

Continuous freeze-drying and its relevance to the pharma/biotech industry

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# Continuous freeze-drying and its relevance to the pharma/biotech industry

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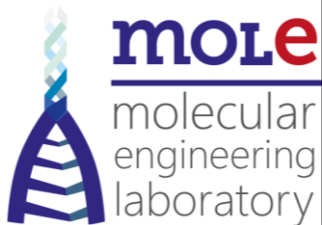
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# Continuous freeze-drying and its relevance to the pharma/biotech industry



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# Introduction

## Freeze-drying / Lyophilization is

a process where water, or another solvent, is removed from a frozen solution at low temperature and pressure via sublimation

A freeze-drying cycle encompasses **three steps**

- Freezing
- Primary drying
- Secondary drying

Almost **50% of biopharmaceuticals** listed by FDA and EMA is lyophilized, proving that freeze-drying is the preferred way to stabilize large molecules that are not stable in liquid, despite its high energy consumptions and long processing time.

# Introduction

Freeze-drying of pharmaceuticals is performed **batch-wise**

vial-to-vial  
heterogeneity

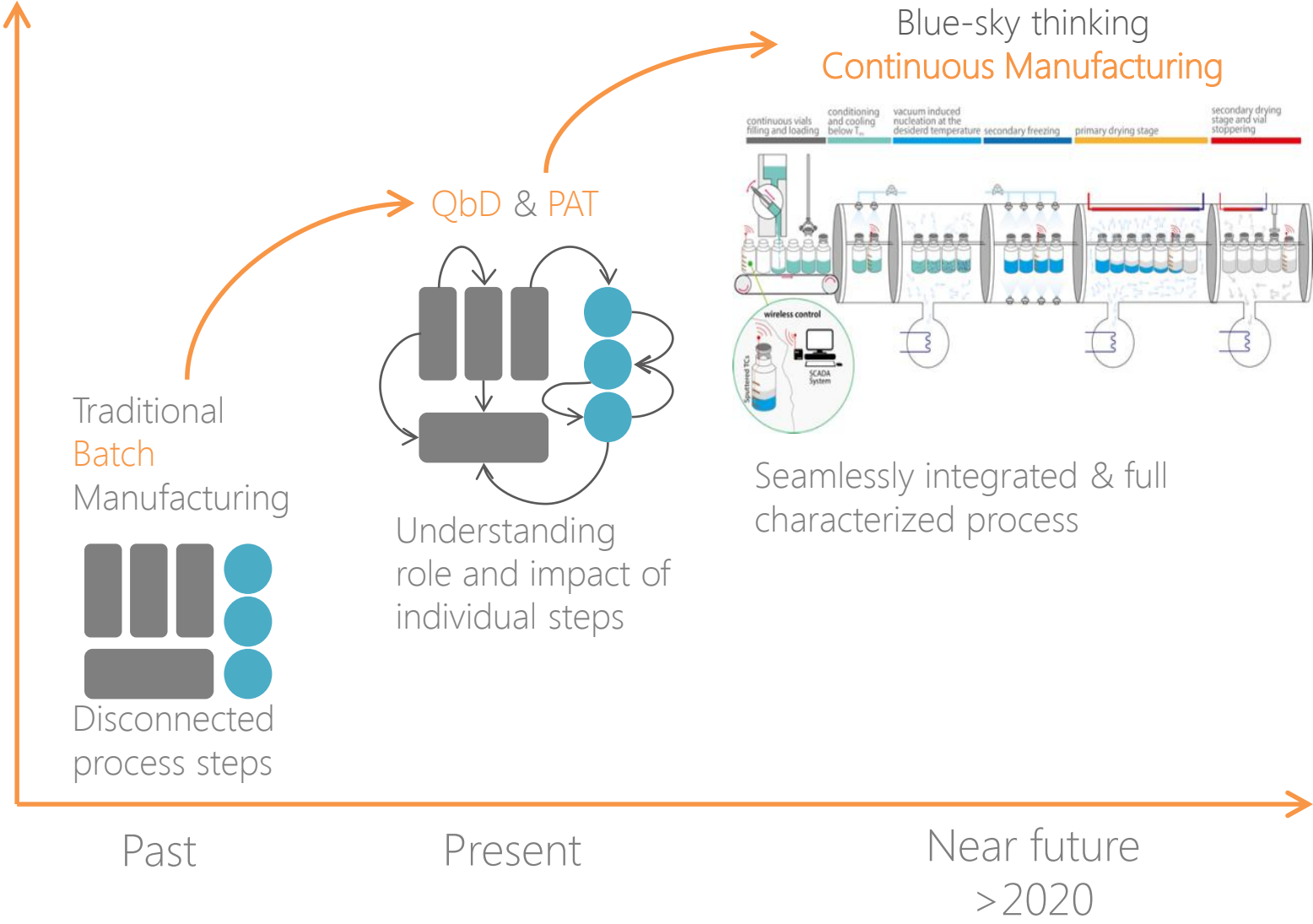
- Long and expensive process
- Heat and mass transfer is not uniform within the batch of vials
- Heterogeneity in freezing behavior
- Heterogeneity in drying behavior
- Poor control of product quality



Examples of lyophilized samples belonging to the same lot of production



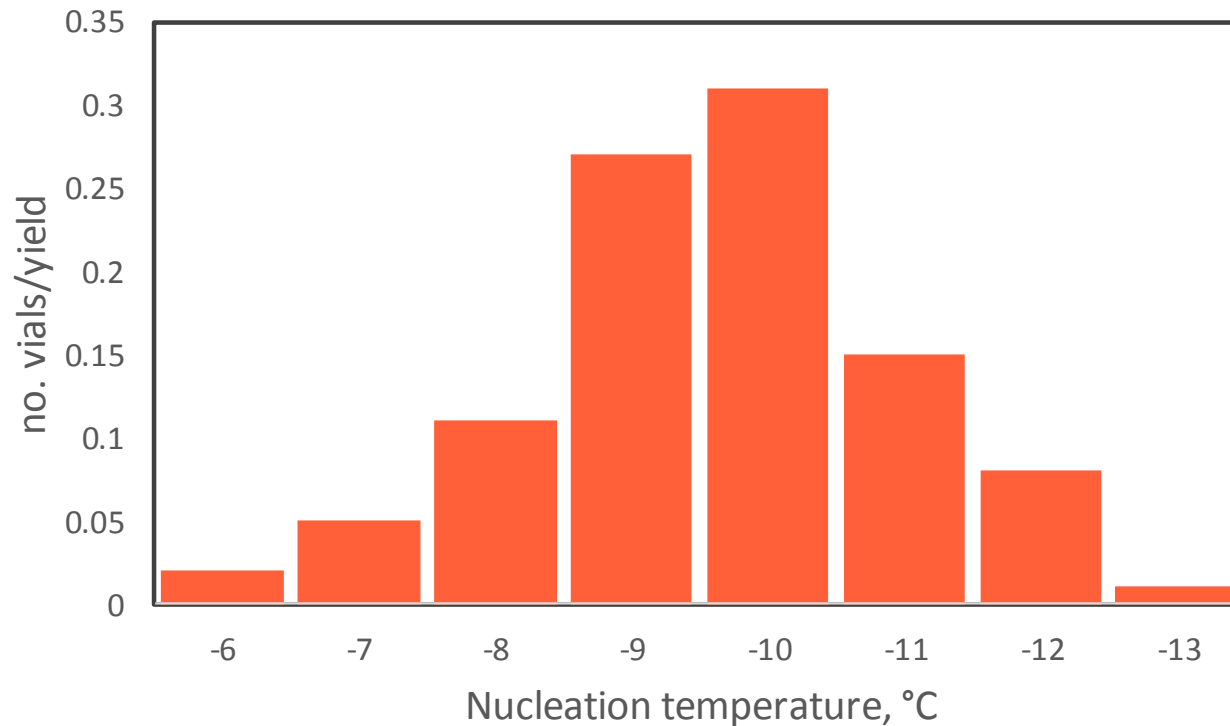
# Background & Problem statement



# Drawbacks of batch freeze-drying

Heterogeneity in freezing behavior ...

