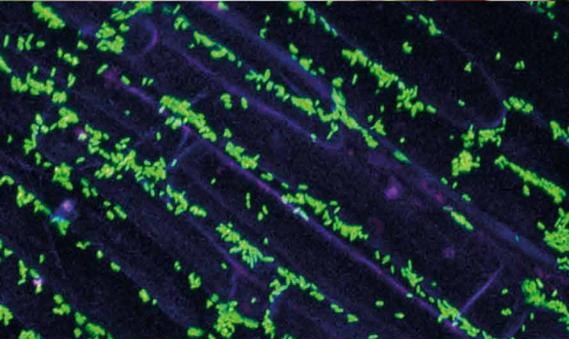


BURLEIGH DODDS SERIES IN AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE

Microbial bioprotectants for plant disease management

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Contents

Series list	xiv
Acknowledgements	xxii
Introduction	xxiii

Part 1 Product development of microbials

1	Advances in understanding modes of action of microbial bioprotectants	3
	<i>Gabriele Berg, Graz University of Technology and Austrian Centre of Industrial Biotechnology, Austria; Peter Kusstatscher, Franz Stocker and Ahmed Abdelfattah, Graz University of Technology, Austria; and Tomislav Cernava, Graz University of Technology and Austrian Centre of Industrial Biotechnology, Austria</i>	
	1 Introduction	3
	2 Modes of action of plant-associated microorganisms with their host	5
	3 Modes of action between plant-associated microorganisms and pathogens	8
	4 Understanding the structure and function of the plant microbiome	10
	5 The role of the plant microbiome in plant health and biocontrol	14
	6 Consequences for discovery and application of bioprotectants	20
	7 Conclusion and future trends	22
	8 Where to look for further information	23
	9 Acknowledgement	23
	10 References	23
2	Advances in screening approaches for the development of microbial bioprotectants to control plant diseases	33
	<i>Wagner Bettiol, Embrapa (Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation), Brazil; Flávio Henrique Vasconcelos de Medeiros, Universidade Federal de Lavras, Brazil; Josiane Barros Chiaramonte, Vittia Fertilizantes e Biológicos SA, Brazil; and Rodrigo Mendes, Embrapa (Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation), Brazil</i>	

1	Introduction	33
2	Screening microorganisms for biological control of plant diseases: exclusive and inclusive approaches	34
3	The nine-step approach to screening for biocontrol agents	47
4	Non-traditional biocontrol agents of plant diseases: entomopathogenic fungi and bacteria	52
5	Non-traditional biocontrol agents of plant diseases: bacteriophages and mycoviruses	54
6	Niche markets for biocontrol agents	56
7	Regional markets for biocontrol agents	61
8	Formulation of biocontrol agents	62
9	The role of the microbiome in biocontrol	63
10	Microbiome engineering for disease control	65
11	Future trends	68
12	Where to look for further information	68
13	Acknowledgements	70
14	References	70
3	Visualising plant colonisation by beneficial bacteria: a key step to improve the understanding of plant-microbe interactions <i>Stéphane Compant, Günter Brader and Angela Sessitsch, AIT Austrian Institute of Technology GmbH, Austria</i>	87
	1 Introduction	87
	2 Methods to visualise and determine microbial colonisation of plants	88
	3 Colonisation of beneficial bacteria from the soil to the root surface	89
	4 Colonisation of beneficial bacteria to root internal tissues	92
	5 Colonisation of the aerial plant parts	94
	6 Improving applications by understanding the colonisation processes	96
	7 Conclusion and future trends in research	97
	8 Where to look for further information	97
	9 References	98
4	Durability of efficacy of microbial bioprotectants against plant diseases <i>Marc Bardin, Thomas Pressecq and Philippe C. Nicot, INRAE, Pathologie Végétale, Avignon, France; and Yousra Bouaoud, University of Bejaia, Algeria</i>	103
	1 Introduction	103
	2 Durability of plant protection against pests	104
	3 Main modes of action of microbial bioprotectants against plant pathogens and potential mechanisms of resistance developed by plant pathogens	106

	4 Diversity of susceptibility of plant pathogens to microbial bioprotectants	110
	5 Risk of emergence of resistance to microbial bioprotectants in plant pathogens	113
	6 Future trends in research and recommendations for a durable use of microbial bioprotectants	115
	7 Where to look for further information	116
	8 Acknowledgements	118
	9 References	118
5	Advances in production and formulation of commercial microbial bioprotectant products <i>Jacob Eyal, Michael Dimock, and José João Carvalho, Certis USA LLC, USA</i>	123
	1 Introduction	123
	2 Bioprotectant products containing bacteria	125
	3 Bioprotectant products containing fungi propagules produced by fermentation	135
	4 Bioprotectant products containing yeast	143
	5 Production and formulation of bacteriophage for controlling plant disease	148
	6 Innovative microbial bioprotectant products for controlling plant disease	153
	7 Innovative formulations for bioprotectants	160
	8 Conclusion and future trends	162
	9 Where to look for further information	163
	10 References	163
6	Key issues in the regulation of microbial bioprotectants in the European Union: challenges and solutions to achieve more sustainable crop protection <i>Rüdiger Hauschild, APIS Applied Insect Science GmbH, Germany; and Willem J. Ravensberg, Koppert Biological Systems, The Netherlands</i>	187
	1 Introduction	187
	2 Issues of the administrative registration procedure in the European Union	189
	3 Issues and solutions for the data requirements for microbial bioprotectants	196
	4 New research, novel products and application methods	209
	5 Conclusion and future trends	210
	6 References	216

7	Microbial bioprotectants and the marketplace <i>Mark C. Trimmer, DunhamTrimmer LLC, USA</i>	223
	1 Microbial market history	223
	2 The microbial bioprotectant market	226
	3 Microbial market trends and drivers	231
	4 Myths about the bioprotectant market	235
	5 Limitations for microbial bioprotectants	237
	6 Future opportunities and threats	238
	7 Summary	242
	8 Where to look for further information	242
	9 References	243

Part 2 Biological control agents

8	The use of <i>Bacillus</i> spp. as bacterial biocontrol agents to control plant diseases <i>Adrien Anckaert, Anthony Arguelles Arias and Grégory Hoff, Gembloux Agro-Bio Tech, ULiege (University of Liège), Belgium; Maryline Calonne-Salmon and Stéphane Declerck, UCLouvain (University of Louvain-la-Neuve), Belgium; and Marc Ongena, Gembloux Agro-Bio Tech, ULiege (University of Liège), Belgium</i>	247
	1 Introduction	247
	2 <i>Bacillus</i> spp. as biocontrol agents (BCAs)	249
	3 The diversity of <i>Bacillus</i> spp. metabolites involved in biocontrol	252
	4 <i>Bacillus</i> spp. biocontrol mechanisms: root colonization	258
	5 <i>Bacillus</i> spp. biocontrol mechanisms: antagonistic activity	261
	6 <i>Bacillus</i> spp. biocontrol mechanisms: induced-systemic resistance	264
	7 Factors influencing the production of bioactive secondary metabolites: cellular regulation	266
	8 Factors influencing the production of bioactive secondary metabolites: biofilm formation	268
	9 Factors influencing the production of bioactive secondary metabolites: abiotic factors	269
	10 Factors influencing the production of bioactive secondary metabolites: biotic factors	271
	11 Interactions of <i>Bacillus</i> spp. with other beneficial microorganisms and their use in biocontrol	272
	12 Conclusions and future trends	274
	13 Funding	276
	14 Where to look for further information	276
	15 References	276

9	The use of <i>Pseudomonas</i> spp. as bacterial biocontrol agents to control plant diseases <i>Monica Höfte, Ghent University, Belgium</i>	301
	1 Introduction	301
	2 <i>Pseudomonas</i> taxonomy	302
	3 Plant-beneficial <i>Pseudomonas</i> strains	304
	4 Secondary metabolite production in <i>Pseudomonas</i> biocontrol strains	305
	5 Secretion systems that play a role in biocontrol	313
	6 <i>Pseudomonas</i> biocontrol strains: <i>Pseudomonas protegens</i> subgroup	314
	7 <i>Pseudomonas</i> biocontrol strains: <i>Pseudomonas chlororaphis</i> subgroup	320
	8 <i>Pseudomonas</i> biocontrol strains: <i>Pseudomonas corrugata</i> subgroup	322
	9 <i>Pseudomonas</i> biocontrol strains: <i>Pseudomonas fluorescens</i> subgroup	326
	10 <i>Pseudomonas</i> biocontrol strains: <i>Pseudomonas koreensis</i> subgroup	328
	11 <i>Pseudomonas</i> biocontrol strains: <i>Pseudomonas mandelii</i> subgroup and <i>Pseudomonas gessardii</i> subgroup	329
	12 <i>Pseudomonas</i> biocontrol strains: <i>Pseudomonas putida</i> group	331
	13 <i>Pseudomonas</i> biocontrol strains: <i>Pseudomonas syringae</i> group and <i>Pseudomonas aeruginosa</i> group	334
	14 Commercial <i>Pseudomonas</i> -based bioprotectants	339
	15 Conclusion	343
	16 Where to look for further information	345
	17 Acknowledgements	346
	18 References	346
10	Are there bacterial bioprotectants besides <i>Bacillus</i> and <i>Pseudomonas</i> species? <i>Emilio Montesinos and Anna Bonaterra, Institute of Food and Agricultural Technology, University of Girona, Spain</i>	375
	1 Introduction	375
	2 Modes of action	377
	3 Building a strain collection	379
	4 Screening techniques	381
	5 Biosafety issues	385
	6 Strain improvement	387
	7 Commercial exploitation	388
	8 Summary and future trends	393
	9 Where to look for further information	393
	10 References	395
11	The use of <i>Trichoderma</i> spp. to control plant diseases <i>Enrique Monte and Rosa Hermosa, Spanish-Portuguese Institute for Agricultural Research (CIALE) - University of Salamanca, Spain</i>	401

