

QUANTITATIVE STUDIES ON THE DYNAMICS OF CARBON DIOXIDE
AND BICARBONATE IN THE RUMEN

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Master of Rural Science

by

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Preface

The studies presented in this dissertation were completed by the author as a postgraduate student in the Department of Biochemistry and Nutrition, University of New England, Armidale, N.S.W., Australia. Assistance given by other persons is indicated in the list of acknowledgements. All references cited are included in the bibliography. The work is otherwise original.

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I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any degree. I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

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R.W. Dixon

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SUMMARY

1. The increase in fermentation rate which accompanies the feeding of more readily digested diets as compared with roughage diets fed to ruminants leads to large increases in gas (CO_2 and CH_4) and acid produced in the rumen. The latter results in a reduction in the buffering ability of rumen contents unless salivary flow or bicarbonate movement into the rumen increases with fermentation rate. Where the acidity of rumen fluid contributes to an increase in CO_2 produced by acidification of salivary HCO_3^- . The rate of gas production and degree of accumulation of HCO_3^- in the rumen are factors which dictate the severity of the condition of bloat.

A study of the dynamics of the bicarbonate buffering system of the rumen with particular reference to the sources and routes of input of C into the HCO_3^- , H_2CO_3 , CO_2 and CH_4 pools is required to fully understand the bloat syndrome.

2. Continuous infusion dilution techniques were used to:
 - a) quantify the flow of C between the rumen fluid bicarbonate pool, blood bicarbonate pool and the rumen CO_2 and CH_4 gas pools under different rumen fluid pH conditions in sheep. Rumen fluid pH was manipulated by varying the grain content of diets.
 - b) examine the fate of bicarbonate-C in rumen fluid when it leaves the rumen and passes into the omasum and abomasum.
3. During infusions of isotopes, there was considerable variability in the plateau SR of sampled pools leading to often high variations

in the flow of C between specific compartments and a relatively large SE.

4. Compartmental models consisting of 2, 3 or 4 pool models were used to describe the flow of C between total rumen fluid bicarbonate, blood bicarbonate and CO₂ and CH₄ gas pools in sheep. The mean IL for 3 pool models were 43.16, 185.00 and 48.14 gC/d for the rumen bicarbonate, blood bicarbonate and rumen CO₂ gas pools respectively and a mean rumen fluid pH of 6.58. The mean IL for 4 pool models were 58.90, 188.28, 64.97 and 16.28 gC/d for rumen bicarbonate, blood bicarbonate and rumen CO₂ and CH₄ gas pools respectively and a mean rumen fluid pH of 5.74.

Analysis of compartmental models of C flow suggested that as rumen fluid pH decreases, there was:

- a) a large increase in the flow of C from rumen fluid bicarbonate to rumen CO₂ gas.
 - b) a large increase in the production of CO₂ gas.
 - c) an increase in the absorption of CO₂ gas across the rumen epithelium from the CO₂ gas pool into the blood bicarbonate pool.
5. Accompanying a decrease in rumen fluid pH, there was:
 - a) a decrease in total rumen fluid bicarbonate and HCO₃⁻ directly related to the rumen fluid pH and a variable change in rumen fluid H₂CO₃.
 - b) an increase in the proportion of CO₂ in the rumen gas pool.
 - c) an increase in the proportion of propionate and a decrease in the proportion of acetate in rumen fluid.

Rumen fluid pH had no effect on the concentration of bicarbonate

and H_2CO_3 in the blood nor the number of protozoa in rumen fluid.

At rumen fluid pH values around 5.5 and below, the concentration of bicarbonate in rumen fluid was too low for bicarbonate to be an effective buffer.