- ▶ temperature of nucleation is not uniform within the batch of vials, but is stochastically distributed,



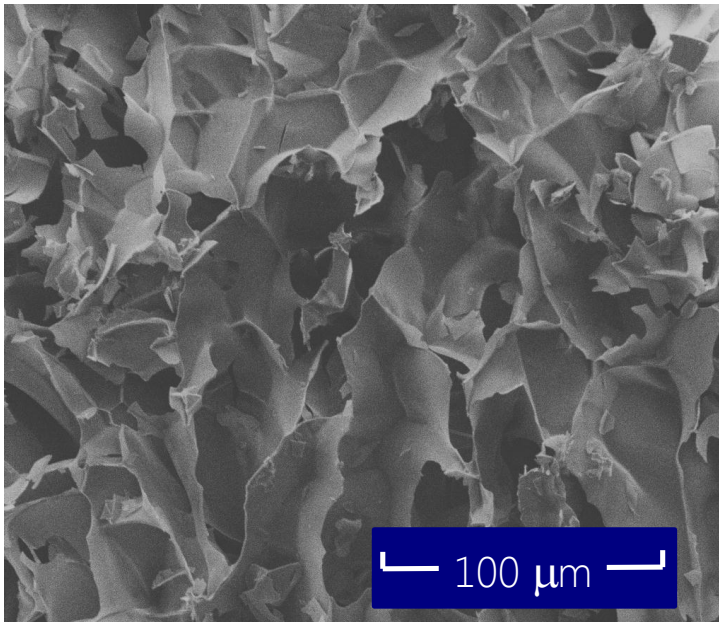
Distribution of the nucleation temperature as observed in a batch freeze-drying cycle

# Drawbacks of batch freeze-drying

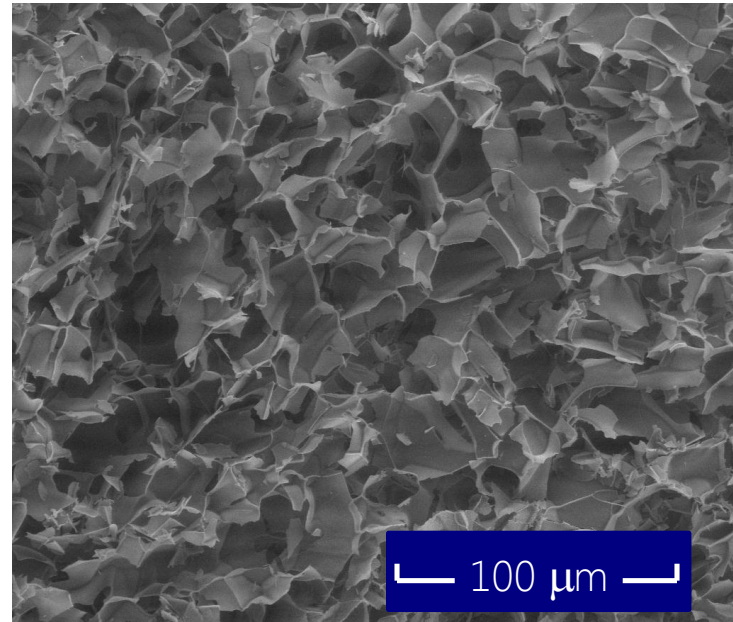
Heterogeneity in freezing behavior ...

- ▶ temperature of nucleation is not uniform within the batch of vials, but is stochastically distributed
- ▶ ice structure and, hence, cake morphology changes from vial to vial

$T_n = -10\text{ °C}$



$T_n = -15\text{ °C}$



SEM micrographs of mannitol 5% as produced by batch freeze-drying

# Drawbacks of batch freeze-drying

Heterogeneity in freezing behavior ...

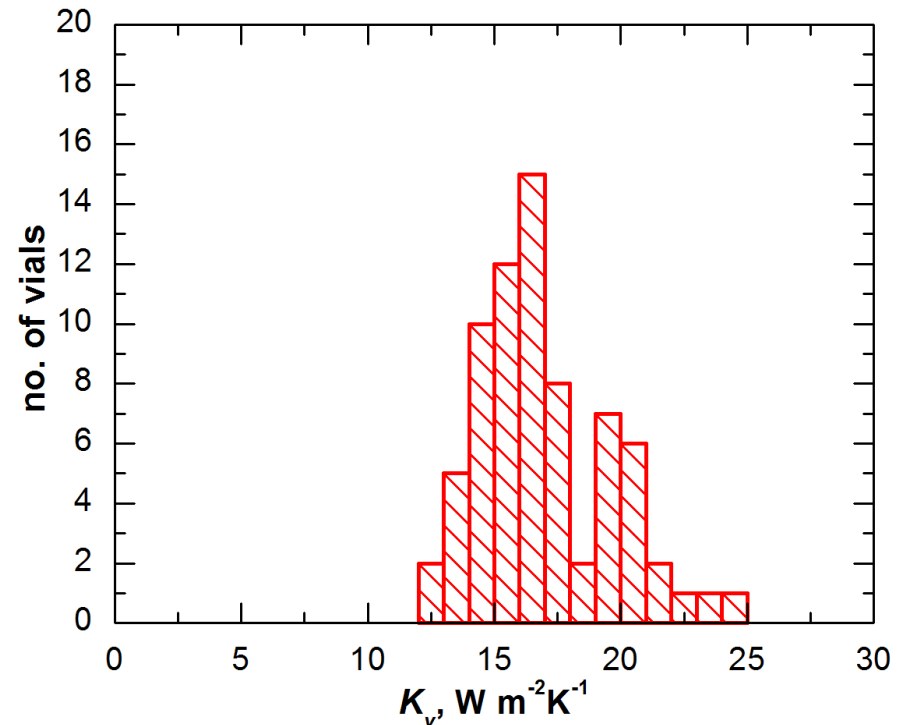
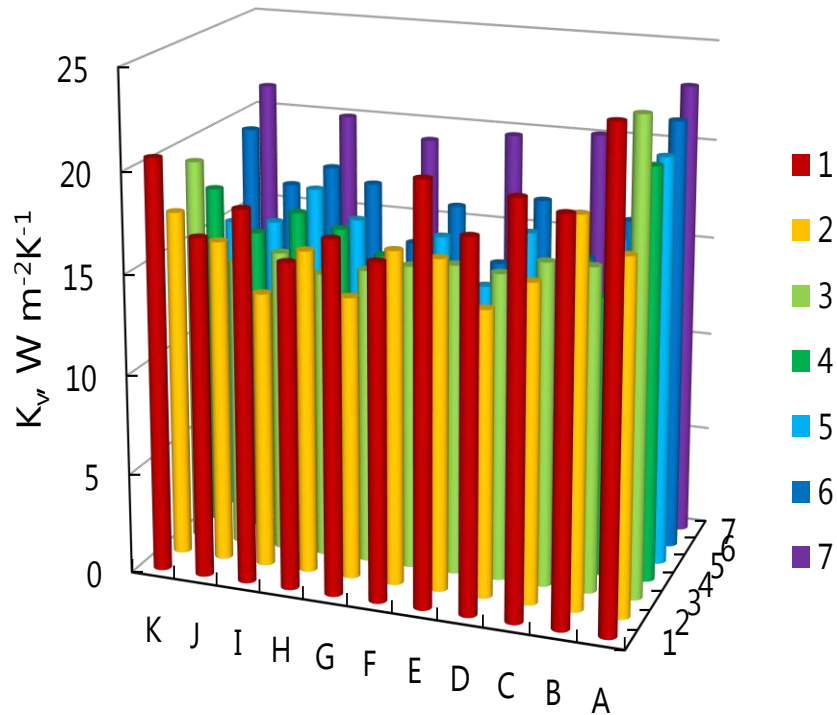
- ▶ temperature of nucleation is not uniform within the batch of vials, but is stochastically distributed
- ▶ ice structure and, hence, cake morphology changes from vial to vial
- ▶ both primary and secondary drying behavior change from vial to vial
- ▶ vial-to-vial variations in polymorphs composition
- ▶ large distributions in residual moisture and potentially in API activity/stability

