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Efficiency of N Use by Wheat as a Function of Influx and Efflux of NO_3^-

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ABSTRACT

Since N assimilation is one of the most costly functions of a plant, its efflux before assimilation results in a serious energy cost and loss in efficiency which could decrease yields. Efficient crop production is critical to CELSS. Our objective is to determine the extent of efflux of the N species NO_3^- , NH_4^+ , NO_2^- , and urea after uptake, and possible means of regulation. We found that NO_3^- efflux became serious as its substrate level increased. Efflux/Influx (E/I) of NO_3^- was greater in darkness (35%) than in light (14%) and the ratio greatly increased with increased substrate NO_3^- , (up to 45% at 10 mM). It seems advantageous to use the lowest possible nutrient concentration of NO_3^- . The feasibility of using ClO_3^- as a trapping agent (competitive inhibitor of NO_3^- uptake) for effluxed NO_3^- was assessed and its toxicity determined.

INTRODUCTION

Crop production during extended space flights requires the development of procedures leading to the optimum use of the available energy. Optimizing the utilization of N by crop plants represents an area where significant progress can be made in the CELSS program.

It is well recognized that ion uptake requires ATP and electron flow. The cost of NO_3^- assimilation is particularly high not only due to the energy requirement of uptake but also because of the need for 10 electrons to reduce it to the level of glutamate. In addition are the costs of maintaining pH balance, since each reduction of NO_3^- to the level of NH_4^+ produces an OH^- . Thus it is not surprising that estimates of respiratory costs of ion absorption range up to 50% of total root respiration and 20% of total plant respiration (1).

Recent reports in the literature indicate that NO_3^- efflux can begin very rapidly after its influx (2,3,4,5,6). In addition, prolonged leakage of NO_3^- occurs from root storage pools dependent upon the N-status of the roots

(7,8,9,10,11). Lee and Clarkson (6) estimated that efflux, at external concentrations above 1 mM, could account for up to 40% of the influxed NO_3^- . Thus NO_3^- efflux could represent a significant additional cost to an already energy costly assimilatory pathway. Little is known concerning the regulation of NO_3^- efflux. Recent work of Briskin (12) showed evidence that efflux of NO_3^- utilizes ATP, which could greatly add to the energy cost of NO_3^- assimilation.

Measurement of NO_3^- efflux has been hampered by the lack of easy, rapid, and less costly analytical techniques for detecting the very low concentrations involved in a process with a half-life ($t_{1/2}$) of minutes. The use of ^{15}N as a tracer is laborious and has problems of sensitivity. ^{13}N has only a 10 min half-life, must be used at the site of generation (cyclotron), and is very costly to use. We developed an HPLC method which has the sensitivity, ease and low cost required. In addition, we evaluated ClO_3^- as a trapping agent for NO_3^- .

This report presents results estimating NO_3^- influx, efflux, and net uptake across several mechanisms of NO_3^- uptake.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Plant growth. Wheat seedlings were grown hydroponically in a 1/4 strength Hoagland's solution for 8 days in an environmentally controlled growth chamber at $400 \mu\text{E}/\text{m}^2\text{sec}$, at 18°C , and 80% relative humidity (13,14). On the 7th day they were transferred into 1/4 strength Hoagland's (loading solution) containing NO_3^- at the concentration to be used in the efflux study (specified in each experiment).

Measurement of NO_3^- efflux. After removal from the loading solution, 10 seedlings were placed in 300 ml of the efflux solution for various periods of time (specified below) containing 0.06 mM Pi at pH 5.8, 0.2 mM CaSO_4 , and with or without ClO_3^- at the specified concentrations. The seedlings were rinsed

for 2 sec in 300 ml of efflux solution, then placed in 60 ml of efflux solutions for the following times: 10 sec, 30 sec, 1, 2, 5, 10, 15, and 20 min and the amount of NO_3^- released at each time from the roots was determined.

Measurement of NO_3^- and ClO_3^- . These compounds were measured by HPLC as described previously for NO_3^- (13,14). ClO_3^- was also measured at 210 nm with a UV monitor.

Uptake rates of NO_3^- and ClO_3^- . Uptake rates were determined as previously described by determining rates of depletion of NO_3^- from substrate solutions, then fitting the rate curves to best fit curves by polynomial analysis using a computer (13).

RESULTS

Mechanisms of NO_3^- uptake. The results in Figures 1 and 2 show several mechanisms for NO_3^- uptake. Uptake as a function of NO_3^- concentration can be determined by either step up or step down, on continuous depletion experiments; Figures 1 and 2 are the results of continuous depletion experiments. In Figure 1, one mechanism is readily seen between about 0.2 and 0.7 mM. This is commonly referred to as Mechanism I in the literature (14). The rates above 0.7 mM are largely undefined but are referred to in the literature as Mechanism II. Another mechanism is indicated in Figure 1 at concentrations below 0.1 mM and it is readily seen when the data are plotted between 0 and 0.1 mM (Fig. 2).

Comparison of uptake of NO_3^- and ClO_3^- . The comparative uptake of NO_3^- and ClO_3^- is shown in Figures 3 and 4 at initial concentrations of 0.5 and 1 mM. Wheat plants deplete the NO_3^- concentration very efficiently to near zero (Fig. 1), whereas depletion of ClO_3^- is not straight forward. The ability to take up ClO_3^- is continuously lost with time (Fig. 4).

Toxic effects of ClO_3^- on NO_3^- uptake. The increasingly toxic effects of ClO_3^- on NO_3^- uptake with time is seen in Table 1.

