

Nonlegume Hemoglobin Genes Retain Organ-Specific Expression in Heterologous Transgenic Plants

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nodules of *Lotus*, with expression concentrated in the central region of the nodule, which contains the cells infected by the bacteria. The pattern of expression is similar to that of the endogenous *Lotus* leghemoglobin as well as to that of a GUS reporter gene driven by the soybean *lbc₃* promoter. The chimeric genes also showed low levels of expression in the roots of transgenic *Lotus*. In transgenic tobacco plants both promoters showed preferential expression in roots, a pattern similar to that in non-nodulated *Trema* or *Parasponia* plants.

RESULTS

The Promoters of *Parasponia* and *Trema* Hemoglobin Direct Root-Specific Expression in Tobacco

The *Parasponia*-GUS (P-GUS), *Trema*-GUS (T-GUS), and soybean-GUS (*lbc₃*-GUS) constructs were introduced into tobacco using *A. tumefaciens* transformation procedures. Roots and expanded leaves of six randomly chosen transformed tobacco plants growing in tissue culture were assayed for each construct; the data are displayed graphically in Figure 1. The *lbc₃*-GUS plants were initially screened by DNA gel blot hybridizations to identify those containing complete inserts. As seen in Figure 1, the P-GUS and T-GUS constructs gave comparable, high levels of GUS expression in roots [means of 301 and 289 specific activity units (picomoles of 4-methylumbelliferone produced per minute per microgram of soluble protein), respectively] but considerably less expression in leaves (means of 4.2 and 34.0 units, respectively). There was some variation in the level of GUS activity between individual transgenic plants, presumably the result of differences in the position of integration of the chimeric genes (Dean et al., 1988), but for any one plant expression was always higher in the roots. In P-GUS the ratio of root-to-leaf expression varied from 15 to 650 with a mean of 71. The T-GUS plants, on the other hand, had smaller ratios, varying from 1.5 to 33 in different plants with a mean of 6.5, largely due to the relative increase in levels of leaf expression. Therefore, of the two, P-GUS had the more tightly controlled pattern of organ-specific expression.

The *lbc₃*-GUS construct from soybean, consistent with previous reports of expression being restricted to nodules (Stougaard et al., 1987a, 1987b), gave very little expression in any part of the transgenic tobacco plants, although the levels of expression in the roots (mean of 1.4 specific activity units) were significantly above the background level observed in leaves (mean of 0.12 units) or in the roots or leaves of either transformants containing a promoterless GUS gene or nontransformed control tobaccos (all with activities less than 0.09 units). Figure 2 shows the distribution of P-GUS and T-GUS expression in tobacco roots

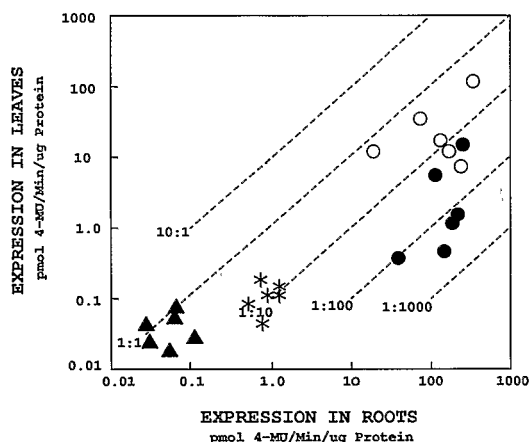


Figure 1. GUS Expression in the Roots and Leaves of Transgenic Tobacco Plants.

