

A metabolomic analysis of G-protein signalling
mutants of *Stagonospora nodorum*

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“Up and at them”

Rainier Wolfcastle

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Acknowledgements

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Abstract

Stagonospora nodorum is the causal agent of *Stagonospora nodorum* blotch (SNB) of wheat. This fungus has cost the Australian grains industry upwards of 100 million dollars (AUD) p.a. in recent growing seasons, making it one of the most agriculturally damaging pathogens in Australia.

Disease severity is governed by the polycyclic lifecycle of *S. nodorum*, requiring a succession of spore inoculum arising from the asexual fruiting body of the fungus, known as the pycnidium. The resultant fungal density will determine the level of damage and ultimately influence the grain yield of the plant. G-protein signalling through the heterotrimeric G-protein is a biochemical mechanism used by *S. nodorum* in the host-pathogen interaction and has been linked to important biological processes including asexual sporulation. In this work, the unique phenotypes of three mutant strains of *S. nodorum*; each lacking either the G α (Gna1), G β (Gba1), or G γ (GgaA) subunit of the heterotrimeric G-protein were explored, and the biochemistry underpinning the phenotypes assessed by metabolomics.

The mutant strain *S. nodorum ggaA* was created by homologous recombination of the *GgaA* gene for comparison with the previously created *gna1* and *gba1* strains. All strains possessed developmental defects and reduced pathogenicity on the wheat plant. Growth assays uncovered differences in carbon source utilisation between the strains. Asexual sporulation was monitored by light microscopy; with the differentiation of mutant mycelia into pycnidia found to occur only after a comparatively longer culture time than in wild type, and at a reduced temperature. Until this time, asexual sporulation is completely abolished in the mutant strains. The matured pycnidia also possessed an irregular morphology. These results identified an association of all three G-protein subunits in asexual sporulation in *S. nodorum*.

Metabolites were isolated from *S. nodorum* mycelia for gas chromatography-mass spectrometer (GC-MS) analysis. An assessment of existing metabolomic methods identified some key steps in the sample preparation employed prior to injection into the GC-MS. Quenching the fungal metabolism

upon harvesting, drying the fungal mycelia prior to metabolite extraction and isolation, and lyophilisation of the fungal metabolites in preparation for chemical derivatisation; each improved the metabolite recovery and overall reliability of the metabolomic analyses. These methods were applied to the metabolomic characterisations that followed.

Metabolite extracts from the *in vitro* cultured fungal strains were analysed using a single-quadrupole GC-MS and the recorded analytes cross-referenced to purchased metabolite standards for identification. Changes in the accumulation of various carbohydrates were apparent in the mutant metabolomes. Of those, the altered abundances of the metabolites glucose and trehalose are believed to in part explain or be consequential to the sporulation phenomena of these strains. Metabolomic analysis of the mutant strains in differentiating from a non-sporulating to a sporulating phenotype revealed the specific association of a number of metabolites with each of the two phenotypic classifications. Many of which have been targeted for identification in future studies. Among those identified was again trehalose, providing further evidence for it having a role in the asexual sporulation of this fungus.

These results have demonstrated the requirement for Gna1, Gba1 and GgaA in regulating developmental processes and the pathogenesis of *S. nodorum*, and added significantly to the biochemical dissection of asexual sporulation in this fungus.

Table of Contents

Declaration	III
Acknowledgements	IV
Abstract	V
List of Figures	XII
List of Tables	XVI
List of Appendices	XVIII
Gene/protein nomenclature	XIX
Abbreviations and Units	XIX
Chapter 1 General Introduction	1
1.1 <i>Stagonospora nodorum</i> the necrotroph.....	2
1.2 The Infection cycle	2
1.3 G-protein signalling.....	6
1.3.1 A model of G-protein signalling	7
1.3.2 Traditional dissection of G-protein signalling	9
1.4 Fungal pathogens and the ‘omics	14
1.4.1 Metabolomics	14
1.4.2 Metabolomic analyses of <i>S. nodorum</i>	16
Aims of this work	17
Chapter 2 General Materials and Methods	18
2.1 Culture media and solutions.....	19
2.2 General molecular methods	21
2.2.1 Extraction of genomic DNA from <i>S. nodorum</i>	21
2.2.2 Determination of DNA concentration.....	21
2.2.3 PCR Amplification.....	21
2.2.4 Agarose gel electrophoresis.....	21
2.2.5 PCR Product purification	21
2.3 Growth and maintenance of <i>S. nodorum</i> strains.....	22
2.3.1 Inoculation of V8PDA medium.....	22
2.3.2 Cryogenic storage	22
2.3.3 Detached Leaf Assay (DLA).....	22
2.3.4 Obtaining fresh isolates of <i>S. nodorum</i>	23
2.4 Preparation of asexually sporulating <i>S. nodorum</i>	23

2.4.1	<i>S. nodorum</i> inoculated V8PDA.....	23
2.4.2	<i>S. nodorum</i> inoculated minimal medium.....	23
2.5	Isolation of asexual spores from <i>S. nodorum</i>	24
2.5.1	<i>S. nodorum</i> inoculated V8PDA.....	24
2.5.2	<i>S. nodorum</i> inoculated minimal medium.....	24
2.6	Methods for fungal metabolomics	25
2.6.1	Inoculation of liquid medium with <i>S. nodorum</i> spores.....	25
2.6.2	Harvesting <i>S. nodorum</i> mycelia from liquid medium	25
2.6.3	Preparation of <i>S. nodorum</i> mycelia from solid medium.....	26
2.6.4	Harvesting <i>S. nodorum</i> mycelia from solid medium.....	26
2.6.5	Isolation of metabolites from liquid medium cultured <i>S. nodorum</i>	27
2.6.6	Isolation of metabolites from solid medium cultured <i>S. nodorum</i>	27
2.7	Analytical Methods	29
2.7.1	MEOX-TMS Derivatisation of fungal metabolites for GC-MS analysis.....	29
2.7.2	GC-MS Analysis of fungal metabolite extracts.....	29
2.7.2.1	Retention time locking-Chemstation	30
2.8	Data Processing.....	30
2.8.1	Overlay of chromatograms-Chemstation	30
2.8.2	Data processing and peak deconvolution-AnalyzerPro™	30
2.8.3	NIST Mass Spectral Library searches.....	31
2.8.4	Data layout and manipulation -Microsoft Excel	32
2.8.5	Peak alignment –Ruby.....	32
2.8.6	Principal component analysis –The Unscrambler®	32
2.8.7	Statistical analyses –JMP®.....	32
Chapter 3 Creation and characterisation of <i>S. nodorum</i> mutant strains.....		33
3.1	Introduction	34
3.2	Methods.....	37
3.2.1	Extraction of genomic DNA from <i>S. nodorum</i>	37
3.2.2	Determination of DNA concentration.....	37
3.2.3	PCR Amplification.....	37
3.2.4	Agarose gel electrophoresis.....	37
3.2.5	PCR Product purification	37
3.2.6	Identification and disruption of <i>Gna1</i> and <i>Gba1</i> in <i>S. nodorum</i>	38
3.2.7	Synthesis of the <i>GgaA</i> (SNOG_00288) gene disruption construct.....	38

