis Chalkidis, Katerina Grigoriadou, Christos G. Athanassiou</i> | 41 |
| Development of a PCR-based method to discriminate between dead and living insect pests present in stored rice <i>Nuria Agustí, Lidia del Arco, Cristina Castañé and Jordi Riudavets</i> | 42-43 |
| Stored grain pests in India and their control <i>Ramneet Kaur</i> | 44 |

Session 2. Biology of stored product pests and diseases, insects as food

- Linking the behavioral response by stored product insects
to emissions of microbial volatiles from grain
*William R. Morrison, Marco A. Ponce, Petra Sierra, Sandra Lizarraga,
Taylor van Winkle, Avery James, Erin D. Scully, Tania N. Kim* 46-47
- Short-term spatial niche partitioning in single-layer grain columns
between the larger grain borer and maize weevil
with implications for management of stored maize
Hannah Quellhorst, Tania Kim, Kun Yan Zhu., William Robert III Morrison 48
- Population growth of *Prostephanus truncatus* (Horn) (Coleoptera: Bostrychidae)
in a wide range of temperatures: Does the geographic origin of a strain
affect its development and progeny production capacity?
*Georgia V. Baliota, Eleni Papadimitriou, Erin D. Scully,
Christos G. Athanassiou* 49-52
- Parental acclimation reduces offspring thermal fitness
in the postharvest insect species *Sitotroga cerealella* (Olivier)
Precious Mpofo, Honest Machekano, Casper Nyamukondiwa 53-58
- Influence of lateralization on male mating success of *Tribolium castaneum* (Herbst)
and *Tenebrio molitor* L. (Coleoptera: Tenebrionidae)
*Maria C. Boukouvala, Donato Romano, Nickolas G. Kavallieratos,
Cesare Stefanini, Angelo Canale, Giovanni Benelli* 59-63
- Are trypsin inhibitors responsible for the suitability of different legumes
for *Acanthocelides obtectus* development?
*Sonja Gvozdenac, Aleksandra Ilić, Mirjana Vasić, Nevena Nagl,
Dejan Prvulović, Gordana Petrović, Snežana Tanasković, Filip Vukajlović* 64-70
- Strain effect on the development and mating compatibility of *Tenebrio molitor* L.
(Coleoptera: Tenebrionidae)
*Christina Adamaki-Sotiraki, Christos I. Rumbos, David Deruytter,
Christos G. Athanassiou* 71-76
- Red flour beetle and the paradigm of edible pests
*Sonia Duarte, Henrique Geirinhas, João Limao, Liliana Pires,
Graça Barros, Luisa Louro, Isabel de Sousa, Miguel Mourato,
Maria Otilia Carvalho* 77-83
- The Mediterranean flour moth, the black soldier fly, and the yellow mealworm
for the bioconversion of different by-products of the agro-food industry
*Jordi Riudavets, Cristina Castañé, Lidia del Arco, Nuria Agustí,
Fatma Boukid, Massimo Castellari, Montse Martí,
Emma Martínez, Jordi Ariño* 84-86

| | |
|--|---------|
| Optimising mealworm rearing for stored product and edible insects' applications: the effect of wet feed <i>Christos I. Rumbos, Georgia V. Baliota, Christina Adamaki-Sotiraki, Korina Kotsouri, Marianna Rigopoulou, Christos G. Athanassiou</i> | 87-91 |
| Development of <i>Plodia interpunctella</i> and <i>Corcyra cephalonica</i> on cricket flour <i>Sara Savoldelli, Silvia de Milato, Daniela Lupi, Costanza Jucker</i> | 92-96 |
| Genomics tools to assess the usage of alternate habitats and landscapes by <i>Rhyzopertha dominica</i> (Coleoptera: Bostrichidae) <i>Erin D. Scully, Valerie Nguyen, Georgina Bingham, Charles Michael Smith, and Kun Yan Zhu</i> | 97-103 |
| Feeding preferences of <i>Rhyzopertha dominica</i> (Fabricius, 1792) (Coleoptera: Bostrichidae) in four Tunisian <i>Triticum durum</i> varieties <i>Tasnim Djebbi, Abir Soltani, Hadhami Chargui, Jouda Mediouni Ben Jemâa</i> | 104-110 |
| Effect of physical characteristics of winter wheat <i>Triticum aestivum</i> L. grains on the development of grain weevil <i>Sitophilus granarius</i> L. <i>Beata Gabryś, Krzysztof Jankowski, Bożena Kordan</i> | 111 |
| Development of the confused flour beetle <i>Tribolium confusum</i> Duv. on different products of millet <i>Panicum</i> sp. <i>Bożena Kordan, Krzysztof Jankowski, Beata Gabryś</i> | 112-113 |
| Foraging preference of cigarette beetle and rice weevil when dispersing to novel food patches with and without microbes <i>Marco A. Ponce, Tania N. Kim, Erin D. Scully, William R. Morrison III</i> | 114-115 |
| Susceptibility of different dried fruits to infestation by <i>Plodia interpunctella</i> (Lepidoptera: Pyralidae) in laboratory conditions <i>Filip Vukajlović, Dragana Predojević, Sonja Gvozdenac, Snežana Tanasković, Vesna Perišić, Ana Mitrovski Bogdanović, Snežana Pešić</i> | 116-120 |

