

CRYOGENIC FREEZING OF BERRIES - ASSESSMENT OF PHASE CHANGE HEAT TRANSFER

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Abstract: This paper presents some aspects concerning raspberries and blueberries freezing using liquid nitrogen: duration of the process, parameters variation along the freezing tunnel, advantages and disadvantages of this modern method. Quick freezing of food products in a cryogenic freezer consist in the use latent heat of evaporation of the liquid nitrogen, as well as of the sensible heat of the vapors, whose temperature increase up to final temperature of the frozen product. Considering the demands for reduction of fuel consumption involved in generation of electrical energy needed for classical refrigeration systems, this method uses for freezing liquid nitrogen obtained as secondary product at oxygen production.

1. Introduction

Freezing is the favorite modern mean for best preservation of nutrient and organoleptic properties of a large number of food products, ensuring better quality and long term preservation compared to vapor compression system products. Using cryogenic systems one can avoid the large investment required for a compression refrigeration system, using only liquefied cryogenic fluid delivery from time to time.

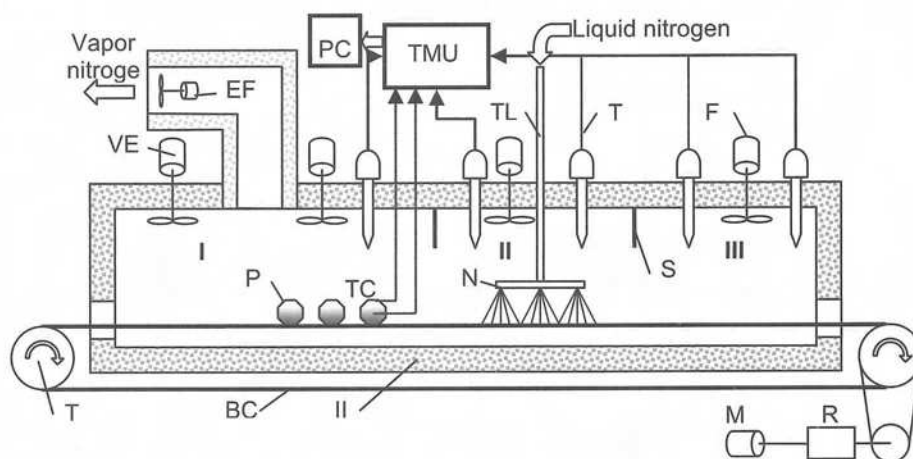
Quick freezing of products in a cryogenic freezer consists in the use of evaporation latent heat of the liquid nitrogen, as well as of the sensible heat of the vapors, whose temperature increases up to final temperature of the frozen product; the method has the main advantage of a large increase of the heat transfer coefficient between the product to be frozen and the refrigerant.

The use of cryogenic freezing with liquid nitrogen and

international market concerns more the quality level than the price, quick freezing systems have continuously developed since 1960 in the USA and then in Europe.

Freezing is the favorite modern mean for best preservation of nutrient properties of a large number of alimentary products, ensuring long term preservation. Direct contact freezing using liquids (nitrogen or CO₂), is done either by sinking the product in a cold liquid or by spraying the product with this liquid. Nitrogen is chemically passive, colorless, odorless and tasteless. At 77.36 K and a pressure of 760 mm Hg, 1 l of liquid nitrogen flashes to 650 l of gas. After usage the gaseous nitrogen is discarded in the environment, without any danger of suffocation for the workers.

The liquid can evaporate or not, but in either cases, the method has the main advantage of a great improvement of the heat transfer coefficient between the



carbon-dioxide is regarded as the "century revolution" in the food area. Because today's competition in the food

product to be frozen and the refrigerant.

Using cryogenic systems one can avoid the large

Fig. 1. Cryogenic freezer.

M - electric motor; P - product; BC - belt conveyor; R - worm reducer; F - fan; EF - vapor exhaust fan; N - nozzle; SW - separating wall; TL - nitrogen transfer line; D - drum; T -thermo resistance; TC - thermocouple; TMU - temperature measuring unit; PC - computer; I - pre-cooling area; II - freezing area; III - sub-cooling area

investment required for a compression refrigeration system, using only from time to time cold delivery in the shape of the liquefied cryogenic fluid.

2. Problem Formulation

2.1 Freezing model

A freezing model was created and solved using Fluent. The freezing model uses the following assumptions

- The products are considered as individual spheres placed on a isothermal surface
- Cooling is made by air
- Product properties have averaged values between water and solid substance properties

2.2 Required freezing time

Freezing is the process by which most of the water from the cellular liquid and the water from a product's tissues (capillary vases, intercellular spaces) is turned into ice. Water crystallization temperature ranges between -1...-5 °C, at which 60...75 % of the whole water content turns into solid.

The process must be continued afterwards by subcooling the product to a final temperature of -18 to -25 °C, at which 90 to 95 % of the water content turns into solid. Thermal core temperature is a main indicator of the end of the freezing process as it can be with maximum 3 to 5 °C higher than the products' storage temperature.

