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**Author(s):** Saifullah, Shahed; Margus, Aigi; Kankare, Maaria; Lindström, Leena

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Correspondence: Leena Lindström, Department of Biological and Environmental Science,  
Survontie 9C, FI-40014, University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Tel: +358 40 8427228; email:  
leena.m.lindstrom@jyu.fi

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

**Repeated exposure of fluazinam fungicides affects gene expression profiles yet carries  
no costs on a non-target pest**

Shahed Saifullah, Aigi Margus, Maaria Kankare and Leena Lindström

*Department of Biological and Environmental Science, 40014 University of Jyväskylä,  
Finland*

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**Abstract**

Fungicides are used to control pathogenic fungi of crop species, but they have also been shown to alter behavioral, life history and fitness related traits of non-target insects. Here, we tested the fungicide effects on feeding behavior, survival and physiology of the non-target pest insect, the Colorado potato beetle (*Leptinotarsa decemlineata*). Feeding behavior was studied by a choice test of adult beetles, which were allowed to choose between a control and a fungicide (fluazinam) treated potato leaf. Larval survival was recorded after 24-hour and 72-hour exposure to control and fungicide-treated leaves with two different concentrations. The adults did not show fungicide avoidance behavior. Similarly, survival of the larvae was not affected by the exposure to fungicides. Finally, to understand the effects of fungicides at the physiological level (gene expression), we tested whether the larval exposure to fungicide alter the expression of five metabolic pathway and stress associated genes. Highest concentration and 72-hour exposure caused upregulation of one cytochrome P450 (*CYP9Z14v2*) and one insecticide resistance gene (*Ldace1*), whereas metabolic detoxification gene (*Ugt1*) was downregulated. 24-hour exposure to highest concentration caused downregulation of another common detoxification gene (*Gs*), while both exposure times to lowest concentration caused upregulation of the *Hsp70* stress tolerance gene. Despite these overall effects, there was a considerable amount of variation among different families in the gene expression levels. Even though the behavioral effects of the fungicide treatments were minor, the expression level differences of the studied genes indicate changes on the metabolic detoxifications and stress-related pathways.

**Key words** behavior; fluazinam; gene expression; *Leptinotarsa decemlineata*; metabolic detoxification; non-target animal

## Introduction

Fungal pathogens of the crops are considered as one of the most economically significant phyto-pathogens that can be a severe threat to the food security (Pennisi, 2010; National Academy of Sciences, 2011). Agricultural fungicides control fungal diseases of the crops and as the severity of the fungal diseases has increased over the past few decades (Fisher *et al.*, 2012) so has the fungicide usage. In Europe, fungicides are one of the most widely used plant protection chemicals (41.76% in 2015: Eurostat, 2020) and it is likely that fungicide residuals are also present in our environment (air or water) and even in the food (Woodrow *et al.*, 1995; Cabras *et al.*, 1997; Caldas *et al.*, 2001; Kreuger *et al.*, 2010; EFSA, 2016) as fungicide exposed animals and plant materials can be found in many food chains (Walorczyk *et al.*, 2013; Mu *et al.*, 2016). Presence of the fungicides in the food may in turn have negative impacts on the health of the consumers. However, impact of the fungicide on the animal may vary depending on the active ingredient and its pattern of exposure (Piel *et al.*, 2019). In general, fungicides are designed to target essential cellular or physiological processes in the fungi (FRAC, 2021), but they may also target the common cellular organelles in other organisms, which are similar in fungi and in eukaryotes (Maltby *et al.*, 2009). Several studies have shown the potential negative impacts of fungicides on many organisms, such as fish, pollinators and arthropods etc. (Wightwick *et al.*, 2010, Elskus, 2014, Shi *et al.*, 2018). Indeed, excessive use of agricultural fungicides can induce costs to the species living in the agro-environment.

Toxicity information of many fungicide classes is mostly available for fish, rats and mice, although, these organisms are unlikely to be regularly exposed to the fungicides (Oruc, 2010; Rouabhi, 2010). Non-target organisms, such as plants, insects, micro-organisms,

aquatic animals and birds that live near to the fungicide application sites, are common non-target species (Zaller & Brühl, 2019). Moreover, the effects of many commonly used fungicides are still unknown for many of the likely non-target organisms such as pollinators or pest insects in the agricultural settings (but see Campbell *et al.*, 2016; Clements *et al.*, 2018a). Fungicides can be applied once or multiple times in the fields depending on the severity of the fungal diseases (Reilly *et al.*, 2012) and hence species living in the crop fields can be exposed to fungicides for both short and extended periods of time. Effects of the fungicide can also vary depending on the duration of the exposure of the non-target species to the fungicide (Damalas & Eleftherohorios, 2011). Eco-toxicological data for fungicides are mostly from short-term studies focused on the acute toxic effect on mortality, but chronic exposure data and sublethal effects of the fungicides on other fitness related traits are also important to understand (Elskus, 2014; Sancho *et al.*, 2016). Fungicide concentrations and the mode of exposure found in the agricultural fields may have both acute toxic effect after one, or chronic effects (on fitness related traits) after multiple exposures (Wightwick *et al.*, 2010; Reilly *et al.*, 2012).

Several studies have reported the effects of fungicides on multiple fitness and life history related traits in non-target organisms, including fish, amphipod, moth, and beneficial and pest insects etc. (Biggs & Hagley, 1988; Michaud 2001; Adamski *et al.*, 2011; Vu *et al.*, 2016, 2017). For instance, in the *Agrotis segetum*, (turnip moth), fungicide (mancozeb) negatively affected the egg count and development of the larvae, but the larval survival remained unaffected (Adamski *et al.*, 2011). Another fungicide (boscalid) reduced both the survival and reproduction (the number of offspring) in a marine arthropod (*Allorchestes compressa*) (Vu *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, two other fungicides, (propiconazol and chlorothalonil) decreased the larval survival and egg hatching success in the Japanese beetle (*Popillia japonica*) (Obear *et al.*, 2016) and these two chemicals also decreased the activity of

detoxification related enzymes in the larvae. In the Colorado potato beetle (*Leptinotarsa decemlineata*), chlorothalonil and boscalid altered the activity of glutathione S-transferase (GST) enzyme and multiple genes involved in the metabolic detoxification pathways (Clements *et al.*, 2018a). In a study with zebra fish (*Danio rerio*) showed that a commonly used fungicide (fluazinam), can also alter the expression of stress-related genes (Wang *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, the effects of fungicides on any non-target species should be studied at multiple levels ranging from the behavior to the gene expression levels.

