

# **Characterization Of GmSAT1 And Related Proteins From Legume Nodules**

Submitted by

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## Table of Contents

<b>I.</b>	<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>Declaration.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>Abbreviations.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Literature Review .....</b>	<b>1-1</b>
<b>1.1</b>	<b>Nitrogen Fixation .....</b>	<b>1-1</b>
<b>1.2</b>	<b>Early Signaling Events in Nodulation .....</b>	<b>1-2</b>
<b>1.3</b>	<b>Nodule Organogenesis .....</b>	<b>1-3</b>
<b>1.4</b>	<b>Symbiosome Development .....</b>	<b>1-5</b>
<b>1.5</b>	<b>Symbiosome Membrane Proteins .....</b>	<b>1-6</b>
<b>1.6</b>	<b>Nitrogen Assimilation and Transport out of Nodules .....</b>	<b>1-6</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Assessing the <i>in planta</i> function of GmSAT1 .....</b>	<b>2-1</b>
<b>2.1</b>	<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>2-1</b>
2.1.1	GmSAT1 activity in yeast.....	2-1
2.1.2	The role of GmSAT1 <i>in planta</i> .....	2-2
2.1.3	Membrane-bound transcription factors .....	2-2
2.1.4	<i>GmSAT1</i> orthologues in <i>Arabidopsis</i> .....	2-3
<b>2.2</b>	<b>Results .....</b>	<b>2-4</b>
2.2.1	GmSAT1 binds DNA <i>in vitro</i> .....	2-4
2.2.2	Identification of <i>GmSAT2</i> .....	2-5
2.2.3	Assessing the Function of GmSAT2 .....	2-5
2.2.4	The N-terminus of GmSAT1 is important for activity in yeast .....	2-6
2.2.5	Alternative Transcript Abundance from the <i>GmSAT1</i> and <i>GmSAT2</i> loci .....	2-7
2.2.6	Localization of <i>GmSAT1</i> and <i>GmSAT2</i> promoter activity .....	2-8
2.2.7	Subcellular localization of GmSAT1 in onion cells .....	2-9
2.2.8	Microarray of <i>GmSAT1</i> RNAi in soybean .....	2-9
2.2.9	Analysis of <i>B. japonicum</i> fixation genes in <i>GmSAT1</i> RNAi .....	2-11
2.2.10	Expression of <i>GmSAT1</i> is increased at night .....	2-12
<b>2.3</b>	<b>Materials and Methods.....</b>	<b>2-46</b>
2.3.1	Expression and purification of GmSAT1 .....	2-46

