

Improvement of shelf life of strawberry using *Aloe vera* gelatin as an edible coating

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Abstract

Strawberries are a perishable fruit, so a post-harvest processing method is needed that can increase the shelf life of the fruit. The right method to maintain the shelf life of strawberries is edible coating. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to apply *Aloe vera* gelatin (AVG) as an edible coating to increase the shelf life of strawberries. The research was conducted by soaking strawberries in an edible coating solution for 3 min, then storing them in plastic packaging. The results showed that strawberries coated with AVG had a slower reduction in quality parameters than uncoated fruit. The sensory test results showed that the fruit coated with the edible coating still had the taste and aroma of fresh fruit until the 5th day of storage, while those that were not coated with flavor and aroma had only been able to survive on the 2nd day. The ability of AVG as an edible coating to maintain the shelf life of strawberries is the novelty of this research.

1. Introduction

Strawberry (*Fragaria ananassa* Duch.) is in high demand by people all over the world because it has an attractive aroma, taste and color (Giampieri *et al.*, 2014; Li *et al.*, 2018; Hwang *et al.*, 2020). This fruit has a high respiration rate after harvest (Ozcan and Barringer, 2011; Zhang *et al.*, 2014). As a result, this fruit has a short shelf life (Chisari *et al.*, 2007; Li *et al.*, 2020), which can only last 1-2 days at room temperature (Souza *et al.*, 2014; Abountiolas *et al.*, 2018; Lesme *et al.*, 2020). Strawberry fruit is oval-shaped, similar to a tomato, but the skin is scaly (Blanch and Castilo, 2012; Li *et al.*, 2019; Abdelmaksoud *et al.*, 2020).

Strawberries can be eaten directly or processed into processed products (Alikhani and Garmakhany, 2012; Crecelius *et al.*, 2017). Food products from strawberries can be found on the market in various types, such as candy, dodol, syrup, and fruit ice (Patras *et al.*, 2009), but the general public still likes fresh strawberries because of the different aroma and taste after being processed into processed products (Xu *et al.*, 2006; Watson *et al.*, 2020). In addition, the delicious taste and attractive colors of fresh fruit have caused market demand to increase every year (Jouquand *et al.*, 2008). In line with this, a method is needed to maintain the shelf

life of strawberries so that they have a longer shelf life (Liu and Peng, 2017; Amiri *et al.*, 2021).

In recent years, research on edible coatings for fresh fruit has become more focused on making coatings from plant sources (Nor and Ding, 2020). This is in line with the desires of consumers who demand reduced use of chemicals and look for natural ingredients that can be used as coatings (Yong *et al.*, 2022). At present, there are various types of coatings that have been developed to increase fruit shelf life (Shetty *et al.*, 2018; Thakur *et al.*, 2019). Each coating material has different advantages and disadvantages depending on fruit varieties (Zambrano-Zaragoza *et al.*, 2018).

Increasing the shelf life of fruit using the edible coating method has been developed by previous researchers (Galus and Kadzinska, 2015). This method is a thin coating technique to inhibit the growth of fungi and bacteria, so that fruit shelf life can increase (Davoodi *et al.*, 2020). The main edible coating material must be made from plants that can be consumed safely (food grade) (Liu *et al.*, 2013; Kim *et al.*, 2016).

Several compounds have been applied as edible coatings, such as polysaccharides, proteins, lipids and composite-based layers (Malaka *et al.*, 2017; Hassan *et*

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al., 2018). The use of edible coatings cannot replace the use of traditional packaging material. However, this method has advantages in certain applications (Hanani et al., 2018). Most coatings are formulated as liquid solutions to regulate humidity, solutes and gas exchange between the internal and external atmosphere (Ncama et al., 2018; Hamid et al., 2020). The functional properties of edible coating can be improved by adding antimicrobial compounds (Warkoyo et al., 2022). Some researchers have used this antimicrobial compound and have proven it to be effective in improving mechanical properties and reducing water vapor permeability (Motamedi et al., 2018; Ansar et al., 2022).

Commonly used edible coating materials are synthetic materials that can interfere with health (Saucedo-Pompa et al., 2009). Even though abundant plants are available that can be used as raw materials for making edible coatings. One of them is *Aloe vera*, which contains phenolic compounds that can be used as antioxidants because they can inhibit the growth of pathogenic microorganisms in the fruit (Mendy et al., 2019). Phenolic compounds are secondary metabolites found in the *Aloe vera* plant and have been applied to the food and drug industries as antioxidants, antimicrobials, antivirals and anti-inflammatories (Banerjee and Bose, 2019).

