# Chapter 9 Bioprospecting with Brazilian Fungi

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**Abstract** Fungi produce important substances for industrial utilization. Among these substances, colorants, biosurfactants, antibacterial compounds and enzymes are of particular relevance. Bioprospecting studies are important in order to identify fungal producers of these substances. Understanding that good producers of these substances can be found in places with high diversity and microbial competition is recognized widely and Brazil is perhaps the most biodiverse country for this type of work. The aim of this chapter is to present relevant research involving bioprospecting with Brazilian fungi.

# 9.1 Introduction

Brazilian researchers have initiated bioprospecting efforts to identify fungi that produce substances of industrial interest. Among these compounds, colorants, biosurfactants, antibacterial compounds and enzymes are of particular relevance. This chapter describes how the bioprospecting of these substances is being carried out in Brazil.

Brazil is the 5th largest country in the world and occupies 47 % of South America. This large territory contains different ecosystems such as the (a) Amazon rainforest (recognized as having the greatest biological diversity in the world), (b) Atlantic forest, (c) Cerrado savanna, (d) Caatinga (a desert in northeast Brazil) and (e) Araucaria forest, a temperate forest in the south. These conditions make Brazil a mega-diverse country (Brasil 2015).

The study of this diversity and its technological potential is mainly being performed by government-run universities and research institutes. Most of these institutions are located in the southeast region of Brazil, which is the most economically

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developed region of the country. The results generated by these researchers typically have academic value, but unfortunately, very few of these findings have been applied to the industrial sector. Brazil significantly contributes to the scientific community via manuscripts, books, etc.; however, the country generates few patents (Glänzel et al. 2006; Leta et al. 2006).

Many of the chemicals that exhibit technological potential and could result in new patents, products and services are fungal and fungi play a very important role in environmental dynamics. The following discussion aims to examine the importance of these substances and presents some of the major related studies that have been conducted in Brazil.

# 9.2 Colorants

# 9.2.1 General

Colorant additives are used to provide color to otherwise dull substances. They can be classified as insoluble pigments or soluble dyes; however, these terms are typically used interchangeably (Saron and Felisberti 2006; Mapari et al. 2010). Dyes have been used worldwide as food additives to enhance the marketability of products by making their color more attractive (Uenojo et al. 2007; Volp et al. 2009). This technique is utilized because the loss or reduction of a food product's natural color during processing or storage, which it is assumed, lessens their appeal to the consumer (Serdar and Knežević 2009).

Currently there is growing interest in the discovery of dyes of natural origin, because synthetic dyes have been reported as carcinogenic and mutagenic, as well as causing allergies (Gunasekaran and Poorniammal 2008; Polônio and Peres 2009). Examples are the amaranth and erythrosine dyes, which have been shown to be genotoxic although they are presumably safe (and permitted) at low concentrations (Düsman et al. 2012). Therefore, synthetic dyes face more severe legislation, which has reduced the number of substances that can be used in food due to their adverse health effects in the short and/or long term, further fueling the search for biocolorants.

Bacteria, yeasts, filamentous fungi and algae, can synthesize pigments, but fungi stand out for their high productivity and extracellular release of such metabolites (Mapari et al. 2010; Hailei et al. 2011). *Blakeslea trispora* is a non-toxigenic filamentous fungus isolated from tropical plants that can synthesize high concentrations of the yellow-orange carotene pigment (Dufossé 2006). There are other producing species, such as *Phycomyces blakesleanus* and *Mucor circinelloides* and the yeast, *Rhodotorula* (Dufossé 2006; Oh et al. 2009; Takahashi and Carvalho 2010). Riboflavin, or vitamin B2, can be synthesized by the fungus *Ashbya gossypii* and is also used as a food colorant (Braga et al. 2011).

Bioprospecting of fungal-derived dyes has gained increasing prominence due to their reduced toxic properties and added medicinal values (Chengaiah et al. 2010). In the textile industry, replacing synthetic dyes with other non-synthetic sources is feasible and would also decrease environmental toxicity (Mirjalili et al. 2011).

