Revolutionizing Livestock: A Detailed Study of Genetic Engineering's Impact on Productivity and Animal Health

[1]K. Snega, [2] M. Sadha

B. Tech (Pursuing)
Department of Biotechnology,
St. Michael College of Engineering and Technology
Kalaiyarkoil – 630551, Tamil Nadu, India.

Abstract- **Genetic engineering has emerged as a revolutionary tool in the livestock industry, offering tremendous potential to enhance livestock productivity and improve animal health. This review article delves into the various genetic engineering techniques employed in livestock improvement, including selective breeding, transgenesis, and gene editing. We explore how these techniques can be harnessed to enhance productivity traits such as improved growth rates, enhanced feed efficiency, and increased milk and meat production. Furthermore, we investigate the promising role of genetic modifications in conferring disease resistance to livestock, thereby reducing dependency on antibiotics and improving overall animal welfare. While examining the ethical considerations and risks associated with genetic engineering in livestock, we analyze the moral concerns related to animal welfare and address the environmental implications of such practices. A comprehensive overview of the existing regulatory frameworks and public perception surrounding genetically engineered livestock is presented, underscoring the importance of responsible innovation. Additionally, we showcase case studies that illustrate successful applications of genetic engineering in livestock. This review article also acknowledges the challenges and limitations that researchers and stakeholders may encounter while implementing genetic engineering practices in the livestock industry. Finally, we present an outlook on the future perspectives of this transformative technology and its potential to shape the future of livestock.**

Index Terms- **Genetic Engineering, Livestock Improvement, Selective Breeding, Transgenesis, Gene Editing, Productivity Traits, Animal Health, Ethical Considerations, Regulatory Frameworks, Environmental Implications.**

I. INTRODUCTION

The livestock industry plays a crucial role in meeting the growing demand for animal-based products, such as meat, milk, and eggs, driven by the increasing global population and rising standards of living. To meet these demands, traditional breeding practices have been extensively employed to improve livestock traits over the centuries. However, with the rapid advancement of genetic engineering techniques, a new era has begun in livestock improvement, offering a revolution in productivity and animal health. Genetic engineering techniques, such as selective breeding, transgenesis, and gene editing, allow scientists to precisely manipulate an animal's genetic material. By adding, deleting, or altering DNA sequences in animal genomes, specific traits can be enhanced or new traits introduced, including improved growth rates and disease resistance. Transgenic technology offers numerous potential applications for creating innovative and improved cattle strains. It can be practically utilized to enhance prolificacy, animal well-being, feed utilization, growth rates, milk output, and meat production. The benefits of genetically modified animals extend beyond productivity gains and include enhancing food production, reducing environmental impact, improving animal health and welfare, and exploring cutting-edge industrial uses. Disease resistance is a critical aspect influenced by the interaction of the host immune system, host genetics, and pathogens. It is possible to create animals through genetic engineering that are resistant to disease, stress, and parasites. These attributes can lead to improved well-being, as healthier and more robust animals are likely to be more productive. While the potential benefits of genetic engineering in livestock are encouraging, it is essential to consider the ethical implications and potential risks associated with this technology. Addressing animal welfare concerns, evaluating environmental implications, and navigating public perception and regulatory frameworks are crucial challenges that must be carefully addressed. Genetic engineering has the power to revolutionize the livestock industry by significantly improving productivity and animal health. By harnessing the potential of genetic modifications, livestock can be made more resilient, efficient, and environmentally sustainable. However, responsible and thoughtful implementation, considering both the benefits and ethical considerations, is essential to ensuring the long-term success and acceptance of genetic engineering in livestock farming.

II. GENETIC ENGINEERING TECHNIQUES IN LIVESTOCK IMPROVEMENT

Genetic engineering techniques have revolutionized the field of livestock improvement, offering powerful tools to enhance desirable traits and overcome limitations associated with traditional breeding methods. With the increasing global demand for animal products, these innovative techniques have become indispensable in addressing challenges related to food security and sustainable agriculture. This section delves into three key genetic engineering techniques that have been harnessed to optimize livestock breeding and production:

Selective Breeding:

Selective breeding, also known as traditional breeding or artificial selection, has been practiced for centuries to improve specific traits in livestock populations. It involves selecting animals with desirable traits and breeding them to pass on those traits to subsequent generations. Selective breeding relies on genetic variation within a population and the ability to identify and measure traits of interest. Selective breeding techniques in livestock have traditionally focused on traits such as growth rate, meat quality, milk production, disease resistance, and reproductive performance. By selectively mating animals with the desired traits, breeders can gradually enhance these traits over successive generations. However, selective breeding has limitations. It is a slow and time-consuming process that relies on the availability of sufficient genetic variation within the population. It may also be constrained by genetic constraints, such as inbreeding depression, where the accumulation of deleterious genes reduces overall fitness.