Session 3. Biological control, mating disruption and natural products

| | |
|--|---------|
| Control of the maize weevil, <i>Sitophilus zeamais</i> , with the larval parasitoid <i>Anisopteromalus calandrae</i> in big bags of paddy rice <i>Cristina Castañé, José Miguel Campos, María Teresa Martínez, Lidia del Arco, Nuria Agustí, Jordi Riudavets</i> | 122-124 |
| <i>Cephalonomia tarsalis</i> , a promising parasitoid for the control of the sawtoothed grain beetle <i>Lidia del Arco, Jordi Riudavets, Cristina Castañé</i> | 125-126 |

| | |
|---|---------|
| Detection of the chemical defenses of <i>Callosobruchus maculatus</i> when <i>Anisopteromalus calandrae</i> is used as a biological control agent in stored chickpeas <i>Rey Iturralde-García, Paola Velázquez-Rodríguez,</i> <i>Ricardo González-Vega, César Otero-León, María Moreno-Vásquez,</i> <i>Lizette Del-Toro-Sánchez and Ariadna Bernal-Mercado</i> | 127-128 |
| Application of nuclear techniques for the improvement of mass rearing of parasitoids for implementing biological control of pests <i>Md. Mahbub Hasan, Lubna Yeasmin</i> | 129-133 |
| Influence of mating disruption treatments on male and female <i>Plodia interpunctella</i> behaviour <i>James F. Campbell, Alison R. Gerken, Danielle Dryer</i> | 134-135 |
| Female Indianmeal moths, <i>Plodia interpunctella</i> , respond to synthetic pheromone by altering their behavior <i>Alison R. Gerken, Shelby R. Abts, Danielle Dryer, James F. Campbell</i> | 136-141 |
| Potential use of different strains of entomopathogenic fungi to control store grain insect pests red flour beetle (<i>Tribolium castaneum</i>) (Tenebrionidae: Coleoptera) <i>Shahbaz Ahmad and Samreen Gul</i> | 142 |
| Mating disruption of <i>Ephestia</i> sp. and <i>Plodia interpunctella</i> in a feed mill <i>Paraskevi Agrafioti, Philipos M. Ioannidis, Evagelia Lampiri,</i> <i>Stathis Kaloudis, Vasilis Chalkidis, Christos G. Athanassiou</i> | 143 |
| Interaction between <i>T. castaneum</i> and mycotoxin-producing fungi present in milled grains <i>Sónia Duarte, Carolina Hilário, Joana Tomás, Paula Alvito,</i> <i>Ricardo Boavida, Ana Magro, Maria Otilia Carvalho</i> | 144-148 |
| Insecticidal potential of <i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i> essential oil against <i>Cryptolestes ferrugineus</i> and its impact on sensory parameters of semolina <i>Abir Soltani, Tasnim Djebbi, Imen Mathlouthi, Abir Haddad,</i> <i>Insaf Sadraoui-Ajmi, Islem Yangui, Jouda Mediouni Ben Jemâa</i> | 149-153 |
| Efficacy of some botanical oils against the maize weevil, <i>Sitophilus zeamais</i> <i>Mistouriath Zakari-Toure, Nesrin Ormanoğlu, Büşra Şahin,</i> <i>Ahmet Güray Ferizli, Alper Gökbulut, Mevlüt Emekci</i> | 154-156 |
| Biological and insecticidal activity of different fennel chemotypes against stored-product insects <i>Benjamin Fürstenau, Patrick von Moltke</i> | 157-158 |

