

55

56 **Abstract**

57 BACKGROUND: Cattle feed is at the beginning of the food chain in the “farm-to-fork”
58 model and might serve as a source of contamination with pathogenic bacteria. Heat
59 treatments are one of the most effective methods utilized to ensure the microbial safety
60 of feeds. In this work, the thermal resistance of *Salmonella enterica*, *Escherichia coli*
61 and *Staphylococcus aureus* isolated from vegetable feed ingredients was investigated in
62 phosphate buffer saline (PBS) and in cattle feed.

63 RESULTS: Mean *D* values calculated in PBS ranged from 34.08 to 5.70 min at 55°C
64 decreasing to 0.37 and 0.22 min at 65°C for *E. coli* and *S. enterica*, respectively. No
65 relationship was found between thermoresistance and source of isolation. *D* values in
66 feed were calculated from the adjustment of two nonlinear models to the inactivation
67 data. Thermal resistance of *E. coli* and *S. enterica* in cattle feed showed similar results
68 to liquid medium however, a 5-fold increment of *S. aureus* thermoresistance in feed was
69 observed. Our results also revealed an increase of microbial thermoresistance with the
70 mean feed particle diameter.

71 CONCLUSION: These results provide relevant information for the improvement in the
72 safety of cattle feed regarding its process conditions (*i.e.* time, temperature and particle
73 size).

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75

76 **Keywords:** food safety; thermal processing; foodborne microorganism; cattle feed;
77 mathematical modeling.

78

79 **Abbreviations:** AIC, Akaike's information criterion; LIA, Lysine Iron Agar; PBS,
80 phosphate buffer saline; TSB, tryptic soy broth; TSI, Triple Sugar Iron Agar; XLD,
81 xylose lysine deoxycholate.

82

83 **INTRODUCTION**

84

85 Despite the development of new food processing technologies, microbial contamination
86 of feed continues to be a global concern since it is at the beginning of the food chain in
87 the "farm-to-fork" model. ¹ Contamination with pathogenic bacteria in the animal
88 production industry has been linked to the consumption of contaminated feed, being
89 considered a vehicle for the transmission of pathogens, some of great health
90 significance for humans such as *Salmonella enterica* or *Escherichia coli*, including *E.*
91 *coli* O157:H7. ² One of the sources of such contamination is feed ingredients, which are
92 susceptible to contamination by pathogens at several stages from the growth and
93 harvesting to transport and storage. ³

94 Among the wide number of preservation methods available to reduce the microbial
95 contamination of feeds, heat treatments are one of the most effective methods utilized.
96 Although the effectiveness of heat treatments is usually high, the resulting pelleted
97 feeds are sensitive to post-processing recontamination. ⁴ In this regard, Bucher et al. ⁵
98 suggested that the most thermoresistant *Salmonella* strains could survive the heating
99 process during feed pelleting. Besides, several studies have reported increased microbial
100 thermal resistance due to adverse environmental conditions such as low a_w , ^{6,7} acidity ⁸
101 and even food structure. ⁹

102 Therefore, a critical point to ensure the microbial safety of feeds is defining a heat
103 treatment designed to achieve a specific lethality of target microorganisms.
104 Nevertheless, few published papers deal with microbial heat resistance in animal feed,

105 ^{7,10-12} since its low a_w limits the proliferation of remaining bacteria after heat treatment.

106 ¹²

107 Finally, different experimental conditions referred in the literature to quantify decimal
108 reduction times make it difficult to compare the effectiveness of heat treatments,
109 particularly because frequent deviations from the classical semi-logarithmic linear
110 behavior (presence of shoulders and tail-effects) are widely reported in the literature. ¹³

111 The aim of this study was to characterize the thermal inactivation of *Salmonella*, *E. coli*
112 and *S. aureus* isolated from cereals and vegetable thermally-treated feed ingredients in
113 feed. For this purpose, thermal inactivation kinetics of 21 isolates of *Salmonella*, *E. coli*
114 and *S. aureus* were carried out in liquid medium (PBS). The effect of feed matrix was
115 also studied with selected isolates. The linear model and two nonlinear models (biphasic
116 linear and biphasic logistic) were fitted to survival curves, comparing their goodness-of-
117 fit and predicted parameters.

