



The effect of succinate dehydrogenase inhibitor/azole mixtures on selection of Zymoseptoria tritici isolates with reduced sensitivity

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Accepted Version

Dooley, H., Shaw, M. W., Spink, J. and Kildea, S. (2016) The effect of succinate dehydrogenase inhibitor/azole mixtures on selection of Zymoseptoria tritici isolates with reduced sensitivity. *Pest Management Science*, 72 (6). pp. 1150-1159. ISSN 1526-4998 doi: <https://doi.org/10.1002/ps.4093> Available at <http://centaur.reading.ac.uk/41770/>

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To link to this article DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ps.4093>

Publisher: Wiley

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1 **Detection of SDHI insensitivity in a *Zymoseptoria tritici* field**
2 **population carrying the *SdhC*-H152R and *SdhD*-R47W**
3 **substitutions**

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5 Hilda Dooley^{ab}, Mike W Shaw^b, Jeanne Mehenni-Ciz^a, John Spink^a and Steven Kildea^a

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7 ^a*Department of Crop Science, TEAGASC Crops, Environment and Land Use Programme, Oak*
8 *Park, Carlow, Rep. of Ireland*

9 ^b*School of Agriculture, Policy and Development, University of Reading, Whiteknights,*
10 *Reading, RG6 6AR, UK.*

11 Email: stephen.kildea@teagasc.ie

12 Tel: +353 59 9170288

13 **Abstract**

14 BACKGROUND: Succinate dehydrogenase inhibitor fungicides are important in the
15 management of *Zymoseptoria tritici* in wheat. New active ingredients from this group of
16 fungicides have been introduced recently and are widely used. Because the fungicides act at a
17 single enzyme site, resistance development in *Z. tritici* is classified as medium-to-high risk.

18 RESULTS: Isolates from Irish experimental plots in 2015 were tested against the SDHI
19 penthiopyrad during routine monitoring. The median of the population was approximately 2 x
20 less sensitive than the median of the baseline population. Two of the 93 isolates were much

1 less sensitive to penthiopyrad than least sensitive of the baseline isolates. These isolates were
2 also insensitive to most of commercially available SDHIs. Analysis of the succinate
3 dehydrogenase coding genes confirmed the presence of the substitutions *SdhC*-H152R and
4 *SdhD*-R47W in the very insensitive isolates.

5 CONCLUSION: This is the first report showing that the *SdhC*-H152R mutation detected in
6 laboratory mutagenesis studies also exists in the field. The function and relevance of this
7 mutation, combined with *SdhD*-R47W, still needs to be determined.

8 **1 Introduction**

9 Throughout north-western Europe, realising potential winter wheat yields is dependent on the
10 management of diseases, most notably septoria tritici blotch (STB). Caused by the ascomycete
11 pathogen *Zymoseptoria tritici* (synonym *Mycosphaerella graminicola*), STB can reduce yields
12 by up to 50%.¹ At present, control of STB is achieved through the timely application of
13 fungicides. In European *Z. tritici* populations, resistance to the QoI fungicides,^{2,3} in addition
14 to declining azole sensitivity,⁴ has developed over the last 10-15 years. Currently, control of
15 STB is heavily dependent on the succinate dehydrogenase inhibitors (SDHIs), azole mixtures,
16 and multi-site acting fungicides such as chlorothalonil and folpet, all of which are used in
17 combination. In addition to the loss of azole sensitivity, the future availability of azoles is in
18 doubt due to EU regulations,⁵ so STB control is expected to become increasingly reliant on the
19 SDHI fungicides. Five active ingredients from this group of fungicides are now registered in
20 northern Europe as foliar fungicides for use on cereals; bixafen, boscalid, fluxopyroxad,
21 isopyrazam and penthiopyrad.