Continuous freeze-drying might be beneficial to ...

- ▶ achieve a narrow distribution in nucleation temperature
- ▶ make the frozen product morphology more uniform
- ▶ make drying behavior more uniform among the vials of the batch
- ▶ reduce vial-to-vial heterogeneity

# Drawbacks of batch freeze-drying

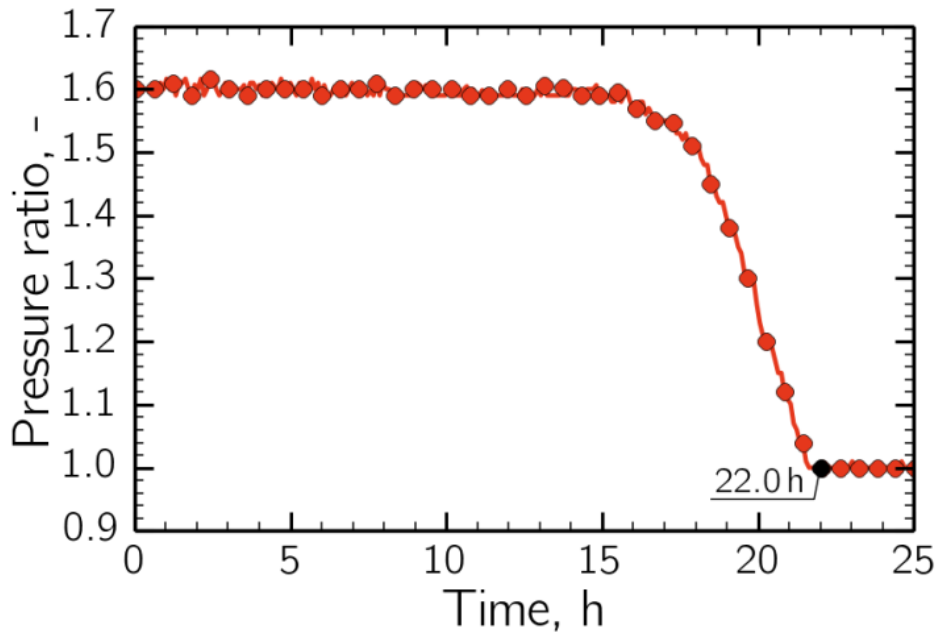
Heterogeneity in heat transfer ...



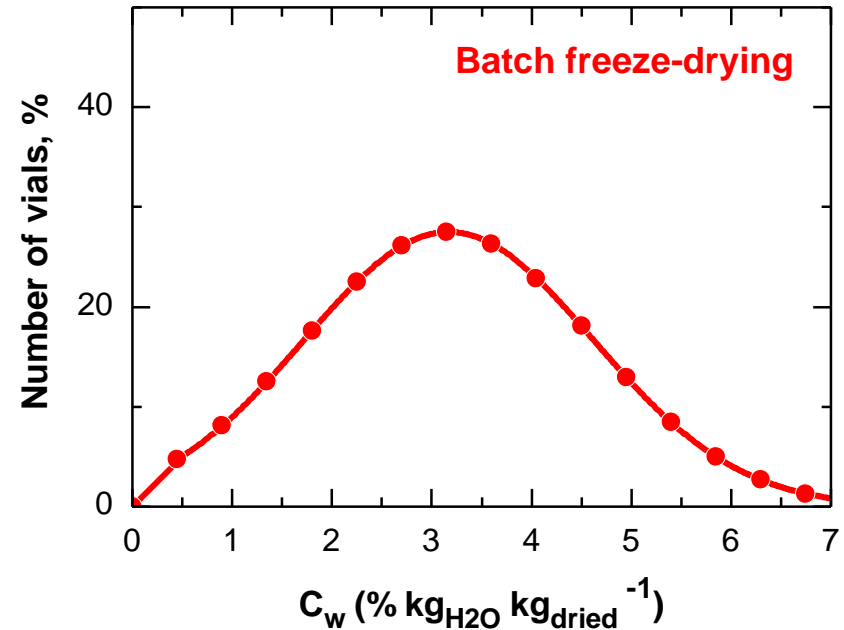
Spatial and statistical distribution of the heat transfer coefficient, between shelf and container, within a batch of vials. Data refer to primary drying, 10 Pa as chamber pressure

# Drawbacks of batch freeze-drying

Heterogeneity in heat transfer ...