The specific activity of the β -glucuronidase enzyme was assayed in the roots and leaves of tobacco plants transformed with the P-GUS (●), T-GUS (○), and *lbc₃*-GUS (*) gene constructs or control plants without a chimeric GUS gene (▲) as described in Methods. Each point represents the root and leaf activity for a separate transformant for each of the gene constructs. The dotted lines represent the locations of common coordinates having leaf-to-root activity ratios of 10:1, 1:1, 1:10, 1:100, and 1:1000, respectively.

and leaves as determined by histochemical staining for GUS activity. Figures 2A and 2B show that GUS activity was greatest in the meristematic region of the root tip in both the P-GUS and T-GUS plants. The root caps of both groups of plants were not stained. In those plants containing the P-GUS construct, GUS expression was also detected in differentiated tissues in the vascular cylinder (shown in Figure 2A), 2 mm to 3 mm proximal to the root tip. Further up the root, low-level staining was also observed in the cortex (not shown). T-GUS plants, on the other hand, showed little or no staining in the differentiated root tissues (Figure 2B) despite the intense staining in the root tips. In those T-GUS plants that expressed the highest levels of GUS activity in the leaves (not shown), this activity appeared to be confined to the vascular system in a manner similar to the GUS gene driven by the 35S promoter of cauliflower mosaic virus analyzed by Jefferson et al. (1987) but at much lower absolute levels. When tested in *N. plumbaginifolia* protoplasts, both nonlegume gene constructs were expressed at low but detectable levels relative to a 35S-GUS gene construct. The relative promoter strengths were 35S-GUS > P-GUS > T-GUS, a pattern not reflected in the root tissues of transgenic plants where T-GUS and P-GUS had similar mean values that were only slightly below 35S-GUS constructs (not shown).

The *lbc₃*-GUS construct had no detectable activity in tobacco protoplasts.

P-GUS and T-GUS Are Highly Expressed in *Lotus* Nodules

The P-GUS, T-GUS, and *lbc₃*-GUS chimeric genes were introduced into *Lotus* using *A. rhizogenes*. Nodules were produced on the hairy roots by inoculation with *R. loti*. GUS activities were quantified fluorometrically in individual roots and their associated nodules; the data are displayed in Figure 3. Each root system represents a separate transformation event. Between four and 11 mature pink nodules were assayed for each construct. Although there was considerable variation among different transformants, all three constructs showed high levels of expression in *Lotus* nodules, the soybean promoter being the most active and the *Trema* promoter the least active. On average, the level of GUS activity in the nodules increased by threefold between T-GUS (245 specific activity units) and P-GUS (791 units) or twofold between P-GUS and *lbc₃*-GUS (1312 units).

When transgenic *Lotus* nodules were stained for GUS activity, expression in the mature nodules was confined to the central core of tissue, corresponding to the bacteroid-containing cells, which also express the endogenous *Lotus* leghemoglobin. Most T-GUS nodules showed relatively uniform expression throughout the core (Figure 2C), whereas P-GUS expression seemed to be more intense at the periphery of the central core, probably just internal to the vascular tissue that surrounds the bacteroid-containing cells (Figure 2D). This difference in the staining pattern may simply reflect absolute levels of GUS expression because some T-GUS nodules, which expressed lower levels of GUS, showed a similar differential between the nodule vascular tissue and the inner bacteroid-containing cells (Figure 2F, larger nodule). GUS activity was absent from the cortical cells surrounding the nodule (Figures 2C and 2D) for both constructs. Not all apparently mature nodules on any particular transformed root were positive for GUS expression. It is unclear whether these nodules were somehow disturbed in nodule development, but they did appear normal at a gross structural level. The *lbc₃*-GUS nodules were not analyzed in any great detail, but they, too, showed GUS staining only in the central core of the nodule and not in the cortical cells or the non-nodulated part of the root.

The time of expression of the nonlegume hemoglobin promoters in the transgenic legume nodules appeared to correlate with nodule size and, therefore, to the developmental stage of the nodule (Figure 2F and results not shown). We have not been able to determine precisely whether GUS expression and *Lotus* leghemoglobin synthe-

sis are initiated simultaneously, but the highest levels of staining occurred in large nodules that had already turned pink because of leghemoglobin accumulation.

