

Modern Method of Lactic Acid Recovery from Fermentation Broth

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Abstract

HÁBOVÁ V., MELZOCH K., RYCHTERA M. (2004): **Modern method of lactic acid recovery from fermentation broth.** Czech J. Food Sci., **22**: 87–94.

Electrodialysis was used for lactic acid recovery from fermentation broth. In the first step, lactate was recovered and concentrated by desalting electrodialysis, and the second step was electroconversion of lactate to lactic acid by water-splitting electrodialysis. The final lactic acid concentration of 151 g/l was obtained. Total energy required in both electrodialysis processes was about 1.5 kWh per 1 kg of lactic acid obtained. The fermentation broth had to be pretreated prior to the electrodialysis experiments. The pretreatment consisted of ultrafiltration, decolourisation, and the removal of multivalent metal ions.

Keywords: lactic acid recovery; electrodialysis; pretreatment of fermentation broth

Lactic acid (2-hydroxypropionic acid) was discovered for the first time in 1780 by a Swedish chemist Scheele and since 1881 it has been produced commercially by fermentation. Lactic acid is frequently used in food industry, esp. for the beverage production and in pharmaceutical industry, chemical industry, or medicine (VICK ROY 1985). The recent growing interest for the manufacture of biodegradable plastics initiates a high demand for lactic acid as the raw material for polylactate production (DATTA *et al.* 1995; SÖDERGARD & STOLT 2002).

Another very promising lactic acid application is the production of environmentally friendly “green” solvents (lactate esters). They can replace traditional solvents made from petrochemical feedstocks (TSAI *et al.* 1999).

Generally, lactic acid can be manufactured by either biological fermentation or chemical synthesis. While the chemical synthesis produces a racemic mixture of lactic acid (L(+)- and D(-)-forms), fermentation technology is able to selectively synthesise the desired enantiomer due to the high stereospecificity of several lactic acid bacteria. The traditional fermentation process is carried out in the batch mode at a constant pH between 5.5 and 6.0 and at temperatures above 40°C, with molasses or other sugars as the C-source (KAŠČÁK *et al.* 1996).

There are a lot of studies on lactic acid fermentation, on the production of L(+) lactic acid, and on the use of the agricultural cellulosic feedstock and waste for this purpose (IYER & LEE 1999; BAI *et al.* 2003a,b; JIN *et al.* 2003; WASEWAR *et al.* 2003).

Supported from EUREKA Σ! 1820 BIOLACTATE and by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic, Grant No. CEZ: J19/98: 223300005.

To obtain lactic acid of the required purity, efficient downstream processing is necessary. The conventional fermentation process produces calcium lactate precipitate which has to be reacidified with a strong acid; large amounts of effluents arise, in particular gypsum. It was estimated that downstream processes absorb about 80% of the production costs, indicating an urgent need for more economical downstream technologies, and for bioengineers to design and operate them (HULSE 2004).

Recently, many investigations were focused on the downstream processing of lactic acid from fermentation broth with the aim to reduce costs, to simplify the recovery procedure, to reduce the contents of effluents, and to decrease the negative impact on the surrounding environment (TIMMER *et al.* 1994; MATSUMOTO *et al.* 1998; FRIELING & SCHÜGERL 1999; CAO *et al.* 2002).

Membrane techniques, mainly electro dialysis and nanofiltration, have been shown as promising ways for the lactic acid recovery (JEANTET *et al.* 1996; BAILLY 2002; CHOI *et al.* 2002). LEE *et al.* (1998) used a two-stage electro dialysis method for the lactic acid recovery and KIM and MOON (2001) used one-stage electro dialysis with two- and three-compartment water-splitting electro dialysis. LI *et al.* (2004) proposed an electrokinetic membrane bioreactor for the lactic acid production that couples fermentation with *in situ* lactic acid separation and the product concentration. BÖRGARDTS *et al.* (1998) studied an integrated process using electro dialysis for the lactic acid recovery. MIN-TIAN *et al.* (2003) described the production of L(+) lactic acid by the electro dialysis fermentation.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Chemicals. Sodium lactate (p. a. purity) was from Sigma, the other chemicals were chemically pure products of Lachema (Brno, Czech Republic). Demineralised water (resistivity of 18.2 MΩ.cm) was prepared from distilled water in the device Millipore – Q gradient (Molsheim, France). Granulated active charcoal Purolite AC 20G (Purolite International Ltd., UK) was used for decolourisation of the fermentation broth. Chelating resin Purolite S 940 (Purolite International Ltd., UK) and the weak cation exchanger Duolite C-433 (Fluka, Switzerland) were used for the recovery of multivalent metal ions.

