

**CONTROLLED CATALYTIC REDUCTION IN SYNTHESISING PURE
TETRAHYDROCUCUMIN**

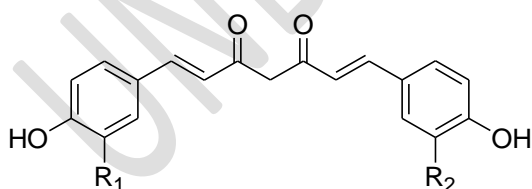
ABSTRACT:

Pd-Catalyzed hydrogenation process has been developed to synthesize tetrahydrocurcumin from synthetic curcumin. Use of diphenyl sulphide as catalyst poison is crucial for lowering the activity of the catalyst and thus reduces impurity formation. The process avoids column chromatography to achieve good quality tetrahydrocurcumin in cost effective manner.

KEYWORDS: Curcumin, Tetrahydrocurcumin, Hydrogenation, Poison catalyst.

1. INTRODUCTION:

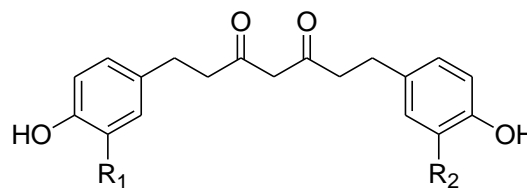
Tetrahydrocurcumin **2a** is a metabolite of curcumin **1a** and is the most powerful anti-oxidant due to the free radical cleavage of the beta position of the gamma diketone moiety.¹ The inhibitory activity of **2a** is dependent on its keto-enol tautomer.² **2a** is stronger anti oxidant when compared with curcumin. Highly pure tetrahydrocurcumin **2a** is used in foods, alcohols, medicaments and cosmetics, etc., due to its excellent anti-oxidative properties. Since tetrahydrocurcumin is colourless and odourless,³ especially when colouring acts as an evil, it serves as a material which conquered the faults of curcumin **1a**.



1a, $R_1 = R_2 = \text{OCH}_3$

1b, $R_1 = \text{OCH}_3$, $R_2 = \text{H}$

1c, $R_1 = R_2 = \text{H}$



2a, $R_1 = R_2 = \text{OCH}_3$

2b, $R_1 = \text{OCH}_3$, $R_2 = \text{H}$

2c, $R_1 = R_2 = \text{H}$

Figure 1: Structures of curcumin (**1a**), curcuminoids (**1b-c**), tetrahydrocurcumin (**2a**) and tetrahydrocurcuminoids (**2b-c**)

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Experimental Section:

^1H NMR and DEPT spectral data were obtained in deuterated Chloroform (CDCl_3) and D_2O at 300MHz and 500MHz spectrometers. The chemical shift values were reported on the δ scale in parts per million (ppm), downfield from tetra methyl silane (TMS, $\delta = 0.0$) as an internal standard. Spin multiplicities are given as s (singlet), d (doublet), dd (double of doublet), t (triplet) and m (multiplet) as well as broad (broad singlet). Coupling constants (J) are given in Hertz. IR spectra were recorded in the solid state as KBr dispersion using a PerkinElmer spectrum one Fourier transform (FT)-IR spectrophotometer. Mass spectrum was recorded using PerkinElmer PE SCIEX API 2000, equipped with an ESI source used online with an HPLC system after the ultraviolet (UV) detector. HPLC chromatographic purity was determined by using area normalization method.

2.2.1 Process for the preparation of Curcumin **1a**^{7a}

Vanillin (60 g, 0.394 moles) was suspended in ethyl acetate (200 mL) at 25-30 °C. The reaction was stirred for 10 minutes. Tributyl borate (170.16 g, 0.74 moles), acetyl acetone (23.7 g, 0.237 moles) and boric anhydride (10 g, 0.142 moles) were added to the reaction mixture at 25-30 °C. Butyl amine (2.96 g, 0.04 moles) was added drop wise to the reaction mixture 25-30 °C and maintained for 40 hours. The reaction mass was quenched with 6 N aqueous hydrochloric acid and maintained at 25-30 °C for 1 hour. Ethyl acetate (400 mL) was added to the reaction mass and maintained at 25-30 °C for 2 hours. The reaction mass was filtered and washed with water (3x100 mL) and methanol (3x60 mL). The obtained solid was purified from aqueous methanol (990 mL) to produce title compound (51 g, 70%) with chromatography purity 95.33% performed by HPLC. IR (KBr, cm^{-1}); 3856, 3565, 2923, 2357, 2327, 1863, 1626, 1506, 1462, 1376, 1281, 1180, 1113, 1026, 986, 886, 783, 668; ^1H NMR (CDCl_3 , 500 MHz, δ): 3.95 (s, 6H), 5.80 (s, 1H), 5.85 (s, 2H), 6.49 (d, 2H, $j=8$), 6.943 (d, 2H, $j=2$), 7.05(d, 2H, $j=2.5$), 7.11(d, 2H, $j=2$), 7.57 (d, 2H, $j=15$);.