22 SDHIs inhibit fungal respiration by disrupting the functioning of the succinate
23 dehydrogenase (*Sdh*) enzyme within the pathogens' mitochondria, and they provide a broad

1 spectrum of disease control in a wide range of crops including cereals.⁶ The specific nature of
2 this control does, however, pose risks for the development of resistance in the target pathogens,
3 and for this reason they are regarded as at a medium-to-high risk of resistance development.⁷
4 To date there are reported to be 12 plant pathogens of economic importance which have
5 developed some level of field resistance to the SDHIs, with resistance induced in an additional
6 two pathogens under laboratory conditions.⁸ Field resistance has resulted from mutations in
7 one or more of the *SdhB*, *SdhC* or *SdhD* subunits (*Sdh* enzyme). More than 27 different
8 mutations have been identified across these different pathogens, including alternative amino
9 acids at the same codon position, and depending on the pathogen, mutation and individual
10 active ingredient, resistance factors can vary from low to extremely high.⁶

11 To gain further insights into potential molecular mechanisms of resistance to the SDHIs
12 in *Z. tritici*, laboratory induced resistant mutants have been analysed by several groups.⁹⁻¹² In
13 those studies mutations in one or all of the three subunits were found and the most commonly
14 identified mutations included *SdhB*-H267Y, *SdhC*-A84V and *SdhC*-H152R. However, the
15 effects of the different mutations on sensitivity depended on the SDHI used and, in some
16 instances, on the genetic background of the *Z. tritici* isolates tested. Mutations at some of the
17 codons identified in the mutagenesis studies have been identified in field strains (*SdhB*-N225T,
18 *SdhC*-T79N, and *SdhC*-N86S) in different locations throughout north-western Europe,
19 although resistance factors have been reported to be low.⁸

20 In 2015, during monitoring of a *Z. tritici* field population from an experimental trial
21 against the SDHI penthiopyrad, isolates exhibiting decreased SDHI sensitivity were
22 discovered. A selection of isolates from that population was further examined and compared
23 to a larger collection, representing populations prior to the recent commercialisation of the 3rd
24 generation SDHI fungicides, to confirm their sensitivity and potential cause of insensitivity.

1 **2 Materials & Methods**

2 **2.1 Origin of strains**

3 Winter wheat plots of the variety Cordiale, treated with the SDHI penthiopyrad, the azole
4 prothioconazole or the multi-site folpet, were randomly sampled for *Z. tritici* infected leaves.
5 From these, 93 strains were isolated and their sensitivity to the SDHI fungicide penthiopyrad
6 determined as described by Dooley et al.¹³ Eight of these isolates were selected from that
7 collection based on sensitivity to penthiopyrad (Figure 1). Four were highly sensitive with
8 EC_{50} values within the baseline range (EC_{50} values < 1.6 mg/l), two had moderate sensitivity
9 (EC_{50} values slightly above the highest EC_{50} in the baseline range, > 1.6 mg/l) and two had low
10 sensitivity (EC_{50} values > 30 mg/l).

11 The baseline sensitivity was based on a collection of 209 field isolates from the years
12 2005-2010. Sample sizes were: 2005, $n = 26$; 2006, $n = 36$; 2007, $n = 19$; 2009, $n = 80$; 2010,
13 $n = 48$. Isolates came from commercial fields, representing 21 locations in Ireland, and four
14 locations in the UK for comparison. The UK isolates (courtesy of J. Blake, ADAS) were
15 collected in 2010 only.

16 **2.2 Fungicide sensitivity**

17 Sensitivity of the whole 2015 collection was determined to penthiopyrad initially, using a
18 microtitre plate assay as described by Dooley et al.¹³ Sensitivity of eight selected strains
19 representing the range of sensitivities present was determined to boscalid, bixafen, fluopyram,
20 fluxapyroxad, isopyrazam, and penthiopyrad using the same assay used for the initial screen
21 but with a greater range of test concentrations: from 0 to 100 mg/l with 12 dilutions, and plates
22 were replicated three times. The sensitivity of all baseline isolates was determined to the same
23 six SDHIs mentioned above using the same assay with appropriate concentration adjustments.

