



Review Paper

Reasons led to reconsideration of botanicals as stored grain insect pest control agents

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Abstract

Ensuring the safety of food grains poses a significant and pressing challenge for grain handling organizations and experts in stored product entomology worldwide. Insects are universally recognised as the primary adversaries of stored grains, as they not only cause direct damage but also create an environment conducive to secondary infestations, primarily by fungal pathogens. Synthetic insecticides and fumigants have demonstrated higher efficacy in managing insect pests that affect stored grains. However, their widespread and indiscriminate use over many years, aimed at reducing post-harvest losses and preserving grain quality, has resulted in several adverse outcomes. These include the development of genetic resistance in pest species, lingering residues in stored grains, safety hazards during handling, pollution of storage environments, health concerns for humans, and detrimental impacts on the environment, thereby jeopardising the sustainability of ecosystems. These undesirable consequences have driven researchers to seek safer, efficient, and nontoxic grain protectants. Natural products derived from plants are increasingly gaining recognition as promising bio rational substitutes for synthetic insecticides in the control of postharvest insect pests. There has been a growing interest in various regions across the globe in investigating botanicals as a new approach to safeguarding grains. This review primarily focuses on the reasons that have sparked renewed scientific curiosity in utilising botanicals as stored grain insect pest control agents. It explores botanicals as an ecofriendly alternative to synthetic insecticides for stored grain insect pest management and provides an overview on the use of botanicals as stored grain insect pest control agents. This review also summarises the obstacles, constraints linked to the commercialization of botanicals as grain protectants.

Keywords: Botanicals, Stored grain insect pests, Postharvest losses, Grain protectants, Synthetic insecticides, Insecticide resistance, Integrated pest management, Pest control agents.

Introduction

Ensuring the safety of food grains stands as a paramount challenge faced by global grain handling organizations and experts in stored product entomology. Preserving food grains deserves equal attention as their efficient production. It is supported by the fact that “post-harvest losses are directly proportional to the backwardness of a nation”. Prevention of food grain losses in developing countries could greatly reduce or eliminate the need to import food grains^{1,2}. Grains must be stored between harvests to ensure a steady supply throughout the year and to maintain their quality until needed. It is estimated that 60-80% of grain produced in tropics is stored at the farm level³.

Grain storage often results in both quantitative and qualitative losses due to physical, chemical, and biological factors, particularly pests like insects, rodents, birds, and microorganisms^{4,5}. Poor storage facilities and insect pest damage during storage, transportation, and shipping are major

concerns, across the world⁶ especially in developing countries^{7,8}. Insect pests cause significant destruction of stored food grains globally, leading to substantial losses in crop production for farmers⁹. Post-harvest losses resulting from insects remain a huge challenge^{10,11}. Insects are considered the most significant pests of stored grain worldwide, as they not only cause direct damage but also generate conditions conducive to secondary infestation by rot organisms, primarily fungi^{12,13}.

Post-harvest losses, mainly caused by storage pests, is a major threat to global food security and lead to significant economic implications. In developed countries, these losses account for up to 9%, while in developing nations, they can reach as high as 20%¹⁴. A World Bank study highlights that approximately 12-16 million tonnes of food grains are lost annually due to storage pests, a quantity sufficient to feed nearly one-third of the global population¹⁵. India, being the second-largest producer of food grains with an average annual production of 250 million tonnes, faces substantial post-harvest losses. It is estimated that 11-15% of the total production, amounting to 27.5 to 37.5 million metric

tonnes per year, is lost due to various factors¹⁶. These losses translate to over 50 billion INR (exceeding \$1 billion) annually¹⁷, with insect-related losses alone contributing around 17 billion INR (\$364 million)¹⁸. Such post-harvest grain losses in India could potentially feed 70-100 million people, approximately one-third of the country's poor population^{19,20}.

While advances in production technology have led to a consistent increase in grain production, inadequate storage practices have resulted in significant grain losses. The presence of insect pests in stored grain is a major concern as they inflict substantial damage on agricultural produce held in storage. In fact, their impact on stored grains post-harvest is often comparable to the damage caused by crop pests during the growing season. On a global scale, annual grain losses due to insect damage following harvest are estimated to range between 10% and 40%²¹⁻²³. The financial impact caused by the feeding activities of pest insects, including larvae and adults, amounts to billions of dollars each year^{24,25}. In India, insect pests are responsible for a loss of approximately 6.5% of stored grain^{26,27}.

Once infestation is established pest insects cause gradual and progressive damage that leads to loss in weight, nutritional, organoleptic, and aesthetic quality of stored grains. Apart from the percentage losses incurred from the grain they feed on, insect pests also render large quantities useless by contaminating grains with their droppings, webs, and odours. Their biochemical activities could lead to generation of heat that may eventually result in hot spot in bulk grain storage, leading to the caking of grains¹³. Damaged grains may become inedible, unusable and in the case of seed, the germination capacity may be impaired²⁸. Spoilage of food grains caused by heat and moisture from insect infestations encourage molds, bacteria and this not only reduces grain quality and quantity but can pose health risks^{29,30}. Allergies are widespread hazards associated with insect infestation of food materials³¹.

