In 1964, a summary of airborne mold surveys (13) ranked Aspergillus fourth among dominant airborne spores in frequency; no species were distinguished. Airborne spores of Aspergillus flavus Lk. ex Fr. have been identified at various sites. The percentage of days on which spores were collected at each site differed from year to year but was never below 17%. In 1976 and 1977, the percentage of days at opposite ends of the state (northwest and southeast Missouri) was more efficient than that in the middle of the state. ADM was more efficient than GA (2).

ACKNOWLEDGMENT
We thank P. R. Fry for supplying us with MII-16.

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Incidence and Distribution of Airborne Spores of Aspergillus flavus in Missouri

MARK G. HOLTMEYER, Graduate Research Assistant, Department of Plant Pathology, and JACK R. WALLIN, Research Plant Pathologist, AR, SEA, USDA, and Department of Plant Pathology, University of Missouri, Columbia 65211

ABSTRACT

Airborne spores of Aspergillus flavus, a fungus that may produce aflatoxin, were collected with three air samplers at several sites near cornfields in Missouri during 1976-1978. "Decapped" corn kernels and Aspergillus differential medium (ADM) were used to detect A. flavus spores. The percentage of days on which spores were collected at each site differed from year to year but was never below 17%. In 1976 and 1977, spores were caught on the highest percentage of days at opposite ends of the state (northwest and southeast Missouri). ADM was more efficient than decapped kernels for detecting and estimating the concentration of airborne A. flavus spores.

In 1964, a summary of airborne mold surveys (13) ranked Aspergillus fourth among dominant airborne spores in frequency; no species were distinguished. Airborne spores of Aspergillus flavus Lk. ex Fr. have been identified at various sites (4,8,9,11,14-17). In most cases (4,11,14-17), spores were collected and identified on solid agar growth medium in petri dishes exposed to the air. In this method, spores are deposited on the agar by gravity and wind; they are not differentiated according to their ability to germinate and grow in corn kernels and produce aflatoxin. A new method (18) uses "decapped" corn kernels in a presumptive test of material collected by air samplers for aflatoxin. Furthermore, Aspergillus differential medium (ADM) (3,6) has been used for rapid detection and identification of A. flavus and related organisms in the A. flavus group. We used the decapped kernel technique and ADM to estimate the incidence and distribution of airborne spores of the fungus near Missouri cornfields before, during, and after harvest.
in 1978. Sterile toothpicks were aseptically placed on the unexposed surface of tapes to facilitate the rapid removal of the tapes from the Rotorod collecting arms or Hirst collection drum and to aid in the later handling of the sticky tapes. The tapes were placed exposed-side-down (toothpick-side-up) on the surface of ADM agar in plastic petri dishes. 

_A. flavus_ colonies on plates were counted after a 72-hr incubation at 28 C.

In 1977 and 1978, we used the Andersen sampler to test the usefulness of ADM for estimating _A. flavus_ spore concentrations. The six collection plates of the sampler each contained 27 ml of ADM. The sampler was operated for exposure periods of 1 and 5 min (5 min only in 1978) on each sampling day. After each exposure, plates were incubated for 72 hr at 28 C, then examined for the characteristic yellow-orange pigment under a microscope. Viable spores of _A. flavus_ colonies on the six plates by the number of minutes the sampler was operated (flow rate of sampler = 1 ft³/min) and then multiplying the resulting number by 35.315 to convert from cubic feet to cubic meters (35.315 ft³ = 1 m³).

When characteristic colonies had been counted, mycelial plugs from individual colonies were transferred to Czapek solution agar for species verification. Isolates obtained from the air samplers were also tested for their ability to produce aflatoxin; results of these tests have been published (10).

Samplers were located next to cornfields at sites indicated in Table 1. Rotorod samplers were placed 0.3 and 1.8 m above the soil surface and were operated for 15-min periods 2 days each week from time of planting until a few weeks after harvest (1 day per week at Norburne in 1977 and McCredie in 1977 and 1978). At some locations, a Hirst sampler was placed next to the Rotorod sampler and operated continuously from time of planting until after harvest (about 15 May-1 November). Hirst collection drums were changed weekly, so that exposed tapes of the Hirst sampler represented spores collected from 8:00 a.m. Monday to 8:00 a.m. the following Monday.

