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Article Title: The roles of the Cucumber mosaic virus 2b protein in promoting movement and inducing or sustaining symptom induction in Arabidopsis and Nicotiana plants

Year of publication: 2009

Link to published version: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1094/MPMI-22-6-0642>

Publisher statement: None

1 **The roles of the *Cucumber mosaic virus* 2b protein in promoting**
2 **movement and inducing or sustaining symptom induction in**
3 ***Arabidopsis* and *Nicotiana* plants**

4

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17

1 ABSTRACT

2 The cucumber mosaic virus (CMV) 2b protein is a counter-defense factor and
3 symptom determinant. Conserved domains in the 2b protein sequence were
4 mutated in the 2b gene of strain Fny-CMV. The effects of these mutations were
5 assessed by infection of *Nicotiana tabacum*, *N. benthamiana* and *Arabidopsis*
6 *thaliana* (ecotype Col-0) with mutant viruses and by expression of mutant 2b
7 transgenes in *A. thaliana*. We confirmed that two nuclear localization signals
8 were required for symptom induction and found that the N-terminal domain was
9 essential for symptom induction. The C-terminal domain and two serine
10 residues within a putative phosphorylation domain modulated symptom severity.
11 Further infection studies were conducted using Fny-CMV Δ 2b, a mutant which
12 cannot express the 2b protein and that induces no symptoms in *N. tabacum*, *N.*
13 *benthamiana* or *A. thaliana* ecotype Col-0. Surprisingly, in plants of *A. thaliana*
14 ecotype C24, Fny-CMV Δ 2b induced severe symptoms, similar to those induced
15 by the wild-type virus. However, C24 plants infected with the mutant virus
16 recovered from disease whilst those infected with the wild-type virus did not.
17 Whereas expression of Fny 2b-transgenes induced symptom-like phenotypes in
18 Col-0, this was rarely seen in the C24 background. Expression of 2b-transgenes
19 from either Fny-CMV or from LS-CMV (a mild strain) in Col-0 plants enhanced
20 systemic movement of Fny-CMV Δ 2b and permitted symptom induction by Fny-
21 CMV Δ 2b. Taken together, the results indicate that while the 2b protein is an
22 important symptom determinant in certain hosts, it can also synergize symptom
23 induction by other CMV-encoded factors.

1 INTRODUCTION

2

3 *Cucumber mosaic virus* (CMV) is the type *Cucumovirus* species and CMV
4 strains are further classified into one of three subgroups (IA, IB, or II) (Palukaitis and
5 García-Arenal 2003; Roossinck et al. 1999). Cucumoviruses possess tripartite,
6 positive sense RNA genomes encoding five proteins (Habibi and Francki 1974;
7 Palukaitis and García-Arenal 2003; Wikoff et al. 1997). One of these proteins is the
8 multifunctional 2b protein (c. 12 kDa) encoded by the second open reading frame
9 (ORF) of RNA 2 and synthesized by the translation of a sub-genomic mRNA, RNA
10 4A (Ding et al. 1994).

11

12 The 2b protein influences local and systemic viral movement and inhibits host
13 defense mechanisms based on salicylic acid (SA)-induced resistance and RNA
14 silencing (Béclin et al. 1998; Brigneti et al. 1998; Ding et al. 1995; Guo et al. 2005; Ji
15 and Ding 2001; Li et al. 1999; Mourrain et al. 2000; Shi et al. 2003; Soards et al.
16 2002). The severity of the symptoms induced by subgroup IA, IB and II CMV strains
17 and by tomato aspermy virus, another cucumovirus, is determined in large part by the
18 properties of the 2b proteins of these viruses (Du et al. 2007; Shi et al. 2002, 2003).
19 Thus, a mutant of the subgroup II CMV strain Q that cannot express the 2b protein
20 (Q-CMV Δ 2b) was unable to move systemically in cucumber and displayed decreased
21 symptom induction in *Nicotiana glutinosa* and tobacco (*N. tabacum*) (Ding et al.
22 1996; Ji and Ding 2001). A 2b deletion mutant of the subgroup IA strain Fny (Fny-
23 CMV Δ 2b) moves systemically in tobacco and *N. benthamiana* but does not induce
24 symptoms (Soards et al. 2002; Ziebell et al. 2007).

25

1 Constitutive expression of *2b* genes from various subgroup II and subgroup IA
2 strains of CMV in transgenic *Arabidopsis thaliana* (ecotype Col-0) and *Nicotiana* spp.
3 (Du et al. 2007; Siddiqui et al., 2008) provided evidence that the severity of symptoms
4 induced by these strains was related to the ability of their respective 2b proteins to
5 disrupt the regulation of host gene expression by micro(mi)RNAs (Chapman et al.
6 2004; Lewsey et al. 2007; Zhang et al. 2006). Thus, transgenic plants expressing Fny-
7 CMV 2b protein displayed strong symptom-like phenotypes (distortion of leaves,
8 general stunting and disturbance of root architecture: Lewsey et al. 2007), whereas
9 transgenic plants expressing Q- or LS-CMV 2b proteins are similar in appearance to
10 non-transgenic plants (Chapman et al. 2004; Lewsey et al. 2007; Zhang et al. 2006).
11 Using the subgroup IA strain Fny-CMV we have investigated the importance of
12 specific domains within the 2b protein for symptom induction and the requirement for
13 the 2b protein in symptom induction by the virus in a number of hosts.

14

15

16

1 **RESULTS**

2

3 **Mutagenesis of specific domains in the 2b protein affects CMV-induced** 4 **symptoms**

5 The *2b* genes and protein sequences from different CMV strains share several
6 highly conserved features. For example, there is an overlap between the 5' region of
7 the 2b open reading frame (ORF) and the 3' region of the 2a replicase protein gene.
8 Other conserved features include: a conserved bipartite, arginine-rich nuclear
9 localization sequence (NLS); a putative phosphorylation sequence, and a C-terminal
10 sequence of approximately 17 amino acids (Lucy et al. 2000; Mayers et al. 2000;
11 Wang et al. 2004) (Fig. 1A). To investigate the roles of these conserved regions and
12 domains in protein function, we carried out site-directed mutagenesis of the 2b ORF
13 in an infectious cDNA clone of Fny-CMV RNA 2 (pFny209: Rizzo and Palukaitis
14 1990) (Supp. Table 1).

