Geographical susceptibility of Louisiana and Texas populations of the sugarcane borer, *Diatraea saccharalis* (F.) (Lepidoptera: Crambidae) to *Bacillus thuringiensis* Cry1Ab protein

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Received 10 August 2007; received in revised form 7 November 2007; accepted 8 November 2007

Abstract

The susceptibilities of 18 field populations of the sugarcane borer, *Diatraea saccharalis* (F.), to two sources of *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) Cry1Ab protein were determined using laboratory bioassays. Fifteen of the 18 field populations were collected from seven locations across Louisiana and the other three populations were sampled from the Gulf Coast area of Texas during 2004–2006. Neonates of *D. saccharalis* were exposed to a meridic diet treated with selected concentrations of Cry1Ab protein. Larval mortality was measured at 7 days after inoculation. Statistically significant differences in median lethal concentrations (LC\textsubscript{50}s) were detected among insect populations from different geographical locations, but the field populations remained as susceptible as a laboratory strain of *D. saccharalis* that had been maintained in the laboratory for > 20 years without exposure to any chemical insecticides or Bt toxins. The LC\textsubscript{50}s of Cry1Ab protein, which was extracted from DKC69-70 Bt corn hybrid, ranged from 0.03 to 0.32 \textmu g/g for the seven field populations collected during 2004. The LC\textsubscript{50} values based on bioassays with purified, trypsin-activated Cry1Ab protein from a recombinant *Escherichia coli* culture were 0.03–0.17 \textmu g/g for the 11 field populations collected during 2005–2006. Small changes in Cry1Ab susceptibility were detected among crops, years of sampling, or locations. All field-collected insect populations, except one, exhibited lower LC\textsubscript{50} values than the laboratory strain. The results of this study suggest that field populations of *D. saccharalis* remain generally susceptible to the Cry1Ab protein after 8 years use of transgenic Bt corn in Louisiana and the Gulf Coast area of Texas.

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Keywords: *Diatraea saccharalis*; Cry1Ab; *Bacillus thuringiensis*; Susceptibility; Field corn

1. Introduction

Evaluating the susceptibility of an insect pest species to insecticides across geographic areas is useful in assessing the potential risk of resistance development, understanding if variation in susceptibility among different populations is associated with the historical use of insecticides, and measuring the success of resistance management programs (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2001). Significant variation in susceptibility to an insecticide among geographic populations of an insect species often

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indicates a high risk of resistance development (Kinsinger and McGaughey, 1979).

The sugarcane borer, *Diatraea saccharalis* (F.), is a key pest of sugarcane in the Americas (Long and Hensley, 1972; Reagan, 2001; Posey et al., 2006). Occasionally, this insect also causes economic losses in rice and grain sorghum (Castro et al., 2004a). In recent years, *D. saccharalis* has become an important corn stalk boring species in some areas in the mid-southern region of the United States, especially in Louisiana (Castro et al., 2004a; Huang et al., 2006a) and Texas (Porter et al., 2005). A 3-year survey (2004–2006) in Louisiana showed that *D. saccharalis* accounted for 73% of the total corn borer populations across the major corn areas of the state (Huang et al., 2006a). Large sugarcane borer infestations on field corn were also reported in south and central Texas during 2005 (Porter et al., 2005). This insect species was recently listed as a target pest of transgenic *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) corn in the United States (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2005a, b).

Although studies have shown that corn plants expressing Cry1Ab protein (e.g. YieldGard™ corn) are less potent against *D. saccharalis* than against other major corn borer species such as European corn borer, *Ostrinia nubilalis* (Hübner), and southwestern corn borer, *Diatraea grandiosella* Dyar (Castro et al., 2004b; McAllister et al., 2004; Huang et al., 2006b), Bt corn has been successfully used since 1999 to control a corn borer complex of *D. grandiosella* and *D. saccharalis* in the mid-southern region of the United States (Castro et al., 2004a; Sankula and Blumenthal, 2004). Transgenic Bt corn is now the most important tool for management of corn borer pests in the region, accounting for >40% of the total corn acreage (National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2006; Huang et al., 2006a). The high adoption of Bt crops will place strong selection pressure on target pest populations that could eventually lead to resistance in the field. Management of *D. saccharalis* resistance, therefore, is important in order to ensure the long-term success of transgenic Bt corn technology for the region.

