Food allergens: screening analysis of soybean and peanut by ELISA, real-time PCR and digital PCR

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Introduction

In Europe, soybean and peanut are two of the fourteen substances that must be labeled according to Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 and checked using analytical methods that ensure adequate sensitivity and specificity. The available methods for food allergens detection and quantification are proteomic, immunological and DNA-based tests such as mass spectrometry (MS), enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) and lateral flow devices, polymerase chain reaction (PCR), respectively, and related drawbacks (1-3).

Many studies about the detection of food allergens were focused on qPCR results, and there are no available data on ddPCR. The aim of the study was to evaluate the performances of different screening methods for various food matrices.

Methods

Three different screening methods were used for various food matrices: ELISA, real-time PCR (qPCR), and droplet digital PCR (ddPCR).

The development of DNA-based tests consisted in several steps:
- evaluation of optimal test portion
- assessment and validation of DNA extraction method
- selection of target DNA sequences (four for both peanut and soybean)
- optimization and verification of qPCR methods
- application of selected protocols in ddPCR (one for peanut and two for soybean)
- analysis of market samples.

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PCR system</th>
<th>Peanut</th>
<th>Soybean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ddPCR</td>
<td>Arach2-PG</td>
<td>Biotecon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qPCR</td>
<td>Arach2-PG</td>
<td>Biotecon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market samples</td>
<td>copy n.</td>
<td>mean Cq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spike1 1000ppm</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spike2 100ppm</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spike3 10ppm</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spike4 1ppm</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tested qPCR and ddPCR methods exhibit same sensitivity, furthermore the droplet digital PCR was useful to identify a non-specific soybean target, which was not detectable using real-time PCR with hydrolysis probes.

Discussion

The applied technologies can also provide quantitative results for peanut and soybean allergens, even though not required according to the current European legislation. Anyhow, a quantitative evaluation of the protein fractions eliciting allergic reactions could be useful and appropriate.

The results of this study show the potentiality of digital PCR as allergen analysis and provide a future chance to screen simultaneously several targets maintaining a high specificity, without losing sensitivity such as in multiplex real-time PCR.

Acknowledgments

The study was supported by Italian Ministry of Health grant IZSUMB 07/2014 RC (Study and control of food allergens: development and evaluation of a confirmatory biomolecular method).

References

1. Amjad Iqbal et al. (2016) Allergens of Arachis hypogaea and the effect of processing on their detection by ELISA. Food & nutrition research