INFLUENCE OF THE STRUCTURE OF RENNET-INDUCED GELS ON THE CHEESEMAKING PROCESS AND CHEESE COMPOSITION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of some selected processing conditions on the formation, structure and properties of rennet-induced milk gels and the impact of these conditions on the cheesemaking process and final cheese composition.

The effect of pH, temperature, calcium chloride addition, rennet concentration and protein concentration on rennet gels were determined using rheology, permeability measurement and confocal microscopy. In rennet gels formed at pH 5.8, 6.2 and 6.5, the storage modulus (G') increased with a decrease in pH while the gelation time (GT) increased with pH increase. The permeability coefficient (B) increased with a decrease in pH. Rennet gels made at 25, 32 and 40°C showed that the G' values increased while gelation time decreased with an increase in temperature, with a maximum G' at 32°C. The B values increased with an increase in temperature. The rennet gels made with zero, 0.01% and 0.02% CaCl₂ addition showed a slight increase in G' with CaCl₂ addition, but no significant differences in B values. For gels made with 40, 80 and 120µl rennet addition/l, the G' values increased slightly with an increase in rennet concentration, but there were no significant differences in B values. For rennet gels with different protein contents (range from 3.45 to 5.10%), the G' values increased whereas B values decreased with increasing protein content. All the confocal micrographs corresponded well with the results from the permeability and rheological analyses.

Two rennet gel systems were developed in this study. "High syneresis" gel systems were made using low pH, high temperature and normal protein concentration and "low syneresis" systems with high pH, low temperature and high protein concentration. These two systems were used in cheese manufacture in a pilot plant. It was expected that 'high syneresis' gel system would expel more whey and result in low moisture cheese, while the 'low syneresis' system would yield cheese with higher moisture content. It was found that the cheese produced from high syneresis system
had higher moisture content than the cheeses made from low syneresis system. It was opposite to what was expected. The set to cut time and acid production (starter levels) are thought to be the reasons for the outcome of the first pilot plant trial. The process conditions were redesigned to investigate the effect of gel firmness and pH on the composition of cheese. Similar results were found in the second pilot plant trial.

The factors involved in the cheesemaking process are much more complex than what has been investigated in the present study. Therefore, further investigations on the other factors affecting cheese moisture content are recommended (e.g. syneretic power).
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ................................................................. i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT ....................................................... iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS ..................................................... V
LIST OF TABLES ............................................................ ix
LIST OF FIGURES .......................................................... x

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION ................................................ 1

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW ........................................... 3

2.1 Milk ........................................................................... 3
   2.1.1 Casein micelles .................................................... 3
   2.1.2 Whey proteins ...................................................... 6
   2.1.3 Milk salts ............................................................. 6
2.2 Cheese manufacture ................................................... 6
2.3 Rennet coagulation of milk ......................................... 10
   2.3.1 Mechanism of coagulation ...................................... 11
2.4 Factors affecting rennet coagulation ............................... 13
   2.4.1 Influence of pH ..................................................... 13
   2.4.2 Influence of temperature ........................................ 14
   2.4.3 Influence of ionic strength ...................................... 14
   2.4.4 Influence of calcium concentration .......................... 14
2.5 Gel formation in renneted milk ..................................... 15
2.6 Gel structure and properties ........................................ 16
   2.6.1 Rheological properties .......................................... 16
   2.6.2 Syneresis .............................................................. 17
   2.6.3 Permeability of rennet gels .................................... 19
2.7 Factors affecting gel formation, structure and properties .... 20
   2.7.1 Effect of protein concentration ................................ 20
   2.1.2 Effect of rennet concentration ................................ 22
   2.1.3 Effect of temperature ............................................ 23
   2.1.4 Effect of calcium and phosphate ............................. 24
2.1.5 Effect of pH and NaCl .............................................................. 25
2.1.6 Behaviour of rennet milk gels at large deformation ............. 27
2.8 Drainage of whey (syneresis) .................................................... 28