Although resistance to Bt in field populations has not resulted in field control failures in target insect species after 11 seasons of commercial use of Bt corn and Bt cotton, major resistance genes that could allow insects to complete development on Bt crops have been detected in three species targeted by Bt cotton (Gould et al., 1997; Tabashnik et al., 2000; Akhurst et al., 2003; Gunning et al., 2005; Xu et al., 2005) and one species, *D. saccharalis*, targeted by Bt corn (Huang et al., 2007a; Wu et al., 2007). Bt-resistant *D. saccharalis* demonstrated resistance to all seven commercial corn hybrids expressing the Cry1Ab protein evaluated by Wu et al. (2007).

Information regarding regional differences in susceptibility to Bt toxins in populations of *D. saccharalis* is unavailable. In this study, the susceptibilities of a laboratory strain and 18 field populations of *D. saccharalis* to two sources of Cry1Ab protein were determined using laboratory bioassays. These field populations were collected from corn, sugarcane, rice, and grain sorghum from seven locations in Louisiana and three locations of the Gulf Coast area of Texas. The objectives of this study were to estimate geographical variation in susceptibility of *D. saccharalis* to Bt proteins, and to provide baseline information to measure any notable changes in Bt susceptibility that could occur in field populations of this species following several years of commercial use of transgenic Bt corn.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Insect collection

During 2004, seven field populations of *D. saccharalis* were established from pupae or late-stage larvae collected from four crops in five parishes in Northeast and Central Louisiana (Fig. 1 and Table 1). Three populations were

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![Fig. 1. Sampling locations (parish/county) where *Diatraea saccharalis* were collected in Louisiana and Texas, USA.](image-url)
collected from corn, two from sugarcane, one from grain sorghum, and one from rice. The parental collections used to establish each population ranged from 41 to 150 individuals. During 2005–2006, 11 populations were established from pupae and larvae collected from cornfields in four parishes of Louisiana and three locations in Texas (Fig. 1 and Table 2). Each insect population established during 2005–2006 was initiated from 58 to 150 field-collected individuals for each of the eight Louisiana populations and from 20 to 30 individuals for each of the three Texas populations. Larval and pupal mortality could occur during insect rearing in the laboratory. The actual initial individuals that made contributions to each population could be less than the number of insects collected from the field. Based on independent data from rearing *D. saccharalis*, mortality of field-collected larvae reared on meridic diet was usually low (e.g., <9%) with a high pupal emergence rate (e.g., >95%) (Huang et al., 2007a).

Insects were collected during the first field generation (for the 2004 Franklin population from corn plants) or the second field generation (for all other insect populations).

### Table 1
Susceptibility of Louisiana populations of *Diatraea saccharalis* collected during 2004 to *Bacillus thuringiensis* Cry1Ab protein extracted from Bt corn leaf tissues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location/population (parish)</th>
<th>Host</th>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>No. of insects collected</th>
<th>( \chi^2 )</th>
<th>( p )</th>
<th>Slope ± SE</th>
<th>LC(_{50}(95% CI)) (mg/g)(^b,c)</th>
<th>LC(_{95}(95% CI)) (mg/g)(^c,d)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lab(^a)</td>
<td>Sugarcane</td>
<td>&gt;20</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>30.12</td>
<td>0.0255</td>
<td>1.94 ±0.29</td>
<td>0.38(0.28–0.54) d</td>
<td>2.67(1.48–7.92) c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin(^a)</td>
<td>Corn</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>23.34</td>
<td>0.0417</td>
<td>2.99 ±0.43</td>
<td>0.27(0.21–0.34) d</td>
<td>0.97(0.70–1.70) c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapides</td>
<td>Corn</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>37.63</td>
<td>0.0098</td>
<td>1.84 ±0.25</td>
<td>0.15(0.11–0.20) b</td>
<td>1.18(0.73–2.63) c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pointe Coupee</td>
<td>Sorghum</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>21.46</td>
<td>0.2567</td>
<td>3.57 ±0.34</td>
<td>0.19(0.16–0.21) c</td>
<td>0.54(0.43–0.74) b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin</td>
<td>Sorghum</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>44.80</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
<td>3.20 ±0.70</td>
<td>0.32(0.22–0.44) d</td>
<td>1.06(0.69–3.04) c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin</td>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>27.28</td>
<td>0.1261</td>
<td>1.70 ±0.30</td>
<td>0.27(0.21–0.34) d</td>
<td>0.67(0.50–0.91) b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoyelles</td>
<td>Sugarcane</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>28.49</td>
<td>0.0550</td>
<td>3.22 ±0.53</td>
<td>0.04(0.03–0.05) a</td>
<td>0.12(0.09–0.20) a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcasieu</td>
<td>Sugarcane</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>14.28</td>
<td>0.7109</td>
<td>2.44 ±0.35</td>
<td>0.03(0.02–0.04) a</td>
<td>0.15(0.11–0.22) a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)Total number of neonates assayed.
\(^b\)LC\(_{50}\) = 50% lethal concentration and 95% CI = 95% confidence intervals.
\(^c\)LC values within a vertical column followed by different letters are significantly different, lethal dose ratio tests (Robertson and Preisler, 1992).
\(^d\)LC\(_{95}\) = 95% lethal concentration and 95% CI = 95% confidence intervals.