Fermentation broth. Real fermentation broth was obtained through lactic acid fermentation using

Lactobacillus plantarum L10 as the producent strain (the strain was obtained from the Collection of Department of Dairy and Fat Technologies, ICT Prague, Czech Republic). The lactate concentration ranged from 17 to 88 g/l. The initial medium consisted, respectively, of (g/l): glucose, 40–100; yeast extract, 5.3; KH₂PO₄, 2.6; CH₃COONa.3H₂O, 6.6; ammonium citrate 2.6; MgSO₄.7H₂O, 0.24; MnSO₄.4H₂O. The fermentation temperature was 37°C and pH was kept at 5.8 by means of NaOH (20 g/l).

Electro dialysis equipment. The electro dialysis laboratory unit BEL-500 (Berghof, Germany) consisted of a control unit (adjustable outputs of voltage from 0 to 50 V and of current from 0 to 3.9 A), a measuring device (conductivity and voltage), and 3 independent circuits with pumps and storage containers (for the diluate, the concentrate, and the electrode solution). The membrane stack ED 0 (Mega, Czech Republic) with 20 pairs of ion exchange membranes Ralex CMH and Ralex AMH was used for the desalting in the electro dialysis experiments. The effective membrane area was 180 cm², the distance between the membranes was 1 mm. Stack Type 500 with 4 bipolar membranes Neosepta BP-1 and 5 cation exchange membranes Neosepta CMB (Tokuyama Corp., Japan) was used for water-splitting electro dialysis, the distance between membranes being 0.5 mm. The effective membrane area was 57.6 cm².

Operating conditions. Electro dialysis experiments were carried out in the batch mode.

Desalting electro dialysis: The electrode solution (Na₂SO₄ – 25 g/l), the concentrate (sodium lactate – initial concentration 3–104 g/l), and the diluate (the pretreated fermentation broth – the initial concentration from 15 to 88 g/l) were circulated through the corresponding compartments of the desalting stack at the flow rate of 2.4 l/min. For the constant current period, voltage of 1.5 V per one pair and current density of 7.8 mA/cm² were used. For the constant voltage period, voltage of 18 V was used. The experiments were terminated when the lactate concentration in the diluate dropped to 1–2 g/l.

In the case of the two-level electro dialysis, only the depleted diluate was replaced by another fresh fermentation broth after the first level. The conditions of the second level were the same as mentioned above.

For water-splitting electro dialysis, the following solutions were used: NaOH – 20 g/l (electrode

solution), NaOH – 1 g/l (concentrate), and the concentrate obtained from desalting electrodi-
alysis (diluate). Current density of 67.7 mA/cm²
and voltage of 12 V were applied. The circulation
flow rate was 2 l/min. When conductivity in the
diluate reached the value of 5 mS/cm, the experi-
ments were terminated.

Ultrafiltration. UF cartridge TFF 300 kD (Mil-
lipore, USA) was used for the clarification of the
fermented broth.

**Decolourisation, the removal of multivalent
metal ions.** These operations were carried out in
glass columns filled with the above mentioned ma-
terials. The flow rate of the cell-free fermentation
broth through the column was 1 bed volume per
hour (decolourisation), resp. 2 bed volumes per
hour (removing of multivalent metal ions).

Analytical methods. Lactate was determined
by HPLC (Laboratorní přístroje Praha, Czech
Republic); column – Ostion LG KS in H-cycle;
refractometer detector RIDK 101; mobile phase
– H₂SO₄ (*c* = 0.005 mol/l), flow rate of the mobile
phase 0.5 ml/min; column temperature 85°C. The
concentration of lactic acid and the concentration
of NaOH were determined by titration with stand-
ard solutions of NaOH (*c* = 0.025 mol/l) or HCl
(*c* = 1 mol/l), respectively, using phenolphthalein as
indicator. The colour intensity of the fermentation
broth was measured by spectrophotometer at the
wavelength of 400 nm relative to water. Multivalent

metal ions were determined by AAS method, and
the biomass as a dry weight at 105°C.

Calculations. The equations were taken from
LEE *et al.* (1998).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A sequence of five separate steps for the lactic
acid recovery from the fermentation broth was
proposed and tested. The separation consisted of
three pre-treating steps (ultrafiltration, decolouri-
sation, the removal of multivalent metal ions),
and of two electrodi-
alysis procedures (desalting
electrodi-
alysis and water-splitting electrodi-
alysis) (Figure 1).