2.2.2 Process for the preparation of tetrahydrocurcumin (2a) without using diphenyl sulphide⁸

Curcumin (20 g, 0.054 moles) was suspended in methanol (400 mL) at 25-30 °C in autoclave. 10% palladium/carbon (1 g, 5% w/w) was added to this reaction mass at 25-30 °C. Hydrogen pressure (10 kg) was applied and the reaction mass was maintained at 25-30 °C for 2 hours. After completion of the reaction, the catalyst was removed from the reaction mass. Carbon (2 g, 10% w/w) was added to the reaction mass and maintained for 1 hour at 25-30 °C. Carbon was also removed from the filtrate. The filtrate was concentrated and isolated from methyl tert butyl ether to produce title compound **2a** (9 g, 40%) with HPLC purity 74.33%. IR (KBr, cm⁻¹); 3854, 3420, 3065, 2948, 2133, 1901, 1740, 1610, 1548, 1414, 1326, 1265, 1156, 1032, 921, 837, 772, 681; ¹H NMR (CDCl₃, 500 MHz, δ): 1.55 (t, 4H, j=7.5), 2.81 (t, 4H, j=7.5), 3.85 (s, 6H), 5.42 (s, 1H), 5.47 (s, 2H), 6.66 (d, 4H, j=5), 6.81 (d, 2H, j=10), 15.4(s, 1H) .

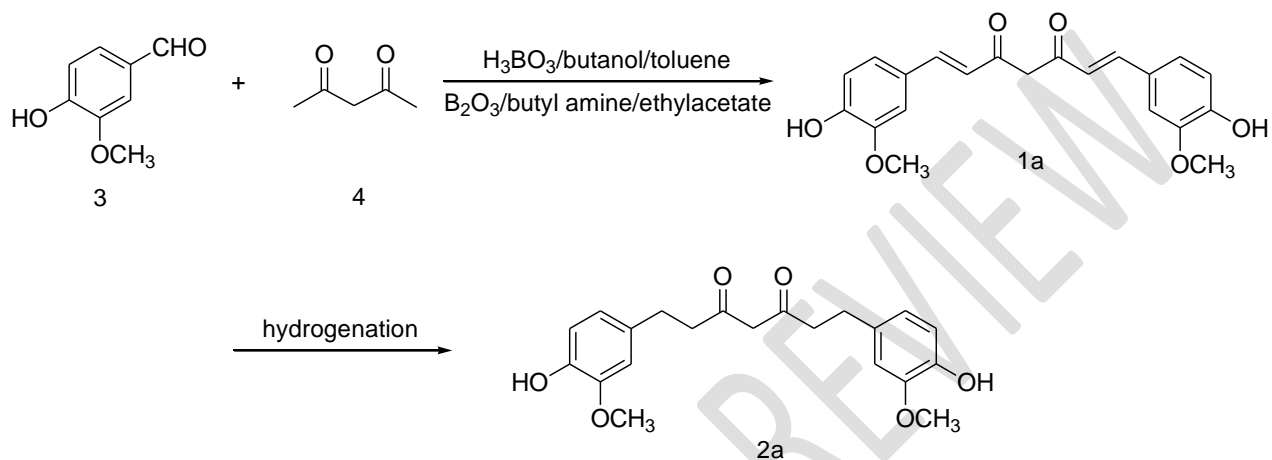
2.2.3 Process for the preparation of tetrahydrocurcumin (2a) using diphenyl sulphide:

