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CLONING AND SEQUENCING OF A CELLOBIOHYDROLASE GENE FROM *TRICHODERMA HARZIANUM FP108*†

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ABSTRACT

A *cbh*1 cellobiohydrolase gene was cloned and sequenced from the fungus *Trichoderma harzianum* FP108. The cloning was performed by PCR amplification of *T. harzianum* genomic DNA, using PCR primers whose sequence was based on the *cbh*1 gene from *Trichoderma reesei*. The 3' end of the gene was isolated by inverse PCR; attempts to clone regions upstream of the 5' end of the gene were unsuccessful. Sequence comparisons suggest that this gene is closely related to *cbh*1 genes from other Trichoderma species. In particular, all catalytically important amino acids in the protein sequence deduced from the *T. harzianum cbh*1 gene are conserved between species.

INTRODUCTION

Cellulose degradation by fungi has been an area of intense research interest (for example, Anu et al., 1991; Warren, 1996). One focus of this research has been the development of fungal strains that more efficiently convert cellulose to glucose for use in ethanol production. The conversion of cellulose to glucose by fungi requires the action of several enzymes. These include cellobiohydrolases that release cellobiose (two glucose units) from the nonreducing end of the cellulose chain (Shoemaker, et al., 1983), endoglucanases that cut internal β-1,4-glucosidic bonds in native cellulose (Teeri, et al., 1987), and β-glucosidases that hydrolyze cellobiose to glucose (Fig. 1).

We had previously isolated a fungus with cellulolytic activity from a reed sedge peat bog in Northern Minnesota. This organism was identified as *Trichoderma harzianum* (Chang and Gu, unpublished) and designated *T. harzianum* FP108. Initially, we compared the cellulolytic activity of this fungus with a well-studied cellulolytic fungus, *Trichoderma reesei* (for example, Abuja, et al., 1988). Compared to *T. reesei, T. harzianum* FP108 had higher levels of β-glucosidase activity but lower levels of endoglucanase activity and less overall cellulolytic activity (Chang and Gu, unpublished). To help determine if the lesser cellulolytic activity in *T. harzianum* was due to differences in the sequence of cellobiohydrolase genes, we cloned and sequenced a cellobiohydrolase gene from *T. harzianum*. Comparison of that sequence with previously published sequences of the *T. reesei cbh1* gene and the T *viride cbh1* gene indicated these genes are closely related and likely encode proteins with similar enzymatic activity. Therefore, some factor other than Cellobiohydrolase I activity probably accounts for the differences in cellulolytic activity between *T. reesei* and *T. harzianum*.

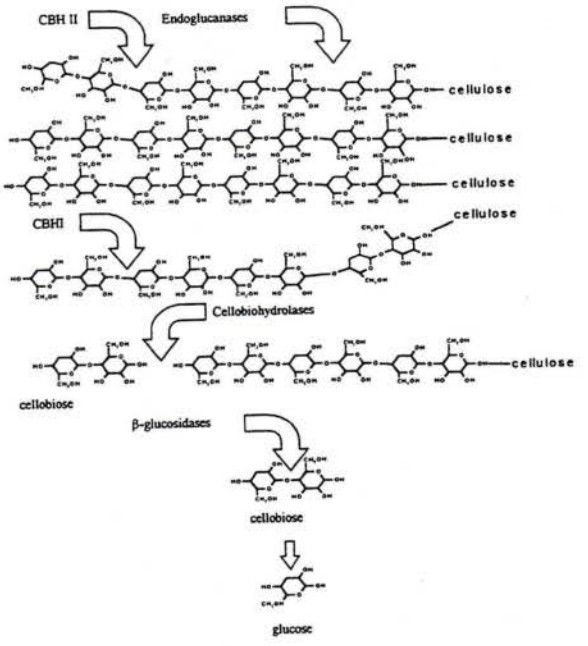

Figure 1. Fungal degradation of cellulose. Endoglucanases hydrolyze cellulose molecules at random sites along the polymer to produce shorter molecules of various lengths. β-glucosidases hydrolyze the β-1,4 bonds in cellobiose to produce glucose. Cellobiohydrolases (exoglucanases) release cellobiose from the ends of cellulose molecules. In *T. reesei,* the cellobiohydrolase CBHI separates one cellulose chain at a time from cellulose and hydrolyzes it. CBHII acts at one tip of the cellulose crystal (diagram based in part on Nidetzky et al., 1994; Divne et al., 1994).

