



Producción de vacunas y otros compuestos biológicos en plantas transgénicas

Production of vaccines and other biological compounds in transgenic plants

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Abstract

Even though plants have been utilized by man for medicinal purposes for thousands of years, it is only recently that by using genetic engineering they have been employed as "biofactories" or "biorreactors" to produce compounds of pharmaceutical interests. Considering the increased demand for these type of products all over the world, this technology is being increasingly employed. Nowadays, the high cost of many pharmaceutical compounds limits their distribution and applicability; however, by using transgenic plants, the cost can be considerably reduced, the product easy to store, production can be scaled up or down, and products will be safer than those produced in other systems.

Key words: TRANSGENIC PLANTS, EDIBLE VACCINES, ANTIBODIES, BIOREACTORS, PHARMACEUTICAL PROTEINS.

Resumen

Aunque las plantas se han utilizado durante miles de años con fines medicinales, recientemente comienzan a usarse por medio de la ingeniería genética como biofábricas o biorreactores con el propósito de producir diversos compuestos de interés farmacéutico. Como consecuencia de que la demanda por estos últimos aumenta en el mundo, el uso de esta tecnología también se ha extendido. Actualmente el alto costo de muchos compuestos biológicos limita su disponibilidad y aplicación; en este contexto, los productos obtenidos de plantas transgénicas son, por el contrario, baratos para producir y almacenar, de fácil escalamiento para producción en masa, y más seguros que los derivados de otros sistemas.

Palabras clave: PLANTAS TRANSGÉNICAS, VACUNAS COMESTIBLES, ANTICUERPOS, BIORREACTORES, PROTEÍNAS FARMACÉUTICAS.

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Introduction

The use of reactors or bioreactors for the industrial production of determinate substances is no news. For many years, great quantity of diverse types of compounds (including biologics) in other systems have been producing. This was possible because the majority of the genes, of any origin, can be expressed in heterogeneous systems. The ideal expression system would be the one that produces the material in greater quantity, safer and biologically more active at the lowest cost. The use of modified animal cells with recombinant DNA techniques has the advantage of producing identical compounds as the naturals; nevertheless, it is highly expensive to culture these cells and it can only be done in a limited scale.^{1,2}

The use of microorganisms, such as bacteria, permits great scale production, but it has the disadvantage of originating products that are not equally the same as the ones of natural origin. For instance, proteins that are generally glycosylated in mammals are not so while being expressed in bacteria. Even more, eukaryotic proteins that express themselves in high levels in *Escherichia coli* frequently acquire artificial conformation and are more susceptible to intracellular precipitation, due to the lack of disulfur bridges and to an inadequate folding.³

The first discovery that allowed the development of biotechnology of plants is the capacity that only one of its cells possesses to originate a complete plant with all the parental characteristics.^{4,5} The second discovery was that it is possible to transfer only one gene to a plant's genome by the bacterial infection of the *Agrobacterium tumefaciens*. This has been one of the main methods of genes' transference to plants. *A. tumefaciens* carries the plasmid Ti with the concerned gene, and as it infects the vegetal cells it transfers the gene to the genome of the plant. Other methods of transformation are the microprojectile bombardment (biobalistic) and, in lesser grade, the electroporation.⁵⁻⁸

The main expression promoter used in plants is the 35S of the cauliflower mosaic virus (35S CPMV).⁹ Besides, a series of promoters have been used as constitutive and tissue specific, depending on the system used and the level of expression desired.¹⁰⁻¹²

The procedure consists of the concerned gene's insertion in the adequate vector that contains the correspond promoter and terminator. The vegetal tissue that is going to be utilized may be vegetative (leaves) as well as reproductive (embryos, meristems, pollen, etc.). Once the transformation is done by the mention methods, the vegetal tissue is incubated in a synthetic medium adequate for the complete plant generation.

Introducción

El uso de reactores o biorreactores para la producción industrial de determinadas sustancias no es nuevo. Durante muchos años se ha producido gran cantidad de compuestos de diversos tipos (incluyendo los biológicos) en otros sistemas. Lo anterior fue posible debido a que la mayoría de los genes de cualquier origen se pueden expresar en sistemas heterólogos. El sistema de expresión ideal sería el que produce el material en mayor cantidad, más seguro y biológicamente más activo con el costo más bajo. De esta manera, el uso de células de mamíferos modificadas con técnicas de ADN recombinante, tiene la ventaja de producir compuestos idénticos a los naturales; sin embargo, cultivar estas células resulta muy costoso y se puede realizar solamente en escala limitada.^{1,2}

El uso de microorganismos permite la producción en escala mayor, pero tiene la desventaja de originar productos que no son exactamente iguales a los de origen natural. Por ejemplo, las proteínas que generalmente son glicosiladas en mamíferos no lo son al expresarse en bacterias. Además, las proteínas eucariotas que se expresan en altos niveles en *Escherichia coli* adquieren con frecuencia conformación artificial y son más propensas a precipitarse en forma intracelular debido a la carencia de puentes disulfuro y a un plegamiento inadecuado.³

El primer descubrimiento que permitió el desarrollo de la biotecnología de plantas es la capacidad que una sola de sus células posee para originar una planta completa con todas las características parentales;^{4,5} el segundo fue que es posible transferir un solo gen al genoma de una planta mediante la infección bacteriana del *Agrobacterium tumefaciens*. Éste ha sido uno de los principales métodos de transferencia de genes a las plantas. *A. tumefaciens* porta al plásmido Ti con el gen de interés, de manera que al momento de infectar a las células vegetales transfiere el gen al genoma de la planta. Otros métodos de transformación son el bombardeo de partículas (biobalística) y en menor grado el de electroporación.⁵⁻⁸

El principal promotor de expresión usado en plantas es el 35S del virus del mosaico de la coliflor (35S CPMV).⁹ Además, se han utilizado una serie de promotores tanto constitutivos como específicos de tejido, según el sistema utilizado y los niveles de expresión deseados.¹⁰⁻¹²

El procedimiento consiste en la inserción del gen de interés en el vector adecuado que contiene el promotor y el terminador correspondiente. El tejido vegetal que se va a utilizar puede ser tanto vegetativo (hojas) como reproductor (embriones, meristemos, polen, etc.). Después de que se efectúa la transformación por medio de dichos métodos, el tejido vegetal se

In theory, each cell of the new plant should contain a copy of the inserted gene.