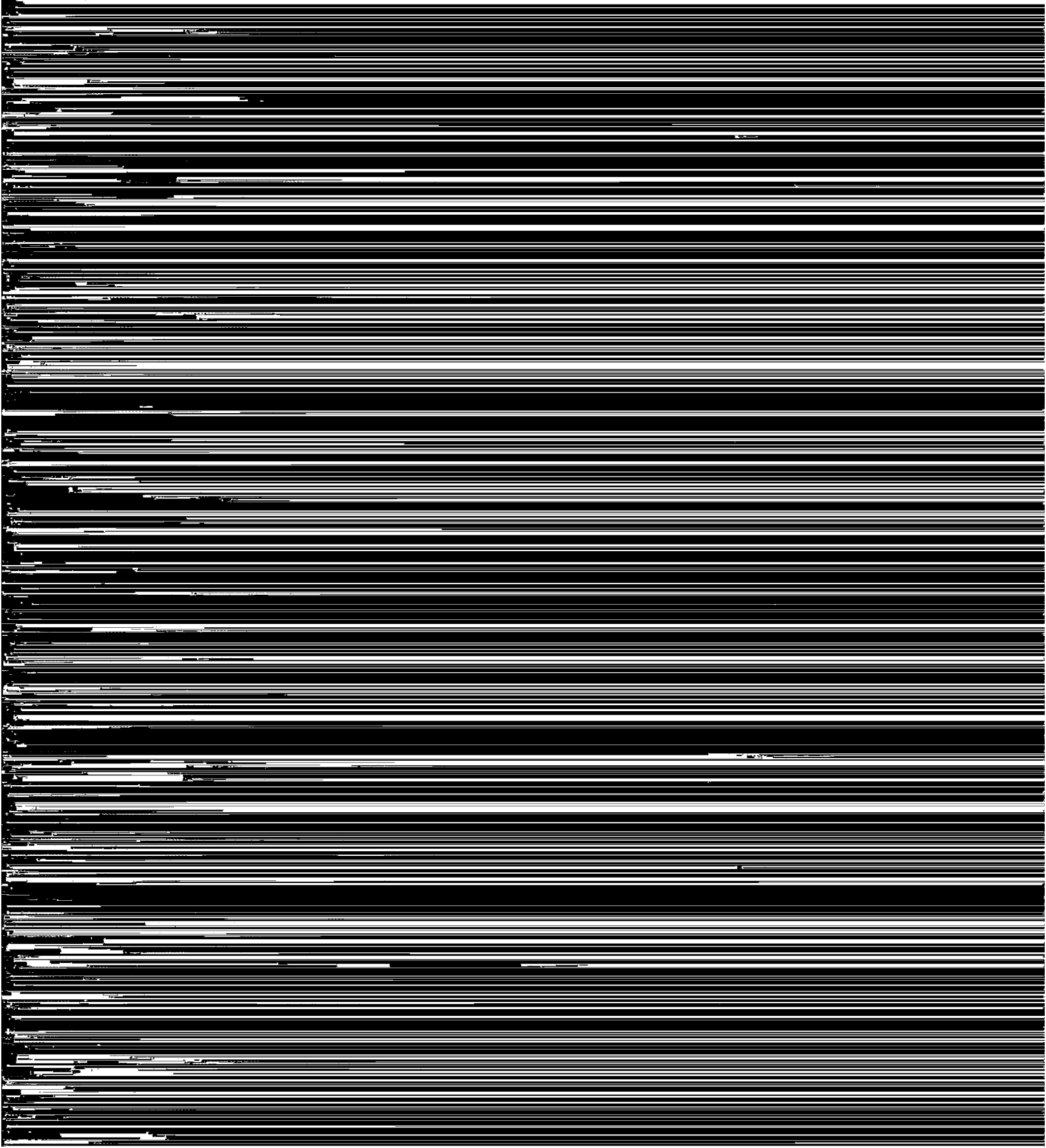
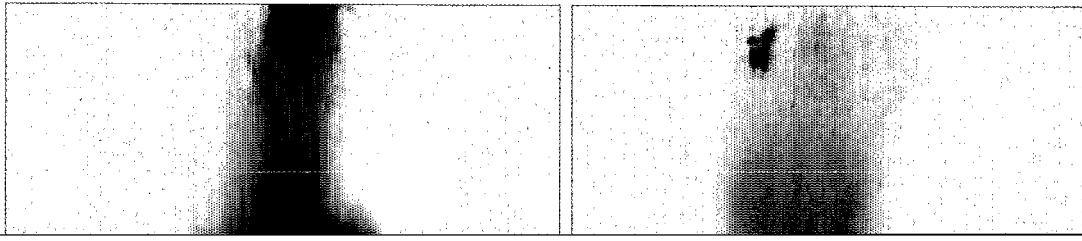
P-GUS and T-GUS Show Low Levels of Expression in *Lotus* Roots

