

Microbial production of dihomo- γ -linolenic acid by $\Delta 5$ -desaturase gene-disruptants of *Mortierella alpina* 1S-4

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Received 14 August 2015; accepted 9 December 2015

Available online 6 January 2016

We constructed dihomo- γ -linolenic acid (DGLA)-producing strains with disruption of the $\Delta 5$ -desaturase ($\Delta 5ds$) gene, which encodes a key enzyme catalyzing the bioconversion of DGLA to arachidonic acid (ARA), by efficient gene-targeting, using $\Delta lig4$ strain of *Mortierella alpina* 1S-4 as the host. In previous study, we had already identified and disrupted the $lig4$ gene encoding DNA ligase 4, which involves in non-homologous end joining, in *M. alpina* 1S-4, and the $\Delta lig4$ strain had showed efficient gene-targeting. In this study, the uracil auxotroph of $\Delta lig4$ strain was constructed, and then transformed for disruption of $\Delta 5ds$. The isolation of nine $\Delta 5ds$ -disruptants out of 18 isolates indicated that the disruption efficiency was 50%. The ratio of DGLA among the total fatty acids of the $\Delta 5ds$ -disruptants reached 40.1%; however, no ARA was detected. To our knowledge, this is the first study to report the construction of DGLA-producing transformants by using the efficient gene-targeting system in *M. alpina* 1S-4.

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[Key words: *Mortierella alpina*; Gene-targeting; $\Delta 5$ -desaturase; Polyunsaturated fatty acid; Dihomo- γ -linolenic acid]

Dihomo- γ -linolenic acid (20:3 ω 6, 20:3^{8cis,11cis,14cis}, DGLA) is a precursor of physiologically active eicosanoids, including group 1 prostaglandins and thromboxanes. DGLA has attracted a great deal of interest because of its unique biological activities. For example, DGLA is used in combination with interferons for the enhancement of the anti-virus, anti-cancer, or anti-inflammatory effects (1), and in combination with prostaglandin E1 for the treatment of atopy of the skin and mucosa (2). A small amount of DGLA has been detected as a component of cellular lipids in fungi (3), algae (4), protozoa (5), and animals (6).

The oil-producing fungus *Mortierella alpina* 1S-4 is a producer of carbon 20 polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs) such as arachidonic acid (20:4 ω 6, ARA) and eicosapentaenoic acid (20:5 ω 3, EPA), which are rich in triacylglycerols (7). Moreover, this fungus produces large amount of lipids. Therefore, it has been used as a model oleaginous microorganism for studying the biosynthesis and accumulation of lipids, including PUFAs (8–16). In previous studies, various PUFA-producing strains have been constructed by chemical mutation and/or molecular breeding (17,18). A $\Delta 5$ -desaturase ($\Delta 5ds$, Fig. 1) gene-defective mutant (S14) was constructed by chemical mutation, and showed high DGLA production (19,20). However, some mutants and recombinants showed unfavorable characteristics with respect to mycelia growth, spore germination, and PUFA

productivity, since the mutations and/or insertion of the plasmid vector might occur at random positions, thereby introducing defects in essential genes.

Recently, it was reported that disruption of $lig4$, which encodes DNA ligase 4, a key enzyme in non-homologous end joining, led to an improvement in gene-targeting efficiency through homologous recombination in various filamentous fungi. $lig4$ -disruptants have been used as hosts for various applications (21–25). We previously developed an efficient gene-targeting system through homologous recombination in *M. alpina* 1S-4 by disrupting $lig4$ to avoid unfavorable gene mutations and random insertions (26).

In this study, we aimed to develop a highly efficient DGLA-producing strain that does not harbor unfavorable mutations and gene-defects from *M. alpina* 1S-4 by gene-targeting. We obtained a uracil auxotrophic ($ura5^-$) strain as a host strain from the efficient gene-targeting strain ($\Delta lig4::ura5$) (26), and attempted to construct a DGLA-producing strain by disrupting $\Delta 5ds$.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Enzymes and chemicals Restriction enzymes and other DNA-modifying enzymes were obtained from Takara Bio (Shiga, Japan). All other chemicals were of the highest purity commercially available.

