



# Determination of Chlorsulfuron and Pendimethalin Residues in Soil Using Modified QuEChERS Method by Liquid Chromatography-Tandem Mass Spectrometry

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(First received 16 October 2021 and in final form 15 December 2021)

(DOI: 10.31590/ejosat.1010792)

**ATIF/REFERENCE:** Balkan, T. (2021). Determination of Chlorsulfuron and Pendimethalin Residues in Soil Using Modified QuEChERS Method by Liquid Chromatography-Tandem Mass Spectrometry. *European Journal of Science and Technology*, (31), 539-544.

## Abstract

Pesticides, which accumulate in the ecosystem at high concentrations, interfere with the food chain of life forms and cause significant damage to them. The continuous increase in weather, soil and water pollution due to the extensive use of pesticides has made it necessary to develop effective analytical methods to detect pesticides and to monitor continuously the level of residues with these methods.

In this study, an analytical method for the detection of chlorsulfuron and pendimethalin in soil matrix was developed and validated. The soil sample was fortified with a known quantity of pesticides at three different concentration levels (0.01, 0.05 and 0.1 mg kg<sup>-1</sup>) and the analytes were extracted via a modified QuEChERS method.

Recovery studies were performed with 5 different modified QuEChERS methods. Better recoveries were obtained in T4 method (extraction with 266.6 mg MgSO<sub>4</sub>, 66.6 mg NaCl, 66.6 mg Trisodium citrate dehydrate (TSCD) and 33.3 mg Disodium hydrogen citrate sesquihydrate (DHS), dispersive -solid phase extraction technique (d-SPE) cleanup with 300 mg magnesium sulphate (MgSO<sub>4</sub>) and 100 mg prime sekonder amine (PSA)). The recoveries were in the range 70–120%, with relative standard deviation (RSD) values lower than 15%. Chlorsulfuron and pendimethalin of limits of detection (LODs) were 0.96 and 1.30 µg kg<sup>-1</sup> and limits of quantification (LOQs) were 3.19 and 4.34 µg kg<sup>-1</sup>, respectively.

**Keywords:** dSPE, LC-MS/MS, Method validation, Pesticide residue, Soil

## Sıvı Kromatografi-Tandem Kütle Spektrometrisi ile Modifiye QuEChERS Yöntemi Kullanılarak Chlorsulfuron ve Pendimethalin Kalıntılarının Toprakta Belirlenmesi

### Öz

Ekosistemde yüksek konsantrasyonlarda biriken pestisitler, canlıların besin zincirine karışarak onlara önemli zararlar vermektedir. Pestisitlerin yaygın kullanımı nedeniyle hava, toprak ve su kirliliğinin sürekli artması, pestisitlerin tespiti için etkin analitik yöntemlerin geliştirilmesini ve bu yöntemlerle kalıntı düzeylerinin sürekli izlenmesini gerekli kılmaktadır.

Bu çalışmada, toprak matrisinde chlorsulfuron ve pendimethalin tespiti için analitik bir yöntem geliştirilmiş ve valide edilmiştir. Toprak numunesi bilinen miktarda pestisit ile üç farklı konsantrasyonda (0.01, 0.05 ve 0.1 µg kg<sup>-1</sup>) fortifike edilmiş ve analizler modifiye QuEChERS yöntemi ile ekstrakte edilmiştir.

Geri kazanım çalışmaları 5 farklı modifiye QuEChERS yöntemi ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. T4 yönteminde (266.6 mg MgSO<sub>4</sub>, 66.6 mg NaCl, 66.6 mg TSCD ve 33.3 mg DHS ile ekstraksiyon, 300 mg MgSO<sub>4</sub> ve 100 mg PSA ile d-SPE cleanup) daha iyi geri kazanımlar elde edilmiştir. Geri kazanımlar %70-120 aralığında olup, bağıl standart sapma (RSD) değerleri %15'ten düşük bulunmuştur. Chlorsulfuron ve pendimethalin'in sırasıyla LOD değerleri 0,96 ve 1,30 µg kg<sup>-1</sup> ve LOQ değerleri 3,19 ve 4,34 µg kg<sup>-1</sup> olarak belirlenmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** dSPE, LC-MS/MS, Metod validasyonu, Pestisit kalıntısı, Toprak

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## 1. Introduction

Pesticides are extensively used around the world, and pesticide demand is continues to increase for high agricultural yields and quality production (Sarkar et al., 2021). The most important advantages of pesticides are their ease of use, wide variety and faster results compared to other pest control methods. However, the negative effects of pesticides on ecology should also be taken into account. Pesticides have various effects on the beneficial microflora in the soil, such as inhibiting nitrification and reducing soil fertility (Diğrak et al. 1996; Sato 1987). In addition, pesticides that seep into rivers from cropland soils and reach lakes or the sea via surface and groundwater affect a variety of life forms. Pesticides are applied directly to the soil surface and into the soil, on the plant or on the seed in the form of seed spraying. A significant part of the pesticides thrown onto the plant surface falls into the soil and the pesticides falling on the soil can move in the soil over time depending on the soil type, solubility, permanence and climate factors (Kurutaş and Kılınç, 2013).

