
**ABSTRACT**

A tetrahydroquinoline alkaloid compound named “aspernomine” has been isolated from the sclerotia of the fungus *Aspergillus nomius*. Aspernomine has the structure:

and is effective for controlling Lepidopteran insects.

7 Claims, No Drawings
ASPERNOMINE, AN ANTHINSECTAN METABOLITE

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention
The present invention is generally related to tetrahydroquinoline alkaloid compounds. More specifically, the tetrahydroquinoline alkaloid compound is used as an insecticide for control of Lepidoptera species.

2. Background of the Art
Certain fungi produce specialized resting bodies known as sclerotia as a means for surviving adverse environmental conditions where other fungal bodies cannot tolerate, such as harsh climate, nutrient deficiency and desiccation. Generally, sclerotia remain viable in soil for periods of several years, and provide primary inoculum for the producing species when conditions again become favorable for fungal growth. Sclerotia are formed under natural conditions or in solid substrate fermentations, but are not commonly produced in the liquid fermentation cultures generally employed in studies of microbial metabolites. Accordingly, many novel sclerotial metabolites of common fungi such as Aspergillus nomius have not been characterized.

While sclerotia are known to contain biologically active secondary metabolites not found in other fungal parts or in liquid cultures, study of sclerotia as sources of novel metabolites has been limited. Investigation of large sclerotia (ergots) of Claviceps purpurea led to the discovery and medicinal use of ergot alkaloids.

Sclerotia have recently been recognized as a valuable potential source for natural antiseptics. Many sclerotia, which are subjected to predation by fungivorous insects and arthropods during their period of dormancy in soil, have been shown to contain metabolites that exert adverse physiological effects on insects. Glen et al. [J. Org. Chem. 53: 5457 (1988)] and Wicklow et al. [Trans. Br. Mycol. Soc. 91: 433 (1988)] disclose the isolation of four antiseptic aflavamine derivatives from the sclerotia of Aspergillus flavus for use in controlling the dried-fruit beetle Carposphthorus hemipterus (Nitidulidae: Coleoptera). TePaske et al. [J. Org. Chem. 55: 5299 (1990)] disclose a related metabolite, aflavazole, which was isolated from extracts of A. flavus sclerotia. Glen et al. [J. Org. Chem. 54: 2530 (1989)] describe an insecticidal indole diterpene known as nominine found only in the sclerotia of Aspergillus nomius for the control of the corn earworm Helicoverpa zea (Lepidoptera), formerly Heliothis zea. Nominine is also disclosed by Dowd et al. in U.S. Pat. No. 5,017,598 issued May 21, 1991, and entitled “Nominine, an Insecticidal Fungal Metabolite”.

There remains a continuing need for new insecticides because many agriculturally important insect species have developed a resistance to the most potent insecticides which are currently available. Moreover, environmentally tolerable replacements for these insecticides are declining. New natural, biodegradable insecticides which are relatively nontoxic to vertebrates and may be produced by fermentation processes are a cost effective replacement for known insecticides.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION
In order to satisfy the need for a cost effective, natural, biodegradable insecticide, one aspect of the present invention provides a substantially pure tetrahydroquinoline alkaloid compound. This “aspernomine” compound is isolated from the sclerotia of the fungus Aspergillus nomius and is effective for controlling Lepidopteron insects. The compound has the structure:

Another aspect of the present invention provides a composition for controlling insects containing the aspernomine compound and an inert carrier. The aspernomine compound is preferably present in the composition in an amount effecting insects of the Lepidoptera species, such as Helicoverpa zea. An effective amount of the composition may be applied to a locus of insects in order to control the insects.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides a substantially pure tetrahydroquinoline alkaloid compound effective in controlling insects, insecticidal compositions containing the compound of the present invention and a method for controlling insects by applying the compositions to the locus of the insects.