Improvement of postharvest handling using edible coating methods to extend fruit shelf life is very important. Maintaining post-harvest fruit quality is a complex process because fruit tends to lose quality during storage and distribution to consumers (Ansar et al., 2019). Therefore, this study aimed to apply AVG as an edible coating to increase the shelf life of strawberries. The new thing from this research is the application of edible coating on strawberries using AVG as a coating material without using other additives. This is important because it is able to protect fruit from decay due to microbial attack. In addition, the fruit that is coated with AVG can look fresher.

2. Materials and methods

2.1 Materials and experimental design

The research sample was the Sweet Charlie variety strawberry obtained from the farmer in Mataram, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. In the laboratory, 300 pieces were selected with homogeneous colors and sizes and not injured. One hundred fruits were used for the analyses of their properties at harvest, and the rest were coated with AVG (pharmaceutical quality, 100% purity) produced at the Bioprocess Engineering Laboratory, Mataram University, Indonesia. AVG was diluted using mineral water to produce 3 different concentration

variations, namely 10% (AVG-1), 20% (AVG-2) and 30% (AVG-3). Each sample was immersed for 3 min in AVG at a temperature of $29\pm 2^\circ\text{C}$. After treatment, strawberries were air-dried, divided randomly into 7 groups (mean mass 300 g) and stored at $29\pm 2^\circ\text{C}$ and RH at 80-90%. Each group for treatment and control fruit was excluded due to the need for fruit quality analysis every day during storage.

2.2 Color

Strawberry fruit color was measured by using the Hunter Lab System and the Minolta colorimeter CR200TM model (Minolta Camera Co., Osaka, Japan). The observed sample color consisted of lightness (L^*), green to red (a^*) and blue to yellow (b^*). It is measurement using the Hunter $L^* a^* b^*$ system (Ansar et al., 2020).

For lightness was defined as:

$$L^* = L^*_d - L^*_f$$

For redness was defined as:

$$a^* = a^*_d - a^*_f$$

For yellowness was defined as:

$$b^* = b^*_d - b^*_f$$

Where, L^* = lightness ($L^* = 0$ for black, $L^* = 100$ for white), a^* = green-red ($a^* < 0$ for green, $a^* > 0$ for red), b^* = blue-yellow ($b^* < 0$ for blue, $b^* > 0$ for yellow), subscript 'f' refers to fresh weight and 'd' to the values of after storage.

2.3 Weight loss

The weight loss of the strawberry fruit was measured before and after storage using the following equation:

$$\text{Weight loss} = \frac{w_f - w_s}{w_f} \times 100\%$$

where, w_f = mass of strawberry fruit before storage (grams), w_s = mass of strawberry fruit after storage (grams).

2.4 Texture

The strawberry fruit texture was measured using a texture analyzer (Brookfield, UK). The loading was carried out from the vertical axis with a compression speed of 4 mm/s and a compressibility level of 30%. Each test was repeated 3 times. The deformation curve of the test results was recorded in real-time.

2.5 Sensory evaluation

A sensory evaluation was conducted to compare the aroma and taste qualities of coated and uncoated fruit. This evaluation used a panel of 20 people aged 25 to 45

years. Panelists were trained in the pre-test to assess the aroma and taste characteristics of strawberries with a rating scale of 1-5. The ratings for aroma are: 5 = very fresh, 4 = slightly fresh, 3 = less fresh, 2 = slightly rancid, and 1 = smell rancid. The rating scale for taste are: 5 = very sweet, 4 = very sweet, 3 = slightly sweet, 2 = slightly sour, and 1 = very sour.

2.6 Data analysis

Data was presented in tables and graphs. Comparisons between different treatment groups were carried out using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). All statistical analyzes were performed using Data Processing Systems (DPS) statistical software. A *P*-value <0.05 was considered statistically significant (Ansar et al., 2021).

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Strawberry color

The results of measuring the color of strawberries in various treatments are shown in Figure 1. After storage, it can be seen that the samples without edible coating experienced a faster color change than the samples the edible coating. The color of the fruit that is not given an edible coating is dark, although it still shows the specific color of the strawberry. The most attractive fruit color was in the AVG-3 treatment with bright colors. This is presumably because aloe vera gel, as an edible coating, can protect the color of strawberries during storage.