118

119 **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

120 **Bacterial isolates and culture conditions**

121 Bacteria were isolated in our laboratory from vegetable feed ingredients (Table 1).
122 Detection and isolation were performed using the ISO methods for *Salmonella* spp.
123 (ISO 6579: 2002), *E. coli* (ISO 4831:2006 and ISO 4832:2006) and coagulase-positive
124 *Staphylococcus* (ISO 6888-1:1999) detection in food and animal feed. Biochemical
125 confirmative tests were performed following preliminary identification based on colony
126 morphology on selective media. Isolates were preserved as frozen stocks at -80°C in
127 Tryptic Soy Broth (Cultimed Panreac Química S.A., Barcelona, Spain), containing 300
128 $\mu\text{L ml}^{-1}$ of glycerol, and propagated twice in appropriate media before use. All cultures
129 were grown in 250 ml Erlenmeyer flasks containing 50 ml of TSB on a rotary shaker, at

130 37°C for 24 h.

131

132 **Thermal inactivation in liquid medium**

133 Cells were harvested by centrifugation (13000 g, 10 min, 4°C), washed twice in 8 g L⁻¹
134 sterile buffered saline solution (PBS) and suspended in 5 mL of PBS. A sample of
135 working bacterial suspension (50 µl) was dispensed in glass capillary tubes (Micro
136 haematocrit capillary 1.15×75mm, BRAND GmbH, Germany) in duplicate. Tubes were
137 heat sealed and immediately incubated in a thermostatically controlled water bath at 55,
138 57.5, 60, 62.5 and 65°C. At each sampling time, samples were removed, immediately
139 cooled and sanitized with 100 mL L⁻¹ sodium hypochlorite. After rinsing, the content of
140 each capillary tube was diluted with PBS, obtaining the count suspension (S_c). Then, 0.1
141 mL of appropriate dilutions of S_c was plated, in duplicate, using the following media:
142 Levine (*E. coli*), Xylose lysine deoxycholate (*Salmonella*) and Baird-Parker (*S. aureus*),
143 purchased from Cultimed Panreac Química S.A. (Barcelona, Spain). Plates were
144 aerobically incubated at 37°C for 48 h, and colonies were counted and recorded as
145 numbers of cfu mL⁻¹.

146

147 **Preparation of contaminated feed**

148 The composition of the antibiotic and acid-free pelleted cattle feed utilized is shown in
149 Table 2. The feed was previously milled using a laboratory batch mill (IKA-Werke
150 GmbH & Co. KG, Staufen, Germany) and sterilized by autoclaving. Cultures were
151 centrifuged (13000 g, 10 min, 4 °C), cells resuspended in PBS and added (20 mL kg⁻¹)
152 to the feed at a concentration of approximately 1×10^5 cfu g⁻¹ in case of *Salmonella* and
153 1×10^7 cfu g⁻¹ for *E. coli* and *S. aureus* isolates. Cultures were sprayed and then
154 agitated end-over-end in a 1.5 L plastic beaker for 4 minutes, as previously optimized in

155 our laboratory.

156

157 **Thermal inactivation in cattle feed**

158 For thermal inactivation experiments, one gram of acidified feed was used to fill
159 devices specifically designed to perform the kinetics.¹⁴ These devices (3 mm thick and
160 45 mm of internal diameter) consisting of a flat rubber O-ring completely sealing two
161 aluminum layers, were submerged in a thermostatically controlled water bath at the
162 same temperatures assayed in PBS. After heat challenges, the procedure was identical to
163 that described in the previous section, determining the number of surviving bacteria (cfu
164 g⁻¹) in the contaminated feed after incubation at 37°C for 48 h. Experiments were
165 performed in triplicate.

166 To analyze the effect that cattle feed structure had on bacterial survival, inactivation
167 kinetics were carried out at 60°C, using feed with different particle diameters (mm):
168 $1 < \varphi < 2$, $0.5 < \varphi < 1$ and $\varphi < 0.5$.

