Milk-deteriorating exoenzymes from *Pseudomonas fluorescens* 041 isolated from refrigerated raw milk

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Submitted: August 8, 2013; Approved: June 6, 2014.

Abstract

The practice of refrigerating raw milk at the farm has provided a selective advantage for psychrotrophic bacteria that produce heat-stable proteases and lipases causing severe quality problems to the dairy industry. In this work, a protease (AprX) and a lipase (LipM) produced by *Pseudomonas fluorescens* 041, a highly proteolytic and lipolytic strain isolated from raw milk obtained from a Brazilian farm, have been purified and characterized. Both enzymes were purified as recombinant proteins from *Escherichia coli*. The AprX metalloprotease exhibited activity in a broad temperature range, including refrigeration, with a maximum activity at 37 °C. It was active in a pH range of 4.0 to 9.0. This protease had maximum activity with the substrates casein and gelatin in the presence of Ca⁺². The LipM lipase had a maximum activity at 25 °C and a broad pH optimum ranging from 7.0 to 10. It exhibited the highest activity, in the presence of Ca⁺², on substrates with long-chain fatty acid residues. These results confirm the spoilage potential of strain 041 in milk due to, at least in part, these two enzymes. The work highlights the importance of studies of this kind with strains isolated in Brazil, which has a recent history on the implementation of the cold chain at the dairy farm.

Keywords: raw milk, food deterioration, *Pseudomonas fluorescens*, extracellular protease, extracellular lipase.

Introduction

In Brazil, the practice of refrigerating raw milk at the dairy farm started in the 90s, was officially instituted by the government in 2002 and it is still being implemented in some areas of the country [Brasil, 2002; Brasil, 2011]. The refrigeration of raw milk in the farm and dairy industries has improved the quality and shelf life of milk and dairy products. However, it does not prevent the growth of psychrotrophic microorganisms that produce heat-stable enzymes such as proteases and lipases (Cousin 1982; Sorhaug and Stepaniak 1997; Decherni et al., 2005; De Jonghe et al., 2010; Corrêa et al., 2011; Baglinière et al., 2013; Quigley et al., 2013).

Many of these enzymes are produced by *Pseudomonas fluorescens*, a frequent psychrotrophic spoilage bacterium found in milk (Wiedmann et al., 2000; Dogan and Boor, 2003; Pinto et al., 2006; Dufour et al.; 2008; Marchand et al., 2009; Baglinière et al., 2013). As hydrolytic enzymes from this bacterium are generally not inactivated by pasteurization or even by Ultra-High Temperature (UHT) treatment (Griffiths et al., 1981; Chen et al., 2003; De Jonghe et al., 2010; Baglinière et al., 2013), they can cause severe problems in the dairy industry such as milk protein hydrolysis, development of off-flavors, shelf-life reduction, decrease of yield during cheese production, milk heat-stability loss, and gelation of UHT milk (Fairbairn and Law, 1986; Datta and Deeth, 2001; Chen et al., 2003; Dufour et al., 2008; Baglinière et al., 2013).

A common type of protease produced by *P. fluorescens* is metalloprotease. This class of enzyme contains one zinc atom and up to eight calcium atoms, conferring thermostability to the protein (Sorhaug and Stepaniak, 1997). These authors listed some important...
characteristics of the metalloproteases secreted by strains of \textit{P. fluorescens} including temperature optimum between 30 and 45 °C, a significant residual activity at 4 °C, and a pH optimum in the neutral range. These authors pointed out that a heat treatment of milk sufficient to fully inactivate these enzymes would also create unacceptable changes in the product and it is therefore unpractical for the dairy industry.

Microorganisms that produce lipolytic enzymes, such as \textit{P. fluorescens}, are important in the dairy industry because they can produce rancid flavors and odors in milk and dairy products that make these foods unacceptable to consumers (Cousin 1982). Bacterial lipases generally have molecular masses between 30 to 50 kDa, and the pH optimum is slightly alkaline (in the range of 7 to 9) (Chen et al., 2003; Chakraborty and Paulraj, 2009; Boran and Ugur 2010; Anbu, 2014). Lipase production by \textit{P. fluorescens} is influenced by the type and concentration of carbon and nitrogen sources, iron, pH, dissolved oxygen concentration, and growth temperature (Cousin 1982; Burger et al., 2000; Woods et al., 2001; Rajmohan et al., 2001).

