



Manipulation of gibberellin biosynthesis for the control of plant height in *Eragrostis tef* for lodging resistance

By

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

PHILOSOPHIAE DOCTOR

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In the

Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences

University of Pretoria

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May 2012

DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other University

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ABSTRACT

Manipulation of gibberellin biosynthesis for the control of plant height in *Eragrostis tef* for lodging resistance

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Lodging is a key agronomic problem in *E. tef*. due to morpho-physiological features, such tall and slender phenotype of the plant. Gibberellins metabolic genes are key targets in the control of plant height. Plant growth regulators (PGRs) that inhibit GA biosynthesis are used to shorten stem length thereby increasing lodging resistance. *E. tef* responded to treatment with PGRs such as GA, chlormequat chloride (CCC) and paclobutrazol (PBZ). Both PGRs reduced *E. tef* plant height but CCC treatment did not affect grain yield. Stem diameter was not affected by PGR treatment and also not the poor tapering (acropitally increasing diameter).

Putatively transformed *E. tef* plants carrying a bean GA 2-oxidase (*PcGA2ox*) coding sequence were further produced via embryogenic callus after Agrobacterium-mediated transformation and plants were successfully grown into mature fertile plants. Eight putative transformed plants were finally generated carrying the insert (*PcGA20 ox* or *nptII* gene

sequence) at the T₀ generation. Constitutive expression of the GA 2-oxidase (*PcGA2ox*) coding sequence in *E. tef* resulted in phenotypic changes such as reduction in culm height, change in biomass, reduction in amount of GA in putative transformant semi-dwarf plants. The challenges found in the transgene detection in the T1 generation has been highlighted. Pheno-morphic changes occurred with little or no effect on yield.

Genes involved in height control (orthologs to the rice *sd-1* gene) and signaling (*Rht*) in *E. tef* were also identified and characterized. Activity of the protein for the putative rice *sd-1* orthologs was further confirmed by heterologous expression. The three putative sequences in *E. tef* were named *EtGA20ox1a*, *EtGA20ox1b* and *EtGA20ox2*. Expression analysis showed that *EtGA20ox2* were much less transcribed compared to the others and *EtGA20ox1b* could be the functional equivalent to the rice *sd-1* (*OsGA20ox2*) gene in *E. tef*.

Further, *E. tef* mutants with a semi-dwarf phenotype could be developed through mutagenesis and TILLING. However, regardless of height, grain yield was severely reduced in all mutants except in the semi-dwarf mutant GA-10. This line also had significantly higher diameter in most internodes which might contribute to the stiffness of stem. G-10 is therefore a promising line for further investigations.

Thesis composition

Chapter 1 of this thesis provides a summary of the lodging problem in cereals and alternative methods (chemical and genetic approaches) used to control lodging as well as the traits involved. An up-to-date review of the lodging problem in *E. tef* including phenomeric features relating to lodging and experiences in other crops as well as in the “green revolution” are outlined. Approaches solving the lodging problem and genes that play a key role in plant architecture modification in cereal crops for improving lodging resistance are discussed. The rationale, aim, and objectives for carrying out this study are further outlined at the end of the introduction. In **Chapter 2**, results obtained from treatment of *E. tef* plants with GA biosynthesis inhibitors in controlling plant height are presented. This includes treatment with GA₃, CCC and Paclobutrazol and changes in plant height and other phenomeric and agronomical features due to PGR treatment are reported. **Chapter 3** reports about transforming *E. tef* plants using immature somatic embryos via embryogenic callus for Agrobacterium-mediated transformation. Successful regeneration of putative transformed plants after a transformation procedure using combinations of different media is outlined. Moreover, characterization of plants over-expressing GA2 oxidase from *Phaseolus coccineus* (*PcGA2ox1*) for inducing dwarfism is presented and results of characterizing putatively transformed T0 generation plants regarding their morpho-physiological features and expression of a semi-dwarf phenotype with reduced height are reported. The inconsistent PCR results at T1 and the possibility that any found differences could also be due to somaclonal variations owing to the relatively higher rate of auxin applied is indicated. **Chapter 4** outlines the identification, and characterization of height-controlling genes. This includes the rice homologous *SD-1* in *E. tef*, the wheat *Rht* orthologue and two Cytochrome P450 monooxygenase genes (*Eui* and Brassinosteroid deactivation genes). Also an activity

