



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**CAROTENOID PROFILES AND PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION ON
CAROTENOID BIOSYNTHESIS IN THE OIL PALM
(*ELAEIS GUINEENSIS*) MESOCARP**

JANE SONIA KAUR

FPSK (M) 2002 4



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By

JANE SONIA KAUR

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science
Universiti Putra Malaysia**

March 2002





For my Dad & Mom.....

Here is the endeavour of my absences



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment
of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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Chairman: Associate Professor Ong King Kok, Ph.D.

Faculty: Medicine and Health Science

The oil palm fruit is one of the richest sources of carotenoids. However, little is known about the pathway for carotenoid synthesis in the oil palm. Therefore, the aim of this study is to provide some basic information on carotenoid synthesis in the oil palm mesocarp. In order to do so, we needed to firstly extract carotenoids from the oil palm mesocarp. A technique for extracting carotenoids from the oil palm mesocarp was optimised. Cold saponification was used to remove unwanted lipid materials from the crude carotenoid extract. Ultra violet-Visible (UV-Vis) spectrophotometry was utilized to compare the absorbance profiles of the carotenoid extracts of oil palm fruits at different stages of development i.e 15-20 weeks after anthesis (WAA). The results showed that in unripe oil palm fruit, carotenoids absorb strongly in the UV range while in ripe fruit the carotenoids absorb strongly in the visible range as more carotenoids are formed. Reverse phase high pressure liquid chromatography (RP-HPLC) coupled with a photo-diode array (PDA) detector was used in this study for characterizing the carotenoid profiles of

the saponified carotenoid extracts of the oil palm mesocarp at different stages of development. The saponified carotenoid extracts were separated on both C18 and C30 columns and the results of the HPLC separations showed that separation on the C30 column was better as it yielded more peaks in all the saponified carotenoid extracts. α -Carotene, β -carotene and their isomers were identified in all the saponified extracts. Lycopene was not detected in any of the saponified carotenoid extracts. Thus, it can be concluded that lycopene is not present in oil palm fruit. In order to understand carotenoid biosynthesis in oil palm mesocarp, the incorporation of various ^{14}C -labelled substrates into carotenoids in the mesocarp slices of 20-WAA oil palm fruits was carried out. Incorporation studies showed that isopentenyl pyrophosphate (IPP) is the main intermediate for carotenoid synthesis in oil palm fruits. Thin layer chromatography (TLC) was carried out to study the flow of the various radiolabelled substrates into the carotenoid fractions. The results of this study suggested that carotenoid synthesis in oil palm fruits follows the acetate/mevalonate pathway.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

**PROFIL KAROTENOID DAN KAJIAN PERMULAAN TERHADAP
BIOSINTESIS KAROTENOID DALAM MESOKARPA
POKOK SAWIT (*ELAEIS GUINEENSIS*)**

Oleh

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Buah sawit merupakan salah satu sumber yang kaya dengan karotenoid. Namun, tidak banyak yang diketahui tentang tapak jalan untuk sintesis karotenoid dalam buah sawit. Oleh itu, tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk memberikan maklumat asas berkenaan dengan sintesis karotenoid dalam mesokarpa pokok sawit. Untuk memenuhi tujuan ini, pengekstrakan karotenoid daripada mesokarpa buah sawit dijalankan terlebih dahulu. Satu teknik pengekstrakan karotenoid daripada mesokarpa buah sawit telah dioptimumkan. Saponifikasi sejuk telah dilakukan untuk menyingkir bahan lipid yang tidak dikehendaki daripada ekstrak mentah karotenoid. Spektrofotometri cahaya nampak-ultra lembayung (UV-Vis) telah digunakan untuk membandingkan profil penyerapan ekstrak karotenoid dalam buah sawit pada peringkat perkembangan buah yang berlainan iaitu 15 hingga 20 minggu selepas antesis (WAA). Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa karotenoid dalam buah belum masak menyerap lebih dalam lingkungan cahaya ultra lembayung sementara karotenoid dalam buah masak menyerap lebih dalam lingkungan cahaya nampak

