

ADVANCES IN CROP RESPONSES TO ENHANCED UV-B RADIATION

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Abstract The increased ultraviolet-B (UV-B) radiation (280–320 nm) on the Earth's surface is one of the most important concerns of global change. This concern is primarily because increased UV-B radiation has been unambiguously shown to be responsible for the majority of harmful effects on aquatic as well as terrestrial organisms, and thus influence ecological interactions. For the past 4 plus decades, many studies have been conducted on the damaging effects of elevated UV-B radiation on plants. These studies have shown a diverse range of responses to UV-B radiation, and might be in general arbitrarily divided into two classes, photomorphogenic and stress responses at the morphological, physiological, biochemical and molecular levels. Crop plants evolved different adaptive or defensive mechanisms to UV-B radiation, including accumulation of UV-absorbing sunscreens, production of enzymatic and non-enzymatic antioxidants, changes of phytohormones or activation of DNA-repairing enzymes. A diagram illustrating the general responses of UV-B radiation and complexity of the interactions among factors was developed. Three urgent specific researches are proposed, which might provide opportunities for genetic engineering and possibility of breeding to deal with potential crop yield reductions due to elevated UV-B in agricultural systems, and thus will play a major role in determining the crops future.

Keywords: *global change, UV-absorbing compounds, antioxidants, phytohormones, DNA-repair*

Introduction

There has been significant interest in documenting the potential impacts of long-term increases in ultraviolet-B (UV-B, 280–320 nm) radiation on crop plants over the last several decades (Germ et al., 2006; Caldwell et al., 2007; Ballaré et al., 2011; Häder et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2013). Great intraspecific variation in the responses of plants to UV-B radiation has been observed in main crops, e.g., wheat (Li et al., 2010; Zu et al., 2010; Singh et al., 2012; Schreiner et al., 2012), maize (Biggs and Kossuth, 1978; Correia et al., 1999; Cartwright et al., 2001), soybean (Sullivan and Teramura, 1990; D'surney et al., 1993; Caldwell et al., 1994; Feng et al., 2001; Li et al., 2002; Zu et al., 2003; Baroniya et al., 2013), rice (Barnes et al., 1990; Dai et al., 1994; Kumagai et al., 2001; Hidema and Kumagai, 2006) and sorghum (Ambasht and Agrawal, 1998; Kataria and Guruprasad, 2012a). There has been significant interest in documenting the potential impacts of long-term increases in ultraviolet-B (UV-B, 280–320 nm) radiation on crop plants over

the last several decades (Germ et al., 2006; Caldwell et al., 2007; Ballaré et al., 2011; Häder et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2013).

Direct effects of natural or enhanced levels of UV-B radiation on plant yield have been detected under field conditions. However, in quantitative terms, these effects tend to be modest, with growth reductions rarely exceeding 20% (Searles et al., 2001; Newsham and Robinson, 2009; Wargent et al., 2009; Ballaré et al., 2011). These differences in UV-B sensitivity among crops and cultivars can be due to different adaptive or defensive mechanisms to UV-B radiation, which provides opportunities for genetic engineering and possibility of breeding to deal with potential crop yield reductions due to elevated UV-B in agricultural systems, and thus will play a major role in determining the crops future.

Relative to the 1979–1992 conditions, for the 2010–2020 time period, the GISS model results indicate a springtime enhancement of erythemal UV doses of up to 14% in the Northern hemisphere and 40% in the Southern hemisphere (Taalas et al., 2000). Therefore, the discovery of how crop plants interact with UV-B radiation, and what kind of protective strategies or mechanisms they possess in order to cope with the harmful UVB radiation, is essential to a better understanding of the balance between damage and protection.

Earlier review on field crop responses to UV-B reported the effects of UV-B radiation on visual symptoms, cell and its components, leaf ultrastructure and anatomy, photosynthesis, growth and development, transpiration and stomatal conductance, production and yield, as well as interactions of UV-B with abiotic and biotic factors of crop plants such as low temperature and drought (Kakani et al., 2003; Breznik et al., 2009). This article summarized much-needed and useful information to researchers regarding the general consequences of ultraviolet-B radiation on crop plants from the morphological, physiological, especially biochemical, cellular and molecular levels, and intended to raise genetic modification questions for molecular biologists and geneticists to address, which will aid future climate negotiations and support growers to maintain high productivity.

Leaf morphology, anatomy and UV-absorbing compounds

Photomorphogenic responses result in altered architecture or chemical composition and may be thought to be adaptive responses of plants to the incident radiation micro-climate, which may ultimately modify the penetration of UV radiation into plants (Beggs and Wellman, 1994; Ballaré et al., 1992, 2011). UV-induced morphological changes include thicker leaves, shorter petioles, shorter stems, increased axillary branching and altered root: shoot ratios (Robson et al., 2015). The epidermal attenuation appears to be the dominant UV-B screening mechanism in the majority of plants. In order for UV radiation to be effective in plants, it must effectively penetrate into the tissues and be absorbed. Ultraviolet penetration varies with plant species. Penetration of UV-B was found to be the greatest in herbaceous dicotyledons (broad-leaf plants) and was progressively less in woody dicotyledons, grasses and conifers (Day et al., 1992, 1993).

Enhanced UV-B reduced leaf area and leaf thickness (indicated by specific leaf weight) has been reported in maize, *Amaranthus tricolor* and sorghum varieties (Correia et al., 1999; Kataria and Guruprasad, 2012), while specific leaf area and length of internodes and petiole in Indian cress (*Tropaeolum majus*) were unaffected by enhanced UV-B radiation (Germ et al., 2015). The decrease in leaf thickness may have increased the UV-B penetration within leaves and decreased photosynthetic rates and dry weight accumulation. Increased epidermal cell wall thickness was also found in loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*) and Scots pine (Laakso et al., 2000). Qi et al. (2003) found that there was a good correlation between total leaf thickness and total concentration of leaf UV-B absorbing compounds in southern broadleaf tree species in USA, and a strong presence of UV-absorbing compounds in the upper and lower epidermis, the vascular bundles and the leaf hairs, if present. However, the main site of UV-B attenuation took place within the upper leaf epidermis (Qi et al., 2003).

