

Abstract
Process Economics Program Report 6E
ACRYLIC ACID FROM GLYCERIN
(December 2011)

Acrylic acid (AA) is a 4.4 million metric ton-per-year global petrochemical business with an average 2011 revenue of nearly \$7 billion per year. AA is used primarily as a feedstock to produce water-soluble acrylate coatings for the paint industry, and to produce superabsorbent polymers (SAP) for the baby diaper industry. The dominant chemical company participants are Nippon Shokubai, BASF, Evonik and Dow Chemical.

Nearly all commercial quantities of AA are produced via the two-stage oxidation of propylene monomer in air. Nippon Shokubai is the dominant AA process technology and catalyst provider, while BASF utilizes its own proprietary AA technology, primarily for captive use.

Propylene feedstock cost is the largest single component of AA production costs. Since the propylene market price is closely tied to crude oil prices due to the use of crude oil derivatives—naphtha (via steam cracking) and vacuum gas oil (via fluid catalytic cracking)—as the feedstocks for making propylene, alternative feedstocks for making AA have been considered that may, in the long term, have fundamentally lower costs to acquire, and result in fundamentally lower costs to produce AA.

One such alternative feedstock for making AA is glycerin. Most commercial quantities of glycerin are produced as a by-product of converting natural oil triglycerides (palm oil, coconut oil, PKO, etc.) to commercial acids and alcohols via hydrogenation. Biodiesel production uses the same hydrogenation chemistry with feedstocks soybeans and rapeseeds, and has the potential to produce enormous quantities of glycerin (more than the conventional market can absorb), should biodiesel economics in the future become cost competitive with conventional diesel fuel from crude oil.

Due to the potential availability of large quantities of biodiesel-based glycerin (at presumably low costs), several companies are investigating the potential for producing commercial quantities of AA from glycerin. Two such efforts have been reported by Nippon Shokubai and Arkema.

This study presents Class-3 preliminary process engineering analysis, and the corresponding production economics, for producing AA from glycerin, and compares the results to comparable analysis of the conventional route to AA from propylene monomer, and from sugar fermentation through 3-hydroxypropionic acid as an intermediate product. The results allow the estimation of the production cost of AA as a function of the feedstock acquisition costs for glycerin versus propylene.



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ACRYLIC ACID FROM GLYCERIN

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CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1-1
	WHAT IS ACRYLIC ACID?	1-1
	PHYSICAL PROPERTIES OF ACRYLIC ACID	1-2
	ACRYLIC ACID USES.....	1-2
	INTEGRATED PRODUCT CHAIN	1-3
	PERSONAL SAFETY	1-4
	PROCESS SAFETY	1-5
	HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	1-6
	PRODUCT GRADES.....	1-7
	ACRYLIC ACID SUPPLY/DEMAND	1-8
	ACRYLIC ACID PRODUCERS	1-9
	ACRYLIC ACID PROCESS LICENSORS.....	1-9
	MAJOR ISSUES CONFRONTING THE ACRYLIC ACID BUSINESS.....	1-9
	CONVENTIONAL MANUFACTURING TECHNOLOGY	1-10
	BIO-BASED MANUFACTURING OPTIONS.....	1-10
	PRIOR PUBLISHED PEP REPORTS	1-11
2	SUMMARY	2-1
3	ACRYLIC ACID INDUSTRY STATUS	3-1
	FORMS OF ACRYLIC ACID	3-1
	RELEVANT GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS.....	3-2
	COMMERCIAL PRODUCT OFFERINGS	3-3
	Grade.....	3-4
	ACRYLIC ACID INHIBITOR CONSIDERATIONS	3-4
	ACRYLIC ACID STORAGE SAFETY.....	3-5
	ACRYLIC ACID COMMERCIAL USES	3-6

CONTENTS (Continued)

