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Amanda J White
amanda.white.3@louisville.edu

Susana Perez-Martinez
University of Louisville, susana.almaguermartinez@louisville.edu

Mark P. Running
University of Louisville, mark.running@louisville.edu

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The Effects of PPAL-1 in Arabidopsis Gamete Development

Amanda White¹, Susana Perez-Martinez¹, Mark Running¹
¹The University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, USA

ABSTRACT

Prenylation is a type of post-translational modification in which a 15- or 20-carbon lipid is added to the carboxyl (C) terminus of the protein. Arabidopsis thaliana contains the PROTEIN PRENYLTRANSFERASE ALPHA SUBUNIT-LIKE (PPAL) gene, which encodes a protein with homology to the α-subunits of the three known prenylation enzymes, PFT, PGGT, and Rab-GGT. We previously identified two mutations in PPAL, one of which is ppal-1, which contains a T-DNA insertion in the fourth intron. We have previously observed that self-fertilizing heterozygous ppal-1 plants produce progeny in which homozygous ppal-1 is underrepresented. This project attempts to ascertain possible affects of ppal-1 in gametophyte growth and development that might cause this underrepresented homozygous ppal-1 population.

Crosses were performed between homozygous ppal-1 and wild-type (WT) plants. Both F₀ and F₁ generations were genotyped. The results indicated that there was WT contamination of the ppal-1 F₀ population. The data also indicated the ppal-1 primers were nonfunctional. Additionally, a pollen germination test was performed for both ppal-1 and WT plants. The results indicated that ppal-1 pollen had developmental delays for germination, but upon germination, they could form pollen tubes of equal length to the WT pollen. However, due to the likely WT contamination in the ppal-1 population used, these experiments must be replicated in further studies.

KEYWORDS: Arabidopsis, pollen, ovules, prenylation, genetics

INTRODUCTION

Most proteins undergo post-translational modification, which impacts their function. One important type of post-translational modification is prenylation: the addition of a 15- or 20-carbon lipid to the carboxyl (C) terminus of the protein. As this process adds a hydrophobic moiety to the protein, it facilitates membrane association and protein-protein interactions [1].

Protein prenylation is a conserved process in all eukaryotes [1,2]. This process involves the addition of a single 15-carbon farnesyl or the addition of a single or double 20-carbon geranylgeranyl moieties to either one or two Cysteines near the C-terminus of the target protein. The three known heterodimeric proteins that perform prenylation are: farnesyltransferase (PFT), geranylgeranyltransferase (PGGT), and Rab geranylgeranyltransferase (Rab-GGT). PFT and PGGT have the same α-subunit, and different, but related, β-subunits that determine their respective substrate specificities. Both PFT and PGGT recognize a C-terminal CaaX box, in which C is the prenylated Cysteine; a is usually an aliphatic amino acid, meaning that it is nonpolar and non-aromatic; and X varies for each enzyme. For PFT, X is usually alanine, cysteine, glutamine, methionine, or serine. For PGGT, X is almost always leucine. Rab-GGT also consists of an α and a β subunit, which are distantly related to their PFT/PGGT counterparts. Additionally, Rab-GGT requires Rab escort protein (REP) to function properly. Rab-GGT can also perform prenylation on a wider variety of C-terminal target sequences, such as CC, CXC, CCX, CCXX, CCXXX, and CXX [1,3]. It is also worth noting that in Arabidopsis, there is only one copy of the α and β subunits of PFT and PGGT, but there are two putative Rab-GGT α and β subunits in the genome, along with a REP homolog [4,5,6].

The target proteins affected by PFT, PGGT, and Rab-GGT are diverse. PFT and PGGT prenylate a wide variety of signaling proteins, such as members of the Ras superfamily of small GTPases, protein kinases, and heterotrimeric G protein γ subunits. Ras mutations have been implicated in about a third of human cancers, particularly overactivation, and therefore, chemotherapies may be developed by inhibiting PFT [7]. Mammalian and yeast Rab-GGT prenylate Rab-GTPases, which are involved in organelle biosynthesis and vesicle transport. Rab-GGT mutations have also been implicated in several
human diseases [8]. Rab-GGT has not been as well-characterized in plants as in mammals and yeast; however, recent evidence from our lab suggests that Arabidopsis Rab-GGT has broader substrate specificity and can prenylate select non-Rab small GTPases [9].