Synthetic dye residues can contaminate soil and natural water sources and are responsible for causing serious problems of environmental pollution (Ali 2010; Mirjalili et al. 2011). Fungal pigments, in turn, are more readily biodegradable and are potential dyes for industrial application.

Among the producing fungi the literature has highlighted, *Aspergillus*, *Penicillium*, *Paecilomyces* and *Monascus* are prominent (Gunasekaran and Poorniammal 2008; Méndez et al. 2011). *Monascus* is a cosmopolitan genus, and species such as *M. ruber* and *M. purpureous* are known for production of orange and red pigments. Some *Penicillium* species are capable of producing chemicals of various colors, including azaphilones. The sclerotiorin pigment produced by *P. sclerotiorum* and chromophores of the anthraquinone-type red pigment, such as Red Arpink produced by *P. oxalicum* are used in the food industry (Gunasekaran and Poorniammal 2008; Petit et al. 2009; Celestino et al. 2014; Kumar et al. 2015).

# 9.2.2 Brazilian Situation

In Brazil, many fungi have been studied for their synthesis of pigments during fermentation as follows:

A *P. sclerotiorum* strain isolated from soil samples of the Brazilian Cerrado produced the yellow-orange pigment sclerotiorin (Hamano and Kilikian 2006; Kanokmedhakul et al. 2006; Lucas et al. 2010). Sclerotiorin was also obtained from *P. sclerotiorum* isolated from Amazonian soil that showed increased production of the metabolite when modified sources of carbon and nitrogen were added to the growth medium (Celestino et al. 2014).

The endophyte fungus *Phoma sorghina* found in association with *Tithonia diversifolia* (Asteraceae), produced anthraquinones with orange and yellow colors (Borges and Pupo 2006). Polyketides of red, yellow and lilac shades have been found in Ascomycetes isolated from Amazonian soil, flowers and sawdust (Durán et al. 2002). Another report listed three Amazonian strains of *Penicillium simplicissimum, Penicillium melinii* and *Aspergillus sclerotiorum* that produced xantoepocinapigments(yellow),atrovenetina(yellow)andneoaspergilicoacid(yellow–green), respectively. These have high economic value and low toxicity (Teixeira et al. 2012).

#### 9.3 Biosurfactants

#### 9.3.1 General

Surfactants have industrial applications including detergency, emulsification, lubrication, foaming capacity, "wettability", solubilization and dispersion. The use of these substances is increasing particularly in cleaning products (soaps and detergents), oils, cosmetics and toiletries (Nitschke and Pastore 2002). Commercially available surfactants are synthetic and are obtained from petroleum products, although they present toxicity and are non-biodegradable (Soberón-Chávez and Maier 2011). The growing environmental concerns among consumers, combined with new environmental control laws, have led to the search for alternative biosurfactants (Nitschke and Pastore 2002).

Biosurfactants are a structurally diverse group of surface-active substances produced by living organisms. These substances are amphiphilic and composed of a hydrophilic and a hydrophobic group. The hydrophilic group consists of mono, oligo or polysaccharides, peptides or proteins and typically contains hydrophobic mid-chain saturated hydrocarbons or unsaturated fatty acids (Marchant and Banat 2012).

The composition and variations of biosurfactants are classified according to their chemical composition and microbial origin, because they have different chemical structures, especially those produced in the presence of hydrocarbons. These can belong to seven groups: glycopeptides, lipopeptides, phospholipids, fatty acids, neutral lipids, surfactants and polymeric surfactants particulates (Shekhar et al. 2014). The production of biosurfactants by microorganisms is well studied and has been published in studies using bacteria and filamentous fungi (Bhardwaj 2013).