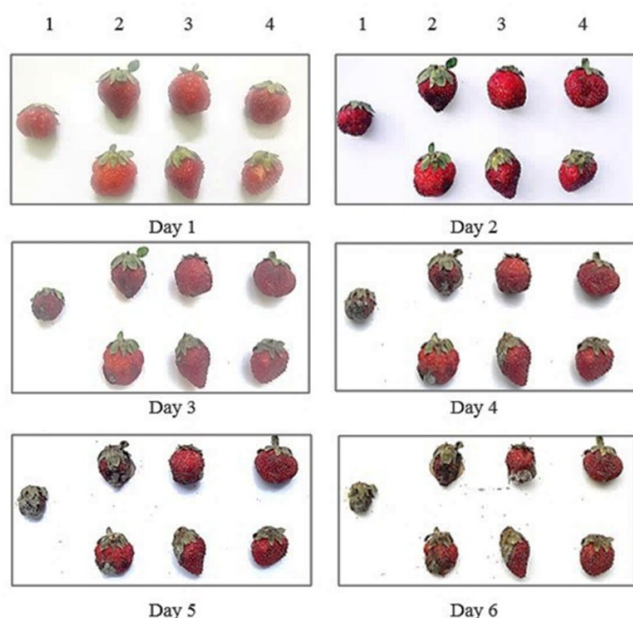


Figure 1. Effect of an edible coating on the strawberries during storage at room temperature (29±2°C). In the first column, representing the control sample, was AVG-0, the second column was AVG-1, the third column was AVG-2, and the fourth column was AVG-3.

The observations showed that all samples underwent color changes during storage. However, uncoated fruit

suffered very high damage compared to coated fruit (Figure 1). This data is in line with the reports by Gol et al. (2015), which state that edible coatings from polysaccharides are able to prevent discoloration in lychees, tomatoes, papayas and apples. Liu et al. (2017) also reported that the use of edible coatings can inhibit the discoloration of apples because the coating is able to delay the ripening process. The benefits of using AVG as an edible coating have been proven by Mendy et al. (2019) that edible coating can maintain the color and texture of papaya in a fresh condition.

Based on Figure 1, it can be seen that the strawberries stored on AVG-1 and AVG-2 have decreased brightness on the 3rd day, whereas on the AVG-3 treatment, the brightness begins to decrease on the 5th day. This data shows that strawberries coated with edible coating have a significant influence (*P*<0.05) on fruit brightness. The treatment without coating (AVG-0) shows the greatest decrease in brightness because it does not have a coating that can inhibit the rate of damage. This data is in accordance with the results of research by Zahedi et al. (2019), who reported that mangoes stored without an edible coating decompose faster because the respiration process takes place quickly, whereas those using an edible coating, enzymatic browning reactions run slower.

The use of AVG at a concentration of 30% can maintain the lightness (*L*^{*}) of strawberries compared to concentrations of 20 and 10% (Figure 2). These data indicate that aloe vera as an edible coating is able to maintain the brightness of the strawberry color. Some of the results of previous studies have also reported the same thing that brightness is an excellent index for evaluating colors in fruit. Barrett et al. (2010) reported that acetic acid-based edible coatings can maintain the color of garlic during storage. Similarly, edible coatings from chitosan can also reduce pineapple discoloration during storage, as reported by George et al. (2017).

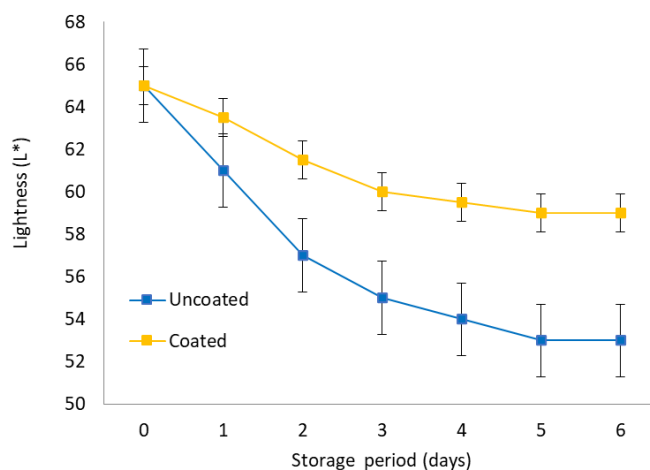


Figure 2. A lightness color change (*L*^{*}) of strawberries during storage at room temperature.

