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12. Algae Bacteria Interactions: Exploring Symbiosis in Aquatic Ecosystems and Biotechnological Applications

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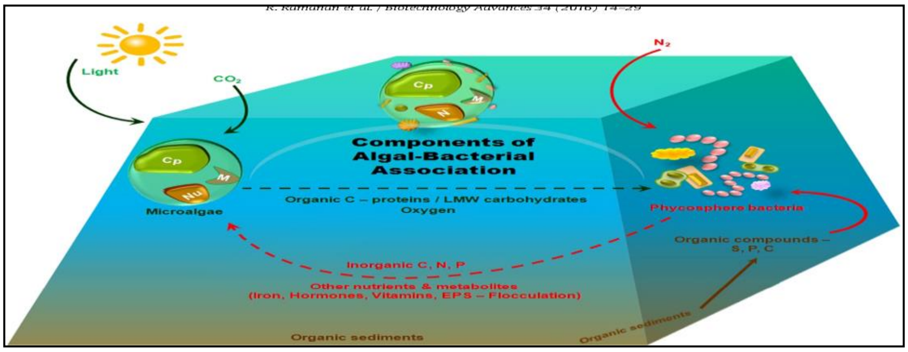

Figure 12.1: Algae Bacteria Interactions

Abstract:

Algae, as primary producers in aquatic ecosystems, play a vital role in sustaining ecological balance by generating organic matter, fostering the growth of heterotrophic bacteria, and enabling nutrient recycling. Within these ecosystems, specific interactions between distinct species of algae and bacteria have been identified through ecological studies, implying the existence of specialized associations. These interactions encompass diverse mechanisms, including nutrient exchange, signal transduction, and gene transfer. Scientific investigations have scrutinized the profound impact of these interactions on shaping aquatic communities and influencing the intricate geochemical cycles prevalent in natural environments. Concurrently, there has been a concerted effort to leverage algae for various biotechnological applications, such as water treatment and bio-energy production. Notably, bacteria exhibit multifaceted influences on algal activities within these applications. The elucidation of the underlying mechanisms governing algae-bacteria interactions holds tremendous promise for advancing the development of more efficient and untapped biotechnological processes. A comprehensive understanding of these intricate relationships stands poised to revolutionize biotechnological applications, potentially unveiling novel avenues for sustainable and enhanced processes. Consequently, delving deeper into the complexities of algae-bacteria interactions offers a pathway towards the optimization of biotechnological practices, driving innovation in environmental sustainability and technological advancements.

Keywords:

Algae, cyanobacteria, environmental sustainability, ecosystems, biotechnological applications.

12.1 Introduction:

Algae, found in both freshwater and marine environments, encompass a spectrum of forms—from minute single-celled microalgae like cyanobacteria and diatoms to expansive multicellular macroalgae such as giant kelp. These organisms, as primary producers, play a pivotal role in synthesizing organic compounds from carbon dioxide, thereby supporting a network of heterotrophic organisms responsible for decomposing organics and recycling essential elements within ecosystems 1-9. Ecological studies have unveiled specific associations between distinct groups of heterotrophic bacteria and various algae (Figure 12.1).

For instance, research has highlighted seasonally adaptive bacterial biofilms adhering to different species of marine macroalgae, indicating species-specific associations. Algal exudates not only influence surface-attached biofilm bacteria but also impact planktonic organisms within the 'phycosphere,' a region influenced by algal exudates and thriving with specific interactions between algae and bacteria. Studies have identified consistent pairings of particular algae with distinct bacterial phyla within phycospheres. For instance, Proteobacteria (such as Roseobacter and Sulfitobacter) and Bacteroidetes (including Cytophaga and Flavobacterium) are frequently associated with diatoms. Conversely, heterotrophic bacteria exhibit varied effects on algal behaviors, stimulating growth, morphogenesis, spore germination, and colonization. These interactions play pivotal roles in shaping aquatic communities and have significant ecological and biogeochemical implications 10-15.