3.2.8	Preparation of <i>S. nodorum</i> protoplasts	40
3.2.9	Split-marker transformation of <i>S. nodorum</i> protoplasts	41
3.2.10	PCR Screening of fungal transformants	41
3.2.11	RT-(q)PCR determination of gene copy number	42
3.2.12	Light microscopy	42
3.2.13	Spore germination and viability	42
3.2.14	Histological staining and microscopy.....	43
3.2.15	Fungal growth assays	43
3.3	RESULTS.....	44
3.3.1	Identification and disruption of <i>GgaA</i> in <i>S. nodorum</i>	44
3.3.1.1	Bioinformatic identification of the putative <i>S. nodorum</i> G-protein- γ	44
3.3.1.2	Deletion of <i>GgaA</i>	45
3.3.2	Growth and pathogenicity of the <i>S. nodorum gna1, gba1</i> and <i>ggaA</i>	46
3.3.2.1	Colony morphology of the <i>S. nodorum gna1, gba1</i> and <i>ggaA</i> strains	46
3.3.2.2	Pathogenicity of <i>S. nodorum gna1, gba1</i> and <i>ggaA</i> strains on wheat	52
3.3.3	Pycnidial development in <i>S. nodorum</i> strain <i>ggaA</i>	53
3.3.4	Pycnidial development in <i>S. nodorum</i> strains <i>gna1</i> and <i>gba1</i>	54
3.4	Discussion.....	63
3.4.1	Growth characteristics of the <i>S. nodorum gna1, gba1</i> and <i>ggaA</i> strains.....	64
3.4.1.1	Nutrient sensing in the <i>S. nodorum gna1, gba1</i> and <i>ggaA</i> strains	64
3.4.1.2	Biochemical implications of carbon source utilisation	66
3.4.1.3	Metabolite secretion by the <i>S. nodorum gna1, gba1</i> and <i>ggaA</i> strains.....	67
3.4.2	Pathogenicity and asexual sporulation of the <i>S. nodorum gna1, gba1</i> and <i>ggaA</i> strains 68	
3.5	Conclusions	69
Chapter 4 Metabolomic Methods Development.....		71
4.1	Introduction	72
4.1.1	Metabolome coverage	72
4.1.2	Instrumentation	72
4.1.3	Gas Chromatography-mass spectrometry	74
4.1.3.1	Gas chromatography.....	74
4.1.3.2	GC-MS	75
4.1.3.3	Derivatisation.....	75
4.1.3.4	Metabolite library	77

4.1.4	The <i>S. nodorum</i> metabolome	77
4.2	Methods.....	78
4.2.1	Preparation of <i>S. nodorum</i> mycelia for metabolite extraction.....	78
4.2.2	Extraction and isolation of <i>S. nodorum</i> metabolites.....	78
4.2.3	Method Development.....	79
4.2.3.1	Quenching of Metabolism	79
4.2.3.2	Lyophilisation of metabolite extracts	80
4.2.3.3	Extraction of metabolites from lyophilised mycelia	80
4.2.4	MEOX-TMS Derivatisation of fungal metabolites for GC-MS analysis.....	81
4.2.5	GC-MS Analysis of fungal metabolite extracts.....	81
4.3	RESULTS.....	83
4.3.1	Quenching of Metabolism	83
4.3.2	Lyophilisation of metabolite extracts prior to MEOX-TMS derivatisation.....	87
4.3.3	Extraction of metabolites from lyophilised mycelia	93
4.4	Discussion.....	98
4.4.1	Quenching temperature	98
4.4.2	Lyophilisation of metabolite extracts prior to MEOX-TMS derivatisation.....	101
4.4.3	Extraction of metabolites from lyophilised mycelia	103
4.4.3.1	Aqueous methanol solution to extract <i>S. nodorum</i> metabolites	104
4.5	Conclusions	105
Chapter 5 A metabolomic analysis of G-protein signalling mutants of <i>S. nodorum</i>		106
5.1	Introduction	107
5.1.1	The <i>S. nodorum</i> metabolome	107
5.2	Methods.....	110
5.2.1	Preparation of flask-cultured <i>S. nodorum</i> for metabolite extraction	110
5.2.2	Preparation of plate-cultured <i>S. nodorum</i> for metabolite extraction	111
5.2.3	Metabolite extraction and isolation	111
5.2.4	MEOX-TMS Derivatisation of fungal metabolites for GC-MS analysis.....	112
5.2.5	GC-MS Analysis of fungal metabolite extracts.....	112
5.3	Results.....	113
5.3.1	Analysis of flask-cultured <i>S. nodorum</i> SN15, <i>gna1</i> , <i>gba1</i> and <i>ggaA</i> strains	114
5.3.2	Using metabolomics to dissect plate growth of <i>S. nodorum</i> strains <i>gna1</i> , <i>gba1</i> and <i>ggaA</i>	117
5.3.2.1	Glucose availability and the <i>S. nodorum</i> strains	117

5.3.2.2	Multivariate analysis of intracellular and extracellular metabolite abundances ...	119
5.3.2.3	The intracellular metabolomes of <i>S. nodorum</i> strains SN15, <i>gna1</i> , <i>gba1</i> and <i>ggaA</i>	123
5.3.3	Dissecting the cold-induced sporulation phenomena	129
5.4	Discussion.....	140
5.4.1	<i>S. nodorum</i> cultured in liquid medium	140
5.4.2	A metabolomic analysis of the solid medium-cultured <i>S. nodorum</i> strains over time	142
5.4.2.1	Glucose metabolism is altered in the <i>gna1</i> , <i>gba1</i> and <i>ggaA</i> strains	143
5.4.2.2	Further alterations in carbohydrate metabolism in the <i>gna1</i> , <i>gba1</i> and <i>ggaA</i> strains	144
5.4.2.3	Comparative analysis of the metabolome and proteome of the <i>S. nodorum gna1</i> strain	146
5.4.2.4	The metabolomes of the <i>S. nodorum gba1</i> and <i>ggaA</i> strains.....	149
5.4.2.5	The overabundance of metabolites of the <i>S. nodorum ggaA</i> strain - a metabolic quagmire	150
5.4.3	Dissecting the cold-induced sporulation phenomena	151
5.4.3.1	The influence of glucose abundance on the metabolome of <i>S. nodorum</i>	151
5.4.3.2	<i>S. nodorum</i> metabolites associated with cold stress.....	152
5.4.3.3	Metabolites associated with sporulation events?	154
5.4.3.4	Metabolites associated with sporulation events!.....	156
5.5	Conclusions	168
	Summary of Key Findings & Concluding Remarks	169
	References.....	174
	Appendices.....	183

List of Figures

FIGURE 1.1 COMPREHENSIVE PHYLOGENETIC ANALYSIS HAS PLACED *S. NODORUM* IN THE ORDER PLEOSPORALES, ALONG WITH A NUMBER OF OTHER POTENTIALLY DAMAGING NECROTROPHIC FUNGAL PATHOGENS. REPRODUCED FROM (HANE ET AL., 2007). 4

FIGURE 1.2 AGAR PLATE CULTURE (40× MAGNIFICATION) OF *S. NODORUM* STRAIN SN15. PYCNIDIOSPORES ARE FORMED IN PYCNIDIA AND RELEASED IN PINK CIRRHUS. IMAGE CAPTURED AT 40× MAGNIFICATION. 5

FIGURE 1.3 LEAVES FROM WHEAT SEEDLINGS DISPLAYING REGIONS OF NECROSIS DUE TO INFECTION WITH THE FUNGAL PHYTOPATHOGEN *S. NODORUM*. 5

FIGURE 1.4 CELL SIGNALLING IN *N. CRASSA* BY THE MECHANISM OF THE HETEROTRIMERIC G-PROTEIN. THE GA AND GB γ SUBUNITS DISSOCIATE FROM THE PARENTAL TRIMER TO REGULATE CELLULAR EFFECTORS. ADAPTED FROM (BORKOVICH, 1996). 8

