

1 **Title:** Repurposing brewery contaminant yeast as production strains for low-alcohol beer
2 fermentation

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14 **Take Away:**

- 15 - Fungal isolates from brewery microbiota were screened for beer production
- 16 - Numerous maltose-negative strains were tested for low-alcohol beer fermentation
- 17 - *Trigonopsis cantarellii* showed promise compared to a commercial reference strain
- 18 - *T. cantarellii* produced no off-flavours and higher levels of *trans*-geraniol

19

20 **Abstract**

21 A number of fungal isolates were recently obtained from a survey of the microbiota of multiple
22 breweries and brewery products. Here, we sought to explore whether any of these brewery
23 contaminants could be repurposed for beneficial use in beer fermentations, with particular focus on
24 low-alcohol beer. 56 yeast strains were first screened for the utilization of different carbon sources,
25 ability to ferment brewer's wort, and formation of desirable aroma compounds. A number of strains
26 appeared maltose-negative and produced desirable aromas without obvious off-flavours. These
27 were selected for further scaled-up wort fermentations. The selected strains efficiently reduced wort
28 aldehydes during fermentation, thus eliminating undesirable wort-like off-flavours, and produced a
29 diverse volatile aroma profile. Sensory analysis of the beer samples using projective mapping
30 identified two strains, *Trigonopsis cantarellii* and *Candida sojae*, that produced beers similar to a
31 commercial reference lager beer. 30 L-scale wort fermentations were performed with these two
32 strains together with a commercial *Saccharomyces ludwigii* reference strain. Both strains
33 performed comparably to the commercial reference, and the *T. cantarellii* strain in particular,

34 produced low amounts of off-flavours and a significantly higher amount of the desirable
35 monoterpene alcohol *trans*-geraniol. The strain was also sensitive to common food preservatives
36 and antifungal compounds, and unable to grow at 37 °C, suggesting it is relatively easily
37 controllable in the brewery, and appears to have low risk of pathogenicity. This study shows how
38 the natural brewery microbiota can be exploited as a source of non-conventional yeasts for low-
39 alcohol beer production.

40

41 **Introduction**

42 The global market for low-alcohol and non-alcoholic beer has increased considerably in the past
43 decade [Statista 2021; Bellut and Arendt 2019]. This increase is driven by numerous factors,
44 including health consciousness and growth in areas where alcohol consumption is forbidden.
45 Compared to regular-strength beer, however, low-alcohol beer is typically afflicted with less ‘beer
46 flavour’ and the presence of undesirable off-flavours. The flavour quality of low-alcohol beer is
47 very much dependent on the production method, which can be broadly divided into those which are
48 physical or biological [Brányik, Silva, Baszczyński, Lehnert, and Almeida e Silva 2012]. The
49 biological methods, where ethanol formation is limited, have gained much interest in the past years
50 because of their potential for improved flavour quality. Numerous non-conventional yeasts have
51 successfully been applied for low-alcohol beer production [Bellut, Michel, Zarnkow, Hutzler,
52 Jacob, Atzler, Hoehnel, Lynch, and Arendt 2019; Johansson et al. 2021; Saerens and Swiegers
53 2013; Methner, Hutzler, Matoulková, Jacob, and Michel 2019; Capece, De Fusco, Pietrafesa,
54 Siesto, and Romano 2021]. These yeasts lack the ability to metabolise maltose and maltotriose, the
55 most abundant sugars in brewer’s wort, yet produce sufficient amounts of the volatile secondary
56 metabolites characteristic of beer. Alcohol formation is therefore naturally limited to that produced
57 from the metabolism of the wort monosaccharides. Compared to the *Saccharomyces* yeasts
58 traditionally used in brewing, many non-conventional yeasts produce higher amounts of desirable
59 aroma-active compounds [Gutiérrez, Boekhout, Gojkovic, and Katz 2018; Holt, Mukherjee,
60 Lievens, Verstrepen, and Thevelein 2018; Gamero, Quintilla, Groenewald, Alkema, Boekhout, and
61 Hazelwood 2016].

62

63 Non-conventional yeasts suitable for brewing have been isolated from a wide range of
64 environmental niches [Cubillos, Gibson, Grijalva-Vallejos, Krogerus, and Nikulin 2019].
65 Repurposing of yeasts isolated from fermented food systems, like sourdoughs, kombucha and other
66 traditional fermented beverages, has been a popular strategy [Johansson et al. 2021; Bellut et al.

67 2018; Tamang, Watanabe, and Holzapfel 2016]. Natural environments, like fruits, tree barks and
68 insects, have been shown to be a good source of such strains as well [Osburn et al. 2018; Madden,
69 Epps, Fukami, Irwin, Sheppard, Sorger, and Dunn 2018; Nikulin, Vidgren, Krogerus, Magalhães,
70 Valkeemäki, Kangas-Heiska, and Gibson 2020; Hutzler, Michel, Kunz, Kuusisto, Magalhães,
71 Krogerus, and Gibson 2021]. The brewery environment itself offers another potential source for
72 non-conventional yeasts. Indeed, brewery facilities, ingredients and products are routinely tested for
73 the presence of contaminant organisms to ensure that product quality and hygiene standards are
74 maintained. Many yeasts, e.g. *Brettanomyces bruxellensis* and diastatic *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*,
75 are common contaminants that can seriously influence product quality and lead to product recalls if
76 unchecked [Tubia, Prasad, Pérez-Lorenzo, Abadín, Zumárraga, Oyanguren, Barbero, Paredes, and
77 Arana 2018; Krogerus and Gibson 2020]. However, many of the species routinely discovered in
78 brewery systems are not a serious threat to product quality but are rather indicative of hygiene
79 levels [Powell and Kerruish 2017]. These benign species are commonly found in traditional
80 fermentation systems where they are known to contribute to flavour development [Spitaels, Wieme,
81 Janssens, Aerts, Daniel, Van Landschoot, De Vuyst, and Vandamme 2014]. Examples of such
82 contaminants include certain *Kluyveromyces* and *Hanseniaspora* species, which are known to
83 produce floral aromas that are considered positive in beer [Fabre, Blanc, and Goma 1998; Moreira,
84 Mendes, Hogg, and Vasconcelos 2005], and *Torulaspora delbrueckii*, which produces fruity amyl
85 alcohols [Canonico, Agarbati, Comitini, and Ciani 2016; Michel, Kopecká, Meier-Dörnberg,
86 Zarnkow, Jacob, and Hutzler 2016].

