HIGH TEMPERATURE CO_2 TREATMENTS FOR INSHELL WALNUTS

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California walnut processors normally fumigate inshell nuts shortly after drying to disinfest product of field pests such as navel orangeworm or codling moth. Environmental restrictions on currently used fumigants require that non-chemical alternatives be considered. Earlier work (Soderstrom et al. 1996a, b) found that 98% CO_2 at 43°C for 7.3 hours should be an effective phytosanitary treatment for these insects, as it is the estimated probit 9 upper 95% confidence limit for the most tolerant stage (diapausing codling moth larvae). This paper evaluates the treatment as a potential alternative to fumigation.

A laboratory CATTS unit (Controlled Atmosphere/Temperature Treatment System, Neven 2005) was used to apply the treatment. The humidity controls normally used to obtain high humidity for fresh fruit were not applied. Inshell walnuts artificially infested with laboratory-reared diapausing codling moth were placed in onion bags and buried in uninfested walnuts held in perforated crates within the treatment chamber. Nutmeat temperatures were monitored with thermisters. Relative humidity and gas levels were also recorded (Fig. 1). A treatment time of 8 hours was selected. Uninfested walnut samples were weighed before and after treatments to estimate moisture loss during treatments. Additional samples were held after treatment under accelerated storage conditions (35°C for 10 and 20 days, comparable to normal storage for 1 and 2 years), and then sent to an industry laboratory for quality analysis. Results will be discussed.

Ancillary studies showed that walnut moisture levels were reduced from about 8.4% to about 6.5 and 5.5% after 7 hours in hot forced air ovens kept at 38 and 43°C, respectively (Fig. 2). This suggests that some humidity control in the treatment may be necessary to prevent excessive drying of the product. Additional studies examined the amount of CO_2 sorbed by walnuts under high CO_2 conditions. The possibility of CO_2 sorption by the product may play an important role in determining the amount of CO_2 required for treatment. The experimental procedure used was modified from that of Cofie-Agblor et al. (1998). Single armed one liter glass flasks were fitted with 2-hole rubber stoppers into which copper tubes were inserted. Side arms of the flasks were connected to pressure-temperature sensing data loggers. 250 g of walnut halves (8% moisture), were placed in the flasks which were tightly sealed with the stoppers and vacuum grease. Flasks were conditioned for about 6 h at 43°C before being flushed with CO_2 (99.9% purity) for 5 minutes under atmospheric pressure immediately after

which the flasks were tightly closed. Flasks were held at 43°C for 100 h and the pressure (kPa) inside the flasks was recorded every 30 minutes. The amount of CO_2 inside the flasks was determined with a gas chromatograph. Control samples were flushed with normal atmosphere. The pressure drop inside the CO_2-treated flask was proportional to the amount of CO_2 sorbed (g/ kg of walnut), and was calculated using the universal gas equation (Cofie-Agblor et al. 1998). The pressure did not change in the control samples (Fig. 3) indicating no gas sorption occurred. The mean initial CO_2 concentration was 95.3% at 43°C.The sorption rate of CO_2 by the walnuts in the first 5 h was very rapid (Fig. 4), and thereafter sorption increased linearly with time. Walnuts sorbed 4-5% of the CO_2 within the first 8 h of the treatment. This was much higher than CO_2 sorption by grains at 43°C (Cofie-Agblor et al. 1995, 1998), probably due to the high oil content in walnuts, and indicates that care must be taken to maintain the CO_2 levels in commercial applications of this method to walnuts.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Richard Gill, Paul Neipp, Dave Bellamy and Steve Tebbets, all of the Commodity Protection and Quality Unit of the San Joaquin Valley Agricultural Sciences Center, for their hard work and expertise.

