

Characterization of Three Berry Standard Reference Materials for Nutrients

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For submission to: J. Agric. Food Chem.

ABSTRACT

The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) has been working with the National Institutes of Health Office of Dietary Supplements to produce Standard Reference Materials (SRMs) of interest to analysts of dietary supplements. Some of these SRMs are traditional foods including SRM 3281 Cranberry (Fruit), SRM 3282 Low-Calorie Cranberry Juice Cocktail, and SRM 3287 Blueberry (Fruit), which have been characterized for nine nutritional elements and sugars. The blueberries have also been characterized for proximates, two water-soluble vitamins, and amino acids. These new materials are intended for use in method development and validation as well as for quality assurance and traceability when assigning values to in-house control materials. Foods can be difficult to analyze because of matrix effects. With the addition of these three new SRMs, it is now possible to more closely match controls to matrices and analyte levels for fruit and vegetable test samples. Several nutritional elements in these three SRMs are present at lower levels than those in other food-matrix SRMs.

INTRODUCTION

The Nutrition Labeling and Education Act of 1990 requires that processed foods sold in the U.S. be labeled with specific nutrition information, while labeling of raw fruits and vegetables is voluntary as long as at least 60 % of the industry provides nutrition information on labels or at the point of sale (1). In continued support of this legislation, the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) is developing several new food Standard Reference Materials (SRMs) for laboratories to use to ensure the quality of the information they provide on their labels. This paper describes the value assignment of nutritional elements and sugars in SRM 3281 Cranberry (Fruit), 3282 Low-Calorie Cranberry Juice Cocktail, and 3287 Blueberry (Fruit) as well as proximates, two water-soluble vitamins, and amino acids in SRM 3287. A separate publication (2) describes preparation of these three materials and characterization of organic acid content. These SRMs are intended for use as primary control materials when assigning nutrient and organic acid values to in-house (secondary) control materials and for validation of analytical methods for the measurement of these analytes in similar matrices.

Foods can be difficult to analyze for elemental content because matrix effects result from the presence of easily ionized elements (e.g., sodium and potassium) as well as elements that are more difficult to ionize (3). These effects can be minimized by using the method of standard additions. At low concentrations, the detection of an element becomes subject to interferences, which may not be apparent when the element is at a higher concentration. Spectral background

shifts are more evident when measuring trace levels of analytes and can cause enhancement or suppression of the signals of the analytes of interest. Differences in spectral background can cause confusing results if an unsuitably matched sample is associated with a control that has a particularly high concentration of a spectral interferent. Therefore, it is important to analyze a control material that is compositionally similar to the test samples being analyzed.

AOAC International developed a food composition triangle to demonstrate the applicability (or lack thereof) of an analytical method to foods; if the method provided reliable results for one or two foods with a certain fat, protein, and carbohydrate composition, the method was expected to do the same for foods of similar composition (4,5). NIST extended this model to reference materials (6): a reference material of a certain composition is expected to be useful as a control material for other foods of similar compositions. Food-matrix SRMs distributed across the nine sectors of the triangle were produced to meet the need for reference materials of these varying compositions. The food and dietary supplement SRMs that have been characterized for fat, protein, and carbohydrate content are shown in the AOAC triangle in Figure 1. SRM 3287 Blueberry (Fruit) is located in sector five, with its high carbohydrate content and low fat and protein. SRM 3281 Cranberry (Fruit) and SRM 3282 Low-Calorie Cranberry Juice Cocktail have not been placed in one of these sectors because proximate analysis was not performed on either of these materials. Based on USDA nutrition data (7), the locations of both are also expected to be the lower left corner of sector 5.

Experimental

Phillips et al. describe the preparation of the SRMs (2). Briefly, SRMs 3281 Cranberry (Fruit) and 3287 Blueberry (Fruit) consist of freeze-dried, ground, and sieved cranberries and blueberries, respectively. Low-calorie cranberry juice cocktail was used to produce SRM 3282. Value assignment of the mass fractions of nine nutritional elements (calcium, copper, iron, potassium, magnesium, manganese, sodium, phosphorus, and zinc) in the blueberry and cranberry fruit SRMs was based on the combination of NIST determinations using inductively coupled plasma optical emission spectrometry (ICP-OES) and determinations by collaborating laboratories (Table 1). (Phosphorus was not detected in SRM 3282 by NIST using ICP-OES).

