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Enhancing crop protection and yield through crop improvement for climate change Resilience: A comprehensive review

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ABSTRACT

Climate change poses a significant threat to global food security by altering temperature and precipitation patterns, leading to increased pest and disease pressure on crops. In order to mitigate these challenges and ensure sustainable agricultural production, it is crucial to enhance crop protection and yield through innovative strategies. Climate change significantly impacts crop protection and yields by reducing growth periods and yields, as rising temperatures accelerate maturation. Heat-sensitive crops like wheat and rice suffer immensely. Water scarcity from erratic rainfall threatens irrigation, while excess water leads to soil erosion. Pests and pathogens change behavior and proliferate with warmer climates, increasing crop vulnerability. Soil health is compromised by extreme weather, affecting productivity. These challenges necessitate resilient agricultural practices and innovative strategies to ensure sustainable crop yields and food security in the face of a changing climate. Hence in light of the growing challenges posed by climate change, enhancing crop resilience and productivity becomes paramount. As we address food insecurity concerns, innovative approaches to crop improvement hold the key to ensuring sustainable agricultural systems. Molecular approaches and breeding strategies are revolutionizing crop improvement. Techniques like marker-assisted selection (MAS) and genomics selection enable precise trait selection, enhancing yield and quality. Genome editing tools such as CRISPR-Cas9 allow for targeted genetic modifications, overcoming traditional breeding limitations. These methods facilitate rapid development of crop varieties with desired traits like disease resistance, nutritional value and high yield. Trait pyramiding combines multiple beneficial genes, while RNA interference (RNAi) and epigenetic modifications offer additional layers of control over gene expression. Integrating these with multi-omics approaches promotes broad plant responses, further enhancing resilience to climate change. This paper provides the current research on climate change impacts on crop production, as well as the potential options to improve crop resilience and productivity. By analysing the latest scientific literature, this review aims to highlight the importance of implementing adaptive measures to address the challenges posed by climate change and ensure food security for current and future generations.

Key words: Climate change, genome, molecular tools, plant breeding, resilient agriculture

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RÉSUMÉ

Le changement climatique constitue une menace significative pour la sécurité alimentaire mondiale en modifiant les schémas de température et de précipitations, ce qui entraîne une pression accrue des ravageurs et des maladies sur les cultures. Pour atténuer ces défis et assurer une production agricole durable, il est crucial d'améliorer la protection et le rendement des cultures par des stratégies innovantes. Le changement climatique impacte significativement la protection et les rendements des cultures en réduisant les périodes de croissance et les rendements, car l'augmentation des températures accélère la maturation. Les cultures sensibles à la chaleur comme le blé et le riz en souffrent énormément. La rareté de l'eau due à des précipitations erratiques menace l'irrigation, tandis qu'un excès d'eau conduit à l'érosion des sols. Les ravageurs et les pathogènes modifient leur comportement et se multiplient avec des climats plus chauds, augmentant la vulnérabilité des cultures. La santé des sols est compromise par des conditions météorologiques extrêmes, affectant la productivité. Ces défis nécessitent des pratiques agricoles résilientes et des stratégies innovantes pour assurer des rendements agricoles durables et la sécurité alimentaire face au changement climatique. Ainsi, face aux défis croissants posés par le changement climatique, l'amélioration de la résilience et de la productivité des cultures devient primordiale. En abordant les préoccupations liées à l'insécurité alimentaire, les approches innovantes en matière d'amélioration des cultures sont essentielles pour garantir des systèmes agricoles durables. Les approches moléculaires et les stratégies de sélection révolutionnent l'amélioration des cultures. Des techniques comme la sélection assistée par marqueurs (SAM) et la sélection génomique permettent une sélection précise des traits, améliorant le rendement et la qualité. Les outils d'édition du génome tels que CRISPR-Cas9 permettent des modifications génétiques ciblées, surmontant les limitations de la sélection traditionnelle. Ces méthodes facilitent le développement rapide de variétés de cultures avec des traits désirés comme la résistance aux maladies, la valeur nutritionnelle et le haut rendement. Le pyramiding de traits combine plusieurs gènes bénéfiques, tandis que l'interférence par ARN (ARNi) et les modifications épigénétiques offrent des couches supplémentaires de contrôle sur l'expression des gènes. L'intégration de ces approches avec des méthodes multi-omiques favorise des réponses végétales larges, renforçant encore la résilience au changement climatique. Cet article fournit un aperçu de la recherche actuelle sur les impacts du changement climatique sur la production agricole, ainsi que des options potentielles pour améliorer la résilience et la productivité des cultures. En analysant la littérature scientifique la plus récente, cette revue vise à souligner l'importance de mettre en œuvre des mesures adaptatives pour relever les défis posés par le changement climatique et garantir la sécurité alimentaire pour les générations actuelles et futures.