Comparative effects of pretreatments of ClO_3^- and NO_3^- on their uptakes.

The comparative effects of pretreatments of ClO_3^- and NO_3^- on their uptakes are shown in Table 2. Pretreatments varying in time had little effect on subsequent uptake of NO_3^- , whereas increasing time of pretreatments greatly decreased ClO_3^- uptake.

ClO_3^- as a competitive inhibitor of NO_3^- uptake. Double reciprocal plots of rates vs concentrations show evidence that ClO_3^- is a competitive inhibitor of NO_3^- uptake (Fig. 5).

NO_3^- efflux. Figure 6 shows a typical example of a determination of NO_3^- efflux. Our results matched quite closely those reported in the literature showing two different early losses of NO_3^- , one with a $t_{1/2}$ of less than 10 sec and another with a $t_{1/2}$ of minutes. After one min, the second set of rates approximate an apparent first order reaction. Extrapolation to t_0 gives an estimate of the rate of NO_3^- efflux. At a concentration of 1 mM NO_3^- , efflux varied consistently between 2.0 and 2.5 $\mu\text{mol/gxh}$.

Effect of increasing concentrations of NO_3^- and ClO_3^- on NO_3^- efflux.

Efflux in the presence of increasing concentrations of NO_3^- and ClO_3^- is shown in Figure 7. As expected, efflux increased with increasing concentrations of NO_3^- and ClO_3^- .

Influx, efflux, and net uptake of NO_3^- . Comparative rates of the three kinetic components of NO_3^- absorption are shown in Table 3. Efflux and influx greatly increased between 0.2 and 10 mM external NO_3^- , whereas net uptake remained about the same. Efflux/influx increased from 15 to 45% with increasing concentration of NO_3^- .

Effect of light and dark on influx, efflux, and net uptake of NO_3^- .

NO_3^- efflux was similar in plants in darkness and in light; however, influx and net uptake were much greater in light (Table 4). Thus, in darkness 35% of the influxed NO_3^- was effluxed, while in light the proportion effluxed was reduced to 14%.

DISCUSSION

It is important to continue to develop information concerning the mechanisms of uptake of nutrient ions both to understand the reactions of the plants to changing concentrations and also for planning optimum concentrations of nutrient solutions for maximum efficiency.

Mechanisms of NO_3^- uptake. At least three mechanisms of NO_3^- uptake are present, one between 0 and about 0.05 to 0.08 mM with a K_m of ca 0.012 to 0.018 mM, and another between 0.1 and about 0.7 mM with a k_m of ca 0.025 to 0.04 mM (Figs. 1 and 2). The latter is the typical mechanism reported in the literature (14). At concentrations above 1 mM, the mechanisms are largely undefined and are difficult to determine because efflux becomes such an important component (discussed below).

Comparison of uptake of NO_3^- and ClO_3^- . In a determination of NO_3^- efflux, very low concentrations of NO_3^- are present in the external solution. At these low levels of NO_3^- (see Fig. 3), the wheat plant can very efficiently absorb the NO_3^- as it is effluxed into the external solution. Hence, ClO_3^- has been used as a trapping agent for the effluxed NO_3^- .

Although much work has been reported on the effects of ClO_3^- on NO_3^- uptake, the analytical procedures reported to separate ClO_3^- from NO_3^- in the solutions were in some cases non specific, i.e., ion electrodes (3). Radioactive ClO_3^- was also used (3) which presents problems of low specific activity and sticking to glassware. We developed an HPLC method which effectively separates NO_3^- from ClO_3^- and both can be measured simultaneously. In addition, much of the reported literature did not discriminate between kinetic effects and toxic effects of ClO_3^- on NO_3^- uptake (15).

Toxic effects of ClO_3^- . The results showed that toxicity symptoms, as shown by decreased rates of uptake of NO_3^- and ClO_3^- , were apparent after 1 h (Fig. 4, Tables 1 and 2). Toxic effects of ClO_3^- were greater toward its own

uptake than towards NO_3^- uptake. We found that little toxicity occurred during the 20 min period of the efflux experiments.

ClO_3^- as a competitive inhibitor of NO_3^- uptake. The results verified that ClO_3^- was a competitive inhibitor of NO_3^- uptake as earlier reported (3) (Fig. 5). Apparently the NO_3^- transporter discriminated effectively between NO_3^- and ClO_3^- since proportionately much larger concentrations of ClO_3^- were required to inhibit NO_3^- uptake. In summary, ClO_3^- could be used as a trapping agent for effluxed NO_3^- for short time experiments.

NO_3^- efflux. The method for determining efflux was based on some excellent work done by Lee and Clarkson (6) and Shone and Flood (16) who used cereal roots to determine the kinetic parameters required to measure efflux of NO_3^- . They found that the combined $t_{1/2}$ of release of NO_3^- in the surface film attached to the roots from the external solution and from the root free space was ca 7 sec. In addition, their results showed that the $t_{1/2}$ for cytoplasmic release of NO_3^- was ca 4 min. A semilog plot of efflux rate vs time resulted in a linear regression line after 1 min, since at that time the first two kinetic parameters had passed through ca 9 half-lives. In our results, the relative contributions of these parameters would be very small in relation to the amount of NO_3^- efflux. The rates of efflux we measured are similar to those reported for cereals by workers using $^{13}\text{N-NO}_3^-$ at NO_3^- concentrations of 1.5 to 5 mM (3,4,6).