Strains, media, and growth conditions *Mortierella alpina* 1S-4 has been deposited in the Graduate School of Agriculture of Kyoto University (17). Czapek–Dox agar medium containing 0.05 mg/ml uracil, was used for sporulation of the uracil auxotrophic ($ura5^-$) strain, as described previously (27). Strains used in this research were listed in Table 1. Synthetic complete (SC) medium was used as a uracil-free synthetic medium to cultivate the transformants derived from the uracil auxotrophs at 28°C (27). GY medium (2% [w/vol] glucose and 1% yeast

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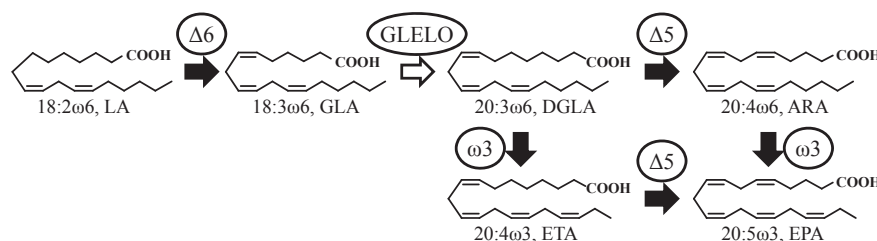


FIG. 1. Polyunsaturated fatty acid (PUFA) biosynthetic pathways in *M. alpina* 1S-4. ARA is synthesized by the desaturation of DGLA at the $\Delta 5$ -position by $\Delta 5$ -desaturase. LA, linoleic acid; GLA, γ -linolenic acid; DGLA, dihomo- γ -linolenic acid; ARA, arachidonic acid; ETA, $\omega 3$ -eicosatetraenoic acid; EPA, eicosapentaenoic acid; $\Delta 6$, $\Delta 6$ -desaturase; GLELO, $\Delta 6$ -elongase; $\Delta 5$, $\Delta 5$ -desaturase; $\omega 3$, $\omega 3$ -desaturase.

TABLE 1. *M. alpina* 1S-4 strains used in this study.

Strain	Parental strain	Genotype	Reference
<i>M. alpina</i> 1S-4	—	Wild-type	7
Uracil auxotroph of wild-type	Wild-type	<i>ura5</i> ⁻	7
$\Delta 5ds$ -defective mutant S14	Wild-type	$\Delta 5ds$ ⁻	20
$\Delta lig4$	Uracil auxotroph of wild-type	<i>ura5</i> ⁻ $\Delta lig4::ura5$	26
Uracil auxotroph of $\Delta lig4$	$\Delta lig4$	<i>ura5</i> ⁻ $\Delta lig4::ura5$ ⁻	This study
$\Delta 5ds$ -disruptants	Uracil auxotroph of $\Delta lig4$	<i>ura5</i> ⁻ $\Delta lig4::ura5$ ⁻ $\Delta \Delta 5ds::ura5$	This study

extract) was used for fatty acid analysis and extraction of genomic DNA. GY agar plates containing 0.1% 5-fluoroorotic acid (5-FOA) were used to obtain uracil auxotrophs from the *lig4* gene-disrupted ($\Delta lig4::ura5$) strain (26). Uracil-free SC agar plates containing 0.03% Nile blue A (Sigma—Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA) and GY agar plates containing 10 μ g/ml carboxin and 0.03% Nile blue A were used to select transformants. *Escherichia coli* strain DH5 α was used for DNA manipulation and was grown on LB agar plates containing 50 μ g/ml kanamycin. *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* C58C1 was used to transform the *M. alpina* 1S-4 *ura5*⁻ strain. LB-Mg agar medium, minimal medium, and induction medium were used for transformation, cultivation, and infection of *A. tumefaciens*, respectively (28). All solid media were made with 2.0% agar.

Isolation of uracil auxotrophs of the $\Delta lig4::ura5$ strain from *M. alpina* 1S-4 Uracil auxotrophs were isolated as described previously (29). The $\Delta lig4$ strain from *M. alpina* 1S-4 was incubated on Czapek—Dox agar medium at 28°C for a month, and allowed to sporulate at 12°C for a month. Spores of the $\Delta lig4::ura5$ strain were harvested from the surface of Czapek—Dox medium (2.6×10^8 spores/225 cm²); 2.6×10^7 spores were spread on GY agar medium containing 5-FOA (1.0 mg/ml) and uracil (0.05 mg/ml).

Identification of a mutation site on *ura5* integrated in the *lig4* genomic gene locus The *lig4* gene locus containing the *ura5* gene marker cassette was amplified with Lig4 up F and Lig4 down R primers (Table 2), using genomic DNA isolated from the uracil auxotroph of the *lig4* gene-disrupted strain as a template. The PCR product was sequenced with a Beckman—Coulter CEQ8000 system using Hispro stop F, *ura5* 300 F, *ura5* 400 R, and SdhBt R primers (Table 2).

