

Cloning of the *CYP51* gene from the eyespot pathogen *Tapesia yallundae* indicates that resistance to the DMI fungicide prochloraz is not related to sequence changes in the gene encoding the target site enzyme

Henry M. Wood^a, Matthew J. Dickinson^a, John A. Lucas^b, Paul S. Dyer^{a,*}

^a School of Biological Sciences, University of Nottingham, University Park, Nottingham NG7 2RD, UK

^b IACR-Long Ashton Research Station, University of Bristol, Long Ashton, Bristol BS18 9AF, UK

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Abstract

Resistance to sterol 14 α -demethylase inhibitor (DMI) fungicides has been correlated with mutations in the *CYP51* gene encoding the target enzyme eburicol 14 α -demethylase. *CYP51* was isolated from the eyespot pathogen *Tapesia yallundae* revealing a predicted 526-amino acid product exhibiting homology to other fungal CYP51s. *CYP51* was sequenced from four field isolates sensitive or resistant to the DMI fungicide prochloraz and partially sequenced from two further isolates and eight progeny from a cross between prochloraz-sensitive and -resistant parents. Two alleles of the gene were detected termed *CYP51-1* and *CYP51-2*. No correlation was found between sequence change and fungicide sensitivity. Therefore prochloraz resistance involved a mechanism other than mutation in the target site gene. © 2001 Federation of European Microbiological Societies. Published by Elsevier Science B.V. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

Sterol 14 α -demethylase inhibitor (DMI) fungicides represent the largest and most important group of modern anti-fungal compounds. They have remained highly effective despite many years of use and their single-site mode of action [1]. However, decreased sensitivity and field resistance to certain DMIs has been reported in at least 13 species of plant pathogen [2].

Field isolates of the cereal eyespot pathogen *Tapesia yallundae* with reduced sensitivity to the imidazole DMI fungicide prochloraz (1-[*N*-propyl-*N*-[2-(2,4,6-trichlorophenoxy)ethyl]carbamoyl]-imidazole) have recently been detected in France and New Zealand [3,4]. Understanding the molecular genetic basis of resistance should aid in developing improved strategies for managing eyespot disease and predicting models of resistance to prochloraz in other pathogens [5]. Sexual crosses between field isolates of *T. yallundae* with varying levels of resistance to pro-

chloraz, together with appropriate back and F₁ crosses, have indicated that resistance is conferred by a single major gene [4]. There was also evidence of polygenic components increasing levels of resistance in the most resistant isolates.

Given that DMI fungicides inhibit the enzyme eburicol 14 α -demethylase in filamentous fungi, studies of DMI resistance have primarily investigated *CYP51*, the gene encoding this enzyme. Point mutations at amino acid residue 136 (in a highly conserved region thought to be responsible for substrate recognition) have been correlated with DMI resistance in field isolates of *Erysiphe graminis* and *Uncinula necator* [6–8]. Laboratory-generated mutants of *Candida albicans* and strains of *Penicillium italicum* resistant to DMIs also showed changes in this and two other regions [9–12]. Alteration(s) in the *CYP51* gene was therefore seen as a likely mechanism of prochloraz resistance in *T. yallundae*.

This study describes the isolation and sequencing of *CYP51* with comparisons made between sequences from field isolates sensitive and resistant to prochloraz. Progeny from a cross between sensitive and resistant parents were also analysed to determine whether differences in gene se-

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 (115) 9513203;
Fax: +44 (115) 9513251; E-mail: paul.dyer@nottingham.ac.uk

quence segregated with resistance. Finally, the gene copy number within sensitive and resistant isolates was investigated as a possible basis for increased fungicide resistance.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Fungal isolates, media and DNA extraction

Field isolates of *T. yallundae* with differing levels of resistance to prochloraz (Table 1) were grown as previously described [4]. Eight progeny from a cross between 22-433 and PR11 [4] were also used: 37-53-4, 37-53-61, 37-53-101, 37-53-118 ($IC_{50} \leq 0.03$ mg l⁻¹, i.e. sensitive) and 37-53-34, 37-53-38, 37-53-44, 37-53-65 (IC_{50} 0.3–0.6 mg l⁻¹, i.e. resistant). Cultures for DNA production were grown as described [13] and DNA extracted using a DNeasy plant mini kit (Qiagen).

