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Reverse genetic analyses of *TERMINAL EAR*-like
RNA-binding protein genes in *Arabidopsis*
thaliana (L.) Heynh.

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ABSTRACT

In maize, a loss-of-function mutation in a *MEI2*-like gene, *terminal ear1* (*te1*), leads to morphological defects able to be traced back to the shoot apical meristem. One *MEI2*-like gene has been identified in maize, while six have been identified in rice and nine in *Arabidopsis thaliana*. In this thesis, a programme of reverse genetic analysis has been designed to investigate if *Arabidopsis* genes most closely aligned in parsimony trees with *TE1*, *TERMINAL EAR-LIKE 1* (*TEL1*), *TERMINAL EAR-LIKE 2* (*TEL2*), perform the same function as *TE1*. The expression pattern of *TEL1* and *TEL2* genes is restricted to the Shoot Apical Meristem (SAM) and the Root Apical Meristem (RAM) suggesting these genes are important in meristem maintenance or function. Results of the molecular genetic analysis of *TEL* genes in *Arabidopsis* support models in which these genes help maintain cells in a pluripotent state. For the first part of the thesis, analysis of lines carrying single knockouts of *TEL1* and *TEL2* and double knockout lines reveals a slightly accelerated rate of organogenesis, consistent with these genes normally acting to inhibit terminal differentiation pathways. Plants grown on medium containing gibberellic acid and sucrose, at higher than normal concentrations, present a further accelerated rate of organogenesis.

As the second part of the thesis, *in situ* and promoter/reporter GUS fusion analyses indicate *TEL1* is preferentially expressed in both the root and shoot apical meristems. Deletion analysis using GFP reporter constructs show that 5' sequences are sufficient to drive quiescent centre (QC) expression in the root while additional sequences are required for central zone (CZ) expression in the SAM. Physiological studies indicate expression of *TEL1* in the root is sensitive to the hormones, auxin, gibberellic acid and zeatin, when added at physiological concentrations. To confirm the auxin effect, GFP expression is no longer visible after 12 hours of exposure to auxin transport inhibitors in plants containing GFP under the control of the *TEL1* promoter, suggesting, in common with other QC markers, that *TEL* expression is sensitive to auxin levels. Analysis of mutant plants with altered root patterning suggests QC specific expression of *TEL1* requires early acting genes, such as *PLETHORA 1* and 2, but does not depend on later acting genes such as *SCARECROW* or *SHORTROOT*.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
CONTENTS.....	iii
List of Figures	v
List of Tables	vi
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 MERISTEM INITIATION AND MAINTENANCE	1
1.2 THE SHOOT APICAL MERISTEM.....	4
1.2.1 SAM organisation	4
1.3 THE ROOT APICAL MERISTEM	8
1.3.1 RAM organisation.....	8
1.4 GENES INVOLVED IN MERISTEM MAINTENANCE	11
1.4.1 Shoot apical meristem identity genes	11
1.4.2 Root apical meristem identity genes	13
1.4.3 Gene expression determines root and shoot meristem identity	14
1.4.4 Plant hormones specify root and shoot meristem identity	15
1.4.5 Developmental processes are regulated by controlling transcription	19
1.4.6 Molecular mechanisms of <i>MEI2</i> -like genes	21
1.4.7 Non functional <i>MEI2</i> -like genes affect organ initiation	22
1.4.8 <i>MEI2</i> members in <i>Arabidopsis</i>	24
1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THIS RESEARCH	31
2 METHODS AND MATERIALS.....	33
2.1 Plant material.....	33
2.1.1 Plant propagation	33
2.1.2 Generation of out-crossed progeny.....	34
2.1.3 Root phenotype analysis	34
2.1.4 Pollen viability	35
2.1.5 Reporter gene visualisation.....	36
2.2 Molecular techniques	38
2.2.1 Extraction of <i>Arabidopsis thaliana</i> DNA	38
2.2.2 Quick DNA extraction protocol.....	38
2.2.3 High Throughput DNA preparation (Xin et al., 2003)	39
2.2.4 DNA amplification from the BAC clone	39
2.2.5 Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) amplification.....	39
2.2.6 Polymerase Chain Reaction thermal cycler programme.....	40
2.2.7 Gel electrophoresis.....	40
2.3 Vector construction	41
2.3.1 Restriction digests	41
2.3.2 Plasmid DNA sequencing.....	43
2.3.3 <i>Escherichia coli</i> (<i>E. coli</i>) DH5 α transformation	45
2.3.4 Plasmid purification	45
2.3.5 Transformation of <i>Agrobacterium tumefaciens</i>	46
2.3.6 Transformation of <i>Arabidopsis thaliana</i>	46
2.3.7 Statistical analyses	47
3 RESULTS	48
3.1 TEL1 AND TEL2 PHENOTYPIC ASSESSMENT	48
3.1.1 Procurement of knockout alleles.....	48
3.1.2 Identification of knockout alleles.....	49

