

Bacterial biofilms and their new control strategies in food industry

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Biofilm is a multicellular layer of adherent bacteria surrounded by organic polymer matrix. The development of biofilms in food processing environments is a potential source of hazard for food safety and quality [1]. Food contact surfaces are commonly disinfected with different chemical compounds. However, corrosion and toxicity limit the use of these commercial disinfectants [2]. The risk will become more serious, if the bacteria in biofilm increase their resistance to disinfectants [3]. This book chapter provides a contribution to better understand and highlights the importance and relevance of pathogenic food-borne bacteria and their associated biofilm formations, factors affecting their biofilm formations and new natural potential biofilm control strategies compared with commercial disinfectants in food industry.

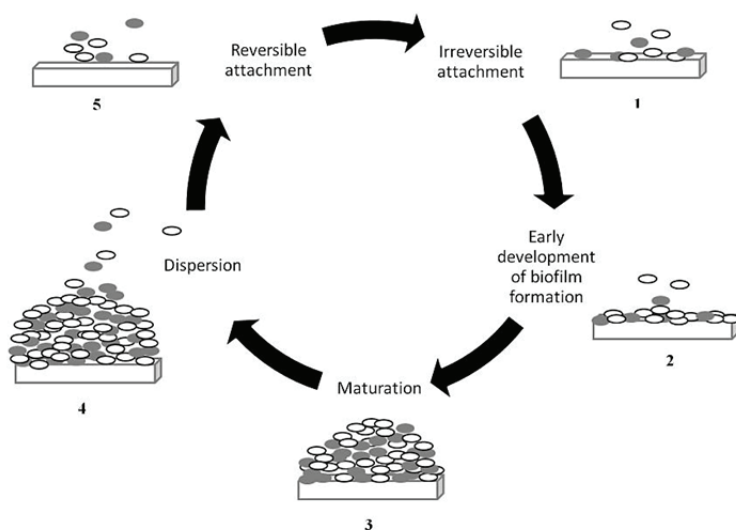
Keywords: food-borne bacteria; food contact surfaces; biofilm prevention; biofilm removal

1. Introduction

The control of food borne pathogens has received a great deal of attention for the last decade, because these organisms can readily form biofilms on the different surfaces [4]. Biofilm is a multicellular layer of adherent bacteria enclosed by polymeric matrix [5, 6]. The attachment of different bacteria with subsequent development of biofilms on food processing surface can lead food spoilage or transmission of diseases [7-9]. Bacteria detached from the biofilms are potential sources of contamination and can cause significant damage to food quality. The formation and development of biofilms depend on different factors including strain of bacteria [10, 11], attachment surface material and environmental parameters such as the pH, temperature and nutrients [12]. Biofilm formation provides survival of bacteria under environmental stress conditions as ultraviolet radiation, physicochemical stresses or insufficient supply of nutritive resources. In addition, bacteria in biofilms can be up to 10 to 1000 times more resistant to the effects of antimicrobial agents than planktonic bacterial cells [13-15].

Food contact surfaces are widely treated with chemical disinfectants that contain peroxides, chloramines or hypochlorites [16, 17]. The disinfectant compounds must be effective for both inactivating pathogens and maintaining quality of the product [18]. Moreover; corrosion, product contamination, and toxicity could limit the use of these commercial chemical compounds [19]. The resistance of biofilm forming microorganisms to these antimicrobial agents indicated that there is a great need of developing new and safe antibiofilm agents for food industry [20]. Therefore, the interest in natural antimicrobials for biofilm formations has increased in recent years [21]. Although there are several researches on both biofilm formations and their effective and safe control strategies, there is still a big gap in the literature. The purpose of this book chapter is to provide new and relevant knowledge for the biofilm formations of food-borne bacteria and new natural potential biofilm control strategies compared with commercial disinfectants in food industry.