6. The infusion of $\text{NaH}^{14}\text{CO}_3$ into the omasum and abomasum resulted in a very rapid increase in ^{14}C detected in the blood. This suggested that the major route of loss of bicarbonate from the omasum and abomasum was by absorption into the blood and re-entry into the rumen via the saliva.
7. In order to test whether control over rumen pH could be attained, studies were designed to:
 - a) test the response of rumen characteristics of sheep to Na-bentonite supplement when fed high concentrate diets.
 - b) quantify (using isotopes) the flow of C between the rumen fluid bicarbonate, blood bicarbonate and rumen CO_2 gas pools in sheep fed a Na-bentonite supplement.
8. The inclusion of Na-bentonite in high concentrate diets of sheep resulted in an increase in rumen fluid pH. This was partially due to an increase in rumen fluid total bicarbonate concentration in sheep fed Na-bentonite supplement. However, when rumen fluid bicarbonate concentration was related to rumen fluid pH, the inclusion of Na-bentonite (pH 9.6), pH was maintained at higher levels at the same concentration of total bicarbonate. This indicates that the action of Na-bentonite was not solely to increase pH by increasing the bicarbonate concentration, but that it performed some other role which resulted in an increase in the

buffering ability of the rumen fluid.

9. An isotope modelling approach was used with sheep to determine whether there was any effect of two Na-bentonites (pH 5.5 and pH 9.6) on the flow of C in a system consisting of rumen fluid bicarbonate, blood bicarbonate and rumen CO₂ gas pools. No significant difference was found between the two Na-bentonites.

Over the experimental period, there was a gradual day to day increase in rumen fluid pH which may have been due to the action of Na-bentonite accumulating in the rumen or to gradual increases in salivary buffering of the rumen.

10. The results of this study have confirmed that the feeding of high concentrate diets results in an increase in the amount of CO₂ produced that has to pass through the gas phase of the rumen, usually via the liquid phase. The feeding of high concentrate diets also results in a reduction in the bicarbonate buffering ability of rumen contents. With manipulation of the diet, it is possible to increase and stabilize the buffering capacity of the rumen.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1	INTRODUCTION		
1.1	GENERAL		4
1.2	PURPOSE AND AIM OF THE STUDY		5
CHAPTER 2	LITERATURE REVIEW		
2.1	COMPOSITION OF RUMEN GASES		7
2.2	SOURCES OF RUMEN GAS		8
2.2.1	Carbon dioxide		8
2.2.1.1	Fermentation of carbohydrates.		8
2.2.1.2	Fermentation of amino acids		9
2.2.1.3	Bicarbonate as a source of carbon dioxide		11
2.2.2	Methane		13
2.2.3	Hydrogen		15
2.2.4	Hydrogen sulphide		16
2.2.5	Oxygen and nitrogen		16
2.3	RATE OF GAS PRODUCTION		17
2.4	LOSS OF GAS FROM THE RUMEN		19
2.4.1	Eructation		19
2.4.2	Absorption		21
2.4.3	Metabolic pathways		25
2.5	SALIVA		26
2.5.1	Salivary glands		26
2.5.2	Salivary characteristics		26
2.5.3	Composition		28
2.5.4	Saliva secretion rate		31
2.5.5	Salivary bicarbonate		32
2.6	BUFFERING IN THE RUMEN		35
2.7	BUFFERING MATERIALS IN RUMINANT DIETS.		37
2.8	PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE USE OF BUFFERS.		42
2.9	RELATIONSHIP OF RUMEN GAS, pH AND SALIVA WITH BLOAT.		42
2.10	LOSS OF BICARBONATE IN FAECES AND URINE.		45
CHAPTER 3	GENERAL MATERIALS AND METHODS		
3.1	GENERAL		46
3.2	ANIMALS		46
3.3	INFUSION SOLUTION TECHNIQUES		47
3.4	SAMPLING TECHNIQUES		51
3.4.1	Measurement of pH		51
3.4.2	Protozoa and VFA samples		51
3.4.3	Specific radioactivity of rumen bicarbonate		52
3.4.4	Preparation of BaCO ₃ for counting		52
3.4.5	Specific radioactivity of blood bicarbonate		53
3.4.6	Gas samples		53
3.4.6.1	Gas samples for specific radioactivity		55
3.4.6.2	Rumen gas proportions		55
3.4.7	Blood and rumen fluid bicarbonate concentration		60
3.5	RUMEN TURNOVER AND VOLUME		60