In preparation for ICP-OES measurements at NIST, duplicate 0.5 g portions were taken from each of six packages of SRMs 3281 and 3287 and single 1.5 g portions were taken from each of six ampoules of SRM 3282 and placed into Teflon microwave vessels along with either concentrated HNO₃ or a concentrated HNO₃ / HF mixture (90/10 volume fractions). Weighed amounts of SRM 3124a Indium Spectrometric Solution and SRM 3148a Scandium Spectrometric Solution were added to each vessel for use as internal standards, which improve the precision of the instrumental measurements. Samples were digested using a microwave sample preparation system. Four instrumental measurements were made and averaged for each sample and each spiked solution. Analyte mass fractions were calculated by the method of standard additions to compensate for any matrix effects.

The Grocery Manufacturers Association (GMA) Food Industry Analytical Chemistry Committee (FIACC) laboratories (Table 1) measured nutrient elements, proximates, total dietary fiber, amino acids, sugars, and vitamins in the blueberries in a semi-annual interlaboratory comparison

exercise. A subset of these laboratories measured elements and sugars in the cranberry and low-calorie cranberry juice cocktail SRMs. The labs were asked to use their usual methods and to make two measurements on test portions taken from each of two packets or ampoules of each SRM. The median of the means of the collaborating laboratories' data were used to assign reference values for proximates, vitamins, and sugars. The median of the means of the GMA FIACC laboratory data was combined with the mean result of the NIST data for calculation of the certified values and estimates of uncertainty for elements in SRMs 3282 and 3287. GMA FIACC results were not used for value assignment of elements in SRM 3281 (see below).

Discussion

To determine whether an analytical method is generating reliable results, it is important to choose a quality control material that is a good match to the test sample matrix and analyte levels. The lines that define the nine sectors of the AOAC triangle are guides, and a material near the border of a sector may be a good matrix match to materials in an adjacent sector, as well. Because elemental analyses typically involve a complete digestion in concentrated acids, the fat, protein, and carbohydrate contents may be somewhat less important for elemental analyses than for other analyses. Matching analyte concentrations becomes especially important at lower concentration levels, where analytes approach method detection limits (MDLs). There is also the potential for differences in spectral background if an unsuitably matched sample has a particularly high concentration of a spectral interference. A summary of the elemental compositions of selected food-matrix SRMs available from NIST is provided in Table 2. As has been observed previously, some laboratories have difficulty measuring low concentrations of elements in foods, e.g., sodium in SRM 2384 Baking Chocolate (8). Contamination in the laboratory is the probable cause of the problem.

To identify contamination issues, it is important to prepare and analyze several procedural blanks using all reagents and steps that were used in the dissolution method. MDLs typically are estimated as three times the standard deviation of the measurements of procedural blank solutions prepared along with the samples. The MDL is the level at which an analyte can be seen above the signal of the blanks and determines whether an analyte can be measured. Limit of quantification (LOQs), typically estimated by taking ten times the standard deviation of the measurements of the procedural blank solutions, is the level at which mass fractions of an analyte begin to be accurately determined (9). The content of each analyte in these procedural blanks is crucial to accurately determining trace analyte levels. For example, if there is a high level of sodium in the procedural blank, then clearly the analyses of the real samples will be impacted. It is better to identify and to eliminate sources of contamination than it is to try to compensate for them. If a low-level quality control material can be accurately measured, it can be reasonably assumed that mass fractions in the unknown sample have been accurately measured. Table 3 shows both MDLs and LOQs for analyses of juice SRM 3282 and berries SRMs 3281 and 3287 compared to analyte mass fraction levels. The MDL and LOQ for the cranberries and blueberries are the same because these materials were analyzed together. SRM 3282 Low-Calorie Cranberry Juice Cocktail was analyzed separately and has different MDLs and LOQs.

