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Biochemical characterisation of dairy yeasts and their application in cheese as anaerobic adjunct cultures

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Food Technology at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

Shantanu Das

2004
MASSEY UNIVERSITY
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Abstract

Yeasts are traditionally used as part of the surface microflora in surface-ripened cheeses, where they contribute positively to the flavour of the cheese. The primary objective of this study was to investigate the potential of three dairy yeasts to provide attributes as adjuncts in anaerobically ripened cheeses. *Geotrichum candidum* (B9001), *Yarrowia lipolytica* (B9014) and *Candida kefyr* (B9006), obtained from the Fonterra Co-operative Group Ltd, Palmerston North, New Zealand, were studied. They showed diverse metabolic activities in laboratory media, which were influenced by the growth conditions. The metabolic activities of special interest were the lipase and proteinase activities and the production of volatile compounds, as these are important for cheese ripening and flavour development.

Lipase activity (*p*-nitrophenyl butyrate assay) and proteinase activity (fluorescein isothiocyanate β-casein assay) were determined in three fractions prepared from yeast cultures and designated as extracellular fraction, washed-cell fraction and intracellular fraction. Lipase activity of *G. candidum* was detected only in the extracellular fraction and increased five fold when induced by safflower oil in a shake culture (0.16 μM/min/mL supernatant at 24 h). Lipase expression was delayed in static cultures. *Y. lipolytica* showed lipase activity in extracellular, washed-cell and intracellular fractions under all conditions. Static cultures in both glucose and safflower oil media showed higher lipase activity than shake cultures. The lipase activity of *Y. lipolytica* was higher in the late stationary phase than in the log phase under all conditions tested. The highest lipase activity was detected in a 192 h static culture grown in safflower oil medium (0.13 μM/min/mg dry cell weight, 0.3 μM/min/mg dry cell weight and 4.29 μM/min/mL supernatant in the intracellular, washed-cell and extracellular fractions respectively). *C. kefyr* did not show any lipase activity (< 0.03 μM/min/mL culture) under any of the growth conditions tested.

Proteinase activity was detected in the intracellular fraction of 72 h shake cultures of *G. candidum* grown in both glucose medium and safflower oil medium (154 and 122 RFU/min/mg dry cell weight respectively) but was not detected in static cultures. Proteinase activity was absent in the *Y. lipolytica* cultures under all conditions tested.
(<10 RFU/min/mL culture). C. kefyr showed low proteinase activity (12–74 RFU/min/mL supernatant) in the extracellular fraction only in shake cultures grown in glucose medium.

Volatile compounds of the headspace were sampled and analysed using solid phase microextraction (SPME) and gas chromatography–mass spectrometry (GC–MS). The concentrations of volatile compounds were highest in shake cultures grown in glucose medium for all three yeasts. All yeasts produced several alcohols. Several esters were also detected in the G. candidum and C. kefyr cultures whereas aldehydes were detected only in the G. candidum cultures.

G. candidum and Y. lipolytica were selected for cheese production trials because of their active cheese ripening enzymes. These yeasts, grown under different conditions, were added to Cheddar cheese (10 L vat). The yeast adjuncts influenced the cheese ripening by lipolysis [in terms of the production of free fatty acids (FFAs) analysed by gas chromatography–flame ionisation detector (GC–FID)] and the production of volatile compounds (SPME–GC–MS), whereas proteolysis (analysed by size-exclusion high performance liquid chromatography) by yeast enzymes was not obvious.

The influence of Y. lipolytica as an anaerobic adjunct to cheese ripening was dependent on the growth conditions used during its propagation in laboratory media. The concentration of total FFAs was very high (37.1 mg/g cheese at 6 months) when a 192 h Y. lipolytica culture grown in safflower oil medium was added to a cheese make, whereas the cultures grown in glucose medium did not have any detectable effect. Addition of G. candidum culture to the cheese curd was more effective than its addition to the cheese milk.

Both G. candidum and Y. lipolytica lipase(s) selectively hydrolysed the long-chain unsaturated fatty acids from the milk triglyceride in the cheese environment. Also, Y. lipolytica lipase exhibited some selectivity towards hydrolysis of butyric acid from the milk fat in the cheese.

2-Heptanone, 3-methyl-2-butanone and 2-nonanone were detected (1–10 x 10^6 relative peak area) only in the cheeses with yeast adjuncts but not in the control cheese.
Enhancement of the production of both conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) and ethyl esters in a washed-curd, dry-salted cheese (375 L vat), made with *G. candidum*, *Y. lipolytica*, *Propionibacterium freudenreichii* ssp. *shermanii*, *Lactobacillus fermentum* and *Lb. rhamnosus*, was only partially successful. Higher concentrations of ethyl esters (> five fold; analysed by SPME–GC–MS) were produced in the cheeses made with yeast adjuncts. However, the concentration of total CLA (free plus esterified; analysed by GC–FID) did not increase although a higher concentration of free linoleic acid (> 10 fold), the substrate for CLA synthesis, was produced in the cheeses made with yeast adjuncts.