The accumulation of flavonoids in the epidermis has been shown to reduce epidermal transmittance of UV-B radiation (Tevini et al., 1991), and those exhibited high epidermal transmittance may be less UV-B tolerant. Feng et al. (2003) found that the greater tolerance of soybean cultivar 'Jindou' to elevated UV-B exposures was attributed partly to its higher foliar flavonoid content, smaller leaf size, thicker leaf cuticle and scabrous (hairy) lamina. Differences in UV-absorption characteristics between a barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) mutant and the mother line indicated that the flavonoid mutant exhibits increased sensitivity to UV-B radiation, though the content of flavonoid in the mutant was only 7% compared to the mother variety in the primary leaf (Reuber et al., 1996). In addition, cuticular waxes and lignins may also serve protective roles by absorbing UV radiation (Caldwell et al., 1983). Wax content increased in tolerant genotypes while it decreased in the susceptible genotypes, because wax layer is an important surface character that responds to UV-B radiation (Kakani et al., 2004).

UV-B radiation is an important environmental factor for many plants with remarkable influence on defence-related secondary metabolite biosynthesis (Germ et al., 2015). Many studies suggest that the accumulation of UV-absorbing phenylpropanoid compounds, mainly flavonoids, anthocyanins and related phenolics in cell vacuoles and/or cell walls of the leaf epidermis is a protective measure against UV-B effects on mesophyll tissue of a leaf (Robberecht and Caldwell, 1978; Schmelzer et al., 1988; Day, 1993; Li et al., 1993; Beggs and Wellman, 1994; Rozema et al., 1997; Hutzler et al., 1998; Bornman, 1999; Mazza et al., 2000; Bieza and Lois, 2001; Flint et al., 2004; Sullivan et al., 2007; Izaguirre et al., 2007). In fact, in a meta-analysis, Searles et al. (2001) found that an increase in UV-absorbing compounds in response to supplemental UV-B was the most consistently reported response to UV-B radiation. UV-B absorbing compounds are present throughout the leaf, but accumulate significantly in leaf trichomes and epidermal cells (Zancan et al., 2008). They have effective radical scavenging capabilities, and can contribute directly to enhance photoprotection against UV-B radiation (Smith and Markham, 1998; Karioti et al., 2008; Li et al., 2012).

Arabidopsis flavonoid mutants are hypersensitive to UV-B radiation, thus confirming the role of flavonoids and other phenolic compounds in the UV-B protection of plants (Li

et al., 1993). In addition, another *Arabidopsis* mutant reported to be tolerant to lethal UV-B levels showed constitutively elevated accumulation of flavonoids and other phenolic compounds (Bieza and Lois, 2001). Flavonoids not only served as UV-B filters, but also were hypothesized to act as antioxidants, by absorbing UV-B radiation in the upper tissue layer and thus preventing damage to sensitive targets, their absence could lead to greater oxidative stress (Peng et al., 2003). Changes in flavonoid contents in wheat leaves have been observed under field conditions (Li et al., 2000). In soybean, increases in total leaf phenolics exposed to ambient UV radiation were demonstrated by Mazza et al. (2000).

Levizou and Manetas (2002) showed significant correlations between total phenolic levels and UV-B absorbing capacity (simple methanolic absorbance at 300 nm). Enhanced UV-B radiation induced increased synthesis of total phenolic compounds in leaves, but not in flowers of Indian cress (*Tropaeolum majus*) (Germ et al., 2015). Koti et al. (2007) observed genotypic variation in the production of these compounds at high UV-B levels. However, opposite results were reported by different authors. Kreft et al. (2002) showed that exposure of buckwheat plants (*Fagopyrum esculentum* Moench) to elevated UV-B radiation reduced the accumulation of rutin, a flavonoid with antioxidant properties. Yao et al. (2006) found that effect of UV-B radiation on the concentration of the flavonoid rutin in buckwheat leaves depended on leaf position and the level of UV-B radiation. Rutin concentration was higher in top leaves than in lower ones regardless of the UV-B level, top leaves typically receive more radiation than lower leaves. Sullivan et al. (2007) did not find that even though UV-B absorbing compounds accumulated with an imposed stress, but these compounds were not directly related to sensitivity/tolerance of soybean genotypes.

Intraspecific differences in the composition and concentration of flavonoids have been found among five cultivars of *Cucumis sativus* (Murali and Teramura, 1986) and in two cultivars of soybean (Murali et al., 1988), 20 cultivars of wheat (Li et al., 2000), 10 soybean cultivars (Feng et al., 2001), and 20 soybean cultivars (Li et al., 2002). Screening of the total flavonoid contents in 20 Chinese soybean cultivars in a field study using UV-B lamps revealed that seven cultivars had increased total flavonoid levels while five showed decreased levels, and no changes were observed in eight cultivars (Zu et al., 2003). Since alterations in the levels of individual flavonoids were not taken into account, UV-B could have had an impact on certain compounds without increasing the total level. Warren et al. (2003) found that certain flavonoids were selectively produced after UV-B exposure.

A series of experiments provided convincing evidence that plants subjected to UV-B radiation responded to changes in the content and ratios of different flavonoid in leaf epidermal cells, wax, and hairs (Harborne and Williams, 2000). Some flavonoid increased much more than others, especially the flavonoids with ortho-hydroxy structures in B-ring such as quercetin and quercetin glycoside in *Trifolium repens* (Hofmann et al., 2000), luteolin in *Marchantia polymorpha* (Markham et al., 1998), chlorogenic acid in *Cucumis sativus* (Kondo and Kawashima, 2000), isoorientin acylated glucosides in *Oryza sativa* (Markham et al., 1998).