87

88 A recent survey of the microbiota in multiple breweries yielded a large collection of fungal isolates
89 [Sohlberg, Sarlin, and Juvonen 2021]. While a broad microbiota may typically be seen as a negative
90 in an industrial brewery, we wanted to turn this into a positive. The aim was to first use high-
91 throughput screening to identify maltose-negative strains suitable for low-alcohol brewing. A subset
92 of isolates was further screened in small-scale and 2 L-scale wort fermentations, after which
93 chemical and qualitative sensory analysis was performed on the resulting beers. Following this
94 screening, two candidate strains were selected for scaled-up wort fermentations and descriptive
95 sensory analysis. The present study highlights how the natural brewery microbiota can be exploited
96 for low-alcohol beer production.

97

98 **Materials & Methods**

99 *Yeast strains*

100 A list of all non-conventional yeast strains included in this study is found in Supplementary Table
101 S1. In addition, the following three strains from VTT's culture collection
102 (<http://culturecollection.vtt.fi>) were included as commercial references: *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*
103 VTT-A75060, *Saccharomyces pastorianus* VTT-A63015, and *Saccharomycodes ludwigii* VTT-
104 C181010.

105

106 Microplate cultivations

107 Growth on various carbon sources and in the presence of 100 mg/L hop-derived iso-alpha acids was
108 tested in microplate cultivations. The microcultures were carried out in 100-well honeycomb
109 microtiter plates at 25 °C (with continuous shaking), and their growth dynamics were monitored
110 with a Bioscreen C MBR incubator and plate reader (Oy Growth Curves Ab, Finland). The wells of
111 the microtiter plates were filled with 300 µL of defined medium (0.67% yeast nitrogen base without
112 amino acids, 1% carbon source). Precultures of the strains were started in 20 mL YPD medium (1%
113 yeast extract, 2% peptone, 2% glucose) and incubated at 25 °C with shaking at 120 rpm overnight.
114 The optical density at 600 nm was measured, and precultures were washed and resuspended to an
115 OD₆₀₀ value of 3. The microcultures were started by inoculating the microtiter plates with 10 µL of
116 cell suspension per well (for an initial OD₆₀₀ value of 0.1) and placing the plates in the Bioscreen
117 C MBR. The optical density of the microcultures at 600 nm was automatically read every 30 min.
118 Four replicates were performed for each strain in each medium. Growth curves for the
119 microcultures were modelled based on the OD₆₀₀ values over time using the 'GrowthCurver'-
120 package for R.

121

122 The ability to produce phenolic off-flavour was estimated using the absorbance-based method
123 described by Mertens et al. (2017).

124

125 Wort fermentations

126 Small-scale fermentations were carried out in 100 mL Schott bottles capped with glycerol-filled
127 airlocks. Yeast strains were grown overnight in 25 mL YPD medium at 25 °C. The pre-cultured
128 yeast was then inoculated into 80 mL of all-malt wort (extract ranged from 5 to 10 °Plato) at a rate
129 of 1 to 2.5 g fresh yeast L⁻¹ (depending on °Plato of wort). Fermentations were carried out in
130 duplicate at 25 °C for 7 days. Fermentations were monitored by mass lost as CO₂.

131

132 2 L-scale fermentations were carried out in 3 L cylindroconical stainless steel fermenting vessels
133 containing 2 L of 5 °P wort. Yeast was propagated in autoclaved wort. The 5 °P wort (23.3 g
134 maltose, 6.3 g maltotriose, 5.8 g glucose, and 1.6 g fructose per litre) was produced at the VTT Pilot
135 Brewery from barley malt. The wort was oxygenated to 10 mg L⁻¹ prior to pitching (Oxygen
136 Indicator Model 26073 and Sensor 21158; Orbisphere Laboratories, Switzerland). Yeast was
137 inoculated at a rate of 1 g fresh yeast L⁻¹. The fermentations were carried out in duplicate at 25 °C
138 for 7 days.

139

140 30L-scale fermentations were carried out in 40 L stainless steel tanks containing 30 L of 7.5 °P
141 wort. The 7.5 °P wort (36.3 g maltose, 10.1 g maltotriose, 9.7 g glucose, and 2.4 g fructose per litre)
142 was produced at the VTT Pilot Brewery from barley malt. Yeast was propagated and inoculated as
143 above. Fermentations were carried out for 7 days, after which the beer was collected in sterilized
144 kegs for maturation. Green beers were matured at 10 °C for five days before five days' stabilization
145 at 0 °C, after which time the beers were depth filtered (Seitz EK filter sheets with a relative
146 retention of <1.0 µm, Pall Corporation, USA), carbonated to 5 g/l of CO₂ and bottled. The bottled
147 beer was further pasteurized at 60 °C for 30 minutes.

148

149 Chemical analysis

150 The alcohol content of the final beer was measured with an Anton Paar density meter DMA 5000 M
151 with AlcoLyzer beer ME and pH ME modules (Anton Paar GmbH, Austria).

152

153 Volatile aroma compounds were analysed using headspace solid phase micro-extraction coupled
154 with gas chromatography (Agilent 7890A) - mass spectrometry (Agilent 5975C; HS-SPME-GC-
155 MS) by modifying the method used by Rodriguez-Bencomo et al. [Rodriguez-Bencomo, Muñoz-
156 González, Martín-Álvarez, Lázaro, Mancebo, Castañé, and Pozo-Bayón 2012]. 6 mL of beer
157 sample, 1.8 g of NaCl, and 50 µL of internal standard solution (containing 1.28 µg 3-octanol, 1.19
158 µg 3,4-dimethylphenol) were added to 20 mL headspace vials. The samples were pre-incubated in
159 Gerstel MPS autosampler at 44.8 °C for 10 min and the volatiles were extracted by using a 2 cm
160 divinylbenzene/ carboxen/polydimethylsiloxane (DVB/CAR/PDMS) fibre (Supelco) at 44.8 °C for
161 46.8 min. The samples were injected in splitless mode (10 min desorption time at 270 °C) and the
162 compounds were separated on an HP-Innowax silica capillary column (60 m, 0.250 mm i.d., 0.25
163 µm film thickness). The oven temperature program was from 40 °C (3 min) to 240 °C
164 (4 °C min⁻¹) and the final temperature was held for 15 min. The MS data were collected at a

165 mass range of 35-450 amu. Identification was based on spectral data of reference compounds and
166 those of NIST 08 library. Calibration curves determined for 2-methoxy-4-vinylphenol, 2-
167 phenylethyl acetate, α -terpineol, β -citronellol, *cis*-geraniol, *trans*-geraniol, isopentyl acetate,
168 linalool, and ethyl esters of acetic, butyric, decanoic, hexanoic and octanoic acids, respectively (r^2
169 = 0.933-0.999). Other compounds were quantified by using internal standards (3-octanol or 3,4-
170 dimethylphenol).