Insect pests play a significant role in the loss of stored grains, causing economic damage worth millions of dollars each year. This poses a serious threat to the food security programme of any nation, especially in developing countries, where agricultural produce is largely stored by farmers with limited resources^{32,33}. Studies suggest that over 20,000 species of field and storage pests are responsible for destroying nearly one-third of the global food production annually, valued at over \$100 billion. The highest proportion of these losses, about 43%, is reported in developing countries^{24,34} because they lack modern storage methods^{14,35}.

Losses in temperate regions of the world due to insect damage can be expected to be lower than in the tropics and subtropics. The occurrence and number of stored grain insect pests are directly related to geographical and climatic conditions³⁶. The tropics and subtropics provide optimum conditions for pest multiplication and losses tend to increase^{37,38}. The quantitative and qualitative damage to stored grains and grain products from

the insect pests amount to 20–30% in the tropical zone and 5–10% in the temperate zone³⁹⁻⁴¹.

Global food production must increase by 70% to sustain a population projected to reach 10 billion by 2050. In India, the population has been growing at an annual rate of 1.8% and was expected to reach 1.3 billion by 2020. To meet the food demand associated with this growth, the country would need an additional 2 million tonnes of food grains every year⁴². The highest food grain production in India, 259.32 million tonnes, was recorded in 2010-2011. However, 20-25% of this yield was lost due to damage caused by stored grain pests^{43,44}. Such damaged grains exhibit reduced nutritional content, lower germination rates, decreased weight, and diminished market value⁴⁵.

The presence of stored grain insect pests poses a significant agricultural challenge, resulting in substantial economic setbacks for warehouse operators, the milling industry, and small-scale farmers worldwide. Mitigating post-harvest losses caused by these insects is not only essential for preserving food grain supplies but also for enhancing overall production efficiency. Thus, safeguarding grains and agricultural produce from insect damage during storage is essential.

Control of stored grain insect pest infestation by synthetic insecticides and insecticide resistance problem

Several methods are used in controlling insect pests in stored grain including physical (smoking, heating), cultural (drying of grains, airtight storage), biological (male insect sterilization, natural enemies, resistant grain varieties) and chemical (synthetic and natural products). Since 1950s synthetic insecticides have been used intensively in developed and transitional countries⁴⁶ in grain facilities to control stored product insect pests. Synthetic insecticides have become easy weapons for controlling insect pests because they are highly effective, rapid in curative action, adaptable to most situations and flexible in meeting with changing agronomic and ecological conditions¹³. They were widely accepted by the farmers, agri-industries and grain handlers due to their uniform and rapid effectiveness ease of shipment, storage, application and often relatively long term persistence²⁷. Thus, synthetic pesticides were immediately embraced due to their effectiveness and efficacy in managing serious pests⁴⁷.

Globally, two main chemical methods are used to manage insect pests in stored grains: fumigation and the use of contact insecticides for grain protection⁴⁸⁻⁵⁰. Fumigation is considered one of the most effective techniques, where insect pests are exposed to a toxic gaseous environment created by applying a fumigant. The fumes from these fumigants enter insects through their spiracles, traveling through their tracheal system and interact with their haemolymph. Over time, various synthetic fumigants have been used to control insect pests in stored grains. Common fumigants include carbon disulphide, carbon

tetrachloride, ethylene dichloride, ethylene oxide, methyl bromide, chloropicrin, trichloroethylene, sulphur dioxide, methyl formate, and trichloroacetonitrile. For fumigating empty storage facilities, a mixture of ethylene dichloride and carbon tetrachloride in a 3:1 ratio is often used to target eggs, larvae, and adult insect stages of stored pests⁶. Therefore, safeguarding of stored grains largely depends on chemical control methods, particularly the use of protectant insecticides and fumigants¹³.

In recent times, there has been a gradual increase in the resistance of stored product insects to fumigation methods, resulting in a significant decline in the availability of effective fumigants for insect pest control. Presently, only two fumigants remain in use, methyl bromide and phosphine. It is suspected that methyl bromide may leave behind residues that can be harmful to warm-blooded animals⁵¹. Further, the utilization of methyl bromide is being restricted and phased out in accordance with the Montreal Protocol due to its detrimental impact on ozone depletion⁵².

Phosphine is currently the primary fumigant used globally to protect stored grains and other stored commodities from insect pests⁵³⁻⁵⁵. Its widespread adoption can be attributed to its affordability, ease of application, low residue levels, and compatibility with various storage systems and commodities⁵⁶⁻⁵⁹. While phosphine has long been an effective tool for managing stored product insects, its excessive and uncontrolled use has led to the development of resistant insect populations^{60,61}. Reports of resistance have become increasingly concerning, with several species of grain pests exhibiting resistance in different regions worldwide⁶²⁻⁶⁴. In some cases, this has resulted in fumigation failures⁶⁵. A global survey by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 1972-73, revealed resistance in stored grain pests across 33 of the 82 countries surveyed, affecting 82 of the 849 insect populations tested⁶⁶. Insect resistance to fumigants used in grain storage remains a significant issue worldwide⁶⁷.

