ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH

In Vitro Study on the Effect of Organic Acids on *Campylobacter jejuni/coli* Populations in Mixtures of Water and Feed

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ABSTRACT Gastroenteritis caused by *Campylobacter* spp. infection has been recognized as one of the important public health problems in the developed countries. Outbreaks mostly originate from the consumption of contaminated poultry or infected water.

The aim of this study was to determine the bactericidal activity on *Campylobacter* spp. of organic acids individually and in combinations at different pH levels and times and to compare bactericidal activities with activities of commercially available products. Ten strains of *Campylobacter* were added in a mixture of water with commercial broiler feed, separately adjusted by four acids: formic, acetic, propionic, and hydrochloric acids, into pH 4.0, 4.5, 5.0, and 5.5. A combination of three organic acids was used in two different formulation ratios: formic:acetic:propionic at 1:2:3 and 1:2:5, at pH 4.0, 4.5, 5.0, and 5.5. All organic acids showed the strongest bactericidal effect on *Campylobacter* at pH 4.0.

In contrast, at pH 5.0 and 5.5, the bactericidal activity of the four acids was low. The combination of organic acids showed a synergistic bactericidal activity at pH 4.5. Interestingly, the effect of the combined organic acids was stronger than the commercial products. Morphological cell changes were studied by transmission electron microscopy to determine the effect of the organic acids on the cell structure of *Campylobacter*. Some loss of outer membranes of the bacteria could be found in treated groups.

Therefore, it can be concluded that organic acids, individually or in combination, have a strong bactericidal effect on *Campylobacter* spp. Routine application of organic acids to the water supply on poultry farms could prevent or diminish *Campylobacter* transmission.

(Key words: *Campylobacter jejuni/coli*, organic acid, broiler feed, water, bacteria)

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INTRODUCTION

Gastroenteritis due to *Campylobacter* spp. is one of the diseases that plays an important role in public health in developing and developed countries. There are an increasing numbers of illnesses caused by *Campylobacter jejuni*. The elderly and the young are particularly vulnerable. Consumption of contaminated chicken meat is often the source of infection. Poultry is initially infected by these bacteria at the farm level (Shanker et al., 1982; Jacobs-Reitsma et al., 1995). Also, water as a vehicle plays an important role in the horizontal transmission route on broiler farms (Pearson et al., 1993). Previous results have shown that *Campylobacter* is able to survive or multiply in natural surface water (Blaser et al., 1980), public water supplies and in wastewater from slaughterhouses (Koenraad et al., 1995). Thus, poultry are likely to become infected by *Campylobacter* from rearing-water sources on the farm.

It has been reported that the disinfectants, e.g., phenolic, iodophor, quaternary ammonium compound, ethyl alcohol, and glutaradehyde solutions used in hospitals could dramatically decrease *Campylobacter* within a short time (Wang et al., 1983). However, these products are too toxic to add to the drinking water of chickens. Therefore, substances added to water to control transmission of *Campylobacter* should have a strong bactericidal effect on *Campylobacter* but should be also simple to use, inexpensive, nonerosive, and nontoxic.

Short-chain organic acids (SCA) have been widely used to preserve food products in western European countries, because they can be used safely without creating residue problems. Their bactericidal effect can also prevent spoilage and kill potential pathogenic organisms. SCA have also been studied and used to eliminate pathogenic bacteria under different conditions, e.g., decontamination of

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chicken carcasses using acetic or lactic acids reduced *Campylobacter* on carcasses or meat (Cudjoe and Kapperud, 1991; Van Netten et al., 1994). Hinton and Linton (1988) found that giving feed with formic and propionic acids could reduce *Salmonella* colonization in broilers. Thomson and Hinton (1997) showed that formic and propionic acids caused sublethral damage to *Salmonella*, causing incomplete colonization in broilers. However, the bactericidal activities of SCA as a disinfectant in rearing water on farm are rarely documented. Consequently, increasing the hygiene barrier by reducing the level of infection in chickens by decontaminated water could be one of the methods for keeping chickens free of *Campylobacter* infection.