Pendimethalin is widely applied to soil as a selective preplant, preemergence and sometimes postemergence herbicide in variety of crop plants including cotton, sunflower, tobacco, maize, wheat, rice and vegetable crops to control annual grasses, certain broad leaf weeds of dryland crops and non-crop areas and also for plant growth promotion under tropical, subtropical, as well as temperate conditions (Jape et al. 2019).

Chlorsulfuron mainly utilize to control a large variety of grass and broad-leaved weeds as pre-emergence application on wheat or as a post-emergence application on wheat, barley, rye and oat crops (Alesso et al. 2016).

Pesticides, which accumulate in the ecosystem at high concentrations, interfere with the food chain of life forms and cause significant damage to them. The continuous increase in soil and water pollution due to the extensive use of pesticides has made it necessary to develop effective analytical methods to detect pesticides and to continuously monitor the level of residues with these methods (Taylor et al., 2002; Pinheiro and de Andrade, 2009; Park et al., 2010; Sharma et al., 2017).

A wide variety of chromatographic methods e.g., liquid chromatography (LC) (Navneet and Makhan, 2015), gas chromatography (GC) (Chopra et al., 2015), capillary electrophoresis (Han et al. 2008), electroanalytical (Andressa et al., 2011), colorimetric methods (Jigneshkumar and Suresh, 2017) and enzyme-linked immunoassay (Zeng et al. 2006) have been used till date for the determination of pesticide residues in many matrices. Today, Gas Chromatography/ Tandem Mass Spectrometry (GC-MS-MS) and Liquid Chromatography/ Tandem Mass Spectrometry (LC/MS-MS) are more preferred for pesticide analysis. Equipped with ionization technique such as electrospray ionization (ESI) (Hernandez et al. 2006; Dolores et al. 2007; Wong et al. 2010; Bletsou et al. 2013; Islam et al. 2018) and atmospheric pressure chemical ionization (APCI) (Bonmatin et al. 2003; Xu et al. 2009; Botitsi et al. 2011), LC-MS/MS provides advanced sensitivity and selectivity compared to classic detectors (Saha et al., 2015).

Sample preparation step before chromatographic analysis is very important to detect pesticide residues. For pesticide residue analysis in many matrices, liquid-liquid extraction (LLE), solid phase extraction (SPE) and combinations of both are the most commonly used sample preparation methods (Mohammad et al. 2018; Yang et al., 2019; Zhang et al. 2019). The QuEChERS

(quick, easy, cheap, rugged, effective and safe) method developed by Anastassiades et al. (2003) is the most widely used sample preparation approach in the World. This method is simple and enables various modifications to be made at almost every process of the analysis (Rejczak and Tuzimski, 2015).

In this study, we aimed to develop methods with high sensitivity, accuracy, and precision to meet the SANTE/12682/2019 standard for determination of chlorsulfuron and pendimethalin pesticide residues in soil by modifying QuEChERS extraction and SPE clean-up using liquid chromatography- tandem mass spectroscopy (LC-MS/MS).

## 2. Material and Method

### 2.1. Standarts, reagents and sorbents

Chlorsulfuron (99.60% purity) and Pendimethalin (97.34% purity) reference standards were taken from Dr. Ehrenstorfer GmbH (Augsburg, Germany). Acetonitrile (MeCN), methanol (MeOH), magnesium sulfate anhydrous (MgSO<sub>4</sub>), sodium acetate (NaOAc) and acetic acid (AcOH) were taken from Merck (Darmstadt, Germany). Primary secondary amine (PSA), graphitized carbon black (GCB) were taken from Supelco Analytical (Bellefonte, PA, USA). C18 was obtained from Agilent Technologies (Santa Clara, CA, USA).

