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DENISE PUNTEL BASSO

**CONTRIBUTION TO THE CHARACTERIZATION OF THE ACQUISITION OF
THE EMERGENCY VIGOR DURING SEED MATURATION**

Botucatu

2018

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ABSTRACT

The stable production of high vigorous seeds regardless of the environment is a key lever to increase crop production. Seed vigor is defined as the sum of the physiological properties that lead to homogenous and vigorous seedling establishment. It includes longevity, defined as the capacity to remain viable for long periods during dry storage and the capacity to elongate after germination. However, how these traits are acquired during seed development and how the environment impacts their acquisition remain poorly understood. Yet this information is important to determine the harvest stage corresponding to maximum vigor. Using agronomy and physiological approaches on soybean and *Medicago truncatula*, we confirm that longevity is progressively acquired during seed maturation. In soybean, our data suggest that the climate influenced longevity whereas in *Medicago*, heat applied during seed maturation had no significant impact. This work also showed that HEAT SHOCK FACTOR A2.2, a homologue of HSFA9 and hub gene involved in seed maturation does not play a role in seed longevity but acts as negative regulator of embryonic dormancy. Longevity is evaluated by the ability to germinate after storage, which represents only a part of the success of crop establishment. How seed maturation affects the loss of seedling establishment capacity during storage was evaluated in soybean using an experimental system set up to assess elongation capacity. The pattern of acquisition of elongation capacity during maturation varied between crop years and growth conditions. The time to 50% loss of elongation capacity during storage was similar to that of loss of germination. Also, it increased steadily during seed maturation after mass maturity and harvest maturity stages, highlighting the importance of the late phase of seed maturation in building seed vigor.

Keywords: Maturation. Elongation. Heat shock factor. Vigor. Seed quality.

RESUMO

A produção de sementes altamente vigorosas, independentemente do ambiente, é uma alavanca fundamental para aumentar a produção agrícola. O vigor das sementes é definido como a soma das propriedades fisiológicas que levam ao estabelecimento homogêneo e vigoroso de plântulas. Inclui a longevidade, definida como a capacidade de permanecer viável por longos períodos durante o armazenamento a seco e a capacidade de alongamento após a germinação. No entanto, como essas características são adquiridas durante o desenvolvimento de sementes e como o ambiente impacta sua aquisição permanecem pouco compreendidas. No entanto, essa informação é importante para determinar o estágio de colheita correspondente ao vigor máximo. Utilizando abordagens agronômicas e fisiológicas em soja e *Medicago truncatula*, confirmamos que a longevidade é progressivamente adquirida durante a maturação das sementes. Em soja, nossos dados sugerem que o clima influenciou a longevidade, enquanto em *Medicago* o calor aplicado durante a maturação de sementes não teve impacto significativo. Este trabalho também mostrou que o FATOR DE CHOQUE DE TÉRMICO A2.2, um homólogo de HSFA9 que está envolvido na maturação de sementes, não desempenha um papel na longevidade das sementes, mas age como regulador negativo da dormência embrionária. A longevidade é avaliada pela capacidade de germinar após o armazenamento, o que representa apenas uma parte do sucesso do estabelecimento da cultura. Como a maturação de sementes afeta a perda de capacidade de estabelecimento de plântulas durante o armazenamento foi avaliada em soja usando um sistema experimental montado para avaliar a capacidade de alongamento. O padrão de aquisição da capacidade de alongamento durante a maturação variou entre os anos agrícolas e as condições de crescimento. O tempo para perda de 50% da capacidade de alongamento durante o armazenamento foi semelhante ao da perda de germinação. Além disso, aumentou de forma constante durante a maturação das sementes após a maturação em massa e nos estágios de maturação da colheita, destacando a importância da fase tardia da maturação das sementes na construção do vigor das sementes.

Palavras-chave: Maturação. Alongamento. Fator de choque térmico. Vigor. Qualidade de sementes.