Contact insecticides applied directly to grains or storage facilities, such as malathion, chlorpyrifos, and deltamethrin, are used to protect against infestations for extended periods. However, various pests in stored grains have shown resistance to these insecticides. Some of these contact insecticides have lost their effectiveness due to widespread resistance among insect populations. Currently, 122 pest species have developed resistance to malathion^{68,69}. Resistance to this insecticide has been observed globally and remains stable in natural populations, even without continued insecticide exposure⁷⁰. The rise of cross resistance and multi resistance in insect strains of many important insect species is an alarming issue worldwide^{71,27}.

The rising issue of insecticide resistance presents a significant challenge to the protection of stored grains. To date, more than 500 insect species have been documented to develop resistance to one or more insecticides, with 12 species showing resistance

to nearly all insecticides. The spread of resistant insect strains through global trade poses the challenges we are bound to face with pests targeting stored products⁷². The widespread, prolonged, and uncontrolled use of synthetic insecticides has created a strong selection pressure, leading to changes in the genetic makeup of pest populations. Individuals with natural resistance have survived synthetic insecticide treatments, allowing them to pass on resistant traits to subsequent generations⁷³. Over time, this has resulted in a significant increase in the proportion of insect populations resistant to insecticides, resurgence of stored product insect pests⁷⁴, compelling the use of double and triple application rates, increased marketing costs with reduced benefits⁷² making them unavailable to small farmers, particularly in underdeveloped and developing countries⁷⁵. Consequently, the effectiveness of chemical control has declined in recent decades due to the emergence of resistance in insect pests⁷⁶.

The failure of synthetic insecticides to effectively control pests, leading to resistance and subsequent food losses, results in annual global economic damage amounting to billions of dollars⁷⁷. Insect pest resistance to insecticides has thus emerged as one of the key constraints to continued successful post-harvest protection of the grain and is threatening the economic viability of the stored grain protection industry.

Adverse effects of synthetic insecticides as grain protectants

Synthetic insecticides played a prominent role in decreasing post-harvest losses due to insect pests⁷⁸. Although effective, their widespread, extensive and injudicious use for decades has reduced the biodiversity of agro ecosystems, provoking their instability and caused harmful effects such as evolution of resistant strains, primary pest resurgence, secondary pest outbreaks, conversion of innocuous species to pests, direct toxicity to non-target beneficial fauna, disruption of natural biological control and pollination, residual effects on stored grain, handling hazards, pollution of storage environment, human health issues and deleterious effects on the environment endangering the sustainability of ecosystems⁷⁹⁻⁸³.

Most of the synthetic insecticides currently in use leave behind long-lasting residues that are challenging to eliminate during grain processing⁸⁴. These persistent insecticides also accumulate themselves at various concentrations in different levels of ecosystems leading to bioconcentration, biomagnification and are found to be carcinogenic and mutagenic in action⁸⁵. Therefore, the excessive and enthusiastic utilization of synthetic insecticides for controlling insect pests in stored grain has led to a range of adverse consequences that were not anticipated when these chemicals were first introduced.

Reliance on synthetic chemical insecticides resulted in many serious drawbacks⁸⁶. The synthetic insecticides possess inherent toxicities that endanger the health of the warehouse operators,

consumers, and the environment⁸⁷. Constituent compounds of synthetic insecticides have been linked to chronic human health issues, either through exposure or consumption^{88,89}. Studies suggest these insecticides may contribute to cancer development through non-genotoxic mechanisms, including promotion, peroxisome proliferation, hormone disruption, or by influencing the carcinogenic process in ways that can alter the genome and enhance the growth of neoplastic cells^{90,91}. These insecticides are known to induce oxidative stress as part of their toxic effects, leading to the production of free radicals and changes in antioxidant or oxygen-free radical scavenging enzymes⁹². Oxidative stress can result in DNA damage, which is associated with malignancies and other disorders⁹³.

Certain insecticides can have harmful effects on the nervous, immune, endocrine, renal, respiratory, and reproductive systems in both men and women⁹¹. Exposure during foetal development can lead to congenital disorders, genetic diseases, DNA damage, and hormonal imbalances in the foetus⁹⁴. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 3 million cases of pesticide poisoning occur annually, resulting in over 250,000 deaths, primarily due to improper handling, application, or intentional poisoning⁹¹. Agricultural workers and consumers are at risk of adverse health effects from insecticide residues, and their breakdown products, particularly due to inadequate registration, poor storage, and misuse⁹⁵. As such, the use of synthetic insecticides presents significant risks to human health.