Winter and Rostas (2008) confirmed that three of the analyzed flavonoids showed a significant increase in plants receiving full ambient radiation. Of these, two compounds were quercetin based flavonols, resulting in a shift in the relative flavonol content in favor of the quercetin glycosides and at the expense of kaempferol glycosides. As quercetin flavonols are known to have an improved ability as free radical scavengers due to the additional ortho-dihydroxyl group in the B-ring (Harborne and Williams, 2000) compared to kaempferol flavonols, it might be of advantage for the plants to invest more in quercetin flavonols under UV stress. Due to our lack in understanding of flavonoid function in plants, further studies would be worthwhile. Laboratory studies have demonstrated that the regulation of flavonoid biosynthesis may involve multiple photoreceptors, including the phytochromes, blue-absorbing photoreceptors, and one or more UV photoreceptors (Beggs and Wellmann, 1994).

Genetic blocks in the synthesis of phenolic sunscreens in phenylpropanoid mutants are known to result in increased susceptibility to UV (e.g. Li et al., 1993; Lois and Buchanan, 1994; Stapleton and Walbot, 1994; Landry et al., 1995; Reuber et al., 1996), however, it is not yet clear whether the slight variations in levels of UV-absorbing compounds that are commonly detected among varieties of the same species or between plants subjected to different UV regimes are physiologically significant under field conditions.

The accumulation of anthocyanins in the vacuoles of epidermal cells where they attenuate the UV component of sunlight with minimal absorption of photosynthetically active radiation has also been suggested (Stapleton and Walbot, 1994; Landry et al., 1995). Gould et al. (2002) reported that purified anthocyanin extracts showed strong antioxidant properties *in vitro*, and they can also scavenge reactive oxygen in living cells. By real-time imaging of H₂O₂ in cells after mechanical injury, they found that anthocyanins, among various flavonoids, were the only molecules suitably located to account for the enhanced rates of H₂O₂ scavenging, suggesting that anthocyanins have elevated antioxidant capabilities *in vivo* (Gould et al., 2002). Therefore, the mechanism by which anthocyanins confer UV protection may involve UV absorption or scavenging of reactive oxygen species (ROS), or both. In *Arabidopsis thaliana*, sinapate esters also provide UV-B attenuation, but this biosynthetic pathway is not present in corn (*Zea mays*) (Sheahan, 1996).

Proline is regarded as an osmoprotectant, however, several authors implicated a role for proline in the detoxification of ROS (Saradhi et al., 1995; Matysik et al., 2002), and an enhanced accumulation of proline in soybean leaves could be linked with detoxification against Ni and UV-B induced oxidative stress (Prasad et al., 2005).

A similar manner as ascorbate or glutathione and function as an electron donor for the peroxidase reaction was assumed (Takahama and Oniki, 2000). A key function of ascorbic acid in the apoplast is redox buffering, which protects the plasmalemma from oxidative damage. It has been demonstrated that the symplastic ascorbate redox state is relatively constant throughout the life of a cell, despite large changes in apoplastic ascorbate. Moreover, the ascorbate redox state in the apoplast is largely independent of that in the symplasm and the ascorbate pool in the apoplast is flexible. This flexibility

allows the cell to sense the environment and contribute to trigger molecular responses (Pignocchi and Foyer, 2003).

Due to our lack in understanding of functional significance of natural variations in phenylpropanoid levels, there is a knowledge gap regarding the photocontrol of phenylpropanoid accumulation under field conditions, and the dynamics of specific compound accumulation, localization patterns and constitutive or background levels of UV-screening compounds warrant further studies.

Besides the compounds mentioned above, recently, Smrkolj et al. (2006) proposed that selenium (Se) could protect plants from the harmful effects of UV-B radiation. They observed that enhanced UV-B radiation leads to higher selenium accumulation in flowers compared to ambient UV-B radiation conditions in buckwheat. Germ et al. (2009) found that for St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum* L.) herb, the highest concentration of Se was found in plants exposed to reduced UV-B radiation, which might be a self-defence mechanism involved in this plant for antioxidative effects. Therefore, Selenium can increase the tolerance of plants to UV-induced oxidative stress, and there could be a similar connection between radiation and selenium as that known for flavonoids and radiation.

The antioxidant defense system

To keep UV-B damage to a minimum, plants possess enzymatic and non-enzymatic antioxidative defense systems in cellular compartments (Bowler et al., 1992). UV-B exposure is known to lead to the generation of active oxygen species (AOS) and eventually results in oxidative stress in plants (Arnott and Murphy, 1991; Dai et al., 1997; Hideg et al., 2003; Kalbina and Strid, 2006). AOS not only function as destructive radicals, but also as signaling molecules during UV-B responses (Green and Fluhr, 1995; Mackerness et al., 1997, 2001; Mackerness and Jordan, 1999).

The inhibition effect on plant growth and development was mainly due to enhanced oxidative stress caused by UV radiation (Jansen et al., 1998). It has also been reported that UV-B can promote the formation of lipid oxidation products, destroy the natural lipid soluble antioxidants (Salmon et al., 1990), and induce the expression of the genes which encode for antioxidants (Strid et al., 1994).

It has already been demonstrated that plant cells and tissues protect themselves against oxidative insults through the up-regulation of a wide variety of antioxidants enzymes to UV-B exposure (Davies, 1986; Beligni and Lamattina, 1999; Chen et al., 2003). The main enzymatic antioxidant defense system includes enzymes such as superoxide dismutase (SOD; EC 1.15.1.1), catalase (CAT; EC 1.11.1.6), guaiacol peroxidase (POD; EC 1.11.1.7), ascorbate peroxidase (APX; EC1.11.1.11), glutathione reductase (GR; EC1.6.4.2), and dehydroascorbate reductase (DHAR; EC1.8.5.1) (Bowler et al., 1994; Kondo and Kawashima, 2000).