Moreover, algae have emerged as pivotal subjects in biotechnological research, particularly in water treatment and bioenergy production. Bacterial influences in these processes have been a focus, impacting biotechnological outcomes diversely. Efforts to harness algae-bacteria interactions within designed consortia, such as microbial solar cells (MSCs), showcase the potential for innovative biotechnological applications. These initiatives signify a novel direction in biotechnology, leveraging natural interactions to engineer synthetic biology systems, anticipating the construction of complex organismal and community-based components rather than solely genetic elements. Although currently limited in scope, the intricate and complex interactions between algae and bacteria offer promising prospects for future advancements in synthetic biotechnology.

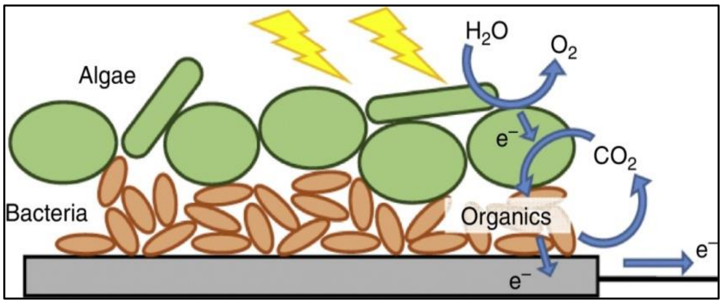

Figure 12.2: Precision Agriculture

12.2 Algae-Bacteria Symbiosis: Types and Mechanisms:

12.2.1 Types of Symbiotic Mutualism Relationships:

In the intricate dynamics of aquatic ecosystems, mutually beneficial relationships thrive between algae and bacteria, creating a symbiotic bond that supports both organisms. These interactions often involve bacteria assisting algae in nutrient uptake, such as providing vital elements like nitrogen or phosphorus. In exchange, the algae offer essential resources to these bacteria, ensuring their survival and growth in their shared habitat (Figure 12.2). This reciprocal exchange forms a cornerstone of their relationship, where both partners rely on each other's metabolic activities for their well-being in aquatic environments. These mutualistic associations extend beyond nutrient provision, encompassing intricate interactions that foster enhanced growth and survival strategies for both algae and bacteria. For instance, certain bacteria contribute to synthesizing compounds that aid algal growth or improve their resilience against environmental stressors. In return, algae offer shelter or access to synthesized compounds that support bacterial growth and metabolic functions.

These collaborations highlight the delicate balance of reciprocal support, crucial for the vitality and resilience of both organisms within the complex tapestry of interactions in aquatic ecosystems.

A. Commensalism:

In the intricate tapestry of aquatic life, commensalism relationships between bacteria and algae often exemplify scenarios where one organism gains benefits without causing harm to the other. This relationship illustrates situations where bacteria derive advantages, such as gaining a habitat or utilizing resources provided by algae, while the algae remain unaffected by the presence or activities of these bacteria.

For instance, certain bacteria may find a suitable environment on the surface of algae, utilizing them as a habitat for colonization without imposing any detrimental effects on the algae's health or growth. In this mutually coexisting relationship, the bacteria benefit from the algae's surface as a stable and favorable environment, while the algae carry on their usual functions without being influenced or impacted negatively by the bacteria's presence.

Highlighting commensalism interactions further, there are instances where bacteria derive resources from algae without causing harm or alterations to their host's well-being. For instance, some bacteria may utilize organic compounds or metabolic byproducts released by algae as a source of nutrients or energy, obtaining benefits without impeding the algae's growth or functions.

This illustrates a form of indirect support where the bacteria benefit from the resources provided by the algae without imposing any adverse effects on their host. These interactions underscore a delicate balance where bacteria gain advantages from algae without disrupting the latter's vital processes, portraying a harmonious coexistence within the intricate ecosystems of aquatic environments.