These well documented ecotoxicological, environmental and social consequences led to increasingly stringent environmental regulation of synthetic insecticides⁹⁶. Recent regulations have led to a reduction in the availability of synthetic insecticides for pest management in agriculture and storage facilities⁹⁷. This decline is primarily due to the increasing resistance to these chemicals and their deregistration, driven by growing awareness of their environmental and human health impacts. In response, there has been a shift towards ecologically based practices⁹⁸. Moreover, rising consumer concerns regarding the safety of food treated with synthetic insecticides have contributed to a gradual abandonment of their use for controlling post-harvest bio-deterioration^{99,100}. Therefore, the existing approach to rely exclusively on synthetic insecticides to control post-harvest insect pests needs to be redesigned⁹⁷.

The adverse impacts of synthetic pesticides have spurred a demand for a safer and ecologically conscious alternative. There is an imminent demand for a novel methodology capable of significantly reducing the utilization of synthetic insecticides. The emerging pest control agents must adhere to a completely distinct set of criteria. They must exhibit specificity towards pests, lack any adverse effects on plant health, pose no harm to mammals and beneficial organisms, be biodegradable, environmentally sustainable, less susceptible to pest resistance, relatively cost-effective, and locally available. In this context, botanicals have been championed as efficacious substitutes for synthetic chemical insecticides in the management of stored

grain insect pests. Increasing awareness of the risks linked to widespread synthetic insecticide use has sparked a renewed interest in plant-based pest control agents¹⁰¹ because of their fewer ecological side effects^{102,103}.

Botanicals as an ecofriendly alternative to synthetic insecticides for stored grain insect pest management

The increasing potential risks associated with the use of synthetic insecticides raised doubt about their use as grain protectants in the future. To combat increasing pressure of insecticide resistance in insect pests and to reduce the insecticide residue in the treated stored grain the researchers are compelled to find safer, effective, alternative nontoxic grain protectants. Recently in different parts of the world attention has been given towards exploration of novel classes of insect pest control agents with alternative modes of action, environmentally benign, toxicologically safe, more selective and can replace or minimize the use of synthetic insecticides. As plant secondary metabolites, botanicals present an appealing and ecofriendly option for pest control¹⁰⁴. The use of plant-based pest management has a long history, until technological advancements led to the development of synthetic pesticides¹⁰⁵. The reliance on plant-based natural products gradually declined, but with growing concerns about the risks posed by synthetic pesticides to human health and the environment, there has been a resurgence in interest in this natural and ecofriendly alternative¹⁰⁶.

Plants, as nature's chemical factories, produce a range of bioactive compounds primarily designed to defend against insect pests^{107,108}. Scientific literature confirms that plant secondary metabolites known as botanicals play a key role in plant interactions with other species, primarily by defending against pests. These compounds represent a vast reservoir of chemical structures with pesticidal properties¹⁰⁹. Various plant species serve as a valuable source of secondary metabolites, which hold immense potential for development as insecticides¹¹⁰. Despite this potential, their use as insecticides remains largely unexplored. Botanical insecticides offer distinct advantages over synthetic insecticides, including rapid breakdown by sunlight, moisture, or detoxifying enzymes, reduced phytotoxicity, and high target specificity. These attributes make botanical insecticides an attractive and sustainable option for insect pest management. Higher plants produce a wide variety of secondary metabolites, such as phenolics, terpenes, alkaloids, lignans, and their glycosides. Thus, these bioactive compounds apart from playing a vital role in the plant's defense system also serve as promising structural prototypes for designing lead molecules, which can serve as innovative insect pest control agents. Natural compounds with anti-insect properties present less risk to the environment than synthetic insecticides¹¹¹. In this context, botanicals with anti-insect properties are gaining attention.

Natural plant-derived products are emerging as promising bio-rational alternatives to synthetic insecticides for managing post-harvest insect pests¹¹²⁻¹¹⁴. The significance of botanicals with anti-insect properties lies in their effectiveness, biodegradability, diverse mechanisms of action, minimal toxicity, and the availability of raw materials^{103,115}. As byproducts of metabolic processes shaped by species co evolution, botanicals offer several environmental benefits¹¹⁶. Research has shown that botanicals are not only highly effective and more biodegradable but also less likely to cause environmental contamination and demonstrate a lower potential for resistance, making them a viable substitute for synthetic pesticides^{117,118}. In various regions across the globe, there has been a growing focus on the exploration of botanical resources as a novel avenue for safeguarding grains. Currently, botanical insecticides make up just 1% of the global insecticide market^{119,120}. The botanical pesticide market is expected to experience an annual growth rate of 10%, while synthetic chemical insecticides are projected to see a more modest increase of 1-2%¹²¹. The expectation is that botanicals will find their place in agriculture primarily as supplements to synthetic insecticides or as essential components of pesticide rotation strategies. This application will help in slowing down the emergence of resistance¹²².

Botanicals play a crucial role in managing pests of post-harvest produce^{107,123,124}. Historically, people relied on botanicals to control pests before turning to other pesticides. Botanicals have a historical record of being employed for the management of agricultural pests in ancient civilizations such as China, Egypt, Greece, and India dating back over two millennia¹⁰⁷. The agricultural industry's growing fascination with natural plant-based products has driven extensive research into the chemical composition of different plant families¹²⁵. Approximately 200 plant species have been identified as effective against pests that target stored products. These species are distributed across 96 different plant families, with the Asteraceae and Lamiaceae families being the most represented^{126,127}.