ACRYLIC ACID COMMERCIAL MANUFACTURING	3-9
Acrylic Acid from Propylene Monomer	3-10
Acrylic Acid from Acetylene	3-15
Acrylic Acid from Propane	3-15
Acrylic Acid from Ethylene Oxide (Novomer Technology)	3-22
BIO-BASED ROUTES TO ACRYLIC ACID	3-23
Acrylic Acid via Thermal Decomposition	3-23
Acrylic Acid via Fermentation of Sugar to Form 3-Hydroxypropionic Acid	3-23
Acrylic Acid via Fermentation of Sugar through Fumaric Acid	3-25
Acrylic Acid via Direct Fermentation of Sugar	3-27
Acrylic Acid from Lactic Acid	3-27
Acrylic Acid from Glycerin	3-27
ACRYLIC ACID PROCESS LICENSORS	3-27
ACRYLIC ACID COMMERCIAL PRODUCERS	3-29
ACRYLIC ACID PRICING	3-34
4 VALUE PROPOSITION FOR MAKING ACRYLIC ACID FROM GLYCERIN	4-1
ECONOMICALLY DRIVEN PROPONENTS	4-1
Production Cost of Conventional Acrylic Acid Process	4-1
Propylene Feedstock Sourcing and Cost	4-4
Propylene versus Ethylene Historic Price	4-9
Propylene versus Glacial Acrylic Acid Price	4-10
SOCIETAL DRIVEN VALUE PROPOSITION	4-12
Greenhouse Gas Emissions	4-12
Dependence on Imported Oil and Gas	4-13
Transition to Sustainable Products and Feedstocks	4-13
Local Jobs and Economic Activity	4-14
TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPER VALUE PROPOSITION	4-15

CONTENTS (Continued)

Bio-Fuels versus Bio-Chemicals	4-15
Bio-Chemicals Developer Business Strategy.....	4-17
5 CHEMISTRY AND TECHNOLOGY OF ACRYLIC ACID PRODUCTION	5-1
TWO-STAGE OXIDATION OF PROPYLENE TO ACRYLIC ACID	5-1
Chemistry	5-1
Temperature and Pressure	5-2
Reactor Design.....	5-2
Type of Catalyst.....	5-3
Theoretical and Practical Feedstock Yield	5-4
Process Sequence	5-4
MODIFIED HIGH PRESSURE REPPE PROCESS FOR ACRYLIC ACID PRODUCTION	5-5
Chemistry	5-5
Temperature and Pressure	5-6
Reactor Design.....	5-6
Type of Catalyst.....	5-6
Theoretical and Practical Feedstock Yield	5-6
Process Sequence	5-7
ACRYLIC ACID FROM PROPANE	5-8
Chemistry	5-8
Temperature and Pressure	5-9
Reactor Design.....	5-9
Type of Catalyst.....	5-9
Theoretical and Practical Feedstock Yield	5-9
Process Sequence	5-10
ACRYLIC ACID FROM GLYCERIN	5-11
Chemistry	5-12

CONTENTS (Continued)

Temperature and Pressure	5-12
Reactor Design.....	5-13
Theoretical and Practical Feedstock Yield	5-13
Process Sequence	5-13
ACRYLIC ACID FROM SUGAR/GLUCOSE	5-14
Chemistry	5-16
Temperature and Pressure	5-17
Reactor Design.....	5-18
Type of Catalyst.....	5-18
Theoretical and Practical Feedstock Yield.....	5-18
Process Sequence	5-19
6 DESIGN BASIS.....	6-1
BUSINESS OBJECTIVES.....	6-1
SCOPE OF PROJECT	6-2
Plant Design Criteria.....	6-2
PRODUCTION CAPACITY	6-3
PRODUCT SPECIFICATIONS.....	6-3
FEEDSTOCK SPECIFICATIONS	6-5
Glycerin	6-5
Propylene	6-9
AA PRODUCT PACKAGING AND HANDLING	6-10
PLANT LOCATION.....	6-11
REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT AND EHS STANDARDS	6-12
PROCESS TECHNOLOGY SELECTION	6-12
DESIGN PHILOSOPHY	6-13
DESIGN PRIORITIES	6-14

CONTENTS (Continued)