RÉSUMÉ

La production de semences vigoureuses est un levier pour augmenter les rendements. La vigueur est définie comme la somme des propriétés physiologiques conduisant à l'établissement homogène et vigoureux du peuplement végétal. Elle comprend la longévité, définie comme la capacité à rester viable pendant le stockage et la capacité de la plantule à s'allonger après germination. Cependant, comment ces caractéristiques sont acquises au cours du développement de la graine et comment l'environnement influence leur acquisition restent mal compris. Ces informations sont importantes pour déterminer le stade de récolte correspondant à une vigueur maximale. En utilisant des approches agronomique et physiologique sur le soja et *Medicago truncatula*, nous montrons que la longévité est progressivement acquise au cours de la maturation. Chez le soja, le climat influence la longévité de manière complexe alors que chez *Medicago*, la chaleur pendant la maturation ne l'impacte pas significativement. Nous montrons également que HEAT SHOCK FACTOR A2.2, un homologue de HSFA9 impliqué dans la survie à l'état sec ne joue pas de rôle dans la longévité chez *Medicago* mais agit comme régulateur négatif de la dormance. La longévité se mesure par la perte de la germination pendant le stockage et ne représente qu'une partie du succès de l'établissement de la culture. Donc, l'influence de la maturation sur la perte de capacité d'établir une plantule lors du stockage a été évaluée chez le soja. L'acquisition de la capacité d'élongation pendant la maturation varie entre les années de culture et selon les conditions de croissance des plantules. Le temps nécessaire pour diminuer la capacité d'élongation de 50% pendant le stockage augmente constamment pendant la maturation après la maturité de masse. Ceci démontre l'importance des phases tardives de la maturation dans l'élaboration de la vigueur germinative.

Mots-clés: Maturation. Élongation. Heat shock factor. Vigueur. Qualité des semences.

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1	31
Figure 1 – Characterization by phenological stages on the plant and pods according to the description of Fehr and Caviness (1977) with adaptations by Lima et al. (2017).....	32
Figure 2 – The distribution of relative maturity groups for soybean cultivars in Brazil (ALLIPRANDINI et al., 2009).....	34
Figure 3 – Main physiological and biochemical events related to seed filling and late seed maturation are overlapping in <i>Medicago truncatula</i> (LEPRINCE et al., 2017).....	38
Figure 4 – Relative importance of the three phases of seed development.....	41
Figure 5 – Pattern of development of seed physiological quality traits (BEWLEY et al., 2013).....	43
Figure 6 – Physiological characterization of soybean seed maturation.....	45
Figure 7 – Factors involved in the induction of seed longevity during maturation according to Diagram of key events and players in the establishment of longevity during maturation and late maturation of a dicot seed. Most of the data are from <i>Arabidopsis</i> and <i>M. truncatula</i> as model plants.....	51
Figure 8 – Hormonal interactions during the regulation of seed dormancy release and germination of <i>Nicotiana</i> (a) and <i>Brassica</i> (b) model species.....	53
Figure 9 – Hormonal networks underlying light-regulated plant development encompassing seed germination (left) and light (photomorphogenesis)- and dark-grown seedlings (right).....	58
CHAPTER 2	78
Figure 1 – Variations in maximum (open circles), medium (black triangle) and minimum temperature (black circles) and daily precipitation (red square) at the experimental field from sowing to harvest during the crop years 2014/2015 (A) and 2015/2016 (B).....	82
Figure 2 – A) Pod and seed development of soybean as described in Lima et al. (2017). B) Phenological stages added for the purpose of this work. C) Stem of a mature plants showing seeds at stage R9.....	84

