
Detection and Expression of Biosynthetic Genes in Actinobacteria

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Table of Contents

Declarations	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
List of Figures	v
List of Tables	vii
List of Abbreviations	x
Aims of project, experimental objectives, null hypothesis	xii
Chapter 1: Introduction	
Section 1: General Aspects of Actinobacteria	1
1.1.1 Description of genetic, biochemical and morphological features of Actinobacteria	1
1.1.2 Industrial Relevance of Actinobacteria	1
1.1.3 Sources of Actinobacterial Secondary Metabolite Diversity	2
1.1.4 Evolution of biosynthetic pathways and their relation to secondary metabolite production	3
1.1.5 Classification of Actinobacteria	3
1.1.6 Actinobacterial Genetic Diversity and Drug Discovery	4
1.1.7 Activities of Actinobacteria in the natural habitat	4
Section 2: Biology of Secondary Metabolism and the Discovery of Secondary Metabolites in Actinobacteria	5
1.2.1 Microbial secondary metabolism	5
1.2.1.1 Secondary metabolite production	5
1.2.1.2 Functions of Secondary Metabolites	6
1.2.1.3 Resistance Mechanisms and Secondary Metabolite Secretion	6
1.2.2 Microbial Screening for Secondary Metabolites	7
1.2.2.1 Rapid identification of microbial metabolites	9
1.2.2.2 Chemical screening using chromatography and spectroscopy	9
Section 3: Secondary Metabolites Produced by Actinobacteria	11
1.3.1 General Aspects of Polyketides	11
1.3.1.1 Polyketide Biosynthesis Pathway	13
1.3.1.2 Polyketide Synthases (PKS)	14
1.3.1.3 Biosynthetic Genes Clusters of Type I Polyketide Synthases	14
1.3.1.4 Biosynthetic Gene Clusters of Type II Polyketide Synthases	16
1.3.2 Biosynthesis of Deoxysugar Aminoglycoside Antibiotics	19
1.3.2.1 Aminoglycoside Deoxysugar Biosynthetic Genes in Actinobacteria	20
1.3.3 β -Lactam Antibiotics	21
1.3.3.1 β -lactam biosynthetic genes	22
Section 4: Gene expression in Actinobacteria	24
1.4.1 Regulation of Gene Expression in Actinobacteria	24
1.4.1.1 Transcription	25

1.4.1.2 Codon Usage (CU)	27
Section 5: Genetic Factors Affecting the Production of Secondary Metabolites	27
1.5.1 Plasmid Instability	27
1.5.2 Induced Mutagenesis	27
Section 6: Molecular Techniques used to Detect Secondary Metabolite Biosynthetic Genes	28
1.6.1 DNA Homology of Secondary Metabolite Biosynthetic Genes (SMBG) in Actinobacteria	29
1.6.2 Detection of Secondary Metabolite Biosynthetic Genes in Actinobacteria using Heterologous DNA Probes	29
1.6.3 Detection of Secondary Metabolite Biosynthetic Genes using Polymerase Chain Reaction	32
1.6.3.1 PCR Screening of SMBG in Natural Actinobacterial Populations	33
1.6.3.2 PCR Cloning and Screening of SMBG in Actinobacteria	34
1.6.4 Accessing Secondary Metabolite Diversity from Uncultured Soil Microorganisms	35
Section 7: Production of Secondary Metabolites	36
1.7.1 Physical Conditions Affecting Secondary Metabolite Production	37
1.7.2 Submerged Fermentation (SmF) Conditions Affecting Secondary Metabolite Production	37
1.7.2.1 Components of fermentation media	38
1.7.2.2 Macronutrients	38
1.7.2.2.1 Carbon Source	38
1.7.2.2.2 Nitrogen Source	39
1.7.2.2.3 Phosphate Source	39
1.7.2.2.4 Sulfur, Potassium, Magnesium Sources	40
1.7.2.3 Inorganic and Organic Micronutrients	41
1.7.2.4 Temperature Shifts	42
1.7.2.5 pH Effects	44
1.7.2.6 Dissolved Oxygen	44
1.7.2.7 Precursors, Cofactors and Nucleotides	45
1.7.2.8 Enzyme Inhibitors and Repressors of Secondary Metabolism	45
1.7.2.9 Autoregulators	46
1.7.2.10 Miscellaneous Factors Influencing Secondary Metabolite Production	46
1.7.3 Solid State Fermentations	47
Section 8: Genetic Modification of Biosynthetic Genes and the Development of Novel Compounds	48
1.8.1 Genetic manipulation of secondary metabolite producing Actinobacteria	48
1.8.2 Metabolic Engineering of Secondary metabolite Producing Actinobacteria	49