The tetrahydroquinoline alkaloid compound of the present invention has been designated “aspernomine”. The aspernomine compound, which is effective for controlling Lepidopteron insects, has the structure:

The aspernomine compound is isolated from the sclerotia of the fungus Aspergillus nomius, a member of the A. flavus taxonomic group. A strain of the fungus Aspergillus nomius was deposited on Jun. 10, 1991 in the Agricultural Research Service Patent Culture Collection (NRRL) in Peoria, III. and has been assigned Deposit No. NRRL 18836. The culture deposit will be stored and made available to the public in accord with the provisions of the Budapest Treaty for the Deposit of Microorganisms. All restrictions on the availability of the culture deposit to the public will be irrevocably removed upon the granting of a patent disclosing the strain.

The sclerotia of A. nomius are produced by solid-substrate fermentation on corn kernels. They are ground by conventional means to a suitable particle size and are extracted with at least one solvent. Suitable solvents for
the extraction could be readily determined by the skilled artisan and would include any solvents in which
the aspernomine compounds of the present invention are soluble. Preferably, the ground sclerotia are ex-
tracted with pentane and are subsequently extracted with a hexaneethyl acetate gradient.

Isolation and purification of the aspernomine compound from the solvent extract is effected by the use of
conventional techniques, such as high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC), thin layer chromatog-
raphy (TLC), silica gel column chromatography and countercurrent distribution (CCD). In the preferred
embodiment of the invention, the pentane extract is concentrated to afford a yellow-orange oil. The oil was
subjected to silica gel column chromatography. Asper-
nomine was obtained as white needles upon evaporation of
selected fractions eluted with hexane. The details of
the isolation procedure are described in Example 1,
although the procedure is not limited thereto.

Commercial formulations including the aspernomine
compound may be prepared directly from fungal ex-
tracts or from the fractions derived from the extracts.
However, the formulations are prepared from a pure or
a substantially pure aspernomine when a high degree of
specificity is required. For example, if a high degree of
predictability of the intended response by both target
and nontarget species is required, a formulation pre-
pared from a pure or substantially pure form of an
aspernomine would be used. The formulation would then
exclude other substances found in natural fungi which
might have an adverse effect on activity or a toxic effect
toward nontarget species.

Insecticidal compositions of the present invention
include the aspernomine as described above in combina-
tion with a suitable inert carrier as known in the art.
Agronomically acceptable carriers such as alcohols,
ketones, esters and surfactants are illustrative. Asper-
nomine is present in the composition in an amount effect-
ing the target species which is typically at least about
1.0 ppm. The concentration of the aspernomine com-
pound in an insecticidal composition will vary consid-
ervably depending upon the target species, substrate,
method of application and desired response. Additional
factors to be considered in determining an optimum
concentration include phytotoxicity toward the treated
plant and the tolerance of nontarget species.

The aspernomine compound acts to control pests by
mechanisms including growth regulation, death induc-
ment, sterilization, as well as interference with meta-
morphosis and other morphogenic functions. The re-
sulting response is dependant on the pest species, asper-
nomine concentration and method of application. The
aspernomine compound is administered in an amount
effecting one or more of the responses as may be prede-
termined by routine testing. Where the intended re-
sponse is pest mortality, an "effective amount" is de-

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defined as the quantity of aspernomine compound which
will effect a significant mortality rate of a test group as
compared with an untreated group. The actual effective
amount will vary with the species of pest, stage of larval
development, nature of the substrate, the type of inert
carrier, the period of treatment and other related fac-
tors.

The compositions of the present invention are effec-
tive in controlling a variety of insects. Agronomically
important insects such as those of the orders Lepidop-
tera and Coleoptera are of particular interest. However,
the compounds and compositions of the present inven-
tion are not limited thereto.

The insecticidal compositions of the present invention
are used to control insects by applying the compo-
sition to the locus of the pest to be controlled. When
the aspernomine compound is intended as a stomach poi-
sion, it is applied in conjunction with an inert carrier to
the pest diet. The composition is applied to plants by
treating the leaf surfaces or by systemic incorpora-
tion. As a contact poison, any topical method of appli-
cation will be effective, such as direct spraying on the
pest or on a substrate which is likely to be contacted by
the pest.

The following examples are presented to describe
preferred embodiments and utilities of the present in-
vention and are not meant to limit the present invention
unless otherwise stated in the claims appended hereto.

