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Enzymatic hydrolysis from carbohydrates of barley straw pretreated by ionic liquids

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND: Lignocellulosic biomass offers many potential advantages in comparison with the traditionally used sugars or starchy biomass since it's vastly available and it does not compete with food and feed production. The abundance and high carbohydrates content of barley straw make it a good candidate for bioethanol production in Europe. Since biomass must be pretreated before enzymatic hydrolysis to improve the digestibility of both the cellulose and the hemicellulose biomass, the use of ionic liquids (IL) has been proposed as an environmental friendly pretreatment of biomass.

RESULTS: Different pretreatment conditions were investigated to determine the effects of the experimental conditions (temperature and time) on the enzymatic digestibility of pretreated material. The pretreatment of barley straw with 1-ethyl-3-methyl imidazolium acetate treatment resulted in up to a 9-fold increase in the cellulose conversion and a 13-fold increase in the xylan conversion when compared with the untreated barley straw.

CONCLUSION: Ionic liquid pretreatment of barley straw at 110 °C for 30 minutes, followed by enzymatic hydrolysis, leads to a sugar yield of 53.5 g/100 g raw material. It's then ready available for conversion into ethanol and is equivalent to more than 86%

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3 1 from potential sugars. The increase in saccharification was possible due to the rupture in
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5 2 lignin-hemicellulose linkages with treatment of 1-ethyl-3-methyl imidazolium acetate.
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10 4 Keywords: Lignocellulose, cellulose digestibility, biomass pretreatment, ionic liquid,
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12 5 barley straw.
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16 7 INTRODUCTION

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18 8 Ethanol production from biomass has gained considerable interest in order to provide
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20 9 energy security and reduce greenhouse-gas emissions. Lignocellulosic biomass offers
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22 10 many potential advantages in comparison with the traditionally used sugary or starchy
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24 11 biomass for its large quantity and not competing with food and feed production.
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26 12 Furthermore, lignocellulosic ethanol has shown to involve up to 85 % net reduction in
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28 13 greenhouse-gas emissions¹. Among lignocellulosic substrates, barley straw is a good
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30 14 candidate for bioethanol production in Europe due to its high availability and high
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32 15 carbohydrates content².
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36 16 In the lignocellulosic biomass to ethanol process based on the use of hydrolytic
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38 17 enzymes, biomass must be pretreated before enzymatic hydrolysis to improve the
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40 18 digestibility of both cellulose and hemicellulose fractions. The pretreatment consists of
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42 19 breaking the lignocellulose matrix to expose the carbohydrates for enzymatic reaction.
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44 20 Among pretreatment methods, the use of ionic liquid has been proposed as an
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46 21 environmental friendly pretreatment of biomass^{3,4}.
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50 22 The use of ionic liquids (ILs) as solvents for pretreatment of cellulosic biomass
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52 23 has received attention during the last decade. ILs are capable of breaking down the
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54 24 extensive hydrogen-bonding network in the polysaccharides and promote its
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56 25 solubilization. ILs are generally defined as salts that melt at or below 100 °C, affording
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3 1 liquids exclusively composed of ions⁵. These salts show unique properties including an
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5 2 almost negligible vapour pressure and high solvation capacity, which make them ideal
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7 3 solvents for a range of applications⁶. Their solvent properties can be varied by adjusting
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10 4 the anion and the alkyl constituents of the cation⁷.

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12 5 Although most available data showing the effectiveness of ILs have been
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14 6 developed using pure crystalline cellulose, recent studies have demonstrated that ionic
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16 7 ILs can be used to pretreat lignocellulosic biomass such as sugarcane bagasse^{8,9}, wheat
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18 8 straw¹⁰ or wood¹¹. Several imidazolium-based ILs were originally reported as good
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20 9 methods to dissolve large amounts of cellulose¹². Acetate-based ILs are considered an
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22 10 attractive choice for processing cellulosic biomass in a efficient and environmentally
23
24 11 friendly way, as they dissolve large amounts of cellulose under very mild conditions and
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26 12 can be nearly 100% recovered⁷.