As the mass fraction values of the working solutions approach the LOQ, the ability to accurately measure an analyte in an unknown decreases and an appropriately chosen quality control material becomes more important. As can be seen in Table 3, both zinc and iron mass fractions are above the MDLs for SRM 3282, but are not above the LOQs. Relative expanded uncertainties are high for these two elements; therefore, reference values are assigned. The range of mass fractions reported for iron is 0.53 mg/kg to 7.5 mg/kg and includes the NIST values. The range of mass fractions reported for zinc is 0.16 mg/kg to 3.95 mg/kg. The procedural blank solutions for both iron and zinc were nearly 10 % of the analyte mass fraction. A high level of between-laboratory variability was seen in collaborating laboratories' data for sodium in SRM 3287: 14 mg/kg to 292 mg/kg. The sodium mass fraction in the blueberries is just slightly above the LOQ determined by NIST, and the reference value is assigned using only NIST data. Once all sources of contamination have been eliminated and low-level control materials can reliably be measured, it is reasonable to assume that the unknown is being measured accurately.

Assigned values for SRMs 3281, 3282, and 3287 are provided in Tables 4 through 6, respectively, and are compared to the data used for value assignment. A NIST certified value is a value in which NIST has the highest confidence in its accuracy in that all known or suspected sources of bias have been investigated or taken into account (10). Certified values in the berry SRMs were provided for analytes measured by both NIST and the collaborating laboratories. NIST reference values represent a best estimate of the true value where all known or suspected sources of bias have not been fully investigated or taken into account. Reference values have associated uncertainties that may not include all sources of uncertainty and may represent only the precision of the measurement method(s) (10). Reference values may be assigned if no NIST data are available, or if sources of bias in NIST measurements have not been fully resolved (11).

While certified values were provided for the majority of the nutrient elements in SRM 3282 and SRM 3287, the elements in SRM 3281 are provided as reference values because the relative expanded uncertainties are somewhat high. A comparison of NIST data and data provided by collaborating laboratories is provided in Table 4. The between-laboratory variability in the collaborating laboratories' data is higher than expected (Tables 4 through 6). Several labs reported seeing poorer repeatability in their own results for this material than usual; however, this poor repeatability was not observed at NIST. The poor repeatability observed by collaborating laboratories may have been caused by incomplete digestion of the cranberries.

Reference values for sugars, proximates, two water-soluble vitamins, and amino acids are provided in Table 7. Sugars and organic acids are typically included in the suite of tests used to demonstrate adulteration and verify authenticity of juice and juice products (see, for example, <http://www.tcjpp.org/normdb.html>). SRM 3282 is the first "juice" material available from NIST. Multielemental (12-15) and amino acid analyses (16) can be used to demonstrate geographic origin, which can also be used to support a demonstration of authenticity. These analyses typically include 18 to 20 elements, some of which are the traditional "nutrition" elements and some of which are associated with the compositions of the soils on which agricultural products were grown (17). While it may be possible to determine a berry's geographical origin, it has also been demonstrated that berry species can be determined by their chemical composition (18). Composition of organic acids and sugars differ among species of blueberries and can be used for identification. Highbush blueberries contain fructose, glucose, and traces of sucrose while the

smaller lowbush blueberries contain only fructose and glucose (18). Thus, the certified values for organic acids (2) and the reference values for sugars should be a valuable quality assurance resource for laboratories measuring species differences.

NIST has been working with the National Institutes of Health, Office of Dietary Supplements (NIH-ODS) to produce SRMs of dietary supplement matrices. Some dietary supplements contain conventional foods, such as berries, and their extracts as ingredients. New food-matrix SRMs 3281 Cranberries (Fruit), 3282 Low-Calorie Cranberry Juice Cocktail, and 3287 Blueberries (Fruit) will provide a broader selection for matrix-matched controls with appropriate analyte concentrations for the food industry as well as for dietary supplement manufacturers interested in demonstrating method applicability and providing quality assurance for their products.

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Table 1. The following laboratories reported data for their analysis of one or more of the three SRMs described in this paper.