Fungicides target fungal cell membrane components or essential cellular functions, like nucleic acid or protein synthesis, cell division, signal transduction or respiration (FRAC, 2021; Yang *et al.*, 2011). Fungicides that have target sites in the mitochondrial respiratory system of the fungi are one of the most popular classes due to their broad-spectrum anti-fungal activity and low toxicity to non-target mammals (EFSA, 2016; FRAC, 2021). Studies with respiratory inhibitor fungicides have shown that they do not cause acute toxicity to mammals, birds and bees but are highly toxic to fish, marine and freshwater invertebrates (Tomlin, 2000; Elskus, 2014). Fluazinam, an oxidative phosphorylation (OXPHOS, an essential stage in the mitochondrial ATP synthesis reaction) inhibitor fungicide, is commonly used in the various crop fields to control broad range of fungal diseases. These include molds (e.g., *Botrytis cinerea*), stem and root rot (*Sclerotinia sclerotiorum*), and potato blights (e.g. *Phytophthora infestans* and *Alternaria solani*) (Kalamarakis *et al.*, 2000; Runno-Paurson *et al.*, 2015; Schepers *et al.*, 2018). In the fungal cell, the mode of action of fluazinam involves the inhibition of ATP synthase enzyme i.e. it blocks the ATP production (Vitoratos, 2014). If fluazinam can also affect the mitochondria and/or the respiration process in other organisms, this could explain the negative effects of such OXPHOS inhibitor fungicides in non-target organisms as complete or partial inhibition of the ATP can compromise growth, development, activity and immune function (Campbell *et al.*, 2016; Wang *et al.* 2018).

Earlier studies have indicated that unlike in fungi (where it targets ATP synthase), fluazinam does not have specific target site in the non-target species, but it impairs to some degree the energy production (Guo *et al.*, 1991; Lee *et al.*, 2012; Wang *et al.*, 2018). In addition, fluazinam toxicity may vary between different species due to the difference in metabolism and excretion process of the fungicide in different organisms (Guo *et al.*, 1991). Some animals may also be more susceptible to fungicide than others, due to their physiology or behavior (Oruc, 2010). However, very little information exists on the effects of fungicides on invertebrates that frequently come into contact with these chemicals in the agricultural fields.

During the growing seasons, potato fields can be heavily infested with the early and late blight (*A. solani* and *P. infestans*) which are controlled by fungicides, including fluazinam (FRAC MoA C5) (Reilly *et al.*, 2012; Schepers *et al.*, 2018) and non-target species like arthropods living in the agricultural field can also be affected. As the most likely non-target species of the crop fields, pest insects are particularly interesting, because they can be repeatedly affected by the fungicides. Even though the effects of few classes of fungicides, such as boscalid, chlorothalonil and mancozeb have been studied in some pest insects, information about the effects of many common fungicides on non-target pest species are still unavailable (Adamski *et al.*, 2011; Obear *et al.*, 2016; Patterson & Alyokhin 2014; Clements *et al.*, 2018a). Moreover, the effects of the most commonly used class of respiratory inhibitor fungicide, i.e. OXPHOS inhibitors, of a specific crop, like potato are still unknown for its most likely non-target pest species, Colorado potato beetles.

The Colorado potato beetle (CPB) is the most harmful insect pest of potato (*Solanum tuberosum*) (Alyokhin *et al.*, 2008). As it is an invasive pest species, chemical insecticides are used to control its occurrence worldwide, and hence many CPB populations have developed resistance to various insecticides (Huseth *et al.*, 2014, Mota-Sanchez & Wise, 2021). Besides

the insecticides that are applied frequently in the fields, other chemical inputs may also play a role in the development of insecticide resistance in the species (Clements *et al.*, 2018a). One of the important factors can be the cross-resistance between insecticides and fungicides that may facilitate the rapid development of resistance in a population. Earlier studies have shown that fungicides can negatively affect the larval survival, development and can also activate metabolic detoxification related pathways similar to those affected by the insecticide treatments in the CPB (Patterson & Alyokhin, 2014; Clements *et al.*, 2018a, 2018b). However, the effects of the OXPPOS inhibitor fungicides, like fluazinam, on the CPB have not been investigated. Beetles are most likely exposed to fluazinam in the potato field multiple times during either their larval and/or adult stages since the fungicide is applied throughout the growing seasons (Schepers *et al.*, 2018). If fluazinam affects the respiratory system of the beetle, it may affect the survival or physiology of the larvae (by altering the enzyme and gene activity). Exposure to the fungicide, as often shown in insecticide exposure, may also induce behavioral responses (avoidance of the fungicide treated leaves) in the adult beetles (e.g., feeding behavior). Therefore, our aim of this study was twofold: to understand the effects of fluazinam, on (i) the adult and (ii) larval stage of the CPB. We tested the feeding behavior of the CPB adults under three field related concentrations of the fluazinam used in Finland and in other European countries (EU Pesticides database, 2021). First, we tested whether the fungicide is aversive to the beetles and whether this aversion is related to the level of fungicide concentrations on the treated potato leaves by measuring feeding behavior. Further, we checked whether there are differences in the feeding behavior between the sexes. Second, we investigated the direct effects of fungicide on larval performance by measuring larval survival under different fungicide treatments (i.e., control, 24-hour and 72-hour exposure to 0.25 mg/L and 0.66 mg/L of fluazinam). Finally, we investigated gene expression level differences between different treatments using three metabolic detoxification

related genes (*CYP9Z14v2*, *Ugt1* and *Gs*), one insecticide resistance gene (*Ldace1*), and one stress tolerance gene (*Hsp70*).