Mots clés : Changement climatique, génome, outils moléculaires, sélection végétale, agriculture résiliente

Introduction

Climate change is one of the most pressing issues facing the world today, with significant implications for global food security (FAO, 2020). Changes in temperature and precipitation patterns have already had a profound impact on agricultural production, leading to reduced crop yields and increased pest and disease pressure (Pugnaire *et al.,* 2019; Calleja-Cabrera *et al.,* 2020; Chen and Palta, 2024). In order to address these challenges and ensure sustainable food production, it is essential to develop innovative strategies to enhance crop protection and yield in the face of a changing climate. Crop protection and yield enhancement in changing climate are crucial aspects of agriculture that directly impact food security and economic prosperity. Plant breeding plays an important role in improving crop protection and increasing yield under changing climate patterns. By developing new varieties with enhanced resistance to pests and diseases, as well as improved tolerance to environmental stresses, plant breeders can help farmers achieve higher productivity and profitability (Pugnaire *et al.,* 2019; Calleja-Cabrera *et al.,* 2020; Sivasankar *et al.,* 2021; Chen and Palta, 2024). With the increasing global population and changing climate conditions, there is a growing need to improve crop productivity while minimizing losses due to pests, diseases, and environmental stresses. Crop improvement through breeding, genetic engineering, and agronomic practices play a key role in achieving these goals.

Climate change is expected to have a range of impacts on crop production, induced by changes in temperature, precipitation, and extreme weather events (Govind *et al.,* 2022; Kumar *et al.,* 2023). These changes can lead to shifts in the distribution and abundance of pests and diseases, as well as alterations in crop growth and development. In addition, climate change can also affect soil fertility, water availability, and nutrient cycling, further impacting crop productivity (Sivasankar *et al.,* 2021; Govind *et al.,* 2022; Kumar *et al.,* 2023). One of the key challenges posed by climate change is the increased pressure from pests and diseases on crops. Rising temperatures and changing precipitation patterns can create more favorable conditions for the proliferation of pests and diseases, leading to reduced crop yields and quality (Sivasankar *et al.,* 2021; Govind *et al.,* 2022). In addition, extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, and storms can further exacerbate these challenges, causing significant damage to crops and agricultural infrastructure.

In order to address these challenges, it is essential to develop effective strategies for enhancing crop protection and yield in the face of a changing climate (Chen and Palta, 2024). This requires a multi-faceted approach that integrates both traditional and innovative techniques, including the use of resistant crop varieties, biological control agents, integrated pest management practices, and precision agriculture technologies (Sivasankar *et al.,* 2021). In this context, plant breeding plays a crucial role in mitigating climate change impacts on agriculture. By selecting and genetically enhancing crops for traits like drought tolerance, heat resistance, and water efficiency, breeders can develop varieties that maintain yields despite extreme weather (Razzaq *et al.,* 2021; Govind *et al.,* 2022). This adaptation not only secures food production but also contributes to sustainability by reducing the need for water and other inputs (Suprasanna *et al.,* 2023). Furthermore, breeding for disease and pest resistance helps protect crops against new pests and diseases that emerge due to the shifting climates. Overall plant breeding is vital for resilient crop production in a changing climate. This review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the latest advancements in crop improvement for enhancing crop protection and yield in the context of climate change, with a focus on the potential solutions to improve crop resilience and productivity. By analysing the latest scientific literature, this review identifies the key strategies for enhancing crop protection and yield through plant breeding in the context of climate change, and highlights the importance of implementing adaptive measures to ensure food security for currentband future generations.

Challenges of Climate Change for Crop Production.

Climate change poses significant challenges to crop production, impacting food security globally. Rising temperatures, altered precipitation patterns, and increased frequency of extreme weather events can lead to reduced crop yields (Habib-ur-Rahman *et al.,* 2022). For instance, heat stress can impair photosynthesis, while drought conditions can limit water availability, both crucial for plant growth (Ahmed *et al.,* 2022). Additionally, climate change can exacerbate pest and disease pressures, further reducing crop productivity (Eigenbrode *et al.,* 2018).