2.3.2	EMSA .....	2-46
2.3.3	Generation of clones for Yeast Complementation.....	2-47
2.3.4	Western Blots.....	2-48
2.3.5	Isolation of <i>GmSAT1</i> and <i>GmSAT2</i> Splice Variants .....	2-48
2.3.6	Cloning and Expression of <i>GmSAT1</i> and <i>GmSAT2</i> Promoters.....	2-49
2.3.7	Onion Transformations .....	2-50
2.3.8	Soybean Microarray .....	2-50
2.3.9	Soybean Diurnal Expression.....	2-51
<b>2.4</b>	<b>Discussion .....</b>	<b>2-52</b>
2.4.1	<i>GmSAT1</i> is a <i>bona fide</i> transcription factor .....	2-52
2.4.2	Residues contributing to <i>GmSAT1</i> activity in yeast .....	2-52
2.4.3	<i>GmSAT2</i> is a partially redundant version of <i>GmSAT1</i> .....	2-53
2.4.4	Localisation of <i>GmSAT1</i> <i>in planta</i> .....	2-53
2.4.5	<i>GmSAT1</i> is linked to the circadian clock .....	2-54
2.4.6	Is nitrogen export disrupted in <i>GmSAT1</i> RNAi nodules? .....	2-56
<b>3</b>	<b>Identification and Cloning of <i>MtSAT1</i> and <i>MtSAT2</i>.....</b>	<b>3-1</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>3-1</b>
3.1.1	<i>Medicago truncatula</i> as a model Species .....	3-1
<b>3.2</b>	<b>Results .....</b>	<b>3-2</b>
3.2.1	Sequences of <i>MtSAT1</i> and <i>MtSAT2</i> .....	3-2
3.2.2	Expression of <i>MtSAT1</i> and <i>MtSAT2</i> .....	3-2
3.2.3	Tissue-specific expression of <i>MtSAT1</i> and <i>MtSAT2</i> .....	3-3
3.2.4	Subcellular localization of <i>MtSAT1</i> and <i>MtSAT2</i> .....	3-3
3.2.5	Effect of silencing <i>MtSAT1</i> and <i>MtSAT2</i> .....	3-3
<b>3.3</b>	<b>Materials and Methods.....</b>	<b>3-17</b>
3.3.1	Cloning <i>MtSAT1</i> and <i>MtSAT2</i> and RACE .....	3-17
3.3.2	<i>MtSAT1</i> and <i>MtSAT2</i> gene expression.....	3-17
3.3.3	Promoter analysis of <i>MtSAT1</i> and <i>MtSAT2</i> .....	3-18
3.3.4	Analysis of GFP fusions to <i>MtSAT1</i> and <i>MtSAT2</i> .....	3-19
3.3.5	Silencing of <i>MtSAT1</i> and <i>MtSAT2</i> .....	3-19
<b>3.4</b>	<b>Discussion .....</b>	<b>3-20</b>
3.4.1	Comparison of <i>MtSAT1</i> and <i>MtSAT2</i> to <i>GmSAT1</i> .....	3-20
3.4.2	Silencing of <i>MtSAT1</i> and <i>MtSAT2</i> .....	3-21

<b>4 Identification of a Novel Family of Ammonium-Transporting Major Facilitator</b>	
<b>Proteins .....</b>	<b>4-1</b>
<b>4.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>4-1</b>
4.1.1 Ammonium transport in yeast.....	4-1
4.1.2 Ammonium transport in plants .....	4-1
4.1.3 Major Facilitator Transporters .....	4-2
<b>4.2 Results .....</b>	<b>4-3</b>
4.2.1 Identification of a novel family of major facilitator proteins .....	4-3
4.2.2 Cloning of <i>GmMFS1.3</i> and <i>GmMFS1.5</i> .....	4-4
4.2.3 Genomic Synteny .....	4-5
4.2.4 Structure of <i>GmMFS1.3</i> and mutations .....	4-5
4.2.5 Transport Properties of <i>GmMFS1.3</i> .....	4-6
4.2.6 Expression of MFS genes in Soybean .....	4-6
4.2.7 Subcellular Localization of <i>GmMFS1.3</i> .....	4-6
4.2.8 Tissue-Specific Expression of <i>GmMFS1.3</i> .....	4-7
4.2.9 Expression of <i>Medicago</i> MFS Transporters .....	4-7
<b>4.3 Materials and Methods.....</b>	<b>4-27</b>
4.3.1 Expression of Soybean <i>MFS</i> genes.....	4-27
4.3.2 Cloning of <i>GmMFS1.3</i> and <i>GmMFS1.5</i> .....	4-27
4.3.3 Localization in Onion .....	4-28
4.3.4 Expression of <i>GmMFS1.3</i> in yeast and <sup>14</sup> C-Methylammonium Flux.....	4-29
4.3.5 Stopped Flow Spectrophotometry .....	4-30
4.3.6 Cloning of <i>GmMFS1.3</i> and <i>MtMFS3</i> promoters .....	4-31
<b>4.4 Discussion .....</b>	<b>4-31</b>
4.4.1 Synteny of SATs and MFSs.....	4-31
4.4.2 The function of <i>GmMFS1.3</i> .....	4-32
<b>5 GmCamK1 Manuscript.....</b>	<b>5-1</b>
<b>6 Conclusion and Future Directions.....</b>	<b>6-1</b>
<b>7 Bibliography .....</b>	<b>7-1</b>