## Materials and methods

### *Study species*

We used the laboratory population of the CPB originally collected from the Vermont (44°43' N, 73°20' W), USA, in 2010. To maintain the lab population, we mated the field collected adult beetles in the laboratory conditions and new adults of the next generation were overwintered in controlled chambers at 5°C (detailed rearing conditions are described in Lehmann *et al.*, 2014 and in Margus *et al.*, 2019). We used 7th generation of the adults for the behavior trials (choice and food consumption experiments, summer 2017) and larvae from the 8th generation for the survival and gene expression experiments (summer 2018).

### *Fungicide choice experiment on adults*

We chose randomly 133 adults (62 females and 71 males) from 24 families of the CPB for the fungicide choice experiment, where we allowed each individual to choose from either control or fungicide treated leaf (Table 1). Commercial fungicide product, Shirlan (Syngenta Crop Protection AG, Switzerland) which contains fluazinam (500 g/L) as active ingredient was used for the experiment. We used half of the lowest (0.12 mg/L), lowest (0.25 mg/L) and highest (0.66 mg/L) field recommended concentration of fluazinam for the experiment. Before the experiment the adult beetles were weighed ( $\pm 1$  mg) (AM100, Mettler, Columbus, OH, USA) and then randomly divided into three fungicide concentration groups: 0.12 mg/L

(N = 42), 0.25 mg/L (N = 46) and 0.66 mg/L (N = 45). We allowed beetles to choose from two potato leaf discs (1.7 cm in diameter), which were either dipped to distilled water (control) or to the different fungicide solutions. The two leaf discs were offered to the beetles on the petri dish (9 cm in diameter). The adult beetle was put on its back in the centre of the petri dish and the beetle's choice was counted when it started eating the leaf discs. The choice the beetles made (control or fungicide) and the time it took to choose the leaf was recorded. Each of the adults was allowed to choose three times between a new set of treated and control leaf discs.

#### *Larval survival experiment*

To test the direct effect of two field related fluazinam concentrations (0.25 mg/L and 0.66 mg/L) and treatment types (24-hour and 72-hour exposure) on the larval survival, we exposed the 2nd instar (i.e., 2-3-day old) larvae (N = 875) from 12 different families either to control (distilled water) or to a fluazinam-treated leaf disc. We had five treatments in total (control, 24-hour exposure of 0.25 mg/L and 0.66 mg/L and 72-hour exposure of 0.25 mg/L and 0.66 mg/L of fluazinam). We took 15 larvae from each family and randomly divided them into five treatment groups where each group had three larvae. We repeated each of the families 4–5 times for each treatment group. For the exposure, we dipped a leaf into a fungicide solution and placed them into a randomly chosen well (36 mm in diameter) of 6-well-falcon plate (127 mm in length). In the 24-hour exposure treatments, we exposed the larvae once to the treated leaf at the beginning of the experiment and subsequently gave beetles fresh leaves after 24 and 48 hours. For the 72-hour exposure, we exposed the larvae to the new fungicide treated leaf 3 times (at the beginning, after 24 hours and after 48 hours). We recorded the 72-hour survival and snap froze alive larvae with liquid nitrogen and stored them at  $-80^{\circ}\text{C}$  for RNA extractions.

### *Target gene selection*

We chose to test the effects of fungicide treatment on the expression levels of five candidate genes, which have been previously associated with the metabolic detoxification (3 genes), insecticide resistance (1 gene) and stress tolerance (1 gene) in the Colorado potato beetle (detailed below).

CPB has shown to have metabolic resistance against carbamate, organophosphate and pyrethroid insecticides (reviewed in Kaplanoglu, 2016). A common enzyme group involved in the metabolic detoxification is cytochrome P450 (CYPs; Li *et al.*, 2007; Feyereisen, 2012). *CYP9* genes of this family have been found to be associated with the resistance to pyrethroids and organophosphate insecticides in several different insects, like in *Bombyx mori* (silkworm) and *Rhynchophorus ferrugineus* (weevil beetle) (Zhao *et al.*, 2011; Antony *et al.*, 2019) as well as in CPB (Zhu *et al.*, 2016; Clements *et al.*, 2016). For this study, we selected detoxification gene *CYP9Z14v2*, which have been shown to be upregulated in the neonicotinoid resistant individuals of the CPB (Zhang *et al.*, 2008; Kaplanoglu *et al.*, 2017). We also choose another metabolic detoxification related gene, *Uridine diphosphate glycoronosyltransferase 1 (Ugt1)* which is associated with the metabolic detoxification of insecticides in the CPB (Kaplanoglu *et al.*, 2017; Clements *et al.*, 2018b). In addition, we used *Glutathione synthetase (Gs)* gene, which is known to be related to neonicotinoid resistance in the CPB (Clements *et al.*, 2016, 2017) and *acetylcholine esterase1 gene (Ldace1)*, with high expression levels associated with the resistance against organophosphate and carbamate insecticides in CPB (Margus, 2018; Revuelta *et al.*, 2011). Finally, we measured the expression levels of a heat shock protein gene, *Hsp70*, which is an early marker of stress associated with the respiration process and temperature shock (Lee *et al.*, 2012; Chen *et al.*, 2014; Wang *et al.*, 2018).

Primers for four of the above-mentioned target genes, *CYP9Z14v2*, *Gs*, *Ldace1* and *Hsp70* and for two reference genes used in the quantitative real time PCR, ribosomal protein S18 gene (*RpS18*) and 50S Ribosomal protein L13e gene (*L13e*) were collected from the published studies (Table 2). In addition, we designed primers for *Ugt1* gene using the annotated transcriptome of the CPB (DDBJ/EMBL/GenBank accession: GEEF00000000, Clements *et al.*, 2016) with programs: Net Primer (<http://www.premierbiosoft.com/netprimer/>) and Primer3 (version 0.4.0, <http://bioinfo.ut.ee/primer3-0.4.0/>).