Process Safety	6-14
Reliability	6-14
Environmental Conformance.....	6-15
Hazardous Waste Incineration	6-16
Flexibility for Economic Optimization.....	6-16
Ease of Operations and Maintenance	6-16
Buildings	6-17
Security and Vulnerability Analysis	6-17
LOCATION FOR CAPITAL COST ESTIMATING	6-18
Construction Capital Cost Index.....	6-18
CONSTRUCTION METHODOLOGY	6-21
OFFSITE FACILITIES	6-21
Black Start Capability	6-22
PROCESS CONTROL PHILOSOPHY.....	6-22
Project to Provide Machine Condition Monitoring Instrumentation	6-23
ENGINEERING AND DESIGN STANDARDS	6-23
SITE SPECIFIC DESIGN CONDITIONS	6-24
CAPITAL AND OPERATING COST BASES.....	6-24
Capital Investment.....	6-24
Project Construction Timing	6-26
Available Utilities	6-26
Production Cost Factors.....	6-27
Feedstock, Product and Energy Pricing.....	6-27
Effect of Operating Level on Production Costs	6-28
7 ACRYLIC ACID FROM GLYCERIN USING NIPPON SHOKUBAI TECHNOLOGY	7-1
BACKGROUND.....	7-1

CONTENTS (Continued)

NIPPON SHOKUBAI PATENT POSITION.....	7-3
KEY NIPPON SHOKUBAI DESIGN CONCEPTS.....	7-4
Glycerin Dehydration.....	7-4
Acrolein Azeotrope.....	7-7
Acrylic Acid Purification via Extractive Distillation.....	7-8
By-Product Management.....	7-17
KEY COMPETITOR DESIGN CONCEPTS.....	7-17
PROJECT DESIGN BASIS.....	7-20
PROCESS DESCRIPTION.....	7-22
Glycerin Evaporator.....	7-22
Glycerin Dehydration Reactors.....	7-23
Dehydration Product Gas Quench and Purification.....	7-23
Recovering 1-Hydroxyacetone.....	7-23
Converting Acrolein to Crude Acrylic Acid.....	7-24
Purification of Crude Acrylic Acid.....	7-25
DESIGN MATERIAL BALANCE.....	7-26
EQUIPMENT LIST.....	7-35
ITEMIZED CAPITAL COST ESTIMATE.....	7-38
TOTAL FIXED CAPITAL COST.....	7-42
UNIT ACRYLIC ACID PRODUCTION COST.....	7-44
8 ACRYLIC ACID FROM PROPYLENE OXIDATION USING NIPPON SHOKUBAI TECHNOLOGY.....	8-1
INTRODUCTION.....	8-1
PURIFYING ACRYLIC ACID VIA CRYSTALLIZATION.....	8-2
ADVANCES IN OXIDATION REACTOR DESIGN AND OPERATION.....	8-8
Single Oxidation Reactor Design.....	8-8
Exhaust Gas Recycle.....	8-11

CONTENTS (Concluded)

Liquid-Phase Oxidation of Propylene	8-11
Manufacturing Excellence	8-12
Recent Nippon Shokubai Patents	8-13
UPDATED PRODUCTION ECONOMICS.....	8-15
9 ACRYLIC ACID FROM SUGAR FERMENTATION VIA 3-HPA USING OPX TECHNOLOGY	9-1
INTRODUCTION	9-1
BACKGROUND ON FERMENTATION TO 3-HPA	9-2
Feedstock Yield.....	9-4
COMMERCIAL PROCESS SEQUENCE	9-4
CAPITAL COSTS	9-6
VARIABLE PRODUCTION COSTS	9-6
TOTAL PRODUCTION COSTS	9-8
10 COMPARISON OF TECHNOLOGIES.....	10-1
CAPITAL COST COMPARISON.....	10-1
VARIABLE COST COMPARISON	10-2
PRODUCTION COST COMPARISON	10-4
APPENDIX A PATENT SUMMARY TABLES.....	A-1
APPENDIX B REFERENCES.....	B-1
APPENDIX C PROCESS FLOW DIAGRAMS.....	C-1