Climate change is expected to have a range of impacts on crop production, included by changes in temperature, precipitation, and extreme weather events. These changes can lead to shifts in the distribution and abundance of pests and diseases, as well as alterations in crop growth and development (Chen and Palta, 2024). In addition, climate change can also affect soil fertility, water availability, and nutrient cycling, further impacting crop productivity (Habib-ur-Rahman *et al.,* 2022). One of the key challenges posed by climate change is the increased pressure from pests and diseases on crops, rising temperatures and changing precipitation patterns can create more favorable conditions for the proliferation of pests and diseases, leading to reduced crop yields and quality (Calleja-Cabrera *et al.,* 2020; Kumar *et al.,* 2023;Chen and Palta, 2024). In addition, extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, and storms can further exacerbate these challenges, causing significant damage to crops and agricultural infrastructure (Habib-ur-Rahman *et al.,* 2022).

Adaptation strategies are essential to mitigate these impacts. Developing climate-resilient crop varieties, optimizing planting dates, and employing sustainable agricultural practices can enhance crop tolerance to abiotic stresses (Habib-ur-Rahman *et al.,* 2022). Moreover, integrating technology such as early warning systems and precision agriculture can improve resource use efficiency and crop management under variable climatic conditions (Habib-ur-Rahman *et al.,* 2022). Scientific research is needed for addressing these challenges. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports that climate-related impacts have already reduced yields of staple crops like wheat, maize, and rice, a trend likely to continue as temperatures rise (UNFCCC, 2014). Therefore, a concerted effort to involve research, policy, and practice is vital to ensure the sustainability of crop production in the face of climate change.

Molecular Approaches for Enhancing Crop Protection

Marker-assisted selection (MAS) is a molecular breeding technique that uses markers linked to desirable traits to select plants with enhanced resistance to pests and diseases. This approach accelerates the breeding process by allowing for the selection of individuals based on genotype rather than phenotype (Kumawat *et al.,* 2020). The MAS approaches rely on the identification of quantitative trait loci (QTLs) associated with specific agronomic traits. Once QTLs are mapped, markers closely linked to these loci can be used to screen breeding populations. This enables the selection of plants carrying favorable alleles for disease resistance, even before the plants are field-tested (Boopathi, 2013). The integration of MAS into breeding programs has significantly improved the efficiency of developing new crop varieties with built-in protection against biotic stressors. It reduces the time and resources required for field trials and increases the precision of selecting plants with the desired traits (Kamaluddin *et al.,* 2022). By focusing on genetic resistance, MAS contributes to sustainable crop protection strategies, minimizing the need for chemical interventions and thereby reducing the environmental impact of agriculture (Choudhary *et al.,* 2008).

Genomic selection (GS) is a transformative approach in crop protection that leverages the entire genome to predict and select for desirable traits such as disease resistance. Techniques like CRISPR-Cas9, TALENs, and ZFNs have revolutionized GS by enabling precise genetic modifications. CRISPR-Cas9 (Clustered Regularly

Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats-Cas9) is a versatile and efficient tool that allows for targeted genes editing by creating double-strand breaks at specific genomic locations. This system has been widely adopted due to its simplicity and high specificity, making it ideal for developing crops with enhanced resistance to bioticstresses (Jaganathan *et al.,* 2018; Wani *et al.,* 2023). TALENs (Transcription Activator-Like Effector Nucleases) are another class of engineered nucleases that facilitate targeted DNA modifications. TALENs bind to specific DNA sequences and introduce breaks, which are then repaired, leading to gene insertions, deletions, or replacements. This method is highly precise and can be used to introduce traits that confer protection against pests and diseases (Hashem *et al.,* 2023; Wani *et al.,* 2023). ZFNs (Zinc Finger Nucleases) are custom-designed proteins that can target and modify plant genomes. Although they were among the first genome editing tools developed, they are less commonly used now due to the complexity of designing specific zinc finger proteins for each target site (Hashem *et al.,* 2023). These genome editing techniques are integral to GS, as they allow for the rapid introduction of traits into crop genomes, significantly speeding up the breeding process. By using these methods, scientists can create plants that are not only resistant to current threats but also have the potential to adapt to emerging challenges, ensuring sustainable crop production and food security. The application of these techniques has led to the development of crops that are considered non-genetically modified organisms (Non-GMOs), as they do not contain foreign DNA. This is particularly important for meeting regulatory requirements and public acceptance of genetically edited crops (Hashem *et al.,* 2023; Wani *et al.,* 2023).

Gene stacking and traits pyramiding are advanced molecular breeding strategies aimed at enhancing crop protection and productivity. Gene stacking involves the introduction of multiple genes, either transgenes or naturally occurring alleles, into a single crop variety to confer multiple beneficial traits (Khan *et al.,* 2024). Traits pyramiding, on the other hand, is the process of combining several desirable traits, such as disease resistance or drought tolerance, into one plant through selective breeding (Rajput *et al.,* 2023).

