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Advances in Biofeedstocks and Biofuels

PRODUCTION TECHNOLOGIES

FOR BIOFUELS

Edited by
Lalit Kumar Singh
Gaurav Chaudhary



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Contents

1	Processing of Bioethanol from Lignocellulosic Biomass	1
	<i>Rebecca Gunn and Pattanathu K.S.M. Rahman</i>	
1.1	Introduction	2
1.2	Method	3
1.2.1	Pretreatment	3
1.2.2	Saccharification	10
1.2.3	Detoxification	11
1.2.4	Organism Selection	12
1.2.5	Media Composition and Operating Parameters	16
1.2.6	Ethanol Recovery	17
1.3	Discussion	18
	References	20
2	A Perspective on Current Technologies Used for Bioethanol Production from Lignocellulosics	25
	<i>Archana Mishra and Sanjoy Ghosh</i>	
2.1	Introduction	26
2.2	Bioethanol Production from Various Feedstocks	26
2.2.1	Bioethanol Production from Sucrose Based Feedstocks	28
2.2.2	Bioethanol Production from 1st Generation Feedstocks (Starch)	28
2.2.3	Bioethanol Production from 2nd Generation Feedstocks (Lignocellulosic Biomass)	29
2.3	Various Conversion Paths or Technology Routes from Lignocellulosic Biomass to Ethanol	32
2.3.1	Seperate Hydrolysis and Fermentation (SHF)	33
2.3.2	Simultaneous Saccharification and Fermentation (SSF)	35

2.3.3	Simultaneous Saccharification and Co-Fermentation (SSCF)	37
2.3.4	Consolidated Bioprocessing (CBP) or Direct Microbial Conversion (DMC)	37
2.3.5	Thermochemical Conversion Processes or Syngas Platform	40
2.3.5.1	Syngas Catalytic Conversion	41
2.3.5.2	Biological Path or Syngas Fermentation Route	43
2.4	Bioethanol Production Technologies Based on Different Fermentation Modes	46
2.4.1	Batch Fermentation	47
2.4.2	Fed Batch or Semi-Batch Fermentation	48
2.4.3	Continuous Fermentation	49
2.4.4	Fermentation Using Immobilized Cells	50
2.4.5	Fermentation Using Process Stream Recycling	52
2.5	Conclusion and Preferred Technology Route	53
	References	56
3	Immobilized Enzyme Technology for Biodiesel Production	67
	<i>Sarah M. Meunier, Hamid-Reza Kariminia and Raymond L. Legge</i>	
3.1	Introduction	68
3.2	Production of Biodiesel	70
3.3	Immobilized Lipase for Biodiesel Production	71
3.3.1	Enzyme Selection	73
3.3.2	Enzyme Immobilization Methods	79
3.3.3	Reaction Conditions	79
3.4	Reaction Kinetics	89
3.5	Bioreactor Configurations	95
3.6	Conclusions	99
	References	100
4	Oleaginous Yeast- A Promising Candidatea for High Quality Biodiesel Production	107
	<i>Alok Patel, Parul A Pruthi and Vikas Pruthi</i>	
4.1	Introduction	108
4.2	Advantages of Using Biodiesel as Vehicular Fuel	110
4.3	Technical Aspects of Biodiesel Production Using Oleaginous Yeast	111

4.4	Selection of Low-Cost Feedstock for Biodiesel Production	114
4.5	Triacylglycerols (TAGs) Accumulation in Oleaginous Yeasts	117
4.6	Conclusion	120
	References	121
5	Current Status of Biodiesel Production from Microalgae in India	129
	<i>Vijay Kumar Garlapati, Rakesh Singh Gour, Vipasha Sharma, Lakshmi Shri Roy, Jeevan Kumar Samudrala Prashant, Anil Kant and Rintu Banerjee</i>	
5.1	Introduction	130
5.2	Algal Species for Oil Production	132
5.3	Engineering Modifications	132
5.3.1	Production of High Density Cultivated Microalgae	134
5.3.1.1	Cultivation Conditions	134
5.3.1.2	To Get High Lipid Content	135
5.4	Production of Biodiesel	137
5.4.1	Culturing of Microalgae	137
5.4.2	Harvesting	138
5.5	Current Status of Biodiesel Production in India and Abroad	142
5.6	SWOT Analysis of Biofuels in India	147
5.7	Challenges	148
5.8	Conclusions	149
	References	149
6	Biobutanol: An Alternative Biofuel	155
	<i>Neeraj Mishra and Akhilesh Dubey</i>	
6.1	Introduction	156
6.1.1	Advantages of Biobutanol	158
6.2	Biobutanol as Alternative Fuel	159
6.3	Biobutanol Production	161
6.3.1	Steps to Biobutanol Production	163
6.3.2	Directed ABE Fermentation to Butanol	164
6.3.3	Substrates Used for Biobutanol Production	166
6.3.4	Microbial Strains for Biobutanol Production	168
6.3.5	Purification of Biobutanol	169
6.3.5.1	Adsorption for Butanol Recovery	169