B. Parasitism:

Within the complex dynamics of aquatic ecosystems, instances of parasitic relationships between bacteria and algae illustrate scenarios where one organism gains advantages at the expense of the other. In these interactions, bacteria reap benefits while potentially causing harm to the algae, negatively impacting their health or growth. For instance, certain bacterial infections target algae, compromising their physiological functions and overall well-being. These infections can hinder essential processes within the algae, such as nutrient uptake or photosynthesis, leading to reduced growth rates or even the death of the host algae. Such parasitic relationships exemplify an exploitative strategy where bacteria benefit by utilizing the resources of the algae, causing detrimental effects on their host's health.

Expanding on parasitic interactions, there are strategies where bacteria exploit algae, adversely affecting their growth or survival without providing any benefit in return. For example, certain bacterial species may release substances that inhibit the growth of algae or produce toxins that disrupt the algal cell's normal functions. These exploitative tactics result in weakened or compromised algae, reducing their fitness and making them more susceptible to environmental stressors or predation. Such instances showcase parasitism as a one-sided relationship, where bacteria thrive at the expense of the algae's well-being, emphasizing the imbalance and negative impact on the host's health within aquatic ecosystems.

12.2.2 Mechanisms Underlying Interactions:

A. Nutrient Exchange:

Certainly, here's an explanation in two paragraphs detailing the nutrient exchange mechanisms between algae and bacteria within their symbiotic relationship: Within the intricate realm of aquatic ecosystems, nutrient exchange forms the foundation of the symbiotic relationship between algae and bacteria, ensuring their mutual sustenance and growth. This exchange occurs through various mechanisms and pathways, facilitating the transfer of essential elements and compounds vital for both partners' metabolic functions. Algae often produce and release organic compounds, such as sugars or amino acids, into their surrounding environment. These compounds act as a valuable resource for bacteria, serving as a nutrient-rich substrate that supports bacterial metabolism. In return, certain bacterial species contribute to nutrient acquisition for the algae, aiding in the uptake of essential elements like nitrogen or phosphorus from the environment. This reciprocal exchange fosters a balanced symbiotic relationship, where both algae and bacteria benefit from the shared transfer of nutrients, sustaining their growth and metabolic activities within the aquatic milieu.

The transfer of elements and compounds between algae and bacteria occurs through various mechanisms, including diffusion, active transport, or specialized transport proteins. Elements essential for growth, such as carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, and sulfur, move across cellular membranes or through specialized channels, driven by concentration gradients or active transport processes. Algae release organic compounds as exudates, acting as a currency for nutrient exchange within their vicinity. Bacteria, in turn, absorb and utilize these exudates, metabolizing them to acquire energy or essential building blocks for cellular processes. This dynamic exchange of elements and compounds supports the algae's growth by providing necessary nutrients while fueling bacterial metabolism, reinforcing their interdependent relationship within the aquatic ecosystem.

B. Signaling Pathways:

Communication between algae and bacteria is facilitated by intricate signaling methods that allow for coordination and collaboration within their symbiosis. These communication pathways involve various mechanisms enabling the exchange of information and cues crucial for mutualism activities. For instance, algae and bacteria utilize signaling molecules such as quorum-sensing molecules, hormones, or secondary metabolites to convey messages and coordinate their activities. Quorum-sensing molecules enable both algae and bacteria to gauge population density, regulating behaviors and activities accordingly. Hormones and secondary metabolites act as chemical cues, influencing the growth, development, or metabolic pathways of both partners. These signaling methods enable precise coordination, ensuring mutualism interactions and fostering a harmonious relationship between algae and bacteria within the complex aquatic environment.