Mutations in the three prenylation enzymes have shown the importance of this process in plant growth and development. For example, mutations in the PFT β subunit in Arabidopsis, called ENHANCED RESPONSE TO ABRISCIC ACID1 (ER1), cause an increased sensitivity to abscisic acid [10]. These er1 mutants also have a variety of developmental defects including increased size of shoot meristems, wider floral meristems, and extra organs, especially sepals and petals [11]. Interestingly, PGT β subunit (GGB) mutations do not cause developmental defects [12]. Mutations in the common Arabidopsis PFT/PGGT α subunit (PLURIPETALA or PLP) cause extreme developmental traits, including large shoot meristems, extra floral organs, and stem fasciation [11]. Rab-GGT β subunit 1 (RGTB1) mutants have shown many interesting phenotypes including extreme branching, smaller, epinastic leaves, infertility, and shoot gravitropic defects [6]. In Arabidopsis, Rab-GGT β subunit 2 (RGTB2) and RGTB1 mutations have been shown to affect cells involved in intense vesicle transport, such as pollen tubes and root hairs [13]. No mutations have been reported in either α subunit, RGTAl and RGTA2.

Recently, the Running lab has discovered a previously uncharacterized protein called PROTEIN PRENYLTRANSFERASE ALPHA SUBUNIT-LIKE (PPAL), which is related in amino acid sequence to the α subunit of PFT/PGGT and the α subunits of Rab-GGT [14]. PPAL is thought to play a role in plp viability. However, the function of PPAL remains relatively unknown.

Preliminary research in the Running lab with two Arabidopsis ppal mutant alleles has shown that it plays a role in sugar metabolism. ppal-1 contains a T-DNA insertion in the fourth intron and appears to be a partial loss of function allele. When grown with sugar, it hyperaccumulates that sugar to the point of death. Even when grown without an external sugar source, ppal-1 over-accumulates internally made sugars. This sugar hyperaccumulation could potentially have implications as a bioethanol source because plants used for bioethanol would ideally have a relatively large cellular sugar concentration [15]. Although ppal-1 develops slower than WT, it is still able to grow as tall as WT. In contrast, ppal-2 contains a T-DNA insertion in the third exon and appears to be a complete knockout (KO). This mutation results in a small plant with very slow growth, and nearly completely male infertility.

The potential of ppal-1 as a bioethanol source has interested the Running lab in further studying this mutation. However, it has been difficult to identify homozygous ppal-1 Arabidopsis mutants from self-fertilizing heterozygous plants. This project is specifically interested in the cause of why homozygous ppal-1 Arabidopsis plants are underrepresented in progeny of heterozygous plants.

The homozygous ppal-1 progeny of self-fertilizing heterozygous plants is lower in frequency than expected. Interestingly, when homozygous ppal-1 plants are created, they produce seeds at a normal rate. This indicates a possible competition between the WT and mutant gametophytes during the reproductive and/or developmental process, in which the WT gametophytes are more successful than the ppal-1 gametophytes.

Plant gametophytes are haploid, meaning they only have one copy of their genes. Whereas the heterozygous diploid plant cells have a copy of both WT and ppal-1, the haploid gametophytes only have a single copy of either the WT PPAL allele or the ppal-1 allele. Gametophytes are also multicellular; the male gametophyte of Arabidopsis thaliana has three cells, and the female gametophyte has seven cells. The seven cells of the female gametophyte include: the homo-diploid central cell nucleus, the egg cell, two synergid cells, and three antipodal cells. The three cells of the male gametophyte include: the vegetative cell and two generative (sperm) cells [16].

