

Application Note

Rapid validation of an LC-MS approach to differentiate tainted and untainted boar meat based on compound biomarkers

Overview:

- **A broad nontargeted metabolomics study** was performed to establish the feasibility of an LC-MS/MS approach to differentiate samples from boars with tainted meat from those without taint.¹
- **Progenesis CoMet** reanalysed 113 LC-MS runs from this study to determine if we could provide the same proof of concept within a few hours compared to several weeks.
- **Data analysis took <3 hours** including searches against an HMDB compound database² to generate a sub-set of 18 compounds with significant abundances differences between the two groups. **10/18 compounds** were found to be **common to the original study results**, three with identifications confirmed.
- **Progenesis CoMet showed advantages in speeding up data analysis for discovery-focused experiments** prior to committing further resource into method development and targeted metabolomics.

Introduction & Method:

In many countries male piglets are castrated shortly after birth to avoid the production of meat with an unpleasant smell and flavor known as boar taint. Extensive research has been carried out during the last 40 years to delineate compounds that are responsible for this problem. The most frequently candidates are androstenone, skatole and indole¹. However, the level of these compounds does not always correlate with results from classical sensory panels and other factors are thought to be involved. Research by *Olson et al*¹ demonstrated the feasibility of LC-MS/MS to discriminate tainted and non-tainted carcasses based on a sub-set of biomarker compounds. This provides potential for a quantitative metabolomics assay to be applied early in production that can avoid customer complaints, reduce the need for castration and provide better efficiency in stock rearing¹.

A set of 113 LC-MS runs generated by the original research comprising 3 technical replicates of adipose tissue extracts from 32 individual pigs, (16 qualified as "untainted" and 17 qualified as "tainted" by a sensory panel), controls (a pool of adipose tissue extract from all 32 pigs) and extraction process blanks were loaded into Progenesis CoMet. The simple, automatic workflow took <3 hours to retention-time align all runs against a pool sample run, peak pick, deconvolute adduct ions and quantify ion abundance of 2,532 compounds. All detected compounds were searched against the HMDB SDF database v3.0 using our unique search tool, MetaScope. 1,127 compound identifications were returned and automatically linked to the quantified compounds. Three separate experiment designs were set up within the same analysed experiment, each comparing a set of technical replicates. The significantly different ($p < 0.01$) compounds common to all groups of technical replicates were selected using the "tagging" feature. PCA plots were made using the sub-set of tagged compounds and the identifications of these 18 significant compounds were exported and compared to the original study results.

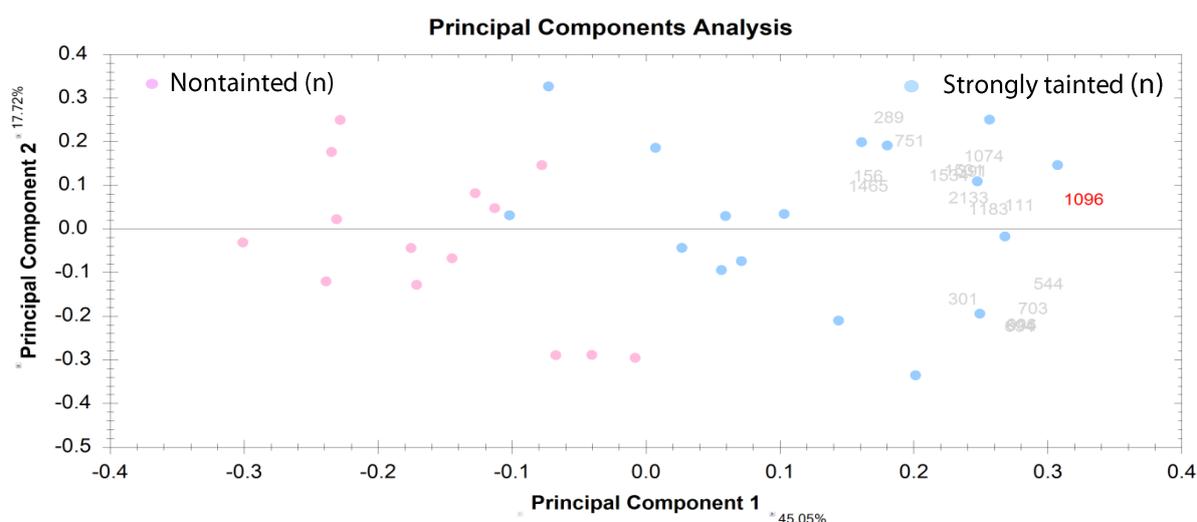


Figure 1: Principle Components Analysis (PCA) following analysis by Progenesis CoMet showing separation between samples taken from 32 individual pigs, 17 identified as "strongly tainted" (blue dots) and 16 identified as "non-tainted" (pink dots) by a sensory panel. The PCA plot was generated using a sub-set of compounds that were significantly different between groups, p -value < 0.01 , and common to all three sets of technical replicates. This list of 18 significant compounds included 10 compounds or compound ions common to the original research.