169

170 **Mathematical modeling**

171 *Survival kinetics in PBS*

172 Survival data were transformed onto their base-10 logarithms ($\log(\text{cfu mL}^{-1})$) and a
173 linear equation was fitted to the time course of surviving bacteria:

174

$$175 \quad \log N(t) = \log N_0 - \frac{t}{D} \quad [1]$$

176

177 where, N_0 and $N(t)$ are the initial and final number of cells (cfu mL⁻¹) after a treatment
178 time of t (min), respectively. D is the decimal reduction time (min).

179 The decimal reduction temperature (z_D) or the temperature increase required to reduce

180 the D value in one logarithm unit, was obtained using the following linear relationship:

181 ¹⁵

182

$$183 \quad \log D = \alpha - \frac{T}{z_D} \quad [2]$$

184

185 where, α is the intercept and T is the temperature (°C).

186

187 *Survival kinetics in cattle feed*

188 Two types of equations were used to fit the survival kinetics in cattle feed:

189 i) a biphasic linear model proposed by Cerf & Metro ¹⁶ considering a heat-sensitive and
190 a heat-resistant population and formulated based on the equation of Den Besten et al.: ¹⁷

191

192

$$193 \quad \log N_T(t) = \log N_{T_0} + \log \left[(1-f) e^{\frac{-2.3t}{D_1}} + f e^{\frac{-2.3t}{D_2}} \right] \quad [3]$$

194

195 where, N_{T_0} is the initial number of cells (cfu g⁻¹), N_T is the number of survivors (cfu g⁻¹)
196 after a treatment time of t (min) and f is the fraction of bacteria in the subpopulation –
197 2–. D_1 and D_2 are the decimal reduction times (min) of the two subpopulations,
198 respectively. When the value of $\log N_{T_0}$ is reduced in one logarithmic unit, then t is
199 equal to D and so, the D value can be estimated by means of numerical optimization,
200 after substituting in equation [3] the values of f , D_1 and D_2 previously calculated by
201 nonlinear regression.

202

203 ii) a biphasic logistic model, describing survival profiles of two distinct subpopulations
204 with different specific mortality rates. The equation described for biphasic survival
205 curves by Kamau et al.¹⁸ was utilized in the form of Xiong et al.,¹⁹ parameterized to
206 have explicit D_1 and D_2 :

207

$$208 \quad \log N_T(t) = \log N_{T_0} + \log \left[\frac{2f}{1 + e^{\left(\frac{2.3t}{D_2}\right)}} + \frac{2(1-f)}{1 + e^{\left(\frac{2.3t}{D_1}\right)}} \right] \quad [4]$$

209

210 where, N_{T_0} is the initial number of cells (cfu g⁻¹), N_T is the number of survivors (cfu g⁻¹)
211 after a treatment time of t (min) and f , D_1 and D_2 have the same meaning as described
212 above. The D_T value can be estimated by means of numerical optimization, as
213 previously described, after substituting in equation [4] the values of f , D_1 and D_2
214 calculated by nonlinear regression.

215

216 **Numerical and statistical analysis**

217 Fitting procedures and parametric estimations were carried out by minimizing the sum
218 of quadratic differences between observed and model predicted values using the
219 nonlinear least-squares (quasi-Newton) method provided by the *Solver* macro of the
220 Microsoft Excel 2007 spreadsheet (Microsoft, Redmond, WA). Confidence intervals
221 from the parametric estimates (Student's t -test) and consistence of mathematical models
222 (Fisher's F test) were evaluated using DataFit 9 (Oakdale Engineering, Oakdale, PA).
223 Also the Akaike's information criterion (AIC) was also used for equation comparison.

224 ^{20,21}

225 A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with the Tukey post hoc test ($P = 0.05$) was
226 used to determine whether there were significant differences between D and zD mean

227 values. Statistical analysis was performed using the general linear model (GLM)
228 procedure of the software package IBM® SPSS® Statistics 20 for Windows (Release
229 20.0.0, IBM SPSS Inc., Armonk, NY, 2011).