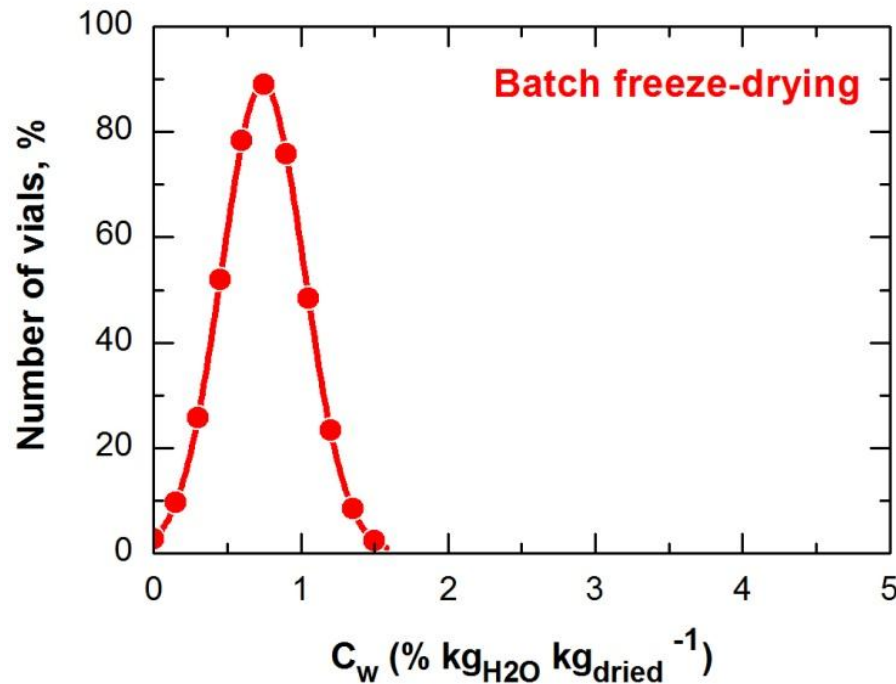
Evolution of pressure ratio as observed in a batch freeze-dryer



Statistical distribution of the residual moisture within the lyophilized samples at the end of primary drying

# Drawbacks of batch freeze-drying

- ▶ Variations in product morphology due to freezing
- ▶ Variations in the residual moisture at the end of primary drying
- ▶ Variations in the residual moisture at the end of secondary drying



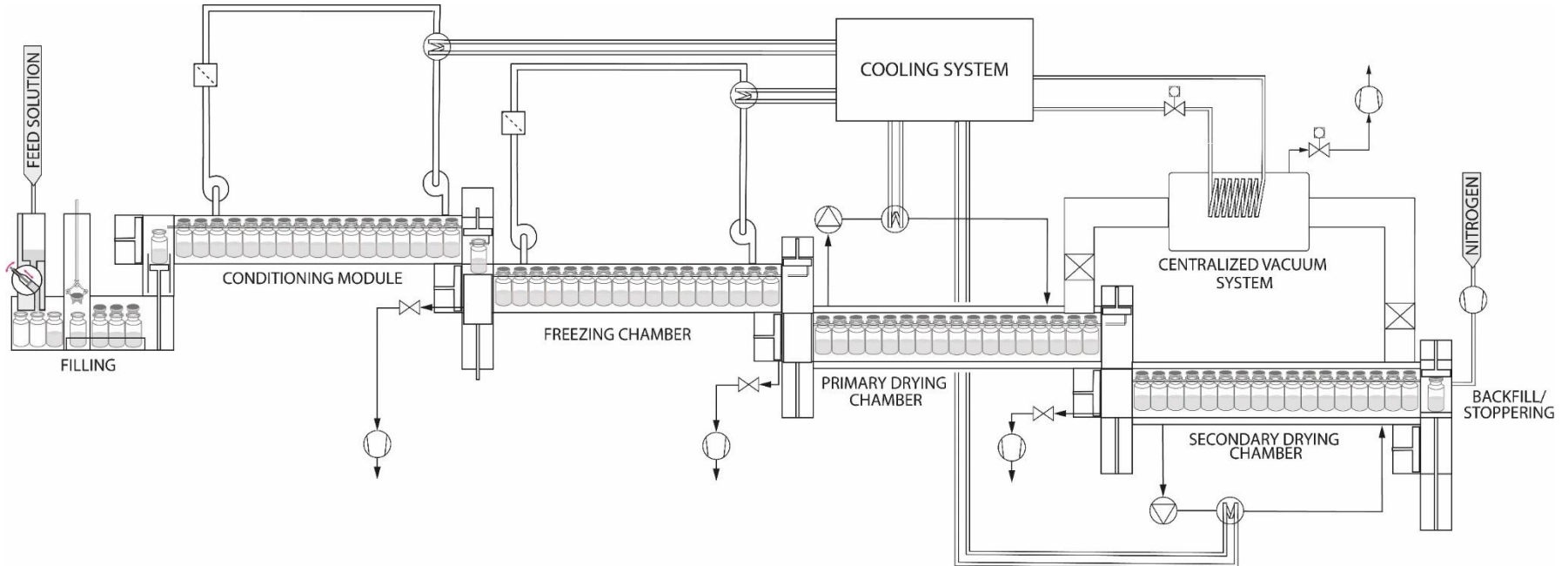
Statistical distribution of residual moisture within the lyophilized samples as observed at the end of secondary drying

The extent of heterogeneity in freezing and drying behavior is equipment-specific.

A cycle developed in a laboratory freeze-dryer cannot be transferred without modifications to the production unit → **scale up**

# A new concept for the continuous freeze-drying of unit doses

**OBJECTIVE:** development of a continuous freeze-dryer that produces a final product having similar properties and structures to that obtained by a conventional batch unit.