Campbell Soup Company; Camden, NJ
ConAgra Foods Analytical Laboratory; Omaha, NE
Covance, Inc.; Madison, WI
Eurofins Scientific, Inc.; Des Moines, IA
General Mills, Inc.; Minneapolis, MN
Hormel Foods Corporation; Austin, MN
Krueger Food Laboratories; Cambridge, MA
Silliker Inc.; Chicago Heights, IL
The Coca-Cola Company, Apopka, FL
The J. M. Smucker Company; Orrville, OH
The National Food Laboratory; Livermore, CA
The Schwan Food Company; Salina, KS

Table 2. Comparison of element content in food-matrix SRMs arranged by AOAC fat-protein-carbohydrate triangle sector. Certified mass fraction values (bold) and reference values (normal typeface) are mg/kg unless otherwise noted.

Sector ^a	SRM Number	Name ^b	Ca	Cu	Fe	Mg	Mn	P	K	Na	Zn
2	2384	Baking Chocolate	840	23.2	132	2570	20.3	3330	8200	40	36.6
3	2387	Peanut Butter	411	4.93	16.4	1680	16.0	3378	6070	4890	26.3
4	1546	Meat Homogenate	323	0.60	10.1	163	0.23	1530	2370	9990	18.3
4	1845a	Whole Egg Powder; in preparation	2388	2.395	84.27	412.4	1.2468	8925	4309	4543	57.53
(5)	1567a	Wheat Flour	0.0191*	2.1	14.1	0.040*	9.4	0.134*	0.133*	6.1	11.6
(5)	1568a	Rice Flour	0.0118*	2.4	7.4	0.056*	20.0	0.153*	0.1280*	6.6	19.4
5	3233	Fortified Breakfast Cereal; in preparation	36497	3.90	739	1062	32.26	2549	3010	6741	621
(5)	3281	Cranberry (Fruit)	528	3.52	27.7	446	21.9	835	8020	259	6.9
(5)	3282	Low-Calorie Cranberry Juice Cocktail	26.3	0.23	0.54	12.97	0.493		247	201	0.15
5	3287	Blueberry (Fruit)	323	2.22	12.2	313.7	8.47	671	4490	16.39	6.49
5	2383a	Baby Food Composite; in preparation	342.5	0.719	4.164	213.9	0.9309	451.8	3018	181.05	2.098
6	1549	Non-Fat Milk Powder	1.30*	0.7	1.78	0.120*	0.26	1.06*	1.69*	0.497*	46.1
6	1849	Infant/Adult Nutritional Formula	4900	20.29	177.1	1578	51.00	3782	8860	4150	152.3

6	1548a	Typical Diet	1967	2.32	35.3	580	5.75	3486	6970	8132	24.6
7	2385	Slurried Spinach	624	0.90	17.1	368	3.81	323.7	3650	47	8.37
7	3234	Soy Flour; in preparation	2970	14.39	75.16	3251	34.41	7682	23560	2.37	45.39
7	1566b	Oyster Tissue	0.0838*	71.6	205.8	0.1085*	18.5		0.652*	0.3297*	1424
7	1570a	Trace Elements in Spinach Leaves	1.527*	12.2			75.9	0.518*	2.903*	1.818	82
(9)	1577c	Bovine Liver	131	275.20	197.94	620	10.46	(1.175*)	1.023*	0.2033*	181.1

^a Determination of locations in sectors shown in parentheses are based on USDA nutrition information (7).

^b Values for materials currently in preparation are estimated from NIST ICP-OES data.

Table 3. Comparison of final NIST results (mg/kg) to method detection limits (MDLs) and limits of quantification (LOQs) for SRMs 3281, 3282, and 3287.

Mass Fraction (mg/kg)	Ca	Cu	Fe	K	Mg	Mn	Na	P	Zn
MDL	1.4	0.27	2.0	74	0.83	0.75	4.2	20	0.58
LOQ	4.5	0.90	6.8	246	2.8	2.5	14	68	1.9
SRM 3281	528	3.52	27.7	8020	446	21.9	259	835	6.9
SRM 3287	329	2.23	12.6	4593	312	8.8	16.4	663	6.4
MDL	0.74	0.0036	0.33	0.99	0.11	0.0050	0.10	5.1	0.087
LOQ	2.5	0.012	1.1	3.3	0.36	0.017	0.34	17	0.29
SRM 3282	25.5	0.20	0.53	247	13.0	0.486	210		0.15

Table 4. Reference mass fractions (mg/kg) for selected elements in SRM 3281 Cranberry (Fruit)^a. Values in SRM 3281 are reported on a dry-mass basis.

