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HERBICIDE RESISTANCE OF TRANSGENIC PLANTS

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Plant Breeding and Genetics Department of Plant Science Massey University Palmerston North New Zealand

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In the name of God the most compassionate and the most merciful

In memory of my brother Hokm Ali
Abstract

A cloned dehalogenase gene, conferring the ability to degrade the herbicide dalapon, was introduced into white clover and tobacco using Agrobacterium-mediated transformation. The objectives of this study can be divided into three parts. The first part consists of the evaluation of genetically transformed white clover and tobacco plants for their level of resistance to dalapon, determination of the heritability of the introduced transgene at different stages of growth, and identification of the segregation pattern of the transgene. The second part consists of the study of the quantitative inheritance of the transgene in transgenic tobacco plants. The third part consists of a determination of the number of copies of the transgene integrated into the genome of a transgenic tobacco line, inheritance of the transgene over successive generations and analysis of steady state levels of mRNA of the transgene in leaf tissue. Relationships between the levels of transgene mRNA and the degree of resistance of these plants to dalapon were also assessed.

The resistance of genetically transformed white clover and tobacco plants to dalapon was studied under both in vitro and greenhouse conditions using different experimental designs. In the in vitro studies, both white clover callus lines and tobacco seedlings showed resistance to high concentrations of dalapon. The level of resistance of the tobacco plants to dalapon was studied under greenhouse conditions using six transgenic lines and one non-transgenic control line. The non-transgenic line was unable to grow at dalapon levels greater than 6.0 kg ha⁻¹, while the majority of the transgenic lines were able to grow at a herbicide level of 48.0 kg ha⁻¹. There were significant differences between the transgenic tobacco lines in their resistance to the dalapon.

The heritability of necrosis, leaf length, leaf width and stem height characters were estimated at various levels of dalapon. The heritability of dalapon resistance for developed transgenic tobacco plants at various levels of dalapon was high. The heritability of dalapon resistance for the characters under study decreased with increasing dalapon levels, with the lowest values of heritability occurring at the highest level of dalapon (48 kg ha⁻¹). The leaf length and leaf width characters had the highest heritabilities, while the necrosis and stem height characters had the lowest heritabilities. The effect of time and the interaction between time and herbicide concentration as environmental factors where lowest for the leaf length
and leaf width characters, while the time effect was highest for the stem height character. The interaction between time and the effects of dalapon were highest for the necrosis character. The heritability of dalapon resistance in transgenic tobacco seedlings grown in vitro was significantly lower than in plants, indicating either a low expression of the transgene or a high effect of environmental factors for plants at an early stage of growth. The segregation ratio (resistant:susceptible phenotype) for the transgenic lines was 3:1, and $\chi^2$ test results demonstrated the involvement of single gene inheritance for the lines.

Quantitative inheritance studies of the transgene in tobacco plants using generation means with six generations and 9x9 full diallel mating designs revealed that the additive component of variation was greater than the dominance (hemizygosity) component of variation. The hemizygosity effect was partial and towards the dalapon resistant phenotype. There was significant inter-allelic interaction (epistasis), either between the host plant allele(s) and the dehalogenase transgene or between copies of the transgene. The non-significance of reciprocal effects in the diallel table analysis revealed a lack of maternal or cytoplasmic effects. The analysis of general combining ability and specific combining ability in the diallel table indicated that the majority of transgenic parents had significant general combining ability effect (g.c.a. effects) towards the resistant phenotype, while the non-transgenic parents showed significant g.c.a. effects towards the susceptible phenotype. The progeny derived from crosses between resistant transgenic parents and susceptible, non-transgenic parents showed significant s.c.a. effects towards the resistant phenotype. In contrast, progeny derived from crosses between the susceptible, transgenic parent and non-transgenic parents, as well as progeny derived from crosses between non-transgenic parents showed significant s.c.a. effects towards the susceptible phenotype.

In molecular studies of the copy number of the transgene at different generations of one transgenic tobacco line, the transgenic plants were shown to contain two closely linked copies of the transgene at a single locus, whereas the non-transgenic plants were shown to lack the transgene. It was also shown that the transgene was stably integrated into the plant genome in successive generations and that rearrangement of the integrated transgene did not occur. A dehalogenase-specific mRNA was detected in total RNA extracted from leaves of the transgenic plants. Although all of the transgenic plants contained the same
gene, they showed significant variation in the accumulation of dehalogenase-specific mRNA. In control, non-transgenic plants no dehalogenase-specific mRNA was detected. Although the level of the dehalogenase-specific mRNA in transformed plants varied considerably between the lines, was no significant differences between the individual plants within the lines.