15

16 A number of mutant plasmids were made (Fig. 1 and Supp. Table 1). In
17 plasmid pFny209:Δ5T the nucleotides encoding the first 17 amino acids of the Fny-
18 CMV 2b protein sequence were deleted (Fig. 1). Plasmids pFny209:ΔNLS1,
19 pFny209:ΔNLS2 and pFny209:ΔNLS1+2 encode, respectively, RNAs 2 in which one
20 of the two segments of the 2b protein NLS (1 or 2) or both segments were deleted
21 (Fig. 1). Plasmid pFny209:ΔKSPSE encodes an RNA 2 in which the sequence for the
22 putative phosphorylation motif KSPSE in the 2b protein was entirely deleted (Fig. 1).
23 Plasmids pFny209:S40A and pFny209:S42A encode, respectively, 2b protein
24 sequences in which serine residues 40 and 42 have been replaced by alanine residues
25 (Fig. 1). These two serine residues are the most probable phosphorylation sites within

1 the putative phosphorylation domain. Plasmid pFny209:Δ3T encodes a truncated
2 RNA 2 lacking the 3' terminal RNA sequence of the 2b ORF, corresponding to the C-
3 terminal 16 amino acids of the 2b protein (see Fig. 1 and Supp. Table 1). For all
4 newly made constructs, successful mutation of pFny209 was confirmed by DNA
5 sequencing (data not shown).

6

7 Wild-type (WT) and mutant RNAs 2 were generated by *in vitro* transcription
8 and combined as appropriate with *in vitro*-synthesized RNAs 1 and 3 using the
9 plasmids pFny109 and pFny309 as templates (Rizzo and Palukaitis 1990; Supp. Table
10 2). Infectious transcripts of the mutant Fny-CMVΔ2b, in which most of the 2b ORF
11 is deleted, were also reconstituted (Ryabov et al. 2001; Soards et al. 2002;
12 Supplementary Supp. Table 2). These were mechanically inoculated onto leaves of
13 tobacco (cv. Xanthi-nc), *N. benthamiana* and *A. thaliana* plants and the development
14 of symptoms was observed (Table 1; Fig. 2; Supp. Figs. 1 and 2). In all host/virus
15 combinations, systemic accumulation of the virus was confirmed by RT-PCR (Fig. 3
16 and data not shown), using PCR primers flanking the 2b coding region (Ziebell et al.
17 2007). Conservation of the mutations within the viral progeny was confirmed by
18 DNA sequencing of RT-PCR products (data not shown).

19

20 Infections of tobacco with Fny-CMVΔ5T, Fny-CMVΔNLS1, Fny-
21 CMVΔNLS2, Fny-CMVΔNLS1+2 or Fny-CMVΔKSPSE were asymptomatic (Table
22 1; Fig. 2A; Supp. Fig. 1). As previously described, infection of tobacco by Fny-
23 CMVΔ2b was also asymptomatic (Table 1; Fig. 2A; Supp. Fig. 1; Soards et al., 2002).
24 Infection with Fny-CMVS40A or Fny-CMVS42A caused mild symptoms in tobacco.
25 These included leaf distortion, mild vein clearing and very slight stunting (Table 1;

1 Fig. 2A; Supp. Fig. 1). Tobacco plants infected with Fny-CMV Δ 3T exhibited severe
2 symptoms, which included mosaic and leaf distortion and a more marked yellowing
3 than those induced by Fny-CMV (Table 1; Fig. 2A; Supp. Fig. 1).

4

5 Similarly, infection of *N. benthamiana* plants with Fny-CMV Δ 5T, Fny-
6 CMV Δ NLS2, Fny-CMV Δ NLS1+2 or Fny-CMV Δ KSPSE did not induce any obvious
7 symptoms (Table 1; Fig. 2B). However, symptoms induced by Fny-CMV Δ 3T were
8 more severe than those induced by Fny-CMV in *N. benthamiana*, in that plants
9 infected with Fny-CMV Δ 3T exhibited more extensive necrosis than those infected
10 with Fny-CMV (Table 1; Fig. 2B; Supp. Fig. 2). Infection with Fny-CMV Δ NLS1
11 caused mild stunting, whilst Fny-CMVS40A caused slight leaf distortion and slight
12 stunting (Table 1; Fig. 2B; Supp. Fig. 2). Infection with Fny-CMVS42A caused
13 moderate stunting and leaf distortion (Table 1; Fig. 2B; Supp. Fig. 2).

14

15 In *A. thaliana* ecotype Col-0 plants, infection with Fny-CMV Δ 2b, Fny-
16 CMV Δ 5T, Fny-CMV Δ NLS1, Fny-CMV Δ NLS2, Fny-CMV Δ NLS1+2 or Fny-
17 CMV Δ KSPSE did not induce symptoms (Table 1; Supp. Fig. 2C). Fny-CMVS40A or
18 Fny-CMVS42A infections caused mild stunting, whilst Fny-CMV Δ 3T infection
19 caused severe symptoms similar to those induced by WT Fny-CMV infection (Table
20 1; Supp. Fig. 2C). These reactions were similar to those of tobacco and *N.*
21 *benthamiana* (Table 1; Fig. 2; Supp. Figs. 1 and 2).

22

23 Constitutive expression of the Fny-CMV 2b ORF in *A. thaliana* induced a
24 symptom-like phenotype (Lewsey et al. 2007). Expression was achieved using the
25 binary expression vector pBI121 Fny 2b, which contains a cauliflower mosaic virus

1 (CaMV) 35S promoter to drive constitutive expression of the *2b* gene (Lewsey et al.
2 2007). The $\Delta 5T$ and $\Delta 3T$ truncations (Fig. 1) of the *2b* protein were recreated in this
3 vector by introducing stop codons at amino acids 2 and 9 ($\Delta 5T$) or amino acid 95
4 ($\Delta 3T$) (Supp. Fig. 3). In transgenic *A. thaliana* (Col-0) plants the 35S:Fny2b $\Delta 5T$
5 construct induced no obvious changes in phenotype, whilst 35S:Fny2b $\Delta 3T$ induced a
6 symptom-like phenotype similar to that induced by constitutive expression of a wild-
7 type Fny-CMV *2b* transgene (Supp. Fig. 4; Lewsey et al. 2007). These modified plant
8 phenotypes are consistent with the symptoms induced by infection of non-transgenic
9 plants with the corresponding mutant viruses. This indicates that the differences in
10 symptoms induced by Fny-CMV $\Delta 5T$ and Fny-CMV $\Delta 3T$, compared with those
11 induced by wild-type Fny-CMV, are due solely to the properties of the mutant *2b*
12 proteins and not to altered interactions between the *2b* protein and other CMV gene
13 products.