CHAPTER 3 OBJECTIVES ................................................................. 30

CHAPTER 4 MATERIALS AND METHODS ...................................... 31
4.1 Materials .......................................................................................... 31
4.1.1 Milk source ................................ .................................................. 31
4.1.2 Rennet source ........................................................................... 31
4.1.3 Starter source ........................................................................... 31
4.1.4 Sodium azide (NaN₃) ............................................................. 31
4.2 Processing methods ........................................................................ 32
4.2.1 Preparation of reconstituted skim milk .................................... 32
4.2.2 Preparation of high protein skim milk ..................................... 32
4.3 Analytical methods ......................................................................... 32
4.3.1 Protein content ......................................................................... 32
4.3.2 Moisture content ...................................................................... 32
4.4 Experimental procedures .............................................................. 33
4.4.1 Rheological properties ............................................................ 33
4.3.2 Permeability measurements .................................................... 35
4.3.3 Determination of microstructure ............................................. 37
4.3.4 Syneresis measurements ........................................................ 37
4.3.5 Cheese manufacture–pilot plant trials .................................... 38

CHAPTER 5 INFLUENCE OF SOME PROCESSING AND COMPOSITIONAL FACTORS ON THE FORMATION AND PROPERTIES OF RENNET-INDUCED SKIM MILK GELS ................................................................. 41
5.1 Introduction .................................................................................... 41
5.2 Results and discussion .................................................................. 42
5.2.1 Effect of pH on rennet-induced milk gels ................................ 42
5.2.1.1 Rheology ............................................................................. 43
5.2.1.2 Permeability coefficient .......................................................... 45
5.2.1.3 Confocal microscopy ............................................................ 47
5.2.2 Effect of temperature on the rennet milk gels ......................... 49
  5.2.2.1 Rheology ........................................................................... 49
  5.2.2.2 Permeability coefficient ....................................................... 51
  5.2.2.3 Confocal microscopy ......................................................... 52
5.2.3 Effect of calcium chloride addition on the rennet milk gels ...... 54
  5.2.3.1 Rheology ........................................................................... 54
  5.2.3.2 Permeability coefficient ....................................................... 55
  5.2.3.3 Confocal microscopy ......................................................... 56
5.2.4 Effect of rennet concentration on the rennet milk gels ............ 58
  5.2.4.1 Rheology ........................................................................... 58
  5.2.4.2 Permeability coefficient ....................................................... 59
  5.2.4.3 Confocal microscopy ......................................................... 60
5.2.5 Effect of protein concentration on the rennet milk gels .......... 61
  5.2.5.1 Rheology ........................................................................... 61
  5.2.5.2 Permeability coefficient ....................................................... 62
  5.2.5.3 Confocal microscopy ......................................................... 63
5.3 Effect of a combination of different conditions on the rennet milk gels ... 66
5.4 Conclusions ............................................................................... 70

CHAPTER 6 MANUFACTURE OF CHEESE FROM “HIGH SYNERESIS”
AND “LOW SYNERESIS” GELLING SYSTEMS................................................. 73
6.1 Introduction to syneresis tests ..................................................... 73
6.2 Pilot plant trial - I ............................................................... 77
  6.2.1 Rheology ........................................................................... 79
  6.1.2 Permeability coefficient ....................................................... 80
  6.1.3 Confocal microscopy ......................................................... 81
6.3 Pilot plant trial - II ................................................................. 87
6.4 Conclusions ........................................................................... 94
CHAPTER 7 GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS... 95

7.1 Introduction ..................................................................................................................95

7.2 Effect of different conditions on the structure and physical properties of skim milk rennet gel ........................................................................................................................................96

7.3 Cheesemaking process and cheese composition ........................................................................97

7.4 Recommendations ........................................................................................................98