1 Following incubation, sensitivity of each isolate was determined by assessing fungal growth,
2 measured as light absorbance at 405 nm using Synergy-HT plate reader and Gen5™ microplate
3 software (BioTek Instruments, Inc., USA) and subsequently expressed as the fungicide
4 concentration inhibiting growth by 50% (EC₅₀) by fitting a logistic curve to percentage
5 inhibition data using XLfit (IDBS Inc., UK). Standard error was calculated for the EC₅₀ values
6 of the eight individual isolates.

7 All statistical analyses were carried out using GenStat V 14.1.0. For the baseline
8 collection the Shapiro-Wilk test was used to test for normality. A randomisation test was used
9 to estimate the probability that the two most insensitive isolates found would be found in the
10 2015 sample if there were actually a constant frequency in all samples.

11 **2.3 Sequence analysis of *SdhB*, *SdhC*, and *SdhD* subunits**

12 The DNA sequences of the eight isolates from 2015 and a subset of 96 isolates (46% of the
13 baseline collection) from the baseline collection were determined. Baseline isolates were
14 chosen based on their sensitivity (EC₅₀ value) to isopyrazam. From each of the five years 19
15 strains were chosen, six of which had low, seven had medium and six had high Isopyrazam
16 EC₅₀ values relative to that year's collection. DNA extraction, PCR amplification, sequencing
17 of each subunit and analysis was performed as previously described by Dooley et al.¹³ with the
18 exception that both forward and reverse primers were used to sequence the 2015 isolates.

19 **3 Results**

20 **3.1 Sensitivity of isolates**

21 A wide range of sensitivities to the SDHI fungicide penthiopyrad (between 0.02 and > 30 mg/l)
22 was observed amongst the 93 field isolates from 2015 (Figure 1). The median sensitivity of

1 the 2015 collection shifted towards EC₅₀ values about 50% greater than the baseline, from EC₅₀
2 values of 0.163 mg/l to 0.26 mg/l, and the distribution was bi-modal (Figure 1). The sensitivity
3 to the other SDHIs of the eight isolates tested further was, with the exception of fluopyram,
4 consistent with the response to penthiopyrad (Table 1). Isolates initially selected as highly
5 sensitive to penthiopyrad had sensitivities similar to the mean/median baseline sensitivity of
6 the other SDHIs, again with the exception of fluopyram (see Table 2 for baseline sensitivity).
7 Those with moderate sensitivity were individually within the baseline normal or skewed
8 normal distributions (see Table 2 for baseline sensitivity). The two isolates initially selected
9 as having very low sensitivity to penthiopyrad had high resistance factors (Table 1) and did not
10 lie in the original normal distributions, where applicable ($P < 0.001$ for EC₅₀ to all fungicides
11 except fluopyram on the null hypothesis of a normal distribution). Although both less sensitive
12 isolates were found in 2015, there is no convincing evidence for any increase in frequency in
13 the field since the start of commercial use of SDHI fungicides ($P = 0.094$ by direct calculation
14 or randomisation test). However, the 2015 sample distribution as a whole is less sensitive than
15 the baseline (Kolmogorov 2-sample test, $D = 0.31$, $P < 0.001$)

16 **3.2 Variation in the *Sdh* subunits of isolates**

17 In the eight isolates from 2015 only a single synonymous substitution was observed in the *SdhB*
18 subunit. A large number of variations were observed in the *SdhC* subunit, however only five
19 of these resulted in changes in the target protein (Table 1). The amino acid substitutions *SdhC*-
20 R13P, *SdhC*-N33T and *SdhC*-N34T had no observable impact on SDHI sensitivity as
21 measured; *SdhC*-N33T and *SdhC*-N34T were detected widely within the baseline collection
22 (Table 3); *SdhC*-N79T was detected in a single strain and associated with medium levels of
23 SDHI sensitivity. The isolates OP15.13 and OP15.15, both displaying high resistance factors

1 towards penthiopyrad and other SDHIs, contained the *SdhC*-H152R and *SdhD*-R47W
2 substitutions.