14

15 ***A. thaliana* ecotypes exhibit different responses to a CMV mutant lacking the *2b***
16 **gene**

17 Fny-CMV $\Delta 2b$ infection is symptomless in plants of two cultivars of *N.*
18 *tabacum* (Soards et al. 2002; Ziebell et al. 2007), as well as in *N. benthamiana*
19 (Ziebell et al. 2007) and *A. thaliana* (ecotype Col-0) (Lewsey et al. 2007). We also
20 found that infection with this mutant virus was symptomless in *N. clevelandii* and *N.*
21 *rustica* plants (data not shown). However, Wang and colleagues (2004) previously
22 observed that *Cucurbita pepo* L. cv. Ma'yan plants infected with Fny-CMV $\Delta 2b$
23 exhibited mild symptoms early in infection followed by recovery. We have observed
24 similar results in *C. pepo* cv. Goldrush (data not shown) and the Warwick accession
25 of *Chenopodium quinoa* (Supp. Fig. 5). *N. occidentalis* plants exhibited symptoms of

1 systemic mosaic and leaf curling when infected with Fny-CMV or Fny-CMV Δ 2b, but
2 recovery was not assessed (data not shown). These observations suggest that in
3 certain hosts the 2b protein cannot be the sole determinant required for full
4 pathogenicity. Consistent with this idea, we found that *A. thaliana* plants belonging
5 to the ecotypes Wassilewskija, Landsberg erecta, Nössen and RLD (Fig. 4) exhibited
6 stunting, but no other symptoms, in response to infection with Fny-CMV Δ 2b and that
7 this mutant evoked easily recognizable symptoms in plants of the C24 ecotype (Fig.
8 5A). These symptoms included necrosis and disturbance of normal leaf development
9 (Fig. 5A). This contrasted with infection of *A. thaliana* ecotype Col-0 by Fny-
10 CMV Δ 2b, which was asymptomatic (Table 1; Supp. Fig. 1).

11

12 When infected with either wild-type Fny-CMV or the mutant Fny-CMV Δ 2b,
13 C24 plants exhibited symptoms that included extensive necrosis, which was not
14 observed on plants of the other ecotypes following infection with either of these
15 viruses (Fig. 5A and data not shown). Observation over time indicated that symptom
16 induction on C24 plants by Fny-CMV Δ 2b was delayed relative to Fny-CMV and that
17 the symptoms induced by the mutant were slightly milder (Fig. 5A). *A. thaliana*
18 ecotype C24 plants infected with Fny-CMV eventually died, whilst those infected
19 with Fny-CMV Δ 2b eventually exhibited recovery from disease in the form of
20 apparently symptom-free new growth (Fig. 5A and B). Fny-CMV Δ 2b RNA was
21 detected by RT-PCR in the emerging leaves that exhibited recovery from disease (Fig.
22 5C). This indicates that the plants had not undergone a true recovery, where the
23 initially infecting virus is usually undetectable in recovered tissue.

24

1 **Symptom determination by the 2b protein is independent of its ability to**
2 **promote viral movement**

3 We explored further the roles of the 2b protein in enhancement of systemic
4 movement and the induction of symptoms when expressed in 2b-transgenic plants.
5 Transgenic *A. thaliana* (Col-0) plants expressing the Fny-CMV 2b protein
6 (35S:Fny2b: Lewsey et al. 2007) were infected with Fny-CMV or Fny-CMV Δ 2b.
7 Virus accumulation and the induction of symptoms in systemically infected leaves
8 were examined at various times following inoculation. The systemic movement of
9 wild-type and mutant CMV was monitored by taking samples of protein from non-
10 inoculated leaves at 6, 12 and 21 days post-inoculation (dpi). Virus accumulation was
11 detected by immunoblot analysis of leaf proteins using an antiserum specific for the
12 CMV coat protein.

13

14 In non-transgenic plants of *A. thaliana* ecotype Col-0, Fny-CMV Δ 2b spread to
15 non-inoculated leaves less rapidly than wild-type Fny-CMV (Fig. 6A), consistent with
16 the pattern of Fny-CMV Δ 2b systemic movement in tobacco (Soards et al. 2003). In
17 transgenic plants constitutively expressing the Fny 2b protein, Fny-CMV Δ 2b
18 movement to non-inoculated tissues occurred as rapidly as movement of wild-type
19 Fny-CMV (Fig.4A). However, the amount of mutant virus that accumulated in the
20 non-inoculated leaves was still less than that achieved by the wild-type virus (Fig.
21 6A).

22

23 Experiments were conducted to further delineate the abilities of 2b proteins
24 from CMV strains from different subgroups to promote movement and induce
25 symptoms. Transgenic *A. thaliana* ecotype Col-0 harboring the 2b coding region of a

1 subgroup II CMV strain (LS-CMV) under the control of a CaMV 35S promoter
2 (35S:LS2b; Lewsey et al. 2007) were utilized. The 35S:LS2b transgene induces only
3 very slight changes in plant phenotype and infection of non-transgenic *A. thaliana*
4 ecotype Col-0 with LS-CMV is symptomless (Lewsey et al. 2007). Non-transgenic *A.*
5 *thaliana* ecotype Col-0 plants, 35S:LS2b and 35S:Fny2b plants were inoculated with
6 Fny-CMV Δ 2b. Samples of protein were extracted from non-inoculated leaf tissue at
7 5, 7, 9 and 11 dpi and analyzed for CMV coat protein accumulation by
8 immunoblotting (Fig. 6B). It was found that the 35S:LS2b transgene complemented
9 accumulation of Fny-CMV Δ 2b in systemically infected tissues as effectively as
10 35S:Fny2b (Fig. 6B).

