Evaluation of Hermetic Maize Storage in 208 Liter (55 Gal) Steel Barrels for Smallholder Farmers

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Abstract
Maize is an important crop for many smallholder farmers in the world. Maize weevils (} cause a significant loss in quality and quantity during maize storage, especially in tropical regions. Hermetic storage of maize has been shown to be effective in controlling maize weevils in laboratory and field settings. The objective of this research was to test the effectiveness of steel barrels that could be used by smallholder farmers for hermetic storage. Six 208 L (55 gal) steel barrels were each loaded with 170 kg (375 lb) of maize at an average moisture of 13.4% w.b., with initial weevil population densities of 25 live weevils kg\(^{-1}\) (11 live weevils lb\(^{-1}\)) of maize. All six barrels were stored at 27°C (81°F) under non-hermetic conditions for 120 d, corresponding to approximately three weevil lifecycles. After 120 d, weevil population densities had increased to an average of 99 live weevils kg\(^{-1}\) (45 live weevils lb\(^{-1}\)) in all six barrels. Three of the six barrels were subsequently hermetically sealed. After an additional 30 days (150 days since experiment start), the weevil population densities were zero in every hermetically sealed barrel (100% mortality) and averaged 141 live weevils kg\(^{-1}\) (64Â live weevils lb\(^{-1}\)) in the non-hermetic barrels. All barrels where then exposed to non-hermetic conditions for an additional 40 days (approximately one weevil lifecycle). The barrels previously under hermetic conditions had zero live weevils, while the other barrels averaged 214 live weevils kg\(^{-1}\) (98 live weevils lb\(^{-1}\)), demonstrating that all stages of weevils (eggs, larvae, and pupae) were killed. Means of barrel oxygen content, test weight (TW), moisture content (MC), temperature, and humidity were significantly different between the hermetically sealed and control treatments. In contrast, broken corn and foreign material (BCFM) and mechanical damage (MD) were not significantly different. Hermetically sealed steel barrels may be an effective maize storage option for smallholder farmers.

Keywords
BCFM, Maize weevil, Mechanical damage, Moisture content, Mortality, Mycotoxins, Test weight

Disciplines
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EVALUATION OF HERMETIC MAIZE STORAGE IN 208 LITER (55 GAL) STEEL BARRELS FOR SMALLHOLDER FARMERS

D. Bbosa, T. J. Brumm, C. J. Bern, K. A. Rosentrater, D. R. Raman

ABSTRACT. Maize is an important crop for many smallholder farmers in the world. Maize weevils (Sitophilus zeamais) cause a significant loss in quality and quantity during maize storage, especially in tropical regions. Hermetic storage of maize has been shown to be effective in controlling maize weevils in laboratory and field settings. The objective of this research was to test the effectiveness of steel barrels that could be used by smallholder farmers for hermetic storage. Six 208 L (55 gal) steel barrels were each loaded with 170 kg (375 lb) of maize at an average moisture of 13.4% w.b., with initial weevil population densities of 25 live weevils kg⁻¹ (11 live weevils lb⁻¹) of maize. All six barrels were stored at 27°C (81°F) under non-hermetic conditions for 120 d, corresponding to approximately three weevil lifecycles. After 120 d, weevil population densities had increased to an average of 99 live weevils kg⁻¹ (45 live weevils lb⁻¹) in all six barrels. Three of the six barrels were subsequently hermetically sealed. After an additional 30 days (150 days since experiment start), the weevil population densities were zero in every hermetically sealed barrel (100% mortality) and averaged 141 live weevils kg⁻¹ (64 live weevils lb⁻¹) in the non-hermetic barrels. All barrels where then exposed to non-hermetic conditions for an additional 40 days (approximately one weevil lifecycle). The barrels previously under hermetic conditions had zero live weevils, while the other barrels averaged 214 live weevils kg⁻¹ (98 live weevils lb⁻¹), demonstrating that all stages of weevils (eggs, larvae, and pupae) were killed. Means of barrel oxygen content, test weight (TW), moisture content (MC), temperature, and humidity were significantly different between the hermetically sealed and control treatments. In contrast, broken corn and foreign material (BCFM) and mechanical damage (MD) were not significantly different. Hermetically sealed steel barrels may be an effective maize storage option for smallholder farmers.

Keywords. BCFM, Maize weevil, Mechanical damage, Moisture content, Mortality, Mycotoxins, Test weight.