3.6	FEED ANALYSIS	60
3.6.1	Dry matter and organic matter	60
3.6.2	Total nitrogen	62
3.6.3	Dry matter digestibilities	62
3.6.4	Pepsin digestible nitrogen	63
3.6.5	Ether extract	63
3.6.6	Gross energy	63
CHAPTER 4	TRACER DILUTION TECHNIQUES	
4.1	INTRODUCTION	64
4.2	ASSUMPTIONS	64
4.3	TYPES OF TRACER EXPERIMENTS	65
4.3.1	Single injection	65
4.3.2	Continuous infusion	66
4.3.3	Linear simultaneous equation solution	67
4.4	CALCULATIONS	67
4.4.1	Irreversible loss	68
4.4.2	Transfer quotients	68
4.4.3	Linear simultaneous equations	68
4.5	THE DYNAMICS OF BICARBONATE IN THE RUMEN AND BLOOD POOLS	69
4.5.1	Introduction	69
4.5.2	The system under study	69
4.6	EFFECT OF DATA ERROR IN THE ANALYSIS OF TRACER DILUTION EXPERIMENTS	70
4.7	STATISTICAL ANALYSIS	74
4.8	COMPUTER ANALYSIS	75
CHAPTER 5	THE DESTINATION OF BICARBONATE FLOWING OUT OF THE RUMEN IN LIQUID	
5.1	INTRODUCTION	76
5.2	MATERIALS AND METHODS	78
5.2.1	Experiment 1	78
5.2.2	Experiment 2	80
5.2.3	Experiment 3	80
5.2.4	Experiment 4	81
5.2.5	Experiment 5	81
5.2.6	Calculations	82
5.2.7	Statistical analysis	83
5.3	RESULTS	83
5.3.1	Statistical analysis	83
5.3.2	Experiment 1	85
5.3.2.1	Estimates of flow rates of carbon	85
5.3.2.2	VFA proportions and rumen fluid pH values	85
5.3.2.3	Rumen gas proportions	90
5.3.2.4	Protozoa numbers	90
5.3.3	Experiments 2 and 3	90
5.3.3.1	Estimates of flow rates of carbon	90
5.3.3.2	Rumen fluid and blood pH and bicarbonate concentrations	100
5.3.3.3	VFA and rumen gas proportions	100
5.3.3.4	Protozoa numbers	100
5.3.4	Experiment 4	104

5.3.4.1	The SR of rumen fluid and blood bicarbonate and CO ₂ and CH ₄	104
5.3.4.2	Rumen fluid and blood pH and bicarbonate concentrations	104
5.3.4.3	VFA proportions	104
5.3.4.4	Rumen volume and half-time	104
5.3.4.5	Protozoa numbers	104
5.3.5	Experiment 5	106
5.3.5.1	The SR of rumen fluid, blood bicarbonate and rumen CO ₂ and CH ₄	106
5.4	DISCUSSION	109
CHAPTER 6	THE INFLUENCE OF NA-BENTONITE ON BICARBONATE DYNAMICS IN SHEEP	
6.1	INTRODUCTION	115
6.2	MATERIALS AND METHODS	116
6.2.1	Experiment 6	116
6.2.2	Experiment 7	117
6.2.3	Calculations	118
6.2.4	Statistical analysis	118
6.3	RESULTS	119
6.3.1	Experiment 6a	119
6.3.1.1	Total bicarbonate and pH of rumen fluid	119
6.3.1.2	Protozoa numbers	119
6.3.2	Experiment 6b	121
6.3.2.1	Total bicarbonate and rumen fluid pH	121
6.3.3	Experiment 7	122
6.3.3.1	Estimates of flow rates of carbon	122
6.3.3.2	Rumen fluid pH and bicarbonate concentration	135
6.3.3.3	VFA and gas proportions	135
6.4	DISCUSSION	139
CHAPTER 7	GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	
7.1	EXPERIMENTAL TECHNIQUES	142
7.2	CONCLUSIONS	143
7.3	FUTURE RESEARCH PRIORITIES	144
APPENDIX A	SOLUTION TO MODELS IN TRACER DILUTION EXPERIMENTS	
APPENDIX B	DATA USED IN MODELLING	
APPENDIX C	CALCULATION OF INFUSION RATES	
C.1	RUMEN AND BLOOD INFUSIONS	154
C.2	¹⁴ CO ₂ INFUSION	154
APPENDIX D	DATA USED FOR GRAPHS IN CHAPTER 6.	