assay through heterologous expression of *EtGA20ox1* in *E. coli* and specific tissue expression of the three *EtGA20ox* homologs as well as copy number of these genes in the *E. tef* genome are presented. In **Chapter 5**, data on phenotype (plant stature) characterization is outlined for selected mutant *E. tef* lines developed through mutagenesis and TILLING to generate sufficient variability for semi-dwarfism in *E. tef* for lodging resistance. Morphological and physiological attributes and agronomic relevance of these mutant lines are described in terms of plant height reduction, tillering, biomass and yield. **Chapter 6** finally summarizes the findings and relevant information developed in this PhD study. It also outlines the salient features that need to be considered further in a lodging-resistant *E. tef* ideotype. This is followed by the list of citations (References) used in this dissertation. The **Appendix** provides further sequence results (nucleotides and translated amino acid) from the gene cloning and characterization study, alignment and phylogenetic analysis of *E. tef* sequences with different species.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First of all, I thank The Lord Almighty for His abundant love and grace, his inspiration providing me with the wisdom needed to pursue science with enthusiasm. PRAISE YOUR NAME O LORD!

My deepest gratitude goes to my mother, Askale Nida and my father Gebre Kedisso for their love and caring implanting in me so much good things. I feel proud of my elder and younger brothers and sisters for their constant prayers and the pure love we share.

I express my deep gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Karl Kunert for his follow up, guidance and critical help and inputs encouraging me all throughout my study period. Thank you also for creating opportunities to attending conferences and research visit to Rothamsted Research in UK and for creating linkages to research groups in different countries. All this have considerably facilitated my study and contributed to acquiring skills. Thank you for your great concern, patience and kindness.

My earnest gratitude also goes to my co-supervisor Dr. Urte Schlüter for her very valuable inputs, advices and encouragement during the course of my study. Thank you also for the help creating opportunity linking my research to groups at Rothamsted, UK which has been very valuable to my study and for successfully finishing my experiments.

I am also very grateful to Prof. Peter Hedden for the supervision and guidance during my six month stay at Rothamsted Research working in his lab. It was a very valuable time I spent. I am also indebted to Dr. Simon Volghur for his kind assistance in molecular analysis and

technical help during and after my visit. I also would like to thank colleagues at Molecular biology lab and Experimental Greenhouse at Rothamsted Research for their kind support.

I also am very grateful to Prof. Maryon J Mayer, Head of the Plant Science Department, and Rene Stewart Executive Secretary of the department for the positive and kind help and encouragement in times of need during my study. I also thank the Forestry and Agricultural Biotechnology Institute (FABI) management and team for the very good working environment I enjoyed to be part during my study period.

I would like to thank Dr. Solomon Assefa, Director EIAR, for his support and positive consideration of my extension request and Dr. Adefris T/Wold who shared with me the idea of working on tef as well as for his kind help and encouragement during the study period. I would also like to thank Dr. Likyelesh Gugssa for the very valuable help providing me with technical information on tef transformation and other materials and Dr. Kebebew Assefa providing me with valuable publications on tef at the beginning of my study. I am also very grateful to Dr. Zerihun Tadelle for his cooperation to work on some of his mutagenized lines for my experimentation.

An earnest thank you to my entire lab mates in SA, Berhanu, Rosita, Priyen, Ryhanrd, Stephan, Magdeleen, Celia, Tsholofelo, Kutzai and Abigel for the nice environment of interactions we kept alive in the lab, for the concern and help during the long hours of work together in those years. I am grateful to my FABI friends for the kindness during my study period. I am particularly very thankful to the unreserved help I received from Tuan, Magriet and Markus.