# 9.3.2 Brazilian Situation

In Brazil, the most investigated topics are the use of agro-industrial waste as substrates for biosurfactant production and the bioprospecting of fungi for biosurfactants. It is expected that new and innovative products will be generated as a result. Although not bioprospecting in terms of using novel fungi, Luna et al. (2012) evaluated the use of industrial wastes from processing corn and peanuts as substrates for the production of biosurfactants from Candida sphaerica and obtained yields of up to 9 g/l. Katerine et al. (2013) investigated the potential use of waste from the bioethanol and fuel industry in the production of biosurfactants by mixed cultures and also obtained good yields. Two recent publications (Santos et al. 2013, 2014) reviewed the use of animal fat and corn steep liquor as substrates for biosurfactant production from Candida lipolytica. Silva et al. (2014) investigated the use of residues from corn and soybean processing industries with Cunninghamella echinulata, a fungus isolated from the Brazilian Cerrado. They showed that the biosurfactant could reduce and increase the vicosity of hydrophobic substrates and their molecules, suggesting a candidate for oil recovery. The residual glycerol from biodiesel production has been studied as a substrate by Yarrowia lipolytica for biosurfactant production (Ribeiro et al. 2013). Luna et al. (2012) investigated the environmental applications of biosurfactants produced by C. sphaerica and concluded that these biosurfactants have potential for use as adjuvants in the remediation/treatment of oily industrial effluents. Solid-state fermentation was also investigated for the production of biosurfactants by Aspergillus fumigatus (Castiglioni et al. 2013) on paddy rice bran and verified the importance of inducing substrates such as diesel oil.

With optimal nutritional conditions, *A. fumigatus* showed a good emulsifying activity and in experimental conditions, was able to provide a novel alternative for process optimizations in biosurfactants production. However, this fungus may be a human pathogen and should be avoided. In general, the data from these studies indicate that agro-industrial waste can be used for production of biosurfactants that have the potential to generate economically-promising bioprocesses.

Bioprospecting studies of biosurfactant-producing filamentous fungi have been conducted (Teixeira et al. 2012). Suzana et al. (2014) and Da Silva et al. (2014) isolated (a) *Pichia* strains from industrial effluents and (b) endophytic fungi using the biopanning technique (peptides affinity selection) in the plant *Myrcia guianensis* respectively. Both studies revealed high emulsification indexes, and that the strains were able to produce biosurfactants, demonstrating the potential of these organisms for bioremediation under a wide range of environmental conditions.

# 9.4 Antibacterials

The misuse of antibiotics for the treatment and prevention of infectious diseases has led to an increase in antimicrobial resistance (Michael et al. 2014). Millions of years ago, pathogenic bacteria modified their virulence to adapt to the host defense system (Beceiro et al. 2013). Evidence suggests that the development of antibiotic resistance by bacteria, over time, is a natural process, occurring in the absence of humans and animals (Arias and Murray 2009). While there was a marked decrease in the discovery of new antimicrobial agents in the last 30 years due to lack of research and development by large drug companies, the rate of bacteria resistant to multiple drugs (MDR) has alarmingly increased, resulting in a serious worldwide problem with consequences for the treatment of infectious diseases (Wright et al. 2014).

Bacterial resistance is a consequence of the evolution of bacteria and worsened with the ease of mobility of easy international travel. The (a) increasing world population; (b) misuse of antibiotics in human medicine, veterinary medicine and agriculture; (c) constant loss of antimicrobial efficacy and (d) decrease of new antimicrobial agents (Wright et al. 2014; Shaikh et al. 2015) contribute to the situation. In the 1980s and 1990s, many pharmaceutical companies refocused their research programs for new antimicrobial agents in more profitable areas, primarily focusing on gram-positive bacteria, due to the rapid rise of *Staphylococcus aureus* resistant to methicillin (MRSA). The increase in MDR gram-negative bacteria intensified the search for new antibiotics, as these also promised a good financial return for pharmaceutical companies (Theuretzbacher 2009).