Curcumin (50 g, 0.135 moles) was suspended in methanol (1000 mL) at 25-30 °C in autoclave. 10% Palladium/carbon (3.25 g, 6.5% w/w) was added, followed by diphenyl sulphide (65 mg, 0.13% w/w) and DM water (15 mL) were added to this reaction mass at 25-30 °C. Hydrogen pressure (10 kg) was applied and the reaction mass was maintained at 40-45 °C for 4 hours. After completion of the reaction, the catalyst was removed from the reaction mass. Carbon (5 g, 10% w/w) was added to the reaction mass and maintained for 1 hour at 25-30 °C. Carbon was also removed from the filtrate. The filtrate was concentrated and isolated from isopropyl alcohol (150 ml) to produce title compound (35.4 g, 70%) with HPLC purity 99.05%.

3. Result and Discussions:

Our strategy for the synthesis of tetrahydrocurcumin **2a** from curcumin **1a** is provided in **Scheme 1**.
1. Compound **2a** was obtained from **1a** by selective hydrogenation. Curcumin **1a** was synthesized from commercially available vanillin **3** and acetyl acetone **4** as per literature reported method (**Scheme 1**).⁷
The process comprised of condensing **3** and **4** in the presence of tributyl borate, boric anhydride and

butyl amine. After the completion of the reaction, solvent was evaporated and product **1a** was precipitated using 10% aqueous acetic acid. Crude product **1a** was suspended in water and stirred at 70-80 °C for 1h. Reaction mass was subsequently cooled to 25-30 °C and pure compound **1a** was isolated by filtration and drying (**Scheme 1**).



Scheme 1: Synthetic strategy for the preparation of tetrahydrocurcumin 2a

The major disadvantage with the reported methods is formation of impurities, for example, hexahydrocurcumin **5**, desmethyl tetrahydrocurcumin **6** and octahydrocurcumin **7** (**Figure 2**). These impurities are removed by column chromatography which limits the application of the process on large scale.

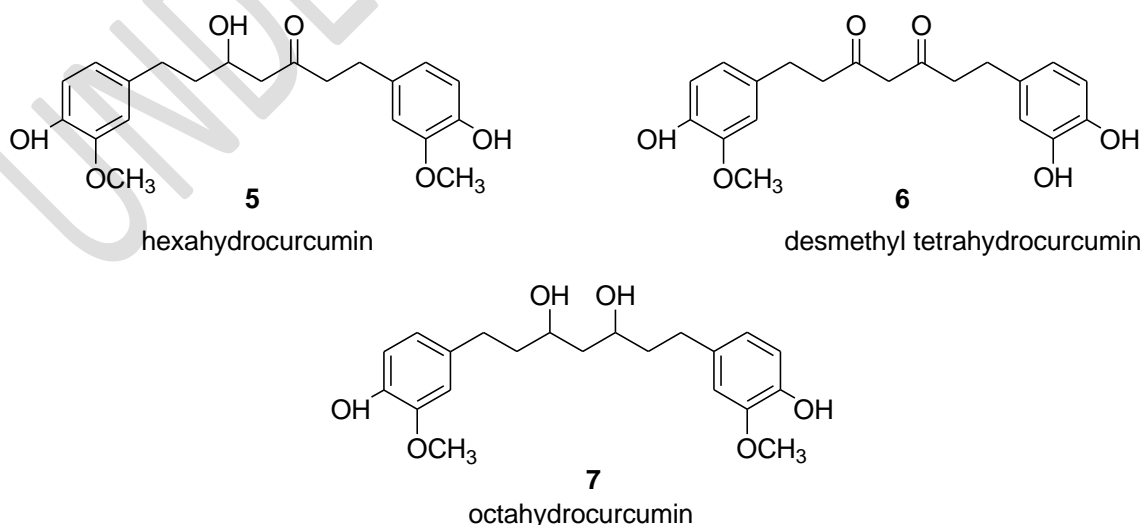


Figure2: Impurities (5-7) formed during synthesis of 2a from 1a

Peter *et al.*,^{7a} have reported the reduction of **1a** in acetone with Raney nickel. The main drawback of the method is that the catalyst is used in higher quantities and the product **2a** is obtained as a yellow coloured solid. We had attempted number of purifications but we could not get off-white coloured compound **2a**. Since yellow coloured compound **2a** has restricted use in cosmetics and foods, this process is not suitable for commercial scale manufacturing of **2a**.