1	Introduction	401
2	Biocontrol mechanisms: mycoparasitism	403
3	Biocontrol mechanisms: antibiosis	408
4	Biocontrol mechanisms: competition	411
5	Plant beneficial effects: systemic defense and growth promotion	413
6	Registration and commercialization	416
7	Conclusions	417
8	Where to look for further information	418
9	Acknowledgements	419
10	References	419
12	<i>Clonostachys rosea</i> to control plant diseases	429
	<i>Dan Funck Jensen and Mukesh Dubey, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden; Birgit Jensen, University of Copenhagen, Denmark; and Magnus Karlsson, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden</i>	
1	Introduction	429
2	Taxonomy and sources	430
3	Mechanisms of action	431
4	Lessons from genomics and transcriptomics	437
5	Product development and commercialisation	440
6	Delivery and action of <i>C. rosea</i> as a biological control agent	452
7	Conclusion and future trends	458
8	Where to look for further information	460
9	Acknowledgements	460
10	References	461
13	Bacteriophages to control plant diseases	473
	<i>Manoj Choudhary and Mathews Paret, University of Florida and North Florida Research and Education Center, IFAS, University of Florida, USA; Aleksa Obradović, University of Belgrade, Serbia; Katarina Gašić, Institute for Plant Protection and Environment, Serbia; and Jeffrey B. Jones, University of Florida, USA</i>	
1	Introduction	473
2	Advantages of bacteriophages for biocontrol over other strategies	474
3	Early research on bacteriophages	475
4	Sources of bacteriophages	483
5	Bacteriophage–host interactions	483
6	Concerns in using bacteriophages as biocontrol agents	486
7	Factors affecting the efficacy of bacteriophages for plant disease control	487
8	Approaches for optimum efficacy of bacteriophage for plant disease control	490
9	Bacteriophage therapy challenges that need to be addressed	494

10	Conclusions	497
11	Where to look for further information	497
12	References	497
14	The use of mild viruses for control of plant pathogenic viruses <i>Nelia Ortega-Parra, De Ceuster Meststoffen BV (DCM) and Wageningen University & Research, The Netherlands; Zafeiro Zisi, Scientia Terrae Research Institute VZW and Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium; and Inge M. Hanssen, De Ceuster Meststoffen NV (DCM), Belgium</i>	507
	1 Introduction	507
	2 Unraveling the molecular mechanisms of cross-protection	508
	3 Key issues for a safe and effective cross-protection strategy	515
	4 Application of cross-protection under commercial cultivation conditions: overview and case study	520
	5 Summary and future trends	525
	6 Where to look for further information	529
	7 Acknowledgement	530
	8 References	530
15	Biocontrol via mycoviruses: a neglected option for bioprotection? <i>Anne D. van Diepeningen, BU Biointeractions and Plant Health, Wageningen University and Research, The Netherlands</i>	541
	1 Introduction	541
	2 Mycovirus types and origins	542
	3 Mycovirus detection and incidence	546
	4 Mycovirus effects	549
	5 Transmission of mycoviruses	554
	6 Essential traits for a virocontrol product	559
	7 Success story: <i>Cryphonectria parasitica</i>	562
	8 Future trends	565
	9 Conclusion	567
	10 Where to look for further information	568
	11 References	569

Part 3 Examples of use of microbial bioprotectants

16	Development and scale-up of bioprotectants to keep staple foods safe from aflatoxin contamination in Africa <i>Ranajit Bandyopadhyay, Alejandro Ortega-Beltran, Matieyedou Konlambigue, Lawrence Kaptoge and Titilayo D. O. Falade, International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, Nigeria; and Peter J. Cotty, Ocean University of China, China</i>	587
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1	Introduction	587
2	<i>Aspergillus</i> biology and aflatoxin epidemiology	589
3	Aflatoxin management options	593
4	Biocontrol product development and the registration process in Africa	594
5	Manufacturing development	601
6	Barriers preventing adoption and how to overcome them	605
7	Scaling up aflatoxin biocontrol technology	607
8	Current challenges and needs	611
9	Some final thoughts	613
10	Conclusion	615
11	Where to look for further information	616
12	Acknowledgement	617
13	References	617
17	Using <i>Verticillium albo-atrum</i> WCS850 to control Dutch elm disease	629
	<i>Joeke Postma, Wageningen University & Research, The Netherlands</i>	
1	Introduction	629
2	Development of the <i>Verticillium albo-atrum</i> WCS850 strain	631
3	Production, method of application, registration and use	632
4	Testing long-term efficacy	634
5	Conclusion	635
6	Where to look for further information	637
7	Acknowledgements	637
8	References	637
Part 4 Future outlook on microbial biopesticides		
18	The role of biopesticides for disease control in integrated crop protection approaches	641
	<i>Jürgen Köhl, Wageningen University & Research, The Netherlands</i>	
1	Introduction	641
2	The role of biopesticides in conventional high-input cropping systems	644
3	The role of biopesticides in integrated pest management cropping systems	645
4	The role of biopesticides in organic cropping systems	649
5	Future integrated approaches	652
6	Case study: the role of biopesticides in different apple scab control approaches	656
7	Conclusions and future trends in research	661
8	Where to look for further information	662
9	References	663

19	Future outlook on microbial bioprotectants in agriculture <i>Willem J. Ravensberg, Koppert Biological Systems, The Netherlands</i>	669
	1 Introduction: crop protection over time	669
	2 Scientific developments affecting bioprotectants	671
	3 Regulatory issues	675
	4 Crop protection and political goals	677
	5 Towards a new agriculture	678
	6 Major factors influencing the future developments of bioprotectants	681
	7 Conclusion	682
	8 Where to look for further information	683
	9 References	684
	Index	691

Introduction

With growing concerns about the environmental impact of synthetic fungicides, increasing levels of fungicide resistance and increasing regulatory restrictions on fungicide use, the crop protection sector and farmers face mounting pressure to replace synthetic fungicides with environmentally friendly biological alternatives for disease control. This volume examines the recent advances in the development of ecologically balanced biological methods using biopesticides based on beneficial microorganisms to control plant diseases.

Part 1 of the book focuses on product development of microbials, discussing aspects such as modes of action of microbial biopesticides and developments in screening approaches. Chapters in Part 1 also examine methods to visualise and determine microbials, durability of efficacy of microbial biopesticides, the commercialisation of microbial biopesticides, advances in production of commercial microbials and the regulation of microbials in the European Union. Part 1 concludes with a chapter on microbial biopesticides and the marketplace. Part 2 examines the use of biological control agents to control plant disease, focusing on bacterial, fungal and viral agents. Part 3 provides examples of the use of biopesticides, specifically highlighting the use of biopesticides to protect food from aflatoxin contamination and the use of *Verticillium albo-atrum* WCS850 to control Dutch elm disease. Part 4 of the book concludes with a discussion of the future of biopesticides, focusing on their role in integrated crop protection approaches.

Part 1 Product development of microbials

Part 1 opens with a chapter that focuses on the advances in understanding modes of action of microbial biopesticides. Plant-associated microorganisms are involved in important functions related to growth, performance and health of their hosts. Understanding their modes of action is pivotal for the development and application of microbial biopesticides and biostimulants. Chapter 1 summarises current knowledge about beneficial plant-microbe interactions, discusses recent insights into the functioning of the plant microbiome and beneficial plant-microbe networks. It shows that the use of microorganisms and the exploitation of beneficial plant-microbe interactions offer promising and environmentally-friendly strategies to achieve sustainable agriculture on a global scale.

Chapter 2 examines advances in screening approaches for the development of microbial biopesticides to control plant diseases. The chapter begins by discussing screening of microorganisms for biological control of plant

diseases, specifically focusing on exclusive and inclusive approaches. It then goes on to discuss the nine-step approach to screening for biocontrol agents, which is then followed by an analysis of non-traditional biocontrol agents of plant diseases such as entomopathogenic fungi, bacteria, bacteriophages and mycoviruses. Sections on niche and regional markets for biocontrol agents are also included. The chapter also provides an overview of the formulation of biocontrol agents, the role of the microbiome in biocontrol and the use of microbiome engineering for disease control.

The subject of Chapter 3 is visualising plant colonisation by beneficial bacteria, which is considered a key step to improve the understanding of plant-microbe interactions. Plants contain diverse microorganisms that interact with their hosts and with each other. Beneficial bacteria can be utilised on crops to protect plants against biotic and abiotic stresses and to stimulate plant growth. However, the behaviour of specific microorganisms on and within plants is still underexplored. The chapter begins by highlighting the methods that can be used to visualise and determine microbial colonisation of plants. The chapter then goes on to examine colonisation of beneficial bacteria from the soil to the root surface and to root internal tissues. A section on the colonisation of the aerial parts of plants is also provided, which is then followed by a discussion on improving applications by understanding colonisation processes. These techniques are crucial in the selection process of biocontrol agents and the development of a product formulation and method of application.

Chapter 4 addresses the durability of efficacy of microbial bioprotectants against plant diseases. The chapter highlights current knowledge concerning erosion of efficacy of microbial bioprotectants against plant pathogens and its possible consequences for field applications. It starts by reviewing the durability of plant protection against bio-aggressors, then goes on to discuss the main modes of action of microbial bioprotectants against plant pathogens in relation to potential mechanisms of resistance developed by plant pathogens. The chapter also reviews the diversity of susceptibility within plant pathogen populations to microbial bioprotectants and the related risk of emergence of resistance to microbial bioprotectants in plant pathogens as well.

The next chapter reviews the recent commercialisation of microbial bioprotectant products containing bacteria, fungi, yeast and bacteriophages for the control of plant diseases. Chapter 5 also summarises recent development activities of new bioprotectant products based on microorganisms or their metabolites, including induced resistance products, single domain antibody proteins produced by microorganisms, and protozoans (amoebae). Production, mainly by submerged fermentation, and formulation processes of microbial bioprotectants are discussed. Key factors influencing the fermentation, formulation and the scale up for industrial production of such microorganism

as bioprotectant products are also addressed, including stability and viability of the active substances produced by liquid fermentation processes.

