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**CITRIC ACID PRODUCTION FROM YEASTS:
COMPARISON OF A PARENT AND A MUTANT
STRAIN OF *CANDIDA GUILLIERMONDII*, AND
SUBSEQUENT REVERSION OF THE MUTANT**

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ABSTRACT

Citric acid production from yeasts has been studied widely owing to the short duration of fermentation, the broad choice of carbon source and the better yields obtained when compared to the currently used submerged or surface fermentation with *Aspergillus niger*.

In this work two strains of *Candida guilliermondii* were compared for their citric acid-producing capabilities, these being parent strain *Candida guilliermondii* NRRL Y-448, and mutant strain *Candida guilliermondii* IMK1. The mutant was previously selected for its ability to produce much higher concentrations of citric acid than the parent. These strains were grown under various nutrient limitations to determine if nutrient limitation had an effect on the amount of citric acid produced.

Several differences were observed between the non-citric acid-producing parent and the citric acid-producing mutant. The mutant generally consumed less glucose (g.g^{-1}), produced less biomass (g.L^{-1}) and produced much higher levels of citric acid – the best production (7.34 g.g^{-1}) seen from the culture grown under phosphorus-limited (0.15 mM) conditions. Upon assessment of enzyme activities it was found that the mutant also exhibited reduced activity of the enzyme NAD-ICDH (NAD-dependent isocitrate dehydrogenase), a recognised control point for the over-production of citric acid. NAD-ICDH is inhibited by increased concentrations of ATP - these are associated with the accumulation of citric acid in the cell in the stationary phase of growth. This reduction in NAD-ICDH activity correlated with a dramatic increase in the activity of NADP-ICDH (NADP-specific isocitrate dehydrogenase), the activity of which was thought to compensate for the loss of activity of NAD-ICDH. However, in a subsequent experiment, the mutant was found to have reverted - losing its ability to produce citric acid. This loss of productivity occurred before the levels of adenine

nucleotides in the cell could be assessed, meaning that the suggested inhibition of NAD-ICDH by elevated levels of ATP could not be confirmed.

Upon analysis of the revertant, it was found that glucose consumption (grams per gram of cells) had increased, as had the production of biomass (g.L^{-1}). Even though the revertant failed to consume as much glucose as the parent, in many instances it produced higher levels of biomass. Upon analysis of enzyme activity, it was found that the activity of NAD-ICDH had increased, so reducing the accumulation of citric and isocitric acids. The activity of NADP-ICDH had decreased somewhat, but activity of this enzyme remained at significant levels. It is proposed that the activity of NADP-ICDH in the revertant was responsible for the increased efficiency of biomass production.

In conclusion, it is suggested that overproduction of citric acid in *Candida guilliermondii* IMK1 was due to the consumption of lowered levels of glucose combined with the reduced activity of the enzyme NAD-ICDH, which it is speculated was due to elevated concentrations of ATP in the cell.

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*A cloud does not know why it moves in such a direction and at such a speed
It feels an impulsion.....this is the place to go now
But the sky knows the reasons and patterns behind all clouds
And you will know too – when you lift yourself high enough to see beyond horizons*

*Richard Bach
Illusions*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Literature Review	3
2.1	Citric acid – General	3
2.1.1	History of Citric Acid Production	3
2.1.2	Uses and Properties of Citric Acid	5
2.1.3	Biochemistry of the Citric Acid Cycle	7
2.1.4	Regulation of the Citric Acid Cycle- General	7
2.1.5	Strains used in Citric Acid Production	10
2.1.6	Citric Acid Production by <i>Aspergillus niger</i>	11
2.2	Citric Acid Production from Yeasts	14
2.2.1	Introduction	14
2.2.2	Yeast biology	15
2.2.2.1	Growth and Multiplication of Yeasts	15
2.2.2.2	Yeast Cell Structure	18
2.2.3	Media Used in the Production of Citric Acid	21
2.2.3.1	Carbon Source	21
2.2.3.2	Nutrient Limitation	23
	Nitrogen	24
	Phosphorus	24
	Vitamins and Minerals	25