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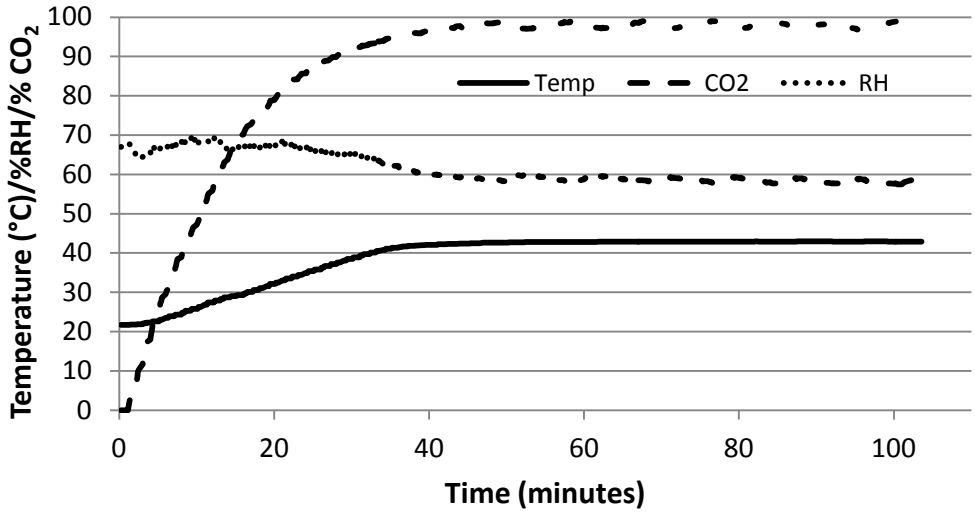

Figure 1. Typical temperatures, CO_2 levels and relative humidities (RH) recorded during preliminary tests using the CATTS unit.

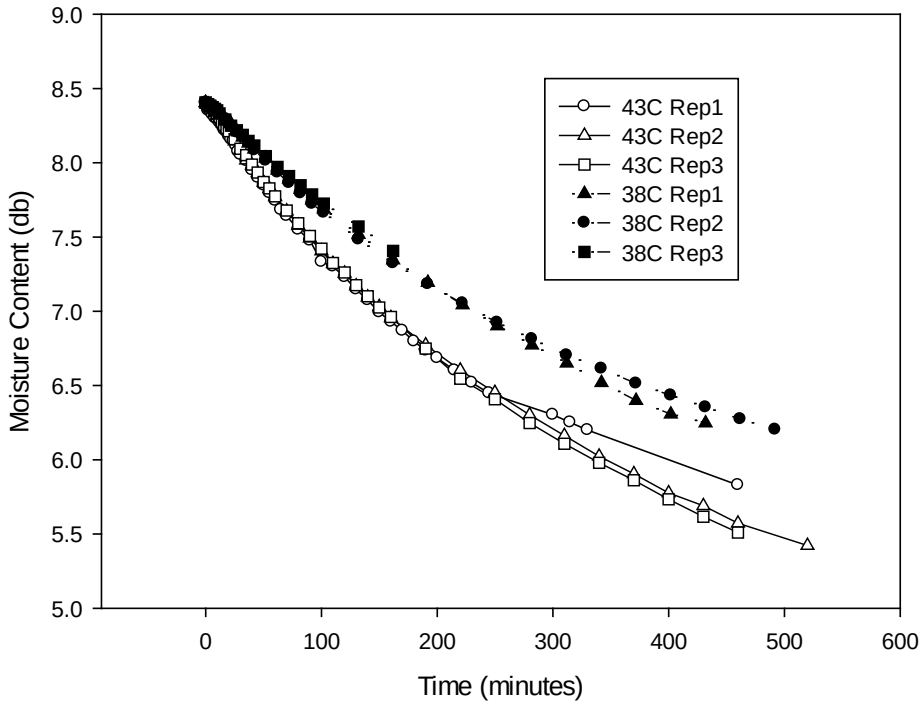

Figure 2. Moisture content changes (dry basis) in walnuts held in a 38 or 43°C hot forced air oven.

