Leaf and root pectin methylesterase activity and $^{13}$C/$^{12}$C stable isotopic ratio measurements of methanol emissions give insight into methanol production in *Lycopersicon esculentum*

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**Summary**

- Plant production of methanol (MeOH) is a poorly understood aspect of metabolism, and understanding MeOH production in plants is crucial for modeling MeOH emissions. Here, we have examined the source of MeOH emissions from mature and immature leaves and whether pectin methylesterase (PME) activity is a good predictor of MeOH emission. We also investigated the significance of below-ground MeOH production for mature leaf emissions.
- We present measurements of MeOH emission, PME activity, and MeOH concentration in mature and immature tissues of tomato (*Lycopersicon esculentum*). We also present stable carbon isotopic signatures of MeOH emission and the pectin methoxyl pool.
- Our results suggest that below-ground MeOH production was not the dominant contributor to daytime MeOH emissions from mature and immature leaves. Stable carbon isotopic signatures of mature and immature leaf MeOH were similar, suggesting that they were derived from the same pathway. Foliar PME activity was related to MeOH flux, but unexplained variance suggested PME activity could not predict emissions.
- The data show that MeOH production and emission are complex and cannot be predicted using PME activity alone. We hypothesize that substrate limitation of MeOH synthesis and MeOH catabolism may be important regulators of MeOH emission.

**Introduction**

Emission of methanol (MeOH) from plants is ubiquitous and plays major roles in atmospheric chemistry. MeOH is the second most abundant organic gas after methane. Annual global budgets of phytogenic MeOH emissions are estimated to be anywhere from 75 to 280 Tg yr$^{-1}$ (Tg = teragrams = $10^{12}$ g), while anthropogenic emissions resulting from industrial processes range from only 4 to 8 Tg yr$^{-1}$ (Singh *et al.*, 2000; Galbally & Kirstine, 2002; Heikes *et al.*, 2002; von Kuhlmann *et al.*, 2003a,b; Tie *et al.*, 2003; Jacob *et al.*, 2005). MeOH has an atmospheric lifetime of c. 10 d (Jacob *et al.*, 2005). This long lifetime allows MeOH to move into the upper troposphere where it can substantially lower hydroxyl radical concentrations as background concentrations of other volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in the upper troposphere are low (Singh *et al.*, 2000, 2001; Tie *et al.*, 2003).

Studies have consistently shown that young expanding leaves emit greater amounts of MeOH than mature leaves...
(Macdonald & Fall, 1993; Hüve et al., 2007). Although mature leaf MeOH emissions are significantly lower than immature leaves (on average three to four times lower across species), they are still substantial and should not be ignored in modeling efforts (Macdonald & Fall, 1993; Nemeczek-Marshall et al., 1995; Harley et al., 2007). Mature leaf MeOH emission can be just as significant as immature leaf emission on an annual scale. For example, after accounting for changes in leaf area index and length of time spent at each ontogenetic stage, mature and immature leaves of deciduous trees contribute approximately equal amounts to annual MeOH flux. Therefore, mature leaf MeOH emission has significant implications for atmospheric chemistry and deserves attention.

Currently, the dominant biosynthetic pathway for MeOH production in mature leaves is unknown. MeOH production in immature leaves, on the other hand, is believed to be derived from the demethylation of pectin by the enzyme pectin methylesterase (PME) (Fall & Benson, 1996; Frenkel et al., 1998; Galbally & Kirstine, 2002; Keppler et al., 2004). Demethylation of pectin by PME facilitates crosslinking of pectin polymer chains and stabilizes the cell wall during expansion. As a by-product of cell growth, cumulative daily MeOH flux is known to strongly correlate with leaf expansion (Hüve et al., 2007). The PME pathway has also been directly linked to MeOH production and emission in two studies in which silencing PME genes led to significantly decreased MeOH production in tomato fruit (Frenkel et al., 1998) and significantly decreased MeOH emission response to herbivory (Korner et al., 2009). MeOH production resulting from the demethylation of DNA and protein repair pathways is believed to be small because of low activity rates; for example, PME activity rates are at least six orders of magnitude higher than protein repair enzyme activity rates (Fall & Benson, 1996). Although it is generally accepted that PME activity is the source of MeOH emissions from immature leaves, the relationship between PME activity and MeOH emissions has yet to be described.