International Institute of Refrigeration established the following conditions: final temperature of the products thermal core ≤ -15 °C, average final temperature ≤ -18 °C. Freezing process of a food product is a typically transient heat and mass transfer process. Transfer phenomenon is complex due to the phase change of the solidifying water and of the transport properties of the product (thermal conductivity, specific heat, etc.).

Computing methods use some simplifying assumptions which allow establishing some simple calculus relations for the freezing duration (according to Plank):

- all the heat is drawn from the product at the freezing point temperature,
- the products are homogenous and isotropic,
- the cooling surroundings has a constant temperature,
- the product has already been cooled down to the freezing temperature.

Total duration of the freezing process is [1]:

$$\tau_c = \tau_r + \tau_{cg} + \tau_{sr} \quad [s] \quad (1)$$

where: τ_r [s] - primary refrigeration duration; τ_{cg} [s] - freezing duration; τ_{sr} [s] - product duration subcooling;

Primary refrigeration duration can be computed from the following relation:

$$\tau_r = \frac{m \cdot c}{\alpha \cdot s} \cdot \ln \frac{t_i - t_{mI}}{t_f - t_{mI}} \quad [s] \quad (2)$$

$$m = \rho \cdot V \quad [kg] \quad (3)$$

$$V = \frac{4 \cdot \pi \cdot r_0^3}{3} \quad [m^3] \quad (4)$$

where: m - product mass; ρ - density; c - specific heat; α - convection coefficient; s - product's external area; t_i - initial temperature; t_f - final temperature; t_{mI} - cooling surrounding temperature (zone I);

For a spherical shape product, freezing duration can be determined using Plank's formula [4]:

$$\tau_{cg} = \frac{\rho \cdot l_{cg}}{t_{cg} - t_{mII}} \cdot \left(\frac{r_0^2}{6 \cdot \lambda} + \frac{r_0}{3 \cdot \alpha} \right) \quad (5)$$

where: t_{cg} - freezing temperature; t_{mII} - cooling surrounding temperature (zone II); α - convection coefficient; r_0 - sphere radius; l_{cg} - freezing latent heat; ρ - density; λ - thermal conductivity;

The duration [h] for subcooling of the frozen product to the final average temperature (t_{mf}) can be calculated using Plank's relation:

$$\tau_{sr} = 933 \cdot c_m \cdot n \cdot \left| \lg \frac{t_{cg} - t_{mIII}}{t_{III} - t_{mII}} - 0,0913 \right| \cdot \left(\frac{2 \cdot r_0}{\alpha} + \frac{r_0^2}{\lambda} \right) \cdot \frac{1}{3,6} \quad (6)$$

where: c_m - frozen product average specific heat; n - dimensionless coefficient, whose values depends on the Biot dimensionless group, defined by:

$$Bi = \frac{\alpha \cdot \delta}{\lambda} \quad (7)$$

where $\delta = r_0$.

Table 1. Values for the dimensionless coefficient n vs. Bi [2]

Bi	0.25	0.5	1.0	2.0	4.0	10	∞
n	1.21	1.188	1.156	1.112	1.06	1.02	1.00

t_{cg} - freezing final temperature; t_{mII} - cooling surrounding temperature (zone III); t_{mIII} - thermal core final temperature of the product;

2.3 Cryogenic freezing system

The cryogenic freezer is shown below in Fig. 1, and has the following features: hourly freezing capacity: 110 to 120 kg; dimensions: 5220 x 750 x 1450 mm; weight: 500 kg; the temperature of frozen product: -18 °C; the length of conveyer band: 4.5 m; speed of the band: 1.12 m/min; freezing time: ≈ 4 min. Based on the tests carried out, we found out that the thermal core temperature of the product ($t_c \leq -18$ °C) was achieved depending on the exhausted nitrogen vapors temperature, for constant freezer capacity and sprayed liquid nitrogen flow-rate can influence the operating conditions of the cryogenic freezer in stationary regime are: outside air temperature, fat contents of the product, the distance among products on the band, the blockage of a forced air circulation fan and product thickness.

Table 2. Various properties of the considered products

Property/Product	t_c [°C]	c_{pl} [kJ/kgK]	c_{pIII} [kJ/kgK]	l_{cg} [kJ/kg]	u [%]	λ [W/m-K]	ρ [kg/m ³]
Blueberries	-2.6	3770	1930	288.4	87.4	0.54	1000
Raspberries	-1.1	3520	1840	283.8	82	0.49	998

If the exhausted nitrogen vapors temperature increases, the nitrogen consumption decreases. For a vapor temperature of -30 °C, a -18 °C temperature in the core of product is easily achieved. One considered that the exhausted low temperature nitrogen vapors can be used for cooling a temporary food-bank used for product storage prior shipping.

Tunnel temperature was measured every 30 sec using 6 Pt100 sensors. Product's center and surface temperatures were measured using NTCs. Values presented in Table 3 are mean values for 30 sec.

Various properties of the considered products are presented in the Table 2.

Table 3. Tunnel average Parameters

Parameter	Symbol	Unit	I	II	III
Average temperature	t_m	°C	-75	-150	-60
Heat transfer coefficient	α	W/m ² -K	25	175	60

The cooling environment zonal average temperatures (t_{mI} , t_{mII} , t_{mIII}) as well as the product temperatures (t_{cg} , t_{mIII}) were measured using NTCs connected to a computer.