The production of recombinant proteins in plants has many potential advantages to generate biological compounds of clinical medical importance: *a)* the vegetal systems are more economical than the industrial infrastructure that is based on the use of fermentation or bioreactor systems;¹³ *b)* the technology to harvest and process plants and their by-products at industrial scale is available;¹⁴⁻¹⁶ *c)* the purification requirement of the compound can be eliminated when the plant tissue, that contains the recombinant protein, is used as food (edible vaccine);^{17,18} *d)* the recombinant proteins can be directed to certain cellular compartments, or directly express them, as in the case of chloroplasts;¹⁹⁻²¹ *e)* the produced recombinant protein implants can be obtained in industrial scale.^{22,23}

Finally, the health's risks that are present by possible contamination of the recombinant product with human pathogens are minimum.^{9,11} There are two areas in which this technology is having an important impact: in the antibodies production and its receptors, and in the edible vaccine production.

Production of antibodies in transgenic plants

For more than ten years plants have showed to be versatile production systems for many forms of antibodies like IgG and IgA, IgG/IgA chimerics and others. Plants have a great potential as a virtually unlimited source of cheap monoclonal antibodies (called "plantibodies") for human and animal therapy.²⁴

Until now, the majority of expressed antibodies have been in tobacco, although potato, soy, alfalfa, rice and wheat have been used.^{25,26} The principal advantage of using leaves (like tobacco and alfalfa) to produce an antibody, is the efficiency. Alfalfa, as well as tobacco can be harvested several times in a year, with a potential biomass production per year of 17 tons/ha and more than 50 tons/ha, respectively. In contrast, the maximum production of wheat, rice or corn rarely exceeds six tons/ha. Other advantages of tobacco are: its facility for genetic manipulation, the production of a great number of seeds (up to one million per plant) and the need to explore other uses for this crop.

The antibodies produced in plants are stable at room temperatures²⁵ as well as 4°C.²⁷ The vegetal material containing the antibody can be stored and the purification can be performed in a processing plant that does not need to be near the place where the vegetables are and can be used all year. As Table 1 shows, there are many examples of antibodies and its receptors successfully produced in plants; the chime-

incuba en un medio sintético adecuado para la generación de la planta completa. En teoría, cada célula de la nueva planta debe contener una copia del gen insertado.

La producción de proteínas recombinantes en plantas tiene muchas ventajas potenciales para generar compuestos biológicos de importancia en medicina clínica: *a)* los sistemas vegetales son más económicos que la infraestructura industrial que se basa en el uso de sistemas de fermentación o en biorreactores;¹³ *b)* la tecnología para cosechar y procesar plantas y sus productos a escala industrial ya está disponible;¹⁴⁻¹⁶ *c)* el requisito de la purificación del compuesto puede ser eliminado cuando el tejido de la planta, que contiene la proteína recombinante, se utiliza como alimento (vacunas comestibles);^{17,18} *d)* las proteínas recombinantes se pueden dirigir hacia determinados compartimientos celulares, o expresarlos directamente, como es el caso de los cloroplastos;¹⁹⁻²¹ *e)* la proteína recombinante producida en plantas se puede obtener a escala industrial.^{22,23}

Finalmente, los riesgos a la salud que se presentan como consecuencia de posible contaminación del producto recombinante con patógenos humanos son mínimos.^{9,11} Hay dos áreas en donde esa tecnología está teniendo un impacto importante: en la producción de anticuerpos y sus receptores, y en la producción de vacunas comestibles.

Producción de anticuerpos en plantas transgénicas

Desde hace más de diez años las plantas han demostrado ser sistemas versátiles de producción para muchas formas de anticuerpos como IgG e IgA, IgG/IgA quiméricos y otros. Las plantas tienen un gran potencial como fuente ilimitada de anticuerpos monoclonales baratos (llamados "planticuerpos") para terapia humana y animal.²⁴

La mayoría de los anticuerpos expresados hasta la fecha lo han sido en tabaco, aunque también se ha utilizado papa, soya, alfalfa, arroz y trigo.^{25,26} La ventaja principal de usar hojas (como en tabaco y alfalfa) para producir el anticuerpo es el rendimiento. Tanto la alfalfa como el tabaco pueden ser cosechados varias veces al año, con una producción potencial de biomasa por año de 17 ton/ha y más de 50 toneladas por ha, respectivamente. En contraparte, la producción máxima de trigo, arroz o maíz difícilmente rebasa las seis ton/ha. Otras ventajas del tabaco incluyen su facilidad para manipulación genética, la producción de gran número de semillas (hasta un millón por planta) y la necesidad de explorar otros usos para este cultivo.

