

Phytosterols by HPLC with Corona *ultra* Charged Aerosol Detection

Phytosterols are a group of naturally occurring steroid alcohols found in plants and their oils. Phytosterols are a key structural component of plant cell membranes, assuming the role that cholesterol plays in mammalian cells. There is considerable interest in phytosterols as a dietary supplement as they are reported to lower cholesterol levels and have a positive impact on cardiovascular diseases. However, recent research has suggested that phytosterols supplementation may aggravate atherosclerosis and lead to aortic valve stenosis.

Phytosterols are commonly measured using gas chromatography (GC). However, this approach is time consuming requiring saponification of the sample, a number of extractions, and derivatization. Presented here is a simplified method, using reversed-phase high pressure liquid chromatography (HPLC) and charged aerosol detection (Corona *ultra*) (RP-HPLC-CAD). The Corona *ultra* is a sensitive, mass-based detector that is sufficiently sensitive to quantify analytes in the low nanograms on-column range. The Corona also has response factors that are similar across many compounds allowing for analytes' mass-percent values to be estimated using peak area-percent.

The chemical structures of five standards, campesterol, cholesterol, stigmasterol, β -sitosterol, and stigmastanol, are shown in Figure 1. The structures of these compounds are very similar, with only small changes in alkyl content and/or unsaturation, yet resolution was still possible using a reversed-phase column. These standards and a sample of red palm oil were dissolved in methanol/chloroform and analyzed directly, using RP-HPLC-CAD.

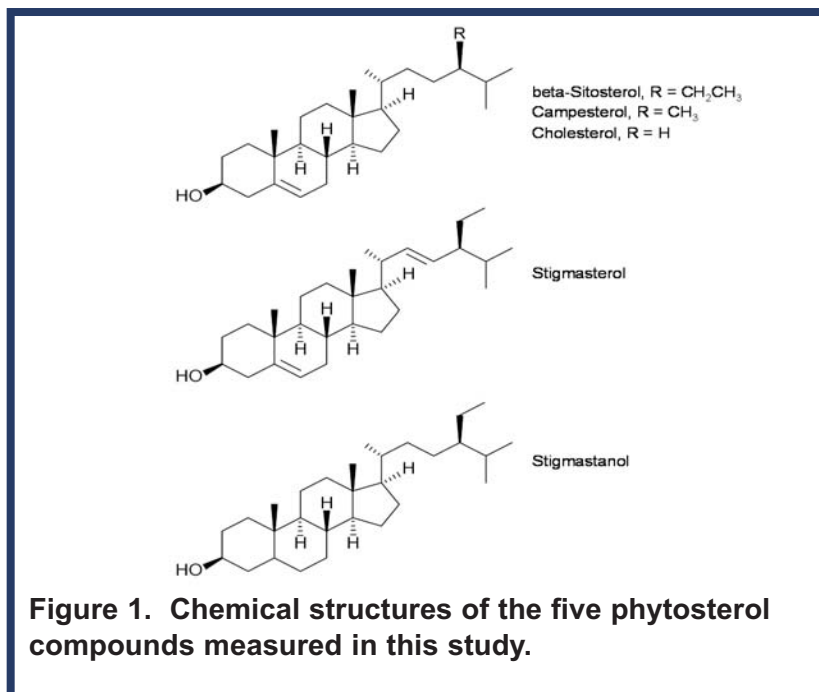


Figure 1. Chemical structures of the five phytosterol compounds measured in this study.

The RP-HPLC-CAD method is simple to implement, shows good linearity and sensitivity, and is capable of measuring numerous phytosterols in plant extracts. This approach can be used to examine product purity, supplement content and possible adulteration.

Method Parameters

Column:	Halo C8, 150 x 4.6 mm, 2.7 μ m, 50 °C
Gas:	Nitrogen
Gas Pressure:	35.0 psi
Nebulizer Heater:	30 °C
Filter:	Medium
Mobile Phase A:	Methanol / Water / Acetic Acid (750 : 250 : 4)
Mobile Phase B:	Acetone / Methanol / Tetrahydrofuran / Acetic Acid (500 : 375 : 125 : 4)
Gradient:	See Table 1
Flow Rate:	0.8 mL/min
Run Time:	25-35 minutes
Injection Volume:	5 μ L at 20 °C
Sample Solvent:	Methanol / Chloroform (1:1)

Time	%A	%B
0.0	100.0	0.0
1.0	100.0	0.0
3.0	70.0	30.0
20.0	62.0	28.0
20.1	100.0	0.0
25.0	100.0	0.0

Table 1. UHPLC gradient.

