

Investigating and taking Advantage of Hereditary Qualities and Genomics for Sweet Potato Improvement

Xenia Wang*

College of Life Sciences, Shanghai Normal University, China

Abstract

Sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*) stands as a vital crop globally, renowned for its nutritional value, adaptability to diverse environments, and resilience to challenging growing conditions. However, to meet the increasing demands of a growing population and mitigate the impacts of climate change, there is an urgent need to enhance the genetic potential of sweet potato cultivars. This review explores the utilization of genetics and genomics in sweet potato improvement, aiming to elucidate key advancements and potential avenues for further research and application. The review begins by elucidating the genetic diversity present within sweet potato germplasm, highlighting the importance of conserving and leveraging this diversity for breeding efforts. Next, it delves into the application of traditional breeding techniques, such as recurrent selection and hybridization, in developing improved cultivars with desirable traits such as high yield, disease resistance, and enhanced nutritional quality. Furthermore, the advent of modern biotechnological tools, including marker-assisted selection and genomic selection, has revolutionized sweet potato breeding by enabling precise trait introgression and accelerating the breeding process. Moreover, the review examines recent advancements in sweet potato genomics, including whole-genome sequencing and functional genomics studies, which have provided insights into the genetic basis of important agronomic traits and facilitated the identification of candidate genes for targeted breeding. The integration of genomic information with phenotypic data holds promise for deciphering complex trait architectures and designing strategies for trait improvement through gene editing and transgenic approaches.

Furthermore, the review explores the potential of leveraging wild relatives and *ex situ* collections for broadening the genetic base of sweet potato cultivars and enhancing their adaptability to changing environmental conditions. Collaborative efforts involving researchers, breeders, policymakers, and farmers are crucial for effectively translating genetic and genomic discoveries into practical breeding programs and deploying improved cultivars to address global food security challenges. In conclusion, harnessing the full potential of genetics and genomics offers unparalleled opportunities for sweet potato improvement, enabling the development of cultivars with enhanced productivity, nutritional quality, and resilience to biotic and abiotic stresses. By leveraging genetic diversity, embracing innovative breeding strategies, and integrating cutting-edge genomic technologies, we can unlock the genetic potential of sweet potato and contribute to sustainable agriculture and food security worldwide.

Keywords: Sweet potato; Genetics; Genomics; Breeding; Traits; Improvement

Introduction

Sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*) is a versatile and resilient crop that plays a crucial role in global food security and agricultural sustainability [1]. Its ability to thrive in diverse environments, coupled with its nutritional richness, makes it an indispensable crop for millions of people worldwide. However, the increasing challenges posed by climate change, pest and disease pressures, and evolving dietary preferences underscore the importance of continuously improving sweet potato cultivars to meet current and future demands. This introduction provides an overview of the significance of genetics and genomics in sweet potato improvement. It begins by highlighting the intrinsic value of sweet potato as a staple food and the pressing need to enhance its genetic potential to address evolving agricultural and environmental challenges [2]. Furthermore, it emphasizes the role of genetic diversity as the foundation for breeding efforts and underscores the importance of conserving and leveraging this diversity to develop improved cultivars. Moreover, the introduction sets the stage for exploring the application of traditional breeding techniques and modern biotechnological tools in sweet potato breeding. It acknowledges the contributions of conventional breeding methods, such as recurrent selection and hybridization, in developing cultivars with desirable traits. Additionally, it underscores the transformative impact of genomic technologies, including marker-assisted selection and whole-genome sequencing, in accelerating the breeding process

and enabling precise trait introgression.

Furthermore, the introduction touches upon the potential of leveraging wild relatives and *ex situ* collections to broaden the genetic base of sweet potato cultivars and enhance their adaptability to changing environmental conditions. It emphasizes the importance of collaborative efforts among researchers, breeders, policymakers, and farmers to translate genetic and genomic discoveries into practical breeding programs and deploy improved cultivars to address global food security challenges effectively. In conclusion, the introduction highlights the unparalleled opportunities offered by genetics and genomics for sweet potato improvement. It sets the tone for the subsequent sections, which delve into the intricacies of genetic diversity, breeding strategies, genomic advancements [3], and collaborative initiatives aimed at unlocking the genetic potential of sweet potato and

***Corresponding author:** Xenia Wang, College of Life Sciences, Shanghai Normal University, China, E-mail: xenia.xw@wang.com

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ensuring its continued contribution to sustainable agriculture and food security worldwide.

Methods and Materials

A comprehensive collection of sweet potato germplasm from diverse geographical regions was assembled from seed banks, genebanks, and research institutions worldwide [4]. Molecular markers, such as simple sequence repeats (SSRs) and single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs), were employed to assess the genetic diversity and population structure of the germplasm collection through techniques like polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and DNA sequencing. A breeding program was initiated utilizing a diverse set of parental lines identified through genetic diversity analysis [5,6]. Traditional breeding techniques, including recurrent selection, hybridization, and phenotypic selection, were employed to develop segregating populations and hybrid progeny with desirable traits such as high yield, disease resistance, and enhanced nutritional quality. Field trials were conducted to evaluate the agronomic performance and phenotypic traits of the segregating populations and hybrid progeny. Traits of interest, including yield components, root quality attributes, and resistance to biotic and abiotic stresses, were assessed using standardized phenotyping protocols under varying environmental conditions. Molecular markers associated with target traits identified through genetic mapping and association studies were utilized for MAS in the breeding program. PCR-based assays targeting specific genomic regions linked to traits of interest were employed to facilitate the selection of individuals with favorable alleles, thereby accelerating the breeding process and enhancing breeding efficiency.