Los anticuerpos producidos en plantas son estables

ric secretor antibody of IgG/IgA against a superficial antigen of *Streptococcus mutans*, causal agent of dental cavities, tested inclusive in humans and produced in tobacco, was applied topically to several volunteers' teeth and was found to be as effective as a IgG produced in mouse hybridoma to prevent the re-colonization of the gums by *S. mutans*.²⁸ Another example is the antibody against the herpes (HSV) virus produced in soy and resulted efficient in the prevention of the vaginal infection by HSV in mouse.²⁹

An important aspect that has been outstanding in the production of antibodies in plants is the low production cost potential. There are few cost studies; therefore, the available estimations imply some suppositions. The cost of producing IgG in alfalfa grown in a greenhouse of 250 m² was estimated in 500-600 dollars per gram, compared to 5000 dollars per gram for the same antibody produced in hybridomas.¹³ It is unquestionable that the levels of expression will have a significant impact on costs. The highest level of expression registered for a plantibody was for a secreted IgA (500 µg/g of leaf),²⁶ with a final cost estimated below 50 dollars per gram. This contrasts with the costs of a purified antibody, obtained from a cell culture (one

tanto a temperatura ambiente²⁵ como a 4°C.²⁷ El material vegetal que contiene al anticuerpo se puede almacenar y así la purificación se puede realizar en una planta de procesamiento que no necesita estar cerca del lugar donde están los vegetales, además se puede utilizar todo el año. Como muestra el Cuadro 1, hay muchos ejemplos de anticuerpos y sus receptores producidos exitosamente en plantas; en este sentido, el anticuerpo secretor quimérico de IgG/IgA contra un antígeno superficial de *Streptococcus mutans*, agente causal de la caries dental, se ha probado incluso en humanos dicho anticuerpo, producido en tabaco, se aplicó tópicamente a los dientes de varios voluntarios y se encontró que era tan eficaz como una IgG producida en un hibridoma de ratón para prevenir la recolonización de las encías por *S. mutans*.²⁸ Otro ejemplo es el anticuerpo contra el virus del herpes (HSV) que fue producido en soya y resultó eficaz en la prevención de la infección vaginal por HSV en ratón.²⁹

Un aspecto importante que se ha destacado de la producción de anticuerpos en plantas se refiere al bajo costo de producción. Existen pocos estudios de costos y por eso las estimaciones disponibles implican algunas suposiciones. Por ejemplo, el costo de produ-

Cuadro 1
PLANTICUERPOS PARA USOS TERAPÉUTICOS Y DE DIAGNÓSTICO
PLANTIBODIES FOR THERAPEUTIC AND DIAGNOSIS USES

<i>Application and specificity</i>	<i>Antibody type</i>	<i>Plant</i>	<i>Expression levels</i>	<i>Refs</i>
Dental cavities; Antigen I or II of <i>S. mutans</i>	IgA	<i>Nicotiana tabacum</i>	500 µg/g leaves fresh (FW) weight	70,71
Diagnosis; anti-human IgG	IgG	Alfalfa	1.0% Total soluble protein (TSP)	13
Cancer treatment; carcinoembryonic antigen	Simple chain from antibody FvScFv	Wheat	900.0 µg/g leaves 1.5 µg/g seeds	25
Cancer treatment; carcinoembryonic antigen	ScFv	Rice	29.0 µg/g leaves; 32.0 µg/g seeds; 3.8 µg/g callous	25
Cancer treatment; carcinoembryonic antigen	ScFv	Rice	27.0 µg/g leaves	25
Cancer treatment; carcinoembryonic antigen	IgG	<i>Nicotiana tabacum</i>	1.0 µg/g leaves	32
B cells lymphoma treatment; ideotype vaccine	scFv	<i>Nicotiana benthamiana</i>	30.0 µg/g leaves	74
Herpes simples virus 2	IgG	Soy	Not informed (NI)	29
B Hepatitis	Surface Anti-antigen of Hepatitis B	<i>Nicotiana tabacum</i>	Variable 15-40 µg/g	23
Anti RH Factor	Anti RH-D	Arabidopsis	NI	73
Antirabies treatment	IgG	<i>Nicotiana tabacum</i>	NI	74
Polyepitope of cells B against measles	scFv	Carrot	NI	75

thousand dollars/g), or from transgenic animals (100 dollars/g). The most relevant cost in the obtainment of plantibodies is the purification. Nevertheless, the expression in rice and wheat germs²⁵ opens the possibility of oral administration of some therapeutic antibodies without the necessity of purification, since the transformed plants can be administered directly per oral, as a consequence of the intestinal mucous' immune system that allows the recognition and absorption of diverse molecules. Due to the former, more recombinant proteins are being produced with different purposes (Table 2).^{22,23}

Many antibodies are subjected to glycosylation, which is critical for its activity. There is a study that analyzes the glycosylation of an antibody produced in plants in comparison to the one produced on hybridomas of mouse.³¹ It was found that sugars in the antibody derived from plants were structurally diverse; 40% was mannose type. Other 60% had type β -(1,2)-xylose and β -(1,3)-fucose links. These links are typical of plants, but are not found in mammals. The sialic acid, that represented 10% of the sugar content of the monoclonal antibody of the mouse, was not found in the antibodies of plants. Nevertheless, these structural differences seemed not to have any effect over

the cost of IgG in alfalfa grown in a greenhouse of 250 m² was estimated in 500-600 dollars per gram, in comparison with the five thousand dollars per gram for the same antibody produced in hybridomas.¹³ It is undeniable that the levels of expression will have a significant impact on the costs. The highest expression level recorded for a plant body has been for an IgA secreted (500 μ g/g of leaf),²⁶ whose final cost was estimated to be inferior to 50 dollars per gram. This contrasts with the costs of a purified antibody, obtained in cell culture (thousand dollars/g), or from transgenic animals (100 dollars/g). The most relevant cost in the obtaining of plant bodies is observed in the purification process. However, the expression in rice and wheat²⁵ opens the possibility of oral administration of some therapeutic antibodies without the necessity of purification, since the transformed plants can be administered directly per oral, as a consequence of the immune system of the intestinal mucosa that allows the recognition and absorption of diverse molecules. Due to this, each time more recombinant proteins are produced with different purposes (Table 2).^{22,30}

Many antibodies are subjected to a process of

Cuadro 2
PROTEÍNAS DE IMPORTANCIA TERAPEUTICA PRODUCIDAS
EN PLANTAS TRANSGÉNICAS
IMPORTANT THERAPEUTIC PROTEINS PRODUCED IN TRANSGENIC PLANTS

