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Recent progress in consolidated bioprocessing

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Consolidated bioprocessing, or CBP, the conversion of lignocellulose into desired products in one step without added enzymes, has been a subject of increased research effort in recent years. In this review, the economic motivation for CBP is addressed, advances and remaining obstacles for CBP organism development are reviewed, and we comment briefly on fundamental aspects. For CBP organism development beginning with microbes that have native ability to utilize insoluble components of cellulosic biomass, key recent advances include the development of genetic systems for several cellulolytic bacteria, engineering a thermophilic bacterium to produce ethanol at commercially attractive yields and titers, and engineering a cellulolytic microbe to produce butanol. For CBP organism development, beginning with microbes that do not have this ability and thus requiring heterologous expression of a saccharolytic enzyme system, high-yield conversion of model cellulosic substrates and heterologous expression of CBH1 and CBH2 in yeast at levels believed to be sufficient for an industrial process have recently been demonstrated. For both strategies, increased emphasis on realizing high performance under industrial conditions is needed. Continued exploration of the underlying fundamentals of microbial cellulose utilization is likely to be useful in order to guide the choice and development of CBP systems.

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Introduction

Cellulosic plant biomass has many desirable features as an energy source [1,2], but is difficult to efficiently convert into liquid fuels. Biological processing is a promising technology option for achieving this conversion, but still poses great challenges. These challenges arise primarily

because plants have evolved to be recalcitrant to attack by the elements, and in particular by microbes and their enzymes.

The recalcitrance barrier can in principle be overcome by thermochemical technologies involving reactive intermediates other than sugars (e.g. synthesis gas, pyrolysis oil), fermentative processes (e.g. acid hydrolysis, phosphoric acid swelling, ionic liquid pretreatment) that overcome recalcitrance primarily via innovations in the realm of process engineering, and fermentative processes that overcome recalcitrance primarily via innovations in the realm of biotechnology. In the latter category, processes in which cellulosic biomass is fermented to desired products in one step without adding externally produced enzymes are of obvious appeal. Indeed, such ‘consolidated bioprocessing’ (CBP) is widely recognized as the ultimate configuration for low cost hydrolysis and fermentation of cellulosic biomass [3••].

A CBP-enabling microbe must be able to both solubilize a practical biomass substrate and produce desired products at high yield and titer under industrial conditions. Since microbes with these properties have not been found in nature, genetic engineering is required via one of the two strategies. The native strategy: beginning with microbes that have native ability to utilize insoluble components of cellulosic biomass, and the recombinant strategy: beginning with microbes that do not have this ability and thus require heterologous expression of a saccharolytic enzyme system. The CBP strategy is in principle applicable to production of a broad range of products from plant biomass, but has received the most attention with respect to ethanol production and is being implemented commercially for this product first.

We endeavor here to provide an overview of technological and scientific advances relevant to CBP. Since our last such review [3••], the wholesale price of gasoline has more than doubled underscoring that both the need and opportunity for low cost biomass processing have grown considerably.

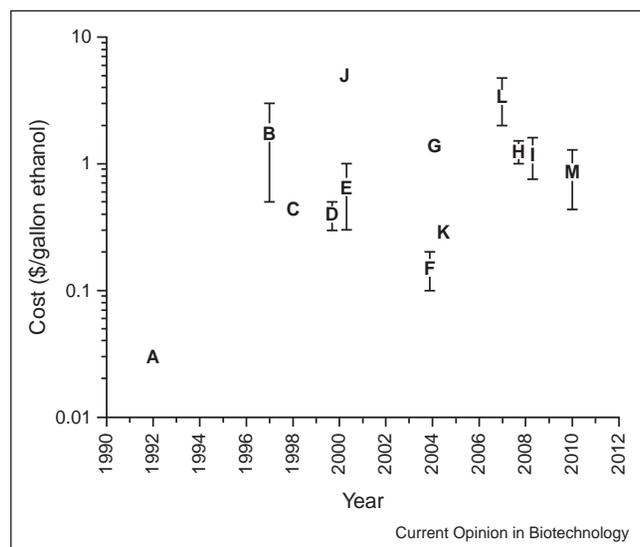
Economic motivation

CBP has potential to lower the cost of biomass processing compared to process configurations featuring a dedicated step for cellulase production due to elimination of operating and capital costs associated with dedicated enzyme production and/or more effective biomass solubilization.