The interplay of signaling molecules and chemical cues is pivotal in regulating interactions and mutualism activities between algae and bacteria. Signaling molecules, acting as messengers, trigger specific responses or behaviors in both organisms, facilitating mutualism activities. Chemical cues play a significant role in modulating various physiological and metabolic processes, influencing the growth, reproduction, or defense mechanisms of algae and bacteria. This intricate communication network enables synchronized responses to environmental changes or nutrient availability, optimizing their symbiotic interactions. The exchange of signaling cues and molecules fosters a coordinated and mutually beneficial relationship between algae and bacteria, showcasing the sophistication of their communication mechanisms within the dynamic aquatic ecosystems.

C. Genetic Transfer:

Instances of genetic material exchange between algae and bacteria underscore the intricate dynamics of their symbiotic relationship. This exchange often involves the transfer of genetic elements, such as plasmids or even genetic material itself, through mechanisms like conjugation or transformation.

Such exchanges impact their symbiotic relationship by contributing to genetic diversity and adaptation. For example, bacteria may transfer genes encoding metabolic pathways or stress response mechanisms to algae, enhancing their adaptability to changing environmental conditions. Similarly, algae might share genetic material related to the production of specific compounds or the modulation of metabolic processes, benefiting the bacteria. This mutual exchange of genetic material between algae and bacteria serves as a driving force behind their symbiosis, shaping their functional traits and influencing their ability to thrive within their shared ecosystem.

Horizontal gene transfer (HGT) plays a pivotal role in shaping symbiotic dynamics between algae and bacteria, profoundly impacting their ecological adaptations. HGT enables the rapid acquisition and integration of genetic material from one organism to another within the same ecological niche.

This process facilitates the transfer of advantageous genes, allowing for quick adaptations to environmental challenges or niche-specific conditions. In the context of algae-bacteria symbiosis, HGT contributes to the sharing of beneficial genetic traits, potentially enhancing metabolic capabilities or providing resistance to stressors. The integration of foreign genetic material through HGT influences the evolutionary trajectory of both algae and bacteria, shaping their interactions, and fostering their ability to adapt and thrive in diverse and ever-changing aquatic environments.

12.2.3 Examples of Algae-Bacteria Associations:

A. Specific Associations:

One well-studied example of mutualism between algae and bacteria is found in the relationship between certain species of diatoms, a type of algae, and bacteria belonging to the genus Rose bacteria. These diatoms provide Rose bacteria with organic compounds as a nutrient source, aiding their growth and metabolic activities. In return, the bacteria assist the diatoms by producing growth-promoting substances and aiding in nutrient acquisition, thereby fostering the algae's growth and enhancing their fitness.

This mutualism association enables both partners to thrive, with the bacteria benefiting from the organic compounds released by the diatoms, while the diatoms gain advantages in nutrient uptake and growth promotion from the bacteria.

Conversely, an example illustrating parasitism involves certain pathogenic bacteria that infect and negatively impact algae. One such case is the infection of green algae by bacteria of the genus. These bacteria invade the algal cells, leading to cell ultimately causing harm to the host algae. The infection interferes with the algal cells' normal physiological functions, disrupting their growth and metabolic processes. This parasitic relationship demonstrates how bacteria exploit algae for their own benefit, adversely affecting the algae's health and growth. Such associations highlight the detrimental consequences observed in parasitic interactions between bacteria and algae within aquatic ecosystems.

B. Ecological Implications:

The associations between algae and bacteria play pivotal roles in shaping the ecological dynamics of aquatic environments. These interactions significantly contribute to essential ecological processes, including nutrient cycling, ecosystem stability, and biogeochemical processes.

For instance, the mutualism relationships between algae and bacteria facilitate efficient nutrient cycling by enhancing the uptake, transformation, and recycling of nutrients such as carbon, nitrogen, and phosphorus. Algae release organic compounds that serve as substrates for bacterial metabolism, contributing to nutrient availability for other organisms. This collaboration enhances nutrient cycling efficiency, ensuring a continuous supply of essential elements within aquatic ecosystems.