Strawberries stored using an edible coating showed better brightness compared to those without an edible coating. This shows that edible coating is able to maintain the freshness of strawberries. The same research results have been revealed by Li *et al.* (2017) that strawberries that are stored without an edible coating are very prone to decay because it has been contaminated directly with dust, which can trigger the growth of spoilage bacteria. Yan *et al.* (2019) showed very good results from the addition of antimicrobials combined with edible coatings, so that fruit browning was inhibited.

During storage, it was also seen that all the research samples changed color. The highest color change occurred in the AVG-0 treatment, and the lowest was in the AVG-3 treatment. After 2 days of storage, the color of the sample has not changed much. Changes increased drastically starting on day 2 for AVG-1, and day 3 for AVG-2 and AVG-3. These data indicate that aloe vera gel as an edible coating can inhibit enzymatic reactions in samples during storage. The results of the study are in line with what has been reported by Corduas *et al.* (2013), that the use of edible coatings can inhibit the rate of color change in fruit.

Color is an important attribute and is most easily seen to detect the quality and extent of fruit damage (Aamer *et al.*, 2021). Damaged fruit has a distinctive color that is different from fresh fruit. The appearance of colors that are not suitable for fruit indicates a loss of freshness or damage. Consumers generally have certain preferences that are taken into consideration when they want to buy fruit.

3.2 Weight loss

Weight loss can damage fruit tissue and disrupt various physiological processes that can cause a decrease in fruit quality. Weight loss is driven by the water potential gradient between the fruit surface and the surrounding air. Prevention of weight loss can be done with an edible coating. This coating forms a barrier to the transmission of water vapor by maintaining surface moisture, thereby reducing water vapor pressure. Some researchers have proven a reduction in weight loss by using edible coatings (Yan *et al.*, 2019).

All samples in this study showed a decrease in weight loss during storage (Figure 3). The highest weight loss occurred in the AVG-0 treatment, and the lowest was in the AVG-3 treatment. At the beginning of storage, the weight loss of the sample is still constant, then decreases dramatically starting on day 3 for AVG-0 and day 5 for AVG-3. The use of AVG as an edible coating can prevent loss of sample water content. Weight

loss control during storage is very important so that the quality of the fruit is maintained. Many researchers have reported the benefits of using edible coatings to control fruit weight loss during storage. Mendy *et al.* (2019) reported that the use of lipid-based edible coatings can inhibit the weight loss of papaya fruit. Arroyo *et al.* (2020) using alginate and chitosan in edible coating formulations can reduce the weight loss in quavers because this coating can prevent water evaporation.

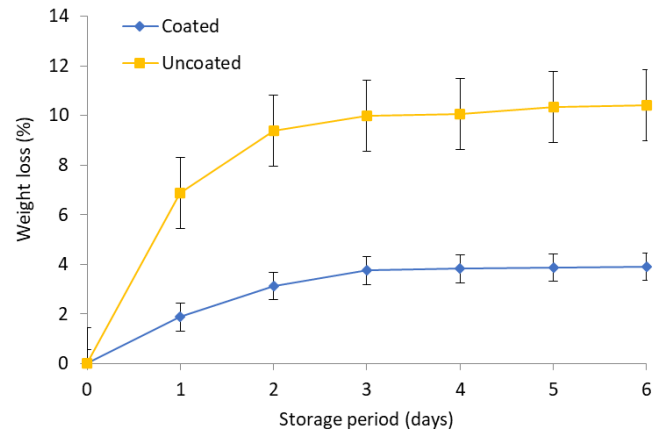


Figure 3. The weight loss changes in strawberries during storage at room temperature.

It was estimated that around 20-75% of fruit weight loss occurs during storage if not using edible coatings that comply with standards. Weight loss can occur at any post-harvest and distribution stages. This has led to low consumer acceptance of fruit (Arah *et al.*, 2015). In fact, Barrett *et al.* (2010) have identified the initial loss in fruit weight that occurs during the harvest stage by 18-28%. This loss will continue to occur during storage, transportation, marketing and trade. These losses have a major impact on fruit farmers, consumers, and the income of exporting countries (Nor and Ding, 2020). For example, the Philippines suffered losses of around 27-42%, 15-35% in Malaysia, 20-25% in Indonesia, 17-35% in Thailand, and 20-25% in Vietnam (Mendy *et al.*, 2019). The main cause of these losses is that the fruit is prone to loss of water, so it must be coated with an edible coating.