Chapter 2: Materials and Methods

Section 2.1: General Microbiological Methods	52
2.1.1 Actinobacteria Cultures	52
2.1.2 Maintaining Cultures (solid media)	53
Section 2.2: Primer Design For Actinobacteria-Specific Secondary Metabolite Biosynthetic Genes	53
2.2.1 In silico Analysis of Nucleotide Sequences	53
2.2.1.1 Retrieval of Nucleotide Sequences from databases	54
2.2.1.2 PILEUP Multiple Sequence Alignment (MSA) Program	55
2.2.1.3 PRETTY Consensus Sequence Program	55
2.2.1.4 Database Similarity of Primer Sequence using the FASTA program	55
2.2.1.5 Calculating Annealing Temperatures of Primers	55
2.2.1.6 <i>In silico</i> PCR experiments using AMPLIFY simulation program	56
2.2.1.7 Selection of primers for screening	56
Section 2.3: Molecular Biology Methodologies	57
2.3.1 Extraction of Bacterial DNA	57
2.3.2 PCR Reaction Conditions	57
2.3.2.1 General PCR Conditions for Designed Non-degenerate Primers	58
2.3.2.2 Degenerate PCR Conditions for Type I PKS	58
2.3.2.3 PCR Controls	59
2.3.2.4 Agarose Electrophoresis of PCR Products	60
Section 2.4: Analysis of sequenced amplified PCR products	60
Section 2.5: Phylogenetic Analysis	61
Section 2.6: Extraction and Processing of Actinobacteria Culture Extracts	61
2.6.1 Actinobacteria agar metabolite extraction	62
2.6.1.1 Small scale actinobacteria fermentation metabolite extraction and processing	63
2.6.2 Large scale production and recovery of antimicrobial metabolites	63
2.6.3 Concentration of Extract	64
Section 2.7: Bioassays of Secondary Metabolites	64
2.7.1 Plug Type Bioassay	64
2.7.2 Well Type Bioassay	65
2.7.3 Bioautography	65
Section 2.8: Fermentation of Secondary Metabolites	65
2.8.1 Small Scale Submerged Shake-Flask Fermentations	65
2.8.2 Small Scale Solid State Fermentations (SSF)	66
2.8.3 Liquid Fermentations Supplemented with Refined Oils	67
Section 2.9: Physicochemical Characterisation Methods Used to Elucidate Semi-Purified Fermented Extract	67
2.9.1 Thin Layer Chromatography (TLC)	68
2.9.2 Ultraviolet-Spectrophotometry	68

2.9.3	Reverse-Phase High Performance Liquid Chromatography (RP-HPLC)	68
2.9.4	HPLC/UV Mass Spectrometry (MS)	69
2.9.5	Literature Searching of Natural Product databases	69