230

231 **RESULTS**

232 **Thermal inactivation in liquid medium**

233 Survival curves of *Salmonella*, *E. coli* and *S. aureus* in PBS at different temperatures
234 are shown in Figure 1. Due to the linear behavior of the logarithmic representation of
235 the counts, equation [1] acceptably fitted the data ($R^2 > 0.9$). As expected, *D* values
236 decreased with increasing temperature (Table 3). Microbial viability fell at temperatures
237 above 57.5°C, however after 2 min of heat treatment, drops of viability varied from 1
238 log-unit at 55°C and 57.5°C to reductions of 4-5 log-units (*Salmonella*) and 2-3 log-
239 units (*E. coli* and *S. aureus*) at the highest temperatures assayed.

240

241 **Thermal inactivation in cattle feed**

242 Isolates showing the highest *D* values among assayed temperatures (*slSAL-1*, *ecSJ4-2*
243 and *stSAL-7*) were selected to carry out survival kinetics in cattle feed. Equation [1] was
244 used for modeling the semi-logarithmic plots of the counts (Figure 2). Results showed
245 thermal resistance decreased in the order *S. aureus* > *E. coli* > *Salmonella*, although the
246 time required for reducing the viability equivalently was rather different. After 5 min of
247 heating at 55°C and 57.5°C, *Salmonella* and *E. coli* counts were reduced in 1 log-unit,
248 while 2 and 1 h were necessary to ensure consistent reductions of *S. aureus* counts at
249 those temperatures. At 65°C, heating for 2 or 5 min resulted in around 2 log-units
250 reductions in *Salmonella* and *E. coli* numbers, respectively. By contrast, at this
251 temperature, 30 min of heat treatment were required to achieve reductions of 4 log-units

252 in *S. aureus* counts. Decimal reduction times (D) from [1] were calculated using the
253 linear portion of the inactivation curves (Figure 2). Generally, D values were higher
254 than those observed in PBS, with differences particularly relevant for *stSAL-7*.

255 Although calculating D values from the linear portion of the semi-logarithmic plots of
256 survival curves is a common practice in thermobacteriology, non-linear models must be
257 applied to correctly describe tailing curves. In the present study two equations
258 commonly used to describe biphasic profiles, the Cerf model [3]¹⁶ and the Kamau
259 model [4],¹⁸ were compared using the logarithmic counts as survival response. Figure 3
260 shows the experimental results and descriptions according to both equations. Parameter
261 estimates and statistical analysis are also listed in Table 4. The results showed that both
262 equations were statistically robust ($p < 0.01$ from Fisher's F test) and parameter
263 estimations were almost always significant (Student's t test, $\alpha = 0.05$). Besides, all the
264 adjusted coefficients of multiple determination between predicted and observed values
265 were higher than 0.97. Comparison of the r^2 and Akaike's information criterion (data
266 not shown) indicated that both models adequately described the inactivation data in
267 cattle feed, though differences were found for each species. For most of the
268 experimental conditions, the Kamau model was most likely to be correct for fitting
269 experimental data (probability higher than 65%) of *Salmonella* and *S. aureus* isolates.
270 While for *E. coli* isolate, the Cerf model described better the inactivation data, with a
271 probability higher than 65% at all temperatures tested.

272 As can be seen in Table 4, D values calculated from equations [3] and [4] show very
273 close values due to the suitability of both models to describe the experimental data. In
274 addition, thermoresistance of *stSAL-7* was clearly higher than that observed for *E. coli*
275 and *Salmonella* isolates. Specifically, $D_{55.0}$ values increased from 12 min in PBS to
276 more than 2 h for the thermoresistant subpopulation, *i.e.* nearly a 9-fold increment of

277 microbial viability in cattle feed.