Antimicrobials are generally classified by their molecular structure and mechanism of action in the bacterial cell. The  $\beta$ -lactams target Penicillin Binding Proteins PBPs, inhibiting the synthesis of peptidoglycans and the formation of the cell wall in susceptible bacteria. These glycopeptides act on the D-ala-D-wing of lipid II, inhibiting peptidoglycan synthesis. Macrolides, lincosamides, chloramphenicol and oxazolidones act on the 50S subunit of the ribosome and inhibits protein synthesis. Tetracycline and aminoglycosides affect the 30S ribosomal subunit, thus inhibiting protein synthesis. The fluoroquinolones inhibit topoisomerases (DNA gyrase and topoisomerase IV), thus inhibiting DNA replication (Silver 2011).

Fungi are used for the discovery of new bioactive natural products because they are a source of compounds with different biological activities and can produce antiviral, antimicrobial and insecticidal substances with relevance in the industrial, agricultural and pharmaceutical sectors (Vieira et al. 2011). Most of the classes of antimicrobial agents used today were discovered from actinomyces in the soil (Aminov 2010). However, there are many antimicrobials produced by fungi currently used in therapy, including (a) cephalosporins produced by *Cephalosporium acremonium*; (b) penicillins produced by *Penicillium chrysogenum, Aspergillus nidulans* and *Cephalosporium acremonium*; (c) pleuromutilin produced by *Pleurotus mutilus* and *P. passeckerianos*; and (d) fusidic acid produced by *Fusidium coccineum* and *Acremonium fusidioides* (Wright et al. 2014).

# 9.4.1 Brazilian Situation

Brazil is carrying out bioprospecting of antibiotics produced by endophytes fungi, the production of nanoparticles with antimicrobial activity and optimizing antimicrobial activity. Using a bioprospecting approach, Orlandelli et al. (2012) investigated the production of antimicrobials, including terpenes by the endophytic fungus Piper hispidum. They observed that some of the isolates produced antimicrobials and three produced terpenes. Vaz et al. (2012) investigated the endophytic fungi on plants belonging to Brazilian flora (i.e. Myrciaria floribunda, Alchornea castaneifolia and Eugenia aff. bimarginata) and Emericellopsis donezkii and Colletotrichum gloesporioides produced an antimicrobial with an MIC similar to that of conventionally used antimicrobials. Santos et al. (2015) investigated the fungi from the leaves of Indigofera suffruticose Miller. (Fabaceae) where Nigrospora sphaerica and Pestalotiopsis maculans showed antimicrobial activity against gram positive (Staphylococcus aureus, Bacillus subtilis) and gram negative (Escherichia coli, Klebsiella pneumonia, Pseudomonas aeruginosa) bacteria. Flores et al. (2013) investigated the production of 3-nitropropionic acid by endophytic Phomopsis longico from Trichilia elegans A. JUSS spp. and found that it had activity against Mycobacterium tuberculosis.

Important investigations have also been carried out in the biogenesis of nanoparticles. Rodrigues et al. (2013) demonstrated the ability of *Aspergillus tubingensis* and *Bionectria ochroleuca* to produce silver nanoparticles with antimicrobial activity. Ishida et al. (2014) used a similar approach and obtained similar results by using *Fusarium oxysporum*.

The influence of the bioprocess factors on the production of metabolites with antimicrobial activity has also been studied. Bracarense and Takahashi (2014) using *A. parasiticus*, investigated modulation in the production of antibiotics, including

kojic acid, showing growth inhibition against *A. flavus, C. albicans, E. coli* and *S. aureus.* However, *A. parasiticus* is a well-known aflatoxin producing fungus and should be avoided for bioprospecting procedures. Pigments of Brazilian fungal origin were also assessed for biological activity. Teixeira et al. (2012) investigated the biological activity of the dyes produced by *Aspergillus* and *Penicillium* isolated from the Amazon forest and found that many of these showed biological activity, with the pigments produced by *A. sclerotiorum* and *P. simplicissimum* being particularly important.

The cited studies present a panorama of bioprospecting and screening of endophytic fungi; however, clinical evaluation of these substances is required to determine the therapeutic potential for these preliminary findings.

