



Detection of protease and lipase activity in *Pseudomonas fluorescens* isolated from milk and surfaces as milk deteriorating indicators

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Abstract

Raw milk exposure to many sources of contamination and cold storage is a big problem and may impact milk quality, especially the psychotropic *Pseudomonas fluorescens* a predominant bacterium causing milk spoilage. Some *P. fluorescens* strains can produce protease and lipase exoenzymes accelerating the milk spoilage process and reducing the shelf-life of milk and dairy products. Thirty-nine isolates of *P. fluorescens* isolated from raw cow milk, teat surfaces and milk tanks were examined to detect their abilities to produce both protease and lipase enzymes. These enzymes may increase the virulence of this bacterium based on the detection of both *aprX* (1434bp) and *lip* (1422bp) genes using polymerase chain reaction. Results of this study revealed the detection of the *aprX* gene in 36.8% of *P. fluorescens* isolates from raw milk and 81.8% in bacterium isolated from teat surfaces. However, their ability to produce lipase enzymes was reduced by detecting *lip* genes in 26.3, 9.1, and 33.3% of *P. fluorescens* isolates from milk, teat surfaces and milk tanks respectively. These results confirm the potential of *P. fluorescens* to induce spoilage in milk and dairy products processed from milk through protease secretion which causes casein hydrolysis and indicates prognosis about the hygienic procedures during milking and processing affecting the milk shelf-life period.

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Introduction

P. fluorescens represents a saprophytic nonpathogenic with poor nutritional requirements and great diversity enabling them to survive in different environments including utensils used in the dairy production chain (1,2). These bacteria cause dairy product spoilage through their ability to produce some exoenzymes mainly proteases and lipases (3,4). Sometimes pseudomonas counts aren't indicative of the assessment of milk spoilage (5,6). Although some pseudomonas species become inactive after the thermal processing of milk like pasteurization their exoenzymes revealed high resistance to heat and affected milk shelf-life by casein and fat degradation (7,8). One of these enzymes is Alkaline zinc metalloprotease which consists of one zinc atom with eight atoms of calcium and a high molecular

weight ranging between 21-25 kilodaltons their activity depends on the presence of calcium ions (9,10). AprX hydrolyzes k-casein, para k-casein and beta-casein releasing plasmin and plasminogen which create unacceptable changes in milk (11). *P. fluorescens* produce lipolytic enzymes giving the rancid odor and flavor of dairy products (12,13). Lipases have a molecular mass between 30-50 KDa with optimum alkaline PH (14). The production of lipase is affected by the concentration and the type of nitrogen, iron and carbon whereas the presence of magnesium, zinc and iron decreases the activity of lipase (15,16). Molecular methods including polymerase chain reaction assay are used to monitor the impact of protease and lipase by detecting related genes represented by *aprX* and *lip* genes as spoilage indicators to evaluate milk quality (17). Local research studies the molecular features and antimicrobial sensitivity

of different bacterial isolates in some dairy products including some *Pseudomonas* spp. especially *P. aeruginosa* (18-20).

A few of them investigate the impact of *P. fluorescens* exoenzymes on milk quality therefore this study aims to screen the presence of *aprX* and *lip* genes in *P. fluorescens* isolated from cow milk teat surfaces and milk tanks in dairy farms in Nineveh province.

Materials and methods

Ethical approval

The research was conducted considering the ethical approval of the institutional Animal Care and Use Committee at the College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Mosul and included an authorized ID of UM.VET. 2023.102. Mosul, Iraq, 2024.

Samples

The study included collecting one hundred fifty samples of cows' raw milk, teat surfaces swabs and milk tank swabs from Nineveh province dairy farms to detect the presence of *P. fluorescens*. Thirty-nine positive isolates of *P. fluorescens* were distributed as 19, 11, and 9 isolates from raw milk, teat surfaces and milk tanks respectively were examined to investigate their abilities to produce exoenzymes as spoilage indicators.

Isolation and identification

samples were cultivated on Cetrimide agar (Neogen/USA) incubated at 25°C for 24-48 hours then

purified on Cetrimide agar and followed by biochemical tests (21). The *P. fluorescens* isolates were confirmed using a polymerase chain reaction depending on the *16srRNA* gene.

DNA extraction

P. fluorescens colonies were subjected to DNA extraction depending on the bacterial DNA preparation kit (AddBio, Korea) following the manufacturer's instruction protocol.

Polymerase chain reaction (PCR)

P. fluorescens protease and lipase activity were investigated using PCR assay depending on the detecting *aprX* and *lip* genes respectively. A specific primer was provided by (Macrogen/Korea). The primer consists of forward and reverse primers (22) with a molecular weight of 1434 bp and 1422 bp to *aprX* and *lip* gene respectively (Table 1). The thermal profile included an initial denaturation of 10 min. at 95°C followed by 35 cycles of 95°C for 45s, then annealing 58°C, 55°C for 45 sec. for *aprX* and *lip* gene respectively, extension at 72°C for 1 min. and final extension of 72°C for 5 min. with cooling at 4°C. PCR products were analyzed by electrophoresis (1.5% agarose gel) (AddBio, Korea) with 3 µl GelRed dye (AddBio, Korea). 5 µl of each PCR product was loaded into the well of agarose gel. The electrophoresis was carried out at 75 volts for 1 hour. The band was identified using the Gel doc EZ image (Bio-Rad, USA).