Transgenesis:

Transgenesis involves the introduction of foreign genes into the genome of an organism, resulting in the expression of novel traits. In the context of livestock improvement, transgenesis allows for the insertion of specific genes into the DNA of animals to confer desired traits. The process of transgenesis typically involves isolating the gene of interest, modifying it if necessary, and introducing it into the fertilized embryo. The modified embryo is then implanted into a surrogate mother, and the offspring carrying the transgene can exhibit the desired traits. Transgenesis has been used in livestock to introduce traits such as disease resistance, improved growth rates, and enhanced nutrient utilization. For example, the introduction of a gene coding for an antimicrobial peptide into pigs has shown increased resistance to certain pathogens. Similarly, the introduction of genes associated with improved milk production into dairy cows has resulted in increased milk yields [1].

Gene Editing:

Gene editing technologies, such as CRISPR-Cas9, have emerged as powerful tools for precise and targeted modifications to the genetic material of livestock. Unlike transgenesis, which involves the introduction of foreign genes, gene editing allows for the precise modification or deletion of existing genes within an organism's genome. CRISPR-Cas9, in particular, has gained widespread attention for its ability to edit DNA with unprecedented precision and efficiency. It works by using a guide RNA molecule to direct the Cas9 enzyme to a specific target sequence in the genome, where it can induce a cut in the DNA [2]. The cell's natural repair mechanisms then come into play, either introducing desired modifications or disrupting the targeted gene. Gene editing in livestock holds immense potential for improving productivity and animal health. It enables the introduction of beneficial genetic variations without introducing foreign genes. For example, gene editing can be used to enhance disease resistance by disrupting specific genes associated with susceptibility to certain pathogens. It can also be used to modify traits related to animal welfare, such as hornlessness in cattle, reducing the need for painful dehorning procedures.

III. ENHANCING PRODUCTIVITY TRAITS

Livestock production has witnessed a transformative revolution through the application of genetic engineering, aimed at enhancing important productivity traits such as growth rates, feed efficiency, milk production, and meat production. These innovations have not only reshaped the livestock industry but have also played a pivotal role in addressing global food security concerns. With the world's population projected to exceed 9 billion by 2050, ensuring an adequate and sustainable food supply has become a paramount challenge. Moreover, as climate change and environmental degradation threaten traditional farming practices, genetic engineering offers a path to developing climate-resilient and disease-resistant livestock breeds. By breeding animals with enhanced adaptability to changing climates and improved disease resistance, the livestock industry can safeguard its productivity against potential disruptions. In the face of mounting challenges like land scarcity, resource depletion, and economic pressures, genetic engineering emerges as a game-changing tool to achieve sustainable and efficient livestock production. As researchers continue to explore new approaches for genetic advancements, the future of livestock farming appears promising, providing hope for a more food-secure and ecologically balanced world.

Improved Growth Rates:

The advancement of genetic engineering has significantly impacted animal growth rates, offering promising solutions for more efficient livestock farming. Cellular processes and developmental pathways are manipulated by genetic engineering techniques to achieve improved growth rates in animals. This leads to accelerated size and weight gain, reducing the overall time required to reach market weight. As a result, the livestock sector has experienced substantial growth, contributing to economic progress and food availability. The livestock sector's impressive compound annual growth rate of 7.9% over the last five years, as reported in the Economic Survey 2020, highlights the positive impact of these advancements on animal husbandry and overall agricultural profitability.

Enhanced Feed Efficiency:

Feed efficiency, a critical aspect of livestock farming, measures the amount of growth or production achieved per pound of consumed dry matter. By genetically engineering animals with improved feed efficiency, farmers can optimize resource utilization and reduce overall feed costs. The traditional measure of feed efficiency, the feed conversion ratio (FCR), has been positively influenced, leading to improved profitability for livestock farmers and a reduced environmental impact. Enhancing feed efficiency is not only instrumental in enhancing farm profitability but also contributes to promoting animal health and welfare. As the livestock industry plays a vital role in meeting global food demand, efficient resource utilization becomes increasingly important.