In a two phase selection experiment, some transgenic callus lines exhibited a dissimilarity in expression of the dehalogenase gene and the neomycin phosphotransferase II gene, conferring kanamycin resistance, used in these experiments as a second selectable marker. Some of the genetically transformed cells selected on medium containing kanamycin, when transferred onto medium containing dalapon, did not show resistance to dalapon. Similarly, when transformed cells selected on medium containing dalapon were transferred onto medium containing kanamycin, some of the callus lines did not show resistance to kanamycin. These results show that in some cases selection for one of the transferred genes does not result in expression of the other, non-selected, transferred gene.
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# Table of Contents

Chapter 1........................................................................................................... 1

Introduction ........................................................................................................ 1

Chapter 2 ........................................................................................................... 4

Literature Review ............................................................................................. 4

2.1 Herbicide resistant transgenic plants ......................................................... 4
  2.1.1 2,2-dichloropropionic acid (dalapon) ................................................. 4
  2.1.2 Enzymatic and metabolic effects of dalapon ...................................... 5
  2.1.3 Dehalogenase enzyme ....................................................................... 6
  2.1.4 Herbicide resistant transgenic plants ............................................... 8
  2.1.5 Dalapon resistant transgenic plants ................................................. 10
  2.1.6 Plant transformation methods ........................................................... 10
    2.1.6.1 Agrobacterium-mediated DNA transfer to the plant genome .... 10
    2.1.6.1.1 Ti plasmids ........................................................................... 11
    2.1.6.1.2 Disarmed Ti plasmids .......................................................... 12
    2.1.6.1.3 Binary vector systems .......................................................... 13
  2.1.6.2 Direct gene transfer methods ....................................................... 14
  2.1.7 Transgene copy number ................................................................... 15
  2.1.8 Transgene copy number determination ............................................ 16
  2.1.9 Variation in transcription of the transgene ....................................... 17
  2.1.10 Inheritance of the transgene ............................................................ 19

2.2 Quantitative genetics ............................................................................... 21
  2.2.1 Quantitative characters which are controlled with a few genes ....... 21
  2.2.2 Partitioning the genetic variance ...................................................... 23
  2.2.3 Genetical mating designs ................................................................. 25
  2.2.4 Generation means ............................................................................ 26
  2.2.5 Diallel crossing .................................................................................. 28
    2.2.5.1 Analysis of Jinks-Hayman diallel table .................................... 29
    2.2.5.2 Graphical analysis of Jinks-Hayman diallel .......................... 32
    2.2.5.3 Griffing diallel ......................................................................... 32
  2.2.6 Heritability ......................................................................................... 34
  2.2.7 Genetic advance (ΔG) and number of effective factors .................. 38

Chapter 3 .......................................................................................................... 40