<i>Application or potential use</i>	<i>Protein</i>	<i>Plant</i>	<i>Expression level</i>	<i>Refs</i>
Neutropenia	Human GM-CS factor	Tobacco	Not informed (NI)	85
Growth hormone	Human somatotropin	Tobacco	7.00% TSP	19
Growth hormone	Nuclear expression	Tobacco	< 0.01% TSP	19
Anemia	Human erythropoietin	Tobacco	< 0.01% TSP	14
Antihyperanalgesic	Human encephalin	Arabidopsis	0.10% protein of seed	14
Treatment for Hepatitis C and B	Human interferon- β	Tobacco	< 0.01% fresh weight	14
Hepatic cirrhosis, burns, surgery	Human serum albumin	Tobacco	0.02% TSP	14
Collagen	Human homotrimetric collagen	Tobacco	< 0.01% fresh weight	86
Cystic fibrosis, hepatic diseases and haemorrhage	Human α -1-antitrypsin	Rice	NI	85
Trypsin inhibitor for transplant surgery	Human aprotinine	Corn	NI	85
Antimicrobial	Human lactoferrin	Potato	0.10% TSP	87
Hypertension	Angiotensin converter enzyme	Tobacco, tomato	NI	85
HIV-AIDS therapy	α -Tricosanthin of TMV-U1 Protein of the subgenomic capsid	<i>Nicotiana bethamiana</i>	2.00% TSP	85
Vacunal adjuvant, therapy against cancer	IL-12	Tobacco	NI	88

the union to the antigen or the affinity *in vitro*^{13,26,29,32} and could be insignificant *in vivo*. A IgG produced in alfalfa had a middle life in serum of Balb/c mice similar to that of a monoclonal antibody (MA).¹³

Although there has been certain concern for the immunogenicity potential and allergenic capacity of the plantibodies, maybe these will not present any problems for the majority of individuals because the glycoproteins of plants are ubiquitous in the human and animal diet.³³ In this sense, there was no evidence of allergic reaction to a anti-mouse human antibody in 60 patients that received the topic oral application of specific secretor IgA for *S. mutans*.²⁸

Edible vaccines

The production of diverse antigens in transgenic plants is a demonstrated fact throughout the years.³⁴ The interest to perform these experiments aroused due to the uncertainty that some immunogenic proteins could be synthesized in plants and later use the vegetal tissue as oral immunogens in human beings or animals. Currently, it has been demonstrated that this idea is totally viable using diverse bacterial and viral proteins.

Vaccination in great scale faces a series of difficulties; on one side, the high costs of vaccines and, on the other, the risk that the distribution in remote places and of difficult access, might not be adequate. The World Health Organization has recommended the search for options to substitute injections, due to the fact that in some countries up to 30% of these are done with syringes that are not sterile because of economical problems in those places. In this context, the oral administration would be a good alternative for the vaccines that are actually administered parenterally. With oral vaccines the probability of acquiring immunity through the mucous against infectious agents that enter the body by this route is incremented.³⁵

An important worry about oral vaccines is the degradation of the antigens in the stomach and intestine before they can induce an immune response. To protect them from degradation, several methods have been developed, like the use of recombinant strains of attenuated microorganisms (for instance, *Salmonella*) of bio-encapsulation vehicles, like liposomes, and finally transgenic plants.

In theory, the ideal species to express the antigens should be consumed fresh and have high levels of soluble protein; in this sense, fruits like banana and tomato or cereals, are convenient systems for this purpose. Although in the first studies with vaccines derived from plants, tobacco and potato were used, due to its facility of manipulation.³⁶⁻³⁹

Table 3 shows the variety of antigens of human

glicosilación, lo cual es crítico para su actividad. En esta tesitura, existe un estudio que analiza la glicosilación de un anticuerpo producido en plantas en comparación con el que se produce en hibridomas de ratón.³¹ Se encontró que los azúcares en el anticuerpo derivado de plantas eran estructuralmente más diversos; 40% fue del tipo manosa, otro 60% tenía enlaces tipo β -(1,2)-xilosa y β -(1,3)-fucosa. Estos enlaces son típicos de plantas, pero no se encuentran en mamíferos. El ácido siálico, que representaba 10% del contenido de azúcar del anticuerpo monoclonal de ratón, no se encontró en el anticuerpo de plantas. Sin embargo, estas diferencias en estructura parecieron no tener efecto sobre la unión al antígeno o sobre la afinidad *in vitro*.^{13,26,29,32} y pudieran ser intrascendentes *in vivo*. Un IgG producido en alfalfa tuvo vida media en suero de ratones Balb/c, similar a la de un anticuerpo monoclonal (AM).¹³

Aunque ha habido cierta preocupación por la inmunogenicidad potencial y capacidad alérgica de los planticuerpos, quizá éstos no presenten problemas para la mayoría de los individuos porque las glicoproteínas de plantas son ubicuas en la dieta humana y animal.³³ En este sentido, no hubo evidencia de reacción alérgica a un anticuerpo humano antirratón en 60 pacientes que recibieron la aplicación oral tópica de IgA secretora específica para *S. mutans*.²⁸

Vacunas comestibles

La producción de diversos antígenos en plantas transgénicas constituye un hecho demostrado desde hace años.³⁴ El interés para realizar estos experimentos surgió debido a la duda sobre si determinadas proteínas inmunogénicas se podrían sintetizar en plantas, y después usar el tejido vegetal como inmunógenos orales en seres humanos o en animales. Actualmente se ha demostrado que esta idea es viable si se utilizan diversas proteínas bacterianas y virales.