11

12 During the experiments investigating systemic movement of Fny-CMV and
13 Fny-CMV Δ 2b in *2b*-transgenic plants, virus-induced symptom development was
14 monitored. *A. thaliana* ecotype Col-0 plants harboring 35S:Fny2b or 35S:LS2b
15 transgenes were infected with Fny-CMV, Fny-CMV Δ 2b or were mock-inoculated.
16 Fny-CMV Δ 2b infection was confirmed by RT-PCR for Fny-CMV Δ 2b RNA (Fig. 7).
17 Plants confirmed to be infected with Fny-CMV Δ 2b were assessed visually for
18 symptoms one month post-inoculation and photographed (Fig. 8). It should be noted
19 that non-infected plants of these 35S:Fny2b lines exhibit a mild symptom-like
20 phenotypic change in response to the transgene and that non-infected plants of the
21 35S:LS2b lines utilized exhibit very mild developmentally perturbed phenotype
22 changes (Lewsey et al. 2007). Infection of all *2b*-transgenic plants with wild-type
23 Fny-CMV resulted in very severe disease symptoms. These were more severe than
24 those induced by infection of non-transgenic *A. thaliana* ecotype Col-0 (Fig. 8). This
25 is most likely to be because development of these plants is affected by both the *2b*

1 protein expressed from the transgene and the 2b protein expressed by the virus. Fny-
2 CMV Δ 2b did not induce symptoms in non-transgenic *A. thaliana* ecotype Col-0
3 plants (Fig. 5, 8; Supp. Fig. 1C). Contrastingly, plants expressing either the
4 35S:Fny2b or the 35S:LS2b transgene infected with Fny-CMV Δ 2b exhibited obvious
5 stunting compared to mock-inoculated controls (Fig. 8). This demonstrates that the
6 2b protein of either LS- or Fny-CMV was able to complement symptom induction by
7 Fny-CMV Δ 2b.

8

9 We examined the possibility that complementation of systemic movement of
10 Fny-CMV Δ 2b and the induction of symptoms in 2b-transgenic plants was a result of
11 recombination between the transgenic 2b mRNA and the truncated RNA 2 of the
12 mutant virus, resulting in the generation of reconstituted wild-type or chimeric virus.
13 We carried out RT-PCR reactions on RNA from systemically infected leaves using a
14 primer combination that can be used to distinguish between wild-type and mutant
15 RNA 2 molecules (Ziebell et al. 2007). Full length CMV RNA 2 was not detected in
16 any RT-PCR reactions (Fig. 6 and data not shown), indicating that recombination had
17 not occurred between the transgene-encoded mRNAs and RNA 2 of Fny-CMV Δ 2b.
18 Thus, the effects on systemic movement (Fig. 6) and on symptom development (Fig.
19 8) are caused by 2b protein supplied *in trans*, as RT-PCR data indicated that 2b
20 transgene-derived mRNAs had not recombined with the virus (Fig. 7).

21

22

1 **DISCUSSION**

2

3 The results of this study show that the CMV 2b protein influences disease
4 induction in two ways. Firstly, and consistent with earlier studies, the 2b protein can
5 act directly as an inducer of symptoms (Lewsey et al. 2007; Lucy et al. 2000; Wang et
6 al., 2004; Zhang et al. 2006). Secondly, it can synergize and sustain symptom
7 induction by other viral gene products. This supporting role in symptom induction
8 appears to be independent of the ability of a 2b protein to induce symptoms
9 autonomously.

10

11 **The roles in symptom induction of specific domains within the 2b protein**

12 The 2b protein of the subgroup IA strain of CMV, Fny-CMV, is a strong
13 inducer of symptoms in several hosts. Amino acid sequence domains within the 2b
14 protein were found to affect its ability to induce symptoms in plants from three host
15 species: tobacco, *N. benthamiana* and *A. thaliana* ecotype Col-0. In all three hosts,
16 deletion of the entire putative phosphorylation sequence (in the mutant Fny-
17 CMV Δ KSPSE) completely abolished symptom induction. Point mutations in Fny-
18 CMVS40A and Fny-CMVS42A, whereby the potential for phosphorylation of the 2b
19 protein was abolished by exchange of serine for alanine residues greatly decreased but
20 did not completely abolish CMV-induced symptom induction in these three hosts.
21 Deletion of the corresponding five residues from the 2b protein of Q-CMV (subgroup
22 II) also abolished symptom induction (Ding et al. 1995). These results are consistent
23 with our suggestion that these serine residues are likely to be phosphorylatable and
24 indicate that the phosphorylation state of the 2b protein modulates its symptom-
25 inducing activity. Sequence analysis by Lucy and colleagues (2000) indicated that

1 these five residues may contain motifs for phosphorylation that occur in substrates for
2 casein kinase II (CKII) and cyclin-dependent kinase 2 (CDK2). They proposed that
3 the combination of NLSs with CDKII and CDC2 phosphorylation sites constitutes a
4 CcN motif, which has been shown to be involved in regulation of nuclear import for
5 many proteins (Lucy et al. 2000). They also noted that several aligned 2b sequences
6 possessed potential nuclear export signals, suggesting that the 2b protein may shuttle
7 in and out of the nucleus (Lucy et al. 2000).

8

9 Previous studies have demonstrated that functional NLS(s) are required for 2b
10 protein to act as a symptom determinant when expressed from vectors derived from
11 potato virus X and zucchini yellow mosaic virus (Lucy et al. 2000; Wang et al. 2004).
12 Our data also demonstrate that both NLS domains are required for 2b protein to
13 operate as an effective symptom determinant of CMV. However, this is the first
14 demonstration that they are required for symptom determination during an authentic
15 CMV infection, rather than when wild-type and mutant 2b proteins are expressed
16 from heterologous viruses. Deletion of the N-terminal region of the 2b protein (in
17 mutant CMV Δ 5T) also rendered the virus unable to induce symptoms, indicating that
18 this region is required for symptom induction. It should be noted, though, that such a
19 large deletion (seventeen amino acids) may have altered 2b protein function by
20 affecting protein structure. Interestingly, deletion of the sixteen C-terminal amino
21 acids (in CMV Δ 3T) did not attenuate symptom induction. Rather, it seemed to alter
22 the precise nature of symptoms in tobacco and slightly increase severity in *N.*
23 *benthamiana*. A previous study found that the region had transcriptional activation
24 activity in yeast (Ham et al. 1999). Our results suggest that in certain hosts, this
25 region of the 2b protein may down-regulate symptom severity.