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1.1. Early signaling events in the epidermis of legume roots.....	1-3
Figure 1.2. Development of determinate and indeterminate nodules. ....	1-4
Figure 2.1. Secondary structure prediction of GmSAT1.....	2-13
Figure 2.2. Expression and purification of MBP:GmSAT1 from <i>E. coli</i> . ....	2-14
Figure 2.3. Overview of <i>YOR378W</i> and <i>PHO84</i> promoter sequences. ....	2-15
Figure 2.4. GmSAT1 binds to the <i>YOR378W</i> and <i>PHO84</i> promoters <i>in vitro</i> . ....	2-16
Figure 2.5 Genomic synteny of the <i>GmSAT1</i> and <i>GmSAT2</i> loci.....	2-17
Figure 2.6. Overview of <i>GmSAT1</i> and <i>GmSAT2</i> and domain swaps.....	2-18
Figure 2.7. Growth of yeast strain 26972c expressing <i>GmSAT1</i> and <i>GmSAT2</i> .....	2-19
Figure 2.8. Growth of 26972c with <i>GmSAT1</i> and <i>GmSAT2</i> domain exchanges. ....	2-20
Figure 2.9. Processing of the GFP:GmSAT1 in yeast. ....	2-21
Figure 2.10. Overview of <i>GmSAT1</i> N-terminal deletions. ....	2-22
Figure 2.11. Growth of 26972c expressing truncated N-termini of GmSAT1.....	2-23
Figure 2.12. Growth of 26972c expressing further truncated N-termini of GmSAT1... ..	2-24
Figure 2.13. Growth of 26972c expressing GFP fusions to truncations of GmSAT1....	2-25
Figure 2.14. Alternative ESTs mapped to the <i>GmSAT1</i> locus.....	2-26
Figure 2.15. Overview of <i>GmSAT1</i> alternative transcripts.....	2-27
Figure 2.16. Summary of <i>GmSAT2</i> alternative transcripts. ....	2-28
Figure 2.17. Expression of <i>GmSAT1</i> and <i>GmSAT2</i> splice variants. ....	2-29
Figure 2.18. Plasmids used for GUS analysis and onion expression.....	2-30
Figure 2.19. Promoter analysis of <i>GmSAT1</i> in soybean hairy roots. ....	2-31
Figure 2.20. Promoter analysis of <i>GmSAT1</i> in soybean nodules.....	2-32
Figure 2.21. Promoter analysis of <i>GmSAT2</i> in soybean roots and nodules.....	2-33
Figure 2.22. Expression of GFP fusions to GmSAT1 in onion epidermal cells.....	2-34