### Table 2
Susceptibility of Louisiana (LA) and Texas (TX) populations of *Diatraea saccharalis* collected from field corn during 2005–2006 to trypsin-activated purified *Bacillus thuringiensis* Cry1Ab protein

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Location/population (parish/county)</th>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>No. of insects collected</th>
<th>( \chi^2 )</th>
<th>( p )</th>
<th>Slope ± SE</th>
<th>LC(_{50}(95% CI)) (mg/g)(^b,c)</th>
<th>LC(_{95}(95% CI)) (mg/g)(^c,d)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Franklin, LA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>0.9985</td>
<td>2.77 ±0.29</td>
<td>0.10(0.09–0.12) def</td>
<td>0.40(0.32–0.54) ed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rapides, LA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>13.38</td>
<td>0.4970</td>
<td>2.02 ±0.36</td>
<td>0.06(0.03–0.08) bc</td>
<td>0.39(0.30–0.60) cd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tensas, LA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>8.13</td>
<td>5.47 ±0.48</td>
<td>0.09(0.08–0.10) cd</td>
<td>0.18(0.16–0.21) a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>East Carroll, LA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>616</td>
<td>17.76</td>
<td>3.91 ±0.30</td>
<td>0.11(0.10–0.12) ef</td>
<td>0.30(0.26–0.36) bc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Franklin, LA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>25.38</td>
<td>0.1148</td>
<td>1.85 ±0.19</td>
<td>0.09(0.08–0.11) cde</td>
<td>0.72(0.52–1.16) d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rapides, LA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>1445</td>
<td>10.46</td>
<td>6.556</td>
<td>2.10 ±0.39</td>
<td>0.03(0.01–0.04) a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tensas, LA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>608</td>
<td>21.99</td>
<td>4.602</td>
<td>1.93 ±0.17</td>
<td>0.17(0.15–0.20) g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>East Carroll, LA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>13.21</td>
<td>5.0997</td>
<td>3.40 ±0.36</td>
<td>0.07(0.06–0.08) bc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Victoria, TX</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>768</td>
<td>17.80</td>
<td>1.7182</td>
<td>1.86 ±0.19</td>
<td>0.08(0.06–0.09) bc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jackson, TX</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>619</td>
<td>41.20</td>
<td>0.0014</td>
<td>1.39 ±0.27</td>
<td>0.04(0.01–0.06) ab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Calhoun, TX</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>632</td>
<td>44.03</td>
<td>0.0006</td>
<td>2.00 ±0.48</td>
<td>0.03(0.01–0.05) a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)Total number of neonates assayed.
\(^b\)LC\(_{50}\) = 50% lethal concentration and 95% CI = 95% confidence intervals.
\(^c\)LC values within a vertical column followed by different letters are significantly different, lethal dose ratio tests (Robertson and Preisler, 1992).
\(^d\)LC\(_{95}\) = 95% lethal concentration and 95% CI = 95% confidence intervals.
In the sampling locations in Northeast Louisiana, corn is the predominant host of *D. saccharalis*, accounting for approximately 82% of total host crop acreages. Bt corn has been planted on the maximum allowable acreage (i.e., 50%) in this area. Two other minor host crops are rice and grain sorghum, representing 15% and 3% of the total host crop acreages, respectively. Sugarcane is not a farm crop in this area (*Louisiana AgCenter*, 2005). In the sampling areas located in Central Louisiana, a mixture of sugarcane, corn, rice, and sorghum are planted, each representing approximately 36%, 17%, 29%, and 18% acreages of the host crops. The corn produced in the seven parishes sampled in Louisiana accounted for approximately 40% of the total corn production of the state (*Louisiana AgCenter*, 2005). The three sampling sites in Texas were selected in the middle Gulf Coast area of the State where field corn was severely infested by *D. saccharalis* during 2005 (Porter et al., 2005).