La vacunación en gran escala enfrenta una serie de dificultades; por un lado, los altos costos de las vacunas y, por otro, el riesgo de que la distribución en lugares remotos y de difícil acceso no sea adecuada. La Organización Mundial de la Salud ha recomendado la búsqueda de opciones para sustituir a las inyecciones, debido a que ha encontrado que en algunos países hasta 30% de éstas se realizan con jeringas no estériles, debido a los problemas económicos de esos lugares. En este contexto, la aplicación oral sería buena alternativa para las vacunas que actualmente se administran vía parenteral. Con las vacunas orales se incrementa la probabilidad de adquirir inmunidad en mucosas contra agentes infecciosos que entran al cuerpo a través esta ruta.³⁵

Una preocupación importante respecto de las

pathogens expressed in transgenic plants. The antigens derived from plants have induced immune response at mucous and serum level, when they have been administered by injections as well as per oral in laboratory animals. Several experiments exist where these have adequately protected against the pathogen.^{10,36-44} Likewise, several clinical tests have been successfully performed with human volunteers where the orally consumed antigens, in vegetal tissue, induced a significant immune response.⁴⁵⁻⁵⁰ For this reason, it is considered that prepared vaccines in plants have great potential.⁵¹ The bio-encapsulation of the B subunit of the labile toxin of *Escherichia coli* in transgenic corn, induced a strong immune response in mice, in comparison to the one reached by the sole antigen, which was weaker.⁴⁹ Maybe this was due to the fact that the antigen was protected against degradation in the intestine.

Considering the serious problem of pathogens that affect public health like: AIDS, hepatitis B, anaplasmosis, malaria and rabies, among others, this fact is of great relevance.

Edible vaccines in veterinary field

There are several reports on edible vaccines against diseases that affect animals (Table 4) which have been evaluated in laboratory and domestic animals. Since 1996, it has been reported that antigens and protector peptides expressed in plants of *Arabidopsis*, tobacco, potato, corn and peanut, have been tested in laboratory animals and pigs.^{49,52,53} Some of the edible vaccines of veterinary interest that have been obtained in plants have expressed for example: glycoprotein S and protector peptides of the coronavirus which produce transmissible gastroenteritis in pigs (TGE); peptides of the VP2 from canine parvovirus; the VP1 from foot and mouth disease; the VP60 from the virus that produce the hemorrhagic rabbit disease, a lineal peptide of the hemagglutinin of the rinderpest virus and a gene that codifies for a virulence factor (F18) of *E. coli* that produces swine oedema.^{15,42,54,55} Likewise, a peptide has been selected that possesses the same sequence of protector peptides that are found in the mink enteritis virus, canine parvovirus and feline panleukopenia. This protein fragment expressed itself in the cauliflower mosaic virus, the authors proposed that this construction could protect against these three diseases.⁵⁶ All these tests report parenteral administration (injection) of the purified proteins, or orally consuming fresh plants. For both routes, immunoglobulins (Ig) G, IgA were promoted, and in the case of evaluating the protection, it was always reported to be more than 80%. In 1999, it was reported that the use of protein VP1 of the aphthous fever, using as a vector

vacunas orales es la degradación de los antígenos en el estómago e intestino antes de que puedan inducir una respuesta inmune. Para proteger a aquéllos de la degradación, se han desarrollado varios métodos, como el uso de cepas recombinantes de microorganismos atenuados (*v. gr.*, *Salmonella*), o de vehículos de bioencapsulación, como liposomas, y finalmente la utilización de plantas transgénicas.

En teoría, la especie ideal para expresar los antígenos debería consumirse en fresco y tener altos niveles de proteína soluble; en este sentido, frutos como el plátano y el jitomate o los cereales, son sistemas convenientes para este fin; aunque en los primeros trabajos con vacunas derivadas de plantas se usó tabaco y papa, debido a la facilidad de su manipulación.³⁶⁻³⁹

El Cuadro 3 ilustra la variedad de antígenos de patógenos humanos expresados en plantas transgénicas. Los antígenos derivados de plantas han inducido respuestas inmunes a nivel de mucosas y de suero, cuando han sido administrados tanto con inyecciones como por vía oral en animales de laboratorio. Existen varios experimentos donde éstos han protegido adecuadamente contra el patógeno.^{10,36-44} Asimismo, se han realizado exitosamente varias pruebas clínicas con voluntarios humanos; se observó que los antígenos consumidos vía oral en tejido vegetal indujeron respuesta inmune significativa.⁴⁵⁻⁵⁰ Por esta razón se considera que las vacunas preparadas en plantas tienen gran potencial.⁵¹ La bioencapsulación de la subunidad B de la toxina lábil de *Escherichia coli* en maíz transgénico indujo fuerte respuesta inmune en ratones, en comparación con la alcanzada con el antígeno desnudo, que fue más débil.⁴⁹ Quizá esto se debió a que el antígeno estaba protegido contra la degradación en el intestino.

De acuerdo con lo anterior, al considerar el grave problema de patógenos que afectan la salud pública, como el sida, hepatitis B, anaplasmosis, malaria y rabia, entre otros, el planteamiento que se hace en este trabajo es de gran relevancia.

Vacunas comestibles en el campo veterinario

Existen varios informes sobre vacunas comestibles contra enfermedades que afectan a los animales (Cuadro 4), aquéllas ya han sido evaluadas tanto en animales de experimentación como en animales de compañía. A partir de 1996 se ha informado respecto de antígenos y péptidos protectores expresados en plantas de *Arabidopsis*, tabaco, papa, maíz y cacahuete, que se han usado en animales de laboratorio y en cerdos.^{49,52,53} Algunas de las vacunas comestibles de interés veterinario obtenidos en plantas se han expresado de la siguiente manera: la glicoproteína S

Cuadro 3
ANTÍGENOS DE PATÓGENOS HUMANOS, EXPRESADOS EN PLANTAS TRANSGÉNICAS
HUMAN PATHOGEN ANTIGENS, EXPRESSED IN TRANSGENIC PLANTS