Phenotypic expression and heritability of resistance to dalapon .................. 40
  3.1 Introduction ............................................................................................. 40
    3.1.1 Phenotypic expression of transgene ............................................... 40
    3.1.2 Heritability of transgene .................................................................. 40
    3.1.3 Inheritance of transgene .................................................................. 41
  3.2 Materials and Methods ............................................................................ 42
    3.2.1 Herbicide resistance of transgenic white clover ......................... 42
      3.2.1.1 Developing the transgenic white clover ............................... 42
3.2.1.2 Herbicide resistance of in vitro-grown transgenic white clover calli .................... 43
3.2.1.2.1 White clover callus lines .................... 43
3.2.1.2.2 Experimental layout .................... 43
3.2.1.3 Herbicide resistance of transgenic white clover plants .................................. 46
3.2.2 Herbicide resistance of transgenic tobacco ................................ 46
3.2.2.1 Tobacco seed material .................... 46
3.2.2.2 Herbicide resistance of in vitro-grown tobacco seedlings .................... 47
3.2.2.3 Herbicide resistance of transgenic tobacco plants .................... 48
3.2.2.4 Methods for estimating the heritability ($h^2$) of characters .................... 51
3.2.3 Inheritance of dalapon resistance .................... 52
3.3 Results ........................................ 55
3.3.1 Herbicide resistance of transgenic white clover ................................ 55
3.3.1.1 The herbicide resistance of in vitro-grown transgenic white clover calli .................... 55
3.3.1.2 Herbicide resistance of white clover plants .................... 57
3.3.2 Herbicide resistance of transgenic tobacco lines .................... 61
3.3.2.1 The resistance of in vitro-grown tobacco seedlings to dalapon .................... 61
3.3.2.2 Heritability of fresh weight of in vitro-grown tobacco seedlings .................... 62
3.3.2.3 Herbicide resistance of tobacco plants .................... 64
3.3.2.4 Heritability of different characters in transgenic tobacco plants .................... 83
3.3.2.5 Inheritance of the dalapon resistance phenotype .................... 87
3.3.2.5.1 Inheritance of dalapon resistance phenotype based on pooled analysis .................... 88
3.3.2.5.2 Inheritance of dalapon resistance phenotype based on each level of herbicide .................... 89
3.4 Discussion ........................................ 92
3.4.1 Transgenic white clover ................................ 92
3.4.1.1 Herbicide resistance of In vitro-grown transgenic white clover callus .................... 92
3.4.1.2 Herbicide resistance of transgenic white clover plants .................... 93
3.4.2 Transgenic tobacco ................................ 94
3.4.2.1 In vitro-grown tobacco seedlings fresh weight .................... 94
3.4.2.2 Heritability of herbicide resistance in in vitro-grown transgenic tobacco seedlings .................... 96
3.4.2.3 Transgenic tobacco plants .................... 96
3.4.2.4 Heritability of herbicide resistance in transgenic tobacco plants .................... 100
3.4.2.5 Inheritance of the dalapon resistance phenotype .................... 104
Chapter 4 .......................................................... 106
Quantitative genetics of herbicide resistance .................. 106

4.2 Introduction ................................................. 106
4.2.1 Quantitative inheritance of transgene ................. 106
4.2.2 Heritability of transgene ............................... 107
4.2.3 Combining ability ....................................... 107

4.2 Materials and Methods ...................................... 108
4.2.1 Plant development for transgenic crossing .......... 108
4.2.1.1 Homozygous plant development .................... 108
4.2.1.2 TF₁, TF₂, TBC₁, and TBC₂ seeds production .... 109

4.2.2 Quantitative inheritance studies ....................... 110
4.2.2.1 Generation means ................................. 110
4.2.2.1.1 Attributes .................................. 110
4.2.2.1.2 Generation means analysis ................... 110
4.2.2.1.3 Generation variance analysis ................. 112
4.2.2.1.4 Heritability .................................. 113
4.2.2.1.5 Method of estimating the number of effective factors .... 114
4.2.2.2.1 Diallel crossing programme and TF₁ and F₁ seed production . 115
4.2.2.4 Jinks-Hayman diallel crossing design ............. 115
4.2.2.4.1 Attributes .................................. 115
4.2.2.4.2 Analysis of diallel table ....................... 116
4.2.2.4.3 Genetical components ......................... 117
4.2.2.4.4 Estimating heritability through Jinks-Hayman diallel .... 119
4.2.2.5 Method for analysis of Griffing diallel ........... 119

4.3 Results ...................................................... 123
4.3.1 Generation means analysis ........................... 123
4.3.1.1 Components of means ........................... 123
4.3.1.2 Components of variation ........................ 128
4.3.2 Jinks-Hayman diallel crossing ....................... 131
4.3.2.1 Basic array statistics ........................... 138
4.3.3 Griffing diallel ......................................... 145

4.4 Discussion ................................................ 153
4.4.1 Generation means ................................... 153
4.4.1.1 Components of means ........................... 153
4.4.1.2 Components of variation ........................ 155
4.4.2 Jinks-Hayman diallel crossing ....................... 157
4.4.3 Griffing diallel crossing ............................. 160
4.4.4 Interallelic interaction (epistasis) ................. 163

Chapter 5 ..................................................... 167
Molecular genetics of herbicide resistance .................... 167

5.1 Introduction ................................................. 167
5.1.1 T-DNA inheritance and organisation ................. 167
5.1.2 Level of the dehalogenase gene mRNA ............... 167
5.1.3 Variability in the level of expression of T-DNA genes 168