2. Biofilm Formation



2.1 Biofilm formation processes

A biofilm is composed of complex communities of bacteria mostly with mixed species that is irreversibly attached to different surface materials. This structure is enclosed in a matrix of primarily polysaccharide material and a mix of proteins, lipids, and nucleic acids forming a single layer or three-dimensional structures [22-24]. Moreover, mature biofilms are well organized structures in which water channels are dispersed and can provide passages for the exchange of nutrients, metabolites and waste products [23]. Bacterial growth and biofilm formation on solid material is a five-step process [5, 25, and 26] (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1 A simplified schematic diagram of a five-step biofilm formation and detachment.

2.1.1 Initial reversible attachment

Biofilm formation starts with the attachment of planktonic bacteria to solid surfaces. The reversible attachment is attained between bacteria and surface through van der Waals and electrostatic forces [27]. Most of the bacteria are negatively charged the electrostatic interactions tend to facilitate the repulsion [28]. However, the positive charge of *Stenotrophomonas maltophilia* could cause reversible attachment to negatively charged material such as Teflon [29, 6]. The direct contact with the surface material occurs via the surface appendages of bacteria such as flagella, fimbriae and extracellular polymers [30-32].

2.1.2 Irreversible attachment

The biofilm grows through a process of cell division and reversible attachment. This attachment, then, differentiates to irreversible attachment with the production of extracellular polymers (EPS) by the bacteria. In the irreversible phase, the interactions are dipole-dipole, hydrophobic, ion-ion ion-dipole, covalent bonds and hydrogen interactions [33, 34]. In addition, bacterial cells up regulate the expressions of specific attachment-related genes within a few minutes of their attachment to the surface [35].

2.1.3 Early development of biofilm structure

The EPS layer strengthens the structure between bacterial cells and the substratum. Over a period of time, the interactions and bonds are strengthened, making the attachment irreversible.

2.1.4 Maturation

During the maturation, the biofilm develops into an organized resistant structure to toxic chemicals and disinfectants. The irreversibly attached cells grow more by using available nutrients from the surrounding fluid environment and form microcolonies.

2.1.5 Dispersion

Bacterial cells are released from biofilm into the surrounding environment. The detachment of cells from the surface can be regulated by own population density-dependent gene expression (Quorum sensing, QS) controlled by extracellular signalling molecules such as acyl-homoserine lactones (AHLs) for Gram-negative bacteria or oligopeptides for Gram-positive bacteria [36]. The detached bacteria find new locations and restart the new biofilm formation [37].

3. Molecular mechanisms for biofilm formation and detachment

The molecular mechanisms of biofilm formation in food processing industry are getting higher attention in recent years [38-40]. From the initial interaction with surfaces, significant changes in expression of many genes occur in the bacterial cells [41-46]. This process includes a number of up- and down-regulation of a number of genes [47-49]. It was shown that *algC* up-regulation in individual bacterial cells within minutes of attachment to surfaces [47]. Prigent-Combaret et al. [48] found that 22% of these genes were up-regulated in the biofilm state, while 16% were down-regulated in *E. coli*. In a recent study, formation of physical contact between the bacterium and the surface initiated adhesin production in *Caulobacter crescentus* [49].

Quorum sensing (QS) is a communication between bacteria to provide information about cell density for adjusting their own gene expression properly. QS process includes production and sensing of signal molecules such as auto inducers [50]. Many of bacterial behaviour and physiological processes such as growth, pathogenicity, sporulation, and biofilm formation are regulated by QS [51-53]. QS contributes to biofilm formation by many different bacteria, but its role in food related biofilm structures has not been completely clarified yet. Quorum-sensing controlled expression of surfactant molecules is important for biofilm forming and dispersion. In *staphylococci*, the accessory gene regulator (*agr*) quorum-sensing system mediates biofilm detachment [54, 55]. Some of the surfactant-like molecules produced by bacteria to establish and detach biofilms are surfactins [56-57], rhamnolipids [58, 59] and the surfactant peptides [60].