SOD rapidly converts O₂ to H₂O₂ which can then be converted to water and oxygen by CAT (Noctor and Foyer, 1998). Contrasting responses of SOD to UV-B exposure have been reported revealing no uniform responses. For example, SOD activity was increased

by UV-B radiation in pea and wheat (Alexieva et al., 2001), *Arabidopsis* (Rao and Ormord 1995), *Lemna gibba* (Babu et al., 2003) and rice (Dai et al., 1997), but was not affected in barley (Mazza et al., 1999) and soybean (Malanga et al., 1999), and was decreased in sunflower cotyledon (Costa et al., 2002).

Also, SOD expression was not affected by UV-B radiation in *Nicotiana plumbaginifolia* L. (Willekens et al., 1994), but was decreased in *Pisum sativum* (Strid et al., 1994). In a field study, supplemental UV-B increased SOD activity in wheat and mung bean (Agrawal and Rathore, 2007).

CAT is a constitutive component of peroxisomes and has a low substrate affinity (Corpas et al., 1999). An alternative mode of H₂O₂ destruction is via APX which is found throughout the cell (Jimenez et al., 1997). APX is a specific peroxidase that catalyzes the breakdown of H₂O₂ at the expense of oxidizing ascorbate to monodehydroascorbate. APX isozymes are distributed in at least four cells compartments: the stroma, the thylakoid membrane, the microbody, and the cytosol (Asada, 1992). The removal of H₂O₂ through series of reactions is known as the ascorbate–glutathione cycle (Noctor and Foyer, 1998).

Synthesis of antioxidant enzymes like POD, APX and SOD have been observed in UV-B treated *Arabidopsis thaliana* seedlings (Rao et al., 1996). Liu and McClure (1995) revealed that POD enzyme activities were increased under UV-B irradiation to adapt to the oxidative stress, and the SOD activities were changed differently according to the UV-B irradiation intensities (Tekchandani and Guruprasad, 1998).

Although it is not known how plants irradiated with UV-B generate AOS, it is thought that NADPH oxidase may be involved in the generation of AOS (Rao et al., 1996). Direct evidence of induction of NADP-malic enzyme by UV-B radiation was observed in leaves, stems and roots of three bean cultivars (Pinto et al., 2002). These results suggest that NADP-malic enzymes play an active role in plant defense responses against UV-B, possibly by providing NADPH for lignin and flavonoid biosynthesis. It is also possible that measures of only total activities of enzymes may not adequately reflect UV-induced compartment-specific changes or enzyme alterations that do not change total activity. For example, UV-B could differently regulate enzyme isoforms as reported for POD (Murali et al., 1988), CAT (Willekens et al., 1994), SOD (Babu et al., 2003; Rao et al., 1996) and APX (Yannarelli et al., 2006a) in previous studies. More studies are needed to resolve these issues.

Logemann et al. (1995) found UV-induction of enzymes can provide carbon substrates for the shikimate pathway, while Casati and Walbot (2003) proposed that induction of enzymes that can also provide energy in the form of ATP for the synthesis of these and other molecules necessary for cell functions under UV-B stress. Shweta and Agrawal (2006) have shown that simultaneous exposure of UV-B+Cd and UV-B+Ni caused increased accumulation of malondialdehyde (MDA) content in spinach. Increased MDA content caused by UV-B indicated a loss of membrane function and induction of oxidative damage (Li et al., 2012). Elevated MDA content is regarded as a sensitive indicator of oxidative stress in plants exposed to different stresses including Cd and UV-B (Wang et al., 2008).

A hierarchical cluster analysis by Zu et al. (2003) indicated that the contribution of each physiological indicator (% change) to the overall sensitivity of soybean cultivars to enhanced UV-B radiation had the following sequence: SOD activity, membrane permeability, flavonoid contents, malonaldehyde (MDA) contents, chlorophyll a contents, chlorophyll b contents. Zu et al. (2010) further demonstrated that UV-B induced oxidative stress via indirect mechanisms such as inhibition of antioxidative defense systems, or via the activation of ROS-producing enzymes such as NADPH oxidases.

Studies on the effects of UV-B on the enzymatic antioxidants at both the activity level (Agrawal and Rathore, 2007; Yannarelli et al., 2006b) and the mRNA level (Willekens et al., 1994) have yielded inconsistent results so it is not clear how uniform this response is among plant species and how this may be modified by concurrent environmental conditions. Yannarelli et al. (2006b) demonstrated that increased HO[•] activity was associated with augmented protein expression and transcript levels.

The non-enzymatic defense system consists of low molecular weight antioxidants such as proline, ascorbate, glutathione, α -tocopherol, and carotenoids (Larson, 1988; Rao et al., 1996; Arora et al., 2002; Matysik et al., 2002; Giordano et al., 2004; Jain et al., 2004; Shiu and Lee, 2005). Ascorbic acid (AsA) is a major primary antioxidant reacting directly with hydroxyl radicals, superoxide and singlet oxygen, and also a powerful secondary antioxidant reducing the oxidized form of α -tocopherol. Increases in the AsA pool in response to UV-B exposure have been observed in several species (Galatro et al., 2001; Dai et al., 1997; Takeuchi et al., 1996; Rao and Ormord, 1995). However, in maize seedling, UV-B exposure had no effect on the AsA content (Carletti et al., 2003). Glutathione is the major low molecular weight thiol compound in most plants (Foyer et al., 1994). Overall, glutathione (or homoglutathione) appears to play a role in protection against oxidative damage arising from a number of stresses such as irradiation, heat, and exposure to heavy metals (Grill et al., 1985). Moreover, ascorbic acid and glutathione may be involved in several types of protective mechanisms (Wefers and Sies, 1988). The reduced and oxidized forms of ascorbate and glutathione are transported across the chloroplast envelope (Anderson et al., 1983; Beck et al., 1983) by transporters whose activity may be changed in response to stress.