Increased Milk and Meat Production:

Addressing the challenge of feeding a growing global population sustainably, genetic engineering has been instrumental in boosting milk and meat production in livestock. Meat consumption worldwide has been on the rise, and meat output has more than tripled in the last 50 years, exceeding 340 million metric tons annually. However, traditional meat production practices have considerable environmental consequences, including increased greenhouse gas emissions, land use, and freshwater consumption. Through genetic engineering, livestock breeders have been able to develop animals that yield higher quantities of milk and produce leaner, more efficient meat cuts. The dairy industry has benefited significantly from these advancements, with approximately 250 million cows globally producing over 852 million metric tons of milk in 2019 [3]. Modern dairy farming practices, including genetic improvements, nutrition, and animal welfare, have contributed to these increased production levels. The pursuit of sustainable and environmentally friendly meat and dairy production remains a pressing concern for the global agricultural community. Genetic engineering offers a promising pathway to address these challenges by creating livestock with higher productivity levels, ensuring a more efficient use of resources, and minimizing environmental impacts.

IV. Disease Resistance and Animal Health

Genetic engineering has revolutionized the livestock industry by enabling the development of animals with improved disease resistance, leading to significant advancements in animal health. By selectively altering the genetic makeup of animals, researchers have successfully enhanced their ability to combat diseases that once posed significant threats to their health and well-being. Through precision gene editing and targeted transgenesis, livestock now possess innate immune responses that shield them from a range of pathogens [4]. As a result of these genetic modifications, the reliance on antibiotics has been notably curtailed, mitigating the emergence of antibiotic-resistant strains and safeguarding both human and animal populations. This reduction in antibiotic usage not only preserves the effectiveness of these life-saving drugs for medical purposes but also minimizes potential adverse effects on the environment. Beyond the context of disease resistance, genetic engineering has underscored its potential to elevate animal welfare standards.

Genetic Modifications for Disease Resistance:

Disease resistance in livestock plays a pivotal role in preventing infections and ensuring better animal health. Advances in genetic engineering have facilitated the development of animals with enhanced disease resistance. Molecular breeding techniques involving the introduction of genetic markers responsible for disease resistance have resulted in livestock that are less susceptible to infections. Genome editing technologies have further expanded the possibilities for generating disease-resistant livestock. Technical advancements and declining costs over time have improved the implementation of genome editing techniques in this area. Notably, gene knockout studies have helped to improve disease resistance in a variety of organisms. One significant example of genetic modification for disease resistance is observed in the pig sector, where the porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome virus (PRRSV) is a virus that causes porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome (PRRS). Pigs infected with PRRSV experience reduced growth rates and increased mortality rates. Gene editing techniques have been employed to alter the CD163 gene in pigs, resulting in modified pig cells that are equipped with receptors that offer resistance against PRRSV [5].

Reduction of Antibiotic Usage:

The overuse of antibiotics in traditional livestock farming has been a growing concern due to the emergence of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, posing a threat to human health and animal welfare. Genetic engineering has emerged as a valuable tool to address this issue by creating animals with improved innate disease resistance, as mentioned in the previous section. Animals with enhanced resistance to diseases require fewer antibiotics for treatment, thereby mitigating the development of antibiotic-resistant strains. Moreover, genetic engineering has also been utilized to produce animals that can naturally synthesize certain antimicrobial peptides or proteins, providing an additional defense against pathogens. As a result, the reliance on antibiotics for disease prevention and treatment in livestock has been reduced, promoting more sustainable and responsible agricultural practices.

Improvement of Animal Welfare:

Beyond disease resistance, genetic engineering has opened avenues for improving animal welfare in the livestock industry. By targeting specific genes associated with stress responses or susceptibility to certain health issues, scientists have been able to develop animals that are better adapted to their environment, experience reduced pain, or exhibit improved overall well-being. For example, genetic modifications have been used to breed animals with reduced sensitivity to environmental stressors, leading to less suffering in challenging conditions. Additionally, the development of animals with improved health and resistance to diseases inherently contributes to better animal welfare, as it reduces the need for aggressive medical interventions and treatments.

However, while these genetic advancements offer huge potential, it is important to navigate ethical considerations and regulatory frameworks to ensure responsible and sustainable use. As genetic engineering continues to shape the livestock industry, striking the right balance between progress and ethical considerations remains paramount for the welfare of animals, humans, and the ecosystem as a whole.

V. Ethical Considerations and Risks:

The ethical considerations and risks associated with genetic engineering in livestock require careful evaluation and management. Animal welfare and moral concerns, environmental implications, and regulatory frameworks vary across different regions and nations. To harness the full potential of genetic engineering while safeguarding animal welfare and the environment, comprehensive ethical assessments, transparent communication, and robust regulatory frameworks are necessary. Public awareness and engagement are important for encouraging responsible practices and informed decision-making in the field of genetic engineering in livestock.