Fluorometric GUS assays of transformed *Lotus* roots, both nodulated and non-nodulated, showed a low level of expression of both the P-GUS and T-GUS chimeric genes (Figure 3). The expression of the T-GUS construct (37.2 specific activity units) was considerably higher than that of the P-GUS gene (9.6 units), whereas the *lbc₃*-GUS gene was poorly expressed (1.8 units). There was a decreasing mean ratio of nodule-to-root expression from *lbc₃*-GUS (727) to P-GUS (82) to T-GUS (6.6), primarily because of the relative increase in expression in the non-nodulated parts of the roots.

The distribution of GUS expression in transgenic *Lotus* roots was determined histochemically. In contrast to tobacco roots, P-GUS expression was not detected at high levels in the root tip. There was a low level of staining that was difficult to localize but was probably associated with the vascular tissues. The T-GUS construct was expressed at slightly higher levels in the transgenic *Lotus* roots but low compared with its expression in tobacco. Staining was generally confined to the vascular tissues of mature roots (Figure 2C). In general the root tips were not stained; occasionally, newly emerged roots expressed the gene but in the vascular region and not the meristem (Figure 2E). No staining was detected in the transgenic roots containing the *lbc₃*-GUS gene (not shown).

DISCUSSION

We have demonstrated that the promoters of the hemoglobin genes of the two nonlegumes *Parasponia* and *Trema* function at elevated levels in the transgenic nodules of the legume *Lotus*. The soybean *lbc₃* promoter, as expected from previous studies with a chimeric chloramphenicol acetyltransferase gene construction (Stougaard et al., 1987b), also showed an extremely high level of expression in transgenic *Lotus* nodules with only low levels of expression in the non-nodulated roots. The general spatial and temporal distribution of GUS activity, determined histochemically, directed by the two nonlegume hemoglobin-GUS chimeric genes within the *Lotus* nodule appeared to parallel both that of endogenous *Lotus* leghemoglobin and the introduced soybean hemoglobin-GUS gene. This finding indicates that nodule-specific regulatory sequences are sufficiently conserved between nonlegumes and legumes to control expression of the nonlegume promoters in transgenic legume plants.



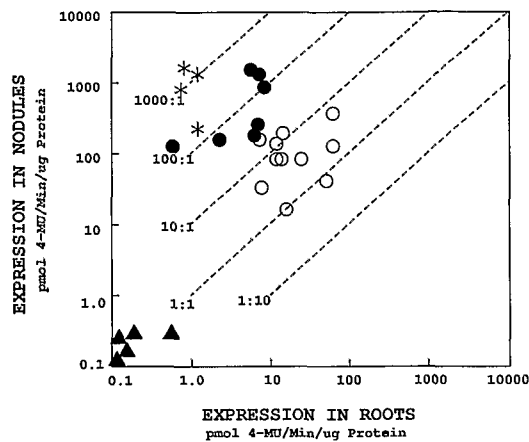


Figure 3. GUS Expression in the Roots and Nodules of Transgenic *Lotus* Plants.

