

**ISOLATION AND CHARACTERIZATION OF LACTIC ACID
BACTERIA FROM CHEESE****Desalegn Amenu**

College of Natural and Computational science, Biology Department, Wollega University,
P.Box, 395, Nekemte; Ethiopia.

Article Received on 10/09/2014

Article Revised on 04/10/2014

Article Accepted on 28/10/2014

***Correspondence for
Author****Dr. Desalegn Amenu**

College of Natural and
Computational science,
Biology Department,
Wollega University, P.Box,
395, Nekemte; Ethiopia.

ABSTRACT

Lactic acid bacteria are the most important and commonly used bacteria in food industrials. Specially selected starter cultures are required for the industrial production of cheese. These starter cultures are mainly composed of lactic acid bacteria (LAB). Starters LAB have many functions in cheese production. They produce lactic acid during the fermentation process and provide formation of the curd. Furthermore, they show proteolytic activity and also they play a role in

the production of aroma compounds and antimicrobial substances. In order to prevent loss of LAB biodiversity and loss of traditional cheese diversity, it is important to identify novel LAB from traditional cheese.

KEY WORDS: Lactic acid bacteria, starter culture, fermentation and isolation of LBA.

1. INTRODUCTION

Production of cheese is essentially achieved by bringing four ingredients together: milk, rennet, microorganisms, and salt. The process includes the following steps: gel formation, acid production, whey expulsion, salt addition, and finally ripening period. The main biochemical changes that occur in cheese manufacture is the production of lactic acid from lactose. This is achieved by different species of lactic acid bacteria (LAB). The responsible flora that form acid development during cheese production are starter cultures that cause decrease in the pH, formation of curd, expulsion of whey^[2].

For the identification of novel starter strains, working with fresh cheese is very important because fermentation occurs at the beginning. Strains participate in fermentation process diminish immediately after fermentation. It is reported that at the fermentation step, starter strain amount may reach up approximately 10^9 colony forming units (cfu) per g of cheese. During ripening, however, the number of starter cells decreases about two orders of magnitude ^[2]. There have been many reports about the isolation of starter LAB from traditional cheese ^[3,7,10,11,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,22].

2. Lactic Starters in Cheese Industry

According to some research conducted, in many dairy industries, starter cultures can be divided into three groups as; (1) Mesophilic starter cultures, (2) Thermophilic starter cultures, (3) Artisanal starter cultures. Each of them can be divided further: undefined cultures, in which number of strains is unknown and defined cultures which are composed of a known number of strains ^[1].

2.1. Mesophilic Starter Cultures

Mesophilic group of LAB have an optimum growth temperature at 30 °C. They are composed of species which belong to the two genera, *Lactococcus* and *Leuconostoc*. *Lactococcus lactis* ssp *lactis*, *Lactococcus lactis* ssp. *cremoris* which are acid producers and *Lactococcus lactis* ssp. *lactis* var. *diacetylactis*, *Leuconostoc lactis*, *Leuconostoc cremoris* which are flavor producers. According to the nature of flavor produced (citrate positive strains), mesophilic cultures can be divided into 4 group; 1. O type, containing only *L. lactis* ssp. *lactis* and *L. lactis* ssp. *cremoris*. 2. D type, containing citrate fermenting species as flavor producers only *L. lactis* ssp. *lactis* var. *diacetylactis*. 3. B (or L) type, containing citrate fermenting species as flavor producers only *Leuconostoc*. 4. BD (or LD) type, containing both flavor producers as *L. lactis* ssp. *lactis* var. *diacetylactis* and *Leuconostoc*.

Mesophilic starter cultures are used in the manufacture of broad range of cheese type. It was estimated that two thirds of the milk fermentation is mesophilic type. The dairy industry is concerned with strains which ferment milk as rapidly as possible. This appears to be a property of *Lactococci*. Strains of other species will lower the pH of milk at a much slower rate ^[8]. After fermentation of milk, the autolysis of the *lactococci* is occurred during following ripening times. Autolysis of starter cells is due to a muraminidase ^[2]. This could be originated by NaCl concentration and associated salt in moisture values of cheese ^[2].