I hypothesize that the difficulty in producing homozygous ppal-1 Arabidopsis thaliana comes from a defect in male or female gametophytes, or both. Specifically, these defects could be the inability of the ppal-1 male gametophyte (pollen) to germinate as well, grow as fast, and/or fertilize as well as a WT gamete, and/or defects in the development or receptivity of the female gametophyte (embryo sac). Our reasoning is that, in heterozygous plants that self-fertilize, ppal-1 gametophytes are outcompeted by WT gametophytes, resulting in an underrepresentation of the ppal-1 allele in diploid progeny. A second possibility, that early embryo development is severely affected in ppal-1, will also be examined.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Arabidopsis Growth Conditions

All Arabidopsis plants, whether ppal-1 or WT, were planted in the same manner. Sungro Horticulture Propagation Mix soil was de-clumped and used to fill 3x4 inch pots. A tray was filled with 3 rows of 6 pots. 3 L of 0.265% Gnatrol (w/v), a solution of Bacillus thuringiensis which make the natural larvicide bacillus toxin, was
added to the tray to control fungus gnat larvae. These sat overnight to promote absorption of the solution. Four seeds per pot were placed on top of the moist soil, one per corner. The trays were then incubated at 4°C for six days.

On the sixth day, trays were transferred to an environmental chamber at 23.0°C, with a relative humidity of 50%. Plants grew until the ages specified in the subsequent experiments.

Crosses

*Arabidopsis* in the F₀ generation were grown until flowers appeared (approximately 3 weeks). Plants considered for crossing were genotyped as described in the Genotyping *Arabidopsis* section. Two groups of crosses were generated: *ppal-1* ovules with WT pollen (ppal-*1* x WT) and WT ovules with *ppal-1* pollen (WT x *ppal-1*). For each cross, an unopened flower was chosen, as flowers at this stage are likely to have not yet released pollen. The flower was opened and inspected to ensure the stamens were a green color – an indication that pollen had not been released yet. These stamens were then removed. The flower was allowed to continue growth for 24 hours. After 24 hours, the pistil was inspected to ensure it had stigma that would be receptive the pollen from the cross. Pollen

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reagent</th>
<th>Concentration</th>
<th>Amount (µL)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sterile H₂O</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>17.375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex taq buffer</td>
<td>10X</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dNTPs</td>
<td>2.5 mM</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-Primer</td>
<td>10 µM</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-Primer</td>
<td>10 µM</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNA</td>
<td>&gt;10 ng/µL</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taq DNA Polymerase</td>
<td>5000 U/mL</td>
<td>0.125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1. PCR Reagents.* Table 1 shows the list of reagents used for PCR amplification per sample of DNA. For a greater number of samples for PCR, the amount of each reagent was multiplied by the number of samples used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primer</th>
<th>Sequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RP</td>
<td>5’-ACTATCGGCTACATGAAGCCC-3’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LP</td>
<td>5’-TGTATTTCCCGAGAGTGACGTC-3’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LBal</td>
<td>5’TGGTTCACGTAGTGCGCCATCG-3’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2. PCR Primers.* Table 2 shows the list of primers used for PCR. RP was the R-primer common to both WT and *ppal-1*, LP was the F-primer for WT, and LBal was the F-primer for *ppal-1*.

*Figure 1. PCR Primers.* Figure 1 shows the program settings for PCR. Stage 1 ran at 95.0°C for 30 seconds. Stage 2 included the denaturation, annealing, and extension steps, each with their own temperatures and time periods. Stage 3 ran at 68°C for 5 minutes. Stage 4 let the finished product sit at 4.0°C until the products were taken out of the machine.
from the opposite plant type (WT pollen for a ppal-1 ovule or ppal-1 pollen for a WT ovule) was dusted onto the exposed pistil. This flower was then marked with a thread. A cross was considered successful if the ovule formed a seed pod, marked with the thread. The seeds were collected when the pods were completely ripe (brown). These seeds represent the F1 generation. They were planted as described in the Arabidopsis Growth Conditions section. They were genotyped as described in the Genotyping Arabidopsis section.

