

1 Survey of Mycotoxins in U.S. Distiller's Dried Grains with Solubles 2 from 2009 to 2011

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5 **ABSTRACT:** Distiller's dried grains with solubles (DDGS) is a major coproduct of the fuel-ethanol industry and is becoming a
6 popular low-cost ingredient for animal feed. Uncertainties regarding the risk factors in DDGS, such as level of mycotoxins, could
7 limit its application in the animal feed industry. To provide a scientifically sound assessment of the prevalence and levels of
8 mycotoxins in U.S. DDGS, we measured aflatoxins, deoxynivalenol, fumonisins, T-2 toxin, and zearalenone in 67 DDGS samples
9 collected from 8 ethanol plants in the midwestern United States from 2009 to 2011. Among the five mycotoxins, deoxynivalenol
10 was the main focus of the study because the crop year of 2009 was favorable for deoxynivalenol occurrence in corn. We learned
11 that no more than 12% of the samples contained deoxynivalenol levels higher than the minimum advisory level for use in animal
12 feed provided by the U.S. FDA, and the deoxynivalenol levels in all DDGS collected in 2011 were <2 mg/kg. Besides, intensive
13 study showed that the enrichment of deoxynivalenol from contaminated corn to DDGS was about 3.5 times. With regard to the
14 other mycotoxins in DDGS, the study suggested that (1) almost none of the DDGS samples produced in 2010 contained
15 detectable aflatoxins and the highest level of aflatoxins in DDGS was 5.7 $\mu\text{g}/\text{kg}$; (2) no more than 6% of the samples contained
16 fumonisin levels higher than the guidance level for feeding equids and rabbits provided by the U.S. FDA; (3) none of the samples
17 contained T-2 higher than the detection limit; (4) most samples contained zearalenone levels between 100 and 300 $\mu\text{g}/\text{kg}$. This
18 study was based on representative DDGS samples from the U.S. ethanol industry, and the data were collected using state-of-the-
19 art analytical methodology. This study provided a comprehensive and scientifically sound assessment of the occurrence and levels
20 of mycotoxins in DDGS produced from 2009 to early 2011 by the U.S. ethanol industry.

21 **KEYWORDS:** DDGS, aflatoxins, deoxynivalenol, fumonisins, T-2 toxin and zearalenone

22 ■ INTRODUCTION

23 Mycotoxins are unavoidable contaminants in crops, and
24 therefore they occur in commodities entering the marketing
25 chain including those grains to be used in ethanol production.¹
26 Currently, corn (maize) is the primary commodity used for the
27 production of ethanol in the United States. Several mycotoxins
28 can potentially be found in corn including aflatoxins,
29 deoxynivalenol, fumonisins, T-2 toxin, and zearalenone.¹
30 Most of these toxins can occur in corn, preharvest, and are
31 present in the grain at harvest; however, such occurrence is
32 dependent upon the unique environmental conditions that are
33 conducive to the growth of specific molds that produce these
34 mycotoxins during crop development. Therefore, mycotoxin
35 contamination in corn is not an annual event because the
36 appropriate environmental conditions are often lacking for the
37 growth of the specific responsible fungi.²⁻⁴ In 2009, the
38 weather conditions for corn production in the United States
39 were favorable for the growth of deoxynivalenol, and numerous
40 papers showed data on detectable deoxynivalenol in corn,
41 which eventually led to the concern of elevated deoxynivalenol
42 level in distiller's dried grains with solubles (DDGS).⁵

43 During the corn-to-ethanol production process, approx-
44 imately two-thirds of the grain, mainly starch, is fermented by
45 yeast to produce ethanol and carbon dioxide, neither of which
46 would contain mycotoxins if contaminated corn was used.⁶
47 However, the remaining coproduct, DDGS, could potentially
48 contain a higher concentration of any mycotoxin that was
49 present in the grain prior to fermentation. The increased level
50 of a given mycotoxin in DDGS was reported to be

approximately 3 times as high as the level in the grain.⁷⁻⁹ To
51 safeguard the quality of DDGS, most ethanol plants perform
52 mycotoxin screening on incoming corn as often as weekly,
53 when it is known that the corn came out of a mycotoxin-prone
54 crop year. 55