FILLING

CONDITION-  
ING

VACUUM  
CHAMBER

PRIMARY  
DRYING  
MODULE

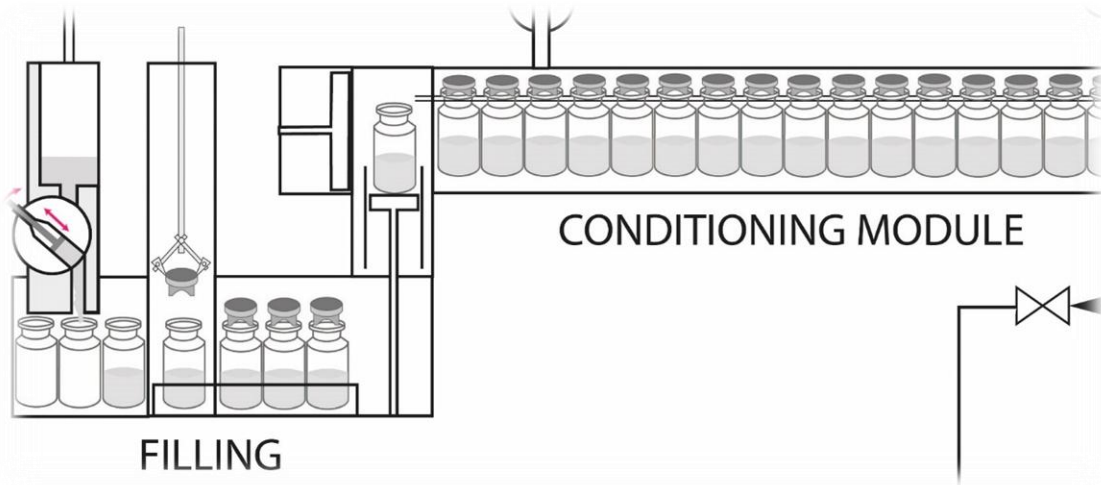
SECONDARY  
DRYING  
MODULE

BACK/STOP  
PERING

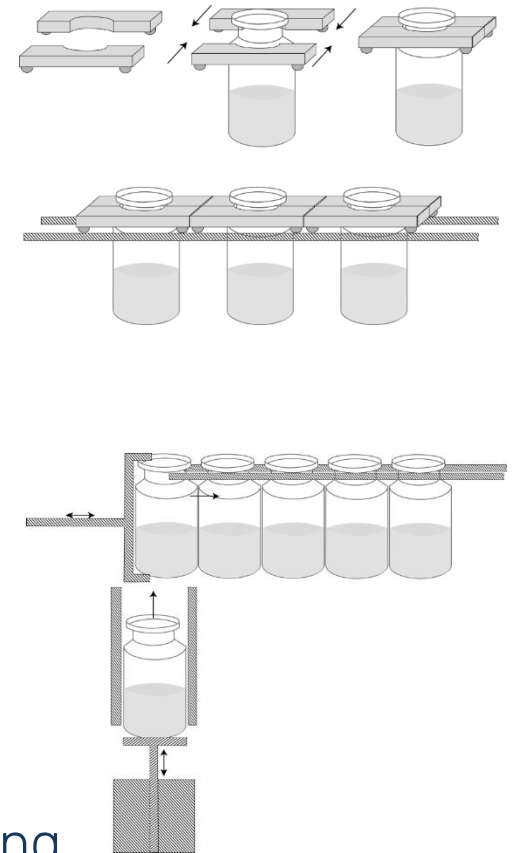
# A new concept for the continuous freeze-drying of unit doses

## Filling and Loading

Conditioning module  
Nucleation module  
Freezing module  
Primary drying module  
Secondary drying module



## Moving of vials



The continuous flow of vials is achieved by suspending the vials over a track → **uniformity in heat transfer**