#### 9.5 Enzymes

The enzyme industry is part of biotechnology that has developed rapidly, especially during the previous four decades. Since ancient times, enzymes found in nature have been used in the production of foodstuffs such as cheese, beer, wine and vinegar (Saxena 2015). The use of fungi for the production of enzymes has led to a highly diverse industry with significant economic importance.

Fungi produce enzymes that are critical to their survival. These can act extracellularly or intracellularly to contribute to the digestion of food or in defense (Lange et al. 2012). These enzymes have not escaped the eyes of bio-engineering researchers. They are still being studied and occupy important positions in various industries, including the food, pharmaceutical and chemical industries (Kirk et al. 2002; Choi et al. 2015).

Fungal enzymes have been produced by the biotechnology industry in large quantities and low cost, and these enzymes can be modified according to desired characteristics. Enzymes of animal and plant origin have more complicated procurement mechanisms and modification procedures (Freedonia 2015). Multidisciplinary teams of chemists, microbiologist, biochemical engineers, biochemists and experts in other areas have come together to complement the knowledge that each area has on enzymes to improve their practices and develop technological innovations (Monteiro and Silva 2009).

The consumer markets are based on enzymes intended for industrial fabrics and cleaning products, foods and drinks and animal feed. The main industrial enzymes are proteases, amylases, lipases, cellulases, xylanases and phytases, and the largest producers are often European, e.g. International (Finland), Gist-Brocades (the Netherlands), and Novo Nordisk (Denmark), with Genencor, USA also a major player (Mussatto et al. 2007). Novo Nordisk controls about half of the global market where costs for production are decreasing, while the demand continually increases (Sanderson 2011; Jemli et al. 2014).

Brazil has an enormous diversity of microorganisms that can be exploited for the production of different enzymes of industrial interest in various areas (Table 9.1).

Industrial			
enzymes	Microorganisms	Authors	Methodology
Amylase	Filamentous fungi	De Castro et al. (2010)	Solid State Fermentation
Amylase	Lichtheimia ramosa	Silva et al. (2013)	Solid State Fermentation
Amylase	Filamentous fungi	Pasin et al. 2014)	Submerged Fermentation
Amylase	Candida parapsilosis, Rhodotorula mucilaginosa, Candida glabrata	De Oliveira et al. (2015)	Solid State Fermentation
Amylase	Pycnoporus sanguineus	Onofre et al. (2015)	Semi Solid Fermentation
Cellulase	Aspergillus niger	Cunha et al. (2012)	Submerged Fermentation, Semi Solid Fermentation
Cellulase	Aspergillus fumigatus	Moretti et al. (2012)	Submerged Fermentation
Cellulase	Acremonium strictum	Goldbeck et al. (2013)	Submerged Fermentation
Cellulase	Penicillium funiculosum	Maeda et al. (2013)	Submerged Fermentation
Cellulase	Lasiodiplodia theobromae, Trichoderma sp. Fusarium sp.	Faheina Junior et al. (2015)	Submerged Fermentation
Lipase	Penicillium sp.	Griebeler et al. (2009)	Solid State Fermentation
Lipase	Penicillium sp.	Rigo et al. (2010)	Solid State Fermentation
Lipase	Yeast	Bussamara et al. (2010)	Submerged Fermentation
Lipase	Aspergillus sp.	Colla et al. (2010)	Submerged Fermentation
Lipase	Aspergillus candidus	Cyndy et al. (2015)	Solid State Fermentation
Phytase	Filamentous fungi	Guimarães et al. (2006)	Submerged Fermentation
Phytase	Aspergillus niger	Spier et al. (2011)	Solid State Fermentation
Phytase	Paecilomyces variotii	Madeira et al. (2011)	Solid State Fermentation
Phytase	Lichtheimia blakesleeana	Neves et al. (2011)	Solid State Fermentation
Phytase	Penicillium chrysogenum	Ribeiro Corrêa et al. (2015)	Recombinant Expression
Protease	Myceliophthora sp.	Zanphorlin et al. (2010)	Solid State Fermentation, Submerged Fermentation
Protease	Duddingtonia flagrans	Braga et al. (2011)	Submerged Fermentation
Protease	Filamentous fungi Yeast	Rodarte et al. (2011)	Solid State Fermentation
Protease	Mucor hiemalis	Ribeiro et al. (2015)	Submerged Fermentation
Protease	Filamentous fungi	Mendes et al. (2015)	Solid State Fermentation
Xylanase	Filamentous fungi	Simões et al. (2009)	Submerged Fermentation, Solid State Fermentation
Xylanase	Aspergillus sp.	Peixoto-Nogueira et al. (2009)	Semi Solid Fermentation
Xylanase	Neosartorya spinosa	Alves-Prado et al. (2010)	Solid State Fermentation
Xylanase	Lichtheimia blakesleeana	Neves et al. (2011)	Solid State Fermentation
Xylanase	Myceliophtora thermophile	Moretti et al. (2012)	Solid State Fermentation
Xylanase	Rhizomucor sp.	Cassia Pereira et al.	Solid State Fermentation
	Myceliophthora sp.	(2015)	