3.3 Texture of strawberries

Texture is one of the important parameters for assessing the quality and shelf life of fruit. The results of measurements of strawberry texture during storage are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4 shows the different strawberry textures in each coating treatment. Strawberries in the AVG-0 treatment had a lower texture than the other treatments. The highest strawberry texture on AVG-3 was caused by the inhibited respiration process, so that evaporation of water content was also inhibited. Whereas the AVG-0

sample decreased texture faster because strawberries experienced a faster metabolic process. In line with the results of this study, Fan *et al.* (2019) have succeeded in extending the shelf life of star fruit until 21 days of storage by using an edible coating.

Changes in the texture of strawberries are influenced by turgor pressure through an overhaul of the components of the cell wall, so that the strawberries become softer. According to Li *et al.* (2017), during storage, there will be changes in protopectin, which is not water-soluble to water-soluble, so that the cohesion of cell walls with other cells continues to decline, and as a result, the texture of the fruit becomes soft. Ncama *et al.* (2018) also reported that texture changes can occur in fruit from hard to soft due to water loss during respiration and transpiration.

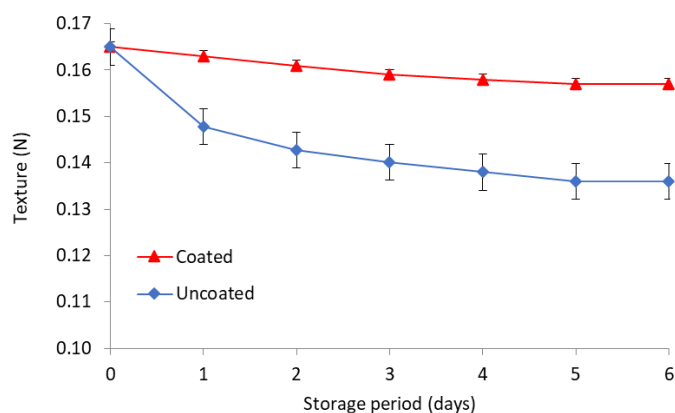


Figure 4. Change in texture of the strawberries during storage at room temperature.

Texture is an important parameter to determine fruit quality and shelf life. The decrease in texture shows a decrease in fruit quality (Motamedi *et al.*, 2018; Ansar *et al.*, 2020). A good coating must provide adequate texture strength and be free from minor defects. This attribute can be achieved by having a flexible edible coating that is resistant to mechanical impacts (Senna *et al.*, 2014). Compressive strength is the parameter that leads to this property. Important factors for texture according to Menezes and Athmaselvi (2016) include polymer structure, type of plasticizer, plasticizer concentration, molecular weight of the coating material, type of solvent and layer thickness. The structural cohesion of edible coatings contributes significantly to the effect of the mechanical properties of the coating. The ability of edible coatings to form many strong molecular bonds between polymer chains can inhibit the separation between fruit cells.

3.4 Aroma of strawberry

The results of the panellists' assessment of the aroma of strawberries at various concentrations of AVG during storage are presented in Figure 5. The scent of

strawberries that was most liked by the panellists was that of a very fresh fruit aroma in the AVG-3 treatment, and the one that was disliked was a slightly rancid aroma found in AVG-0. This data shows that the AVG as an edible coating can keep the strawberry aroma fresh. The results of this study are in line with the research of Mendy *et al.* (2019), who reported that the edible coating of CMC and gum can retain fruit aroma for 120 days stored at 4°C.

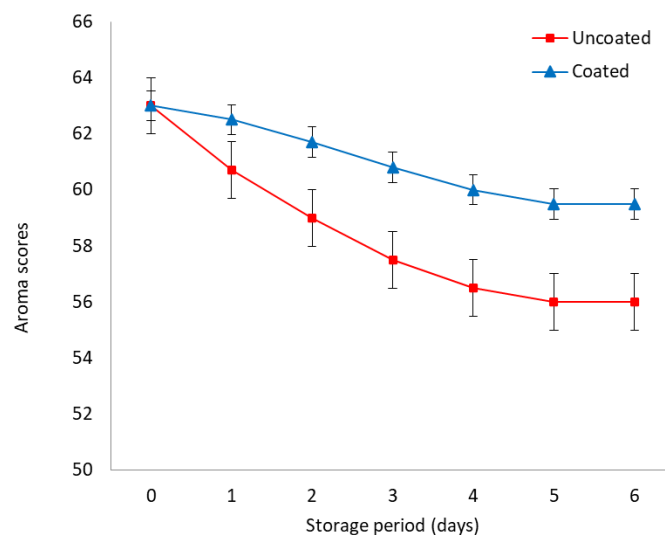


Figure 5. The results of panellists' assessment of the strawberries' aroma during storage.