Figure 3 – Changes in water content of immature soybean seeds harvested in 2015 at indicated phenological stages during maturation. Seeds were submitted to slow (closed symbols) and fast drying (open symbols)...	87
Figure 4 – Evolution of desiccation tolerance following fast (open symbols) and slow (closed symbols) during seed maturation.....	87
Figure 5 – Changes in germination percentage of immature seeds harvested at indicated phenological stages and dried slowly (A) and fast (B).....	88
Figure 6 – Evolution of longevity following fast (open symbols) and slow (closed symbols) during seed maturation.....	89
Figure 7 – Changes in seed longevity during seed maturation in crop years 2014/2015 (black symbols) and 2015/2016 (open symbols).....	90
Figure 8 – Principal Components Analysis (PCA) showing the relationships between seed longevity at stages R7.2, R9, R9 bottom, R9 top, seed weight and the sum of days when the temperature was above 30oC for the crop seasons 2014/2015 and 2015/2016.....	91
Figure 9 – Principal Components Analysis (PCA) and respective vectors considering P50 from the stages R7.2, R9 and R9 top and R9 bottom and the accumulation of rainfall (at different times for the crop seasons 2014/2015 and 2015/2016).....	94
Figure 10 – A) Wrinkled seeds harvested from bottom nodes at stage R9 in 2015. B) The Photo of a tetrazolium stained seeds showing lesions such as striations of intense red coloration in the region opposite the thread....	94
Figure 11 – Effect of temperature on germination percentage of seed lots harvested at R7.2 and R9 (top nodes of the plant) from the crop 2015/2016.....	95
Figure 12 – Effect of temperature on germination speed of seeds harvested at stage R7.2 (open symbols) and R9 (closed symbols).....	96
Figure 13 – Relation between phenological stages during maturation and germination percentages (A-C) and germination rate (D-F) at 15 °C (A, D) 25 °C (B, E) and 38 °C (C, F) for the crop years 2014/2015 (black symbols) and 2015/2016 (open symbols).....	97
CHAPTER 3.....	108
Figure 1 – Variations in maximum (open circles), medium (black triangle) and minimum temperature (black circles) and daily precipitation (red square)	

at the experimental field from sowing to harvest during the crop years 2014/2015 (A) and 2015/2016 (B).....	112
Figure 2 – Experimental design used to assess elongation capacity.....	114
Figure 3 – Experimental design used to measure seedling growth in the dark in 2015 (A) and 2016 (B).....	115
Figure 4 – Time course of elongation of hypocotyl (A), root (B) and epicotyl (C) after transferring germinated seeds of indicated phenological stages into darkness at 22°C.....	117
Figure 5 – Elongation capacity increases with maturation.....	118
Figure 6 – Effect of seed position (bottom 3 nodes, black bars; top 3 nodes grey bards) and year of harvest on the elongation of hypocotyl (A) and length (B) and on shoot/root length ratio (C) of dry mature seeds (R9).....	120
Figure 7 – Comparison of the crop year on elongation capacity at indicated phenological stages.....	121
Figure 8 – Profiles of the loss of elongation capacity during storage.....	123
Figure 9 – Comparison of the time to 50% loss of germination and seedling elongation [A – hypocotyl (TH50) and B – root (TR50)] during maturation.....	124
Figure 10 – Characterization of the population of seedlings of mature seeds (R9) before storage (A-B, G) and during storage at 35°C, 75% RH (C-F, H). A, C, E).....	126
CHAPTER 4	136
Figure 1 – Maximum parsimony analysis of HSFA proteins involving 47 amino acid sequences and showing orthologs of HaHSFA9 (delineated in red) from legumes (<i>Glycine max</i> , <i>Medicago truncatula</i> , <i>Lotus japonica</i> and <i>Arabidopsis thaliana</i>).....	146
Figure 2 - Schematic representation of the MtHSFA2.2 gene (Medtr4g126070).....	149
Figure 3 – Germination curves of freshly harvested mature seeds grown at 20°C (A) and 26°C (B).....	150
Figure 4 – Longevity of WT and Mt-hsaf2.2 seeds harvest from plants grown at 20°C and 26°C. Longevity was expressed as P50, corresponding to days of storage at which the seed lost 50% viability.....	151
Figure 5 – Schematic representation of the AtHSFA9 gene (At5g54070).....	152