Effect of increasing concentrations NO_3^- and ClO_3^- on NO_3^- efflux. As expected, efflux increased with increasing concentrations of NO_3^- (Fig. 7). In the region of Mechanism II of uptake (0.2 mM), efflux was a significant deterrent to N use efficiency. Here 15% of the NO_3^- influxed was effluxed. Net NO_3^- uptake remained quite constant as external NO_3^- increased beyond 0.2 mM. This occurred because, although influx increased, efflux correspondingly increased. The ratio of efflux/influx, expressed as a percentage, increased up to 45% at 10 mM NO_3^- . These results help explain results from Raper's

laboratory which showed that net uptake changed little as NO_3^- concentrations increased to high levels (11). These workers also presented evidence for significant levels of efflux at increasing concentrations of NO_3^- .

Effect of light and dark on influx, efflux, and net uptake of NO_3^- . Since efflux is a function of the concentration of NO_3^- in the cytoplasm, light and dark periods had a profound effect on the ratio of efflux/influx (Table 4). Although efflux was the same in light or dark, influx was greatly increased in light along with the rate of NO_3^- reduction (17,18). Therefore, the relative percentage of NO_3^- effluxed is much less in light.

Effect of increasing concentrations ClO_3^- on NO_3^- efflux. Higher rates of NO_3^- efflux were detected as ClO_3^- increased in the efflux solution (Fig. 7). This could be because of ClO_3^- serving as a trapping agent or because of an unknown effect. The increase in efflux rate with 5 and 10 mM ClO_3^- was sufficiently large to be somewhat uncertain. We are currently evaluating this result.

Effect of NH_4^+ on NO_3^- efflux. The literature is confusing on this issue with results of little if any effect of NH_4^+ on NO_3^- efflux (5,6), and of large effect (4). We have not yet examined the interactions of the different N species on NO_3^- efflux.

Ramifications. As the concentration of NO_3^- increases in the external solution, efflux becomes an increasingly important energy cost to the plant. Not only is energy needed for NO_3^- influx, it now appears that NO_3^- efflux may utilize ATP (12). This results in an almost doubling of the cost of absorption at higher concentrations of NO_3^- . On this basis, it would seem that a nutrient solution for crop growth in CELSS should be optimized at the lowest concentrations possible. In addition, it is increasingly critical to determine the regulation of efflux of N compounds since it is not known how NO_3^- , NH_4^+ , NO_2^- , and urea influence each others efflux. Will total efflux

decrease if the total concentration of N in the nutrient solution is made up of the four species instead of only NO_3^- and NH_4^+ ?

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Table 1. Effect of pretreatment of ClO_3 on NO_3 uptake. The initial concentration of substrate NO_3 was 0.6mM. See Materials and Methods for procedures.

HOURS PRETREATMENT	$[\text{ClO}_3]$	
	1mM	5mM
0	7.3	7.3
1	6.2	5.3
2	5.3	3.0
3	4.9	2.3

Table 2. Effect of pretreatment of ClO_3 or NO_3 on their uptakes. See Materials and Methods for procedures.

<u>HOURS</u> <u>PRETREATMENT</u>	<u>PRETREATMENT (1mM)</u>	
	<u>NO_3</u>	<u>ClO_3</u>
	<u>UPTAKE (at 1mM)</u> <u>($\mu\text{mol/gxh}$)</u>	
0	6.3	3.5
3		1.1
5	6.8	0.5

Table 3. Efflux, net uptake and influx of NO₃. See Materials & Methods for procedures.

INFLUX, EFFLUX, AND NET UPTAKE OF NO₃

	EFFLUX	NET UPTAKE	INFLUX	<u>EFFLUX</u> <u>INFLUX</u>
[NO ₃] (mM)		μmol/gxh		%
0.2	1.1	6.5	7.6	15
1.0	2.5	8.5	11.0	23
10.0	7.7	9.5	17.2	45

Table 4. Effect of light and dark treatments (24h) on NO₃ efflux, net uptake and influx. See Material and Methods for procedures.

<u>TREATMENT</u>	<u>EFFLUX</u>	<u>NET UPTAKE</u>	<u>INFLUX</u>	<u>EFFLUX INFLUX</u>
		($\mu\text{mol/gxh}$)		%
LIGHT*	1.3	7.9	9.2	14
DARK	1.0	1.8	2.8	35

*plants induced in 0.2mM NO₃ for 24h light or dark

FIGURE LEGENDS

Fig. 1. NO_3 uptake across Mechanisms I and II. See Materials and Methods for procedures.

Fig. 2. NO_3 uptake across Mechanism I. See Materials and Methods for procedures.

Fig. 3. Depletion of NO_3 from 0.5 and 1.0mM substrate solutions. See Materials and Methods for procedures.