In addition, the role of PME activity in MeOH emissions from mature leaves is unknown. As mature leaves are fully expanded, foliar PME activity is expected to be low. Mature cell walls are known to have lower degrees of methyl esterification than immature cell walls and therefore have lower potential for MeOH production via the PME pathway. Alternatively, production of MeOH in other areas of the plant may be supplying mature leaves with MeOH via the transpiration stream. Previous work has suggested that MeOH emissions from mature leaves are derived from below-ground MeOH production (Folkers et al., 2008). Experimentation with the cooling of roots, thereby decreasing metabolic activity in root tissue, indicated that some MeOH emitted from mature deciduous tree leaves is derived from MeOH production below ground (Folkers et al., 2008). The spatial heterogeneity of MeOH production in plants may therefore significantly influence MeOH emissions from mature leaves and deserve further investigation.

While the instantaneous flux of MeOH from leaves is a function of leaf MeOH concentration and stomatal conductance (Niinemets & Reichstein, 2003a,b), an outstanding challenge for the field of biogenic VOC emission studies is to develop models that can predict the leaf concentration of individual VOCs (Lerdau, 1991). Such models for MeOH concentration do not yet exist. In order to help develop mechanistic MeOH emission models and address the uncertainty surrounding the role of PME activity in MeOH production, we investigated three main questions. Are MeOH emissions from mature and immature leaves derived from the same biosynthetic pathway? Is PME activity a good predictor of MeOH emissions? Do below-ground sources significantly contribute to MeOH emissions from mature leaves? We addressed the three research questions using stable carbon isotope analysis, PME activity assays, MeOH flux measurements, and MeOH extractions from mature and immature Lycopersicon esculentum.

Materials and Methods

Study species

All Lycopersicon esculentum L. individuals were Micro Tom clones, a dwarf variety of tomato (Meissner et al., 1997). L. esculentum was chosen as a model plant because of its rapid growth and high MeOH emission behavior. MeOH emissions from mature leaves of L. esculentum, Fagus sylvatica, and Quercus robur are on average 3.6, 0.77, 0.33 nmol m⁻² s⁻¹, respectively (Folkers et al., 2008). Plants were grown in the greenhouse at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville (38°N, 78°W). Pots were placed in flats filled with 1 inch of water and illuminated during a 16 h period with natural light supplemented with high-pressure sodium lamps. Plants were fertilized every 2 wk (Scotts 20% N, 20% P, 20% K; Scotts Miracle-Gro Company, Marysville, OH, USA) and kept insect-free using a variety of insecticides. Immature leaves were sampled 3 wk past germination and mature leaves 6 wk past germination. Leaf size was measured regularly with calipers to ensure that immature leaves were rapidly expanding and mature leaves were fully expanded.