278

279 **Effect of feed structure in thermal inactivation**

280 To assess the effect of cattle feed structure on bacterial survival, inactivation kinetics
281 were carried out at 60°C using feed with different particle size (mm): $1 < \phi < 2$, $0.5 < \phi < 1$
282 and $\phi < 0.5$. Our results showed that particle size influenced the specific mortality rate
283 with an increase of microbial thermoresistance (*D* values) with the mean feed particle
284 diameter (Figure 4). *E. coli* $D_{60.0}$ values increased from 4 min in fine feed particles
285 (< 0.5 mm) to 10 min in coarser feed ($1 < \phi < 2$ mm), *i.e.* a 2.5-fold increment of microbial
286 viability. A lesser effect was observed for *Salmonella* and *S. aureus*, showing in both
287 cases a 1.6-fold greater $D_{60.0}$ values in feed with larger particle size.

288

289 **DISCUSSION**

290

291 Bacteria isolation sources shown in Table 1 include cereals and thermally treated
292 ingredients (soybean meals, wheat bran and corn distillers dried grains with solubles).
293 This selection followed a double goal, to include microbial indicators of good
294 manufacturing practices and to investigate whether heat treatment influenced the
295 thermoresistance of isolates from processed ingredients.

296 The average *D* values of *Salmonella* isolates in PBS (Table 3) were similar to
297 previously reported for multiantimicrobial-resistant strains in TSB²² and slightly higher
298 than those of *Salmonella* Enteritidis and Typhimurium in PBS.²³ Lower $D_{55.0}$ values
299 were obtained than those reported by Stopforth et al.²⁴ in peptone water, while higher
300 thermoresistances at 60 and 65°C were observed in the present study. Otherwise, the
301 resistance of *E. coli* isolates used in this work (57.5°C) was similar to that described by
302 Buchanan & Edelson²⁵ for three strains of *E. coli* O157:H7 in TSB at 58°C. Gabriel &

303 Nakano ²⁶ reported significantly lower $D_{55.0}$ values for *E. coli* O157:H7 and *E. coli* K-
304 12 in PBS. Except for *ecSJ4-2*, $D_{55.0}$ values were among those reported (2.6 and 21.5
305 min) for 17 different strains of *E. coli* O157:H7 in BHI broth. ²⁷ Nevertheless, at 60°C,
306 higher thermoresistance was observed in the isolates assayed in the present work, since
307 the highest $D_{60.0}$ value reported by these authors was 2.1 min. Thermal resistance data of
308 *S. aureus* available in the bibliography are not as abundant as D values of *Salmonella*
309 and *E. coli*. In general, D values obtained in this study were lower than those previously
310 reported for *S. aureus* in TSB ²⁸. These authors reported D_{55} and D_{60} values ranged from
311 13.7 to 21 min and 4.8 to 6.5 min after direct selective plating onto Baird-Parker agar.
312 The average z_D values obtained in this study ranged from 7°C to 14°C (Table 3), being
313 greater than those reported by Juneja & Eblen ²⁹ for *Salmonella* in chicken broth at
314 temperatures ranging from 58 to 62°C and by Bacon et al. ²² in TSB. On the other hand,
315 Buchanan & Edelson ²⁵ reported a decimal reduction temperature of 4.3°C for *E. coli*
316 O157:H7 in TSB (56-62°C).
317 Differences in D and z_D values reported in this study compared to those described in the
318 literature can be due to variations in experimental conditions, both in terms of strain and
319 medium in which the thermoresistance is studied (*i.e.*, pH, a_w), conditions of microbial
320 growth, etc. ³⁰ Besides, from our results no relationship was found between
321 thermoresistance and source of isolation. So, we cannot conclude that isolates from
322 thermally processed ingredients are a selection of the most heat-resistant
323 microorganisms, as suggested by some authors. ^{5,13}
324 Thermal inactivation curves of isolates showing the highest D values in PBS (slSAL-1,
325 *ecSJ4-2* and *stSAL-7*) had a tailing effect in cattle feed at all temperatures (Figure 2).
326 Profiles with tailing effects and lag phases have been widely reported for thermal
327 inactivation kinetics. ^{31,32} Different causes can explain non-linear kinetic data, including

