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(12) United States Patent

Heckel et al.

(54) POLYNUCLEOTIDE ENCODING A GENE CONFERRING RESISTANCE TO BACILLUS THURINGIENSIS TOXINS

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(US)

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- (52) **U.S. Cl.** 435/6; 536/23.1; 536/24.3

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(45) **Date of Patent:** Apr. 18, 2006

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Primary Examiner—Ethan Whisenant (74) Attorney, Agent, or Firm—Dority & Manning, P.A.

(57) ABSTRACT

Nucleic acid (DNA) probes are provided which will specifically identify a gene for resistance of Bt in insect populations. Sequences are identified associated with the onset of resistance to *Bacillus thuringiensis* toxins. The sequences are used as probes to monitor the presence of acquired insect resistance associated with transgenic crops.

7 Claims, 5 Drawing Sheets

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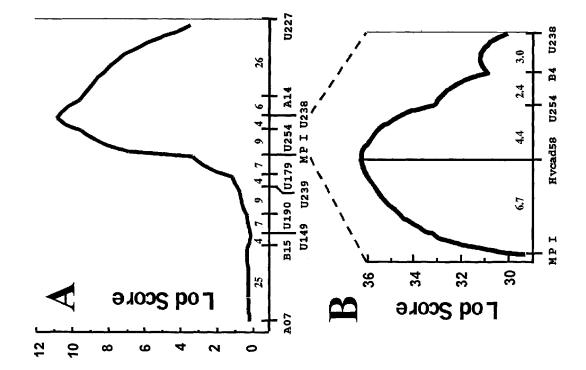
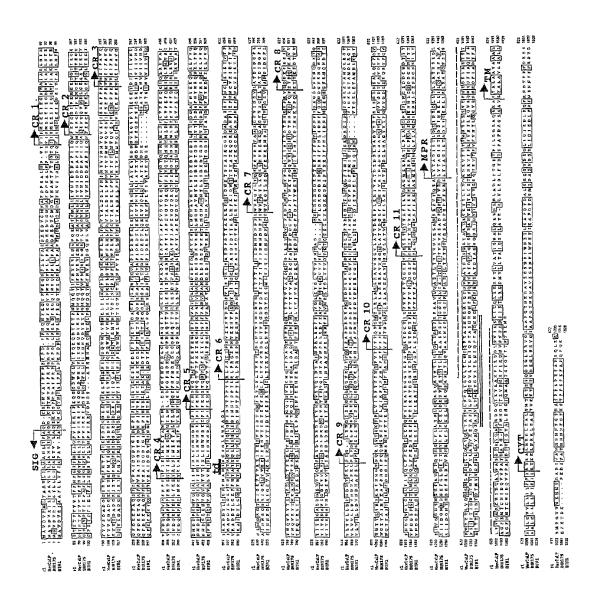
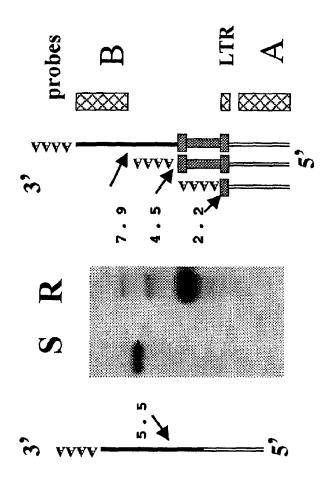


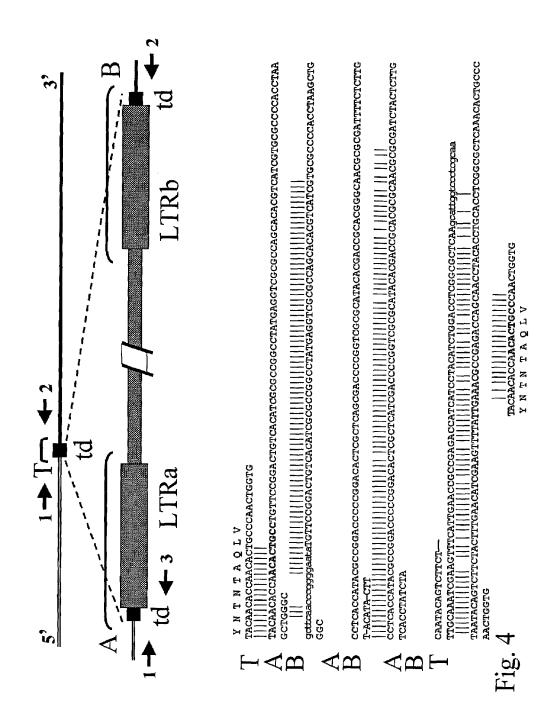
Fig.

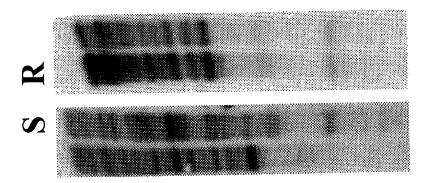




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Fig. 3





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POLYNUCLEOTIDE ENCODING A GENE CONFERRING RESISTANCE TO BACILLUS THURINGIENSIS TOXINS

RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims the benefit of U.S. provisional application having Ser. No. 60/276,180 filed on Mar. 15, 2001, and which is incorporated herein by reference.

STATEMENT AS TO RIGHTS TO INVENTIONS MADE UNDER FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

The United States Government may have rights to this 15 invention under the terms of a sponsored research agreement by the National Science Foundation, grant number MCB-9816056.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention is directed towards the occurrence and identification of pesticide tolerance of certain insects. The invention makes use of specific polynucleotide sequences associated with the onset of resistance to *Bacillus thuring-* 25 *iensis* toxins which are used as probes to monitor the presence of acquired insect resistance associated with transgenic crops. The specific polynucleotide sequences are also used to monitor changes in the frequencies of alleles which confer the resistance to the toxins.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) contains genes encoding insecticidal proteins. Bt proteins are toxic when 35 ingested by susceptible insect larvae. The protein attacks the insect's midgut, causes cessation of feeding, and eventually kills the insect. Bt toxins have been produced as fermentation products of Bt cultures and used in spray formulations for crop protection. Bt genes have also been used commercially to transform crop plants; these transgenic crop plants' cells then produce the insecticidal protein which attacks susceptible insects that attempt to feed on the plant.