Phytosterol	LOD (ng)	LOQ (ng)
Cholesterol	2	6
Campesterol	2	7
Stigmasterol	2	7
beta-Sitosterol	2	8
Stigmastanol	3	9

Table 2. LOD and LOQ values for the five phytosterols.

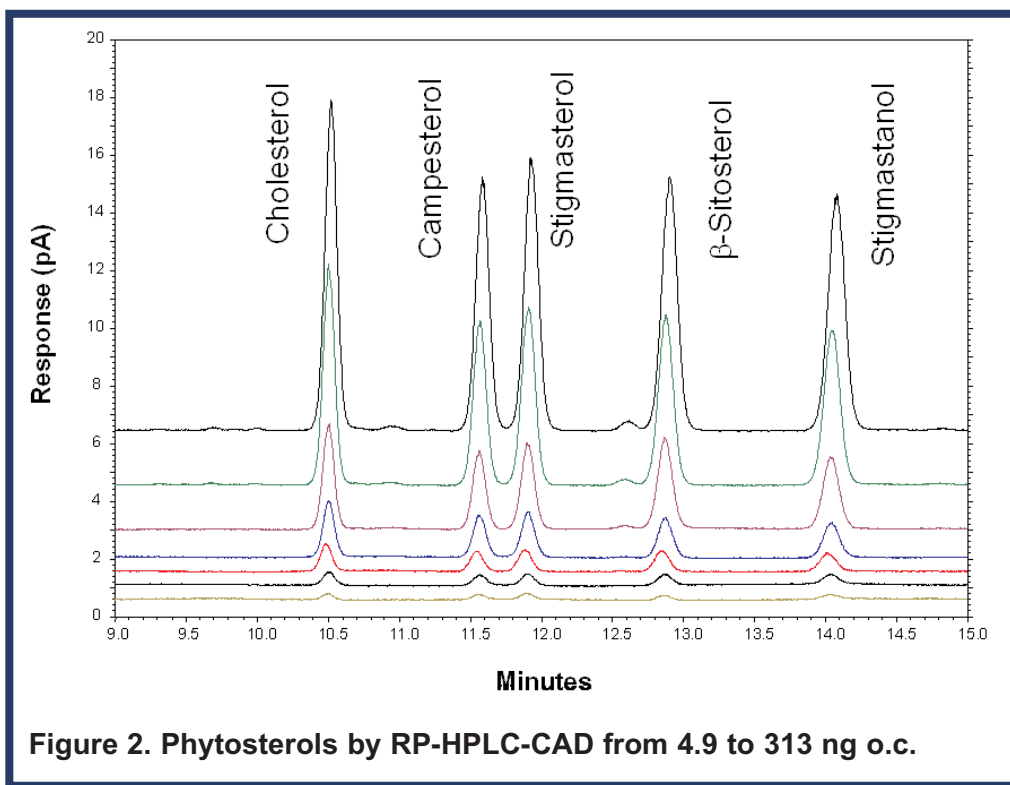
Results and Discussion

The method was able to completely resolve all five phytosterols in under 15 minutes. Standards (Sigma-Aldrich) were analyzed using a shorter gradient (0%B for 5 minutes at a time of 20.1 minutes). The full gradient is required for many biological samples, in order to elute the highly retained hydrophobic compounds.

The response of the phytosterols was linear over three orders of magnitude. Replicate chromatograms (n=3) for different amounts of each phytosterol (4.9 to 313 ng o.c.) are shown in Figure 2. The method is also precise, with RSD values less than 6% for all phytosterols greater than 10 ng o.c. A calibration plot, from 4.9 to 313 ng o.c. of each phytosterol, is presented in Figure 3, and shows good linearity ($R^2 = 0.997 - 0.999$).

