Dissemination pattern of bacterial heart rot (BHR) disease and screening of the disease resistance among commercial pineapple varieties in Malaysia

Azlan Azizi Muhamad Nor1*, Rozlaily Zainoi2, Raziyah Abdullah3, Nur Sulastri Jaffar2, Muhamad Zamir Abdul Rasid4, Rozeita Laboh5, Norsyuhaida Ahmad Shafawi6 and Noor Baiti Abdul Aziz6

1Soil, Water and Fertilizer Research Centre, MARDI Cameron highlands, P.O. Box 19, 39000, Cameron Highland, Pahang, Malaysia.
2Horticulture Research Centre, MARDI Kluang Station, P.O. Box 525, 86009, Kluang, Johor, Malaysia.
3Animal Science Research Centre, MARDI Kluang Station, P.O. Box 525, 86009, Kluang, Johor, Malaysia.
4Soil, Water and Fertilizer Research Centre, MARDI Serdang P.O. Box 12301, 50774 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
5Agrobiodiversity and Environment Research Centre, MARDI Serdang P.O. Box 12301, 50774 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
6Horticulture Research Centre, MARDI Kluang Station, P.O. Box 525, 86009, Kluang, Johor, Malaysia.

Email: azlanmn@mardi.gov.my

ABSTRACT

Aims: Bacterial heart rot (BHR) disease caused by Erwinia chrysanthemi or the new nomenclature Dickeya zeae was identified as the lethal disease of pineapple and caused massive losses for the farmers due to non-satisfactory solutions. Thus, this study aims to understand the disease dissemination pattern and screen for tolerance pineapple variety prior to establishment of disease management strategies.

Methodology and results: Dissemination of BHR disease was observed visually in 2 study plots consisting 200 plants in each plot. Single plant inoculation of the pathogen was done in each plot namely Plot A at the edge and Plot B at the middle. Disease incidence was recorded at weekly interval for 12 weeks. The pattern of disease spreading in both plots was then mapped based on the results. Separately, 8 commercial pineapple varieties (Maspine, N36, MD2, Morris, Sarawak, Kristal, Gandul and Josapine) were screened for their resistance towards BHR. The varieties screening study was carried out using complete randomized block design. Overall, disease incidence (DI) was observed lower in plot A compared to Plot B. Percentage of DI in Plot A increased continuously from week 1 to 12, but in plot B the DI was stagnant starting from week 3 onwards. This study revealed that there is highly significant difference in percentage of infection between varieties tested. Josapine and MD2 were the most infected varieties based on lesion on plant. Both were found susceptible to BHR. Besides that, Chrystral Honey, Maspine and Sarawak varieties were less infected and classified as moderately resistance compared to other varieties.

Conclusion, significance and impact of study: Inoculum source was recognized as determinant factor for dissemination of BHR. Aggregation pattern was observed, and disease spreading was severe when disease started from the edge of the plot compared to in the middle. These findings will help farmers to choose the varieties of interest and plan for disease control measure based on first observed disease symptom in their field. This study is also important to researchers and plant breeders for varietal improvement in the future.

Keywords: Bacterial heart rot, Erwinia chrysanthemi, pineapple, Josapine, MD2, Dickeya sp.

INTRODUCTION

Pineapple (Ananas comosus var comosus) is one of the most popular tropical fruit crops in family of Bromeliaceae and classified under the order of Bromeliales (Coppens d'Eeckenbrugge and Leal, 2003). Pineapple was reported as the third most important commercial fruit crops in the world with approximately 30 cultivars grown for commercial purpose (Karnataka, 2007). In Malaysia, pineapple industry was recognized as source of wealth for the nation. Pineapple is the oldest industrial crops in Malaysia and started more than 100 years ago. This plant can provide a good income, especially with the high-density cultivation that can provide stable revenue, such as breed of Gandul for cans and Moris for fresh consumption (Selamat, 1996). However, pineapple industry particularly in Malaysia has been badly affected by disease tribulation. Various diseases caused by bacterial infection have been reported and the most severe is bacterial heart rot (BHR) caused by Erwinia chrysanthemi or newly known as Dickeya zeae (Marrero et al., 2013). BHR was first reported in Malaysia by Johnston in year 1957 (Lim, 1985; Toth et al., 2011). According to Ramachandran et al. (2005), it is one of the
major pathogens threatening pineapple industries in Malaysia. To date, there are no definite solutions to overcome this problem. Although conventional techniques were used in the control of BHR disease but none of them are satisfactory due to the resistant strains and effect on environment caused by the chemical treatments (Abdenbi et al., 2010). He also reported that once the pathogen invades the inner parts of the plants, the conventional chemical products such as copper may not provide adequate control for the disease. To solve this problem, many scientists have focused on alternative solutions such as biological control agents and developing resistance variety as a substitute for ineffective chemical control. Hence, this study was implemented to understand the spread, epidemiology, management strategies for BHR disease and also screen for tolerance pineapple variety towards BHR.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Isolation of the pathogen**