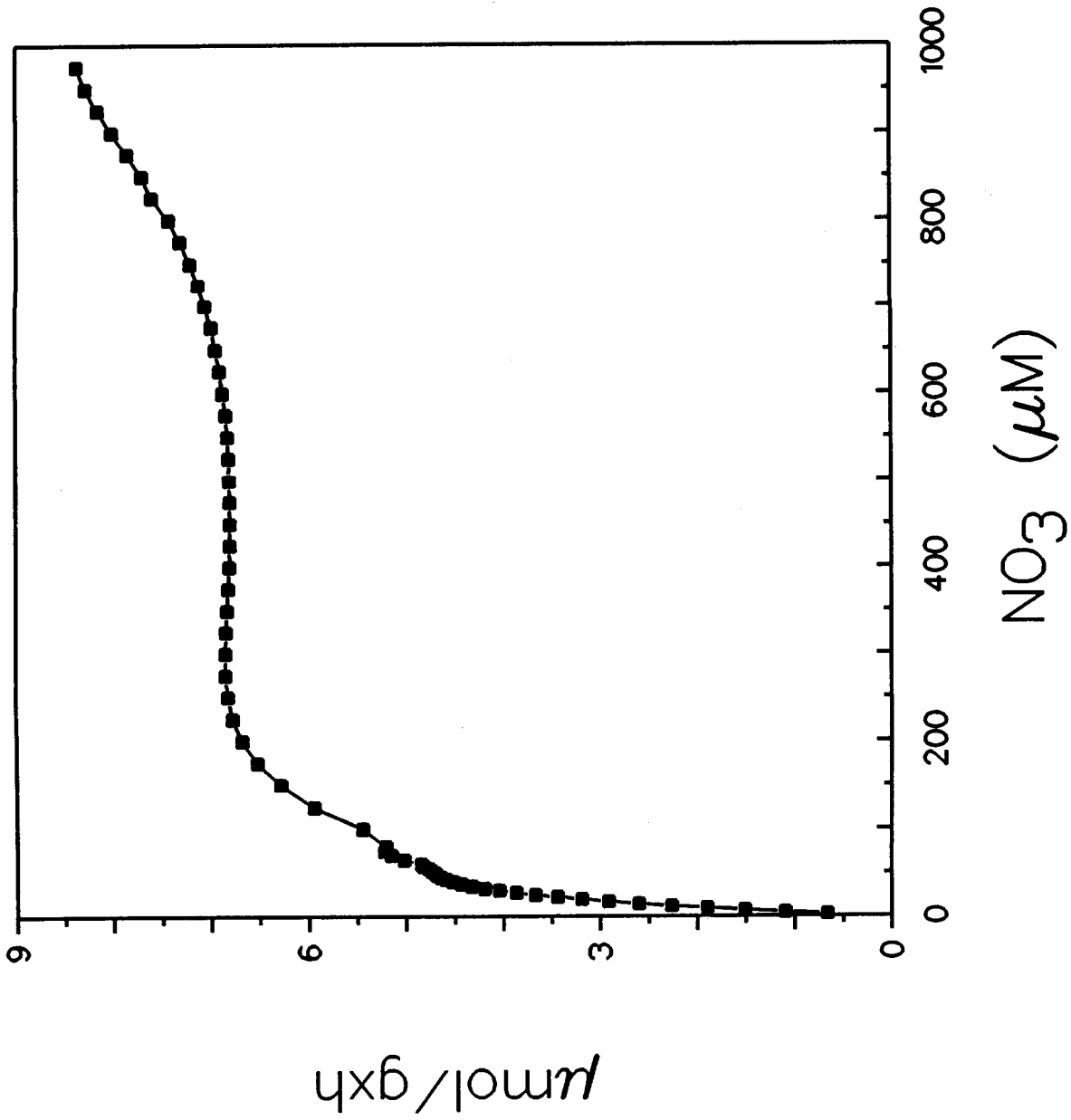
Fig. 4. Depletion of ClO_3 from 0.5 and 1.0mM substrate solutions. See Materials and Methods for procedures.

Fig. 5. ClO_3 as a competitive inhibitor of NO_3 uptake. See Materials and Methods for procedures.

Fig.6. Semilog plot of NO_3 efflux vs time. See Materials and Methods for procedures.

Fig.7. Effect of ClO_3 on NO_3 efflux. See Materials and Methods for procedures.

NO₃ UPTAKE



■—■ umol/gxh

Figure 1.