#### *Extraction of RNA, cDNA synthesis and gene expression analyses with quantitative real time PCR (qPCR)*

For gene expression analysis we randomly chose six unrelated CPB families out of 12 that were exposed to five fungicide treatments (control, 24-hour and 72-hour exposure to 0.25 mg/L and to 0.66 mg/L of fluazinam). We then randomly took five larvae (out of 15 treated) from each of the treatments for each the six families for RNA extractions. We had in total 150 larvae from five treatment groups (five larvae for six families/treatment).

Total RNA was extracted from single larvae with TRI Reagent (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA) and RNeasy RNA isolation kit (Qiagen, Hilden, Germany). Concentration and the integrity of the RNA were measured with TapeStation (Agilent 2200, Santa Clara, CA, USA). The concentration of the RNA from each of the single larval samples were then normalised to 400 ng/ $\mu$ L and 20 ng/ $\mu$ L were used for the cDNA synthesis using iScript cDNA Synthesis Kit (Bio-Rad, Laboratories Inc. Alfred Nobel Drive, Hercules, CA, USA) according to manufacturer's protocol. qPCR reaction was performed with a total volume of

20  $\mu\text{L}$  by using 1  $\mu\text{L}$  of cDNA, 10  $\mu\text{L}$  of 2 $\times$  SYBR Green Supermix (Bio-Rad Laboratories Inc.), 1  $\mu\text{L}$  of the forward (10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) and 1  $\mu\text{L}$  of the reverse (10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) gene-specific primers, and 7  $\mu\text{L}$  of the nuclease free water. qPCR reactions were run on CFX96 instrument (Bio-Rad) with the following temperature cycles: initiation at 95°C for 3 min and 39 cycles of 10 s at 95°C, 10 s at 56°C and 30 s at 72°C. Melting curves of the reactions to check the amplification purity of the reactions were then measured at 65°C to 95°C. For each treatment group and family, we used five larvae (biological replicates) with three technical replicates and the final threshold value ( $C_q$ ) was defined as a mean of the technical replicates that produced good quality data. Normalization of the qPCR data was done with  $\Delta\Delta(C_t)$  normalization method (Pfaff, 2001) with *RpS18* and *L13E* as reference genes (these genes had equal expression levels in all the compared samples, data not shown) using BioRad CFX Maestro 1.1 program. Efficiency of the genes was quantified using 2-times dilutions series with the same software. Statistical significance of the expression level differences between different treatments and family groups was analysed with REST (<http://rest.gene-quantification.info/>) software with 10000 iterations and using real efficiency values.

### *Statistical analyses*

Choice (i.e., control or fungicide) made by the adult beetles was analyzed with Chi square test. To analyze the time it took for the beetles to choose treated and untreated leaf we used the time (in minutes) taken to make the first choice as a dependent variable in ANCOVA where fungicide treatment, first choice (control/fungicide) and sex were used as a fixed factor, and the weight of the beetle as a covariate. 72-hour larval survival was analyzed with the binary logistic regression where the fungicide concentration treatment was used as a

categorical factor and family as a random factor. Analyses were carried out using SPSS v.24 (company information (IBM Corp. Armonk, NY).

## Results

### *Effects of the fungicide on feeding behavior*

We offered both control and fungicide treated leaf discs to the adults of the CPB and measured their feeding and response-time behavior. We did not identify any general fungicide avoidance behavior since the beetles chose the fungicide treated leaves as likely as control leaves on their first choice ( $\chi^2 = 0.957$ ,  $N = 133$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $P = 0.620$ ). Moreover, there was no avoidance of fungicide treated leaves over the three trials (average choice, ANOVA  $F_{2,130} = 0.28$ ,  $P = 0.972$ ). However, there was a difference in time it took for the female and male beetles to choose the treated leaves in the different fungicide treatments in the first trial (ANCOVA,  $F_{2,130} = 3.284$ ,  $P = 0.041$ ) and therefore the responses of the sexes were analysed separately. There was a tendency that the fungicide treatment affected the time it took for females to take the first leaf disc (ANCOVA,  $F_{2,55} = 2.924$ ,  $P = 0.066$ ) and females seemed to be more hesitant to choose the leaf discs in the average (0.25 mg/L) concentrations). Whereas for the males it appeared to take longer to take the fungicide treated leaf discs although the difference was not statistically significant (ANCOVA,  $F_{1,64} = 3.507$ ,  $P = 0.067$ ). When the average times for all trials were analysed these difference disappeared (Females: fungicide treatment ANCOVA  $F_{2,58} = 1.329$ ,  $P = 0.273$ ; Males: fungicide treatment ANCOVA  $F_{2,67} = 0.504$ ,  $P = 0.606$ ). When data was analysed by individual choices there were altogether 93 adults that did not show any clear preference to fungicide or to control treated discs (Fig. 1). However, there were 40 beetles, that systematically chose only either the control ( $n = 22$ ) or the fungicide discs ( $n = 18$ ). Males ( $n = 9$ ), that systematically chose fungicide discs were on

average 12.9 minutes slower compared to males ( $n = 12$ ) that chose the control discs (ANCOVA,  $F_{1,20} = 8.127$ ,  $P = 0.011$ , Fig. 1B) whereas no such difference was observed in females (ANCOVA,  $F_{1,18} = 1.143$ ,  $P = 0.301$ , Fig. 1A).

#### *Effects of fungicide treatments on the survival of the larvae of the CPB*

The overall 72-hour larval survival ( $n = 875$ ) was very high (> 95 % for all groups, only 16 individuals died). The survival under 72-hour exposure to the highest fungicide concentration (0.66 mg/L, survival 95.5 %) did not differ significantly from the other groups (control; survival 100 %, 24-hour exposure to 0.25 mg/L; survival 97.7%, 72-hour exposure to 0.25 mg/L; survival 98.3 %, or from 24-hour exposure to 0.66 mg/L; survival 99.4 %) (Wald = 5.444,  $df = 4$ ,  $P = 0.245$ ). Finally, survival of the larvae did not differ among different families (Wald = 3.809,  $df = 11$ ,  $P = 0.975$ ).