Chapter 3: Results

Section 3.1: Development of a Polymerase Chain Reaction-Based Screening Assay for the Detection of SMBG	70
3.1.1 Primer design and PCR screening assay for actinobacterial type II PKS synthases	70
3.1.2 PCR Screening Assay for Modular Polyketide Synthases	82
3.1.3 PCR Screening Assay for dDTP-Glucose Synthase	88
3.1.4 PCR Screening Assay for Isopenicillin N Synthase Gene	92
Section 3.2: Chemical Screening for Secondary Metabolites in Actinobacteria	97
3.2.1 Bioassays of Environmental Actinobacteria cultures	97
3.2.1.1 Plug Type Antimicrobial Assays	98
3.2.1.2 Well Type Antimicrobial Assays of Metabolites Extracted from Agar	98
3.2.2 Small Scale Liquid Fermentations of Antimicrobial Producing Actinobacteria	98
3.2.2.1 Well-Type Antimicrobial Assays of Metabolites Extracted from Liquid Fermentation Media	98
3.2.3 Improving Antimicrobial Metabolite Production in Low Yielding Actinobacteria Cultures	99
3.2.3.1 Solid-Substrate Fermentations (SSF)	99
3.2.3.2 Liquid Fermentations Supplemented with Refined Oils	102
3.2.4 Thin Layer Chromatography (TLC) of Antimicrobial Metabolites from Fermented Actinobacteria Cultures	103
3.2.4.1 Liquid Fermentations	104
3.2.5 Bioautography of Antimicrobial Metabolites	105
3.2.6 UV-Vis Spectroscopy of Semi-Purified Antimicrobial Organic Extract	107
3.2.7 Reverse-Phase High Performance Liquid Chromatography of Semi-Purified Antimicrobial Organic Extracts	109
3.2.8 Determination of antibacterial activity of HPLC fractions from Organic Extracts	110
3.2.9 Electrospray Ionisation High Performance Liquid-Chromatography Mass-Spectrometry (ES –HPLC-MS) of Organic Extracts	110
3.2.10 Literature search of natural product database of organic extract physico-chemico characteristics	111

Chapter 4: Discussion

4.1: PCR screening assays for detecting biosynthetic capability in environmental actinobacteria	112
4.1.1 Design of PCR primers	113
4.1.2 Type II Polyketide Synthase	113
4.1.3 Type I Polyketide Synthase	115
4.1.4 dTDP – glucose synthase	117
4.1.5 Isopenicillin N synthase	118
4.2: Secondary metabolite production of actinobacteria	121
4.2.1 Solid Agar	121
4.2.2 Submerged Fermentations	121
4.2.2.1 Carbon Sources	121
4.2.2.2 Nitrogen sources	122
4.2.2.3 Suitability of liquid media for secondary metabolite screening	123
4.2.2.4 Effect of oil supplementation to submerged fermentations	123
4.2.2.5 Duration for chemical expression of bioactive metabolites	124
4.3: Correlation between genetic screening and antibiotic effects	124
4.4: Adaptation of cultivation conditions for secondary metabolite Screening	126
4.4.1 Solid Substrate Fermentations	126
4.5: Extractability of bioactive metabolites	127
4.6: Isolation of Bioactive Metabolites	128
4.7: UV-Vis Spectroscopy scanning of organic extracts	129
4.8: Analysis of bioactive organic extracts by Reverse-Phase High Performance Liquid Chromatography (RP-HPLC) with UV-Visible Diode Array and Electrospray Ionisation- mass Spectrometric (ESI-MS) detection	130
4.9: Conclusions	132
APPENDIX 1: Conference presentation and Awards	
A1.1: Conference Presentation	134
A1.2: Awards	134
REFERENCES	135

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Adelaide, May 2008

George Bervanakis

DECLARATIONS

I certify that this Masters thesis entitled “Detection and Expression of Biosynthetic Genes in Actinobacteria” constitutes my own work and has been carried out by myself, unless stated otherwise. The thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief that it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text. The work described in this thesis was performed by myself while I was enrolled as a Masters of Science student at Flinders University of South Australia, (Biotechnology, School of Medicine), Department of Microbiology and Infectious Diseases, Faculty of Health Sciences.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Abstract

Most microbial organic molecules are secondary metabolites which consist of diverse chemical structures and a range of biological activities. Actinobacteria form a large group of Eubacteria that are prolific producers of these metabolites. The recurrence of pathogens resistant to antibiotics and a wider use of these metabolites apart from their use as anti-infectives, has been the impetus for pharmaceutical companies to search for compounds produced by rare and existing actinobacterial cultures.

Accessing microbial biosynthetic pathway diversity has been possible through the use of sensitive and innovative molecular detection methodologies. The present study evaluated the use of molecular based screening as a rational approach to detect secondary metabolite biosynthetic genes (SMBG) in uncharacterised natural Actinobacterial populations. A polymerase chain reaction (PCR) approach was selected for ease of application and high sample processivity. Rational designed screening approaches using PCR in the discovery of SMBG, involved identifying common functions in secondary metabolite biosynthetic pathways, such as condensation reactions in polyketide synthesis, genes encoding these functions, and using conserved regions of these genes as templates for the design of primers to detect similar sequences in uncharacterised actinobacteria. Design of primers involved rigorous *in silico* analysis followed by experimentation and validation.