Figure 6 – Germination curves of mature seeds of associated wild type (aWT) and hsa9 seeds of Arabidopsis at different times of after-ripening.....	153
Figure 7 – Longevity of associated WT and hsa9 seeds of Arabidopsis.....	155
Figure 8 – Relative transcript abundance of HSP17.5 (A), HSP18.2 (B), HSP70 (C) in mature seeds of <i>Medicago truncatula</i> after 3 months of storage....	155
Figure 9 – Sugar contents in WT and M-thsfa2.2 mature seeds: A) glucose; B) sucrose; C) raffinose; D) stachyose and E) verbascose.....	157
Figure 10 – Relative transcript abundance of GolS2 in mature seeds after 3 months of storage. All seeds were from plants grown at 20°C.....	158
Figure 11 – Relative transcript abundance of <i>EM1</i> and <i>EM2</i> in mature seeds after 3 months of storage.....	159
Figure 12 – Effect of fluridone on seed germination of <i>Mt-hsfa2.2</i> seeds.....	160
Figure 13 – Impact of ABA on germination of mature seeds of <i>Mt-hsfa2.2</i> compared to wild-type seeds.....	162
Figure 14 – Relative abundance of ABA 8'-hydroxylase (CYP707A4, Medtr8g072260) transcripts in mature seeds and after 6 h of imbibition in the dark.....	162
Figure 15 – Relative abundance of HONSU (Medtr3g068200) transcripts in mature seeds and after 6 h of imbibition in the dark.....	163
Figure 16 – Germination speed, expressed as T50, of mature seeds of wild type seeds (WT and aWT) and <i>Mt-hsfa2.2</i> in 10µM gibberellic acid (GA 4+7).....	165
Figure 17 – Relative abundance of GA2Ox1 transcripts in mature seeds and after 6 h of imbibition in the dark.....	165
Figure 18 – Relative abundance of GA2Ox2 transcripts in mature seeds and after 6 h of imbibition in the dark.....	166
Figure 19 – Relative abundance of GA3Ox1 transcripts in mature seeds and after 6 h of imbibition in the dark.....	166
Figure 20 – (A) Germination of intact embryos naked embryos of wild type and Mthsfa2.2 mutants during imbibition. (B) Germination of naked embryos naked embryos of wild type and Mthsfa2.2 mutants during imbibition. (C) photo of naked embryos after 5 days of imbibition.....	168

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 2	78
Table 1 – Physico-chemical characteristics of the soil at 0-0.20 m depth before sowing. SOM: soil organic matter, P resin: Potential acidity; CEC: cation exchange capacity; BS: base saturation.....	82
Table 2 – Characterization of the phenological stages of soybean seeds during maturation according to LIMA et al. (2017) with adaptations.....	83
Table 3 – Analysis of Variance showing P values for principal effects and Interaction between phenological stages and years for the germination and germination speed variables.....	96
Table 4 – Significant effects of maturation of soybean on germination for seasons 2015 and 2016. Data are the average of 4 replicates of 25 seeds.....	97
Table 5 – Significant effects of maturation of soybean on germination speed for seasons 2015 and 2016. Data are the average of 4 replicates of 25 seeds.....	98
CHAPTER 3	108
Table 1 – Characterization of the phenological stages of soybean seeds during maturation according to (LIMA et al., 2017) with adaptations.....	113
Table 2 – Drying rate influences elongation capacity drying maturation.....	118
Table 3 – Results of the ANOVA analysis of the effect of germination rate as treatment on hypocotyl and root elongation across phenological stages of maturation.....	122
CHAPTER 4	136
Table 1 – List of primers used for experiments performed by PCR (Tnt1 insertion selection).....	140
Table 2 – PCR Mix and details of programs used for PCR.....	144
Table 3 – Two-way ANOVA of longevity in <i>Mthsfa2.2</i> mutants using P50 values calculated from 3 survival curves for each treatment.....	150
Table 4 – Average number of days after flowering to reach pod abscission and seed dry weight at maturation in the different genotypes of <i>M. truncatula</i> cultivated at 20 and 26 °C.....	150