I want to sincerely thank my Ethiopian friends studying at UP for the warm friendship and good social environment we enjoyed together. I thank Ethiopian students who lived in Tuks Dorp, UP namely Berhanu, Dr. Wubetu, Dawit, Dr. Legesse, Hiywot, Dr. Temesgen, Ato Habtamu, Dr. Yemaneh, Meheretu, Yebelta and others for their friendship and support. After moving to Sunnyside, I missed a lot the football game we established and the small evening running we used to do. I am also very thankful particularly to Yohannes (John), Dr. Abayneh, Tedlaye and their families for the unforgettable time my wife and I had together with them. I also thank Kebron Church leaders and Christian friends in the Ethiopian Christian Fellowship for the great time we had together that made our stay in Pretoria such a blessing.

This PhD research work was sponsored by the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR), Rural Capacity Building Project (RCBP) and partly by the Rothamsted International (RI) and was carried out at the Food and Agricultural Biotechnology Institute (FABI), Department of Plant Sciences, University of Pretoria and at Rothamsted Research, UK. I am very grateful to the above institutions that constituted the financial backbone for my study.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my wife Meseret Worku, whose understanding, love, kindness and help enabled me to pursue the work to the end; and to my parents, brothers and sisters who occupy such a special place in my heart for their love and inspiration uplifting my spirit through their prayers.

ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

%	Percentage
μg	Microgram
μL	Microlitre
2-ODD	2-Oxoglutarate dependent dioxygenase
bp	Base pair
BSA	Bovine serum albumin
CCC	Chlormequate chloride
CCM	Co-cultivation medium
CaMV	Cauliflower mosaic virus
cDNA	complementary deoxyribonucleic acid
cDNA	Complimentary DNA
CPS	<i>ent</i> -copaly diphosphate synthase
Ct	Cycle threshold
CTAB	hexadecyl-trimethyl-azanium bromide
DMSO	dimethyl sulphoxide
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
DNase	Deoxyribonuclease
dNTP	deoxy nucleotide triphosphate
DZ	Debre Zeit
E. coli	Escherichia coli
EDTA	Ethylenediamine tetra acetic acid
EMS	ethylmethanesulphonate
ER	Endoplasmic reticulum
EUI	elongated uppermost internode
g	Grams
GA _n	Gibberellin A _n
GA-ox	Gibberellin -oxidase
GA 2-ox	Gibberellin 2-oxidase
GAI	Gibberellin insensitive
gDNA	genomic deoxyribonucleic acid
GGPP	geranyl-geranyl diphosphate
GID	Gibberellin insensitive dwarf
GUS	β -Glucuronidase
h	hours
H ₂ O	Water
IE	Immature embryo
IPTG	Isopropyl- β -d-thiogalactopyranoside
KAO	<i>ent</i> -kaurenoic acid oxidase
KO	<i>ent</i> -kaurene oxidase
KS	<i>ent</i> -kaurene synthase
L	Litre
LB	Luria broth
LCM	Laser capture microdissection

M	Molar
min	minute
mL	Millilitres
mM	Millimolar
NaAC	Sodium acetate
NaCl	Sodium chloride
NaOH	Sodium hydroxide
ng	Nanogram
NTC	No-target control
°C	Degree Celcius
ORF	Open reading frame
PBZ	Paclobutrazol
PcGA2ox	<i>Phaseolous cuccinosis</i> GA 2-oxidase
PCR	Polymerase chain reaction
PPFR	Photosynthetic photonflux rate
qRT-PCR	quantitative reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction
RACE	Random Amplified cDNA Ends
RGA	repressor of <i>ga1-3</i>
RHT	Reduced height
RNA	Ribonucleic acid
RNAase	ribonuclease
rpm	Revolutions per minutes
s	Second
sd H ₂ O	Sterile distilled water
SD1	semi-dwarf 1
SDS	Sodium dodecyl sulphate
SLN	Slender
SNP	Single Nucleotide Polymorphism
TILLING	Targeting induced local lesions in genomes
UV	ultra violet
v/v	volume per unit volume
w/v	weight per unit volume
wk	week (s)

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