3.1.3	Preliminary phenotype assessment	53
3.1.4	Root experiments	54
3.1.5	Pollen viability and telomere maintenance	55
3.1.6	Putative multiple mutants	57
3.1.7	Identification of knockout alleles.....	59
3.1.8	Phenotypic analysis of the <i>TEL1</i> single mutant.....	62
3.1.9	Multiple mutants	63
3.1.10	Phenotype of <i>tell1tel2</i> double mutant plants.....	65
3.2	TEL1 AND TEL2 GENE REGULATION	77
3.2.1	Gene regulation.....	77
3.2.2	<i>TEL1</i> gene regulation sequences.....	77
3.2.3	Construction of the <i>TEL1</i> gene including introns pCambia1391Xb plasmid 82	
3.2.4	<i>TEL1</i> expression.....	83
3.2.5	Analysis <i>in silico</i> of the promoter region.....	89
3.2.6	Interaction with phytohormones	91
3.2.7	Assessment of -1900 P _{TEL1} ::ER-GFP in a <i>short root</i> , <i>scarecrow</i> , or <i>plethora1</i> and <i>plethora2</i> mutant background.....	95
4	DISCUSSION	98
4.1	TEL1 AND TEL2 PHENOTYPIC ASSESSMENT	98
4.1.1	Mutant analysis	98
4.1.2	<i>Arabidopsis</i> genotypes used in this research	99
4.1.3	<i>Arabidopsis TEL</i> genes have genetic redundancy	101
4.2	TEL1 AND TEL2 GENE REGULATION	103
4.2.1	Sequences within the coding region of <i>TEL1</i> are required for expression in the SAM.....	104
4.2.2	<i>TEL1</i> promoter deletion analysis shows regulated transcription explains QC limited expression.....	106
4.2.3	Plant hormones regulate <i>TEL1</i> expression.....	108
4.2.4	<i>TEL1</i> promoter activity reflects changes in hormone levels.....	112
4.2.5	Genetic regulation of expression	113
4.3	BIOLOGICAL FUNCTION OF TEL GENES.....	116
4.3.1	Comparisons of gene activity between plant species.....	117
5	FUTURE WORK.....	121
5.1	MUTANT ANALYSIS	121
5.2	REGLATORY SEQUENCES	124
6	REFERENCES	127
7	LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	140
8	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	142
9	APPENDIX 1.....	143
10	APPENDIX 2.....	144

