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Nb₂O₅ or NbOPO₄ as Catalysts for the Valorization of *Chlorella sp.* Algae to 5-HMF

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Microalgae contain polysaccharides that can be hydrolyzed to glucose which in turn can be isomerized to fructose that can be dehydrated to 5-hydroxymethylfurfural (5-HMF), a “platform molecule” for the chemical industry.

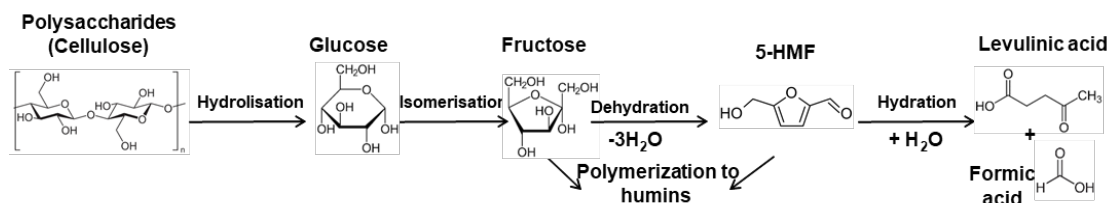


Figure 1: Production of 5-HMF from cellulose obtained from algae.

We have demonstrated the suitability of Nb₂O₅ and NbOPO₄, acid catalysts, in the valorization of microalgae *Chlorella sp.*¹ The process occurred in two phases: i) pre-treatment of the biomass by implementing different strategies to obtain maximum release of carbohydrate monomers from the algae cells, ii) catalytic reaction with Nb₂O₅ and NbOPO₄ to obtain 5-HMF through the isomerization/dehydration of the glucose and fructose from algae. Figure 1 illustrates the overall process.

From the procedures applied to extract carbohydrates from algae, the best result gave a quantity of sugars of 35% with respect to the total amount of biomass. The heterogeneous catalytic reaction in the presence of NbOPO₄ gives a 5-HMF yield of 21% with respect to the total sugars content. The same reaction was performed in a biphasic H₂O/methylisobutylketone system, obtaining a 5-HMF yield of 29% with respect to the total sugars contained in the algae.

References

¹ Lima, S.; García-López, E.I.; Adawy, A.; Marci, G.; Scargiali, F.; *Chem. Eng. J.*, **2023**, 471, 144583.