The general mode of action of Bt toxins is well known in the art and is described for example by Rajamohan F, Lee M 45 K, Dean D H (1998) Progress in Nucleic Acid Research and Molecular Biology 60: 1–27. The protein produced by the bacterium is usually a protoxin, which itself is not toxic until it is proteolytically cleaved by the insect's own proteases. The smaller protein resulting from proteolysis is the active 50 toxin. This toxin diffuses through the peritrophic membrane to the midgut epithelium, where it binds to one or more sites in the membrane. This initial binding step may be reversible, but eventually the toxin becomes irreversibly bound to the membrane. A conformational change occurs in the toxin, 55 whereby membrane-spanning alpha helices are inserted into the membrane, where they aggregate and form pores. These pores disrupt the normal osmotic balance of the epithelial cells. The cells swell and lyse, leading to destruction of the midgut epithelial cell layer and eventual death of the insect. 60

The initial binding step is believed to be necessary for toxin action; consequently there have been many studies on binding interactions of Bt toxins and components of the midgut, described for example by Pietrantonio P V and Gill S S (1996) in *Biology of the Insect Midgut*, Chapman & Hall, 65 London, pp 345–372. Techniques used to study binding often start with the isolation of a brush border membrane

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vesicles (BBMVs) from the microvillar portion of columnar epithelial cells. Binding to BBMVs in suspension can be measured using labeled toxin. Alternatively, proteins can be isolated from BBMVs, separated by denaturing electrophoresis conditions, transferred to membranes, and probed with toxin. In addition, histological sections of insect midguts can be prepared and binding of labeled toxin can be visualized using microscopy.

Binding of Bt toxins to specific insect proteins can also be 10 measured. Several proteins that interact with Bt toxins are well known in the art. Aminopeptidases exist in many different forms in insect midguts, and many of them have been shown to bind Bt toxins (Knight P J K, Knowles B H, Ellar D J (1995) Journal of Biological Chemistry 270 (30): 17765-17770; Gill S S, Cowles E A, Francis V (1995) Journal of Biological Chemistry 270 (45): 27277–27282; Luo K, Sangadala S, Masson L, Mazza A, Brousseau R, Adang M J (1997) Insect Biochemistry and Molecular Biology 27 (8-9): 735-743). Members of the cadherin super-20 family have also been shown to bind Bt toxins (Vadlamudi R K, Weber E, Ji I H, Ji T H, and Bulla L A (1995) Journal of Biological Chemistry 270: 5490–5494; and Nagamatsu Y, Koike T, Sasaki K, Yoshimoto A, Furukawa Y, (1999) FEBS Letters 460: 385–390). Phosphatase enzymes have also been implicated in Bt toxin binding (Sangadala S, Walters F S, English L H, Adang M J, (1994) Journal of Biological Chemistry 269 (13): 10088-10092). TPP-75, an elastaselike serine protease, binds to certain Bt toxins and causes them to precipitate (Milne R E, Pang A S D, Kaplan H (1995) Insect Biochemistry and Molecular Biology 25 (10): 1101–1114). BTR-270, a peptidoglycan, binds Cry1A toxins with high affinity (Valaitis AP, Jenkins JL, Lee MK, Dean DH, Garner KJ (2001) Archives of Insect Biochemistry and Physiology 46 (4): 186-200). Bt toxins have also been shown to bind to nonprotein components of midgut epithelial membranes. Glycolipids from Manduca sexta have been shown to bind Cry1A toxins using an overlay technique (Garczynski S F and Adang M J (2000) in Entomopathogenic Bacteria: From Laboratory to Field Application, Kluwer Academic Publishers, pp 181–197). Neutral lipids are involved in Bt toxin binding to Manduca sexta brush border membranes (Sangadala S, Azadi P, Carlson R, Adang M J (2001) Insect Biochemistry and Molecular Biology 32 (1): 97-107). Neutral glycolipids, especially hexa- and trisaccharylceramides, are implicated in Cry1A toxin binding in diamondback moth (Kumaraswami N S, Maruyama T, Kurabe S, Kishimoto T, Mitsui T, Hori H, (2001) Comparative Biochemistry and Physiology B-Biochemistry & Molecular Biology 129 (1): 173–183).

The relationship between binding targets for Bt-toxins and susceptibility or resistance to Bt is very complicated and not completely understood at the present time. Several hundred strains of *Bacillus thuringiensis* exist, with considerable specificity toward various groups of insects. Coevolution between the insects and Bt has resulted in specificity of the interaction between Bt-toxin and the membranes of insect gut cells. The Bt-toxin of a particular strain of *Bacillus thuringiensis* may bind to the gut of some insect larvae but not to others. Thus, the Bt-toxins may have a high specificity for a small number of insect pest species while having no significant activity against beneficial insects, wildlife, or humans.

Plants transformed to carry Bt genes and express insecticidal proteins are known in the art and include potato, cotton, tomato, corn, tobacco, lettuce, and canola. Transformed plants are known in the art as reflected in U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,608,142; 5,495,071; 5,349,124; and 5,254,799, the

specifications of which are incorporated in their entirety herein by reference. The use of genetically engineered plants is designed to reduce the use of broad spectrum insecticides.

There is concern that resistance may evolve to Bt toxins, whether they are applied to plants in spray formulations or 5 the plants are genetically engineered to express them. The development of resistance to Bt-toxin expressing crops may also result in resistance to commercial formulations of fermented strains of Bt such as DIPEL® (Abbott Laboratories).