5.2 Materials and Methods .................................... 169
5.2.1 Isolation of plasmid pAS501 from *Agrobacterium* .......... 169
  5.2.1.1 A modified STET method of plasmid DNA isolation .......... 169
  5.2.1.2 Analysis of isolated plasmid DNA .................. 170
  5.2.1.3 Horizontal mini gel electrophoresis ............... 170
  5.2.1.4 Determination of molecular weight of DNA samples .... 171
  5.2.1.5 Competent cell preparation and transformation of *E.coli* with plasmid pAS501 .......... 171
    5.2.1.5.1 Preparing *E.coli* strain DH5α competent cells .......... 171
    5.2.1.5.2 Transformation of *E.coli* with plasmid pAS501 .......... 172
  5.2.2 Restriction enzyme site mapping of plasmid pAS501 .......... 172
    5.2.2.1 Conditions for restriction enzymes digestion ............... 172
      5.2.2.1.1 Single digests .......................... 172
      5.2.2.1.2 Double digests .......................... 172
    5.2.2.2 Restriction mapping of plasmid pAS501 .......... 173
  5.2.3 Making a dehalogenase gene probe ................. 174
    5.2.3.1 Isolation of DNA fragments using a modified DEAE method .......... 174
    5.2.3.2 *E.coli* transformation and selection for transformed cells .......... 175
    5.2.3.3 Polymerise chain reaction (PCR) amplification of the dehalogenase gene ...... 176
    5.2.3.4 Preparation of a dehalogenase gene probe .......... 177
    5.2.3.5 A method of making [α-32P]-dCTP-labelled probe .......... 177
      5.2.3.5.1 Determining quality of labelled probe DNA .......... 177
      5.2.3.5.2 Purification of labelled probe DNA .......... 178
  5.2.4 Plant DNA isolation .......... 178
  5.2.5 Typical method of plant DNA restriction enzyme digestion .......... 179
  5.2.6 Plant RNA isolation using guanidine isothiocyanate .......... 179
  5.2.7 Southern blotting .......... 181
    5.2.7.1 Running the DNA samples on gel .......... 181
    5.2.7.2 Capillary blotting .......... 182
    5.2.7.3 Alkali fixation of DNA to the membrane .......... 182
    5.2.7.4 Hybridisation of probed DNA to membrane .......... 183
  5.2.8 RNA dot blotting technique .......... 183
    5.2.8.1 Dot blot hybridisation .......... 184
  5.2.9 Tobacco leaf transformation method .......... 185
  5.3 Results .......... 187
    5.3.1 T-DNA organisation in tobacco line 51-1 and subsequent generations .......... 187
    5.3.2 Dehalogenase specific mRNA levels .......... 203
    5.3.3 Two phase (dual) selection of genetically transformed cells .......... 213
5.4 Discussion ........................................... 216
  5.4.1 Transgene copy number .......................... 216
  5.4.2 Transcription of the transgene .................... 218
  5.4.3 Two phase selection ............................... 221

Chapter 6 ................................................. 223

General discussion ....................................... 223
  6.1 Level of resistance of transgenic lines to the herbicide .... 223
  6.2 Inheritance of the transgene based on phenotypic and molecular
      studies ............................................. 225
  6.3 Heritability of herbicide resistance .................... 226
  6.4 Expression of the transgene ........................... 227
  6.5 Quantitative genetics studies .......................... 229
  6.6 In vitro dual selection ............................... 233
  6.7 Possible further studies .............................. 233

References .................................................. 236

Appendices .................................................. 250
  Appendix 1. B5 medium .................................. 250
  Appendix 2. WR8 medium .................................. 251
  Appendix 3. Antibiotic stock solutions ..................... 251
  Appendix 4. B5+2ip medium ............................. 251
  Appendix 5. MS medium .................................. 252
  Appendix 6. TY medium .................................. 253
  Appendix 7. Plasmid DNA isolation; modified STET method .... 253
  Appendix 8. Horizontal gel electrophoresis ................ 253
  Appendix 9. LB Medium .................................. 254
  Appendix 10. Materials for DNA fragment isolation from gel .... 254
  Appendix 11. Materials for plant DNA extraction .............. 254
  Appendix 12. Materials for plant RNA isolation .............. 255
  Appendix 13. RNA sample preparation ...................... 257
  Appendix 14. Materials for Southern blotting ................ 258
  Appendix 15. Materials for tobacco leaf transformation ..... 258
  Appendix 16. DNA electrophoresis figures relating to the plasmid
                  mapping ....................................... 260
  Appendix 17. Maps of plasmids pAS501 and pRK290 ............ 268
List of Figures