Maize (Zea mays) is a major staple crop for smallholder farmers, with over 300 million consumers in Africa (Daily Guide, 2010). In 2014, maize was harvested on 183 million ha worldwide, resulting in 1.04 billion Mg of production (FAOSTAT, 2014). By 2025, maize will be the most highly produced crop globally (CIMMYT, 2011; Rosegrant et al., 2008).

The maize weevil (Sitophilus zeamais) can be extremely destructive to stored maize, with losses in excess of 50% reported (Boxall, 2001). The female weevil bores through the pericarp of undamaged kernels and deposits an egg into the intact inner portion of the kernel, which she then seals with a mucus-like substance. An adult female can lay about 300 to 400 eggs over a period of 4 to 5 weeks (Hill, 1987). The pupa consumes the inner portion of the kernel. After emergence, adult weevils damage grain by feeding on the endosperm of the kernel, as well as chewing 1.5 mm holes in the pericarp (Kranz et al., 1997). The average weevil lifecycle is 36 days at 27°C ±1°C and 69% ±3% relative humidity (Shariff and Mills, 1971). Damage inflicted on the kernels provides potential openings for disease and fungal growth in the grain (CGC, 2013), creates dust, and lowers overall grain quality.

Hermetic storage of maize depletes oxygen and increases carbon dioxide inside a storage system due to respiration by maize and other living organisms (i.e., maize weevils) and container sealing, which prevents CO₂ venting and O₂ replenishment. When oxygen levels fall below about 5%, insect activity ceases and insects die (Gummert et al., 2004). Banks and Annis (1990), Fleurat (1990), and Navarro (1978) recommended oxygen levels below 3% for effective control. Atmospheres with depleted oxygen levels and elevated carbon dioxide levels can maintain grain quality for extended periods of time (Navarro et al., 2012).

Previous research studied the effects of maize temperature, time, maize moisture, and oxygen levels on maize weevil mortality during hermetic storage (Yakubu et al., 2011). Weevil-infested commercial hybrid maize samples in 476 mL (1 pint) jars were held under hermetic conditions at maize moisture levels of 6.3% and 16%, and at 10°C and 27°C. Hermetic conditions were effective in killing weevils, and the rate of mortality was affected by temperature and maize moisture content. Equations were developed and val-
Hermetic storage techniques have been implemented in many locations. Plastic bags (Baoua et al., 2013; Murdock and Baoua, 2014; Murdock et al., 2012) and steel drums (Murdock et al., 1997) have been extensively used to hermetically store cowpeas in West Africa. Both containers can be effective in preventing insect damage during storage. Plastic bagging uses one to three layers of polyethylene protected by an exterior woven bag. The Purdue Improved Cowpea Storage (PICS) bags (Purdue, 2016) and GrainPro bags (GrainPro, 2016) are in use today in developing countries. However, they are not effective against rodents, and some insects can bore through the bags, rendering them ineffective for hermetic storage. Steel drums are rodent-proof and have long life, but they also have a higher initial investment cost. Based on initial costs and projected useful life, Moussa et al., (2011) estimated annual storage costs at $20 U.S. per Mg for plastic bags and $16 U.S. per Mg for steel drums. Thus, steel drums may be a more effective storage strategy in the long term.

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation introduced the Postcosecha galvanized steel silo in Central America in 1980. Hundreds of thousands are now in use in Central America, Africa, and elsewhere. The silos can be fabricated in sizes from 100 to 3000 kg and are built by local artisans using 26 gauge (0.7 mm) galvanized steel and lead-based solder (Tefera et al., 2011). The silos are effective in preventing storage losses due to rodents and birds. They can provide hermetic storage and consequent protection from insect pests only if they are properly sealed and filled to capacity to exclude as much air as possible.

Steel barrels are available in many developing countries, particularly sub-Saharan Africa. They may be potentially used for hermetic storage of maize by smallholder farmers. In light of the lower cost projected for steel drum storage methods, and the lack of prior work focused on hermetic storage of medium volumes of maize, the objective of this research was to evaluate the effectiveness of 208 L (55 gal) steel barrels for hermetic maize storage. The specific objectives were to determine weevil mortality in maize stored in sealed steel barrels, determine changes in maize quality during storage, and determine whether hermetically sealed maize becomes re-infested when unsealed.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**CONTAINERS**

Six 208 L (55 gal) open-head, unlined steel barrels (model 882-35, Sioux Chief Mfg. Co., Peculiar, Mo.) were used as storage containers. The barrels (fig. 1) could be covered either with: (1) screens (0.3 mm openings) to retain weevils yet allow for air passage (long ultra-sunblock solar screens, New York Wire, Mt. Wolf, Pa.) or (2) hermetically sealable lids from the experimental Sukup Food Storage system (Sukup Manufacturing Co., Sheffield, Iowa). Before use, the barrels were cleaned with Ajax triple-action liquid soap, a large cotton mop, and a medium-handle brush with warm water. After thorough rinsing, the barrels were left to dry.