FIGURE 1.5 THE NUMBER OF ACADEMIC PUBLICATIONS BY YEAR, OVER THE DECADE FROM 2000, USING THE ‘OMIC SEARCH TERMS “GENOMICS”, “PROTEOMICS”, “METABOLOMICS” AND “METABONOMICS” ([HTTP://WEBTOOLS.MF.UNI-LJ.SI/PUBLIC/MEDSUM.HTML](http://webtools.mf.uni-lj.si/public/medsun.html)). 15

FIGURE 3.1 THE GENE DEACTIVATION VECTOR IS CREATED BY FUSION OF THE SELECTABLE MARKER WITH THE 5’ AND 3’ NON-CODING FLANKING REGIONS OF THE GENE TO BE DEACTIVATED. HOMOLOGOUS RECOMBINATION OF THE FLANKING REGIONS OF THE CONSTRUCT WITH THOSE OF THE TARGET GENE WITHIN THE *S. NODORUM* GENOME RESULTS IN THE REPLACEMENT OF THE GENE WITH THE SELECTABLE MARKER. 39

FIGURE 3.2 A SCHEMATIC AND SEQUENCES OF THE PREDICTED 408BP DNA AND TRANSLATED 98 AMINO ACID HYPOTHETICAL *S. NODORUM* SN15 PROTEIN SNOG_00288. ■ START CODON, ■ EXON, ■ INTRON, ■ STOP CODON..... 45

FIGURE 3.3 AGAROSE GEL ELECTROPHORESIS OF PCR PRODUCTS ARISING FROM THE AMPLIFICATION OF THE *GGA* LOCUS OF THE CREATED *S. NODORUM* MUTANTS. TARGETED INSERTION OF THE PHLEOMYCIN CASSETTE IN PLACE OF THE *S. NODORUM GGA* GENE RESULTS IN A 4196BP AMPLICON (LANES 25, 26, 30, 31) , REPLACING THE 1789BP AMPLICON OF THE WILD TYPE (WT) SN15. MW, MOLECULAR WEIGHT MARKER; WT, *S. NODORUM* SN15 GDNA; NTC, NO TEMPLATE PCR CONTROL; THE REMAINING LANES LABELED BY MUTANT CULTURE NUMBER. LANES 1, 2, 11, 20, 32, 34, NO OBSERVED AMPLIFICATION..... 46

FIGURE 3.4 *S. NODORUM* WILD-TYPE SN15 READILY DEVELOPS PYCNIDIA AND ASEXUALLY SPORULATES WHEN CULTURED ON MINIMAL MEDIUM AT 22°C. UNDER THE SAME CULTURE CONDITIONS, *S. NODORUM* MUTANT STRAINS *GNA1-35*, *GBA1-6* AND *GGAA-25* DO NOT DEVELOP PYCNIDIA OR SPORULATE AND GROW WITH A UNIFORM ‘DRY-MASS’ PHENOTYPE. *S. NODORUM* STRAINS ARE PICTURED GROWING ON MINIMAL MEDIUM (CONTAINING 30MM GLUCOSE) AGAR. 48

FIGURE 3.5 THE GROWTH RATE AND PHENOTYPIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE *S. NODORUM* STRAINS DEPEND ON THE AVAILABLE CARBON SOURCE. INDIVIDUAL COLONY DIAMETERS (MM) ARE DISPLAYED AS A REPRESENTATION OF GROWTH 3, 5 AND 10 DPI WITH *S. NODORUM* WILD-TYPE STRAIN SN15, *GNA1-35*, *GBA1-6* OR *GGAA-25*. THE DISPLAYED CIRCLE DIAMETERS ARE PROPORTIONATE TO COLONY DIAMETER..... 49

FIGURE 3.6 A VISUAL COMPARISON OF PIGMENTS SECRETED INTO THE MEDIUM BY STRAINS OF *S. NODORUM* WHEN GROWN IN THE DARK (A.), COMPARED TO THOSE GROWN UNDER A 12 HOUR WHITE LIGHT CYCLE (B.). DISCOLOURATION OF THE MEDIUM IS DRAMATICALLY INTENSIFIED IN CULTURES OF *S. NODORUM* WILD-TYPE SN15 WHEN EXPOSED TO LIGHT; LESS SO FOR MUTANT STRAINS *GBA1-6* AND *GGAA-25*; WITH LITTLE CHANGE BETWEEN THE LIGHT AND DARK CULTURED *GNA1-35* MUTANT. AGAR CULTURES ARE PICTURED FROM BENEATH THE PETRI-DISH..... 51

FIGURE 3.7 DETACHED LEAF ASSAY (DLA) OF WHEAT LEAF (CV. CALINGIRI) INOCULATED WITH *S. NODORUM* WILD-TYPE STRAIN SN15 AND MUTANT STRAINS *GNA1-35*, *GBA1-6* AND *GGAA-25*, DISPLAYED AT 5 (A) AND 13 (B) DPI..... 53

FIGURE 3.8 PYCNIDIA DEVELOPMENT PROGRESSES SLOWLY IN THE MUTANT *S. NODORUM* STRAINS UNDER STUDY. LONGITUDINAL SECTIONS OF A WAX EMBEDDED EXCISION OF A *S. NODORUM GGAA-25* CULTURE -STAINED WITH TOLUIDINE BLUE, IS PICTURED. SLOW DIFFERENTIATION OF MYCELIA INTO PYCNIDIA ALLOWED ALL STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT TO BE CAPTURED IN AN EXCISION FROM A SINGLE CULTURE. PYNIDIA FORMATION BEGINS WITH THE INTERTWINING OF MYCELIA TO FORM A MYCELIAL KNOT (A), WHICH IS FOLLOWED BY DIFFERENTIATION AND ENLARGEMENT OF THE CELLS (EC), FORMING A PRIMORDIUM (B THROUGH F), WHICH MATURES INTO THE PYCNIDIUM (G), EVENTUALLY PRODUCING PYCNIDIOSPORES FROM THE CONIDIOGENOUS CELLS (CV) WITHIN THE PYCNIDIAL CAVITY. 56