1

2 **Symptom production and systemic movement by the Fny-CMV Δ 2b mutant virus**
3 **in non-transgenic and 2b-transgenic *A. thaliana* plants**

4 In this study and in previous work, we found that the Fny-CMV Δ 2b mutant
5 can spread systemically in *A. thaliana* ecotype Col-0 but induces no symptoms
6 (Lewsey et al. 2007), which was consistent with work with the same mutant in
7 tobacco and *N. benthamiana* (Table 1; Supp. Fig. 1). However, Wang and colleagues
8 (2004) noted that Fny-CMV Δ 2b induces transient symptoms in squash. This finding
9 was confirmed by our data and it was noted that Fny-CMV Δ 2b has similar effects on
10 *C. quinoa* and *N. occidentalis* and, surprisingly, on plants of the C24 ecotype of *A.*
11 *thaliana*.

12

13 The induction of symptoms in C24 plants by Fny-CMV Δ 2b was investigated
14 in greater detail. It was observed that Fny-CMV Δ 2b induced symptoms of leaf
15 distortion, chlorosis and necrosis. However, new growth in these plants did not show
16 clear symptoms, although these young tissues were systemically infected with Fny-
17 CMV Δ 2b (Fig. 5). This suggests that these host plants had adapted in some manner
18 and had recovered from virus-induced disease, although this was not a true recovery
19 from virus infection. In contrast, *A. thaliana* ecotype C24 plants did not recover from
20 disease caused by infection with wild-type Fny-CMV. The symptoms induced by the
21 wild-type virus were stronger than those induced by Fny-CMV Δ 2b, or by wild-type
22 Fny-CMV infection of plants of the Col-0 ecotype, and eventually resulted in death of
23 the plants.

24

1 The 2b protein enhances systemic movement of CMV in several hosts and
2 preliminary work using Fny-CMV Δ 2b had indicated that it was required for efficient
3 long-distance movement in *A. thaliana* (Soards 2003). To further examine the
4 functionality of the 2b protein expressed in 2b-transgenic plants we inoculated them
5 with Fny-CMV Δ 2b and monitored virus accumulation in directly inoculated and non-
6 inoculated leaves at various times. In non-transformed *A. thaliana* plants Fny-
7 CMV Δ 2b accumulated and spread less rapidly than wild-type Fny-CMV and induced
8 no disease symptoms, similar to previous results seen in Fny-CMV Δ 2b-infected
9 tobacco (Soards et al. 2003). However, in transgenic plants expressing the 2b protein
10 of the Fny-CMV strain, Fny-CMV Δ 2b accumulation and spread occurred as rapidly
11 as for wild-type virus, although the amount of mutant virus that accumulated in non-
12 inoculated leaves was still less than that achieved by the wild-type CMV (Fig. 6A). A
13 previous report indicated that CMV infection ameliorated 2b-induced phenotype
14 changes in 2b-transgenic tobacco (Praveen et al. 2008). Contrastingly, we found that
15 infection of Fny 2b-transgenic *A. thaliana* ecotype Col-0 plants with Fny-CMV
16 resulted in extremely severe disease symptoms and that even infection with Fny-
17 CMV Δ 2b exacerbated the stunting exhibited by the 2b-transgenic plants. Transgenic
18 expression of the LS 2b protein complemented movement of Fny-CMV Δ 2b as
19 effectively as Fny 2b protein. More surprisingly, Fny-CMV Δ 2b induced disease
20 symptoms in these plants. Since LS-CMV infection is essentially asymptomatic in *A.*
21 *thaliana* ecotype Col-0 plants and transgenic expression of LS 2b protein causes only
22 very mild changes in plant phenotype (Lewsey et al. 2007), the symptoms must have
23 been caused by one or more gene products expressed by Fny-CMV Δ 2b.

24

1 **The 2b protein can induce symptoms but also facilitates symptom induction by**
2 **other CMV gene products**

3 The 2b protein of a severe CMV strain can induce symptoms autonomously of
4 other CMV gene products (Lewsey et al. 2007; Lucy et al. 2000; Wang et al. 2004;
5 Zhang et al. 2006) and the characteristics of 2b-induced symptoms depend upon
6 specific domains within the 2b protein sequence (data from this study; Lucy et al.
7 2000; Ham et al. 1999). However, whereas expression of Fny 2b in transgenic Col-0
8 plants induces strong disease-like phenotypes (this study; Lewsey et al. 2007; Zhang
9 et al. 2006), this was not seen in the majority of lines created in the C24 background.
10 Thus, the host background also conditions symptom induction by 2b proteins.
11 Furthermore, a 2b protein, whether it originates from a severe or a mild strain, can
12 also facilitate and sustain symptom induction by other viral gene products even when
13 it induces no symptoms or symptom-like phenotypes of its own. Thus, the 2b protein
14 from LS-CMV, a strain that does not induce strong symptoms in *A. thaliana*, does not
15 induce a strong symptom-like phenotype when expressed in transgenic plants.
16 However, expression of 2b in transgenic plants converted a symptomless infection by
17 Fny-CMV Δ 2b into a severe infection.

18

19 Taken together, our results indicate that although the 2b protein may be the
20 predominant determinant of symptom induction, it is not the only CMV protein
21 involved in symptom determination. This is consistent with previous studies that
22 have mapped determinants of CMV symptoms to all three genomic RNA segments
23 and to all five known CMV protein genes (Palukaitis and García-Arenal 2003). For
24 example, work by Zhang et al. (1994) demonstrated that in tobacco symptoms were
25 determined by both RNAs 1 and 2 of Fny-CMV. However, the results obtained by

1 infecting *A. thaliana* ecotype C24 plants and transgenic ecotype Col-0 plants
2 expressing the 2b protein of LS-CMV with Fny-CMVΔ2b indicate that successful
3 symptom induction and/or sustained induction of symptoms by other CMV gene
4 products requires the 2b protein.

5

6 Interestingly, previous work has suggested that CMV may exert effects on
7 RNA silencing and symptom induction that are not dependent solely upon the 2b
8 protein itself. It was shown that in transgenic *N. benthamiana*, infection by Fny-
9 CMVΔ2b could to some extent relieve the silencing of an amplicon derived from
10 potato leafroll virus (Taliensky et al. 2004). The subgroup II CMV strain Q-CMV,
11 and 2b deletion mutants derived from it (Q-CMVΔ2b), do not induce strong disease
12 symptoms in *A. thaliana* plants belonging to the Col-0 ecotype. Remarkably, Diaz-
13 Pendon and colleagues (2007) found that both wild-type Q-CMV and Q-CMVΔ2b
14 induced strong disease symptoms in mutant *A. thaliana* plants lacking functional
15 genes for dicer-like (DCL) enzymes: specifically in double *dcl 2/4* and triple *dcl 2/3/4*
16 mutants. These DCLs are largely responsible for RNA silencing-mediated resistance
17 to viruses (Deleris et al. 2006). Diaz-Pendon et al. (2007) argued that these results
18 indicate that 2b is dispensable for symptom induction. However, our results
19 demonstrate that the ability of 2b to induce symptoms in CMV-infected plants, or
20 symptom-like phenotypes in transgenic plants, is both host plant specific and virus
21 strain specific. Furthermore, even in plants where a given 2b protein has no symptom-
22 inducing activity it can still support or potentiate the symptom induction by other
23 CMV gene products and it appears to be needed to prevent recovery of the plant. Our
24 work demonstrates that the 2b protein does not operate in isolation; rather, it is a key
25 component of a complex, precision attack on plant development mounted by the virus.