The purpose of the present study was to determine whether organic acids individually, e.g., formic, propionic, or acetic acid, or combinations thereof, at different pH levels, had an influence on 10 strains of *Campylobacter jejuni/coli* in a mixture of water and feed. To determine the morphological cell changes in *Campylobacter* caused by these acids, the bacteria were studied by transmission electron microscopy (TEM). The effects of two commercial products containing three organic acids and chlorine were evaluated on the same 10 strains and compared with the effects of the organic acids.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Bacterial Strains**

*Campylobacter jejuni* C144, C186, C350, C591, C690, C2146, and C2150 and *Campylobacter coli* C4596, C4601, and C4602 isolated from chickens were provided from Institute for Animal Science and Health. They were maintained in glycerol broth and stored at −70°C before beginning the experiment. One hundred microliters of each strain from a thawed vial was inoculated into 10 mL of Brucella broth, containing 0.02% cysteine HCl, and placed on a shaker plate at 37°C for 24 h under microaerophilic conditions. All strains were subcultured onto *Campylobacter* blood-free agar plates. Samples were taken at 0, 0.5, 1, 2, 4, 6, and 8 h after adding the bacteria to the different mixtures with the combined organic acid, A-2 as described above, at pH 4.0. As described in the general method, the survival of *Campylobacter* was determined by a direct plate count method of 10-fold dilutions of *Campylobacter* on blood-free agar plates. Samples were taken at 0, 1, 2, 4, 6, and 8 h after adding the bacteria to the different organic acids. The experiments were done in triplicate. All cultures were kept under microaerophilic conditions by using a GasPak at 37°C for 42 h. Typical colonies were counted and expressed as log10 colony-forming units per milliliter. Examination of screw-like motility by light microscope was used when necessary.

**Individual Strain Test**

One milliliter from the current stock solution was put into the prepared mixture bottles with pH at 4.0, 4.5, 5.0, or 5.5, as well as into a bottle with control mixture. Bottles were kept in a water bath at 32°C until the end of experiment. The survival of *Campylobacter* was determined by a direct plate count method of 10-fold dilutions of *Campylobacter* on blood-free agar plates. Samples were taken at 0, 1, 1, 2, 4, and 8 h after adding the bacteria to the different organic acids. The experiments were done in triplicate. All cultures were kept under microaerophilic conditions by using a GasPak at 37°C for 42 h. Typical colonies were counted and expressed as log10 colony-forming units per milliliter. Examination of screw-like motility by light microscope was used when necessary.

**Testing Commercial Products**

Commercial products tested were product A (Hyalus11), based on chlorine dioxide and product B (Selko12), based on organic acids. The bactericidal effect of both commercial products in different concentrations on *Campylobacter* populations, with and without feed, was measured. Therefore, three bottles (No. 1, 2, and 3) with

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1ID-Lelystad, 8200AB, Lelystad, The Netherlands.
2BBL, 11088, Becton Dickinson Co., MD 21030.
3L-cysteine 102839, Merck Co., Darmstadt 64293 Germany.
4GasPak, Becton Dickinson Co., MD 21030.
5Oxoid CM 739, Oxoid, Co., Hampshire, RG24 8PW UK.
6Oxoid CM 739, Oxoid, Co., Hampshire, RG24 8PW UK.
7Product 62893-203, Sigma Co., St. Louis, MO 63178.
8Product c6255, Sigma Co., MO 63178.
9Coppens Hoogeloon, 5548AZ, The Netherlands.
10Merck KgaA. Co., D-64271, Darmstadt, Germany.
11Hyalus, Envirotect. Co., Hereford, HR4 9UN UK.
250 mL of sterile water and 0.2 or 5% of Hyalus solution and 0.2% of Selko solution and three bottles (No. 4, 5, and 6) with 250 mL of water and commercial feed as described in the previous experiment and 0.2 and 5% Hyalus solution and 0.2% of Selko solution were made. One milliliter of active stock solution of 10 strains of Campylobacter was prepared and introduced into Bottles 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 as previously described.