To provide a scientifically sound assessment of the
56 prevalence and levels of mycotoxins in DDGS produced from
57 the midwestern United States from 2009 to 2011, we measured
58 various mycotoxins, including aflatoxin, deoxynivalenol, fimo-
59 nisins, T-2 toxin, and zearalenone, in DDGS produced from
60 eight dry-grind ethanol plants in the midwestern United States
61 between August 2009 and January 2011. Because the year 2009
62 was favorable for the occurrence of deoxynivalenol in corn, we
63 specifically monitored the deoxynivalenol level in corn and
64 DDGS from two ethanol plants for 14 consecutive days to
65 better understand how to monitor and control deoxynivalenol
66 accumulation in DDGS from contaminated corn. 67

68 ■ MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample Collection. DDGS samples were collected from eight
69 ethanol plants in the midwestern United States every other month
70 from August 2009 to January 2011. The sampling plan was designed to
71 represent DDGS from corn produced in the crop years of 2008, 2009,
72 and 2010. For example, the DDGS samples collected from August
73 2009 to January 2010 were likely produced from the mixture of corn 74

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75 harvested in the crop years of 2008 and 2009, whereas the DDGS
76 samples collected after January 2010 were likely produced from corn
77 harvested in the crop year of 2009. Later in August of 2010, corn and
78 DDGS samples were collected from the two ethanol plants with
79 relatively high levels of deoxynivalenol in DDGS for 14 consecutive
80 days to study how deoxynivalenol enriched from contaminated corn to
81 DDGS.

82 About 2 kg of DDGS grab sample was collected at the ethanol
83 plants immediately after they were produced, and about 2 kg of whole
84 kernel corn was collected from the two ethanol plants before milling.
85 After overnight shipment to the National Corn-to-Ethanol Research
86 Center, the samples were immediately vacuum sealed and stored in a
87 freezer at -20°C .

88 **Sample Testing.** The mycotoxin tests were performed by Trilogy
89 Analytical Laboratories (Washington, MO). Samples were analyzed for
90 aflatoxins B₁, B₂, G₁, and G₂, deoxynivalenol, fumonisins B₁, B₂, and B₃,
91 and zearalenone by high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC)
92 and for T-2 toxin by thin layer chromatography (TLC). Aflatoxins B₁,
93 B₂, G₁, and G₂ were detected after extraction with acetonitrile/water
94 (84:16), isolation using a solid phase cleanup column (Trilogy TC-
95 M160) and detection with a fluorescence detector with a Kobra cell for
96 postcolumn derivatization (AOAC 994.08).¹⁰ Fumonisin B₁, B₂, and
97 B₃ were detected after extraction with methanol/water (3:1), isolation
98 using an immunoaffinity cleanup column and detection with a
99 fluorescence detector with naphthalene dicarboxaldehyde (NDA) for
100 precolumn derivatization (AOAC 2001.04).¹¹ Deoxynivalenol was
101 detected after extraction with acetonitrile/water (84:16), isolation
102 using a combination of solid phase (Trilogy TC-M160 and TC-C210)
103 and immunoaffinity cleanup columns, and detection with an UV
104 detector.¹² Detection of T-2 toxin was after extraction with
105 acetonitrile/water (84:16), isolation using a combination of solid
106 phase cleanup columns (Trilogy TC-M160 and TC-C210), and TLC
107 detection.¹³ Zearalenone was detected after extraction with acetonitrile/water (84:16), isolation using a combination of solid phase (Trilogy TC-M160) and immunoaffinity cleanup columns, and detection with a fluorescence detector.¹⁴ The detection limits for the tests were 1 $\mu\text{g}/\text{kg}$ for each aflatoxin, 0.1 mg/kg for deoxynivalenol, 0.1 mg/kg for each fumonisin, 0.1 mg/kg for T-2 toxin, and 0.05 mg/kg for zearalenone.

114 ■ RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

115 The results for five mycotoxins in DDGS from eight ethanol
116 plants are listed in Table 1A, and the results for deoxynivalenol
117 in corn and DDGS from two ethanol plants are listed in Table
118 2.