These techniques address the limitations of traditional breeding by accelerating the development of crop varieties with improved yield, quality, and resistance to biotic and abiotic stressors. For instance, genes stacking has been successfully used to integrate multiple Bt genes in crops, providing broader pest resistance than single-gene traits (ISAAA, 2023). Similarly, trait pyramiding has been instrumental in developing varieties with multiple disease resistance, which is especially important in areas prone to complex disease pressures (Dormatey *et al.,* 2023). Recent publications highlight the significance of these approaches. Khan *et al.* (2024) have provided a comprehensive analysis of molecular techniques, including gene stacking and traits pyramiding, for crop improvement. Rajput *et al.* (2023) have reviewed the challenges and advancements in genes pyramiding in transgenic plants, emphasizing the role of the genome editing tools like CRISPR-Cas9, TALENs, and ZFNs in precise genetic modifications. The integration of these techniques with modern genomic tools has the potential to revolutionize crop breeding. By enabling the combination of multiple traits, they contribute to sustainable agriculture by reducing the need for chemical inputs and enhancing crop resilience to changing environmental conditions. As the global population grows, such innovative approaches are crucial for ensuring food security and environmental sustainability.

Genome editing technologies particularly CRISPR/

Cas9, has revolutionized crop protection by enabling precise modifications to plant genomes. This approach allows for the development of crops with enhanced resistance to pests, diseases, and environmental stresses (Yuhong *et al.,* 2022; Sufyan *et al.,* 2023). CRISPR/Cas9, along with other genome editing tools like TALENs and ZFNs, has been instrumental in improving critical agronomic traits (Sufyan *et al.,* 2023). These techniques offer a significant advantage over traditional breeding methods, as they allow for targeted modifications without introducing foreign DNA, thus bypassing some of the regulatory and public acceptance issues associated with genetically modified organisms (GMOs) (Yuhong *et al.,* 2022; Sufyan *et al.,* 2023). The application of the genome editing for crop protection involves identifying genes associated with resistance traits and then using CRISPR/Cas9 to either knock out susceptible genes or introduce beneficial mutations (Yuhong *et al.,* 2022). This has led to the development of crops that are more resilient to biotic and abiotic stresses, contributing to sustainable agriculture and food security (Yuhong *et al.* 2022). Moreover, the speed editing strategy of gene-family members has been designed to accelerate the use of gene-editing technologies for crop enhancement (Sufyan *et al.,* 2023). This strategy is particularly useful for quickly modifying crops to adapt to changing environmental conditions and to meet the growing food demands of the global population (Yuhong *et al.,* 2022). The genome editing, with CRISPR/Cas9 at the forefront, offers a promising path for enhancing crop protection. It provides a precise, efficient, and flexible method for improving plant resistance to various threats, thereby supporting the goal of achieving zero hunger (Yuhong *et al.,* 2022).

RNA Interference (RNAi) is a powerful biological process used to enhance crop protection by silencing genes that are essential for pest survival and virulence. This technology has been increasingly applied in agriculture to manage plant insect pests and pathogens, improve plant agronomic traits, and increase the desirability of food for consumers (Mezzetti *et al.,* 2020). RNAi operates by introducing double-stranded RNA (dsRNA) molecules that are homologous to the target gene's messenger RNA (mRNA). These dsRNA molecules are processed into small interfering RNAs (siRNAs), which then guide the RNA-induced silencing complex (RISC) to the complementary mRNA, leading to its degradation and thus silencing the gene (Mamta and Rajam, 2018). The specificity and efficiency of RNAi make it an attractive tool for crop protection. It has been used to develop plants that are resistant to various biotic stresses, such as viruses, fungi, and insect pests, by targeting their specific genes. For instance, RNAi has been employed to silence genes in aphids, reducing their ability to damage crops (CAST, 2023). Moreover, RNAi can be used to enhance the nutritional value of crops, alter plant architecture for better environmental adaptation, and even generate sterile male lines for hybrid seed production (Ullah *et al.,* 2022). The versatility of RNAi extends to the regulation of plant responses to abiotic stress, such as drought and salinity, by modulating the expression of relevant genes (Zhang *et al.,* 2022). Thus, RNAi is a promising approach for crop improvement, offering a novel and environmentally friendly method for pest management and enhancing plant traits. Its application in agriculture continues to grow, providing a sustainable solution for protecting crops against a wide range of threats.