NO₃ UPTAKE

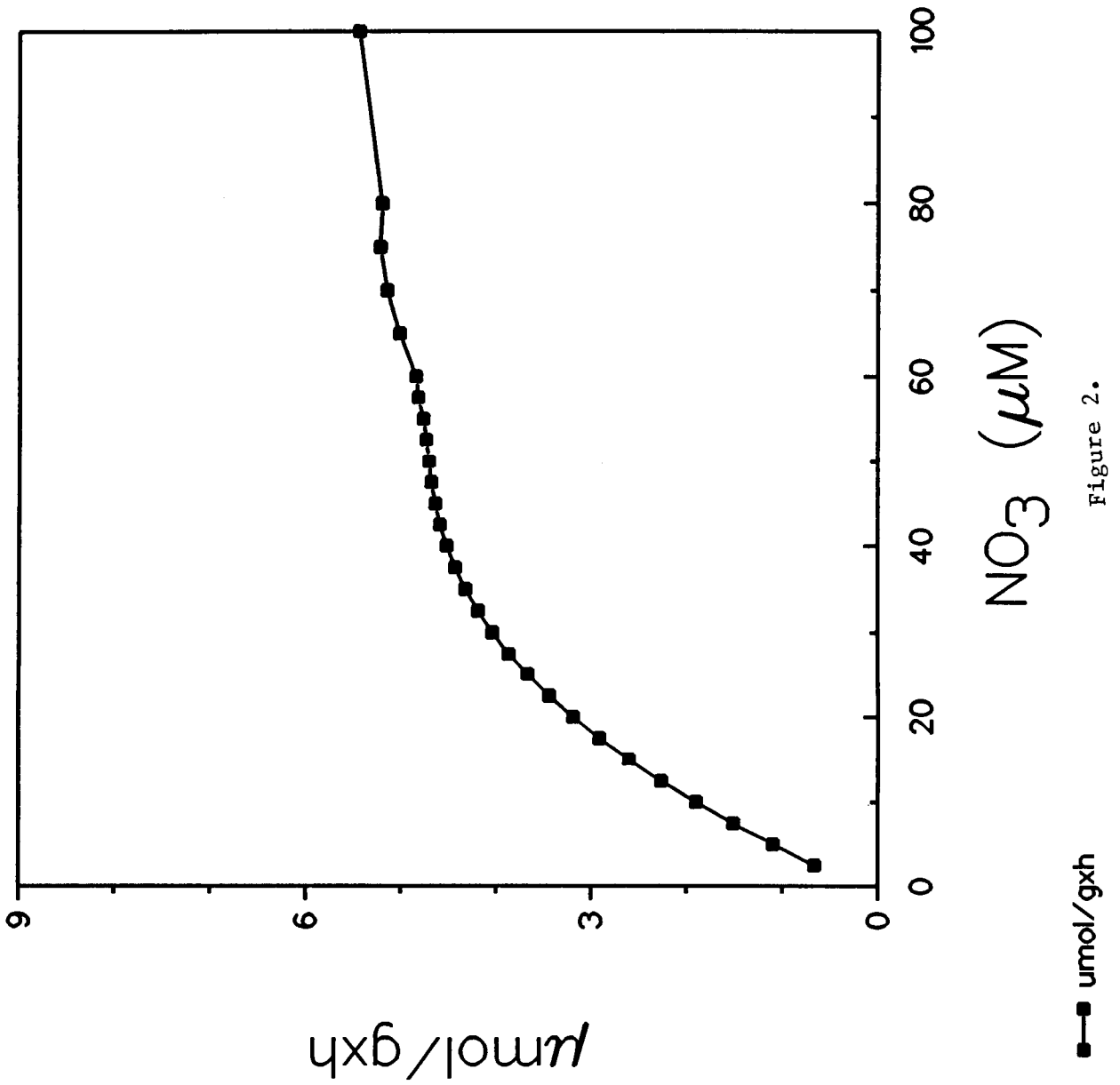


Figure 2.

NO₃ DEPLETION

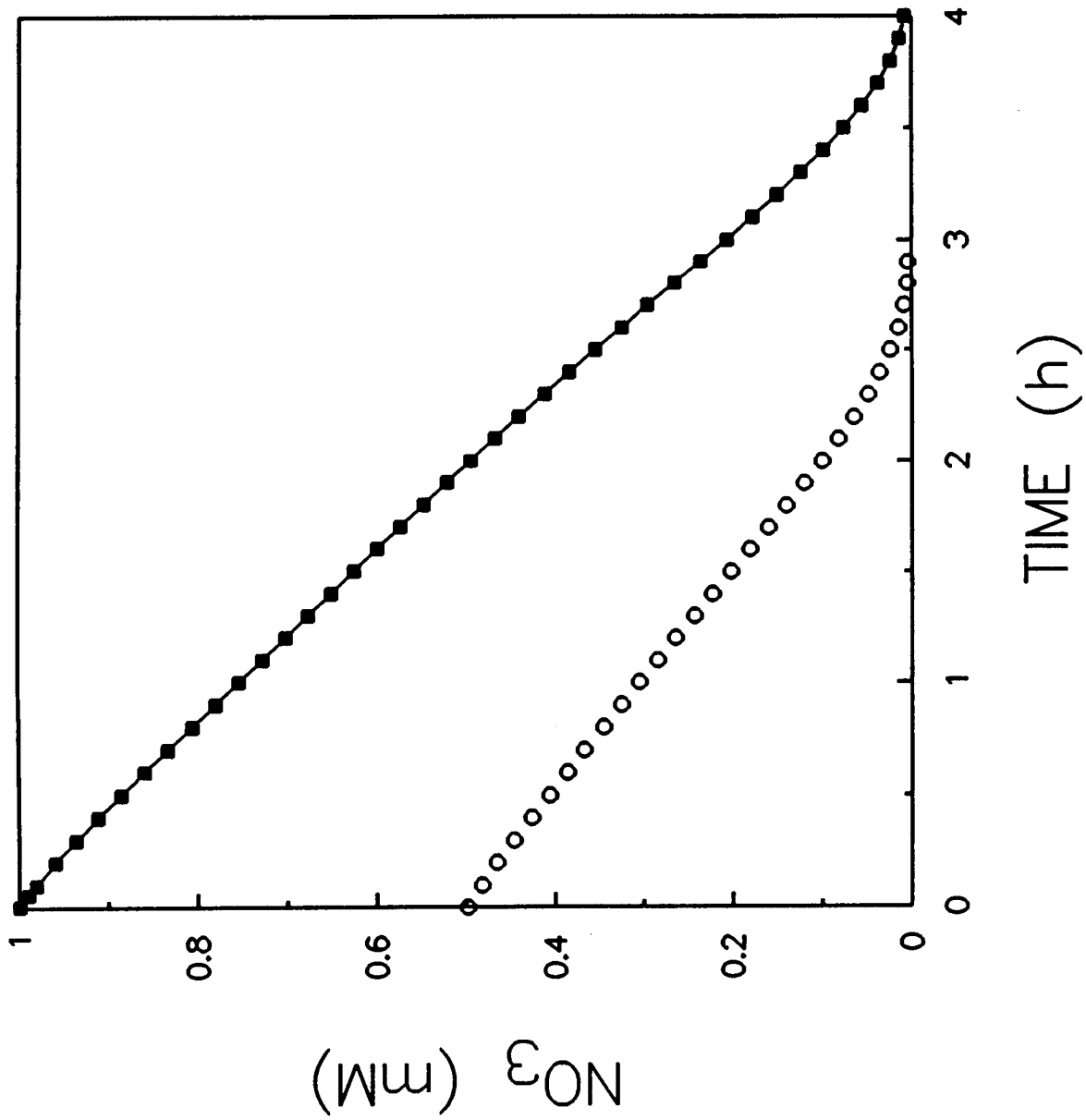


Figure 3.