171

172 Aldehydes were analysed as oximes by using a headspace sampler (Agilent 7697A) coupled with
173 gas chromatograph (Agilent 7890B) and compounds were detected using a Micro Electron Capture
174 Detector (HS-GC-ECD). Carbonyl compound standards were 2-methylpropanal, 2-methylbutanal,
175 3-methylbutanal, hexanal, furfural, methional, phenylacetaldehyde, and (*E*)-2-nonenal (Aldrich,
176 Finland). A stock solution containing a mixture of the standard compounds in ethanol was prepared
177 at 1000 $\mu\text{g L}^{-1}$ each. The calibration range was 0.5–40 $\mu\text{g L}^{-1}$ and dilutions were prepared in
178 5% ethanol. The sum of the peak areas of the two geometrical isomers (*E* and *Z*) was used for
179 calculations. An aqueous solution of derivatization agent O-(2,3,4,5,6-pentafluorobenzyl)-
180 hydroxylamine (PFBOA) (Sigma-Aldrich) was prepared at a concentration of 6 g/L. One hundred
181 microliters of this solution and 5 mL of deionized water or beer were placed in a 20 mL glass vial
182 and sealed with a crimp cap (Agilent). The sample/standard vial was then placed in the headspace
183 sampler with following conditions: sample equilibrium in oven for 30 min at 60 °C, after which
184 1 min of injection of sample fill pressurized at 25 psi. Loop temperature was 100 °C and transfer
185 line was held at 110 °C. The following GC conditions were applied: HP-5 capillary column,
186 50 m \times 0.32 mm \times 1.05 μm (J&W Scientific, Folsom, CA). Helium was the carrier gas at a
187 flow rate of 1.0 mL/min and for ECD, nitrogen make up gas was applied at a flow rate of
188 30 mL/min. The front inlet temperature was 250 °C. The injection was in the split mode and the
189 split ratio 10:1 was applied. The oven temperature program used was 40 °C for 2 min, followed
190 by an increase of 10 °C min^{-1} to 140 °C (held 5 min) and 7 °C min^{-1} to 250 °C. The final
191 temperature was held for 3 min.

192

193 Diacetyl, dimethyl sulphide, higher alcohol and ester concentrations in the beers produced at 30L-
194 scale were analysed at Campden BRI (UK).

195

196 Sensory analysis

197 Projective Mapping with Ultra Flash profiling was conducted for the beers based on established
198 methods [Risvik, McEwan, Colwill, Rogers, and Lyon 1994; Perrin and Pagès 2009; Aisala,
199 Laaksonen, Manninen, Raittola, Hopia, and Sandell 2018] and carried out in an ISO-8589 sensory
200 evaluation laboratory at VTT. A total of 10 selected and trained assessors participated in the
201 evaluation. Written informed consents were obtained from the participants prior to the evaluation. A
202 commercial beer sample was included in the samples twice (second time as a blind duplicate) for a
203 total number of 9 samples. The samples were served in black beer glasses covered in lids, marked
204 with 3-digit codes and served in random order. The evaluation was done in two parts: the first
205 Projective mapping based on odour properties and the second one based on taste and flavour
206 properties. An A3 size paper was used for placing the samples. The assessors were asked to first
207 smell or taste the samples and make notes on the provided A4 paper with instructions. Then they
208 were asked to physically place the samples on the A3 evaluation paper so that the similarity of the
209 samples was reflected in their distances. After the assessor was ready with the placement, they were
210 asked to mark the locations of the samples with the 3-digit code, mark possible groups, and write
211 descriptive terms next to the samples or sample groups. The filled papers were scanned, and the
212 coordinates of each sample were measured digitally using the ImageJ software [Schneider,
213 Rasband, and Eliceiri 2012]. The descriptive terms were collected into a contingency table. The
214 resulting dataset was analysed with Multiple Factor Analysis (MFA) using R and the ‘SensMineR’
215 package [Le and Husson 2008].

216

217 The descriptive profiling of the three beer samples was conducted by nine trained assessors in the
218 same sensory evaluation laboratory as above. The base attribute list was developed by four trained
219 assessors in a consensus session. After that, the whole panel was trained in two groups where they
220 refined this base sensory lexicon, discussed the intensity ranges of the samples, and decided on
221 reference samples for the intensities. The final sensory profile had 6 odour attributes, 4 taste and
222 flavour attributes and 2 mouthfeel attributes. The samples (50 mL) were served in black beer
223 glasses with 3-digit codes and the serving order was randomized with a Latin squares design. The
224 attribute intensities were evaluated with a 0–10 continuous line scale that was anchored with 0 =
225 attribute non-perceivable, and 10 = attribute perceived as very intense. The data were collected with
226 Compusense five 5.6 (Compusense Inc., Guelph, ON, Canada). Water was used as the palate
227 cleanser and the assessors were instructed to spit the sample out after tasting. The descriptive
228 sensory data was analysed with a two-way mixed model analysis of variance with samples as the

229 fixed factor and the assessors as a random factor using SPSS version 26 (IBM Corp, Armonk, NY,
230 USA). Tukey's HSD was used as the post hoc test.

231

232 Assessment of process and health safety

233 The tolerance to common food preservatives was tested in microplate cultivations using the
234 BioScreen C incubator similarly as described above. Cultivations were carried out in 150 µl of YPD
235 (1% glucose w/v) supplemented with 5% ethanol, 150 mg/L sodium benzoate (Sigma-Aldrich,
236 Darmstadt, Germany), 250 mg/L potassium sorbate (Sigma-Aldrich, Darmstadt, Germany), or
237 200 mg/L potassium metabisulfite (Brown, Poland). All media were adjusted to pH 4 with HCl.