Element	Collaborating Laboratories			NIST ICP-OES		Reference	
	Median	Mean (s)	Range	Mean	<i>U</i>	Assigned Value	<i>U</i>
Ca	382	415 (88)	330 - 566	528.1	8.1	528	7
Cu	2.42	2.81 (0.90)	1.9 - 3.88	3.52	0.13	3.52	0.09
Fe	20.4	25 (23)	7.2 - 89.3	27.7	0.95	27.7	0.7
Mg	337.5	300 (107)	147 - 456	446.0	3.8	446	4
Mn	18	15 (7.1)	4.48 – 21.5	21.91	0.29	21.9	0.2
P	757	857 (281)	626 - 1403	835	18	835	17
K	7442	7272 (984)	5750 - 8840	8015	145	8020	130
Na	316	372 (207)	224 - 801	259.2	3.6	259	3
Zn	6.36	36 (69)	3.0 - 194	6.89	0.26	6.9	0.2

^a Each reference value, expressed as a mass fraction for the material as received, is the mean of results from analyses by NIST. The uncertainty in the reference value, calculated according to the method described in the ISO Guide (10), is expressed as an expanded uncertainty, *U*. The expanded uncertainty is calculated as $U = ku_c$, where u_c is intended to represent, at the level of one standard deviation, the combined effect of between-laboratory and within-laboratory components of uncertainty. The coverage factor, *k*, is determined from the Student's *t*-distribution corresponding to the appropriate associated degrees of freedom and 95 % confidence level for each analyte.

Table 5. Certified (bold) and reference (normal typeface) mass fractions (mg/kg) for selected elements in SRM 3282 Low-Calorie Cranberry Juice Cocktail ^a. Values in SRM 3282 are reported on an as-received basis.

Element	Collaborating Laboratories			NIST ICP-OES		Certified	
	Median	Mean (s)	Range	Mean	<i>U</i>	Assigned Value	<i>U</i>
Ca	26.2	25.04 (5.26)	15.9 – 29.1	25.52	0.82	26.3	1.6
Cu	0.3	0.32 (0.13)	0.202 – 0.513	0.2020	0.0075	0.23	0.06
Fe	1.59	2.54 (2.86)	0.65 – 7.5	0.53	0.18	0.54	0.14
Mg	13.4	13.52 (1.76)	11 - 41	13.04	0.16	12.97	0.84
Mn	0.5	0.51 (0.03)	0.486 – 0.54	0.4859	0.0037	0.493	0.016
P	17.75	22.95 (13.58)	11 - 41				
K	239	240.80 (44.35)	181 - 303	246.8	1.9	247	12
Na	175	180.00 (33.56)	132 - 214	209.8	1.7	201	20
Zn	0.6	1.69 (1.86)	0.16 – 3.95	0.153	0.069	0.15	0.06

^a Each certified value, expressed as a mass fraction for the material as received, is the mean from the combination of the mean of results from analyses by NIST, the median of the mean results provided by collaborating laboratories, and the mean result provided by the material manufacturer, where available. Each reference value, expressed as a mass fraction for the material as received, is the mean from the combination of the median of the mean results provided by collaborating laboratories and the mean result provided by the material manufacturer, where available. The uncertainty in the certified and reference values, calculated according to the method described in the ISO Guide (10), is expressed as an expanded uncertainty, *U*. The expanded uncertainty is calculated as $U = ku_c$, where u_c is intended to represent, at the level of one standard deviation, the combined effect of between-laboratory and within-laboratory components of uncertainty. The coverage factor, *k*, is determined from the Student's *t*-distribution corresponding to the appropriate associated degrees of freedom and 95 % confidence level for each analyte.

Table 6. Certified (bold) and reference (normal typeface) mass fractions (mg/kg) for selected elements in SRM 3287 Blueberry (Fruit)^a. Values in SRM 3287 are reported on a dry-mass basis.