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

Genomic DNA Isolation: Genomic DNA was isolated from *T. harzianum* FP108 using the procedures of Raeder and Broda (1985).

PCR amplification and cloning of the T. harzianum cbh1 gene: 100 to 200 ng of genomic *T. harzianum* DNA was used in a 50 µL PCR reaction with 2.5 units of *Taq* DNA polymerase (Perkin-Elmer, Foster City, CA) 2.5 mM $MgCl_2$, 25 pmoles of each primer, 200 µM each deoxynuclecotide triphosphate and 1 X PCR buffer (50 mM KCl and 10 mM Tris-HCl, pH 8.3). PCR was performed in a Perkin Elmer Model 480 thermocycler (Foster City, CA) for 35 cycles of 94° C for 30 sec., 50° C for 30 sec., and 72° C for 90 sec.

Both primers used in the PCR reaction included restriction enzyme sites to facilitate cloning, and were based on the *T. reesei cbh1* gene sequence (Shoemaker, et al., 1983). The primer sequences were:

Upstream primer

5'AAA*CTGCAG*TCGACGTCATATGTATCGGAAGT TGGCCGTC-3'

Downstream primer

5'GCG*TCTAGA*TTACAGGCACTGAGAGTAGTA-3'

The underlined sequence in the upstream primer represents the translational start codon in the *T. reesei* gene. The underlined sequence in the downstream primer represents the translational stop codon in the *T. reesei* gene. The italicized sequence in the upstream primer indicates a *Pst*I restriction enzyme site used for cloning; the italicized sequence in the downstream primer indicates a *Xba*I restriction enzyme site used for cloning.

The PCR products were purified by ultrafiltration (Millipore Ultrafree, Millipore, Bedford, MA) as directed by the manufacturer. Purified PCR products were digested with *Pst*I and *Xba*I (these sites were in the PCR primers) and run on a 0.7 % TBE-agarose gel containing 0.5 µg mL^{-1} ethidium bromide. The pBluescriptII KS plasmid (Stratagene, La Jolla, CA) was also digested with *Pst*I and *Xba*I and run on the same gel. The PCR products and pBluescript plasmid were isolated by electrophoresis to NA45 DEAE membrane (Schleicher and Schuell, Keene, NH) and eluted from the membrane in a buffered ammonium acetate solution (Guilfoile and Hutchinson, 1991).

The eluted DNA was resuspended in 11 µL of sterile distilled water and ligated with the addition of 3 µL 5X ligase buffer and 1 µL T4 DNA ligase (Gibco/BRL, Gaithersburg, MD). The ligation reaction was then incubated overnight at room temperature. *E. coli* DH5α cells (Gibco/BRL, Gaithersburg, MD) were transformed with 7 µL of the ligation mixture, using standard protocols, except that LB broth and LB agar were used instead of SOC broth and SOB agar (Sambrook et al., 1989, p 1.82). Colonies containing putative recombinant plasmids were grown overnight in LB broth containing 150 µg mL^{-1} ampicillin and plasmid DNA was isolated by an alkaline lysis procedure (Morelle, 1988). The DNA from recombinant plasmids containing the putative *cbh1* gene from *T. harzianum* was prepared using a large-scale column procedure (Qiagen Plasmid Midi kit, Qiagen, Chatsworth, CA) for DNA sequencing.