Bacterial causing agent of the disease was isolated from symptomatic samples of infected pineapple in Pontian, Johor. The disease samples were processed within 24 h. after sampling. A small piece from the edge of infected lesion was cut, rinsed with 10% Clorox, and followed by 3 times of sterilized distilled water. The piece was then crushed in sterile mortar with 1 mL of sterilized distilled water. The suspension was subjected to serial dilution with sterile water and a loopful of the suspension from dilution was streaked on a selective agar media, Luria-Bertani (LB). The plates were incubated at 28 °C ± 2 °C and bacterial growth was observed from 24 to 36 h. Purified bacterial colonies were multiplicated by streaking onto nutrient agar (NA) and stored at −80°C in 20% aqueous glycerol for further use.

**Confirmation of bacteria ID**

**DNA extraction**

Genomic DNA was extracted and purified by using a commercial kit, DNeasy Blood and Tissue Kit (QIAGEN, Germany). Extraction method was according to the manufacturer’s instruction. DNA was stored at −20 °C until required.

**Detection of bacteria by species-specific primer**

Detection of bacteria was done by using a pair of species-specific primer for *D. zeae*. This primer pair, ADE1 (5'-GATCAGAAAGGCGGAGCCATGAT-3') and ADE2 (5'-CTTGCGCAGTTGTTGTTGTC-3'), was expected to amplify a 420-bp fragment. The DNA was amplified in 50 μL reaction volumes containing PCR buffer (25 μL PCR Master Mix) by Thermo Scientific-DreamTaq Green PCR Master Mix (2×), 1 μM or each primer and 1 μg of DNA template. The PCR was run for 5 min at 94 °C in the first cycle, 25 cycles of 1 min at 94 °C, 2 min at 72 °C and for the final step, 8 min at 72 °C (Nassar et al., 1996) in MyCycler™ Thermal Cycler (Bio-Rad). All PCR products were analyzed on a 1% agarose gel at 80V for 90 min in Tris-borate buffer. Gel stained with Fluoresafe DNA stain and visualized by Compact Digimage System UVDI (Major Science), together with 100 bp ladder set (Thermo Scientific).

**PCR amplification and sequencing of 16S rRNA**

The 16S rRNA were amplified by using universal primers fD1 and rP2 (Weisburg et al., 1991). Amplification reactions were prepared in a total volume of 50 μL that contained PCR buffer (25 μL PCR Master Mix) by Thermo Scientific-DreamTaq Green PCR Master Mix (2×), 1 μM or each primer and 1 μg of DNA template. Amplification conditions were as follows: Initial denaturation at 94 °C for 4 min, 30 cycles of 94 °C for 4 min, annealing at 58 °C for 1 min, and extension at 72 °C for 3 min and followed by final extension at 72 °C for 10 min. DNA sequencing was performed at First Base Laboratories, Seri Kembangan, Selangor, Malaysia.

**Sequence analysis**

The 16S rRNA nucleotide sequences obtained in this study were aligned with ClustalW multiple alignment programme using MEGA software, version 6.0 and compared with other known sequences of BBD stains in GenBank using BLAST (Basic Local Alignment Search Tool) search programme of National Institute of Biotechnology Information (http://blast.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov). The 16S rRNA sequences which we determined have been deposited in the GenBank database.

**Disease dissemination pattern study**

Two observation plots were prepared for disease dissemination study. Two hundred (200) plants of Josapine pineapple variety were planted in each plot. One plant from each plot was selected as disease infection source. The plant was then inoculated with *E. chrysanthemi* inoculum. In Plot A the inoculated plant was set at the edge of the plot while in Plot B in the middle. Disease incidence (DI) was evaluated and mapped for 12 weeks.