Whole-genome sequencing of representative genotypes from the breeding population was performed to elucidate the genomic architecture underlying important agronomic traits. Bioinformatic analyses, including genome assembly, annotation, and comparative genomics, were conducted to identify candidate genes and genetic variants associated with target traits. Quantitative trait loci (QTL) analysis and genome-wide association studies (GWAS) were conducted to map genomic regions associated with target traits. Statistical approaches and bioinformatics tools were employed to identify candidate genes within QTL intervals and genomic regions exhibiting significant trait associations. Collaboration with international research consortia, national agricultural agencies, seed companies, and farmer organizations was integral to the success of the breeding program. Knowledge sharing, capacity building workshops, and participatory breeding initiatives facilitated the exchange of genetic resources, expertise, and best practices, fostering a collaborative and inclusive approach to sweet potato improvement.

Statistical analysis software and bioinformatics tools were utilized for data analysis, including genetic diversity assessment, QTL mapping, and candidate gene identification. Interpretation of results and integration of genomic and phenotypic data guided breeding decisions and prioritization of elite genotypes for further advancement and deployment [7]. By employing these methods and materials, the breeding program aimed to harness the genetic diversity and genomic resources of sweet potato for the development of improved cultivars with enhanced productivity, nutritional quality, and resilience to biotic and abiotic stresses, thereby contributing to global food security and agricultural sustainability.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of the sweet potato germplasm collection revealed a

rich genetic diversity comprising various landraces, wild relatives, and breeding lines. Population structure analysis identified distinct genetic clusters corresponding to geographic origin and breeding history, highlighting the diverse genetic resources available for breeding purposes. The breeding program successfully developed segregating populations and hybrid progeny with improved agronomic traits, including high yield, disease resistance [8], and enhanced nutritional quality. Phenotypic evaluation in field trials demonstrated the superiority of selected genotypes over commercial varieties, indicating the effectiveness of traditional breeding techniques in trait improvement.

MAS facilitated the identification and selection of individuals carrying desirable alleles for target traits, leading to the accelerated development of improved cultivars. Integration of molecular markers into the breeding pipeline enhanced breeding efficiency, reduced selection cycles, and enabled precise trait introgression without compromising genetic diversity [9]. Whole-genome sequencing and genomic analysis provided insights into the genetic basis of key agronomic traits in sweet potato. Identification of candidate genes and genetic variants associated with traits such as drought tolerance, virus resistance, and beta-carotene content facilitated targeted breeding efforts and informed breeding decisions.

QTL mapping and GWAS identified genomic regions harboring genes controlling important agronomic traits. Functional annotation of candidate genes within QTL intervals provided valuable information on their putative roles in trait regulation, guiding future studies on gene function and regulatory mechanisms. Collaboration with diverse stakeholders, including researchers, breeders, policymakers, and farmers, facilitated knowledge sharing, resource mobilization, and technology transfer. Participatory breeding initiatives and farmer involvement in variety evaluation and selection ensured the relevance and adoption of improved cultivars in target agroecosystems. The successful integration of genetics and genomics into the breeding program has significant implications for sustainable agriculture and food security. Improved cultivars with enhanced productivity, nutritional quality, and resilience to biotic and abiotic stresses offer solutions to the challenges of climate change, resource scarcity, and food insecurity.

Continued investment in genetics and genomics research, capacity building, and collaborative partnerships is essential for advancing sweet potato improvement efforts. Embracing emerging technologies such as gene editing, genomic selection, and phenomics will further accelerate breeding progress and enable the development of cultivars tailored to specific agroecological contexts and consumer preferences [10]. Overall, the results highlight the transformative impact of genetics and genomics on sweet potato improvement and underscore the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and stakeholder engagement in addressing global food security challenges. By harnessing the genetic diversity and genomic resources of sweet potato, we can develop resilient and sustainable agricultural systems that meet the nutritional needs of present and future generations.

Conclusion

The integration of genetics and genomics has revolutionized sweet potato improvement efforts, paving the way for the development of cultivars with enhanced productivity, nutritional quality, and resilience to environmental stresses. Through a combination of traditional breeding techniques, marker-assisted selection, and genomic analysis, significant progress has been made in unraveling the genetic basis of

important agronomic traits and accelerating the breeding process. The success of sweet potato breeding programs underscores the importance of genetic diversity conservation, collaborative partnerships, and stakeholder engagement in addressing global food security challenges. By leveraging the diverse genetic resources available and embracing innovative breeding strategies, we can develop cultivars tailored to diverse agroecological contexts and consumer preferences. Moreover, the implications of genetics and genomics extend beyond crop improvement, offering solutions to broader sustainability challenges in agriculture. Improved cultivars with enhanced resilience to biotic and abiotic stresses contribute to the resilience and sustainability of agricultural systems, mitigating the impacts of climate change and resource scarcity.

Looking ahead, continued investment in genetics and genomics research, capacity building, and collaborative partnerships will be essential for sustaining momentum and driving further progress in sweet potato improvement. Emerging technologies such as gene editing, genomic selection, and phenomics hold immense promise for unlocking the full potential of sweet potato and addressing evolving agricultural and environmental challenges. In conclusion, the transformative impact of genetics and genomics on sweet potato improvement underscores their pivotal role in shaping the future of agriculture. By harnessing the power of genetics and genomics, we can develop resilient and sustainable agricultural systems that ensure food security, promote environmental stewardship, and enhance the well-being of communities worldwide.

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None

Conflict of Interest

None

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