4. Factors affecting biofilm formations

The attachment of microorganisms to surfaces is a very complex process. In the process of a dynamic and complex biofilm formation, properties of solid material, hydrophobicity of both material and cell surface, production of extracellular polymeric substances, and environmental factors such as nutritional properties of the food matrix, availability of moisture and nutrients, the pH level, the temperature of the contact surface and even the presence of other bacteria play important roles [61-64]. In general, rougher, and more hydrophobic surfaces are preferred attachment

sides at the beginning of the biofilm formation. An increase in flow velocity, temperature, or nutrient concentration could also increase attachment, if these parameters are at optimal levels for bacterial growth.

4.1 Physical properties of the contact surface material

Food contact surface materials have substantial effect on the attachment and biofilm formation. The materials used for food contact surfaces are mostly stainless steel, glass, rubber, polyurethane [65], Teflon, nitrile butyl rubber (NBR, Buna-n) [66], and may be wood in some countries [67]. The adhesion to the abiotic surface is affected by the physicochemical characteristics of the surface material such as roughness [12], surface charge [68], hydrophobicity [12], pH, temperature [69], and nutrient composition of the preconditioning solution [12, 70]. For instance, primary attachment of bacteria to stainless steel and Teflon was enhanced in the presence of surface-associated milk proteins [71]. Howell and Behrends [72] reported that the extent of microbial attachment was correlated with surface roughness. The surface roughness of a polyester urethane conveyor belt affected the biofilm forming ability of *L. monocytogenes* [73]. Hydrophobic/hydrophilic interactions are found to be effective for adhesion of bacteria to the abiotic surfaces [74, 75]. Metal surfaces are negatively charged and referred as hydrophilic as shown by water contact angles, while Teflon is less electrostatically-charged and referred as hydrophobic surface [76]. Previously, it was shown that hydrophobic surfaces were more resistant to bacterial adhesion than the hydrophilic surfaces [77-80]. However, Baker [81] could not determine any difference between hydrophilic glass and polystyrene plates for the attachment of freshwater bacteria. In another study, Sinde and Carballo [82] found that *Salmonella* and *Listeria* species can attach in higher numbers to hydrophobic surfaces than the hydrophilic ones. It was reported that *Salmonella* spp. and *L. monocytogenes* can produce biofilms on plastic surfaces [83]. It was also suggested that besides the material itself, parts of the food processing plants such as joints, corners, and equipment design can also affect biofilm formation [84].

4.2 Physicochemical properties of bacterial cells

Cell surface hydrophobicity, cell surface structures such as fimbriae, other proteins, EPS, and flagella play important roles in the attachment of bacteria to the substratum. Fimbriae, some proteins, and mycolic acids of Gram-positive bacteria play major role for attachment to hydrophobic surfaces. EPS and lipopolysaccharides are more important in attachment to hydrophilic materials. In addition, attachment is facilitated by different adhesive organelles, e.g., flagella and type IV pili play important roles in attachment of *Pseudomonas* spp. and *Vibrio cholera*, whereas fimbriae like type 1 pili, curli, and conjugative pili are important for biofilm formation in *E. coli* [85-88]. Different types of fimbriae involve to the attachment such as type 1 fimbriae, curli, type 4 pili, long polar fimbriae, and F9 fimbriae in the attachment of Shiga-toxin producing *E. coli* (STEC) to surfaces [89].

4.3 Biosynthesis of extracellular polymers

Exopolysaccharide (EPS) molecules are accepted as a major factor affecting the biofilm formation. EPS molecules strengthen the interactions between the bacteria for microcolony formation on abiotic substratum [5, 22]. EPS have different chemical and physical properties depending on their chemical composition [90]. They are composed of either homopolysaccharides or heteropolysaccharides. The EPS synthesis is affected by environmental factors such as carbon or nitrogen supply, pH value, culture temperature and oxygen concentration [75, 91, 92, and 93]. Leriche et al., [94] showed that different organisms produce different amounts of EPS and that the amount of EPS increases with age of the biofilm. EPS could be hydrophobic characteristics. However, most types of EPS are both hydrophilic and hydrophobic [90].