List of Tables

(abbreviated titles)

TABLE

- 2.1 Mean CO₂ and CH₄ absorption from the rumen of 2 cows on hay and grain diets.
- 2.2 The mean weights of salivary glands (g) and body weight (kg) in the sheep and calf.
- 2.3 Summary of characteristics of the salivary glands of sheep.
- 2.4 Mean composition of mixed saliva for 4 sheep.
- 2.5 Composition of saliva from various sources expressed in m.equiv/l.
- 5.1 Proximate analysis of feed components for experiments 1-5.
- 5.2 Mean VFA proportions and total VFA concentrations in the rumen of sheep used in experiment 1.
- 5.3 Mean rumen fluid pH over experimental period.
- 5.4 The proportions of CO₂ and CH₄ in rumen gas and ratio of CO₂ to CH₄ in sheep used in experiment 1.
- 5.5 The number of protozoa per ml (mean \pm SD) in the rumen fluid of sheep used in experiment 1.
- 5.6 The concentration of total bicarbonate, HCO₃⁻ and H₂CO₃ and pH in rumen fluid for sheep used in experiment 2.
- 5.7 The concentration of total bicarbonate, HCO₃⁻ and H₂CO₃ and pH in rumen fluid of sheep used in experiment 3.
- 5.8 The concentration of total bicarbonate, HCO₃⁻ and H₂CO₃ and pH in blood for sheep used in experiment 2.
- 5.9 The concentration of total bicarbonate, HCO₃⁻ and H₂CO₃ and pH in blood for sheep used in experiment 3.
- 5.10 Mean VFA proportions and total VFA concentration in the rumen fluid of sheep used in experiment 2.
- 5.11 Mean VFA proportions and total VFA concentration in the rumen fluid of sheep used in experiment 3.
- 5.12 The proportions of CO₂ and CH₄ in rumen gas and ratio of CO₂ to CH₄ for sheep used in experiment 2.
- 5.13 The proportions of CO₂ and CH₄ in rumen gas and ratio of CO₂ to CH₄ for sheep used in experiment 3.
- 5.14 The number of protozoa per ml (mean \pm SD) in the rumen fluid of sheep used in experiment 2.

- 5.15 The number of protozoa per ml (mean \pm SD) in the rumen fluid of sheep used in experiment 3.
- 5.16 The concentration of total bicarbonate, HCO_3^- and H_2CO_3 and pH in rumen fluid of sheep used in experiment 4.
- 5.17 The concentration of total bicarbonate, HCO_3^- and H_2CO_3 and pH in blood for sheep used in experiment 4.
- 5.18 Mean VFA proportions and total VFA concentrations for sheep used in experiment 4.
- 5.19 The number of protozoa per ml (mean \pm SD) in the rumen fluid of sheep used in experiment 4.
- 6.1 The proximate analysis of feed components in experiment 7.
- 6.2 The number of protozoa per ml (mean \pm SD) in the rumen fluid of sheep used in experiment 6a.
- 6.3 Mean VFA proportions and total VFA concentrations for all sheep used in experiment 8.
- 6.4 The proportions of CO_2 and CH_4 in rumen gas and ratio of CO_2 to CH_4 for sheep used in experiment 7 (pre-feed).
- 6.5 The proportions of CO_2 and CH_4 in rumen gas and ratio of CO_2 to CH_4 for sheep used in experiment 7 (post-feed).
- A.1 Plateau specific radioactivities (SR) and infusion rates for each pool considered.
- B.1 The inputs (mean \pm SD) for the solution of the 2 pool models in experiment 1 (Chapter 5).
- B.2 The inputs (mean \pm SD) for the solution of the 3 pool models in experiment 2 (Chapter 5).
- B.3 The inputs (mean \pm SD) for the solution of the 4 pool models in experiment 3 (Chapter 5).
- B.4 The inputs (mean \pm SD) for the solution of the 3 pool models in experiment 7 (Chapter 6) for sheep at the pre-feeding period.
- B.5 The inputs (mean \pm SD) for the solution of the 3 pool models in experiment 7 (Chapter 6) for sheep at the post-feeding period.
- D.1 The change in total bicarbonate (Total bic.) after infusion began for experiment 6b (no Na-bentonite).
- D.2 The change in total bicarbonate (Total bic.) after infusion began for experiment 6b (+ Na-bentonite).
- D.3 The change in pH after infusion began for experiment 6b (no Na-bentonite).
- D.4 The change in pH after infusion began for experiment 6b (+ Na-bentonite).