### 2.2. Device and Tools

In the study, LC-MS/MS (Shimadzu LC-MS/ MS-8050), centrifuge (Hettich Rotina 380, 50 mL and Hettich Universal 320R, suitable for 15 mL centrifuge tube), analytical balance (Shimadzu AUW220D,  $\pm 0.0001$  g), industrial cutter (Empero), Vortex (Ika) were used. Also, micropipette, 15 and 50 mL centrifuge tubes, washing bottle, ultrasonic bath, 2 and 12 mL glass vials with screw cap, 5 mL syringes, 45/25 mm syringe filters, balloon joje, disposable pipette and various materials such as weighing container were used in the analysis. Data was obtained and processed through LabSolution software provided with the instrument.

### 2.3. Extraction of samples, clean up

Extraction and clean up in residue analysis was performed with 5 different modified QUECHERS. Detailed information of the method is given in schematic diagram (Figure 1).

### 2.4. Chromatographic conditions

Chromatographic analysis were performed using LC-MS/MS (Liquid Chromatography/Tandem Mass Spectrometer). Chromatographic separation were performed using a gradient elution program with eluent A consisting dH<sub>2</sub>O + 5 mM ammonium formate and eluent B consisting of MeOH + 5 mM ammonium formate. Analysis started with 5% eluent B, which was increased linearly to 60% in 3 min, 70% in 4 min, 80% in 6 min, 95% in 7 min. This gradient was held for further 1.5 min before being returned to 5% eluent B in 8.51 min, followed by re-equilibration time for 6.49 min, to give a total run time of 15 min. The flow rate was 0.40 mL min<sup>-1</sup>. The injection volume was set to 10  $\mu$ L. The column temperature was maintained at 40 °C. For MS/MS detection, the electro spray ionization (ESI) interface was used positive polarity with the following; 400 °C of heat block temperature, 250 °C of desolvation line (DL) temperature, Nitrogen (N<sub>2</sub>) as nebulizer gas of 2.9 L min<sup>-1</sup> and drying gas of 10 L min<sup>-1</sup>.