Su-Lin *et al.*, have reported the reduction in ethyl acetate with 10% Pd/C.⁸ We had tried this process in our hands to check its efficacy. After the completion of the reaction, catalyst was filtered through hyflo and residue was washed with ethyl acetate. Filtrate was evaporated completely and product **2a** was isolated from methyl tertiary butyl ether. The main limitation with this process is that the hydrogenation is not selective and formation of impurities **5** and **6** is high. Product **2a** was obtained in low yield of 14% due to repeated purifications.

Chatchwan *et al.*, have reported the reduction in methanol with 10% Pt/C.⁹ Isolated compound **2a** was contaminated with impurities **5-7**. The drawback of this method is cost of Pt/C catalyst and also compound **2a** is obtained with unwanted impurities **5-7**. Removal of these impurities required repeated purifications and compound **2a** was obtained in low yield.

We had evaluated hydrogenation of **1a** to furnish **2a** under literature reported conditions. The rate of hydrogenation being fast under these conditions generated more impurities due to uncontrolled over reduction. Removal of impurities **5** and **6** required column purification which resulted in lower yield and also the method is non-viable on commercial scale.

The present article is directed towards developing a process for the preparation of pure compound **2a**¹ with impurities **5-7** in lower levels. We have attempted to slower the rate of hydrogenation by using sulphur related compound, for example diphenyl sulphide, and thus reducing the levels of impurities **5-6**.

In our study, use of Raney nickel provided **2a** in good yield and purity but yellow colour was still present in the product. So the method is not suitable for commercialization. Several purification techniques were tried but **2a** could not be isolated as off-white product (Table 1).

Table 1: Screening of Ph₂S catalyst poison for hydrogenation of 1a to give 2a

| Entry | catalyst | molar ratio | solvent | Ph ₂ S loading (%w/w) | time (h) | purity by HPLC (%) ^a | yield (%) ^b |
|-------|----------|-------------|----------|----------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 | Raney Ni | 0.3 | acetone | - | 2 | 78.57 | 80 |
| 2 | Raney Ni | 0.2 | acetone | - | 2 | 84.5 | 82 |
| 3 | Raney Ni | 0.1 | acetone | - | 1 | 88.01 | 83.5 |
| 4 | Raney Ni | 0.1 | acetone | 0.1 | 2.5 | 96.86 | 88 |
| 5 | Raney Ni | 0.1 | methanol | 0.1 | 2 | 30.5 | - |

^areaction conversion during monitoring; ^bisolated yield

In further study, we have evaluated the conversion of **1a** to **2a** with variety of reducing agents (Table 2).

Table 2: Screening of catalysts/reagents for room temperature reduction of 1a to 2a in methanol

| Entry | Catalyst/reagent | time (h) | loading (%w/w) | purity by HPLC (%) ^a | yield (%) ^b |
|-------|-----------------------------------|----------|----------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 | 10%Pd/C | 2 | 5 | 76.31 | 40 |
| 2 | 10%Pd/C | 20 | 2 | 79.24 | 41 |
| 3 | Pd/CaCO ₃ | 2 | 5 | 47.23 | 25 |
| 4 | NaBH ₄ | 1 | 2 moles | ND ^c | ND ^c |
| 5 | Pd/Al ₂ O ₃ | 15 | 5 | 64.24 | 35 |
| 6 | Pd/C/AlCl ₃ | 10 | 5 | ND ^c | ND ^c |
| 7 | PtO ₂ | 2 | 5 | 54.99 | 30 |
| 8 | 5%Pd/C (Type-39) | 1 | 5 | 55.67 | 30 |

| | | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|---|---|-------|----|
| 9 | 10%Pd/C (Type 490 paste) | 2 | 5 | 82.20 | 43 |
|---|-----------------------------|---|---|-------|----|

^aconversion during monitoring; ^bisolated yield; ^cnot detected

Among various tested reducing agents, we have observed that 10% Pd/C was best suited for this reduction. This is because of the faster rate of the reaction (less than 0.1% unreacted starting material was observed after 2 hours). Using other reducing agents, more than 0.1% of starting material was left unreacted even if the reaction was performed for more than 15 hours. Presence of more than 0.1% of starting material renders yellow colour to the product, which is undesirable and cannot be used in drug products and in food substances. On the other hand, when PtO₂ was used as reducing agent, reaction completed in 2 hours (less than 0.1% of unreacted starting material was left out). But this reducing agent is highly expensive, which is not suitable for scale up and commercialisation. Keeping in view of above facts, we concluded that 10% Pd/C should be the best reducing agent for this reaction.