# A new concept for the continuous freeze-drying of unit doses

Filling and Loading

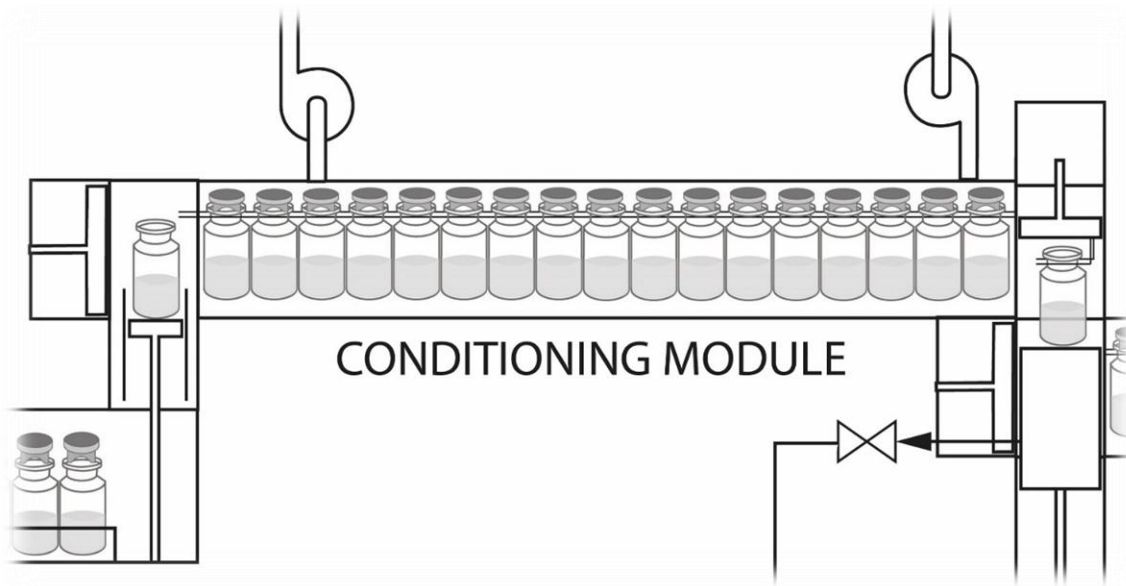
## Conditioning module

Nucleation module

Freezing module

Primary drying module

Secondary drying module

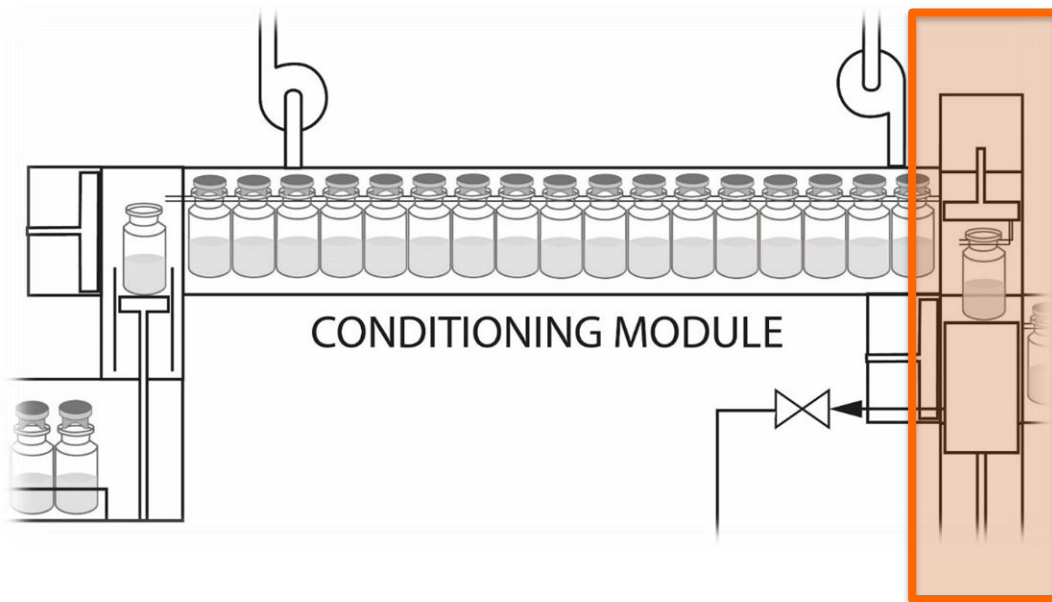


# A new concept for the continuous freeze-drying of unit doses

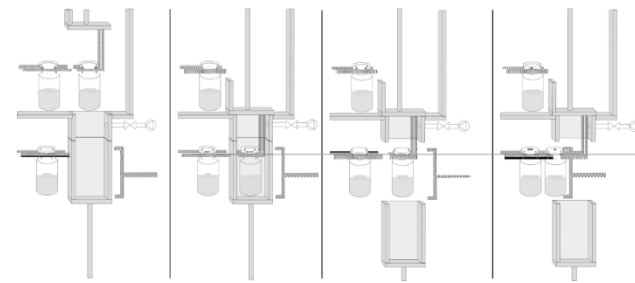
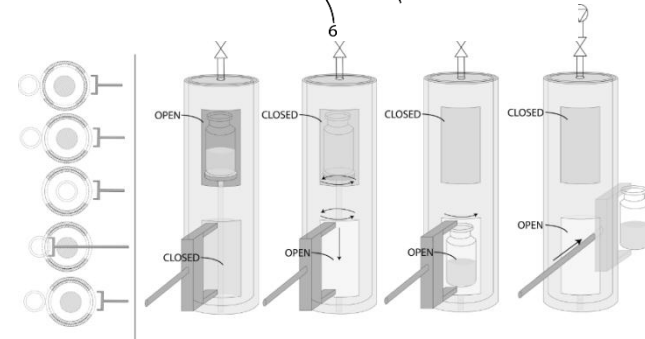
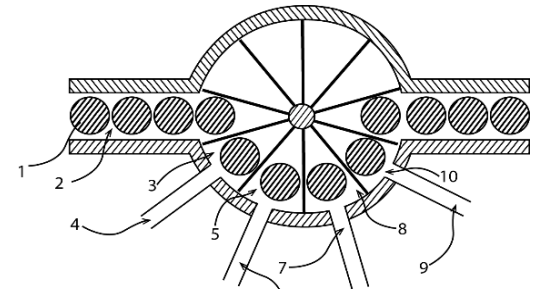
Filling and Loading  
Conditioning module

## Nucleation module

Freezing module  
Primary drying module  
Secondary drying module



## Example of nucleation chambers

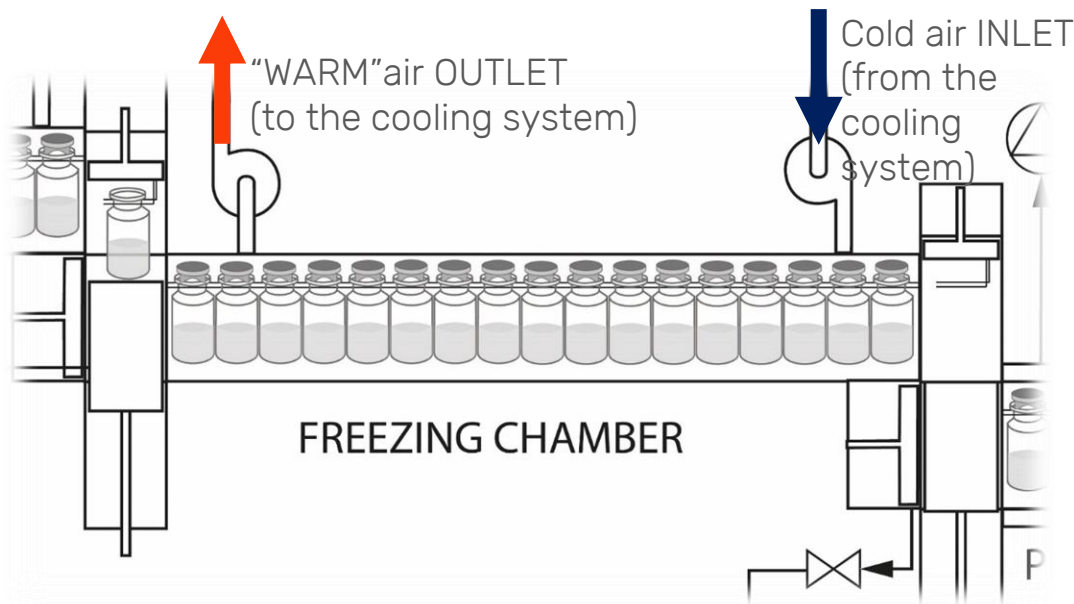


# A new concept for the continuous freeze-drying of unit doses

Filling and Loading  
Conditioning module  
Nucleation module

## Freezing module

Primary drying module  
Secondary drying module



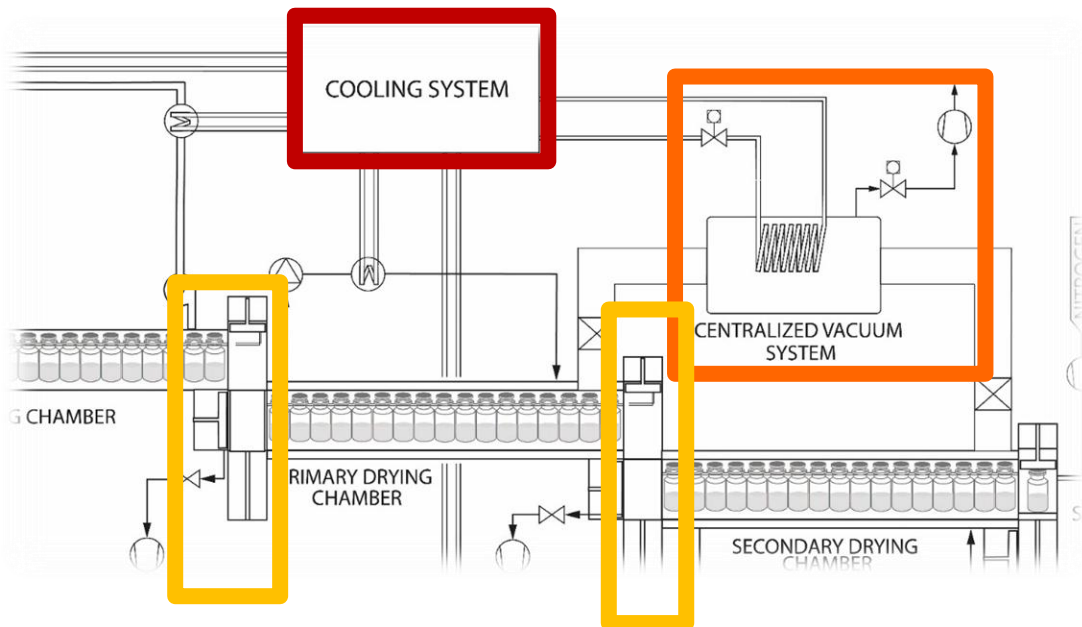
- The nucleated solution is further cooled by forced convection until the its complete solidification.
- The external surface of the vessel is equally flushed by the cryogenic gas.
- Different freezing protocols can be performed modulating temperature and velocity of cryogenic gas.

# A new concept for the continuous freeze-drying of unit doses

Filling and Loading  
Conditioning module  
Nucleation module  
Freezing module

## Primary drying module

Secondary drying module



In the primary drying module ...