238

239 Biofilm formation was assessed by crystal violet staining of microplate cultures in 96-well plates
240 [Shukla and Rao 2017]. Wells were filled with 250 µL of 10 °Plato wort, and inoculated with 2.5
241 µL of overnight culture in five replicates. Plates were statically incubated for five days at 20 °C.
242 The yeast cultures were removed by pipetting, and the plate was rinsed with sterile deionized water.
243 300 µL of 0.1 % crystal violet solution was placed in the wells for five minutes, after which the
244 plate was rinsed three times with sterile deionized water. The plate was left to air-dry for 15 minutes
245 in a laminar flow cabinet. The remaining crystal violet, which was still bound to the cells, was
246 dissolved with 300 µl of 95 % ethanol. Absorbances of the wells were measured at 595 nm with a
247 Multiskan EX plate reader (Labsystems Oy, Finland). The plate was left overnight at 4 °C and
248 absorbance was re-measured.

249

250 Tolerance to nine antifungal compounds was tested using Sensititre YeastOne YO10 plates
251 (Thermo Scientific, Finland) using kit instructions. Concentrations of biogenic amines in beers was
252 measured at Campden BRI (UK).

253

254 Whole-genome sequencing

255 The whole-genome of *Trigonopsis cantarellii* P-69 was sequenced at NovoGene (UK). DNA was
256 extracted using the method described by Denis et al. [2018]. Sequencing was carried out on a
257 NovaSeq 6000 instrument (Illumina). The 150 bp paired-end reads have been submitted to NCBI-
258 SRA under BioProject number PRJNA748016. Reads were trimmed and filtered with fastp using
259 default settings (version 0.20.1; [Chen, Zhou, Chen, and Gu 2018]). Trimmed reads were assembled
260 with SPAdes (version 3.10.1; [Bankevich et al. 2012]). The resulting assembly was filtered using
261 CVLFilter (using minimum length of 500 and minimum coverage of 10) to remove low-coverage

262 contigs resulting from potential contaminating DNA [Douglass, O'Brien, Offei, Coughlan, Ortiz-
263 Merino, Butler, Byrne, and Wolfe 2019]. BUSCO (Benchmarking Universal Single-Copy
264 Orthologs; version 3.0.2; using the saccharomycetales_odb9 dataset) was used to assess the gene set
265 completeness of the assembly [Waterhouse, Seppey, Simão, Manni, Ioannidis, Klioutchnikov,
266 Kriventseva, and Zdobnov 2018].

267

268 The *T. cantarellii* P-69 assembly was compared to the assemblies of other closely related species
269 obtained from NCBI-Assembly under BioProject PRJNA429441 [Shen et al. 2018]. A multiple
270 sequence alignment of BUSCO genes was performed as described in [Steenwyk, Shen, Lind,
271 Goldman, and Rokas 2019]. In brief, the amino acid sequence of orthologous single-copy BUSCO
272 genes with >50% taxon occupancy were extracted (using genomic_BUSCOs2uscofa.py from
273 https://github.com/JLSteenwyk/Phylogenetic_scripts) and aligned with MAFFT (version 7.407;
274 [Katoh and Standley 2013]). The alignments were trimmed with trimal (version 1.4.rev15;
275 [Capella-Gutierrez, Silla-Martinez, and Gabaldon 2009]), and a maximum likelihood phylogenetic
276 tree was constructed using IQ-TREE (version 1.5.5; [Nguyen, Schmidt, Von Haeseler, and Minh
277 2015]) with the JTT+I+G4 model and 1000 bootstrap replicates [Minh, Nguyen, and Von Haeseler
278 2013]. In addition, a neighbour-joining tree based on MinHash distances [Ondov, Treangen,
279 Melsted, Mallonee, Bergman, Koren, and Phillippy 2016] was generated using mashtree [Katz,
280 Griswold, Morrison, Caravas, Zhang, Bakker, Deng, and Carleton 2019]

281

282 **Results and Discussion**

283 *Phenotypic screening of fungal brewery isolates for brewing-relevant traits*

284 A total of 56 yeast strains, previously isolated from industrial brewery environments [Sohlberg,
285 Sarlin, and Juvonen 2021], were screened for various brewing-relevant phenotypes. Among the
286 strains were 18 different species from 10 genera, and the isolation environments included brewery
287 air, brewery surfaces, raw materials, and spoiled products. A *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* ale strain,
288 *Saccharomyces pastorianus* lager strain, and *Saccharomycodes ludwigii* low-alcohol strain were
289 included as references. First, their growth on various carbon sources (glucose, fructose, maltose,
290 and maltotriose) was measured in microplate cultivations (Figure 1A). The strains could be broadly
291 grouped into three groups: those capable of growing on both maltose and maltotriose, those only on
292 maltose, and those on neither. For full-strength beer fermentation, a yeast strain must be capable of
293 utilizing at least maltose (constituting approx. 60% of the fermentable wort sugars), and preferably
294 maltotriose as well (constituting approx. 20% of the fermentable wort sugars). Maltose-negative

295 strains, on the other hand, have shown promise for low-alcohol beer fermentations [Johansson et al.
296 2021; Bellut et al. 2019]. In addition, growth in the presence of 100 mg/L hop-derived iso-alpha
297 acids was tested, and no inhibition was observed for any of the strains (data not shown).

298

299 Small-scale anaerobic wort fermentations were also carried out with all the strains to confirm the
300 results observed during the microplate cultivations, and to test which strains produce pleasant
301 aromas. Again, the strains grouped into three main groups: those producing approx. >4% ABV,
302 approx. 1% ABV, and those showing negligible alcohol formation (Figure 1B). Expectedly,
303 *Saccharomyces* yeasts performed well in wort and grouped into the first group. The third group
304 consisted of multiple strains showing no signs of fermentation in wort. Interestingly, however, a pH
305 decrease was observed for five strains, indicating metabolic activity despite no ethanol formation.