328 the need of certain damage before inactivation follows a first order kinetics³³ or the
329 presence of subpopulations with different death mechanisms or different sensitivities to
330 heat.¹⁶ Also this tailing effect was reported to be a consequence of using dry heat in
331 thermal inactivation studies of *Escherichia coli* O157:H7 in cattle feeds.¹²

332 In these cases, *D* values were obtained from the adjustment of two nonlinear models
333 (biphasic linear and biphasic logistic) to the inactivation data (Figure 3). Both biphasic
334 equations accurately described the tailing-survival curves (Table 4), suggesting the
335 existence of two subpopulations with different thermoresistance. In fact, *S. aureus*
336 isolate showed a markedly tailing behavior at 57.5, 60 and 62.5°C (Figure 3), indicating
337 the presence of a highly heat-resistant subpopulation. Although this group of cells is a
338 minor fraction of the population (Table 4), might be responsible of the enhanced
339 thermoresistance observed in cattle feed. *D* values calculated using this approach were
340 comparable to results reported by Hutchison et al.,¹² who found reductions of 2 log
341 units of a mixture of *E. coli* O157 after thermal treatment at 70°C for 2 min in cattle
342 feed.

343 As mentioned in the introduction, other factors like a_w , acidity and structure of foods
344 influence the heat resistance of foodborne microorganisms. In regards to feed, Liu et al.
345⁷ reported greater thermal resistance (52-85°C) of *Salmonella* Senftenberg 775W in dry
346 feeds with lower moisture content. However, despite being particle size a relevant
347 variable in feed pelletization technology and on the thermal resistance of foodborne
348 microorganisms,⁹ to our knowledge, its effect on microbial heat inactivation parameters
349 has not been investigated.

350 Laroche et al.⁶ observed a significant effect of food powders size on the heat resistance
351 of *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*. These authors attributed the higher thermal resistance to
352 an increase in the time required for the diffusion of heat into the food particles, reducing

353 the temperature at which cells are exposed and increasing the time or temperature
354 needed to achieve an equivalent level of decontamination. Likewise, the protective
355 effect of feed observed on the thermal resistance of *Salmonella*, *E. coli* and *S. aureus*
356 can be due the lower heat conductivity into the feed particle when the mean diameter is
357 increased. In general, larger particle size has yielded higher microbial heat resistance in
358 solid food matrices as diverse as wheat flour³⁴ and meats such as beef³⁵ and turkey.⁹

359

360 **CONCLUSIONS**

361 This study focused on the characterization of *Salmonella enterica*, *Escherichia coli* and
362 *Staphylococcus aureus* thermal resistance in liquid medium (PBS) and in cattle feed.
363 The bacteria utilized in the present work were isolated in our laboratory from cereals
364 and thermally treated ingredients. Mean *D* values calculated in PBS ranged from 34.08
365 to 5.70 min at 55°C decreasing to 0.37 and 0.22 min at 65°C for *E. coli* and *S. enterica*,
366 respectively. Furthermore, from our results we found no association between the
367 thermoresistance and the source of isolation, suggesting that isolates from thermally
368 processed ingredients are not a selection of the most heat-resistant microorganisms.
369 Thermal inactivation curves of isolates showing the highest *D* values in PBS had a
370 tailing effect in cattle feed at all temperatures and so, *D* values were calculated from the
371 adjustment of two nonlinear models to the inactivation data. According to this approach,
372 thermal resistance of *E. coli* and *S. enterica* in cattle feed showed similar results to PBS,
373 however, a 5-fold increment was observed for *S. aureus* *D* values. Our results also
374 revealed an increase of microbial thermoresistance with the mean feed particle diameter.
375 Overall, these results provide relevant information for the improvement in the safety of
376 cattle feed regarding its process conditions (*i.e.* time, temperature and particle size).

377

378 **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

379 This research was financially supported by the Xunta de Galicia, Spain (project
380 PGIDIT03TAL07E). Isabel Rodríguez was funded by a PhD fellowship from the Plan
381 Galego de Investigación, Desenvolvemento e Innovación Tecnolóxica-Incite (2006-
382 2010) (Xunta de Galicia). We thank COREN, S.C.L. for their collaboration in the
383 elaboration of this work.

384

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