Stable carbon isotope measurements

Gaseous MeOH released from immature (n = 6) and mature (n = 5) leaves of L. esculentum were measured by coupling a Li-Cor LI-6400 portable gas exchange system (Li-Cor, Inc., Lincoln, NE, USA) to a heavily modified gas chromatography isotope ratio mass spectrometer.
Leaf-level MeOH emissions were quantified with a Li-Cor LI-6400 portable gas exchange system coupled with a proton-transfer-reaction mass spectrometer (high sensitivity PTR-MS; Ionicon Analytik, Innsbruck, Austria). PTR-MS has been described in detail elsewhere (Lindiger et al., 1998). PTR-MS requires no preconcentration or chromatography of VOCs. Instead, the air flows directly to the drift tube where VOCs undergo chemical ionization via proton-transfer-reaction with H₂O⁺. Protonated VOCs are then counted by the ion detector and can be measured down to the parts-per-trillion (ppt) level. Air exiting the LI-6400 cuvette was routed to the PTR-MS inlet via 1/4 inch Teflon tubing with a T-fitting in order to release extra flow. Flow rates through the cuvette ranged from 150 to 350 μmol s⁻¹. Despite typically stable concentrations of MeOH in ambient air throughout the sampling periods, empty cuvette measurements were coupled with each leaf measurement in order to control for fluctuations in background MeOH. All measurements were taken between 10:00 and 16:00 h. PTR-MS measurements were recorded for 20 cycles for a total sampling time of c. 3 min. All measurements were taken under steady-state conditions at a PPFD of 750 μmol m⁻² s⁻¹, a leaf temperature of 31 ± 1.9°C, stomatal conductances of 0.09 ± 0.04 mol m⁻² s⁻¹ (mature) and 0.15 ± 0.06 mol m⁻² s⁻¹ (immature), photosynthetic rates of 7.0 ± 2 μmol CO₂ m⁻² s⁻¹ (mature) and 10.5 ± 2 μmol CO₂ m⁻² s⁻¹ (immature), and relative humidities of 55.6 ± 3% (mature) and 58.2 ± 4% (immature).
The leaf surface area enclosed in the cuvette was measured using a Li-Cor Leaf Area Meter. The portion of leaf enclosed in the cuvette was weighed directly after being removed from the plant. MeOH emission rates are expressed on a per unit FW basis (nmol g⁻¹ FW s⁻¹). Four point calibrations were made regularly throughout the sampling period with dilutions of a gravimetrically prepared MeOH gas standard provided by the Riemer laboratory (University of Miami) containing 3 ppmv (3 μl l⁻¹) ± 2% MeOH in nitrogen gas. The accuracy of MeOH measurements was estimated to be c. 20% (based on the accuracy of calibration measurements) and reproducibility of c. 10%. MeOH emission measurements were made on 10 immature and 10 mature L. esculentum leaves.

PME enzyme activity rates

Directly following MeOH emission measurement, sampled leaves were excised and frozen in liquid nitrogen. A portion of the sampled plant’s root mass was rinsed and also frozen in liquid nitrogen. Frozen samples were assayed for PME enzyme activity via a titration technique previously developed for L. esculentum (Anthon & Barrett, 2006). Plant tissue was ground in a mortar and pestle to a fine powder, weighed, and mixed in equal weight with a solution composed of 50% 2 M NaCl and 50% 10 mM phosphate buffer (pH 7.5). Samples were then centrifuged at 8000 g for 5 min. A 25 μl quantity of plant supernatant was added to 2.5 ml of pectin solution containing 0.5% pectin, 0.2 M NaCl, 0.1 mM phosphate buffer (pH 7.5). The sample solution pH was adjusted to 7.5 using small amounts of 0.1 M NaOH (in 1–5 μl). Once the solution dropped back down to pH 7, 1–5 μl 0.1 M NaOH was added until the solution pH reached 7.3. The time for the solution to drop back down to pH 7 was recorded. The demethylation of pectin by PME acidifies the solution. PME activity is therefore expressed in nmol g⁻¹ FW s⁻¹ based on the change in pH for a given amount of fresh tissue over time. Measuring change in pH over time is a proxy for PME activity and not a direct measurement of enzyme activity, but this change in pH has been shown to be a highly repeatable proxy for enzyme activity (Anthon & Barrett, 2006). A total of 10 immature and 10 mature L. esculentum were assayed for PME enzyme activity.

MeOH extractions

MeOH extraction was conducted on stem and leaf L. esculentum tissue. Whole plants were frozen in a liquid nitrogen bath before removal of the midstem and an adjacent mature leaf. Tissues were weighed and ground in 5 × equal weight EDTA with a mortar and pestle (Leegood, 1993; Nemecek-Marshall et al., 1995). Samples were then centrifuged at 3000 g for 4 min before removing the top layer and neutralizing with NaOH. Samples were then injected into a gas chromatograph coupled with a flame ionization detector (GC-FID). A three-point calibration was made with dilutions of pure MeOH in deionized water. An additional calibration curve was made with aliquots of pure MeOH added to plant extract, which produced a standard equation similar to the DI water calibration curve. MeOH concentration was measured with an uncertainty of 4%. Tissues from 12 immature and nine mature plants were measured for MeOH concentration.