PCR amplification and cloning of the 3' end of the cbh1 gene: The region of DNA downstream of the 3' end of the *cbh1* gene was amplified by inverse PCR (Ochman, et al., 1990). Genomic *T. harzianum* DNA was digested with *Sau*3A overnight at room temperature, precipitated with isopropanol and ammonium acetate, and resuspended in TE. About 250 ng (1 µL) of digested DNA was added to 10 µL of 5X ligase buffer, 38 µL of sterile distilled water, and 1 µL T4 DNA ligase. The ligation mixture was then incubated overnight at room temperature. The PCR conditions were as described above except that the third part of each cycle was held for 2 min. The primers used were:

Upstream: 5'CCAGTCAGTAATGTAATAG-3'

Downstream: 5'ACTCCAAGGTTATCTACT-3'

These primers were chosen because they are located 3' to the last *Sau*3A site in the *cbh1* gene. The upstream and downstream primers are complementary to opposite DNA strands, and they are oriented in such a way that they will amplify the entire region between the last *Sau*3A site in the *cbh1* gene and the first *Sau*3A site in the DNA located 3' to the *cbh1* gene.

Purified PCR product (5 µL containing about 500 pg) was added to 5 µL (about 500 pg) of pUC19 that had been digested with *Sma*I. Then, 3 µL of 5X ligase buffer, 1µL of T4 DNA ligase and 1µL of *Sma*I were added (to cleave plasmids that self-ligated) and the reaction mixture was incubated overnight. Transformation and plasmid isolation was as described above for the *cbh*1 gene. Despite numerous attempts, we were unable to clone the region upstream of the 5' end of the gene by inverse PCR or other methods.

DNA sequencing and analysis: Plasmids were sequenced by the dideoxy terminator method with Sequenase 2.0 (Amersham, Arlington Heights, IL) as directed by the manufacturer. At least two independent PCR products were sequenced from each region of the gene. The DNA sequences were analyzed using the software programs EDITSEQ, MAPDRAW, and MEGALIGN (DNASTAR, Madison, WI).

RESULTS

The PCR amplification of *T. harzianum* genomic DNA with the *cbh1* primer set described above produced a DNA fragment of about 1600 bp, the size expected based on the previously published *T. reesei* DNA sequence (Shoemaker, et al., 1983, Fig. 2a). This

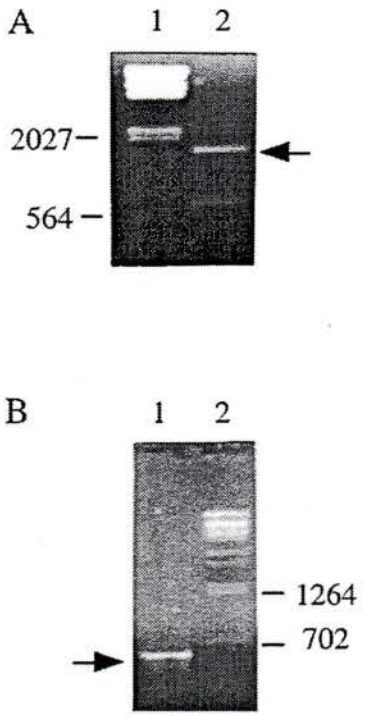

Figure 2. PCR products used for sequencing the *cbh1* gene from *T. harzianum*. (A) the PCR product of the entire *cbh1* gene. Lane 1, λ *Hind*III DNA marker. Lane 2, PCR product. The arrow indicates the PCR product in lane 2 that was cloned and sequenced. The numbers to the left of the photograph indicate the size of the DNA fragments (in bp) in the marker DNA. (B) The PCR product of the 3' end of the *cbh1* gene and downstream regions. Lane 1, PCR product. Lane 2, λ *Bst*EII DNA marker. The arrow indicates the PCR product in lane 1 that was cloned and sequenced. The numbers to the right of the photograph indicate the size of DNA fragments (in bp) in the marker DNA.

DNA fragment was cloned into the pBluescript plasmid and sequenced (Fig. 2b). Inverse PCR produced a 600 bp product of the region beyond the 3' end of the gene. This PCR fragment was cloned into pUC19 and sequenced as well (Fig. 2b) .