306

307 The fermented worts were also subjected to a ‘sniff’ test, to identify strains producing pleasant or
308 clearly undesirable aromas (Figure 1C). Undesirable solvent-like aromas were detected in a large
309 number of strains, particularly among *Wickerhamomyces anomalus* isolates. Undesirable wort-like
310 aromas were also detected for many strains, mainly those performing poorly during wort
311 fermentations. Desirable fruity aromas were observed mainly among the *Saccharomyces* strains,
312 however, they were frequently coupled with undesirable phenolic aromas. The ability to
313 decarboxylate ferulic acid to 4-vinylguaiacol (i.e. phenolic off-flavour formation) was therefore
314 tested for all strains (Figure 1D), and found in approx. 45%. Out of the 56 strains that were
315 screened, nine had a pleasant aroma lacking any obvious off-flavours (e.g. phenolic, solvent-like, or
316 wort-like). These included strains of *Candida pararugosa*, *Candida sojae*, *Kregervanrija delftensis*,
317 *Pichia manshurica*, *S. cerevisiae*, *Trigonopsis cantarellii*, *Trigonopsis variabilis*, and
318 *Zygosaccharomyces rouxii*. As the majority of these were maltose-negative, we next explored
319 whether they could be used for low-alcohol beer fermentation.

320

321 Identifying strains suitable for low-alcohol beer fermentations

322 Seven brewery isolates (Table 1), as well as a commercial *S. ludwigii* reference strain, were selected
323 for further trials following the initial pre-screening. 80 mL-scale wort fermentations were first
324 performed. With the exception of those fermented with the *W. anomalus* isolate P-2.4, the alcohol
325 content of the beers remained below 0.70% alcohol by volume (Table 1). pH values of the beers
326 ranged from 4.4 to 5.1 (dropping from 5.3 in the wort), with the highest values measured in the beer
327 fermented with the *S. ludwigii* reference strain. A beer pH value below 5 is typically recommended

328 for microbiological safety reasons [Menz, Aldred, and Vriesekoop 2011]. The main contributors to
329 the wort-like flavour of unfermented wort, a flavour that is considered undesirable in beer, are a
330 number of unbranched and branched-chain aldehydes. Hence, we measured the concentration of six
331 key aldehydes in the beers. The wort aldehydes were efficiently reduced by all strains (Figure 2A),
332 and were in many cases below the levels measured in a commercial full-strength lager beer (dashed
333 line). Methional, in particular, with its low flavour threshold of 5 µg/L, is considered one of the
334 main causes of wort-like flavour [Gernat, Brouwer, and Ottens 2020]. Here, the majority of the
335 strains reached concentrations below the flavour threshold. Volatile aroma compounds in the beers
336 were also measured with HS-SPME-GC/MS. The aroma profiles could be broadly divided into four
337 groups (Figure 2B), with the wort and the beer fermented with *W. anomalus* P-2.4 forming two
338 outliers. The wort sample was expectedly characterized by aldehydes, while the *W. anomalus* beer
339 was characterized by the highest concentrations of volatile esters (Figure 2C). *Meyerozyma*
340 *caribbica* T-31 and *Candida sojae* T-39 clustered together with the *S. ludwigii* reference strain,
341 while the other strains clustered intermediate between the three other groups.

342

343 Based on these results, five brewery isolates (*C. sojae*, *K. delftensis*, *T. cantarellii*, *T. variabilis*, and
344 *W. anomalus*) and the *S. ludwigii* reference strain were selected for 2 L-scale wort fermentations
345 and subsequent sensory analysis. The alcohol content of the beers ranged from 0.0% to 0.6%
346 alcohol by volume after one week of fermentation, while beer pH again ranged from 4.5 to 5.1
347 (Table 2). The beer was collected for sensory analysis, which was carried out by ten trained
348 participants at VTT's sensory lab. We wanted to identify what beers were most similar to a
349 commercial full-strength lager beer, and for that sensory analysis was performed using Projective
350 Mapping with Ultra Flash Profiling [Risvik, McEwan, Colwill, Rogers, and Lyon 1994; Perrin and
351 Pagès 2009]. Here, the six experimental beer samples, along with two duplicate commercial lager
352 beers and a wort sample, were assessed based on odour and flavour. The results were analysed with
353 multiple factor analysis (MFA), and they revealed that the experimental beers were mostly similar,
354 and tended to group between the wort sample and the commercial beer (Figure 3A). The *W.*
355 *anomalus* beer was again a clear outlier, as the odour and flavour were dominated by solvent-like
356 tones. Based on flavour, the beers fermented with *T. cantarellii* and the *S. ludwigii* reference strain
357 were scored closest to the commercial full-strength lager (Figure 3B). Some common odour and
358 flavour descriptors for these two strains and *C. sojae* were 'mild', 'fruity', and 'sweet' (data not
359 shown). On the other hand, *T. variabilis*, *K. delftensis* as well as *S. ludwigii* were described as

360 ‘worty’. Based on the fermentation and sensory results, *T. cantarellii* and *C. sojae* were chosen for
361 pilot-scale fermentations.

362

363 Pilot-scale low-alcohol wort fermentations with selected strains

364 30 L-scale wort fermentations were carried out with brewery isolates *T. cantarellii* and *C. sojae*.
365 *S. ludwigii* was again included as a reference strain. Fermentations progressed similarly to previous
366 smaller-scale fermentations, with the beers reaching alcohol levels of 0.29%, 0.48%, and 0.68%
367 alcohol by volume, respectively, after one week (Figure 4A). pH values in all three beers were
368 identical (4.8). Fermentation progressed the fastest by *S. ludwigii*. Following fermentation, samples
369 were drawn for chemical analysis, after which beers were carbonated and bottled for sensory
370 analysis.