Statistical analysis

Differences between mature and immature mean MeOH δ¹³C values were examined with a t-test (Proc TTEST, SAS 9.1; SAS Institute Inc., Cary, NC, USA). Linear regression was used to assess how well the independent variables leaf enzyme activity, root enzyme activity, and leaf type (mature and immature) predict MeOH emissions (Proc GLM, SAS 9.1; SAS Institute Inc.). Differences between mature and immature MeOH emission rates were also examined with a t-test. Data used in regression analyses and t-tests were log-transformed to meet normality and homogeneity of variance assumptions. Nonparametric regression was used to determine whether or not MeOH concentration in stem tissue was a good predictor of MeOH concentration in leaf tissue (Proc GAM, SAS 9.1; SAS Institute Inc.). A Wilcoxon two-sample exact test was used to compare MeOH concentrations measured in leaf tissue between leaf types (Proc NPAR1WAY, SAS 9.1; SAS Institute Inc.). Three outlier points were detected according to Cook’s D influence statistics and were removed from the analysis.

Results

Stable carbon isotope analysis of MeOH emissions was used to test the hypothesis that the stable carbon isotopic signatures of MeOH from mature and immature leaves are similar. The measured δ¹³C of MeOH emissions from mature and immature L. esculentum leaves were not significantly different (t = −1.08, df = 8, P = 0.31); the values for mature and immature leaves were, on average, −19.0 and −21.5‰, respectively (Fig. 1). We interpret this similarity to support the hypothesis that the dominant biosynthetic pathway for MeOH production in plants, PME activity, is conserved as leaves develop. Stable carbon isotope analysis of pectin and the pectin methoxyl pool was used to test the hypothesis that the isotopic signature of the pectin methoxyl pool is similar to the signature of MeOH emissions. We measured the δ¹³C values of purified apple pectin and apple pectin methoxyl groups. The δ¹³C of purified apple pectin (−26.2‰) was enriched in ¹³C relative to the
pectin methoxyl groups (−38‰; Fig. 1). The depletion of the 13C pectin methoxyl pool is biosynthetically reasonable because the methyl donor to pectin is S-adenosyl-methionine (SAM), which has a δ13C of −39.2‰ (as measured in caffeine by Weilacher et al., 1996). The apple pectin methoxyl pool was isotopically distinct from apple pectin, previously measured tomato pectin (Park & Epstein, 1961), and MeOH emissions from tomato (Fig. 1). We interpret the difference in isotopic signature between the pectin methoxyl pool and MeOH emissions as evidence that an enrichment process (e.g. MeOH catabolism) may occur during the production and emission of MeOH in plants.

Enzyme activity is known to be a good predictor for mechanistic VOC emission models (Fall & Wildermuth, 1998; Logan et al., 2000). Flux measurements were taken in conjunction with enzyme activity rate measurements in leaves to test if PME activity in leaves and roots were good predictors of MeOH emission. Foliar PME activity was significantly related to MeOH emission across both leaf types ($F = 6.24, P = 0.022$; Fig. 2a), but only explained a small amount of the variance in MeOH emission ($R^2 = 0.26$). Additionally, no significant relationship between PME activity and MeOH emission was detected within leaf type ($F = 1.66, P = 0.22$; Fig. 2a). We interpret these results as evidence that, although foliar PME activity was related to MeOH emission, other factors must also be considered when predicting MeOH emission. Root PME activity did not correlate with MeOH emission across leaf types ($F = 0.52, P = 0.48$) or within leaf type ($F = 0.25, P = 0.63$), indicating that below-ground PME activity was not related to foliar MeOH emission (Fig. 2a). These data were graphed on log scale plots as they were log-transformed for statistical analysis (Fig. 2a,b).