2.2 Insect culture

Field-collected larvae of *D. saccharalis* were individually reared to the pupal stage in 30-ml plastic cups (Fill-Rite, Newark, NJ) each containing approximately 10 ml of meridic diet (Bio-Serv, Frenchtown, NJ) (Huang et al., 2006b). Pupae, directly collected from fields or derived from field-collected larvae, were placed in 3.79-l cardboard cartons (Neptune Paper Products, Newark, NJ) for adult emergence, mating, and oviposition. Bioassays with field populations of *D. saccharalis* were conducted using neonates of the first, second, or third generation reared in the laboratory. A laboratory strain of *D. saccharalis* was included as a reference. The laboratory strain was originated with larvae collected from sugarcane plants near Houma in Terrebonne Parish, LA, and cultured at the USDA, ARS Sugarcane Research Laboratory, Houma, LA. This colony had been reared on a meridic diet (Bio-Serv, Frenchtown, NJ) (Huang et al., 1993) as described in Huang et al. (2006b). Fresh leaves were removed from corn plants, cut into small pieces, and blended with distilled water in a heavy-duty blender (Model CB15, Waring Laboratory, Torrington, CT). Leaf extract solution was filtered using gauze bags to exclude coarse plant materials. The filtered solution was centrifuged and the supernatant was freeze-dried in a lyophilizer (ART, Laurel, MD) to concentrate the Cry1Ab protein. Cry1Ab concentration in the final solution was determined using an ELISA-based technique (QuantiPlate™ Kit, Envirologix, Portland, ME).

In bioassays with purified protein, Cry1Ab protein (99.99% purity) was obtained from Dr. Marianne Puztai-Carey, Department of Biochemistry, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH. The Cry1Ab protein was produced using recombinant *Escherichia coli* culture and activated with trypsin before it was used in the bioassays. The purity of Cry1Ab protein was determined using high-performance liquid chromatography and sodium dodecyl sulfate polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (Puztai-Carey et al., 1995; Masson et al., 1998).

2.4 Insect bioassays

Susceptibility of *D. saccharalis* to purified Cry1Ab protein or Cry1Ab extracted from Bt corn leaves was determined using a modified procedure as described by Huang et al. (2006b). Neonates (<24 h old) of *D. saccharalis* were placed on a meridic diet that contained different concentrations of the Cry1Ab protein. For bioassays with corn leaf extract, Cry1Ab protein was diluted in a solution of corn leaf extract from DK697 non-Bt corn leaf tissue. The solution containing non-Bt corn leaf extract was obtained by using the same procedures as described for the Cry1Ab protein extractions. Six Cry1Ab concentrations ranging from 0.031 to 1 µg of Cry1Ab protein per g of diet (µg/g) were used in each bioassay. In bioassays with purified Cry1Ab protein, 6–8 concentrations ranging from 0.0625 to 8 µg/g were used for each test. A non-treated control (regular diet) was included in each bioassay. In addition, a negative control (diet treated with a solution containing non-Bt corn leaf extract) also was employed in the leaf extract bioassays.

In bioassays, approximately 1 ml (assays with purified Cry1Ab protein) or 1.5 ml (assays with leaf extract) of treated or non-treated diet was put into each cell of 128-cell trays (Bio-Ba-128, C-D International, Pitman, NJ). One neonate (<24 h old) of *D. saccharalis* was inoculated on the diet surface in each cell. The bioassay trays were placed in an environmental chamber maintained at 27–28 °C, 50% r.h., and a L16:D8 cycle. The number of dead larvae and surviving larvae that did not significantly increase in weight (<0.2 mg per larva) was recorded at 7 days after inoculation. Each combination of insect population by Cry1Ab concentration was replicated four times with 16–32 larvae in each replicate.
2.5. Data analysis