| | |
|--|---------|
| Mixing essential oil-based nanoemulsions: A step towards the generation of effective green grain protectants <i>Nickolas G. Kavallieratos, Erifili P. Nika, Anna Skourti, Diego Romano Perinelli, Eleonora Spinuzzi, Giulia Bonacucina, Loredana Cappellacci, Mohammad Reza Morshedloo, Angelo Canale, Giovanni Benelli, Filippo Maggi</i> | 159-164 |
| Public acceptance regarding the use of diatomaceous earth for the protection of stored agricultural products <i>Christina Kleisiari, George Kleftodimos, Georgia V. Baliota, Christos G. Athanassiou, George Vlontzos and Dimitrios Kateris</i> | 165-170 |
| Evaluation of graphene for the control of stored product insects <i>Evagelia Lampiri, Ioannis Charalambos Moisidis, Maria K. Sakka, Ramesh Karanguran, Dusan Losic, Christos G. Athanassiou</i> | 171-175 |
| New attractants for trapping the cigarette beetle: from laboratory to field application <i>Salvatore Guarino, Pompeo Suma, Ezio Peri</i> | 176-182 |
| Efficacy of inert dusts and plant powders against <i>Sitophilus oryzae</i> adults under laboratory conditions <i>Tanja Bohinc, Jerneja Jelnikar, Luka Batistič, Stanislav Trdan</i> | 183-189 |
| Improving the storage life of carrots by using natural products <i>Simona Chrapačienė, Lina Dėnė, Neringa Rasiukevičiūtė, Alma Valiuškaitė</i> | 190-193 |
| Using of botanical repellent extracts for protection of food packaging <i>Tomas Vendl, Radek Aulicky, Vaclav Stejskal</i> | 194-198 |
| Session 4. Chemical pest control | |
| Overview of insecticide formulations used against storage pests <i>Vaclav Stejskal, Tomas Vendl, Radek Aulicky</i> | 200-205 |
| Resistance here, resistance there, resistance everywhere! – a dispute about phosphine and its use in the light of best management practice <i>M.-Carolin Götze, Maria Sakka, Paraskevi Agrafioti, Christos G. Athanassiou</i> | 206-209 |
| Real time monitoring of phosphine and insect mortality in different storage facilities <i>Vasilis Sotiroudas, Paraskevi Agrafioti, Efstathios Kaloudis, Sotiris Bantas, Christos G. Athanassiou</i> | 210 |

| | |
|---|---------|
| Minimizing resistance in stored grains with web-based real-time phosphine concentration monitoring <i>Dennis Glennon</i> | 211-213 |
| Concentration-time relationships in phosphine fumigation on different species and strains: the UTH protocol <i>Paraskevi Agrafioti, Vasilis Sotiroudas, Sotiris Bantas, Christos G. Athanassiou</i> | 214-216 |
| HPLC methods for quantifying depositions from aerosol pesticide applications <i>Daniel Brabec, Amie Norton, Michael Tilley, Deanna Scheff</i> | 217-223 |
| Immediate and delayed efficacy of phosphine on different life stages of <i>Alphitobius diaperinus</i> Panzer and <i>Tenebrio molitor</i> L. (Coleoptera: Tenebrionidae) <i>Marina Gourgouta, Christos G. Athanassiou</i> | 224-228 |
| Sustainable storage of grains by implementing a novel protectant and versatile application technology <i>Anna Kósa-Tass, Dániel Bajomi, János Szilagyi, Frederic Verwilghen</i> | 229 |
| Evaluation of the use of ProFume [®] fumigant (sulfuryl fluoride) on dried/cured tobacco leaf in storage facilities <i>Barbara Nead-Nylander, Ellen Thoms, Wiley Hall, Vernon Schmidt</i> | 230-234 |
| Development of a scrubber for removal of sulfuranyl fluoride following fumigation <i>Barbara Nead-Nylander, Spencer Walse, Stephen Corbett, Janet Rowley, Stan Buckley</i> | 235-237 |
| Evaluating Spinosad for use as a contact insecticide in grain bins and warehouses – A 12-month study <i>Deanna S. Scheff, James F. Campbell</i> | 238-242 |
| Fumigation of edible cut flowers with ethyl formate mixed with CO ₂ <i>Hagit Navarro, Shlomo Navarro, Nadav Inbari</i> | 243-248 |
| Insecticidal efficacy of contact insecticides, applied in surfaces against two major stored-product insects <i>Paraskevi Agrafioti, Marina Gourgouta, Dimitrios Kateris, Dionysis Bochtis, Christos G. Athanassiou</i> | 249 |
| Evaluation of the occurrence of resistance in important species of storage pests to insecticides <i>Radek Aulicky, Barbora Frydova, Tomas Vendl, Vaclav Stejskal</i> | 250-254 |
| Web based fenceline phosphine monitoring validates bystander safety in commercial operations with buffer zone integrity confirmed <i>Dennis Glennon</i> | 255-256 |