LIST OF ABBREVIATION

ABA	Abscisic Acid
ABI3	ABA-insensitive 3
ABI5	ABA-insensitive 5
AWT	Associated wild type.
BR	Brassinosteroids
cDNA	Complementary acid desoxyribonucleic
CK	Cytokinin
CDT	Controlled deterioration treatment
DAF	Days after flowering,
DNA	Acid desoxyribonucleic
DW	Dry weight
DNase	Desoxyribonuclease
ETH	Ethylene
GA	Gibberellin
RH	Relative humidity
HSF	Heat Shock Factor
HSFA9	Heat Shock Factor A9
HSP	Heat Shock Protein
IAA	Indole acid
INRA	Institut de Recherche en Horticulture et Semences
IRHS	Institut de Recherche en Horticulture et Semences
K ₂ CO ₃	Potassium carbonate
LiCl	Lithium chloride
LEA	Late embryogenesis abundant
M	Molar
MeOH	Methanol hydroxide
MM	Maturity mass
NaCl	Sodium chloride
PCA	Principal component analysis
PCR	Polymerase chain reaction
PM	Physiological maturity
RFO	Raffinose family oligosaccharides

RNA	Ribonucleic acid
RNase	Ribonuclease
ROS	Reactive oxygen species
RT-PCR	Reverse transcriptase-PCR
SAM	Shoot apical meristem.
SD	Standard deviation
SE	Standard error
SUC	Sucrose
TD	Desiccation tolerance
UNESP	University of São Paulo "Júlio de Mesquita Filho"
UV	Ultra violet
WC	Water content
WT	Wild type

SUMMARY

GENERAL INTRODUCTION	27
CHAPTER 1	31
LITERATURE REVIEW	31
1.1 Soybean seed production and stages of development.....	31
1.2 Seed development.....	36
1.3 Acquisition of physiological quality during development.....	43
1.3.1 Germinability	44
1.3.2 Seed desiccation tolerance	44
1.3.3 Seed longevity and hormonal control	46
1.3.4 Seed dormancy and hormonal control.....	52
1.3.5 Seed vigor and seedling establishment.....	54
1.4 Role of the maternal environment on the seed vigor	59
1.4.1 The position of seeds on mother plant	59
1.4.2 Environmental factors affecting seed quality	60
1.5 Heat Shock Proteins (HSP) and HSF.....	62
REFERENCE	64
CHAPTER 2.....	78
THE ACQUISITION OF SEED VIGOR IS AFFECTED BY ENVIRONMENTAL AND MATERNAL EFFECTS.....	78
ABSTRACT	78
2.1 INTRODUCTION	78
2.2 MATERIAL AND METHODS	82
2.2.1 Plant material, growth conditions and seed sampling.....	82
2.2.3 Physiological characterization	84

2.2.3 Statistical analyses	85
2.3 RESULTS	86
2.3.1 Influence of the drying regime on longevity	86
2.3.2 Impact of the environmental conditions on the acquisition of seed longevity	89
2.3.3 Acquisition of the thermal dependence of germination during seed maturation.....	94
2.4 DISCUSSION.....	98
2.4.1 The impact of environmental conditions and the effect of the mother plant on the acquisition of seed longevity	100
2.4.2 Acquisition of germination capacity at high temperature during seed maturation.....	103
REFERENCE.....	103
CHAPTER 3	108
IMPACT OF MATURATION ON THE ACQUISITION OF ORGAN ELONGATION DURING SEEDLING ESTABLISHMENT AND IMPLICATIONS ON VIGOR.....	108
ABSTRACT.....	108
3.1 INTRODUCTION	108
3.2 MATERIAL AND METHODS.....	111
3.2.1 Plant material, growth conditions and seed sampling	111
3.2.2 Experimental design and statistical analysis	115
3.3 RESULTS	116
3.3.1 Kinetics of organ elongation of germinated seeds	116
3.3.2 Effect of drying during seed maturation on hypocotyl elongation.....	116
3.3.3 The effect of maturation on seedling elongation from two crop seasons.....	119

