Original article

Leucine aminopeptidase of Fasciola gigantica: functional characterization and evaluation as a vaccine in animal fasciolosis

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Abstract

The infection of livestock animals with the parasite Fasciola gigantica causes economic loss due to mortality, weight loss, reduced productivity and poor milk production. An effective vaccine to overcome these problems would be a viable alternative to the currently used drugs. Leucine aminopeptidase (LAP) plays an important role in the parasite's biology, such as in processing, maturation, activation or degradation of substrates and is, therefore, considered as a candidate for development of a vaccine. In the presented work the protein coding fragment of a FgLAP cDNA was subcloned into the pThioHisB bacterial expression vector. Recombinant FgLAP was expressed and purified from Escherichia coli TOP10. The purified rFgLAP has and will be used in further studies such as proteolytic activity assays, immunohistochemistry and vaccine development. FgLAP protein- and DNA-based immunization trials have been performed in mice to test the antigen's vaccine potential. In addition to the recombinant FgLAP, a complex of synthetic FgLAP peptides (spFgLAP) was designed from the active site of FgLAP and has also been used for protein-based immunization. DNA-based immunization has been performed with the pSecTag2A mammalian expression vector containing the FgLAP coding DNA.

Keywords: Fasciola gigantica, leucine aminopeptidase, vaccine, molecular cloning

Introduction

Fasciolosis is a helminth disease caused by trematodes in the genus Fasciola (F. hepatica and F. gigantica) and belongs to the plant-borne zoonoses. F. gigantica is the common Fasciola species infecting ruminants in the tropical parts of Asia. The infection of livestock animals with the parasite causes economic loss due to, weight loss, reduced productivity and poor milk production. Triclabendazole is the standard drug for treatment of animal fasciolosis, but the cost of treatment with this drug is a problem in developing countries. An effective vaccine to overcome these problems would be a viable alternative to Triclabendazole and other currently used drugs.

Methods

In the present study a cDNA encoding leucine aminopeptidase from Fasciola gigantica (FgLAP) was synthesized and isolated from total RNA using reverse transcription and polymerase chain reaction with oligonucleotide primers specific to the leucine aminopeptidase DNA sequence from F. hepatica. The sequence of the obtained FgLAP cDNA was determined by Sanger dideoxy sequencing. The coding DNA fragment of the FgLAP cDNA was then inserted into the pThioHisB bacterial expression vector and Escherichia coli TOP10 was transformed with the plasmid for production of recombinant FgLAP (rFgLAP) fused to bacterial thioredoxin encoded by the plasmid. Expression of rFgLAP was induced by addition of 1 mM IPTG to the medium.

Both protein- and DNA-based immunization trials have been started to test the vaccine potential in mice. Recombinant FgLAP and synthetic peptides (spFgLAP) which
cover parts of the active site of FgLAP have been used in protein-based immunization. DNA-based immunization has been performed with mammalian expression vectors carrying the FgLAP encoding sequence with and without additional signal peptide encoding sequences.

**Results**

The deduced amino acid sequence of FgLAP is closely related to the homologous leucine aminopeptidase of *F. hepatica*. Both proteins contain 523 amino acid residues and have 98% sequence identity while LAP from *Clonorchis sinensis* has only 70% identity (Fig. 1). The bacterially expressed and purified rFgLAP-thioredoxin fusion protein was soluble and migrated as a single band at a molecular mass of 66 kDa on SDS-PAGE (Fig. 2).

**Figure 1.** The sequence alignment of the *F. gigantica* leucine aminopeptidase (FgLAP) with the LAP sequences from *F. hepatica* (AAV59016) and *Clonorchis sinensis* (ABK91810).

**Figure 2.** SDS-PAGE of rFgLAP: purified under denaturing conditions by Ni-NTA affinity chromatography. Lane 1: flow through, lanes 2, 3: washes, lanes 4-7: elution fractions. The arrow indicates the rFgLAP-thioredoxin fusion protein at 66 kDa.
Discussion

The purified rFgLAP fused with thioredoxin will be used for further studies such as functional analysis of rFgLAP, production of polyclonal anti-rFgLAP antiserum, analysis of tissue-specific distribution of native LAP, vaccine development approaches. Sera from immunized mice will be used for analysis of specific antibody responses by ELISA and Western blot.

Conclusion

The FgLAP protein is highly conserved in the genus Fasciola (98% identity between the two species) and also shows high conservation to LAP from C. sinensis with 70% identity. Recombinant FgLAP could be expressed as a 66 kDa soluble fusion protein in E. coli.

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References