| | |
|---|---------|
| Hydrogen cyanide-based fumigant (BLUEFUME®): Overview of formulations, registrations, and efficacy <i>Jonas Hnatek, Eva Travnickova, Jana Lebedova, Radek Aulicky, Vaclav Stejskal</i> | 257-262 |
| Fumigation modelling of hopper-bottom railcars <i>Efstathios Kaloudis, Daniel Brabec, Paraskevi Agrafioti, Christos G. Athanassiou, James Campbell, Deanna S. Scheff, Sotiris Bantas, Vasilis Sotiroudas</i> | 263-269 |
| Development and application of molecular diagnostics for monitoring phosphine resistance in major stored product pests <i>Konstantinos Mavridis, Maria K. Sakka, Maria Riga, Kyriaki Maria Papapostolou, John Vontas, Christos G. Athanassiou</i> | 270 |
| Entomocomplex during storage, species composition of pests, methods of regulating their numbers <i>Svitlana Mostoviak, Ivan Mostoviak</i> | 271-275 |
| New evidence of phosphine resistance in stored product insects in Israel <i>Elazar Quinn, Aharon Rubin, Aviv Rapaport, Anatoly Trostanetsky, Ariel Menahem, Daphna Gottlieb</i> | 276-280 |
| Session 5. Physical control, modified atmospheres | |
| Efficacy of moderate heat against all stages of the tobacco beetle <i>Lasioderma serricorne</i> at controlled humidity <i>Cornel Adler</i> | 282-287 |
| Cold tolerance of stored product beetles; implications on low temperature-based commodity disinfestation <i>Honest Machezano, Precious Mpofo, Casper Nyamukondiwa</i> | 288-294 |
| Instrumentation for monitoring shocks suffered by a big-bag filled with seeds <i>Louis Labrot-Rhodes, Éric Campo, Pierre Poujaud</i> | 295-301 |
| Monitoring rice storability using carbon dioxide and relative humidity sensors in gastight storage <i>Melanie B. Ocreto, Lei Anne P. Fuertes</i> | 302-307 |
| Why conventional disinfestation processes are problematic! <i>Thorsten Roth</i> | 308-313 |
| Insecticidal effect of nitrogen on stored-product beetle populations with different susceptibility levels to phosphine in commercial chambers and silos <i>Maria K. Sakka, Christos G. Athanassiou</i> | 314-319 |

| | |
|---|---------|
| Evaluation of the Ekomille® CO ₂ device as an animal welfare suppression system for rodent pests' management <i>Giuseppe Spina</i> | 320-326 |
| Controlled atmosphere as quarantine treatments for California nuts <i>Spencer S. Walse and Adelaine E. Abrams</i> | 327-332 |
| Controlled atmosphere with CO ₂ as an alternative to phosphine treatment for pest control in dried figs <i>María José Pons, Ramón Sempere, Jordi Mallén, Sonia Guri</i> | 333 |
| Practical test on the entomological efficacy of treatment in a protective modified atmosphere (MAP) using carbon dioxide (CO ₂) in big bags <i>Paolo Guerra, Lorenzo Moschini, Gianni Conti</i> | 334-340 |
| The "circular" and eco-sustainable disinfestation to counter Arthropods in food industry and poultry farms through high temperatures obtained from electric air heaters connected to generators powered by biomethane <i>Paolo Guerra, Chiara Montanari, Lorenzo Moschini, Gianni Conti</i> | 341-346 |
| Biorational CO ₂ fumigation of sunflower and common bean: insecticidal potential and effect on seed vitality and quality <i>Sonja Gvozdenac, Miloš Krstić, Aleksandra Ilić, Jelena Ovuka, Tijana Zeremski, Biljana Radović, Dejan Prvulović</i> | 347-351 |
| Effectiveness of high CO ₂ or N ₂ modified atmospheres packaging on the control of <i>Zabrotes subfasciatus</i> in stored beans <i>Rey Iturralde-García, César Campaña-Chavarría, Fátima Méndez-Mayboca, César Otero-León, Guillermo Arteaga, Jesús Borboa-Flores and Francisco Wong-Corral</i> | 352-353 |
| Effect of CO ₂ on the mortality and fecundity of <i>Callosobruchus chinensis</i> (Coleoptera: Chrysomelidae) <i>Francisco J. Wong-Corral, Luz Raquel Bourne-Murrieta, Rey D. Iturralde-García, Cristina Castañé, Jordi Riudavets</i> | 354-358 |