2.2.3.3	Growth Conditions	28
2.2.4	Yeast Strains Used in the Production of Citric Acid	30
2.2.5	Control of Citric Acid Production from Citric Acid Producing Yeasts	31
2.2.5.1	Introduction	31
2.2.5.2	Nutrient Limitation and Citric Acid Production	32
2.2.5.3	Enzyme Activity	34
2.2.5.4	Adenine Nucleotides	37
2.2.5.5	Transport of Glucose and Citric Acid in Citric Acid-Producing Yeasts	38
	Glucose Transport	38
	Citric Acid Transport	39
2.2.5.6	Growth Conditions Affecting Citric Acid Production	40
	Carbon Source	40
	pH Levels	43
	Oxygen Levels	45
2.2.6	Productivity of Citric Acid-Producing Yeasts	47
2.3	Yeast Mutation and Repair	49
2.3.1	Introduction	49
2.3.2	Repair	50
2.3.3	Inactivation	52
2.3.4	Modification of Effects of Radiation	53

2.3.4.1	Post-irradiation Treatments	53
2.3.4.2	Cell Phase	54
2.3.4.3	Mitochondria	54
2.3.5	Mutation and Citric Acid-Producing Yeasts	55
3.	Nutrient Limitation Experiment - Materials and Methods	59
3.1	Introduction	59
3.2	Cultures - Origin and Maintenance	59
3.2.1	Yeast Strains	59
3.2.2	Maintenance	60
3.3	Nutrient Limitation Experiment	60
3.3.1	Media composition and concentration of limiting nutrients	60
3.3.2	Inoculation of flasks	61
3.4	Analysis of Samples	62
3.4.1	Preparation of sample for further analysis	62
3.4.2	Optical density	62
3.4.3	pH	63
3.4.4	Dry weight determination	63

3.5	Analysis of Concentration of Glucose and Citric Acid Cycle	
	Metabolites in the Fermentation Medium	64
3.5.1	Glucose	64
3.5.2	Citric acid	65
3.5.3	Isocitric acid	66
3.5.4	Pyruvate	67
3.5.5	2-Oxoglutarate	67
3.5.6	Fumarate	68
3.5.7	Malate	69
3.6	Analysis of Enzyme Activities of the Citric Acid Cycle	70
3.6.1	Fermentation and sampling	70
3.6.2	Disruption of cells and sample preparation	71
3.6.3	Protein analysis	71
3.6.4	Citrate Synthase (EC 4.1.3.7)	72
3.6.5	Aconitase (EC 4.2.1.3)	72
3.6.6	NAD-dependent Isocitrate Dehydrogenase (EC 1.1.1.41)	73
3.6.7	NADP-specific Isocitrate Dehydrogenase (EC 1.1.1.42)	73
3.6.8	Pyruvate Carboxylase (EC 6.4.1.1)	74
4.	Mutant Reisolation	75
4.1	Introduction	75
4.2	UV Mutagenesis	75

5. Nutrient Limitation Experiment - Part 1

Results and Discussion	78
5.1 Introduction	78
5.2 Optical density (OD)	79
5.3 Changes in pH	82
5.4 Biomass Production	83
5.5 Biomass Yield	85
5.6 Glucose Consumption and Citric Acid Production	88
5.6.1 Glucose Consumption	88
5.6.2 Citric Acid Production	88
5.6.3 Substrate Yield	91
5.7 Specific Rates of Glucose Consumption and Citric Acid Production	93
5.7.1 Glucose Consumption	93
5.7.2 Citric Acid Production	96
5.8 Ratio of Citric Acid to Isocitric Acid	97

5.9	Levels of Citric Acid Cycle Intermediates Excreted into the Medium	99
5.9.1	Isocitrate	99
5.9.2	Pyruvate	101
5.9.3	2-Oxoglutarate	103
5.9.4	Fumarate	105
5.9.5	Malate	107
5.10	Experiment 1: Summary and Discussion	110

6. Nutrient Limitation Experiment - Part 2

Results and Discussion 116

6.1	Introduction	116
6.2	Comparison of Internal and External Levels of Citric Acid Cycle Intermediates	117
6.2.1	Citric Acid	117
6.2.2	Isocitric Acid	119
6.2.3	Pyruvate	122
6.2.4	2-Oxoglutarate	124
6.2.5	Malate	126
6.2.6	Fumarate	128

6.3	Enzyme Activities	131
6.3.1	Citrate Synthase	131
6.3.2	Aconitase	134
6.3.3	NAD-dependent Isocitrate Dehydrogenase	135
6.3.4	NADP-specific Isocitrate Dehydrogenase	136
6.3.5	Pyruvate Carboxylase	137
6.4	Experiment 2: Summary and Discussion	139