Plant-derived botanicals exhibit the potential to influence various aspects of insect biology, including their behaviour, morphology, physiology, and metabolic processes^{107,128,129}. These effects can manifest in different ways, such as inhibiting growth, preventing egg-laying, exhibiting ovicidal properties, and triggering mechanisms that hamper growth¹³⁰⁻¹³³. The anti-insect properties of botanicals are linked to the bioactive compounds they contain. These compounds, which include unique structural motifs found in secondary metabolites such as alkaloids, essential oils (e.g., terpenes), flavonoids, phenolics, phytosterols, polyketides, and resins, contribute to their potent insecticidal activity^{134,125}.

Secondary metabolites have been recognized as promising candidates for their potential use as biopesticides¹³⁵. Remarkably, more than 2000 plant species are recognized for their pesticidal attributes, effectively combating a range of

stored grain pests¹³⁶. Various scholarly sources have also outlined diverse plant-derived products, each exhibiting a distinctive level of effectiveness against these pests^{137,138}. These plant-derived botanicals, are commonly administered in various forms, including aqueous or solvent extracts, powders, slurries, volatiles, oils, or as shredded components^{139,140}.

In post-harvest pest control, farmers have long relied on plant-based protection agents, particularly for grain storage. The use of plant insecticides against pests by Ancient Romans were documented as early as 400 B.C.¹⁴¹. In ancient Rome, granaries frequently underwent fumigation using a variety of aromatic plants, such as rosemary, myrrh, and juniper. Additionally, aromatic plants were strategically placed near the entrances of these granaries. Consequently, individuals gained knowledge about the deterrent properties of aromatic botanical substances¹⁴². To this day, the conventional practice of employing botanicals for safeguarding field crops and preserving stored produce remains widespread and valuable among subsistence and transitioning farmers¹⁴³.

Before the Second World War, natural insecticides such as pyrethrum, rotenone, and nicotine accounted for at least 20% of the commercial insecticide market¹⁴⁴. Several scientific publications offer insightful information on the varieties of plants utilized across different regions worldwide for the protection of stored products^{127,145-147}. In East Africa, specifically in countries like Kenya and Tanzania, various botanical substances are commonly employed as grain protectants. These botanicals are from plants such as *Ocimum* spp., *Eugenia aromatica*, *Bascia* spp., *Tagetes* spp., *Tephrosia vogelii*, *Azadirachta indica* (neem), *Eucalyptus* spp., and *Lantana camara*¹⁴⁸.

India possesses an abundant diversity of plants that can be utilized as botanical pesticides, offering an effective alternative to chemical pesticides. India, being a tropical country, serves as a rich source of various secondary metabolites suitable for formulating different botanical pesticides. Botanical pesticides are derived from either the entire plant or specific plant parts, whether fresh or dried, and they contain active ingredients capable of combating insects and pathogens¹²⁶. In India, there is an extensive tradition of utilising more than 450 botanical derivatives in agricultural practices, with neem being one of the most extensively researched trees. Neem has been found to have insecticidal properties in nearly all parts of the tree. The practice of using neem leaves and powdered neem kernels to manage pests in stored grains has a long history in India¹⁴⁸.

Nowadays, *Azadirachta indica* based pesticides have gained significant popularity due to their biodegradability, minimal residual presence, low toxicity to non-target organisms, cost-effectiveness, and ready accessibility. In India, neem-based products have proven efficacy in combatting a wide array of pests, spanning crop fields and the protection of stored grains such as rice, wheat, corn, legumes, potato, tomato, and more¹⁴⁹.

Both leaves and fruit of neem plant known to have bitter taste exhibit anti-insect properties¹⁵⁰. The pesticidal effectiveness of crude or commercially available pesticides derived from neem tree seeds, twigs, and stem barks has been documented against more than 700 pests and disease causing pathogens. This property has been ascribed to their secondary metabolites, specifically triterpenoids and nonterpenoids^{151,152}.

The anti-insect properties of neem (*Azadirachta indica*) are extensively studied, and indeed attributed to a group of natural compounds known as limonoids (triterpenoids). Among these limonoids, azadirachtin A is considered the most active and prominent compound responsible for the insecticidal properties of neem. However, it is important to note that other limonoids present in neem extracts may also contribute to the overall efficacy of neem-based insecticides¹⁵³⁻¹⁵⁵. Further, these additional limonoids may play a role in preventing the development of resistance to azadirachtin A¹⁵⁶. Azadirachtin is a versatile insecticide known for its broad-spectrum effectiveness. It functions as an antifeedant, interferes with insect development, and functions as a sterilizing agent, making it suitable for controlling a broad range of insect pests related to agriculture, including species from the orders Coleoptera, Hymenoptera, Diptera, Orthoptera, and Isoptera. Recognized as one of the most effective insecticides, it targets over 550 insect species. Azadirachtin is distinguished by its remarkable selectivity, exhibiting low toxicity to mammals¹⁵⁷, and is easily degradable, non-mutagenic, and safe for non-target and beneficial organisms¹⁵⁸.