1 MATERIALS AND METHODS

2

3 Site-directed mutagenesis

4 Targeted mutations of the *2b* coding region were introduced into plasmids
5 pFny209 (Rizzo and Palukaitis, 1990) and pBI121 Fny *2b* (Lewsey et al., 2007) by
6 site-directed mutagenesis using the Quick-Change II XL kit (Stratagene;
7 <http://www.stratagene.com/>) according to the manufacturer's instructions. The
8 sequences of primers used are detailed in Supp. Table 1.

9

10 Plant growth and virus inoculation

11 *A. thaliana* seeds were planted on a 4:1 compost/sand mixture and maintained
12 at 21°C with an 8 h photoperiod. *Nicotiana* spp., *C. quinoa* (Warwick HRI accession)
13 and *C. pepo* seeds were planted on compost and maintained at 25 °C either in a
14 greenhouse (with supplementary lighting) or in a custom built growth chamber with
15 an 8 h photoperiod and a light intensity of 200 $\mu\text{mol.m}^{-2}.\text{s}^{-1}$ (Conviroon;
16 www.conviroon.com).

17

18 Infectious RNAs for Fny-CMV and mutants thereof were regenerated from
19 infectious cDNA clones by *in vitro* transcription as described previously (Soards et
20 al., 2002), using the combinations of plasmids described in Supplementary Supp.
21 Table 2. *A. thaliana* plants were inoculated with infectious transcripts at the 4 to 6
22 leaf stage by applying solutions of transcripts to Carborundum-dusted leaves using a
23 cotton bud. Plants of all other species were inoculated at 2 to 5 weeks post-
24 germination by applying transcripts to Carborundum-dusted leaves using a roughened
25 glass microscope slide. Infection was confirmed in transcript-inoculated plants by

1 reverse transcription coupled to the polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR). To
2 inoculate plants with infectious sap leaves from plants confirmed to be infected were
3 ground in 0.1M potassium phosphate buffer (pH 7) and the clarified homogenate was
4 applied to Carborundum-dusted leaves of plants with a gloved finger. Virus
5 purification was conducted by the method of Ng and Perry (2004) and inoculated to *A.*
6 *thaliana* plants as per infectious transcripts, using a suspension of 100 $\mu\text{g}\cdot\text{ml}^{-1}$ viral
7 particles. Infected plants were photographed with a Nikon Coolpix digital camera
8 (<http://www.nikondigital.com/main.html>).

9

10 Experiments assessing symptom induction of Fny-CMV mutants in tobacco
11 were conducted twice using infectious transcript inocula, with plants maintained in a
12 greenhouse, and once using infectious sap, with plants maintained in a growth
13 chamber. These experiments were conducted twice in *N. benthamiana* using
14 infectious transcript inocula, with plants grown in a greenhouse. In *A. thaliana* the
15 experiment was conducted once, with each virus inoculated onto 4-6 plants. Results
16 were consistent between plants of the same species inoculated with the same virus.

17

18 **RT-PCR and DNA sequencing**

19 RNA extraction and RT-PCR to detect Fny-CMV or mutants thereof was
20 performed using primers flanking the *2b* coding region, according to Ziebell et al.
21 (2007). PCR products were purified for sequencing by extraction from agarose gels
22 using the Qiaquick gel extraction kit (Qiagen; <http://www1.qiagen.com/>). Sequencing
23 of purified RT-PCR products from wild-type and mutant CMV-infected plants and of
24 mutant plasmids was performed by Geneservice Ltd. (<http://www.geneservice.co.uk/>).

25

1

2 Arabidopsis transformation

3 *Agrobacterium tumefaciens*-mediated transformation was performed by floral
4 dipping (Clough and Bent, 1998) and selection of transformants was conducted
5 according to Lewsey et al (2007).

6

7 Immunoblotting

8 Immunoblotting for CMV coat protein was conducted according to Naylor et
9 al. (1998) except that bound primary antibody was detected using an anti-rabbit
10 horseradish peroxidase conjugate as the secondary antibody and visualized using
11 Western Lightning enhanced luminol chemiluminescence reagent (PerkinElmer;
12 <http://las.perkinelmer.com>) according to manufacturer's instructions.

1 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

2

3 We are grateful for the technical assistance provided by Caroline York. Work
4 was funded by grants from the UK Department for the Environment and Rural Affairs
5 (Defra) (Project no. HH3205SFV) (JW), Rural and Environment Research and
6 Analysis Directorate (RERAD) (PP), Plant Signaling Network Research Center (R11-
7 2003-008-02002-0) from the Korean Science and Engineering Fund (KOSEF) (KHR)
8 and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (grant
9 BB/D008204/1) (JPC). FR was supported by a PhD studentship from the Gatsby
10 Charitable Foundation, SHC was supported by a visiting fellowship from the Korean
11 Science and Engineering Fund (KRF-2005-214-C00156), MS was supported by
12 Fondation Baxter et Alma Ricard and HZ was supported by the Walter Grant Scott
13 Research Fellowship (Trinity Hall, Cambridge). Work was carried out at the
14 University of Cambridge and Warwick HRI under Defra plant health licenses.

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16

1 **TABLES**

2

3 **Table 1** Symptoms induced by Fny-CMV variants in *A. thaliana* ecotype Col-0, *N.*
4 *benthamiana* and tobacco. N/O indicates no obvious symptoms.

