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THE ROLE OF PLANT LIPASES
IN THE BOVINE RUMEN

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Biochemistry

at

Massey University

New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

The role of plant lipases in the hydrolysis of dietary lipids in the rumen of pasture-fed ruminants has been investigated by means of in vitro and in vivo experiments with rumen contents. Lipases present in the leaves of numerous pasture plants remained highly active for at least 5h in the presence of actively metabolising rumen microorganisms, leading to the hydrolysis of triglyceride. Parallel experiments showed that the lipase activity of actively metabolising rumen microorganisms in rumen fluid was very low. A slight increase in lipase activity attributable to microorganisms occurred after about a 4h incubation with autoclaved plant extract at which stage the metabolic activity of the microbial population had passed its peak.

In vivo experiments showed that the lipolytic activity of rumen fluid obtained 0.5h to 5.0h after feeding fresh grass was about twice that of rumen fluid obtained after overnight fasting.

Lipase activity was present in clarified rumen fluid. Paired-feeding experiments with monozygotic twin cows demonstrated that the lipase activity of clarified rumen fluid prepared from the twin 0.5h after feeding fresh pasture was much higher than that of clarified rumen fluid from the 20h-fasted twin.

Further paired-feeding experiments showed that lipase activity was higher in protozoa-free rumen fluid from the pasture-fed than from the hay-fed cow. In both treatments the highest levels of lipolytic activity were observed in the rumen samples removed 0.5h after feeding and there was a steady decline in activity over the sampling periods.

Nevertheless, there was appreciable activity in the rumen samples obtained from the hay-fed animal which is consistent with the presence of lipase activity in the extracts of dried grass.

Multiple forms of plant esterases and phosphatases were present in the soluble fraction of rumen fluid several hours after feeding.

It is concluded that the rapid release of fatty acids which follows the ingestion of pasture is due mainly to the activity of plant lipases and that rumen microorganisms have a subsidiary role in hydrolysing ingested lipid in a pasture-fed ruminant.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author expresses his sincere gratitude to his supervisors, Dr. J.C. Hawke and Dr. B.D.W. Jarvis for their invaluable advice, guidance and encouragement received at all stages of this study.

Dr. G.F. Wilson and the staff of No. 2 Dairy Unit are gratefully acknowledged for the provision of animals and facilities required for this study. Helpful discussion with Dr. R.T.J. Clarke, Dr. W.T. Jones and Dr. G.G. Pritchard is also gratefully acknowledged. Appreciation is extended to Mr. D.R. Body for proof-reading the manuscript of this thesis.

Special thanks are due to Mrs. R.E. Couling for the very capable and rapid typing of this thesis; Mrs. M.K. Scott, Mr. P.J. Herbert and Mr. G.R. Stewart for the reproduction of photographs and figures.

The Author would like to record his thanks to the staff of Massey University - in particular of the Chemistry, Biochemistry and Biophysics Department for making possible the circumstances under which this study was carried out; and to all his friends for their help and encouragement during this study.

Finally, the author is grateful to the Government of New Zealand for a Colombo Plan Scholarship.

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