Chapter 6 examines the key issues in the regulation of microbial bioprotectants in the European Union, focusing specifically on the challenges and solutions to achieve more sustainable crop protection. Microbial bioprotectants, like chemical pesticides, are required to pass a risk assessment and risk management procedure prior to use in plant protection, which in many countries is an obstacle for market access, in particular, the European Union. Administrative issues and data requirements, adapted from those used for chemicals, cause issues for both applicants and evaluators. These issues are reviewed and improvements are proposed. Biology should be the basis of the evaluation and data requirements for microorganisms, with an emphasis in this chapter on microbial compounds and testing methods. Political actions involving the use of pesticides are reviewed and recommendations are made on how to improve the system for microbial bioprotectants, including new uses of microorganisms. New legislation is suggested for all microorganisms used in agriculture and related uses based on the assumption that well-known microorganisms are of low risk to human health and the environment.

The final chapter of Part 1 reviews microbial bioprotectants and the marketplace. Chapter 7 begins by discussing the latest figures in terms of microbial bioprotectants global market value. It also highlights the different types and ways these bioprotectants can be used. The chapter also discusses the trends and drivers in the microbial market, focusing specifically on why microbials dominate and the factors that drive bioprotectant adoption. A section on the myths about the bioprotectant market is also included, which is then followed by a discussion of the limitations for using microbial bioprotectants. Future opportunities and threats for microbial bioprotectants are also highlighted.

Part 2 Biological control agents

The first chapter of Part 2 focuses on the use of *Bacillus* spp. as bacterial control agents to control plant diseases. Biocontrol agents (BCAs) based on plant growth promoting rhizobacteria have recently been developed as alternatives to chemical pesticides. Among those beneficial bacteria, *Bacillus* spp. are one of the most promising BCAs. A wide range of bioactive secondary metabolites (BSMs) are involved in biocontrol via antibiosis to plant pathogens and/or via elicitation of systemic resistance in their host plants. Chapter 8 illustrates the diversity of pathosystems in which BCA based on *Bacillus* spp. have proved effective. It describes the mechanisms underpinning this biocontrol activity via production of a wide range of enzymes, proteins and small-size BSMs. As these BSMs are clearly involved in pathogen control, the chapter emphasises

the importance of understanding the ecological factors influencing their production. The final section of the chapter highlights the potential interactions between *Bacillus* spp. and other soil microorganisms in developing consortia of biocontrol agents combining species with synergistic activities for plant health improvement.

Chapter 9 examines the use of *Pseudomonas* spp. as bacterial biocontrol agents to control plant diseases. The chapter starts by highlighting recent advances in *Pseudomonas* taxonomy and a summary of its most important biocontrol traits. It then provides an overview of the most important *Pseudomonas* groups and subgroups harbouring biocontrol strains. Based on their activity, *Pseudomonas* biocontrol strains come in three types. The first type, represented by *P. chlororaphis*, *P. protegens*, *P. corrugata* and *P. aeruginosa* (sub)group strains, produces an arsenal of secondary metabolites with broad antimicrobial activity. The second type is found in the *P. putida*, *P. fluorescens*, *P. koreensis*, *P. mandelii*, and *P. gessardii* (sub)group. The spectrum of biocontrol properties of these strains is less diverse and involves siderophores and cyclic lipopeptides. The third type colonizes above-ground plant parts. Strains from this type mainly belong to the *P. syringae* group and are used to control postharvest pathogens. Examples of well-characterized and representative biocontrol strains show the links between phylogeny, ecology and biocontrol traits. The chapter concludes by reviewing commercially-available biocontrol strains.

Moving on from Chapters 8 and 9, Chapter 10 focuses on bacterial bioprotectants besides *Bacillus* and *Pseudomonas* species. The chapter begins by discussing the taxonomy of non-*Bacillus* and *Pseudomonas* (NBP) bioprotectant strains, including enterobacteria, actinomycetes, *Sphingomonas*, *Methylobacterium*, *Agrobacterium-Rhizobium* and *Lactobacillus*. The chapter reviews their mechanisms of action against plant pathogens. Sources of isolates and methods of isolation are discussed in building strain collections. The chapter then reviews procedures for screening antagonistic bacteria candidates as bioprotectants using biochemical and molecular markers, including the example of lactic acid bacteria. The chapter also covers strain improvement to increase fitness and efficacy in the field through physiological and genetic manipulation. Since they are essential for commercial development, biosafety issues are discussed, followed by an overview of patented substances and commercialized products. The chapter concludes with a summary and future trends in research section on non-*Bacillus* and *Pseudomonas* species.

The next chapter addresses the use of *Trichoderma* spp. to control plant diseases. *Trichoderma* is one of the most studied genera of ascomycetous fungi due to the beneficial effects it has on plants. *Trichoderma* spp. are involved in the production of cell wall-degrading enzymes and metabolites with antimicrobial activity. It also produces volatile compounds that act together as direct

biocontrol agents to protect plants against phytopathogenic fungi, oomycetes, nematodes and bacteria. Chapter 11 first reviews the various biocontrol mechanisms that can be used, specifically focusing on mycoparasitism, antibiosis and competition between the soil microbiota and plants for resources such as nutrients. The chapter also examines systemic defence and growth promotion in plants and how these can both have beneficial effects on the plant. A section on the importance of registration and commercialisation of *Trichoderma* strains is also provided as well as an overview of successful uses.

The subject of Chapter 12 is the use of *Clonostachys rosea* to control plant diseases. The fungus *C. rosea* was recognized as an aggressive parasite on other fungi already in the late 1950s. Research into its potential use in biological control of plant diseases soon followed, resulting in several commercial products. The chapter begins by reviewing the taxonomy and sources of *C. rosea*, then goes on to discuss the range of mechanisms of action involved in combating *C. rosea*. A section on the lessons that can be learnt from genomics and transcriptomics and *C. rosea* is also provided, which is then followed by a review of *C. rosea* product development and commercialisation. The chapter also analyses the delivery and action of *C. rosea* as a biocontrol agent, before concluding with an overview of why the use of *C. rosea* for plant disease control is a promising prospect.

Chapter 13 looks at the use of bacteriophages to control plant diseases. Bacteriophages are viruses that kill target bacteria without affecting another microorganism and environment. Bacteriophage efficiency on the phyllosphere is mainly affected by ultraviolet (UV) light. The chapter first discusses the advantages of using bacteriophages for biocontrol over other strategies, then goes on to examine the early research on bacteriophages. The chapter also reviews the sources of bacteriophages and the interactions they can have with host cells. A section on the concerns in using bacteriophages as biocontrol agents is also provided which is followed by an analysis of the facts that can affect the efficacy of bacteriophages for plant disease control. Approaches for optimum efficacy of bacteriophage for plant disease control are discussed and the bacteriophage therapy challenges that need to be addressed are also included. A list of applications of bacteriophages is also provided.

The next chapter focuses on the use of mild viruses for the control of plant pathogenic viruses. Plant virus management strategies have largely been limited to the application of hygiene protocols, the control of viral vectors such as insects and nematodes and the use of resistant varieties. However, these approaches are often insufficient to prevent infections. The rapid control of newly emerging viral diseases remains challenging. Chapter 14 focuses on cross-protection using mild viruses as active substances in biocontrol. The chapter begins by describing the theoretical modes of action of cross-protection. It then goes on to discuss crucial elements in the development

of a cross-protection strategy, taking into account new insights based on commercial application of cross-protection. The chapter also provides case studies in which cross-protection has been applied in commercial crops, in particular vaccination strategies to control Pepino mosaic virus (PepMV) in greenhouse tomato. Finally, developments that may impact future research into the control of emerging viral pathogens are discussed.

The final chapter of Part 2 looks at the possibility of mycoviruses as a means of biocontrol. Chapter 15 discusses the characteristics of mycoviruses and the conditions that need to be met to make a successful virocontrol agent. Virocontrol involves biocontrol of pathogens via hypovirulence-causing mycoviruses. The chapter describes one of the success stories so far, that of virocontrol of *Cryphonectria parasitica*, the chestnut blight pathogen. The chapter ends by reviewing future trends and where to find more information on mycoviruses and virocontrol.

Part 3 Examples of use of microbial bioprotectants

Part 3 opens with a chapter that focuses on the development and scale-up of bioprotectants to keep staple foods safe from aflatoxin contamination in Africa. Aflatoxins pose a significant public health risk, decrease productivity and profitability and hamper trade. To minimise aflatoxin contamination a biocontrol technology based on atoxigenic strains of *Aspergillus flavus* that do not produce aflatoxin is used widely in the United States. The technology, with the generic name Aflasafe, has been improved and adapted for use in Africa. Aflasafe products have been developed or are currently being developed in 20 African countries. Aflatoxin biocontrol is being scaled up for use in several African countries through a mix of public, private, and public-private interventions. Farmers in several countries have commercially treated nearly 400 000 ha of maize and groundnut achieving >90% reduction in aflatoxin contamination. Chapter 16 summarises the biology of aflatoxin-producing fungi and various factors affecting their occurrence, including climate change. Various management practices for aflatoxin mitigation are then discussed. These include biological control, which is increasingly being adopted by farmers in several countries. The chapter also discusses biocontrol product development and commercialization in various African countries. Subsequently, the chapter highlights some barriers to adoption and other challenges.

Chapter 17 highlights the potential of using *Verticillium albo-atrum* WCS850 to control Dutch elm disease, specifically focusing on its prominence in Europe. The chapter first describes the development of the *Verticillium albo-atrum* WCS850 strain, which first started in the 1980s. The chapter then goes on to review the production, method of application, registration and use of the *Verticillium albo-atrum* WCS850 strain as a biocontrol agent. A section

on testing long-term efficacy of the biocontrol strain is also provided, before concluding with an analysis of how Dutch elm disease treatment has changed since it was first identified.