FIGURES

1.1	Molecular Structure of Acrylic Acid.....	1-1
1.2	Acrylic Acid Integrated Product Chain.....	1-4
1.3	2010 Regional Distribution of Acrylic Acid Demand.....	1-8
2.1	Capital Cost Comparison (160 kty)	2-2
2.2	Total Production Cost Comparison (160 kty)	2-3
2.3	Total Production Cost as Function of Feedstock Cost (\$US/mt at 160 kty).....	2-4
3.1	Two-Step Acrylic Acid Production from Propylene.....	3-11
3.2	Acrylic Products Integrated Product Chain	3-12
3.3	Nippon Shokubai Acrylic Products Integrated Product Chain.....	3-12
3.4	Nippon Shokubai Corporate Product Chain	3-13
3.5	Global Uses for Propylene Monomer	3-14
3.6	Acrylic Acid Production by Propane Oxidation Process Flow Diagram	C-3
3.7	SRIC Reactor Design Process Flow Design for Propane to Propylene.....	3-17
3.8	Schematic of BASF Propane to Acrylic Acid Process (USP 7897812).....	3-20
3.9	Mixed Metal Catalyst System on Porous Ceramic Substrate	3-21
3.10	Novomer Co-Platform Product Chain.....	3-22
3.11	Molecular Structure of Fumaric Acid	3-25
3.12	Global Acrylic Acid Market Share.....	3-32
3.13	U.S. Historical Glacial Acrylic Acid Prices.....	3-34
4.1	Distribution of Capital Cost for 160 Kty Ester-Grade AA Plant	4-2
4.2	Distribution of Ester-Grade AA Unit Production Plant.....	4-3
4.3	Long-Term U.S. Historic Crude Oil Prices	4-4
4.4	Long-Term International Historic Crude Oil Prices.....	4-5
4.5	Crude Oil Price Unit Conversion Factor	4-6
4.6	Long-Term U.S. Historic Crude Oil Prices	4-6
4.7	Historic U.S. Crude Oil and Naphtha Prices	4-7
4.8	Historic U.S. Propane and Naphtha Prices	4-8

FIGURES (Continued)

4.9	Historic U.S. Propylene and Naphtha Prices	4-9
4.10	Historic U.S. Propylene and Ethylene Prices	4-10
4.11	Historic U.S. Propylene and Glacial Acrylic Acid Prices	4-11
4.12	M. King Hubbert's Peak Oil Production Curve: Regional versus Individual Wells.....	4-14
4.13	Greenhouse Gas Emission Improvements Using Corn-Based Ethanol versus Conventional Gasoline	4-16
5.1	Oxidation of Propylene to Acrylic Acid	5-1
5.2	Typical Reactor Schematic for Propylene Oxidation Process.....	5-3
5.3	Block Flow Diagram for Propylene Oxidation Process	5-5
5.4	Block Flow Diagram for Modified Reppe Process.....	5-8
5.5	Block Flow Diagram for Propane to Acrylic Acid Process (USP 7897812).....	5-11
5.6	Glycerin Dehydration to Acrolein.....	5-12
5.7	Block Flow Diagram for Glycerin Dehydration to Acrylic Acid.....	5-14
5.8	3-Hydroxypropionic Acid Derivatives.....	5-15
5.9	Fermentation Pathways to 3-Hydroxypropionic Acid	5-17
5.10	Block Flow Diagram for Acrylic Acid via Fermentation.....	5-20
6.1	Project Scope of Work.....	6-2
6.2	Raw and PreTreated Biodiesel Plant Glycerin	6-6
6.3	Biodiesel Plant Processing Schematic Drawing.....	6-7
6.4	Raw Glycerin Treatment Scheme	6-8
6.5	U.S. PEP Cost Index	6-20
6.6	PEP Construction Cost Index.....	6-20
7.1	Apparatus of Producing Acrolein via Dehydration of Glycerin (USP 1672378)	7-2
7.2	Nippon Shokubai Acrylic Acid Extractive Distillation (USP 5785821, 28-Jul-1998).....	7-10
7.3	Nippon Shokubai Acrylic Acid Purification Configuration.....	7-11
7.4	Nippon Shokubai Acrylic Acid Purification Method (USP 6252110, 26-Jun-2001)	7-12

FIGURES (Continued)