Figure 2.23. Effect of silencing <i>GmSAT1</i> on nodule development. ....	2-35
Figure 2.24. Assessment of the RNA quality for microarray analysis. ....	2-37
Figure 2.25. Quality control analysis of scanned soybean microarrays. ....	2-38
Figure 2.26. qPCR expression analysis of <i>B. japonicum</i> fixation marker genes.....	2-42
Figure 2.27. Diurnal expression of selected soybean transcripts.....	2-43
Figure 3.1. Schematic tree of legume evolutionary history.....	3-5
Figure 3.2. mRNA sequence and translation of <i>MtSAT1</i> .....	3-6
Figure 3.3. mRNA sequence and translation of <i>MtSAT2</i> .....	3-7
Figure 3.4. Protein sequence alignment of Soybean, <i>Medicago</i> , and <i>Arabidopsis</i> SATs. ....	3-8
Figure 3.5. Circular phylogenetic tree of soybean, <i>Medicago</i> , and <i>Arabidopsis</i> SATs....	3-9
Figure 3.6. qPCR expression analysis of <i>MtSAT1</i> and <i>MtSAT2</i> in <i>Medicago</i> .....	3-10
Figure 3.7. Promoter analysis of <i>MtSAT1</i> in <i>Medicago</i> roots and nodules. ....	3-11
Figure 3.8. Promoter analysis of <i>MtSAT2</i> in <i>Medicago</i> .....	3-12
Figure 3.9. Plasmids used for GFP-fusion and RNAi experiments.....	3-13
Figure 3.10. Localisation of <i>MtSAT1</i> and <i>MtSAT2</i> <i>in planta</i> by GFP fusion. ....	3-14
Figure 3.11. Effect of silencing <i>MtSAT1</i> and <i>MtSAT2</i> in <i>Medicago</i> . ....	3-15
Figure 4.1. Comparison of sequence and topology of YOR378W with <i>GmMFS1.3</i> .....	4-9
Figure 4.2. Alignment of the identified major facilitator subfamily members.....	4-10
Figure 4.3. Circular phylogenetic tree of MFS transporters. ....	4-11
Figure 4.4. <i>GmMFS1.3</i> sequence and translation. ....	4-12
Figure 4.5. <i>GmMFS1.5</i> sequence and translation.....	4-13
Figure 4.6. Conserved relative location of <i>MFS</i> and <i>SAT</i> loci in plant genomes. ....	4-14
Figure 4.7. <i>De novo</i> prediction of <i>GmMFS1.3</i> structure.....	4-15
Figure 4.8. Location of isolated mutations in <i>GmMFS1.3</i> . ....	4-16
Figure 4.9. <i>GmMFS1.3</i> transport of methylammonium in yeast.....	4-17
Figure 4.10. Expression of <i>GmMFS1.3</i> in soybean tissues. ....	4-18

Figure 4.11. Expression of <i>GmMFS1.1-1.5</i> in soybean tissues by RNA-seq.....	4-19
Figure 4.12. Expression plasmids used for onion localization. ....	4-20
Figure 4.13. Localization of <i>GmMFS1.3</i> in onion epidermal cells.....	4-21
Figure 4.14. Plasmid used for promoter analysis of <i>GmMFS1.3</i> and <i>MtMFS3</i> .....	4-22
Figure 4.15. Activity of <i>GmMFS1.3</i> promoter in soybean nodules and roots.....	4-23
Figure 4.16. Expression of <i>Medicago MFS1-4</i> genes in various tissues.....	4-24
Figure 4.17. Expression of <i>MtMFS3</i> in <i>Medicago</i> roots and nodules. ....	4-25

### **List of Tables**

Table 2.1. Expression level of <i>GmSAT1</i> in RNAi versus empty vector control.....	2-36
Table 2.2. List of genes significantly downregulated ( $\geq -2$ fold change, p-value $\leq 0.05$ ) upon silencing of <i>GmSAT1</i> by RNAi.....	2-39
Table 2.3. Expression analysis of selected transcripts from <i>GmSAT1</i> nodule RNAi. ....	2-40
Table 2.4. List of genes significantly upregulated ( $\geq 2$ fold change, p-value $\leq 0.05$ ) upon silencing of <i>GmSAT1</i> by RNAi.....	2-41
Table 2.5. List of primers used in this chapter.....	2-45
Table 3.1. List of primers used in this chapter.....	3-16
Table 4.1. List of primers used in this chapter.....	4-26

## I. Abstract

Nitrogen is an essential nutrient for plant growth and is normally obtained from the soil medium. Legumes are a unique group of plants that acquired the ability to form a symbiosis with nitrogen-fixing bacteria, called rhizobia, enabling growth in nitrogen-poor soils. *GmSAT1*, a predicted bHLH transcription factor from soybean, is essential for nitrogen fixation; however the role of this protein remains elusive (Kaiser et al., 1998; Loughlin, 2007).