2.2. Thermophilic Starter Cultures

They are used in making cheese types where high cooking temperatures are required (Emmental, Gryere, Grana, Comte). The thermophilic LAB belong to two genera which are Lactobacillus and Streptococcus. Although Lactobacillus is a large group that consists of 64 species with both homo- and heterofermentative characteristic. Only a few of them are involved in milk fermentation. The commercial lactobacilli starters mainly consist of Lactobacillus delbrueckii ssp bulgaricus, Lactobacillus delbrueckii ssp lactis and Lactobacillus helveticus which are obligate fermenters. On the other hand, Streptococcus thermophilus is only one dairy and food associated species among 27 Streptococcus species. Until recent times, it was described as Streptococcus salivarius ssp. thermophilus because it was observed to have a very close relationship with Streptococcus salivarius. After a more detailed DNA hybridization analysis, raised it to species level again [24]. Therefore, it is suggested that only the galactose fermenting lactobacilli should be used as starter together with Str. thermophilus [25].

2.3. Artisanal or “Natural” Starter Cultures

Artisanal cultures are derived from using part of a previous batch of fermented product to inoculate a new batch. For instance, Kopanisti which is a Greek cheese variety, is produced by mixing cheese from a previous batch with drained curd of new batch. It is obvious that their composition is very complex, relatively variable and often undefined. Several types of species may be present. Although their variable performance contrasts with current trends in starter technology where consistent performance is required, their replacement by defined starter systems has sometimes results in less flavor [1].

2.4. Starter Functions

2.4.1. Acid Production

LAB use carbohydrate fermentatively and produce lactic acid. Lactic acid production leads decrease in pH. Fermentation of sugars that cause leading to pH decrease is important for clotting of milk. Beside, increasing acidity initiates following desirable reactions and changes such as whey expulsion. Because there is a correlation between pH and whey expulsion from curd. Additionally, acid production has beneficial effect on formation of texture, aroma and flavor [23].

2.4.2. Proteolytic Activity

Proteolysis is an important event that occurs during cheese ripening. The lactic acid bacteria use the polypeptides. These polypeptides are generated by milk clotting enzymes and by bacterial cell-wall proteins. Rennet which is the milk clotting enzyme, is responsible for casein degradation. Because of the casein degradation peptides are produced which are transported into the cell. In the cell, peptidases continue degradation to produce smaller peptides and amino acids. It has been known that amino acid composition plays an essential role in the aroma of cheese [12].

2.4.3. Flavor Formation

The quality of cheese and other fermented food products is dependent on the ability of flavor and aroma production of microorganisms which include starter culture. Flavor compounds produced by LAB can be divided into two groups; the compounds in fermented milk, the compounds present mostly in matured cheese. First group consists of organic acids such as lactic acid and acetic acid, which are produced by *L. lactis* ssp *lactis* and *L. lactis* ssp *cremoris*. Second group consists of acetaldehyde, diacetyl, acetoin, and 2-3 butylene-glycol which are produced by *L. lactis* ssp. *lactis* biovar *diacetylactis* and *Leuconostoc* species from citrate present in milk. It has been reported that these aroma compounds might be produced to avoid to pyruvate accumulation in the cell. Moreover, improved knowledge of proteolysis and peptidolysis in cheese, analysis on enzymatic systems of LAB and evaluation of different strains, will provide better understanding between flavor development and starter activity. A number of different LAB have been evaluated for their ability to degrade amino acids to aroma compounds. *L. lactis* subsp. *lactis* and *L. lactis* subsp. *cremoris*, *Lactobacillus lactis*, *Lactobacillus helveticus*, *Lb. bulgaricus*, *Lb. casei* are capable of degrading methionine to methionethiol, dimethyldisulphide (DMDS) and dimethyltrisulphide (DMTS) [13].