Part 4 Future outlook on microbial bioprotectants

Chapter 18 addresses the role of bioprotectants for disease control in integrated crop protection approaches. Bioprotectants have the potential to replace chemical pesticides in agricultural cropping systems and crop protection approaches. Development of new bioprotectants in combination with more restricted use of chemical crop protection will result in their much stronger market position in the future. Bioprotectants fulfil particular roles in current and future crop protection approaches, primarily reducing pesticide residues in harvested products in conventional systems, as well as being the first and preferred control option in integrated pest management programs and organic farming, and complementing resident microbiomes in future resilient cropping systems. The process of developing bioprotectants until market access can take from up to 10 to 15 years. The chapter gives a brief overview of the role of bioprotectants in current and future crop protection approaches to stimulate discussion within the biocontrol industries, and amongst scientists and funding agencies on the need for new generations of bioprotectants for an agriculture industry undergoing transition.

The final chapter of the book highlights the future outlook on microbial bioprotectants in agriculture. Microbial bioprotectants have the potential to play a major role in the future of crop protection. Agriculture needs to become more sustainable and still provide food security within planetary borders. New technologies and scientific discoveries can unravel the interactions between the plant, the microbiome and the soil and provide new opportunities for crop protection and more resilient cropping systems. Regulatory issues delay and hamper exploitation and research of genetic resources. Chapter 19 describes the factors that promote the use of microbial bioprotectants as well as those that hamper their further adoption. A sustainable and resilient agriculture depends on the microbial interactions between plants in promoting plant growth and combatting biotic and abiotic threats. The transition to a resilient agriculture requires big changes in policy, regulation and farming practices. The chapter assesses the future outlook for the methods for controlling plant diseases described in this book as well as the factors determining their uptake and success.

Chapter 1

Advances in understanding modes of action of microbial bioprotectants

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- 1 Introduction
- 2 Modes of action of plant-associated microorganisms with their host
- 3 Modes of action between plant-associated microorganisms and pathogens
- 4 Understanding the structure and function of the plant microbiome
- 5 The role of the plant microbiome in plant health and biocontrol
- 6 Consequences for discovery and application of bioprotectants
- 7 Conclusion and future trends
- 8 Where to look for further information
- 9 Acknowledgement
- 10 References

1 Introduction

Human activities substantially affect the environment. According to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), for example, species extinctions are currently up to 1000 times higher than normal (ipbes.net). Intensive agriculture has contributed significantly to these long-lasting anthropogenic impacts (Crutzen, 2002). The conversion of atmospheric nitrogen to ammonia by the Haber-Bosch process, for efficient production of fertilizers, has fundamentally altered the global nitrogen cycle. Overuse of chemicals leads to the development of resistant plant and human pathogens, which are difficult or impossible to suppress. Current agricultural practices focus on increased productivity to ensure high crop yields with maximized profitability. Growing levels of fertilizer and pesticide inputs globally have led to the contamination of the environment as well as of food, resulting in negative impacts on so-called *One health* or planetary health (Flandroy et al.,

2018). We have already exceeded planetary boundaries for nitrogen supply, land use, as well as biodiversity loss (Rockström et al., 2009).

Microbial biopesticides and biostimulants could provide a solution to these problems (Köhl et al., 2019). Plants and soil naturally harbor specific microorganisms that fulfill functions, such as nutrient, mineral, and vitamin supply, and protect against biotic and abiotic stress (Bakker et al., 2020). Such beneficial microbes can be categorized according to their modes of action into biopesticides and biostimulants (Lugtenberg and Kamilova, 2009; Dunham Trimmer, 2017). In this chapter, we follow the definition of biopesticides provided by the International Biocontrol Manufacturers Association (IBMA) (<https://ibma-global.org/what-is-biocontrol>), in order to avoid the ambiguity that might be caused by different national and continental definitions.

Biopesticides based on beneficial microbes can potentially replace chemical pesticides. Gram-positive bacteria with spore-forming ability are currently the main group being commercialized; however, they represent only a small proportion of the potential microbial community. The commercial use of biopesticides depends on the reliability of microbial formulations, their modes of action, as well as their safety. A low shelf life and inconsistent effects in the field characterize many of the products that have been commercialized so far. There have been recent developments in methods for the analysis of microbial communities based on next-generation sequencing (Jansson and Baker, 2016; Berg et al., 2020). They have resulted in an improved knowledge base in terms of understanding the modes of action of biocontrol agents (Spadaro and Droby, 2016). This knowledge is important during all stages of the development of microbial products, from their discovery to risk and efficacy assessment.

Microbiome research has revolutionized our understanding of the way plants function and opened new possibilities to develop more sustainable agriculture (Berg et al., 2020). This new field of research has contributed to our understanding of the modes of action of binary plant-microbe interactions as well as the interplay within the whole plant microbiome. Promising results from microbiome research have provided a boost for the whole 'microbiome market' as well as private investment in companies and startups (global-engage.com). Advances in the engineering of environmental microbiomes are predicted to replace potentially toxic chemicals in agriculture in the future, stimulate a more sustainable use of environmental resources, and improve food processing. Currently, agricultural products based on the microbiota are one of the fastest-growing sectors in agronomy, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 15–18% and a predicted value of over \$10 billion US dollars by 2025 for the whole biocontrol sector (Dunham Trimmer, 2017).

This chapter summarizes current knowledge about beneficial plant-microbe interactions and discusses recent insights into the functioning of the

plant microbiome and beneficial plant-microbe networks. It shows that the use of microorganisms and the exploitation of beneficial plant-microbe interactions offer promising and environmental-friendly strategies to achieve sustainable agriculture on a global scale.

2 Modes of action of plant-associated microorganisms with their host

Over the past 125 years, research and practical applications have both repeatedly demonstrated that microorganisms can have an intimate interaction with their host plants and are able to promote plant growth as well as suppress plant pathogens (Hiltner, 1902; Whipps, 2001; Berg, 2009). Plant-beneficial effects can result either from direct interactions of microorganisms with their plant hosts or indirectly by the suppression of plant pathogens. Under *in vitro* conditions, the principles of these interactions, their regulation, and stimulation are well understood at the molecular level. However, in nature, they often occur in combination and direct mechanisms are difficult to differentiate from indirect disease suppression (Haas and Défago, 2005). The ability of a microorganism to colonize plant habitats is essential for all successful plant-microbe interactions (Lugtenberg et al., 2002). Distinct steps in the initiation of such interplay include recognition, adherence, invasion (only endophytes and pathogens), colonization, and growth to establish interactions (Hardoim et al., 2015). Figure 1 provides an overview of tripartite interactions between beneficial microorganisms and plants, including the native microbiome as well as pathogens. It also illustrates the modes of action that are involved. Box 1 includes examples of studies on modes of action of plant-beneficial microorganisms with their plant hosts.

Box 1 Selected reviews of the modes of action of plant-associated microorganisms with their host and pathogens

Reviews describing modes of action in general were published by Whipps (1988, 2001), Weller et al. (2002), Berg (2009), and Lugtenberg and Kamilova (2009). Moreover, reviews focusing on modes of action of specific genera are also available, for example, for *Pseudomonas* (Haas and Défago, 2005), *Burkholderia* (Compant et al., 2008), *Bacillus* (Santoyo et al., 2012), and *Paenibacillus* (Rybakova et al., 2016); all of them are representatives of common plant-beneficial genera. Köhl et al. (2019) discussed the modes of action especially with regard to the potential risk for human and environmental health.

There are three general types of direct beneficial interaction of microorganisms with their plant hosts:

Index

- 1-Aminocyclopropane-1-carboxylic acid (ACC) 7
- 2,4-diacetylphloroglucinol (DAPG) 110, 305, 308
- 2-Hexyl-5-propyl-alkylresorcinol (HPR) 306, 309
- 2-hydroxyphenazine (2-OH-PHZ) 306
- 2-hydroxyphenazine-1-carboxylic acid (2-OH-PCA) 306
- 4-gene MLSA 303
- 6-Pentyl pyrone (6-PP) 409
- 6-PP. *see* 6-Pentyl pyrone (6-PP)
- 7-Hydroxytropolone 333, 334
- 7NSK2 338
- 16S rRNA gene 302, 380
- ABC. *see* ATP-binding cassette (ABC)
- ABCG5 ATP-binding cassette (ABC) transporter 436
- Abi. *see* Abortive infection (Abi)
- Abortive infection (Abi) 487
- AbrB/Abh system 267, 268
- ABS rules 681
- ACC. *see* 1-Aminocyclopropane-1-carboxylic acid (ACC)
- Acremonium altematum* 57
- Acremonium persicinum* 57
- ACRPC. *see* Arizona Cotton Research and Protection Council (ACRPC)
- Actinovate 89, 133, 225, 392
- AER. *see* *Aspergillus* ear rot (AER)
- Afla-guard product 603
- Aflasafe Initiative 589, 599, 612, 614, 616, 617
- Aflasafe Technology Transfer and Commercialization (ATTC) 70, 607
- Aflatoxin contamination
causal agents of 589-591
factors influencing 591-593
- Aflatoxins (AFs) 59, 60, 135, 203, 587
- AfuPmV-1. *see* *Aspergillus fumigatus* polycymovirus-1 (AfuPmV-1)
- Agaricus bisporus* 547
- AGAT-25 341
- Agitated liquid cultures 268
- AgraQuest 130, 224, 230, 231, 255, 256
- AgResults Aflasafe Challenge 606
- Agrobacterium radiobacter* 36, 387-389
- AHL. *see* N-acyl-homoserine lactone (AHL)
- Alamethicins 409, 410, 416
- ALSV. *see* Apple latent spherical virus (ALSV)
- AMIR. *see* Artificial miRNA-induced PTGS (AMIR)
- Amoéba 158-160, 210
- Ampelomyces quisqualis* 38, 107, 135, 138, 141, 200
- Anna Karenina principle 15
- Antagonistic bacteria, screening for 380-381
- Antagonistic interactions 13, 273
- Anthracnose 36, 147, 154, 251, 340, 390, 405
- Antibiosis 8-9, 21, 43, 50, 54, 88, 106, 109, 248, 258, 261, 272, 304, 308, 377, 378, 380, 402, 407-411, 431, 433, 436, 438
- Antibiotic compounds, secretion of 433-435
- Antifungal compounds, tolerance towards 436
- APC2 protein 262
- Apple latent spherical virus* (ALSV) 515
- Apple scab epidemiology and control 656-657
- Application strategies 490-491
- Arbuscular mycorrhizal (AM) fungi 273
- Arizona Cotton Research and Protection Council (ACRPC) 595