Estimates of the cost of added enzymes for lignocellulose conversion vary widely and do not show a decreasing

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Figure 1



Historical estimates of the contribution of cellulase enzyme cost to final ethanol cost. Letters refer to individual references. Error bars represent the extent of the high and low estimates when given. A [52], B [53], C [54], D [55], E [56], F [57], G [58], H [59], I [60], J [61], K [61], L [62], M [62].

trend over time (Figure 1). Any cost savings estimate for CBP depends, however, on the choice of both the advanced technology configuration assumed as well as the base-case to which it is compared. If the base case has high loading of added enzymes, projected savings from eliminated cellulase production by CBP are potentially large. If a base case has low loading of added enzyme, projected savings from a CBP process achieving high rates and yields are primarily in the form of decreased capital and operating costs related to fermentation and feedstock. This dynamic partially explains why enzyme cost estimates differ so widely. Another implication is that the cost savings of CBP can be much larger than the cost of added enzyme if the basis of comparison is a process designed to minimize enzyme addition. In any case, all indications are that the cost of added enzyme continues to be a major constraint to cost-effective processing of cellulosic biomass (Figure 1). At the low end of recent estimates, 50 cents per gallon ethanol, the cost of cellulase is comparable to the purchase cost of feedstock. One is hard pressed to come up with an example of a commodity process where the catalyst cost is comparable to that of the raw material.

More effective biomass solubilization by CBP may arise because cellulase loadings are higher in CBP than is practical in other configurations, use of complexed cellulase systems, high temperature, enzyme-microbe synergy [4], or a combination of these. Economic benefits of more effective cellulose solubilization may be realized as a result of higher rate, higher yield, less expensive

pretreatment, greater savings due to eliminated enzyme production, or a combination of these — again depending on the base case to which CBP is compared.

The native strategy

The main challenges for the native strategy include the availability of tools to do genetic modification, and the application of these tools so that a desired fuel is produced with high yield, titer and robustness under industrial conditions. Candidates for the native strategy can be organized into three groups: fungi, free-enzyme bacteria and cellulosome-forming bacteria.

Progress in the development of genetic tools for fungal systems has recently been reviewed and will not be discussed in detail [5]. Although to date, most engineering efforts have focused on increasing cellulase production, there is also interest in engineering biofuel production in fungal systems such as *Fusarium oxysporum* [6] and *Trichoderma reesei* [7*].

There has also been substantial progress in the development of genetic tools for free-enzyme bacterial systems, including *Clostridium phytofermentans* [8], *Clostridium japonicus* [9], and *Thermoanaerobacter* and *Thermanaerobacterium* sp. [10–12]. *Thermoanaerobacterium saccharolyticum*, a thermophilic anaerobe that utilizes a broad range of substrates including xylan and all naturally occurring sugars present in biomass (although not crystalline cellulose), provides a prominent example of engineering an organism with recently developed genetic tools to produce a biofuel at high yield. Shaw *et al.* [13*] eliminated acetic and lactic acid production resulting in a strain that produces ethanol at a yield of 0.46 g ethanol/g xylose or other sugars. Such yield was observed under a variety of conditions (e.g. different substrate concentrations, batch and continuous culture), although it was not demonstrated in industrial growth media. In another notable genetic engineering feat reported by Cripps *et al.* [14*], *Geobacillus thermoglucosidasius*, a thermophile capable of oligosaccharide fermentation, was engineered by deletion of *ldh* and *pfl* and upregulation of *pdh* to produce industrially relevant yields of 0.42–0.47 g ethanol/g hexose sugar, although the reported yield was slightly less for pure pentose sugars.