Genotyping Arabidopsis

DNA Extraction

10 mL of DNA extraction solution was prepared with 2 mL of 1 M Tris-HCl (pH 7.5), 0.5 mL of 5 M sodium chloride, 0.5 mL of EDTA (pH 8.0), 0.5 mL of 10% SDS, and 6.5 mL of deionized water. Leaf tissues from three-week-old plants were collected in individual sterile Eppendorf tubes. The tissues were ground to a paste with a small plastic pestle in the Eppendorf tubes. 400 µL of extraction solution was added and the tubes were vortexed for 5 minutes at 14000 rpm. 300 µL of the supernatant was transferred to a new microcentrifuge tube. 300 µL of isopropanol was added to the supernatant and the tubes were gently inverted a few times to allow thorough mixing. The tubes were incubated for 2 minutes at room temperature, and then centrifuged at 14000 rpm for 10 minutes at room temperature. The supernatant was removed with long-tipped pipettes without disturbing the pellets. 400 µL of 70% ethanol was added to the tubes without disturbing the pellets. The ethanol was quickly removed with long-tipped pipettes to remove salts from the pellets. The pellets were allowed to dry and 50 µL of sterile DI water was added to the tubes to dissolve the pellet. The tubes were heated at 95°C for 3 minutes to destroy any remaining DNases or kill any remaining microorganisms that could harm/degrade the extracted DNA. A Nanodrop was used to judge the quality and concentration of the extracted DNA, as a minimum of 10 ng/µL were needed for PCR, and a 260/280 value of about 2.00 showed a decent DNA peak.

Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR)

Samples for PCR were prepared using the reagents described in Table 1. Table 1 shows the reagents necessary for 1 sample of DNA. For more than one sample, the amount of reagent used was multiplied by the number of samples present. For both WT and ppal-1 DNA amplification, the R-primer, RP, was the same. However, the F-primers differed for WT and ppal-1. The F-primer for wild type was LP, whereas the F-primer for ppal-1 was LBal. All three primers are shown in Table 2.

Samples were then run in the PCR machine using the program shown in Figure 1. Briefly, Stage 1 of the cycle occurred at 95.0°C for 30 seconds and occurred only once. Stage 2 cycled through three steps, and cycled 30 times. Step 1, the denaturation step, ran at 95.0°C for 30 seconds. Step 2, the annealing step, ran at 58.0°C for 35 seconds. Step 3, the extension step, ran at 68.0°C for 1 minute and 30 seconds. Stage 3 of the cycle occurred at 68.0°C for 5 minutes. Stage 4 ran until the samples were taken out of the PCR machine, and it kept the samples at 4.0°C. After the cycle was run, the DNA samples were transferred to a -20°C freezer until they were needed further.

Gel Electrophoresis

To check the results of PCR, gel electrophoresis through 1.2% agarose was performed (0.6 g of agarose was mixed with about 50 mL of 0.5X TBE). This mixture was heated in a microwave for 1 minute and 30 seconds. 1 drop of ethidium bromide was added. The solution was poured into a sealed gel holder, and a 14-well comb was added. The solution hardened for 30 minutes away from light. While the gel hardened, the DNA samples were prepared. 2 µL of 6X bromophenol blue dye was added to 3 µL of each DNA sample in PCR tubes. Once the gel solidified, the wells were loaded with each DNA sample. The ladder used was the 100 base pairs (bp) ladder. Gels were run for 30 minutes at 75 V, and then observed under a UV lamp.

In Vitro Pollen Germination Test

The pollen germination test was adapted from [17] and performed on both ppal-1 and WT. Briefly, an agar medium for the pollen germination test was made with 18% sucrose (w/v), 0.01% boric acid (w/v), 1 mM MgSO4, 1 mM CaCl2, 1 mM Ca(NO3)2, and 0.5% agar (w/v), pH 7.0. The agar medium was autoclaved, allowed to cool, and transferred into 10 sterile petri dishes, 5 for each plant type. Pollen from 25 open flowers was transferred onto the medium of each plate, totaling 125 flowers for the 5 ppal-1 plates and 125 flowers for the 5 WT plates. The plates were then incubated for 24 hours at room temperature. After incubation, pollen was transferred from the plate to a microscope slide to examine under a Nikon Eclipse TE200 compound microscope. Pictures of 40 ppal-1 pollen tubules and 42 WT tubules were taken with the digital camera. Germinated and non-germinated pollen of both ppal-1 and WT was counted to find the percent germination for each plant type. A chi-square test was performed on the percent germination data to determine statistical significance. Additionally, the length of the tubules of both ppal-1 and WT germinated pollen was recorded. A two-sample t-test was performed on the tubule length data to test for statistical significance.