Ultraviolet radiation has been shown to be very effective in inducing lipid oxidation of biological membranes (Kochevar, 1990; Foyer et al., 1994), polyunsaturated fatty acids (Yamashoji et al., 1979) and phospholipid liposomes (Pelle et al., 1990). There is a considerable amount of data that demonstrates ways in which UV radiation alters membrane structure or function: changes in membrane permeability, inhibited K-ATPase and peroxidized lipids in wheat (*Triticum aestivum*) (Li et al., 2000; Wright et al., 1981) and decreased membrane resistance in *Chara coralline* (Doughty and Hope, 1973). The damage to nonphotosynthetic membranes that are detected by electron microscopy generally requires high fluence or occurs only after a long lag time following irradiation. In the latter case, the effect of UV can be regarded as an acceleration of normal senescence processes (Skokut et al., 1977). The physiological effects of UV stimulated membrane changes are uncertain. There is little evidence that the UV damage to

membranes is responsible for cell death. UV stimulated membrane changes may play a role in the UV-induced synthesis of anthocyanins (Murphy, 1983).

Hydrogen peroxide is known to diffuse across biological membranes and causes cellular damage. An increase in lipid peroxidation and H₂O₂ was demonstrated following UV-B treatments (Mishra et al., 2011). Understanding the mechanisms for removal of AOS is important for UV studies because increasing evidence suggests that AOS are involved in the damage caused by UV-B radiation. For example, UV-B radiation has been shown to increase AOS levels (Kalbina and Strid 2006; Hideg et al., 2003) and lipid peroxidation (Yannarelli et al., 2006b; Yang et al., 2005) in plants.

Therefore, adaptation or acclimation to photooxidative stress is multifactorial and many factors are involved in the overall defense strategy of the plant. A more indepth understanding of the generation and scavenging of AOS is needed before this relationship can be fully understood. However, very few studies have been conducted on the impacts of solar UV-B radiation on enzymes and antioxidants under natural and UV-B exclusion conditions (Mazza et al., 1999; Agrawal and Rathore 2007; Xu et al., 2008a).

Phytohormones responses to UV-B

It is well known that phytohormones play a vital role in the regulation of the growth and development of higher plants, as they are involved in controlling the ongoing process in the cell division, elongation and development, morphogenesis, and biological production (Beffa et al., 1990; Liu et al., 2010). The importance of the five “classical” classes of phytohormones in higher plants is well established. More recently, several other molecules have also been recognized as phytohormones. These include jasmonic acid (JA), salicylic acid (SA), brassinosteroids (BR) and polyamines (PA) (Saruhan et al., 2012).

The synthesis and action of phytohormones are modulated by environmental factors (Lachno and Baker, 1986). Plant hormones are the initiation factor of adversity-responsive gene expression (Zaffari et al. 1998). Studies indicated that a relatively small increase in UV-B can have dramatic effects on synthesis, transport, and allocation of plant endogenous hormones such as indole-3-acetic acid (IAA), cytokinin (CTK), and abscisic acid (ABA) etc., which resulted in inhibition of cell elongation, stomatal closure, and decreasing photosynthetic rate (Keiller and Holmes, 2001).

Photooxidation free-radical damage caused by strengthening UV-B radiation decreased IAA and gibberellins (GA) content, but increased indole acetic acid oxidase (IAAO) activity, which reinforced the harm from free radical induced by UV-B stress (Huang et al., 1997; Wang and Li, 2000; Huang et al., 2005).

Reduction in plant height has often been used as an index to assess the degree of UV-B radiation sensitivity (Biggs and Kossuth, 1978). UV-B radiation significantly dwarfed soybean, primarily due to shorter internodes rather than smaller node number (Teramura, 1980). This could be due to photo-oxidative destruction of the phytohormone IAA followed by reduced cell wall extensibility as demonstrated in sunflower seedlings (Ros and Tevini, 1995). The levels of ethylene, which promote radial growth and reduce

elongation, are increased after irradiation with UV-B (Caldwell et al., 1995). However, the mechanism for UV-B radiation to increase plant height is still not clear. UV-B radiation may directly affect cell division and some intrinsic growth characteristics (Beggs et al., 1985).

It is believed that GA signaling is essential for internode elongation, cambial activity, and fiber differentiation, which has been documented in tobacco stems (Dayan et al., 2012). Phytochromes regulate GA synthesis during germination and seedling establishment. However, in the UV region of the spectrum, the absorption spectra for Pr and Pfr exhibit little discrimination (Lagarias et al., 1987; Chen et al., 2004) so this family of photoreceptors may not be involved in controlling soybean internode elongation.

Luo et al. (2006) and Zhu et al. (2006) demonstrated that several GA hormones were present in high concentrations in the upper-most internode of a mutant rice plant and were involved in the elongation of this internode. Also Sharma and Guruprasad (2009) demonstrated similarities in response of young *Amaranthus caudatus* plants to exclusion of UV-B and exclusion of both UV-A and UV-B with responses to external application of GA₃, including increased hypocotyl lengths.