Sensitivity was evaluated, using the results from the 4.9 ng standard (Figure 4). The estimated LODs (S/N = 3) and LOQs (S/N = 10) for the five phytosterols are presented in Table 2. Typical LODs and LOQs were <5ng and <10ng, respectively.

The method can be used to measure phytosterols in complex matrices. For example, red palm oil was dissolved in methanol/chloroform and analyzed



directly. The sample chromatogram, overlaid with the 156 ng standard chromatogram is presented in Figure 5. Only the phytosterol region is shown, for clarity. All five phytosterols were found in the palm oil sample. The method is compatible with mass spectrometry which can be used to help identify other peaks in the chromatogram.

Conclusion

This application note describes a simple, direct analytical method for the separation and measurement of five phytosterol compounds. The method is sensitive, down to 3 ng (o.c.), precise, and linear over three orders of magnitude. The method does not require derivatization or extensive sample preparation. Samples are simply diluted prior to analysis.

The practical use of the method is illustrated using red palm oil. All five phytosterols could be measured in this complex matrix.

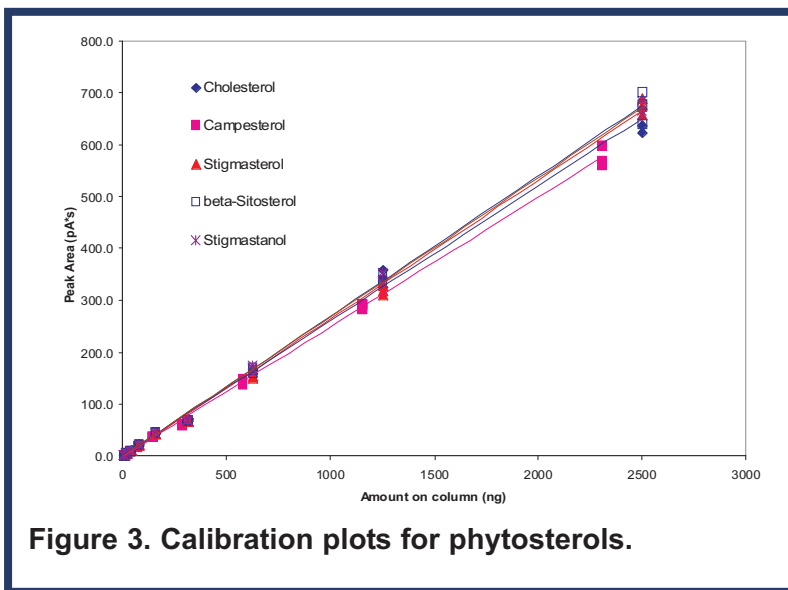


Figure 3. Calibration plots for phytosterols.