The present work aimed at the molecular characterization of a protease and a lipase produced by \textit{P. fluorescens} 041, a highly milk deteriorating strain isolated from refrigerated raw milk obtained from a Brazilian farm. Both enzymes were overexpressed in \textit{Escherichia coli}, purified to homogeneity by affinity chromatography and biochemically characterized in order to evaluate their role in the spoilage of milk components.

Material and Methods

Bacterial strains and plasmids

The bacterial strains and plasmids used in this study are listed in Table 1. \textit{P. fluorescens} 041 and 07A strains were isolated from refrigerated raw milk as highly proteolytic and lipolytic psychrotrophic bacteria (Martins et al., 2005; Pinto et al., 2006; Pinto et al., 2010).

| Strain or plasmid | Description | Reference or source |
|-------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| \textit{E. coli} XL1-Blue | Cloning and subcloning host supE44, hsdR17, endA1, recA1, gyrA96, thi1, relA1, lac- F[prolAB+], lacIq, lac-Z-M15, Tn10 (terF)] | Bullock et al., 1987 |
| \textit{P. fluorescens} 07A | Wild type | Martins et al., 2005 |
| \textit{P. fluorescens} 041 | Wild type | Martins et al., 2005 |
| pCR2.1-TOPO | Cloning vector, lacZa fragment containing MCS, fl origin, ColE1, Km\(^{R}\) | Invitrogen |
| pQE30-Xa | Vector for the insertion of a Factor Xa Protease recognition site C-terminal of the 6xHis tag, T5 promoter, lac operator, ribosome binding site, ATG start codon, His tag sequence, multiple cloning sites, stop codons in all three reading frames, Col E1 origin of replication, Ap\(^{R}\) | Qiagen |
| pQE30-Xa-aprX041 | 1.43 kb fragment containing \textit{aprX} from \textit{P. fluorescens} 041 in pQE30-Xa, Ap\(^{R}\) | This study |
| pQE30-Xa-lipM041 | 1.42 kb fragment containing \textit{lipM} from \textit{P. fluorescens} 041 in pQE30-Xa, Ap\(^{R}\) | This study |

Growth conditions

\textit{P. fluorescens} was cultured in TYEP (tryptone 1%, yeast extract 0.25%, KH\(_2\)PO\(_4\) 0.1%, K\(_2\)HPO\(_4\) 0.1%, and CaCl\(_2\) 0.25%) broth at 25 °C with aeration or in 12% (w/v) reconstituted skim milk powder. \textit{E. coli} XL1-Blue was cultured in Luria-Bertani (LB) broth or on LB agar plates at 37 °C, as required.

DNA manipulations, PCR reactions and sequencing

DNA manipulations

Cloning, restriction enzyme analysis, and transformation of \textit{E. coli} were performed using established procedures (Sambrook et al., 1989). PCR was performed with TaKaRa Ex Taq polymerase (TaKaRa Shuzo, Shiga, Japan). Plasmid DNA was isolated using the QIAprep Spin Miniprep kit, and chromosomal DNA was purified with the DNeasy tissue kit. DNA fragments were purified from agarose gels by using the QIAquick gel extraction kit (all kits from Qiagen, Hilden, Germany).

Amplification and sequencing of the protease and lipase genes by PCR

The reaction consisted of 2.0 mM MgCl\(_2\), 5.0 \(\mu\)L of 10X buffer Ex Taq, 2.5 mM deoxynucleotide triphosphates (dNTPs), 0.5 \(\mu\)M of each primer, 1 \(\mu\)L of Ex Taq DNA polymerase, and 40 ng of DNA in a final volume of 50 \(\mu\)L. Primers based on the sequences of the \textit{aprX} (GenBank accession numbers DQ146945, AY298902, AF216700, AY973251) and \textit{lipM} (GenBank accession numbers AF216702, AY694785, M86350, S77830, D11455, AB063391, AY304500, AY673674, M74125, AY700013) of other \textit{P. fluorescens} strains were designed (Table 2), and synthesized by Microsynth (Zürich, Switzerland). The reactions were carried out in a T3 thermocycler (Biometra\textsuperscript{®}, Biolabo Scientific Instruments, Zürich, Switzerland).