Sequence comparison with the *cbh1* gene from *T. reesei* and *T. viride* (Cheng et al., 1990) suggested that the genomic *T. harzianum cbh1* DNA contains 2 introns (Fig. 3). The intron sequences were poorly conserved between the *cbh1* genes of the three species (Table 1). In contrast, the coding regions of the three genes are highly conserved (Table 1), and many of the DNA substitutions resulted in conservative amino acid replacements (Fig. 4). Of particular importance, the catalytically active regions of the cellobiohydrolase-1 proteins from the three species were highly conserved. Three acidic residues required for catalysis (Glu^{229}, Asp^{231} and Glu^{234}; Divne et al., 1994) are present in all three cellobiohydrolase-1 proteins (Fig. 4). Also, 23 cysteines, at least ten of which form disulfide bridges necessary for proper structure of the enzyme, are present in all three deduced enzyme sequences (Divne et al., 1994; Fig. 4).

Table 1. Comparison of the DNA sequences of the deduced *cbh1* introns and deduced *cbh1* coding regions from *Trichoderma harzianum, T. reesei and T. viride.*

Comparison	Identity of Sequences†	
	Exon	Intron
	%	
T. harzianum: T. Reesei	80	25
T. harzianum: T. viride	80	27
T. Reesei: T. viride	94	39

† DNA sequences were aligned by the Clustal method in the program MEGALIGN (DNASTAR, Madison, WI). Putative exons for the *T. harzianum cbh1* gene were determined by comparison with the *T. reesei* and *T. viride* DNA sequences (Shoemaker et al., 1983; Cheng et al., 1990). Intron sequences were determined by comparison with the published *T. reesei* sequence (Shoemaker et al., 1983) and the "GT-AG rule"(Lewin, 1997), where the sequence "GT" is found at the 5' end of the intron and the sequence "AG" is found at the 3' end of the intron.

Discussion

Differences in cellulolytic activity between fungal strains and species may be due to a number of factors including differences in enzymatic activity, differences in regulation of enzymatic synthesis, and the presence or absence of other enzymes required for biodegradation of cellulose. Our work suggests that the difference in cellulolytic activity between *T. harzianum* and *T. reesei* is probably not due to differences in the enzymatic activity of the *cbh1* genes, but rather, may be the result of differences in gene regulation or the presence or absence of *cbh2*, endoglucanase, or β-glucosidase genes. Future work on cloning the region upstream of the *T. harzianum cbh1* gene may help reveal potential regulatory controls.

As more becomes known about cellulose degradation by fungi, prospects should improve for the genetic engineering of fungal strains that more efficiently degrade cellulose. For example, fungal strains which produce optimal levels of each of the cellulolytic enzymes, or which are directly capable of converting glucose to ethanol may more efficiently bioconvert cellulose. This, in turn, may contribute to a substantial reduction in the costs of producing ethanol via fermentation.

Figure 3. Sequence of the *cbh*1 gene from *Trichoderma harzianum* FP108. The first three nucleotides (ATG) are the putative tranlational start codon. The TAA sequence in the last line with a dot underneath is the putative translational stop codon. Introns are set off with open bars below the intron sequence. The 3'UTR is represented with a dark bar. The inferred amino acid translation is given below the DNA sequence. The first 21 nucleotides in the sequence were derived from the PCR primer used to amplify the DNA.