Animal Welfare and Moral Concerns:

The attention given to animal welfare varies across different regions and nations. While higher-income countries often have more comprehensive policies and laws regarding animal welfare, underdeveloped nations may lag behind in addressing these concerns. Traditional farmers may have personal connections with their animals, but knowledge and action gaps can restrict the adoption of more animal-friendly farming practices. In some emerging nations, although awareness of animal welfare issues is growing, it has not yet significantly influenced consumer behaviour. Coordinated efforts from various stakeholders in the livestock industry are required to further improve animal well-being [6].

Environmental Implications:
The main environmental concern with genetically modified animals is the risk of their escape and potential establishment in the wild. Different species have varying abilities to survive and reproduce outside of controlled settings. While some genetically modified farm animals may not survive long in the wild, others could thrive and impact local ecosystems. The functionality of the introduced transgenes also plays a role in determining their environmental impact. Understanding the potential consequences of releasing genetically modified animals into the environment is essential for responsible decision-making [7]. For instance, the escape of genetically modified fish could lead to their colonization in certain areas, impacting local biodiversity. This scenario is not limited to transgenesis but also applies to conventional breeding practices. The potential for gene flow between genetically modified animals and their wild relatives raises concerns about genetic contamination and unintended consequences for natural populations.

Regulatory Framework and Public Perception:
Different countries have varying regulatory frameworks concerning genetic engineering in livestock. India, for example, has a systematic and organised regulatory framework for assessing the biosafety of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and their by-products. The Environment (Protection) Act of 1986 and other laws and regulations govern the control of GMO-related activities in India. Competent Authorities, such as the Recombinant DNA Advisory Committee and the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee, oversee various aspects of GMO research and application [8].

Similarly, Canada also has regulations in place for gene editing and genetically modified animals. The Canadian Environmental Protection Act of 1999 and the New Substances Notification Regulations control animal genetic engineering for study and release. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency and Health Canada regulate gene-edited food, including animal products, and ensure thorough safety evaluations are conducted [9].

In the European Union (EU), the regulation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) aims to provide a high level of protection for human health, animal welfare, and the environment. The regulatory framework includes pre-market approval based on risk assessment, traceability of GMOs, and labelling of GMOs in the market [10].

The public's perception of genetic engineering in livestock varies worldwide. While some may be excited about the technology for its potential benefits in addressing global food challenges, others may have concerns about its ethical implications and environmental risks. Building public trust through transparent communication and engagement is crucial for the acceptance and responsible use of genetic engineering in livestock farming.

VI. CASE STUDIES:

Case Study 1: Safety Assessment of Recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone (rbGH) in Dairy Cattle
The application of Recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone (rbGH), also known as recombinant bovine somatotropin (rbST), to dairy cattle has been subject to scientific analysis and regulatory evaluation. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) conducted a comprehensive safety evaluation of rbGH to determine its impact on consumer health and safety [11].

Biological Activity in Humans: The FDA's assessment revealed that bovine Growth Hormone (bGH) is not biologically active in humans. Furthermore, oral toxicity studies in rats, a species responsive to parenterally administered bGH, demonstrated that rbGH is not orally active in animals [11].

Insulin-like Growth Factor-I (IGF-I) in Cow's Milk: Recombinant bGH treatment in dairy cows results in an increase in the concentration of Insulin-like Growth Factor-I (IGF-I) in their milk. However, additional oral toxicity studies demonstrated that bovine IGF-I lacks oral activity in rats [11].

Comparison with Human Breast Milk: The concentration of IGF-I found in milk from rbGH-treated cows was determined to be within the normal physiological range found in human breast milk. Moreover, the processing of cow's milk for infant formula denatures IGF-I, further mitigating any potential risk associated with its consumption [11].

Absorption of IGF-I in Humans: Based on estimates of the amount of intact protein absorbed in humans and the concentration of IGF-I in cow's milk during rbGH treatment, the FDA determined that biologically significant levels of intact IGF-I would not be absorbed by humans [11].

The safety assessment conducted by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) provides substantial evidence supporting the safe use of recombinant bovine Growth Hormone (rbGH) in dairy cattle. The findings indicate that rbGH does not pose any increased health risk to consumers, as bovine GH and IGF-I lack biological activity in humans and are not orally active in animal studies. As a result, the responsible application of genetic engineering in dairy farming can contribute to increased milk productivity, meeting the global demand for dairy products while adhering to safety standards and consumer welfare [11].