371

372 A number of yeast-derived aroma-active esters play a central role in the aroma of beer [Pires,
373 Teixeira, Brányik, and Vicente 2014], however, the concentration of these is typically low in beer
374 fermented with maltose-negative yeast from reduced metabolism [Bellut and Arendt 2019]. Here,
375 the beers also showed low amounts of esters and higher alcohols, with values in many cases being
376 below detection limits (Table 3). The highest concentrations were measured in the beer produced
377 with the *S. ludwigii* reference strain. HS-SPME-GC/MS analysis was used to measure other volatile
378 aroma compounds as well. Differences in monoterpene alcohol concentrations were observed in the
379 beers. Levels of the hop-derived linalool were equal in all beers, however, *trans*-geraniol and *cis*-
380 geraniol levels were significantly higher in the *C. sojae* beer, while *trans*-geraniol levels were
381 significantly higher in the *T. cantarellii* beer (Figure 4B-D). These monoterpenes contribute floral
382 and citrus-like aroma to the beer. *cis*-geraniol levels were below reported flavour thresholds (80
383 µg/L; [Takoi, Itoga, Koie, Kosugi, Shimase, Katayama, Nakayama, and Watari 2010]), but sub-
384 threshold concentrations may nevertheless contribute positively to the beer aroma through
385 synergistic effects with other monoterpenes [Dietz, Cook, Huisman, Wilson, and Ford 2020]. The
386 varying concentrations of monoterpene alcohols in the beers suggests potential biotransformation of
387 hop-derived monoterpene alcohols [Serra Colomer, Funch, Solodovnikova, Hobley, and Förster
388 2020].

389

390 In regards to off-flavours, aldehyde levels in all beers again decreased from those measured in the
391 wort (Figure 4G-H). Lowest aldehyde levels were measured in the beer fermented with *T.*
392 *cantarellii*. Beers fermented with *S. ludwigii* tended to have higher levels of branched-chain

393 aldehydes. Methional concentrations again decreased substantially in the beers compared to the
394 levels in the wort. In addition to the aldehydes, concentrations of both diacetyl and dimethyl
395 sulphide close to their respective flavour thresholds were observed in the *C. sojae* beers (Figure 4E-
396 F). Diacetyl, with a butter-like aroma, is a common off-flavour in beer [Krogerus and Gibson 2013].
397 It is both indirectly generated by and reduced by the yeast during fermentation, and high beer
398 concentrations are typically indicative of a too short fermentation time. Dimethyl sulphide, with a
399 ‘cooked corn’ aroma, is considered undesirable at concentrations above 100 µg/L [Anness and
400 Bamforth 1982]. Concentrations of these two off-flavours were considerably below the flavour
401 threshold in the other two beers.

402

403 The bottled beers were subjected to sensory analysis at VTT’s sensory lab. Nine trained participants
404 performed descriptive profiling of 12 attributes, and a commercial non-alcoholic lager beer was
405 included as a reference. The three experimental and one reference beer scored similarly across the
406 12 attributes (Figure 5). Statistically significant differences were observed only for sweetness,
407 which divided the samples into two groups: the more intense sweetness
408 of *T. cantarellii* and *C. sojae* beers, while the reference beer and *S. ludwigii* beers were less sweet.
409 Of the experimental beers, the one fermented with the commercial *S. ludwigii* strain scored lowest
410 in fruitiness, possibly from the lower concentrations of monoterpene alcohols. As already revealed
411 during chemical analysis, diacetyl notes were also detected by the panel in the *C. sojae* beer. The
412 other beers were free of obvious off-flavours. Based on the pilot-scale fermentations, along with
413 subsequent sensory and chemical analysis, *T. cantarellii* appears to be a promising candidate for
414 low-alcohol beer fermentation.

415

416 Process and hygiene control

417 As many non-conventional yeasts have not been used in food or beverage production before, it is
418 vital that they are safe to use from both a health and process hygiene perspective. Particularly, since
419 the yeasts studied here were already isolated from the brewery environment. To assess process
420 safety, the tolerance of *T. cantarellii* and *C. sojae* to common food preservatives [Kregiel 2015], as
421 well as potential for biofilm formation, was tested (Figure 6). Modern breweries often also produce
422 non-beer beverages in the same facilities, which increases the need for controlling potential cross-
423 contaminations. *T. cantarellii* was inhibited by all of the tested preservatives, while *C. sojae* was
424 able to grow in the presence of 150 mg/L benzoate and 200 mg/L sulphite (Figure 6A and B).
425 Biofilm potential was estimated using crystal violet staining of washed microculture plates, and *T.*

426 *cantarellii* produced significantly less biofilm than the *S. pastorianus* A-63015 control (Figure 6C).
427 *C. sojae*, on the other hand, produced significantly more biofilm than the control. Hence, *T.*
428 *cantarellii* appears to be relatively easy to control from a process hygiene perspective, as it can be
429 controlled using typical food preservatives in non-beer beverages, and shows little biofilm potential.

430

431 To assess the potential health risks associated with the *T. cantarellii* and *C. sojae* isolates, a series
432 of tests were carried out. First, the tolerance of the *T. cantarellii* and *C. sojae* isolates to nine
433 antifungals was tested, to ensure that any emerging infection would be treatable. *C. sojae* was
434 sensitive to all of the tested antifungals, while *T. cantarellii* was only able to grow in the presence
435 of 5-fluorocytosine at the tested concentrations (MIC values in Table 4). Neither of the strains were
436 able to grow at 37 °C (i.e. body temperature), suggesting a low potential for pathogenicity.
437 Furthermore, the strains only produced trace levels of biogenic amines, and concentrations
438 remained below those found in commercial beer [Poveda 2019]. Both isolates therefore appear to be
439 relatively safe from a health perspective, however, the strains should be thoroughly tested before
440 industrial use. *T. cantarellii* is also considered a safe yeast for beneficial use according to
441 Bourdichon et al. [Bourdichon et al. 2012].

442

443 As *T. cantarellii* showed particular promise for low-alcohol beer production, whole-genome
444 sequencing was finally used to confirm the identification of the strain. The paired-end sequencing
445 reads were *de novo* assembled using SPAdes (assembly statistics available in Table 5). As no
446 sequencing data for other *T. cantarellii* strains was found in public databases, the *T. cantarellii*
447 assembly was compared to assemblies of other closely related species [Shen et al. 2018]. These
448 included *Trigonopsis variabilis*, *Trigonopsis vinaria*, *Sugiyamaella lignohabitans*, *Tortispora*
449 *ganteri*, and *Botryozyma nematodophila*. The assembly of *T. cantarellii* P-69 grouped close to
450 *Trigonopsis variabilis*, *Trigonopsis vinaria* and *Sugiyamaella lignohabitans*, in both a maximum
451 likelihood phylogenetic tree generated based on an alignment of 996 BUSCO genes (Figure 7A),
452 and in a neighbour-joining tree computed based on MinHash (Mash) distances in the assemblies
453 (Figure 7B).