#### *Expression of metabolic detoxification, insecticide resistance and stress tolerance genes under different fungicide concentrations in different beetle families*

Long-term exposure (when the larvae were exposed to fungicide for 72 hours) to the highest fungicide concentration (0.66 mg/L) altered the expression of the investigated metabolic detoxification genes *CYP9Z14v2*, *Ugt1* and insecticide resistance gene, *Ldace1* (Fig. 2) in CPB larvae. The expression of *CYP9Z14v2* and *Ldace1* genes overall samples were significantly upregulated while that of *Ugt1* was downregulated. Moreover, short-term (24 hours) exposure to the highest fungicide concentration caused downregulation of *Gs* gene. Finally, both 24-hour and 72-hour exposure to the lowest field concentration of fungicide (0.25 mg/L) increased the expression of a stress tolerance gene *Hsp70* (Fig. 2).

Due to the large variation in the gene expression levels over all samples, we analyzed expression changes in each of the CPB families separately (Fig. 3). There were no significant differences in the expression levels of *CYP9Z14v2* under 24-hour or 72-hour exposure to the lowest fungicide concentration in any of the families. However, the expression increased significantly in one family under 24-hour exposure, and in two families under 72-hour exposure to the highest fungicide concentration. The expression of *Ugt1* was unaffected in all the families under 24-hour exposure to the lower concentration while it showed significant downregulation in all except two families in the other treatments. Interestingly, in one family, *Ugt1* was significantly upregulated under 24-hour exposure to the higher fungicide concentration. Unfortunately, gene expression results of the third metabolic detoxification gene, *Gs*, are more difficult to interpret as this gene was significantly upregulated in one of the families under 72-hour exposure to both lower and higher concentrations while two other families showed significant downregulation in the 24-hour but not in the 72-hour treatment to the higher concentration. Expression levels of the insecticide resistance gene, *Ldace1*, were unaffected by both the 24-hour and 72-hour exposure to the lower concentration, as well as by the 24-hour exposure to the higher concentration. However, this gene was significantly upregulated in all except one family under the longer treatment of higher fungicide concentration when compared to control samples. Finally, expression of the stress tolerance gene, *Hsp70*, increased significantly in three families under the 24-hour exposure of the lower concentration. Surprisingly, however, under the 72-hour exposure to the higher concentration, expression level of this gene both increased and decreased in different families while it remained unchanged under 72-hour exposure to the lower concentration and under 24-hour exposure to the higher fungicide concentrations in all families.

## Discussion

In agriculture, fungicides are important pesticides to reduce crop losses due to the plant pathogens, but at the same time, their effects even at the field related concentrations can extend to the non-target pest species. In this paper, we ran a series of experiments to test the effects of field related concentrations of fluazinam (a common fungicide used against the potato late blight) on the non-target pest species, the Colorado potato beetle. To get a comprehensive picture of the effects, we tested the fluazinam effects on beetles on three different levels, (i) at the behavioral (adult feeding behavior), (ii) at the individual (larval) fitness and (iii) at the gene expression level.

In the adult behavioral tests beetles did not clearly avoid fungicide treated leaf discs, as they chose to eat both control and fungicide treated leaves at the same rate, and they did not even differentiate between different fungicide concentrations suggesting that field related concentrations of fluazinam are not aversive to the beetles. Alternatively, it is possible that these concentrations were not high enough to be detected by the beetles. In aquatic ecosystems aversion behavior has been observed in juvenile zebra fish (*D. rerio*) and frog tadpoles (*Leptodactylus latrans*), which both avoided fungicide (pyrimethanil; FRAC MoA D1) contaminated water (Araújo *et al.*, 2014a; 2014b). Although the results among different species and environments are not directly comparable (Elskus, 2014; Müller, 2018) the lack of choosing either of the leaves suggests that the CPB adults would be exposed to the fungicides in the potato field. There was however individual level variation in the choosiness of the individuals (see Fig. 1), which may contribute to the exposure of fungicides in the field.

In addition to the adult behavior, neither of the field related fluazinam concentrations increased short-term larval mortality in our study. Similar results have been observed before in zebrafish (Wang *et al.*, 2018), although higher fluazinam concentrations disrupted mitochondrial bioenergetics and induced oxidative stress. Moreover, Clements *et al.* (2018a) showed that boscalid fungicide (FRAC MoA C2) did not increase mortality directly, but that it delayed the CPB larval growth rate and larvae gained less mass compared to control group, which also lead to a smaller size. Therefore, it is possible that delayed fitness effects related to fungicide exposure could also require longer experiments or fungicides used in combination with other stressors (see e.g. Cullen *et al.*, 2019).

While there were no effects on adult behavior or larval mortality, the field related concentrations of fungicides still affected gene expression levels of the beetle larvae (see Shi *et al.*, 2018, Fig. 2). Overall, out of the five genes tested, the smallest concentration affected only *Hsp70* gene expression, whereas the higher fluazinam concentration affected all the other four genes (Fig. 2) though there were big differences between different CBP families (Fig 3.). The fact that the higher concentration and repeated exposure increased the gene expression the most, is a very general dose-dependent finding (Wang *et al.*, 2018) and suggests that even these low field related fluazinam concentrations may have metabolic costs for individuals. These costs may in turn have long term fitness consequences which were not observed here.