Culturability of Campylobacter populations from each bottle was tested three times by direct plate count on charcoal-cetoperazone-deoxycholate agar (CCDA) plates by sequential time, as in the first experiment. All cultures were incubated under microaerophilic conditions at 37 °C for 48 h.

**TEM**

The Campylobacter strains C4596 and C4601 were studied. One milliliter of each culture was transferred into 4 mL of Mueller Hinton\textsuperscript{13} broth balanced at pH 4 by HCl or formic acid. A control was performed at pH 5.8. The cultures were kept in a dark-light box under microaerophilic conditions at 37 °C for 2 h. Then the cultures were centrifuged at 5,000 rotations per minute for 10 min, and the supernatant was discharged. The pellets were washed with PBS solution. The suspensions were recentrifuged at 5,000 rotations per minute for 10 min. Pellets were collected and fixed by immersion fixation in Karnovsky fixative (2.5% glutaraldehyde and 2% paraformaldehyde in 0.1 M Na-cacodylate buffer, pH 7.3), and postfixed for 3 h in 2% OsO\textsubscript{4} in the same buffer. The samples were stained en bloc with 2% aqueous uranylacetate for 3 h, followed by dehydration in graded series of acetone and embedded in Durcupan ACM.\textsuperscript{14} Ultrathin sections (silver-gold) were prepared with a diamond knife on a LKB V ultratome and mounted on formvar-carbon-coated copper grids. After staining with lead citrate, the sections were examined and photographed with a transmission electron microscope\textsuperscript{15} operated at 80 kV.

**Statistical Methods**

Differences in bacterial counts among treatments were determined by ANOVA with SPSS software (1997). Values of $P < 0.05$ were considered significant. Undissociated acid concentrations were calculated with the Henderson-Hasselbach equation, $\text{pH} = pK_a + \log [A^-]/[HA]$, where $[A^-]$ is the dissociated acidic form and $[HA]$ is the undissociated acidic form.

**RESULTS**

**Effect of Organic Acids on Cell Viability**

There were no great differences among organic acids, but there were significant pH differences. However, at pH 4.0 with formic, propionic, and acetic acids, the survival of Campylobacter rapidly declined from the beginning doses of $3.44 \pm 0.33$, $3.21 \pm 0.16$, and $3.17 \pm 0.03 \log_{10} \text{cfu/mL}$, respectively, to below detection limits within 1 h of incubation (Figure 1b, c, and d). On the other hand, when HCl was used at pH 4.0, survival rates decreased much more slowly. It took 4 h of incubation with HCl to go from the beginning incubation dose of $3.27 \pm 0.20 \log_{10} \text{cfu/mL}$ to a nondetectable level (Figure 1a and b).

At pH 4.5, the bactericidal effects of propionic, formic, acetic, and hydrochloric acids on Campylobacter population gave reductions of 2.55, 2.38, 2.02, and 1.21 $\log_{10} \text{cfu/mL}$ at 1 h of incubation time, respectively. At pH 4.5 and 2 h incubation, Campylobacter numbers were below detection limits for the organic acid solutions and remained so through the 8-h test period, whereas for HCl, Campylobacter numbers did not decline below detection limits until 6 h of incubation.

At pH 5.0 and 5.5 propionic, formic, acetic and hydrochloric acids, Campylobacter showed was culturable, respectively, for 3.04 ± 0.73, 3.07 ± 0.04, 2.85 ± 0.28, and 2.77 ± 0.23 and 2.93 ± 0.42, 3.39 ± 0.14, 3.24 ± 0.12, and 2.66 ± 0.23 $\log_{10} \text{cfu/mL}$ after 1 h of incubation. Culturability consistently decreased until the end of the study. Campylobacter survival in the control samples was high compared with the treated samples. However, there was a slight decrease over time (Figure 1).