Case Study 2: PRRS-Resistant Pigs
Porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome (PRRS) is a highly contagious and economically significant disease that affects the swine industry globally. The emergence of highly pathogenic PRRS virus (HP-PRRSV) variants has led to increased morbidity and mortality rates, posing even greater challenges for swine producers. A key entry mediator for PRRSV is the scavenger receptor CD163, which contains nine scavenger receptor cysteine-rich (SRCR) domains. SRCR domain 5 (SRCR5), encoded by exon 7 of the CD163 gene, has been identified as essential for PRRSV infection *in vitro* [12].

Scientists aimed to develop PRRS-resistant pigs using advanced gene editing technology, specifically CRISPR/Cas9 combined with a donor vector. The objective was to modify the porcine CD163 gene by substituting exon 7 with the corresponding exon from human CD163-like 1 (hCD163L1), known to confer resistance to PRRSV [12].

Gene Editing Process: Scientists employed CRISPR/Cas9 to precisely edit the CD163 gene in pig embryos. The donor vector containing modified exon 7 from hCD163L1 was introduced to facilitate the targeted substitution [12].

CD163Mut/Mut Pigs: The genetically engineered pigs, referred to as CD163Mut/Mut pigs, were born healthy and displayed no adverse effects on important physiological functions, including hemoglobin-haptoglobin (Hb-Hp) complex clearance and erythroblast growth [12].

In Vitro Findings: *In vitro* infection experiments were conducted, demonstrating that the CD163 mutant effectively inhibited HP-PRRSV replication. The modified CD163 receptor prevented virus uncoating and genome release and restricted the virus's ability to infect cells [12].

In Vivo Results: When infected with HP-PRRSV, CD163Mut/Mut pigs displayed significantly lower viral loads in their blood than wild-type (WT) pigs. They also got relief from the fever that PRRSV caused. Surprisingly, by the end of the experiment, three out of four CD163Mut/Mut pigs had survived and recovered, while all WT pigs had died from the infection [12].

This case study presents a ground-breaking advancement in the development of PRRS-resistant pigs using gene editing technology. By precisely modifying the CD163 gene, Scientists successfully created pigs with enhanced resistance to HP-PRRSV. These PRRS-resistant pigs displayed reduced viral loads, milder clinical symptoms, and increased survival rates compared to their non-modified counterparts when exposed to the highly pathogenic PRRSV variant. This remarkable achievement establishes a solid foundation for breeding PRRS-resistant pigs using gene editing techniques, offering a promising and sustainable solution to combat PRRS and improve the swine industry's health and productivity. However, continued research, responsible use, and addressing ethical considerations will be essential to ensuring the safe and effective implementation of genetically engineered animals in commercial swine farming [12].

VII. CONCLUSION:

We conclude that genetic engineering has provided the livestock industry with a transformative opportunity to enhance productivity and animal health. The application of selective breeding, transgenesis, and gene editing has led to remarkable advancements in livestock improvement, benefiting both producers and consumers. By harnessing the potential of genetic engineering, the livestock industry can become more sustainable, efficient, and resistant to challenges such as disease outbreaks and environmental changes. However, it is necessary to proceed with caution and prioritize responsible innovation. In order for genetic engineering to be successful in livestock farming over the long term, it is important to address ethical issues, reduce risks, and promote public acceptance. A future where genetic improvements in livestock truly contribute to a more food-secure, environmentally sustainable, and responsible world will require a balanced approach that takes into account both the advantages and potential risks of genetic engineering. A future where genetic improvements in livestock truly contribute to a more food-secure, environmentally sustainable, and responsible world will require a balanced approach that takes into account both the advantages and potential risks of genetic engineering.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

1) bGH - bovine Growth Hormone
2) CRISPR - Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats
3) EU - European Union
4) FCR - Feed Conversion Ratio
5) FDA - Food and Drug Administration
6) GMO - Genetically Modified Organisms
7) Hb-Hp - hemoglobin-haptoglobin
8) hCD163L1 - human CD163-like 1
9) HP-PRRSV - Highly Pathogenic Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome virus
10) IGF-I - Insulin-like Growth Factor-I
11) PRRS - Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome
12) PRRSV - Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome Virus
13) rbGH - recombinant bovine Growth Hormone
14) rbST - recombinant bovine Somatotropin
15) SRCR - Scavenger Receptor Cysteine-Rich
16) SRCR5 - SRCR domain 5
17) WT - wild-type

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