Are trypsin inhibitors responsible for the suitability of different legumes for *Acanthoscelides obtectus* development?

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Abstract: Legumes represent a valuable source of proteins in human and animal nutrition, as well as of different nutrients. Also, they enable diversification of agroecosystems and can be considered climate smart crops. Therefore, they are gaining importance in both developed and developing countries. The most important, and often limiting factor in legume production is the presence of the bean weevil (*Acanthoscelides obtectus*). This work tested the suitability of three different legume species, i. e. common bean, grass pea and faba bean (two accessions of each species) with growing interest in human nutrition, for the development and population growth of this pest, with special emphasis on the levels of anti-nutritive compounds – trypsin inhibitors. The suitability was assessed based on the progeny production after each month. The development and progeny production were significantly affected by the legume species, but also by the accessions. The highest number of emerged adults was on common bean, while the lowest regardless on observation period, was on faba bean, indicating its low suitability for weevil development. Correlation analysis detected significant influence of the level of trypsin inhibitors on progeny production.

Key words: bean weevil, common bean, faba bean, grass pea, progeny production, anti-nutritive compounds.

Introduction

Distributed worldwide, the legume family has a significant role in total agricultural turnover. Common bean (*Phaseolus vulgaris* L.) is among the most important crops for human consumption. For people in developing countries, it is usually the only source of proteins, fibres and other nutrients (Broughton et al., 2003). Besides common bean, two other legumes, faba bean (*Vicia faba* L.) and grass pea (*Lathyrus sativus* L.) were traditionally used by the local people. However, these two species are denoted as less cultivated and neglected. Some efforts are being made towards their reintroduction in cultivation and use because they meet the basic dietary needs of millions of people and animals around the world thanks to high protein, carbohydrate, fibre, and micronutrients contents. Also, these two species are getting more attention from producers and consumers due to their unimpaired nutritional and medicinal value, as well as a better tolerance to adverse environments (Multari et al., 2015; Ramya et al., 2022). Common bean, grass pea and faba bean enable diversification of agroecosystems and

can be considered climate smart crops. Thus, they are important components in sustainable cropping systems (Pathania et al., 2014).

Legume production is often limited by insect pests, and major losses are caused by the bean weevil, *Acanthoscelides obtectus* (Say) (Coleoptera: Bruchinae). This is a serious pest of several legumes worldwide that infests different hosts in the fields and storages (Vuts et al., 2018). Larvae feed inside kernels and cause quantitative damages by reducing seed weight, as well as qualitative losses by reducing the physiological quality and germination capacity. Also, their presence increases temperature and moisture content in a seed bulk and spoils the seeds purity with insect residues (Faroni and Sousa, 2006). Although the main host of this pest is *Phaseolus vulgaris* L., the bean weevil may adapt to different non-host legumes including grass pea (*Lathyrus* sp.) and faba bean (*Vicia faba*) (Labeyrie and Hossaert, 1985; Hamraoui and Regnault-Roger, 1995). Nonetheless, some leguminous species have developed a certain degree of resistance against insect pests. One of the “strategies” is the production of anti-nutritive compounds, such as protease inhibitors (PI) that may play defence role against insect pests (Alizadeh and Leung, 2011; Bhattacharjee et al., 2012). Production of PIs is one of the naturally occurring defence mechanisms in plants, which adversely affect protein digestion. PIs cause reduction in the availability of essential amino acids and exert physiologic stress on insects leading to growth retardation (War et al., 2012). PIs in legumes are one of the most promising weapons that confer resistance against insects by inhibiting proteases present in the gut of insect larvae (Jalalia et al., 2014). Also, they have the potential to be used in breeding programs to enhance the seed tolerance to storage pests.