3 **4 Discussion**

4 The six 2015 isolates selected as moderately sensitive or highly sensitive were similar to
5 baseline isolates in both sensitivity and mutation spectrum. The *SdhC*-N79T mutation was
6 present in one of these moderately sensitive isolates, confirming the low resistance factors
7 previously reported by FRAC.⁸ The two isolates which had the mutations *SdhC*-H152R and
8 *SdhD*-R47W were extremely insensitive to all SDHIs, with the exception of fluopyram. This
9 cross-resistance amongst SDHIs was also seen in the baseline data (data not shown) and is in
10 agreement with Fraaije et al.¹¹ who found clear positive correlations between different SDHIs,
11 and Schürch and Cordette¹⁴ who found similar patterns but with weaker relationships. The
12 *SdhC*-H152R mutation has previously been identified by both Stammler et al.¹⁰ and Scalliet et
13 al.¹² in mutagenesis studies; the latter reporting high resistance factors to the majority of newer
14 SDHIs. The incomplete cross-resistance between fluopyram and the other SDHIs, which was
15 observed in the baseline data (data not shown), was also demonstrated by Scalliet et al.,¹² who
16 found that an isolate with the *SdhC*-H152R mutation which grew in the presence of boscalid
17 and isopyrazam, was all but restricted in the presence of fluopyram. This incomplete cross-
18 resistance has also been demonstrated in other pathogens such as *Alternaria alternata*,¹⁵ *A.*
19 *solani*,¹⁶ *Botrytis cinerea*,¹⁷ and *Corynespora cassicola*¹⁸.

20 This is the first finding of *SdhC*-H152R in a *Z. tritici* field population, and as such
21 represents an important development. Whilst Scalliet et al.¹² demonstrated the mutation *SdhC*-
22 H152R did not affect the ability of *Z. tritici* laboratory mutated strains to infect and cause
23 disease, they did report a reduction in enzyme activity. As our isolates were retrieved from the

1 field at a frequency (0.66%, 95% CI 0.08%-1.8%) much larger than the mutation rate (typically
2 less than 10^{-9} for point mutations), they must be able to infect and cause disease. Whether they
3 suffer a fitness penalty, and what role if any the mutation *SdhD*-R47W plays, remains to be
4 determined.

5 Irrespective of potential fitness penalties it must be assumed that the continued
6 widespread use of SDHIs is likely to result in an increase in frequency of the alleles associated
7 with high resistance factors because of the very strong selection imposed by good current
8 control levels.¹⁹ Such an increase will adversely affect the efficacy of those SDHIs currently
9 available as foliar applied products for STB control. Currently the SDHIs are an essential tool
10 in the control of STB in in north-western Europe. It is imperative that all available measures
11 are taken to maintain their excellent field performance against *Z. tritici* for as long as possible.
12 Continued monitoring of *Z. tritici* field populations is essential to be able to identify changes
13 in sensitivity and mutations which cause those changes. Fungicide resistance management
14 strategies, such as reductions in the number of applications of active ingredients from a single
15 group and mixing with effective fungicide partners,²⁰ particularly multi-site acting fungicides,
16 must be used to help slow the selection of resistant strains. Disease incidence should be reduced
17 by using host resistance^{21, 22} and any proven agronomic practices which reduce *Z. tritici*
18 population growth rates during the period of application of fungicide implemented, since they
19 will reduce the rate of selection.²³⁻²⁵

20 **Acknowledgements**

21 The authors would like to thank Liz Glynn and Jim Grace from Teagasc, and student Aurélien
22 Lepennetier for their help with laboratory testing. This research has been funded by Teagasc
23 under the Walsh Fellowship scheme and the Irish Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine
24 under their research stimulus fund, grant number 11S113.

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24

1

2 Figure 1 Frequency distribution of baseline isolates (n = 209) and 2015 isolates (n = 93) to the
3 SDHI fungicide penthiopyrad. Re-tested isolates for which *Sdh* sequence was obtained are
4 marked by arrows.