In this work, a further functional characterization of GmSAT1 was undertaken. Using the promoters of known upregulated genes in yeast upon expression of *GmSAT1*, it was found that purified GmSAT1 directly interacts with DNA. Further, GFP-fusion analysis in onion epidermal cells, found that GmSAT1 localizes to the nucleus, as well as peripheral vesicles, demonstrating that GmSAT1 is a likely a transcription factor. Residues from both the N- and C-termini required for GmSAT1 activity were also identified by exchanging domains with GmSAT2, a protein that arose during the relatively recent whole-genome duplication in soybean.

Recently, GmSAT1 was shown to be essential for proper nodule development in soybean (Loughlin, 2007). Therefore, a DNA microarray analysis was conducted to identify transcripts that are differentially expressed after silencing of *GmSAT1* by RNA interference (RNAi) in soybean nodules. Of the ninety-five genes downregulated, twelve were associated with the circadian clock, potentially explaining the *GmSAT1* RNAi phenotype. Investigations were also initiated in the model legume *Medicago truncatula* to identify and characterize *GmSAT1* orthologues. Two genes, *MtSAT1* and *MtSAT2* were cloned and analyzed. *MtSAT1* and *MtSAT2* are expressed in roots and the inner cortex of nodules, similar to *GmSAT1*. By *in planta* GFP-fusion analysis, both MtSAT1 and MtSAT2 were found to associate with vesicles and the nucleus. Insertional mutations in either gene alone did not render a phenotype, however downregulating both genes by RNAi disrupted nodule formation.

Using the sequence of a newly discovered ammonium channel protein from yeast (ScAMF1), which is activated by GmSAT1, a novel subfamily of major facilitator transporter proteins (MFSs) from plants was identified. Interestingly, members of the



MFS gene family are found linked with *GmSAT1* loci in soybean, as well as *M. truncatula* and many sequenced dicots. *GmMFS1.3*, a representative from soybean, was cloned and characterized. *GmMFS1.3* expression was localized to the root stele and the inner cortex of nodules. Further, expression of GmMFS1.3 in yeast induced the uptake of methylammonium. Interestingly, *GmMFS1.5* was found to be downregulated in *GmSAT1* RNAi nodules. The link between GmSAT1 and the MFS transporters *in planta* will be the focus of future experiments.

A novel receptor-like kinase protein was also characterized from soybean nodules. GmCaMK1 was identified in a protein interaction screen using conserved calmodulin as bait. The calmodulin-binding domain overlaps the GmCaMK1 kinase subdomain XI, however it was found that GmCaMK1 is able to auto-phosphorylate independent of calmodulin. Therefore, calmodulin binding may influence the interaction of GmCaMK1 with its phosphorylation targets. Taken together, these studies have enriched our knowledge of nitrogen fixation, a critically important component of agricultural practice.

## II. Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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Date

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Cheers!

### III. Abbreviations

AA	Amino Acid
bHLH	Basic Helix-Loop-Helix
BLAST	Basic Local Alignment Search Tool
cDNA	Complementary DNA
CaMV 35S	Cauliflower Mosaic Virus Constitutive Promoter
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic Acid
EMSA	Electromobility Shift Assay
ER	Endoplasmic Reticulum
EST	Expressed Sequence Tag
GFP	Green fluorescent protein
GUS	$\beta$ -Glucuronidase
kB	Kilobase
kD	Kilodalton
LB	Luria Broth
MA	Methylammonium
OD	Optical Density
PBM	Peribacteroid Membrane
PCR	Polymerase Chain Reaction
PEG	Polyethylene Glycol
RACE	Rapid Amplification of cDNA Ends
RNA	Ribonucleic Acid
RNAi	RNA Interference
SDS	Sodium Dodecyl Sulfate
SDS-PAGE	SDS Polyacrylamide Gel Electrophoresis
TBST	Tris Buffered Saline (with Tween 20)
TMD	Transmembrane Domain
Tris	Tris(hydroxymethyl)aminomethane
UTR	Untranslated Region
v/v	Volume/Volume
w/v	Weight/Volume
X-gluc	5-bromo-4-chloro-3-indolyl-beta-D-glucuronic acid
YNB	Yeast Nitrogen Base