Epigenetic modifications are heritable changes in gene function that do not involve alterations to the underlying DNA sequence. In crop protection, these modifications can play a pivotal role in enhancing plant resilience to stress without the need for genetic modification (Agarwal *et al.,* 2020;Huang *et al.,* 2022). One of the key mechanisms of epigenetic regu-

DNA methylation, which can activate or repress gene expression. In crops, targeted DNA methylation has been used to improve tolerance to biotic and abiotic stresses, such as pests, diseases, and extreme environmental conditions (Agarwal *et al.,* 2020). Histone modifications, another form of epigenetic change, can also influence the gene expression and are involved in the response to stress (Dar *et al.,* 2022). Recent advances in epigenomic mapping techniques have enabled the identification of epigenetic markers associated with desirable traits in major crops like rice, maize, and wheat. These markers can be used against certain traits in breeding programs (Huang *et al.,* 2022). Additionally, the development of epigenome editing tools, such as CRISPR/Cas9, has opened up new possibilities for precise manipulation of epigenetic states to enhance crop traits (Huang *et al.,* 2022). The plasticity of the epigenome allows plants to adapt to changing environmental conditions, which is crucial for maintaining crop yield and quality. Understanding and harnessing epigenetic mechanisms can lead to the development of crops with improved phenotypes and stronger environmental adaptability (Dar *et al.,* 2022). Finally, epigenetic modifications offer a promising approach to crop protection, providing a sustainable and flexible method to improve plant resistance and productivity. As research progresses, epigenetic-based strategies are likely to become an integral part of modern agriculture.

Multi-omics approaches are revolutionizing the field of crop protection by providing comprehensive insights into plant biology and stress responses. These techniques encompass genomics, transcriptomics, proteomics, metabolomics, phenomics, and ionomics, allowing for a holistic understanding of plant systems (Yang *et al.,* 2021). Genomics has been foundational in identifyinggeneticmarkersassociatedwithdiseaseresistance,while transcriptomics reveal gene expression changes during pathogen attack. Proteomics and metabolomics offer detailed profiles of proteins and metabolites, respectively, which are crucialinplantdefencemechanismsPhenomics and ionomics contribute to understanding the physical and chemical traits that influence crop resilience (Roychowdhury *et al*., 2023). The integration of these omics data through bioinformatics and systems biology enables the identification of key regulatory networks. This integrated approach can lead to the development of crops with enhanced resistance to biotic and abiotic stresses. For instance, the panomics platform combines complex omics data to construct models predicting traits for crop improvement (Yang *et al.,* 2021). Challenges remain in the functional analysis of genes and their networks. However, multi-omics approaches are instrumental in developing strategies for crop protection, such as the design of defence inducers and disease-resistant transgenic plants (Rani *et al.,* 2023; Roychowdhury *et al.,* 2023). Recent publications highlight the potential of multi-omics in crop science. Yang *et al.* (2021) have discussed the role of multi-omics in crop breeding, emphasizing the integration of various omics for improving genetics and breeding science. Rani *et al.* (2023) and Roychowdhury *et al.* (2023) have focused on the application of omics in managing crop diseases, including the development of markers and immunodiagnostic kits. The multi-omics approaches are pivotal for enhancing crop protection. They enable the dissection of complex biological processes and the design of innovative solutions to safeguard crops against an array of threats.

Limitations of molecular techniques. Molecular techniques have revolutionized the field of crop protection, offering precise tools for enhancing crop traits and resistance to various stresses. However, these techniques are not without limitations. Below are some of the constraints associated with some key molecular techniques.

Multi-Omics Approaches: Multi-omics integrates data from genomics, transcriptomics, proteomics, and metabolomics to understand complex biological systems. While powerful, it faces challenges in data integration and interpretation due to the sheer volume and complexity of data. Additionally, the cost and technical expertise required for multi-omics studies can be prohibitive (Khan *et al.,* 2024).

Epigenetic Modifications and RNA Interference (RNAi). Epigenetic modifications can alter gene expression without changing the DNA sequence, and RNAi can silence specific genes. However, both techniques can have off-target effects, leading to unintended changes in the plant's genome. Moreover, the stability of these modifications over successive generations is a concern for long-term crop improvement (Khan et al., 2024).

Genome editing (CRISPR-Cas9, TALENs, and ZFNs). Genome editing allows for precise modifications at specific genomic locations. While it holds great promise, regulatory hurdles and public perception issues can impede its widespread adoption. There is also the risk of off-target mutations and the ethical considerations of creating genetically modified organisms (GMOs) (Wani and Aftab, 2022).

Gene Stacking and Trait Pyramiding. These techniques involve combining multiple traits or genes into a single plant to enhance its characteristics. The limitation here is the complexity of interactions between different genes, which can lead to unpredictable phenotypes. Additionally, the process can be time-consuming and technically challenging (Khan *et al.,* 2024).