Study of *Caldicellulosiruptor* sp. as potential CBP organisms has recently been initiated, motivated in part by their having the highest temperature optima among described cellulolytic microbes, and the finding that cultures are able to achieve substantial solubilization of lignocellulose without pretreatment [15*]. The architecture of the cellulase system of members of this genus features multiple catalytic enzyme modules in single enzymes [16], and appears to be different from both the noncomplexed paradigm exemplified by the cellulases of *T. reesei* and other aerobic fungi, and cellulosome

Table 1
Recent results from native cellulose-fermenting CBP organisms

Organism	Relevant genotype	Substrate	(g/L)	Conversion (%) ^a	Product	Titer (g/L)	Metabolic yield, (%) ^b	Rate (g L ⁻¹ h ⁻¹)	Reference
<i>C. thermocellum</i> M1570 and <i>T. saccharolyticum</i> ALK2 co-culture	M1570 Δ ldh Δ pta ALK2 Δ ldh Δ pta Δ ack	Avicel	92.2	90	Ethanol	38.1	82	0.26	Argyros <i>et al.</i> , AEM, in press
<i>C. cellulolyticum</i> H10	Wildtype	Cellulose MN301	50	26	Ethanol	0.51	7	1.1E-03	Guedon <i>et al.</i> [73]
<i>C. phytofermentans</i> ATCC 700394	Wildtype	AFEX-Corn Stover	8*	81	Ethanol	2.8	85	1.2E-02	Lin <i>et al.</i> [74]
<i>C. thermocellum</i> DSM 1313	Wildtype	Avicel	19.5	90	Ethanol	1.3	15	1.8E-02	Argyros <i>et al.</i> , AEM, in press
<i>C. cellulolyticum</i> CC-pMG8	<i>pac adh</i>	Cellulose MN301	50	64	Ethanol	0.83	5	1.8E-03	Guedon <i>et al.</i> [73]
<i>Geobacillus sp. R7</i>	Wildtype	Prairie cord grass	10.8*	ND	Ethanol	0.035	ND	2.1E-04	Zambare <i>et al.</i> [75]
<i>T. hirsuta</i>	Wildtype	Rice straw	10.3*	ND	Ethanol	3	ND	3.1E-02	Okamoto <i>et al.</i> [76]
<i>C. japonicus</i> Ueda107	Wildtype	Avicel	10	ND	Ethanol	0.0002	ND	4.2E-06	Gardner and Keating [9]
<i>C. phytofermentans</i> ATCC 700394	Wildtype	Filter paper	10	63	Ethanol	2.9	81	4.3E-03	Tolonen <i>et al.</i> [77]
<i>C. cellulolyticum</i> pWH320	<i>kivd yqhD alsS ilvCD</i>	Sigma 50	10	ND	Isobutanol	0.66	ND	4.6E-03	Higashide <i>et al.</i> [19]
<i>C. japonicus</i> MSB280	<i>pac adhB</i>	Avicel	10	ND	Ethanol	0.0035	ND	7.3E-05	Gardner and Keating [9]
<i>C. thermocellum</i> M1570	Δ ldh Δ pta	Avicel	19.5	94	Ethanol	5.6	60	7.8E-02	Argyros <i>et al.</i> , AEM, in press
<i>C. acetobutylicum</i> 7	Wildtype	Grass	30	ND	1-Butanol	0.6	ND	ND	Berezina <i>et al.</i> [81]

ND: Not determined, insufficient data.

^a (starting substrate – ending substrate)/starting substrate \times 100%.

^b Product titer/(consumed substrate \times theoretical yield).

* Concentration of total carbohydrates.

paradigm exemplified by *C. thermocellum* and other anaerobes. Active investigation is underway to develop genetic tools for manipulation of this organism with promising results presented at scientific meetings and submitted.