<i>Expressed protector antigen</i>	<i>Causal agent</i>	<i>Plant</i>	<i>Expression level</i>	<i>Immunogenic capacity</i>	<i>Refs</i>
Subunit B of the heat sensible toxin	<i>E. coli</i> enterotoxigenic	Tobacco	< 0.01% Total soluble protein (TSP)	The intact protein forms multimerics and is immunogenic administered orally	36
Subunit B of the heat sensible toxin	<i>E. coli</i> enterotoxigenic	Potato	0.19% TSP	Immunogenic, protector and of binding activity administered orally	36,43,45
Subunit B of the heat sensible toxin	<i>E. coli</i> enterotoxigenic	Corn	Not informed (NI)	Immunogenic and protector administered orally	49
Subunit B of the heat sensible toxin	<i>Vibrio cholerae</i>	Potato	0.30% TSP	The intact protein forms multimerics, has the activity of binding to the receptor and it is immunogenic and protector administered orally	40, 64
Main antigen	Anthrax	Tobacco	NI	Biological activity	76
Superficial protein of the cover	Hepatitis B virus	Potato	< 0.01% Fresh weight (FW)	Forms virus type particles and the extracted protein is immunogenic administered parenterally	37, 44
Superficial protein of the cover	Hepatitis B virus	Lupine (<i>Lupinus</i> spp)	> 0.01% FW	Immunogenic administered orally	65
Superficial protein of the cover	Hepatitis B virus		> 0.01% FW	Immunogenic administered orally	46
Protein of the capsid	Norwalk virus	Tobacco	0.23% TSP	Forms virus type particles, immunogenic administered orally	38
Protein of the capsid	Norwalk virus	Potato	0.37% TSP	Forms virus type particles, immunogenic administered orally	38,67
Glycoprotein	Rabies virus	Tomato	1.00% TSP	Intact protein	39
Glycoprotein B	Human cytomegalovirus	Tobacco	< 0.02% TSP	Immunologically related protein	66
Protein F	Respiratory syncytial virus	Tomato	NI	Immunogenic administered orally	78
HPV 11	Papillomavirus	Potato	NI	Immunogenic administered orally	79
Principle protein of the capsid L 1	Papillomavirus	Norwalk virus	0.2% - 0.5% TSP	Immunogenic administered orally	80
HPV type 16 – L 1	Papillomavirus	<i>Nicotiana tabacum</i>	0.2% - 0.4% FW	Immunogenic administered orally	81
VP 7	Rotavirus	Potato	NI	Immunogenic administered orally	80

the mosaic virus of tobacco, produces protection in mice.¹⁰ Afterward, experiments have been performed to characterize the immune response provoked by a chimeric plant against canine parvovirus that induces mucous and systemic immunity in mice.⁵⁷

In the zoonosis field, the G protein as well as the N of the rabies virus have been expressed in several

y péptidos protectores del coronavirus, ésta produce la gastroenteritis transmisible de los cerdos (GETC); los péptidos de la VP2 del parvovirus canino, la VP1 de la fiebre aftosa; la VP60 del virus que produce la enfermedad hemorrágica de los conejos, un péptido lineal de la hemaglutinina del virus de rinderpest y un gen que codifica para un factor de virulencia (F18) de

Cuadro 4
ANTÍGENOS DE PATÓGENOS ANIMALES EXPRESADOS EN PLANTAS TRANSGÉNICAS
ANTIGENS OF ANIMAL PATHOGENS EXPRESSED IN TRANSGENIC PLANTS

<i>Causal agent</i>	<i>Protector antigen expressed in plants</i>	<i>Plant</i>	<i>Expressed level</i>	<i>Immunogenic capacity</i>	<i>Refs</i>
Hemorrhagic virus of rabbits	VP60	Potato	0.30% TSP	Immunogenic and protector administered orally	47, 83
Foot and mouth disease	VP1	Arabidopsis	NI	Immunogenic and protector administered orally	Norwalk virus
Foot and mouth disease	VP1	Alfalfa	NI	Immunogenic and protector administered orally	10
Foot and mouth disease	Epitope highly immunogenic VP135 - 160	Alfalfa	NI	Immunogenic and protector administered orally	54
Foot and mouth disease	VP1	Tobacco	NI	Immunogenic and protector administered orally	84
Transmissible gastroenteritis in pigs (TGE)	Glycoprotein S	Arabidopsis	0.06% TSP	Immunogenic and protector administered parenterally	42
TGE	Glycoprotein S	Corn	< 0.01% FW	Protector per oral	49
Rinderpest virus	Hemagglutinin	Peanut	NI	Seroconversion when administered parenterally with plant derivatives	53

vegetables, and several tests have been done in mice and humans;^{39,50,58} nevertheless, few tests are done to produce an edible vaccine against bovine rabies, disease that in Latin America causes severe economical losses.⁵⁹

Presently, different groups are working in this area trying to specifically induce an immune response of cellular type, using as adjuvants cytokine and chemokine molecules. This strategy has been used⁶⁰⁻⁶² although not with plants administered orally, but parenterally. Thus, it is expected not only to induce a general immunity, but to influence on the type of response. Besides, it has been recently determined that the DNA of plants possesses immunostimulatory sequences, since it was proved that the DNA of plants can activate the antigen-presenting cells, including dendritic cells, macrophages and B cells, for which they are considered as potential adjuvant.⁶³

Expression levels of bio-pharmaceutical components in transgenic plants

The quantity of vegetal tissue that constitutes a dose of vaccine should be small. For this, it is important to reach high levels of protector antigen expression in the vegetal tissue. Different strategies have been used to increase the levels of expression of the transgenes;

E. coli que produce el edema de los cerdos.^{15,42,54,55} Asimismo, se ha elegido un péptido que posee la misma secuencia de péptidos protectores que se encuentran en los virus de enteritis del mink, parvovirus canino y panleucopenia felina. Este fragmento de proteína se expresó en el virus del mosaico de la coliflor, los autores propusieron que esta construcción podría proteger contra estas tres enfermedades.⁵⁶ Todos estos ensayos notifican la administración, vía parenteral, de las proteínas purificadas, o bien por vía oral comiendo las plantas frescas. Por ambas rutas se han promovido inmunoglobulinas (Ig) G, IgA y, en caso de haber evaluado la protección, se informa que ésta fue siempre más de 80%. En 1999 se notificó que el uso de la proteína VPI del virus de la fiebre aftosa, usando como vector al virus del mosaico de tabaco, produce protección en ratones.¹⁰ Posteriormente se han realizado experimentos para caracterizar la respuesta inmune provocada por una planta quimérica contra el parvovirus canino, que induce inmunidad mucosal y sistémica en ratones.⁵⁷