Furthermore, these interactions contribute to ecosystem stability by regulating population dynamics, influencing community structure, and mitigating environmental fluctuations. The interdependence between algae and bacteria forms a cornerstone of biogeochemical processes, influencing nutrient availability and energy flow, thereby shaping the ecological balance and resilience of aquatic environments. These interactions significantly contribute to the functioning and resilience of aquatic ecosystems. For example, in coastal environments, the symbiotic relationships between algae and bacteria are vital in maintaining water quality through the removal of excess nutrients.

The associations contribute to the formation of microbial communities, forming the base of aquatic food webs and supporting diverse tropic levels. Additionally, these interactions enhance the adaptability and resilience of aquatic ecosystems to environmental changes. For instance, in nutrient-limited environments, certain bacteria associated with algae aid in nutrient acquisition, promoting the survival and growth of algae.

This adaptability highlights the significance of these associations in ensuring ecosystem stability and resilience in the face of changing environmental conditions. Altogether, the intricate connections between algae and bacteria underscore their critical role in supporting ecosystem functioning and resilience, underscoring their ecological significance in aquatic habitats.

12.3 Ecological Significance in Aquatic Ecosystems:

A. Role of Algae-Bacteria Interactions in Nutrient Cycling, Primary Productivity, and Ecological Balance:

The interactions between algae and bacteria wield significant influence in nutrient cycling, primary productivity, and maintaining ecological equilibrium in aquatic environments. Algae, as primary producers, synthesize organic matter through photosynthesis, releasing organic compounds into their surroundings.

Heterotrophic bacteria capitalize on these compounds, playing a crucial role in decomposing organic matter, thereby facilitating nutrient cycling. The breakdown of organic material by bacteria releases essential nutrients back into the ecosystem, such as nitrogen and phosphorus, which are vital for sustaining primary productivity. Additionally, these interactions contribute to maintaining ecological balance by regulating nutrient availability, ensuring a continuous supply of essential elements to support diverse aquatic life forms. Such interactions play a pivotal role in shaping nutrient dynamics, primary productivity, and ecological stability within aquatic ecosystems.

B. Influence of Algae-Bacteria Interactions on Aquatic Communities:

The interactions between algae and bacteria exert significant influence on the composition and functioning of aquatic communities. These interactions contribute to structuring microbial assemblages, influencing the diversity and abundance of microbial communities in aquatic habitats.

For instance, specific bacterial associations aid in algae colonization and bio film formation, impacting the adherence and settlement of other organisms within the community. Moreover, these interactions foster tropic interactions by serving as a crucial link between primary producers (algae) and higher tropic levels, shaping the tropic structure and energy flow within aquatic food webs. The intricate web of interactions between algae and bacteria orchestrates the functioning and stability of aquatic communities, illustrating their fundamental role in shaping community composition and dynamics.

C. Illustrative Case Studies Demonstrating Ecological Importance:

Numerous case studies underscore the ecological importance of symbiotic relationships between algae and bacteria. For instance, research in freshwater ecosystems has demonstrated the significance of algal-bacterial interactions in the regulation of harmful algal blooms. Certain bacterial communities associated with algae can mitigate algal bloom formation by consuming excess algal biomass and releasing compounds, contributing to ecosystem resilience. Furthermore, studies in marine environments highlight the role of these interactions in coral reef ecosystems, where bacteria associated with algae provide essential nutrients to corals, aiding in their health and resilience against stressors. These case studies illustrate the ecological significance of symbiotic relationships between algae and bacteria in diverse aquatic ecosystems, showcasing their impact on ecosystem functioning and stability.