Pd/C is known as the most universal catalyst for hydrogenation in synthetic organic chemistry because of its high catalyst activity, cost efficiency, easy separation from the reaction mixture and reusability.¹⁰ Pd/C exhibits high catalytic activity and due to this reason its application to chemo selective hydrogenation between different types of reducible functionalities is very challenging. Highly active catalyst can lead to undesirable secondary reactions to generate undesired products. In some of these cases, the addition of small amount of a catalyst poison increase the yield of the desired product by lowering the catalyst activity and thus minimizing side reactions.

During our efforts to solve the problem, we found that the addition of a sulphur atom containing catalyst poison controls the activity of Pd/C for transformation of **1a** to **2a**. Herein, we describe the Pd/C catalyzed chemo selective hydrogenation using diphenylsulphide as a sulphur containing catalyst poison.^{11,12} Further to reduce the impurity formation in the reaction, which are formed due to over reduction, we tried to limit the reaction rate by using various sulphur related catalytic poisons (Table 3). We found that diphenyl sulphide was the best catalytic poison for this reaction. When we used diphenyl sulphide as catalytic poison reaction completed in 24 hours at 45 °C, the formation of impurities in the

reaction were reduced from 25-30% to 2-3%. This shows the efficiency of diphenyl sulphide as catalytic poison.

Table 3: Screening of catalyst poisons for conversion of 1a to 2a

| Entry | catalyst poison | catalyst for reduction | purity of 2a by HPLC (%) ^a |
|-------|--------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | disodium sulphide | 10% Pd/C | ND ^b |
| 2 | dimethyl sulfoxide | 10% Pd/C | ND ^b |
| 3 | thioacetic acid | 10% Pd/C | ND ^b |
| 4 | cyclopropyl mercaptoacid | 10% Pd/C | ND ^b |
| 5 | diphenyl sulphide | 10% Pd/C | 96.44 |

^aconversion during monitoring; ^bnot detected

We have further optimised the quantity of catalytic poison required to suppress impurity formation. Use of 0.5% w/w of the catalyst did not give good results and more than 0.1% of unreacted starting material was left out at 45 °C even though few impurities were also present (Table 4, entries 1 & 2). Similarly, use of 0.05% w/w and 0.08% w/w did not furnished satisfactory results (Table 4, entries 3 & 4). On the other hand, use of 0.1% w/w of diphenyl sulphide (Table 4, entry 5) as poison yielded the product **2a** with a purity of more than 99%.

Table 4: Screening of optimum quantity of diphenyl sulphide catalyst poison for conversion of 1a to 2a

| entry | quantity of diphenyl sulphide (% w/w) | temperature (°C) | time (h) | purity of 2a by HPLC (%) ^a |
|-------|---------------------------------------|------------------|----------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | 0.5 | 45 | 20 | 87.27 |
| 2 | 0.25 | 45 | 29 | 88.29 |
| 3 | 0.05 | 45 | 2 | 75.4 |
| 4 | 0.08 | 45 | 3 | 87.04 |
| 5 | 0.1 | 45 | 4 | 96.44 |

^aconversion during monitoring

Next, we looked for the best solvent for this reaction (Table 5). Among the various tested solvents, we have observed methanol is best in attaining **2a** in good purity in lesser time with good yield. Also, methanol is less expensive solvent compared to ethanol and isopropyl alcohol (Table 5).

Table 5: Screening of solvents for synthesis of 2a from 1a using 10% Pd/C (5% w/w) & Ph₂S (0.1% w/w)

| entry | solvent | time (h) | purity of 2a by HPLC (%) ^a |
|-------|-------------------|----------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | ethanol | 20 | 75.76 |
| 2 | methanol | 4 | 96.44 |
| 3 | ethyl acetate | 6 | 57.94 |
| 4 | DCM | 1 | 12.66 |
| 5 | acetonitrile | 1 | 14.53 |
| 6 | isopropyl alcohol | 36 | 85.8 |

^aconversion during monitoring

In the absence of the Ph₂S, purity level of **2a** is lower and impurities **5** & **6** are forming in higher amount (Table 6). On the basis of these results, we observed that the use of diphenyl sulphide poison would be crucial for the efficient and selective catalytic reduction of **1a**. Diphenyl sulphide acts as a poison which modulates the activity of palladium on carbon and thus minimizes impurity formation.