**Effect of the Combination of Organic Acids on Cell Viability**

When organic acid combinations were used, A-1 and A-2, the bactericidal effect on Campylobacter survival yielded a kinetic characteristic graph, which was similar to that of the individual acids (Figure 2). At pH 4.0, however, the organic acid combinations (A-1 and A-2) caused Campylobacter numbers to decline to below detection limits within 1 h.

Surprisingly, at pH 4.5 and 1 h of incubation, A-1 and A-2 gave a high reduction rate at 3.03 and 3.22 $\log_{10} \text{cfu/mL}$, respectively ($P < 0.05$). These rates were much higher when compared to rates for the individual organic acids. At pH 5.5, A-1 and A-2 gave continuous reduction rates of Campylobacter numbers over the corresponding time. After that, the culturability was below detection limits by 8 h of incubation (Figure 2).

**Effect of Combined Organic Acid (A-2) on Individual Strain Viability**

Only strains C690, C591, C144, C350, C186, and C2146 were above the detection limit after 0.5 h of incubation time. No Campylobacter viability could be detected after 1 h incubation time (Table 1).

**Bactericidal Effect of a Commercial Product on Cell Viability**

Both commercial products, when used in water, lowered Campylobacter viability below the detection limit.

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\textsuperscript{13} Oxoid, CM 405 Unipath Co., Hampshire, RG24 8PW UK.
\textsuperscript{14} Fluka, Buchs, 3330AA, Switzerland.
\textsuperscript{15} CM 10 Philips, Philips Co., 5627GB, Eindhoven, The Netherlands.
within 1 h (Table 2). When the low concentration of product A (0.2%) was mixed with feed (Bottle 4, Table 2) Campylobacter numbers were consistently high ranging from $4.31 \pm 0.22 \log_{10} \text{cfu/mL}$ at 1 h to $2.52 \pm 0.23 \log_{10} \text{cfu/mL}$ at 8 h. When the high concentration of product A was mixed with feed (Bottle 5, Table 2) Campylobacter numbers declined from $4.03 \pm 0.31 \log_{10} \text{cfu/mL}$ at inoculation to $1.40 \pm 0.50 \log_{10} \text{cfu/mL}$ by 2 h and were below detection limits by 4 h. Adding 0.2% of product B to feed (Bottle 6, Table 2) reduced Campylobacter numbers below detection limits by 1 h of inoculation.

**Effect of Acids on Cell Integrity**

No significant differences were observed on the TEM pictures of the two strains C4596 and C4601 when grown in HCl or formic acid compared with growth at pH 5.8. Generally, the inner membrane stayed intact (Figures 3 and 4).

**DISCUSSION**

A previous study showed that the appropriate pH range for growth of Campylobacter jejuni was 5.5 to 7.5

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**FIGURE 1.** The survival of 10 strains of Campylobacter jejuni/coli after being exposed organic acids at different pH levels and times at 37 C; ◆, control; ■, pH 5.5; ▲, pH 5.0; ●, pH 4.5; and △, pH 4.0. a) Hydrochloric acid; b) acetic acid; c) formic acid; d) propionic acid.

**FIGURE 2.** The survival of 10 strains Campylobacter jejuni/coli after being exposed combined organic acids at different pH levels and times at 37 C; ◆, control; ■, pH 5.5; ▲, pH 5.0; ●, pH 4.5; and △, pH 4.0. a) A-1 = formic:acetic:propionic acids at 1:2:3; b) A-2 = formic:acetic:propionic acids at 1:2:5.