12.4 Impact on Geochemical Cycles and Environmental Processes:

A. Influence on Elemental Cycles and Environmental Processes:

Collaborations between algae and bacteria wield a profound influence on elemental cycles, notably carbon, nitrogen, and phosphorus, significantly impacting environmental processes in aquatic ecosystems. Algae contribute to the carbon cycle by fixing carbon dioxide through photosynthesis, converting it into organic compounds. Heterotrophic bacteria play a pivotal role in the decomposition of organic matter produced by algae, facilitating the release of carbon back into the ecosystem as carbon dioxide. Moreover, nitrogen and phosphorus cycles are significantly influenced by these collaborations. Algae assimilate nitrogen and phosphorus compounds from the environment, incorporating them into their biomass. Bacteria assist in the recycling of nitrogen and phosphorus by decomposing organic matter, releasing these nutrients back into the ecosystem for reuse by primary producers. These interactions regulate elemental cycles, influencing nutrient availability, and maintaining the balance of carbon, nitrogen, and phosphorus in aquatic environments, which are crucial for sustaining life and ecosystem functioning.

B. Implications for Mitigating Environmental Pollution and Water Quality Maintenance:

The interactions between algae and bacteria hold significant implications for mitigating environmental pollution and maintaining water quality in aquatic ecosystems. These collaborations are integral in the bioremediation of pollutants, as certain bacteria associated with algae possess the capability to degrade and detoxify various contaminants, including organic pollutants and heavy metals. Additionally, the metabolic activities of algae and bacteria contribute to nutrient removal and water purification. Algae assimilate nutrients, particularly nitrogen and phosphorus, reducing their concentrations in the water.

Concurrently, bacteria mineralize organic matter, effectively recycling nutrients and aiding in maintaining balanced nutrient levels in aquatic systems. Moreover, these interactions help in the breakdown of harmful algal blooms, where specific bacterial communities associated with algae can control algal proliferation and mitigate the detrimental effects of algal toxins. Altogether, these interactions play a vital role in the restoration and maintenance of water quality, offering promising strategies for environmental pollution mitigation in aquatic environments.

12.5 Biotechnological Applications and Innovations:

A. Utilization in Biotechnological Applications:

Algae-bacteria interactions have emerged as a promising tool in various biotechnological applications, notably in wastewater treatment, bio energy production, and bioremediation. In wastewater treatment, these interactions play a crucial role in the removal of pollutants. Algae absorb nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus from wastewater, while bacteria assist in the breakdown of organic matter and pathogens, contributing to the purification process. Furthermore, these interactions are instrumental in bio energy production, particularly in the field of algal bio fuels. Algae, through photosynthesis, produce biomass rich in lipids, carbohydrates, and proteins, which can be converted into biofuels. Bacteria aid in the degradation of algal biomass, enhancing the efficiency of bio fuel production processes. Additionally, algae-bacteria collaborations have been pivotal in bioremediation efforts, where specific bacterial communities associated with algae exhibit the capability to degrade pollutants, offering promising solutions for environmental cleanup.

B. Successful Case Studies and Technological Advancements:

Numerous successful case studies showcase the efficacy of algae-bacteria interactions in biotechnological advancements. One notable example is the implementation of algal-bacterial consortia in wastewater treatment plants. These consortia effectively treat wastewater by utilizing the synergistic interactions between algae and bacteria, resulting in enhanced nutrient removal and improved water quality. Moreover, advancements in bio energy production have been witnessed through the utilization of algae-bacteria interactions. Innovative approaches incorporating algal-bacterial systems have led to increased efficiency in bio fuel production processes, contributing to the development of sustainable energy sources. Additionally, the application of algae-bacteria interactions in bioremediation has yielded positive outcomes. Case studies demonstrate the successful remediation of polluted sites through the utilization of specific algal-bacterial communities capable of degrading pollutants, indicating their potential in environmental cleanup and restoration efforts.