2.2. PCR of *CYP51* with degenerate primers

The amino acid sequences of published *CYP51* genes from the filamentous fungi *P. italicum* (GenBank accession number AFZ49750 [14]), *Ustilago maydis* (AFZ48164 [15]), *U. necator* (AFU72657 [6]) and *E. graminis* (AFO52515 [8]) were aligned and degenerate primers F2 (5'-[CT]TIA-CIACICIGTITT[CT]GG-3') and R2 (CCIGCCATIA-[AG]IA[AG]IG[CT]IATCATCAT) designed to anneal to regions of high homology. These were used in 50 µl reactions containing 5 µl 10× buffer, 150 pmol each of F2 and R2, 200 µM dNTPs, 1 U Sigma Jumpstart polymerase and approx. 40 ng 22-432 genomic DNA. Cycle conditions were 94°C for 5 min; 45 cycles of 94°C for 1 min, 48°C for 1 min and 72°C for 1 min 45 s; 72°C for 5 min. An appropriately sized band was excised and purified using a Qiaex II gel extraction kit (Qiagen) prior to sequencing.

Table 1
Characteristics of field isolates used in sequencing of *CYP51* from *T. yallundae*

Strain	Source	IC_{50} (mg l ⁻¹) ^a	Phenotype ^b
22-432	Wheat, Cambs., UK	≤0.03	Prc-S
22-433	Wheat, Beds., UK	≤0.03	Prc-S
22-445	Wheat, northern France	≤0.03	Prc-S
PR1	Wheat, northern France	1.0	Prc-MR
PR11	Wheat, northern France	0.5	Prc-LR
11-3-18	Wheat, Southland, New Zealand	2.4	Prc-HR

^a IC_{50} value, prochloraz concentration required to inhibit mycelial growth by 50%.

^bProchloraz sensitivity/resistance. Prc-S indicates sensitive ($IC_{50} < 0.05$ mg l⁻¹); Prc-LR indicates low resistance ($IC_{50} = 0.2$ – 0.6 mg l⁻¹); Prc-MR indicates medium resistance ($IC_{50} = 0.7$ – 1.5 mg l⁻¹); Prc-HR indicates high resistance ($IC_{50} = 1.6$ – 5.0 mg l⁻¹).

2.3. Library screening, PCR and sequencing of *CYP51* from various isolates

A ³²P-labelled probe was made from the *CYP51* PCR product and hybridised at 65°C with plaque lifts of a Lambda FIX II library of 22-432 bound to Hybond-N membranes in three rounds of library screening (Amersham). Positive plaques were selected by PCR according to product formation with two specific primers, WK13 (CGGTTATGAGGTAGAGGAGC) and WK15 (AAG-ATTGGACTCACCCTGACG), derived from the sequenced PCR product. Further PCR was performed with 1 µl phage suspensions using Expand High Fidelity or Expand Long Template PCR systems (Boehringer Mannheim) with combinations of T3, T7, WK13 and WK15 primers according to the manufacturer. Resulting bands were gel-purified and sequenced. New primers were designed to allow double strand chromosome walking through the whole region of the putative *CYP51* gene.

Further primers flanking the *CYP51* gene were designed (ENDF, GGCACGAGCCAATCACACGGAGGC; and ENDR, GCTATCCCACCCAAAGACGC) and used to amplify the complete gene from field isolates PR11, 22-433 and 11-3-18 with an annealing temperature of 55°C. Resultant products were gel-purified and sequenced. Later analysis identified differences between sensitive and resistant isolates upstream of, and at the 5' end of the putative *CYP51* gene. This region was therefore sequenced from PR1, 22-445 and eight progeny from a cross between 22-433 and PR11.

Finally, Southern analysis was performed using standard protocols [16] to determine gene copy number. Genomic DNA from 22-433 (Prc-S), PR11 (Prc-LR), and 11-3-18 (Prc-HR) was digested using *Bam*HI, *Eco*RI and *Eco*RV and probed using a 1019-bp fragment of the *CYP51* gene.