4.4 Other environmental factors

Biofilm formation on different substratum can be influenced by species of bacteria and environmental conditions (nutrient level, pH and temperature) [95]. Environmental conditions such as starvation and nutrient availability can start biofilm formation [93, 96]. In some of the laboratory research, nutritional starvation triggered the cell adhesion, whereas in other studies bacterial colonization process increased by high amount of nutrients [5, 96, and 97]. It was shown that both pH and temperature are important for bacterial adhesion to stainless steel surface [98, 99]. Fletcher [100, 101] reported that an increase in the concentration of cations such as sodium, calcium, lanthanum or ferric iron affected the attachment of *P. fluorescens* to glass surfaces.

5. Biofilms in Food industry

5.1 Food borne bacteria in food processing environments

Adhesion of bacteria to equipment surfaces could be the main reason for transmission of pathogens to food in the food processing industry [102, 103]. Inclusion of pathogens to surfaces can be either by directly or indirectly through airborne particles [104]. Cross-contamination from raw products through hands and utensils could lead to the outbreaks

of foodborne illness [104]. Moreover, equipment surfaces in food processing industry are known as a major source of bacterial contamination [105]. Many of pathogenic bacteria including *Bacillus*, *Salmonella*, *Listeria*, *Staphylococcus* and *Escherichia* could attach and form biofilm on food processing environments such as metal, glass, plastic or rubber surfaces [106-110]. Metabolic interactions between these species contribute to the formations of biofilms, and the production of a dynamic local environment [111-112]. In food industry, biofilms with mixed-bacterial species are usually very stable and cell-to-cell interactions affect the biofilm formation, biofilm structure, and resistance to the antimicrobial treatments [113-117]. Although it is clear that many pathogenic bacteria can form biofilms in the food processing industry, the most important biofilm forming bacterial species in relation to food safety are listed below [118].

Listeria monocytogenes: *Listeria monocytogenes* is a Gram-positive opportunistic food-borne pathogen which causes outbreaks of listeriosis [119,120]. This bacterium can be found in many environments such as water, soil, sewage, and animal feces and survive for a long time [121,122]. *L. monocytogenes* can grow at refrigerated temperature, under high osmotic pressure (10% NaCl), and at a wide pH range (pH 4-9) [123]. *L. monocytogenes* in food processing environments can adhere to many different surfaces and forms biofilms [124-128]. *Listeria* utilizes flagella, pili, and membrane proteins for attachment to surfaces [129]. It was shown that *Listeria* can form biofilms on slicers and other steel utensils [130]. This can cause further cross contamination of this pathogenic bacteria.

Salmonella spp.: *Salmonella* was the first reported foodborne bacteria adhering to food surfaces for biofilm formation [131]. Several studies have shown that *Salmonella* can attach and form biofilms on surfaces found in food-processing environments such as plastic and stainless steel surfaces [132, 133]. *Salmonella* has a cell-surface appendage (SEF-17 *fimbriae*) for attachment to surfaces and resistance to mechanical forces [118].

Escherichia coli: *E. coli* can form biofilms through their flagella, pili, and membrane proteins for their adhesion. After adhesion to the different surfaces *E. coli* loses its flagella and produces sticky extracellular polysaccharides [118, 134]. Many species of the *Enterobacteriaceae* family including *E. coli* produce cellulose for the survival of the bacteria in the environment stress conditions [135].

Pseudomonas spp.: *Pseudomonas* spp. are major pathogenic bacteria on dairy product, poultry and meat processing industry [136, 137]. In the dairy food industry, the psychotropic *Pseudomonas* are the most frequently found bacteria causing deterioration of raw milk stored at refrigerated temperature. Its rapid growth at refrigeration temperatures and production of exopolysaccharides provides the *Pseudomonas* with a great ability of biofilm formation [138]. *Pseudomonas* strains are more resistant to chemicals when they found as mixed cultures within biofilms with *Listeria*, *Salmonella* and other pathogens [118, 133].

Bacillus spp.: *Bacillus* spp. is found and survives in dairy processing industry especially in pipelines and joints [118, 133]. *Bacillus cereus* is often forming mixed biofilms with other bacterial species in the food [139,140] and beverage industries [141]. High levels of *Bacillus* biofilms have been reported in dairy processing industries [142].