- Vials are exposed to low temperature and pressure
- Heat is transferred by radiation from temperature-controlled surfaces

■ Vacuum system  
(condenser + vacuum pump)

■ Cooling/heating system

■ Sluice-gate/load-lock

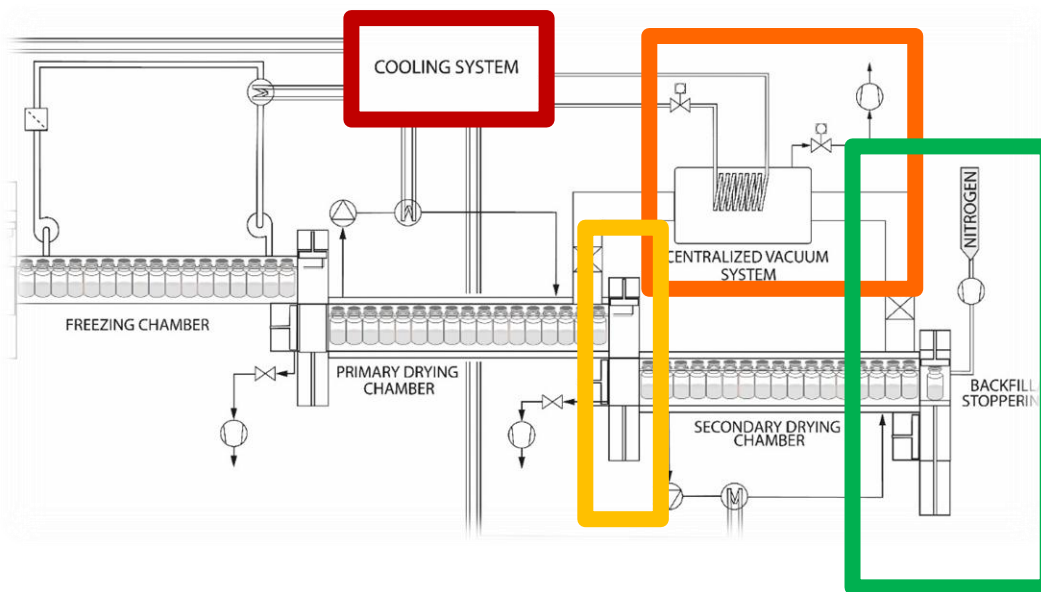
# A new concept for the continuous freeze-drying of unit doses

Filling and Loading  
Conditioning module  
Nucleation module  
Freezing module  
Primary drying

## Secondary drying module

In the secondary drying module ...

- Vials are exposed to high temperature and low pressure so as to promote desorption of bounded water



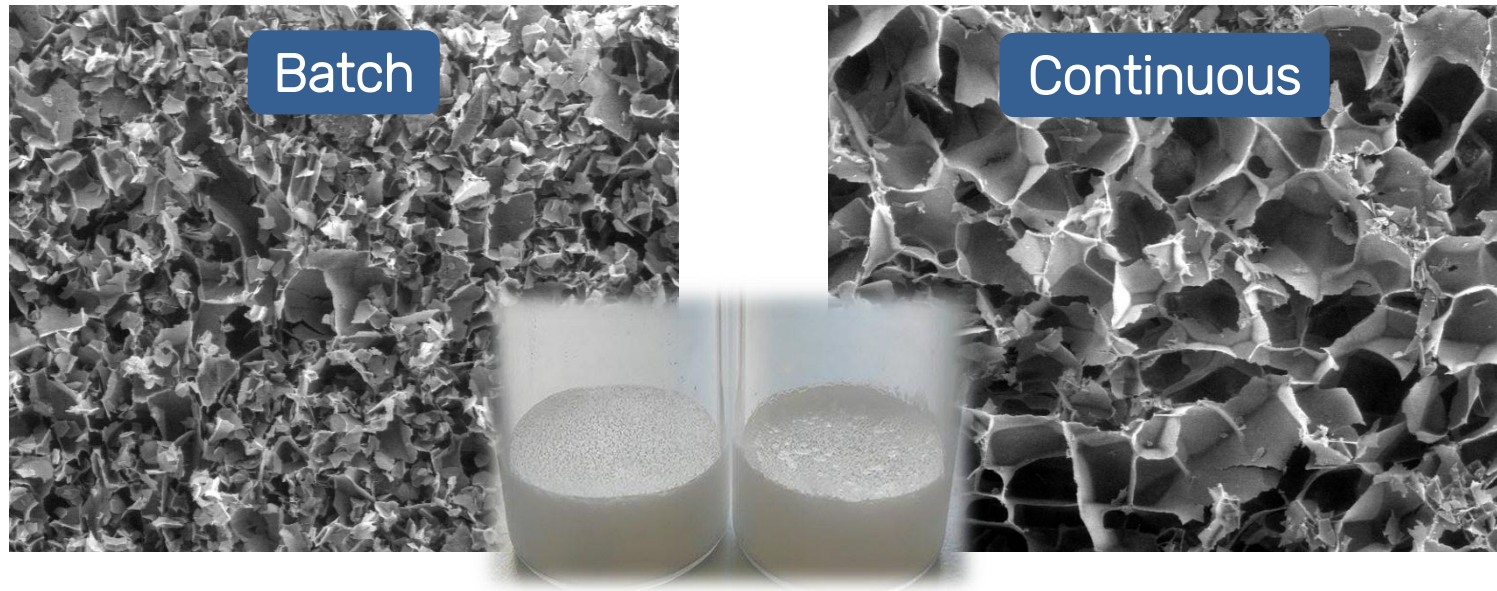
- Vacuum system (condenser + vacuum pump)
- Cooling/heating system
- Sluice-gate/load-lock
- Stoppering/sealing



# Experimental results

## Product morphology

- More precise control of freezing conditions
- Larger pores and hence smaller resistance to mass transfer during primary drying

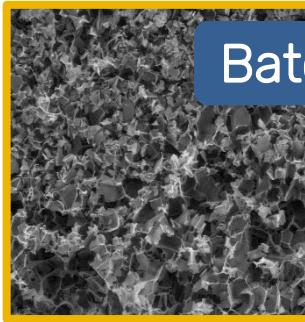
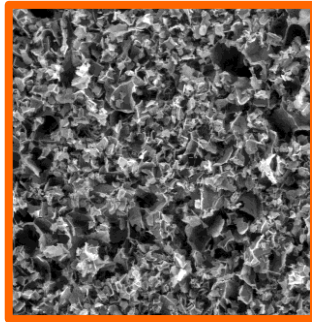
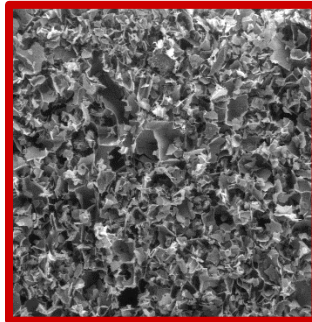


SEM images of lyophilized mannitol samples produced on constant drying conditions. Images refer to the same enlargement

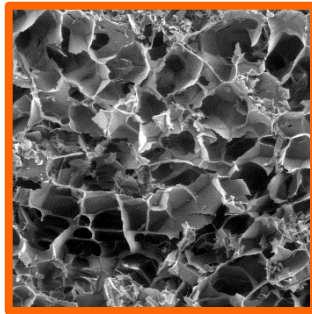
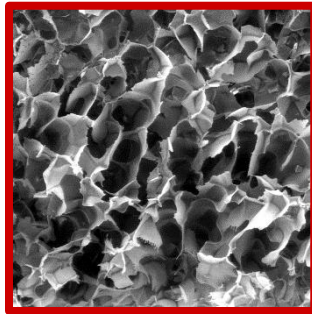
# Experimental results

## Product morphology

- More precise control of freezing conditions
- Larger pores and hence smaller resistance to mass transfer during primary drying
- Intra-vial heterogeneity is less evident