A measurement of ‘practical’ mortality (Sims et al., 1996; Huang et al., 2006b) was used to determine the relative susceptibility of different populations of *D. saccharalis*. This measurement combines both actual mortality as well as larval growth inhibition caused by Cry1Ab protein (Marçon et al., 1999). The practical mortality of *D. saccharalis* at a Cry1Ab concentration was calculated using the following equation: practical mortality (\( \% \)) = 100 \times \frac{[\text{number of dead larvae} + \text{number of surviving larvae}]}{\text{total number of insects tested}} / (Abbott, 1925). Corrected dose/mortality data were then subjected to probit analysis (Finney, 1971; SAS Institute, 1999) to determine Cry1Ab concentrations that caused 50% (LC50) mortality to the control diet using the method described by Abbott (1925). Larval mortality data at each Cry1Ab concentration were corrected for mortality occurring on the control diet using the method described by Abbott (1925). Corrected dose/mortality data were then subjected to probit analysis (Finney, 1971; SAS Institute, 1999) to determine Cry1Ab concentrations that caused 50% (LC50) and 95% (LC95) mortality and the corresponding 95% confidence intervals (CI). Relative susceptibility of different populations of *D. saccharalis* to Cry1Ab protein were compared using LC50 and LC95 values. Lethal dose ratio tests (Robertson and Preisler, 1992) were used to determine significant differences in LC50s and LC95s among insect populations at the \( \alpha = 0.05 \) level.

3. Results

3.1. Susceptibility of *D. saccharalis* to Cry1Ab protein extracted from Bt corn leaf tissues

The median lethal concentrations (LC50s) of Cry1Ab protein extracted from Bt corn leaf tissues to *D. saccharalis* were significantly different \((P < 0.05)\) among the laboratory strain and field populations collected during 2004 (Table 1). All seven field populations exhibited a lower LC50 value than the laboratory strain. The range of LC50s among the field populations was from 0.03 to 0.32 \( \mu \text{g/g} \) (or \( \approx 10\)-fold). The two populations collected from corn and grain sorghum in Franklin Parish were the least susceptible to the Cry1Ab protein with LC50s of 0.27 and 0.32 \( \mu \text{g/g} \), respectively. The LC50s of these two populations were significantly greater \((P < 0.05)\) than the LC50 of the other field populations, except for the population collected from rice in Franklin Parish. The two insect populations collected from sugarcane in Avoyelles and Calcasieu Parishes were the most susceptible to the Cry1Ab protein, with LC50s of 0.03 and 0.04 \( \mu \text{g/g} \), respectively, which were significantly lower \((P < 0.05)\) than that of other populations. Significant differences \((P < 0.05)\) in LC50s were also detected among the three other field populations, but the differences were small \(<2\)-fold.

Difference in the 95% lethal concentrations (LC95s) of Cry1Ab protein extracted from Bt corn leaf tissues to *D. saccharalis* among the eight insect populations evaluated during 2004 followed a similar pattern as observed for the LC50s (Table 1). The LC95s of the seven field populations were lower than that of the laboratory strain, with a range of 0.12 \( \mu \text{g/g} \) for the population collected from sugarcane in Avoyelles Parish to 1.18 \( \mu \text{g/g} \) for the Rapides population collected from corn plants.

3.2. Susceptibility of *D. saccharalis* to trypsin-activated purified Cry1Ab protein

Similarly, the LC50s of *D. saccharalis* to trypsin-activated Cry1Ab protein were significantly \((P < 0.05)\) different among the laboratory strain and the 11 field populations collected during 2005 and 2006 (Table 2). All of the field populations, except one, exhibited lower LC50 values than the laboratory strain. The population collected from Tensas Parish during 2006 was the least susceptible to Cry1Ab protein with an LC50 of 0.17 \( \mu \text{g/g} \), a value that was \( \approx 6\)-fold higher than that of the most susceptible field population. Among the 11 field populations, three populations (Calhoun and Jackson Counties, TX, and Rapides Parish, LA) collected during 2006, were the most susceptible to the purified Cry1Ab protein, with LC50s of 0.03–0.04 \( \mu \text{g/g} \), followed by the two populations from Rapides Parish, LA (LC50 0.06 \( \mu \text{g/g} \), collected during 2005 and East Carroll Parish, LA (LC50 0.07 \( \mu \text{g/g} \), collected during 2006. Significant differences \((P < 0.05)\) in LC50s also were detected among the other five field populations, but the differences were small, and ranged from 0.08 \( \mu \text{g/g} \) (for the population from Victoria County, TX) to 0.10 \( \mu \text{g/g} \) (for the population from Franklin Parish, LA, collected during 2005). Differences in LC50s of the two Franklin populations collected in different years (2005 and 2006) were not significant \((P > 0.05)\). However, for populations collected from Rapides, Tensas, and East Carroll Parishes, LA, differences in LC50s between populations collected in the 2 years at the same location were significant \((P < 0.05)\), but small (e.g. \( \leq 2\)-fold).