3.3.4 The influence of storage on the elongation capacity during seed maturation	122
3.4 DISCUSSION	127
3.4.1 Seed position on the mother plant does not influence hypocotyl elongation.....	128
3.4.2 The influence of storage on the elongation capacity during seed maturation	128
3.4.3 Storage has a complex effect on organ elongation	130
REFERENCE	131
CHAPTER 4.....	136
HEAT SHOCK FACTOR A2.2 REGULATES GERMINATION QUALITY DURING SEED MATURATION OF MEDICAGO TRUNCATULA	136
ABSTRACT	136
KEYWORDS: DORMANCY. HEAT SHOCK FACTORS. LONGEVITY. MEDICAGO TRUNCATULA.....	136
4.1 INTRODUCTION	136
4.2 MATERIAL AND METHODS	139
4.2.1 Plants material and growth conditions	139
4.2.2 Physiological tests.....	142
4.2.3 Statistical analysis	145
4.3 RESULTS	145
4.3.1 Identification of MthSFA2.2 in M. truncatula as the ortholog of HSFA9.....	145
4.3.2 Isolation of two independent lines of Mthsfa2.2	147
4.3.3 Physiological characterization Mthsfa2.2 mutants.....	148
4.3.4 Role of HSFA2.2 in seed longevity	150

4.3.5 Identification of hsfa9 mutants of Arabidopsis and characterization of their physiological quality	152
4.3.6 Mt-hsfa2.2 seeds show deregulated expression of seed specific HSPs	154
4.3.7 Regulation of galactinol synthase (GOLS2) in Mthsfa2.2 of Medicago	156
4.3.8 Regulation of LEA in Mthsfa2.2 of Medicago	158
4.3.9 Role of ABA in the dormancy phenotype of hsfa2.2 mutant seeds	159
4.3.10 Role of Gibberellic Acid in the dormancy phenotype of hsfa2.2 mutant seeds	163
4.3.11 The dormancy phenotype of Mthsfa2.2 seeds has an embryonic origin.....	167
4.4 DISCUSSION.....	168
4.4.1 MtHSFA2.2 is a negative regulator of seed dormancy.....	171
REFERENCE.....	173
GENERAL DISCUSSION AND PERSPECTIVES	177
REFERENCE (GENERAL DISCUSSION AND PERSPECTIVES).....	179
REFERENCE (GENERAL INTRODUCTION)	181

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Legume crops are important to the global agriculture since it provides a sustainable solution to food and feed protein security. Significant efforts are being made to increase yield and quality of legumes and to identify climate-resilient genotypes with improved grain characteristics (CONSIDINE et al., 2017). Soybean is one of the most important commodities worldwide, being a rich source of protein and oil for a multitude of end-products for feed and food (GUNSTONE, 2011) With the continued increase in world demand for sources of plant oil and proteins, soybean production has spread rapidly to tropical regions. In Brazil the annual growth of soybean production in the last 20 years was 3.5 million tons, representing an increase of 13.4% each year due to an increase in productivity and in the cultivated areas (JUNIOR et al., 2017).