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29 13 The 1-ethyl-3-methyl imidazolium acetate is currently regarded as one of the
30
31 14 most effective pretreatment solvents, as its application partly dissolves lignocelluloses
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33 15 while also achieving substrate delignification and the decrystallization of cellulose^{11,13}.
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35 16 Some authors have reported that IL-pretreatment of switchgrass significantly improves
36
37 17 the enzymatic saccharification of both cellulose (96% glucose yield in 24 h) and xylan
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39 18 (63% xylose yield in 24 h)¹⁴. This improvement is attributed to the reduction in cellulose
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41 19 crystallinity and the delignification effect during dissolution-regeneration steps.
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43 20 However, scarce information about ILs pretreatment on barley straw has been found.

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47 21 For the large-scale application of ILs, development of energy-efficient
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49 22 recycling methods for ILs is a prerequisite and should be investigated in detail¹⁵.
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51 23 Toxicity to enzymes and fermentative microorganisms must also be studied before ILs
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53 24 can be considered a real option for biomass pretreatment¹⁶. Despite of these current
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55 25 limitations, advanced research such as potential synthesis of ILs from carbohydrates,
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3 1 may play a role in reducing their cost. Development of ILs pretreatment could offer a
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5 2 great potential for future lignocellulose biorefinery processes.
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7 3 In this work, the enzymatic hydrolysis of barley straw pretreated with ionic
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9 4 liquids was studied for the first time. Different pretreatment conditions were investigated
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11 5 to determine the effects of the experimental conditions on the sugar yields by enzymatic
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13 6 hydrolysis.
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15 7 16 8 **MATERIAL AND METHODS** 17 18 19

20 9 21 22 10 *Raw Material*

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24 11 Barley straw (*Hordeum vulgare*, 6-7 % moisture), supplied by CEDER (Spain) was used
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26 12 as raw material. The analysis showed the following composition (% dry weight): glucan
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28 13 34.9 ± 0.8 , xylan 20.8 ± 0.6 ; arabinan 2.5 ± 0.01 , galactan 0.8 ± 0.01 and acid insoluble
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30 14 lignin 18.1 ± 0.8 . Its composition was determined by total acid hydrolysis using the
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32 15 standard Laboratory Analytical Procedures for biomass analysis provided by the
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34 16 National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) (Colorado, USA)¹⁷
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42 18 *Pretreatment*

43 19 A barley straw sample (500 mg) was dissolved in 9.5 g of hot 1-ethyl-3-methyl
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45 20 imidazolium acetate [EMIM][OAc] (manufactured by BASF and purchased from Sigma-
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47 21 Aldrich). Assay temperature ranged between 90 and 130 °C and residence time between
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49 22 30 and 60 minutes. Pretreatment was performed in a glass vessel into a temperature-
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51 23 controlled oil bath with magnetic stirring. The reaction was stopped by adding the same
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53 24 amount of deionized water (anti-solvent). After the addition of water, the precipitated
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55 25 material was separated by filtration. The liquid was analyzed for monomeric sugars and
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3 1 degradation compounds by HPLC and the solid fraction was washout thoroughly with
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5 2 water and was characterized as glucan, hemicellulose, and lignin, as described in
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7 3 analytical methods.
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11 5 *Enzymatic hydrolysis.*

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14 6 The solid fraction obtained after pretreatment was used as substrate for enzymatic
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16 7 hydrolysis. Enzymatic microassays¹⁸ were carried out in 2 mL eppendorf tubes.
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18 8 Experiments were performed at 5% (w/v) dry pretreated substrate loading, at 50 °C for
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20 9 72 h in a microplate incubator (ThermoStar, 3 mm shaken amplitude) and 800 rpm using
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22 10 citrate buffer 0.05 mol/L at pH 5. Cellulose-hydrolyzing enzymes, Novozyme 50013
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24 11 with an activity of 65 filter paper units (FPU)/g, and Novozyme 50010 with a β -
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26 12 glucosidase activity of 590 IU/g, were used in all experiments. Enzymes were kindly
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28 13 provided by Novozymes A/S (Denmark). Enzyme loading of 15 FPU/g of dry pretreated
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30 14 substrate of cellulase and 15 IU/g pretreated substrate of glucosidase was used. After 72
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32 15 h enzymatic hydrolysis, glucose and xylose content was analyzed by HPLC. Enzymatic
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34 16 hydrolysis yields (EH_g and EH_x) were calculated as the ratio of glucose and /or xylose
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36 17 release divided by potential glucose and /or xylose content in solid fraction.
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45 19 *Analytical methods.*