Among cellulosome-forming bacteria, *C. thermocellum* and *C. cellulolyticum* are the most well-developed as potential CBP hosts. There has been substantial recent progress with respect to development of tools for genetic manipulation [17] and subsequent metabolic engineering [18**,19], including production of butanol in the case of *C. cellulolyticum* [19]. Reported values of key performance parameters are shown in Tables 1 and 2, which includes both native cellulose-utilizing microbes and native hemicellulose-utilizing microbes. An early comprehensive analysis of the economic benefits of CBP described an advanced scenario with a very low projected cellulosic ethanol selling price based on a titer of 50 g/L, 92% hydrolysis yield after pretreatment, 90% metabolic yield after fermentation, and a rate of 1.39 g/L/h [20]. The Argyros *et al.* result with a co-culture of *C. thermocellum* and *T. saccharolyticum* [18**] is remarkably close to meeting these milestones, although it has yet to be shown with a real-world substrate under industrial conditions.

The concept of a ‘titer gap’ — a difference between the maximum concentration of a compound that is tolerated when it is *added* to a culture and the maximum concentration of that compound that is *produced* — is relevant when considering organism development for CBP via the native strategy. The titer gap may be defined with respect to either growth or metabolism, and is often not the same for these two points of reference. A substantial titer gap is a salient feature of most microbes of interest for the native strategy. In the case of *C. thermocellum*, for example, several studies have established that strains able to grow in the presence of added ethanol at concentrations exceeding 50 g/L can readily be obtained by serial transfer [21,22], and uncoupled metabolism at yet higher concentrations seems reasonable to expect. However, the maximum concentration of ethanol produced by this organism in pure culture remains at about 25 g/L [21,23]. Production of ethanol at concentrations at or exceeding the tolerance exhibited in exogenous addition experiments has been observed in the case of engineered strains of *T. saccharolyticum*, for which titers \geq 65 g/L have been obtained (Hogsett, DA, abstract 2.3.2.3, Biochemical Conversion Platform Peer Review, Denver, CO, February 2011).

Experience with industrial microorganism development provides increasing support for the proposition that with sufficient effort, stoichiometric yields of engineered products can be achieved, and the titer gap closed.

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Table 2

Recent results from native hemicellulose-fermenting CBP organisms

Organism	Relevant genotype	Substrate	(g/L)	Conversion (%) ^a	Product	Titer (g/L)	Metabolic yield (%) ^b	Rate, (g L ⁻¹ h ⁻¹)	Reference
<i>T. saccharolyticum</i> M1442	Δ ldh Δ pta Δ ack	Hardwood hydrolysate	13.8	93	Ethanol	7.4	113	0.11	Lee et al. [80]
<i>T. aotearoense</i> Δ ldh mutant	Δ ldh	Xylose	9.7	>99	Ethanol	3.5	71	0.15	Cai et al. [78]
<i>T. saccharolyticum</i>	Wildtype	Xylose	11.1	>99	Ethanol	3.4	60	0.31	Shaw et al. [13*]
<i>T. saccharolyticum</i> ALK2	Δ ldh Δ pta Δ ack	Xylose	12	>99	Ethanol	5.5	90	0.55	Shaw et al. [13*]
<i>G. thermoglucosidarius</i> TM242	Δ ldh Δ apl	Xylose	29	95	Ethanol	9.6	69	0.76	Cripps et al. [14*]
<i>C. phytofermentans</i> ATCC 700394	<i>pdh</i> -upregulated Wildtype	Birch Wood Xylan	3	ND	Ethanol	0.46	27	1.9E-02	Tolonen et al. [77]
<i>T. mathranii</i> BG1L1	Δ ldh	Xylose	5.2	>99	Ethanol	2.2	84	4.6E-02	Yao and Mikkelsen [79]
<i>T. mathranii</i> BG1	Wildtype	Xylose	5.5	>99	Ethanol	2.3	83	4.8E-02	Yao and Mikkelsen [79]
<i>T. aotearoense</i> SCUT27	Wildtype	Xylose	8.6	88	Ethanol	1.5	39	6.3E-02	Cai et al. [78]

ND: Not determined, insufficient data.