The M13 Forward and Reverse Primers were used to sequence the \textit{aprX} and \textit{lipM} genes of \textit{P. fluorescens} 041.
Cloning, heterologous expression and purification of *P. fluorescens* 041 protease and lipase

Once the complete sequences of the *aprX* and *lipM* genes were obtained, primers were designed (Table 2) to amplify the open reading frames (ORF) by PCR using the bacterial genomic DNA as a template and TaKaRa Ex Taq as DNA-polymerase. The primers generated BamHI and SacI sites at the 5' and 3' ends of the amplified fragments, respectively.

**Table 2 - Primers used to amplify the aprX and lipM gene by PCR.**

| Primer | Sequence (5'-3') | Application |
|--------|------------------|-------------|
| Apr-F  | TGATGTCGAAAAGTGAAGAC | Amplification of aprX gene |
| Apr-R  | TCAGGCTACGATGTCACTGG | Amplification of aprX gene |
| APRX-F | ATTGGATCCAAAAGCTATTCGATCTGACC | Amplification of aprX gene and preparation for cloning in pQE-30Xa |
| APRX-R | ATTGGATCTTACGATGCTACGGC | Amplification of aprX gene and preparation for cloning in pQE-30Xa |
| Lip-F  | ATGGGTTTCTGACTTAAAACCC | Amplification of lipM gene |
| Lip-R  | TTAACCGTACACATCCCTCCTC | Amplification of lipM gene |
| LIPM-F | ATTGGATCCAAAACGTGGACTGCCAC | Amplification of lipM gene and preparation for cloning in pQE-30Xa |
| LIPM-R | ATTGGGCTCTTACGATGCTCACCTCCC | Amplification of lipM gene and preparation for cloning in pQE-30Xa |

The introduced restriction sites BamHI and SacI are underlined.

The amplified DNA fragments of 1,434 bp and 1,422 bp, containing the *aprX* and *lipM* structural genes, respectively, were digested with BamHI and SacI and ligated into vector pQE-30Xa (Qiagen) previously cut with the same restriction enzymes. Plasmids harbouring the *aprX* or *lipM* ORFs inserted downstream of the T5 promoter were named pQE-30Xa-aprX041 or pQE-30Xa-lipM041. The plasmids were subsequently transformed into strain *E. coli* XL1-Blue.

For overproduction of AprX and LipM, *E. coli* XL1-Blue cells carrying pQE-30Xa-aprX041 or pQE-30Xa-lipM041 were grown in dYT medium (tryptone 1.6%, yeast extract 1.0%, NaCl 0.5%, and glucose 0.2%) containing ampicillin (100 µg mL⁻¹) at 37 °C under shaking at 300 rpm. At an optical density of 0.5 at 600 nm, isopropyl-β-D-thiogalactopyranoside (IPTG) was added to the culture to a final concentration of 1 mM, in order to induce the expression of *aprX* and *lipM*. After 5 h incubation at 37 °C, the cells were collected by centrifugation at 10,000 g for 30 min, resuspended in 50 mM Tris-HCl (pH 8.0) and centrifuged at 10,000 g for 30 min, followed by two washing steps with 50 mM Tris-HCl pH 8.0, NaCl 150 mM. The resulting cell pellets were finally resuspended in lysis buffer (8 M urea, 0.1 M NaH₂PO₄, 0.01 M Tris-HCl, pH 8.0) and the recombinant histidine-tagged enzymes were purified after denaturing conditions using the Ni-NTA Spin Columns (Qiagen) according to the suppliers’ instructions. After purification, the enzymes were subjected to overnight dialysis with Tris-HCl 20 mM, pH 8.0, CaCl₂ 5 mM at 4 °C to allow renaturation.

**Protein quantification, SDS-PAGE and zymograms**

Protein concentration of the purified AprX and LipM enzyme solutions was determined by using the method of Bradford (1976). Proteins were analysed by sodium dodecyl sulfate-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis [Laemmli, 1970]. After electrophoresis the gels were stained with Coomassie brilliant blue.