PCR screening was applied to 22 uncharacterised environmental isolates, eight of these displayed the presence of the ketosynthase (*KS*) gene belonging to the type I polyketide synthases and eight contained the ketosynthase (*KS_α*) gene belonging to the type II polyketide synthases, six of the isolates contained the presence of a presumptive dTDP-glucose synthase (*strD*) gene which is involved in the formation of deoxysugar components of aminoglycoside antibiotics and one isolate contained the presence of a presumptive isopenicillin N synthase (*pcbC*) gene involved in beta-lactam synthesis. Alignments of partially sequenced PCR products from isolates A1488 and A3023 obtained using type II PKS primers showed close similarities with *KS_α* genes from antibiotic producing actinobacteria. Similarly, alignments of

sequences from isolates A1113 and A0350 showed regions of similarities to *KS* genes from antibiotic producing actinobacteria.

Fermentation techniques were used for inducing expression of secondary metabolites from the uncharacterised actinobacteria isolates. By using antimicrobial guided screening it was determined that most of the isolates possessed the capacity to produce antimicrobial metabolites. Dominant antagonistic activity was detected against Gram positive bacteria and to a minor extent against fungi. Optimal fermentation liquid media were identified for certain isolates for the production of antimicrobial metabolites. Two alternative fermentation methods; solid-state and liquid-oil fermentations were evaluated to improve secondary metabolite production in the uncharacterised isolates. Solid-substrate fermentation showed that it could induce a complex metabolite pattern by TLC analysis, however this pattern varied according to the substrate being used. Liquid media supplemented with refined oils, showed a positive response indicated by higher antibacterial activities detected.

Evaluation of semi-purified organic extracts identified two isolates A1113 and A0350 producing similar antimicrobial metabolites as detected by HPLC/UV/MS, a literature database search of similar compounds containing the same molecular weight identified the compound as belonging to the actinomycin group of compounds. A complex metabolic pattern was identified for isolate A2381, database searching identified some of the compounds as having similar molecular weights to actinopyrones, trichostatins, antibiotics PI 220, WP 3688-5 and YL 01869P.

Drug discovery screening can serve to benefit from PCR detection of biochemical genotypes in initial screens, providing a rapid approach in identifying secondary metabolite producing capabilities of microorganisms prior to the commencement of costly and time consuming fermentation studies. Additionally the identification of biochemical genotypes allows a directed approach in using fermentation media designed to induce biosynthetic pathways of specific classes of compounds.

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Primary metabolic pathways leading to the formation of secondary metabolites _____	5
Figure 2: Schematic representation of a bacterial cell eliciting resistance mechanisms _____	7
Figure 3: Clustering of biosynthetic and resistance genes, a segment of the <i>Streptomyces fradiae</i> genome containing tylosin biosynthetic genes (EDHFJ) and tylosin resistance genes [tlrB,tlrC] _____	7
Figure 4: Screening process for a new bioactive microbial metabolite _____	8
Figure 5: Illustration depicting the key enzyme reactions in polyketide biosynthesis _____	13
Figure 6: General modular organization of the type I PKS _____	14
Figure 7: Modular organization of two polyketide synthases _____	16
Figure 8: Aromatic polyketide biosynthesis of the gene products from the actinorhodin PKS cluster _____	17
Figure 9: Structural organization of aromatic polyketide synthase genes of various secondary metabolites produced by actinobacteria _____	18
Figure 10A: Streptomycin (str) gene clusters of <i>S. griseus</i> N2-3-11 and <i>S. glaucescens</i> GLA.0 _____	20
Figure 10B: Streptomycin biosynthetic pathway in <i>Streptomyces griseus</i> _____	20
Figure 11: The general structure of β -lactams _____	21
Figure 12: β -lactam biosynthetic gene cluster _____	23
Figure 13: Illustration depicting the key enzymatic reactions in the β -lactam biosynthetic pathway _____	23
Figure 14: Diagram depicting the regulatory network in response to a stimulus and the changes accompanying a cells activities and functions _____	25
Figure 15: Cloning soil DNA for isolating new biosynthetic pathways for the synthesis of bioactive molecules from noncultured soil microorganisms _____	36
Figure 16: The influence of temperatures permitting vegetative growth on secondary metabolism _____	43
Figure 17: Flow chart depicting the strategy employed for selecting and validating appropriate primer sequences _____	54
Figure 18: Schematic flow diagram of the isolation of microbial bioactive secondary metabolites _____	62
Figure 19: Illustration depicting the conserved minimal PKS gene organization in Type II PKS _____	71
Figure 20: Comparison of the amino acid sequences of KS α genes _____	73
Figure 21: Comparison of the nucleic acid sequences of KS α genes _____	75
Figure 22: PCR amplification of 0.47 kb KS α internal fragment by PCR from environmental actinobacterial isolates _____	78
Figure 23: Multiple sequence alignment of β -Ketoacyl synthase (KS α) genes from type II PKS of spore antibiotic producing actinobacteria with amplified environmental KS α genes from actinobacterial isolates A1488 and A3023 _____	79
Figure 24: Unrooted neighbour-joining phylogenetic tree constructed from amino acid sequences of KS α gene fragments from type II polyketide synthases _____	81