Pretreatment of fermentation broth

The fermentation broth had to be pretreated
prior to the electrodi-
alysis experiment due to the
high demands of the electrodi-
alysis membranes,
especially bipolar ones, on the quality of the feed
solution used. The cells can be deposited on the
membrane surface and create clusters in the space
between the membranes, the dyes from the fermen-
tation broth can be adsorbed on the membranes.
Both phenomena significantly decrease the elec-
trodi-
alysis efficiency (CZYTKO *et al.* 1987; HERIBAN
et al. 1993). Multivalent metal ions (Ca, Mg, Fe,
etc.) cause irreversible damage of the bipolar

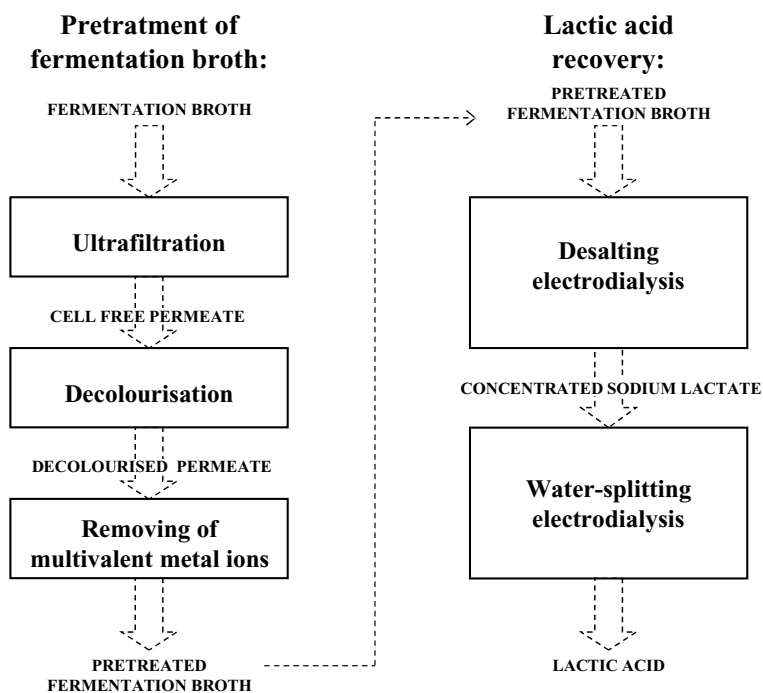


Figure 1. Scheme of lactic acid recovery from fermentation broth

membranes, they require, consequently, less than 1 mg multivalent metal ions per litre.

Ultrafiltration

The broth after lactic acid fermentation contained 3.35 g/l of biomass, the cells having been removed from it by a spiral-wound module. The cell free permeate and concentrate containing 51.1 g/l of biomass were obtained. Relatively considerable fouling of membranes was found. To use a different type of the membrane cartridge would seem advisable.

Decolourisation

The renewable granulated active charcoal Purolite AC 20 was chosen and used for decolourisation. The results were reported earlier (HÁBOVÁ *et al.* 2001).

The flow of the fermentation broth through the column influenced significantly the decolourisation degree. If the flow rate was as slow as 1 bed volume per hour only, the amount of the fermentation broth corresponding to the 10-fold bed volume was decolourised by 90%. At a higher flow rate, the decolourisation capacity decreased. When the decolourisation was carried out in a batch mode, the decolourisation degree was equal to that mentioned above; more decolourising agent, however, was used up.

Regeneration was done successively by water flow, by boiling with 4% HCl, by water flow, by boiling with 4% HCl and by water flow. Regenerated charcoal showed practically the same decolourisation capacity as the initial batch and its value after 15 decolourising cycles was lower by 5%.

Removal of multivalent metal ions

Two ion exchangers were tested. The chelating resin Purolite AC 20 G showed better results than the weak cation exchanger Duolite C-433 (Table 1). Purolite AC 20 G was used for the removal of multivalent metal ions from the fermentation broth designated for the electro dialysis experiments.