■ [NO₃]
○ [NO₃]

ClO₃ DEPLETION

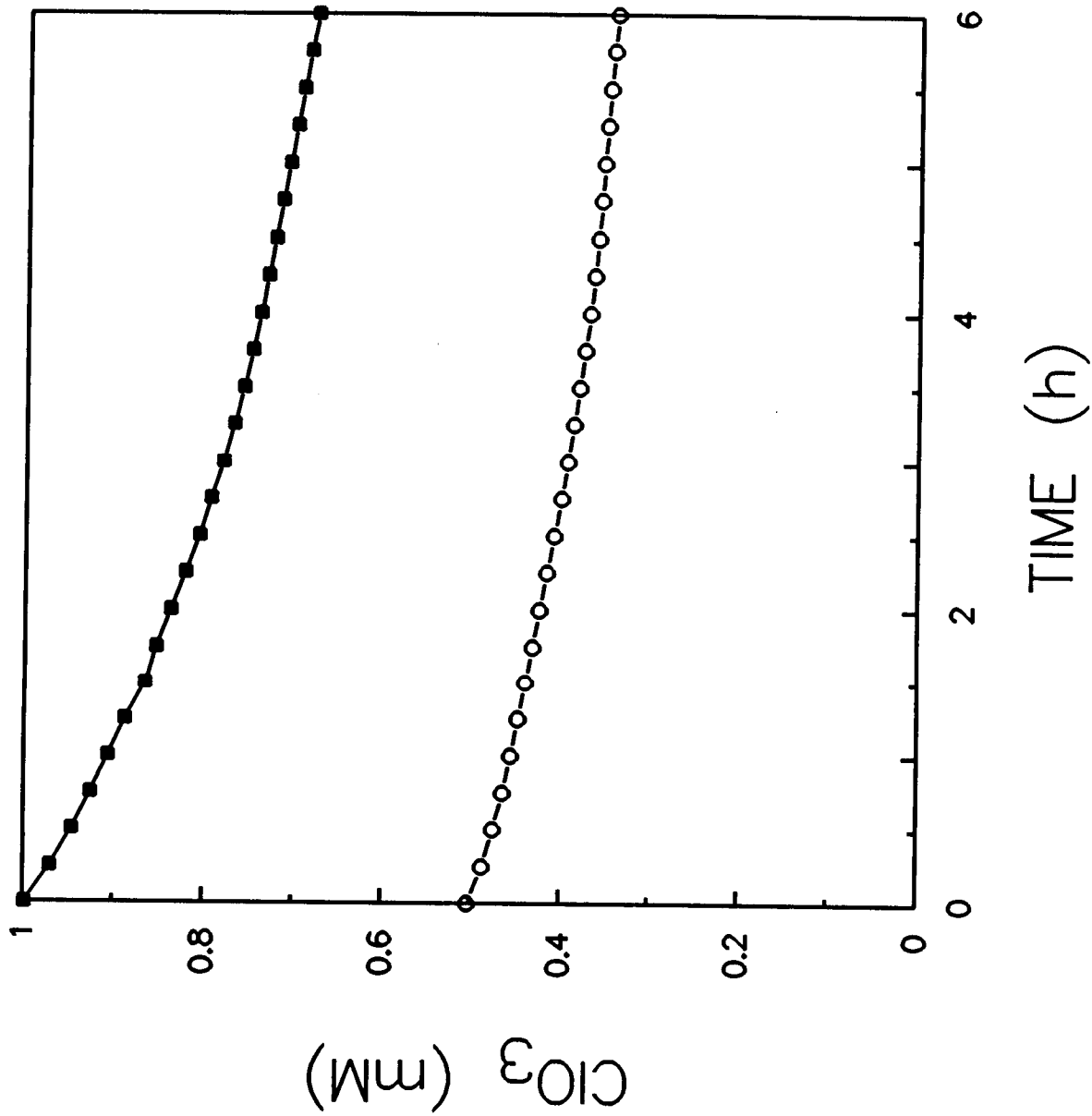


Figure 4.