FIGURE 3.9 PYCNIDIA DEVELOPMENT (ACCOMPANIED BY ASEQUAL SPORULATION) IN THE <i>S. NODORUM</i> WILD-TYPE STRAIN SN15 IS OBSERVED IN A DISTINCT CIRCADIAN RING PATTERN (A AND B) WITHIN 5 DAYS POST INOCULATION (DPI) OF SOLID MINIMAL MEDIUM. PYCNIDIA DO NOT DEVELOP IN THE MUTANT STRAINS DURING THIS TIMEFRAME. THE FORMATION OF PYCNIDIA IN THE <i>S. NODORUM</i> MUTANT STRAINS <i>GNA1-35</i> , <i>GBA1-6</i> AND <i>GGAA-25</i> IS EVIDENT AMONGST THE OUTER MYCELIA (C - E) FROM BETWEEN 3 AND 6 WEEKS INCUBATION OF (THE INITIALLY) NON-SPORULATING (5 DPI) CULTURE AT A REDUCED TEMPERATURE. <i>S. NODORUM</i> STRAINS ARE PICTURED GROWING ON NITROCELLULOSE MEMBRANES (30MM DIAMETER)-OVERLAYING MINIMAL MEDIUM AGAR.	57
FIGURE 3.10 THE OBSERVED PIGMENTATION AND SIZE OF THE MUTANT PYCNIDIUM DIFFERS SIGNIFICANTLY BETWEEN STRAINS. PICTURED IS A SINGLE <i>GNA1-35</i> PYCNIDIUM, AND PYCNIDIA OF THE <i>GBA1-6</i> AND <i>GGAA-25</i> STRAINS OF <i>S. NODORUM</i> , AMONGST THE MYCELIA. IMAGES CAPTURED AT 40X MAGNIFICATION.....	58
FIGURE 3.11 LIGHT MICROSCOPY OF THE ASEQUAL SPORES OF <i>S. NODORUM</i> , HARVESTED FROM THE WILD-TYPE SN15 AND MUTANT STRAINS <i>GNA1-35</i> , <i>GBA1-6</i> AND <i>GGAA-25</i>	59
FIGURE 3.12 A LONGITUDINAL SECTION OF A WAX EMBEDDED EXCISION FROM AN ASEQUAL SPORULATING CULTURE OF <i>S. NODORUM</i> SN15 -STAINED WITH TOLUIDINE BLUE. PICTURED ARE PYCNIDIOSPORES BEING RELEASED FROM A MATURE PYCNIDIUM. ARROWS POINT TO THE MASSES OF ENLARGED CELLS PRODUCING THE OSTIOLE, FORMED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MATURE PYCNIDIUM, FROM WHICH THE PYCNIDIOSPORES ARE RELEASED FROM THE PYCNIDIAL CAVITY AS A CIRRHUS. CV, PYCNIDIAL CAVITY; W, PYCNIDIAL WALL; CH, CIRRHUS.	60
FIGURE 3.13 LONGITUDINAL SECTIONS OF A WAX EMBEDDED EXCISION FROM ASEQUAL SPORULATING CULTURES OF <i>S. NODORUM</i> -STAINED WITH TOLUIDINE BLUE. PICTURED ARE CONIDIogenous CELLS AND PYCNIDIOSPORES CONTAINED WITHIN THE MATURE PYCNIDIA OF WILD-TYPE STRAIN SN15, AND THE (POTENTIALLY LESS) 'MATURED' PYCNIDIA OF MUTANT STRAINS <i>GNA1-35</i> , <i>GBA1-6</i> AND <i>GGAA-25</i> . THE PYCNIDIA OF SN15 AND <i>GNA1-35</i> OFTEN DEVELOP FUSED, BUT THE PYCNIDIAL CAVITIES REMAIN VISUALLY DISTINCT, BY COMPARISON TO THOSE OF <i>GBA1-6</i> AND <i>GGAA-25</i> WHICH OFTEN FORM A SINGLE BODY OF PYCNIDIA. CV, PYCNIDIAL CAVITY; W, PYCNIDIAL WALL.	61
FIGURE 3.14 A LONGITUDINAL SECTION OF A WAX EMBEDDED EXCISION FROM AN ASEQUAL SPORULATING CULTURE OF <i>S. NODORUM</i> -STAINED WITH TOLUIDINE BLUE. PICTURED ARE CONIDIogenous CELLS AND PYCNIDIOSPORES CONTAINED WITHIN TWO (VISUALLY DISTINCT) BUT FUSED MATURE PYCNIDIA OF WILD-TYPE STRAIN SN15.	62
FIGURE 4.1 SILYLATION OF AN ANALYTE BY MSTFA FORMS A PRODUCT MORE AMENABLE TO GC ANALYSIS. THE 'ACTIVE' HYDROGEN (H) IS REPLACED BY $\text{Si}(\text{CH}_3)_3$ (TMS), IMPROVING THE ANALYTICAL PROPERTIES OF COMPOUND R.	76
FIGURE 4.2 PCA OF THE NORMALIZED METABOLITE ABUNDANCES AS DETERMINED BY GC-MS, OF <i>S. NODORUM</i> SN15 REPLICATES HARVESTED USING EITHER -40°C (1), -20°C (2), ICE-CHILLED (3) OR ROOM-TEMPERATURE (R) QUENCHING SOLUTION, HAVING BEEN RAPIDLY SEPARATED FROM THE QUENCHING SOLUTION (○), OR REMAINING IN THE QUENCHING SOLUTION FOR 60 MINUTES (●). THE RELATIVELY CLOSER SCORES COORDINATE VALUES OF THE 0 AND 60 MINUTE REPLICATES OF THE -40°C QUENCHED CULTURES, COMPARATIVE TO THE EQUIVALENT CULTURES QUENCHED AT WARMER TEMPERATURES, SUGGESTS MORE EFFICIENT QUENCHING OF METABOLISM AT THE LOWER TEMPERATURE.	85
FIGURE 4.3 PCA LOADINGS, DISPLAYING THE 10 MOST INFLUENTIAL POSITIVE LOADING METABOLITES, AND 10 MOST INFLUENTIAL NEGATIVE LOADING METABOLITES, OF PRINCIPAL COMPONENT ONE (PC1; 50%).	86
FIGURE 4.4 RECOVERY OF METABOLITES (EXPRESSED AS TOTAL TIC AREA AND TOTAL COMPONENT NUMBER) DETERMINED BY GC-MS ANALYSIS OF METABOLITE EXTRACTS OF <i>S. NODORUM</i> SN15 CONTAINING AN EQUIVALENT AMOUNT OF METABOLITES FROM 2, 5, 7, 8 AND 10MG OF MYCELIA. THE TOTAL TIC AREA (◆) AND NUMBER OF COMPONENTS (▲) OF SPEED-VACUUM CONCENTRATED METABOLITE EXTRACTS, LYOPHILIZED TO DRYNESS, COMPARED TO THE TOTAL TIC AREA (◇) AND NUMBER OF COMPONENTS (▲) OF SPEED-VACUUM-DRIED METABOLITE EXTRACTS.	89
FIGURE 4.5 RELATIVE RAW PEAK AREAS OF TREHALOSE, SUCCINATE AND GLUCOSE 6-PHOSPHATE DETECTED IN METABOLITE EXTRACTS OF <i>S. NODORUM</i> AFTER DRYING THE EXTRACTS BE EITHER LYOPHILISATION OR VACUUM CONCENTRATING. THE ABUNDANCES ARE SCALED COMPARATIVELY.	90
FIGURE 4.6 RECOVERY OF THE <i>S. NODORUM</i> INTRACELLULAR METABOLITE ARABITOL AND THE ADDED STANDARD RIBITOL (EXPRESSED AS ABUNDANCE) AS DETERMINED BY GC-MS; COMPARING TWO METHODS FOR DRYING THE METABOLITE EXTRACTS PRIOR TO CHEMICAL DERIVATISATION. OVERLAYS OF THE CHROMATOGRAPHIC PEAKS GENERATED BY EXTRACTS FROM AN EQUIVALENT OF 2, 5, 7, 8 AND 10 MG OF <i>S. NODORUM</i> MYCELIA USING EACH OF THE TWO DRYING METHODS (A AND B) ARE DISPLAYED. THE	