7.5	Pure Acrylic Acid Boiling Curve.....	7-13
7.6	Nippon Shokubai Patent for Proprietary Azeotropic Solvents (EP 0551111, 18-Jun-1997)	7-14
7.7	Nippon Shokubai Acrylic Acid Purification Method (USP 7332624, 19-Feb-2008).....	7-15
7.8	Nippon Shokubai Inhibitor Injection Device (USP 6409886 B1, 25-Jun-2002).....	7-17
7.9	Preferred Arkema Process Configuration (USPA 2010/0274038 A1)	7-19
7.10	Acrylic Acid from Glycerin.....	7-20
7.11	Acrylic Acid from Glycerin Process Flow Diagram	C-5
7.12	Glycerin Boiling Curve.....	7-22
7.13	Vacuum Distillation Curve for Water	7-25
8.1	Nippon Shokubai Acrylic Acid Process Process Flow Diagram	C-9
8.2	Nippon Shokubai Acrylic Acid Crystallization (EP 1116709)	8-3
8.3	Glacial Acrylic Acid via Nippon Shokubai Crystallization	8-4
8.4	Sulzer Chemtech Falling Film Crystallizer Schematic Drawing	8-5
8.5	Sulzer Chemtech Falling Film Crystallizer Rendering.....	8-6
8.6	Sulzer Crystallizer at BASF Acrylic Acid Plant Antwerp.....	8-7
8.7	Nippon Shokubai Acrylic Acid Crystallization (USP 7183428, 27-Feb-2007)	8-8
8.8	Rohm and Haas AA Process Using Exhaust Gas Recycle.....	8-9
8.9	Rohm and Haas AA Process Oxidation Reactor.....	8-10
8.10	Rohm and Haas Reactor Tube Packing Details.....	8-11
8.11	Mitsubishi Rayon Aa Liquid-Phase Oxidation Process (USP 7820856, 26-Oct-2010)	8-12
9.1	Potential 3-HPA Derivatives (USP 8048624)	9-1
9.2	Organism Toxicity to High Concentration Product (USP 8048624)	9-3
9.3	Alternative Genetic Pathways (USP 8048624)	9-3
9.4	Acrylic Acid from Glucose Process Flow Diagram	C-15

FIGURES (Concluded)

10.1 Capital Cost Comparison 10-1

10.2 Variable Cost Comparison 10-3

10.3 Total Production Cost Comparison 10-5

TABLES

1.1	Chemical Descriptors for Acrylic Acid	1-1
1.2	Physical Properties of Acrylic Acid	1-2
1.3	Potential Effects of Exposure to Acrylic Acid.....	1-5
1.4	Rohm and Haas Glacial Acrylic Acid Specification	1-7
1.5	Major Acrylic Acid Technology Development Efforts	1-10
1.6	Major ZeaChem Bio-Based Technology Development Efforts	1-11
2.1	Capital Costs as a Function of Capacity	2-3
2.2	Production Costs as a Function of Capacity	2-4
3.1	Commercial Acrylic Acid Properties	3-2
3.2	U.S. Regulations Affecting Acrylic Acid.....	3-3
3.3	EU Regulations Affecting Acrylic Acid.....	3-3
3.4	Representative Glacial Acrylic Acid Commercial Specifications.....	3-4
3.5	High Volume Acrylic Acid Comonomer Esters Supplied by Nippon Shokubai	3-7
3.6	Specialty Acrylic Acid Comonomer Esters Supplied by Nippon Shokubai	3-7
3.7	Acrylate Monomers Offered by BASF	3-8
3.8	Super Absorbent Polymer (SAP) Supplied by Nippon Shokubai	3-9
3.9	Hydrocarbon Feedstock Routes to Acrylic Acid	3-10
3.10	Global Segmentation of Propylene Monomer Demand.....	3-15
3.11	Reactor Conditions for Propane to Acrylic Acid	3-17
3.12	BASF U.S. Patents for Acrylic Acid Production from Propane.....	3-19
3.13	Arkema U.S. Patents for Acrylic Acid Production from Propane.....	3-21
3.14	Announced Bio-Based Routes to Acrylic Acid	3-23
3.15	3-HPA Derivatives	3-23
3.16	3-HPA Derivative Companies.....	3-24
3.17	Relevant Genomatica U.S. Patent Applications	3-26
3.18	Nippon Shokubai Acrylic Acid Process Licensees	3-28
3.19	Nippon Shokubai Group's AA Production Capacity	3-28
3.20	Acrylic Acid Process Licensors	3-29

TABLES (Continued)