Fny-CMV variant	Symptoms induced in host species		
	<i>A. thaliana</i> ecotype Col-0	<i>N. benthamiana</i>	Tobacco
Wild type Fny-CMV	Stunting; leaf distortion	Stunting; leaf distortion	Stunting; leaf distortion; systemic mosaic
Fny-CMV Δ 2b	N/O	N/O	N/O
Fny-CMV Δ 5T	N/O	N/O	N/O
Fny-CMV Δ NLS1	N/O	Mild stunting	N/O
Fny-CMV Δ NLS2	N/O	N/O	N/O
Fny-CMV Δ NLS1+2	N/O	N/O	N/O
Fny-CMVS40A	Mild stunting	Mild stunting	Mild stunting; mild leaf distortion; mild systemic mosaic
Fny-CMVS42A	Mild stunting	Mild stunting; mild leaf distortion	Mild stunting; mild leaf distortion; mild systemic mosaic
Fny-CMV Δ KSPSE	N/O	N/O	N/O
Fny-CMV Δ 3T	Stunting; leaf distortion	Stunting; leaf distortion; necrosis	Leaf distortion; systemic mosaic; chlorosis

5

6

1 **FIGURE LEGENDS**

2

3 **Figure 1.** Schematic map describing locations of mutations, indicated by amino acid
4 residue numbers, created in the 110 amino acid 2b protein of Fny-CMV. Mutations
5 were generated by site-directed mutagenesis using primers described in Supp. Table 1.

6

7 **Figure 2.** Symptoms induced by Fny-CMV variants in tobacco plants (A; scale bars
8 5cm), *N. benthamiana* plants (B; scale bars 5cm) and *A. thaliana* ecotype Col-0 plants
9 (C; scale bars 3cm). Symptoms in tobacco and *N. benthamiana* were photographed
10 approximately 5 weeks post-inoculation (wpi), whilst those of *A. thaliana* were taken
11 approximately 3 wpi.

12

13 **Figure 3.** Confirmation of systemic infection by Fny-CMV variants in *A. thaliana*
14 ecotype Col-0 (A) and *N. benthamiana* (B). Non-inoculated tissue was tested for the
15 presence of viral RNA by RT-PCR. The identity of the virus is indicated above each
16 lane. The expected product size from Fny-CMV Δ 2b was 370bp and the expected
17 product from WT Fny-CMV is 664 bp (Ziebell et al., 2007). “M” denotes lanes
18 loaded with molecular weight marker and “-ve” denotes lanes containing the results of
19 RT-PCR reactions conducted using RNA from mock-inoculated plants.

20

21 **Figure 4.** Symptoms induced by Fny-CMV Δ 2b and Fny-CMV in *A. thaliana*
22 ecotypes Wassilewskija (Ws), Landsberg erecta (Ler), Nössen (Nö) and RLD. Plants
23 were inoculated with purified virions. Infection was confirmed by RT-PCR using
24 primers flanking the 2b coding region and symptoms observed at 19 dpi. Scale bars
25 indicate 3 cm.

1

2 **Figure 5.** Symptoms induced by Fny-CMV Δ 2b and Fny-CMV in *A. thaliana* ecotype
3 C24. Plants were inoculated with purified virions. Infection was confirmed by RT-
4 PCR using primers flanking the 2b coding region and symptoms observed at intervals
5 up to 20 dpi (A; Scale bar indicates 3 cm). Control plants were photographed at 21
6 dpi (A; scale bars indicate 3cm). Recovery from disease was photographed in Fny-
7 CMV Δ 2b inoculated plants at 30 dpi (B; scale bar indicates 3 cm). Newly emerged
8 tissue exhibiting recovery from disease was tested for the presence of Fny-CMV Δ 2b
9 RNA by RT-PCR (C). Lanes R1 and R2 contain RT-PCR products from recovered
10 tissue of two independent plants; Lane I contains an RT-PCR product from directly
11 inoculated tissue; Lane M contains a molecular weight marker, with 300, 400 and 600
12 bp bands indicated. The lane denoted “-ve” contains the results of an RT-PCR
13 reaction conducted using RNA from a mock-inoculated plant.

14

15 **Figure 6.** Accumulation of Fny-CMV or Fny-CMV Δ 2b in non-inoculated leaves of
16 non-transgenic *A. thaliana* ecotype Col-0 and plants harboring the 35S:Fny2b
17 transgene or 35S:LS2b transgene. Plants were inoculated on three lower leaves with
18 purified virions and non-inoculated leaves were collected for analysis. The
19 accumulation of Fny-CMV and Fny-CMV Δ 2b in two independent lines (2.11C and
20 2.30F) harboring the 35S:Fny2b transgene was assessed at 6, 12 and 21 dpi (A).
21 Infecting viruses are denoted F (Fny-CMV), Δ (Fny-CMV Δ 2b) and U (uninfected
22 control). M denotes marker lanes loaded with 1 μ g of purified CMV. X indicates
23 non-loaded lanes. Accumulation of Fny-CMV Δ 2b in one 35S:Fny2b and one
24 35S:LS2b line was assessed at 5, 7, 9 and 11 dpi (B). Lanes loaded with protein from
25 non-transgenic *A. thaliana* plants are labeled NT. In both experiments proteins were

1 extracted, separated by SDS-PAGE and equal loading assessed by staining with
2 Ponceau S. CMV accumulation was analyzed by immunoblotting. Each test lane
3 represents a separate plant. Individual plants were analyzed at one time point only.

4

5 **Figure 7.** Confirmation of Fny-CMV Δ 2b infection of plants harboring the
6 35S:Fny2b and 35S:LS2b transgenes. Plants of two independent transgenic lines
7 harboring the 35S:Fny2b transgene (lines 2.11C and 2.30F), two independent
8 transgenic lines harboring the 35S:LS2b transgene (lines 4.31A and 5.7D) and non-
9 transgenic *A. thaliana* ecotype Col-0 plants were inoculated with Fny-CMV Δ 2b.
10 Successful infection was confirmed by RT-PCR for Fny-CMV Δ 2b RNA. Lanes are
11 labeled with the 2b-derived transgene the plant harbored, the identity of the
12 independent line and a number indicating the specific plant tested. Lanes M contain
13 molecular weight markers, with 300 and 400 bp bands labeled. The lane denoted “-
14 ve” contains a no RNA negative control RT-PCR.