List of Figures

(abbreviated titles)

FIGURE

- 2.1 Rumen carbohydrate metabolism.
- 2.2 The relationship between solubility of protein and the extent of its digestion in the rumen.
- 2.3 Anatomy of eructation showing gas caps; arrow indicates gas movements during secondary sequences.
- 2.4 Concentration of total CO₂ in omasal contents of slaughtered cows.
- 2.5 Location and relative size of salivary glands in the sheep.
- 2.6 Variation in the composition of saliva with time after stimulation; g/g.hr = grams of saliva secreted per gram of salivary tissue in one hour.
- 2.7 The pathways for movement of bicarbonate from blood into the saliva.
- 3.1 Rumen bung with two sampling probes and infusion probe inserted.
- 3.2 Glass syringe used to withdraw gas samples.
- 3.3 The apparatus used for oxidization of CH₄.
- 3.4 Gas chromatograph.
- 3.5 Wheatstone bridge contained in the katharometer.
- 3.6 The vial with suspended cup for determining bicarbonate concentration.
- 4.1 General open-compartment models of flows of C between (a) rumen bicarbonate-C (Pool 1) and blood bicarbonate-C (Pool 2); (b) rumen bicarbonate-C (Pool 1), blood bicarbonate-C (Pool 2) and rumen CO₂ (Pool 3); (c) rumen bicarbonate-C (Pool 1), blood bicarbonate-C (Pool 2), rumen CO₂ (Pool 3) and rumen CH₄ (Pool 4). The movements between pools are given for each flow (F_{i,j}) as explained in Section 4.4.2.
- 5.1 The two compartment model for experiment 1 giving flows of C (gC/d) between rumen fluid bicarbonate-C and blood bicarbonate-C.
- 5.2 Two compartment models describing the flow of C (gC/d) between total rumen fluid bicarbonate and blood bicarbonate in sheep fed 420 g/d lucerne chaff and 280 g/d rolled barley (experiment 1).
- 5.3 Three pool models describing the flow of C (gC/d) between total rumen bicarbonate, blood bicarbonate and CO₂ compartments in sheep fed 420 g/d lucerne chaff and 280 g/d rolled barley (experiment 2).

- 5.4 Four compartment models describing the flow of C (gC/d) between total rumen fluid bicarbonate, blood bicarbonate, CO₂ gas and CH₄ gas in sheep fed 280 g/d lucerne chaff and 420 g/d rolled barley (experiment 3).
- 5.5 The SR of rumen bicarbonate, blood bicarbonate, rumen CO₂ gas and rumen CH₄ gas in sheep used in experiment 4 following the continuous infusion of NaH¹⁴CO₃ into the omasum.
- 5.6 The SR of rumen bicarbonate, blood bicarbonate, rumen CO₂ gas and rumen CH₄ gas in sheep used in experiment 5 following the continuous infusion of NaH¹⁴CO₃ into the abomasum.
- 6.1 The relationship between total bicarbonate and rumen fluid pH for (i) basal diet, (ii) basal diet + Na-bentonite (pH 5.5) and (iii) basal diet + Na-bentonite (pH 9.6) in experiment 6a.
- 6.2 The change in pH with time for basal diet alone and basal diet + Na-bentonite (experiment 6b).
- 6.3 The decrease in total bicarbonate with time for the basal diet and basal diet + Na-bentonite (experiment 6b).
- 6.4 Three pool models describing the flow of C (gC/d) between the rumen fluid and blood bicarbonate and CO₂ gas compartments in the pre-feeding period (experiment 7).
- 6.5 Three pool models describing the flow of C (gC/d) between the rumen fluid and blood bicarbonate and CO₂ gas compartments for the post-feeding period (experiment 7).
- 6.6 The relationship between rumen fluid pH and time for the pre-feeding periods of experiment 7 for sheep given Na-bentonite (pH 5.5) and Na-bentonite (pH 9.6).
- 6.7 The relationship between rumen fluid pH and time for post-feeding periods of experiment 7 for sheep given Na-bentonite (pH 5.5) and Na-bentonite (pH 9.6).
- A.1 The compartments being considered.