Rapid, reliable methods for broad screening to distinguish and detect the development of Bt resistance in populations of insects are needed. Heretofore, all methods require living or fresh-frozen insect larvae or preparations derived from them. The simplest methods employ bioassays on living 15 insects, in which survivorship or larval metabolic rates are determined over time following a diet containing a specified concentration of a Bt-toxin. One such bioassay based on reduced metabolic rates after exposure to low doses of toxin mixed into artificial diet is discussed in U.S. Pat. No. 20 6,060,039 to Roe et al. which is incorporated herein by reference. Other bioassays are based on survival after exposure to a single, high diagnostic dose of toxin (for example, Diaz-Gomez O, Rodriguez J C, Shelton A M, Lagunes-T A, Bujanos-M R, (2000) Journal of Economic Entomology 93 25 (3): 963–970).

In principle, these bioassay methods can detect resistance no matter what its biochemical or physiological mechanism is. However, they require living, healthy larvae for their use, which are not always available. A more severe limitation on 30 these methods is that, depending on the frequency of resistance genes in the populations, millions of individuals may need to be tested to detect a single resistant larva. High-level resistance to Bt is usually recessive, which means that an resistant. To a very good approximation, the frequency of such homozygous individuals is given by the square of the frequency of the resistance allele. For example, if the resistance allele frequency is one in a thousand, the fremillion. In this example, more than a million larvae would need to be screened to detect resistance.

One solution to this problem is to develop methods for detecting the resistance genes directly. In the example just given, the frequency of heterozygous carriers of one copy of 45 the resistance allele is 2×0.001×0.999 or approximately 2 in a thousand. When resistance is recessive, these individuals would not be identified by bioassay because the one resistance allele they carry is not enough to make them fully resistant. But a direct, DNA-based method for detecting the 50 resistance allele would identify these individuals, and sample sizes on the order of a thousand, rather than a million, would suffice.

The main limitation to developing DNA-based methods for detecting resistance alleles is that, up to now, the identity 55 of resistance-causing genes has been unknown. In spite of much work on Bt toxin mode of action, prior to the invention described herein there has not been a demonstration of which genes, when mutated, actually cause resistance. Accordingly, there is room for variation and improvement in 60 the art of screening assays useful in detecting the presence of genes conferring Bt resistance in natural populations.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is one aspect of one of the present inventions to provide a genetic probe to identify and monitor resistance for the

Bt-toxin in target insect populations. One such insect pest is the tobacco budworm (Heliothis virescens) which is a major economic pest of cotton.

It is yet another aspect of one of the present inventions to develop a DNA probe and assay protocol which distinguishes between the conditions of homozygotes and heterozygotes with respect to resistance to Bt in populations of Heliothis virescens and other insects.

It is yet another aspect of one of the present inventions to provide a process and useful sequences in which nucleotide probes are used to monitor the presence of acquired insect resistance associated with a transgenic crop.

It is yet another aspect of one of the present inventions to provide a process and useful nucleotide sequences which are used to monitor population changes in the frequency of alleles which are associated with the resistance to Bt toxin.

These and other features, aspects, and advantages of the present invention will become better understood with reference to the following description and appended claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

A full and enabling disclosure of the present invention, including the best mode thereof, to one of ordinary skill in the art, is set forth more particularly in the remainder of the specification, including reference to the accompanying

FIG. 1 is a QTL map of the Cry1Ac resistance trait on linkage group 9 of Heliothis virescens.

FIG. 2 is a conceptual translation of HevCaLP (s1 allele and r1 allele) in alignment with BmBtR175 of Bombyx mori and BtR1 of Manduca sexta.

FIG. 3 is a northern analysis of mRNA isolated from insect must have two copies of the resistance gene to be 35 susceptible and resistant strains following probing with the gene sequences set forth herein.

> FIG. 4 sets forth the insertion point of the Hel-1 element in the r1 allele of HevCaLP.

FIG. 5 shows the multi-copy occurrence of Hel-1 in quency of homozygous resistant individuals is one in a 40 genomic DNA of resistant and susceptible strains of Heliothis virescens.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEQUENCE LISTINGS

The accompanying sequence ID listings are identified below. The sequence listings appear following the claims and are incorporated herein by reference.

The first sequence 1 identifies SEQ ID NO: 1 which is the DNA sequence of the susceptible allele s1 of HevCaLP.

Sequence 2 is the protein sequence SEQ ID NO: 2 of a conceptual translation of allele s1 as used in the protein alignment to Bombyx and Manduca.

Sequence 3 is the DNA sequence of SEQ ID NO: 3 which is the resistant allele r1 of HevCaLP, including the Hel-1 insert and the duplicated target sequences.

Sequence 4 is the DNA insert identified as SEQ ID NO: 4 for the Hel-1 insert which does not include duplicated target sequences.

Sequence 5, having SEQ ID NO: 5, is a DNA sequence corresponding to the left LTR of the Hel-1 insert.

Sequence 6, having SEQ ID NO: 6, is a DNA sequence corresponding to the right LTR of the Hel-1 insert.

Sequence 7, having SEQ ID NO: 7, is a DNA sequence of primer F1 corresponding to bases 1982 to 2001 of SEQ ID NO: 3.

Sequence 8, having SEQ ID NO: 8, is a DNA sequence corresponding to primer R2 consisting of the reverse complement of bases 4322 to 4351 of SEQ ID NO: 3.