12.6 Future Perspectives and Research Directions:

A. **Current Challenges and Gaps in Understanding Algae-Bacteria Interactions:** Understanding the complex dynamics of algae-bacteria interactions presents several challenges and knowledge gaps. One significant challenge lies in comprehending the specificity and diversity of these interactions. The intricate web of associations between different algal and bacterial species remains largely unexplored, and the factors determining the specificity and selectivity of these partnerships require further elucidation. Additionally, the mechanistic understanding of signaling pathways and molecular communication between algae and bacteria remains a crucial gap. Clarifying the exact nature of signaling molecules and their roles in mediating these interactions is essential for deciphering the intricacies of their relationships. Furthermore, limited insights into the genetic mechanisms underlying these interactions hinder our ability to fully exploit their potential for biotechnological applications. These challenges highlight the need for comprehensive studies to bridge the gaps in our understanding of the multifaceted interactions between algae and bacteria.
B. **Potential Avenues for Future Research and Technological Innovations:** Future research in algae-bacteria interactions holds promising avenues for technological innovations and scientific advancements. One potential area lies in exploring integrating genomics, proteomics and to unravel the complexities of these interactions at a molecular level. Understanding the genetic and molecular underpinnings of these associations will pave the way for targeted manipulation and engineering of algal-bacterial consortia for various biotechnological applications. Additionally, investigating microbial communities in diverse aquatic ecosystems and their responses to environmental changes will aid in comprehending the ecological relevance and

adaptability of these interactions. Furthermore, harnessing artificial intelligence and modeling techniques can facilitate predictive modeling of algal-bacterial interactions, offering insights into their dynamics and behavior under different environmental conditions.

C. **Emphasis on Continued Exploration for Sustainable Biotechnological Solutions:** Continued exploration and research into algae-bacteria interactions are imperative for harnessing these relationships toward sustainable biotechnological solutions. The potential of these interactions in wastewater treatment, bio energy production, and bioremediation calls for concerted efforts to translate scientific knowledge into practical applications. Developing innovative biotechnological strategies based on these interactions requires interdisciplinary collaboration between biologists, environmental scientists, engineers, and technologists. Furthermore, fostering long-term studies and monitoring programs in natural environments will aid in understanding the ecological implications of manipulating these interactions. Continued exploration, coupled with ethical considerations and environmental assessments, will pave the way for leveraging these associations toward sustainable solutions for environmental challenges.

12.7 Conclusion:

In summary, this chapter has elucidated the multifaceted dynamics of algae-bacteria interactions within aquatic ecosystems, unveiling their pivotal roles in nutrient cycling, ecological balance, and biotechnological innovations. The intricate collaborations between algae and bacteria underscore their significance in shaping elemental cycles such as carbon, nitrogen, and phosphorus, crucial for maintaining ecosystem functioning. Moreover, these symbiotic relationships play a fundamental role in influencing the composition and functioning of aquatic communities, highlighting their impact on ecological dynamics.

Importantly, the chapter delved into the diverse biotechnological applications of algae-bacteria interactions, showcasing their potential in wastewater treatment, bio energy production, and environmental remediation, emphasizing their significance for sustainable technological advancements. The significance of algae-bacteria interactions cannot be overstated, as they bridge the realms of ecological contexts and biotechnological advancements. These symbiotic relationships serve as a cornerstone for environmental stability, contributing extensively to the regulation of nutrient cycles, ecosystem resilience, and water quality maintenance. Furthermore, their exploitation in various biotechnological applications holds promise for sustainable solutions to environmental challenges. However, the chapter also highlights the existing gaps in understanding these interactions, emphasizing the need for further exploration and research endeavors.

Future studies should focus on deciphering the complexities of molecular signaling, genetic mechanisms, and community dynamics within these associations to unlock their full potential for sustainable biotechnological solutions. The potential for further exploration and application of algae-bacteria interactions remains vast. Continued research efforts, technological innovations, and interdisciplinary collaborations are crucial for harnessing these symbiotic relationships effectively. Emphasizing ethical considerations and environmental assessments while exploring and applying these associations will be pivotal in ensuring their utilization for sustainable and impactful biotechnological solutions. As we advance in understanding these intricate relationships, their translation into practical applications holds promise for addressing pressing environmental challenges while advancing technological innovations for a more sustainable future.

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