**Screening of pineapple varieties for its resistance towards BHR**

**BHR field inoculation procedures**

*Erwinia chrysanthemi* inoculum was prepared in laboratory and Josapine pineapple variety was use as a control. The plants were inoculated with bacterial suspension at 1×10⁸ CFU per mL into 4-month-old pineapple plants (Ramachandran et al., 2015). Ten milliliters of bacterial suspension inoculated into each test plants.
Evaluation of lesion development incidence

Eight varieties of pineapple (Maspine, N36, MD2, Morris, Sarawak, Chrystal honey, Gandul and Josapine) were planted in the field using standard agricultural practices and arranged in Random Complete Block Design (RCBD). Percentage of lesion and leaf infected were recorded and classified based on disease observation scale index (Figure 1).

| Scale | Definition | Presence of Lesion | No. leaf infected per plant |
|-------|------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| 0     | Resistant  | No lesion on leaves | No leaves infected.         |
| 1     | Moderately resistant | Slight lesion on leaves. (Less than 5%) | Less than 10% leaves infected. |
| 2     | Moderately susceptible | Slight lesion on leaves. (over 5% to 10%) | 10-25% of leaves infected. |
| 3     | Susceptible | Lesion on leaves (over 10% to 20%) | 20-30% of leaves infected. |
| 4     | Very susceptible | Lesion on leaves (21% and above) | 40% and above leaves infected. |

Figure 1: Scale descriptions of pineapple leaves’ physical parameters.

Statistical data analysis

Field experiment was performed using a randomized complete block design with four replications. Percentage of lesion and leaf infected were recorded and classified based on disease observation scale. Data was then analysed using analysis of variance (ANOVA) followed by comparison of means separation using Duncan multiple range test (DMRT).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Confirmation of bacteria ID

An approximately 420-bp amplified fragment of the ubiquitous was obtained from bacterial strains isolated from the study (Figure 2a). The species specific- PCR test with ADE1 and ADE2 primers used were able to accurately detect and identify the D. zeae isolated from pineapple. This 420-bp fragment is part of the pectate lyase-encoding pel gene belonging to the pelADE family in D. zeae. Approximately 1500-bp product (Figure 2b) was obtained for the primer pair df1/rP2. The partial 16S rRNA gene sequences obtained was then compared with gene sequences of known strains in Genbank database. Tested strain had highest homology (95 to 96%) to the 16S rDNA of D. zeae CFBP 2052 (NR041923). The partial 16S rDNA sequence of the isolated strain was deposited into the Genbank database with accession number MK874911. This strain was later used as a working culture inoculated in the field test.

Disease dissemination pattern

Dissemination pattern showed that BHR spreading was aggregated in both plots and can be observed clearly in Plot A (Figure 3 and 4). Disease incidence (DI) was found higher (6.0%) in plot A where disease source was at the edge of the plot compared to plot B where source was in the middle (2.0%). Percentage of DI in Plot A was gradually increasing from week 1 to 12. However, for Plot B, it was stagnant from week 3 to 12 as showed in the Figure 5. The dissemination pattern in plot A, showed that DI spreading from the edge towards the center of the plot. This pattern might be influenced by wind direction due to the source of inoculum located at the edge of plot easily blown by the wind compared to the Plot B which the inoculum source in the middle of plot covered by the surrounding plants. It was supported by Rohrbach and Johnson (2003) whom reported that wind and soil splash are mode of disease dissemination in field. Aggregated pattern of disease spreading showed immobility characteristic which resulted in the higher concentration of infected plants in the same area compared to random spreading normally occurred caused by the spreading due to insects. Previously study conducted by Sueno et al. (2014) also reported random pattern of symptomatic pineapple plant was observed in field and suggested the disease occurrence was triggered due to the infected planting materials.
Figure 3: Disease dissemination patterns in Plot A (Observation done on week 1 to week 12 after inoculation of *E. chrysanthemi*).

Figure 4: Disease dissemination patterns pattern in Plot B (Observation done on week 1 to week 12 after inoculation of *E. chrysanthemi*).

Figure 5: Percentage of Disease Incidence (DI) in Plot A and Plot B.