5.2 Use of antibiofilm agents in food industry

Biofilms are a great concern in food industry. There have been many research activities on the prevention and eradication of biofilm formations for many years [133, 143, and 144]. The commercial chemical compounds used as sanitizers in the food processing industry are chlorine-based sanitizers, iodine and quaternary ammonium compounds. Below is a brief description of some of disinfectants that are commonly used in food processing environments.

Chlorine-based sanitizers and peracetic acid (PAA) are frequently used in food processing industry such as washing fruits and vegetables and sanitizing food contact surfaces. They are easy to prepare and apply, and economical. The maximum allowable level for food contact without a rinse step is 200 ppm available chlorine [145]. Hypochlorides are the most effective chlorine compounds among chlorinated sanitizers. Chlorine mixed with sodium (sodium hypochlorite, NaClO) used for sanitization of food-contact surfaces [144]. The major disadvantages of chlorine compounds are their decreasing solubility in water and increasing corrosiveness to metal surfaces with a higher temperature. There is also a great concern based upon the involvement of chlorine in the formation of trihalomethanes (THMs) which are carcinogenic under certain conditions [146]. In addition, chlorine can also irritate skin and mucosal membrane.

Peroxyacetic acid (Peracetic acid, PAA) is a mixture of acetic acid and hydrogen peroxide in an aqueous solution used as a disinfectant for fruits, vegetables, meat, and eggs and also as a sanitizer for food contact surfaces for a potential replacement for chlorine applications [147]. PAA leaves no toxic residues, thus, it can be applied without rinsing. PAA is also effective on biofilm forming bacteria especially if the biofilm contains food residues [133]. However, PAA can be corrosive for the surface materials. Furthermore, exposure to PAA can cause irritation to the skin, eyes and respiratory system and permanent lung damage or asthma [148]. In addition to its disadvantages, another drawback is that it is not cheap and increases organic content in the effluent [149].

Iodophors are a combination of non-iodine-wetting agents and iodine. The primary disadvantages are that iodine can affect the flavor and odor of food and cause staining on some surfaces (especially plastics). In the hot environmental conditions iodine can vaporize and can be corrosive to equipment.

Quaternary ammonium compounds (QAC) are widely used in disinfection treatments in food industry [150]. However, the broad application of QACs in food industries can cause the microbial growth and adaptation [151, 152].

5.3 Novel safe approaches for the control of biofilm formations

Bacteria in biofilms have enhanced resistance to chemical sanitizers. In addition, these sanitizer residues are designated as toxic [153-156]. The interest in natural antimicrobials has increased in recent years [21]. In particular, these biologic sources are enzymes, phages and microorganisms originated antimicrobial compounds [157] or natural plant molecules [158].

Plant-derived compounds such as many essential oils have been evaluated for their antimicrobial and antibiofilm activities against food-borne pathogens in several studies [159-162]. Sandasi et al., [163] assessed the antibiofilm activities of plant extracts on *L. monocytogenes* biofilms on polyvinyl chloride (PVC) surface and found that the plant extracts could inhibit biofilm formation and reduce the biofilm growth.

Polysaccharides can inhibit the biofilm formation of bacteria, possibly by modifying the physical properties of both abiotic and biotic surfaces [164]. It was shown that *E. coli* exopolysaccharides can alter the abiotic surface properties such as increase the hydrophobicity of glass surfaces and also can prevent cell-to cell auto aggregation via adhesions of bacteria [165,166].

Enzymes could also be possible alternative treatments as natural antibiofilm agents. Serine proteases were efficiently reducing *Bacillus* biofilms whereas polysaccharides remove more efficiently *Pseudomonas fluorescens* than serine proteases [167]. Polysaccharide polymerases and esterase can also control biofilm formations [168,169].

Nisin is an extracellular protein produced by some strains of *Lactococcus lactis* and has been employed as an anti-biofilm agent [170]. Nisin is a Generally Recognized as Safe (GRAS) substance. It has been approved in the EU (as additive E234) and by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [171]. Nisin has a mode of action that results in the formation of pores in the cell membrane of the bacteria. Pore formation leads to cell lysis and death. The bactericidal activity of nisin has been shown to target other Gram positive bacteria closely related to *Lactococcus lactis* and some Gram positive pathogens, such as *Listeria monocytogenes* [172]. Nisin is effective against planktonic cells of multi-drug resistant staphylococci [173, 174].