^a (starting substrate – ending substrate)/starting substrate \times 100%.^b Product titer/(consumed substrate \times theoretical yield).

* Concentration of total carbohydrates.

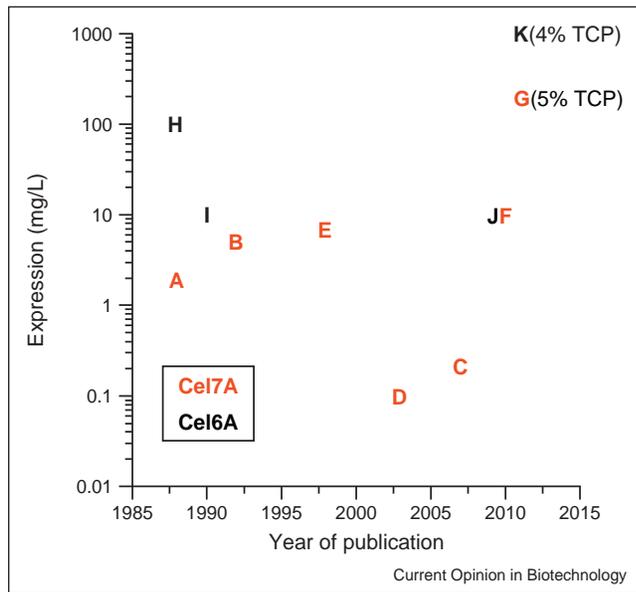
Prominent examples include ethanol production in yeast and *E. coli*, and, more recently, engineering of *E. coli* to produce propane diol at 81% of theoretical yield and a titer of 135 g/L [24]. It can be expected that this is also true for less well-established organisms of interest for the native CBP development strategy, with *T. saccharolyticum* providing the most fully developed example to date (Hogsett, DA, abstract 2.3.2.3, Biochemical Conversion Platform Peer Review, Denver, CO, February 2011). Progress with hosts for the native CBP strategy will be slower because tools are less developed, although this will probably become less true over time. The case for eventual success via the native strategy is somewhat less clear with respect to industrial robustness, including compatibility with practical pretreatments, fermentation at high substrate (and hence solids) concentration in industrial growth media, and strain management and stability. We suggest that these and other dimensions of industrial robustness are a key area for investigation aimed at advancing the native strategy.

The recombinant strategy

The primary challenge for the ‘recombinant strategy’ is heterologous expression of sufficient quantities of several types of cellulase and/or hemicellulase enzymes to permit rapid growth and conversion of pretreated lignocelluloses. Total enzyme activity produced by the host can be increased by improving both total expression and specific activity of the enzyme system. Moreover, specific activity of the system is a function of both the composition of the system and the specific activity of the components. Given the expense of aerating large culture volumes, as well as loss of product yield and feedstock energy as a result of aerobic respiration, non-oxidative metabolism is highly desirable and is likely required for many applications. The recombinant strategy has been pursued in a number of host organisms including *S. cerevisiae*, *E. coli*, and *Bacillus subtilis*, with work in *S. cerevisiae* the most advanced to date.

Significant advances have recently been made with regard to expression level of cellulases in *S. cerevisiae*. As shown in Figure 2, the report of Ilmen *et al.* represents a large increase in the maximum titer achieved for two critical cellulases Cel6A (CBH1) and Cel7a (CBH2). The cellulase expression levels achieved in this study correspond to 4–5% of total cell protein, which meets the calculated levels for growth on cellulose at rates required for an industrial process [3•]. However, data for heterologous cellulase production in yeasts in Figure 2 and in the literature in general have been reported for aerobic cultures with cell densities in the range of approximately 5 g/L (shake flask) to 50 g/L (fed batch, bioreactor), whereas CBP will involve anaerobic cultures with cell densities at the low end of this range. Assessing the impact of the advances reported by Ilmen *et al.*, and future advances, will require data obtained under anaerobic conditions