**Screening of pineapple varieties**

Observation of lesion development on each plant varieties (Table 1) indicated that there is highly significant difference between pineapples varieties observed. Based on developed lesion scale, scored from 0 to 4, highest score was recorded in Josapine variety (3.09), which is over 10-20% of lesion was recorded. Low percentages of lesion (less than 5%) were recorded in 3 varieties (Chrsytal Honey, Maspline and Sarawak) which their scales range from 1.41 to 1.46. This indicated that, Josapine variety is the most susceptible variety with the highest percentage of lesion while chrsytal honey, maspine and Sarawak showed tolerant ability towards BHR. Study also found that, there is highly significant difference between lesion and days of observation. Study recorded that as day after planting increased; percentages of lesion on plant also increased.

**Table 1: Observation of lesion scale with different pineapples varieties and time of observation.**

| Variables | Lesion scale |
|-----------|--------------|
| Pineapple varieties |             |
| Maspine | 1.46d         |
| N36 | 1.66cd        |
| Md2 | 2.49b         |
| Morris | 2.36b         |
| Sarawak | 1.56d         |
| Chrsytal honey | 1.41d         |
| Gandul | 1.87c         |
| Josapine | 3.09a         |
| F-test | **           |

| Observation days | Lesion scale |
|------------------|--------------|
| 5 days |             |
| 8 days |             |
| 11 days |             |
| 14 days |             |
| 17 days |             |
| 20 days |             |
| 23 days |             |
| F-test | **           |

Interaction Ns

Notes: Non-significant (NS), significant (*) and highly significant (**) at P≤0.05, respectively by DMRT.

The study on leaf infected number also found that there is highly significant difference between pineapples varieties tested (Table 2). Based on developed leaf infected scale (from 0 to 4), the highest percentage of leaf infected recorded in two varieties of pineapple which is MD2 and Josapine with scoring 1.52 and 1.43 respectively. Besides that, the lowest percentage of leaf infected found in Chrystal Honey variety with scale 1.04. Although there is a difference in ANOVA group, all the varieties are in the similar scoring group which is score 1, with slight difference in the percentage of infected leaves (less than 10%). This disease normally affects the young leaf which is located in the heart (core) of pineapple plant. Study also found that there is no significant difference between leaf infected and different observation days.

Although the highest percentage of lesion observed in scale 3 (over 10-20% lesion) and percentage of leaf infected only less than 10% in individual plant, this disease has the potential to spread easily, especially...
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Although the highest percentage of lesion observed in scale 3 (over 10-20% lesion) and percentage of leaf infected only less than 10% in individual plant, this disease has the potential to spread easily, especially during raining season where the drainage and sanitation in the field is not in good order.

Table 2: Observation on number of leaves infected between pineapple varieties and time of observation.

| Variables                | Leaf infected scale |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Pineapple varieties      |                     |
| Maspine                  | 1.09cd              |
| N36                      | 1.11cd              |
| Md2                      | 1.52a               |
| Morris                   | 1.24b               |
| Sarawak                  | 1.18bc              |
| Chrystal honey           | 1.04d               |
| Gandul                   | 1.21bc              |
| Josphine                 | 1.43a               |
| F-test                   | **                  |

| Observation days          |                     |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| 5 days                   |                     |
| 8 days                   |                     |
| 11 days                  |                     |
| 14 days                  |                     |
| 17 days                  |                     |
| 20 days                  |                     |
| 23 days                  |                     |
| F-test                   |                     |
| Interaction              |                     |

Notes: Non-significant (NS), significant (*) and highly significant (**) at P≤0.05, respectively by DMRT.

CONCLUSION

Disease dissemination pattern of BHR disease in field was found to be aggregated. Initial inoculum source spot was observed as the determinant factor for disease development and spreading. Thus, disease monitoring, early detection, removing and destroying of infected plant is essential as the best management strategy in controlling the spreading of BHR in the field. Chrystal Honey, Maspine and Sarawak varieties were recommended based on their tolerant to BHR. However, for farmers who choose to plant other varieties, frequent disease surveillance is very important as prevention of disease infection. This finding is also important especially for plant breeders for developed of new varieties, identification of the potential varieties and prospecting for resistance gene for varietal improvement in the future.

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