**EXAMPLE 1**

Isolation and Purification of Aspernomine

A strain of *A. nomius* (NRRL 18836) originally iso-
lated from a pine sawfly (*Diprion similis*) was obtained
from the ARS Culture Collection at the USDA North-
eran Regional Research Center in Peoria, III. Sclerotia
were prepared by solid substrate fermentation of *A.
nomius* on autoclaved corn kernels using procedures
described by Wicklow et al. in supra (1988), and were
stored at 4°C until extraction. Sclerotia of *A. nomius*
(120.8 g) were ground with a mortar and pestle and then
extracted with n-pentane in a soxhlet apparatus for 54
hours. Concentration of the resulting N-pentane extract
afforded 297 mg of a yellow-orange oil. A portion of
this extract (80 mg) was subjected to silica gel chroma-
tography (26 x 1.5 cm column) using a hexane-ethyl
acetate gradient, collecting 4-mL fractions. Aspernomi-
ne was obtained as white needles (6.7 mg) upon evap-
oration of selected fractions eluted with 90% hexane.
This procedure was repeated with the remaining extract
to yield a total of 18.8 mg of aspernomine.

In determining the properties of aspernomine, carbon
multiplicities were determined by a distortionless en-
hancement by polarization transfer (DEPT) experi-
ment. One-bond C-H correlations were obtained using a
heteronuclear multiple quantum correlation (HMOC)
experiment optimized for 120 Hz. Proton assignments
were made by analysis of correlated spectroscopy (COSY),
homonuclear decoupling, and HMOC experi-
ments. Axial and equatorial orientations were deter-
mined where possible on the basis of coupling constants
and nuclear overhauser enhancement/exchange spec-
troscopy (NOESY) interactions. Long-range C-H cor-
relations were obtained either by selective insensitive
nuclei enhanced by polarization transfer (INEPT) ex-
periments or by a heteronuclear multiple bond correla-
tion (HMBC) experiment optimized for 8.5 Hz. All
2D-NMR experiments were conducted at 600 MHz.
Individual proton signals studied using the selective
INEPT technique were subjected to as many as five
separate experiments optimizing for 5, 7, 8, 10 or 12 Hz.

Aspernomine has the following characteristics: [α]D+225° (c=0.12 g/dl; MeOH, 27°C); 1H NMR,
13C NMR, NOESY, and HMBC data in Table 1; UV
(MeOH) 336 (ε1150), 302 (2510), 244 (5760), 232 (5460);
IR (neat) 3500, 3360, 2970, 2930, 1698, 1606, 1490, 750

-1;

Electron impact mass spectrometry (EIMS) (70
eV) 421 (M+; rel. int. 45%), 184 (7), 156 (100), 143 (37),
130 (28); High resolution electron impact mass spec-
The presence of a 1,2-disubstituted benzene ring, and isolated NHCH₂CH₂, CH₂CH₃, and 4-methyl-3-pentenyl units were established from the COSY, decoupling, and HMOC data. The following partial structure

![Structural Diagram]