3. Results and discussion

The *CYP51* gene was sequenced from isolates of *T. yallundae* both sensitive and resistant to the DMI fungicide prochloraz in order to determine whether resistance was correlated with differences in sequence as reported elsewhere [7–9,11,12].

3.1. Isolation and sequencing of *CYP51*

PCR with primers F2 and R2 yielded a 608-bp product which was used as a probe to obtain a clone containing the putative *CYP51* gene from a genomic library of *T. yallundae*. The *CYP51* sequence was assembled from overlapping 3-kb and 12-kb fragments amplified using primers T7 and WK15 or T3 and WK13 respectively. The resulting gene (GenBank AF276660) was 1708 bp in

3.2. Comparison of *CYP51* from isolates with different sensitivities to prochloraz

CYP51 was completely sequenced from 22-433, PR11 and 11-3-18 (GenBank AF276660, AF276661 and AF276662 respectively). The sensitive isolate 22-433 had an identical sequence to 22-432 (Prc-S) derived from the genomic library. In contrast, differences were evident with the resistant isolates PR11 and 11-3-18, which had identical sequences. A substitution (threonine for alanine) was present at residue 6, and there were 10 further silent substitutions, all within the first 750 bp (Fig. 1). Differences were also evident in the 125-bp sequence upstream of the start codon, with two substitutions and a deletion of seven nucleotides. Thus, two allelic forms of the gene, termed *CYP51-1* and *CYP51-2* (from 22-432 and 22-433, or PR11 and 11-3-18 respectively) appeared to be present. These alleles were also detected in isolates 22-445 and PR1, and the 37-53 sexual progeny. However, no correlation was evident between change in sequence and increased resistance to prochloraz with sensitive isolate 22-445 having the identical *CYP51-2* sequence as the resistant isolates PR1, PR11 and 11-3-18 in the region sequenced (Fig. 1). Furthermore there was no correlation between nucleotide sequence and alteration in fungicide sensitivity in the 37-53 sexual progeny with resistant and sensitive progeny exhibiting the same *CYP51* sequence (Fig. 1). Thus, resistance to prochloraz in *T. yallundae* is not due to a mutation in the gene encoding the target enzyme, at least for the isolates examined in this study. This is an important finding because it contrasts with results for *U. necator*, *E. graminis* [7,8], *P. italicum*, [12] and *C. albicans* [9–11] in which resistance to DMI fungicides is linked to point mutations in *CYP51*. In particular, no point mutation was evident at codon 136 in *T. yallundae*, unlike the other species. However, our results do not preclude the possibility that prochloraz resistance in other species or field isolates of *T. yallundae* may arise from mutations in *CYP51*. One other *CYP51* sequence from *T. yallundae* became available at the end of the study period (AF208658), differing from *CYP51-1* only at amino acid position 13 (threonine instead of glutamine).

Hybridisation results revealed no clear differences in signal intensity between 22-433, PR11 and 11-3-18 (results not shown). All appeared to have a single copy of *CYP51*, although restriction pattern polymorphisms were evident. Thus, increased copy number of *CYP51* did not provide a mechanism for increased fungicide resistance, although this has been reported elsewhere [16].

Previous work has established that prochloraz resistance in *T. yallundae* is primarily conferred by a single major gene for resistance [4]. Assumptions that resistance is due to mutation(s) in the gene encoding the target protein, as may be hypothesised from comparable DMIs, are invalid. The mechanism of resistance may alternatively involve an alteration in a gene upstream in the sterol biosynthesis

pathway, as reported for *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* [18] or expression of a gene conferring ability to detoxify prochloraz as in *Rhizoctonia solani* [19]. Genes involved with multidrug resistance (notably ABC transporter genes) may also confer fungicide resistance [20–22]. However, preliminary screening suggests that DMI fungicide resistance in *T. yallundae* is not associated with resistance to fungicides of different chemical classes (H.M. Wood, unpublished results). Future work to identify the genetic basis of prochloraz resistance in *T. yallundae* will now involve the identification of molecular marker(s) [23] linked to resistance genes and examination of sterol biosynthetic pathways.

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