6.3.5.2	Membrane Processes for Recovery of Butanol	169
6.3.5.3	Pervaporation for Recovery of Butanol	170
6.3.5.4	Gas Stripping for Recovery of Butanol	170
6.4	Advancements in Biobutanol Production	171
	Summary	172
	References	173
7	The Production of Biomethane from the Anaerobic Digestion of Microalgae	177
	<i>Tom Bishop and Pattanathu K.S.M. Rahman</i>	
7.1	Introduction	177
7.2	The Process	179
7.2.1	Selection and Cultivation of Microalgae	180
7.2.2	Pre-Treatment	181
7.2.2.1	Thermal Pre-Treatment	184
7.2.2.2	Mechanical Pre-Treatment	185
7.2.2.3	Chemical Pre-Treatment	185
7.2.2.4	Biological Pre-Treatment	185
7.2.3	Lipid Extraction	185
7.2.4	Digestion	186
7.2.4.1	Inhibition of the Digestion Process	188
7.2.4.2	Ammonia	188
7.2.4.3	Volatile Fatty Acids	188
7.2.4.4	Hydrogen Sulphide	188
7.3	Downstream Processing and Use of Gaseous Products	189
7.3.1	Purification	189
7.3.1.1	Bioscrubbing	189
7.3.1.2	Biotrickling	191
7.3.2	Product Use: Current and Potential	192
7.4	Conclusions	194
	References	195
8	Electrohydrogenesis: Energy Efficient and Economical Technology for Biohydrogen Production	201
	<i>Pratima Gupta and Piyush Parkhey</i>	
8.1	Introduction	202
8.1.1	The Present Energy Scenario	202
8.1.2	Biohydrogen: The Current Status	203
8.1.3	Electrohydrogenesis: Need of the Hour	205

8.2	Microbial Electrolytic Cell	206
8.2.1	Working Principle	206
8.2.2	Design	208
8.2.3	Setting up the Reactor	209
8.2.4	Fuelling the MEC Reactor: Substrates	212
8.2.5	Powering the MEC Reactor: Exoelectrogens	214
8.3	Components of a Microbial Electrolytic Cell	215
8.3.1	Electrodes: Anode and Cathode	216
8.3.2	Gas Collection Units	218
8.4	Mathematical Expressions and Calculations	222
8.4.1	Hydrogen Yield (Y_{H_2})	222
8.4.2	Hydrogen Recovery	224
8.4.3	Energy Efficiency	226
8.5	Challenges and Future Prospects	227
	References	230
	Index	235

Processing of Bioethanol from Lignocellulosic Biomass

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Abstract

Increasing population and urbanisation combined with depleting fossil fuel reserves have resulted in the need for the development of an alternative transport fuel source. Additionally, climate change associated with fossil fuels has resulted in the need for a greener energy source. Biofuels are fuels that are derived from biological sources to be used alone as transport fuel or as part of a fuel blend. Biofuels may provide a solution to the current fuel crisis and their need and potential is well-recognised. Bioethanol is a biofuel produced via the fermentation of sugars. Second generation bioethanol is produced from lignocellulosic biomass found in abundance in agricultural wastes. The complex structure of lignocellulose results in the necessity of a multi-step process encompassing: pretreatment, saccharification, fermentation, and distillation. Process integration is currently the most promising prospect in second-generation technologies, and efforts should now focus more on the optimisation of such integrated processes.

Keywords: Bioethanol, biofuel, lignocellulose, biomass, second generation, pretreatment, distillation, fermentation, saccharification, process integration

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1.1 Introduction

The demand for and consumption of energy has never been higher due to substantial increases in population and urbanisation. Mass increases in energy are required by transportation, industrial, and agricultural sectors; the use of fossil fuels has long played a primary role in providing for this need. However, in recent decades, it has been made apparent that this is a limited resource and reserves are incapable of sustaining the present rising demand. Major concerns are also raised regarding the environmental impact of the emissions of 'green house gases,' such as CO_2 , when burning fossil fuels. These issues have given rise to a vital need to develop new greener sources of energy [1].