454

455 **Conclusions**

456 In this study we aimed to repurpose and exploit fungal isolates from the natural brewery microbiota
457 for low-alcohol beer production. A number of promising strains for low-alcohol beer fermentation
458 were identified following pre-screening, and two strains were ultimately selected for 30L-scale wort

459 fermentations and descriptive sensory analysis. The two selected strains, *Trigonopsis cantarellii* P-
460 69 and *Candida sojae* T-39, performed comparably to a commercial *Saccharomyces ludwigii*
461 reference strain. The *T. cantarellii* strain in particular, produced low amounts of off-flavours and a
462 significantly higher amount of the desirable monoterpene alcohol *trans*-geraniol. The mechanisms
463 and potential for monoterpene biotransformation should be studied in more detail in the future. The
464 strain also appears to be easily controllable by common food preservatives in the brewery, and
465 appears to have low risk of pathogenicity.

466

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473

474 **Conflict of Interest Statement**

475 All authors were employed by VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland. The funders had no role
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477

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- 649
- 650

651 Figure Legends

652

653 **Figure 1** - Phenotypic screening of 56 strains isolated from brewery environments. **(A)** The ability
654 to grow on fructose, maltose and maltotriose as sole carbon sources. **(B)** The relationship between
655 beer pH and alcohol by volume after wort fermentation with the 56 strains and three controls. The
656 controls are marked with green, while the strains selected for further characterization are marked
657 with red. **(C)** Principal component analysis of the results from the sniffing of beers produced with
658 the 56 strains and three controls. Undesirable aromas are coloured red, while desirable aromas
659 green. Points are coloured as in **(B)**. **(D)** The ability to decarboxylate ferulic acid (to 4-vinyl
660 guaiacol) among the 56 strains and three controls as assessed by the decrease in absorbance at 320
661 nm after growth in media supplemented with 100 mg/L ferulic acid.

662

663 **Figure 2** - **(A)** Concentrations of aldehydes in wort and beers ($\mu\text{g/L}$). The dotted line indicates
664 concentrations in a commercial pale lager beer. **(B)** Principal component analysis (PC1 vs PC2) of
665 the concentrations of volatile aroma compounds detected in the wort and beers. **(C)** Heatmap of the
666 concentrations of volatile aroma compounds detected in the wort and beers. The heatmap is
667 coloured based on Z-scores of the concentrations for each compound (blue: negative Z-score, red:
668 positive Z-scores).

669

670 **Figure 3** - Sensory analysis of beers made with selected isolates. Sensory analysis was performed
671 using projective mapping based on **(A)** odour and **(B)** flavour. Experimental beers were compared
672 to an unfermented wort sample and two replicates of a commercial full-strength lager beer.

673

674 **Figure 4** - Fermentation profiles and chemical analysis of beers produced at 30L-scale. **(A)** Alcohol
675 by volume (%) in the fermenting wort. Concentrations of **(B)** linalool, **(C)** *cis*-geraniol, **(D)** *trans*-
676 geraniol, **(E)** diacetyl, **(F)** dimethyl sulphide, **(G)** 3-methylbutanal, and **(H)** methional in the beers
677 and wort. All values are the mean of two biological replicates. Error bars when present show
678 standard deviation. **(C)** and **(D)** An asterisk indicates a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) compared to
679 the *S. ludwigii* reference strain as determined by an unpaired two-tailed t-test.

680

681 **Figure 5** - Descriptive flavour profiling of beers produced at 30L-scale. Sweetness is the only
682 attribute with statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$, marked with an asterisk) between
683 samples in the two-way mixed model ANOVA.

684

685 **Figure 6** - Growth of **(A)** *T. cantarellii* P-69 and **(B)** *C. sojae* T-39 in the presence of common food
686 preservatives. **(C)** Biofilm formation after cultivation in wort for 5 days. Different letters in the two
687 series indicate significant differences ($p < 0.05$) as determined by one-way ANOVA and Tukey's
688 posthoc test.

689

690 **Figure 7** - **(A)** A maximum likelihood phylogenetic tree of *Trigonopsis cantarellii* P-69 (coloured
691 red) and five closely related yeast species based on alignment of 996 BUSCO genes. Values at
692 nodes represent bootstrap support. **(B)** A neighbour-joining tree generated based on MinHash
693 distances in the assemblies of *Trigonopsis cantarellii* P-69 (coloured red) and five closely related
694 yeast species.

695

696 Tables

697 **Table 1.** Alcohol by volume (%) and pH of beers produced with 7 brewery isolates and a *S.*
698 *ludwigii* reference at lab-scale. Standard deviation in parenthesis.

Strain	Alcohol by volume (%)	pH
<i>Wickerhamomyces anomalus</i> P-2.4	2.13 (± 0.03)	4.57 (± 0.08)
<i>Pichia manshurica</i> P-5.2	0.04 (± 0.01)	4.61 (± 0.03)
<i>Trigonopsis variabilis</i> P-5.8	0.02 (± 0.01)	4.78 (± 0.01)
<i>Trigonopsis cantarellii</i> P-69	0.58 (± 0.04)	4.40 (± 0.03)
<i>Kregervanrija delftensis</i> R-7	0.10 (± 0.01)	4.36 (± 0.01)
<i>Meyerozyma caribbica</i> T-31	0.61 (± 0.01)	4.52 (± 0.04)
<i>Candida sojae</i> T-39	0.50 (± 0.00)	4.66 (± 0.01)
<i>Saccharomyces ludwigii</i> C181010	0.70 (± 0.00)	5.09 (± 0.02)

699

700

701 **Table 2.** Alcohol by volume (%) and pH of beers produced with 5 brewery isolates and a *S.*
702 *ludwigii* reference at 2L-scale. Standard deviation in parenthesis.

Strain	Alcohol by volume (%)	pH
<i>Wickerhamomyces anomalus</i> P-2.4	0.60 (±0.00)	4.64 (±0.01)
<i>Trigonopsis variabilis</i> P-5.8	0.02 (±0.02)	4.54 (±0.42)
<i>Trigonopsis cantarellii</i> P-69	0.14 (±0.00)	4.81 (±0.01)
<i>Kregervanrija delftensis</i> R-7	0.00 (±0.00)	5.06 (±0.08)
<i>Candida sojae</i> T-39	0.22 (±0.01)	4.72 (±0.03)
<i>Saccharomyces ludwigii</i> C181010	0.43 (±0.00)	4.84 (±0.04)

703

704

705 **Table 3.** Concentrations of higher alcohols and esters (mg/L) in the beers produced at 30L-scale.