Mature leaf PME activity was higher than expected based on our knowledge of PME activity in fully expanded leaves (average ± SE PME activity rates were 6.4 ± 1.7 and 11.9 ± 2.1 nmol g⁻¹ FW s⁻¹ for mature and immature leaves, respectively; Fig. 3). Based on mean PME activity rates measured in mature and immature leaves, average mature leaf MeOH flux was lower than expected. Mature leaf PME activity was c. 50% of immature leaf PME activity, while MeOH flux from mature leaves was c. 33% of MeOH flux from immature leaves (average ± SE MeOH flux rates were 0.03 ± 0.01 and 0.09 ± 0.02 nmol g⁻¹ FW s⁻¹ for...
mature and immature leaves, respectively; Fig. 3). We interpret relatively high PME activity and low MeOH emission from mature leaves as possibly indicative of a MeOH sink. Mature and immature leaves did not have significantly different concentrations of MeOH ($P = 0.28$, Wilcoxon exact; average ± SE MeOH concentrations were $0.74 ± 0.17$ and $0.93 ± 0.20$ mg g$^{-1}$ FW for mature and immature leaves, respectively), indicating that although immature leaf MeOH emission was high, immature leaf MeOH concentration was not. We interpret relatively high MeOH emissions without high MeOH concentrations in immature leaves as also congruent with a MeOH sink.

In order to assess whether the transpiration stream was the dominant contributor of MeOH to leaves, we tested whether or not MeOH concentrations in stems could predict concentrations in leaves. In contrast to our hypothesis, concentrations of MeOH in stems were not good predictors for concentrations of MeOH in leaves ($\chi^2 = 3.28$, $P = 0.35$, across leaf types; $\chi^2 = 6.51$, $P = 0.10$, mature only; $\chi^2 = 2.20$, $P = 0.53$, immature only; Fig. 4). We interpret this result as evidence that MeOH transported in the transpiration stream was likely not the dominant source of MeOH to leaves.

**Discussion**

Although it is believed that MeOH emission from immature leaves is derived from the PME pathway, the relationship between PME activity and immature leaf MeOH emission has not previously been described. Furthermore, the role of PME activity in MeOH production in mature leaf tissue has remained unstudied. Because of the fully expanded nature of mature leaves and a previous study indicating that some mature leaf MeOH is derived from below-ground MeOH production (Folkers et al., 2008), we predicted that mature leaf MeOH would be mainly derived from PME activity in root tissue. We also hypothesized that if the dominant source of MeOH in mature leaves is below-ground production, the concentrations of MeOH in stems would predict concentrations in leaves. In contrast to our hypothesis, root PME activity was not related to MeOH flux, and MeOH extractions from mature stem and leaf tissue showed that MeOH in the transpiration stream could not predict MeOH in leaf tissue. These results provide strong evidence that below-ground MeOH production through the PME pathway was unlikely to be the dominant source of MeOH to *L. esculentum* leaves. We are not, however, aware of a mechanism for the partitioning of MeOH out of the transpiration stream and subsequent storage of MeOH in tissue. We cannot, therefore, exclude the possibility that leaves extracted MeOH from the transpiration stream. Additionally, it is possible to have significant transport of MeOH from roots to leaves without significant correlation between MeOH concentrations in stems and leaves. This could occur, for example, if flow rates of MeOH in stems and leaves were not constant. However, we assumed constant flow rates of MeOH in *L. esculentum* as the plants were grown and maintained in well-watered and stable environmental conditions. It may be that other species have high rates of MeOH transport from roots to leaves and that this root-derived MeOH is significant in these taxa. It is also important to note that our experiments did not explore the significance of night-time root growth for early morning MeOH emissions. Night-time root growth could lead to the accumulation of MeOH in the transpiration stream, contributing to high MeOH emission rates that have been observed during stomatal opening (Harley et al., 2007). Modeling studies considering morning MeOH emission bursts should take this into consideration. A full understanding of the role of roots as MeOH suppliers to leaves would require a separate study.

**Fig. 3** Leaf pectin methylesterase (PME) activity, root PME activity and leaf methanol (MeOH) flux for mature (black bars; $n = 10$) and immature (gray bars; $n = 10$) *Lycopersicon esculentum*. Values are means ± SE. Immature leaves tended to have higher PME activity ($t$-test; $t = 2.03$, df = 18, $P = 0.057$) and higher MeOH flux ($t$-test; $t = 3.35$, df = 18, $P = 0.0036$) than mature leaves. ***, significant difference at $P < 0.01$. No significant difference was detected between PME activity in immature and mature root tissues ($t$-test; df = 18, $t = 0.32$, $P = 0.76$).