In trials conducted for storage applications, the use of ground neem plant material demonstrated effective and consistent control of coleopteran pests. Azadirachtin exhibits antifeedant properties, acts as a growth regulator, hinders oviposition, and serves as a sterilizing agent. Currently, neem-based commercial products are marketed under various names, including Neem Gold, Neemazal, Econeem, Neemark, Neemcure, and Azatin. These formulations are widely available across many countries, such as the United States, India, Germany, and several Latin American countries¹⁵⁹⁻¹⁶³.

Pyrethrum, an age-old and non-hazardous insecticide derived from the desiccated flower buds of *Chrysanthemum* species, found applications in the early 19th century. Comprising four compounds - pyrethrins I and II, as well as cinerins I and II, pyrethrum stands out as one of the safest insecticides in use, posing minimal toxicity to most mammals. Pyrethrins disrupt normal nerve functioning. To date, the widely employed botanical insecticides for preserving stored commodities are pyrethrins¹²⁷. Sabadilla, also known as "cevadilla," is derived from the seeds of the tropical sabadilla lily (*Schoenocaulon officinale*), native to Central and South America. Its primary active ingredient is an alkaloid called veratrine, which is marketed under trade names such as "Red Devil" and "Natural Guard." Recognized as one of the least toxic botanical insecticides, sabadilla has an oral LD50 ranging between 4000

and 5000 mg/kg. Its mechanism of action involves disrupting the membranes of neuron cells, leading to reduced nerve activity, paralysis, and ultimately, the death of the target pest. Rotenone, a natural compound, is derived from plant species such as *Derris*, *Lonchocarpus*, *Tephrosia*, and *Mundulea*. It functions as both a contact and ingestion agent with repellent properties. Rotenone's mechanism of action involves disrupting electron transport at the mitochondrial level, which prevents the phosphorylation of ADP to ATP, effectively halting insect metabolism¹⁶⁵. Extracted from *Tephrosia*, rotenone has been employed as an insecticide for over a century¹⁶⁵. In storage pest management, ground leaf material from *Tephrosia* has proven effective in controlling coleopteran pests¹⁶⁷⁻¹⁶⁹.

Tobacco's insecticidal effects are due to nicotine and related alkaloids. While nicotine-based pesticides have a rich historical background, their application has decreased over time due to their high toxicity to humans¹⁰⁷. The insecticidal properties of tobacco can be attributed to nicotine and its associated alkaloids. Nicotine-based pesticides have a rich historical background, but their utilization is declining due to their significant toxicity to humans¹⁰⁷. Nicotine acts as a biodegradable contact insecticide. It works by imitating acetylcholine, binding to its receptor on the post-synaptic membrane. The efficacy of ground tobacco leaves was documented with an efficacy of 100% against cowpea weevils^{170,171}.

Botanical pesticides even in their crude form have been demonstrated to possess insecticidal properties¹⁷². Researchers tested the effectiveness of extracts from *Nicotiana tabacum*, *Sinapsis arvensis*, and *Cardiadraba* against *Trogoderma granarium* and found them to be effective in reducing pest populations in stored wheat grains¹⁷³. Extracts from *Pegaum harmala*, *Ajuga iva*, *Aristolochiabaetica*, and *Raphanus raphanistrum* exhibited insecticidal activity against *Triboliumcastaneum*. These extracts worked by disrupting the developmental cycles of the insects and inhibiting the production of F1 progenies¹⁷⁴.

In storage scenarios, ground bitter leaf plant material was employed for the management of coleopteran storage pests. The insecticidal effect of garlic cloves is linked to sulphur-containing compounds produced through the enzymatic breakdown of allicin. Research have shown that garlic extracts exhibit anti-insect properties against a range of pests, including coleopteran, dipteran, lepidopteran, and hemipteran species¹⁷⁵. Storing grains with sweet flag (*Acorus calamus*) powder can effectively prevent insect infestation for up to six months. This successful protection is attributed to the potent and repellent odour emitted by sweet flag, which deters various storage pests from infesting the grains¹²⁰.

Processes for insect repellent and insecticide products of plant origin have also been patented¹⁷⁶. Over the past few decades, there has been extensive exploration of the effectiveness of

botanicals utilized in traditional pest management through research trials. Numerous aromatic plants, widely utilized as culinary herbs and spices, along with their essential oils, have gained scientific interest for their potential as botanical insecticides to prevent storage losses of post-harvest produce¹⁷⁷. More specifically, numerous farmer surveys have brought to light the utilization of a diverse array of botanicals for insect pest control. For instance, in Northern Malawi, farmers employ 10 different botanicals, while in Zambia, 7 are used¹⁷⁸. In the Lake Victoria basin in Uganda, the count reaches 34¹⁷⁹, and in one district of Tamil Nadu State in India, farmers rely on 11 botanicals for this purpose¹⁸⁰.