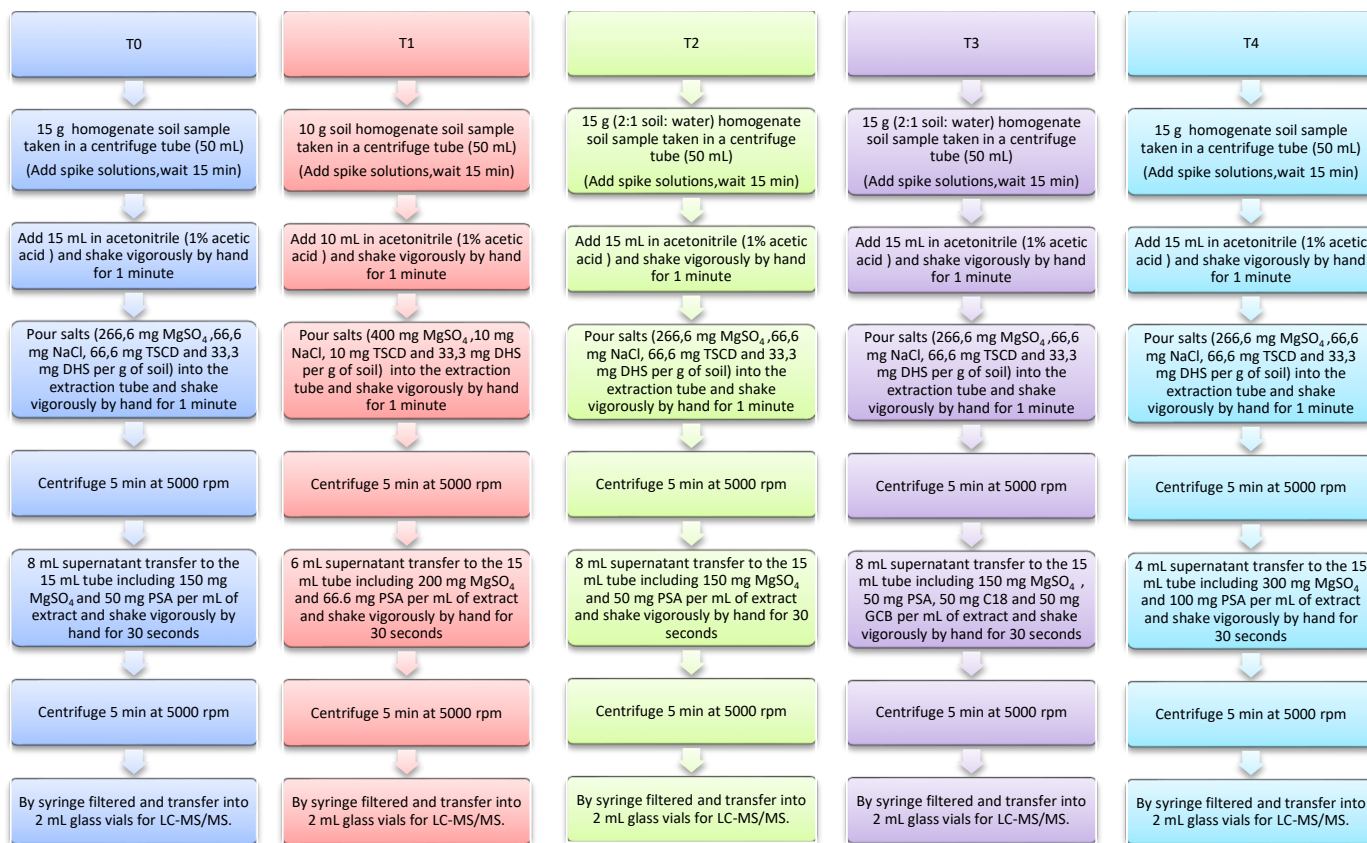


Figure 1. Analytical steps of modified QuEChERS for the analysis of chlorsulfuron and pendimethalin in soil samples

### 3. Results and Discussion

Sample preparation methods are important in the analysis of samples with complex matrices, especially in the simultaneous analysis of many pesticides. QuEChERS is the most widely used sample preparation method in pesticide residue analysis today (Gavel et al., 2019). This method enables various modifications to be made at every step of the analysis (Rejczak and Tuzimski, 2015).

Both the extraction and cleaning steps were modified to improve the efficiency of QuEChERS sample preparation in soil. Each extraction–clean-up combination has been tested by analyzing five soil samples spiked with all target pesticides at the level of 100 µg kg<sup>-1</sup>. Among the modified methods recovery values were found at an acceptable level (70 to 120%) in the T4 method (Table 1). In summary of method optimization, extraction with 266.6 mg MgSO<sub>4</sub>, 66.6 mg NaCl, 66.6 mg TSCD and 33.3 mg DHS, d-SPE cleanup with 300 mg MgSO<sub>4</sub> and 100 mg PSA were selected for validation study.

Table 1. Mean recovery of chlorsulfuron and pendimethalin (100 µg kg<sup>-1</sup>) spiked in soil using the modified methods

Pesticide	Spiking level (µg kg <sup>-1</sup> )	Test Method (% Mean recovery <sup>a</sup> )				
		T0	T1	T2	T3	T4
Chlorsulfuron	100	140.1	155.9	243.5	232.5	71.7
Pendimethalin	100	65.3	57.9	121.7	62.6	96.1

<sup>a</sup> n=5.

#### 3.1. Mass spectrometry

The optimization of mass spectrometric (MS) parameters were initially performed in precursor scan and product scan using direct flow injection. Multiple reaction monitoring (MRM) was performed in positive ion mode. MS/MS parameters for the two herbicides analyzed are given in Table 2. Chromatogram of Chlorsulfuron and Pendimethalin spiked (100 µg kg<sup>-1</sup>) soil sample are given in Figure 2. Method validation parameters were evaluated including specificity, linearity, accuracy and method limits of detection (LOD) and quantification (LOQ).

**Table 2.** Precursor ion, product ion, Q1/Q3 Pre Bias and collision energies of Chlorsulfuron and Pendimethalin (Multiple Reaction Monitoring (MRM) parameters)

Pesticide	Precursor ion (g mol <sup>-1</sup> )	Product ion (g mol <sup>-1</sup> )	Q1 Pre Bias (V)	Collision energies (eV)	Q3 Pre Bias (V)
Chlorsulfuron	357.80	141.10/ 167.10	-17.0/ 17.0	-19.0/ -19.0	-26.0/ 17.0
Pendimethalin	282.00	212.05/ 194.00	-11.0/ 19.0	-10.0/ -18.0	-22.0/ 22.0