2.4.4. Antimicrobial Property

LAB have been used as natural preservatives because of their antimicrobial capacity a. Through fermentation products: Antimicrobial activity can be exerted through the reduction of pH or production of organic acids (lactic acid, acetic acid), CO₂, reuterin, diacetyl, 2-pyrrorelidone, 5-carboxylic acid (PCA) (Mayra, Makinen and Bigret, 1998). Effective starter culture activity can prevent the pathogen and contaminant growth that may occur during cheese making process. b. Through bacteriocins: Bacteriocins can be defined as protein

antibiotics of relatively high molecular weight and mainly affecting the same or closely related species. It is known that LAB are generally regarded as safe microorganisms and so are their bacteriocins. Thus, these bacteriocins can potentially be used to control the growth of spoilage and pathogenic organisms in food ^[4]. Bacteriocin producing lactococcal strains have been used successfully as starter cultures for cheesemaking in order to improve the safety and quality of the cheese. In recent work, 79 wild lactococci have been studied and 32 of these have been found to be antimicrobially active ^[12]. In 17 of these strains, the well-known antimicrobial peptide nisin has been found, whereas the others produced diplococcin, lactococcin or a unidentified bacteriocin-like compound. Moreover, the use of nisin as an effective preservative in processed cheese has been widely accepted.

2.5. Commercial Production of Dairy Starter Cultures

Starter cultures are essential for industrial production of all kinds of cheese. Before adding to milk, cultures have been pre-grown in milk or milk-based media. Depending on the cheese type, the inoculation volume varies from 0.2% to 2% of volume of milk ^[8]. Each year $\sim 12.5 \times 10^{10}$ tons of milk are used in order to produce $\sim 12.5 \times 10^6$ tons of cheese worldwide. If it is assumed that 0.5% (v/v) in ratio inoculums used for each type of cheese, it indicates that $\sim 6.3 \times 10^8$ L starter is required. Commercial production of dairy starter cultures refers this mother culture.

a) Liquid Starter Culture

This is a traditional method which is based on the following procedure. First the starter is cultivated as a liquid stock culture, and then sufficient volume is obtained by subculturing. This method has advantages, if the production area and laboratory that provide culture is close. On the other hand, contamination risk due to the number of inoculations, phage infection could be faced. Strains which are kept in liquid media can easily lose its starter properties also.

b) Air Dried Culture

This method is based on the principle of adsorption of liquid cultures on a special material and drying by pulverization under the vacuum. However, during the vacuum pulverization most of the cells can die.

c) Freeze Dried Starter Cultures (Lyophilization)

Lyophilization is a process in which the product is first frozen so that a matrix is formed in which the solvent is crystallized and separated from its solute. Solvent is then removed by sublimation and desorption. Despite the advantages as easy to use, significant amounts of cell injury and death occur.

d) Freeze-Dried Concentrated Starter Culture

This method aims of direct inoculation of the milk. Freeze-dried concentrated cultures are being used extensively in Europe while in US has limited usage. This is because of that this typ of starters require more time to reach log phase of growth.

e) Frozen-Concentrated Starter Cultures

Frozen concentrated starters usually contain 10^{10} to 10^{11} cfu/g. In this method, the most critical point is rate of thawing in order to minimize cell injury. It is important to thaw the samples rapidly as possible.

2.6. Genetically Modified Lactic Acid Bacteria and Culture Improvement

Due to the considerable economical importance of LAB, culture improvement studies have been accelerated in recent years. Progress in gene technology has allowed this development. Modification has been achieved by introducing new genes to improve bacteria that better fitted to technological processes or enhanced organoleptic properties. It is expected that better understanding of the genetics and physiology of LAB will give rise to better strain use, selection and improvement ^[23]. Construction of bacteriophage resistant strains is very important. The resistance mechanisms are often carried out by plasmids and transposons. Some high level resistance plasmids were shown to carry more than one resistance mechanisms ^[6].

In some cases, the starter strains have been engineered for autolysis. These cells will lyse at an appropriate moment during cheese making. Lysis allows the release of many enzymes into cheese matrix that leads to degradation of peptide to amino acids. These free amino acids are the precursors of aromatic substances (Renault, 2003).

In the future, it will be beneficial to determine the following characteristics of the isolated strains. 1. Bacteriophage resistance. 2. Proteolytic activity. 3. Lipolytic activity. 4. Production of aroma and flavor compounds. 5. Antimicrobial properties. 6. Dietetic

properties (L- Lactic acid produced, probiotic properties). Finally, the isolated strains might also be tried for new fermented food formulations.

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