The production of highly vigorous seeds is crucial to achieve crop production efficiency through seed physiological quality. The term “physiological quality” describes the overall value of a seed lot. It is defined as the sum of physiological properties that leads to homogeneous and fast germination, uniform seedling establishment and greater tolerance of stressful conditions during germination (vigor) and remain viable for long periods during storage in dry state (longevity) (BEWLEY et al., 2013). Also, the fast establishment of normal seedlings in the field also allows the efficient control of weeds and avoids the introduction of pathogens. However, a tropical environment such in Brazil is problematic for soybean as seeds have a short lifespan during storage. Knowledge on the acquisition of these different seed quality traits during development is important to determine the ideal harvest point to obtain seeds with maximum physiological potential.

Seed physiological quality is acquired sequentially during seed development and maturation, but in many plant species the different physiological quality traits are not acquired at same time. The capacity to germinate is acquired prior to maximum dry weight. This is followed by the development of desiccation tolerance. Seed longevity is progressively acquired, after seed filling, until the seed reaches a dry state (CHATELAIN et al., 2012, RIGHETTI et al., 2015, LIMA et al., 2017). During this period of development, late embryogenesis abundant (LEA) protein, raffinose family oligosaccharides (RFOs), heat shock proteins (HSP) accumulate, which confer protection against denaturation and deleterious changes in the

conformation of macromolecules during drying and in the dry state (ROSNOBLET, 2007; BUITINK and LEPRINCE, 2008; CHATELAIN et al., 2012, VERDIER et al., 2013, RIGHETTI et al., 2015). Some works suggest that HSP can improve seed vigor (KAUR et al., 2015).

Also the content of LEA, RFO serves as an indicative of seed maturity and vigor (JALINK et al., 1998; SINNIH et al., 1998; VANDECASTEELE et al., 2011; DE SOUZA VIDIGAL et al., 2016). Longevity is also conferred by a range of antioxidants that protect the seeds against oxidative damage during storage, such as glutathione (KRANNER et al., 2006), tocopherols (MÈNE-SAFFRANÉ et al., 2010, VOM DORP et al., 2015), and flavonoids that are present in the seed coat (DEBEAUJON et al., 2000, DE GIORGI et al., 2015). However, the regulatory mechanisms controlling the acquisition and regulation of seed longevity and vigor remains largely unknown.

In parallel with the longevity, seed vigor continues to increase after severing the connection with the mother plant, which occurs at or shortly after mass maturity (maximum seed dry weight) and does not necessarily coincides with harvest maturity (when seeds can be safely harvested without mechanical damage (DEMIR and ELLIS, 1992; ELLIS et al., 1987, reviewed in FINCH-SAVAGE and BASSEL, 2016, BEWLEY et al., 2013). In the same way, how the vigor and seedling establishment is acquired during maturation remains poorly understood.

The position of the seed on the mother appear to be an effect on seed quality both the seed attributes (weight, shape) and physiological quality (vigor, viability, longevity). However, there is no consensus in the literature about this. The differences in quality attributes may be associated with time to pod set, differences in seed maturity or in time left for seed ageing on the plant. In addition, the environment and external conditions around the pod and internal characteristics (e.g. local sink-source relations) may contribute to position effects on physiological seed attributes (ILLIPRONTI et al., 2000).

With climate change, the impact of the maternal environment on the acquisition of seed vigor becomes highly relevant. Climate change is predicted to affect global agricultural production with adverse effects of high temperature and irregular rains, challenging researchers to find out adaptation strategies for crops (VALLIYODAN et al., 2017). Environmental conditions during reproductive growth of soybean can cause differences in seed yield and quality (EGLI et al., 2005; PUTEH et al., 2013)

but how they influence acquisition of seed vigor remains poorly understood. To achieve a stable production of high vigor seeds, it is necessary to gain further knowledge into the mechanisms governing seed vigor during seed development by taking into account the maternal effects.

So, in order to overcome challenges in agriculture, studies about molecular and physiological mechanisms of seed maturation, dormancy and longevity, and seed vigor can serve as a model to explain how these mechanisms work in many species, therefore, helping breeding programs to increase their chances to improve quality to crops worldwide.