Element	Collaborating Laboratories			NIST ICP-OES		Certified	
	Median	Mean (s)	Range	Mean	<i>U</i>	Assigned Value	<i>U</i>
Ca	311	319 (35)	250 - 378	329.2	5.5	323	16
Cu	2.2	2.3 (1.1)	0.6 – 5.4	2.23	0.11	2.22	0.16
Fe	11	12.2 (3.8)	8.5 – 26.7	12.55	0.95	12.20	0.74
Mg	310	304 (18)	261 - 324	312.4	2.5	313.7	7.2
Mn	8.0	7.5 (0.9)	5.8 – 8.5	8.76	0.34	8.47	0.59
P	669	743 (263)	591 - 1510	663	14	671	21
K	4160	4292 (452)	3490 - 4980	4593	92	4490	220
Na	91	110 (99)	14 - 292	16.39	1.50	16.39	0.74
Zn	6.5	6.1 (1.9)	1.1 – 9.0	6.43	0.22	6.49	0.61

^a Each certified value, expressed as a mass fraction for the material as received, is the mean from the combination of the mean of results from analyses by NIST, the median of the mean results provided by collaborating laboratories, and the mean result provided by the material manufacturer, where available. Each reference value, expressed as a mass fraction for the material as received, is the mean from the combination of the median of the mean results provided by collaborating laboratories and the mean result provided by the material manufacturer, where available. The uncertainty in the certified and reference values, calculated according to the method described in the ISO Guide (10), is expressed as an expanded uncertainty, *U*. The expanded uncertainty is calculated as $U = ku_c$, where u_c is intended to represent, at the level of one standard deviation, the combined effect of between-laboratory and within-laboratory components of uncertainty. The coverage factor, *k*, is determined from the Student's *t*-distribution corresponding to the appropriate associated degrees of freedom and 95 % confidence level for each analyte.

Table 7. Reference mass fraction values (% , except where noted) for sugars and other nutrients in the three berry SRMs ^a. Values in SRMs 3281 and 3287 are reported on a dry-mass basis. Values in SRM 3282 are reported on an as-received basis.

	SRM 3281 Cranberry (Fruit)		SRM 3282 Low-Calorie Cranberry Juice Cocktail		SRM 3287 Blueberry (Fruit)	
	Reference Value	U	Reference Value	U	Reference Value	U
Total Sugars	26.2	2.1	2.86	0.05	60.4	3.3
Fructose	4.51	0.53	2.08	0.10	30.5	1.5
Glucose	21.6	1.1	0.85	0.06	30.5	1.4
Solids					98.59	0.65
Ash					1.126	0.084
Fat					1.40	0.37
Protein					3.43	0.30
Carbohydrate					91.92	0.83
Total Dietary Fiber					18.4	1.3
Calories					392 kcal/100g	10 kcal/100 g
Niacin					20.1 mg/kg	9.2 mg/kg
Vitamin B ₆					2.79 mg/kg	0.35 mg/kg
Alanine					0.167	0.095
Arginine					0.342	0.037
Aspartic Acid					0.279	0.087
Cysteine					0.056	0.023
Glutamic Acid					0.402	0.079
Glycine					0.165	0.006
Isoleucine					0.11	0.034
Leucine					0.211	0.022
Lysine					0.149	0.022
Methionine					0.061	0.007
Phenylalanine					0.134	0.012
Proline					0.121	0.019
Serine					0.141	0.019
Threonine					0.121	0.015
Tyrosine					0.088	0.020
Valine					0.147	0.060

^a The uncertainty provided with each value is an expanded uncertainty about the median to cover the measurand with approximately 95 % confidence, consistent with the ISO Guide (10). The uncertainty incorporates within-method uncertainty and a component related to moisture correction for SRMs 3281 and 3287. The expanded uncertainty is calculated as $U = ku_c$, where u_c is intended to represent, at the level of one standard deviation, the effects of the combined components of uncertainty, and k is a coverage factor corresponding to approximately 95 % confidence for each analyte.

Figure 1. Location of SRM 3287 Blueberry (Fruit) in the AOAC fat-protein-carbohydrate triangle. Other materials in sector 5 are SRM 3233 Fortified Breakfast Cereal (in preparation), SRM 2383a Baby Food Composite (in preparation), and probably SRM 3281 Cranberry (Fruit).