Out of the tested metabolic genes *CYP9Z14v2* gene was upregulated and *Gs* and *Ugt1* were downregulated after exposure to the higher concentration of fungicide. Upregulation of cytochrome P450 (CYP) gene family could indicate that larvae were metabolizing fungicides like other toxic compounds (Terriere, 1984; Werck-Reichhart & Feyereisen, 2000 see also Shang *et al.*, 2020) such as insecticides (Clements *et al.*, 2018a, 2018b) to minimize the

oxidative damages. Previously, upregulation of several CYP genes has been reported in the adults of the CPB fed with fungicides (chlorothalonil, FRAC MoA M05) treated leaves (Clements *et al.*, 2018a). Contrary to our findings, Clements *et al.* (2018a, b) showed upregulation of *Ugt1* and *Gs* in CPB adults under fungicide treatments suggesting that these genes are involved in the insect xenobiotic metabolism pathway. It is possible that the difference among the results is due to the exposure time or differences between the fungicides. However, both experiments suggest that these genes are important xenobiotic metabolic genes to study further.

The insecticide resistance associated gene, *Ldace1* (Fournier *et al.*, 1992; Zhu & Gao, 1999; Clark *et al.*, 2001), was upregulated under the highest concentration of fluazinam suggesting that this chemical can act similarly like insecticides as high expression levels of *Ldace1* have been previously associated with the resistance against organophosphate and carbamate insecticides in CPB (Margus, 2018; Revuelta *et al.*, 2011). On the other hand, if fluazinam slows down the growth of the larvae (see Clements *et al.*, 2018a) it is possible that this difference between treatments is generated by the developmental differences among larvae as *Ldace1* expression goes down when the larvae grow (Revuelta *et al.*, 2011). In contrast to our results, glyphosate-based herbicides inhibited *Ldace1* expression in CPB larvae (Margus *et al.*, 2019, Modesto *et al.*, 2010). The fact that both fungicides and herbicides can affect resistance associated genes underlines that even though fungicide effects are minor, as they can affect the same pathways as insecticides, they may also contribute to the overall insecticide resistance.

Out of the studied genes, only *Hsp70* was upregulated on the lower fungicide concentration. Heat shock proteins (HSPs) perform as molecular chaperones that typically stabilize the structure and functions of the proteins in the cells under thermal stress conditions

(Sun *et al.*, 2014) or insecticide toxicity (Jing *et al.*, 2013). Previously it has been shown that insecticide (imidacloprid) can increase the expression levels of the *Hsp70* gene of CPB under optimal temperature conditions (Chen *et al.*, 2016). It has been also suggested that sublethal insecticide stress could select for higher temperature tolerance through their impact on the heat shock protein pathways (Ge *et al.*, 2013). Whether fungicides could act in a similar manner remains to be tested.

The variation in gene expression levels within each treatment was large in all the studied genes (Fig. 2) and hence we analyzed the overall treatment effect of the fungicide at the family level (Fig. 3). We found that the expression of all the investigated genes among the families show a more complex pattern. For example, whereas the overall expression of *Hsp70* showed no difference from the control samples on the higher concentration, there were differences among the families to different directions, which cancels out the overall effect. Similarly, even though the overall expression of *CYP9Z14v2* and *Ugt1* genes did not change under highest concentration and 24-hour exposure, there were some families which did respond to the fungicide. Similar variation in the expression levels of *Ugt* and one *CYP* gene was found among CPB adults under fungicide (chlorothalonil) treatment (Clements *et al.*, 2018b), which highlights individual level variation in these detoxifying enzymes. Differences in the gene expression levels in different families under same treatment group indicates that responses can vary within a beetle population and that there might be individual level genetic differences in responses to fungicides. It remains to be tested what the underlying mechanisms for these differences are.

## Conclusions

The field related concentrations of the fluazinam (0.12 mg/L, 0.25 mg/L and 0.66 mg/L) did not have any significant negative effect on the behavior of a common non-target pest species.

Furthermore, there were no effects on the larval survival even when individuals were exposed to fungicides for three days. However, we observed that this repeated exposure altered expression of the metabolic detoxification, insecticide resistance and stress tolerance genes. Since the expression levels differed among the families under different fungicide concentrations, this further suggests that there may be genetic differences in the tolerance to fungicides. Together, these results suggest that even though fluazinam only impose minor effects on short-term, long-term consequences should be also tested to fully understand how these widely used pesticides affect non-target pest species and whether they will increase cross resistance with other pesticides.

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### **Disclosure**

Authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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**Table 1** Experimental setup for feeding behavior, sample size and descriptive statistics by different concentrations and sexes. First choice refers to which treated leaf the beetles chose first, average choice ( $\pm$  s.e.m) to how beetles chose on average (random choice = 0.5), the time it took the first leaf for females by different concentrations and for different leaf types for males and finally the average time ( $\pm$  s.e.m) in minutes it took for beetles to choose the leaves.