119 **Aflatoxins.** The major fungus to produce aflatoxins,
120 including aflatoxins B₁, B₂, G₁ and G₂, is *Aspergillus flavus*.
121 Corn becomes susceptible to aflatoxin formation during growth
122 under drought condition or in high moisture/humid
123 storage.^{15,16}

124 Aflatoxin B₁ was detected in DDGS collected in August and
125 October 2009 with the highest level of 1.4 $\mu\text{g}/\text{kg}$. Aflatoxin B₁
126 was not detected in almost all DDGS samples collected since
127 December 2009, and the highest level of aflatoxins in DDGS
128 was 5.7 $\mu\text{g}/\text{kg}$ in one DDGS collected in 2011. None of the
129 other aflatoxin compounds, B₂, G₁, and G₂, were detected in
130 any of the DDGS samples (Table 1A).

131 In comparison with the DDGS produced from 2006 to 2008
132 in the midwestern United States,¹⁷ the results are very similar in
133 that aflatoxins are not detected in most DDGS samples from
134 the midwestern United States, and the highest level observed
135 was $<6 \mu\text{g}/\text{kg}$. The U.S. FDA has set the lowest action level of
136 20 $\mu\text{g}/\text{kg}$ aflatoxins in animal feeds and ingredients,¹⁸ and the
137 European Union Commission has recommended a guidance
138 level of 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{kg}$ aflatoxins in complete feed.¹⁹

139 **Deoxynivalenol.** *Fusarium graminearum* is the principal
140 deoxynivalenol-producing fungus in grains in the United

Table 1. Aflatoxins (A), Deoxynivalenol (B), Fumonisins (C), and Zearalenone (D) in DDGS

sampling time	plant							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
(A) Aflatoxins ($\mu\text{g}/\text{kg}$)								
2009-08	nd ^a	1.2 ^b	1	1.3	2	nd	1.4	nd
2009-10	nd	1.2	1.1	1.4	1.3	nd	1	nd
2009-12	nd	nd	nd	nd	1.3	nd	nd	nd
2010-01	nd	nd	nd	SN ^c	1.5	nd	nd	nd
2010-03	nd	nd	nd	nd	SN	nd	nd	nd
2010-05	nd	1.1	nd	nd	SN	nd	nd	nd
2010-07	nd	nd	nd	nd	SN	nd	nd	nd
2010-09	nd	nd	nd	SN	nd	nd	nd	nd
(B) Deoxynivalenol (mg/kg)								
2009-08	1.0	1.3	2.4	0.3	1.9	2.7	1.3	2.1
2009-10	1.7	2.0	2.3	1.6	1.1	2.3	0.7	1.9
2009-12	12.3	2.6	3.6	5.6	2.7	2.4	2.0	3.0
2010-01	10.4	3.9	1.9	SN	3.0	3.6	3.3	3.1
2010-03	9.4	3.1	2.4	6.3	SN	3.9	3.0	3.3
2010-05	5.9	3.1	2.4	3.9	SN	3.0	2.6	2.6
2010-07	9.1	3.0	2.7	5.0	SN	3.0	3.1	3.1
2010-09	4.5	2.3	2.4	SN	2.6	1.7	3.1	3.2
2011-01	2.1	0.8	0.5	1.7	0.4	1.0	0.6	0.3
(C) Fumonisins (mg/kg)								
2011-01	nd	3.2	1.8	nd	1.9	nd	5.7	0.8
2009-08	0.8 ^d	5.2	8.9	nd	1.8	1.8	5.4	3.3
2009-10	0.9	6.1	3.6	0.5	3.2	0.7	4.4	2.8
2009-12	0.8	0.6	3.7	0.2	0.5	0.2	0.3	0.5
2010-01	0.7	1.3	1.7	SN	1.5	0.2	0.2	nd
2010-03	0.7	0.7	2.2	0.2	SN	0.2	0.2	0.4
2010-05	0.3	0.5	1.7	0.2	SN	nd	0.3	0.2
2010-07	nd	0.4	0.9	nd	SN	nd	0.1	nd
2010-09	0.3	0.4	1.4	SN	1.1	0.1	nd	0.3
2011-01	0.2	1.6	0.9	nd	4.4	nd	nd	nd
(D) Zearalenone ($\mu\text{g}/\text{kg}$)								
2009-08	102	225	234	118	136	270	161	256
2009-10	101	229	119	70	75	216	72	142
2009-12	469	311	334	123	560	116	133	202
2010-01	407	389	290	SN	245	209	114	261
2010-03	539	377	226	261	SN	212	154	228
2010-05	285	472	297	189	SN	161	117	309
2010-07	220	177	290	121	SN	108	130	161
2010-09	299	220	230	SN	244	113	61	263
2011-01	76.1	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd

^and, not detected. ^bThe detected mycotoxin was aflatoxin B₁. ^cSN, sample not available. ^dThe detected fumonisins include fumonisins B₁, B₂, and B₃.