Results and Conclusion

Our re-analysis took a much simpler approach, which did not directly replicate the approaches used for identification searches or selection of significant compounds based on relative quantification compared. Specifically we just took automatically generated results from Progenesis CoMet with no optimisation of analysis parameters to generate a list of "significant" compounds and a PCA plot. We were also limited to searching a different database (HMDB). Despite this, the final list of 18 compounds generated by our analysis included testosterone, androstenedione and 3-oxohexadecanoic acid that were identified in the original study¹. We also found another 7 compounds common to the original study without identifications. The PCA plot generated from our data analysis (see above) also showed that we could discriminate tainted from untainted samples. These results agree with the original study in that they demonstrate feasibility of the LC-MS approach to identify tainted sample from untainted samples and provide a basis for further study but here we managed simpler, faster data-analysis to achieve the same end results.

m/z	RT (min)	Anova p-value	Fold change	Putative identifications
289.2167	7.83	4.22 x 10⁻¹⁴	30	Testosterone
287.2012	8.88	2.35 x 10⁻⁵	24	Androstenedione
148.0762	6.08	5.38 x 10 ⁻⁴	6	Normetanephrine, Methylnoradrenaline, Epinephrine, Norsalsolinol, 3-Pyridinebutanoic acid, Benzocaine, L-Phenylalanine, Indole-3-carbinol, Benzaldehyde
192.0242	5.38	0.001	2	DL-O-Phosphoserine, Phosphoserine, L-4-Hydroxyglutamate semialdehyde, D-Glutamic acid, L-Glutamic acid, N-Methyl-D-aspartic acid, N-Acetylserine, O-Acetylserine
246.1704	5.54	0.002	1.6	Hydroxyvalerylcarnitine, Isovalerylcarnitine, 2-Methylbutyrylcarnitine, Valerylcarnitine
496.3402	11.39	0.003	1.5	LysoPC(16:0), Docosa-4,7,10,13,16-pentaenoyl carnitine, Clupanodonyl carnitine
217.1956	11.79	0.004	1.5	7,10-Hexadecadienoic acid, 7Z,10Z-Hexadecadienoic acid
235.2059	11.79	0.001	1.5	3-Oxohexadecanoic acid
188.0912	5.62	7 x 10 ⁻⁴	6	3,4-Dihydroxyphenylglycol
258.1336	5.52	0.005	4	Glutaryl carnitine
357.2794	7.51	0.002	16	Tetracosahexanoic acid
273.2262	20.16	8 x 10⁻⁴	present/absent	No identification
357.2791	7.81	1 x 10⁻⁵	2	No identification
322.2016	5.93	0.008	4.5	No identification
261.1447	5.52	0.002	1.5	No identification
339.0899	5.11	6 x 10⁻⁴	1.5	No identification
386.2534	6.4	0.007	3	No identification
247.1698	5.93	0.002	3	No identification
358.2228	5.93	0.008	6	No identification

Compounds highlighted in green were common between the original study data and re-analysis by Progenesis CoMet.

Conclusion

Establishing an untargeted approach to metabolomics where there is no set of known answers is a challenge. In this case it is necessary to determine a proof of concept for your chosen sample preparation and data analysis methods. This proof of concept provides the foundation for more extensive method development and validation of putative compound biomarkers. The original study results were generated over several months, requiring the use of many different applications, involvement of biostatisticians and significant resources. LC-MS sample analysis time was also limited. At this stage rapid visualisation of data and confirmation of results would have enabled more confirmatory experiments to be performed while access to essential equipment was limited. Alternatively, the time saved could have enabled more samples to be run or opportunities to refine methods while LC conditions were stable.

In this re-analysis of existing study data we were able to deliver results comparable to those in the original study, which validated an LC-MS/MS method for differentiating samples of "tainted" and "untainted" boar meat based on compound profiles. The data analysis we used to validate the LC-MS approach was performed in hours compared to weeks. The LC-MS method established in this research will be further tested as a more automated and objective way to measure taint in boar meat compared to the current approaches.

Acknowledgement for data and review of results presented: Malin Olson*, Endre Laczkot, Fraser Lewis[‡], Silvia Ampuero*, Giuseppe Bee*, Hanspeter Naegeli*. *Institute of Veterinary Pharmacology and Toxicology, Zurich, Switzerland. †Functional Genomics Center Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland. ‡Institute of Veterinary Epidemiology, Zurich, Switzerland. *Agroscope Liebefeld-Posieux, Posieux, Switzerland. Institut für Veterinärpharmakologie und-toxikologie.

References:

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2. Wishart DS, Knox C, Guo AC, et al. HMDB: a knowledgebase for the human metabolome. Nucleic Acids Res. 2009 37(Database issue):D603-610.