disebabkan oleh pembentukan lebih banyak karotenoid. Kromatografi cecair bertekanan tinggi-fasa berbalik (RP-HPLC) dengan gandingan pengesan 'array' foto-diod (PDA) telah digunakan dalam kajian ini untuk mencirikan profil karotenoid dalam ekstrak karotenoid pada peringkat perkembangan berlainan yang telah disaponifikasikan. Pemisahan ekstrak karotenoid telah dijalankan dengan menggunakan kolum C18 dan C30. Hasil pemisahan menunjukkan bahawa kolum C30 adalah lebih baik kerana ia dapat memperolehi lebih banyak puncak dalam kesemua ekstrak karotenoid. Karotenoid yang telah dikenalpasti dalam kesemua ekstrak karotenoid adalah α -karotena, β -karotena serta isomernya. 'Lycopene' tidak dapat dikesan dalam kesemua ekstrak karotenoid. Oleh itu, dapat disimpulkan bahawa 'lycopene' tidak wujud dalam buah sawit. Bagi tujuan memahami biosintesis karotenoid dalam mesokarpa pokok sawit, pelbagai substrat yang dilabelkan dengan isotop ^{14}C telah dimasukkan ke dalam hirisan mesokarpa 20-WAA. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa isopentasil pirofosfat (IPP) merupakan bahan perantaraan utama bagi sintesis karotenoid dalam buah sawit. Teknik pemisahan kromatografi lapisan nipis (TLC) telah dilakukan ke atas kesemua ekstrak karotenoid 20-WAA yang telah dilabel dengan pelbagai substrat ^{14}C , untuk menentukan tapak jalan biosintesis karotenoid dalam buah sawit. Keputusan mencadangkan bahawa tapak jalan biosintesis karotenoid dalam buah sawit mengikut tapak jalan asetat/mevalonat.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my utmost sincere gratitude to my supervisory committee, Assoc. Prof Dr Ong King Kok, Dr. Ravigadevi Sambanthamurthi and Prof. Dr. Khor Hun Teik for their invaluable guidance, support, helpful comments and intellectual contributions throughout the project and in the preparation of this dissertation

I would also like to say many thanks to my colleagues, Emily and Andy and also to Dr. Ravi's supporting staff at MPOB for all their support and help. Also, a big thank you to both Mr Hong (Research Instruments) and Mr Ang (Jones Chromatography) for their advice and technical support

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the Malaysia-MIT Biotechnology Partnership Program (MMBPP) for providing financial support to the project and to the Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB) for providing a conducive lab environment to conduct my research, making this masters program possible for me.

My deepest love and gratitude is forwarded to my loving parents; Gurchan & Cecilia and my baby sister Jasmin, for their undying love, concern, endless support and encouragement. A special thanks goes out to my uncle Soo Khian and aunt Mary for their continual support and concern. Also, not forgetting my other half, Shiaw Kong, for keeping me sane and for reminding me to keep my perspectives on what is worthwhile in life and for his undeniable love and support. I love you sayang.

Sincere thanks to all my friends for their love, support, encouragement and concern and most importantly, for their friendships. Thank you for enriching my life.

Last but not least, I would like to thank God for spiritually sustaining me and guiding me throughout my study.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| $A_{446\text{nm}}$ | absorbance at 446nm |
| ABA | abscisic acid |
| acetyl-CoA | acetyl coenzyme A |
| APCI | atmospheric pressure chemical ionization |
| CI | chemical ionization |
| DE | diethyl ether |
| DMAPP | dimethylallyl pyrophosphate |
| EI | electron impact |
| ESI | electrospray ionization |
| FAB | fast atom bombardment |
| FPP | farnesyl pyrophosphate |
| G3P | glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate |
| GGPP | geranylgeranyl pyrophosphate |
| GPP | geranyl pyrophosphate |
| HMG-CoA | 3-hydroxy-3-methylglutaryl-CoA |
| HPLC | high pressure/performance liquid chromatography |
| IPP | isopentenyl pyrophosphate |
| KOH | potassium hydroxide |
| λ_{max} | lambda maxima |
| LCMS | liquid chromatography mass spectrophotometry |
| LYC | lycopene cyclase |
| M | Molar |
| mCi | milliCurie |
| MES | 2 - [N-Morpholino] ethanasulfonic acid |