Table 1: Oligonucleotide primers sequence of *P. fluorescens* exoenzymes genes used in the current study

Primers	Primer's sequence (5'-3')	Temperature (°C)	Product size (bp)	Reference
<i>aprX-F</i>	TTATGTCAAAAGTAAAAGAC	58	1434	22
<i>aprX-R</i>	TCAGGCTACGATGTCACTG			
<i>lip-F</i>	ATGGGTRTSTTYGACTATAAAAACC	55	1422	22
<i>lip-R</i>	TTAACCGATCACAATCCCCTCC			

Results

Results showed the detection of protease and lipase exoenzymes genes of *P. fluorescens* strains isolated from cow raw milk, teat surfaces and milk tanks including *aprX* and *lip* genes. The *aprX* gene was detected in 58.9% (23/39) of isolates. The highest rate of *aprX* genes prevalence was found in the *P. fluorescens* isolates from teat surfaces (9/11) which was 81.8% compared to isolates from raw milk (7/19) which was 36.8%. The *lip* gene was detected in 23.1% (9/39) of isolates. *P. fluorescens* isolates from milk tanks revealed a higher percentage of the presence of *lip* gene (3/9) at 33.3% followed by isolates from raw milk (5/19) at 26.3% compared to *P. fluorescens* isolates from teat surfaces (1/11) 9.1% (Table 2 and Figure 1). The *aprX* and *lip* genes were

detected at 1434 bp and 1422 bp respectively as shown in (Figures 2 and 3).

Table 2: Detections of protease and lipase activity in milk, teat surfaces and milk tanks

<i>P. fluorescens</i> sources	No.	Protease activity <i>aprX</i> gene		Lipase activity <i>lip</i> gene	
		No.	%	No.	%
Milk	19	7	36.8	5	26.3
Teat Surfaces	11	9	81.8	1	9.1
Milk tanks	9	7	77.7	3	33.3
Total	39	23	58.9	9	23.1

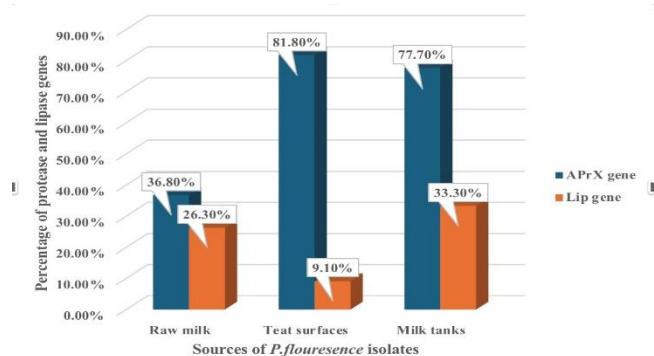


Figure 1: Percentage of protease and lipase genes in *P. fluorescens* isolates from milk, teat surfaces, and milk tanks.

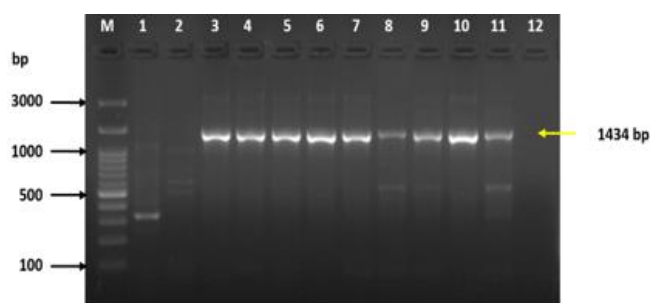


Figure 2: Amplified products of *aprX* gene of *P. fluorescens*, Lanes M represent 100 bp DNA marker, lane 1-2; negative samples, lane 3-11; positive samples at 1434 bp product size, lane 12; negative control.

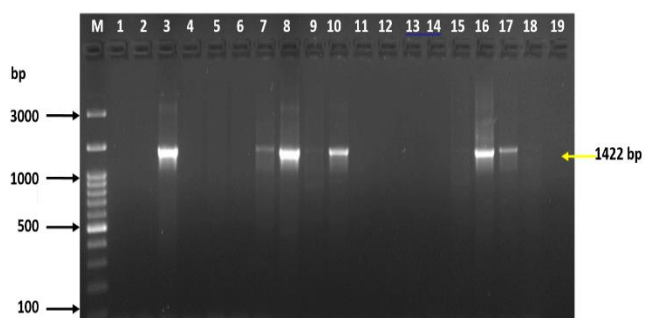


Figure 3: Amplified products of *lip* gene of *P. fluorescens*, Lanes M represent 100 bp DNA marker; lanes 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18; negative samples, lanes 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 16, 17; positive samples at 1422 bp product size lane 19; negative control.