Figure 2



Comparison of expression levels for Cel7A and Cel6A in *S. cerevisiae* in terms of both the titer achieved and the percentage of total cell protein (TCP). A [63], B [64], C [65], D [66], E [67], F [68], G [69], H [63], I [70], J [71], K [69]. Note: percentage of TCP for Cel7A in Ilmen *et al.* was calculated by assuming a cell yield of 0.45 g cells/g glucose, and a protein content of dry cell weight of 42% [72].

under industrial conditions. While such data have not been reported to date in the literature, the authors of this study have observed anaerobic production of CBHs at roughly equivalent levels on a percentage to total cell protein (TCP) basis to the maximum shown in Figure 2 (unpublished data).

One approach to increasing the specific activity of recombinantly expressed enzyme systems is to mimic systems already available in nature, and in some cases already industrially applied. Table 3 depicts the ongoing work to create a complete enzymatic system for *S. cerevisiae*, relying on data generated by studies that have examined enzymatic systems for the breakdown of lignocellulose via proteomic analysis. Enzyme diversity from *Trichoderma reesei*, an organism whose enzymes will be used to hydrolyze lignocellulose at an industrial scale, and from the rapid cellulose utilizer *C. thermocellum* was compared to the enzyme diversity functionally expressed in *S. cerevisiae*. Compared to the Herpoel-Gimbert study [25] 100% of the functional enzyme classes identified in *T. reesei* have been expressed in *S. cerevisiae*, whereas 80% of those identified in Nagendran *et al.* have been expressed in *S. cerevisiae* [26]. Of particular note is recent work that has shown expression of many enzyme categories in *S. cerevisiae*, utilizing >300 genes in the process (Brevnova *et al.* patent applied for). In contrast, but not surprisingly, expression of complexed enzyme system components is

not as advanced as for non-complexed components. Using the enzymatic components of the *C. thermocellum* system as an example, only about 20% of the diversity has been functionally expressed.

Another approach to increasing specific activity is to mimic the cellulosome system of complexed enzymes bound to the cell surface. This approach has shown promising results with activity enhancement of 4.5-fold for complexed systems compared with the same enzymes in a non-complexed system [27]. Surface display and endoglucanase activity have been demonstrated in yeast in several instances [28–30]. Recombinant cellulosomes capable of solubilizing 30% of 10 g/L PASC in 73 hours were developed by expressing a scaffoldin and 3 enzymatic subunits in a single yeast strain [31]. By expressing cellulosome components separately, a different group was able to achieve 60% solubilization of 10 g/L PASC in 50 hours [32]. However in both of these cases, the cellulosome-displaying yeast were unable to grow on PASC, and hydrolysis required a high cell density (OD₆₀₀ ~ 50) using cells pre-cultured in rich media.

Once an enzyme system is created, the components of that system must be combined in an organism to allow cellulose and/or hemicellulose hydrolysis. The first report of anaerobic conversion of phosphoric acid swollen cellulose (PASC) into ethanol using *S. cerevisiae* at low cell densities, to our knowledge, was published in 2007, where the authors demonstrated ~27% conversion of PASC in 192 hours [33]. As per recent reports, more rapid conversion of PASC into ethanol was achieved by optimizing the level and ratios of cellulase enzymes in *S. cerevisiae* using delta-integration of cellulase genes followed by screening for PASC solubilization [34]. The yield of 75% of theoretical ethanol suggests that further increases in enzyme production are necessary and/or additional enzymes to achieve complete conversion. Expression of a single engineered endoglucanase, Bscel5 at very high levels (~5.9% of total cell protein) in *Bacillus subtilis* has been shown to allow conversion of 7 g/L reactive amorphous cellulose (RAC) into 4 g/L lactate in 144 hours [35]. A recent patent application describes the construction of *S. cerevisiae* strains expressing cellulases that can produce small amounts of ethanol directly from Avicel (a crystalline cellulose) by virtue of these expressed enzymes, which to our knowledge is the first report of its kind [36]. Using strains described in this patent application the authors have observed 80% conversion of PASC into ethanol by recombinant *S. cerevisiae* in 96 hours, and 90% conversion of bacterial microcrystalline cellulose into ethanol in 144 hours, using low inoculums (5% v/v) (Unpublished results). While these studies demonstrate the principle that cellulose chains can be hydrolyzed by recombinant enzyme systems, they have all been carried out on extremely reactive substrates, and all but one on amorphous cellulose. Substrates available in