Genomic Selection and Marker-Assisted Selection (MAS). Genomic selection uses genome-wide markers to predict the performance of plant breeding material, while MAS selects for traits linked to specific genetic markers. Both can significantly accelerate breeding programs. However, they may encounter constraints when the potential for further increasing yield or resistance reaches an upper limit. Moreover, MAS is limited by the availability of markers for complex traits (Khan *et al.,* 2024).

While molecular techniques offer significant advantages for crop protection, they are constrained by technical, financial, and regulatory challenges. Continued research and development are essential to overcome these limitations and fully harness the potential of these advanced tools for sustainable agriculture.

Breeding Strategies for Climate-Resilient Crops . Next-generation breeding tools are revolutionizing the development of climate-resilient crops to ensure global food security in the face of climate change. These tools encompass a range of modern biotechnological and computational approaches that enable the creation of crop varieties with enhanced resilience to extreme weather conditions. Genomic-Assisted Breeding (GAB) strategies are pivotal, utilizing highly annotated crop pan-genomes to capture the full spectrum of genetic diversity. This allows breeders to exploit unique genes and genetic variations to optimize breeding programs (Razzaq *et al.,* 2021). CRISPR/Cas systems, including prime editing, base editing, and de nova domestication, have transformed crop improvement. The versatility of Cas orthologs like Cas9, Cas12, Cas13, and Cas14 has significantly improved editing efficiency, enabling the development of crops resistant to abiotic and biotic stresses (Razzaq *et al.,* 2021). The integration of high-throughput phenotyping and big data analytics tools such as artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) is propelling agriculture towards automation. Speed breeding, combined with genomic and phenomic tools, accelerates gene identification and crop improvement programs (Razzaq *et al.,* 2021). Furthermore, next-generation interdisciplinary breeding platforms are opening new avenues for developing climate-ready crops. These platforms have been employed worldwide, with Africa and Asia adopting those most frequently. Techniques like multitrait association studies using genome-wide association studies (GWASs) have allowed precise exploration of the genetic makeup of agricultural traits in crops (Afzal *et al.,* 2023). The synergy of advanced breeding technologies and biotechnological approaches is essential for managing the consequences of climate change and promoting crops with climate resilience. These next-generation tools are not only enhancing crop productivity but also ensuring that future generations have access to sufficient, nutritious food despite the challenges posed by a changing climate (Razzaq *et al.,* 2021; Afzal *et al.,* 2023).

The function of genetic multiplicity and pan genomic resources in crop improvement. Genetic diversity and the concept of the pan-genome play critical roles in crop improvement, particularly in the context of adapting to climate change and ensuring food security. Genetic diversity refers to the variety of genes within a species, providing a pool of traits that breeders can select to improve crops. It is the raw material for breeding programs, essential for enhancing traits such as yield, disease resistance, and environmental adaptability (Singh and Behera, 2022). The pan-genome encompasses the entire gene set of a species, including core genes present in all individuals and dispensable genes that vary among different strains or cultivars. This comprehensive genetic repertoire allows for the identification of novel genes and alleles that may have been lost during domestication or selective breeding (Della Coletta *et al.,* 2021). Incorporating genetic diversity and pan-genomes into breeding strategies enables the development of crops that can withstand the unpredictable challenges posed by a changing climate. For instance, the use of molecular markers, genotyping by sequencing (GBS), and next-generation sequencing (NGS) has facilitated the conservation and utilization of plant genetic resources (PGRs), which are vital for adapting crops to climate change (Singh and Behera, 2022). Moreover, the pan-genome provides insights into structural variations within a species, revealing genes associated with important agronomic traits. By understanding these variations, breeders can introduce desirable traits into crop cultivars more efficiently (Della Coletta *et al.,* 2021). The pan-genome also serves as a resource for exploring genes lost during domestication, offering opportunities to reintroduce beneficial traits into modern crops (Naithani *et al.,* 2023). Overall, leveraging genetic diversity and pan-genomes is fundamental for crop improvement, enabling the creation of resilient, productive, and nutritious crops that can meet the demands of a growing population under the stress of global climate change. (Singh and Behera, 2022; Naithani *et al.,* 2023).

Case Studies

Successful implementation of the molecular techniques in specific crops. In recent years, plant breeders have made significant progress in developing new varieties with improved resistance to pests and diseases. One of the key strategies used in modern plant breeding is the incorporation of resistance genes from wild relatives of crop plants. For example, researchers have successfully introgressed genes for resistance to major diseases such as rusts, blights, and viruses from wild species into cultivated crops like wheat (*Triticum* sp.), rice (*Oryza sativa*), and soybean (*Glycine max*) (Singh *et al.,* 2016). Another important advancement in plant breeding is the use of molecular markers for marker-assisted selection (MAS). By identifying and selecting plants with desirable traits at the molecular level, breeders can accelerate the breeding process and develop new varieties with improved resistance to pests and diseases more efficiently (Collard and Mackill, 2008).