**RESULTS**

_A. flavus_ was a common spore component of the air in Missouri during the 1976-1978 growing seasons. The fungus was collected each year from every location sampled. The percentage of days on which spores were collected varied from year to year but never fell below 17%. The number of days the samplers were operated and the percentage of days that spores were detected at each location in each year are presented in Table 1.

In 1976 and 1977, spores were collected on more than 70% of the days on which air samplers were run at Spickard and Portageville (at the northwest and southeast ends, respectively, of the state), but on less than 41% of the days at Mt. Vernon. In 1978, spores were collected on 88% of the sampling dates at McCredie. In contrast to the two earlier years, spores were collected on 30% and 17% of the sampling days at Spickard and Portageville, respectively, in 1978, and on 54% of the days at Mt. Vernon.

**Atmospheric spore concentrations.** In 1977 at Novelty, _A. flavus_ spores were collected on ADM with the Andersen sampler on 45% of the sampling days; on days when the fungus was detected, viable spores per cubic meter of air averaged 22.7 (Table 2). Spore concentrations were highest in June and October and lowest in August and September (Fig. 1).

On days in 1977 when the concentration calculated with the Andersen sampler was greater than 50 spores per cubic meter, qualitative data from the Hirst and Rotorod samplers also indicated the presence of _A. flavus_ spores in the air. When the concentration was less than 35.0, data from the samplers were not in complete agreement. However, because the Andersen sampler was run infrequently (1 day/wk), great weight cannot be placed on these comparisons.

In 1978, _A. flavus_ spores were collected on 43% of the days the Andersen sampler was operated at Novelty (Table 2); viable spores per cubic meter of air averaged 23.9, and spore count was highest (56.5) on 11 July. At McCredie, spores were collected on 38% of the days, viable spores per cubic meter averaged 14.1, and the count was highest (28.3) on 1 August. At Bradford, spores were collected on 30% of the days, viable spores per cubic meter averaged 12.4, and the count was

![Fig. 1. Atmospheric spore concentration of Aspergillus flavus at Novelty, Missouri, in June-December 1977, as determined with an Andersen six-stage viable particle sampler.](image)

### Table 1. Aspergillus flavus spores collected by Rotorod, Hirst, and Andersen air samplers at eight locations in Missouri, 1976-1978

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*R* = Rotorod sampler; *H* = Hirst volumetric spore trap; *A* = Andersen six-stage viable particle sampler; *T* = total for all samplers.

### Table 2. Atmospheric spore concentration* of Aspergillus flavus at three locations in Missouri during the 1977 and 1978 growing seasons, as determined with an Andersen six-stage viable particle sampler

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>No. of days sampler operated</th>
<th>Days <em>A. flavus</em> was detected (%)</th>
<th>Viable spores of <em>A. flavus</em>/m³</th>
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<td>12.4</td>
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*Average spore concentration on days when spores were detected.
highest (21.2) on 1 August. Because the Andersen sampler was operated on only a few days in 1978, we did not compare these data with the qualitative data from the other two samplers.

DISCUSSION

Airborne spores of A. flavus were present at all sampling sites in each growing season. Collected spores were viable and are potential inoculum for infesting corn kernels before harvest.

Our results indicate greater incidence of A. flavus spores in the air by Missouri cornfields than was found in 1975 in Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, South Carolina, and Virginia, when only 13 of 260 exposed ADM plates yielded characteristic A. flavus colonies after 30-min exposure periods (4). The higher incidence found in Missouri could have been caused by differences in location; more likely, however, our air samplers were more effective in collecting A. flavus spores than the exposed plate method, which relies on gravity and wind.

The decapped kernel technique, though effective, was slow. Using ADM reduced the work load and enabled direct and rapid identification of A. flavus spores. Moreover, ADM provided an excellent method of estimating the concentration of A. flavus spores in the atmosphere from samples collected with the Andersen sampler. Because A. flavus does not develop secondary colonies on ADM during the 3 days of incubation, spore concentration can be estimated more accurately on ADM than on media that do not hinder sporulation.

The incidence and concentration of A. flavus spores fluctuated with the year and season. In 1977 at Novelty, highest spore counts in June and October (Fig. 1) coincided with the greatest tillage and harvesting activities. More frequent sampling with the Andersen sampler and more complete documentation of field tillage activity will help to clarify the relationship between the two phenomena.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to thank Daniel V. Loonan for assistance in collecting the data and R. Shelley, R. Smoot, V. Nelson, L. Meinke, and R. Alexander for technical assistance.

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