- Arthropod biocontrol agents and pests,
microbial interactions with 674–
675
- Artificial miRNA-induced PTGS (AMIR) 514
- Asexual spores 554, 555, 562
- Asexual transmission 555
- Asiatic citrus canker disease 493
- Aspergillus ear rot (AER) 598
- Aspergillus flavus* 59, 135, 137, 138, 201,
203, 263, 595, 617
- Aspergillus fumigatus* 410, 552, 554, 557
- Aspergillus fumigatus* polymycovirus-1
(AfuPmV-1) 554
- Aspinolides 409, 411, 416
- Atoxigenic-based biocontrol, science
of 594–596
- ATP-binding cassette (ABC) 412, 436
- ATTC. see Afilasafe Technology Transfer and
Commercialization (ATTC)
- Aureobasidium pullulans* 144, 145
- Bacillus amyloliquefaciens* 7, 18, 44, 200, 224
- Bacillus mycoides* spp. 154
- Bacillus* spp. 124, 133, 248
antagonistic activity 261
bacteriocins and lantibiotics 262
enzymes 261–262
non-ribosomal metabolites 262–264
volatiles 264
biocontrol activity 252–253, 257–258
as biocontrol agents (BCAs) 249–252,
254–256
BSMs production
abiotic factors 269–270
biofilm formation 268–269
biotic factors 271–272
cellular regulation 266–268
commercial biofungicide products
containing 132
future trends 274–276
host plant interactions 271
induced-systemic resistance 264–266
interactions with other beneficial
microorganisms 272–274
microbial pathogens interactions 271–
272
root colonization 258
chemotaxis 258–259
motility and biofilm formation 259–
261
- Bacillus subtilis* 16, 18, 37, 109, 130, 131,
224, 249, 443, 494
- Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) 52, 53, 105, 202,
223, 248, 677
- Bacterial bioprotectants
biosafety issues 385–387
commercial exploitation 388–393
modes of action 377–379
screening techniques 381–385
strain collection, building 379–381
strain improvement 387–388
- Bacteriophages in disease management,
integration of 494
- Bacteriophages, initial concentration of 487
- Bacteriophages in rhizospheres and
phyllospheres, persistence
of 488–489
- Baculoviruses 199, 200, 206, 207, 211, 224,
227
- Bananamide 307, 311, 328, 329
- Barley life stripe 339
- B. cinerea* 40–43, 55, 107–115, 157,
254–256, 262, 264, 265, 333, 337,
338, 406, 409–412, 431
- Bean yellow mosaic virus* (BYMV) 515
- Beauveria bassiana* 52, 193, 223, 228, 556,
671
- Bee Vectoring Technology (BVT) 240, 443
- BGCs. see Biosynthetic gene clusters (BGCs)
- BIL- 331, 342
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
(BMGF) 602, 617
- Bioactive secondary metabolites
(BSMs) 133, 247, 248, 252, 257,
260, 265, 266, 268, 269, 271
- Biobest 240, 241, 443
- Biocontrol organisms 248
- Biocontrol products, development of 601
- Biocontrol success examples 405–406
- Biocontrol via mycoviruses
Cryphonectria parasitica 562–565
detection and incidence 546–548
effects 549–554
transmission of 554–558
types and origins 542–546
virocontrol product, essential traits
for 559–562
- Biofilms 89, 91, 109, 144, 158, 159,
258–261, 264, 267–269, 271, 272,
274, 306, 310, 322, 327, 334, 385,
386, 487, 489, 491
- BioFun-1 157
- BioJect® Fermentation and Injection
System 340

- Biological seed treatment (BIOst) 156, 240
 Bionematicides 229, 230
 Biopesticides and Pollution Prevention Division (BPPD) 241
 Biopriming 438, 453
 Bioprotectants
 aflatoxin management options 593-594
 Aspergillus biology and aflatoxin epidemiology 589-593
 barriers preventing adoption 605-607
 biocontrol product development 594-601
 manufacturing development 601-605
 registration process in Africa 594-601
 scaling up aflatoxin biocontrol technology 607-611
 Bioprotectants and microbiomes, interactions 653-655
 Bioprotectants, role of
 in conventional high-input cropping systems 644-645
 cropping systems, role in 644
 in different apple scab control approaches 656-661
 drivers of change 642
 future developments 643
 future integrated approaches 652-656
 in integrated pest management 648-649
 in integrated pest management cropping systems 645-649
 in organic cropping systems 649-652
 past, developments in 641-642
 BIOst. see Biological seed treatment (BIOst)
 Biosurfactants 310-311
 Biosynthetic gene clusters (BGCs) 252, 308, 309, 318, 319, 322, 324, 333
 BMGF. see Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF)
 BMV. see Brome mosaic virus (BMV)
 BPPD. see Biopesticides and Pollution Prevention Division (BPPD)
 Brome mosaic virus (BMV) 509
 BSMs. see Bioactive secondary metabolites (BSMs)
 Budapest Treaty 391
 Bumblebee delivery 452
B. velezensis 91, 96, 130, 132, 249-253, 258-260, 262, 264-266, 268, 270-273, 275
 BVT. see Bee Vectoring Technology (BVT)
 BYMV. see Bean yellow mosaic virus (BYMV)
 Cabbage black rot bacteria 487
 Cabbage-rot organism 475
 CAGR. see Compound annual growth rate (CAGR)
C. albidus 144, 146
Candida oleophila 144, 145
 CDV. see Colombian datura virus (CDV)
 Cedomon 127, 336, 339, 340
 Cedress 127, 336, 339
 Cellular slime molds 159
 Cerall 127, 336, 339
 CFP. see Cyan fluorescent protein (CFP)
 CFUs. see Colony-forming units (CFUs)
 Chitin-vitamin agar medium 380
 Chronic cycle 484, 485
 CHV1. see Cryphonectria HypoVirus-1 (CHV1); Cryphonectria parasitica hypovirus 1 (CHV1)
Clonostachys rosea
 delivery and action as biological control agent 452-458
 genomics and transcriptomics, lessons from 437-440
 mechanisms of action 431-437
 product development and commercialisation 440-452
 taxonomy and sources 430-431
 CLP orfamide 315
 cLPs. see Cyclic lipopeptides (cLPs)
 CLP viscosin 327
 CMV. see Cucumber mosaic virus (CMV)
 Coat protein-mediated protection 509
 Cocoyamide 307, 311, 328
 Coffee leaf rust 53-54
Colletotrichum spp. see Anthracnose
 Colombian datura virus (CDV) 523, 524
 Colonisation 64
 Colony-forming units (CFUs) 88
 ComA 17, 19, 267, 268, 376, 562
 Commercialization strategy 607
 Commercial products 391-393, 451-452
 Commission Regulation (EU) 2017/1432, 192, 198
 Competition, biocontrol mechanisms 411-413
 Compound annual growth rate (CAGR) 4, 34
 ComQXPA 267
 Confocal fluorescence microscopy studies 432
Coniothyrium minitans 39, 107, 137, 138, 200
 Consortia 21, 87, 116, 128, 210, 230, 238, 248, 273, 455-456, 654

- Conventional systems, biopesticides
in 657–659
- Copper fungicides 651, 653, 660
- Copper spray schedules 660
- Cornerstone in crop protection,
microorganisms as 675
- CPC cluster 305
- Crop protection approaches 652
- Crop protection products, use of 650–652
- Crop rotation practices 592
- Cryphonectria HypoVirus-1 (CHV1) 558
- Cryphonectria parasitica hypovirus 1
(CHV1) 55
- Ctgb 197, 215, 340
- Cucumber mosaic virus (CMV) 154, 251,
252, 274, 509
- Cyan fluorescent protein (CFP) 515
- Cyclic lipopeptides (cLPs) 109, 131, 253,
257, 265, 271, 306, 319, 335
- DAL. *see* Double Agar Layer (DAL) method
- Damage-associated molecular patterns
(DAMPs) 413
- DAMPs. *see* Damage-associated molecular
patterns (DAMPs)
- DAPG. *see* 2,4-diacetylphloroglucinol (DAPG)
- Daphnia* tests 208
- dar* genes 322
- DC. *see* Dispersible concentrate (DC)
formulation
- Debilitation and hypovirulence 549–552
- Decision support systems (DSS) 642
- DegU 267, 268
- Dictyostelium discoideum* 159, 160
- Diffusible signaling factor (DSF) 491
- Disease prevention 649–650
- Dispersible concentrate (DC)
formulation 162
- Dollar spot 340, 341
- Domains Rearranged Methyltransferase 2
(DRM2) 513
- Double Agar Layer (DAL) method 151
- Double-stranded RNA (dsRNA) 511, 541,
547
- DRM2. *see* Domains Rearranged
Methyltransferase 2 (DRM2)
- DSF. *see* Diffusible signaling factor (DSF)
- DsRNA. *see* Double-stranded RNA (dsRNA)
- DSS. *see* Decision support systems (DSS)
- Dutch strains 326
- DutchTrig® 633–636
- Dycima pulvinata* 35, 57, 58
- ECHA. *see* European Chemicals Agency
(ECHA)
- Efficacy durability against plant diseases
emergence of resistance risk 113–115
future trends 115–116
modes of action against plant
pathogens 106–110
overview of 103–104
against pests 104–105
susceptibility diversity 110–113
- EFSA. *see* European Food Safety Authority
(EFSA)
- Emerging technologies 673
- Endochitinase gene (ChiA) 388, 407, 459
- Endophytic microorganisms 92
- Enterobacteria 375, 376, 387, 388, 393, 496
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) 191,
243, 385, 497, 595, 633
- EPA. *see* Environmental Protection Agency
(EPA)
- EPA's Office of Pesticide Programs (OPP) 241
- EPO. *see* European Patent Office (EPO)
- EPS. *see* Extracellular polysaccharide (EPS)
- Erwinia amylovora* 95, 111, 144, 150, 159,
225, 250, 255, 262, 327, 378, 382,
476, 488, 496
- Erysiphe necator* 53, 111
- ESC-10 strain 334
- ESC-11 strain 334
- Ethos 3D™ 134
- EU Green Deal 211, 213
- EU pesticide database–active substances 520
- EU Regulation (EC) 1107/2009 191
- European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) 159,
195
- European Food Safety Authority
(EFSA) 189, 195, 196, 385
- European Patent Office (EPO) 388
- European Plant Protection Organization
(EPPO) Guideline PP 1/296 192
- European Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009,
123
- Exopolysaccharides 259
- Extracellular polysaccharide (EPS) 491
- Extracellular transmission 557–558
- F2F Strategy 211
- Fengycins 131, 263, 265, 266
- Fenpiclonil 309
- FiBL (Research Institute of Organic
Agriculture) 235
- Fit-toxin 312