Figure 2.1. The deviation of homozygote and heterozygote genotypes from the mid parent (mid point) ........................................... 24
Figure 3.1. Development of dalapon resistant transgenic white clover plants ................................................................. 45
Figure 3.2. Stem height of the transgenic line 54.18 (left) and non-transgenic line KKD (right) at 48 kg ha\(^{-1}\) (top) and no herbicide application (bottom) .................................................. 73
Figure 4.1. The Wr\(\text{Vr}\) graph of necrosis and stem height of tobacco lines. ................................................................. 144
Figure 5.1. A restriction enzyme map of plasmid pAS501 .................. 188
Figure 5.2. Effect of dalapon on different generations of tobacco .......... 192
Figure 5.3. Southern blot result of parents and TF\(_1\) plants ................ 196
Figure 5.4. Southern blot result of TBC\(_1\) plants ......................... 197
Figure 5.5. Southern blot result of TBC\(_2\) plants ......................... 198
Figure 5.6. Southern blot result of TF\(_2\) plants ......................... 199
Figure 5.7. Southern blot result of BglII and EcoRI/BglII digests of DNA extracted from transgenic plants .......... 200
Figure 5.8. Proposed model for T-DNA organisation in 51-1 transgenic plants ................................................................. 201
Figure 5.9. Restriction enzyme map of plasmid pBG35 ................. 206
Figure 5.10. Dot blot of RNAs from susceptible and resistant tobacco lines probed with a rRNA gene probe .......... 209
Figure 5.11. Dot blot of RNAs from susceptible and resistant tobacco lines probed with the dehalogenase gene ........ 211
Figure 5.12. Resistance of tobacco calli against both kanamycin and dalapon ................................................................. 215
Figure A.1. Restriction enzyme digest of plasmid pAS501 (EcoRI, HindIII, SmaI, BglII, SacII, EcoRV) ............................. 260
Figure A.2. Restriction enzyme digest of plasmid pAS501 (PstI, EcoRI/BglII) ................................................................. 262
Figure A.3. Restriction enzyme digest of plasmid pAS501(SacII/EcoRV, SmaI/SacII) and PCR product ......................... 264
Figure A.4. Restriction enzyme digest of plasmid pSDH .................. 266
Figure A.5. Binary vector plasmid pAS501 .................................. 268
Figure A.6. The pRK290 broad host range plasmid vector ............ 269
## List of Tables