States.¹⁶ Deoxynivalenol may coexist with other toxins, such
as zearalenone. The organism survives on old infested residue
left on the field from the previous season, where a cold moist
condition is favorable for the fungus to grow on corn.
Generally, storage is not considered a potential source for
contamination if the corn was mature and was stored at a
moisture level of $<14\%$.¹⁵ Because the weather conditions in
2009 were favorable for the growth of deoxynivalenol in corn,
elevated levels of deoxynivalenol in DDGS were expected.
However, the extent of deoxynivalenol contamination in DDGS
was not systematically studied.

In this study, we learned that deoxynivalenol was detected in
every DDGS sample collected (Table 1B). The detected level

Table 2. Deoxynivalenol (Milligrams per Kilogram) in Corn and DDGS from Plants 1 and 4

sampling day	plant 1		plant 4	
	corn	DDGS	corn	DDGS
1	1.7	9.3	1.3	4.6
2	2.4	9.0	1.0	5.2
3	1.8	8.2	1.8	5.6
4	1.4	7.8	1.1	4.7
5	2.1	7.3	1.0	4.5
6	2.8	7.7	1.0	4.5
7	2.5	8.7	1.1	3.2
8	2.9	7.8	1.4	4.3
9	2.5	8.4	1.6	4.3
10	2.2	8.3	1.4	4.8
11	2.6	6.2	1.9	4.0
12	2.3	7.3	0.9	4.4
13	1.8	6.3	1.2	3.5
14	2.2	8.0	1.1	4.3
mean	2.2	7.9	1.3	4.4
RSD (%)	19	11	25	14

154 of deoxynivalenol in DDGS ranged from 0.3 to 12.3 mg/kg.
 155 Five DDGS samples from plant 1 and three DDGS samples
 156 from plant 4 contained deoxynivalenol at >5 mg/kg, which is
 157 the FDA advisory level for deoxynivalenol in animal feeds.¹⁸

158 Overall, about 12% of the 67 samples studied contained
 159 deoxynivalenol levels higher than the minimum advisory level
 160 by FDA, and those samples were from two ethanol plants
 161 (plants 1 and 4). However, the European Union Commission
 162 set a guidance level of 0.9 mg/kg deoxynivalenol in complete
 163 feed, which is close to the U.S. FDA advisory level if 20%
 164 DDGS inclusion is used in the animal ration.¹⁹

165 With respect to the temporal trend, the deoxynivalenol level
 166 in DDGS from the eight ethanol plants increased from August
 167 2009 to January 2010, then stayed unchanged or slightly
 168 decreased from March 2010 to September 2010, then
 169 drastically decreased in January 2011 (Figure 1A). The
 170 deoxynivalenol in DDGS increasing trend from August 2009
 171 to January 2010 can be explained by the utilization of more and
 172 more deoxynivalenol contaminated corn produced from 2009.
 173 Whereas the temporal trend of deoxynivalenol in DDGS was
 174 similar for the eight plants, only two ethanol plants (plants 1
 175 and 4) showed certain level of deoxynivalenol contamination in
 176 DDGS.

177 In comparison with the DDGS produced from 2006 to 2008
 178 in the midwestern United States,¹⁷ the deoxynivalenol in
 179 DDGS from 2006 to 2008 was around 1 mg/kg, and the
 180 deoxynivalenol in DDGS from 2009 to 2010 was >2 mg/kg.

181 **Fumonisin.** The major producer, *Fusarium verticillioides*, is
 182 capable of producing the fumonisins, mainly B₁, B₂, and B₃.²⁰
 183 Corn is the major commodity affected by the fungi that
 184 produce the toxins. The exact conditions for this disease are
 185 unknown, but it is suggested that drought stress followed by
 186 warm, wet weather during flowering seems to be important. It
 187 is reported that the organism is present virtually in every seed
 188 and is present in the corn plant throughout its growth and that,
 189 sometimes, there is a considerable amount of fumonisins
 190 present in symptomless kernels of corn.