TABLE 1. The effect of the organic acid combination A-2 (formic:acetic:propionic acids at 1:2:5) on individual Campylobacter spp. on different time (h)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incubation time under the acid condition (h)</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0.5</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>1.5</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1441</td>
<td>3.42 ± 0.21&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.33 ± 1.15&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C6901</td>
<td>3.47 ± 0.42</td>
<td>1.87 ± 0.67</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5911</td>
<td>3.62 ± 0.13</td>
<td>1.77 ± 0.40</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4602&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.36 ± 0.28</td>
<td>UD&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4596&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.26 ± 0.65</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3591&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.13 ± 0.12</td>
<td>0.67 ± 1.15</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2150&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5.12 ± 0.08</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1861</td>
<td>2.94 ± 0.15</td>
<td>1.59 ± 0.36</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2146&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.41 ± 0.14</td>
<td>0.10 ± 0.17</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4601&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2.90 ± 0.29</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>1</sup>Campylobacter jejuni.
<sup>2</sup>Campylobacter coli.
<sup>3</sup>Log<sub>10</sub> cfu/mL ± SD.
<sup>4</sup>UD; under detection limit of 1 cfu/mL.

(Fletcher et al., 1983). Blaser et al. (1980) has also demonstrated that Campylobacter jejuni was not able to survive in extremely acidic conditions, e.g., below 3.0, but it was stated that Campylobacter was not affected at pH higher than 3.6. In weak acid conditions with pH between 4.0 to 6.0, Campylobacter could survive well and showed just a slight decrease in culturability (Blaser et al., 1980; Doyle and Roman, 1981; Rotimi et al., 1990; Watterman and Small, 1998). The effect of organic acids has already been shown in the control of Campylobacter contamination on poultry carcasses during slaughter (Stern et al., 1985; Cudjoe and Kapperud, 1991; Epling et al., 1993). Unfortunately, there were no suitable criteria to standardize substance or acidity, which affect inhibition of Campylobacter viability in their experiments.

In this study, we compared the bactericidal effect of organic acids on Campylobacter jejuni/coli at different pH levels with the effect of HCl use. Our results demonstrated that at low pH levels (4.0 and 4.5) HCl had only a slight inhibitory effect on the Campylobacter population, but it was not effective at high pH levels (5.0 and 5.5). Rotimi et al. (1990) has demonstrated that the bactericidal activity of HCl on Campylobacter jejuni was pH dependent. From the results using organic acids, it is quite clear that at low pH (4.0 and 4.5) Campylobacter jejuni/coli rapidly die. The reduction rate was much higher compared to the use of HCl. However, at pH 5.0 and 5.5 Campylobacter could survive. Our results show that organic acids have a very strong bactericidal effect on Campylobacter jejuni/coli culturability at low pH. No individual differences between the different strains of Campylobacter jejuni/coli were found.

The inhibitory mechanism of short chain organic acids on bacteria has not been elucidated. Investigators have reported that growth inhibition of acids on bacteria is caused by two explicit components. One is the specific inhibition of an unidentified metabolic function by undissoociated acid, whereas the other is diffusion of undissoociated acid into the cell, which releases a proton that acidifies the cytoplasm (Eklund, 1983; Baronofsky et al., 1984; Salmond et al., 1984; Kroll and Patchett, 1991).

The degree of bactericidal activity of the different acids on the bacterial cell will most probably depend on the presence of the organic compounds, acid concentration, structure of the acid, and capacity of a cell to alkalinize the cytoplasm. We found that a small excess of undissoociated formic acid gave a stronger bactericidal effect on the culturability of Campylobacter jejuni/coli compared to a large

TABLE 2. Comparison of the survival of 10 strains of Campylobacter jejuni treated by commercial products A and B at different times