Insecticidal sesquiterpene lactones targeting coleopteran pests have been successfully extracted from bitter leaf¹⁸¹. Clove basil essential oil and several of its components also demonstrated insecticidal and repellent properties effective against coleopteran pests¹⁷⁵. Carvone, a monoterpene extracted from the essential oil of *Carum carvi*, is marketed as a non-toxic botanical pesticide under the brand name 'TALENT.' This compound is effective in preventing potato tubers from sprouting during storage and protects them from bacterial decay, while being safe for mammals. Additionally, the monoterpene α -pinene, the primary component of marigold tree essential oil, has shown insecticidal and repellent effects against coleopteran pests that affect stored products. The sesquiterpene lactones found in tree marigold also have demonstrated toxicity against the coleopteran species *Callosobruchus maculatus*^{181,175}.

Capsaicin, the primary compound responsible for the spiciness of chili peppers, is a key ingredient in many commercially available insecticide formulations. It possesses both repellent and insecticidal properties. Ground chili pepper fruits have demonstrated effective control over the cowpea weevil *Callosobruchus maculatus*, making chili pepper a potent solution for killing and deterring various species of weevils that infest stored grains. Furthermore, an essential oil component found in Siam weed, the monoterpene α -pinene, exhibits insecticidal and repellent activities against storage pests of the order coleoptera. Coumarins, which are significant secondary metabolites present in the mother of cocoa, as well as limonoids in China berry, have been well-documented for their insecticidal properties against storage pests belonging to the orders Coleoptera and Lepidoptera. In addition to these, ground moringa leaves have also proven effective in controlling coleopteran storage pests¹⁷⁵.

Rosmarinus officinalis (rosemary), an herb native to Mediterranean region exhibits insecticidal properties¹⁸². The phytochemicals existing in its oil showed anti-insect properties against the stored product insects, *Trogoderma granarium* and *Tribolium castaneum*¹⁸³. *Piper nigrum* (Black pepper) and *Mentha piperita* (Pepper mint) exhibited promising insecticidal activity against *Corcyra cephalonica* (rice moth), and *Sitophilus oryzae* (rice weevil) which are economically significant stored product pests causing severe damage to grains and products in

storage. The anti-insect properties of these plants is due to the presence compounds, menthol, limonene, cineole and isomenthone in pepper mint while α and β pinene, limonene and caryophyllene in black pepper¹⁸⁴.

The wide range of bioactive compounds found in plants can disrupt insect nervous system, inhibit growth, impair reproduction, deter, or kill pests with minimal harm to non-target species and the environment. Sourcing can be done by identifying plants with insecticidal properties, utilizing traditional knowledge, and optimizing extraction methods. Advances in bioprospecting and green chemistry can pave the way for more potent botanical insect pest control agents, reducing dependence on synthetic insecticides and supporting integrated insect pest management.

Major challenges and constraints to the utilization of botanicals as insect pest control agents

Botanical pesticides emerge as a captivating alternative for safeguarding agricultural produce, offering reduced environmental and health hazards. Despite the substantial research conducted across global laboratories and the exponential growth of scientific literature elucidating the pesticide attributes of botanicals, it is rather astonishing that the marketplace has seen a scanty emergence of pest control products rooted in vast plant resource. In spite their merits in eco-friendly pest management, the adoption and utilization of botanical pesticides remain limited, signaling challenges in their acceptance. Various factors hinder the utilization of botanicals as insect pest control agents constraining their broad use and practical implementation.

The commercialization of botanicals as grain protectants faces a unique set of challenges and constraints, primarily related to their effectiveness, safety, regulatory approval, and market acceptance. Overcoming these obstacles will require continued research, investment, education, and collaboration among stakeholders in agriculture and pest management industries. The prevalent challenges hindering their adoption and utilization in the pursuit of sustainable pest management are –

Limited Efficacy: Botanical grain protectants may not be as effective as synthetic chemical pesticides in providing long term protection against a wide range of stored grain pests. This limitation can discourage their adoption by grain storage facilities.

Variability in Active Ingredients: The variability in active ingredients is a common challenge with botanical pesticides because these products often rely on complex mixtures of plant extracts. Factors like plant species, growth conditions, and extraction methods can result in variations in the concentration and composition of active compounds. This variability can make it challenging to predict and control the pesticide's

efficacy, requiring thorough research and quality control measures to ensure consistent performance in pest management.

Pest Resistance: Just as pests can develop resistance to synthetic pesticides, they can also develop resistance to botanicals over time. This resistance can reduce the effectiveness of botanical grain protectants and necessitate the development of alternative solutions.

Shorter Residual Activity: Botanicals often have shorter residual activity compared to synthetic chemicals. As a result, grain may require more frequent treatments with botanicals, which can increase operational costs and labour.