46 20 The chemical composition of the raw material and the solid fraction obtained after
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48 21 pretreatment was determined according to NREL method¹⁷. Sugars concentration was
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50 22 determined by high performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) in a Waters 2695 liquid
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52 23 chromatograph with refractive index detector. A CARBOsep CHO-682 LEAD column
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54 24 (Transgenomic, Omaha, NE) operating at 75 °C with Milli-Q water (Millipore) as
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56 25 mobile-phase (0.5 mL /min) was used.
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3 1 Phenolic compounds were analyzed by HPLC (Agilent, Waldbronn, Germany)
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5 2 employing an Aminex HPX-87H column (Bio-Rad Labs, Hercules, CA) at 65 °C. The
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7 3 mobil phase contained 89% (5 mM H₂SO₄) and 11% acetonitrile at flow rate of 0.7
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9 4 mL/min. A 1050A Photodiode-Array detector (Agilent, Walsbronn, Germany) was
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11 5 employed for detection.
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16 7 **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

18 8 *Effect of pretreatment on the composition of regenerated biomass*

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20 9 The 1-n-ethyl-3-methyl-imidazolium acetate was selected as ionic liquid (IL) for
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22 10 biomass pretreatment, due to its low melting point temperature, and it is liquid at room
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24 11 temperature. Moreover, it has low viscosity and it is easy to handle. The imidazolium
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26 12 group is substituted with relatively short alkyl chains. According to the bibliography,
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28 13 ionic liquid with short-chain groups have been found to be less toxic than long-chain¹⁹.
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30 14 On the other hand, the acetate ion is less corrosive than the IL's halide anions, which
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32 15 have also been described as effective in cellulose dissolution.
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36 16 It is worth mentioning that the IL-pretreated biomass suspension showed a dark
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38 17 brown colour, soon after the onset of the reaction, indicating that IL's has a good ability
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40 18 to extract lignin from barley straw. Moreover, a complete dissolution of the barley straw
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42 19 was observed in all pretreatment conditions, except for pretreatment carried out at 90 °C
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44 20 for 30 minutes. *The colour change of the [EMIM][OAc] following pretreatment was*
45
46 21 *also reported for sugarcane bagasse¹³*
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48

49 22 Table 1 shows the yield of regenerated biomass (solid obtained after solubilisation
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51 23 and precipitation, divided by original oven-dried weight) and composition of insoluble
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53 24 solids obtained after pretreatment (regenerated solid). Yield of regenerated biomass was
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55 25 in the range of 74.7-80.3 %. Similar regenerated biomass yields values were obtained in
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3 1 other herbaceous materials such as switchgrass, while lower to those obtained in poplar
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5 2 using the same ionic liquid²⁰.

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7 3 Glucan (values ranging from 35 to 45.6 %), is the main component of insoluble
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9 4 solids (regenerated solid). Hemicellulose content in the regenerated solid ranges from
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11 5 21.8 to 28.6%. Acid insoluble lignin (AIL) content of regenerated solid, varied 16.2-
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13 6 18.5%. On the other hand, when these values are referred to untreated material, the
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15 7 glucan content varies from to 26.2 to 34.1 %, which means a recovery of glucan in the
16
17 8 range 75-97.4 % in the solid fraction. Hemicellulose recovery in the solid fraction varies
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19 9 from 77.3 to 94.1 %. High values of hemicellulose-sugars recovery in the pretreated
20
21 10 solid would be interesting to increase the total fermentable sugars production. Our results
22
23 11 are in accordance with those obtained in pretreated wood flour with the same IL for 90
24
25 12 min at 130°C removed 16% and 26% of cellulose and hemicellulose using the same IL¹¹.
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27 13 Similarly the pretreatment of switchgrass with [EMIM][OAc] at 160°C resulted in an 80%
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29 14 of the original glucan recovery in the regenerated solid²¹.