 Table 9.1
 Studies on enzyme production by fungi in Brazil

However, enzyme technology is clearly overdue in the country, which is paradoxical. According to the Bio-Economy Agenda of Brazil, the enzyme industry is of great importance to the Brazilian economy, being directly linked to the "Third Industrial Revolution". Brazil is one of the countries that can benefit from the development of a national enzyme technology because it has a huge amount of renewable raw materials that can be transformed enzymatically into products with high added value and would be useful for strategic sectors of the economy (Harvard Business Review 2013).

A study by the US Research Industry Freedonia group estimated that world demand for enzymes will grow 6.3 % annually to \$7 billion by 2017. The increase in per capita income in countries such as China and India will support consumer demand for higher value products, which can be achieved with enzymes such as detergents and foodstuffs. Advances in biotechnology will also boost demand for enzymes (Freedonia 2015).

With the advent of biofuels, studies related to the production of these compounds involving enzymes has become increasingly common (Cadete et al. 2014; Damaso et al. 2014; Aguieiras et al. 2015; Carvalho et al. 2015; Duarte et al. 2015). In addition, it is possible to obtain enzymes of industrial interest using certain waste (or byproducts) as substrates. The need for these enzymes by the world market has spurred studies in several parts of Brazil that go beyond the basic techniques of fermentation and genetic engineering to meet the future demand for renewable energy (Delabona et al. 2012; Valencia and Chambergo 2013; Ióca et al. 2014; Katoch et al. 2014; Souza et al. 2014). Brazil is underexplored for the production of enzymes of industrial interest. The country imports most of the enzymes it uses. Imports were \$119 million, while exports reached \$52 million. The Brazilian market for enzymes was estimated in 2011 at approximately \$200 million (Ministério Do Desenvolvimento, Indústria e Comércio Exterior 2012). From 2007 to 2011, imports have tripled, while exports grew only moderately. To address this, Decree 6041/2007 established the Biotechnology Development Policy and includes the production and industrial use of enzymes (Bon et al. 2008). The current focus on enzymes research in Brazil has been applied in the food industry, antibiotic production, products for cleaning industries, effluent treatment and biofuel production e.g. biodiesel, bioethanol and biogas.

#### 9.6 Conclusions

Brazil is experiencing tremendous growth in the biotech sector, as the main challenge of the current policy in science and technology is to ensure domestic firms participate more intensively in conducting and funding research activities to engender technological autonomy for the country. Innovative companies are being created that seek international competitiveness (Rezaie et al. 2008; Resende 2012). The enormous potential of the Brazilian biodiversity means that new substances and products can be discovered, resulting in the improvement of society's quality of life (Ribeiro and Raiher 2013; Corrêa et al. 2014; Ferreira et al. 2015). In this context, the scientific community, society and governing bodies should strengthen their relationships in a shared vision to invest in the development of technologies to expand domestic production and export of enzymes.

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