REFERENCES .................................................................................................................. 100
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table No</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>The parameters used for rheological measurements.</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>The processing conditions used for different cheese production batches.</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>The conditions used for the formation of rennet gels.</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>The conditions used for making rennet gels with high and low level of syneresis.</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Summary of storage modulus (G'), gelation time (GT) and permeability coefficient (B) results.</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Pilot plant trial I: The processing conditions used in the manufacture of various cheddar cheeses (high and low syneresis systems).</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>The compositional analysis of the final cheeses.</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>The setting time before cutting during processing.</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Pilot plant trial II: The processing conditions used for cheddar cheese production with or without starter.</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>The composition of cheeses with different cutting times.</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure No</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Structure of the casein micelle.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Schematic representation of the rennet coagulation of milk. (a)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Casein micelles with intact κ-casein layer being attacked by the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>chymosin; (b) micelles partially denuded of κ-casein; (c)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>extensively denuded micelles in the process of aggregation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>The changes in storage modulus ($G'$) with time during renneting</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>at (A) natural pH of normal skim milk (○), 2X UF concentrate (○) or</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3X UF concentrate (△) and (B) at pH 6.5 of normal skim milk (●),</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2X UF concentrate (■) or 3X UF concentrate (▼).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Storage modulus $G'$ as a function of time for reconstituted skim</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>milk gels. Rennet concentration was varied: 0.5% (○), 0.025% (×),</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.01% (△). Angular frequency was 1 rad/s. $T = 30^\circ C$, pH = 6.65.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Storage modulus $G'$ as a function of time after rennet addition for</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>milk gels made and measured at the temperature as indicated. Angular</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>frequency was 1 rad/s.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Storage modulus $G'$ as a function of time after rennet addition for</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>skim milk gels; (○) 6mM CaCl$_2$ added, (△) no CaCl$_2$ added; pH</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>= 6.6, $T = 30^\circ C$, angular frequency = 1 rad/s.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Storage modulus $G'$ as a function of time after rennet addition for</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>skim milk gels. (O) pH 6.65, (×) pH 6.25, (△) pH 5.72. $T = 30^\circ$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C, $\omega = 1$ rad/s, 0.025% rennet added.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Schematic diagram of permeability measurement.</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>The schematic diagram of the syneresis system.</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Process flow chart for production of experimental cheeses at the</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Zealand Dairy Research Institute.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Rheological properties which develop during the rennet coagulation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of skim milk at 32°C, pH 6.2 and 80μl/l rennet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
addition. Storage modulus, $G'$ (●), loss modulus, $G''$ (■) and tan δ, (▲).

5.2 Storage modulus, $G'$, as a function of time, for skim milk samples adjusted to pH 5.8 (■), pH 6.2 (▲), and pH 6.5 (△) and then rennet added.

5.3 Permeability coefficients as a function of time of the rennet skim milk gels made at pH 5.8 (● o), pH 6.2 (■ □), and pH 6.5 (▲ △).

5.4 Confocal laser scanning micrographs of standard skim milk gels made at 32°C with rennet concentration of 80µl/l and pH 5.8 (a), 6.2 (b) or 6.5 (c). Samples stained with Fast Green FCF, and the magnification is 400X. The scale bar represents 10 µm.

5.5 Storage modulus, $G'$, as a function of time after rennet addition for skim milk samples incubated at 25°C (■), 32°C (▲), and 40°C (△).

5.6 Permeability coefficients of the rennet skim milk gels made at 25°C (●), 32°C (■), and 40°C (▲).

5.7 Confocal laser scanning micrographs of standard rennet skim milk gels made at pH 6.2 with rennet concentration of 80µl/l and at 25°C (a), 32°C (b) or 40°C (c). The gels were stained with Fast Green FCF, and the magnification is 400X. The scale bar represents 10 µm.

5.8 Storage modulus, $G'$, as a function of time for skim milk with 0% (■), 0.01% (▲), or 0.02% (△) added calcium chloride and then renneted at 32°C and pH 6.2.

5.9 Permeability coefficients (B) of the rennet skim milk gels containing 0% (●), 0.01% (■), and 0.02% (▲) calcium chloride.

5.10 Confocal laser scanning micrographs of rennet skim milk gels made at 32°C with rennet concentration of 80µl/l of milk, pH 6.2 and CaCl₂ addition of 0% (a), 0.01% (b) or 0.02% (c). These
gels were stained with Fast Green FCF, and the magnification is 400X. The scale bar represents 10 µm.