Changes in plant height caused by increases in the internode lengths due to UV-B radiation were likely mediated by a change in the presence of phytohormones or plant growth regulators, but the genetic mechanisms and biochemical syntheses that cause the changes are not known. Several experiments suggest the causal phytohormone is likely to be a GA, judged from the effect of exogenous applied GA upon soybean. Mislevy et al. (1988) applied GA₃ to soybean at seedling emergence and found hypocotyl elongation and elongation of the 1st and 2nd internodes

Peng and Zhou (2009) using hydroponics culture investigated the effects of La III on the contents of endogenous hormone in soybean seedlings under elevated ultraviolet-B radiation (280–320 nm). They showed that the content of IAA in soybean seedlings decreased initially and then increased when the seedlings underwent UV-B treatment during the stress and convalescent period, while indole acetic acid oxidase (IAAO) activity increased at first and then decreased. A similar change of ABA content and IAAO content in soybean seedlings occurred; GA content decreased during the experiment compared with control. They also found that the content of IAA and GA in soybean seedlings with La III + UV-B treatment was higher than those of UV-B treatment; IAAO activity and GA content in soybean seedlings with La III + UV-B treatment were lower than those of UV-B treatment.

One function of ABA is to regulate activity of the stomatal guard cells. In bad conditions, accumulation of ABA in plant tissue can reduce stomatal conductance, caused stomatal closure, and inhibit photosynthesis. Studies have showed that UV-B leads to stomatal closure or incremented stomatal resistance (Tevini and Teramura, 1989; Bjorn, 1996), which resulted from leakage of K from the guard cell or changes of the stomatal regulated hormone ABA content (Yang et al., 2000).

The process of ABA induced stomatal closure required H₂O₂, and NO to attend, and the accumulation of ABA content by UV-B radiation originated from increased chloroplast membrane permeability, turgor loss, and disengaged inhibitory action of an

ABA synthetic (Burnett et al., 2000; Wang et al., 2001). Alonso et al. (2015) found that the triterpene squalene and the diterpene phytol were significantly higher in the treatment with combinations of water deficit, solar UV-B and ABA applications, and two application of ABA on leaves and berries, at veraison and 15 days after, were enough to activate compounds with antioxidant and antifungal properties, and thus proposed it as a possible acclimation mechanism that modifies membrane fluidity under environmental signals both biotic and abiotic.

Salicylic acid (SA) is considered to be an important signalling molecule, which plays an important role in regulating a number of physiological processes and plant resistances to stresses (Saruhan et al., 2012). Studies have demonstrated that SA can ameliorate the injurious effects of abiotic stresses on crops (Nazar et al., 2011; Bandurska and Cieślak 2013). Belkhadi et al. (2010) found that SA pre-soaking counteracted Chl destruction, and the foliar application of SA proved to be equally fruitful in increasing the pigment content (Hayat et al., 2005).

Plants accumulate large amounts of SA when exposed to UV radiation and SA is thought to be directly involved in signalling various antioxidant responses (Larkindale and Knight 2002; Bandurska and Cieślak 2013). Several reports show that SA can induce antioxidant activity under multiple stresses (Mutlu et al., 2009; Saruhan et al., 2012). A decline in activities of CAT, POD, and SOD was observed in plants treated with SA (Choudhury and Panda, 2004).

Li et al. (2014) showed that SA alleviated the adverse effects of Cd and/or UV-B on growth, and pigment content, but did not mitigate the inhibitory effect of Cd on chlorophyll fluorescence parameters in soybean seedlings. Cd and/or UV-B induced oxidative stress and increased lipid peroxidation that was significantly decreased by SA pre-treatment. They also showed that the Cd and/or UV-B increased SOD activity, decreased POD activity, and CAT activity was mostly unaltered. They thus proposed that SA might act as one of the potential antioxidants as well as a stabilizer of membrane integrity to improve plant resistance to the Cd and/or UV-B stress. Ervin et al. (2004) found that exogenous SA application alleviated the damaging effects induced by UV-B radiation in Kentucky bluegrass. SA stimulates photosynthetic machinery by increasing the content of chlorophyll in UV-stressed plants (Mahdavian et al., 2008). Stratmann (2003) reported that UV radiation may influence JA levels and lead to an overlap in gene expression caused by UV-B and herbivory.

However, the mechanism of plant hormones including SA- and JA-induced resistance to UV-B radiation is still unclear.

DNA damage and genetic consequences

Because of its absorption spectrum, DNA is a major target of UV-B damage; even low doses of radiation can kill mutants lacking specific DNA repair pathways (Britt et al., 1993; Britt, 1996; Landry et al., 1997). UV-B radiation is reported to cause cellular damage by generating photoproducts in DNA and direct damage to proteins (Gerhardt et al., 1999; McNamara and Hill, 2000; Bray and West, 2005).

A variety of DNA damage caused by UV radiation is due to direct absorption of UV-B radiation by the native DNA molecule or indirectly by oxidative stress via free radicals and reactive oxygen species (ROS) (Latifi et al., 2009). Hargreaves et al. (2007) proposed that UV-A radiation that is not directly absorbed by DNA, can still induce DNA damage either by producing a secondary photoreaction of existing DNA photoproducts or via indirect photosensitizing reactions. The measurements of DNA damage by Mazza et al. (2000) showed that the UV-B component of sunlight induced greater perturbations in the cells of those leaves that scored as more UV transparent in the fluorescence determinations. They also determined that, under field conditions, most of the sunscreen response induced by solar UV in soybean can be attributed to the UV-B component.

Repair mechanism of plants includes repair of DNA damages by excision repair or by repair of pyrimidine dimers as photolyase, activated by UV-A and photosynthetically active radiation (Britt, 1996; Taylor et al., 1997). Absorption of UV-B radiation by DNA causes phototransformations resulting in the production of cyclobutane pyrimidine dimers (CPDs) and pyrimidine (6–4) pyrimidone dimers (6–4 PPs). Because DNA and RNA polymerases are not able to read through these photoproducts, their elimination by CPD photolyases is essential for DNA replication and transcription (Britt and May, 2003).