Sequence 9, having SEQ ID NO: 9, is a DNA sequence corresponding to primer R3 consisting of the reverse 5 complement of bases 2029 to 2052 of SEQ ID NO: 3.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Reference now will be made in detail to the embodiments of the invention, one or more examples of which are set forth below. Each example is provided by way of explanation of the invention, not limitation of the invention. In fact, it will be apparent to those skilled in the art that various modifi- 15 cations and variations can be made in the present invention without departing from the scope or spirit of the invention. For instance, features illustrated or described as part of one embodiment, can be used on another embodiment to yield a still further embodiment. Thus, it is intended that the present 20 invention cover such modifications and variations as come within the scope of the appended claims and their equivalents. Other objects, features, and aspects of the present invention are disclosed in the following detailed description. It is to be understood by one of ordinary skill in the art that 25 the present discussion is a description of exemplary embodiments only and is not intended as limiting the broader aspects of the present invention, which broader aspects are embodied in the exemplary constructions.

In describing the various figures herein, the same reference numbers are used throughout to describe the same material, apparatus or process pathway. To avoid redundancy, detailed descriptions of much of the apparatus once described in relation to a figure is not repeated in the descriptions of subsequent figures, although such apparatus 35 or process is labeled with the same reference numbers.

Applicants' protocols and procedures may be found in reference to "Identification of a Gene Associated with Bt resistance in Heliothis virescens" which was published in Science, volume 293, pp 857–860, on Aug. 3, 2001; and 40 which is incorporated herein by reference.

A resistant strain of *Heliothis virescens* was previously developed in the laboratory by selection using artificial diet containing various concentrations of Bt toxin (Gould F, Anderson A, Reynolds A, Bumgarner L, Moar W (1995) 45 *Journal of Economic Entomology* 88 (6): 1545–1559). The strain, named YHD2, is 10,000 fold more resistant to the toxin Cry1Ac and is conditioned in a large part by a single recessive gene named BtR-4 which is located in linkage group 9 of *H. virescens*. The initial localization of the 50 resistance gene BtR4 has been reported in the Applicants' prior publication (Heckel D G, Gahan L C, Gould F, Anderson A (1997) *Journal of Economic Entomology* 90: 75–86) and which is incorporated herein by reference.

Further localization of BtR-4 to a particular region of 55 linkage group 9 was carried out using a total of 11 polymorphic markers spanning a length of 105 cM. The markers were scored on a segregating backcross family derived from YHD2 females crossed with susceptible males. The linkage group was scanned for quantitative trait loci (QTLs) conferring Bt resistance following the methods of Lander, E S and Botstein D (1989) *Genetics* 121: 185–193. A single, highly significant peak of the log-likelihood function indicated that the BtR-4 resistance gene is located between A14 and MPI as set forth in FIG. 1.

The cadherin superfamily was chosen as a candidate for BtR-4. Partially degenerate oligonucleotide primers Bmtp5

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and Bmtp8 as shown in Table 1 were designed based on published sequence of the BtR175 gene from *Bombyx mori* (GenBank Accession No AB026260, described by Nagamatsu Y, Toda S, Koike T, Miyoshi Y, Shigematsu S, Kogure M (1998) *Bioscience, Biotechnology and Biochemistry* 62 (4): 727–734). These primers were used in the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) with cDNA prepared from midgut mRNA of larval *Heliothis virescens*. A PCR product of 334 basepairs designated Hvcad58 was amplified, cloned and sequenced using conventional methodology well-known to those skilled in the art. The sequence of Hvcad58 corresponds to bases 4279 to 4612 of SEQ ID NO: 1.

Radiolabeled Hvcad58 was used to probe Southern filters made from additional segregating backcross families for further mapping on linkage group 9. Finer scale QTL mapping in this region using 268 backcross progeny yielded a single peak of the log-likelihood function directly above the map location of Hvcad58 (FIG. 1). The data clearly indicates that the gene containing Hvcad58 is a strong candidate for the BtR-4 resistance gene.

The Hvcad58 probe was used to screen midgut cDNA libraries made from resistant (YHD2) and susceptible strains of *Heliothis virescens*. Clones recovered from these libraries were sequenced and used to design additional primers to amplify the full-length coding sequence from susceptible cDNA. In addition to the cDNA methods, a five-prime RACE (rapid amplification of cDNA ends) technique was used to complete the full sequence.

The sequencing yielded one transcript (s1) cloned from a susceptible strain as given in SEQ ID NO: 1. Conceptual translation of this transcript produced a protein product (that we have named HevCaLP, Heliothis virescens cadherin-like protein) of 1732 amino acids as given in SEQ ID NO: 2. HevCaLP is 70% identical to the BtR175 protein, sharing a signal sequence at the amino terminus, 11 extra-cellular cadherin-type repeats, a non-cadherin proximal membrane region, a transmembrane region, and a highly conserved cytoplasmic domain at the carboxy terminus as shown in FIG. 2. It shows somewhat less similarity to the BT-R1 protein from Manduca sexta, as given in GenBank Accession No. AAB33758 and reported by Vadlamudi R K, Weber E, Ji I H, Ji T H, and Bulla L A (1995) Journal of Biological Chemistry 270: 5490-5494. The transmembrane and cytoplasmic domains are absent from that sequence of BT-R1.

Expression of the mRNA encoding HevCaLP in susceptible and resistant larval midguts was studied using northern analysis and sequencing of clones from the resistant library. As shown in FIG. 3, susceptible larvae show a single transcript of 5.5 kb. YHD2 larvae show three transcripts. The sequence of the rarest (7.9 kb) is denoted as the r1 allele, and given as set forth in SEQ ID NO: 3. It is similar to the susceptible transcript except for a 2.3 kb insert denoted as Hel-1 as given in the accompanying SEQ ID NO: 4. Hel-1 shows several hallmarks of the LTR-type retrotransposons. Hel-1 has an approximately 255 nucleotide long terminal repeat (LTR) sequence at both ends and an unrelated sequence in the middle. The left LTR sequence, LTRa, is given in SEQ ID NO: 5 and the right LTR sequence, LTRb, is given in SEQ ID NO: 6. Hel-1 is flanked by an 8-nt duplication of the host sequence ACACTGCC, as shown in FIG. 4. The transcript of intermediate abundance (4.4 kb) is an abbreviated form, truncated at the second LTR of Hel-1 by a poly-A tail. The third, highly abundant transcript (2.1 kb), is truncated at the first LTR of Hel-1 by a poly-A tail.