Quorum sensing inhibition is also an attractive natural antibiofilm strategy [157]. Among QS inhibitors, halogenated furanones are produced by the marine alga *Delisea pulchra* [175,176]. Rhamnolipids from *P. aeruginosa* and surfactin from *B. subtilis* were found to be effective against mixed-species biofilms of *S. aureus*, *L. monocytogenes*, and *S. enteritidis* for both mono and mixed species of biofilms [177]. Lipopeptide biosurfactants from *Paenibacillus polymyxa* have also inhibitory effect on both single and mixed species biofilms such as *B. subtilis*, *P. aeruginosa* and *S. aureus* [178].

Another approach receiving attention is the use of organic acids (citric, malic, gallic acids etc.) as antibiofilm strategies. Organic acids are widely distributed in plants and animals. They are considered to be safe in terms of human and animal health with no toxic residues. Organic acids can be as effective as chemical disinfectants. Moreover, using organic acids could also help to reduce the use of chemical agents, water consumption, and energy cost.

Organic acids were shown as antimicrobial compounds against many pathogenic bacteria [179, 180]. The antimicrobial effect of organic acids could depend on several factors such as side chain composition, hydrophobicity or chain length [181]. It was also reported that different types of organic acids exerts different antimicrobial effects against bacteria [182]. It is also known that weak organic acids are lipophilic, can penetrate plasma membrane and acidify the cell's cytoplasm. As bacteria maintain a neutral pH of the cytoplasm, bacteria export of excess protons to maintain the pH of the cytoplasm and thus, consume cellular ATP and results in depletion of energy. Organic acids may inhibit membrane function and nutrient transport, prevent synthesis of macromolecules and denature DNA [183].

Citric acid is a hydroxyl tricarboxylic acid produced naturally by various plants. It is also affirmed as Generally Recognized as Safe (GRAS, 21CFR184.1033), and approved for use in the manufacture of fresh and processed meats and poultry at specific concentrations [184]. Citric acid inhibits bacterial cells via metal chelation which are vital for bacterial growth. Previously, it was found that dipping of fresh-cut iceberg lettuce in 0.5% citric acid solution for 2 min could be as effective as chlorine solution at 100 ppm for reducing pathogenic microorganisms [180]. It was reported that the biofilm forming heterotrophic and coliform bacteria inactivated about 99% by citric acid treatment on the surface of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) pipes [185]. Lieleg et al., [186] reported that citric acid can be a fluidization agent for established biofilm formations and this organic acid affects the *P.aeruginosa* biofilm elasticity.

Citric acid treatment can be used as an alternative disinfectant in controlling biofilm formation in the dairy industry. Recently, the prevention and removal of biofilm formation of *S. aureus* strains isolated from raw milk by citric acid treatments (2% and 10%) for 20 min were assessed for comparison with peracetic acid treatment (0.3%) on both on microtitration plate and stainless steel coupons [187]. The prevention and removal of biofilm formation ratios and the numbers of prevented or removed *S. aureus* strains were observed to be higher by using citric acid treatments compared with peracetic acid treatment on both surfaces. Moreover, the prevention and removal of biofilm formation were substantially higher when the concentration of citric acid treatment increased from 2% to 10% and the stainless coupons were used.

Gallic acid is one of the abundant phenolic products found in plants such as tea leaves, fruits and flowers [188]. It has been shown that gallic acid has strong antimicrobial activity against several bacterial strains [189]. Borges et al., [190] also reported antibiofilm activity of gallic acid for the prevention and removal of *E.coli*, *P. aeruginosa*, *S.*

aureus and *L.monocytogenes* biofilms. The researchers found that gallic acid can prevent and remove these pathogens by promoting reductions in biofilm activity >70% of all tested microorganisms.