DETECTED INTENSITIES OF ARABITOL AND RIBITOL SHOW THAT LYOPHILISING THE EXTRACT TO DRYNESS (A) IS MORE REPRODUCIBLE AND REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SAMPLE, THAN VACUUM-CONCENTRATING TO DRYNESS (B).....	92
FIGURE 4.7 MEAN TOTAL PEAK AREAS OF THE TIC FROM GC-MS ANALYSIS OF METABOLITE EXTRACTS FROM <i>S. NODORUM</i> MYCELIA; EXTRACTED USING METHANOL AS THE EXTRACTION SOLVENT AT 100, 90 OR 80% v/v. $R^2 = 0.9882$	95
FIGURE 4.8 ABUNDANCES OF <i>S. NODORUM</i> METABOLITES ISOLATED WITH DIFFERENT METHANOL CONCENTRATIONS; SHOWING ALTERED RECOVERY WITH INCREASING DILUTION OF METHANOL.	95
FIGURE 4.9 NORMALISED ABUNDANCES (\pm SE) OF WHEAT METABOLITES ISOLATED FROM LYOPHILISED (DRY) OR FRESH WHEAT LEAF. SEPARATION OF THE CIRCLES REPRESENT STATISTICALLY DIFFERENT ($p < 0.05$) GROUP MEANS AS DETERMINED BY TUKEY-KRAMER HSD.	96
FIGURE 4.10 OVERLAYED CHROMATOGRAPHIC PEAKS (A) REPRESENTING THE ABUNDANCE OF ALLANTOIN IN <i>S. NODORUM</i> METABOLITE EXTRACTS, ISOLATED FROM MYCELIA USING METHANOL NEAT (A), OR DILUTED TO 90% v/v (B) OR 80% v/v (C). THE FRAGMENTATION (B) OF ALLANTOIN IONS AS DETECTED FOR THE LARGEST PEAK (C) IS ALSO DISPLAYED.	97
FIGURE 5.1 PCA PLOT DISPLAYING SCORES (A) AND LOADINGS (B), CALCULATED FROM THE NORMALIZED AND SCALED ANALYTE ABUNDANCES (OF 143 ANALYTES), COMPARING REPLICATES OF <i>S. NODORUM</i> WILD-TYPE STRAIN SN15 (WT) AND MUTANT STRAINS <i>GNA1-35</i> (GNA), <i>GBA1-6</i> (GBA) AND <i>GGAA-25</i> (GGA). ARROWS IDENTIFY REPLICATES OF SN15, <i>GNA1-35</i> AND <i>GGAA-25</i> CLUSTERING WITH <i>GBA1-6</i> . METABOLITES ARE REPRESENTED AS BLUE CIRCLES. THE LOADINGS FOR GLUCOSE ARE IDENTIFIED.....	116
FIGURE 5.2 NORMALISED MEAN ABUNDANCES* (\pm STD) OF GLUCOSE DETECTED IN <i>S. NODORUM</i> SN15, <i>GNA1-35</i> , <i>GBA1-6</i> AND <i>GGAA-25</i> FLASK-CULTURED MYCELIA AT 10 DAYS POST INOCULATION. ABUNDANCES WERE SCALED COMPARATIVELY. *SEPARATION OF THE CIRCLES REPRESENT STATISTICALLY DIFFERENT ($p < 0.05$) GROUP MEANS AS DETERMINED BY TUKEY-KRAMER HSD. HISTOGRAMS ARE ALSO DISPLAYED.	117
FIGURE 5.3 NORMALIZED MEAN ABUNDANCES* (\pm STD) OF GLUCOSE IN <i>S. NODORUM</i> WILD-TYPE STRAIN SN15 AND MUTANT STRAINS <i>GNA1-35</i> , <i>GBA1-6</i> AND <i>GGAA-25</i> AT 5 AND 10 DAYS POST INOCULATION. ABUNDANCES WERE SCALED COMPARATIVELY. *SEPARATION OF THE CIRCLES REPRESENTS STATISTICALLY DIFFERENT ($p < 0.05$) GROUP MEANS AS DETERMINED BY TUKEY-KRAMER ANALYSIS.....	118
FIGURE 5.4 PCA PLOT DISPLAYING SCORES (A) AND X-LOADINGS (B), IDENTIFIES TRENDS IN METABOLITE ABUNDANCES CONTRIBUTING TO THE DIFFERENCES IN THE METABOLOMES OF <i>S. NODORUM</i> SN15 (WT), <i>GNA1-35</i> (GNA), <i>GBA1-6</i> (GBA) AND <i>GGAA-25</i> (GGA) BETWEEN STRAINS AND OVER TIME. LIBRARY-MATCHED METABOLITES AND FREQUENTLY OBSERVED "UNKNOWNNS" ARE DISPLAYED ON THE X-LOADINGS PLOT WITH THEIR GIVEN MST NAME; UNIDENTIFIED ANALYTES UNIQUE TO THIS ANALYSIS ARE DISPLAYED WITH PURELY NUMERICAL NAMES.....	120
FIGURE 5.5 PCA OF METABOLITE ABUNDANCES FROM THE COMBINED INTRACELLULAR AND EXTRACELLULAR METABOLITE ANALYSES OF <i>S. NODORUM</i> STRAINS SN15, <i>GNA1-35</i> , <i>GBA1-6</i> AND <i>GGAA-25</i> IDENTIFIED THE METABOLITES CONTRIBUTING TO DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE METABOLOMES. THE 10 MOST INFLUENTIAL POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE LOADING METABOLITES OF PC1 (14%) AND PC3 (6%) ARE DISPLAYED.	121
FIGURE 5.6 NORMALIZED MEAN ABUNDANCES (\pm STD)* OF MANNITOL IN <i>S. NODORUM</i> WILD-TYPE STRAIN SN15 AND MUTANT STRAINS <i>GNA1-35</i> (GNA), <i>GBA1-6</i> (GBA) AND <i>GGAA-25</i> (GGA) AT 5 AND 10 DPI.	128
FIGURE 5.7 PCA SCORES PLOT DISPLAYING THE SCORES CALCULATED FROM THE NORMALISED METABOLITE ABUNDANCES OF <i>S. NODORUM</i> MUTANT STRAINS GROWN UNDER NON-SPORULATING AND SPORULATING CULTURE CONDITIONS. THE MUTANT STRAINS <i>GNA1-35</i> (A), <i>GBA1-6</i> (B) AND <i>GGAA-25</i> (r) WERE COMPARED WHEN SPORULATING (BLACK CIRCLE), NEAR SPORULATING (WHITE CIRCLE) AND NON-SPORULATING (OPEN SYMBOL). WILD-TYPE STRAIN SN15 (WT) SPORULATED UNDER ALL CONDITIONS; THE DISPLAYED SYMBOLS REPRESENT COMPARABLE CULTURE CONDITIONS TO THOSE OF THE MUTANT STRAINS. REFER TO TABLE 5.3. SEE FIGURES 5.8; AND 5.9 FOR LOADINGS.	131
FIGURE 5.8 PCA LOADINGS PLOT DISPLAYING THE METABOLITE FACTOR LOADINGS CONTRIBUTING TO THE PROJECTIONS OF THE <i>S. NODORUM</i> STRAINS SN15, <i>GNA1-35</i> , <i>GBA1-6</i> AND <i>GGAA-25</i> ON THE SCORES PLOT (FIGURE 5.7).	133
FIGURE 5.9 THE CALCULATED LOADINGS VALUES CONTRIBUTING TO THE PROJECTIONS OF THE <i>S. NODORUM</i> METABOLITES FROM STRAINS <i>GNA1-35</i> , <i>GBA1-6</i> AND <i>GGAA-25</i> OF THE PCA SCORES AND LOADINGS PLOTS (FIGURES 5.7 AND 5.8).....	134
FIGURE 5.10 A SCHEMATIC BIOCHEMICAL PATHWAY OUTLINING THE FATE OF GLUCOSE 6-PHOSPHATE AS DETERMINED BY CASEY <i>ET AL.</i> 2010; WITH ADDED DETAIL OF METABOLITE DATA FROM 10 DPI (THIS THESIS). "+" AND "-"-SYMBOLS INDICATE THE RELATIVE ENZYME AND METABOLITE ABUNDANCES OF <i>S. NODORUM</i> STRAIN <i>GNA1-35</i> COMPARATIVE TO WILD-TYPE SN15. 1.	