7. Reversion and Reisolation of Mutant Strain

	<i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	144
7.1	Introduction	144
7.2	Citric Acid Production	144
7.3	Glucose Consumption	147
7.4	Biomass Production and Biomass Yield	149
7.5	Levels of Intermediates Excreted into the Medium	152
7.5.1	Isocitric Acid	152
7.5.2	Pyruvate	152
7.5.3	2-Oxoglutarate	156

7.5.4	Fumarate	158
7.6	Enzyme Activity	160
7.6.1	Citrate Synthase	160
7.6.2	Aconitase	162
7.6.3	NAD-dependent Isocitrate Dehydrogenase	163
7.6.4	NADP-specific Isocitrate Dehydrogenase	163
7.6.5	Pyruvate Carboxylase	164
7.7	Possible Site(s) of Repair of the Mutant Strain	165
7.7.1	Glucose consumption	165
7.7.2	Enzyme Activity	166
7.8	Efficiency of Mutation Method	166
8.	Conclusion	168
8.1	Conclusion	168
8.2	Further work	172

Appendix 1 – Literature	174
Appendix 2 – Materials and Methods	183
Appendix 3 – Nutrient Limitation Experiment: Part 1	186
Appendix 4 – Nutrient Limitation Experiment: Part 2	196
Appendix 5 – Reversion of <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	199
References	204

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1:	The citric acid cycle	7
Table 2.2:	Citric acid and isocitric acid production from yeasts (grams per gram of cells)	48
Table 3.1:	Limitations chosen for enzymatic analysis	70
Table 5.1:	Comparison of biomass (dry weights) of parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1 after 144 hours	85
Table 5.2:	Comparison of levels of glucose consumed and citric acid produced for parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1 after 144 hours	91
Table 5.3:	Comparison of ratios of citric acid to isocitric acid (grams per gram of cells) for parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	98
Table 7.1:	Comparison of biomass (dry weights) of parent, mutant and revertant strains after 144 hours.	151
Table A1.1:	Summary of citric acid production from yeasts: substrates, methods and yields	175
Table A1.2a:	Summary of citrate synthase activity from citric acid producing yeasts	178

Table A1.2b: Summary of aconitase activity of citric acid producing yeasts	179
Table A1.2c: Summary of NAD-dependent isocitrate dehydrogenase activity of citric acid producing yeasts	180
Table A1.2d: Summary of NADP-specific isocitrate dehydrogenase activity of citric acid producing yeasts	181
Table A1.2e: Summary of isocitrate lyase activity of citric acid producing yeasts	182
Table A2.1: Nutrient limitation experiment – media and composition	184
Table A2.2: Concentrations of amino acids, vitamins and trace elements	185
Table A3.1: Optical density at A600 nm of parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 at 24 hour intervals	187
Table A3.2: Optical Density at A600 nm of mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1 at 24 hour intervals	187
Table A3.3: pH changes of parent strain at <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 over period of fermentation	188
Table A3.4: pH changes of mutant strain at <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1 over period of fermentation	189

Table A3.6:	Citric acid production and glucose consumption from parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1 over a fermentation period of 144 hours	190
Table A3.7:	Biomass yield (grams of cells per gram of glucose) for parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	192
Table A3.8:	Citrate yield (grams of citrate per gram of cells) for parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	192
Table A3.9:	Substrate yield (grams of citrate per gram of glucose) for parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	193
Table A3.10:	Maximum specific rates of glucose utilisation for parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	194
Table A3.11:	Maximum specific rates of citric acid production for parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	194
Table A3.12:	Levels of intermediates (milligrams per gram of cells) excreted into the fermentation medium by parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1 after 144 hours	195

Table A4.1:	Comparison of internal and external metabolites (milligrams per gram of cells) of parent <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 in logarithmic and stationary phases of growth	197
Table A4.2:	Comparison of internal and external metabolites (milligrams per gram of cells) of mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1 in logarithmic and stationary phases of growth	198
Table A4.3:	Enzyme activities (U/mg protein) of parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1 in logarithmic and stationary growth phases	199
Table A5.1:	Comparison of citric acid production, glucose consumption and biomass yield from <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> – parent, mutant and revertant strains	201
Table A5.2:	Comparison of levels of intermediates (mg/g cells) excreted by <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> – parent, mutant and revertant strains after 144 hours	202
Table A5.3:	Comparison of enzyme activities (U/mg protein) of <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> – parent, mutant and revertant strains	203