The specific activity of β -glucuronidase enzyme was assayed in the hairy roots and their associated nodules from *Lotus* seedlings transformed with the P-GUS (●), T-GUS (○), and *lbc*₃-GUS (*) gene constructs or controls without a chimeric GUS gene (▲) and infected by *R. loti* as described in Methods. Each point represents the activity in a single mature pink nodule and a segment of non-nodulated root from the same root system of independent transformants. The dotted lines represent the locations of common

genes, but in *Trema* the CTCTTC subsequence is on the noncoding DNA strand. Furthermore, in *Trema* the AAA-GAT motif is a poor match, but there is a perfect match further upstream in the same orientation (Figure 4). We are currently generating deletion derivatives of both the P-GUS and T-GUS chimeric genes to identify precisely the sequence elements responsible for the nodule-specific expression of these promoters in transgenic *Lotus* plants.

Both *Parasponia* and *Trema* are tropical or temperate trees and, hence, are phylogenetically distinct from the legumes. *Parasponia*, like the legumes and some other plant species scattered in families throughout the Angiospermae, can be nodulated by *Rhizobium* (or other symbiotic micro-organisms), but *Trema*, despite being in the same subfamily as *Parasponia*, does not form nodules either when inoculated in the wild or in the laboratory (Bogusz et al., 1988). Both species possess single hemoglobin genes that show considerable nucleic acid sequence and inferred amino acid sequence similarity (Bogusz et al., 1988) but that are very different from the hemoglobins found in legumes (only 40% identical at the amino acid level and very little at the nucleic acid level).

Expression of the two nonlegume hemoglobin proteins and their mRNAs has so far been detected at low levels in the roots of *Parasponia* and *Trema* plants (Bogusz et al.,

Trema: AAAGTTTACTAAAGATTAAATCTTACTAAAAGAAACGAAAAAAA
 AAAAAACCCCAAGAGATGGCTCTCCAGTACCCTGAAGAGTTACATCTTATGCTTATCCCCATTTTCCCTATATATACAG

Para: TAAAAACCCCAAGAGATGGCTCCCAATACCCTGAAGAGTTACACAGATCCCATTTTTTCTACTATATATACA

lbc3: AAAGTTTGAAGAGATGATGTCTCTTCCACATACCAATGGATCACCCCTCCTCCAACAGCCAAGAGACATAAG
 "ORGAN-SPECIFIC BOX"
 TTTTATTAGTTATTCTGATCAGCTCTTCAAGCCTCTATATAAATAAG

Figure 4. Conservation of Nodule-Specific Sequence Motifs between Legume and Nonlegume Hemoglobin Promoters.

The sequences at the 5' end of the hemoglobin genes from *Trema* (*Trema*) and *Parasponia* (*Para*) are shown along with the upstream sequences from the legume hemoglobin *lbc₃* gene (*lbc3*). The sequences are aligned at the AAAGAT motif of the "organ-specific box" of the *lbc₃* gene (boxed) as identified by Stougaard et al. (1987b). Sequence motifs homologous to the soybean organ-specific sequences are in boldface type. The TATA boxes of all three promoters are underlined.

evolutionary origin of nodulation ability and nodule-specific gene expression among the Angiosperms.

P. andersonii and *T. tomentosa* are members of the widespread and taxonomically diverse (over 280 species) subfamily Celtidoideae of the family Ulmaceae (Hutchinson, 1967), which contains 12 genera. The ability to nodulate is restricted to the genus *Parasponia* (seven species) and is not seen in any of the other genera, including members of the morphologically similar genus *Trema* (55 species). Taxonomic evidence suggests, therefore, that a species ancestral to *Parasponia* gained the ability to nodulate independently of the legumes and subsequently was responsible for this property in the seven extant *Parasponia* species. The precise regulation of the temporal and spatial expression of the *Parasponia* hemoglobin promoter in the transgenic legume suggests that the legumes and nonle-