Exoprotease activities of *P. fluorescens* culture supernatants, resolved proteases after precipitation with ammonium sulfate, and recombinant expressed AprX protease were visualized in SDS-PAGE-gels supplemented with 0.2% (w/v) azocasein (Christensen et al., 2003). After electrophoresis, proteins were renatured by washing twice in 50 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.5, 25% (v/v) isopropanol for 15 min at room temperature and once in 50 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.5. After overnight renaturation at 4 °C, the zymogram was incubated for 4 h in 5 mM CaCl₂ and 50 mM Tris-HCl, pH 8.0 at 40 °C. Prior to detection, the gel was washed in 1 M NaOH for 5 min. Protease activity was detected as colourless zones in an orange background.

For the analysis of the lipase pattern after SDS-PAGE, proteins were renaturated as above described. The gels were overlaid with the fluorescent substrate methylumbelliferyl-butyrate (0.01 M in dimethylformamide) in order to detect lipolytic activity using UV-light (360 nm) to visualize blue fluorescent bands.

**Identification of proteins by mass spectrometry**

*P. fluorescens* 041 was grown in TYEP medium at 25 °C for 48 h. The cells were removed from the medium by centrifugation at 10,000 g for 30 min, the supernatant was sterilized by filtration, and the proteins were precipitated with ammonium sulfate. Samples were centrifuged 20 min at 10,000 g and the supernatant was discarded. Pellets were washed twice with an 85% ammonium sulfate solution (w/v), and again centrifuged. The pellets were dissolved in 50 Mm Tris-HCl, pH 8.0 and dialysed overnight at 4 °C against Tris-HCl 50 mM, pH 8.0, CaCl₂ 5 mM. Aliquots of
15 μL of the dialysed samples were separated on SDS-PAGE (12%) gels. Coomassie-stained protein bands were excised, digested by trypsin and analysed by mass spectrometry (Riedel et al., 2006).

Enzyme assays

Proteolytic activity was investigated on azocasein, according to Christensen et al. (2003), by incubating 250 μL of 2% azocasein (w/v) with 150 μL sterile filtered culture supernatant or with 75 μL of the purified AprX. Lipolytic activity on p-nitrophenyl palmitate was investigated by incubating 1 mL of substrate with 100 μL supernatant from overnight cultures or with 50 μL of the purified lipase LipM.

Characterization of purified enzymes

The proteolytic and lipolytic activities of purified AprX and LipM were determined as described above at various incubation temperatures (4, 25, 30, 37, 40, 45, 50, and 60 °C) and at various pH values using the following buffer systems: sodium succinate (pH 4.0, 5.0, 6.0), Tris-HCl (pH 6.0, 6.5, 7.0, 7.5, 8.0, 8.5, 9.0), and glycine-NaOH (pH 9.0, 10.0, 11.0, 12.0, 13.0).

In order to determine heat stability of purified AprX and LipM, they were incubated for 5, 10, 15, 20, 30 and 60 min at 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, and 100 °C. They were also incubated at 65 °C for 30 min and 72 °C for 20 s to simulate the milk pasteurization treatments.

To investigate the effect of metal ions on purified AprX and LipM, the reaction mixture was supplemented with 1 mM of each of the following compounds: MnSO₄, CoCl₂, ZnSO₄, FeSO₄, MgSO₄, or FeCl₃. The effect of protease inhibitors on the proteolytic activity of purified AprX was determined by supplementing the reaction mixture with 1 mM of each of the following compounds: MnSO₄, CoCl₂, ZnSO₄, FeSO₄, MgSO₄, or FeCl₃. The effect of protease inhibitors on the proteolytic activity of purified AprX was determined by supplementing the reaction mixture with 1 mM PMSF, 1 mM EDTA, 1 mM Pefabloc SC, 2% (v/v) β-mercaptoethanol and subsequent measuring the residual activities on azocasein substrate.

The substrate specificity of purified AprX was determined on casein, elastin, collagen, bovine serum albumin, and gelatin. The reaction mixture consisted of 0.4% (w/v) of each protein in 400 μL of 50 mM Tris-HCl, pH 6.5 and 150 μL of enzyme solution. After incubation at 37 °C for 1 h, the mixture was withdrawn and the increase in the amount of free amino groups was determined by the ninhydrin method according to Setyorini et al. (2006).