Storage and Stability: Some botanical insecticides are less stable and may require special storage conditions to maintain their efficacy. Challenges related to the stability and storage of botanical insecticides include their susceptibility to degradation over time, sensitivity to environmental factors such as temperature, humidity, and the need for proper packaging to prevent moisture ingress or exposure to light, which can diminish their effectiveness. Finding solutions to these issues is essential to ensure the longterm viability and efficacy of botanical based protectants in grain storage. Innovations in encapsulation technologies and formulation strategies are a key to extending the shelf life of botanical insecticides. This can add complexity to their commercialization and increase costs.

Regulatory Approval: Botanical insecticides may face regulatory challenges in terms of registration and approval. Regulatory agencies may require extensive testing to ensure their safety and efficacy, which can be costly and time-consuming.

Quality Control and Standardization: The challenge of quality control and standardization in botanical insecticides arises from the inherent variability in plant-based ingredients. Ensuring consistent potency and effectiveness across different batches of botanical products can be difficult due to variations in plant sourcing, growing conditions, and extraction methods. Establishing effective quality control measures and standardized manufacturing processes are essential to overcome these issues and provide reliable and effective botanical grain protectants to safeguard grain.

Limited Research and Development Funding: Limited research and development funding for botanical insecticides in grain storage hinders the exploration of their full potential. Unlike synthetic counterparts, botanical insecticides may not receive the same level of investment and attention. This limitation restricts the discovery of new botanical solutions, development of innovative formulations, and comprehensive field trials, hindering progress in enhancing their efficacy and ensuring their suitability for longterm use in grain protection. Increased funding and support are essential to harness the sustainable and ecofriendly advantages of botanical grain protectants in the context of storage of agricultural produce.

Commercialization challenges: Commercialization of botanical pest control agents faces economic impediments, including high production costs and limited market demand. To overcome these hurdles, innovative approaches such as efficient extraction methods, sustainable sourcing, and effective marketing strategies are required.

Compatibility with Integrated Pest Management (IPM): Integrating botanical grain protectants into an IPM program can be challenging due to their variable effectiveness. Finding the right balance between different pest management methods is crucial.

Information Dissemination: A scattered landscape of knowledge and information about botanicals for pest control further obstructs their integration into grain storage practices. A comprehensive, centralized repository of research findings and best practices can catalyze the dissemination of knowledge, thus facilitating their adoption.

Education and Training: Many stakeholders in the grain industry may not be familiar with the use of botanicals as grain protectants or may lack knowledge about their proper application. The training programs and resources are to be provided to warehouse operators and agricultural professionals to enhance their understanding of botanical pesticide benefits, proper application methods, and potential limitations. Such education and awareness campaigns may play a crucial role in successful adoption of botanicals in grain storage.

Market Competition: While botanical pesticides offer ecofriendly alternatives, they face competition from well established synthetic pesticides. Pesticide companies face challenges around efficacy, regulatory compliance, and pricing as they seek market entry. With consumer and regulatory preferences increasingly favouring sustainability, botanical insecticides have a growing opportunity to capture a larger market share, if they can effectively navigate these competitive challenges.

Policy Support: Promote policies that encourage the adoption of ecofriendly pest control methods, such as subsidies or tax incentives for using botanical alternatives. This would support their widespread use in post-harvest produce protection.

A plethora of challenges, in the pursuit of commercially applying plant based pesticides also encompass the procurement of ample plant material, the need for rigorous standardization and enhancement of botanical formulations, safeguarding intellectual property through patents, and navigating the intricate terrain of regulatory approvals¹⁸⁵. Further, there is a vital need to transform these plant-derived products into commercially viable forms that are readily accessible to farmers and grain merchants¹⁸⁶. Thus, to harness the full potential of botanicals, in advancing sustainable agriculture which

predominantly revolves around precision targeting, environmental safety, and biodegradability^{187,188}, numerous hurdles must be surmounted, and uncertainties must be addressed. While these limitations appear conquerable, they present challenges for both the scientific and economic development sectors. Continued research efforts are required to yield more refined formulations exhibiting increased efficacy. These advancements may ultimately offer environmentally sustainable alternatives, supplanting the use of conventional insecticides that raise environmental concerns, in the field of stored grain pest control. Overcoming these challenges and uncertainties could reveal a valuable resource that has the potential to significantly benefit the protection of agricultural produce worldwide.

Conclusion

The future prospect of botanicals as stored grain protectants is promising due to their ecofriendly and sustainable nature. Various botanicals with anti-insect properties have been tested against stored grain pests, showing their potential to protect grains while reducing dependence on synthetic insecticides. Botanicals offer a promising alternative to develop innovative, targeted molecules for sustainable insect pest management in stored grain. To unlock the potential, government support is essential. Direct grants, tax incentives, and subsidies for institutions and private companies focused on green chemistry can accelerate scientific efforts toward sustainable agricultural practices. A comprehensive strategy is needed to address regulatory issues, improve efficacy, and shelf life, increase public awareness and enhance commercial viability. By supporting scientists with proper resources, simplifying regulatory pathways, researchers can unlock the full potential of botanicals, setting the stage for a new era of sustainable and effective grain preservation.

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