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Influence of level of feeding and stage of lactation on proteolytic activity in bovine milk

G.D. NICHOLAS1,2, C.G. PROSSER1, K. STELWAGEN1 AND T.R. MACKLE3

1Dairy Science Group, AgResearch, Ruakura Research Centre, Private Bag 3123, Hamilton, New Zealand.

ABSTRACT

Using a Latin square cross-over design, twelve sets of identical Friesian or Friesian x Jersey twin cows during spring (early lactation: 42 ± 3 d in milk), were assigned to both a high (5 kg DM/d of a barley-based concentrate in addition to ad lib. pasture), or low (restricted to 70% of their metabolic energy requirements) level of feeding, separated by periods of uniformity (ad lib. access to pasture). The trial was repeated in summer (mid lactation: 177 ± 3 d in milk). During spring, low feed reduced milk yield by up to 30%, and during summer, high feed increased milk yield by up to 26%. Proteolytic activity (plasmin + plasminogen-derived activity) was not significantly altered by high feed during either stage of lactation, however during spring, low feed increased activity by up to 33%. The significant interaction between level of nutrition and stage of lactation should be considered when planning management strategies to maximise milk quantity and quality.

Keywords: Plasmin; plasminogen; stage of lactation; nutrition; cows; milk.

INTRODUCTION

Plasmin (EC 3.4.21.7) is responsible for the majority of indigenous protease activity in bovine milk (Fox, 1992). It is present in milk together with its inactive zymogen, plasminogen. The conversion of plasminogen in milk is modulated by plasminogen activators (tissue-type plasminogen activator and urokinase-type plasminogen activator), and plasminogen activator inhibitor-1 (Heegard et al., 1994). Plasmin, plasminogen, and plasminogen activators are heat stable, so both plasmin activity and plasminogen activation continue during storage (Richardson, 1983). Reduced viscosity, bitter peptides, and poor cheese quality are all attributed to the proteolytic action of plasmin on casein in milk (Fox, 1992). In addition, contaminants from casein degradation in the whey may impede optimal use of this milk fraction.

Various genetic and environmental factors affect the level of plasmin activity in milk (Politis et al., 1989b). Peak plasmin levels are observed during late lactation, possibly associated with the process of involution (Richardson and Pearce, 1981; Korycka-Dahl et al., 1983; Politis et al., 1989a). While nutrition is known to affect milk yield and composition (Rook and Thomas, 1983), the influence of plane of nutrition on proteolytic levels has only been investigated during late lactation (Prosser et al., 1995).

In New Zealand there is increasing emphasis on the importance of adequate nutrition to maximise milk protein production. The objective of the present study was to investigate the effect of level of feeding on proteolytic activity in milk, during early (spring) and mid (summer) lactation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Cow Management and Trial Design

Twelve sets of multiparous, monozygotic, Friesian or Friesian x Jersey twin cows were used in a Latin square cross-over design (Figure 1). Uniformity periods were included before each nutritional challenge to minimise carry-over effects. Prior to the experiment, in addition to ad libitum pasture all cows were fed approximately 1 kg of a barley-based concentrate per d, for a period of 14 d, in order to increase their acceptance of the concentrate. In spring (early lactation: 42 ± 3 d in milk) all cows were grazed together with ad libitum access to pasture for 7 d (spring uniform [U] 1). Following this period of uniformity, one member from each twin set was assigned to the high feed challenge for 14 d (twin group 1; spring C1) while the other twin was assigned to a low feed challenge (twin group 2; spring C1). Cows on the high feed challenge were fed increasing amounts of concentrate, so that by d 7 of this period they were receiving approximately 5 kg/d concentrate in addition to ad libitum pasture. Cows on the low feed challenge were restricted on pasture to 70% of their metabolic energy requirements. A second period of uniformity followed for 21 d, during which all cows were grazing the same paddock on an ad libitum basis (spring U2). Following the second period of uniformity, the nutritional challenges were reversed for 14 d (spring C2). The trial was repeated in summer (mid lactation: 177 ± 3 d in milk) with the same trial design, except, the twin initially assigned to the high feed challenge in spring received the low feed challenge first in summer, and, the second period of uniformity was 14 d.