Activities of purified LipM on different p-nitrophenyl fatty acid esters (p-nitrophenyl acetate, p-nitrophenyl butyrate, p-nitrophenyl palmitate, and p-nitrophenyl phosphocholine) were also measured according to the assay for lipolytic activity as described above.

Results

Milk-deteriorating hydrolytic activities of P. fluorescens

P. fluorescens 041 showed higher proteolytic (Figure 1A) and lipolytic (Figure 1B) activities than the strain 07A. Moreover, strain 041 exhibited a higher capacity to hydrolyze milk than P. fluorescens 07A when both strains were inoculated into 12% (w/v) reconstituted skim milk (Figure 1C). Therefore, P. fluorescens 041 was selected for further analysis of its hydrolytic extracellular enzymes.

SDS-PAGE analysis of ammonium sulfate precipitated protein from supernatants of TYEP cultures of P. fluorescens 041 demonstrated the presence of multiple protein bands (Figure 1D). Proteolytic activity of the dominant 50 kDa band was demonstrated by a zymogram incorporating azocasein (Figure 2). Mass spectrometry analysis of the major proteolytic protein band identified this protein as a metalloprotease, which is commonly referred to as AprX. Analysis of the bands with lower molecular weight that showed proteolytic activity (Figure 1D) revealed that these bands were actually degradation products of AprX.

Cloning and sequencing of protease and lipase genes

Primers based on sequences of homologous proteases and lipases from other P. fluorescens strains were synthesized and used to PCR amplify a segment encoding these enzymes from P. fluorescens 041 genome. Electrophoresis of the PCR products revealed a single product of about 1,500 bp for both genes. These PCR products were sequenced to reveal their identity as aprX and lipM genes. The aprX and the lipM genes of P. fluorescens 041 comprised open reading frames of 1,434 bp and 1,425 bp and coded for proteins and 477 and 474 amino acids, respectively. Based on the amino acid sequences, the molecular mass of both enzymes was predicted to be 49.365 kDa and 49.811 kDa, which was confirmed by SDS-PAGE analysis of the purified enzymes (Figure 2, line 3 and 5). The isoelectric point for AprX was 4.46 and 4.36 for LipM, as revealed by isoelectric focusing (Riedel et al., 2003), by incubating 1 mL of substrate with 150 μL sterile filtered culture supernatant or with 75 μL of the purified lipase LipM.

The aprX gene of P. fluorescens 041 showed 97% identity with the extracellular alkaline metalloproteinase (aprX) gene of P. fluorescens strain A506 and with the protease (aprX) gene of P. fluorescens strain F. The lipM gene of P. fluorescens 041 showed 93% identity with polyurethanase lipase A (pulA) gene and 86% with the lipase (lipA) gene of P. fluorescens strain A506.

Biochemical characterization of AprX and LipM

The temperature optimum of activity of the purified protease of P. fluorescens 041 was 37 °C (Figure 3A). Moreover it showed activity under conditions of refrigera-
tion from 4 °C to 7 °C, and low activity in temperatures higher than 45 °C (Figure 3A).

The pH optimum of AprX is between 6.0 and 6.5 (Figure 3B). The protease still exhibits 36% residual activity at pH 4.0 and 62% at pH 9.0.

The protease activity was strongly decreased by pre-incubating the enzyme at different temperatures (Figure 3C); the residual activity of the protease after 60 min at 50, 60, 70, 80, 90 and 100 °C was between 2 and 4%. Inactivation of the metalloprotease at temperature and time conditions used during the pasteurization process were also evaluated: AprX showed 70% residual activity when it was treated at 75 °C for 20 s (HTST treatment: high temperature and short time) and 4% residual activity when it was incubated at 65 °C for 30 min (LTLT: low temperature and long time).

Proteolytic activity of AprX was strongly dependent on the presence of Ca²⁺. However, other metal ions reduced the proteolytic activity (Table 3). The activity of AprX was decreased when 1 mM EDTA, an inhibitor that specifically acts on metalloproteases, was added to the reaction mixture, confirming the type of enzyme. In addition, AprX was strongly inhibited by denaturing and reducing agents such as SDS, dithiothreitol (DTT), β-mercaptoethanol, and urea (Table 4).

The alkaline metalloprotease was further tested for its capability to hydrolyze different substrates such as casein, bovine serum albumin, collagen, elastin, and gelatin. The highest activities were found on gelatin (100%) and casein (87.6%), followed by collagen (57%), elastin (41.2%), and bovine serum albumin (39.8%).