Genomic DNA preparation *Mortierella alpina* strains were cultivated in 100 ml of GY liquid medium at 28°C for 5 days with shaking at 100 rpm. Their genomic DNA was prepared as described previously (26).

Construction of the plasmid vector for $\Delta 5ds$ gene-targeting A T-DNA binary vector for $\Delta 5ds$ gene-targeting was constructed by modifying the *M. alpina* 1S-4

transformation vector pBIG35Zh (28). The $\Delta 5ds$ front fragment (1.2-kb) and $\Delta 5ds$ rear fragment (2.4-kb) were amplified with primer sets, $\Delta 5$ F1 *Apal* and $\Delta 5$ R1 *Apal*, and $\Delta 5$ F2 *XbaI* and $\Delta 5$ R2 *XbaI* (Table 2), by using the genomic DNA of *M. alpina* 1S-4 as a template. The $\Delta 5ds$ rear fragment was digested with *XbaI* and ligated into pBIG35Zh digested with same restriction enzyme. Then, the $\Delta 5ds$ front fragment was digested with *Apal* and ligated into the resulting plasmid vectors digested with same restriction enzyme and designated pBIG35Z $\Delta 5$ (Fig. 2). The sequences between the left and right borders were integrated into the genomic DNA of spores of *M. alpina* 1S-4 through *A. tumefaciens*.

Transformation of the $\Delta lig4$ strain of *M. alpina* 1S-4 Spores of the uracil auxotroph of the $\Delta lig4$ strain was freshly prepared from cultures growing on Czapek—Dox agar medium supplemented with 0.05 mg/ml uracil, and the suspension was filtered through Miracloth (Calbiochem) (27).

Transformation of the *M. alpina* strains were performed using the *Agrobacterium tumefaciens*-mediated transformation (ATMT) method, as described previously (26).

Fatty acid analysis Fatty acid productivity and composition of the transformants were analyzed as described previously (26). The mycelia of the $\Delta lig4$ uracil auxotroph strain used as a host strain, the $\Delta 5ds$ gene-defective mutant S14 (20), and the $\Delta 5ds$ -disruptants were inoculated into 10 ml of GY liquid medium and cultivated at 28°C with reciprocal shaking at 300 rpm for 7 days. After cultivation, the fungal strains were harvested by filtration and used for fatty acid analysis. All experiments were performed in triplicate, and the average of three separate experiments is presented as the mean \pm SD in Table 3.

Identification of gene disruption by PCR and Southern blot analysis Recombinants transformed with the pBIG35Z $\Delta 5$ vector were repeatedly cultured on fresh SC agar medium containing no uracil at least three times to prevent contamination of abortive recombinants. $\Delta 5ds$ -disruptants were selected for PCR analysis by using the $\Delta 5ds$ genomic gene locus amplified with the $\Delta 5$ up F and $\Delta 5$ down R primers (Table 2) as the template and primer sets, $\Delta 5$ F1 *Apal* and $\Delta 5$

TABLE 2. Primers used in this study.

Primer	Sequence (5' to 3')
Lig4 up F	GTGTGCCATCAACACGTTGTCTGC
Lig4 down R	CCAAGAACGACATGTCAATGTACG
Hispro stop F	CTCACCAACACTCTCTCAAC
<i>ura5</i> 300 F	CTGCACCACCGTCATTCGCTTG
<i>ura5</i> 400 R	CATGGTCTCTTTTCTCTTTCG
SdhBt R	GAGGTAGTTCCGTTGGGTCGCTAC
$\Delta 5$ F1 <i>Apal</i>	GCGGGCCCTTTTGTTCCTTGATCCTCACATTC ^a
$\Delta 5$ R1 <i>Apal</i>	GCGGGCCCAAGAAGCTTTGTGACATCGTATAC
$\Delta 5$ F2 <i>XbaI</i>	GCTCTAGATCTGTTCCCGAACGTTTCCAGC
$\Delta 5$ R2 <i>XbaI</i>	GGTCTAGAGCGATAATTATGAAAACCTTACC
$\Delta 5$ up F	CGTCTCTACGATCTCTGACCCGAC
$\Delta 5$ down R	CCACATGGTACCAAGCGTGGGCTG
SdhBt stop F	CGAGATGTCGACGCTGAGCTAAGC
$\Delta 5$ down R2	GCTCTCTACCTGTACATGC
<i>ura5</i> start F	GGATTACCAGCGGAGTTTC
<i>ura5</i> stop R	TAAACACCGTACTTCTCCGGG

^a The underlined sequences represent the synthesized restriction enzyme sites.

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