In two animals a minor pathogen was detected in one quarter of the udder, this was accompanied by low to medium somatic cell counts (- 550,000 cells/ml). In one
Enzyme Analysis

Sample Collection

Milk yield was recorded and milk samples collected on two mornings at the end of each period and analysed for proteolytic activity (plasmin + plasminogen-derived activity). Immediately following milking an aliquot of fresh milk was centrifuged at 490 g for 15 min and the cream fraction discarded. Skim milk was incubated with 50 mM e-amino-n-caproic acid (EACA; A2504, Sigma Chemical Co., St. Louis, MO), for 120 min at room temperature (25°C) to dissociate plasmin and plasminogen from casein micelles. Treated skim milk was then centrifuged at 100,000 g for 60 min at 4°C and the milk serum fraction was stored at -20°C until analysis.

Enzyme Analysis

Plasmin and plasminogen-derived activities were determined in milk serum by the method of Korycka-Dahl et al. (1983) as modified by Stelwagen et al. (1994). Briefly, each well of a 96 well microtiter plate contained 10 µl of milk serum, 125 µl of 50 mM Tris buffer (pH 7.4 containing 110 mM NaCl, 2.5 mM EACA), 25 µl chromagen (6 mM H-D-valyl-L-leucyl-L-lysine-p-nitroanilide dihydrochloride; V7127, Sigma Chemical Co., St. Louis, MO), 25 µl of 0.26 Sigma units/ml human urine urokinase (U8627, Sigma Chemical Co., St. Louis, MO) and deionised water to a total volume of 250 µl, to measure total plasmin + plasminogen-derived activity. The reaction mixture was incubated for 60 min at 37°C to allow the conversion of plasminogen to plasmin. Formation of p-nitroanilide during cleavage of the substrate by plasmin (at 37°C) was measured by absorbance at 405 nm at 30 min intervals for up to 6 hours. The rate of p-nitroanilide formation was computed from the linear part of the absorbance versus time curves (between 2 to 6 h). A similar reaction mixture, without milk serum was used as a control for the spontaneous hydrolysis of H-D-valyl-L-leucyl-L-lysine-p-nitroanilide dihydrochloride.

Statistical analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using SAS® (Release 6.10, 1994, Cary, NC, USA). Main effects and interactions were analysed using the PROC MIXED procedure. Results are expressed as proteolytic activity (plasmin + plasminogen-derived activity), in units/ml. One unit of activity is defined as the amount of the enzyme that produces a change in absorbance of 0.001 in 1 min at 37°C and 405 nm.

RESULTS

The effects of stage of lactation and level of feeding on milk yield are presented in Table 1. The results from the twins have not been pooled as there was a significant influence (P<0.01) of the sequence of nutritional challenge on milk yield. This meant that milk yields for the twin groups were significantly different during the spring U2 period. In spring, there was a significant decrease in milk yield of 30% and 15% when cows were placed on low feed (compared to the preceding uniform period) during the first challenge (C1, twin group 2), or second challenge (C2, twin group 1) respectively. During the first challenge in spring, high feed did not significantly alter milk yield of twin group 1, but at the second challenge, milk yield increased 9% in twin group 2. During summer, low feed had no significant effect on milk yield, while high feed increased yield by 26% and 11% at the first (C1, twin group 2) and second (C2, twin group 1) challenges respectively.