Ovule Staining and Microscopy

Ovule staining was done as described [18]. The only modification was the dissection step. Carpels were removed from various life stages of unopened flowers and
mounted into immersion oil on a new microscope slide. However, this is an ongoing process, and the data have not yet been recorded.

RESULTS

Genotyping the Crosses

Gel of WT Primers on $F_0$ and $F_1$ Generations

![Figure 2. Gel of WT Primers on $F_0$ and $F_1$ Generations.](image)

Figure 2 shows the gel of the DNA that was amplified using WT primers in the $F_0$ and $F_1$ generations. Lanes 1, 14, 15, and 24 were the 100 bp ladders. Lanes 2 and 3 were the 2 WT DNA samples from the $F_0$ generation. Lanes 4-13 and 16-23 were the DNA samples from the $F_1$ plants.

DNA extraction was done for 2 WT plants in the $F_0$ generation and 18 plants in the $F_1$ generation. PCR amplification was run with WT primers, and gel electrophoresis was performed on these PCR products. The rationale for genotyping is as follows. Because of the large T-DNA insert in the $ppal-1$ allele, WT genomic primers that are on either side of the insertion will not amplify the $ppal-1$ allele, since our extension time is limited. Meanwhile, $ppal-1$ primers, one of which corresponds to the sequence of the inserted T-DNA, will not amplify a WT allele, since the T-DNA insertion does not exist in WT. Both sets of primers would be expected to amplify DNA in a plant heterozygous for $ppal-1$, since one chromosome has the T-DNA insert, and the other does not.

Figure 2 shows the gel from this WT PCR amplification. Lanes 1, 14, 15, and 24 all had the 100 bp ladder. Lanes 2 and 3 included the WT samples from the $F_0$ plants. Lanes 4-9 included DNA from the $ppal-1$ x WT $F_1$ plants. Lanes 10-13 and 17-23 included DNA from the WT x $ppal-1$ $F_1$ plants. Every sample, except for those in lanes 3, 11, and 17 showed a band around 1500 bps, corresponding to the wild type $PPAL$ gene amplicon.

Gel of $ppal-1$ Primers on $F_0$ and $F_1$ Generations

![Figure 3. Gel of $ppal-1$ Primers on $F_0$ and $F_1$ Generations.](image)

Figure 3 shows the gel of the DNA that was amplified using $ppal-1$ primers in the $F_0$ and $F_1$ generations. Lanes 1, 14, 15, and 28 were the 100 bp ladders. Lanes 2-6 and 16-19 all contained the $ppal-1$ DNA samples from the $F_0$ generation. Lanes 7-13 and 20-27 all contained the DNA samples from the $F_1$ plants.

DNA extraction was done for 9 $ppal-1$ plants in the $F_0$ generation and 15 plants in the $F_1$ generation. PCR amplification was run with $ppal-1$ primers, and gel electrophoresis was performed on these PCR products. Figure 3 shows the gel from this $ppal-1$ PCR amplification. Lanes 1, 14, 15, and 28 all had the 100 bp ladder. Lanes 2-6 and 16-19 included the $ppal-1$ DNA samples from the $F_0$ plants. Lanes 7-12 included DNA from $ppal-1$ x WT $F_1$ plants. Lanes 13, and 20-27 included DNA from WT x $ppal-1$ $F_1$ plants. No sample showed any bands within the gel.

Gel for Troubleshooting $ppal-1$ PCR

DNA extracted from 1 WT $F_0$ plant and 3 $ppal-1$ $F_0$ plants were PCR amplified using WT primers. Additionally, DNA extracted from 2 $ppal-1$ $F_0$ plants and 2 $F_1$ plants were PCR amplified using $ppal-1$ primers. Two different working primers (working primer 1 and working primer 2) of LBal were used to amplify these 4 DNA samples, resulting in 8 PCR products. Figure 4 shows the gel from these PCR products. Lanes 1 and 14 contained the 100 bp ladder. Lanes 2-5 were all amplified with WT primers. Lane 2 was a DNA sample from a WT $F_0$ plant. Lanes 3-5 were all DNA samples from $ppal-1$ $F_0$ plants. Lanes 6-13 were all amplified with $ppal-1$ primers. However,
lanes 6-9 were amplified with working primer 1 and lanes 10-13 were amplified with working primer 2. Lanes 6, 7, 10, and 11 were all DNA samples from the *ppal*-1 F₀ plants. Lanes 8 and 12 used a *ppal*-1 x WT sample. Lanes 9 and 13 used a WT x *ppal*-1 sample. Lanes 2, 4, and 5 all had bands at about 1500 bps.