**WEEVILS**

Weevil-infested commercially commingled maize was used as the source of maize weevils, which were separated from the maize by passing the infested maize through a Carter Day Dockage tester (CEA, Minneapolis, Minn.) with 4.76 mm (12/64 in.) screen to retain the maize and a 0.99 mm (2.5/64 in.) screen to retain the weevils plus some fine material. Each barrel in the experiment required over 4000 weevils to be added. Rather than count all these weevils, the weevil additions were done on a mass basis, using the bulk density of three representative weevil samples (36.72 g per 1,000 weevils, 0.96 g standard deviation). For subsequent assaying for infestation, weevil numbers were determined by counting.

**EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN AND PROCEDURE**

The experiment consisted of two treatments, hermetically sealed (HS) and non-hermetically sealed (NH), each with three replications. Six barrels were each loaded with 170 kg (375 lb) of weevil-free commercially commingled bulk maize at 13.4% moisture from the 2012 harvest in central Iowa. Each barrel was seeded with 25 live adult weevils kg⁻¹ of maize (time T = 0 days) and covered with a screen to prevent weevil escape. The barrels were held in a 27°C ±2°C room from T = 0 days to T = 190 days. At T = 120 days, hermetically sealable lids were installed on three randomly selected barrels (designated HS1, HS2, and HS3). The remaining barrels (NH) were again covered with a screen. The first 120 days, approximately three lifecycles, allowed the weevils to reproduce and become established. At T = 121 days, the three hermetically sealed bar-
Table 1. Procedures for maize storage in the barrels (three hermetically sealed, and three non-hermetically sealed).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time (d)</th>
<th>Barrel</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Loaded with 170 kg of maize and 25 live weevils per kg of maize, unsealed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Sampled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>121</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Hermetically sealed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>122</td>
<td>HS, NH</td>
<td>Unsealed to diagnose an apparent sensor problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>129</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Hermetically sealed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Unsealed, sampled, and covered with screen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>190</td>
<td>HS, NH</td>
<td>Sampled</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) HS = hermetically sealed barrels, NH = non-hermetically sealed barrels, and All = both HS and NH barrels.

