

Edited by
Ganapathy Subramanian

Continuous Biomanufacturing

Innovative Technologies
and Methods



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Editor

Prof. Dr. Ganapathy Subramanian
44 Oaken Grove
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United Kingdom

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List of Contributors

Kristo Abner

Competence Center of Food and
Fermentation Technologies
Akadeemia tee 15
12618 Tallinn
Estonia

Kaarel Adamberg

Tallinn University of Technology
Department of Chemistry and
Biotechnology
Akadeemia tee 15
12618 Tallinn
Estonia

and

Competence Center of Food and
Fermentation Technologies
Akadeemia tee 15
12618 Tallinn
Estonia

Harshit Agarwal

Indian Institute of Technology
Department of Chemical
Engineering
Hauz Khas
110016 New Delhi
India

Paul Beckett

Millipore SAS
Process Solution Technologies
39 Route Industrielle de la Hardt
67124 Molsheim
France

Helge Berg

Technology Management
Millipore SAS
39 Route Industrielle de la Hardt
67124 Molsheim
France

Torsten Bisschop

Millipore SAS
Process Solution Technologies
39 Route Industrielle de la Hardt
67124 Molsheim
France

Marc Bisschops

Pall Life Sciences
Scientific Laboratory Services
Nijverheidsweg 1
1671 GC Medemblik
The Netherlands

Mathilde Bourguignat

Technology Management
Millipore SAS
39 Route Industrielle de la Hardt
67124 Molsheim
France

Mark Brower

Merck & Co Inc
Biologics & Vaccines
2000 Galloping Hill Road
Kenilworth, NJ 07033
USA

Rimenys J. Carvalho

Federal University of Rio de Janeiro
COPPE
Cell Culture Engineering Laboratory
C.P. 68502
21941-972 Rio de Janeiro, RJ
Brazil

Leda R. Castilho

Federal University of Rio de Janeiro
COPPE
Cell Culture Engineering Laboratory
C.P. 68502
21941-972 Rio de Janeiro, RJ
Brazil

Cedric Geyer

Technology Management
Millipore SAS
39 Route Industrielle de la Hardt
67124 Molsheim
France

Andrew Clutterbuck

Millipore SAS
Process Solution Technologies
39 Route Industrielle de la Hardt
67124 Molsheim
France

M. Nicolas Cruz-Bournazou

Technische Universität Berlin
Department of Biotechnology
Ackerstrasse 76
ACK 24
13355 Berlin
Germany

Michael A. Cunningham

Technology Management
EMD Millipore Corporation
290 Concord Road
Billerica, MA 01821
USA

Reinhard Ditz

Clausthal University of Technology
Institute for Separation and Process
Technology
Leibnizstr 15
38678 Clausthal-Zellerfeld
Germany

Sten Erm

Tallinn University of Technology
Department of Chemistry and
Biotechnology
Akadeemia tee 15
12618 Tallinn
Estonia

and

Competence Center of Food and
Fermentation Technologies
Akadeemia tee 15
12618 Tallinn
Estonia

Guillermina Forno

Ciudad Universitaria
Cell Culture Laboratory
UNL
FBCB
Paraje el Pozo
CC 242 Santa Fe
Argentina

and

Ciudad Universitaria
R&D Zelltek S.A.
UNL
FBCB
Paraje el Pozo
CC 242 Santa Fe
Argentina

Paul Genest

Technology Management
EMD Millipore Corporation
290 Concord Road
Billerica, MA 01821
USA

Sanchayita Ghose

Bristol-Myers Squibb
Downstream Process Development
38 Jackson Road
Danvers, MA 01923
USA

Julie Grace

Pall Life Sciences
Scientific Laboratory Services
20 Walkup Drive
Westborough, MA 01581
USA

Petra Gronemeyer

Clausthal University of Technology
Institute for Separation and Process
Technology
Leibnizstr 15
38678 Clausthal-Zellerfeld
Germany

Sanjeev K. Gupta

Ipca Laboratories Ltd.
Advanced Biotech Lab
Kandivli Industrial Estate
Kandivli (west)
400067 Mumbai
India

Josselyn Haas

Millipore SAS
Process Solution Technologies
39 Route Industrielle de la Hardt
67124 Molsheim
France

Daniel Karst

ETH Zurich
Institute for Chemical and
Bioengineering
Department of Chemistry and
Applied Biosciences
Vladimir-Prelog-Weg 1
8093 Zurich
Switzerland