| | |
|----------------|--|
| mmol | millimol |
| MVA | mevalonic acid |
| N ₂ | nitrogen |
| NMR | nuclear magnetic resonance |
| PDA | photo-diode array |
| PDS | phytoene desaturase |
| PE | petroleum ether |
| PHA | polyhydroxyalkanoate |
| PHB | polyhydroxybutyrate |
| PP | polypropylene |
| PPPP | prephytoene pyrophosphate |
| PSY | phytoene synthase |
| Py | pyruvate |
| RE | retinol equivalent (a unit to define vitamin A activity of β -carotene as retinol) |
| RT | retention time |
| rpm | resolution per minute |
| TLC | thin layer chromatography |
| 3D | three-dimensional |
| 2D | two-dimensional |
| μ Ci | microCurie |
| vol. | volume |
| WAA | weeks after anthesis |
| ZDS | zeta-desaturase synthase |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Elaeis guineensis, which originated from West and Central Africa, is an agricultural crop that is thriving in Malaysia. Today, palm oil derived from *Elaeis guineensis* is widely used for many commercial purposes. It is used in the making of food (e.g. chocolates & margarine), non-food products (e.g. soaps & cosmetics) and in the near future, as fuel for motor vehicles.

The use of palm oil can be traced back to Egypt during the reign of the Pharaohs. In the mid-15th century, the people of West Africa used the oil extensively for cooking. In South East Asia, oil palm was initially grown as an ornamental plant, but it was planted for commercial purposes when the palm oil export trade developed in the nineteenth century. The seedlings from this humble plant first arrived in South East Asia from West Africa in 1848. The Dutch shipped the seeds from Nigeria to their experimental gardens in Bogor, Java, Indonesia. From there, the oil palm was sent to the Botanical Gardens in Singapore in 1875, and subsequently brought to Malaya (as West Malaysia was then known) in 1878.

Elaeis guineensis is a perennial tree that flourishes in the humid tropics. It fruits all year long and is the highest oil-yielding crop. It produces an average of three to four tonnes of oil per hectare per year. When ripe, its fruits look like lush black berries (each 4-5 cm in length) crowded on short branches and are red at the base of each fruit bunch. The oil palm fruit bunches yield two types of oil: palm oil

and palm kernel oil. Palm oil is extracted from the mesocarp (pulp) of the fruit, which contains 45-55% oil. It is reddish-orange in colour due to its high carotene content ($> 42,000 \mu\text{g } \beta\text{-carotene equivalent/100 g fruit}$), while palm kernel oil is extracted from the kernel of the palm. It is pale yellow in colour.

The first commercial planting of the oil palm tree in Malaya took place in 1917. Today, Malaysia is the world's largest producer and exporter of palm oil. It has 3.4 million hectares of land dedicated to oil palm plantation. In 2000, Malaysia produced 10.8 million tonnes of crude palm oil, of which 90% was exported to more than 100 countries.

Significance of the study

Several studies have shown that carotenoids have an important role to play in the field of medicine, nutrition, agrochemistry and pharmaceuticals. This stems mainly from their antioxidant properties. Therefore, the high carotene content of palm oil adds to the beneficial aspects of the oil palm and the importance of these micronutrients in oil palm should not go unnoticed. Due to its health benefits to humankind, there is a need to further exploit the potential of these useful pigments with the increase in demand from consumers in the future.

The information obtained from this study will contribute towards future efforts in metabolic engineering of oil palm fruits to produce value-added products of commercial interests such as palm oil with high lycopene content or high polyhydroxybutyrate (PHBs) content. Studies have proven that lycopene has potent antioxidant properties which help prevent cancer in man, hence, palm oil high in

lycopene has potential in nutraceutical and pharmaceutical applications, while palm oil rich in PHBs would prove to be a great source for the production of biodegradable plastics.

Objectives of the study

The biosynthesis of carotenoids in plants has been studied since the early 1960s. However, not much effort has been put into studying its synthesis in the oil palm. Therefore in this study, experiments were conducted with the following objectives:

- (1) to optimise the extraction of carotenoids from the oil palm fruit
- (2) to characterise the carotenoid profiles in the oil palm fruits at different stages of development using TLC and HPLC techniques
- (3) to study the biosynthesis of carotenoids in oil palm fruits using various ^{14}C -labelled substrates