Compound	<i>Saccharomyces ludwigii</i> VTT- C181010	<i>Trigonopsis cantarellii</i> P-69	<i>Candida sojae</i> T-39
ethyl hexanoate	<0.02	<0.02	<0.02
ethyl octanoate	<0.4	<0.4	<0.4
ethyl decanoate	<0.1	<0.1	<0.1
ethyl dodecanoate	<0.1	<0.1	<0.1
phenyl ethyl acetate	<0.4	<0.4	<0.4
phenyl alcohol	8.1	0.75	1.85
acetaldehyde	4.9	3.7	2.25
ethyl acetate	1.5	<0.59	<0.59
iso-butyl acetate	<0.06	<0.06	<0.06
n-propanol	2.35	3.4	1.95
iso-butanol	6.1	2.3	7.2
iso-amyl acetate	<0.14	<0.14	<0.14
iso-amyl alcohol	14.65	1.4	13.25

706

707

708 **Table 4.** Minimum inhibitory concentrations (MIC) of nine antifungal compounds.

Antifungal compound	<i>Trigonopsis cantarellii</i> P-69	<i>Candida sojae</i> T-39
Anidulafungin	0.12	0.25
Amphotericin B	0.12	0.5
Micafungin	0.12	0.03
Caspofungin	0.12	0.06
5-Flucytosine	>64	0.25
Posaconazole	0.25	0.06
Voriconazole	0.015	0.03
Itraconazole	0.015	0.12
Fluconazole	1	1

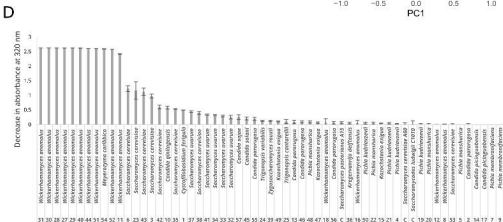
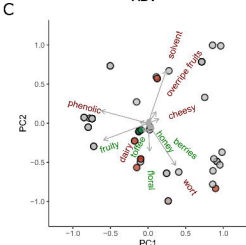
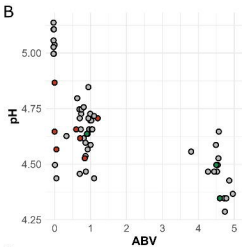
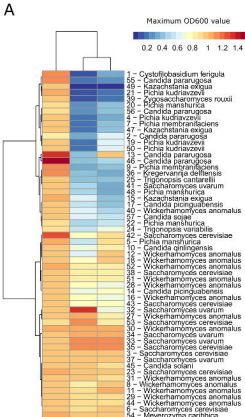
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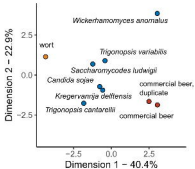
711 **Table 5.** Assembly statistics for *T. cantarellii* P-69.

Genome size (bp)	11566117
Contigs	169
Mean contig size (bp)	68438
Median contig size (bp)	2365
N50	311069
Largest contig size (bp)	1002201
GC(%)	42.88
N count	696
N(%)	0.01
Total BUSCO groups searched	1711
Complete BUSCOs	960
Complete and single-copy BUSCOs	956
Complete and duplicated BUSCOs	4
Fragmented BUSCOs	188

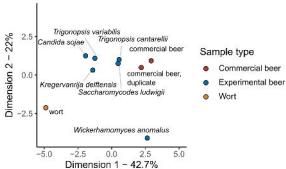
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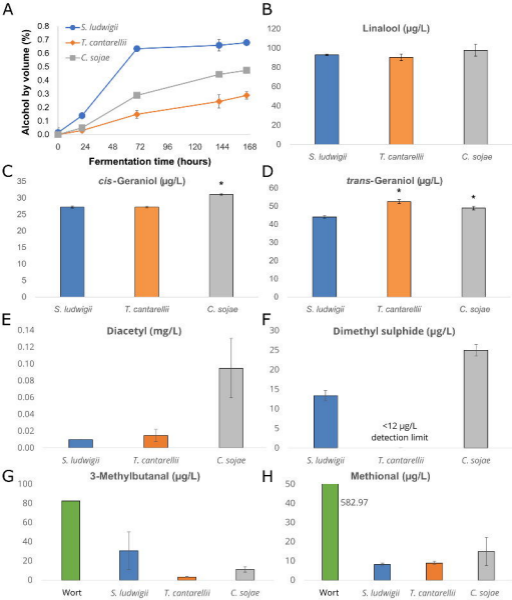


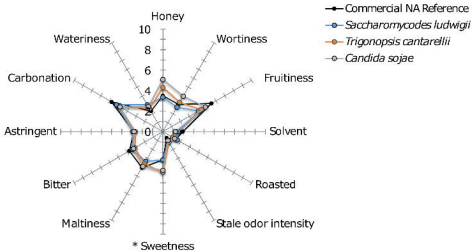
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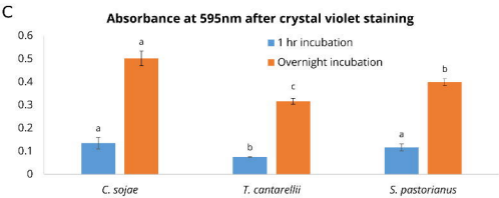
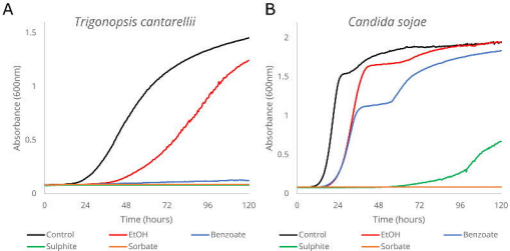


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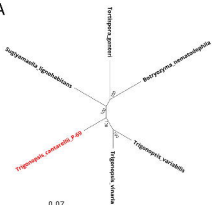






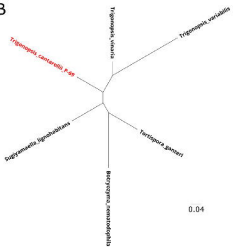


A



0.07

B



0.04