Nikhil Kateja

Indian Institute of Technology
Department of Chemical
Engineering
Hauz Khas
110016 New Delhi
India

Steven S. Kuwahara

GXP BioTechnology LLC
Tucson, AZ 85741
USA

Renato Lorenzi

Millipore SAS
Process Solution Technologies
39 Route Industrielle de la Hardt
67124 Molsheim
France

Kathleen Mihlbachler

Lewa Process Technologies
Inc. Separations Development
8 Charlestown Street
Devens, MA 01434
USA

Massimo Morbidelli

ETH Zurich
Institute for Chemical and
Bioengineering
Department of Chemistry and
Applied Biosciences
Vladimir-Prelog-Weg 1
8093 Zürich
Switzerland

Thomas Müller-Späth

ChromaCon AG
Process Development
Technoparkstrasse 1
8005 Zurich
Switzerland

and

ETH Zurich
Institute for Chemical and
Bioengineering
Department of Chemistry and
Applied Biosciences
Vladimir-Prelog-Weg 1
8093 Zürich
Switzerland

Venkatesh Natarajan

Biogen
Engineering & Technology
225 Binney Street
Cambridge, MA 02142
USA

Peter Neubauer

Technische Universität Berlin
Department of Biotechnology
Ackerstrasse 76
ACK 24
13355 Berlin
Germany

Laura Okhio-Seaman

Sartorius Stedim North America
Validation Services
5 Orville Drive
Bohemia, NY 11716
USA

Nico M.G. Oosterhuis

Celltainer Biotech BV
Bothoekweg 9
7115AK Winterswijk
The Netherlands

Eduardo Ortí

Ciudad Universitaria
R&D Zelltek S.A.
UNL
FBCB
Paraje el Pozo
CC 242 Santa Fe
Argentina

John Pieracci

Biogen
Engineering & Technology
225 Binney Street
Cambridge, MA 02142
USA

David Pollard

Merck & Co Inc
Biologics & Vaccines
2000 Galloping Hill Road
Kenilworth, NJ 07033
USA

Anurag S.Rathore

Indian Institute of Technology
Department of Chemical
Engineering
Hauz Khas
110016 New Delhi
India

Douglas Richardson

Merck & Co Inc
 Biologics & Vaccines
 2000 Galloping Hill Road
 Kenilworth, NJ 07033
 USA

Christian Schild

Merck Life Science
 (a business of Merck KGaA) Process
 Solutions
 Cell Culture Media R&D
 Frankfurter Strasse 250
 64291 Darmstadt
 Germany

Mark Schofield

Pall Life Sciences
 Applications R&D
 20 Walkup Drive
 Westborough, MA 01581
 USA

Andrus Seiman

Tallinn University of Technology
 Department of Chemistry and
 Biotechnology
 Akadeemia tee 15
 12618 Tallinn
 Estonia

and

Competence Center of Food and
 Fermentation Technologies
 Akadeemia tee 15
 12618 Tallinn
 Estonia

Frederic Sengler

Millipore SAS
 Process Solution Technologies
 39 Route Industrielle de la Hardt
 67124 Molsheim
 France

Jochen B. Sieck

Merck Life Science
 (a business of Merck KGaA)
 Process Solutions
 Cell Culture Media R&D
 Frankfurter Strasse 250
 64291 Darmstadt
 Germany

Fabian Steinebach

ETH Zurich
 Institute for Chemical and
 Bioengineering
 Department of Chemistry and
 Applied Biosciences
 Vladimir-Prelog-Weg 1
 8093 Zurich
 Switzerland

Jochen Strube

Clausthal University of Technology
 Institute for Separation and Process
 Technology
 Leibnizstr 15
 38678 Clausthal-Zellerfeld
 Germany

Holger Thiess

Clausthal University of Technology
 Institute for Separation and Process
 Technology
 Leibnizstr 15
 38678 Clausthal-Zellerfeld
 Germany

Raivo Vilu

Tallinn University of Technology
 Department of Chemistry and
 Biotechnology
 Akadeemia tee 15
 12618 Tallinn
 Estonia

and

Competence Center of Food and
Fermentation Technologies,
Akadeemia tee 15
12618 Tallinn
Estonia

Jörg von Hagen

Merck Life Science (a business of
Merck KGaA) Process Solutions
Cell Culture Media R&D
Frankfurter Strasse 250
64291 Darmstadt
Germany

Steffen Zobel-Roos

Clausthal University of Technology
Institute for Separation and Process
Technology
Leibnizstr 15
38678 Clausthal-Zellerfeld
Germany