a structural subunit found in nominine, was also initially proposed by comparison of NMR data with those obtained for nominine. HMBC correlation of H₂-28 with C-15, 16 and 17, and correlation of H₂-29 with C-14, 15, 16 and 20, along with other supporting data, confirmed the partial structure. These five spin systems accounted for all of the carbons except for the ketone carbon and one additional aliphatic quaternary carbon. Connectivity of these units was elucidated by analysis of long-range C—H correlations. The attachment of the 4-methyl-3-pentenyl group to C-20 was established by a correlation of one of the C-22 protons (2.20 ppm) with this carbon. Correlation of the methine proton of the
NHCH\textsubscript{2}H\textsubscript{2} unit (H-2) with C-9 of the 1,2-disubstituted aromatic ring, in conjunction with the downfield chemical shift of C-9 (142.7 ppm), linked the aromatic ring with the nitrogen atom of the NHCH\textsubscript{2}H\textsubscript{2} unit. An HMBC cross-peak between the signal for the aromatic proton H-5 and the additional aliphatic quaternary carbon resonance (C-3) placed C-3 on the aromatic ring ortho to the nitrogen atom. The methine proton H-12 of the isolated CH\textsubscript{2}CH\textsubscript{3} unit (comprised of C-12 and C-13) showed a variety of HMBC cross-peaks that were especially useful in determining the structure of aspernomine. Correlations of the H-12 proton signal to both C-3 and C-4 indicated that C-12 is connected to C-3. Correlations of H-12 to C-19 and C-20 of the structural subunit, as well as to C-21 of the 4-methyl-3-pentenyl side-chain, revealed the direct connection of C-12 to C-20. Thus, these results permitted assignment of all of the atoms directly linked to C-12. A further correlation of the H-12 proton to the methane carbon of the isolated NHCH\textsubscript{2}H\textsubscript{2} unit (C-27) implied connection of C-27 to C-3 to form the six-membered B-ring, since C-27 cannot be directly attached to C-12, C-11 or the NH group. The remaining atom linked to the quaternary carbon C-3 was established as C-13 of the structural subunit based on observation of correlations of the downfield-shifted H\textsubscript{ax}-13 proton with C-3, C-4 and C-27. These results also confirmed the linkage of C-27 to C-3.

A final correlation of H-12 with the ketone carbon (C-10) showed that C-10 must be connected either to C-11 or to C-3. Since all of the connections to C-3 are already connected for, C-10 must be attached to C-11. Supporting evidence was provided by additional correlations of C-10 with H-2, H\textsubscript{ax}-11, and H\textsubscript{eq}-11. The only remaining positions available for connection are C-10 and C-2. Linkage of these two positions is supported by HMBC correlations of C-2 with C-10, and of one of the C-11 protons with C-2. Based on these and other supporting data, the gross structure of aspernomine which has a previously unreported ring system was assigned.

The relative stereochemistry of the E-ring and the D/E-ring fusion of aspernomine (positions 15, 16, 19 and 20) is proposed to be analogous to that of nomine and other related Aspergillus metabolites based on group genetic and NMR similarities. Confirmation of this hypothesis was obtained through NOESY data as shown in Table 1. A NOESY correlation was observed between H-12 and H-16. In order for these two protons to be spatially close, the relative stereochemistry at positions 15, 16 and 20 must be as shown. Furthermore, both protons must be axial (H-12 axial with respect to the D-ring), with the D- and E-rings most likely adopting a chair-chair conformation. Nomine and the aflavines possess a similar cis D/E-ring fusion. Additional supporting evidence was provided by NOESY correlations between H-18 and H\textsubscript{ax}-29, and between H\textsubscript{eq}-29 and one of the protons on C-22. H-19 must have an equatorial disposition (no trans-diaxial coupling with either neighboring proton). This observation, along with NOESY correlations of H-19 with both H-11 protons, plus a weak correlation with H-12, establishes the relative stereochemistry at C-19 as shown. The remaining relative stereochemical assignments were proposed on the basis of other NOESY correlations and on geometrical considerations. A strong correlation of the axial proton on C-13 with H-4 of the aromatic ring led to assignment of the stereochemistry indicated at position 3. This assignment would also rationalize the substantial downfield shift of H\textsubscript{ax}-13 (2.58 ppm) due to aromatic ring current effects. Geometrical constraints of the bridged B/C-ring system require that H-2 must be cis to C-13 with respect to the B-ring. The NOESY correlations mentioned earlier between the C-11 protons and H-19, and between H-12 and H-16 require the relative configuration shown for the remaining stereocenter (C-12). The C-ring would have to adopt a twisted conformation rather than the alternative chairlike form in order to account for proximity of both C-11 protons to H-19.

It is likely that nomine and aspernomine compounds arise biogenetically from a common geranylgeranyl indole precursor. The pathway to aspernomine appears to involve unusual steps. The non-trivial skeletal differences between nomine and aspernomine suggest that nomine is not a precursor to aspernomine, and that the divergence may occur significantly earlier in the biosynthetic process.