Table 3

Expression of cellulase components in *S. cerevisiae*

Type of Activity	Cazy family/ Gene Name*	Actively Expressed in <i>S. cerevisiae</i> **			
		<i>T. reesei</i> Herpoel/Gimbert (2008)	<i>T. reesei</i> Nagendran 2009	<i>C. thermocellum</i> Raman et al. 2009 (fig 5&6)***	
Cellobiohydrolase/ Exoglucanase	GH7	1			
	GH6	1			
	GH5				
	GH9				
	GH48				
Endoglucanase	GH7	2			
	GH5	2			
	GH12	2			
	GH61	2			
	GH45	2			
	GH6	2			
	GH?	2			
	GH9	2			
	GH8	2			
	GH74	2			
xyloglucanase	GH74	2			
β -glucosidase	GH3	3			
xylanase	GH11	4			
	GH10	2			
β -xylosidase	GH3	5			
	GH43	2			
β -mannanase	GH26				
	GH5	6			
β -mannosidase	GH2				
	GH26	2			
acetylxylanesterase	CE5				
	CE1	2			
arabinofuranosidase	GH54	2			
	GH43				
ferulicacid/cinnamoyl esterase	CE1	2			
Swollenin	SWO	8			
glucuronoyl esterase	CIP2	2			
Arabinosidase	GH62				
Polygalacturonase	GH28	11			
α -mannosidase	GH47	*****			
β 1,3-glucanase	GH55				
α -galactosidase		7			
β -galactosidase	GH35	12			
α -glucuronidase	GH67	9			
Acetyl esterase	CE16				
Scaffoldin	CipA	10****			
Anchor protein	SdbA				
Anchor protein	Orf2p				
Anchor protein	OlpB				
Lichenase	GH16				
Putative Esterase	CE12				
Putative Esterase	CE3				
Putative Glycosidase	GH43				
Putative Pectinase	PL11				
Putative Pectinase	PL1	2			
Putative Pectinase	PL1, PL9				
Serpin Proteinase Inhibitor					
Multifunctional (Endoglucanase, ?)	GH9, GH44				
Multifunctional (Endoglucanase, Esterase)	GH5, CE2				
Multifunctional (Endoglucanase, ?)	GH5, GH26				
Multifunctional (Endoglucanase, arabinofuranosidase)	GH5, GH43				
Multifunctional (Xylanase, Esterase)	GH10, CE1				
Multifunctional (Xylanase, Esterase)	GH11, CE4				

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*Enzymes of unreported function are not included

**Numbers given are example references

*** *C. thermocellum* contains multiple versions of several

****Chimeric scaffolding expressed, much smaller than

*****Native *S. cerevisiae*?-mannosidase is localized to ER

industrial processes are unlikely to be as amorphous in character or as reactive as these model substrates, however, and development of CBP organisms using PASC may mask the need for enzymes targeting crystalline cellulose.

In addition to the advances in cellulose utilization, there has been some work directed toward obtaining polymeric hemicellulose utilization. An obvious prerequisite to hemicellulose utilization is the ability to use the monomer sugars, including xylose, galactose, arabinose, mannose, and others resulting from hydrolysis. It is also often necessary to be able to consume these sugars in the presence of glucose, or cello-oligomers. While several candidate organisms such as *E. coli* and *B. subtilis* already possess this ability, it must be engineered into *S. cerevisiae*. Pentose fermentation by *S. cerevisiae* is relatively advanced, and has been reviewed elsewhere [37]. However, one new direction for the field is the creation of strains that co-ferment cellobiose and xylose [38]. In these strains a cellodextrin transporter is coupled with xylose fermentation capability, relieving inhibition of xylose utilization by glucose. Because cellobiose is a potent inhibitor of cellulases, industrial processes where separate hydrolysis and fermentation are used are unlikely to have high concentrations of cellobiose and xylose, but this technology may be applicable to CBP processes if cellobiose or other cello-oligomers can be created and rapidly co-fermented with xylose.