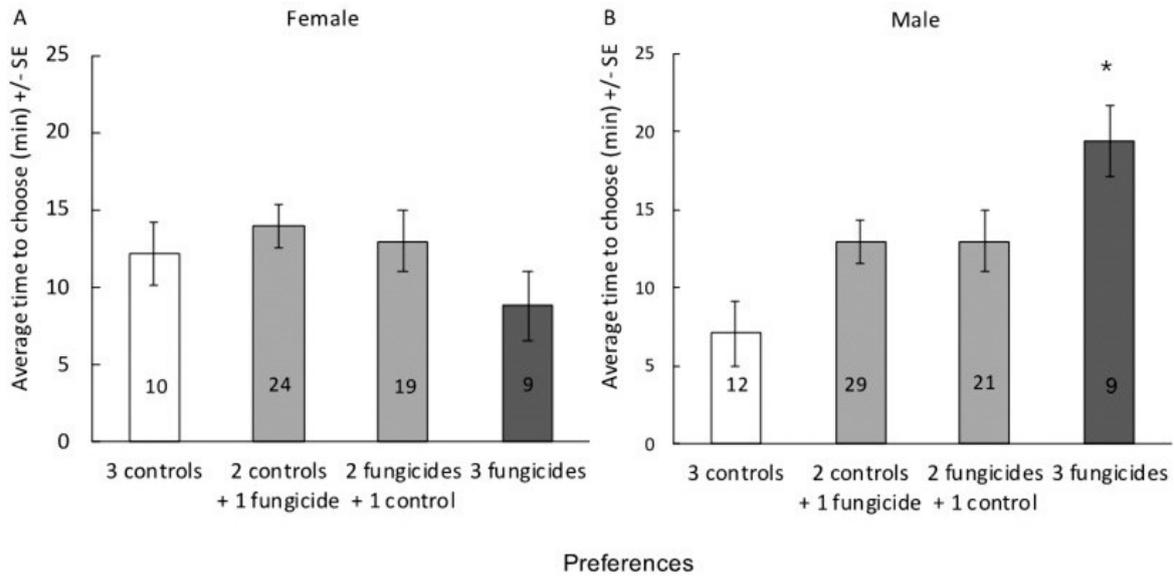
	Fungicide concentration		
	0.12 mg/L	0.25 mg/L	0.66 mg/L
<b>Females (N)</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>21</b>
First choice Control : Fungicide	10 : 9	12 : 10	9 : 12
Average choice (s.e.m.)	0.56 ( $\pm$ 0.1)	0.47 ( $\pm$ 0.1)	0.49 ( $\pm$ 0.1)
Time in first trial, min	8.16 ( $\pm$ 1.8)	18.73 ( $\pm$ 3.9)	15.57 ( $\pm$ 3.3)
Average time (s.e.m.), min	10.78 ( $\pm$ 1.7)	12.53 ( $\pm$ 1.6)	14.17 ( $\pm$ 1.6)
<b>Males (N)</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>
First choice Control : Fungicide	14 : 9	12 : 12	12 : 12
Average choice (s.e.m.)	0.46 ( $\pm$ 0.1)	0.51 ( $\pm$ 0.1)	0.51 ( $\pm$ 0.1)
Time in first trial, min, by type	control 15.03 ( $\pm$ 2.5) : fungicide 22.36 ( $\pm$ 3.2)		
Average time (s.e.m.), min	14.09 ( $\pm$ 2.1)	11.17 ( $\pm$ 1.9)	13.19 ( $\pm$ 2.2)

**Table 2** Primer sequences used in the quantitative real time PCR analysis. Primers were either obtained from published studies or designed for the current study. Primer amplification efficiency (E%) and R-squared (R<sup>2</sup>) values are given for each of the primer pairs. Response gives the information about the stress conditions under which the gene was tested in the published study.

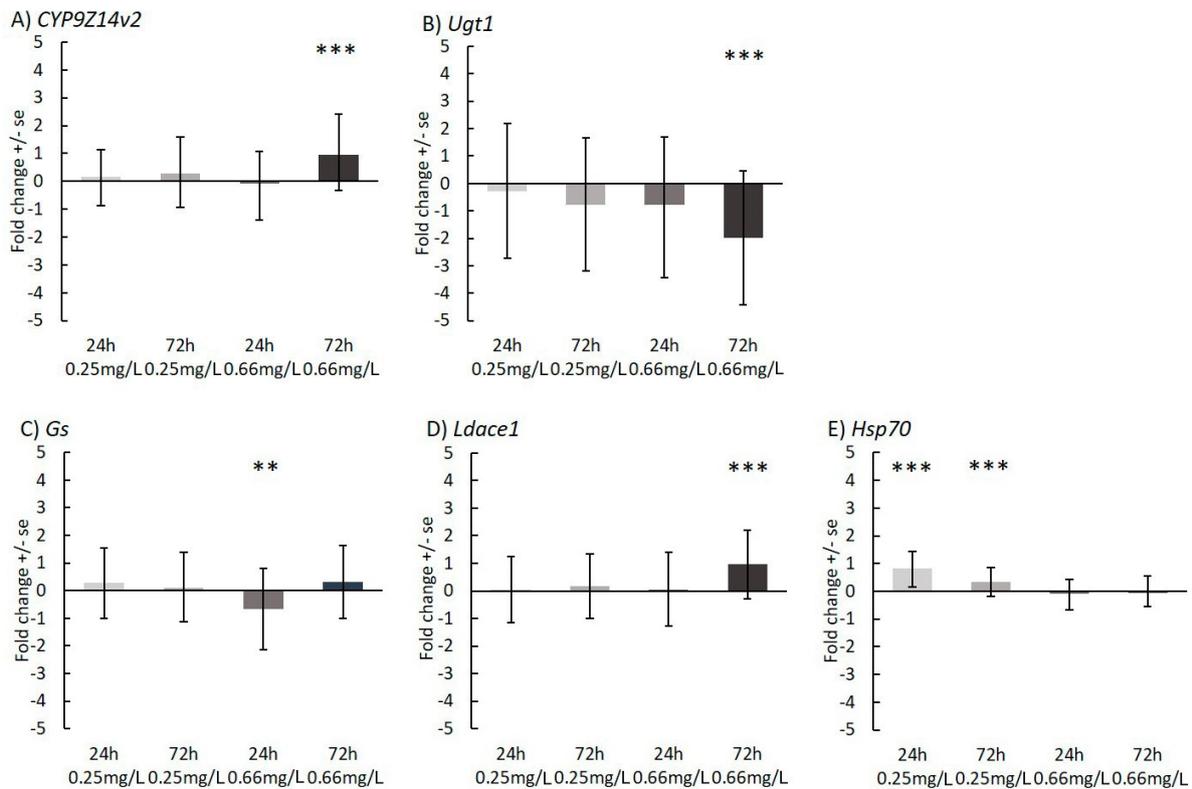
Target genes	E%	R <sup>2</sup>	Forward and reverse primers (5'-3')	Product size (bp)	Response (treatment/pesticide)
<i>CYP9Z14v2</i>	100.4	0.998	F: ACCAATGCGTTTCAATCCCG R: CCAACCCGAATGGCAAATAAG	82	Environmental stress and host plants response <sup>1</sup>
<i>Ugt1</i>	90.3	0.996	F: CGCTGAAGAGTTTGGGCTGT R: TCAGATCGGGACAGTGAGGAA	270	Chlorothalonil and imidacloprid <sup>3</sup>
<i>Gs</i>	97.8	0.999	F: CAGAGCAGGTATGAACCTAATC R: CCAGCCAAGTGATACTGAATCG	114	Chlorothalonil <sup>3</sup>
<i>Ldace1</i>	96.7	0.998	F: CGCCGAGTTACAAAATACCC R: TAGCGTTTCCATCCAATTCC	124	Organophosphate <sup>4</sup>
<i>Hsp70</i>	101.8	0.999	F: GACGAGAAGCAAAGGCAAAG R: TGAGCGGTCTGTTGATCTG	77	Heat shock <sup>5</sup>
Reference genes					
<i>L13e</i>	91.3	0.999	F: TATTCACCAGCCATCCATCA R: GCGTCCTTCACTCTCTTTGC	138	Reference gene <sup>6</sup>
<i>RpS18</i>	91.8	0.999	F: TCCTCGCCAGTACAAAATCC R: ACACGGAGACCCAGTAGTG	174	Reference gene <sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Zhang *et al.* (2008), <sup>2</sup>Clements *et al.* (2018a), <sup>3</sup>Clements *et al.* (2018b), <sup>4</sup>Chen *et al.* (2014), <sup>5</sup>Revuelta *et al.* (2011), <sup>6</sup>Yocum *et al.* (2009), <sup>7</sup>Pauchet *et al.* (2009). Primers were designed from the published transcriptome data.