There was a significant effect of stage of lactation on proteolytic activity in milk (P<0.01), with activity (units/ml) increasing with advancing lactation (spring U1: 47; spring U2: 56; summer U1: 61; summer U2: 68; pooled SEM ± 4; twin group data pooled, n = 24). The effects of

| Table 1: Effect of level of feeding and stage of lactation on milk yield. Values represent milk yield (kg/d) least squares mean (LSM), pooled SEM ±1.0, of 12 animals. |
|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| U1 | C1 | U2 | C2 |
| Spring (early lactation) | | | | |
| Twin group 1 | 23 | high | 22 | 21<sup>a</sup> | low | 17<sup>b</sup> |
| Twin group 2 | 23<sup>a</sup> | low | 16<sup>b</sup> | 18<sup>a</sup> | high | 20<sup>b</sup> |
| Summer (mid lactation) | | | | |
| Twin group 1 | 12 | low | 12<sup>a</sup> | 14<sup>a</sup> | high | 15<sup>b</sup> |
| Twin group 2 | 12<sup>a</sup> | high | 15<sup>b</sup> | 14 | low | 13<sup>b</sup> |

U-uniform (ad lib. pasture). C-challenge: high-5kg DM/d concentrate in addition to ad lib. pasture; low-restricted on pasture to 70% of daily metabolic energy requirements.

<sup>a</sup><sup>b</sup>LSM with different superscripts within a period between twin groups are different P<0.005.

<sup>a</sup><sup>b</sup>Different superscripts indicate differences in LSM between the level of feed challenge and the preceding period of uniformity within a twin group P<0.05.
TABLE 2: Effect of level of feeding and stage of lactation on proteolytic activity in milk. Values represent proteolytic activity (units/ml) least squares mean (LSM), pooled SEM ± 5, of 12 animals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>U1</th>
<th>C1</th>
<th>U2</th>
<th>C2</th>
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<tr>
<td>Spring (early lactation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Twin group 1</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>53</td>
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<td>Twin group 2</td>
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<td>Summer (mid lactation)</td>
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<td>Twin group 1</td>
<td>61</td>
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<tr>
<td>Twin group 2</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>68</td>
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U-uniform (ad lib. pasture), C-challenge: high-5kg DM/d concentrate in addition to ad lib. pasture; low-restricted on pasture to 70% of daily metabolic energy requirements.

A major influence on plasmin activity in milk is the stage of lactation: elevated plasmin activity has been associated with the gradual process of involution during late lactation (Politis et al., 1989a; Politis et al., 1989b). In agreement with these studies, proteolytic activity in the present study increased with advancing lactation.

The influence of level of feeding on proteolytic activity was less consistent. Prosser et al. (1995) observed a significant increase in plasmin activity, but no significant effect on plasminogen activity in cows in which dry matter intake was restricted during late lactation. In the present study total proteolytic activity increased by 33% in the twin group fed low feed as the first challenge in spring and, while the level was also raised due to feed restriction in the second challenge, the increase was not significant. In contrast to feed restriction, a high feeding level, during either stage of lactation, did not significantly alter proteolytic activity in milk, therefore, suggesting that the activity of plasmin and plasminogen in freshly secreted milk can not be manipulated by high feed. However the effect of feed intake on the activators which modulate the conversion of plasminogen to the active enzyme are not known. These activators are relatively heat stable, allowing plasmin activity to increase during storage (Richardson, 1983). Therefore, the possibility that high feed may still be used to maximise milk protein quality in stored dairy products by manipulation of one or more remaining components of the plasmin-plasminogen system can not yet be disregarded.

A further finding from this study was that the increase in proteolytic activity due to feed restriction or an advanced stage of lactation, was associated with a reduced milk yield. This may arise from a greater influx of plasminogen, a blood-derived protein, into milk, similar to changes in albumin observed in the milk of cows on restricted pasture intake (Gray and Mackenzie, 1987), or from the concentrating effect of low milk yield on plasminogen. However, in the converse, where milk yield was increased by feed supplementation, plasminogen in milk was unchanged suggesting the level of plasminogen derived protease activity in milk is not simply inversely related to milk yield.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the staff of the Dairying Research Corporation for care of the animals. G. Nicholas is a recipient of an Agricultural and Marketing Research and Development Trust post-graduate scholarship. This work was supported by the Foundation for Research in Science and Technology.

REFERENCES