As discussed above (Table 3), many if not all of the necessary enzyme classes for hemicellulose hydrolysis have been expressed in *S. cerevisiae*. A recent publication demonstrates that a combination of xylanase, β -xylosidase, and β -glucosidase in a xylose utilizing background yielded 76% conversion of oligomers from pretreated rice straw [39], although these results were obtained using very high cell densities (100 g/L wet cell weight). In addition to this study, several xylan fermenting *E. coli* strains have been developed. A binary culture of *E. coli* strains expressing xylanase enzymes was shown to allow 63% of the birchwood xylan initially present to be converted into ethanol without the addition of exogenous enzymes [40]. Another example of hemicellulase engineering in *E. coli* demonstrated the production of fatty acid ethyl esters from birchwood xylan by expressing the endoxylanase Xyn10B and the xylanases Xsa. In this case, the expression of just two enzymes was sufficient to support growth on xylan [41].

Microbial cellulose utilization fundamentals

There are substantial and perhaps underestimated additional phenomena that arise when considering solubilization of cellulose and other insoluble biomass components by cultures of saccharolytic microbes as compared to solubilization by cell-free enzymatic systems. Examples of these phenomena include bioenergetics

[42], implications of attachment of cells to the surface of insoluble substrates and expression of saccharolytic enzymes on the cell surface with respect to kinetics and substrate capture [43], and metabolic control related to the choice between investing cellular resources in cellulase or growth. There are also some foundational questions of great relevance to CBP for which there are not yet definitive answers, notably including:

- Under what conditions (e.g. temperature, pH, substrate particle size, presence of multiple microorganisms with complementary capabilities) does microbial cellulose utilization proceed fastest?
- How do saccharolytic microbes compare to cell-free cellulase systems as agents of biomass solubilization with respect to key variables such as rate, yield, and the extent of pretreatment required?

While outstanding issues remain, understanding microbial cellulose utilization has received an increased level of effort in the last five years with many exciting findings in the publication pipeline. Highlights of published work during this period include systematic study of the implications of enzymes displayed on the cell surface [31,32,43], indications of cellulose binding-triggered gene expression [44,45,46,47,48,49,50], quantitative demonstration of enzyme-microbe synergy [4], the first studies involving targeted knockout of cellulase components in an obligate anaerobe [8,51], and demonstration of high conversion of unpretreated lignocellulose by microbial cultures [15]. A particularly important focus research during the coming years will be to extend fundamentals-inclusive studies to include lignocellulosic substrates and operation under conditions approaching those that would occur in an industrial process.

Conclusions

During the last five years, key advances have been made in organism development for CBP, while at the same time remaining barriers have been brought into focus. For the native strategy, key advances include development of genetic systems for several cellulolytic anaerobic bacteria, engineering a cellulolytic host to produce butanol, and engineering of a thermophilic bacterium to produce ethanol at commercially attractive yields and titers. For the recombinant strategy, key advances include high-yield conversion of model cellulosic substrates and heterologous expression of CBH1 and CBH2 in yeast at levels believed to be sufficient for an industrial process. For both strategies, increased emphasis on realizing high performance under industrial conditions is needed. Demonstrating high fermentation yields and titer from practical, pretreated lignocellulosic feedstocks is a particular priority for the native strategy. Co-expression of multiple proteins allowing utilization of such pretreated feedstocks with high hydrolysis yields and reasonable rates is a particular priority for the recombinant

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strategy. Continued exploration of the underlying fundamentals of microbial cellulose utilization is likely to be useful in order to guide the choice and development of CBP systems.

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