En el campo de las zoonosis, tanto la proteína G como la N del virus de la rabia se han expresado en diversos vegetales; en este sentido, se han realizado varios ensayos en ratones y en humanos;^{39,50,58} sin embargo, en la actualidad apenas se realizan ensayos para producir una vacuna comestible contra la rabia

for instance, utilizing diverse regulation signals of the genetic expression, as well as optimizing the use of codones.^{43,48,49} The levels of expression could rise through the cross of transformed lines with established and well characterized lines, this strategy has been applied with success to increase the total protein production in corn. It is important that any antigen is present in its natural form in the vegetal tissue, this is evaluated as the size of the synthesized protein examined, its capacity to form adequate structures (for instance, virus type particles) and demonstrating enzymatic activity or union to a receptor.^{10,36,38,39,43,48,64} The stability of the heterologous proteins and the assemble of multimeric structures depend on the subcellular location. Until now, the principle places where antigens have been expressed are the cellular surface, endoplasmic reticulum and Golgi apparatus.^{36,48,64-66} In spite of some reports on high levels of expression, there is a great necessity to find mechanisms to increase the antigen expression in plants and allow its commercial production in great scale. For that purpose, a strategy that has been lately followed is the fusion of antigenic peptides to the β -glucuronidase protein (GUS), with which the expression that normally was of 0.01% to 0.2% can increase up to 3% of the total soluble protein; it has also been used the transformation of plants via chloroplasts and it has been published that levels of expression of almost 2.5% of the total soluble protein of the plant may be obtained.²¹

In general, the levels of expression of the proteins with pharmaceutical application produced in transgenic plants have been of less than 1% of the total soluble protein. This limit of 1% is important for a possible commercial application, if the protein must be purified.¹⁴ The surface antigen of the hepatitis B induced only a low level response in serum antibodies in a study on human volunteers, this may reflect the low level of expression (1-5 ng/g of fresh weight) in transgenic lettuce.⁴⁶ Although the protein of the capsid of the Norwalk virus expressed in potato induced immunization when consumed orally, the levels of the expression were low for the oral administration in great scale: 0.37% of total soluble protein (TSP).^{38,67} The expression of the genes that codify for other human proteins in transgenic plants has also been low: human serum albumin, 0.020% TSP; erythropoietin, ~0.003% TSP; human- β interferon, <0.01% TSP.

Future perspectives

Recently, different groups are working in this area trying to specifically induce an immune response of cellular type, using as adjuvants cytokine and chimokine molecules.⁶⁰⁻⁶² Therefore, it is expected not only

bovina, padecimiento que en América Latina causa severas pérdidas económicas.⁵⁹

Hoy día, diferentes grupos trabajan en esta área para intentar inducir una respuesta inmune de tipo celular específica, utilizando como adyuvantes moléculas de citocinas y quimiocinas. Esta estrategia se ha empleado⁶⁰⁻⁶² aunque no con plantas ni por vía oral, sino vía parenteral. Así, se espera no sólo inducir una inmunidad general, sino también influir en el tipo de respuesta. Aunado a ello, recientemente se ha determinado que el ADN de plantas posee secuencias inmunoestimuladoras, ya que se comprobó que este último puede activar a las células presentadoras de antígeno, incluyendo células dendríticas, macrófagos y células B, por lo que se le considera como adyuvante potencial.⁶³

Niveles de expresión de compuestos biofarmacéuticos en plantas transgénicas

La cantidad de tejido vegetal que constituya una dosis de vacuna debe ser pequeña. Por ello es importante alcanzar altos niveles de expresión del antígeno protector en el tejido vegetal. Se han utilizado diferentes estrategias para aumentar los niveles de expresión de los transgenes; por ejemplo, utilizando diversas señales de regulación de la expresión genética, así como al optimizar el uso de codones.^{43,48,49} Los niveles de expresión se podrían elevar a través de cruces de líneas transformadas con líneas establecidas y bien caracterizadas; esta estrategia se ha aplicado con éxito para aumentar la producción de proteína total en maíz. Es importante que cualquier antígeno esté presente en su forma natural en el tejido vegetal, ello se evalúa al examinar el tamaño de la proteína sintetizada, su capacidad de formar las estructuras adecuadas (por ejemplo, partículas tipo virus) y demostrando actividad enzimática o de unión a un receptor.^{10,36,38,39,43,48,64} La estabilidad de las proteínas heterólogas y el ensamblaje de estructuras multiméricas dependen de la localización subcelular. Hasta ahora, los principales lugares en donde se han expresado antígenos son la superficie celular, el retículo endoplásmico y el aparato de Golgi.^{36,48,64-66} A pesar de algunos informes sobre altos niveles de expresión, hay una necesidad imperiosa de encontrar mecanismos para aumentar la expresión de antígenos en plantas y permitir su producción comercial en gran escala. Para tal propósito, una estrategia que se ha seguido últimamente es la fusión de péptidos antigénicos a la proteína β -glucuronidasa (GUS), con lo cual la expresión que normalmente era de 0.01% a 0.2% puede aumentar hasta 3% del total de la proteína soluble; también se ha empleado la transformación de las plantas mediante los cloroplastos y se ha publicado que se pueden obte-

to induce a general immunity, but to influence in the type of response. Besides, it was recently determined that the DNA of plants possesses immunostimulatory sequences, since it was proved that it can activate the antigen presenter cells, including dendritic cells, macrophages and B cells, reason why they are considered potential adjuvants.⁶³

Before any application in great scale, the biological components derived from plants must comply with the same safety standards and operation that are required in other production systems. Nevertheless, many traditional medicines are now exempt of these scrutiny and are not required to meet with those standards due to its classification as food supplements. Due to the diverse environmental concerns on the genetic manipulated organisms that have been expressed by ecological groups that confuse public opinion, it is important that norms exist to regulate this type of organisms. Its convenient to distinguish between true public concerns and the perceived (scientific and not scientific).³³ If the derived biological compound of plants are potentially harmful, capable of persisting in the environment and can accumulate in non-target organisms, then adequate measures should be taken.