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34 15 In the liquid fraction (IL plus water) low recovery of monomeric sugars (Table
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36 16 2), less than 1 g/100 g raw materials, was obtained. The hydrolysis of cellulose (glucan)
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38 17 and xylan to monomeric sugars in the liquid fraction (IL and water) was negligible.
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40 18 These results agree with those obtained by other authors^{22,23}. The liquid fraction was
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42 19 also analyzed for furans content, and neither HMF nor furfural were detected, which is
43
44 20 consistent with low glucose and xylose found in the soluble fraction. In contrast,
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46 21 phenolic compounds were detected in the liquid fraction. Wide range of phenolic
47
48 22 compounds derived from lignin decomposition is generated during pretreatment as
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50 23 shown in Table 2 where the recovery of phenols in the liquid obtained after IL treatment
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52 24 and precipitation with water (anti-solvent) is depicted. Identified phenols are monomers
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54 25 with an aliphatic substituent with different functional groups: aldehydes, ketones or
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3 1 acids. Phenols as derivatives of cinnamic acids such as acid p-coumaric are found in
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5 2 concentration of 6-13 mg/L (that are equivalent to 23 to 50 mg/100 g raw material). The
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7 3 concentration and type of phenolic compounds are highly dependent on the raw material
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9 4 since lignin content and chemical structure differs among the different lignocellulosic
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11 5 materials. It is worth noticing that vanillin concentration, formed by degradation of
12
13 6 guaiacyl propane (G) units of lignin, is significantly higher than syringaldehyde,
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15 7 produced by degradation of syringylpropane (S) units of lignin. This fact is consistent
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17 8 with the G/S ratio in herbaceous biomass²⁴.

9 Enzymatic saccharification

10 The main objective of pretreatment is to alter the structure of the fibres in order
11 to increase the accessibility of enzymes to cellulose. So, the effect of temperature and
12 time on the enzymatic digestibility of the solid fraction obtained after IL pretreatment
13 was evaluated and results are shown in Fig 1. Enzymatic hydrolysis yield depends on the
14 pretreatment temperature and in general, yield increases as the temperature rises. As a
15 general trend it was observed that shorter time pretreatment increases the glucose
16 production in comparison with longer pretreatment time at 110 °C and 130 °C. However,
17 when pretreatment was carried out at 90 °C, the production of glucose increased over
18 time, which could be related to the fact that 30 minutes and pretreatment at 90 °C results
19 in an incomplete biomass dissolution. The highest glucose production by enzymatic
20 hydrolysis (23.5 g/L) was obtained at 130 °C for 30 min pretreatment, whereas the
21 highest xylose concentration (11.6 g/L) was obtained at 110 °C and 30 min. Glucose and
22 xylose yield (EH_g and EH_x) from glucan and xylan, respectively, were reported as a
23 percentage of theoretical yields of monomeric sugars based on the glucan and xylan
24 analysis of pretreated substrates. Low enzymatic hydrolysis yield were obtained at 90°C
25 68.0 % cellulose yield and 48.8 % xylan yield. However at higher temperature,

1 enzymatic hydrolysis yields over 90 % were obtained. The maximum hydrolysis yield at
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3 1 72 h (100 %) was found in the solid fiber obtained after ILs pretreatment at 110 °C and
4
5 2 60 minutes. The untreated raw material showed an average value of 11 % theoretical
6
7 3 glucose yield in tests performed in parallel to pretreated substrates (data not shown). The
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9 4 IL's pretreatment improved yields of both glucose and xylose sugars. The pretreatment of
10
11 5 barley straw with [EMIM][OAc] treatment resulted in up to a 9-fold increase in the
12
13 6 cellulose conversion and a 13-fold in the xylan conversion when compared with the
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15 7 untreated barley straw. In other pretreatments the presence of hemicellulose and lignin
16
17 8 has been reported to negatively affect the enzymatic hydrolysis; this is not the case of IL,
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19 9 given the high yields of hydrolysis despite considerable amount of xylan in pre-treated
20
21 10 substrate (Table 1). Probably it is because of the particular rupture in lignin-
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23 11 hemicellulose linkages with treatment with ionic liquids, which together with the decline
24
25 12 of the crystallinity of cellulose^{13,25} results in highly hydrolysable substrates by enzymes.
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27 13