191 Fumonisin were detected in almost all DDGS samples. The
 192 fumonisin level in DDGS ranged from not detected to 8.9 mg/
 193 kg. Two DDGS samples from plant 2, one DDGS sample from

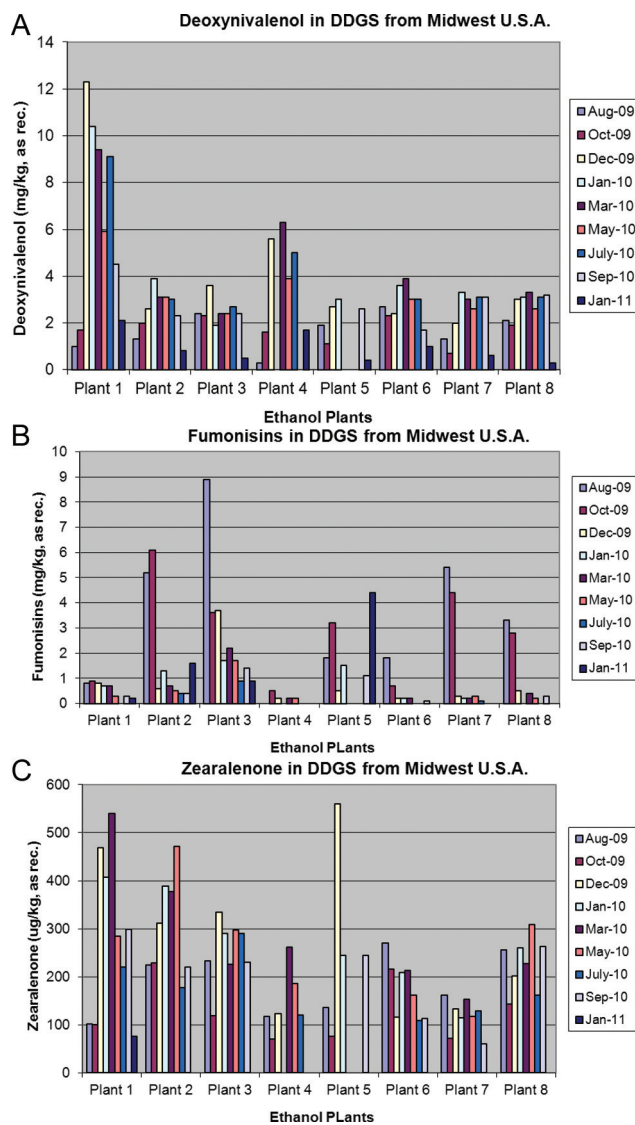


Figure 1. Temporal changes of deoxynivalenol (A), fumonisins (B), and zearalenone (C) in DDGS.

194 plant 3, and one DDGS sample from plant 7 contained
 195 fumonisins at >5 mg/kg, which is the FDA lowest guidance
 196 level for fumonisins in animal feeds.¹⁸ In total, no more than
 197 6% of the 67 samples studied contained fumonisin levels higher
 198 than the guidance level for feeding equids and rabbits by the
 199 U.S. FDA and European Union Commission, and the 6% of
 200 DDGS samples with elevated fumonisins were from three
 201 ethanol plants (plants 2, 3, and 7).

202 Different from the temporal trend of deoxynivalenol in
 203 DDGS, the fumonisin level in DDGS showed relatively high
 204 values in August 2009 and October 2009 and stayed fairly low
 205 afterward (Figure 1B). The plants producing DDGS with
 206 relatively high levels of deoxynivalenol had DDGS with
 207 relatively low levels of fumonisins.

208 In comparison with the DDGS produced from 2006 to 2008
 209 in the midwestern United States,¹⁷ only 6% of the DDGS from
 210 2009 to 2010 contained fumonisin levels higher than the
 211 guidance level for feeding equids and rabbits by the U.S. FDA,
 212 whereas about 12% of the DDGS from 2006 to 2008 contained
 213 fumonisin levels higher than the recommendation level by
 214 FDA.

