Functional Foods Baseline and Requirements Analysis

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OBJECTIVES

Current spaceflight foods were evaluated to determine if their nutrient profile supports positioning as a functional food and if the stability of the bioactive compound within the food matrix over an extended shelf-life correlated with the expected storage duration during the mission. Specifically, the research aims were:

Aim A. To determine the amount of each nutrient in representative spaceflight foods immediately after processing and at predetermined storage time to establish the current nutritional state.

Aim B. To identify the requirements to develop foods that stabilize these nutrients such that required concentrations are maintained in the space food system throughout long duration missions (up to five years).

Aim C. To coordinate collaborations with health and performance groups that may require functional foods as a countermeasure.

KEY CONCEPTS

Functional foods, according to the American Dietetic Association, include whole foods and fortified, enriched, or enhanced foods that have a potentially beneficial effect on health when consumed as part of a varied diet on a regular basis, at effective levels.


The unavailability of fresh foods, fruits, and vegetables in the spaceflight food system makes it critical to understand the stability and capability to deliver bioactive compounds (carotenoids, flavonoids, phenolic acids and tannins) in a shelf-stable food system over time.

Intra and Mohamad (2012) showed that thermal processing degrades most flavonoids and that freeze-drying was less aggressive that hot air drying but still resulted in flavonoid losses.


METHODS

A prospective list of spaceflight foods, thermo-stabilized and freeze-dried, was generated. The foods were pulled just after production, taken from inventory if the items were less than 3 months old, or specially produced in a smaller batch and freeze-dried to spaceflight specifications in the Space Food System Lab. The tested food items are listed in Table 1.

Food samples were sent to the Food Composition Laboratory of the Linus Pauling Institute at Oregon State University (Corvallis, OR) for bioactive compound analysis. The following tests were conducted:

- Vitamin K (HPLC)
- Vitamin E (HPLC)
- Vitamin C (HPLC)
- Carotenoids (HPLC)
- Sterols (HPLC)
- Phenolic, anthocyanin and antioxidants (Spectrophotometric, HPLC)
- Mineral analysis (ICP)

SHELF LIFE STUDIES

Duplicate samples of the food were placed in 4°C, 21°C, and 35°C environmental chambers within the Space Food Laboratory for storage. After 3 months of storage, samples were pulled from each chamber and submitted for repeat analysis.

The stability assessment of the bioactive compounds will proceed over the course of two years. At the one-year storage time point, each food will be pulled from the 4°C, 21°C and 35°C chamber and undergo repeat analysis. Food stored at 4°C and 21°C will be analyzed again at the two-year time point.

RESULTS

Antioxidant Capability

The twelve foods of the study varied significantly in their FRAP antioxidant measurements at the initial time point with Strawberries having the highest antioxidant value of the next highest food. The comparison benchmark, cultivated strawberries FRAP value, is taken from Carlson and others (2010).

Sterols

The sterol content of spaceflight food do not approach the required levels of cardiovascular benefit but initial concentrations are within the range of published values of sterol content in food (Almond 138.4 mg – Spinach 10.2 mg/100 g)

Flavonoids

The initial results showed that the flavonoid quantities are contributed as follows: Strawberries > Granola with Blueberries > Cherry Blueberry Cobbler > Sweet and Savory Kale

Carotenoids

The initial results showed that the carotenoid quantities are contributed as follows: Salmon in the pouch had the greatest concentration of omega-3 in the spaceflight foods, followed by the Oatmega bar. High concentrations of alpha-omega-3 were found in some spaceflight foods, but conversion of ALA to EPA and DHA is very low. There was degradation of EPA and DHA during storage as shown in Figures 4 and 5.

CONCLUSIONS

The ability to provision high-phenolics, high-carotenoids, or high-omega-3 foods within the spaceflight food system was demonstrated by the identification of the target foods and their initial chemical analysis during the first months of storage. Samples continue under controlled storage and nutrient content will be assessed after one and two years of shelf-life.

- Fish products on the space menu are very limited, therefore omega-3 concentrations are limited.
- The use of foods for health benefit in space could be a challenge with the current menu.
- The identification of foods with high bioactive compound concentrations highlighted the fact that the ISS provisioning menu likely does not have a variety of foods with these compounds.