RESEARCH ARTICLE

Conserved structure of the \textit{NPR1} gene distal promoter isolated from a chili pepper (\textit{Capsicum annuum} L.) in West Sumatera [version 1; peer review: 1 approved with reservations]

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Abstract

\textbf{Background:} The non-expressor of pathogenesis related gene 1 (\textit{NPR1}) protein is one of the key regulators in the systemic acquired resistance plant defence system. The \textit{cis}-acting elements of its distal promoter gene are characterized by salicylic acid inducing elements such as the W-box, RAV1AAT and ASF1, accompanied with enhancer and silencer elements. This study was aimed to isolate and characterize the distal promoter sequence of the \textit{NPR1} gene (\textit{PD_CbNPR1}) from the chili pepper (\textit{Capsicum annuum} L.) genotype \textit{Berangkai}, a local genotype known to produce large yields, but is susceptible to viral infection. Elucidating its sequence structure will open a broad range of possibilities to engineer the \textit{NPR1} gene expression which is important to improve chili pepper resistant.

\textbf{Methods:} PCR-based cloning combined with a primer walking strategy was applied in this study. The BioEdit tool was used to edit the sequence and verify sequence integrity, while homology analysis was conducted with BLASTn searching. Identification of a \textit{cis}-acting element was detected by PLACE.

\textbf{Results:} Isolation of the complete distal promoter sequence of \textit{PD_CbNPR1} produced a fragment 5,950 bp in size. BLASTn search analysis indicated that \textit{PD_CbNPR1} sequence is highly conserved (99\% homology) showing only a single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) (base substitution) compared with its reference sequence. Analysis using PLACE tools successfully identified nine \textit{cis}-acting elements containing a W-box, WLE1, RAV1AAT, TATA-box, CAAT-box, GARE and GT1 with multi repeats and diverse motives, as well as enhancer and silencer elements, which is characterized by a CCAAT-box and GAGAAATT pattern, respectively.

\textbf{Conclusion:} The distal promoter of the \textit{NPR1} gene is highly conserved, showing only one SNP caused by one base substitution event.

\textbf{Keywords}

CCAAT-box, distal promoter, NPR1 gene, RAV1AAT, W-box
This article is included in the Global Open Data for Agriculture and Nutrition gateway.

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Competing interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

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**Introduction**

The non-expressor of pathogenesis related gene 1 (NPR1) protein is a main regulator in the systemic acquired resistance response of many plants. Over expression by modifying distal promoter in the W-box element of the OsNPR1 gene in rice could increase its resistance against *Xanthomonas oryzae* pv. *Oryzae* up to 4.3 times (Hwang & Hwang, 2010). Similar results were reported by Zhong et al. (2015), who modified the RAV1 element on the GhNPR1 which increased *Gladiolus hybridus* resistance against *Curvularia gladioli* by up to 18.6 times compared to control. Based on those studies, we expect more prospects of the NPR1 gene promoter in the improvement of plant resistance against many pathogens.

Here we report characteristics of the distal promoter segment of the NPR1 gene isolated from chili pepper (*Capsicum annuum*) genotype Berangkai, a local genotype potentially produces more yields compared to other genotypes cultivated in West Sumatera.

**Methods**

**Genomic DNA isolation**

Healthy young leaves collected from chili pepper genotype Berangkai was used as the plant material in this study. The chili pepper genotype Berangkai was grown in a greenhouse and maintained for 8 weeks before being used for DNA isolation. Genomic DNA isolation was performed using protocol as described by Jamsari & Pedri (2013).

**Fragment isolation and PCR conditions**

PCR-based cloning combined with a primer walking approach was applied for the isolation complete segment of distal promoter of the NPR1 gene. All PCR reactions in this study were performed using the KOD-Plus-Neo kit provided by Toyobo-Japan. Chromosome 7 of *Capsicum annuum* cv. Zinla-1 (Qin et al., 2014), accession number: NC_029983.1, was used as the reference sequence. Primer combinations were designed to cover the interval segment spanning from base 112,600,897 to 112,606,847 on the reference sequence (Table 1). All primers used in this study are listed in Table 1. First-step isolation was started from both termini and continued with successive isolation until both termini formed a complete contig of the target segment. The initial PCR condition was started with 95°C for 3 minutes for pre-denaturation and amplified in two different loops using 14 and 24 cycles. The first 14 cycles were performed using a touch down steps started by denaturation at 95°C for 30 seconds. Annealing was initiated with 70°C for 30 seconds and gradually decreased 1°C for every cycle before finally elongated in 72°C for 2 minutes. The next 24 cycles started with denaturation at 95°C for 30 seconds with annealing at 55°C for 30 seconds and elongation of at 70°C for 2 minutes and elongated for 72°C for 2 minutes. Final extension was maintained at 72°C for 5 minutes. PCR reaction was performed in 50 µl of final volume. PCR composition was set according to manufacturer’s recommendation, containing 5 µl 10x Buffer KOD-Plus-Neo, 5 µl of 2 mM dNTPs, 3 µl of 25 mM MgSO4, 1.5 µl of 10 ng/µl of each primer, 1 µl of KOD-Plus-Neo (Toyobo, Japan) and 1 µl of 10 ng/µl of DNA template. The volume was filled with 32 µl of nuclease-free water.

