

Nano-Delivery System for Efficient Genetic Transformation of Recalcitrant Corn Without Tissue Culture or Agrobacterium

The same nano-delivery strategy enables genotype-flexible, culture-free gene insertion in corn, streamlining R&D for elite lines.

Cereal grains like corn form the backbone of the global food system, contributing billions of dollars every year to global economies and ensuring food security for people everywhere. Given the incredible importance of corn, much research has been dedicated to its genetic improvement, focusing on traits such as yield, disease resistance, nutrient profile, and many more. However, corn, like many cereal grains, is known as a recalcitrant species, or one for which genetic transformation is difficult to achieve with existing methods. Current techniques rely on a combination of agrobacterium DNA introduction followed by a process called tissue culture, in which plant tissue is painstakingly developed and selected for under sterile conditions. Tissue culture as a method is also limited by its genotype dependency, making it applicable to only some of the thousands of corn varieties currently available. A second option is particle bombardment, which has also proven extremely difficult to implement effectively in cereal grains and suffers from genotype-dependent limitations. These methods therefore constrain research and development to specialty labs with highly trained staff, while also lacking efficacy and widespread applicability.

In response to these limitations, researchers at Purdue University have developed a novel method of introducing transformative genes to corn that utilizes innovative nano-delivery technology. This method cuts down on development and testing time, does not rely on agrobacterium, and eliminates the need for sterile tissue culture, opening new doors for potential development settings and lowering the threshold for effective personnel training. This new method has also been shown to have improved efficacy among recalcitrant species such as corn. The use of nano-delivery techniques promises to break down current barriers in the genetic transformation of staple crops like corn, ushering in a new era of genetic enhancement that will reduce the likelihood of devastating crop losses,

Technology ID

2024-MOHA-70771

Category

Agriculture, Nutrition, &
AgTech/Crop Genetics &
Breeding
Biotechnology & Life
Sciences/Synthetic Biology &
Genetic Engineering
Materials Science &
Nanotechnology/Nanomaterials
& Nanostructures

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increase profits, and modernize the cereal grain industry as a whole.

Technology Validation:

Researchers have experimentally demonstrated the ability of this technique to successfully lead to the expression of transgenes. An experiment was conducted using two different types of specialty nanoparticles to introduce plasmid DNA into the genome of wheat seeds, which are functionally very similar to corn. These seeds (T0) were then cultivated, and their progeny were selected for successful transgenic transformation. Those selected seeds (T1) were cultivated, and their offspring (T2) were shown to maintain the introduced phenotype.

Advantages:

- Faster process
- Does not require agrobacterium
- Does not require tissue culture
- Eliminates need for many of the specialty skills traditionally required for DNA transformation, streamlining R&D and personnel training
- Effective method for recalcitrant species such as corn, which are known to be difficult to transform

Applications:

- Agricultural research and development
- Production of genetically modified organisms (GMOs).
- Transformation of recalcitrant cereal species, which are both extremely economically important and historically difficult to transform.

TRL: 5

Intellectual Property:

Provisional-Patent, 2024-06-26, United States

Keywords: corn genetic transformation,nano gene delivery,agrobacterium free method,non tissue culture technique,recalcitrant crop engineering,transgenic corn development,plasmid DNA integration,cereal grain biotechnology,rapid trait deployment,genotype independent

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