Mutualism in a Reduced Gravity Environment (MuRGE)

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ABSTRACT

MuRGE (Mutualism in a Reduced Gravity Environment) is a ground research study to determine the feasibility of assessing fungi-plant interactions (Piriformospora indica- Arabidopsis thaliana) in microgravity. Results from the plant species Arabidopsis thaliana (AT) will be seen in the presence or absence of Piriformospora indica (Pi) an endophytic Sebacinaeaceae family fungus. Pi is capable of colonizing the roots of a wide variety of plant species, including non-mycorrhizal hosts like AT, and promoting plant growth similarly to AMF (arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi). Unlike most AMF, Pi not only colonizes plant symbiotic and can be grown in the absence of a host. In the presence of a suitable plant host, Pi can attach to and colonize root tips. Interaction visualization is accomplished with strong auto-fluorescence in the roots, followed by root colonization via fungal hyphae and chlamydospore production. Increased root growth can be observed even before root colonization is detectable.

In addition, Pi chlamydospores generated from axenic culture in microgravity will be used to inoculate roots of AT grown in 1g to determine the effect of microgravity upon the inherent virulence and beneficial effects. Based on recent reports of increased virulence of S. typhimurium, P. aerrogusia, and S. pneumonia in reduced gravity, differences in microbial pathogenic responses and host plant systemic acquired resistance are expected.

The focus of this project within MuRGE involved the development of P. indica culture media evaluation and microscopy protocol development. High, clean spore harvest yields for the detection of fung-plant interactions microscopically was the immediate goal of this experiment.

BACKGROUND

-Demonstrated sustainability for high yield spore extractions from Pi in short turnovers.

-Sporulation rates shown to be related towards stress exerted upon organisms. Little or no stress yielded light spore production, while higher stress and less resource availability yielded direct resource usage towards increased spore production.

-The methodology revolves around the organisms survival mechanisms. When under increased stress conditions fungi direct more available energy towards reproducing. In a more harsh environment fewer individual organisms of a community are expected to reach maturity, and must increase reproduction to maintain existence.

-Spectrophotometer based concentration readings were compared against haemocytometer microscopically.

-Both large (6mm) and small (2mm) glass beads were used to elevate spores into solution during the extraction process.

DESIGN

Objective- To provide Pi cultivation protocol in which pure and high-yield of basidiospores may be readily harvested.

Hypothesis- Fungal stress levels often regulate community growth rates, and is a reliable way to create a reproducible response via sporation. The physiological state of Pi in higher nutrient media will not be stressed to induce substantial sporulation. Significant stress should be achieved with a more limited media and environmental pressure.

Experimental Design- Pi is subject to a range of morphological characteristics due to environmental stress or nutrient availability. Multiple trials were conducted on a considerably enriched media, and a more basic media.

METHODS

Organism Growth Conditions-

-Frozen stock is used initially to begin growth. Stock is allowed to warm to room temperature, vortexed, and then 300μl aliquots transferred to each of three plates. The stock is spread evenly until the plates are no longer moist.

-Eight milliliters of sterilized DI water is dispensed to a grown plate, and the surface is scrubbed heavily with a spreader to alleviate the fungi. From the liquid suspension over the plate 100μl aliquots are transferred to new plates, and the remainder harvested as described below.

-Cultures are transferred weekly in triplicate for each media type.

-Incubation conditions are 30°C.

Sporation Preparation-

-From the media plates growth was scraped on each of three plates (MS or PDA) with spreader and ~8mL sterile DI water. 5mL detached Pi mycelium was collected from each (3) with 3mL pipette, and aliquoted into 15mL centrifuge tube.

-The Pi was spun out of media @ 5,000rpm for 3min, supernatant discarded, and resuspended in 8mL sterile DI water. The solution was then heavily vortexed on top speed for ~60s, and pulse vortexed for ~15s, then these steps were repeated two more times.

-5x sterilized 6mm glass beads were added, heavily vortexed on top speed for ~60s, pulse vortexed for ~15s, and tubes shaken for ~60s.

-The volume was transferred to a 50mL centrifuge tube, filtered through 41 micron sterilized filter, spun down centrifuge (3,000rpm for 5min), and decanted liquid and resuspended in 3mL for concentration determination via haemocytometer.

-From each of the three plates, the volume of the supernatant (~4mL) was added to ~9mL of pure water (MilliQ), mixed, and vortexed for ~10s. Next, the samples were centrifuged at ~1,600rpm for ~5min to remove larger debris. After centrifugation, the supernatant was removed and the remaining liquid was mixed with ~1mL of pure water (MilliQ) and vortexed for ~10s.

-Concentration was calculated using a formula derived from the concentration of the control sample, and the second sample was used to determine the number of Pi spores present in the experiment.

CONCLUSIONS

-Extended vortex duration with beads (0s vs 30s) yielded a 300%-600% increase in spore concentration during from P. indica cultures.

-6mm glass beads vital in recovering utilize spore mass.

-3mm beads crushed most spores.

-The highest recovery of basidiospores from Pi culture occurred under PDA media.

-130% increase from MS.

-Spectrophotometer readings were not reliable to determine spore concentration.

-Haemocytometer must be used to count manually under microscope for any degree of accuracy.

-Average spore concentrations of upper 1E5 to mid 1E6 are achieved with reliability and purity in a weeks incubation period. The spores have been used with more MuRGE projects to determine mutualistic growth interactions as well as determining staining techniques for visualization of interactions.

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