

Decoupling Post-Climacteric Softening from Ripening in 'Cavendish' Bananas via Cell Wall Fortification with an Enhanced Post-Harvest Coating

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October 2025

Abstract

The high perishability of climacteric fruit such as the 'Cavendish' banana (*Musa* spp. AAA group) is primarily due to rapid post-climacteric softening, leading to significant post-harvest losses. This study proposes a novel post-harvest strategy to reinforce the cell wall structure to mitigate softening independent of the ethylene-mediated ripening signal. A composite coating containing exogenous calcium chloride (CaCl_2) and β -glucan *precursors was applied to mature green bananas, which were subsequently exposed* conditions to induce uniform ripening. Fruit firmness was tracked destructively over a 14-day storage period. We hypothesize that the coating will significantly slow the rate of firmness decay by enhancing pectin cross-linking and actively fortifying the cell matrix against polygalacturonase activity. The experiment was designed as a Two-Way ANOVA (Treatment $\times$ Time) to quantify the magnitude of shelf-life extension. **[PLACEHOLDER: Add 2-3 sentences summarizing the key finding and final conclusion once the experiment is complete.]**

Introduction

The Challenge of Banana Ripening and Post-Harvest Loss

Bananas are the most popular fruit globally, yet their climacteric ripening nature results in substantial post-harvest loss, particularly during storage and transport. The defining characteristic of ripening in bananas is the autocatalytic burst of ethylene production and the rapid degradation of structural carbohydrates, which manifests as softening. This softening is largely attributed to the enzymatic breakdown of the middle lamella and primary cell wall, driven by enzymes like polygalacturonase (PG), pectin methylesterase (PME), and cellulase.

Cell Wall Integrity and the Role of Calcium

Exogenous application of calcium is a widely documented strategy to mitigate fruit softening. Calcium ions (Ca^{2+}) enhance cell wall integrity by binding to free carboxyl groups of pectin polymers in the middle lamella, forming Ca^{2+} -pectate cross-links. This structural fortification restricts the access and activity of pectin-degrading enzymes, thereby slowing the rate of softening. The efficacy of CaCl_2 has been demonstrated across various fruit species, often at concentrations of 1.5% to 2.0% (w/v).

Novelty and Research Hypothesis

This study introduces a novel approach by combining the established cross-linking action of CaCl_2 with β -glucan *precursorstoactivelyfortifythecellwallmatrixagainstenzymaticattack.Thecor*

Hypotheses:

H_a : The post-harvest CaCl_2/β -glucan *coatingwillresultinastatisticallysignificantslowerrateofpulp*, induced ripening conditions.

H_0 : There will be no statistically significant difference in the post-climacteric decrease in banana pulp firmness between the coated and control groups.

Materials and Methods

Plant Material and Sample Preparation

Mature green 'Cavendish' bananas (*Musa* spp. AAA group) were acquired from a single commercial source at a uniform maturity stage (Grade 1/Mature Green). A total of 60 fruits were selected for uniformity in size, shape, and peel color. The fruits were randomized into two treatment groups ($n = 30$ each): (1) Control and (2) CaCl_2/β -glucan *Treatment*.

Coating Application

- **Control Group:** Fruits were dipped in distilled water for 1 minute and air-dried.
- **Treatment Group:** Fruits were dipped for 1 minute in the prepared coating solution, consisting of 2.0% (w/v) CaCl_2 and [PLACEHOLDER: Insert β -glucan precursor concentration (w/v) dissolved in distilled water. Fruits were allowed to air-dry at 20°C for 2 hours.

Accelerated Ripening Induction (C₂H₄ Treatment)

To ensure uniform ripening, all 60 fruits were placed inside a sealed, climate-controlled ripening chamber. Ripening was induced by administering ethylene gas (C₂H₄) to achieve a uniform concentration of **100 ppm**. The induction period was maintained for **24 hours** at a constant temperature of **18°C** and **90% RH**. Following the induction period, the chamber was flushed with fresh air.

Storage and Data Collection

All fruits were transferred to a final storage environment maintained at $20 \pm 1^\circ\text{C}$ and 60% RH for 14 days. Destructive firmness measurements were performed on Days 0, 1, 3, 5, 7, 10, and 14. At each time point, 3 fruits were randomly sampled from each group ($n = 3$ per group per day).

Pulp Firmness Measurement (Dependent Variable)

Pulp firmness was measured using a Texture Analyzer (e.g., TA-XT2) equipped with an 8 mm cylindrical stainless steel probe. Prior to measurement, a small section of the banana peel at the median equatorial area was carefully removed to expose the pulp. The probe was plunged into the pulp tissue at a constant rate until tissue failure. The maximum force recorded during penetration was defined as the pulp firmness and expressed in **Newtons (N)**.

Statistical Analysis

Data will be analyzed using a **Two-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)** with the factors being *Coating Treatment* (Control vs. Treated) and *Storage Time* (Days 0 through 14). Post-hoc analysis (e.g., Tukey's HSD) will be conducted to compare mean firmness values at specific time points. The primary test for hypothesis support will be the p -value associated with the **interaction effect** (Treatment $\times$ Time), where a statistically significant interaction ($p < 0.05$) will indicate that the coating treatment altered the rate of softening over time, allowing for the rejection of H_0 .

Results

[PLACEHOLDER: This section will be populated by the AI in Step 9 after the Researcher provides the raw data from the lab execution.]

Discussion

[PLACEHOLDER FOR RESEARCHER: Interpret these findings.]

- **Hypothesis Assessment:** Do the statistical results (e.g., the p-value of the Treatment $\times$ Time interaction) support the alternative hypothesis (H_a)? Quantify the difference in the rate of firmness decay (e.g., "The treated group lost firmness at a rate of X N/day, which was 40% slower than the control group's rate of Y N/day").
- **Mechanism Comparison:** Discuss how the observed firmness retention compares to the existing literature on CaCl_2 post-harvest treatments. Did the addition of the β -glucan precursor appear to enhance the effect, or was the effect solely attributable to the Ca^{2+} cross-linking?
- **Limitations and Deviations:** What were the limitations of this experiment (e.g., non-uniformity in the banana batch, fluctuations in storage RH, use of destructive sampling)? Note any deviations from the original SOP (Step 6) that may have occurred during the lab execution.

Conclusion

[PLACEHOLDER FOR RESEARCHER: Summarize the main finding and implications.]

- **Summary:** Summarize the main finding in one or two conclusive sentences (e.g., "The CaCl_2/β -glucan coatings successfully extended the marketable shelf-life of 'Cavendish' banana").

Broader Implication: What is the broader implication of this work for post-harvest technology and food security? How does decoupling softening from color change benefit the supply chain?

Future Work: Based on the limitations, what specific experiment should be conducted next (e.g., testing different precursor concentrations, assessing the effect on flavor/aroma, or combining with other ripening inhibitors)?

References

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