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29 14 The principal hemicelluloses in herbaceous crops are arabinoxylan and the
30
31 15 ferulic acid is covalently linked to arbinoxylans. The increase in yield of sugars in the
32
33 16 enzymatic hydrolysis step after IL pretreatment can be attributed the hemicellulose-
34
35 17 lignin cross-linkage disruption. Partial delignification and probable lignin redistribution
36
37 18 coupled with decrease crystallinity would contribute to enhancement of glucose and
38
39 19 xylose yields in the IL pretreated substrates¹³.

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41 20 Ferulic acid is linked by its phenolic group via ether bond to lignin and also
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43 21 principally linked by its carboxyl group via ester bond to lignin and/or hemicellulose²⁶.
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45 22 In Gramineae, these alkali-labile ester linkages involving arabinose predominate over
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47 23 alkali-stable. Hydroxycinnamic acids, such as p-coumaric and ferulic acids, appeared to
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49 24 be strongly linked to lignin molecules, in which p-coumaric acid is bonded to lignin by
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51 25 ester-linkage. Ester linkages are completely broken with alkalis and the ether linkages
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3 1 were hydrolyzed by acidolysis to cleave to phenolic acids in the lignin. During IL
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5 2 pretreatment the ester linkages could be broken due to the basic properties of IL used in
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7 3 this work, and as consequence the rest of ferulic acid may be still attached to the lignin,
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9 4 so contributing to enhancement of enzyme access to cellulose. This fact could explain
10
11 5 that ferulic acid is not found in the liquid fraction after pretreatment as shown in Table 2.
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13 6 While in cereal straw large amount p-coumaric acid was ester-linked to cell wall
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15 7 components, mainly to lignin, these alkali-labile ester linkages could break down during
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17 8 pretreatment and it could explain the presence of p-coumaric in the liquid fraction after
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19 9 IL pretreatment.
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23 10 In order to optimize the overall process, attention must be paid to several partial
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25 11 objectives, e.g. both cellulose and hemicellulose recovery in the solid residue in the pre-
26
27 12 treatment step, and hydrolysis yield in the enzymatic step, some of which may interact
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29 13 with each other. A great cellulose recovery does not guarantee a fine enzymatic
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31 14 hydrolysis. Overall sugar yield, calculated in relation to the raw material for the two
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33 15 phases: pretreatment and enzymatic hydrolysis, is the major indicator of the potential
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35 16 amount of sugars that could be used for ethanol production. Overall sugar yields were
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37 17 evaluated and results are shown in Table 3
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41 18 At the best conditions (IL pretreatment at 110 °C for 30 min) an overall yield of glucose
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43 19 of 34.8 g/100 g barley straw and 18.7 g xylose/100 g barley straw was obtained. This
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45 20 figures are highest than those obtained in barley straw pretreated by steam explosion²⁷.
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49 22 CONCLUSION

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52 23 IL pretreatment of barley straw at 110 °C for 30 minutes followed by enzymatic
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54 24 hydrolysis leads to a sugar yield of 53.5 g/100 g raw material, readily available for
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56 25 conversion into ethanol, equivalent to more than 86 % from potential sugars. The
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3 1 increase in saccharification was possible caused by the rupture in lignin-hemicellulose
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5 2 linkages with treatment with [EMIM][OAc].
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7 3 Results obtained in the present study are very promising and will be following
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9 4 up by examining the ethanol production from pretreated materials.
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29 13 Technology Programme/2009 (Project Ref. n° P2009/ENE-1743).
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5 *Table 1. Regenerated biomass yield and composition of solids resulting from IL pretreatment*
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7 *at test different conditions.*
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Temperature (° C)	Time (min)	Regenerated biomass yield (%)	Chemical composition (%)				
			Glucan	Xylan	Galactan	Arabinan	Acid Insoluble Lignin (AIL)
90	30	78.0	37.7 ± 1.7	24.1 ± 0.5	1.0 ± 0.02	3.4 ± 0.2	17.6 ± 0.5
	60	79.0	36.6 ± 0.1	23.1 ± 0.1	1.0 ± 0.05	3.7 ± 0.04	16.7 ± 0.5
110	30	80.3	40.2 ± 0.5	24.1 ± 0.2	0.6 ± 0.03	2.3 ± 0.01	16.7 ± 0.4
	60	74.8	35.0 ± 0.3	21.2 ± 0.8	0.6 ± 0.03	2.7 ± 0.1	18.4 ± 0.1
130	30	74.7	45.6 ± 1.2	24.7 ± 0.3	0.4 ± 0.02	2.6 ± 0.1	18.6 ± 0.1
	60	80.3	34.3 ± 0.9	21.1 ± 0.7	0.6 ± 0.06	2.8 ± 0.6	16.3 ± 0.5