Table 2. Mean number of live weevils and maize quality factors for hermetically sealed (HS) and non-hermetically sealed (NH) barrels over time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrels</th>
<th>Time (d)</th>
<th>Number of live weevils (kg⁻¹)</th>
<th>Temperature (°C)</th>
<th>Relative humidity (%)</th>
<th>Moisture content (%)</th>
<th>Mechanical damage (%)</th>
<th>Broken corn and foreign material (%)</th>
<th>Test weight (lb bu⁻¹)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25 ±0 Abc</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>13.0 ±0.6 Dab</td>
<td>4.6 ±1.8 Xbc</td>
<td>1.5 ±0.1 Kc</td>
<td>57.4 ±0.2 Ra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NH</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25 ±0 Ad</td>
<td>NH</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>13.2 ±0.1 Dab</td>
<td>4.1 ±0.9 Xd</td>
<td>1.7 ±0.5 Kc</td>
<td>57.4 ±0.2 Ra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>9 ±2 Acd</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>30.6 ±6.0 Uc</td>
<td>13.3 ±0.0 Da</td>
<td>3.8 ±0.5 Xc</td>
<td>1.9 ±0.1 Kbc</td>
<td>57.1 ±0.1 Ra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NH</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8 ±5 Ad</td>
<td>NH</td>
<td>30.6 ±6.3 Uc</td>
<td>13.2 ±0.2 Da</td>
<td>3.9 ±0.3 Xd</td>
<td>1.9 ±0.1 Kbc</td>
<td>57.1 ±0.1 Ra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>44 ±12 Ab</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>31.3 ±1.5 Ua</td>
<td>13.2 ±0.1 Da</td>
<td>4.5 ±0.4 Xbc</td>
<td>2.3 ±0.1 Kbc</td>
<td>56.7 ±0.2 Rbc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NH</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>70 ±17 Acd</td>
<td>NH</td>
<td>31.6 ±1.6 Ta</td>
<td>13.3 ±0.1 Da</td>
<td>6.4 ±0.5 Xcd</td>
<td>2.3 ±0.3 Kbc</td>
<td>56.2 ±0.1 Rcd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>84 ±13 Aa</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>30.9 ±1.9 Ub</td>
<td>12.8 ±0.1 Da</td>
<td>6.4 ±1.0 Xbc</td>
<td>3.2 ±0.5 Kbc</td>
<td>56.2 ±0.1 Rcd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NH</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>114 ±30 Ac</td>
<td>NH</td>
<td>31.2 ±1.5 Tb</td>
<td>12.8 ±0.1 Da</td>
<td>6.9 ±0.9 Xab</td>
<td>3.2 ±0.5 Ka</td>
<td>56.1 ±0.2 Rde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>17 ±11 Acd</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>30.7 ±1.4 Uabc</td>
<td>12.8 ±0.1 Da</td>
<td>6.9 ±0.9 Xab</td>
<td>3.3 ±0.5 Kc</td>
<td>55.5 ±0.1 Re</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NH</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>114 ±30 Bbc</td>
<td>NH</td>
<td>30.5 ±1.2 Ubc</td>
<td>12.8 ±0.1 Da</td>
<td>7.0 ±0.8 Md</td>
<td>3.3 ±0.5 Kc</td>
<td>56.0 ±0.1 Rbc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>28.1 ±1.4 Ud</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>31.3 ±1.3 Tab</td>
<td>13.1 ±0.1 Ebc</td>
<td>7.2 ±0.2 Nb</td>
<td>28.1 ±1.4 Ud</td>
<td>57.4 ±0.2 Rbc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NH</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>214 ±29 Bb</td>
<td>NH</td>
<td>31.6 ±1.7 Ta</td>
<td>13.1 ±0.1 Ebc</td>
<td>7.2 ±0.2 Nb</td>
<td>214 ±29 Bb</td>
<td>57.4 ±0.2 Rbc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Means followed by different uppercase letters within each time (column) and means followed by different lowercase letters within each barrel group (row) for each factor are significantly different at the 0.05 level.
(b) HS barrels were hermetically sealed at T = 120, opened at T = 122, resealed at T = 129, opened at T = 150, and resealed at T = 151.
ing, apparently dead weevils were seen to have accumulated mostly on top of the maize, below the oxygen sensors, and on the sides near the tops. After 24 h of exposure to ambient air with screens on top (T = 122 days), all barrels were sampled. Live weevils dropped from 84 to 17 weevils kg⁻¹ on average in the HS barrels. The calculated expected time to 100% mortality of 99 weevils kg⁻¹ was 8 days (Yakubu et al., 2011), so this degree of mortality was unexpected. It could be, but unlikely, that a significant number of weevils were killed in the one day of hermetic sealing. More likely is that the while the weevils seemed to be dead by visual observation, some were just dormant and became active again after exposure to oxygen. This could have been a narcotic effect of carbon dioxide, leading to immobilization of weevils (Alinazee, 1971; Edwards and Rollas, 1973; Navarro, 2006).

The three HS barrels were left unsealed for seven days (from T = 122 to T = 129) but with screens on top to prevent escape of live weevils. At T = 129 days, the HS barrels were sealed again. The calculated expected time to 100% mortality for 17 weevils kg⁻¹ was 20 days (Yakubu et al., 2011). The HS barrels were exposed to ambient air for 24 h at T = 150 days. After 24 h, all barrels were sampled, and the population density was zero live weevils kg⁻¹ in each of the HS barrels. From T = 150 to T = 190 days, all six barrels were left with screens on top to prevent escape of weevils. The purpose of this period was to determine if the hermetic storage influenced other life stages of maize weevils, that is, eggs, larvae, and pupae.