- Fludioxonil 309
 FMJK cluster 305
 Food production within planetary boundaries 652
 FRAC. see Fungicide Resistance Action Committee (FRAC)
 Freeze drying 147
 Fungal cell wall-degrading enzymes, genes encoding 439
 Fungal cell wall-degrading enzymes, secretion of 432-433
 Fungicide Resistance Action Committee (FRAC) 110, 117
 Fungicides 49, 53, 54, 58, 104, 110, 114, 116, 117, 123, 124, 139, 143, 224, 225, 229-231, 241, 309, 340-341, 344, 391, 408, 417, 435, 436, 456, 642, 644-646, 648, 649, 651, 653, 656-661
 Fusaricidin 330
Fusarium graminearum 17, 19, 55, 60, 249, 321, 406, 548, 550, 552, 553
Fusarium oxysporum 16, 18, 37, 39, 55, 110, 139, 251, 256, 315, 317, 321, 378, 382, 409, 445, 548, 549-551, 553, 636, 654
Fusarium spp. 60
 FZB42 17, 18, 91, 96, 132, 249, 253, 254, 258, 259, 262, 265, 266, 270, 271

Gammaproteobacteria 301
 Gene-editing 681
 'Generally recognized as safe' (GRAS) 387
 Genetic improvement 388
 GlcCer 156, 157
 Gliomix® 440, 452
 Gliotoxin 409-411
 Gliovirin 409, 410
 Gram-negative strains, relevant patents of use of 389-391
 Gram-positive bacteria 4, 17, 124, 125, 130, 133, 134, 249, 324, 375, 376
 GRAS. see 'Generally recognized as safe' (GRAS); Generally regarded as safe (GRAS)
 Groundnut, The Gambia 610
 Guide strand 512, 513

 Hairpin RNA-induced PTGS (hp-PTGS) 514
 Hand-held tree injection system 632
 Harzianic acid 409, 411, 413
 HCN. see Hydrogen cyanide (HCN)
 Heat-shock proteins (HSP) 412
Helicobasidium mompa 555, 558
Hemileia vastatrix 41, 53, 54
Herbaspirillum seropedicae 93
 Hermetic storage 594
 Heterokaryon incompatibility and horizontal transmission 556
 HEX1. see Hexagonal peroxisome protein 1 (HEX1)
 Hexagonal peroxisome protein 1 (HEX1) 408
 High-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) 153
 Holobionts 11, 13, 14, 22
 HPLC. see High-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC)
 Hp-PTGS. see Hairpin RNA-induced PTGS (hp-PTGS)
 HPR. see 2-Hexyl-5-propyl-alkylresorcinol (HPR)
 HPR biosynthetic gene cluster 322
 HSP. see Heat-shock proteins (HSP)
 Human health risks
 associated with plants and microbes 676-677
 Hurdles to explore microorganisms 676
 Hydrogen cyanide (HCN) 305, 307, 309-310, 317, 321, 378, 379
 Hydrophobins 406, 407, 412, 416, 439, 440
 Hypervirulence 552, 559
 Hypovirulence 55, 56, 402, 542, 548-550, 552, 554, 557, 559, 560, 562-569

 IBMA. see International Biocontrol Manufacturers Association (IBMA)
 IFOAM. see International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movement (IFOAM)
 IIHR-PF-2 strain 342
 IK726 434, 435, 438, 440, 441, 445, 446-452, 455
 Improper agronomic practices 592
 Improved manufacturing processes and facilities 602-605
 Improved persistence in phyllosphere and rhizosphere, strategies for 491-494
 Improve soil resilience, amendments to 673-674
 Indigo Agriculture 128, 129
 Indole acetic acid 332
 Induced-systemic resistance (ISR) 264-265, 306, 377, 414

- Industrial-scale fermentation 149
Initial manufacturing plant 602
Insect toxins 312–313
Integrated pest management (IPM) 34, 212, 233–234, 276, 456, 641, 642, 645–648, 670, 678
Integrated pest management systems, bioprotectants in 659–660
Intellectual property rights (IPR) 561
Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) 3
International Biocontrol Manufacturers Association (IBMA) 4, 23, 163, 187, 195, 242, 663, 684
International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movement (IFOAM) 649
International Organisation for biological and integrated control (IOBC) 196, 276, 662
International Organization for Biological Control (IOBC) 69, 676
International Public Good (IPG) 608, 610
IOBC. *see* International Organisation for biological and integrated control (IOBC); International Organization for Biological Control (IOBC)
IPBES. *see* Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)
IPG. *see* International Public Good (IPG)
IPL/PS-01 strain 342
IPM. *see* Integrated pest management (IPM); Integrated Pest Management (IPM)
IPR. *see* Intellectual property rights (IPR)
Isolates and methods of isolation, sources of 379–380
ISR. *see* Induced systemic resistance (ISR); Induced-systemic resistance (ISR); Induction of systemic resistance (ISR)
Iturins 131, 263, 264–266, 269
IUCLID 195

JA. *see* Jasmonic acid (JA)
Jasmonic acid (JA) 154, 155, 377, 409

KALRO/IITA Aflasafe Modular Manufacturing Plant 604
Katumani production process 603
Killer mycoviruses and other beneficial traits 552–553

'Killer-virus'-infected strains 552
Krebs cycle 313

LAB. *see* Lactic acid bacteria (LAB)
LAB example 385
Lactic acid bacteria (LAB) 379
LALSTOP G46 WG® 440
LCI-like peptide 262
L-furanomycin 312, 327
Lipopeptides 109, 131, 133, 253, 257, 258, 260, 263, 266, 267–270, 275, 306, 307, 310–311, 319, 320, 324, 335, 345, 384
Lokisin 311, 328, 329
Loose smut 339, 342
Lysin motif (LysM) 440
LysM. *see* Lysin motif (LysM)

Maize, Kenya 609
MAMPs. *see* Microbe-associated molecular patterns (MAMPs); Microbial-associated molecular patterns (MAMPs)
MAMP-triggered immunity (MTI) 413
Mannitol agar 380
Marrone Bio Innovations (MBI) 132, 137, 138, 337
Maximum Residue Limit (MRL) 645, 677
MBI. *see* Marrone Bio Innovations (MBI)
Mechanically-transmitted viruses 519
Methylophilic 129
Metschnikowia fructicola 40, 144, 188
Microbe-associated molecular patterns (MAMPs) 7, 8, 265, 333, 402, 436
Microbial bioprotectant market
 application type segments 231
 bioprotection crop group 231
 global crop protection market, bioprotectant position 236–237
 global/regional market for microbials 226–227
 limitations
 lack of resources 237–238
 market fragmentation 237
 microbial market history 223–225
 microbials' share of global biocontrol 226
 microbial types 228–229
 microbial use segments 229–231
 opportunities and threats
 bioherbicide development 239–240
 expanded microbial species 238

- improved formulations 239
- innovative application
 - approaches 240-241
 - regulatory requirements 241-242
 - row crops expansion 239
 - synergy with precision agriculture 240
- organic crops, bioprotectant use 235-236
- trends and drivers
 - bioprotectant adoption 233-234
 - microbials dominate 231-233
- Microbial bioprotectants 679-681
- Microbial bioprotectants in agriculture
 - crop protection and political goals 677-678
 - crop protection over time 669-671
 - major factors 681-682
 - regulatory issues 675-677
 - scientific developments affecting bioprotectants 671-675
 - towards new agriculture 678-681
- Microbial bioprotectants, real risk of 677
- Microbial diversity 21
- Microbiomes, fungicide effects on 652-653
- Microcyclus ulei* 57-58
- Microdochium nivale*. see Pink snow mold
- Microorganisms, new applications of 672-673
- Microorganisms, unexplored potential of 671-672
- Mild viruses, use of
 - cross-protection strategy, key issues for 515-519
 - cross-protection under commercial cultivation conditions, application of 520-525
 - cross-protection, unraveling the molecular mechanisms of 508-515
- Mined natural products 651
- Mineral supply 7
- miRNAs 14
- MLSA. see Multi locus sequence analysis (MLSA)
- MLST. see Multi-locus sequence typing (MLST)
- Modes of action, microbial bioprotectants
 - discovery and application 20-22
 - future trends 22
 - overview of 3-5
 - between plant-associated microorganisms and pathogens 8
- interference with pathogenicity 9
- lysis 10
- microbial growth by bioactive substances 8-9
- microenvironments, competition and modification 9
- parasitism 10
- plant-associated microorganisms with
 - host 5-6
 - induction of resistance 7-8
 - nutrients and minerals 6-7
 - plants hormonal status 7
- plant health and biocontrol, plant microbiome role
 - affected by application of bioprotectants 16-17
 - cultivar-specific plant microbiome 17-20
 - dysbiosis 14-16
- plant microbiome
 - assembly 12
 - bioprotectants interact with 18-19
 - communication within 13-14
 - discovery and definition 10-11
 - functioning 13
 - healthy plant microbiome, interactions within 13
 - structure 11-12
- Molecular and biochemical marker-assisted screening 381-384
- MRL. see 'Maximum Residue Level' (MRL); Maximum Residue Limit (MRL)
- MTCC 2539 342
- MTCC 5176 342
- MTI. see MAMP-triggered immunity (MTI)
- Multi locus sequence analysis (MLSA) 302
- Multi-locus sequence typing (MLST) 385
- Mycoparasitism 35, 39, 43, 272, 377, 403-408, 412, 430, 432, 434, 436, 438
- Mycoviruses 54-56, 402, 541-569
- N-acyl-homoserine lactone (AHL) 377
- N-acyl-L-homoserine lactones (AHL) 261
- Nagoya Protocol 681
- Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing of the Convention of Biological Diversity 676
- Nanoparticle encapsulation 161
- Nectria radicola* 552
- Nematodes 433, 671, 674
- NematoKill 341
- NewLeaf Symbiotics 128