Figure 25: Amplification of 0.75 kb ketosynthase fragment using degenerate PCR primers from the Cerylid cultures _____	84
Figure 26: Multiple sequence alignment of the ketosynthase (KS) gene from secondary metabolite producing actinobacteria and amplified KS from environmental actinobacteria A1113 and A0350 _____	86
Figure 27: Unrooted neighbour-joining phylogenetic tree constructed from amino acid sequences of KS gene fragments from type I polyketide synthases _____	87
Figure 28: Illustration depicting the organization of the deoxyhexose genes _____	89
Figure 29: Agarose gel electrophoresis of 0.37 kb strD segment amplified DNA from aminoglycoside positive actinobacterial type cultures _____	90
Figure 30: Amplification of 0.37 kb glucose dTDP glucose synthase fragment by PCR from environmental actinobacterial cultures _____	91
Figure 31: Illustration depicting organization of the β -lactam genes in actinobacteria _____	93
Figure 32: Agarose gel electrophoresis of 0.35 kb isopenicillin N synthase (<i>pcbC</i>) segment amplified DNA from β -lactam positive actinobacterial type cultures _____	94
Figure 33: Thin Layer Chromatography of Fermented Actinobacterial Cultures _____	103
Figure 34: Bioautogram of Extracted Metabolites from Fermented Actinobacterial Cultures _____	105
Figure 35: Spectogram of antimicrobial semi-purified organic extract _____	107
Figure 36: HPLC elution profile of organic extracts obtained from isolates A1113 and A0350 _____	109
Figure 37A: The chemical structure of Actinomycin D _____	132
Figure 37B: The chemical structure of Canicidin D an example of a heptaene macrolide, containing 21 carbon bonds _____	132
Figure 38A: The chemical structure of actinopyrone _____	133
Figure 38B: The chemical structure of trichostatin A _____	133