Figure legends



**Fig. 1** Average time (in minutes) taken to choose the three potato discs for A) female and B) male beetles with different preferences when all concentration treatments are combined. White bars indicate the beetles that chose for only the control treated leaves, and light grey bars for the choice of both fungicide and control treated leaves after three trials. Dark grey bars indicate the beetles that chose for only the fungicide treated leaf after three trials. Numbers in the bars show the number of individuals.



**Fig. 2** Fold change (log<sub>2</sub> transformed ± s.e.) of the target genes, (A) *CYP9Z14v2*, (B) *Ugt1*, (C) *Gs*, (D) *Ldace1*, (E) *Hsp70*, in CPB larvae under fungicide treatments (24-hour of single and 72-hour of repeated (three times) exposure to 0.25 mg/L and 0.66 mg/L of fluazinam) when compared to control (non-treated) sample overall families. Expression levels of the study genes were normalized using *L13e* and *RpS18* reference genes. Significant differences between the control and the treatment groups are marked with asterisk (\* $P \leq 0.05$ , \*\*  $P \leq 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $P = 0.001$ ).

Gene	Family	0.25mg/L 24 hours	0.25mg/L 72 hours	0.66mg/L 24 hours	0.66mg/L 72 hours
<i>CY9Z14v2</i>	1	-0.08	-0.14	↑ 1.52	↑ 2.48
	2	0.39	-0.20	-0.61	1.60
	3	0.12	0.59	-0.10	-0.53
	4	-0.10	-0.09	-0.64	↑ 2.28
	5	0.17	0.11	-0.86	-0.59
	6	0.16	1.52	0.20	0.50
<i>Ugt1</i>	1	0.28	0.47	0.28	-0.97
	2	0.83	0.75	↑ 2.88	-1.76
	3	-1.02	-2.24	↓ -2.83	↓ -4.24
	4	-1.51	-0.88	-1.54	↓ -2.37
	5	-0.27	-0.53	-0.87	-0.36
	6	-0.96	↓ -2.22	-2.07	↓ -2.18
<i>Gs</i>	1	0.24	0.01	0.00	1.13
	2	-0.49	-0.46	0.14	-0.20
	3	-0.13	-0.33	-0.83	-1.80
	4	-0.03	↑ 1.22	0.72	↑ 2.28
	5	-0.13	-0.72	↓ -2.05	-0.29
	6	-0.07	0.82	↓ -1.99	0.68
<i>Ldace1</i>	1	0.72	0.05	0.40	↑ 1.23
	2	0.09	-0.01	0.11	↑ 1.45
	3	-1.05	-0.16	-0.56	-0.74
	4	0.09	-0.10	-0.05	↑ 0.81
	5	0.61	0.60	-0.22	↑ 1.07
	6	-0.50	0.64	0.63	↑ 2.01
<i>Hsp70</i>	1	0.64	-0.05	0.36	0.29
	2	0.12	0.06	-0.15	↑ 0.75
	3	0.60	0.38	-0.33	↓ -1.56
	4	↑ 1.12	0.55	-0.02	↑ 0.78
	5	↑ 0.86	-0.01	-0.61	↓ -0.97
	6	↑ 1.39	0.88	0.17	0.26

**Fig. 3** Fold changes ( $\text{Log}_2$  transformed) of the five target genes (*CYP9Z14v2*, *Ugt1*, *Gs*, *Ldace1*, *Hsp70*) when compared to the control (non-treated) sample ( $n = 5$ ) under four treatments (24-hour and 72-hour exposure to 0.25 mg/L and to 0.66 mg/L of fluazinam) in six CBP families. Expression levels of the study genes were normalized using *L13e* and *RpS18* reference genes. Red colour and positive values denote upregulation and blue and negative

values indicate downregulation. Numbers from one to six indicate the six different families used in the study. Intensity of the color indicate the level of expression, and families with significant differences (collected from REST, see text for details) between the control and the treatment groups are marked with upward or downward arrows.

**Graphical abstract:**

In short term, field related fluzinam concentrations do not affect the fitness of the CPB (*Leptinotarsa decemlineata*). Nevertheless, the concentrations can cause physiological changes at the larval stage. The effects of the fungicide on larval physiology differed among the families tested. Even though the behavioral effects of the fungicide treatments were minor, the expression level differences of the studied genes indicate changes on the metabolic detoxifications and stress-related pathways.