There were significant differences \((P < 0.05)\) in LC95s among the laboratory strain and field populations of *D. saccharalis* collected during 2005–2006 (Table 2). Eight of the 11 field populations had lower LC95 values than the laboratory strain. The highest LC95 value (1.09 \( \mu \text{g/g} \)) among the field populations was 7-fold greater than that of the lowest (0.16 \( \mu \text{g/g} \)). The four populations collected from Tensas Parish, LA (2005), Rapides and East Carroll Parishes, LA, and Calhoun County, TX (2006), had the lowest LC95 values (0.16–0.21 \( \mu \text{g/g} \), followed by the population from East Carroll Parish (2005) with an LC95 value of 0.30 \( \mu \text{g/g} \). The two populations collected from Tensas Parish, LA, and Victoria County, TX, during 2006 had the highest LC95s (1.09 and 0.96 \( \mu \text{g/g} \), respectively). The differences in LC95s of the other four field populations were \(<2\)-fold and were not statistically significant \((P > 0.05)\). The LC95 values for the two populations collected from the same location during successive years (2005 and 2006) were not significantly different \((P > 0.05)\) for the populations from Franklin and East Carroll
Parishes, LA, whereas differences between years were significant for populations from Rapides (2-fold) and Tensas (6-fold) Parishes, LA.

4. Discussion

Geographic differences in susceptibility to Bt toxins in several target pests of transgenic Bt corn have been evaluated, including *O. nubilalis* in the United States (Marçon et al., 1999; Reed and Halliday, 2001), Spain (González-Núñez et al., 2000), and Germany (Saeglitz et al., 2006); *D. grandiosella* in the mid-southern United States (Reed and Halliday, 2001, Trisyono and Chippendale, 2002); Mediterranean corn borer, *Sesamia nonagrioides* (Lefebvre), in Spain (González-Núñez et al., 2000); corn earworm, *Helicoverpa zea* (Boddie), in the United States (Siegfried et al., 2000); and western corn rootworm, *Diabrotica virgifera virgifera* LeConte, in the US Midwestern Corn Belt (Siegfried et al., 2005). Variations in Bt susceptibility among geographical populations within an insect species, in general, were relatively small, with <7-fold differences in LC₅₀s.

Before Bt cotton was introduced, notable variation (e.g. up to 8-fold) in Bt susceptibility was observed in the tobacco budworm, *Heliothis virescens* (F.), a primary target pest of Bt cotton, across the US Cotton Belt (Stone and Sims, 1993; Luttrell et al., 1999), but field populations remained as susceptible as laboratory strains that had been reared in the absence of Bt toxins (Luttrell et al., 1999). After several years of commercial use of Bt cotton, field populations of *H. virescens* showed similar susceptibility (Hardée et al., 2001, Ali et al., 2006) to Cry1Ac protein compared with laboratory strains. Similarly, field populations of *Helicoverpa armigera* (Hübner), a primary lepidopterous target pest of Bt cotton in Asia, were susceptible to Cry1Ac protein after several years of extensive use of Bt cotton in China (Wu et al., 2006) and India (Kalia et al., 2006). Before transgenic Bt crops were commercially planted in the fields, considerable differences in Cry1Ac susceptibility (up to 198-fold) and Cry1Ab susceptibility (up to 61-fold) was reported in field populations of *H. zea* collected from southern cotton areas of the United States (Luttrell et al., 1999).