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Screening assays used for assessing bioactive metabolites _____	7
Table 2: Variation of culture conditions _____	10
Table 3: Polyketide compounds produced by actinobacteria _____	12
Table 4: Aminoglycoside antibiotics produced by actinobacteria _____	19
Table 5: Classes of β -lactams and their respective producing microorganisms _____	22
Table 6: Examples of genes for pathway-specific regulators in the biosynthesis of secondary metabolites in actinobacteria _____	25
Table 7: Mutagenesis of secondary metabolite producing actinobacteria _____	28
Table 8: DNA Probes used in the detection of SMBG in <i>Actinobacteria</i> spp _____	31
Table 9: PCR Screening for SMBG in <i>Actinobacteria</i> spp _____	35
Table 10: Factors affecting secondary metabolism _____	37
Table 11: Inhibition of secondary metabolism by nutrients _____	38
Table 12: Secondary metabolite synthases whose production is repressed by various carbon sources _____	39
Table 13: Phosphate-regulated enzymes involved in secondary metabolite biosynthesis _____	40
Table 14: The effects of iron and zinc on the production of chloramphenicol by <i>Streptomyces venezuelae</i> _____	42
Table 15: Enzyme Inhibitors of Secondary Metabolite Production in Actinobacteria _____	45
Table 16: Autoregulators effecting secondary metabolite production in actinobacteria _____	46
Table 17: Application of SSF to secondary metabolites produced by actinobacteria _____	48
Table 18: Actinobacterial Pure Cultures _____	52
Table 19: Cerylid Environmental Actinobacterial Isolates _____	53
Table 20: Primer sequences and predicted lengths of PCR amplification products _____	56
Table 21: Primer sequences and predicted lengths of PCR amplification products _____	56
Table 22: PCR reaction components for amplification with the designed primers show in table 20 _____	57
Table 23: PCR cycling profile for amplification with the designed primers shown in table 20 _____	57
Table 24: PCR Reaction Components for Type I PKS genes _____	59
Table 25: PCR Cycling Profile for amplification of Type I PKS genes _____	59
Table 26: Sequences of oligonucleotides primers used for 16SrDNA _____	60
Table 27: Test Cultures for Bioassays _____	64
Table 28: Production media used for the secondary metabolite studies _____	66
Table 29: Solid Substrate Fermentation Media _____	66
Table 30: HPLC conditions and parameters _____	68
Table 31: HPLC/UV MS conditions and parameters _____	69
Table 32: Type II PKS genes with respective nucleic acid and amino acid sequences incorporated into the design of the act04f and act06r PCR primers _____	70
Table 33: Relative amino acid positions and codon degeneracies of act04f and act06r primers within the sequence _____	72
Table 34: Relative nucleic acid positions of act04f and act06r primers and variable nucleotides within the sequence _____	72

Table 35: Cerylid actinobacterial isolates A1488 and A3023 nucleotide and translated amino acid sequence, percentage similarity with aromatic PKS genes using gapped-FASTA database search _____	80
Table 36: Secondary metabolite biosynthetic gene nucleic acid and amino acid sequences incorporated into the design of the ole01f and ole01r PCR primers _____	82
Table 37: Relative amino acid positions and codon degeneracies of ole01f and ole01r primers within the sequence _____	83
Table 38: Relative nucleic acid positions and of ole01f and ole01r primers and variable nucleotides within the sequence _____	83
Table 39: Comparison of PCR amplified KS gene from Cerylid cultures A0350 and A1113 sequence percentage similarity with mPKS genes using the FASTA database search _____	85
Table 40: Secondary metabolite biosynthetic gene nucleic acid and amino acid sequences incorporated into the design of the strD01f and strD01r PCR primers _____	88
Table 41: Relative amino acid positions and codon degeneracies of strD01f and strD01r primers within the sequence _____	89
Table 42: Relative nucleic acid positions and of strD01f and strD01r primers and variable nucleotides within the sequence _____	89
Table 43: Comparison of nucleotide and amino acids from amplified dTDP-glucose synthase gene from <i>Streptomyces griseus</i> DSM40236 Type Strain with dTDP-glucose synthase from different actinobacterial strains _____	91
Table 44: Isopenicillin N synthase genes with their corresponding nucleic acid and amino acid sequences incorporated into the design of the pcb03f and pcb03r PCR primers _____	92
Table 45: Relative amino acid positions and codon degeneracies of pcb03f and pcb03r primers within the sequence _____	93
Table 46: Relative nucleic acid positions and of pcb03f and pcb03r primers and variable nucleotides within the sequence _____	94
Table 47: Comparison of nucleotide and amino acid sequences from isopenicillin N synthase (<i>pcbC</i>) gene with sequenced <i>Streptomyces griseus</i> NRRL3851 and <i>Streptomyces cattleya</i> ATCC8507 Type Strains _____	95
Table 48: Summary of PCR screening on Cerylid environmental isolates _____	96
Table 49: Antibacterial and antifungal activities of extracts from the Cerylid environmental actinobacterial cultures: plug and well type diffusion assays _____	97
Table 50: Fermentation analysis, depicting the antimicrobial activities for supernatant and mycelial extracts of the Cerylid environmental actinobacterial isolates _____	99
Table 51: Comparison of fermentation conditions for bioactive metabolite screening _____	100
Table 52: Characterization of ethyl acetate extracted metabolites from A2707 culture on different solid-substrate fermentation media _____	101
Table 53: Well-Type anti-bacterial assay of mycelium extracted metabolites from actinobacterial liquid-oil fermentations after 10 days incubation _____	102