There are some studies that are referring to the bean weevil bionomy, ecology and suppression. However, there is a lack of studies on its preference and biochemical bases for specific species tolerance to this pest. This work aimed to test the suitability of three different legumes with growing interest for human nutrition (common bean, faba bean, and grass pea), for the development of the bean weevil and progeny production, as well as the influence of trypsin inhibitors (PIs) level on legume preference and/or tolerance to this pest.

Materials and methods

Commodities and tests

The development of the bean weevil (*A. obtectus*) and progeny production was assessed on different legume species and accessions common bean (KP114 and KP139), faba bean (KVF4 and KVF19) and grass pea (KL4 and KL12), in a “no-choice” test. The legume accessions were chosen as the most typical representatives of the legume species (typical seed weights, shapes, and colours within the respective species). Seeds were not treated with pesticides and were exposed to -80 °C for 30 min to eliminate potential pests and fungi.

Experimental protocol

The laboratory population of the bean weevil was reared under laboratory conditions in glass jars (5L), on the common bean variety “Belko”, at a constant temperature of 26 ± 2 °C, 50 % air humidity and at light regime 16:8 (day/night), as described by Szentesi (1972). Newly emerged adults (60 specimens per jar) were placed in separate jars on each legume (500 g) and were let to develop for four months (120 days). The jars with weevils were incubated in a climatic chamber during the entire experiment, under the same conditions as for the rearing of the parenteral population. After each month, the number of newly emerged weevils (progeny production) was counted and let further to develop. The experiment was set in four replicates.

The trypsin inhibitor activity (TIA)

TIA assay was based on the hydrolysis of N- α -benzoyl-DL-arginine-p-nitroaniline by trypsin as described by Kakade et al. (1974). Procedure for TIA testing was carried out using microtiter plate method with assay conditions described by Liu and Markakis (1989) and modified by Župunski et al. (2018). Absorbance of reaction mixtures were measured using photometer, at a wavelength of 410 nm (Multiskan Ascent microplate photometer, Thermo Fisher Scientific). Trypsin inhibitor activity has been defined as trypsin units inhibited per mg of sample.

Statistical analysis

The differences in progeny production (number of emerged adults) were analysed using one way ANOVA and Bonferroni test (95% confidence interval). The dependence of progeny production on trypsin inhibitors activity was analysed using correlation analysis in statistical software SPSS 21 (2018).

Results

The progeny production of the bean weevil was significantly affected by the legume species on which the development occurred (Table 1), as well as by the accession. The number of emerged adults after each month, varied significantly among legume species and accessions ($F_{3,12} = 1087,10^{**}$; $2321,91^{**}$; $5433,61^{**}$ and $7034,35^{**}$, $P < 0.000$; respectively; Figure 1). Significantly higher number of weevils emerged on the common bean and grass pea, regardless on the observed periods. The recorded average number of weevils on KP139 was 81.5 after the first month, 265 after the second, 748 after the third and 1236 after fourth month, while on KP192 it was 84.6, 199, 705 and 1067, respectively. On the grass pea, variety KL12, the average number of weevil specimens was 95.7, after the first month, 289 after the second, 783.5 after the third and 1312.5 specimens after fourth month. For variety KL4, the number of emerged adults was 80, 187, 657 and 843.5, respectively. Nevertheless, the total number of emerged adults did not significantly differ between the common bean and grass pea after the first month, but it was significantly different after two, three and four months (Figure 1).

Table 1. Activity of trypsin inhibitors.

| Seed species | Variety | TIA (TU/mg) |
|----------------|--------------|----------------|
| common bean | KP139 | 38.01 d |
| | KP192 | 47.02 c |
| grass pea | KL12 | 32.00 e |
| | KL4 | 52.17 c |
| faba bean | KVF4 | 63.34 b |
| | KVF19 | 71.01 a |
| F value | | 156.08** |

