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Fate and activity of fungal BCAs delivered to strawberry flowers and their potential for integration with fungicides

Jensen Birgit¹, Andersen Birgitte ³, Thrane Ulf ³, Jensen Dan Funck ⁴, Nielsen Kristian Fog ³ and Larsen John²

¹Department of Plant Biology, Thorvaldsensvej 40, 1871, Frederiksberg C. University of Copenhagen, Denmark. E-mail:bje@life.ku.dk
²Department of Integrated Pest Management, University of Aarhus, Denmark.
³DTU Systems Biology, Technical University of Denmark, Kgs. Lyngby, Denmark
⁴Department of Forest Mycology and Plant Pathology, SLU, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Uppsala, Sweden

Introduction.
Grey mold caused by Botrytis cinerea is a serious strawberry disease. Yield loss is prevented by repeated fungicide treatments during flowering which increases the risk of pesticide residues in berries. Fruit lesions are typically initiated from B. cinerea infected stamens or from dead infected petals adhering to the fruit or trapped under the calyx. To implement biological control agents (BCAs) as an alternative control measure, it is crucial that the BCAs are able to colonize flower parts rapidly to combat B. cinerea. The combination of fungicides with BCAs may enhance and stabilise the efficacy of BCAs. The underlying mechanism for such positive combination effects may be related to an improved establishment of the BCAs when their natural competitors have been adversely affected by the fungicide or that the B. cinerea infection has been slowed down.

The objective of the present was to study 1) the interaction between BCAs and B. cinerea on strawberry flowers, 2) the sensitivity of BCAs to strawberry fungicides, and 3) the effect of combined BCA+fungicide treatment on BCAs and on the indigenous mycobiota.

Methods.
The BCAs Clonostachys rosea IK726, Trichoderma harzianum (TRI003 and Supresivit), T. polysporum + T. harzianum (Binab TF) and Ulocladium atrum were applied in various experiments. The interaction on flowers between B. cinerea and the BCAs C. rosea and TRI003 was examined using dual inoculations with strains of the three fungi tagged with fluorescence reporter genes encoding GFP and DsRed (Lübeck et al., 2002, Jensen et al., unpubl).

Establishment of TRI003 on berries was studied in two field experiments. Flowers and green berries were sprayed with TRI003 and labelled in order to quantify establishment of T. harzianum on berries developing from treated flowers and berries, respectively. Fungicide sensitivity of four BCAs (C. rosea, Supresivit, TRI003 and Binab TF) was tested in vitro, using agar plates amended with six fungicides (Table 1) in six dosages (0, x1/4, x1/2, x3/4, x1 and x10) of recommended dosage. Effects on establishment of BCAs and on the indigenous microbiota by combination of BCAs (C. rosea, TRI003 and U. atrum) and the fungicide Teldor (½ x normal dosage) was tested in a semi-field experiment.

Table 1. Fungicides used in strawberry production in Denmark

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trade name</th>
<th>Active compound</th>
<th>Target disease</th>
<th>Dosage ha⁻¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amistar</td>
<td>Azoxystrobin</td>
<td>Mildew</td>
<td>1 l</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candit</td>
<td>Kresoxim-methyl</td>
<td>Mildew</td>
<td>0.2 kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euparen Multi</td>
<td>Tolyfluanid</td>
<td>Grey mould</td>
<td>3 kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scala</td>
<td>Pyrimethanil</td>
<td>Grey mould</td>
<td>2 l</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signum WG</td>
<td>Pyraclostrobin + boscalid</td>
<td>Mildew+grey mould</td>
<td>1.8 kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teldor WG 50</td>
<td>Fenhexamid</td>
<td>Grey mould</td>
<td>1.5 kg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dilution plating on semi-selective media was used for quantification of fungi on flowers/berries (Jensen et al., 2013). The identity of recovered BCA strains was determined by UP-PCR fingerprinting (Lübeck et al. 2000) and ITS1-ITS2 sequencing (Sundelin et al., 2009)
Results
The ability of BCAs to germinate rapidly and in high numbers on flowers is necessary for control of grey mould. Approximately 70% of both _C. rosea_ and _B. cinerea_ conidia germinated on flower while only 20% of _T. harzianum_ conidia germinated within 24 hours. Dual inoculation of the fungi revealed that _C. rosea_ significantly reduced both _B. cinerea_ and _T. harzianum_ germination on flowers. In addition, _C. rosea_ reduced grey mould symptoms on flowers.

In two field trials labelled flowers were sprayed with TRI003. At spraying, the _Trichoderma_ density varied between $10^4$-$10^5$ CFU/flower, while on berries developed from labelled flowers one month later, approximately $10^2$ CFU/berry was recovered. UP-PCR and ITS sequencing of DNA from pure cultures confirmed that the majority of isolates from TRI003 sprayed plots originated from the TRI003.

For successful combined application of BCAs and fungicides, the BCA strains must be insensitive to the fungicide. All the tested grey mould fungicides inhibited growth of the target pathogen _B. cinerea_, with Signum and Teldor being the most efficient fungicides inhibiting the pathogen at x1 and x1/4 of recommended dosage, respectively. Within the tested BCAs both TRI003 and Supresivit were insensitive to the all fungicides (table 1). Binab-TF was inhibited by Candit and Signum at x10 recommended dosage, but was unaffected by the other four fungicides. _C. rosea_ was inhibited by Euparen and Signum at x10 recommended dosage, but was unaffected by the other four fungicides.

In a semi-field experiment the BCAs _C. rosea_, TRI003 and _U. atrum_ were sprayed at the flowering stage singly or in combination with Teldor. The mycobiota on red berries examined four weeks later was dominated by _Cladosporium_ spp. followed by _Penicillium_ spp. and _Botrytis cinerea_. However, the densities of these fungi were not significantly affected by BCAs or by Teldor either alone or in combination with the BCAs. Furthermore, application of Teldor had no significant effect on the establishment of the BCAs. Both _C. rosea_ and _T. harzianum_ was recovered from berries 4 weeks after flower application but at low concentrations. The latter was also identified in plots not sprayed with TRI003. UP-PCR fingerprinting and ITS sequencing revealed that the recovered _Trichoderma_ isolates from TRI003 sprayed plots originated from the product while _Trichoderma_ strains isolated from other plots were indigenous. _U. atrum_ was not isolated from any of the plots.

Discussion and conclusions
After a single application of _C. rosea_ or TRI003 to strawberry flowers the fungi were recovered in low numbers on berries one month later. Microscopy showed that _C. rosea_ germinated rapidly on flowers and restricted _B. cinerea_ growth. Both _C. rosea_ and TRI003 were insensitive to the fungicide Teldor. Combined BCA+Teldor treatment once at flowering did not improve BCA establishment nor did it affect the density of the indigenous fungi on berries. However, since a single application of the BCAs (±Teldor) resulted in a flower to berry transmission of BCAs at low densities, repeated applications e.g. weekly during flowering is expected to increase BCA establishment to a level sufficient to affect grey mold development.

References