215 **T-2.** This mycotoxin is a member of fungal metabolites
216 known as the trichothecenes. *Fusarium sporotrichioides* is the
217 principal fungus responsible for the production of T-2. The
218 production of T-2 is greatest with increased humidity and
219 temperatures of 6–24 °C.¹⁶

220 None of the DDGS samples tested in this study were found
221 to contain levels above the detection limit of 0.1 mg/kg, which
222 is similar to the observation with the DDGS produced from
223 2006 to 2008.¹⁷

224 **Zearalenone.** This is an estrogenic fungal metabolite. The
225 major fungus responsible for producing this toxin is *Fusarium*
226 *graminearum*.¹⁶ A moist and cool growing condition is favorable
227 for this fungus to grow, the same conditions favorable for
228 deoxynivalenol. For storage, controlling moisture at <14% is
229 important to avoid contamination.

230 Zearalenone was detected in all DDGS samples. The
231 zearalenone level in DDGS ranged from not detected to 560
232 µg/kg. No action levels, advisory levels, or guidance levels for
233 zearalenone are available from the U.S. FDA; however, the
234 European Commission Recommendation gave the lowest
235 guidance level for zearalenone in complete feedstuffs of 0.25
236 mg/kg.¹⁹ For most ethanol plants, it seemed that the temporal
237 trend of zearalenone in DDGS was similar to that of
238 deoxynivalenol level in DDGS (Figure 1C). When the level
239 of zearalenone was plotted against deoxynivalenol in DDGS for
240 each plant, the correlation was not strong (Figure 2).

to homogeneously distribute among grains,¹⁶ the sampling and
testing procedure used here was effective and representative to
monitor the mycotoxin quality of DDGS from an ethanol plant.
It is as expected that the deoxynivalenol in DDGS was more
homogeneous than that in corn, because the corn to DDGS
production involves a great amount of milling and mixing to
homogenize the mycotoxins in DDGS.

The data from the two ethanol plants, which do not have
identical processing parameters, confirmed that the enrichment
of deoxynivalenol from corn to DDGS was about 3.5 times.
This suggests that it is effective for an ethanol plant to monitor
incoming corn frequently to safeguard the quality of the DDGS
they produce.

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ZON vs. DON in DDGS from Midwest U.S.A.

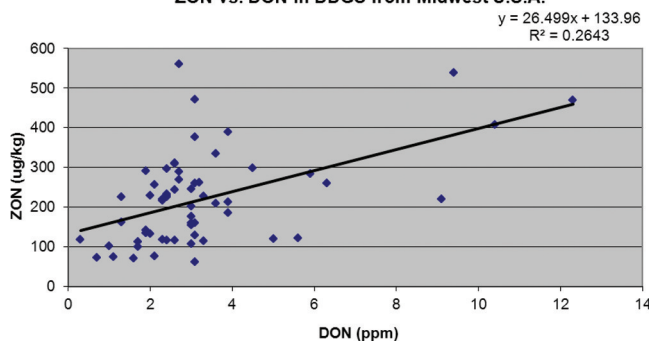


Figure 2. Zearalenone in DDGS versus deoxynivalenol in DDGS.

241 In comparison with the DDGS produced from 2006 to 2008
242 in the midwestern United States,¹⁷ most DDGS from 2006 to
243 2008 contained zearalenone levels of <100 µg/kg; the DDGS
244 from 2009 to 2011 contained zearalenone from not detected to
245 300 µg/kg.

246 **Deoxynivalenol Enriched from Corn to DDGS.** For
247 plant 1, the mean of deoxynivalenol in corn was 2.2 mg/kg with
248 a coefficient of variation (CV) of 19%, and the mean of
249 deoxynivalenol in DDGS was 7.9 mg/kg with a CV of 19%. For
250 plant 4, the mean of deoxynivalenol in corn was 1.3 mg/kg with
251 a CV of 25%, and the mean of deoxynivalenol in DDGS was 4.4
252 mg/kg with a CV of 14%. On the basis of the mean values, the
253 enrichment of deoxynivalenol from corn to DDGS was
254 calculated as 3.5 times for samples from both plants.

255 About 2 kg of each sample was collected from a medium-
256 sized ethanol plant (about 36 t) daily for 14 days, and after
257 grinding, about 5 g of ground material was used for
258 deoxynivalenol testing. Our data showed that the variation of
259 deoxynivalenol in DDGS within 14 days was about 10% for
260 both plants, and the variation of deoxynivalenol in corn within
261 14 days was about 20%. Considering that mycotoxins tend not

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