**Fig. 4** The relationship between methanol (MeOH) concentrations in stem and leaf tissue from mature (closed circles; $n = 9$) and immature (open circles; $n = 12$) *Lycopersicon esculentum* (nonparametric regression; across leaf type, $\chi^2 = 3.28$, $P = 0.35$; mature only, $\chi^2 = 6.51$, $P = 0.10$; immature only, $\chi^2 = 2.20$, $P = 0.53$).
Pectin methylesterase enzyme assays revealed that mature leaves of *L. esculentum* maintained surprisingly high foliar PME activity despite their fully expanded nature. This high activity may be the result of PME’s involvement in plant development (both cell wall expansion and cell wall turnover) and stress response (i.e. in response to cold temperature, ethylene, wounding and herbivory, and wound-signaling compounds such as oligogalacturonides) (Pelloux *et al.*, 2007). Plant PMEs are known to belong to large multigene families yielding numerous isoforms of PME (e.g. 66 PME protein-encoding regions of DNA have been identified in Arabidopsis), which may be differentially regulated as leaves mature (Bordenave & Goldberg, 1994; Willats *et al.*, 2001; Pelloux *et al.*, 2007). A previous study found PME activity to be higher in mature cells of mung bean hypocotyl tissue compared with immature cells with relative abundances of PME isoforms differing between cell types (Bordenave & Goldberg, 1994). Therefore, certain isoforms of PME involved in cell wall turnover and/or environmental stress response may be more active in mature leaf tissue and may thus explain the surprisingly high PME activity rates measured in mature *L. esculentum* leaves.

Our results indicate that PME activity alone could not predict MeOH emissions from *L. esculentum*, and we hypothesize that other mechanisms, such as PME substrate limitation and MeOH catabolism, may contribute to MeOH emission regulation. Although foliar PME activity was significantly related to MeOH emission across leaf types, foliar PME activity was not a good predictor of MeOH emission ($R^2 = 0.26$). As PME activity was not a good predictor of MeOH emission, investigation of additional predictor variables should be pursued. We hypothesize that PME substrate availability may be a good predictor of MeOH production. Cells are known to export galacturonic acid (GA) to the cell wall with differing degrees of methylesterification (Goldberg *et al.*, 1996), thereby limiting available substrate for MeOH production through the PME pathway. Previous studies have demonstrated that under saturating conditions, isoprene synthase activity can explain isoprene emissions (Logan *et al.*, 2000), but when conditions are no longer saturating, isoprene synthase activity can only account for some of the variation in isoprene emissions. Similarly, for MeOH production, PME activity may only be a strong predictor under saturating conditions. PME substrate availability is therefore an important area for future investigation.

In addition to PME substrate limitation, we suspect that MeOH catabolism may contribute to MeOH emission regulation. Although a pathway for MeOH catabolism in plants is known (Cossins, 1964; Gout *et al.*, 2000), the significance of that pathway for MeOH emission has not been investigated. Our results suggest that a MeOH sink, such as MeOH catabolism, may influence MeOH storage and emission. While PME activity rates in mature leaves were only slightly lower than in immature leaves ($P = 0.057$), MeOH emissions from mature leaves were significantly lower than immature leaf emissions ($P = 0.0036$; Fig. 3). We hypothesize that MeOH within the leaf that is not emitted may be catabolized or exported for catabolism in other tissues. MeOH in leaves is known to be oxidized to CO$_2$ or incorporated into amino acids (Cossins, 1964; Gout *et al.*, 2000). Our isotopic data are congruent with this suggestion. While we hypothesize the presence of a MeOH sink, there are several additional processes that may also explain low MeOH emissions from mature leaves despite relatively high PME activity. PME may be substrate-limited in mature leaves, resulting in overall lower MeOH production rates. In addition, the physical resistances between mature and immature leaves may differ. Leaf architecture, however, plays a minor role in dictating emission rates for compounds such as MeOH (Niinemets & Reichstein, 2003a). Therefore, we would not expect mesophyll resistance to play a significant role in inhibiting fluxes from mature leaves. Slightly lower stomatal conductance in mature leaves may inhibit emission and lead to accumulation of MeOH within the leaf. Differences in stomatal conductance, however, were not sufficient to explain differences in flux between mature and immature leaves (stomatal conductance in mature leaves was, on average, 60% of immature leaf stomatal conductance, while MeOH flux from mature leaves was, on average, 30% of immature leaf MeOH flux). Another result that suggested the presence of a MeOH sink concerned MeOH extractions from leaf tissue showing that mature and immature leaves had surprisingly similar concentrations of MeOH. MeOH catabolism could lower the concentrations of MeOH in immature leaves and explain why immature leaves had similar concentrations as mature leaves despite being in a rapidly expanding growth stage. Unfortunately, very little is known concerning rates of MeOH catabolism, and therefore source–sink MeOH dynamics within plants requires further investigation. Our results raise the issue of MeOH catabolism as a significant sink for MeOH in leaves which could influence the amount of MeOH that is stored and transported within plant systems and complicate our ability to use MeOH production alone as a proxy for MeOH emission.