The objective of my PhD is to study the main events related to the acquisition of seed quality (longevity and vigor) that occur during late seed maturation in legumes when the developing seeds prepare for the dry stage. For this purpose, we used soybean seeds grown in two consecutive years under field conditions in Brazil and *Medicago truncatula* grown under controlled optimal conditions and at high temperature.

The work presented here is divided into five parts. A first chapter of bibliographical synthesis exposes current knowledge of seed maturation events and its regulation. In the chapter 2, using soybean we evaluated the impact of the maternal environment on seed quality by comparing the effect of slow and fast drying on the survival in the dry state (desiccation tolerance and seed longevity) at different stages of maturation. Taking advantage of the contrasting climate data of 2015 and 2016, we also evaluated the impact of the environmental conditions on the acquisition of seed longevity and the impact of maturation on the thermal dependence of germination.

In chapter 3 using soybean, the work documents how and when organ elongation during seedling establishment is acquired during seed maturation. We studied whether the progress of maturation, the seed position on the mother plant has an influence on hypocotyl elongation and whether elongation capacity is affected during storage.

The aim of chapter 4 was to assess the role of HSFA2.2 from *Medicago truncatula* and HSFA9 from *Arabidopsis* in the regulation of seed vigor. HSFA.2.2 is the homologue of the sunflower HSFA9 (PRIETO-DAPENA et al., 2006) whose role in seed vigor has been suggested. For this purpose, we obtained and characterized mutant seeds from both species. Since the role of HSF and their

targets, HSP are central to heat response of cells. In *Medicago*, heat stress reduces seed longevity (RIGHETTI et al., 2015). Therefore, the effect of high temperatures on seed maturation was also studied in *Mthsfa2.2* seeds. The corresponding mutants were characterized for seed quality characteristics including dormancy and longevity as well as response to phytohormones.

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND PERSPECTIVES

With the prospects of climate changes, the need to produce high vigor seeds that withstand the negative impact of environmental conditions during production and processing and are adapted during subsequent sowing has become a challenge for researchers and the seed industry. This is partly because the impact of the maternal environment on the acquisition of seed vigor remains poorly understood. Therefore, this work contributes to the knowledge of the main events related to seed quality acquisition that occur during seed maturation in legumes when the developing seeds prepare for the dry stage. Seed maturation is a very important developmental stage as desiccation tolerance, vigor and longevity are acquired.

We confirmed that longevity in soybean is progressively acquired during seed maturation after seed filling (Figure 7, chapter 2). Further work is necessary to understand the mechanisms triggering the embryo into a seed longevity program and which protective factors are implicated. There is increasing evidence that synthesis of protective mechanisms that allows the acquisition of longevity are induced sequentially and increases progressively during late seed maturation (PROBERT et al., 2007; RIGHETTI et al., 2015; LEPRINCE et al., 2017). In the legume *Medicago truncatula*, LEA genes are induced during seed filling, but a specific set of LEA polypeptides accumulate later in conjunction with longevity (CHATELAIN et al., 2012). Therefore, it is likely that developing seeds of soybean harvested at different maturity stages are endowed with different amounts of protective compounds. Lima et al. (2017) showed that the longevity increases concomitantly with increased level in transcripts encoding heat shock proteins and heat shock factors and increased content of raffinose family oligosaccharides (RFO), both contributing to resistance against accelerated ageing (TEJEDOR-CANO et al., 2010). The question whether heat shock proteins are required for seed longevity is debatable since in *Medicago*, seeds of *hsfa2.2* mutants had a longevity similar to wild type (Figure 4-chapter 4). Whether there is a redundant mechanism that allows the synthesis of key HSP during maturation remains to be assessed. In contrast, dormancy was increased in *Mthsfa2.2* seeds, suggesting a role of HSP during seed imbibition (Figure 8 -chapter 4). Using different drying rates, we suggest that the acquisition of longevity is an autonomous embryonic

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