Popular Article

TRENDS IN AGRICULTURE SCIENCE

Vol.3 Issue 11 November 2024, Page: 2296-2300

Vybrid Technology: Improvement In Sorghum

Tamilarasan A, Vasudev R, Susi M S, Mahendran R and Jegadeeswaran M*

Department of Genetics and Plant Breeding, SRM College of Agricultural Sciences (SRMIST), Baburayanpettai, Chengalpattu – 603201, Tamil Nadu, India

Introduction

Sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*) stands out as a vital cereal crop due to its resilience and adaptability to various climatic conditions, making it a key staple in arid and semi-arid regions. While conventional breeding methods for sorghum have made significant contributions, they often face challenges such as lengthy processes and difficulties in maintaining hybrid vigor across generations. However, apomixis—an innovative form of asexual reproduction that produces seeds without fertilization—offers a promising avenue for improvement. By harnessing the potential of apomixis, we can preserve hybrid vigor (heterosis) indefinitely, which could revolutionize the breeding and production practices for sorghum, ensuring its continued role as a vital food source.

What is Apomixis?

Apomixis is an intriguing method of seed formation that enables the embryo to develop without needing male and female gamete fusion. This asexual reproduction process produces progeny genetically identical to the mother plant, effectively creating clonal seeds.

The ability to preserve hybrid traits across generations through apomixis presents exciting opportunities in plant breeding, particularly for crops like sorghum. This characteristic not only enhances the efficiency of breeding programs but also contributes to the development of resilient and uniform crop varieties.

Importance of Sorghum

Sorghum stands as the fifth most important cereal crop in the world, nourishing millions, especially in Asia and Africa. Its remarkable qualities make it a true gift of nature:

- **Drought Tolerance:** Sorghum thrives in harsh conditions, embodying resilience and hope for arid regions.
- **Nutritional Benefits:** Packed with fiber, protein, vitamins, and minerals, it empowers communities with essential nourishment.
- **Versatility:** This incredible crop serves a multitude of purposes, from sustaining lives with food to fueling the future through biofuel production.

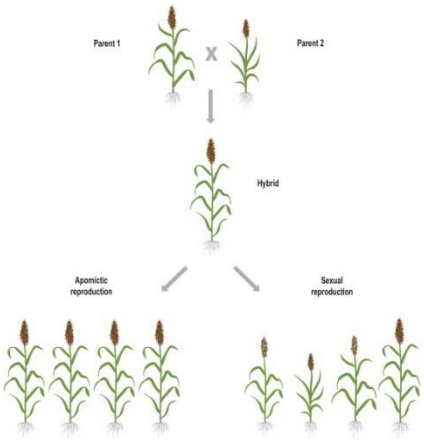
Published: 30 November 2024
ISSN: 2583-7850

Though faced with challenges in breeding, such as the need for genetic diversity and hybrid vigor, the potential for innovation through apomixis shines brightly on the horizon.

Potential of Apomixis in Sorghum Breeding

Apomixis presents a promising opportunity to enhance sorghum breeding in several impactful ways:

- **Stabilization of Hybrid Vigor:** Hybrid sorghum varieties are known for their exceptional traits, including increased yield, improved stress resistance, and enhanced nutritional quality. Apomixis allows for the continuous reproduction of these advantageous hybrid traits, preventing genetic segregation and ensuring consistency in quality.



- **Streamlined Breeding Programs:** Apomixis can considerably simplify and accelerate the breeding process by removing the necessity for recurrent hybridization. This efficiency can lead to faster development of new and improved sorghum varieties.
- **Cost Efficiency for Farmers:** Apomictic sorghum plants enable farmers to utilize seeds from successful plants while maintaining the desired hybrid qualities. This reduces reliance on purchasing new hybrid seeds every season, ultimately lowering costs and promoting sustainability in farming practices.

Mechanisms of Apomixis in Sorghum

Although apomixis has not yet been observed naturally in sorghum, exploring its genetic and molecular mechanisms could pave the way for its introduction through genetic engineering and molecular breeding. Several key approaches can be taken to advance this goal:

- **Gene Identification:** By focusing on the genes and regulatory pathways that govern apomictic reproduction in other plant species, such as Pennisetum and Tripsacum, researchers can gain valuable insights that may apply to sorghum.
- **Genome Editing:** Techniques such as CRISPR/Cas9 present an exciting opportunity to incorporate apomixis-related genes into sorghum, potentially enabling the development of asexual seed formation.
- **Molecular Markers:** Implementing molecular markers can facilitate the tracking of apomictic traits, thereby enhancing the selection process for desirable lines in breeding programs.

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Challenges in Implementing Apomixis in Sorghum

Challenges	Descriptive
Genetic Complexity	The genetic mechanisms controlling apomixis are multifaceted and involve several loci, making conventional breeding approaches inefficient and highlighting the need for innovation.
Environmental Interactions	Environmental influences can vary the expression of apomixis-related traits, which can undermine the reliability of apomictic reproduction. Understanding these interactions is crucial for consistency.
Lack of Natural Apomictic Varieties	Sorghum does not naturally exhibit apomixis, necessitating the introduction of this beneficial trait through advanced breeding techniques. A strong commitment to research and development is essential for progress.

Apomictic line Identification

AS-3 line	The study indicated the presence of functional components of apomixis in a grain sorghum line and suggested that selecting such traits in diploid cultivated crops could be effective.	Elena V. Belyaeva *et al.* 2021
F1 progeny of reciprocal crosses (R473 and 302)	Two parents and their F1 progeny show apomixis through somatic apospory linked to self-incompatibility.	Narsa Reddy *et al*. 1979

Applications of Apomixis in Sorghum

The introduction of apomixis in sorghum could have transformative impacts, including:

1. **Seed Production:** Apomictic sorghum can lead to a consistent, high-quality seed supply, ensuring uniform crop performance.

Published: 30 November 2024
ISSN: 2583-7850

2. **Crop Improvement:** By stabilizing desirable traits across generations, breeders can focus on improving other aspects of the crop, such as disease resistance and stress tolerance.
3. **Resource Efficiency:** Farmers can reduce their dependence on purchasing hybrid seeds every season, making sorghum cultivation more economically sustainable.

Current Research and Future Prospects

Research on apomixis in sorghum represents a cutting-edge area in plant breeding science, where innovative efforts are being made to enhance crop productivity and resilience. Key strategies include:

- Genetic Engineering Approaches: Advanced techniques like CRISPR/Cas9 and other gene-editing tools are employed to introduce genes associated with apomixis effectively.
- Comparative Genomics: Exploring the genomes of apomictic relatives of sorghum, such as *Tripsacum dactyloides*, to pinpoint homologous genes that have the potential to facilitate the induction of apomixis in sorghum.
- Field Trials: Implementing comprehensive trials designed to evaluate the stability and heritability of these induced apomictic traits across various environmental conditions.

These combined efforts are paving the way for significant advancements in sorghum breeding and agricultural innovation.

Conclusion

The integration of apomixis into sorghum breeding is poised to revolutionize the crop's production, preserving hybrid vigor, streamlining breeding programs, and significantly reducing seed costs. While challenges remain in overcoming genetic and environmental hurdles associated with inducing apomixis in sorghum, ongoing research and technological advancements will pave the way for success. Future breakthroughs in molecular biology, genomics, and biotechnology are essential for unlocking the full potential of apomixis and ensuring sustainable sorghum agriculture.

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Published: 30 November 2024
ISSN: 2583-7850

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Published: 30 November 2024
ISSN: 2583-7850