At T = 120 days (before hermetically sealing), there was no significant difference in the number of live weevils between the HS and NH barrels (F₁,₄ = 2.55, p = 0.1857). At T = 122 days (F₁,₄ = 28.28, p = 0.0060), at T = 150 days (F₁,₄ = 71.14, p = 0.0011), and at T = 190 days (F₁,₄ = 162.78, p = 0.0002), the effect due to treatment was significant. In each case, the number of live weevils in the NH treatment was significantly greater. The weevil population decline from T = 0 to T = 40 days was attributed to the weevils not yet being adapted to their environment, and some were probably ending their lifecycle. The population increase in all the barrels after T = 40 days was because of the favorable maize moisture content and temperature (Sone, 2000). The complete mortality in the HS treatment was because of oxygen depletion and likely CO₂ enrichment (Anankware et al., 2013; Anankware and Bonu-Ire, 2013; Fleurat, 1990; Foster et al., 1955; Navarro, 2006; Navarro et al., 1990; Oxley and Wickenden, 1963; Villers et al., 2010; Yakubu et al., 2011).

Navarro et al. (1994) reported that a residual population may be observed after hermetically stored grain is re-exposed to oxygen. That was not the case here. At the end of the experiment (T = 190 days), there were zero live weevils in the HS treatment due to the hermetic storage effect on other life stages of maize weevils (eggs, larvae, and pupae), and the large population of live weevils in the NH treatment (214 weevils kg⁻¹ on average) was due to favorable temperature, maize moisture content, and availability of kernels.

**Temperature**

There was a temperature range of 28.1°C to 31.3°C (82.6°F to 88.3°F) in the hermetically sealed barrels and 30.5°C to 31.6°C (86.9°F to 88.9°F) in the non-hermetic barrels, with 30.7°C (87.2°F) being the overall average. At T = 80, 120, 150, and 190 days, temperatures in the non-hermetic barrels were significantly higher than in the hermetic barrels, probably because of weevil respiration. All recorded temperatures were higher than the 27°C room temperature. The higher temperature values were attributed to respiratory and/or metabolic processes of maize and the weevils (Bern et al., 2013).

**Relative Humidity**

The measured relative humidity range was 59% to 83% inside all barrels, with an overall mean of 70%, and increased over time. There were statistically significant differences between barrel treatments in relative humidity at T = 120 days (F₁,₁₄₃₇ = 53.46, p < 0.0001) and T = 150 days (F₁,₇₅₄ = 386.79, p < 0.0001). However, these differences between barrel treatments (0.5 percentage points and 2.2 percentage points for T = 120 and T = 150, respectively) were of no practical significance.

**Maize Moisture Content**

Average maize moisture ranged from 13.4% to 12.5% for all barrels during the 190 days of the experiment. In general, the moisture contents within barrel treatment (HS and NH) were not significantly different. Similarly, there was generally no significant difference in moisture content between barrel treatments, except for T = 150 days when the HS barrels were slightly higher in moisture content (F₁,₄ = 7.84, p = 0.0488). This difference (0.2 percentage points) was not practically significant. At T = 190 days, moisture content was not significantly different between barrels (F₁,₄ = 1.35, p = 0.3092).

**Maize Quality**

Mechanical damage (MD) is the percentage by weight of kernels with a missing portion or any visible crack or rupture of the seed coat (Steele et al., 1969). There was an increasing trend from 4.34% to 8.43% on average in all treatments. MD was not significantly different between all barrels during the weevil population increase (T = 0 to T = 120 days). There were no significant differences between HS and NH treatments after one day of sealing, i.e., T = 122 days (F₁,₄ = 1.58, p = 0.2769) and after complete resealing, i.e., T = 150 days (F₁,₄ = 6.44, p = 0.0642). However, MD was significantly lower in the HS treatment than in the NH treatment at T = 190 days (F₁,₄ = 9.85, p = 0.0349). Increased mechanical damage over time was attributed to the increasing number of weevils in the barrels. The significant difference in mechanical damage between treatments at the end of the experiment was due to the lack of live weevils in the HS treatment. This result is in line with the results observed by Foster et al. (1955).

There was an increase in the broken corn and foreign material (BCFM) in all barrels from 1.6% to 3.3% on average from T = 0 to T = 150 days. BCFM values were not significantly different between HS and NH treatments at any time (T = 122: F₁,₄ = 1.52, p = 0.2851; T = 150: F₁,₄ = 0.34, p = 0.5888; and T = 190: F₁,₄ = 0.065, p = 0.8112). However, at T = 190 days, the BFCM in the NH barrels showed an unex-
expected significant decrease. Although care was taken in randomly sampling each barrel, it is possible that the NH samples taken at 190 days were not representative (sampling error).