List of Figures

Figure 1-1: Stages of <i>Arabidopsis</i> embryogenesis (from (Jurgens and Mayer, 1994)..3	3
Figure 1-2: Longitudinal section through an <i>Arabidopsis</i> shoot apical meristem.....6	6
Figure 1-3: Longitudinal section through an <i>Arabidopsis</i> root.....9	9
Figure 1-4 <i>PLA2</i> inhibits leaf development.....23	23
Figure 1-5: The phylogenetic relationship of <i>Mei2</i> -like genes.....25	25
Figure 1-6: Localisation of <i>TEL1</i> and <i>TEL2</i> transcripts in embryos, vegetative and floral meristems.27	27
Figure 1-7: Location of <i>TEL1</i> , <i>SCR</i> , <i>SHR</i> , and the <i>PLT</i> genes.30	30
Figure 2-1: Root angle measurements.35	35
Figure 2-2: Schematic of pBINmGFP5-ER vector.....42	42
Figure 3-1: Location of the T-DNA insertion sites in <i>TEL1</i> and <i>TEL2</i>52	52
Figure 3-2: Schematic overview of <i>TEL2</i> and <i>tel2</i>52	52
Figure 3-3: <i>gnom</i> mutants.54	54
Figure 3-4: Schematic of the five <i>Arabidopsis</i> chromosomes.....57	57
Figure 3-5: The location of the T-DNA insertion sites used in this research.61	61
Figure 3-6: Phenotypic analysis of single mutants62	62
Figure 3-7: Parent plant PCR.....64	64
Figure 3-8: <i>tel1 tel2</i> progeny PCR.64	64
Figure 3-9: <i>tel1tel2</i> plants grown on soil76	76
Figure 3-10: <i>TEL1</i> gene structure and the regions used to assess expression.79	79
Figure 3-11: Plasmid for assessing expression of the <i>TEL1</i> upstream region and coding region including exons.80	80
Figure 3-12: Plasmids for assessing <i>TEL1</i> expression.....81	81
Figure 3-13: Embryos of transgenic plants transformed with the -2023 <i>TEL1::GUS</i> construct.....84	84
Figure 3-14: Mature and lateral roots of transgenic plants transformed with the -2023 <i>TEL1::GUS</i> construct.....84	84
Figure 3-15: -2023 <i>TEL1::GUS</i> staining in the SAM of transgenic plants transformed with the -2023 <i>TEL1::GUS</i> construct.85	85
Figure 3-16: GFP expression in 10 day old -1900 P _{TEL1} ::ER-GFP transgenic plants..86	86
Figure 3-17: GFP expression in lateral root primordia.....86	86
Figure 3-18: <i>TEL1</i> driven GFP expression in embryos..87	87
Figure 3-19: <i>TEL1</i> driven GFP expression in plants containing the -1000 construct..88	88
Figure 3-20: Plant hormone and auxin transporter inhibitor studies93	93
Figure 3-21: Plants containing -1000 P _{TEL1} ::ER-GFP construct respond to auxin and auxin transport inhibitors.95	95
Figure 3-22: Roots from 10 day old -1900 P _{TEL1} ::ER-GFP lines in characterised mutant backgrounds.97	97
Figure 3-23: Abnormal roots in <i>shr</i> and <i>scr-3</i> mutant plants.....97	97

List of Tables

Table 1: location of MEI2 like transcripts in <i>A. thaliana</i>	29
Table 2: Formulation of Alexander’s (1969) stain.	35
Table 3: Formulation of GUS wash solution.	37
Table 4 Quick DNA extraction buffer	38
Table 5: High Throughput DNA buffers (Xin et al., 2003).	39
Table 6: PCR reaction constituents.....	40
Table 7: List of primers and their sequences used for sequencing of <i>TEL1</i> DNA.	44
Table 8: T-DNA insert sequence.	49
Table 9: Primer sequences used for the amplification of either the wild type genomic DNA sequence or the T-DNA insert sequence from the target gene.....	50
Table 10: Expected product sizes for the amplified <i>TEL1</i> and <i>TEL2</i> alleles used in this research to create the <i>telltel2</i> double mutant.....	53
Table 11: Average root length and average number of lateral roots of <i>tell1</i> and <i>tell2</i> single mutant plants compared with their wild type cousins and <i>telltel2</i> double mutants compared with their wild type cousins.....	55
Table 12: Primer sequences used for the amplification of either the wild type genomic DNA sequence or the T-DNA insert sequence from the target gene.....	60
Table 13: Expected product sizes for <i>AML1</i> , <i>AML4</i> , <i>MCT1</i> and <i>MCT2</i> alleles from <i>Arabidopsis</i> genomic DNA.....	60
Table 14: Primers used to check for the presence or absence of T-DNA inserts.	63
Table 15: Chi-squared test of <i>telltel2</i> double knockout plants.....	65
Table 16: Comparisons between double-mutant and wild-type plants grown on sucrose and mannitol treatments.....	68
Table 17 Comparisons between double-mutant and wild-type plants grown under different growth room conditions.	70
Table 18: Comparisons between double-mutant and wild-type plants grown on medium containing hormones.....	71
Table 19: Phenotypic analysis of an additional two sets of plants with the same genetic background.	74
Table 20: Number of inflorescences and branches on <i>telltel2</i> plants compared with <i>TEL1TEL2</i> plants.	75
Table 21: Primers used to amplify <i>TEL1</i> truncated promoter regions from the BAC MJL14 PCR product.	82
Table 22: Primers used to amplify the <i>TEL1</i> gene including the 5' promoter region and introns from BAC MJL14.....	82