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Plant-Derived Vaccines: A Sustainable Approach to Disease Control for Global Health

Kirti Mittal[1], Tooba Rizvi[1], Sachin Kumar Tomar[2], Gourav Mishra[2], Surya Prakash D.V.[2,]*

Abstract

Plant-based vaccines present a novel and environmentally responsible approach to vaccination, with significant potential for improving both human and animal health. These vaccines are safer and less expensive than traditional vaccine manufacturing methods because they use genetically modified plants to create antigens that elicit an immune response. Plant-based systems offer a potential remedy for traditional vaccines' high production costs and environmental impact, which are growing problems. Plant-derived vaccines have shown potential in treating bacterial and viral infections in people, and they provide a means of reducing zoonotic diseases and improving animal health in veterinary medicine. This method is especially well-suited for application in regions with limited resources since it offers advantages in terms of scalability, ease of storage, and a decreased dependency on cold-chain logistics. Regulatory obstacles, immunogenicity issues, and the difficulties of large-scale manufacturing are still obstacles, nevertheless. This study highlights the revolutionary potential of plant-based vaccines in global healthcare by examining their developments, challenges, and potential future applications in both human and animal health.

Keywords: Plant, vaccine, health, diseases, technology

INTRODUCTION

In addition to nourishment and nutrition, plants also produce a variety of industrial components and herbal remedies. Additionally, plants can function as green factories that generate valuable biological products like vaccines and biological medicines. A simple, safe, and effective way to protect yourself from harmful infections before exposure is through vaccination. Vaccines boost your immune system and help develop immunity against specific diseases by leveraging your body's natural defenses [1]. Much like the process when your immune system encounters an illness, vaccines train it to create antibodies. However, vaccines do not trigger the disease or raise your risk of related complications, as they only contain weakened or inactivated forms of the bacteria or virus [2] because plants are not hosts for diseases that affect humans or animals, plant-based production platforms have several benefits of easy scalability, affordability, and high protection. Numerous post-translational changes that are present in human as well as animal cells are carried out by plant cells and may be necessary for the biological functioning of recombinant proteins [3]. Significant efforts have been made in the public and corporate sectors to create plant-based vaccine production platforms, spurred by advancements in plant transformation technology. Plant-based COVID-19 and Ebola vaccines are two recent promising examples. The likelihood of infectious diseases spreading more quickly and broadly in both humans and animals is rising because of the changing climate worldwide. Vaccination has been shown to be a very successful way to prevent illnesses that are

***Author for Correspondence**
Surya Prakash D.V.
E-mail: prakashsurya55@gmail.com

[1]Student, Department of Biotechnology, Meerut Institute of Engineering and Technology, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, India.
[2]Assistant Professor, Department of Biotechnology, Meerut Institute of Engineering and Technology, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, India.

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infectious in both farm animals and people [4]. Vaccines are generally regarded as safe since they are strictly regulated. Furthermore, because they effectively prevent and manage viral diseases, they have a negligible environmental impact and are essential for human health as well as the long-term longevity and growth of cattle production worldwide. Due to their inability to convert to pathogenic agents, recombinant subunit vaccines offer a very high level of safety [5, 6]. They might be just as immune stimulating as completely developed viral particles, have excellent durability, and are frequently simple to make. In recombinant subunit vaccines, antigens – like viral capsid and envelope proteins – are essential components that can be expressed in a variety of expression systems, including bacteria, yeast, insects, mammalian cell cultures, cell-free systems, temporarily altered plants, and stable transgenic plants. It is possible to separate them from these platforms and create vaccines from them.