The use of edible coating on strawberries has been shown to retain the aroma of the fruit, so that they do not easily rot due to oxidation reactions. This also shows that the edible coating is able to cover the surface of the fruit and prevent the evaporation of moisture content, so that the fruit smells fresh. The same thing has been reported by Peng *et al.* (2013) that the edible coating can act as a permeable membrane against the exchange of O₂ and CO₂, so that it can retain the fruit aroma. Another thing that needs to be explained is that strawberries without an edible coating, according to the panellists' assessment, have an unpleasant aroma, which began to occur on the 3rd day. This is thought to be because oxygen readily absorbs into the fruit, which can cause an unpleasant aroma. This unpleasant aroma is thought to be because the respiration rate is not inhibited, resulting in a rapid decay process.

3.5 Taste of strawberry

The results of the panellists' assessment of the taste of strawberries at various concentrations of AVG showed that strawberries without edible coating had a lower value than strawberries that were given an edible coating, and there was a significant difference (P<0.05). The taste of strawberries without edible coating was considered less sweet starting on the 3rd day of storage. Strawberries coated with an edible coating have a very

sweet taste according to the panellist's assessment in the AVG-3 treatment. This is thought to be because AVG, as an edible coating, is able to maintain the sugar content in strawberries. The same has been reported by Souza *et al.* (2014) that AVG can retain the sweetness of the fruit during storage.

The results of the panellists' assessment of the taste of strawberries showed that the higher the AVG concentration, the higher the panellists' assessment scores (Figure 6). The highest value was obtained in strawberries coated with 30% AVG concentration, and the lowest was in the strawberry treatment without an edible coating. This happened because the sweet taste did not evaporate during storage at the 30% concentration of AVG treatment. The same has been reported by Lesme *et al.* (2020) that fruit that has been coated with an edible coating has a fresher taste and is preferred by panellists than fruit without coating.

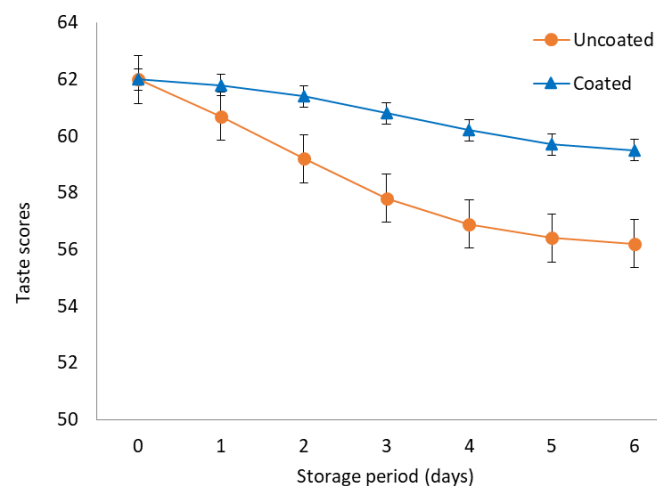


Figure 6. The results of panellists' assessment of the strawberries' taste during storage.

Like other fresh fruit quality parameters, taste is an important quality attribute that can determine consumer acceptance. Strawberry fruit has a distinctive taste because there are volatile compounds (Guarino and Sciarrillo, 2018). These compounds are generally volatile during storage. Therefore, the use of edible coating is important to maintain the taste of strawberries during storage.

4. Conclusion

AVG can be used as an edible coating to maintain strawberry characteristics such as color, texture, weight loss, aroma, and taste. The shelf life of strawberries can be up to 5 days using an AVG as an edible coating. There is a significant difference between fruit coated with fruit not coated with AVG in the shelf life of strawberries. AVG can be used as an edible coating to increase the shelf life of the strawberries.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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