Biotechnology for Industrial Production of Fine Chemicals

International Conference
The 93rd Event of the EFB (European Federation of Biotechnology)
Zermatt, September 29 – October 2, 1996

Structure, Function, and Application of Microbial Lactonases

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1. Novel Microbial Lactonases [1]

Lactonase is a novel enzyme recently discovered by us. The enzyme catalyzes reversible hydrolysis of aldonate lactones to the corresponding aldonate. We isolated this enzyme from a fungus Fusarium oxysporum. The enzyme was characterized in some details and shown to be promising as a practical catalyst for optical resolution of racemic pantoyl lactone (PL), a chiral building block for the commercial production of D-pantothenate.

The relative molecular mass of the fungal lactonase is 125 kDa, and the subunit molecular mass is 60 kDa. The enzyme hydrolyzes aldonate lactones, such as D-galactono-γ-lactone and L-mannono-γ-lactone, stereospecifically. D-PL is also a good substrate of the enzyme. All the substrate lactones, which can be hydrolyzed by the enzyme, have a downward OH group at the 2-position, when the lactone rings are drawn in the Haworth projection, but the corresponding enantiomers are not hydrolyzed at all. The enzyme also irreversibly hydrolyzes several aromatic lactones, such as dihydrocumarin and homogentisic-acid lactone. The enzyme contains about 1 mol of calcium per subunit and is highly glycosylated. Calcium seems to be necessary for both enzyme activity and stability.

A similar kind of lactonase was found in Brevibacterium proteoformiae. The bacterial enzyme hydrolyzes only L-PL; D-PL is not a substrate. Various kinds of aromatic lactones are also hydrolyzed, but aldonate lactones are not hydrolyzed.

2. Optical Resolution of Racemic PL with Lactonase of F. oxysporum [2–4]

If racemic PL is used as a substrate for the hydrolysis reaction by the stereospecific lactonase, only the D- or L-PL might be converted to D- or L-PA and the L- or D-enantiomer might remain intact, respectively. Consequently, the racemic mixture could be resolved into D-PA and L-PL, or D-PL and L-PA as shown in Scheme 1. In the case of L-PL-specific lactonase, the optical purity of the remaining D-PL might be low, except when the hydrolysis of L-PL is complete. On the other hand, using the D-PL-specific lactonase, D-PA with high optical purity could be constantly obtained independently of hydrolysis yield. Therefore, we investigated the enzymatic resolution of racemic PL with D-PL-specific lactonase of F. oxysporum.

When F. oxysporum cells were incubated with DL-PL, only D-PL was hydrolyzed to D-PA; suggesting that F. oxysporum cells as well as the purified lactonase catalyze the enantioselective hydrolysis of PL.

Under the optimized conditions, D-PL in a racemic mixture of 5380 mM PL (700 mg/ml) was stereospecifically hydrolyzed to D-PA by the fungal cells with automatically controlling the pH of the reaction mixture at 7.0 with 15 M NH₄OH. The formation of L-PA was barely detected. After 24 h, the concentration of PL hydrolyzed in the reaction mixture reached 2480 mM (322 mg/ml) with an optical purity of 96% ee for D-PA.

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Development of a Fermentation Process for the Manufacture of Riboflavin

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Introduction

Vitamin B$_2$ (riboflavin) is produced for large-scale commercial applications by chemical synthesis or by a combined fermentative/chemical process. In the last years, novel microbiological production processes for synthesis of riboflavin were developed, some of which represent attractive alternatives to the current production processes. The novel Roche process uses a recombinant *Bacillus subtilis* strain. Here, we describe the development of this strain, its use in fermentation, product purification, and analytics. In addition, we discuss other aspects relevant for the introduction of a novel biotechnology-derived product for application in animal feed and human nutrition, such as safety evaluation and environmental aspects. The Roche process offers the possibility to obtain a product of superior quality by using more environmentally friendly production technology. Riboflavin, thus, represents a good example to illustrate the contribution of modern biotechnology to replace traditional mineral-oil-based chemical processes by more natural ‘green’ production processes based on renewable resources like starch or vegetable oil.

Commercial Application

Riboflavin is mainly used in animal feed and human food. In feed, riboflavin is important as a vitamin for live stock. In food, riboflavin like other vitamins is added mainly to compensate for the loss of vitamins resulting from industrial processing. In addition, riboflavin is used as a colorant for, e.g. soft drinks. Only a small amount of the riboflavin sold is used in human pharmaceutical applications to compensate for vitamin deficiencies. Each year, several thousand tons of riboflavin are produced worldwide, mainly by *F. Hoffmann-La Roche Ltd.* (Switzerland) and *BASF* (Germany).

Current Production Process

Currently, riboflavin is produced mainly by chemical synthesis starting from ribose, which is obtained fermentatively using *Bacillus* strains. This process has been developed and continuously improved in the last decades [1]. Development of biotechnological processes for the commercial production of riboflavin has been a focus for research for many years [2-4], however, until recently, these processes were not economically competitive. Riboflavin production strains were developed on the basis of eukaryotic fungi or prokaryotic bacteria. The fungus *Ashbya goshypii* is a naturally occurring over-

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