The temperature optimum of the purified lipase was 25 °C (Figure 4A). LipM showed a residual activity of 3.7% at 4 °C and exhibited low activities at temperatures higher than 37 °C (Figure 4A). Besides, LipM showed the highest lipase activity at pH 7.5 (Figure 4B). At pH values lower than 6.0 and higher than 11.0 only residual lipase activities could be detected (Figure 4B).

The lipase activity after 60 min of pre-incubation at 50, 60, 70, 80, 90 and 100 °C was nearly undetected (Figure 4C). The treatment of 65 °C for 30 min (LTLT), and 75 °C for 20 s (HTST), reduced the lipolytic activity to 13.2% and 25.4%, respectively.
Lipase activity was dependent on Ca$^{2+}$ ions in the renaturation buffer. The same was observed for the protease activity. The presence of ions other than Ca$^{2+}$ reduced the lipolytic activity (Table 3). Among the tested substrates, LipM exhibited the highest activity for p-nitrophenyl palmitate (100%), followed by p-nitrophenyl butyrate (73%), p-nitrophenyl acetate (20%), and p-nitrophenyl phosphorylcholine (11%). The highest activity on substrates with long-chain fatty acid residues such as p-nitrophenyl palmitate indicates that the enzyme has esterolytic and lipolytic activities.

**Discussion**

Numerous *Pseudomonas* spp. have been shown to produce and secrete hydrolytic enzymes (McCarthy *et al.*, 2004; Burger *et al.*, 2000; Woods *et al.*, 2001; Pinto *et al.*, 2006; Pinto *et al.*, 2010; Liao and McCallus 1998; Koka and Weimer, 2000; Maunsell *et al.*, 2006; Mu *et al.*, 2009; Jankiewicz *et al.*, 2010; De Jonghe *et al.*, 2011). Interestingly, in this study it was verified that aprX encodes for the major, if not the only extracellular protease produced by *P. fluorescens* 041. Mass spectrometry analysis of low molecular weight bands that showed proteolytic activity on the azocasein zymogram were identified as degradation products of the metalloprotease AprX. These results are in agreement with the findings of Liao and McCallus (1998).
who observed that *P. fluorescens* CY091 produces a unique extracellular 50 kDa protease, AprX. Our results are also in agreement with several other studies (Koka and Weimer, 2000; Mu et al., 2009; Jankiewicz et al., 2010). In contrast, Rajmohan et al. (2002) reported that another *P. fluorescens* isolated from milk produces five distinct proteases when they used the ultrafiltration technique to purify these enzymes. Nicodeme et al. (2005) observed the presence of more than one protease band for some strains of *Pseudomon-
nas, while others produced just one protease, as revealed by a zymogram analyzes. According to Sorhaug and Stepaniak (1997) the number of secreted proteases depends strongly on the *P. fluorescens* strain. These findings highlight the great diversity of *P. fluorescens* isolates and reiterate the importance of studies aiming to elucidate the molecular mechanisms of the hydrolytic enzymes produced by these strains.

Once the AprX protein produced by strains of *P. fluorescens* isolated from raw milk showed high similarity with sequences from homologous enzymes in the database (Figure 5), it further confirms the possibility of using the aprX gene as a marker to detect *P. fluorescens* in milk by using PCR as described by Martins et al. (2005) and Machado et al. (2013). This approach would reduce the time for detecting these bacteria in raw milk giving flexibility for the dairy manager to choose the best use for a particular milk batch during processing.

Unlike many proteolytic and lipolytic enzymes described in the literature (Makhzoum et al., 1996; Liao and McCallus, 1998; Rajmohan et al., 2002; Chen et al., 2003; Kojima and Shimizu, 2003; Nornberg et al., 2009; Bagliniere et al., 2013; Anbu, 2014), the protease and lipase evaluated in this study were relatively more sensitive to the heat treatment. This could be attributed due to differences in the enzymes structures or to differences in experimental procedures, as the above mentioned studies have used purified enzymes from culture supernatants and we have purified those from overexpressing *E. coli* strains. However, some authors (Teo et al., 2003; Jing et al., 2010) verified that His-tag did not affect the metalloprotease activities of some strains, indicating that the recombinant metalloprotease was in an active form. Affinity tags have become essential tools for the production of recombinant proteins in a wide variety of settings (Waugh, 2011).