3.21	1965 Acrylic Acid Producers	3-30
3.22	2011 Top 10 Acrylic Acid Producers	3-31
3.23	2011 BASF Acrylic Acid Capacity	3-31
3.24	2011 Global Acrylic Acid Capacity	3-32
3.25	Announced Acrylic Acid Capacity Additions.....	3-34
3.26	Mid-2011 Offered Acrylic Acid Prices on Alibaba.....	3-35
4.1	Unit Feedstock and Energy Costs for 160 Kty Ester-Grade AA Plant	4-2
4.2	Unit Production Costs for 160 Kty Ester-Grade AA Plant	4-3
4.3	U.S. Historic Feedstock and Product Pricing	4-11
5.1	Commercial Acrylic Acid Process Temperatures and Pressures	5-2
5.2	Theoretical and Commercial Acrylic Acid Feedstock Compositions per Unit of Acrylic Acid Product.....	5-4
5.3	Modified Reppe Process Temperatures and Pressures	5-6
5.4	Theoretical and Commercial Reppe Process Compositions per Unit of Acrylic Acid Product	5-7
5.5	Propane Oxydehydrogenation Process Temperatures and Pressures	5-9
5.6	Theoretical and Commercial Propane Oxydehydrogenation Process Compositions per Unit of Acrylic Acid Product.....	5-10
5.7	Theoretical and Commercial Glycerin Dehydration Process Compositions per Unit of Acrylic Acid Product	5-13
5.8	Physical Properties of 3-Hydroxypropionic Acid	5-16
5.9	Temperature and Pressure of Reactions	5-18
5.10	Theoretical and Commercial Fermentation Process Compositions per Unit of Acrylic Acid Product.....	5-18
6.1	Design Capacity of Proposed AA Plants.....	6-3
6.2	Typical Ester-Grade AA Composition.....	6-4
6.3	Typical Glacial-Grade AA Composition	6-4
6.4	Physical Properties of Purified Glycerin	6-5
6.5	Raw Glycerin Composition	6-6
6.6	Pretreated Glycerin Specification	6-9

TABLES (Continued)

6.7	Propylene Feedstock Specifications	6-10
6.8	Construction Cost Location Factors	6-11
6.9	Regional Labor and Utility Cost Factors.....	6-12
6.10	PEP Component Cost Index—United States	6-19
6.11	U.S. PEP Cost Index	6-21
6.12	SRIC Offsite Capital Cost Components	6-22
6.13	Relevant Project Standards Setting Organizations	6-24
6.14	Temperature Design Considerations	6-24
6.15	Project Cost Factors	6-28
7.1	Early Patents on Glycerin Dehydration	7-1
7.2	Degussa Recommendations for Glycerin Dehydration to Acrolein.....	7-3
7.3	Nippon Shokubai Glycerin-Based Relevant Patents.....	7-4
7.4	Reactor Feed Composition.....	7-6
7.5	Desirable Glycerin Dehydration Reaction Design Conditions.....	7-6
7.6	Reactant and Product Boiling Points.....	7-7
7.7	Maximum Contaminant Levels in Acrolein Product.....	7-7
7.8	Prominent Patents for Acrylic Acid Purification	7-9
7.9	Competitor Glycerin-Based Relevant Patents.....	7-18
7.10	Reactor Operating Conditions	7-19
7.11	Process Design Basis	7-21
7.12	Water Rich Stream Composition	7-24
7.13	Stream by Stream Material Balance.....	7-27
7.14	Process Equipment List.....	7-35
7.15	Itemized Capital Cost Estimate	7-39
7.16	Acrylic Acid from Glycerin via Nippon Shokubai Technology Total Capital Cost	7-43
7.17	Variable Costs of Production	7-44
7.18	Total Costs of Production	7-45

TABLES (Concluded)

8.1	Design Basis Used in PEP 6D (2003)	8-2
8.2	Boiling Point and Crystallization Point Comparison	8-3
8.3	Tubemaster U.S. Patents for Reactor Catalyst Loading	8-13
8.4	Recent NS AA Patents in Acrylic Acid.....	8-14
8.5	Design Basis for Updated AA Production Economics.....	8-16
8.6	Variable Costs for Acrylic Acid via NS Oxidation Process	8-17
8.7	Production Cost Estimate for Acrylic Acid via NS Oxidation Process.....	8-18
9.1	Physical Properties of 3-Hydroxypropionic Acid	9-2
9.2	Temperature and Pressure of Reactions	9-4
9.3	Battery Limits Capital Investment Summary	9-6
9.4	Variable Production Costs for Acrylic Acid Production via Fermentation	9-7
9.5	Total Production Costs	9-8
10.1	Capital Cost Comparison	10-2
10.2	Variable Cost Comparison	10-3
10.3	Feedstock Cost Comparison	10-4
10.4	Sugar Fermentation Raw Material Cost.....	10-4
10.5	Total Production Cost Comparison	10-5