Biomass fuels (biofuels) are obtained from currently harvested biological sources and are not by any means a recent discovery. Burning plants for light and the use of solid biofuel for cooking was a common post 20th Century practice. More recently, the fuel crisis has seen an increased drive on the development of modern biofuels as an efficient, clean, and sustainable transport fuel alternative [2, 3]. Interest was renewed in the mid-1970s when production of ethanol from sugarcane and corn began in Brazil and the USA. Their need and potential has since been recognised and is supported by government policies, with over 50 countries setting biofuel blending targets and quotas [4, 5].

One of the most predominant biofuels presently being utilised and developed is bioethanol, $\text{C}_2\text{H}_6\text{O}$, which is structurally identical to ethanol (see Figure 1.1b). First

(1st) generation bioethanol is produced from the fermentation of edible sugars and starch sourced from crops grown primarily for the production of biofuels. Unfortunately, issues arise in the production of 1st generation bioethanol as the growth of crops for energy, as opposed to food, results in reduced food production and, consequently, increased food prices. Second (2nd) generation bioethanol offers a potential solution as it utilises non-edible lignocellulosic biomass found in abundance in readily available agricultural wastes such as corn stover, sugarcane bagasse, straw, and woodchips [2, 6]. Lignocellulosic biomass is principally composed of cellulose, hemicellulose, and lignin. The complex structure of lignocellulose results in the necessity of a multi-step process to produce bioethanol; an overview of the process is shown in Figure 1.1a and Figure 1.1b [7].

1.2 Method

1.2.1 Pretreatment

The structure of lignocellulose consists of polymers of cellulose and hemicellulose encased in lignin; ratios of these components may vary largely, depending on the source of the biomass. Pretreatment of the lignocellulosic biomass promotes the depolymerisation and removal of the lignin outer layer. This structural deformation results in the exposure of cellulose and hemicellulose, and an increase in biomass surface area which is essential for optimal hydrolysis [8].

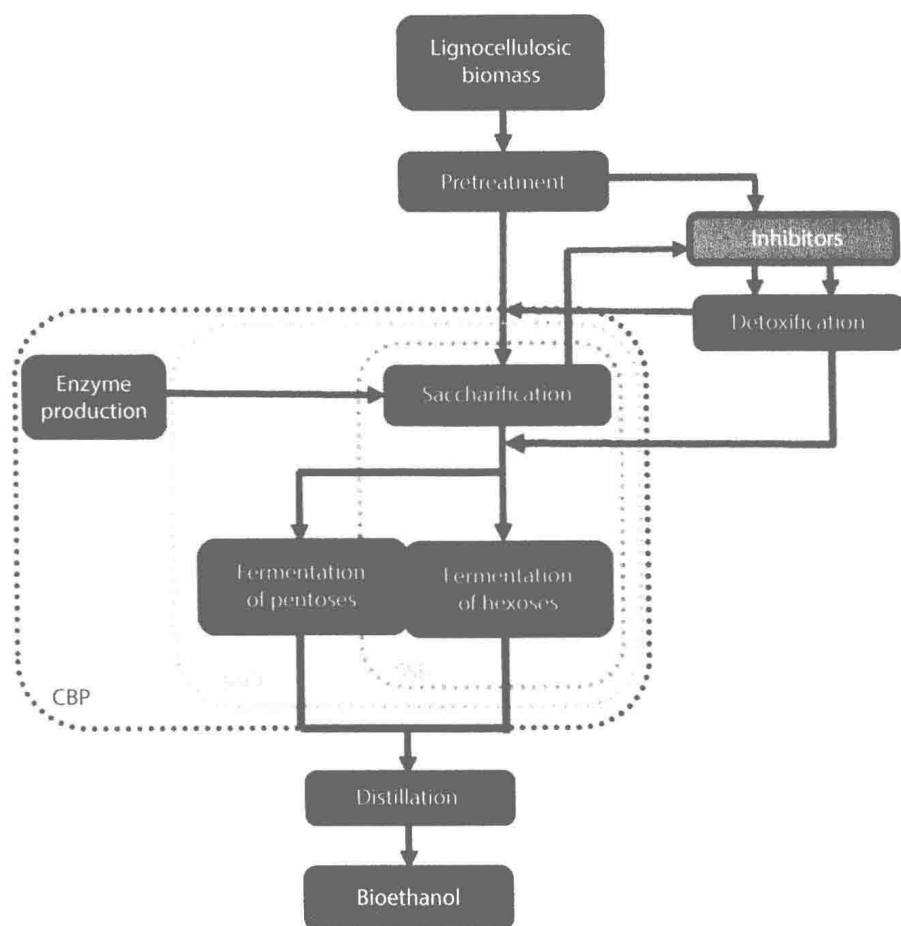


Figure 1.1a A process flow diagram depicting the key process steps required in the production of bioethanol from lignocellulosic biomass. SSF: Simultaneous saccharification and fermentation; SSCF: Simultaneous saccharification and co-fermentation; CBP: Consolidated bioprocessing.