Furthermore, one notable example of the successful implementation of molecular techniques in crop improvement is the development of drought-tolerant maize (*Zea mays*) in sub-Saharan Africa. This region relies heavily on maize as a staple food source, and the introduction of drought-tolerant varieties have been a significant breakthrough. Using molecular markers, researchers have created new strains of maize that maintain yields even under limited water conditions (seqWell, 2023). Another success story is the breeding of rice varieties resistant to diseases such as bacterial leaf blight and blast. These diseases can cause devastating yield losses of up to 100%, but thanks to marker-assisted breeding, scientists have developed rice strains that can withstand these challenges (seqWell, 2023). These advancements are not limited to food crops. In the realm of forage crops, molecular breeding has led to the enhancement of yield, quality, and environmental resilience. For instance, Quantitative Trait Loci (QTL) mapping and Genome-Wide Association Studies (GWASs) have been utilized to improve traits in forage species. A study on alfalfa (*Medicago sativa*) found two markers consistently associated with nine fibre digestibility traits across various environments, showcasing the potential of these molecular techniques (Chen, 2024).

The implementation of genome-editing tools like CRISPR-Cas9 has also played a crucial role in these achievements. These tools allow for precise modifications in plant genomes, leading to improved nutritional value, disease resistance, and adaptability to environmental stresses (Khan *et al.,* 2024). These examples underscore the transformative impact of molecular techniques on agriculture. By leveraging these advanced methods, scientists and breeders can develop crops that are better suited to meet the demands of a growing population and the challenges posed by climate change. The continued success of these techniques will be vital for ensuring food security and sustainable agricultural practices in the future.

Advantages of Enhanced Crop Protection and Yield. Enhancing crop protection and yield through plant breeding offers numerous benefits to farmers, consumers, and the environment. By developing new varieties with improved resistance to pests and diseases, farmers can reduce their reliance on chemical pesticides, leading to lower production costs and reduced environmental impact. Additionally, increased yield and productivity can help farmers improve their livelihoods and food security, especially in regions prone to food insecurity and climate change (FAO, 2019). Increased genetic diversity: Molecular techniques facilitate the transfer of genes across species, broadening the genetic pool available for breeding and introducing novel traits (Khan *et al.,* 2024). Precision breeding:: Techniques like CRISPR-Cas9 allow for precise genome modifications, leading to crops with improved traits such as nutritional content and stress resilience (Khan *et al.,* 2024). Accelerated breeding cycles: Marker-assisted selection and genomic selection reduce the time required to develop new varieties by identifying desirable traits at the genetic level (Khan *et al.,* 2024). Moreover, consumers can benefit from higher-quality crops that are free from harmful residues of chemical pesticides, while the environmental benefits from reduced pesticide use and improved soil health. Overall, enhancing crop protection and yield through plant breeding is a sustainable and cost-effective approach to improving agricultural productivity ,food security and environment health.

Enhanced crop yield: By improving genetic traits, molecular techniques have led to higher crop yields, crucial for feeding the growing global population (Khan *et al.,* 2024). **Improved crop quality:** Molecular breeding has resulted in crops with better taste, nutritional value, and post-harvest longevity (Khan *et al.,* 2024). **Stress-resistant varieties:** Crops developed through molecular techniques exhibit increased resistance to diseases, pests, and environmental stresses (Khan *et al.,* 2024). **Food security:** The development of high-yielding and resilient crop varieties ensures a stable food supply even under challenging conditions (Khan *et al.,* 2024). **Environmental sustainability:** Precision breeding reduces the need for chemical inputs and promotes the efficient use of land and water resources (Khan *et al.,* 2024). **Economic viability:** Farmers benefit from higher yields and reduced losses due to pests and diseases, leading to increased profitability (Khan *et al.,* 2024).

The successful implementation of molecular techniques in crop improvement has brought about transformative benefits and outcomes, significantly impacting global agriculture. These techniques have enabled the development of crop varieties with enhanced yield, quality, and resistance to biotic and abiotic stresses, thereby contributing to food security and sustainable farming practices (Khan *et al.,* 2024). The molecular techniques involvement in crop improvement has had a deep impact on agriculture, offering a sustainable solution to meet the demands of a growing population while preserving environmental integrity.