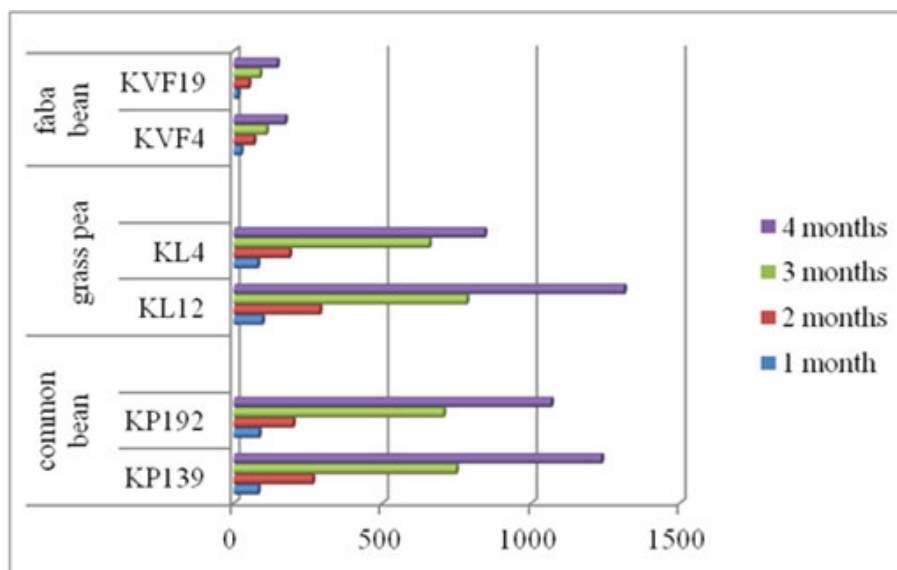


Figure 1. Bean weevil development on different legumes after one, two, three and four months.

The lowest total number of emerged bean weevils, regardless the observation period was on both accessions of faba bean. On KVF4 the average number of weevils was 8 after the first month, 67 after the second, 109 after the third and 172.3 after fourth month. On KVF19 the average number of specimens was 5, 50, 87 and 145.5, respectively.

According to Szentesi (2020) the bean weevil is an oligophagous species feeding on plants within the tribe Phaseoleae (Fabaceae) that comprises *Phaseolus*, *Glycine*, *Lablab* and *Vigna* genera. Occasional observations were made on other legume genera such as *Lupinus*, *Cicer*, *Vicia*, *Lens* and *Lathyrus* (Jarry and Bonet, 1982; Hamraoui and Regnault-Roger, 1995). On seeds of preferred hosts, under favourable conditions, practically every larva becomes an adult, but on non-host and acceptable non-host seeds, such as the faba bean, only a very small percentage of the young larvae reach maturity (Larson and Fisher, 1938). Our results support these findings since the lowest number of adults emerged from the faba bean seeds, regardless on the observation period, and the population growth was the lowest thorough the entire experiment. Several authors (Cronin and Abrahamson, 2001; Zhang and Liu, 2006) noted that some species belonging to the acceptable non host group like *Vicia* sp. (faba bean included) and *Lathyrus* sp. (grass pea included), allowed larval development at some extent. However, the seeds of genus *Lathyrus* were preferent and more suitable for the bean weevil development, while the development was much lower on seeds of *Vicia* species, as also proven in our work.

The highest activity of TI was detected in both faba bean varieties (Table 1), while the lowest was on grass pea variety KL12 (32.00) and common bean KP139 (38.01).

The correlation analysis indicates a strong negative correlation between the activity of TI and the number of emerged adults after all four months. Pearson's correlation coefficient is significant after the first month (-0.919*), and highly significant after the second (-0.985**), third (-0.923**) and fourth months (-0.968**). Results indicate that the increase in the activity of TI causes reduced progeny production, deduced from the number of emerged adults after each observation period. The correlation is more expressed after the second, third and fourth month, which implies reduced fitness of the bean weevil population.

This is the first report on the influence of trypsin inhibitors activity in legume varieties and species on the bean weevil progeny production. We can speculate that a lower bean weevil development and progeny production on faba bean was due to biochemical characteristics including level of trypsin inhibitors. Other important factors (chemicals, further physical, environmental, life-history traits, mobility, predators, host genotype, etc.) that influence host selection (de la Masselière et al., 2017) were not investigated in this work, and will be studied in further investigations. Mickel and Standish (1947) reported that the larvae of certain insect species were unable to normally develop on soybean products, due to the presence of TIs, while Lipke et al. (1954) reported the same for larvae of the flour beetle, *Tribolium confusum*. Following these previous studies, there have been many examples of protease inhibitors activity against different insect species (Koiwa et al., 1998). Opposite results were presented by Guzmán Maldonado (1996). Namely, when testing seeds of 17 common bean varieties for resistance to *A. obtectus* under no-choice and free-choice conditions, no correlations were found with seed hardness, coat thickness, tannins, protein content or trypsin inhibitor activity.

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