**Bioinformatic tools and sequence analysis**

The PCR product generated from each walking step was processed to sequencing reaction using its both forward and reverse primers. All sequencing processes were performed by 1st BASE-Singapore. A number of bioinformatic tools were applied during analysis of the sequence. Trimming, editing and building of the sequence contig were performed using BioEdit v7.2.5 (Hall, 1999). Homology search of the sequence with all available sequences deposited in the NCBI database was run using the BLASTn tool (Altschul et al., 1990). The cis-acting elements were identified using PLACE, developed by Higo et al. (1999).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primer ID</th>
<th>Sequence 5’ to 3’</th>
<th>Expected PCR product (bp)</th>
<th>Verified sequence (bp)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F1-F</td>
<td>TGA TCG CAC TCA CCG AAC</td>
<td>3,597</td>
<td>970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F1-R</td>
<td>CCG TAC CTT GTT AAC CCC ATC</td>
<td>993</td>
<td>993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2-F</td>
<td>CAT GGG GTT AAC AAG GTA CC</td>
<td>3,351</td>
<td>Skipped for sequencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2-R</td>
<td>CCC AAG GCG TAA CTA TTG AAC</td>
<td>1,204</td>
<td>1,115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F1.1-F</td>
<td>CCG ACC CAC ACC AGG TTA TAT</td>
<td>1,915</td>
<td>1,801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F1.1-R</td>
<td>CCC CCT CCT TAG CTT CTC TTC</td>
<td>1,204</td>
<td>1,115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F1.2-F</td>
<td>CCC TTG GTC CTT AGT CAG TGA</td>
<td>1,915</td>
<td>1,801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F1.2-R</td>
<td>CCA TGC GCT CAT ATG GTG A</td>
<td>1,915</td>
<td>1,801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2.1-F</td>
<td>CCC GTC AAG AGG TTT CAC</td>
<td>1,811</td>
<td>1,724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2.1-R</td>
<td>CCC ATC AAG TAC AGA TCA GAG C</td>
<td>1,811</td>
<td>1,724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2.2-F</td>
<td>CCG GAC ATA GAC TAA GGG ATC</td>
<td>1,811</td>
<td>1,724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2.2-R</td>
<td>CCC AAG GCG TAA CTA TTG AAC</td>
<td>1,811</td>
<td>1,724</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results and discussion

Characteristics of the NPR1 distal promoter

We successfully isolated the distal promoter of the *NPR1* gene from our local chili pepper genotype Berangkai, exhibiting 5,950 bp in size and designated *PD_CbNPR1*. The fragment was isolated from two steps round of walking via PCR-based cloning. In the first step, the whole distal promoter region was expected to be covered using two primer combinations (F1 F/R and F2 F/R). However, after verification of the sequence data using BioEdit, the upstream primer combination (F1 F/R) successfully produced a contig spanning only 1,963 bp, while the downstream primer combination (F2 F/R) was skipped for the sequencing process. In the second round of primer walking, four new primer combinations (F1.1-F/R, F1.2-F/R, F2.1-F/R, and F2.2-F/R) (Table 1) were designed in order to extend sequence coverage. Combining all verified sequences obtained from the first and the second round of primer walking successfully produced a contig with a size of 5,950 bp (Figure 1).

Homology analysis between *PD_CbNPR1* and its reference sequence via BLAST search showed 99% homology. The data was verified by only one single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) shown as a substitution event at the position -6,335 from the ATG start codon (Figure 2). This finding clearly indicated that both distal promoters are highly conserved, even they originated from distantly related regions.

Cis-acting regulatory elements

PLACE analysis successfully indicated 9 cis-acting elements with multi repetition (Figure 3). All 9 cis-acting elements contained the W-box (15), WLE1 (W-box like elements) (8), RAV1AAT (20), TATA-box (22), CAAT-box (26), GARE (1), GT1 (20), Enhancer (4) and Silencer (1). The W-Box element binds the WRKY protein, acting as a transcription factor during expression of *NPR1* (Yu *et al*., 2010). Mutation in this element in *Arabidopsis thaliana* delayed the *NPR1* expression induced by salicylic acid (SA). PLACE analysis indicated that *PD_CbNPR1* is characterized by three consensus sequences: TTGAC, TGACY, and TGACT. The TGACY pattern could also be found in the promoter of *ERF3* isolated from tobacco (Nishiuchi *et al*., 2004), while TGACT could be found in the promoter of the *Iso1* barley gene (Sun *et al*., 2003). The WLE1 (W-box like elements) with TGACA pattern has an analog function with the W-box identified in the promoter of *OsNPR1* (Hwang & Hwang, 2010).

