Reprogramming amino acid catabolism in CHO cells with CRISPR-Cas9 genome editing improves cell growth and reduces by-product secretion

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Reprogramming Amino Acid Catabolism in CHO Cells with CRISPR-Cas9 Genome Editing Improves Cell Growth and Reduces By-Product Secretion

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Key message
CHO cells primarily utilize amino acids for three processes: biomass synthesis, recombinant protein production and catabolism. In this work, we disrupted 9 amino acid catabolic genes participating in 7 different catabolic pathways, to increase synthesis of biomass and recombinant protein, while reducing production of growth-inhibiting metabolic by-products from amino acid catabolism.

Background
Amino acid catabolism produces a wide range of growth inhibiting compounds3, amongst these ammonium and lactate. Ammonium is produced by transamination and deamination reactions3, whereas lactate is produced by either amino acid catabolic pathways fueling glycolysis or by NAD+ producing catabolic pathways, which forces the cell to regenerate NAD+ through lactate synthesis3. Disruption of amino acid catabolic pathways may reduce production of growth-inhibiting metabolic by-products.

Physiology of single gene disrupted CHO cells
To study the physiological impact of disrupting single amino acid catabolic pathways, we characterized single gene disrupted clones in triplicate shake flasks in batch mode. We monitored physiological changes in terms of maximum specific growth rate ($\mu_{\text{max}}$), integral of viable cell density (IVCD) and secretion of lactate and ammonium.

Validation of functional gene knock-out
Functional gene disruptions were validated using deep sequencing of the targeted genomic loci, gene expression analysis, western blots and proteomics. All genes displayed out-of-frame mutations (A) and generally reduced transcription (B). Western blots indicated potential wild type proteins in some clones (C), so proteomic analysis and mRNA sequencing was applied to verify functional knock-out of target genes (ongoing work).

Conclusion
Disruption of single amino acid catabolic pathways in CHO cells reduces specific production of lactate and ammonium, while increasing $\mu_{\text{max}}$ and IVCD, leading to increased titers of recombinant proteins. Disruption of multiple catabolic pathways further reduces secretion of lactate and ammonium, but does not increase growth. Thus, we recommend combinatorial disruption of multiple amino acid catabolic pathways, to identify a set of disruptions that increase growth, while reducing secretion of lactate and ammonium.

References

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