Part One

Overview of State-of-the-Art Technologies and Challenges

1

Continuous Bioprocess Development: Methods for Control and Characterization of the Biological System

Peter Neubauer and M. Nicolas Cruz-Bournazou

Technische Universität Berlin, Department of Biotechnology, Ackerstrasse 76, ACK 24, 13355 Berlin, Germany

1.1 Proposed Advantages of Continuous Bioprocessing

1.1.1 Introduction

The change from batch to continuous processing has led to the intensification of processes in a number of industries, including steel casting, automobile and other devices, petrochemicals, food, and pharmaceuticals. Advantages include, aside from a significant increase in volumetric productivity, reduced equipment size, steady-state operation, low cycle times, streamered process flows, and reduced capital cost.

In bioengineering, continuous processing is the standard in wastewater treatment, composting, and some bioenergy processes such as biogas and bioethanol fermentations. In contrast, most production processes run as batch type operations or more specifically fed-batch processes, which is the major production technology today.

Konstantinov and Cooney provide a definition of a continuous process as “A unit operation is continuous if it is capable of processing a continuous flow input for prolonged periods of time. A continuous unit operation has minimal internal hold volume. The output can be continuous or discretized in small packets produced in a cyclic manner.” [1]. They also differentiate between full continuous processes with no or minimal hold volume in the process line or hybrid processes that contain both batch and continuous process operations.

Obviously, the push in continuous manufacturing technologies was initiated by the BioPAT initiative of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 2002 and the published guidance to PAT in 2004 [2], which initially aimed at a better understanding of the connections between product quality and process conditions. This led to the need to develop quality by design (QbD), that is, the implementation of process analytical tools over the whole developmental pipeline from early product screening over the process development in the laboratory scale and during scale up. The needs for a better understanding of the impact of process parameters on the critical quality attributes (CQA) of the respective product also increased the interest in the development and implementation of novel sensors and analytical

tools. As a consequence, this better understanding of processes resulted in further process intensification and provided the instrumental basis to approach challenges in relation to continuous operation.

Aside the FDA initiative, there are several drivers for the increasing interest in continuous processing, not only in the pharmaceutical industry but also in the industrial (white) biotech industry. On one side, we see an increasing demand and thus also increasing production scale for industrial bioproducts (enzymes, small molecules, and bioenergy market) with a need for reduced costs for the products and increased competition. Considering that production scales are steadily growing and that a scale reduction close to factor 10 would be possible by continuous processing, plant sizes and the efficiency of bioprocesses could be increased significantly. On the other side, the opportunity of the selection of new biocatalysts and its implementation in the chemical synthesis for integrated chemoenzymatic processes (i.e., processes which combine chemical and enzymatic reactions) have to be competitive with the existing chemical processes and need to be integrated into the chemical production schemes. Here, continuous processes offer clear advantages.

In biopharma for recombinant proteins, antibodies, highly complex proteins, recombinant enzymes and blood factors, the efficiency of the cell factories, and production systems have dramatically increased during the last decade. Opportunities for high cell density processes with a higher volumetric product yield and quality, as well as the changing situation in view of the intellectual properties by the termination of many patents for important drugs with novel commercial opportunities for new biosimilars and biobetters are a strong driver in increasing the competition especially from emerging markets. In parallel, there is an increasing demand for establishing local production sites for defined regional markets, rather than having single production sites. Strict cost calculations as a developmental driver demand for smaller and effective, but also flexible production plants. This directs interest to evaluate continuous bioprocessing opportunities to minimize investments for production facilities, and thinking about parallelization rather than larger scales. Parallelization would also be an advantage in processes with longer plant cycle times [3] as, for example, cell culture-based products. A nice example that shows the opportunities in significantly decreasing operational and capital expenses by changing from conventional bioprocessing to continuous bioprocessing in the case of production on monoclonal antibodies (mAB) and other non-mAB processes is shown by Walther *et al.* [4].

However, despite the obvious opportunities of continuous processes there are many challenges to solve, mainly the demand for fast realization and risk minimization. Currently, it seems to be easier to transfer a batch process into production than to start a new, longer, and more expensive development of a continuous process even though it is expected to be more efficient.

These scenarios show that there is a big need in strategic methods concerning the development of continuous process strategies for either new products or to derive a continuous process from existing batch type processes. As early-phase product development can practically be only performed as batch processes, a key question in product development is how we can transfer a batch strategy to a continuous operation in a large process.