

Incidence and characterisation of *Bacillus sporothermodurans* isolated from UHT milk

by

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis submitted at the University of Pretoria for the award of a PhD degree is my work and has not been submitted by me for a degree at any other university or institution of higher education.

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May 2010



DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the Almighty God, the creator of heaven and earth and to my father, Peter Akwayi Tabit; my mother, Theresia Omah Tabit and my son, Nkosi Tawi Tabit.

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ABSTRACT

Bacillus sporothermodurans, which was first detected in UHT milk in Germany in 1990, can affect the stability and shelf life of contaminated commercial UHT milk and cause economic losses. Due to the unusual thermal resistance of *B. sporothermodurans* spores, *B. sporothermodurans* can survive UHT treatment and proceed to grow in stored products causing instability because of their proteolytic activity (Huemer *et al.*, 1998). This study was conducted to determine the level of *B. sporothermodurans* contamination in South African dairies and to understand the mechanism of *B. sporothermodurans* spore destruction in order to investigate ways of inactivating these spores without severe heating. The objectives were to determine the presence of *Bacillus sporothermodurans* in retail UHT milk along with milk from different points of a processing line and isolates from UHT milk in South Africa, UP20A and a reference strain of *B. sporothermodurans*, DSM 10599 from Deutsche Sammlung von Mikroorganismen und Zellkulturen GmbH (DSMZ) in Germany were characterised using PCR. The effect of chilling, pre-heating, UHT, reprocessing and H₂O₂, individually and in combination, on the survival of *B. sporothermodurans* was also investigated in broth. Spores were heated at 130 °C for 4, 8 and 12 min in order to investigate the mechanism of structural damage and survival.

The adopted real time (RT) PCR with SYBR Green method was effective for the confirmation of *B. Sporothermodurans*. The structural damage on heated spores was determined using the Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM), while High Performance Liquid Chromatography (HPLC) and spectrophotometry were used to quantify Dipicolinic acid (DPA) and soluble proteins released from the filtrate of heated spore suspensions. All statistical analyses were done using STATISTICA. *B. sporothermodurans* was detected in retail UHT milk packs from only one processor. The combination of chilling and UHT was more effective in eliminating *B. sporothermodurans* spores to a non detectable level than UHT treatment alone. H₂O₂ was also effective in eliminating *B. sporothermodurans* spores, from 6.31 to 1.64 log cfu/ml after 15 min of exposure and. The release of DPA during wet heat treatment coincides with visible signs of structural damage and significant inactivation of

spores. Visible signs of spore structural damage emanate at different rates. The amount of protein release seems to be strain specific.