Batch



Continuous



SEM images of lyophilized mannitol samples

# Experimental results

## Process performances

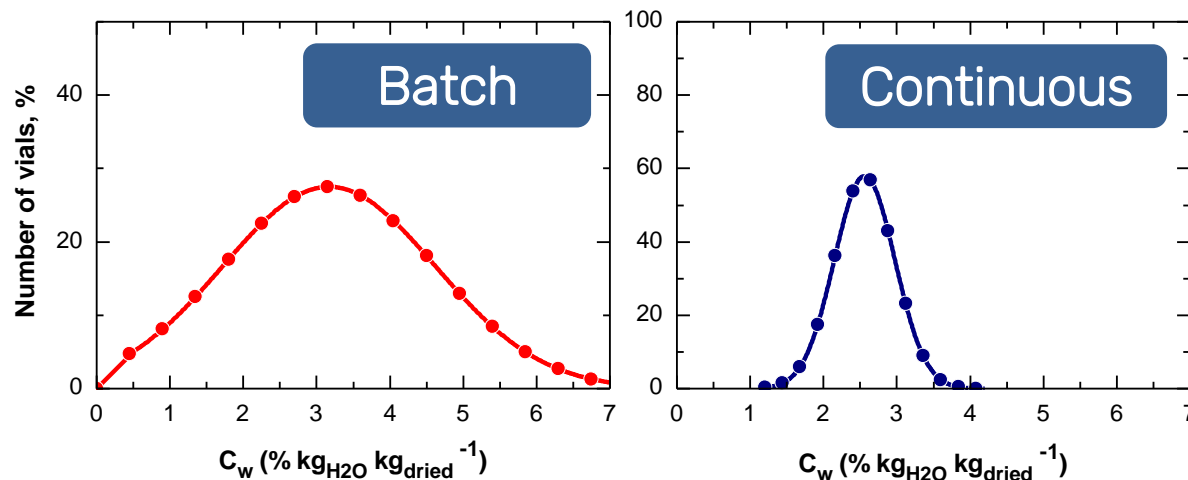
- Larger pores and hence shorter primary drying
- Breaks of a typical batch production can be 20% to 50% of the total cycle time
- The overall cycle time is up to **5 times shorter**

	Loading	Leak test	Freezing	Primary drying	Soak time	Secondary drying	Closing	Unloading	Defrost/CIP /SIP/H2O2
Batch	✓ 5 h	✓ 2-3 h	✓ 6 h	✓ LONG	✓ 6 h	✓ SHORT	✓ 1 h	✓ 6 h	✓ 6 h
Continuous			✓ < 1 h	✓ SHORTER		✓ SHORT			

# Experimental results

## Process performances

- Larger pores and hence shorter primary drying
- Breaks of a typical batch production can be 20% to 50% of the total cycle time
- The overall cycle time is up to **5 times shorter**
- Distribution of the residual moisture at the end of drying is more uniform

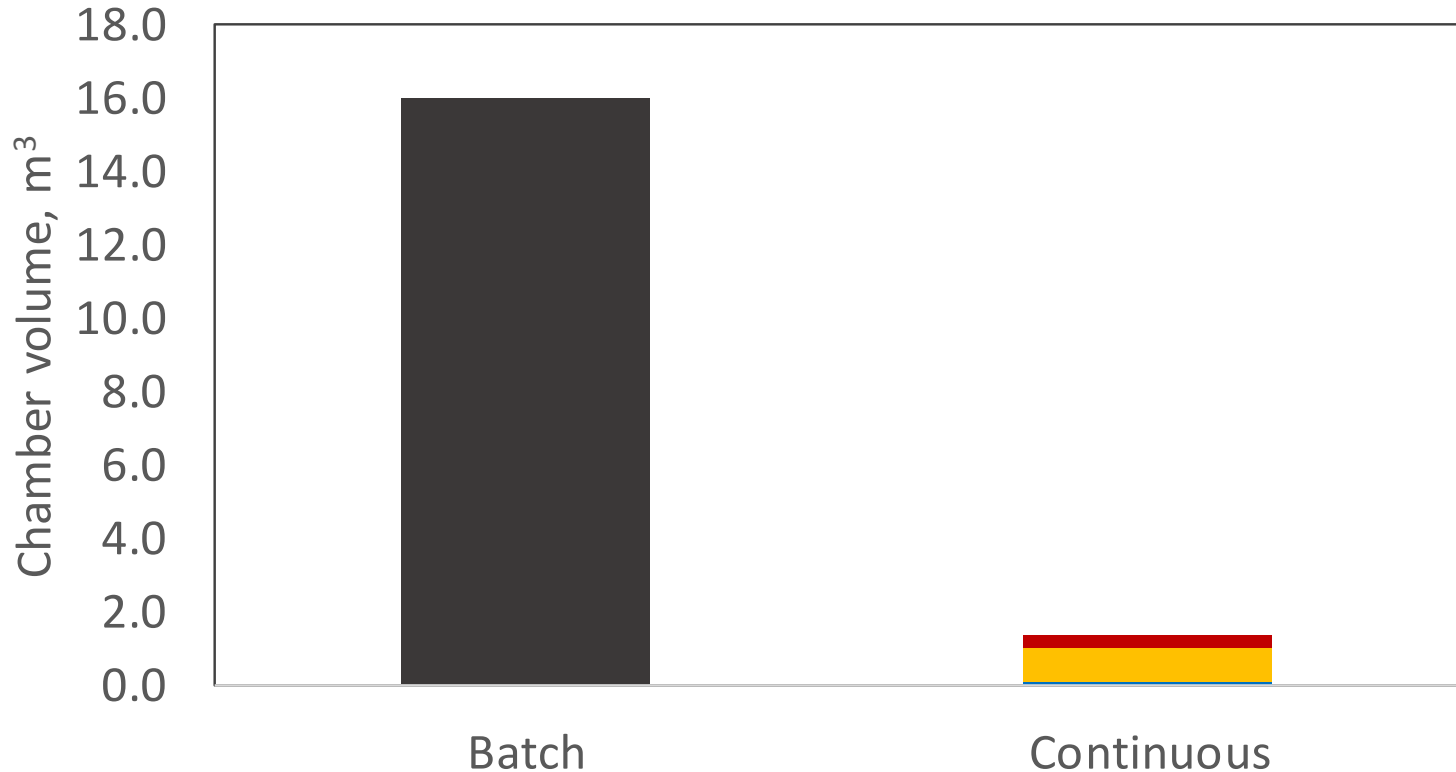


Distribution of the final residual moisture for a sucrose-based formulation (250 vials)

# Experimental results

- Case study #1 – 100,000 vials/week

The equipment volume is approx. 15 times smaller



# Conclusions

## Reduce the risk of product contamination

- No manual handling, increased safety
- The processing time is shorter

## Modular and smaller equipment and facilities

- More flexible operation
- Reduced inventory
- Lower capital costs, less work-in-progress materials

## Eliminate scale-up from lab to production units

## Process flexibility

- Bulk vs. particle-based material
- Yield can be adjusted on market request

## Improve product quality

- Uniformity of the lot of production
- In-line control of product quality

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## Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Department of Chemical Engineering

Prof. Bernhardt Trout

Thanks for  
your attention!