■ ClO₃
○ ClO₃

NO₃ UPTAKE

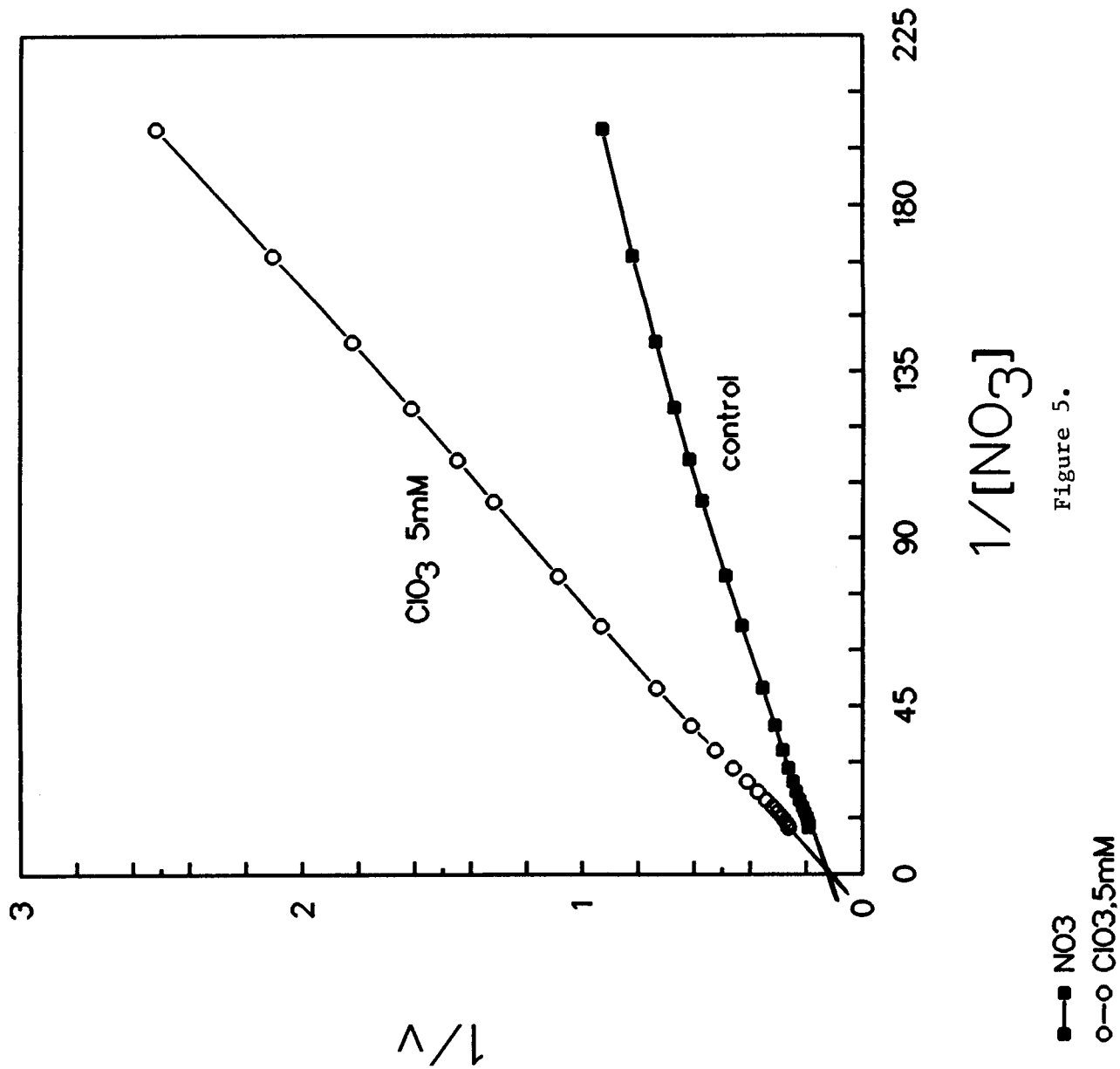


Figure 5.