This research is the first to detect the presence of *B. sporothermodurans* in UHT milk in South Africa and to determine the effect of UHT processing stresses on its survival. These results can be used to design processing parameters so as to effectively eliminate *B. sporothermodurans* spores during UHT processing. Similarly, this research is the first in which RT PCR with SYBR Green has been used to characterise *B. sporothermodurans* as well as to determine the effect of wet heat treatment on the structure of *B. sporothermodurans* spores. This research aims to contribute to the insight regarding the mechanisms of destruction of *B. sporothermodurans* spores by wet heat.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT	1
1.1 Problem statement.....	1
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	4
2.1 Current trends in UHT milk production and consumption.....	4
2.2 Quality and safety of raw milk	5
2.3 Bacterial composition of raw milk.....	6
2.4 Quality and age gelation of UHT milk.....	9
2.5 Rapid methods to determine the bacterial quality of milk	9
2.5.1 Bacterial stains	9
2.5.2 Aminopeptidase activity of Gram-negative bacteria	10
2.5.3 BactiFlow™ flow cytometer	10
2.5.4 Petrifilm™ and SimPlate™ plates	11
2.5.5 Propidium monoazide and real-time PCR	11
2.6 Milk contamination routes.....	12
2.7 Background to UHT milk contamination.....	13
2.8 Thermal processes and properties of treated milk	15
2.8.1 Pasteurisation of milk	15
2.8.2 UHT processing of milk.....	16
2.8.3 Important definitions regarding UHT processing	17
2.8.4 UHT treatment systems.....	18
2.8.5 Holding time during thermal processing of liquid milk	20
2.8.6 Tubular heat exchanger fouling by milk during thermal processing.....	21
2.8.7 Changes in milk on storage as a result of UHT treatment	22
2.9 <i>Bacillus sporothermodurans</i>	23
2.10 <i>B. sporothermodurans</i> characterisation techniques	24
2.10.1 16S rRNA gene sequencing	24
2.10.2 Polymerase chain reaction (PCR).....	25
2.10.3 Amplified ribosomal DNA restriction analysis (ARDRA).....	25
2.11 <i>Bacillus sporothermodurans</i> spores.....	26
2.12 Analysis <i>B. sporothermodurans</i> spore components.....	26
2.13 Thermal inactivation kinetics of <i>Bacillus sporothermodurans</i>	27
2.14 Stress response adaptation of <i>Bacillus</i> Species.....	30
2.15 Other <i>Bacillus</i> species related to thermally processed milk	31
2.15.1 <i>Bacillus cereus</i>	31
2.15.2 <i>Bacillus licheniformis</i>	32
2.15.3 <i>Bacillus stearothermophilus</i>	32
2.15.4 <i>Paenibacillus</i> spp.....	32
2.15.5 <i>Anoxybacillus</i> spp.	33
2.15.6 Research trends on <i>B. sporothermodurans</i>	33
CHAPTER 3: OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES	34
3.1 Objectives	34
3.2 Hypotheses.....	34



CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH	35
4.1 Incidence and survival of <i>Bacillus sporothermodurans</i> during UHT processing.....	35
4.1.1 Abstract.....	35
4.1.2 Introduction.....	36
4.1.3 Materials and methods	38
4.1.4 Results.....	43
4.1.5 Discussion	52
4.1.6 Conclusions.....	56
4.2 The effects of wet heat treatment on the structural and chemical components of <i>Bacillus sporothermodurans</i> spores.....	57
4.2.1 Abstract.....	57
4.2.2 Introduction.....	58
4.2.3 Materials and methods	59
4.2.4 Results.....	62
4.2.5 Discussion	71
4.2.6 Conclusion.....	74
CHAPTER 5: GENERAL DISCUSSION	75
5.1 Methodological considerations	75
5.2 Incidence and survival of <i>Bacillus sporothermodurans</i> during UHT processing.....	78
5.3 Effects of wet heat treatment on the structural and chemical components of <i>Bacillus sporothermodurans</i> spores	82
5.4 Proposals for future research	84
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	87
CHAPTER 7: REFERENCES	88

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	Food borne pathogens associated with milk and milk products	8
Table 2.2	Hazard analysis chart for thermal processing of milk	14
Table 4.1	Bacterial quality of milk collected from retail and during processing of processor D.....	45
Table 4.2	Effect of heating at 120 or 140 °C for 4s, and repeat UHT with 10% reprocessing on the survival of two strains of <i>Bacillus sporothermodurans</i>	48
Table 4.3	Effect of pre-heating (78 °C for 15s), UHT (120 °C for 4s) and a combination of pre-heating and UHT, on the survival of <i>Bacillus sporothermodurans</i>	49
Table 4.4	Effect of UHT treatment (120 °C/4s), with and without chilling (24h at 7 °C), on spores of <i>B. sporothermodurans</i> strains	50
Table 4.5:	Effect of 30% H ₂ O ₂ , on <i>B. sporothermodurans</i> spores, at different exposure times.....	51