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1 Table 2. Sugars and phenols analysed in the liquid obtained after IL treatment and
2 precipitation with water (anti-solvent). Data are expressed as mg/100 g raw material

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Sugars	PRETREATMENT CONDITIONS					
	90 °C		110 °C		130 °C	
	30 min	60 min	30 min	60 min	30 min	60 min
Glucose	780	550	400	600	210	690
Xylose	nd	nd	420	520	740	nd
4-hydroxybenzoic acid	3.9	6.6	7.8	0.0	7.8	11.7
Vanillin	9.8	19.5	30.8	29.3	35.1	73.3
Syringaldehyde	1.0	1.6	3.3	3.2	8.6	5.5
p-coumaric acid	39.0	46.8	50.3	48.8	23.0	25.7
Ferulic acid	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd

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4 nd. Not detected

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2 *Table 3. Overall Sugars yield (g sugar/100 g) from IL-pretreatment of barley straw at varying*
 3 *pretreatment conditions.*

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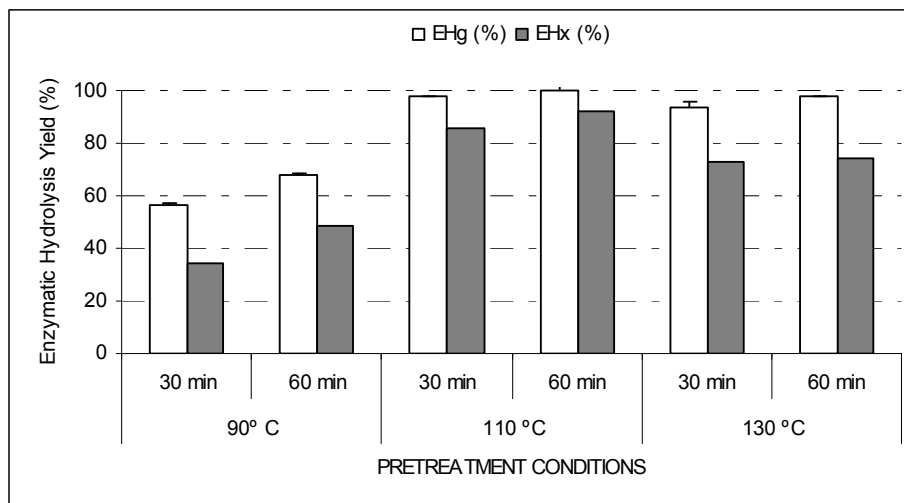
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Temperature (°C)	90		110		130	
	30	60	30	60	30	60
Overall glucose yield (g/100g raw material)	18.2	21.6	34.8	29.9	35.1	29.6
Overall xylose yield (g/100g raw material)	7.3	10.1	18.7	16.5	15.2	14.2

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2 *Figure 1. Enzymatic hydrolysis yield (%) of barley straw pretreated by IL at different*
3 *temperature and residence time conditions (%). Enzymatic hydrolysis conditions: 72 h, 5 %*
4 *substrate loading. Enzymatic hydrolysis yields (EHg and EHx) were calculated as the ratio of*
5 *glucose and /or xylose release divided by potential glucose and /or xylose content in solid*
6 *fraction.*