From Fig 2 it can be noticed that:

- after approximately 3 minutes, product core temperature reaches -15 °C, but temperature leveling in the product will continue (condition for proper freezing is that $t_c \leq -18$ °C), and the measured final temperature was $t_c = -26$ °C;
- heat flow q_s and average heat transfer coefficient α_m are maxim in the liquid nitrogen spraying area;
- after passing the spraying area, the heat flow is still high because there still are liquid nitrogen evaporating drops;
- nitrogen vapor exhaust temperature is approx. -35 to -40 °C and can be determined by adjusting the vapor exhaust fan speed.

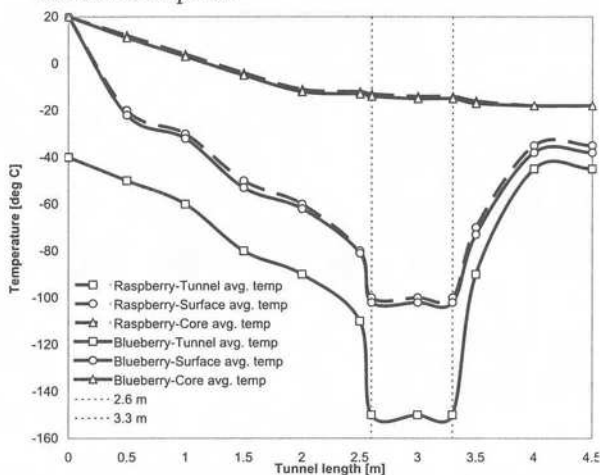


Fig. 2 Measured ambient (average) and product's (surface and core) temperature variation along the freezing tunnel

3. Problem Solution

Numerical modeling was accomplished using Fluent 6.3. The grid of the domain is formed of 3550 triangular elements (Fig.3)

The chosen mathematical model is *Pressure Based*, considering that heat transfer occurs in incompressible fluids.

The model is considered implicit that makes the solver stable and convergent, although the number of equations increases and therefore the complexity of computations. The implicit scheme is recommended for phase change heat transfer, for the reason that offers the liberty of choosing the time step in a large range.

Some of the obtained results are shown in the following Figures.

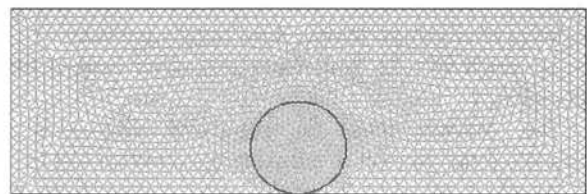


Fig.3. Grid for the domain

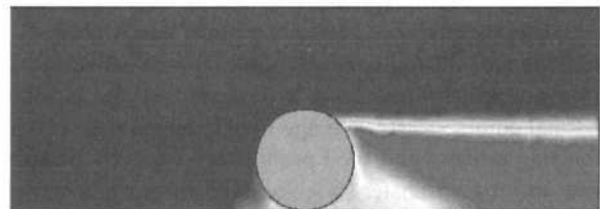


Fig.4. Temperature distribution around a berry at $\tau = 120$ sec

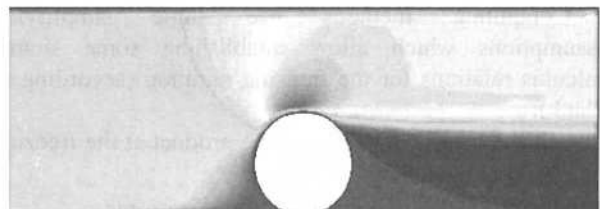


Fig. 5. Air velocity distribution at $\tau = 120$ sec

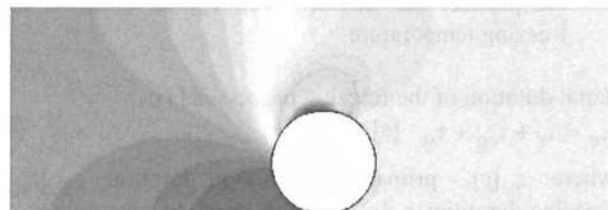


Fig. 6. Static pressure distribution at $\tau = 120$ sec

4 Conclusions

The main advantages of liquid nitrogen freezing (used mainly on expensive products as fish fillet, seafood, pastry, berries, etc.) are:

- simple design, small space required and easy cleaning;
- short startup and freezing times, movable freezers;
- reduced weight losses;
- the system can be used for various food products with no modifications;
- fully automation is possible, no defrost necessary (there are no evaporators);
- due to the high freezing speed, the formed ice crystals are very small and they do not damage the frozen products cells, thus keeping the initial color and taste; no preliminary product cooling is required;
- liquid nitrogen is obtained almost “for free” as an auxiliary product in oxygen production.

The main **disadvantage** of this freezing method is the high cost of liquid nitrogen, but considering that freezing cost accounts only for 13,3 % of the product's price, one may disregard this disadvantage.

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