- Next-generation sequencing (NGS) technologies 380
- Nonribosomal peptides (NRPs) 253, 257, 409, 433
- Non-target organisms 131, 162, 192, 198, 200–205, 208–209, 241, 413, 649
- NRPs. *see* Nonribosomal peptides (NRPs)
- Nunamycin 311, 330
- Nunapeptin 311, 330
- 'Omics' technologies 128
- Orfamide-type CLPs 319
- Organic systems, bioprotectants in 660
- Orthotydeus lambi* 53
- Osmoadaptation 387, 388
- O. ulmi* 631, 634
- Oxygen depletion 270
- PAMPs. *see* Pathogen-associated molecular patterns (PAMPs)
- Pantoea stewartii* 475
- Papaya ringspot virus-type W (PRSV-W) 56
- Paraburkholderia phytofirmans* 91, 92, 93, 95
- Paraphaeosphaeria minitans* 111
- Patents 388–391
- Pathobiome 15, 459, 460
- Pathogen-associated molecular patterns (PAMPs) 265
- PCA. *see* Phenazine-1-carboxylic acid (PCA)
- P. chlororaphis* 128, 304, 307, 309, 311, 312, 319, 320–322, 336, 339–341, 344, 456
- P. churashimaensis* 146
- PCN. *see* Phenazine-1-carboxamide (PCN)
- PCR. *see* Polymerase chain reaction (PCR)
- Penicillium cyclopium* 59
- PepMV cross-protection 521–525
- Peptaibols 408–410
- P. flocculosa* 124, 146
- PGPR. *see* Plant growth-promoting rhizobacteria (PGPR)
- Phage banks 495
- Phage cocktails 149, 476, 478–480, 487, 490–492
- Phage commercialization 486
- Phagefire 495
- Phage sorption 489
- Phage survival 489, 493, 497
- Phage therapy 474
- Phenazine-1-carboxamide (PCN) 306
- Phenazine-1-carboxylic acid (PCA) 110, 306
- Phenazines 129, 305–307, 319–322, 332, 338, 343–345
- Phenylpyrrole fungicides 309
- Phloroglucinol 110, 305, 307–309
- Phosphorylated ComA 267
- Phyllosphere 11–12, 35, 41, 43, 48, 64, 154, 249, 314, 326, 335, 339, 379, 380, 386, 394, 433, 454, 483, 487–489, 491–493, 497, 651, 653, 656
- Phylogenetic studies suggest interspecies transfer 558
- Physiological improvement 387–388
- Phytophthora infestans* 249, 251, 321, 329, 548, 552, 651
- phzABCDEFGHIJ* 306
- Pink snow mold 340
- Pith necrosis 323
- PK. *see* Polyketides (PK)
- PKs. *see* Polyketides (PKs)
- Plant bioassays 55
- Plant breeding and microbiome 674
- Plant colonisation by beneficial bacteria
- aerial plant parts colonisation 94–96
- future trends 97
- improving applications 96–97
- overview of 87–88
- to root internal tissues 92–94
- from soil to root surface 89–91
- visualise and determine microbial colonisation 88–89
- Plant disease control, bacteriophages for
- advantages 474
- as biocontrol agents 486–487
- challenges need to be addressed 494–496
- early research 475–483
- factors affecting the efficacy of 487–489
- host interactions 483–486
- optimum efficacy, approaches for 490–494
- sources 483
- Plant disease resistance 456
- Plant disease resistance, induction of 436–437
- Plant growth-promoting rhizobacteria (PGPR) 6, 97, 248
- Plant protection product (PPP) 123, 144, 148, 158, 187, 191–194, 197, 237, 391, 392, 416, 519, 520, 523, 560, 650, 679, 681
- Plaques 151, 153
- Plasmodiophora brassicae* 109, 437, 448

- PMV®-01 (DCM N.V.) 523
- Pollinators 95, 213, 240, 452, 674, 679, 680
- Poly-*f*Á-glutamic acid (*f*Á-PGA) 493
- Polyketides (PKs) 253, 257, 409
- Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) 206, 384
- Post-Transcriptional Gene Silencing (PTGS) 511
- Potentially toxic microbial compounds 202
- Powdery mildew 36, 38, 44, 53, 107, 109, 111, 135, 138, 145, 146, 154, 157, 250, 378, 392, 436, 650, 655
- PPP. *see* Plant protection product (PPP); Plant protection products (PPP)
- Pre-formulation 63
- Prestop® 241, 440, 443-445, 448, 452, 454-456
- Priming 8, 264, 414, 415, 438, 447, 453, 454
- Product development process 596-599
- Production and formulation, commercial microbial bioprotectants
- bacteriophage, controlling plant disease 148-153
 - containing bacteria 125
 - gram-negative bacteria 125-130
 - gram-positive bacteria 130-134
 - containing fungi propagules by fermentation 135-139
 - chlamydo spores 139-140, 143
 - conidia 141-142
 - fungal microsclerotia 142-143
 - containing yeast 143-148
 - future trends 162-163
 - innovative formulations 160-162
 - innovative microbial bioprotectant products
 - induced resistance (IR) 153-154
 - jasmonates as induced resistance 155-156
 - peptides for plant disease control 156-158
 - protozoans for plant disease control 158-160
 - overview of 123-125
- Promysalin 312
- Prophages 484, 485
- Proteases 10, 252, 403, 404, 407, 432, 439
- Proteins, genes encoding 437-439
- Protoplast fusion and other alternative infection routes 557
- PRSV protection 517
- PRSV-W. *see* Papaya ringspot virus-type W (PRSV-W)
- Pseudobacterin-2 341
- Pseudomonas aeruginosa* group 335-339
- Pseudomonas chlororaphis* subgroup 320-322
- Pseudomonas corrugata* subgroup 322-325
- Pseudomonas fluorescens* A506 95, 97
- Pseudomonas fluorescens* F113 323
- Pseudomonas fluorescens* Q2-87 323
- Pseudomonas fluorescens* subgroup 326-328
- Pseudomonas gessardii* subgroup 331
- Pseudomonas helmanticensis* 112, 113
- Pseudomonas koreensis* subgroup 328-329
- Pseudomonas mandelii* subgroup 329-331
- Pseudomonas protegens* subgroup 314-320
- Pseudomonas putida* group 331-334
- Pseudomonas* spp. 125, 126, 146, 225
 - biocontrol strains 314-339
 - commercial products registered in United States and Europe 127
 - commercial *Pseudomonas*-based bioprotectants 339-343
 - plant-beneficial strains 304-305
 - secondary metabolite production 305-313
 - secretion systems in biocontrol 313-314
 - taxonomy 302-304
- Pseudomonas syringae* group 334-335
- Pseudozyma churashimaensis* 124, 154
- Pseudozyma* spp. 146
- 'P' strains 410
- PTGS 511-513. *see* Post-Transcriptional Gene Silencing (PTGS)
- Pyocyanin (PYO) 306, 307, 338
- Pyoluteorin 306, 308-309, 314, 315, 318, 332, 338
- PYOPYocyanin (PYO). *see* Pyocyanin (PYO)
- Pyrenophora graminiae*. *see* Barley life stripe
- Pyrrolnitrin 110, 114, 115, 118, 307, 309, 314, 315, 318, 320-322, 332, 343, 378
- Pythium irregulare* 108, 409, 548
- QID74, 412-413
- QPS. *see* Qualified presumption of safety (QPS)
- QS. *see* Quorum-sensing (QS) molecule
- QST713 88, 109, 112, 114, 130, 253, 256, 266, 270
- 'Q' strains 410
- Qualified presumption of safety (QPS) 387