Because of an in-frame stop codon 30 bases into the first LTR of Hel-1, conceptual translation of the three different YHD2 transcripts produces the same truncated 622-aa pro-

tein (as shown in the translation of the r1 allele in FIG. 2). Multiple stop codons in all three reading frames of the LTR follow the initial stop codon, preventing translation of a larger protein containing the carboxy-terminus of HevCaLP. Thus, the predicted protein product of the YHD2 r1 allele (if 5 one is produced) would possess the same signal sequence as HevCaLP (possibly directing its secretion into the midgut lumen) but no predicted transmembrane domain or toxin-binding region.

Genomic Southern blots probed with the LTR region of 10 Hel-1 show that it occurs with a copy number of 10-15 in both YHD2 and susceptible insects (FIG. 5). Insertion of this Hel-1 element into the gene encoding HevCaLP has created the novel, knockout r1 allele which confers resistance when homozygous (present in two copies in an individual insect). 15 This insertion event could have occurred in the laboratory during the Bt-resistance selection protocol that produced YHD2, or may already have been present in the field-collected founders of the selection line. Thus it is now evident that a DNA-based method for detecting Bt resistance 20 in *Heliothis virescens* may be devised, based on detection of the specific insertion of the Hel-1 element into the gene encoding HevCaLP, producing the r1 allele.

To illustrate detection of the r1 allele, a PCR assay was designed using two primers flanking the insertion point (F1 25 and R2) and a third (R3) internal to the left LTR (FIG. 4). Primer F1 consists of bases 1982 to 2001 of SEQ ID NO: 3, 5' ATA CGA GCT GAC GAC ACG CTG GGA GA 3', primer R2 consists of the reverse complement of bases 4322 to 4351 of SEQ ID NO: 3, 5' TCT GAG CGT AGG AGG 30 TGT GTT GTT GAT GTC 3', and primer R3 consists of the reverse complement of bases 2029 to 2052 of SEQ ID NO: 3, 5' GCG CGA TGT GAC AGT CCG GM CAG 3'. Primers F1 and R3 produce a 71-bp band from the r1 allele. Primers F1 and R2 amplify a 99-bp band from s1 or other susceptible 35 alleles lacking the Hel-1 insert. Heterozygotes produce both bands. This is a marked improvement on a conventional bioassay, which would not distinguish heterozygotes from homozygous susceptibles because the resistant allele is recessive. It also confirms that the resistant strain is fixed for 40 the r1 allele, as all YHD2 individuals examined to date have the 71-bp band only. It will be evident to those skilled in the art that the detection method for the r1 alelle is not limited to PCR with these specific primers, and that there are many other molecular methods of detecting the specific insertion 45 of the Hel-1 element into the HevCaLP gene, based on the sequence information disclosed herein.

It is believed that the gene encoding HevCaLP is identical to BtR-4, the major resistance gene in YHD2. Recessivity of the resistant allele at BtR-4 is explained by Hel-1 inactivation of HevCaLP. HevCaLP functions as a "lethal target" of Bt-toxin, since two copies of the disrupted allele are required for 10,000-fold resistance. Heterozygotes still present a "lethal target" since they have one copy of the susceptible allele.

The normal physiological function of HevCaLP is unknown, although other members of the cadherin superfamily are involved in cell adhesion and signalling (T. Uemura (1998) *Cell* 93 (7): 1095–1098). Whatever its function, it is not essential for life, as YHD2 is viable and 60 fertile under laboratory conditions, despite being a "natural knockout" strain for HevCaLP. Whether its absence confers a fitness disadvantage in the field has important implications for resistance management, and this question can now be addressed with the information developed here. Target-site 65 resistance to other insecticides usually involves modification but not knockout of the target, which is generally essential

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for life (e.g., acetylcholinesterase for organophosphates, sodium channel for pyrethroids, GABA receptor for cyclodienes) (French-Constant R H, Pittendrigh B, Vaughan A, Anthony N (1998) *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London Series B-Biological Sciences* 353 (1376): 1685–1693,). However, methoprene resistance in *Drosophila melanogaster* provides another example of resistance by gene inactivation (Wilson T G & Ashok M, (1998) *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA* 95 (24): 14040–14044).

The present invention now makes possible the application of molecular methods to Bt-resistance monitoring. We previously estimated the frequency of YHD2-type resistant alleles in field populations of Heliothis virescens prior to widespread planting of transgenic Bt-cotton to be 0.002 (Gould F, Anderson A, Jones A, Sumerford D, Heckel D G, Lopez J, Micinski S, Leonard R, Laster M (1997) Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA 94 (8): 3519-3523). This labor-intensive, bioassay-based estimate was derived by testing progeny of more than 1,000 fieldcaught males mated to YHD2 females, for alleles which would confer resistance when heterozygous with r1. Our results now suggest that this estimate covers the entire class of HevCaLP knockouts regardless of the nature of the molecular lesion, as well as other mutants preventing any expressed HevCaLP from functioning as a toxic target. Development of efficient DNA-based methods to detect these other types of mutants at BtR4 should be a high priority and is now possible with the methods described

Only by monitoring allele frequencies at resistance genes like BtR-4 will it be possible to verify that the high-dose/refuge resistance management strategy for Bt-cotton mandated by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is actually working to keep resistance allele levels low. The present invention affords a new method of complying with EPA regulations which require monitoring resistance levels in *Heliothis virescens*. The present invention provides a nucleic acid probe that will specifically identify genes for resistance in field populations. Further, the probes and protocols set forth herein provide for a method of monitoring the population of homozygous and heterozygous resistant individuals in field populations.