PHOSPHOGLUCOMUTASE; 2. GLUCOSE 6-PHOSPHATE 1-DEHYDROGENASE; 3. INOSITOL 3-PHOSPHATE SYNTHASE; 4. MANNITOL 1-PHOSPHATE DEHYDROGENASE (MPD1); 5. MANNITOL DEHYDROGENASE (MDH1); 6. 6-PHOSPHOGLUCONATE DEHYDROGENASE; 7. TRANSKETOLASE; 8. TRANSALDOLASE; 9. 3-DEOXY-7-PHOSPHOHEPTULONATE SYNTHASE. ADAPTED FROM (CASEY ET AL., 2010).	148
FIGURE 5.11 THE ABUNDANCE OF THE METABOLITE TREHALOSE IN <i>S. NODORUM</i> STRAIN <i>GNA1-35</i> IS CORRELATED WITH THAT OF MALTLOSE. THE TIC OF MALTLOSE (DASHED ARROW) AND TREHALOSE (SOLID ARROW) FROM THE GC-MS ANALYSIS OF AN INTRACELLULAR METABOLITE EXTRACT OF <i>GNA1-35</i> CULTURED FOR 3 WEEKS AT 4°C IS PICTURED. THE DECONVOLUTED MASS SPECTRA ARE DISPLAYED FOR BOTH MALTLOSE (BELOW) AND TREHALOSE (ABOVE).....	159
FIGURE 5.12 THE ABUNDANCE OF THE METABOLITES MALTLOSE AND TREHALOSE IN <i>S. NODORUM</i> STRAINS <i>GBA1-6</i> AND <i>GGAA-25</i> ARE LIKELY CORRELATED. THE TIC OF GC-MS ANALYSED METABOLITE EXTRACTS FROM CULTURES OF <i>GBA1-6</i> AND <i>GGAA-25</i> FOLLOWING 3 WEEKS INCUBATION AT 4°C ARE PICTURED. THE DOMINANT PEAK OF THE TWO SHOWN FOR <i>GBA1-6</i> IS MALTLOSE, WHILST DISPLAYED FOR <i>GGAA-25</i> IT IS TREHALOSE.....	162
FIGURE 5.13 THE TIC OF THE <i>S. NODORUM</i> METABOLITE UNKNOWN_35.27_2194_319 (BLACK ARROW) FROM THE GC-MS ANALYSIS OF THE MUTANT STRAIN <i>GNA1-35</i> IS PICTURED PARTIALLY CO-ELUTING WITH ANOTHER METABOLITE. THE DECONVOLUTED MASS SPECTRUM IS ALSO DISPLAYED.	163
FIGURE 5.14 THE TIC OF THE <i>S. NODORUM</i> METABOLITE UNKNOWN_52.11_3560_307 (BLACK ARROW) FROM THE GC-MS ANALYSIS OF THE WILD-TYPE STRAIN SN15 PICTURED ELUTING CLOSE TO N-HEXATRIACONTANE. THE DECONVOLUTED MASS SPECTRUM IS ALSO DISPLAYED.....	164
FIGURE 5.15 LIGHT MICROSCOPE IMAGES OF AGAR CROSS SECTIONS SHOWING FUNGAL CULTURE MORPHOLOGY WHEN GROWN ON MINIMAL MEDIUM. MATURE PYCNIDIUM FROM <i>S. NODORUM</i> SN15 (A) AND ABNORMAL STRUCTURES PRODUCED DURING PYCNIDIUM DEVELOPMENT FROM <i>S. NODORUM</i> <i>SNSTUA-48</i> (B). ADAPTED FROM IPCHO ET AL 2010.	165
FIGURE 5.16 NIST MASS SPECTRAL SEARCHES OF THE UNIDENTIFIED METABOLITES UNKNOWN_35.27_2194_319 AND UNKNOWN_52.11_3560_307 IDENTIFY MASS SPECTRAL SIMILARITIES WITH KNOWN SUGARS AND SUGAR ALCOHOLS.....	167