Table 1. Comparison of resins used for removal of multivalent metal ions (flow rate was 2 bed volumes/h)

Ion exchanger	Purolite S 940	Duolite C-433
Initial bivalent ions concentration (mmol/l)	1.845	1.845
Final bivalent ions concentration (mmol/l)	0.0025	0.05
Treated bed volumes	42	24
Retained ion efficiency (%)	99.8	97.2
Convenient for process	yes	no

The compositions of the initial fermentation broth and of that treated with resin are given in Table 2. Depleted broth contained less than 1 mg/l of multivalent metals and the bipolar membrane could be used without risk of irreversible membrane damage.

Electrodialysis

Two-stage electro dialysis method was used for lactic acid recovery. Sodium lactate was removed from the pretreated fermentation broth and was concentrated by desalting electro dialysis. Further it was converted to lactic acid by water-splitting electro dialysis using bipolar membranes. Lactic acid was recovered from the model solutions and from the pretreated fermentation broth. The experiments with model solutions were focused on the determination of suitable conditions for the electro dialysis experiments and on the investigation of the time course under different conditions. The results obtained with model solutions were published earlier (HÁBOVÁ *et al.* 2001, 2004).

Desalting electro dialysis

For desalting electro dialysis the fermentation broth was used with three different levels of lactate concentration: 18, 36, and 87 g/l. The results of the

Table 2. Composition of initial and treated fermentation broth (mg/l)

	Ca	Mg	Fe	Mn	Zn	Na	K
Initial fermentation broth	28.3	38.8	0.64	4.36	0.44	16 500	935
Treated fermentation broth	0.39	0.47	0.04	0.02	0.02	16 800	868

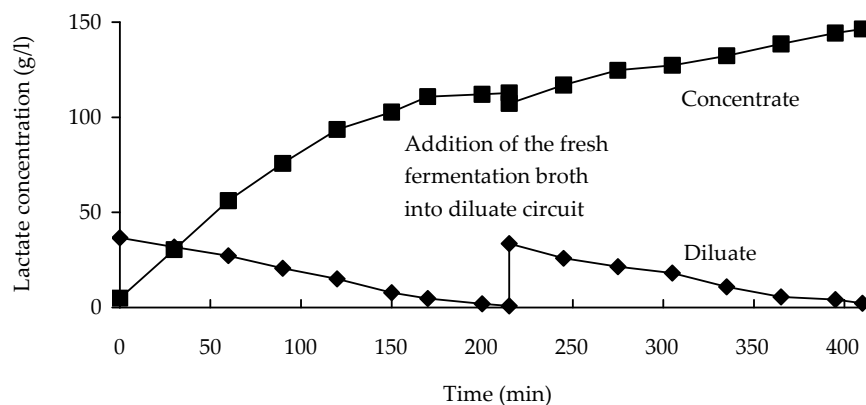


Figure 2. The time course of two level desalting electro dialysis of the pretreated fermentation broth

Table 3. Desalting electro dialysis experiments

Experiment	Operating time (min)	V_{D_0}/V_{K_0}	Concentration (g/l)				Current efficiency (%)	Energy consumption (kWh/kg)
			initial diluate	final diluate	initial concentrate	final concentrate		
DM 1	120	1.87	18.1	1.3	3.9	29.2	53	0.41
DM 2	165	1.87	17.3	1.3	28.7	45.4	55	0.54
DM 3	195	1.87	22.2	1.2	43.0	60.6	39	0.53
DM 4	195	7.50	36.3	2.0	2.8	108	66	0.32
DM 5	180	7.50	36.9	2.8	104	152	69	0.32
DM 6	215	7.50	36.6	0.9	4.8	113	64	0.34
DM 7	195	7.50	36.2	1.2	107	147	64	0.34
DM 8	215	4.38	88.3	3.7	96.4	185	82	0.21
DM 9	220	4.38	85.8	1.2	93.6	175	81	0.22

V_{D_0} – initial volume of diluate, V_{K_0} – initial volume of concentrate

desalting electro dialysis experiments are shown in Table 3. The highest lactate concentration reached was 185 g/l. The comparison of the lactate recovery from the model solutions and from the fermentation broth showed that, in the case of fermentation broth with lower initial lactate concentrations, the transport rate decreased, the energy consumption increased, and the current efficiency decreased.

Nevertheless, at higher lactate concentrations in the fermentation broth a very good agreement with the model solutions was found.