SYSTEM OF PLANT EXPRESSION FOR VACCINE PRODUCTION

Plants may synthesize foreign proteins, such as antigens, either permanently in genetically modified (GM) plants or temporarily. In animal cell cultures or microorganisms, the technology behind them has been proven to be a viable substitute for conventional methods of production [7]. Some examples and clinical research have shown that producing vaccines for humans and animals from plants is feasible, effective, and safe [8]. To produce vaccines in plants, various expression vectors containing the foreign sequence that codes for the antigen are typically tested. Testing different promoters, optimizing the transgene's codon, experimenting with different leader sequences to increase translation efficiency, and employing the right transit or signal peptides to guide the protein to cellular regions are all common steps in the optimization of plant expression systems [9]. To produce recombinant subunit vaccines, plant-based expression methods provide several unique benefits. When compared to alternative expression systems, plant-based vaccines can drastically reduce energy usage and production rates. Plants offer an eco-friendly way to produce recombinant proteins since they absorb CO_2 and use solar energy. Furthermore, it is simpler to scale up production for industrial uses due to the comparatively minimal capital expenditure needed for plant-based systems [10]. Proteins made in plant expression mechanisms frequently exhibit similar post-translational changes, folding, and assembly to those found in mammalian cells, which is frequently essential to generate immune response [11]. A new and exciting field of biotechnology called "plant-derived vaccines" makes use of plants as hosts to create vaccines against viral illnesses that affect humans. By genetically modifying plants to produce proteins that can elicit an immune response, these vaccines – also known as plant-derived vaccines. Reduced production costs, security and simplicity of scaling up are just a few benefits of this strategy.

HOW DO PLANT-BASED VACCINES FUNCTION

1. The technique of plant genetic engineering usually entails introducing the DNA encoding the antigen – the protein that sets off an immune response – into the genetic material of the plant [12]. Viral vectors and agrobacterium-mediated transformation are two methods that can be used for this. The plant creates the antigen once it has grown.
2. The ability of plants like tobacco, tomatoes, bananas, potatoes, and maize to express the recombinant protein in huge numbers makes them popular choices for antigen expression. As a potential vaccine, the plant's antigen can be utilized.
3. *Extraction and purification:* The vaccine substance is taken from the plant once it has developed and begun to express the antigen. A vaccine is then created using the purified antigen from the plant tissue [13]. This could entail removing proteins from the plant's leaves, fruits, or seeds to make sure they're in a state that can be used to vaccinate others.
4. *Immunization:* The antigens produced from plants is processed and then utilized to make vaccine formulations that can be administered by injection, oral administration, or nasal spray, depending on the vaccine type and its intended purpose.

Examples of Plant-Made Vaccines

1. *ZyCoV-D (India):* This COVID-19 DNA vaccine was created on a plasmid DNA platform and has demonstrated efficacy in eliciting an immune response [14]. Although it contributes to the

current pattern of developing plant-based techniques, it also makes use of genetically engineered bacteria rather than plants.

2. The hepatitis B vaccine, which was created by engineering tobacco plants to produce hepatitis B surface antigen, is an example of an edible plant-based vaccine [15]. These plants can boost immunity when ingested.
3. *Banana-made vaccine:* Researchers have successfully employed genetically modified bananas to create a vaccine against enteric disorders, such as rotavirus-induced diarrhea. Individuals who eat these bananas may develop an immunity to the virus.
4. *Vaccinations based on tomatoes:* Researchers have experimented with genetically altered tomatoes to create vaccinations that protect against cholera and HIV [16]. An effective way to produce edible vaccinations is with tomatoes.
5. *Vaccines against Norwalk virus (gastroenteritis) and malaria:* Vaccines against these diseases have been investigated using potatoes and maize. Both direct consumption as they are, and food product processing are possible with these plants.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

- *Regulatory barriers:* Since plant-based vaccines are a relatively young subject, they must overcome regulatory obstacles [17]. Since these vaccinations are regarded as new pharmaceutical products, the approval procedure could be drawn out and complicated.
- *Different antigen expression:* Different plants have varying levels of antigen expression. It is frequently necessary to optimize the production system, which includes choosing the best species of plants and transformation techniques.
- *Public acceptance:* The public's confidence in plant-based vaccinations may be impacted by reluctance to use genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in vaccine production [18].

CONCLUSIONS

It has been determined that plants are a suitable expression system for the commercial synthesis of vaccination antigens. Transgenic plants – including edible plant parts – are seen as great substitutes for commercial scale-up through cultivation and vaccine production. The development of strategies for the high-level expression of vaccination antigens in plants is the result of advances in genetic engineering techniques and a better understanding of plant molecular biology. It is still an emerging area, and with the more sophisticated approach, this strategy could lead to safer, more scalable, and more affordable vaccinations in the future. Overall, plant-made vaccines are a rapidly growing field with significant potential to revolutionize the production and accessibility of vaccines for viral diseases in humans. Continued research and development will likely overcome current challenges and lead to more widespread use of this innovative technology.

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