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time (h)</th>
<th>No. 1&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt; (0.2% product A)</th>
<th>No. 2&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt; (5% product A)</th>
<th>No. 3&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt; (0.2% product B)</th>
<th>No. 4&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt; (0.2% product A)</th>
<th>No. 5&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt; (5% product A)</th>
<th>No. 6 (0.2% product B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>UD&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>3.70 ± 0.23&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4.02 ± 0.10&lt;sup&gt;5&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4.03 ± 0.31&lt;sup&gt;5&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.82 ± 0.13&lt;sup&gt;5&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>4.31 ± 0.22</td>
<td>2.60 ± 0.14</td>
<td>1.40 ± 0.50</td>
<td>UD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>4.01 ± 0.10</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>3.51 ± 0.11</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>3.52 ± 0.20</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>2.52 ± 0.23</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
<td>UD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>1</sup>No. 1, 2, and 3 bottles contained only water. No. 4, 5, and 6 bottles contained water and feed.
<sup>2</sup>Product A was Hyalus (Envirotect. Co., Hereford, HR4 9UN UK).
<sup>3</sup>Product B was Salko (Selko Co., 5048AZ, Tilburg, The Netherlands).
<sup>4</sup>UD = under detection limit of < 1 cfu/mL.
<sup>5</sup>Campylobacter survival in log<sub>10</sub> cfu/mL ± SD.
FIGURE 3. Transmission electron microscopic pictures of C4601 strain incubated for 2 h (a) control pH 5.8, (b) with HCl acid at pH 4, or (c) with formic acid at pH 4.

FIGURE 4. Transmission electron microscopic pictures of C4596 strain incubated for 2 h (a) control pH 5.8, (b) with HCl acid at pH 4, or (c) with formic acid at pH 4.
excess of undissociated propionic or acetic acid at the same pH levels. It is possible that the structure of acids is the most important in the inhibition of Campylobacter jejuni/coli viability. Formic acid is the shortest-chain organic acid, which could be beneficial process for diffusion into the cell and cause acidification of the cytoplasm.

No differences were observed with the TEM pictures between the bacteria grown in pH 5.8 and the acidic solutions. The inner and outer membranes of the bacteria were not damaged. There was a trend for some loss of the outer membrane in the bacteria grown in the acid solutions. Cell death initiated by formic acid, therefore, is probably caused by diffusion into the cell of the undissociated form of this organic acid that probably results in invisible denaturation of enzyme activity or DNA synthesis (Cherrington et al., 1991). Further experiments need to be investigated for this phenomenon.

The results of the use of the mixtures of organic acids (A-1 and A-2) demonstrated that although the amounts of accumulated undissociated acids of each acid in A-1 or A-2 are less than in individual use of acids at the same low pH levels, particular at pH 4.5, the mixtures gave a higher reduction rate. Minor and Marth (1972) reported that there was no synergetic activity on Staphylococcus aureus when acetic acid and HCl were combined. Our results strongly demonstrate that the combination of organic acids gives a remarkably high bactericidal effect on Campylobacter jejuni/coli viability in low pH aqueous solutions. The reason for this synergistic effect is, as yet, unknown.

There is a lack of knowledge of Campylobacter disinfectants under field conditions, especially on poultry farms. Our present experiment also demonstrates the different bactericidal effects of commercial products on Campylobacter that are routinely used on Dutch broiler farms. Although Blaser and colleagues (1986) showed that standard chlorinated water could inhibit growth of Campylobacter spp. within a few minutes, our results of the use of product A, based on chlorine compounds, demonstrated no influence on Campylobacter jejuni/coli populations living in water feed mixtures within 2 h. The effect of chlorinated water on Campylobacter might be reduced by feed. In contrast, product B based on organic substances accomplished Campylobacter jejuni/coli death within 1 h under similar conditions.

In general, rearing water on broiler farms is intensively contaminated with dirty organic matter such as feed, feces, soil, or bedding. This water is a good survival place for pathogenic and nonpathogenic agents. Therefore, re-infection with any bacteria, particularly Campylobacter spp., can certainly occur. This experiment is the first to demonstrate the ability of organic acids to kill Campylobacter jejuni/coli without causing cell membrane changes.

The use of organic acids in rearing water systems for broilers could reduce cross-infection of Campylobacter spp. via rearing water on farm level. Further research, especially animal infection experiments, is necessary to specify the exact effect of acidified water on transmission of Campylobacter bacteria among chickens at farm level.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## REFERENCES