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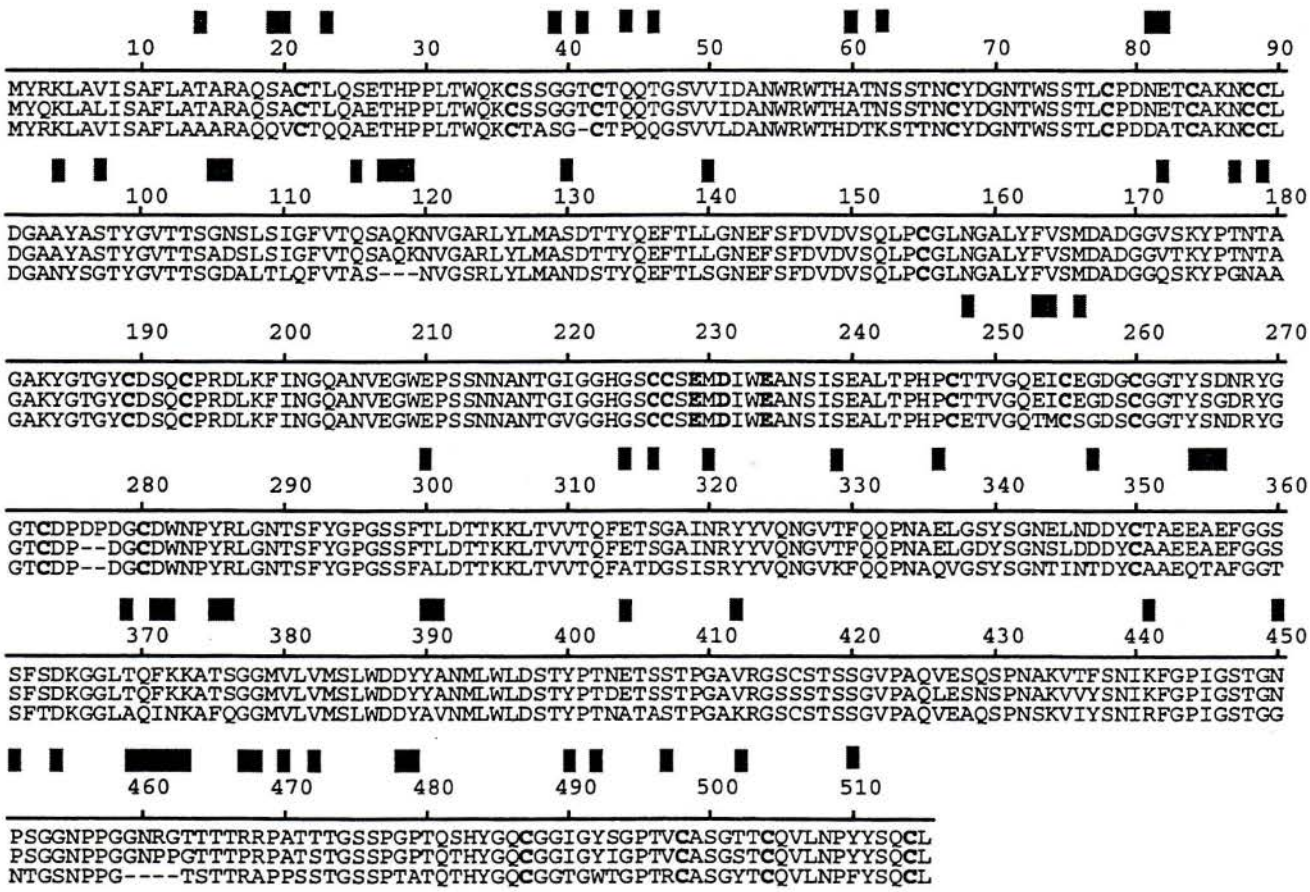

Figure 4. Comparison of the deduced amino acid sequences from the *T. reesei, T. viride,* and *T. harzianum* FP108 *cbh*l genes. The top line is the deduced amino acid sequence of the *T. reesei* CBHI protein. The middle line is the deduced amino acid sequence of the *T.viride* CBHI protein. The bottom line is the deduced amino acid sequence of the *T.harzianum* FP108 CBHI protein. The conserved catalytic amino acids and cysteines are in bold face. Places where the *T. harzianum* sequence differed from the other two sequences (or lacked a conservative amino acid replacement; S = T, S = A, L = I = V) are indicated with a bar. The alignments were generated with the MEGALIGN program using the clustal method with the PAM 250 Residue Weight Table (DNASTAR, Madison, WI).

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