As the heat treatment and refrigeration processes adopted by the dairy industry during milk processing and storage do not fully inhibit enzymatic activity nor the growth of psychrotrophic bacteria, it is important to produce milk under stringent good manufacturing practices to limit contamination and bacterial spoilage.

Although LipM exhibits the conserved serine lipase catalytic domain, it presented somewhat lower similarity, as compared to AprX alignment, to the sequences described in the database (Figure 6). LipM was also less heat stable than some lipases described by other authors (Knaut, 1978; Cousin, 1982; Makhzoum et al., 1996; Boran and Ugur, 2013; Anbu, 2014), although low heat stability has also been observed (Chakraborty and Paulraj, 2009; Dahiya et al., 2010). According to Cousin (1982), complete inactiva-

![Figure 5](image-url) - Multiple sequence alignment of deduced protease AprX from *P. fluorescens* 041 (this study), *P. fluorescens* A506 (Genbank accession number AY298902), and *P. fluorescens* strain F (Genbank accession number DQ146945). The differences in amino acid residues are indicated by gray shading, and the catalytic domain of neutral zinc metalloprotease is underlined. Boxed residues are thought to participate in Calcium binding.
tion of lipases was only obtained by autoclaving milk at 121 °C for 15 min. Knaut (1978) observed that lipases from *P. fluorescens* species were stable even above 100 °C. A heat-treatment of 98 °C for 14 to 25 min was necessary to inactivate lipases from some *Pseudomonas* species, including *P. fluorescens* and *P. fragi* (Cousin, 1982).

Overall, the biochemical properties of the purified protease and lipase from this work were similar to those found for proteases and lipases of other *P. fluorescens* strains isolated from raw milk (Makhzoum et al., 1996; Kim et al., 1997; Schokker and van Boekel, 1997; Liao and McCallus, 1998; Rajmohan et al., 2002; Chen et al., 2003; Kojima and Shimizu, 2003; Dufour et al., 2008; Correa et al., 2011; Baglinière et al., 2013). It is worth to mention that AprX still exhibited 36% residual activity at pH 4.0, so if present in milk, this enzyme would not only affect the quality of pasteurized milk products but also of fermented products such as yogurt and cheese.

Surprisingly, no lipolytic activity could be detected when the renatured SDS-PAGE was overlaid with the lipase substrate methylumbeliferyl-butyrate (results not shown). Probably this occurred due to the degradation of the enzyme by proteases or because Ca²⁺ was not added into the renaturation buffer, and the lipase may need this ion for correct folding.

The purification of AprX and LipM was important for the characterization of these spoilage enzymes and it would be interesting to use them to develop tools for improving their detection in milk. Nowadays, there is a great need for developing fast and reliable methods to detect spoilage enzymes directly from samples in order to determine the quality of milk that arrives at the dairy industry platform (Datta and Deeth, 2001). Most approaches currently available are time consuming, do not have good sensitivity or have detection limits that are too high. Besides characterizing these spoilage enzymes, it is important to estimate the extent of degradation of milk components, and thus further improve enzymatic methods to access milk quality.

In this work a protease and a lipase produced by *P. fluorescens* 041, a highly milk spoilage strain, isolated
from cooled raw milk were purified and characterized. The study showed that both enzymes presented similar biochemical properties to other enzymes from *P. fluorescens* strains isolated from raw milk. The differences that were observed could be accounted for the experimental procedures, especially the use of overexpressed recombinant proteins. The study confirms the spoilage potential of strain 041 in milk due to, at least in part, these two enzymes. The work highlights the importance of studies of this kind with *P. fluorescens* strains, the major spoilage bacteria contaminating milk produced in Brazil (Martins et al., 2005) which has a recent history on the implementation of the cold chain at the dairy farm.

**Acknowledgments**

The authors thank the Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq-Brazil) for a doctoral scholarship provided to M.L. Martins and a post-doctoral scholarship to U.M. Pinto. We are thankful to Leo Eberl from the University of Zurich - Switzerland for his assistance with this work.

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**Associate Editor:** Eduardo Cesar Tondo