Definition of terms and abbreviations

Tracer terminology

Definitions of the terminology used in this thesis for describing tracer dilution techniques based on Brownell et al (1968) and Nolan et al (1976).

Model: A representation of an hypothesis in which a formal structure for a system is proposed.

Biological system: A set of compartments of interest between which the transfer of defined substances occurs.

Compartment: A biologically distinguishable entity of a system throughout which the ratio of concentration of tracer to tracee is uniform at any given time.

Tracee: The defined substance whose movement and behaviour in the system is under study.

Tracer: An isotope-labelled form of the defined substance used to study the system having the basic requirements that it be identical to the tracee in all physical, chemical and biological properties and be negligible in quantity compared to the tracee. Its introduction to the system must cause no perturbation of the characteristics of the system.

Tracer dilution: The change in the ratio of tracer and tracee following the introduction of tracer into a compartment.

Tracer kinetics: The movement and behaviour of tracer in a system with time.

Rate constant: The fraction of the amount of the defined substance that leaves a given compartment per unit time.

Transfer quotient (A_{ij}): The proportion of tracee in a secondary pool (i) arising from the primary pool (j).

Plateau: The estimated value of the asymptote which is approached by the ratio of tracer to tracee during a continuous infusion of tracer into a compartment at a constant rate.

Steady state: A condition of a system characterized by constancy with respect to concentrations and quantities and rates of flow of tracee during the experimental period.

Rate of flux: The rate at which all tracee enters and leaves a compartment which is in steady state. Rate of flux is made up of the irreversible loss and recycling rates.

Recycling rate: Rate of entry of a defined substance into a compartment which has previously been in that compartment.

Irreversible loss (entry rate): That fraction of tracee which leaves the compartment and does not return to the compartment during the experimental period.

Pool: Equivalent to a compartment of tracee which composes a biologically distinguishable entity used for kinetic analysis.

Pool size: The total mass of a defined substance distributed throughout all compartments within the biological system.

Primary pool: The pool or compartment into which the tracer is injected or infused.

Secondary pool: The pool(s) or compartment(s) into which tracer may be

detected after entry from the primary pool.

Half-life: Time required for loss and replacement of one-half of the tracee. Equals turnover time multiplied by 0.693.

Abbreviations

A_{ij}	:	proportion of secondary pool (i) derived from primary pool (j)
AMP	:	adenosine monophosphate
ATP	:	adenosine triphosphate
C	:	carbon
Cr-EDTA	:	chromium complex of ethylenediamine tetra-acetic acid
d	:	day
DM	:	dry matter
DOMI	:	digestible organic matter intake
F_{ij}	:	flow of material into pool i from pool j (g/d)
g	:	gram
g	:	gravity
hr	:	hour
I.D.	:	internal diameter
IL	:	irreversible loss (g/d)
i.u.	:	international unit
kg	:	kilogram
l	:	litre
M	:	molar (concentration)
mCi	:	millicurie
m.equiv	:	milliequivalents (concentration)
mg	:	milligram
min	:	minute

ml : millilitre
mm : millimetre
mm³ : cubic millimetre
mmol : millimole
mCi : millimicrocurie
N : nitrogen
nCi : nanocurie
OM : organic matter
SA : specific activity
SD : standard deviation
SE : standard error
spp. : species
SR : specific radioactivity
STP : standard temperature and pressure
uCi : microcurie
um : micrometre
VFA : volatile fatty acid(s)