It is well-documented that elevated UV-B radiation causes an up-regulation of genes and enzymes involved in the phenylpropanoid pathway (Chappell and Hahlbrock, 1984; Rozema et al., 1997; Ryan et al., 2002). Chalcone synthase (CHS; EC 2.3.1.74) catalyzes the first step reaction of the flavonoid biosynthesis, it may be possible to increase the production of UV-B-protective flavonoids by genetically improving the expression of CHS. Soybean CHS is encoded by a multigene family (GmCHS) of at least eight members (GmCHS1-GmCHS8) (Akada and Dube, 1995). Shimizu et al., (2000) reported that the expression of every member of the family was induced by exposure to white light and was enhanced further by supplemental UV-B radiation, except for that of GmCHS2. It has been shown that under realistic UV-B conditions, reduction in Rubisco levels is the primary cause for the decline in photosynthetic rate (Allen et al., 1997; Baker et al., 1997). Similarly, reduction in the expression and synthesis of Lhcb, encoding the harvesting complex proteins, and psbA, encoding the D1 polypeptide of PSII, could have potential impacts on the efficiency of the photosynthetic system (Jordan et al., 1998; Mackerness et al., 1997). Photosynthetic genes may be down-regulated (Surplus et al., 1998; Mackerness et al., 2001; Jordan, 2002).

Casati and Walbot (2003) examined the response of gene expression in maize to solar UV-B under field conditions, and found several photosynthesis-associated genes were decreased and antioxidant-associated genes were increased. Also, the genes involved in fatty acid metabolism and oxylipin biosynthesis were increased by solar UV-B (Izaguirre et al., 2003). Using microarray analysis, Casati and Walbot (2004) and Ulm et al. (2004) identified more than 100 UV-B responsive genes in maize and *Arabidopsis*, respectively. Yannarelli et al. (2006b) indicated that the up-regulation of HO-1 mRNA occurs in a manner similar to that found in other genes implicated in the

UV-B response. These results are the most comprehensive data currently available on the effects of solar UV-B on plant gene expression, and the actual signal transduction pathways activated by UV-B radiation are not yet well defined (Stratmann et al., 2000; Miles et al., 2002).

Earlier research indicated that plant MYB transcription factors regulate plant anthocyanin and phlobaphene biosynthesis (Dooner et al., 1991), trichome differentiation (Oppenheimer et al., 1991), epidermal cell shape determination (Noda et al., 1994), and gibberellin-regulated gene activation (Gubler et al., 1995). Shimizu et al. (2000) isolated and characterized a subfamily of GmMYB29 genes whose expression was found to be significantly upregulated upon UV-B irradiation. GmMZB29 consists of at least four closely related genes, which were classified into two groups based on their sequence similarity; groups A, and B. Expression of the group A members of the GmMYB29 subfamily was found to reach its peak within two hours after the onset of UV-B irradiation when the accumulation of GmCUS mRNA was still increasing. Similar time lag in the induction of an activator and its target genes has been reported in some other cases. For example, the expression of *Arabidopsis thaliana* Lhcb3 (Light-harvesting chlorophyll a/b binding protein) is induced by light irradiation for 1 hour and its mRNA accumulation increased even under continuous light irradiation up to 12 hours, whereas in CC41, which encodes a putative transcription factor of Lhcb3, the peak of mRNA accumulation was reached after irradiation for 1 hour (Wang et al., 1997).

Spraying plants with antioxidants prior to UV-B treatment can block the increase in pathogen-related transcripts and the decrease in photosynthetic transcripts (Surplus et al., 1998; Mackerness et al., 1999). This was an indication that ROS were involved in the pathway leading to changes in the level of these transcripts in response to UV-B radiation. To assess the role of ROS in the induction of HO-1 transcript levels, Yannarelli et al. (2006a) evaluated the action of AsA pre-treatment on the effects of UV-B. Consistent with the involvement of ROS in the regulation of HO-1 gene expression in response to UV-B, the increase in transcripts was blocked by pre-treatment with AsA.

Measuring DNA damage in higher plants is important in assessing the impacts of increased UV, and in testing the relationship of productivity to DNA damage and repair (Bennett et al., 2001). We still do not have a complete understanding of the molecular bases of these responses, but they generally are the result of signal perception by receptor molecules and transduction of a response signal to the cellular machinery, a part of which may regulate gene expression. However, Xu et al. (2008b) did not detect protein effects involved in the signal transduction, because many of the proteins involved in the signal transduction occurred in too low abundance in crude extracts and membrane proteins were usually under-represented on 2-D PAGE gels.

Also research at the mRNA level may not necessarily translate into the quantity and quality of the final gene products, i.e. the proteins. There is a loose correlation between mRNA and protein levels, especially for chloroplast genes, which are usually controlled at the post-transcriptional level (Mackerness et al., 1997). Moreover, many proteins undergo post-translational modifications (PTM) such as removal of signal

peptides, phosphorylation and glycosylation, which are extremely important for protein activities and subcellular localizations. Therefore, changes at the mRNA level alone may not adequately assess the response to UV-B, and it is necessary to study the effects of UV-B at the protein level. There has been only limited research on the effects of UV-B on proteins, and most of this research focused on a single protein, such as PR-1 (Green and Fluhr, 1995), glutathione reductase, ascorbate peroxidase, superoxide dismutase (Rao et al., 1996) or nitrite reductase (Migge et al., 1998), and heme oxygenase (Yannarelli et al., 2006b).

Suchar and Robberecht (2014) developed a process-based model integrating the effects of UV-B radiation through epidermis, cellular DNA, and its consequences to the leaf expansion. They found that enhanced UV-B radiation induced DNA damage significantly delayed cell division, resulting in significant reductions in leaf growth and development. Leaf expansion was highly dependent on the number of cyclobutane pyrimidine dimers (CPD) present in the DNA, as a result of UV-B radiation dose, quantitative and qualitative absorptive properties of epidermal pigments, and repair mechanisms. Therefore, a thorough understanding the molecular basis of the UV-B response needs in depth research on proteome.