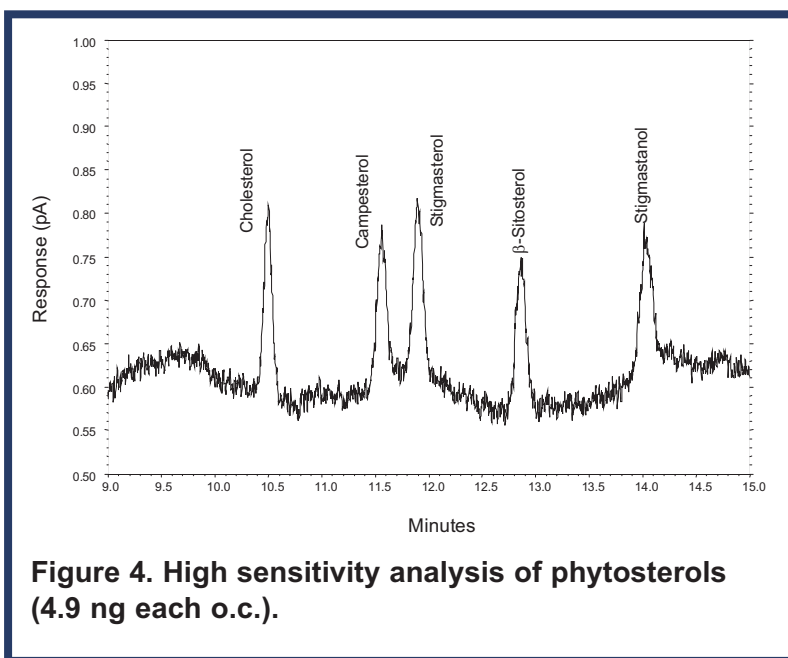
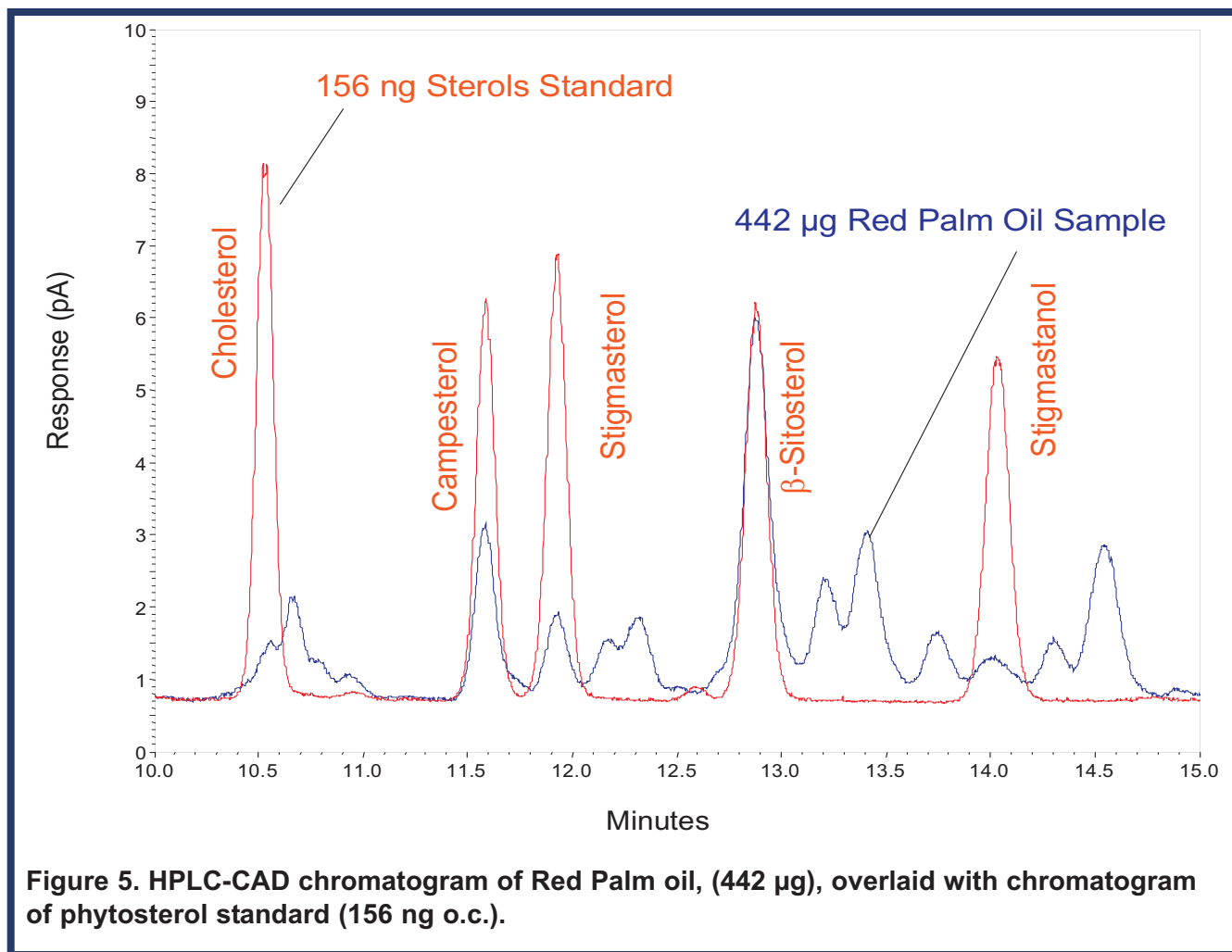


Figure 4. High sensitivity analysis of phytosterols (4.9 ng each o.c.).

The Corona[®] *ultra*[™] Charged Aerosol Detector



Ordering Information

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