**In Vitro Pollen Germination Test**

Table 3 summarizes the results of the pollen germination test. In order to calculate the percent germination, 239 *ppal*-1 pollen samples and 253 WT pollen samples were counted. Of the 239 *ppal*-1 samples, 10 germinated, which gave a 4.18% pollen germination rate. Of the 253 WT samples, 25 germinated, which gave a 9.88% germination rate. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between percent pollen germination and *ppal*-1/WT. The relation between these variables was significant $X^2(1, N=492) = 6.04, p = .014$.

Average tubule length (μm) of 40 *ppal*-1 pollen samples ($M=31.05, SD=40.28$) was compared to the average tubule length (μm) of 42 WT pollen samples ($M=51.11, SD=100.95$), and was found to be not significant $t(80) = -1.156, p = .251$. However, the data for *ppal*-1 pollen included two outliers, and the data for WT pollen included three outliers, where outliers were defined as having a Z-value with an absolute value of greater than 2.5. When these outliers were removed from the data analysis, average tubule length (μm) of the *ppal*-1 samples ($M=22.71, SD=13.15$) were again compared to the average tubule length (μm) of the WT samples ($M=24.44, SD=15.26$), and was again found to be not significant $t(75) = -0.528, p = 0.599$. Figure 5 shows the tubules of the germinated *ppal*-1 pollen. Figure 6 shows the tubules of the germinated WT pollen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>*Percent Germinated</th>
<th>Average tubule length (μm)</th>
<th>Average tubule length (μm)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(outliers included)</td>
<td>(outliers included)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ppal</em>-1</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>31.05±40.28</td>
<td>22.71±13.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WT</td>
<td>9.88</td>
<td>51.11±100.95</td>
<td>24.44±15.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 4. Gel for Troubleshooting *ppal*-1 PCR.** Figure 4 shows the gel for troubleshooting the *ppal*-1 PCR. Lanes 1 and 14 included the 100 bp ladder. Lane 2 included the WT DNA sample from the F₀ generation that was amplified with WT primers. Lanes 3-5 included the *ppal*-1 DNA samples from the F₀ generation that were amplified with WT primers. Lanes 6-9 were amplified with *ppal*-1 primers, including working LBal primer 1. Lanes 10 -13 were amplified with *ppal*-1 primers, including working LBal primer 2. Lanes 6, 7, 10, and 11 were *ppal*-1 DNA samples from F₀ plants. Lanes 8 and 12 used a *ppal*-1 x WT sample. Lanes 9 and 13 used a WT x *ppal*-1 sample.

**Table 3. Pollination Germination Test Summary.** Table 3 shows the summary of the pollen germination test. Whereas the percent germination difference between *ppal*-1 and WT were statistically significant, the average tubule length was not, regardless of the inclusion of outliers.

*Statistically significant

**Figure 5. *ppal*-1 Pollen Tubules.** Figure 5 shows the tubules of germinated *ppal*-1 pollen. a-d have a scale of 50 μm, while d-f have a scale of 25 μm. a-c show pollen that generated longer tubules, whereas e-h show pollen that generated shorter tubules.
DISCUSSION

Developing Crosses

Genotyping of the crosses revealed that nearly all contained WT DNA. Using WT F₀ DNA as a control, the WT ppal gene was shown to occur at 1500 bp. Nearly all of these crosses had this same band in their lanes, which indicated that they had at least one WT ppal allele within their genome. However, the WT F₀ control in Lane 3, as well as the WT x ppal-1 DNA in lanes 11 and 17 did not show a band around 1500 bp. This was likely due to some sort of issue in the PCR process.

While genotyping the crosses showed WT DNA, there were no conclusive results regarding ppal-1 DNA. As seen in the gel of DNA amplified with ppal-1 primers, there were no bands in either the F₀ controls or in any of the F₁ generation. This had two probable causes which were further tested: WT contamination or expired ppal-1 primers. Both causes were tested in the troubleshooting gel. This gel showed the PCR products of three different sets of primers.