The isotopic signatures of MeOH emitted from mature and immature *L. esculentum* leaves were similar, indicating that the dominant biosynthetic pathway for MeOH production, PME activity in cell walls, was most likely conserved as leaves developed. Enriched isotopic signatures of MeOH emissions relative to our measurements of a pectin methoxyl pool suggest that an enrichment process, such as MeOH catabolism, may have strongly influenced the isotopic signature of MeOH emissions. Although the fractionation factor associated with MeOH catabolism has not been measured, previous investigation has shown that MeOH is first oxidized to formaldehyde and formate,
which could entail a substantial kinetic isotope effect (Cossins, 1964; Gout et al., 2000). Therefore, the observed difference in isotopic signature could be the result of preferential catabolism of lighter MeOH leading to isotopically heavier emissions, an effect that is amplified in mature leaves. The process of enrichment of carbon emissions is known to occur if the catabolic product being produced and retained within the plant is preferentially made from light carbon (Ghashghaie et al., 2003). As there is no other known sink beyond MeOH production for the methyl groups released from pectin by PME in the cell wall, it is unlikely that alternate sinks for the methoxyl groups are influencing the isotopic signature of MeOH emissions. Given the possibility of small non-PME sources of MeOH (e.g. demethylation of DNA and protein repair pathways) and mass-dependent catabolism of MeOH, it is impossible to definitively constrain a complete source–sink model. Our data are congruent, though, with the argument that PME is most likely the dominant contributor to MeOH production in plants and that SAM is likely the dominant source to the pectin methoxyl pool. It is unlikely that variation in isotopic signature as a result of interspecific variation and environmental conditions can account for the large difference observed between our measurements of the apple pectin methoxyl pool and MeOH emissions from tomato leaves. Production of GA (the backbone of pectin) from glucose (Smirnoff, 1996) and methylation of GA by pectin methyltransferase (PMT) (Goldberg et al., 1996) are conserved processes across plant species. Although numerous isotopic measurements of pectin have not been conducted, other compounds such as cellulose and starch have been measured multiple times with low variability in isotopic signature across species (up to 4–5‰ across 107 and 34 measurements for cellulose and starch, respectively) (Badeck et al., 2005). We therefore do not expect the isotopic signature of pectin to vary greatly among C3 plants. We also would not expect the isotopic signature of pectin and the pectin methoxyl pool to significantly differ between mature and immature leaves as variations in carbon fractionation as a result of changes in leaf age are known to be relatively small (Leavitt & Long, 1985; Terwilliger, 1997). After determining that the δ13C values of apple pectin and tomato pectin (Park & Epstein, 1961) were similar (Fig. 1), we are confident that apple pectin is an appropriate substrate for our investigation of the isotopic signature of the pectin methoxyl carbon pool. Future investigations will be required in order to understand how the isotopic signature of MeOH emissions changes in relation to the pectin methoxyl pool under conditions of low and high MeOH catabolic rates. This type of study is highly desired as plants are believed to be the main contributor to atmospheric MeOH and the isotopic signature of that source could be a useful tool in balancing the global MeOH budget (Quay et al., 1999; Keppler et al., 2005).