Discussion

P. fluorescens is commonly isolated from soil, water and surfaces as a saprophytic bacterium (23,24) these species can secrete some enzymes including proteases and lipases exoenzymes and a number of these secreted enzymes

depends on the *P. fluorescens* strain which highlighted the vast diversity of *P. fluorescens* isolates (25-27). *aprX* gene and *lip* gene were used as a marker to detect *P. fluorescens* protease and lipase activity in milk depending on PCR technique and distinguish proteolytic and lipolytic strains (28,29), to reduce the time for detecting *P. fluorescens* as deteriorating agents in raw milk and providing more flexible work to the dairy manager to assess milk quality (23,30). Therefore, PCR assay was used as a good and sensitive approach to detect the presence of protease and lipase enzymes as spoilage indicators to estimate the degradation of milk components including casein protein and lipids (31). The results of this study revealed the presence of the *aprX* gene in 36.8% of isolates from raw milk These results agree with the results obtained by De Longhi (32) who showed the presence of the *aprX* gene in 37% of *P. fluorescens* strains isolated from milk which indicates this bacterium's presence in farm animals' milking environments (33,34). *aprX* gene was observed in 71.2% of *P. fluorescens* isolates in bovine milk and the high presence of the *aprX* gene in cow raw milk is associated with sensory defects affecting the shelf life of milk (35). The presence of calcium is an essential factor for the potency and resistance of proteases (36,37). Also increased proteolytic activity in *P. fluorescens* may be related to the type of N-acyl homoserine lactone (AHL) either directly or indirectly (38). Although the *lip* gene was detected in raw milk and milk tank and teat surfaces their presence is at a lower limit than that of the *aprX* gene. These results disagree with Ribeiro (35) who revealed the lipolytic activity in 25% of *P. fluorescens* isolates from cow milk. In comparison the lipolytic activity of cow milk was evaluated in 9.3% of *P. fluorescens* isolates (39). It may be because protease was more resistant at a wide range of PH and temperatures (25,40,41) suggesting the adaptation of *P. fluorescens* strains to various environmental circumstances previous studies referred to the proteolytic activity of *P. fluorescens* in the late exponential and early stationary phase of growth (42-44). However, rapid and sensitive methods are essential to ensure product safety and perform risk assessment Preventive measures should be taken to reduce *aprX* biosynthesis in milk and dairy products.

Conclusion

Early detection of milk spoilage due to *P. fluorescens* is a significant predictive factor. This bacterium secretes exoenzymes represented by protease and lipase enzymes by identifying specific genes. Therefore, the activity of these exoenzymes is a limiting factor maintaining milk quality.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm there was no conflict of interest.

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الكشف عن فعالية البروتيز واللايبيز في جراثيم الزوائف المتألفة المعزولة من الحليب الخام والأسطح كمؤشرات على فساد الحليب

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الخلاصة

يتعرض الحليب إلى العديد من الملوثات خلال مراحل تصنيع منتجاته وتحت ظروف الخزن بدرجة حرارة التبريد تتأثر نوعية الحليب وبدرجة كبيرة بتواجد جراثيم الزوائف وخاصة الزوائف المتألفة كونها الجراثيم السائدة والمسببة للفساد. تمتلك بعض عترات الزوائف المتألفة القابلية على إنتاج الإنزيمات الخارجية المحللة للبروتين والمحللة للدهون والتي تعجل من عملية فساد الحليب وتقلل مدة حفظ الحليب. أخذت تسع وثلاثون عزلة من جراثيم الزوائف المتألفة المعزولة من حليب الأبقار الخام وأسطح حلمات الضرع وخزانات الحليب للكشف عن قابليتها على إنتاج إنزيم البروتيز واللايبيز اعتماداً على وجود الجينات *lip* و *aprX* بتقنية تفاعل البلمرة المتسلسل وإعطاء حزم بوزن جزئي ١٤٢٢ و ١٤٣٤ زوجاً قاعدياً لكل منهما بالتتابع. أظهرت النتائج وجود جين *aprX* في ٣٦,٨% من عزلات الزوائف المتألفة المعزولة من الحليب الخام و ٨١,٨% من عزلات الزوائف المأخوذة من أسطح حلمات الضرع بينما كانت قابلية هذه العزلات على إنتاج إنزيم اللايبيز منخفضة من خلال وجود جين *lip* في ٣٦,٣، ٩,١ و ٣٣,٣% من عزلات الزوائف المتألفة المعزولة من الحليب الخام وأسطح حلمات الضرع وخزانات الحليب على التوالي، وتؤكد هذه النتائج قدرة هذه العزلات على أحداث الفساد في الحليب الخام بتأثير إنزيم البروتيز من خلال تحلل بروتينات الكازئين والتي يمكن اعتمادها كدليل للتنبؤ بحدوث فساد الحليب وتقييم الشروط الصحية أثناء عمليات الحلب وتصنيع منتجات الحليب وفترة حفظ الحليب.