
Title

Transcriptional and structural analysis of non-specific lipid transfer proteins modulated by fungal endophytes in Antarctic plants under drought

Abstract

Lipid transfer proteins (LTPs) play crucial roles in various biological processes in plants, such as pollen tube adhesion, phospholipid transfer, cuticle synthesis, and response to abiotic stress. While a few members of the non-specific LTPs (nsLTPs) have been identified, their structural characteristics remain largely unexplored. Given the observed improvement in the performance of Antarctic plants facing water deficit when associated with fungal endophytes, this study aimed to assess the role of these symbiotic organisms in the transcriptional modulation of putative nsLTPs. The study focused on identifying and characterizing two nsLTP in the Antarctic plant *Colobanthus quitensis* that exhibit responsiveness to drought stress. Furthermore, we investigated the influence of Antarctic endophytic fungi on the expression profiles of these nsLTPs, as these fungi have been known to enhance plant physiological and biochemical performance under water deficit conditions. Through 3D modeling, docking, and molecular dynamics simulations with different substrates, the conducted structural and ligand-protein interaction analyses showed that differentially expressed nsLTPs displayed the ability to interact with various ligands, with a higher affinity towards palmitoyl-CoA. Overall, our findings suggest a regulatory mechanism for the expression of these two nsLTPs in *Colobanthus quitensis* under drought stress, further modulated by the presence of endophytic fungi. © 2024 Scandinavian Plant Physiology Society.

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