**EXAMPLE 2**

**Insecticidal Activity of Aspernomine**

The compound was evaluated by insect bioassays described previously by Dowd in *Entomol. Exp. Appl.* 47:69 (1988). Neonate larvae of *H. zeae* were used for all assays. They were obtained from laboratory colonies reared on pinto bean-based diet at 27° C, ±1° C, 40±10% relative humidity, and a 14:10 light:dark photoperiod.

The diet used to rear the insects was based on a standard pinto bean diet for many species, which contains the following ingredients: 120 g dried pinto beans, 43 g wheat germ, 28 g brewer's yeast, 8 g Vanderzant's vitamin mix, 2.8 g ascorbic acid, 1.75 g methyl paraben, 0.9 g sorbic acid, 12 g agar, 2 ml formaldehyde (38%), 1.5 ml of propionic-phosphoric acid solution (42% propionic acid, 4.2% phosphoric acid), and 550 ml water. All dry diet ingredients (except for the pinto beans) were purchased from U.S. Biochemicals Corp. Before use, the beans were soaked in water until saturated (overnight). The agar was added to 250 ml of water and brought to a boil. The other ingredients were blended in a Waring blender until uniformly mixed. The hot agar was added, and blending continued until all ingredients were uniformly mixed.

The pinto bean-based diet thus prepared was added in 5-ml quantities to test tubes. The test tubes were held at 60° C until chemicals were incorporated to prevent solidification of the diet. The aspernomine was added in 125 μl of acetone to the liquid diet to give a final concentration of 100 ppm. Upon addition of the aspernomine, the mixture was removed from the water bath. The chemical was incorporated into the diets by blending vigorously with a vortex mixer for 20 sec. Preliminary observations with colored solutions of both water and acetone indicated uniform incorporation by this method. The diets were dispensed into culture plates and allowed to cool to room temperature. To remove the potentially toxic acetone, the diets were placed in a fume hood for ca. 20 min until slight darkening occurred. The diets were cut into approximately equal sections, and each section was placed into a well of a 24-well immunoassay plate. A single neonate *H. zeae* was added to each well. To prevent desiccation of the diet, the plate was covered by a sheet of parafilm, a sheet of cardboard, and the plastic cover. The cover was secured by two rubber bands, and groups of plates were placed in two polyethylene bags held closely by rubber bands. The plates were held under the same conditions.
used to rear the insects. Mortality was checked at 2, 4 and 7 days, and the surviving larvae were weighed after 7 days. Each chemical set was tested on a total of 20 larvae.

Aspernomine, a tetrahydroquinoline alkaloid, exhibits significant activity against the corn earworm *H. zea*. Incorporating this compound into a standard test diet at 100 ppm (dry weight) caused a 35.4% reduction in weight gain of the test insects relative to controls. This compound also exhibits moderate cytotoxicity against three human solid tumor cell lines. ED\(_{50}\) values of 3.09, 4.93 and 3.08 \(\mu g/ml\) were observed in assays against A-549 lung carcinoma, MCF-7 breast adenocarcinoma and HT-29 colon adenocarcinoma cell lines, respectively.

While the invention is susceptible to various modifications and alternative forms, specific embodiments thereof have been shown by way of example and were herein described in detail. It should be understood, however, that it is not intended to limit the invention to the particular forms disclosed, but on the contrary, the intention is to cover all modifications, equivalents, and alternatives falling within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.

We claim:

1. A substantially pure tetrahydroquinoline alkaloid designated aspernomine and having the structure:

   ![Chemical Structure](image)

2. In insecticidal composition comprising substantially pure aspernomine and an agro nomically acceptable inert carrier.

3. The composition of claim 2 including an amount of aspernomine effecting insects of the Lepidoptera species.

4. The composition of claim 2 including an amount of aspernomine effecting *Helicoverpa zea*.

5. A method of controlling insects comprising applying an effective amount of substantially pure aspernomine to a locus of insects.

6. The method of claim 5 wherein the insects are Lepidoptera species.

7. The method of claim 5 wherein the insects are *Helicoverpa zea*.