Bt resistance in *Heliothis virescens* caused by other types of mutations that inactivate the HevCaLP gene product may also be screened for using the information provided herein. Such methods may include obtaining portions of the gene or its homologues by cDNA cloning or the polymerase chain reaction, determining the DNA sequence by standard methods, and examining the sequence for the occurrence mutations that may include nucleotide substitution, insertions, or deletions. Such mutations may affect protein sequences encoded by the gene by causing amino acid substitutions, insertions, or deletions as well as incorrect intron splicing, premature chain termination due to nonsense mutations, or errors in the normal initiation or termination of the transcription or translation.

By way of example, DNA or RNA isolated from individual *Heliothis virescens* is used as the template for PCR using primers specifically designed from SEQ ID NO: 1. The PCR products are directly sequenced, or cloned and sequenced, using standard methods. The sequences are examined using commercially available computer programs well known in the art, such as the Wisconsin Genetics Computer Group package. Mutations, such as individual nucleotide substitutions, insertions, or deletions; or insertions or deletions of several nucleotides, are detected by

comparison to SEQ ID NO: 1. Such mutations may alter the amino acid in the protein sequence, leading to reduced binding of Bt toxins to the HevCaLP gene product and thereby conferring resistance. Or such mutations may cause frameshifts or premature occurrence of stop codons, resulting in a truncated or absent protein that fails to bind to Bt toxins and thereby confers resistance.

In the course of this invention, an isolated nucleic acid molecule of the present invention includes a nucleic acid that is at least about 85%, preferably at least about 90%, and 10 still more preferably at least about 95%, and even more preferably at least about 99% identical to the sequence of the susceptible allele s1 of HevCaLP. Additionally, any isolated polynucleotide or naturally occurring polynucleotide that hybridizes to the sequence set forth in SEQ ID NO: 1 at 60° 15 C. in 1×SSC will have properties useful in carrying out the present invention.

Other embodiments of the present invention include isolated nucleic acid molecules that are at least about 85%, preferably at least about 90%, still more preferably at least 20 about 95%, and even more preferably at least about 99%, identical to the sequences set forth in SEQ ID NO: 3 and SEQ ID NO: 4.

Bt resistance in other insect species may also be screened for using the same approach. These species may contain one 25 or more genes homologous to the *Heliothis virescens* Hev-CaLP gene, whose products interact with Bt toxins. Resistance in these other species can be detected by obtaining the sequence of those genes, designing PCR primers, and amplifying and sequencing DNA from individual insects collected 30 from the field or reared in the laboratory. Examination of the sequence for inactivating mutations as described herein will detect Bt resistance in those species. Representative sequences of HevCaLP homologues in other species and which may be used in the screening process described herein 35 include the following:

- Manduca sexta BT-R1, GenBank Accession No.177078, U.S. Pat. No. 5,693,491 (SEQ ID NO: 1) and U.S. Pat. No. 6,007,981 (SEQ ID NO: 1);
- Bombyx mori BtR175, GenBank Accession No. 40 AB026260, described by Nagamatsu Y, Toda S, Koike T, Miyoshi Y, Shigematsu S, Kogure M (1998) Bioscience, Biotechnology and Biochemistry 62 (4): 727–734;
- 3) Pectinophora gossypiella BT-R2, GenBank Accession No. AX150183, Patent Application, International Publi- 45 cation No. WO01/34807 (SEQ ID NO: 1);
- 4) Ostrinia nubilalis, GenBank Accession No. AX147201, Patent application, International Publication No. WO 01/36639 (SEQ ID NO: 1);
- 5) Helicoverpa zea, GenBank Accession No. AX147203, 50 Patent application, International Publication No. WO01/36639 (SEQ ID NO: 3);
- Spodoptera frugiperda, GenBank Accession No. AX147205, Patent application, International Publication No. WO0/136639 (SEQ ID NO: 5); and
- 7) Lymantria dispar BTR-CAD, GenBank Accession No. AF317621.

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The above identified sequences and the referenced publications are all incorporated herein by reference as is set forth in their entirety.

The current methodology includes detecting resistance to *Bacillus thuringiensis* endotoxin in insect populations by screening for mutations that alter the structure or function of a protein as set forth in SEQ ID NO: 2. For the purposes of screening protocols, it is believed that using the sequence set forth in SEQ ID NO: 2 may include homologues and other species which would display at least 60% similarity to the sequence set forth in SEQ ID NO: 2. More preferably, the sequence similarity is at least about 75%, preferably at least about 80%, more preferably at least about 85%, even more preferably at least about 90%, still more preferably at least about 95%, and even more preferably at least about 99% identical to the amino acid sequence set forth in SEQ. ID. NO: 2.

Several of the mutations in other species detected by this approach may not have an obvious effect of activating the HevCaLP homologue. In that case, evidence that the mutation confers resistance may be obtained by conducting a linkage analysis and mapping the gene as described herein for Heliothis virescens. For that purpose, a strain of the species of interest with the mutation is crossed with a wild-type strain, and the F1 hybrids are intercrossed or backcrossed to one of the parental strains. The F2 or backcross progeny are tested for resistance by any of the bioassay methods described previously and well known in the art, and DNA is isolated from each individual progeny. The DNA is analyzed for the presence of the mutation, using restriction fragment polymorphism analysis, allele-specific PCR, denaturing gradient gel electrophoresis, singlestranded conformation polymorphism, denaturing high-performance liquid chromatography, or any other mutation detection system well known in the art. Evidence that the mutation confers resistance is obtained from the correlation across progeny between presence of the mutation and presence of resistance.

A straightforward extension of this method of detecting Bt- resistance is to examine the DNA sequence of genes encoding other proteins that interact with Bt toxins, including but not limited to aminopeptidases, alkaline phosphatases, elastin-like serine proteases, and peptidoglycans.