There was a decline in test weight (TW) from 57.4 to 54.8 lb bu⁻¹ (739 to 705 kg m⁻³) on average during the experiment. During the first 120 days, TW was not significantly different between treatments. TW was significantly higher for the HS treatment at \( T = 150 \) days (\( F_{1,4} = 14.29, p = 0.0194 \)) and at \( T = 190 \) days (\( F_{1,4} = 32, p = 0.0048 \)). TW generally declines with increasing moisture content (Nelson, 1980); however, there were no significant changes in moisture content from \( T = 120 \) to \( T = 190 \) days. Changes in TW are attributed to weevil consumption of the maize kernels, or in the case of HS barrels at \( T = 190 \) days, potential sampling error, as discussed earlier.

**Mold and Mycotoxins**

At the end of the experiment, there were regions of visible fungal growth (storage mold) on fine material and kernels clinging to the barrel walls in all barrels, amounting to less than 1% of the grain mass. The moisture content of the grain did not significantly change over the course of the experiment, but condensation could have occurred. For example, at \( T = 190 \) days, the average conditions in the barrels (31°C and 74.6% RH) resulted in a dew point of 26°C, which was close to the room temperature of 27°C. It could be that localized conditions within the barrels had a dew point at or above the room temperature, thus resulting in condensation that promoted mold growth. Additionally, Navarro (2006) stated that metal silos have a disadvantage of moisture migration and condensation in hot climates, where temperature conditions are similar to those in our experiment.

Grab samples of moldy maize from each barrel were analyzed for aflatoxin. Samples from the three HS barrels had total aflatoxin (B1, B2, G1, and G2) concentrations of 0, 3, and 30 ppb, respectively. Samples from the three NH barrels had total aflatoxin concentrations of 1, 2, and 2 ppb, respectively. Note that the kernels analyzed were not representative of all the moldy maize nor of all the maize in the barrels. However, occurrence of aflatoxin at any level is of concern and requires further study. Storage of maize at moisture contents lower than in this study (12.6% to 13.4%) should reduce the potential for condensation, mold, and mycotoxins.

**Oxygen Levels under Hermetic Conditions**

There was a general decline in oxygen level from 23% to 3% on average in the three HS barrels from \( T = 120 \) to \( T = 120.2 \) days. The oxygen levels then increased to 6.7% from \( T = 120.2 \) to \( T = 120.4 \) days, and finally there was a decline to a constant value of 5.5% on average up to \( T = 120.8 \) days (fig. 2). Oxygen levels inside the HS barrels were significantly lower than the atmospheric oxygen level (\( F_{1,59} = 27.71, p < 0.0001 \)).

The decline in oxygen with time was expected; however, the slight increase between 129.25 and 129.5 days and the rapid decline in oxygen ahead of the calculated complete mortality date were unexpected. The trend was similar to that observed by Villers et al. (2010) while studying hermetic storage of cocoa beans. Fluctuations in oxygen content similar to those seen in figures 2 and 3 were also observed by Hyde et al. (1973), Navarro et al. (1994, 1990), and Oxley and Wickenden (1963) for both laboratory and field experiments.

Complete weevil mortality was achieved with oxygen levels above the 3% level recommended for complete mortality by Banks and Annis (1990), Fleurat (1990), Navarro (1978), and Navarro et al. (2012) for effective control. Bailey (1955, 1956, 1957, 1965) suppressed storage insects at about 5% oxygen with longer exposure time, which is nearly the same concentration observed for our results but at a shorter exposure time. There could also have been a synergistic effect of reduced oxygen and increasing carbon dioxide (Aliniazee, 1971); however, carbon dioxide levels were not measured, so this could not be verified.
CONCLUSIONS

Storage of maize in 208 L (55 gal) open-head, unlined steel barrels that were hermetically sealed resulted in 100% adult weevil mortality, although the 3% level of oxygen recommended for weevil mortality was not maintained in the barrels. Maize quality decreased due to the presence of weevils, but maize quality was maintained when the maize was hermetically stored. Hermetic storage also killed weevil eggs, larvae, and pupae. Storage of maize in such containers can be an effective approach to controlling weevils in maize.

Moldy maize was observed on the walls of both sealed and unsealed barrels. Hermetic storage of maize at moisture contents lower than those in this study (12.6% to 13.4%) should reduce the potential for mold. However, the appearance of mold necessitates further research. Future research should also include evaluating hermetic storage with smallholder farmers in developing countries.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are grateful to Sukup Manufacturing Company for supporting this grain storage research at Iowa State University.

REFERENCES