Malic acid is a dicarboxylic acid found widely in many foods. The studies showed that it can be used to treat food borne pathogens [191-195]. The antimicrobial action of malic acid is to lower the pH value [196] or cause the significant damage to the cytoplasm of bacteria [197]. Singla et al., [198] found that malic acid was also effective in food industry for complete inhibition of *Salmonella* Typhimurium biofilm in carrot and other food contact surfaces. Therefore, the research on the use of organic acid treatments to control biofilms may be promising to overcome potential hazards of commercial chemical sanitizers to the human health and environment.

5.4 Conclusions and future directions

The biofilm formations of food-borne bacteria and natural potential biofilm control strategies are relatively a new research area in food microbiology. The state-of-the-art in using natural biofilm control strategies is presented here. The comparison of their activities with commercial disinfectants is also investigated in detail. The existing literature indicates that using natural antibiofilm agents can be used as potential control strategies for biofilm formations in food processing industry (Fig. 2). However, there are still no available commercialized natural antibiofilm products. This might be attributed to their excessive-cost or lack of financial interest [199]. The followings need to be considered and studied in future studies for using natural antibiofilm agents when they are used effectively and commercially:

- a) Biofilms harbour mixed species of microorganisms. This phenomenon could lead to drastic enhancement in bacterial population resistance to the routinely applied sanitizers and potentially leading to the emergence of opportunistic pathogenic bacterial dispersion previously kept under control.
- b) Intensive studies should determine the effects of different natural antibiofilm agents such as organic acids on different mono and mixed species of biofilm forming bacteria.
- c) The studies should also be extended to control biofilm formation on different food processing surfaces such as teflon, glass. etc.
- d) Continued research efforts in this area will lead to the identification of new effective natural antibiofilm strategies that may be used as a routine procedure for replacement of chemical sanitizers in the industry in the future.
- e) New potent natural antibiofilm agents in the food industry should be required to evaluate carefully to determine validity and protection of human health and environment.
- f) Additionally, it should be noted that validated use of natural agents combined with mechanical action could control biofilms more efficiently.
- g) A concept of green technology by natural antibiofilm agents may have a promising future.

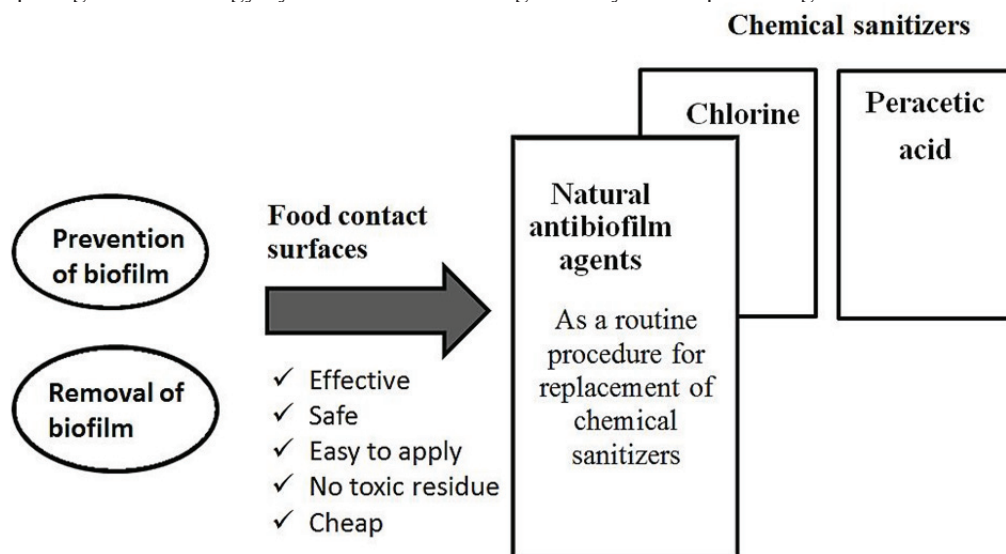


Fig. 2 A schematic illustration of natural antibiofilm agents as replacement strategy for chemical sanitizers.

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