A relevant topic of discussion has been the dispersion of transgenic pollen to herbs or related species.⁶⁸ At the moment, several methods are being researched to contain the transgenic, including apomixes, incompatible genomes, germ latency control, suicide genes, infertility barriers, male infertility and maternal heredity.

Also, there is concern for the expression of certain proteins in transgenic pollen. For example, the observation on the toxic effect of the transgenic corn pollen that contains the crystal protein of *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) in the monarch butterfly larvae, which had a significant impact in the public opinion, although the validity of this research has been questioned in several occasions and the authors had established that the results are not reliable. Another public concern is the presence of genes' resistance to antibiotics or their products (that are used as selection markers) in edible parts of genetically modified cultures. Nevertheless, there are several alternatives to generate plants with transgenes in their nucleus⁶⁹ or in the chloroplasts⁷⁰ without the use of antibiotics.

Because of this, it is clear the enormous potential in this technology to produce vaccines and pharmaceutical compounds of interest. With the purpose to select the adequate crop for production, it will be necessary to consider several factors like levels of production, storage conditions, costs of establishment and operation, purifying strategies, size of the market, environmental concerns, public opinion and alternative technologies.

ner niveles de expresión de casi 2.5% de la proteína total soluble de la planta.²¹

En general, los niveles de expresión de las proteínas con aplicación farmacéutica producidas en plantas transgénicas han sido de menos de 1% de la proteína soluble total. Este límite de 1% es importante para una posible aplicación comercial, para el caso de que la proteína se deba purificar.¹⁴ El antígeno de superficie del virus de la hepatitis B indujo sólo una respuesta de bajo nivel en anticuerpos séricos en un estudio con voluntarios humanos, ello refleja quizá el bajo nivel de la expresión (1-5 ng/g de peso fresco) en lechuga transgénica.⁴⁶ Aunque la proteína de la cápside del virus Norwalk expresada en papa indujo inmunización cuando se consumió por vía oral, los niveles de la expresión fueron bajos para la administración oral en gran escala: 0.37% de proteína soluble total (PST).^{38,67} En este sentido, la expresión de los genes que codificaban para otras proteínas humanas en plantas transgénicas ha sido también baja: albúmina sérica humana, 0.020% PST; eritropoyetina, ~0.003% PST; interferón humano- β , < 0.01% PST.

Perspectivas futuras

Actualmente se sigue trabajando con la mirada puesta hacia el futuro.⁶⁰⁻⁶² Se espera no sólo inducir una inmunidad general, sino también influir en el tipo de respuesta. Aunado a ello, recientemente se determinó que el ADN de plantas posee secuencias inmunostimulatorias, ya que se comprobó que puede activar a las células presentadoras de antígeno, incluyendo células dendríticas, macrófagos y células B, por lo que se le considera un adyuvante potencial.⁶³

Antes de cualquier aplicación en gran escala, los compuestos biológicos derivados de plantas deberán cumplir con los mismos estándares de seguridad y funcionamiento que son requeridos en otros sistemas de producción. Sin embargo, muchas medicinas tradicionales están ahora exentas de tal escrutinio y no se les exige cumplir con esos estándares debido a su clasificación como suplementos alimentarios. Debido a las diversas preocupaciones ambientales sobre los organismos genéticamente manipulados, que han sido expresadas por grupos ecologistas que confunden a la opinión pública, es importante que existan normas para regular a este tipo de organismos. Es conveniente distinguir entre las preocupaciones públicas verdaderas y las percibidas (científicas contra no científicas).³³ Si los compuestos biológicos derivados de plantas son potencialmente dañinos, capaces de persistir en el ambiente y se pueden acumular en organismos no blanco, entonces deben tomarse las medidas adecuadas.

Un tópico de discusión relevante ha sido la disper-

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sión del polen transgénico a hierbas o a especies relacionadas.⁶⁸ Actualmente se están investigando varios métodos para contener a los transgenes, incluyendo apomixis, genomas incompatibles, control de la latencia del germen, genes suicidas, las barreras de infertilidad, esterilidad masculina y herencia materna. Hay también preocupación por la expresión de determinadas proteínas en polen transgénico. Por ejemplo, la observación del efecto tóxico del polen de maíz transgénico que contiene la proteína cristal de *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) en las larvas de la mariposa monarca, tuvieron un impacto significativo en la opinión pública, aunque la validez de este estudio se ha cuestionado en varias ocasiones y los autores hayan establecido que los resultados no son confiables. Otra preocupación pública es la presencia de genes de resistencia a antibióticos o sus productos (que se utilizan como marcadores de selección) en partes comestibles de cultivos genéticamente modificados. Sin embargo, existen varias alternativas para generar plantas con transgenes en sus núcleos⁶⁹ o en los cloroplastos⁷⁰ sin el uso de antibióticos.

Por lo anterior, queda claro el enorme potencial que tiene esta tecnología para producir compuestos de interés farmacéutico y vacunas. Con el fin de seleccionar el cultivo adecuado para la producción, será necesario considerar diversos factores como niveles de producción, condiciones de almacenamiento, costos de establecimiento y operación, estrategias de purificación, tamaño del mercado, preocupaciones ambientales, opinión pública y tecnologías alternas.

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