Figure 2 shows the time course of two-level electro dialysis of fermentation broth. The initial lactate concentration was 36.6 g/l while the final one of 146 g/l was obtained in the concentrate stream. About 1 g lactate per litre remained in the diluate

Table 4. Water-splitting electro dialysis

Experiment	Operating time (min)	Concentration (g/l)			Current efficiency (%)	Energy consumption (kWh/kg)
		initial lactate	final lactic acid	final NaOH		
WM 1	390	145	121	43	66	1.16
WM 2	430	171	151	53	79	0.95

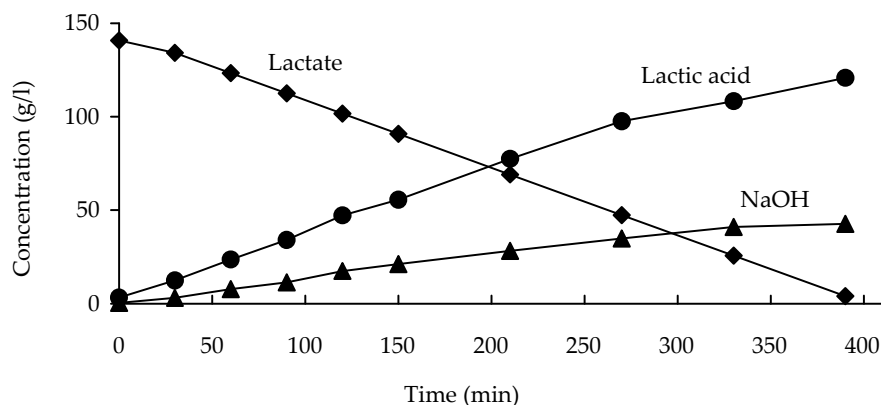


Figure 3. The typical time course of water-splitting electro dialysis

at the end of each level. The concentration of lactate obtained during the two-level electro dialysis was about 4-times higher than that in the fermentation broth. The current efficiency was 64% and the energy consumption was 0.34 kWh/kg.

Due to a high lactate concentration and the lowest concentration of multivalent metal ions, concentrates DM 7 and DM 9 were used for the water-splitting electro dialysis experiments. The other concentrates had too low lactate concentrations or contained more than 1 mg of multivalent metal ions per litre and could not be used, consequently, for the bipolar membrane treatment.

Water-splitting electro dialysis

Water-splitting electro dialysis using bipolar membrane was used for electroconversion of sodium lactate to lactic acid. Time profile of water-splitting electro dialysis is obvious from Figure 3. Table 4 shows the results of two experiments with sodium lactate which was recovered from fermentation broth and concentrated by desalting electro dialysis. The values obtained are very similar to those achieved with model lactate solutions. The final lactic acid concentrations of 121 and 151 g/l, corresponding, respectively, to 92 and 95% conversion were obtained; the energy consumption was about 1 kWh/kg. The final base concentration was 43 and 53 g/l and the current efficiency was 70–80%.

Conclusions

Lactic acid separation from fermentation broth was studied comprehensively and the results obtained showed a very good agreement with the literature sources (LEE *et al.* 1998; BAILLY 2002).

The results confirm that two stage electro dialysis is a suitable and efficient technique for the recovery of lactate ions from the pretreated fermentation broth and the subsequent conversion into lactic acid with respect to environmental aspects.

In the first electro dialysis step, the final lactate concentration of up to 175 g/l was obtained while the final lactic acid concentration of 151 g/l was reached in the second step. The total energy required in both electro dialysis processes representing the energy consumption for the lactate transfer and for its electroconversion to lactic acid was about 1.5 kWh/kg of lactic acid obtained.

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Received for publication February 2, 2004

Accepted after corrections April 7, 2004

Souhrn

HÁBOVÁ V., MELZOCH K., RYCHTERA M. (2004): **Nová metoda separace kyseliny mléčné z fermentačního média.** *Czech J. Food Sci.*, **22**: 87–94.

Pro separaci kyseliny mléčné z fermentačního média byla použita dvoustupňová elektro dialýza. V prvním stupni byl laktát sodný separován a nakoncentrován pomocí odsolovací elektro dialýzy a následně ve druhém stupni byl pomocí elektro dialýzy s bipolárními membránami konvertován na kyselinu mléčnou. V prvním stupni bylo v 1 litru získáno až 175 g laktátu a z něj ve druhém stupni 151 g kyseliny mléčné. Celkově bylo třeba na získání 1 kg

kyseliny mléčné vynaložit 1,5 kWh elektrické energie. Před elektrodialýzou muselo být fermentační médium upravováno. Úprava spočívala v ultrafiltraci, odbarvování a odstranění vícemocných iontů kovů.

Klíčová slova: izolace kyseliny mléčné; elektrodialýza; předúprava fermentačního média

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