All cited references, publications, and sequence listings set forth herein are incorporated by reference in their entirety.

These and other modifications and variations to the present invention may be practiced by those of ordinary skill in the art, without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention. In addition, it should be understood that aspects of the various embodiments may be interchanged both in whole or in part. Furthermore, those of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the foregoing description is by way of example only, and is not intended to limit the invention.

TABLE 1

Primers Used in Determining the Structure of BtR4, the Cadherin-like Polynucleotide in Heliothis virescens

 Bmtp
 5
 -GTR
 CTG
 ACK
 GTT
 AAY
 ATC
 GAG
 CCC
 ACK
 GC-3'

 Smtp
 8
 5'-TAG
 GGG
 YAC
 RTT
 RTC
 SCG
 KAT
 GAA
 GTG
 KCC-3'

 Hvtp05
 5'-AGC
 CCA
 CTG
 CAT
 CTA
 TGC
 ACG
 GCA
 TGT
 TTG
 A-3'

Hvtp08 5'-CCT GAG TTG GGT CTG GTG GTC CCT GGC-3'

TABLE 1-continued

	Primers Used in Determining the Structure of BtR4, the Cadherin-like Polynucleotide in Heliothis virescens
GGp1 CGnotp2	5'-TGT GGA GTC AGC TTC CAT AGA GTC TTG TAT GAG CGT GTA-3' 5'-GAT ACG CGG CCG CAG GTC AGC AGA GCT CTG TTG ATG GTG TCG AGG GTG GAG A-3'
T7p1	5'-TAA GTT GGG TAA CGC GAG GGT TTT CCC AGT GAC-3'
T7p2	5'-GGC CAG TGA ATT GTA ATA CGA CTC ACT ATA GGG CG-3'
T3p1	5'-GAT AAC AAT TTC ACA CAG GAA ACA GCT ATG ACC ATG-3'
T3p2	5'-GAA ATT AAC CAC CCT TAA AGG GAA CAA AAG CTG GAG-3'
CGp3	5'-GGC ACG TTT TTT TCC ACT GAC GGG GTC GTG CG-3'
Cgnotp4	5'-GAT ACG CGG CCG CGG GCA GTC TGA GCG TAG GAG GTG TGT TGA T-3'
RC36T4	5'-GAC GTG TGT TCG CCT GAT CCT AAC TAC T-3'
RC36cg5 RC36cg5+	5'-AGC CTC TTA AAT CCA TAG GGG TCT CCA G-3' 5'-CTG GAG ACC GCT ATG GAT TTA AGA-3'
SC3T6	5'-ATG TTC GAG GTG CTG TAC CTC ACC G-3'
SC3cg7	5'-ACA CGA ACA CAG GAT CGT GGA AGT T-3'
CGp5	5'-TGT ATC TTC TGG AAC TCC GGC ACT TCG AAG TC-3'
CGnotp6	5'-GAT ACG CGG CCG CAT GTG ATG GTT CTG CGT GCC GAC GAT GAA GGA CTG-3'
Sint1	5'-GCT AAG GAC CGG GAT ATT GAT GAT AGA GT-3'
Sint2	5'-CGT GCG GGG CAG TCT GAG AGT AG-3'
RUNI1 RUNI2	5'-CAT ACA CGA CCG CAC GCG CAA CG-3' 5'-TGA GCG CCG AGG TGC AGG TGT AGG-3'
Hvtp13	5'-CTG TAC ACA GCC GGC ATC TCC AC-3'
Hvtp14	5'-CTG GAA GTT GAG GGT CAG CAC TCC AGT-3'
Hvtp15	5'-AAC CGT CGT GTG GAA GCT CT-3'
Hvtp16	5'-TCT TCG ATG CCG ATC AGA TCC GAG TC-3'
Hvtp17	5'-GCG GCG CCG GGC ACC AAC AAG CA-3'
HvA11-RT	5'-AAT AGA TGC TCT TAC ATA ATA CGA GTA TCT TAC-3'
5'R5A4/8	5'-GAT ACG CGG CCG CGA GAA CTA TGA GAT GGC AGT CGA CGT GAG AAT A-3'
HvA11F1	5'-GAA CTA TGA GAT GGC AGT CGA CGT GAG AAT-3'
HvA11F3	5'-TTA ACT TTC GCG CAA GAT TGT TCC TAT ATG-3'
HvA11R2	5'-GAA CTC TGG GCT GAA GGG GGT AGC-3'
HvA11R4	5'-CCC GAA GTT RTT GTT ATG GTT TGC TAC TGA-3'
USTP01	5'-ATG GGC AAC GCA GTT AAC TAC CTG-3'
USTP02	5'-CAT CCT CGT GAC AAT CGA CGA TGC-3'
USTP03	5'-CAG ACA GAA CGA GCT CTT TGT GCA-3' 5'-GCC GTG CAG CAG TTC GAT GAG AAG-3'
F771-5Ksp1 F771-5Ksp2	5'-CTC CCA CTG TAT CAG TAG CCA TCA-3'
738-3.4Ksp1	
738-3.4Ksp2	
738-3.4Ksp3	5'-CCT GAT CAA CTG GAA CGA TGA GCT G-3'
738-3.4Ksp4	5'-CCA AAG TCC ACG GGC GGT TGC GCA C-3'
738-3.8sp6	5'-GTG TAA CGT AGT GTG CTC GTG TAA TGC-3'
738-C10sp8-	
TBR01	5'-GAG ACT AGC ACC TAC ACG GTC GCT-3'
TBR02	5'-TCC AAC GAG CTG TTC CTG CTG ACG-3'
CR9TBR LTR-Pr1	5'-CAC TGT TAC TGT CAA TGT TCG AGA-3' 5'-CAC ACG TCA TCG TGC GCC CCA CCT AAG CTG-3'
LTR-Pr2	5'-CTG GCG CGA CCT CAT AGG CCG GCG CGA TGT-3'
LTR-1.9Ksp1	5'-CGA ATC AGC TGA TTC ATT GTC GCT-3'
LTR-1.9Ksp2	
Rint-Fwd1	5'-ATA CGA GCT GAC GAC ACG CTG GGA GAG CC-3'
Rint-Rev2	5'-TCT GAG CGT AGG AGG TGT GTT GTT GAT GTC-3'
C36RESEQ-F	5'-CCC GGC ACC GAC TCC-3'
C36RESEQ-R	5'-CTC CAT GGT CGT ATG CCT TGA CAT GTA-3'
pc11Fa	5'-GAG ATG GCA GTC GAC GTG AGA ATA CTG A-3'
pc12Fa	5'-CCC GTT TCG CCG TGT TCA GGA ATG TC-3'
pc12Ra	5'-TGG TAC CTC GGT AGT TAA GCC TGG CAA T-3'
pc13Fa	5'-GAA CAC GGC GAA ACG GGC ACC ACA GA-3'
pc13Ra	5'-TGC CAG GCT TAA CTA CCG AGG TAC CA-3'
pc14Fa	5'-AAC CCG CTG CAT TTG TTT AGA GTT ACA G-3'
pc14Ra	5'-CGA ACT GCT GCA CGG CGA AGA TCT CCA T-3'
pc15Ra	5'-TTC CTT CCA CGT CAT TGT CGC CAT ATT T-3'
RintS-F1	5'-ATA CGA GCT GAC GAC ACG CTG GGA GA-3'
RintS-R2	5'-TCT GAG CGT AGG AGG TGT GTT GTT GTC-3'
RintR-R3	5'-GCG CGG ANG CGC CGA MCM ACM CMM 2'
RintR-F4	5'-ACG CGC AAC GCG CGA TCT ACT CTT-3'