Future Perspectives

Potential of integrating AI and machine learning in plant breeding. The evolution of molecular techniques has paved the way for the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) in plant breeding, offering the transformative potential in developing climate-smart crops. Speed breeding, facilitated by AI, accelerates breeding cycles under controlled conditions, integrating marker-assisted selection and gene-editing for early selection of crops with superior traits (Rai, 2022). ML algorithms, such as Random Forest, have demonstrated high accuracy in predicting crop yields from hyperspectral reflectance data, enabling the selection of high -yielding genotypes at early growth stages (Yoosefzadeh-Najafabadi *et al.,* 2021). AI and ML can analyse complex OMICS data sets, essential for successful speed breeding protocols, and delve deeper into the biological and molecular mechanisms governing plant functions under environmental cues (Rai, 2022). The application of high-performance computing and bioinformatics tools, coupled with ML, allows plant breeders to efficiently analyse vast amounts of data, revolutionizing the field and enhancing food security (Yoosefzadeh-Najafabadi *et al.,* 2023). Moreover, ML-assisted approaches in modernized plant breeding programs can integrate, assimilate, and analyse large datasets generated by high-throughput phenotyping tools, overcoming challenges associated with computational and statistical analyses (Yoosefzadeh-Najafabadi *et al.,* 2021). This integration is crucial for predicting phenotypic outcomes from genotypic data, optimizing breeding strategies, and ultimately contributing to sustainable agriculture and food security. The synergy of AI and ML with advanced molecular techniques holds immense promise for the future of plant breeding, enabling the development of resilient crops that can meet the demands of a growing global population under the challenges posed by climate change.

Importance of eco-friendly agriculture for environmental preservation. Sustainable farming, an approach that integrates the use of modern molecular techniques, is vital for reducing environmental impacts and promoting long-term agricultural viability. As we advance in molecular biology, we can enhance crop resilience, improve resource efficiency, and minimize the need for harmful chemicals.

Soil Health and Fertility: Sustainable practices prioritize soil health, leveraging molecular advancements to understand and boost beneficial microorganisms. These organisms are crucial for nutrient cycling, water retention, and soil structure, leading to fertile lands that support robust crop growth (Scale Climate Action, 2023b). **Biodiversity Conservation:** Molecular techniques aid in the conservation of biodiversity by enabling the identification and protection of various species. Sustainable farming supports diverse ecosystems, which are essential for natural pest control and disease resistance, reducing reliance on chemical pesticides (Scale Climate Action, 2023a).

Water Management. With the help of molecular tools, sustainable farming optimizes water usage through efficient irrigation systems and water conservation strategies. This is crucial in maintaining water quality and availability for both agriculture and community needs (Scale Climate Action, 2023a). Climate change mitigation: Sustainable agriculture contributes to climate change mitigation by sequestering carbon in the soil. Molecular advancements facilitate the selection of crops that are better at carbon capture, enhancing the role of agriculture in reducing greenhouse gas emissions (Scale Climate Action, 2023a). **Reduced chemical pollution:** The evolution of molecular techniques allows for the reduction of synthetic chemicals in farming. By employing natural alternatives and integrated pest management, sustainable farming decreases environmental toxins, safeguarding human and wildlife health (Scale Climate Action, 2023b). The integration of molecular techniques in sustainable farming is essential for environmental preservation. It ensures soil health, biodiversity, efficient water use, climate change mitigation, and reduced chemical pollution, thereby securing the future of farming and our planet (Scale Climate Action, 2023b).

Conclusion

Addressing climate change's impact on agriculture requires adaptive strategies, resilient practices, and a global scale transformation of farming methods to secure food supplies for a growing population. Ensuring food security becomes increasingly imperative as the global population is projected to reach 9.7 billion by 2050. Moreover, molecular techniques hold the potential to significantly increase crop yields to meet this growing demand. Furthermore, crops are constantly under threat from pests and diseases, yet molecular research aids in developing resistant varieties, thereby reducing reliance on chemical pesticides and contributing to environmental sustainability. Additionally, climate change presents a substantial risk to agriculture, but molecular innovations enable the creation of crop varieties resilient to extreme weather conditions, such as droughts and floods. In terms of nutritional improvement, molecular techniques can enhance the nutritional content of crops,thusaddressing malnutritionand promoting public health. Consequently, higher crop yields can translateintoincreasedincomeforfarmers, stimulating econo mic growth within agricultural communities. Also, by improving crop resilience and reducing the need for chemicalinputs,molecular techniquessupport sustainable agriculture practices that preserve soil health and biodiversity. Lastly, these techniques can optimize water and nutrient use, making agriculture more efficient and less wasteful, which is essential for the long-term viability of our food systems. Finally, the importance of continued research and innovation in molecular techniques for crop protection and yield cannot be overstated, as it is fundamental to the sustainability and prosperity of future generations.

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The Authors declare no conflict of interest in the paper.

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