a pre-existing root-specific expression system. The first primitive root nodules presumably contained the same rapidly dividing, highly active meristematic root tissues, possibly lateral root meristems, as those in the tobacco root tips where P-GUS and T-GUS are both highly expressed. Subsequent selection pressure for a more precise interaction between the plant and the symbiotic microorganism would have refined and enhanced the nodule specificity of hemoglobin expression. This could have been through changes in either the *cis*-acting DNA elements that regulate root expression or the *trans*-acting transcription factors that interact with these elements. These changes could have controlled precisely the temporal and spatial distribution of gene expression within the nodule, but in the nodulating nonlegumes, the original root function would need to have been maintained because these species possess only one hemoglobin gene that presumably carries out both root- and nodule-specific functions. The relationship between the root-specific and nodule-specific DNA signals in the two nonlegume promoters will eventually be determined by a functional analysis of the promoters in transgenic *Lotus* and tobacco.

The legume-*Rhizobium* symbiosis may also have started with a single root-expressed hemoglobin gene like that in *Trema* and *Parasponia*. During the acquisition of nodulating ability, this hemoglobin gene could have been duplicated multiply (Brisson and Verma, 1982), allowing effective selection in some genes for high levels of purely nodule-specific expression without the necessity for preserving the root function in the same gene. The legume root-expressed and nodule-expressed genes may have diverged sufficiently so that they no longer cross-hybridized. As yet a root-expressed hemoglobin has not been identified in the legumes.

We previously suggested two possible functions for the root-expressed hemoglobins of nonlegumes (Appleby et al., 1988) as either sensors of oxygen tension in the root

xygenation of hemoglobin was established and maintained within the root tip. Further physiological work will be required to test this possibility.

METHODS

Plasmids and Constructions

The promoter fragments of *Parasponia* and *Trema* hemoglobin genes were obtained as follows. The *Parasponia* HpaI/EcoRI fragment from pL305 (Landsmann et al., 1986) was cloned in M13mp18 digested with SmaI and EcoRI. The *Trema* AccI/HindIII promoter fragment from pT16 (Bogusz et al., 1988) was filled in with Klenow fragment of DNA polymerase and cloned in M13mp18 digested with SmaI. A synthetic oligonucleotide 5'CTCTAGAGGATCCCTCTGTGGGTTGAGG-3' was used to generate a deletion terminating 3 bp upstream of the initiation codon (Eghtedarzadeh and Henikoff, 1986) for both the *Trema* and *Parasponia* clones in mp18.

The hemoglobin-GUS constructs are shown schematically in Figure 5 and were constructed as described below. The EcoRI/BamHI promoter fragment of the *Trema* plasmid was then cloned into EcoRI/BamHI-digested pGN100, a promoter expression cassette derived from pBI21 (Jefferson et al., 1987) that carries the GUS reporter gene (*Escherichia coli uidA* gene) and the nopaline synthase (*nos*) termination and polyadenylation signals (J. Walker, unpublished data) (Figure 5). The BamHI promoter fragment of the *Parasponia* plasmid was cloned in pGN100 digested with BamHI (Figure 5). Finally, the pGN100 containing the *Parasponia* or the *Trema* promoter fragments were linearized with HindIII and ligated with the binary plant transformation vector pGA470 (An et al., 1985) previously digested with HindIII (Figure 5).

The soybean hemoglobin-GUS chimeric gene plasmid *lbc₃-GUS-NOS* (Figure 5) was kindly provided by Dr. Jens Stougaard. The 35S-GUS construct (not shown) containing the promoter of the 35S transcript of cauliflower mosaic virus is similar to that described in Jefferson et al. (1987) and was constructed by inserting the 430-bp BamHI 35S promoter fragment from p35SCAT (Walker et al., 1987) into pGN100. These last two plasmids were linearized with HindIII and inserted into the HindIII site of pGA470 (Figure 5).