A study of the formation of aromatic volatile compounds by *C. kefyr* in a medium containing L-phenylalanine (L-phe) showed that the yeast’s ability to produce phenyl ethanol, phenyl ethyl acetate and benzaldehyde (analysed by SPME–GC–MS) was enhanced with an increase in the initial L-phe concentration (in the experimental range; analysed by enzymatic assay using phenylalanine ammonia lyase), but the yield was very low (20–27%). The initial concentration of glucose (in the experimental range; analysed by enzymatic assay using Peridochrom glucose reagent) did not affect the production of these aromatic volatile compounds.

This study successfully showed that the yeasts *G. candidum* and *Y. lipolytica*, when used as anaerobic adjuncts, can influence the ripening and flavour development in Cheddar and washed-curd, dry-salted cheeses. The study also showed the capability of *C. kefyr* to produce aromatic volatile compounds from amino acid fermentation but the yields need to be increased by further manipulation of the medium components and the culture conditions before this capability can be used commercially.
To my wife Jinita and daughter Nilotri
For your love and support
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deep sense of gratitude and appreciation to my chief supervisor Mr Rod Bennett and supervisors Dr Vaughan Crow, Dr Ross Holland and Dr Graham Manderson, for their invaluable guidance and constant encouragement throughout my Ph.D. study. Thanks for your patience in reading my English and making yourselves available at anytime I needed, in spite of your very busy work-schedule. Most of the times I even did not take an appointment.

I would like to acknowledge my special thanks to Mr Rod Bennett for arrangement of this excellent project, constant support, helpful guidance and valuable discussions throughout my Ph.D. tenure. Thanks for your understanding the difficulties of studying in a far-away place in a new environment and your constant support to overcome those difficulties. Thank you for giving me opportunity to present my research work in three international conferences.

I would like to convey my special thanks to Dr Vaughan Crow for explaining to me many details of cheese science over the last three years. Thanks for your patience to help me developing the scientific logic in every step of my research. Special thanks to you for training me to cope with scientific research work after spending five years in industrial production.

I convey my gratitude to Dr Ross Holland for the invaluable support, guidance and discussions during the experimental work and thesis writing. Special thanks to you for the care you have taken for helping me in the preparation of conference presentations and journal articles throughout my Ph.D. tenure and getting all of them passed through the complex approval channel, sometimes in a very tight time schedule.

I convey my sense of gratitude to Dr Graham Manderson for the constant support, guidance and valuable suggestions during the experimental works and thesis writing. Special thanks to you for your constructive criticisms of my works and helping me in finding suitable solutions.
For their invaluable contributions at different stages of my research work, I would like to thank:

- Dr Shao Liu for mentoring me in Fonterra laboratories and valuable suggestions in L-phenylalanine catabolism work.
- Dr Julian Reid for helping in fluorometry and size-exclusion HPLC.
- Mr Mark Reynolds for CLA analyses.
- Dr Barbara Kuhn-Sherlock for help in statistical analyses.
- Mr Graham Holdaway and Mr. Garry Taekema for help in cheese manufacture.
- Ms Sharon Gibson for CLA synthesis works in laboratory media.
- Ms Tianli Wang for help in FFA analyses.
- Mrs Michelle Christison for help in GC-MS analyses.
- Mrs Stephanie Harvey for help in UF of yeast cultures.
- Ms Emily Chen, Ms Kylie Hellier, Ms Julie Ng, Mr Michael Sahayam, Mr Steve Glasgow for various help during the experimental works.
- Dr Shantanu Deb Chaudhury and Mr Peter Jeffery for help in thesis formatting.
- Dr Claire Woodhall for editing.
- Analytical Service Group, Fonterra Co-operative Group, Palmerston North for analysis of cheese composition.

I would like to thank Commonwealth Scholarship and the Fonterra Co-operative Group for their financial assistance in terms of Ph.D. scholarship and project funding respectively.

I extend my sense of gratitude to Dr Tim Coolbear for his support and encouragement during my working in Fonterra laboratories. I am thankful to him for his help in fluorometry and excellent editorial inputs in conference presentations and journal articles throughout my Ph.D. study.

I thank Mr Mathew Levin, Mrs Yvonne Parkes, Mrs Christine Ramsay, Mrs Míria Busby and Mrs Karen Pickering of IFNHH, Mrs Ann-Marie Jackson of ITE, Ms Priscilla Putu of Fonterra for their administrative support.
I would like to take the opportunity to thank my friends and colleagues in New Zealand Ngaio, Rogerio, PK, Hasmukh, Debjit, Krishanti, Subhas, Rajesh, Gaurav, Dilip, Sunny, Arunee and Allan for their help and valuable suggestions at many occasions during my Ph.D. study.

I thank my old friends in India Ashitava, Surojit, Amitava, Kaushik, Samit and Moitreyee, who had helped me in the rigorous process of scholarship application and selection.

I would like to thank my wife Jinita, who encouraged and supported me in all my efforts of Ph.D. study. I cannot express strongly enough my gratitude for your support and continuous encouragement and for your love. I express my gratitude to my parents for their constant support and encouragement throughout and handling a number of administrative tasks regarding scholarship and travel. I express my gratitude to my parents-in-law for their constant support and encouragement. I thank my relatives for their words of encouragement and courage throughout the period. Last but not least I express my thanks and love to my little daughter Nilotri, who with her love, affection and support made my tough tenure of Ph.D. study an enjoyable period.
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