Table 6: Hydrogenation of 1a in the absence of diphenyl sulfide

| entry | reducing agent | solvent | temperature (°C) | time (h) | purity of 2a by HPLC (%) ^a |
|-------|----------------|----------|------------------|----------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | 10% Pd/C | acetone | 27 | 2 | 20.1 |
| 2 | 5% Pd/C | methanol | 27 | 1 | 29.3 |
| 3 | 10% Pd/C | methanol | 50 | 2 | 21.30 |

| | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|----------|----|---|-------|
| 4 | Pd/CaCO ₃ | methanol | 50 | 2 | 28.77 |
| 5 | PtO ₂ | methanol | 27 | 2 | 22.53 |
| 6 | Raney-Ni/Ph ₂ S | methanol | 27 | 2 | 66.29 |

^aconversion during monitoring

After the completion of the reaction, palladium on carbon is filtered through hyflo bed and residue was washed with methanol. Combined organics were evaporated in rotavap at 45-50 °C. Methyl tert-butyl ether was added to the resulting crude and stirred at 0-5 °C for 1h. Crystallized product was filtered to obtain compound **2a** in 60% yield and 98.4% HPLC purity. On the other hand, use of isopropyl alcohol instead of methyl tert-butyl ether furnished **2a** in 70% yield and 99.05% HPLC purity. Finally, the redesigned process furnished **2a** with an overall yield of 49% from vanillin over 2 steps with 99.05% HPLC purity.

Residual solvent and metal content analysis of **2a** was also performed and the values are well within regulatory requirements (Tables 7 & 8).

Table 7: Residual solvent analysis of 2a

| entry | purity by HPLC (%) | | residual solvents by GC (ppm) | | | | | | yield (%) |
|-------|--------------------|------|-------------------------------|------|------|---------------|------|---------|-----------|
| | 1 | V | acetone | IPA | MeOH | ethyl acetate | AcOH | butanol | |
| 1 | 99.29 | 0.57 | ND | 1201 | 170 | ND | ND | ND | 49.12 |
| 2 | 98.92 | 0.86 | ND | 1243 | 145 | ND | ND | ND | 49.09 |

Table 8: Heavy metals analysis of 2a by ICP-OES

| arsenic (ppm) | cadmium (ppm) | palladium (ppm) | lead (ppm) |
|---------------|---------------|-----------------|------------|
| < 1.0 | < 1.0 | < 3.0 | < 1.0 |

It has been observed that **2a** and **1a** obtained from synthetic routes are free from impurities **1b-c** and **4b-c**, respectively (Table 9).

Table 9: HPLC purity of 2a obtained from synthetic and natural 1a

| Entry | source of 1a | 1a (%) | 1b (%) | 1c (%) | 2a (%) | 2b (%) | 2c (%) |
|-------|----------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1 | synthetic | 98.60 | - | - | 99.29 | - | - |
| 2 | natural source | 84.57 | 11.24 | 1.77 | 92.96 | 6.02 | 0.58 |

4. Conclusion:

We have developed an improved process for synthesis of tetrahydrocurcumin **2a** by selective palladium-catalyzed hydrogenation of synthetic curcumin **1a**. The residual metal analysis of **2a** is well within allowed limits and the product meets the regulatory norms in terms of quality. Hydrogenation using 10% palladium on carbon in the presence of diphenyl sulphide catalyst-poison minimizes impurity generation and thus avoids column purification for the preparation of **2a**.

COMPETING INTERESTS DISCLAIMER:

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist. The products used for this research are commonly and predominantly use products in our area of research and country. There is absolutely no conflict of interest between the authors and producers of the products because we do not intend to use these products as an avenue for any litigation but for the advancement of knowledge. Also, the research was not funded by the producing company rather it was funded by personal efforts of the authors.

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