SEQUENCE LISTING

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						act Thr									339
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						atc Ile									483
Gln				Val	Met	ctc Leu 165	Ile		Val		Ile				531
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						aag Lys									627
						acg Thr									675
						gtc Val									723
						atc Ile 245									771

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								gtt Val							1539		
								ctg Leu 520							1587		
								gag Glu							1635		
								att Ile							1683		
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Trp Ser Gln Asn Pro Leu Leu Pro Ala Glu Asp Arg Glu Asp Val Cys 50 55 60	

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Arg	Gly	Thr	Asn 100	Thr	Pro	Thr	Val	Val 105	Thr	Pro	Phe	Asn	Phe 110	Gly	Thr
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qcacacqtca tcqtqcqccc cacctaaqct qqqccctcac catacqccqq acccccqqac
                                                                      120
actcgctcat cgaccccggt cgcgcataca cgaccgcacg cgcaacgcgc gatctactct
                                                                       180
tgtcacctat ctataataca gtcttctact ttgaacatcg aagttttatt gaaacgccga
                                                                      240
gaccagcaac ctacacctgc acctcggcgc tcaaacactg cccaactggt g
                                                                      291
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That which is claimed is:

- 1. A method of detecting resistance to *Bacillus thuringiensis* endotoxin in *Heliothis virescens* populations by screening for the presence of mutations having a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NO: 3 or SEQ $_{50}$ ID NO: 4.
- 2. A method of detecting resistance to *Bacillus thuringiensis* endotoxin in insect populations by screening for mutations that alter the structure or function of any protein encoded by the nucleotide sequence set forth in SEQ ID NO: 55 1.
- **3**. A method of detecting resistance to *Bacillus thuringiensis* endotoxin in insect populations by screening for mutations that alter the structure or function of SEQ ID NO: 2 or homologues of SEQ ID NO: 2, wherein SEQ ID NO: 2 and said homologues of SEQ ID NO: 2 bind *Bacillus thuringiensis* endotoxin.
- **4.** A method for detecting mutations in genes from insect populations by screening for the presence of insertions of a $_{65}$ DNA sequence that hybridizes to SEQ ID NO: 4 or the complement of SEQ ID NO: 4 at 60° C. in 1×SSC.

- **5**. A process for monitoring Bt resistance associated with the presence of an r1 allele in an insect population associated with transgenic crops comprising the steps of:
 - obtaining DNA from an individual insect;
 - amplifying said DNA using primers having nucleotide sequences of SEQ ID NO: 7, SEQ ID NO: 8, and SEQ ID NO: 9.
 - measuring the molecular size of said amplified DNA, thereby determining whether said individual has zero, one, or two copies of said r1 allele.
- **6**. A method of detecting mutations in purified nucleic acid sequences obtained from an insect population by screening for a sequence of at least 24 contiguous nucleotides, wherein the at least 24 contiguous nucleotides are on a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NO: 4, SEQ ID NO: 5, and SEQ ID NO: 6.
- 7. A method of detecting resistance to *Bacillus thuringiensis* endotoxin in insect populations by:
 - providing purified genomic DNA from an individual insect;
 - performing PCR using oligonucleotide primers of 24 nucleotides or greater, identical in at least 16 positions

of 24 to any sequence of 24 contiguous nucleotides of SEQ ID NO: 1 or the complement of SEQ ID NO: 1; determining the DNA sequences of the PCR products; computing the conceptual translations of the DNA sequences of the PCR products in all six reading 5 frames;

comparing each of the predicted polypeptide sequences to SEQ ID NO: 2 or homologues thereof, wherein SEQ ID NO: 2 and said homologues of SEQ ID NO: 2 bind *Bacillus thuringiensis* endotoxin;

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whereupon the comparison, if indicating any change that would lead to the premature termination of the protein such that the last 12 amino acids or more of the carboxy-terminus of SEQ ID NO: 2 or homologues thereof would be predicted to be lacking in the mature protein, the insect will be at least heterozygous for resistance to *Bacillus thuringiensis* endotoxin.

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