List of Tables

TABLE 1.1 LITERATURE-REPORTED PHENOTYPIC EFFECTS RESULTING FROM THE REDUCED OR LOSS-OF FUNCTION OF ONE OF THE SUBUNITS OF THE HETEROTRIMERIC G-PROTEIN OF VARIOUS PHYTOPATHOGENIC FUNGI.	10
TABLE 3.1 PCR PRIMER SEQUENCES USED FOR THE SYNTHESIS OF THE <i>S. NODORUM</i> GGAA DISRUPTION CONSTRUCT, AND SCREENING STRAINS FOR THE TARGETED INSERTION.	40
TABLE 3.2 MEAN DIAMETER (\pm STANDARD DEVIATION)* AND EVIDENCE OF PIGMENT SECRETION OF <i>S. NODORUM</i> STRAINS GROWING IN THE DARK ON MINIMAL MEDIUM SUPPLEMENTED WITH DIFFERENT CARBON SOURCES. WILD-TYPE SN15 AND THE MUTANT STRAINS GNA1-35, GBA1-6 AND GGAA-25 DISPLAY CARBON SOURCE-DEPENDENT CHANGES IN RADIAL GROWTH RATE AND PIGMENT SECRETION AS OBSERVED 10 DAYS POST INOCULATION (DPI). * DISPLAYED COLONY DIAMETERS FOR SN15 AT 10 DPI ARE ALL STATISTICALLY HIGHER ($P < 0.05$) THAN THOSE OF THE MUTANT STRAINS.	50
TABLE 4.1 A COMPARISON OF MASS ANALYSER CAPABILITIES FOR METABOLITE ANALYSIS, ADAPTED FROM GUMMER <i>ET AL.</i> , 2010. 73	
TABLE 5.1 NORMALISED MEAN ABUNDANCE (\pm STD)* OF METABOLITES CONTRIBUTING TO THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE METABOLOME'S OF <i>S. NODORUM</i> SN15 AND MUTANT STRAINS GNA1-35, GBA1-6 AND GGAA-25 AFTER 5 DAYS OF GROWTH. *THE DISPLAYED METABOLITES EACH SHOWED STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IN ABUNDANCE BETWEEN SN15 AND AT LEAST ONE OF THE MUTANT STRAINS; IDENTIFIED IN BOLD. METABOLITE ABUNDANCES WERE SCALED ACCORDING TO THE MAXIMUM RECORDED ABUNDANCE FOR EACH METABOLITE, ACROSS ALL MEASURED GROWTH CONDITIONS, WHICH WAS SCALED TO 10; UNDERLINED. ARROWS (\downarrow) INDICATE A LOWER ABUNDANCE IN THE MUTANT STRAIN COMPARATIVE TO SN15. ; WITH ALL OTHERS OF EITHER EQUAL OR OF GREATER ABUNDANCE. THE NUMBER OF ARROWS REPRESENTS THE NUMBER OF STRAINS POSSESSING THE REDUCED ABUNDANCE.	124
TABLE 5.2 NORMALISED MEAN ABUNDANCE (\pm STD)* OF METABOLITES CONTRIBUTING TO THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE METABOLOME'S OF <i>S. NODORUM</i> SN15 AND MUTANT STRAINS GNA1-35, GBA1-6 AND GGAA-25 AFTER 10 DAYS OF GROWTH. *THE DISPLAYED METABOLITES EACH SHOWED STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IN ABUNDANCE BETWEEN SN15 AND AT LEAST ONE OF THE MUTANT STRAINS; IDENTIFIED IN BOLD. METABOLITE ABUNDANCES WERE SCALED ACCORDING TO THE MAXIMUM RECORDED ABUNDANCE FOR EACH METABOLITE, ACROSS ALL MEASURED GROWTH CONDITIONS, WHICH WAS SCALED TO 10; UNDERLINED. ARROWS (\downarrow) INDICATE A LOWER ABUNDANCE IN THE MUTANT STRAIN COMPARATIVE TO SN15; ALL OTHERS ARE EITHER EQUAL OR OF GREATER ABUNDANCE. THE NUMBER OF ARROWS REPRESENTS THE NUMBER OF STRAINS POSSESSING THE REDUCED ABUNDANCE.	126
TABLE 5.3 CULTURE CONDITIONS DESCRIBED BY THE SYMBOLS USED FOR THE PCA SCORES (FIGURE 5.8; A).	132
TABLE 5.4 NORMALISED MEAN ABUNDANCE (\pm STD)* OF METABOLITES CONTRIBUTING TO THE DIFFERENCES IN THE METABOLOME OF <i>S. NODORUM</i> STRAIN GNA1-35; WHEN PROGRESSING FROM NON-SPORULATING (10 DPI); TO NEAR-SPORULATING (3 WEEKS AT 4°C); FOLLOWED BY DIFFERENTIATION INTO A SPORULATING CULTURE (6 WEEKS AT 4°C), AFTER PROLONGED INCUBATION AT 4°C. *THE DISPLAYED METABOLITES EACH SHOWED STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IN ABUNDANCE BETWEEN THE NON-SPORULATING (10 DPI) AND AT LEAST ONE OF THE 4°C-INCUBATED CULTURES; IDENTIFIED IN BOLD. METABOLITE ABUNDANCES WERE SCALED ACCORDING TO THE MAXIMUM RECORDED ABUNDANCE FOR EACH METABOLITE, ACROSS ALL MEASURED GROWTH CONDITIONS, WHICH WAS SCALED TO 10; UNDERLINED. ARROWS (\uparrow) INDICATE AN INCREASED ABUNDANCE DUE TO COLD EXPOSURE; ALL OTHER VALUES ARE OF EITHER EQUAL OR GREATER ABUNDANCE. THE NUMBER OF ARROWS INDICATES A HIGHER ABUNDANCE OF METABOLITES IN JUST ONE, OR BOTH, COLD-EXPOSED CULTURES.	135
TABLE 5.5 NORMALISED MEAN ABUNDANCE (\pm STD)* OF METABOLITES CONTRIBUTING TO THE DIFFERENCES IN THE METABOLOME OF <i>S. NODORUM</i> STRAIN GBA1-6; WHEN PROGRESSING FROM NON-SPORULATING (10 DPI); TO NEAR-SPORULATING (3 WEEKS AT 4°C); FOLLOWED BY DIFFERENTIATION INTO A SPORULATING CULTURE (6 WEEKS AT 4°C), AFTER PROLONGED INCUBATION AT 4°C. *THE DISPLAYED METABOLITES EACH SHOWED STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IN ABUNDANCE BETWEEN THE NON-SPORULATING (10 DPI) AND AT LEAST ONE OF THE 4°C-INCUBATED CULTURES; IDENTIFIED IN BOLD. METABOLITE ABUNDANCES WERE SCALED ACCORDING TO THE MAXIMUM RECORDED ABUNDANCE FOR EACH METABOLITE, ACROSS ALL MEASURED GROWTH CONDITIONS, WHICH WAS SCALED TO 10; UNDERLINED. ARROWS (\uparrow) INDICATE AN INCREASED ABUNDANCE DUE TO COLD EXPOSURE; ALL OTHER VALUES ARE OF EITHER EQUAL OF GREATER ABUNDANCE. THE NUMBER OF ARROWS INDICATES A HIGHER ABUNDANCE OF METABOLITES IN JUST ONE, OR BOTH, COLD-EXPOSED CULTURES.	136

TABLE 5.6 NORMALISED MEAN ABUNDANCE (\pm STD)* OF METABOLITES CONTRIBUTING TO THE DIFFERENCES IN THE METABOLOME OF *S. NODORUM* STRAIN **GGAA-25**; WHEN PROGRESSING FROM **NON-SPORULATING** (10 DPI); TO **NEAR-SPORULATING** (3 WEEKS AT 4°C); FOLLOWED BY DIFFERENTIATION INTO A **SPORULATING** CULTURE (6 WEEKS AT 4°C), AFTER PROLONGED INCUBATION AT 4°C. *THE DISPLAYED METABOLITES EACH SHOWED STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IN ABUNDANCE BETWEEN THE NON-SPORULATING (10 DPI) AND AT LEAST ONE OF THE 4°C-INCUBATED CULTURES; IDENTIFIED IN **BOLD**. METABOLITE ABUNDANCES WERE SCALED ACCORDING TO THE MAXIMUM RECORDED ABUNDANCE FOR EACH METABOLITE, ACROSS ALL MEASURED GROWTH CONDITIONS, WHICH WAS SCALED TO 10; UNDERLINED. ARROWS (\uparrow) INDICATE AN INCREASED ABUNDANCE DUE TO COLD EXPOSURE; ALL OTHER VALUES ARE OF EITHER EQUAL OR GREATER ABUNDANCE. THE NUMBER OF ARROWS INDICATES A HIGHER ABUNDANCE OF METABOLITES IN JUST ONE, OR BOTH, COLD-EXPOSED CULTURES. 137

TABLE 5.7 THE FOLD-CHANGE IN METABOLITE ABUNDANCE BETWEEN CULTURES OF *S. NODORUM* STRAINS *GNA1-35*, *GBA1-6* AND *GGAA-25* WHEN GROWN UNDER NON-SPORULATING CONDITIONS, COMPARED TO THE SAME STRAIN WHEN ASEXUALLY SPORULATING (6 WEEKS AT 4°C). x, BELOW DETECTION LIMITS IN ONE OF THE CONDITIONS, SUCH THAT THE FOLD CHANGE COULD NOT BE CALCULATED. 139

TABLE 5.8 THE FOLD-CHANGE IN METABOLITE ABUNDANCE BETWEEN CULTURES OF *S. NODORUM* STRAINS *GNA1-35*, *GBA1-6* AND *GGAA-25* WHEN GROWN UNDER NEAR-SPORULATING CONDITIONS (3 WEEKS CHILLED AT 4°C), COMPARED TO THE SAME STRAIN WHEN ASEXUALLY SPORULATING (6 WEEKS CHILLED AT 4°C). x, BELOW DETECTION LIMITS IN ONE OF THE CONDITIONS, SUCH THAT THE FOLD CHANGE COULD NOT BE CALCULATED. 139

TABLE 5.9 DIFFERENTLY ABUNDANCE METABOLITES AS DETERMINED FOR *S. NODORUM* SN15 AND MUTANT STRAIN *SNSTUA-48* AS DETERMINED BY IPCHO *ET AL.*, 2010. MEAN \pm STD;*VALUES ARE IN ARBITRARY UNITS. ND, NOT DETECTED. 165

List of Appendices

APPENDIX 3.1 Agarose gel electrophoresis of the products resulting from PCR amplification of the 1594bp PHL and 1227bp LEO regions of the phleomycin cassette from pAN-8-pGEM-T. Lane.1; Molecular weight marker, Lane.2; no template PCR control, Lane.3; PHL amplicon, Lane.4; LEO amplicon.