15

16 **Figure 8.** Symptoms of infection by Fny-CMV and Fny-CMV Δ 2b of plants
17 harboring the 35S:Fny2b and 35S:LS2b transgenes. Plants of two independent
18 transgenic lines harboring the 35S:Fny2b transgene (lines 2.11C and 2.30F), two
19 independent transgenic lines harboring the 35S:LS2b transgene (lines 4.31A and
20 5.7D) and non-transgenic *A. thaliana* ecotype Col-0 plants were infected with Fny-
21 CMV, Fny-CMV Δ 2b or mock-inoculated. After one month, typical examples of
22 infected plants (confirmed by RT-PCR; Fig. 6) were photographed. The stunting of
23 plants harboring the 35S:Fny2b or 35S:LS2b transgene induced by Fny-CMV Δ 2b
24 infection can be observed, as can the asymptomatic infection of non-transgenic *A.*
25 *thaliana* by Fny-CMV Δ 2b (row labeled NT). Scale bars indicate 3 cm.

1

2

1 **SUPPLEMENTARY TABLE**

2

3 **Supplementary Table 1** Sequences of primers used in site-directed mutagenesis of
 4 the Fny-CMV *2b* coding region and the resulting mutations. Nucleotide co-ordinates
 5 refer to the Fny-CMV RNA 2 sequence available from Genbank (accession
 6 NC_002035).

Mutation	Direction	Primer sequences	Mutation(s) made
Δ5T	Forward	CAA ACA GCG AAA GAA TTA TGG TGG AGG CGA AG	Nucleotides 2419 – 2469 deleted
	Reverse	CTT CGC CTC CAC CAT AAT TCT TTC GCT GTT TG	
ΔNLS1	Forward	CGT ATG GAG GCG TCT CAC AAA CAG AAT CG	Nucleotides 2482 – 2499 deleted
	Reverse	CGA TTC TGT TTG TGA GAC GCC TCC ACC ATA CG	
ΔNLS2	Forward	GTC TCA CAA ACA GAA TGG TCA CAA AAG TCC CAG C	Nucleotides 2515 – 2526 deleted
	Reverse	GCT GGG ACT TTT GTG ACC ATT CTG TTT GTG AGA C	
ΔNLS1+2	Forward	ΔNLS1 and ΔNLS2 Forward primers, sequentially	Nucleotides 2482 – 2499 and 2515 – 2526 deleted
	Reverse	ΔNLS1 and ΔNLS2 Reverse primers, sequentially	
S40A	Forward	GAA CGA GGT CAC AAA GCT CCC AGC GAG AGA GCG	Nucleotides 2536 – 2537 changed from AG to GC
	Reverse	CGC TCT CTC GCT GGG AGC TTT GTG ACC TCG TTC	
S42A	Forward	GGT CAC AAA AGT CCC GCC GAG AGA GCG CGT TCA	Nucleotides 2542 – 2543 changed from AG to GC
	Reverse	TGA ACG CGC TCT CTC GGC GGG ACT TTT GTG ACC	
ΔKSPSE	Forward	CGG GAA CGA GGT CAC AGA GCG CGT TCA AAT	Nucleotides 2533 – 2547 deleted
	Reverse	GAT TTG AAC GCG CTC TGT GAC CTC GTT CCC G	
Δ3T	Forward	GAA GAC CAT GAT TTT TGA AAC CTC CCC TTC GGC	Nucleotides 2701 – 2748
	Reverse	GCG GAA GGG GAG GTT TCA AAA ATC ATG GTC TTC	

7

8

1 **Supplementary Supp. Table 2** Combinations of plasmids from which transcripts
 2 were utilized to produce the Fny-CMV variants used during this study. Variants of
 3 Fny-CMV were regenerated as previously described by Rizzo and Palukaitis (1990),
 4 but using transcripts from the combinations of plasmids described here.

5

Fny-CMV variant	Plasmid combination required
Wild-type Fny-CMV	pFny109; pFny209; pFny309
Fny-CMV Δ 5T	pFny109; pFny209: Δ 5T; pFny309
Fny-CMV Δ NLS1	pFny109; pFny209: Δ NLS1; pFny309
Fny-CMV Δ NLS2	pFny109; pFny209: Δ NLS2; pFny309
Fny-CMV Δ NLS1+2	pFny109; pFny209: Δ NLS1+2; pFny309
Fny-CMVS40A	pFny109; pFny209:S40A; pFny309
Fny-CMVS42A	pFny109; pFny209:S42A; pFny309
Fny-CMV Δ KSPSE	pFny109; pFny209: Δ KSPSE; pFny309
Fny-CMV Δ 3T	pFny109; pFny209: Δ 3T; pFny309
Fny-CMV Δ 2b	pFny109; pFny209/M3; pFny309

6

7

1 **SUPPLEMENTARY FIGURE LEGENDS**

2

3 **Supplementary Figure 1.** Symptoms induced by Fny-CMV variants in non-
4 inoculated leaves of tobacco (scale bar 5 cm). Tobacco plants were inoculated with
5 infectious sap and symptoms were photographed approximately 5 weeks post-
6 inoculation (wpi).

7

8 **Supplementary Figure 2.** Symptoms induced in *N. benthamiana* by Fny-CMV
9 variants, approximately 5 wpi. Photographs are from a replicate experiment, where
10 plants were inoculated later (age approximately 5 weeks post germination) than those
11 used in the experiment shown in Supp. Fig. 1. Scale bars indicate 5 cm.

12

13 **Supplementary Figure 3.** Protein sequences of mutagenized Fny 2b constructs. In
14 2b Δ 5T the codons encoding amino acids 2 and 9 were mutated to stop codons (*);
15 translation of this construct is expected to start at the third start codon (**M**). In the 2b
16 Δ 3T construct the codon corresponding to amino acid 95 has been mutated to a stop
17 codon (*) and translation of this sequence is expected to stop at this amino acid.

18

19 **Supplementary Figure 4.** Phenotypic changes induced in transgenic *A. thaliana*
20 ecotype Col-0 plants by 35S:Fny2b (B), 35S:Fny2b Δ 3T (C) and 35S:Fny2b Δ 3T
21 constructs (D), compared to non-transgenic control (A). Scale bars indicate 3 cm.

22

23 **Supplementary Figure 5.** Symptoms induced by Fny-CMV and Fny-CMV Δ 2b in
24 *Chenopodium quinoa* (panel A). Panel B shows a close up of lesions induced by Fny-

- 1 CMV Δ 2b in directly-inoculated leaves. Plants were photographed 5 weeks post-
- 2 inoculation. Scale bar indicates 10 cm in panel A and 2 cm in panel B.