Pretreatment methods range through physical, chemical, and biological (see Table 1.1); in some cases, a combination of methods may be employed to give optimum cellulose/hemicellulose exposure. The method of pretreatment exploited depends fundamentally on the biomass source. An optimum pretreatment method is characterised by the following criteria; minimum degradation of cellulose and hemicellulose fractions,

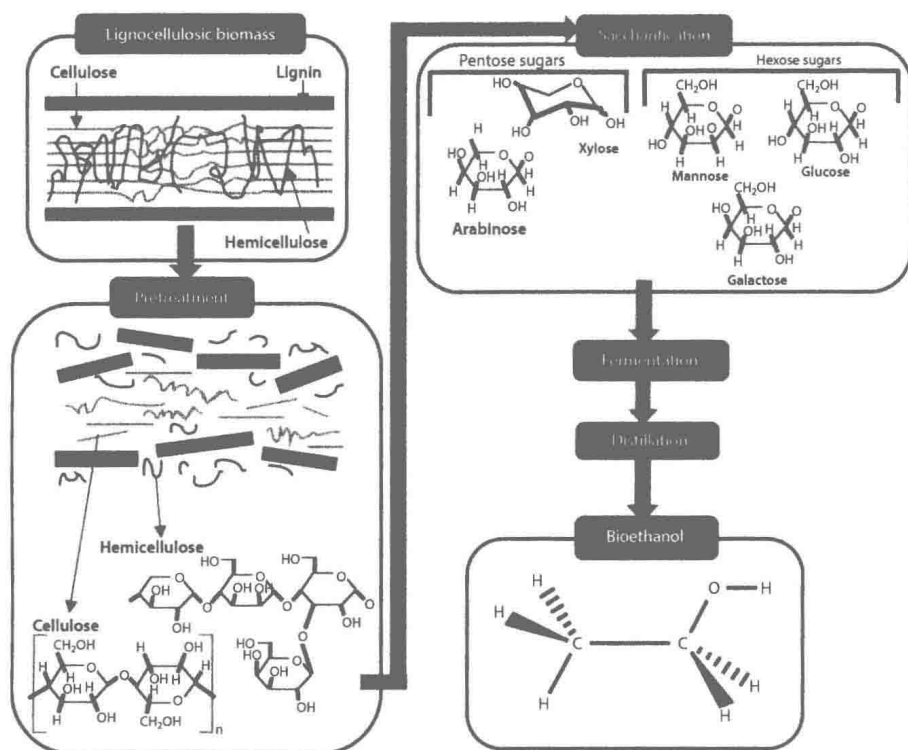


Figure 1.1b Overview of the key modifications and products attained at various stages of lignocellulosic biomass to bioethanol processing. Lignocellulosic biomass consists of cellulose and hemicellulose bound by lignin. Pretreatment of lignocellulose depolymerises the lignin exposing the cellulose and hemicellulose. Saccharification aims to hydrolyse cellulose and hemicellulose into their constituent sugar monomers; glucose, galactose, mannose, xylose, and arabinose. Fermentation of the sugars followed by distillation allows the formation and subsequent recovery of bioethanol. Adapted from [12, 30].

limitation of inhibitor formation, biomass size conservation, minimal energy input, and cost-efficiency. At present, there is no single pretreatment method which is thought to encompass all of these traits as each bears individual advantages and disadvantages including, but not limited to, those shown in Table 1.1. The initial pretreatment step may also influence the selection of other methods in the remaining process [8, 9].

Table 1.1 A selection of pretreatments suitable for lignocellulosic biomass [8, 9, 11, 12, 21, 35–37].

Pretreatment		Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Physical	Mechanical (Milling)	Biomass particle size is physically reduced increasing accessible surface area	No inhibitors produced	High energy requirement High equipment cost
	Concentrated Acid	Concentrated biomass (10–40%) is submerged in concentrated acid at <160 °C	Simultaneously promotes cellulose and hemicellulose hydrolysis Minimal sugar degradation	Corrosion of equipment High inhibitor formation Slurry requires neutralisation Acid must be recovered
Chemical	Dilute Acid	Low concentration biomass (5–10%) is combined with a low concentration dilute acid at a ~220 °C	Low acid usage Cost efficient	Corrosion of materials Slurry requires neutralisation