APPENDIX 3.2 Agarose gel electrophoresis of the products resulting from an annealing temperature-gradient (Lanes 2 – 9) PCR amplification of the 781bp *GgaA* 5' and 759bp 3' UTRs from *S. nodorum* SN15 gDNA. MW, Molecular weight marker; 1, no template PCR control; 2, 53°C; 3, 54°C; 4, 55°C; 5, 56°C; 6, 60°C; 7, 62°C; 8, 63°C; 9, 64°C.

APPENDIX 3.3 Agarose gel electrophoresis the PCR fusion products of the *GgaA*5' UTR with LEO (2008 bp; 1) and *GgaA*3' UTR with PHL (2353 bp; 2) –generating the split-markers. MW, Molecular weight marker; NTC, no template PCR control.

APPENDIX 3.4 A longitudinal section of a wax embedded excision from an asexually sporulating culture of the *S. nodorum* (singularly inserted) ectopic strain *GgaA*-16e -stained with toluidine blue. Pictured are pycnidiospores being released from a mature pycnidium. Arrows point to the masses of enlarged cells producing the ostiole, formed in the development of the mature pycnidium, from which the pycnidiospores are released from the pycnidial cavity as a cirrus. Pc, pycnidial cavity.

APPENDIX 3.5 Longitudinal sections of wax embedded excisions from agar containing *S. nodorum* pycnidia -stained with toluidine blue. The pycnidia of mutant strain *gba1-6* develop as a more distinct unit when formed below the agar surface, compared to those that develop on the agar surface, but remain less defined and misshaped than wild type (SN15) pycnidia.

APPENDIX 3.6 RT(q)PCR quantification of the *GgaA*-deactivation construct in transformed cultures of *S. nodorum*, determined to have targeted (A) or ectopic insertion (B).

APPENDIX 5.1 Statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) differently abundant metabolites between the *S. nodorum* wild-type strain SN15, and at least one of the mutant strains *gna1-35*, *gba1-6* or *ggaA-25*. The metabolites were analysed by GC-MS using metabolite extracts of the combined intra and extracellular metabolites. The relative abundances of each metabolite as determined in cultures harvested 5, 8 or 10 dpi, are displayed in arbitrary values scaled out of 10 – according to the highest recorded abundance for each metabolite.

APPENDIX 5.2 Normalised mean abundances of metabolites contributing to the differences between the metabolome's of *S. nodorum* SN15 and mutant strains *gna1-35*, *gba1-6* and *ggaA-25* after 5 days growth at 22°C, followed by 3 weeks at 4°C (SN15 sporulating, all mutants near sporulating). The abundances displayed in bold showed statistically significant* differences in abundance between SN15 and at least one of the mutant strains. Metabolite abundances were scaled according to the maximum recorded abundance for each metabolite, across all measured growth conditions, which was scaled to 10; underlined.

APPENDIX 5.3 Normalised mean abundances of metabolites contributing to the differences between the metabolome's of *S. nodorum* SN15 and mutant strains *gna1-35*, *gba1-6* and *ggaA-25* after 5 days growth at 22°C, followed by 6 weeks at 4°C (all strains sporulating). The abundances displayed in bold showed statistically significant* differences in abundance between SN15 and at least one of the mutant strains. Metabolite abundances were scaled according to the maximum recorded abundance for each metabolite, across all measured growth conditions, which was scaled to 10; underlined.

Gene/protein nomenclature

Genes are presented in italics, the first letter of which is in uppercase (eg. *Abc1*). Proteins are non-italicised, with the first letter in uppercase (eg. Abc1). Deleted genes are italicised and in lowercase (eg. *abc1*). Fungal mutant strains are identified by the deactivated gene name, italicised and in lowercase, as described for deleted genes.

Abbreviations and Units

3'	3 prime
5'	5 prime
ATP	adenosine triphosphate
aa	amino acid
AUD	Australian Dollars
ACNFP	Australian Centre for Necrotrophic Fungal Pathogens
bp	basepair
BLASTP	basic local (protein) alignment search tool
CE	capillary electrophoresis
cm	centimetre
CSF	cerebral spinal fluid
CS	complete supplement
CT	cycle threshold
cAMP	cyclic adenosine monophosphate
CzV8	Czapek Dox V8 juice
Dpi	days post inoculation
°C	degrees celcius
eV	electron volts
milli-Q	0.22µm Millipore membrane-filtered deionised water
DNA	deoxyribonucleic acid
dNTPs	deoxyribonucleotide triphosphate
DLA	detached leaf assay
L-DOPA	dihydroxyphenylalanine
dpi	days post inoculation
EI	electron ionization
ESI-MS/MS	electrospray ionisation tandem mass spectrometry
E.C	Enzyme Commission/accession number
fmol	femtomoles
FTMS	fourier transform MS
FT-ICR	fourier transform ion cyclotron resonance
GC	gas chromatographer
GC-MS	gas chromatography mass spectrometry

GC-(Q)MS	GC single quadrupole MS
gDNA	genomic DNA
Gα	G-protein alpha subunit
Gβ	G-protein beta subunit
G$\beta\gamma$	G-protein beta-gamma subunit dimer
GPCR	G-protein coupled (plasma membrane) receptor
GFP	green fluorescent protein
Gγ	G-protein gamma subunit
g	gram
g	gravitational force
GTPase	GTP hydrolase
GDP	guanine diphosphate
GTP	guanine triphosphate
G-protein	guanine-binding protein
Hz	Hertz
HSD	honestly significant difference
HST	host-specific toxin
G_s	inhibitory G-protein
P_i	inorganic phosphate
IT	ion trap
kb	kilobase pairs
LOD	limit of detection
MS	mass spectrometer
MST	mass spectral tag
m/z	mass-to-charge
MEOX	methoxylamine hydrochloride
m	metre
μg	microgram
μl	microlitre
μM	micromolar
mg	milligram
ml	millilitre
mm	millimetre
mm²	millimetres squared
mM	Millimolar
MYA	million years ago
MM	minimal medium
M	molar
MW	molecular weight marker
NIST	National Institute of Standards and Technology
NE	necrotrophic effector
MSTFA	N-Methyl-trimethylsilyltrifluoroacetamide
NS	not significant
NTC	no-template control
NMR	nuclear magnetic resonance
nt	nucleotide

p.a	per annum
PPP	pentose phosphate pathway
PFTBA	perfluorotributylamine
PEG	polyethylene glycol
PCR	polymerase chain reaction
PDA	potato dextrose agar
PC	principal component
PCA	principal component analysis
PKA	protein kinase
Q	quadrupole
QTOF	quadrupole TOF
Res.	resolution
RT-qPCR	quantitative real-time PCR
RI	retention index
RT	retention time
rpm	revolutions per minute
SCH	short-chain dehydrogenase
SNB	<i>Stagonospora nodorum</i> blotch
SN15	<i>Stagonospora nodorum</i> strain 15 (wild-type)
Std	standard deviation
SNOG	<i>Stagonospora nodorum</i> gene
G_s	stimulatory G-protein
TBE	tris-borate EDTA buffer
TWA	tap water agar
MS/MS	tandem mass spectrometry
TOF	time of flight
TIC	total ion count/chromatogram
TCA	tricarboxylic acid
TMS	trimethylsilyl (Si(CH ₃) ₃)
QQQ	triple quadrupole
GC×GC	two dimensional gas chromatography
LC×LC	two dimensional liquid chromatography
U	Unit
UTR	untranslated region
V	volts
v/v	volume per volume
wk	week
w/v	weight per volume
WT	wild-type
YPD	yeast potato dextrose