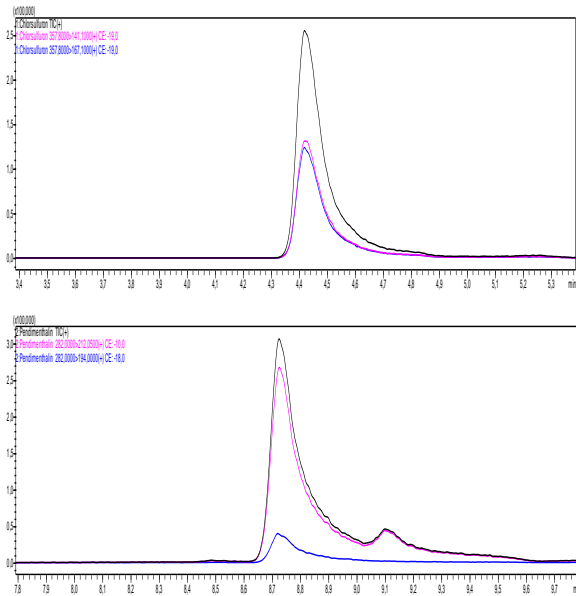


Figure 2. Chromatograms obtained from soil samples spiked with standard solutions

**3.2. Linearity and calibration curve**

The linearity was evaluated using calibration curves at 5, 10, 25, 50 and 100 µg L<sup>-1</sup> prepared in matrix blank extract (soil). Each calibration point was obtained by 3 repeated injections. Linear ranges and correlation coefficients are summarized in Table 3. It can be seen that correlation coefficient were all greater than 0.99. This result shows that the method was linear with a specified concentration ranges.

**Table 3.** Calibration data

Pesticide	Calibration matrix	Calibration range (µg mL <sup>-1</sup> )	Regression equation	Correlation coefficient (r <sup>2</sup> )
Chlorsulfuron	soil	5-100	Y=(13490,1)X + (53892,8)	0.9907542
Pendimethalin	soil	5-100	Y=(31561,0)X + (-35780,7)	0.9981621

**3.3. Accuracy**

Accuracy is a parameter that covers the parameters of recovery and precision (repeatability and within-laboratory reproducibility). The repeatability studies were performed with 3 injections at 3 different concentrations (10, 50 and 100 µg kg<sup>-1</sup>) on the same day. The within-laboratory reproducibility studies were performed with 3 injections at 3 different (10, 50 and 100 µg kg<sup>-1</sup>) concentrations at five different times (Table 4). Data obtained during the validation process meet the criteria (Mean recovery; 70-120%, RSD% ≤ 20%) of the SANTE/12682/2019 guidance document (SANTE, 2019).

**Table 4.** Mean recovery, repeatability (RSD<sub>r</sub>) and within-laboratory precision (RSD<sub>wr</sub>) of the method for the mixture of the compounds in soil spiked at different levels

Pesticide	Spiking level (µg kg <sup>-1</sup> )	% Mean recovery	SD	RSD <sub>r</sub> %	% Mean recovery	SD	RSD <sub>wr</sub> %
Chlorsulfuron	10	96.5	0.35	3.66	104.6	1.32	12.6
	50	104.4	3.46	6.75	98.4	2.47	5.02
	100	94.5	3.24	3.43	91.0	9.69	10.1
Pendimethalin	10	100.2	0.31	3.05	87.4	1.02	11.7
	50	91.5	6.19	13.5	78.3	3.65	9.32
	100	91.7	2.45	2.67	94.9	3.53	3.72

**3.3. LOD and LOQ values**

The studies were performed in 10 replicates at a single concentration (10 µg L<sup>-1</sup>) and the standard deviation (SD) and relative standard deviation (RSD%) values of chlorsulfuron and pendimethalin were calculated. The LOD value is determined as 3 times the calculated standard deviation values for chlorsulfuron and pendimethalin. LOQ value was calculated as 10 times the standard deviation values for chlorsulfuron and pendimethalin (Table 5). The LOQ was obtained lower than EU-MRL values (EC, 2008; EC, 2019).

**Table 5.** Mean, SD, RSD%, LOD, LOQ and MRL values (µg kg<sup>-1</sup>)

	Mean	SD	RSD %	LOD	LOQ	MRL
Chlorsulfuron	9.69	0.32	0.03	0.96	3.19	50*
Pendimethalin	10.1	0.43	0.04	1.30	4.34	50*

\* EU-MRL lowest residual value for plant products (EU, 2008; EU, 2019)

## 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

In this study an analytical method based on modified QuEChERS extraction combined with LC-MS/MS analysis was developed for determination of residues of chlorsulfuron and pendimethalin in soil. The developed method demonstrated appropriate validation parameters in terms of linearity, limit of detection and quantification, high accuracy and precision. Owing to the MS/MS detection, the method gave a good sensitivity and selectivity for chlorsulfuron and pendimethalin. The LOQs assessed by the method were below than the MRL values prescribed by European Union (EU). Interfering peaks were not observed in the chromatograms of the analyzed soil samples. This method is suitable for chlorsulfuron and pendimethalin analysis in soil.

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