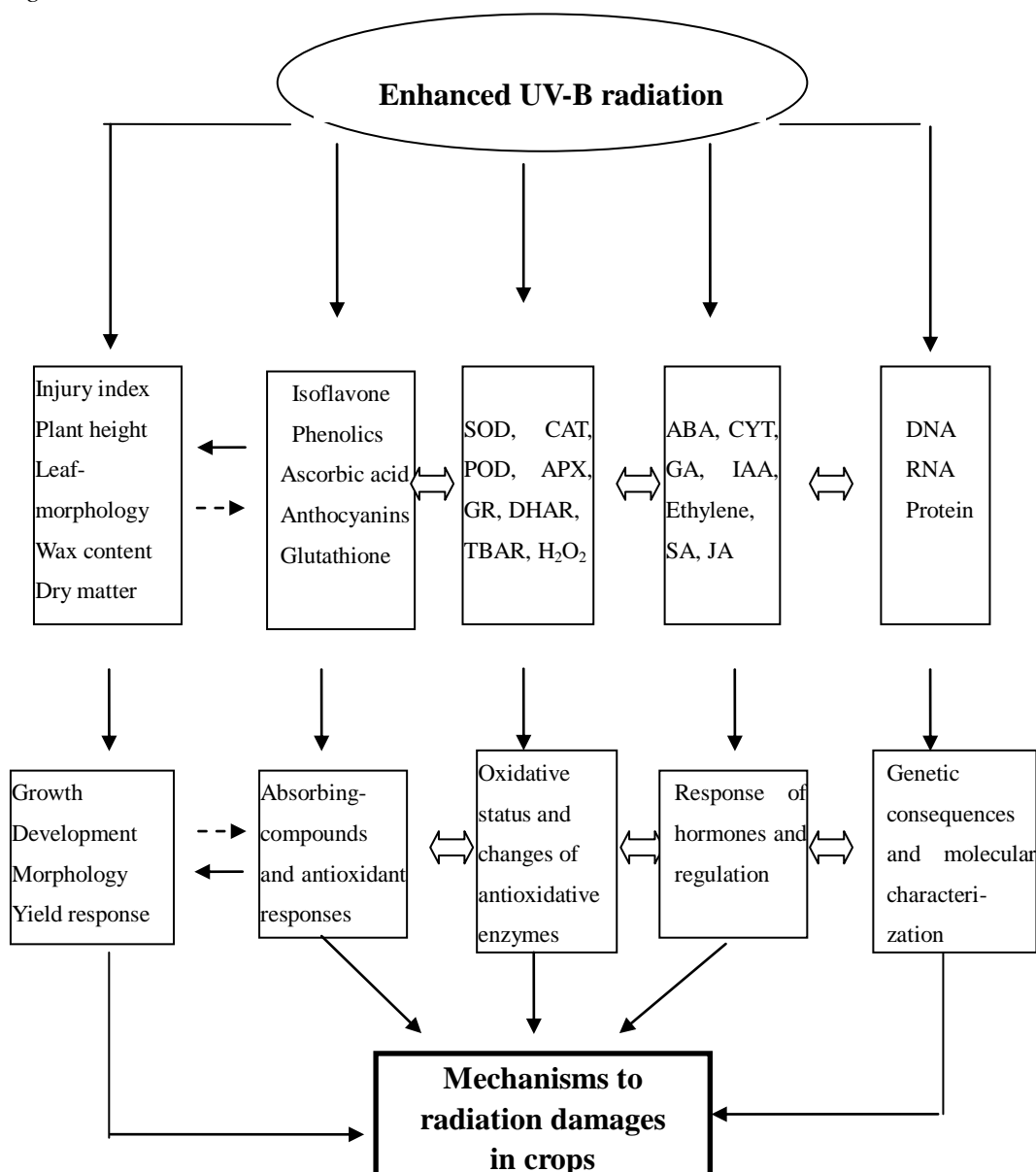
Summary

Based on available information in regard to the effects of the enhanced UV-B radiation on crops, the general responses of UV-B radiation could be proposed as in *Figure 1* to illustrate the complexity of the interactions among factors. The adaptation or acclimation to photooxidative stress is multifactorial and many factors are involved in the overall defense strategy of the plant. A more indepth understanding of the generation and scavenging of AOS is needed before this relationship can be fully understood.

Notwithstanding substantial new knowledge of molecular, cellular and organismal UV-B responses, there remains a clear gap in our understanding of the interactions between these organizational levels, and how they control plant architecture. It remains unproven whether UV-induced morphological changes have a protective function involving shading and decreased leaf penetration of UV-B, counterbalancing trade-offs such as decreased photosynthetic light capture and plant-competitive abilities. Future research will need to disentangle seemingly contradictory interactions occurring at the threshold UV dose where regulation and stress-induced morphogenesis overlap.

Due to our lack in understanding of functional significance of natural variations in phenylpropanoid levels, there is a knowledge gap regarding the photocontrol of phenylpropanoid accumulation under field conditions, and the dynamics of specific compound accumulation, localization patterns and constitutive or background levels of UV-screening compounds warrant further studies. The mechanism of plant hormones including SA- and JA-induced resistance to UV-B radiation is still unclear. A thorough understanding the molecular basis of the UV-B response needs in depth research on proteome.

Figure 1. Interactions among factors and mechanism involved in preventing UV-B radiation damages



Three specific researches are urgently needed, they are: (1) to differentiate the main UV-absorbing compounds and non-enzymatic antioxidants in contributing to defense system, (2) to investigate the specific role of phytohormones in response to UV-B radiation, and (3) to identify genetic consequences caused by full-season UV-B radiation and fill in the knowledge gap regarding the photocontrol mechanisms of UV-B to crops under field conditions.

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