Our measured isotopic signature of MeOH differed greatly from previously measured isotopic signatures of MeOH emissions from plants (Keppler et al., 2004; Yamada et al., 2009). MeOH emissions from fresh plant tissue measured by Keppler et al. (2004) were −68.2 ± 11.2‰ averaged across 11 species of C3 plants. Similarly, Yamada et al. (2009) measured MeOH emissions to be, on average, −74.6 ± 1.2‰ for Ligustrum japonicum. Although neither of these previous studies sampled L. esculentum, there is no reason to expect tomato to differ so significantly from the 12 C3 species previously surveyed (see earlier discussion).

An explanation for the discrepancy between our measured isotopic values for MeOH and previously measured values could be differences in analytical methods. Both Keppler et al. (2004) and Yamada et al. (2009) sampled MeOH emissions by destructively sampling multiple leaves from a plant, sealing the leaves in a small vial for 12–18 h at room temperature, and measuring the MeOH accumulated in the vial via GC-IRMS. Sampling wounded plant tissue removed from the transpiration stream is very different from live plant emission sampling as plant metabolism is significantly altered during destructive sampling and broken tissues are exposed to oxygen and have suffered cell death. These conditions could lead to the production of MeOH derived from a variety of sources, such as from anaerobic metabolism. Methanotrophs and methylobacteria are ubiquitous in the phyllosphere and are known to produce and consume MeOH, respectively (Troitsenko et al., 2001; Doronina et al., 2004; Xin et al., 2004). Large fractionation factors which discriminate against the heavier C isotope are associated with these processes and could have a significant impact on MeOH sampled from incubated plant material (Whiticar, 1999). Giebel et al. (2010) also employed an incubation technique when sampling MeOH emissions from Citrus sinensis and Quercus geminata and reported δ13C values for MeOH that were nearly as depleted as those reported by Keppler et al. (2004). As the same analytical system was used for Giebel et al. (2010) and the data presented here, it appears that the gas sampling technique, not the isotopic analytical method, may be the determining factor for detecting a highly depleted isotopic signature for phytopgenic MeOH. These results provide evidence that incubating plant material may alter the isotopic signature of MeOH. Our method was designed for the measurement of MeOH emission from live, intact leaves as we measured emissions from individual L. esculentum leaves under standardized conditions. We were therefore able to account for leaf-to-leaf variation, interspecific variation via use of clones, and variation in stomatal conductance, which is known to regulate MeOH emissions and influence fractionation of gases during diffusion into and out of the leaf. Therefore, our results may reflect a different plant-derived MeOH than has been previously measured. Similarly, our measured isotopic ratio of the pectin methoxyl pool devi-
ated from the value reported by Keppler et al. (2004). Keppler et al. (2004) measured the MeOH released from incubated freeze-dried biomass by alkaline hydrolysis. We believe the range in isotopic signatures for the pectin methoxyl pools measured by Keppler et al. (2004) may be attributed to variation resulting from incubation methods. We measured the signature of purified pectin before and after alkaline hydrolysis and then calculated the signature of the pectin methoxyl pool. Therefore, differences in analytical methods could account for the differences in reported isotopic values for pectin methoxyl pools.

Our investigation of mature leaf MeOH emission has implications for atmospheric chemistry and basic plant biology. We show that below-ground sources of MeOH were not a dominant source of MeOH to foliar L. esculentum emissions during the day. Our work instead provides evidence that foliar PME activity is related to MeOH emissions. Isotopic signatures of mature and immature MeOH emissions were similar, suggesting that the dominant pathway for MeOH production in plants, PME activity, was likely conserved as leaves developed. No new pathway for MeOH production in plants therefore needs to be added to mechanistic models in order to predict phytogenic MeOH flux to the atmosphere. However, PME activity alone was not sufficient to predict MeOH emission, and other factors, such as PME substrate availability and MeOH catabolism, should be considered for mechanistic model development. In order to successfully model long-term MeOH emission dynamics, not only MeOH emission, but also MeOH production in plants, must be understood (Harley et al., 2007). We suggest that in order to understand and model MeOH emissions, we need to learn more about the factors, in addition to PME activity, that regulate MeOH production and the factors that contribute to MeOH consumption within leaves. Additional studies will need to measure multiple physiological variables concurrently, including not only PME activity, MeOH concentration, MeOH flux, and stomatal conductance, but also PME substrate limitation and MeOH catabolism.

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