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1:	The citric acid cycle. Regulation of the citric acid cycle and anaplerotic pathways.	8
Figure 2.2:	Process of catabolism (degradation) and anabolism (biosynthesis) linked to energy production and provision of reducing power – aerobic metabolism	20
Figure 2.3:	Method for isolation of a fluoroacetate-sensitive, non-citrate metabolizing mutant	56
Figure 5.1:	Optical density at A600 nm of parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 at 24 hour intervals	80
Figure 5.2:	Optical density at A600 nm of mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	81
Figure 5.3:	Biomass yield (grams of cells per gram of glucose) of parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	86
Figure 5.4:	Citrate yield (grams of citrate per gram of cells) for parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	90
Figure 5.5:	Substrate yield (grams of citrate per gram of glucose) for parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	92

Figure 5.6:	Maximum specific rates of glucose utilisation for parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	94
Figure 5.7:	Maximum specific rates of citric acid production for parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	95
Figure 5.8:	Comparison of isocitrate production (milligrams per gram of cells) from parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	100
Figure 5.9:	Comparison of pyruvate production (milligrams per gram of cells) from parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	102
Figure 5.10:	Comparison of 2-oxoglutarate production (milligrams per gram of cells) from parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	104
Figure 5.11:	Comparison of fumarate production (milligrams per gram of cells) from parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	106

Figure 5.12:	Comparison of malate production (milligrams per gram of cells from parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	108
Figure 6.1:	Comparison of internal and external levels of citric acid produced by parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	118
Figure 6.2:	Comparison of internal and external levels of isocitric acid from parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	120
Figure 6.3:	Comparison of internal and external levels of pyruvate from parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	123
Figure 6.4:	Comparison of internal and external levels of 2-oxoglutarate from parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	125
Figure 6.5:	Comparison of internal and external levels of malate from parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	127
Figure 6.6:	Comparison of internal and external levels of fumarate produced by parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	129

Figure 6.7:	Comparison of enzyme activities of parent strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> NRRL Y-448 and mutant strain <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> IMK1	132
Figure 7.1:	Comparison of citric acid production (grams of citrate per gram of cells) from <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> – parent, mutant and revertant strains	145
Figure 7.2:	Comparison of glucose consumption from <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> – parent, mutant and revertant strains	148
Figure 7.3:	Comparison of biomass yield (grams of cells per gram of glucose) for from <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> – parent, mutant and revertant strains	150
Figure 7.4:	Comparison of isocitrate production (milligrams per gram of cells) from <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> – parent, mutant and revertant strains	153
Figure 7.5:	Comparison of pyruvate production (milligrams per gram of cells) from <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> – parent, mutant and revertant strains	154
Figure 7.6:	Comparison of 2-oxoglutarate production (milligrams per gram of cells) from <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> – parent, mutant and revertant strains	157
Figure 7.7:	Comparison of fumarate production (milligrams per gram of cells) from <i>Candida guilliermondii</i> – parent, mutant and revertant strains	159

Figure 7.8: Comparison of enzyme activities of *Candida guilliermondii* – parent, mutant and revertant strains

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Citric acid is currently produced industrially using the submerged or surface fermentation with *Aspergillus niger*. Citric acid has a wide range of uses, but the majority of citric acid produced is used in the food and pharmaceutical industries.

Recently attention has been focused on the use of yeasts for the production of citric acid. Yeasts have certain advantages over fungi, some of these being the shorter duration of fermentation, broad choice of carbon source and better yields.

Much work has been performed on the mechanism of accumulation of citric acid in yeasts. The organisms most commonly used are those of the genus *Candida*, *C. lipolytica* (Synonym: *Yarrowia lipolytica*, *Saccharomycopsis lipolytica*) being the most favoured. It has been found that the optimum production of citric acid can vary depending on the type of carbon source, the medium pH, aeration and also the presence or absence of trace elements.

It is generally accepted that for citric acid production to occur, the culture must be under conditions of nutrient limitation - usually nitrogen limitation. However, other nutrient limitations have been assessed successfully for the production of citric acid.

The object of this research was to compare two strains of *Candida guilliermondii* - the parent (NRRL Y-448) and a mutant strain (IMK1). The mutant was chosen for its increased production of citric acid. Comparisons were made between the parent and the mutant to attempt to identify the differences that were responsible

for the increased production of citric acid from the mutant. Comparisons were made of glucose consumption, rates of production of citric acid, levels of intermediates and enzymes of the tricarboxylic acid (TCA) cycle.

Unfortunately, the mutant proved to be unstable and citric acid producing activity was lost after a period of time. Attempts were made to revive this mutant and to isolate a new citric acid producing mutant, but this proved to be unsuccessful.