Compared with the previous reports on target pests of Bt corn, results of the current study indicate a slightly greater variation in Cry1Aβ susceptibility among the seven field populations of *D. saccharalis* collected during 2004 (≤10-fold difference in LC₅₀s). The greater variation in Bt susceptibility among different geographical populations may suggest the potential for Bt resistance development in *D. saccharalis*. In fact, major Bt resistance alleles have been detected in two Louisiana field populations of *D. saccharalis* during 2004 and 2006 (Huang et al., 2007a; B.Y., F.H., R.L., S.M., unpublished data). However, the difference in susceptibility to purified Cry1Aβ protein among the 11 populations collected during 2005–2006 was smaller than those collected during 2004, ≤6-fold. Nevertheless, all of the 18 field populations, with one exception, exhibited relatively lower LC₅₀ values than the laboratory strain. Only the field population collected from corn in Tensas Parish, LA, during 2006 had a higher LC₅₀ value (1.5-fold) than the laboratory strain. The LC₅₀ value (e.g. 0.12 μg/g) of Cry1Aβ toxin to the laboratory strain was similar to that (e.g. 0.11 μg/g) of a strain generated from a single-pair mating of Bs-susceptible *D. saccharalis* (Huang et al., 2007b), suggesting this laboratory strain used in the current study was susceptible to the Cry1Aβ toxin. In addition, except the significantly lower LC₅₀ values observed for the two field populations collected from sugarcane plants, only relatively small differences (≤6-fold) in Cry1Aβ susceptibility were detected among other crops, years, or geographic locations. The differences in Bt susceptibility among field populations of *D. saccharalis* observed here are more likely due to natural variations among populations rather than caused by selection pressure due to Bt protein exposure. As reported for other insect species, such differences in susceptibility among insect populations could be due to fitness differences (growth and development) (Rossiter et al., 1990; Marçon et al., 1999), uncontrollable variation in bioassay conditions, or other non-genetic factors (Sims et al., 1996).

Therefore, the results of this study generally suggest that field populations of *D. saccharalis* remain susceptible to the Cry1Aβ protein after 8 years, use of transgenic Bt corn in the region. The susceptibility data established from this study can be used as a reference to determine relative susceptibility of *D. saccharalis* to Cry1Aβ protein for other geographical populations or to evaluate changes in Cry1Aβ susceptibility in the future.

In the current study, the source of Cry1Aβ protein used in the bioassays with the insect populations collected during 2004 was extracted from Bt corn plants. The use of Bt proteins extracted from Bt plants should better reflect the status of insect susceptibility to Bt corn compared to the use of Cry1Aβ protein from recombinant *E. coli* cultures, because the Bt proteins expressed in plants are what the insects would contact in the field (National Research Council, 2002). However, the Cry1Aβ protein extracted from Bt corn plants was not purified. Plant materials in the leaf extraction might affect the dose response. Therefore, trypsin-activated purified Cry1Aβ protein was used in the bioassays with the insect populations collected during 2005 and 2006. This study was not designed to evaluate the difference between the uses of the two Cry1Aβ sources. The current bioassays indicated an overall of 2-fold difference between the two Bt sources, suggesting the greater variation in Cry1Aβ susceptibility observed among the insect populations collected during 2004 could be also due to the source of toxin.

Bioassays with both the purified Cry1Aβ protein and the Cry1Aβ extracted from Bt corn plants showed that the laboratory strain of *D. saccharalis* was somewhat less susceptible than the field populations. Such small, but detectable differences, could be also due to the laboratory
strain being more accustomed to the meridic diet, because the laboratory strain had been reared on the meridic diet and maintained in the laboratory for more than 20 years. Similar results were also observed in *H. virescens* to Cry1Ac (e.g. up to 6-fold) (Luttrell et al., 1999) and *D. virgifera virgifera* to Cry3Bb1 (e.g. up to 6-fold) (Siegfried et al., 2005).

*D. saccharalis* is also an important corn pest in several other states in the mid-southern United States (Castro et al., 2004a; Porter et al., 2005). In the current study, field surveys were originally designed to evaluate Bt susceptibility in Louisiana populations of *D. saccharalis*. However, during the study, field corn was severely infested by *D. saccharalis* in the central area of Texas. Therefore, three field populations of *D. saccharalis* were collected from this area during 2006, but the initial sampling sizes of these three populations were limited (20–30 field insects) and represented only a small area of the state. Evaluation of more field populations representing a larger geographical area in Texas and other states of the mid-southern United States is necessary.

**Acknowledgments**

We thank Drs. Gregg Henderson, James Ottea, and Lixin Mao for reviewing an earlier draft of the manuscript. The authors also thank Hung Chu and several other students for insect rearing. This article is published with the approval of the Director of the Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station as manuscript no. 07-26-0330. This project represents work supported by the Louisiana Soybean and Feed Grain Promotion Board, National Science Foundation Center for IPM, the Board of Regents of the State of Louisiana under Contract no. LEQSF(2006-09)-RD-A-0, NC-205, and Hatch funds from Department of Entomology, Louisiana State University Agricultural Center.

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