Binary vectors were transferred into *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* strain LbA4404 (Hoekema et al., 1983) and *A. rhizogenes* strain A4 (White and Nester, 1980) by triparental mating as described in Ellis et al. (1987).

Plant Transformation

Leaf discs of *Nicotiana tabacum* (cv Wisconsin 38) were transformed with engineered *A. tumefaciens* cells using the leaf disc procedure as described in Ellis et al. (1987).

Chimeric *Lotus corniculatus* plants with normal, nontransgenic shoots but transformed hairy root systems were generated with engineered *A. rhizogenes* strains essentially by the procedures of Stougaard et al. (1987a) and Petit et al. (1987) and inoculated with *Rhizobium loti* (Stougaard et al., 1987a; Petit et al., 1987). After 2 weeks to 4 weeks plants were sacrificed and individual root systems dissected away. A single nodule from each root

system was assayed for GUS activity by the fluorometric method to identify the transgenic roots and nodules, which were then analyzed further. Nontransformed roots often developed after the *Lotus* plants were transferred into the glasshouse, necessitating this preliminary screening.

Electroporation

N. plumbaginifolia protoplasts were prepared from suspension cultures and electroporated as described in Llewellyn et al. (1987).

GUS Assays

Histological Detection

Histological assays for GUS expression at the tissue level were done on non-nodulated roots or nodulated roots that had been shown to be transformed by the fluorometric assay, essentially as described by Finnegan et al. (1989). Whole organs were vacuum infiltrated in ice-cold 1% glutaraldehyde in 10 mM sodium phosphate, pH 7.1, and fixed on ice for 30 min to 60 min. After five changes in the same buffer, they were covered with substrate

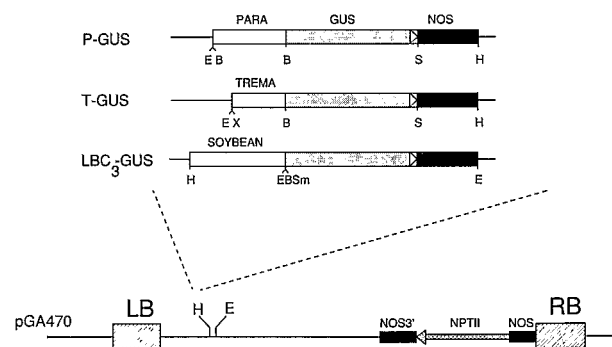


Figure 5. Chimeric Gene Fusions Used To Analyze Hemoglobin Gene Regulation in Transgenic Plants.

Gene fusions between the promoter segments of the *Parasponia* and *Trema* hemoglobin promoters and the β -glucuronidase reporter gene were constructed as described in Methods. P-GUS and T-GUS are transcriptional fusions incorporating 1 kb and 0.6 kb of upstream sequences of the *Parasponia* and *Trema* genes, respectively. The polyadenylation signals provided by a segment of the T-DNA encoded nopaline synthase gene (*NOS*) from *A. tumefaciens*. *lbc₃-GUS* is a transcriptional fusion between the 2-kb upstream sequences of the soybean *lbc₃* leghemoglobin gene and the β -glucuronidase reporter cassette. All three constructs were cointegrated into the binary transformation vector pGA470 at their respective HindIII sites in such a way that they were between the left and right borders (LB and RB) of the T-DNA and adjacent to a selectable kanamycin resistance gene. Abbreviations are B, BamHI; E, EcoRI; H, HindIII; S, SacI; Sm, SmaI; X, XbaI; NPTII, neomycin phosphotransferase. Linear maps are not drawn to scale.

(10 mM sodium phosphate, pH 7.0, 1 mM X-glucuronide, 0.5 mM potassium ferricyanide, 0.5 mM potassium ferrocyanide) and incubated at 37°C for 12 hr to 24 hr in the dark. Roots were incubated whole or cut into 1 cm lengths, and larger (>3 mm diameter) nodules were bisected to facilitate entry of the substrate. After a brief buffer wash, tissues were dehydrated through

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