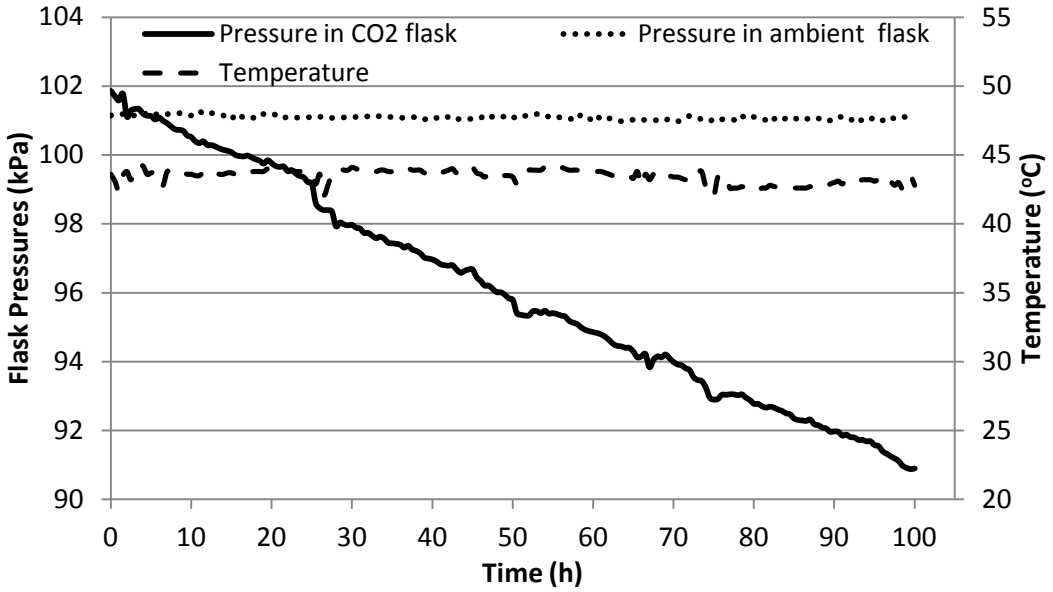

Figure 3. Pressure changes inside flasks containing walnut treated with and without CO_2.

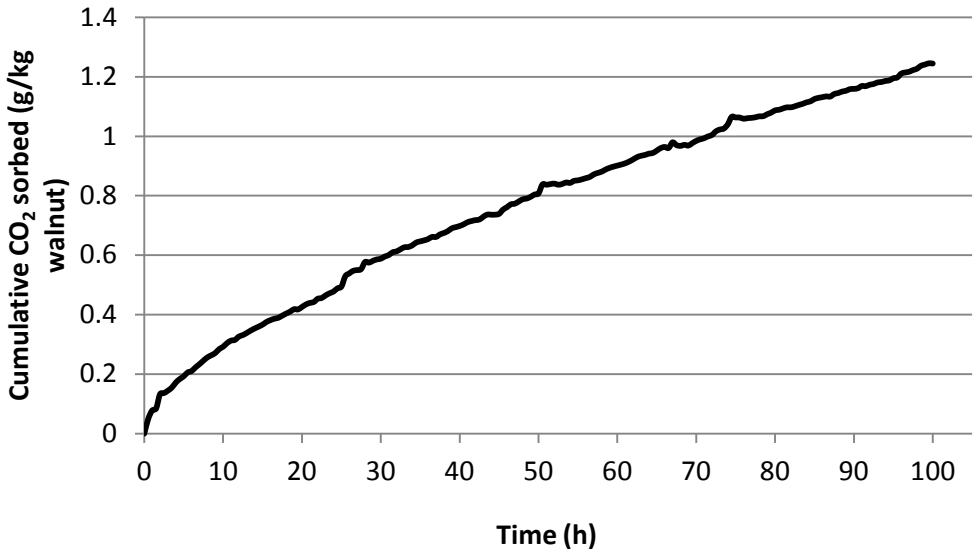

Figure 4. CO_2 sorption by walnut at 8% (dry basis) moisture content and 43°C.