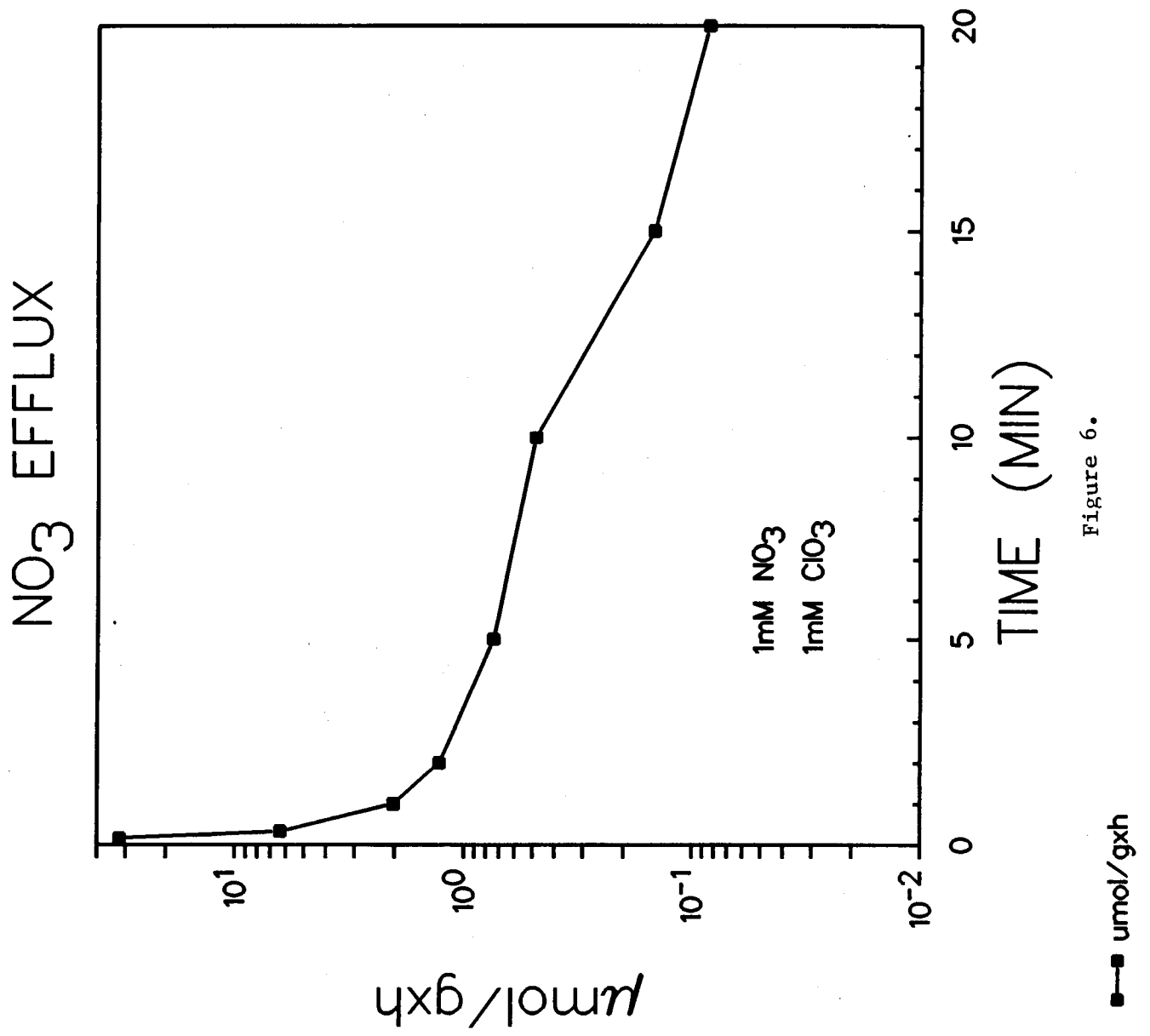


Figure 6.

ClO₃ ON NO₃ EFFLUX

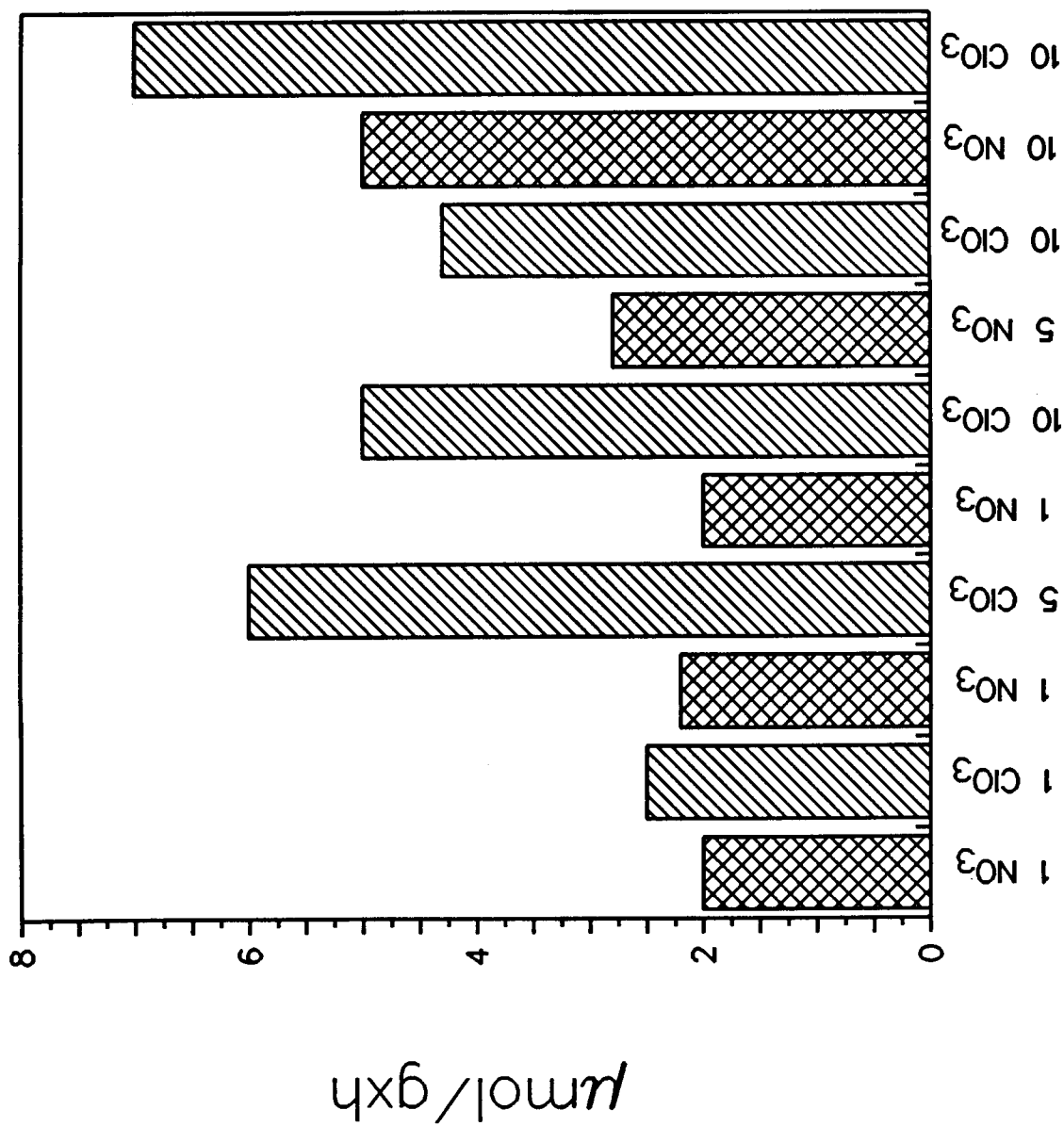


Figure 7.

EFFLUX
 EFFLUX



Report Documentation Page

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