Another cis-acting element found in *PD_CbNPR1* is RAV1AAT, which acts as binding site for protein RAV1 (Hwang & Hwang, 2010). The RAV1 protein is a transcription factor associated with some pathogenesis-related genes (Sohn *et al*., 2006). Two consensus patterns of *RAV1AAT* elements found in *PD_CbNPR1* are CAACA and TGGTG. The CAACA pattern was also found by Kagaya *et al*. (1999) in *Arabidopsis thaliana*, while the TGGTG pattern is similar to the *OsNPR1* promoter (Hwang dan Hwang, 2010). Notably, the ASF1 element is absent in the *PD_CbNPR1*. The ASF1 element has been previously reported by Hwang & Hwang (2010) and Zhong *et al*. (2015) as a cis-acting for common promoter associated with pathogen infection and SA induction.

PLACE analysis identified 22 putative TATA-boxes in our *PD_CbNPR1*, which could be classified into TATA box 3, TATA box 4, TATA box 5 and TATA box Ospl. During transcription, the TATA-box binds with RNA polymerase II and many transcription factors like TFIID, TFIIA, TFIIF, TFIIE, and TFIIH to build the TATA-box complex.

Figure 1. Primer walking steps along distal promoter sequence based on the *Capsicum annuum* cv. Zunla-1 genome. Base position of start and end segment are shown by number on each terminus. Length of verified sequence of each segment is shown by number in bracket on each segment.

Figure 2. Partial multi-alignment showing one single SNP (T/G) at position -6,335 from ATG (red box).
Another interesting element found in PD_CbNPR1 is the CAAT-box (26 repeats) which is associated with the regulation of many genes involved in pathogen infection (Imran et al., 2016). The CAAT-box consensus sequence found in PD_CbNPR1 is characterized with CAAT which is similar that have been found in promoter of the legA gene from Pisum sativum (Shirsat et al., 1989).

We also found a gibberelline-responsive element (GARE) motif, which has been previously reported by Ogawa et al. (2003) as the binding site with some transcription factors induced by gibberellic acid. The consensus sequence of those motifs is TAACAAR. Another cis-acting element induced by abiotic factors such as salt, light and pathogenesis is GT1 motif (Bilas et al., 2016; Park et al., 2004). The identified GT1 element in PD_CbNPRI is characterized by a consensus GRWAAW motif and present in 20 repeats. They could be classified into two forms, GT1CONSENSUS and GT1GMSCAM4, as described previously by Terzaghi & Cashmore (1995). The last GT1 class, GT1GMSCAM4, is initially identified by Park et al. (2004) with consensus pattern GAAAAA.

PLACE analysis also successfully identified four CCAAT-box motifs, which is commonly reported as an enhancer of transcription (Thongbo et al., 2013). This element is able to up-regulate the transcription and replication rate of eukaryotic genes by binding many types of transcription factors (Bilas et al., 2016), da Silva et al. (2013) previously reported that a greater number of CCAAT-boxes could improve promoter capability in increasing of replication rate by binding efficiently with transcription factors. In contrast with the enhancer, we found only one motif of GAGAAATT which is also known as silencer (Lai et al. (2009)). This element is reported to be able to down-regulate the kinesin-like protein 1 (AtKPI) gene in Arabidopsis thaliana by up to 80.9%.

**Conclusion**

We successfully isolated the distal promoter of the NPR1 gene from chili pepper genotype Berangkai (designated PD_CbNPRI) spanning 5,950 bp. The PD_CbNPRI contain 9 cis-acting elements: W-box, WLE1, RAV1AAT, TATA-box, CAAT-box, GARE, GT1, enhancer and silencer elements. Engineering of the cis-acting elements may have future prospects, particularly in improving chili pepper resistance against biotic and abiotic stresses by up- and down-regulating NPR1 gene expression.

**Data availability**

The sequence of the distal promoter of the NPR1 gene sequenced in this study has been deposited in GenBank under accession number MK281381; http://identifiers.org/ncbigi/GI:1547604514.

**Grant information**

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References


Open Peer Review

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Version 1

Referee Report 28 January 2019

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In the manuscript “Conserved structure of the NPR1 gene distal promoter isolated from a chili pepper (Capsicum annuum L.) in West Sumatera”, Dr. Jamsari Jamsari and co-authors offer us the structure of the distal promoter of the NPR1 gene, which will lay a foundation for the understanding of the mechanisms of pepper resistance to viral infection. But there are some issues that need to be explained:

1. The PD_CbNPR1 is cloned by gene walking approach, which needs to be confirmed by PCR amplification with a full-length primer pair.

2. The authors suggest that the structure of PD_CbNPR1 is conservative based on the comparison with the reference gene (Figure 2) and on the cis-element distribution (Figure 3). I think that this is not enough. The comparison of nucleotide sequences among distal promoters from several different plant species should be performed.

3. The PD_CbNPR1 is amplified from a pepper variety with viral susceptibility. I suggest the authors compare the PD sequences between virus susceptible and resistant varieties, which is beneficial to understanding the mechanisms of pepper resistance to viral infection.

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?
Yes

Is the study design appropriate and is the work technically sound?
Partly

Are sufficient details of methods and analysis provided to allow replication by others?
Partly

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?
Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?
Partly

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
Partly
Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: plant tolerance to abiotic stresses especially high temperature

I have read this submission. I believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

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