WT contamination was tested by amplifying 1 WT F₀ plant and 3 ppal-1 F₀ plants with WT primers. Lanes 2-5 included these PCR products. Lane 2 was the WT DNA from the F₀ generation that showed a band in Lane 2 of the WT gel. It was used as a control because it had already been shown to have a band around 1500 bp, indicating WT DNA. Lanes 3-5 included ppal-1 DNA from the F₀ plants. Lanes 4 and 5 showed bands at 1500 bp when amplified with the WT primers, which indicated that these plants were WT contaminants rather than being purely ppal-1. However, lane 3 did not have a band at 1500 bp, which indicated that this F₀ plant was not a WT contaminant. As only 4 F₀ plants were tested, it was not conclusive as to how many of the entire F₀ plant population were WT contaminants. Additionally, it had been shown that not all of these F₀ plants were WT, so it was likely that even though there were contaminants, there were still enough ppal-1 plants that data could be analyzed.

Additionally, ppal-1 primer functionality was tested by using two different sets of premade working primers (working primers 1 and 2). Each working primer was used to amplify the DNA of two ppal-1 F₀ plants, 1 ppal-1 x WT F₁ plant, and 1 WT x ppal-1 F₁ plant. Lanes 6-9 showed these four PCR products for working primer 1, and lanes 10-13 showed these four PCR products for working primer 2. As can be seen, none of these lanes showed any bands. This could have been caused by WT contamination, as had previously been shown, or it could still have been caused by expired primers. Interestingly, Lane 3, 6, and 10 used the same ppal-1 F₀ sample, and yet it did not show a band for either WT or ppal-1 primers. This ppal-1 sample was unlikely to be a WT contaminant, as previously explained. Therefore, the cause of these missing bands was likely due to primer nonviability.

Overall, this indicated that not only were there WT contaminants within the ppal-1 F₀ generation, but also that the ppal-1 primers were likely expired.

In Vitro Pollen Germination Test

The pollen germination test was done to test the pollen viability of ppal-1 versus that of WT. This test showed significant results in the percent germination of ppal-1 versus that of WT. It did not, however, show significant results in the length of the tubules of the germinated pollen in ppal-1 versus those of WT. This indicates a possible developmental delay in forming the pollen tubule for ppal-1 pollen, but once the tubule has started to form, there is no difference in the elongation between ppal-1 pollen and WT pollen. This, in turn, lends support to the idea that WT pollen can outcompete ppal-1 pollen in self-

Figure 6. WT Pollen Tubules. Figure 6 shows the tubules of germinated WT pollen. a-d show pollen that generated longer tubules, whereas e-h show pollen that generated shorter tubules.
fertilizing heterozygotes, which could be a cause as to why homozygous ppal-1 plants are underrepresented in the progeny of self-fertilizing heterozygotes.

It is important to note, however, that the pollen used for this test came from the same seed sample as the F0 plants. The F0 plants were shown to have WT contamination within the ppal-1 population. Therefore, these results possibly overestimate the real percent germination value of ppal-1.

CONCLUSIONS

There are two ways in which this project could be continued. Firstly, the ovule staining test must be completed to produce data to determine if there are any differences in ovule development between ppal-1 and WT. Even though the staining was complete, microscopy could not be performed in the timespan of this project. Secondly, this project needs to be carried out to the F2 generation to show evidence of non-Mendelian inheritance. In other words, homozygous ppal-1 will not form in 25% of the F2 generation as would be predicted in Mendelian inheritance.

While these two continuations would improve the results of this project, they probably cannot be continued with the data that has already been acquired. In other words, the contamination shown in the F0 generation is a limitation to these future studies. The seeds used for the F0 generation were from the same pool used for the plants that produced the ovules for ovule staining. Additionally, the contamination in the F0 generation in and of itself could affect the study of Mendelian inheritance in the F2 generation. By starting with an impure sample, any evidence of non-Mendelian inheritance could be caused by the impure F0 generation rather than gametophyte development issues in ppal-1 plants.

REFERENCES