5.11 Storage modulus, $G'$, as a function of time, for skim milk gels made using 40 µl/l (■), 80 µl/l (▲), and 120 µl/l (△) rennet at 32°C.

5.12 Permeability coefficients ($B$) as a function of time, of the skim milk gels made using 40 µl/l (● ○), 80 µl/l (■ □), and 120 µl/l (▲) rennet.

5.13 Confocal laser scanning micrographs of rennet skim milk gels made at 32°C and pH 6.2 using rennet concentration 40µl/l of milk (a), 80µl/l (b) or 120µl/l (c). The gels were stained with Fast Green FCF and the magnification is 400X. The scale bar represents 10 µm.

5.14 Storage modulus, $G'$, as a function of time, for skim milk containing 3.44% (■), 3.80% (□), 3.89% (▲), 4.16% (△), 4.71% (●), and 5.10% (○) protein and been renneted at 32°C.

5.15 Permeability coefficients ($B$) as a function of time of the rennet skim milk gels containing 3.44% (● ○), 3.89% (■ □), and 4.71% (▲△) protein.

5.16 Confocal laser scanning micrographs of rennet skim milk gels made at 32°C with rennet concentration of 80µl/l of milk, pH 6.2 and protein content of 3.44%(a), 3.80% (b) or 3.89% (c), 4.16% (d), 4.71% (e) or 5.10% (f). The gels were stained with Fast Green FCF, and the magnification is 400X. The scale bar represents 10 µm.

5.17 Permeability coefficients of renneted milk gels made using the conditions shown in Table 5.2 for high syneresis (▲) and low syneresis (■) systems.

5.18 Confocal laser scanning micrographs of standard skim milk gels made using conditions (as shown in Table 5.2) for high syneresis.
system (a) and low syneresis system (b). The gels were stained with Fast Green FCF, and the magnification was 400X. The scale bar represents 10 µm.

6.1 The experimental design for determining the effect of combined conditions with starter addition on syneresis.

6.2 The amount of whey expelled per gram of rennet milk gel, as a function of time, for the high syneresis system, at starter levels of 0.25% (▲), 0.5% (■), 1.0% (●), 1.5% (△) and 2.0% (□).

6.3 The amount of whey expelled per gram of rennet milk gel as a function of time, for the low syneresis system at starter levels of 0.25% (▲), 0.5% (■), 1.0% (●), 1.5% (△) and 2.0% (□).

6.4 Storage modulus, G', after rennet addition, as a function of time for control sample vat 1 (●), high syneresis 1% starter vat 2 (▲), high syneresis 2% starter vat 3 (●), low syneresis 1% starter vat 4 (□) and low syneresis 2% starter vat 5 (△).

6.5 Permeability coefficients as a function of time of renneted cheese milk gels for control vat 1 (●), high syneresis 1% starter vat 2 (▲), high syneresis 2% starter vat 3 (●), low syneresis 1% starter vat 4 (□), low syneresis 2% starter vat 5 (△).

6.6 Confocal laser scanning micrographs of cheese milk gels made using processing conditions shown in Table 6.1 for vat 1 (a), vat 2 (b), vat 3 (c), vat 4 (d) and vat 5 (e) stained with Fast Green FCF, obtained with a 40X oil immersion objective (magnification 400X). The scale bar represents 10 µm.

6.7 The amount of whey expelled per gram of milk gels as a function of time for control sample vat 1 (●), high syneresis 1% starter vat 2 (▲), high syneresis 2% starter vat 3 (●), low syneresis 1% starter vat 4 (□) and low syneresis 2% starter vat 5 (△).

6.8 Percentage moisture for cheese curds cut at 33 minutes after rennet addition at different stages of the process for high
syneresis system with 2% and 0% starter levels and low syneresis system with 2% and 0% starter levels.

6.9 Percentage moisture for cheese curds cut at 66 minutes after rennet addition at different stages of the process for high syneresis system with 2% and 0% starter levels and low syneresis system with 2% and 0% starter levels.