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1	Percentage composition of the South African liquid market (Coetzee & Maree, 2009)	5
Figure 2.2	Possible sources of cross contamination of pasteurised milk (Burgess, Heggum, Walker & Van Schothorst, 1994).....	12
Figure 2.3	Flow diagram for production of UHT milk (Sandrou & Arvanitoyannis, 2000).....	18
Figure 2.4	Diagram of UHT injection and infusion systems (Lewis & Heppel, 2000).....	19
Figure 2.5	Schematic layout of a UHT system using a tubular heat exchanger (Grijnspeerdt <i>et al.</i> , 2004).....	20
Figure 2.6	Schematic layout of a UHT system using a plate heat exchanger (Grijnspeerdt <i>et al.</i> , 2004).....	20
Figure 2.7	Thermal death time curves of <i>B. stearothermophilus</i> spores (Δ) and <i>B. sporothermodurans</i> spores J16B (\blacktriangle); best plot lines through experimental data (Huemer <i>et al.</i> , 1998).....	28
Figure 2.8	Survival of <i>Bacillus sporothermodurans</i> spores from different origins in a pilot ultra-high temperature (UHT) installation (direct mode). \blacklozenge , Feed concentrate isolate MB 1316; \circ Feed concentrate isolate MB 1317; industrial spores (Scheldeman <i>et al.</i> , 2006).....	29
Figure 4.1	Gel photograph of PCR products confirming the identity of some of the UHT milk isolates. Lane 1 and 9, <i>B. sporothermodurans</i> DMSZ No. 10599 (Germany); lanes 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12 and 15, isolates from UHT milk detected as <i>B. sporothermodurans</i> ; lanes 13 and 14, isolates that were not positive for <i>B. sporothermodurans</i> ; Lane 2, <i>Bacillus stearothermophilus</i> as negative control; Lane 7, 100 bp DNA ladder (Fermentas, South Africa).....	46
Figure 4.2	Real time PCR melting curve ($T_m = 86$) specific for <i>Bacillus sporothermodurans</i> using the BSPO-F2 and BSPO-R2 primers.....	46
Figure 4.3	Regression equation of the survival of <i>Bacillus sporothermodurans</i> spores following exposure to 30% H_2O_2 at different time ($D_{30\%} = 3.33$).....	51
Figure 4.4	a & b: Micrographs generated from TEM analysis, showing the detail structures of unheated spores of <i>Bacillus sporothermodurans</i> UP20A, harvested from 14 days old BHI agar plates. NB: The spore structures of both strains as revealed by TEM analysis were similar.	64
Figure 4.5	a, b, c & d: Micrographs generated from TEM analysis, showing the structure of the spore of <i>Bacillus sporothermodurans</i> UP20A, heat treated at 130 °C for 4 min. NB: The spore structures of both strains as revealed by TEM analysis were similar.	65

Figure 4.6	a, b, c & d: Micrographs generated from TEM analysis, showing the structure of <i>Bacillus sporothermodurans</i> UP20A spores, heat treated at 130 °C for 8 min. NB: The spore structures of both strains as revealed by TEM analysis were similar.	66
Figure 4.7	a, b, c & d: Micrographs generated from TEM analysis, showing the structure of <i>Bacillus sporothermodurans</i> UP20A spores, heat treated at 130 °C for 12 min. NB: The spore structures of both strains as revealed by TEM analysis were similar.	67
Figure 4.8	Inactivation trend of spores of two strains of <i>B. sporothermodurans</i> : DSM 10599 and UP20A, following heat treatment at 130 °C at different times. Different letters a, b and c denote statistical differences at $p \leq 0.05$ ($n = 3$). Log cfu/ml of 0 represent counts ranging from 1 to 0 spore/ml ($n = 3$).	69
Figure 4.9	Protein released ($\mu\text{g/ml}$) from spores of two strains of <i>Bacillus sporothermodurans</i> : DSM 10599 and UP20A, following heat treatment at 130 °C at different times. Different letters a, b and c denote statistical differences at $p \leq 0.05$ ($n = 3$). Log cfu/ml of 0 represent counts ranging from 1 to 0 spore/ml ($n = 3$).	70
Figure 4.10	DPA released ($\mu\text{g/ml}$) from spores of two strains of <i>Bacillus sporothermodurans</i> : DSM 10599 and UP20A, following heat treatment at 130 °C at different times. Different letters a, b and c denote statistical differences at $p \leq 0.05$ ($n = 3$). Log cfu/ml of 0 represent counts ranging from 1 to 0 spore/ml ($n = 3$).	71