Table 2.1. Components of mean (based on mead-parent mean) .................................................. 27  
Table 2.2. Components of mean (based on $F_2$ mean) ............................................................... 28  
Table 3.1. Analysis of variance of white clover callus growth-gain (*in vitro*) and leaf necrosis surface area of white clover plants ................................................................. 58  
Table 3.2. Callus growth-gain of white clover for lines, herbicide levels and interaction between lines and herbicide levels ........................................................... 59  
Table 3.3. Leaf necrosis surface for white clover lines, herbicide levels and interaction between lines and herbicide levels .................................................. 60  
Table 3.4. Analysis of variance of tobacco fresh weight .............................................................. 61  
Table 3.5. Fresh weight of tobacco for lines, herbicide levels and interaction between lines and herbicide levels .............................................................. 63  
Table 3.6. Analysis of variance of the necrosis character ............................................................ 65  
Table 3.7. Analysis of variance of stem height character ............................................................ 68  
Table 3.8. Leaf necrosis surface area for lines, herbicide levels and interaction between lines and herbicide levels .................................................. 69  
Table 3.9. Leaf necrosis surface for lines, times and interaction between lines and times ............ 70  
Table 3.10. Stem height (mm) for lines, herbicide levels and interaction between lines and herbicide levels .............................................................. 71  
Table 3.11. Stem height (mm) for lines, different times and interaction between times and lines ..... 72  
Table 3.12. Analysis of variance of leaf length and leaf width characters .................................... 74  
Table 3.13. Leaf length (mm) for lines, different levels of herbicide and interaction between lines and levels of herbicide .................................................. 76  
Table 3.14. Leaf width for lines, different levels of herbicide and interaction between lines and levels of herbicide .............................................................. 77  
Table 3.15. Leaf length (mm) for lines, different times and interaction between lines and times .... 78  
Table 3.16. Leaf width (mm) for lines, different times and interaction between lines and times ..... 79  
Table 3.17. Analysis of variance of drymass character ............................................................... 80  
Table 3.18. Drymass (g) for lines, different levels of herbicide and interaction between lines and levels of herbicide .................................................. 81  
Table 3.19. Phenotypic correlations between characters ............................................................ 83  
Table 3.20. Population, plant and broadsense heritabilities ($h^2$) of the necrosis character at various levels of herbicide .............................................................. 84  
Table 3.21. Population, plant and broadsense heritabilities ($h^2$) of stem height at various levels of herbicide .............................................................. 85  
Table 3.22. Population, plant and broadsense heritabilities ($h^2$) of leaf length at various levels of herbicide .............................................................. 86  
Table 3.23. Population, plant and broadsense heritabilities ($h^2$) of leaf width at various levels of herbicide .............................................................. 86  
Table 3.24. Progeny analysis of the dalapon resistance phenotype of transgenic tobacco lines based on phenotypic and quantitative studies .......................................................... 89  
Table 3.25. Progeny analysis of the dalapon resistance phenotype of transgenic tobacco lines based on phenotypic and quantitative studies for each level of herbicide .......................... 91
Table 4.1. Analysis of variance for Method 2 giving expectation of mean square based on the assumptions of model I (fixed) and model II (random) ................................................................. 120
Table 4.2. Mean necrosis and stem height (mm) of different generations .................................................. 123
Table 4.3. The estimates of the genetic components of means, based on 2,3,4,5 and 6 parameter models for interaction types, as well as a test of significance for the necrosis character .................................................. 126
Table 4.4. The estimates of the genetic components of means, based on 2,3,4,5 and 6 parameter models for interaction types, as well as a test of significance for the stem height character .................................................. 127
Table 4.5. The variance of necrosis and stem height for different generations ............................................... 128
Table 4.6. Estimates of D, H, F, Ew and ratios for necrosis and stem height .................................................. 128
Table 4.7. Analysis of variance of parents and reciprocals for necrosis and stem height characters ................. 132
Table 4.8. Analysis of variance of parent, TF1 and pooled (parents and TF1s) for necrosis ....................... 132
Table 4.9. Analysis of variance of parents, TF1s and pooled (parents and TF1s) for stem height ............... 133
Table 4.10. Mean necrosis and stem height of tobacco parental lines of diallel table ...................................... 135
Table 4.11. Mean necrosis of different crosses of diallel table .................................................................. 136
Table 4.12. Mean stem height of different crosses of diallel table ............................................................. 137
Table 4.13. Array statistics and components of variation for necrosis character ......................................... 141
Table 4.14. Analysis of variance of GCA and SCA effects for the necrosis character ................................. 146
Table 4.15. Analysis of variance of GCA and SCA effects for the stem height character ......................... 146
Table 4.16. Additive/dominance ratio, broadsense heritability and narrow sense heritability for necrosis and stem height ........................................................................................................... 147
Table 4.17. Estimates of g.c.a. effects (leading diagonal) and s.c.a. effects (below diagonal) for necrosis character ........................................................................................................... 149
Table 4.18. Estimates of g.c.a. effects (leading diagonal) and s.c.a. effects (below diagonal) for stem height character ........................................................................................................... 152
Table 5.1. Presence of dehalogenase gene and stem height of parents and TF1 plants ................................ 193
Table 5.2. Presence of dehalogenase gene and stem height of TBC1 plants ............................................. 193
Table 5.3. Presence of dehalogenase gene and stem height of TBC2 plants ............................................. 194
Table 5.4. Presence of dehalogenase gene and stem height of TF2 plants .............................................. 195
Table 5.5. Internal comparison of signal intensity between samples in the dot blot experiment .................. 207
Table 5.6. Analysis of variance of the RNA dot blot signal of lines probed with the dehalogenase gene ........ 208
Table 5.7. Mean intensity of signal of RNA dot blot probed with the dehalogenase gene for different lines .............................................................................................................................. 208
Table 5.8. Selection of transgenic tobacco cells against two selective agents ............................................. 214