Table 54: Chemical metabolic banding profile of compounds using TLC visualized under short wavelength fluorescent light at 254 _{nm} and location of biological active fractions from fermented mycelial extracts _____	104
Table 55: Comparison of the results of the metabolic screening strategies employed in this study _____	106
Table 56: Maximum absorption wavelength λ_{max} detected from semi-purified extracts using UV-Vis Spectroscopy _____	108
Table 57: Summary of mass – spectrometry _____	111
Table 58: Compound database matches with organic extracts _____	111

List of Abbreviations

AA	amino acid
ACP	acyl carrier protein
ACV	δ -(L-a-aminoadipyl)-L-cysteinyl-D-valine
ARS	Agriculture Research Service
AT	acyl transferase
ATCC	American Type Culture Collection
ATP	adenosine triphosphate
AU	absorbance units
BA	bioassay agar
BDH	British Drug House
BLAST	Basic Local Alignment Search Tool
bp	base pair
BSN	broth supernatant
C	carbon
CLF	chain length factor
cm	centimeters
CoA	coenzyme A
CU	codon usage
Da	Dalton
DDBJ	DNA Database of Japan
DEBS	deoxyerythronolide B synthase
DEX	dextrin
DNA	deoxyribonucleic acid
6DOHS	6-deoxysugars
DSM	German Culture Collection
EDTA	ethylenediamine tetra-acetic acid
EMBL	European Molecular Biology Laboratory
EMS	electrospray mass spectrometry
ESI	electrospray ionisation source
EtAc	ethyl acetate
EtOH	ethanol
g	gram
gDNA	genomic deoxyribonucleic acid
h	hour
IPNS	isopenicillin N synthase
kb	kilobase
KR	ketoreductase
KS α	ketosynthase alpha
LC-MS	liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry
LSA	linseed, safflower, and almond crushed seeds
ME	mycelial extracts
MeOH	methanol
min	minutes
mg	milligram
mAU	milli-absorbance units
ml	millilitres

µl	microlitres
µM	micromolar
MS	mass spectrometry
MSA	multiple sequence alignment
mM	milli molar
m/z	mass-to-charge ratio
nm	nanometer
NA	nucleic acid
NRRL	Northern Regional Research Laboratories Culture Collection
°C	degrees Celsius
OLV	olive Oil
ORF	open reading frame
pcbAB	δ-(L-α-aminoadipyl)-L-cysteinyI-D-valine synthase
pcbC	isopenicillin N synthase
PCR	polymerase chain reaction
PDA	Photo Diode Array
PK	Polyketide
PKS	Polyketide Synthetase
R _f	relative mobility
rpm	revolutions per minute
RP-HPLC	reverse-phase high performance liquid chromatography
rRNA	ribosomal ribonucleic acid
σ	sigma
SAF	safflower oil
SBM	soya bean meal
SDS	sodiumdodecylsulphate
SI	sucrose inorganic salts medium
SM	secondary metabolites
SMBG	secondary metabolite biosynthetic genes
SmF	submerged fermentation
SOY	soya oil
SSF	solid-substrate fermentation
spp.	species
SUN	sunflower oil
TLC	thin-layer chromatography
TBE	tris-borate buffer
T _m	melting point temperature
TSB	Tryptic Soy Broth
UV-Vis	Ultra-Violet Visible
VO	vegetable Oil
v/v	volume per volume
WAL	walnut oil
w/v	weight per volume
YME	Yeast-Malt Extract Agar

Aims of the Project

- 1) Identify biochemical genotypes in a range of actinobacteria cultures from different environments, which are related to the productivity of secondary metabolites.
- 2) Induce the expression of secondary metabolites from actinobacteria, with an emphasis on genera that are poor producers.

Experimental Objectives

- 1) To develop and implement PCR screening methodologies for the detection of biosynthetic genes in actinobacteria.
- 2) To formulate a fermentation media that exhibits broad range applicability for the production of secondary metabolites.

Null Hypothesis

- 1) The presence of biosynthetic genes in an actinobacterial strain indicates the presence of a biosynthetic pathway and that the organism may have the capability to produce a specific secondary metabolite under defined fermentation conditions.
- 2) The ability of an actinobacterial strain to produce secondary metabolites is not influenced by the isolation source.