- Quinolobactin gene cluster 331
- Quorum-sensing (QS) molecule 260
- Rap-Phr 267
- Rapporteur Member State (RMS)
 procedure 189, 190
- RdDM. *see* RNA directed DNA methylation (RdDM)
- RDR. *see* RNA-dependent RNA polymerase (RDR)
- Refit procedure 191
- Regenerative agriculture 679
- Registration with regulatory authorities 599-601
- Regulation 1007/2009 194
- Regulation (EC) 1907/2006 (REACH) 195
- Regulation in European Union, challenges and solutions
 administrative registration procedure
 general food law and transparency 194-196
 low-risk active substances 191-194
 and timeline issues 189-191
 data requirements
 biology as basis of risk assessment 199-201
 development 196-198
 issues and solutions 198-199
 microbial compounds and their biology 202-204
 microbial compounds stability 204-205
 new EU guidance 205
 regulatory situation 201-202
 testing methods 205-209
 future trends
 crop protection policy 212-213
 improve approval process and accelerate market access 213-216
 pesticide paradox 210-212
 novel products and application methods 209-210
 overview of 187-189
- Resilient cropping systems, bioprotectants in 660-661
- Resistance to bacteriophages, development of 487-488
- Rhamnolipids 307, 310, 338, 344
- Rhizoamide 311, 328
- Rhizobia 6, 375, 376, 379, 387, 393, 474
- Rhizobium rhizogenes* 36, 378, 392, 388
- Rhizosphere 11, 12, 17, 20, 21, 34-38, 43, 48, 64-67, 88-89, 92, 94, 96, 97, 108, 110, 117, 135, 248, 249, 261, 266, 270, 271, 302, 314, 316-318, 320-330, 332-334, 338, 339, 341-344, 379, 380, 382, 401, 403, 408, 409, 411-413, 430, 433, 439, 453, 456, 474, 481, 483, 488, 489, 491, 653, 654, 674
- Rhizoxins 312, 314, 315, 317-319
- Rice seedling blight 487
- Right strain, selecting 440-441
- RiPPs 253
- RISC. *see* RNA-induced silencing complex (RISC)
- Risk assessment and registration procedures 675-676
- RITS. *see* RNA-induced transcriptional silencing complex (RITS)
- RMS. *see* Rapporteur Member State (RMS) procedure
- RNA-dependent RNA polymerase (RDR) 512, 544, 554, 563
- RNA directed DNA methylation (RdDM) 513
- RNAi. *see* RNA interference (RNAi)
- RNA-induced silencing complex (RISC) 513
- RNA-induced transcriptional silencing complex (RITS) 513
- RNA interference (RNAi) 509, 511, 553
- RNA interference-mediated protection 511
- Root exudates 6, 12, 16, 258, 259, 271, 343, 412
- Saccharomyces cerevisiae* 143, 145, 146, 154, 157, 543, 553
- SAR. *see* Systemic acquired resistance (SAR)
- Sclerosin 307, 311, 324, 325, 330
- Sclerotinia homoeocarpa*. *see* Dollar spot
- Sclerotinia sclerotiorum* 40, 47, 52, 108, 251, 254, 264, 325, 382, 409, 433, 434, 447, 548, 553, 556, 557, 648
- Sclerotinia sclerotiorum* hypovirulence associated DNA virus 1 (SsHADV-1) 557
- Sclerotinia sclerotiorum* mycoreovirus 4 (SsMYRV4) 556
- Screening approaches, plant diseases control
 for biological control agents selection 36-45
 exclusive and inclusive approaches 34-35, 46-47
 formulation, biocontrol agents 62-63
 future trends 68
 microbiome engineering

- cropping systems management 66
 plant breeding, beneficial
 microbiomes 65-66
 prebiotics 67
 suppressive soils exploitation 66-67
 synthetic microbial communities 67
 microbiome role, biocontrol 63-64
 composition and biotic
 interaction 64
 rhizosphere microbiome, control of
 above-ground pathogens 65
 studies 64-65
 niche markets 56-57
 Citrus tristeza virus for control of Citrus
 risteza 58-59
Dicyma pulvinata control of South
 American leaf blight 57-58
 mycoparasite isolation directly from
 pathogen structure 57
 mycotoxin control 59-61
Trichoderma stromaticum control of
 witches' broom in cacao 58
 nine-step approach
 based on competitive advantages of
 biocontrol agent 49-50
 candidate antagonists isolation 49
 cropping systems management 51
 data mining, candidate antagonists
 identification 50
 efficacy testing 50
 full field testing 51
 mass production, preliminary
 assessment 50-51
 pilot formulation 51
 searching *Trichoderma* spp., white
 mould control 52
 target disease, loss and relevance of
 crop 47-48
 upscaling mass production 51
 non-traditional biocontrol agents 52-53
 bacteriophages and mycoviruses 54-
 56
 entomopathogenic fungi and
 bacteria 52-54
 overview of 33-34
 regional markets, biocontrol agents 61
 climate change 62
 temperature 61-62
 sdAb. see Single domain antibodies (sdAb)
 Secondary metabolites 8, 10, 93, 94, 106,
 133, 139, 158, 159, 193, 194, 196,
 201, 202, 204, 205, 211, 247, 248,
 260, 266, 268, 269, 271, 305, 307,
 313-315, 320, 335, 342, 343, 345,
 402, 416, 433, 436, 437, 438, 611,
 654
 Seed coating 453-454
 Semi-continuous batch fermentation
 mode 151, 152
 Sense gene-induced PTGS (S-PTGS) 514
 Sessilin 307, 311, 312, 319
 Sexual spores 562
 Sexual transmission 555-556
 Shaping microbiomes 655-656
 Shenqinmeisu 338
 SHMV. see Shunn-hemp mosaic virus (SHMV)
Shunn-hemp mosaic virus (SHMV) 510
 Siderophores 7-9, 107, 306, 307, 312, 314,
 318, 320, 324, 332, 335, 334, 344,
 379, 413
 Simple sequence repeat (SSR) 597
 Single domain antibodies (sdAb) 125, 156,
 157, 162
 Slavol 494
 Small secreted proteins, genes
 encoding 439-440
 Sodium dodecyl sulfate and potassium
 acetate (SDS/KOAc)
 treatments 547
 Soil-borne pathogens 66
 Soil management 649
 Space and nutrients, competition for 431-
 432
 Spatial separation-induced cross-
 protection 514-515
 Spermosphere 12
 Spray application 454-455
 S-PTGS. see Sense gene-induced PTGS
 (S-PTGS)
srfAA gene 271
S. sclerotiorum 39, 42, 51, 52, 55, 111, 254,
 265, 272, 406, 412, 433, 434, 447,
 554, 558
 SsHADV-1. see *Sclerotinia sclerotiorum*
 hypovirulence associated DNA virus
 1 (SsHADV-1)
 SsMYRV4. see *Sclerotinia sclerotiorum*
 mycoreovirus 4 (SsMYRV4)
 SSR. see Simple sequence repeat (SSR)
 Strain-specific bio-active molecules 312
 Strain variation 488
Streptomyces sp. 111
Streptomyces spp. 91, 133
 Striposomes 510

- SUD. *see* Sustainable Use Directive (SUD)
- Sulfate 7, 131, 159, 494, 547
- Superinfection exclusion 508
- Surfactin 258, 263, 265
- Surfactins 109, 131, 253, 257–261, 263–267, 269–272
- Sustainable Use Directive (SUD) 212, 678
- SWOT analysis 679
- System changes 678–679
- Systemic acquired resistance (SAR) 8, 412, 494
- T3SS genes 313
- T6SS clusters 314
- Tagotose (TAG) application 655
- TAS-PTGS. *see* Trans-acting siRNA-induced PTGS (TAS-PTGS)
- Technology Transfer and Licensing Agreements (TTLA) 601
- TEM. *see* Transmission electron microscopy (TEM)
- Temperature stress 270
- TF. *see* Transcription factors (TF)
- TGS. *see* Transcriptional Gene Silencing (TGS)
- Thanamycin 311, 324, 325
- Thanapeptin 311, 324, 325, 330
- TMV. *see* Tobacco mosaic virus (TMV)
- TNAU strain 342
- Tobacco mosaic virus* (TMV) 265, 509, 670
- Tomato yellow leaf curl virus* (TYLCV) 251, 252, 514
- Toxins 48, 59–61, 105, 135, 143, 153, 201–205, 214, 312, 412, 436, 439, 552, 561, 588–590, 594–597, 606, 611–617
- Toxoflavin 314, 315
- Trans-acting siRNA-induced PTGS (TAS-PTGS) 514
- Transcriptional Gene Silencing (TGS) 511, 512, 554, 563
- Transcription factors (TF) 267, 268, 415
- Transmission electron microscopy (TEM) 139
- 'Transparency' Regulation EU 2019/1381 194
- Trehalose 126, 128, 147, 148, 388
- Trichoderma harzianum* 17, 19, 36, 60, 107, 141, 143, 553
- Trichoderma lignorum* 224
- Trichoderma* spp. 135, 224
 biocontrol mechanisms 403–413
 for plant disease control
 plant beneficial effects 413–416
 registration and commercialization 416–417
- Trichoderma stromaticum* 35, 57, 58
- Trichoderma virens* 139–143
- Trichodermin 409, 410
- Trichokonins 409, 410
- Trichorzianines 409, 410
- Trichothecenes 203, 403, 409–411
- Trinickia* sp. 91
- Trunemco™ 134
- TTLA. *see* Technology Transfer and Licensing Agreements (TTLA)
- TYLCV. *see* Tomato yellow leaf curl virus (TYLCV)
- Type III secretion systems 313–314
- Type VI secretion systems 314
- United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) 243, 497, 595
- USDA-ARS. *see* U.S. Department of Agriculture–Agricultural Research Service (USDA-ARS)
- U.S. Department of Agriculture–Agricultural Research Service (USDA-ARS) 594
- US EPA. *see* United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA)
- US Forestry Service 224
- Ustilago nuda*. *see* Loose smut
- Vacuum drying 147
- VCA. *see* Vegetative compatibility assays (VCA)
- VCGs. *see* Vegetative compatibility groups (VCGs)
- Vegetative compatibility assays (VCA) 597
- Vegetative compatibility groups (VCGs) 564, 590
- Verticillium albo-atrum* WCS850, control
 Dutch elm disease
 development 631–632
 overview of 629–631
 production, method of application 632–634
 registration and use 632–634
 testing long-term efficacy 634–635
- Viability and shelf life, effects on 441–451
- Viridins 409
- Virulence factor genes 9
- Virus-derived small interfering RNA (vsiRNA) 512
- VOC. *see* Volatile organic compound (VOC)

-
- VOCs. *see* Volatile organic compounds (VOCs)
- Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) 8, 144, 264, 377, 378, 409
- VsiRNA. *see* Virus-derived small interfering RNA (vsiRNA)
- WCS358 333
- WCS374 326
- WCS417 326
- 'Willie Commelin Scholten' 333
- Xantholysin 307, 311, 332
- Xylella fastidiosa* 95, 130, 382, 395, 482, 488, 496
- Yellow fluorescent protein (YFP) 515
- YFP. *see* Yellow fluorescent protein (YFP)
- Zequanox 337, 342
- Zymoseptoria tritici* 249, 250, 405, 432, 446