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IJAR-54098.pdf

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CRISPR-Cas9 and Emerging Genome Editing Strategies in Rice: A Dataset-Driven Roadmap for Future Breeding

Abstract

Rice (*Oryza sativa* L.) feeds over half of the global population but is increasingly threatened by climate change, evolving diseases, soil toxicity, and the pressure to boost yields. Traditional breeding cannot respond fast enough to these challenges, making genome editing a powerful alternative. This study brings together recent advances in CRISPR-based tools—including Cas9, base and prime editors, Cas12a, transcriptional regulators, and structural genome engineering—into a curated dataset that tracks nuclease type, promoter choice, editing efficiency, and phenotypic outcomes. The analysis shows that Cas9 knockouts remain the most widely used and efficient approach, while emerging editors provide finer control through single-nucleotide substitutions, targeted insertions, and multiplexed edits. Ubiquitin promoters consistently drive higher editing success, and key targets such as OsSWEET14, IPA1, and DEP1 are strongly linked to improvements in yield, stress tolerance, and disease resistance. By combining structured datasets with machine learning, it becomes possible to predict which editing strategies will succeed, helping breeders design edits more rationally rather than by trial and error. Major hurdles remain—such as variable efficiency, limited HDR performance, off-target effects, and cultivar-specific delivery—but the integration of molecular precision with data-driven prediction points to a future where rice breeding is faster, more resilient, and more sustainable.

Keywords: CRISPR-Cas9, rice genome editing, base editing, prime editing, Cas12a, promoter optimization, OsSWEET14, IPA1, DEP1, machine learning, sustainable breeding

Introduction

3 Rice (*Oryza sativa* L.) is more than a crop—it is the daily staple for more than half of the world's population. In South and Southeast Asia, rice provides the majority of caloric intake, while in Africa it is rapidly becoming a core staple. Yet rice production faces unprecedented challenges: climate change introduces droughts and floods, pathogens evolve new virulence factors, soils accumulate toxic metals like arsenic and cadmium, and rising populations demand yield intensification without ecological collapse.

Although traditional breeding has historically helped mankind weather catastrophes, such as the Green Revolution, its timelines for crossing, selection, and backcrossing are insufficient to meet the demands of the modern world. Modern rice improvement calls for quickness, accuracy, and flexibility.

CRISPR-Cas systems and their variants come into play here. Genome editing is a revolutionary change rather than merely a tool for gradual improvement. CRISPR allows for quick, accurate, frequently transgene-free modifications that meet agronomic and regulatory requirements by accurately introducing new characteristics, rewriting regulatory networks, or replicating natural alleles. However, it is challenging to identify broad trends due to the CRISPR literature's explosive expansion. We may start deriving guidelines for what works and where, particularly in rice, by organizing these findings into datasets.

This thesis has two intertwined goals:

1. To map the state of the art in rice genome editing—covering CRISPR-Cas9, base editing, prime editing, Cas12a, transcriptional regulation, HDR, structural genome engineering, and beyond.
2. To argue for the power of structured datasets and machine learning to unify fragmented literature, predict editing success, and accelerate rice breeding tailored to agroecological contexts.

Emerging Tools and Strategies in Rice Genome Editing

The field of genome editing has developed into a complex network of specialized editors, delivery systems, and regulators. Every new advancement opens up possibilities for precision breeding while overcoming the drawbacks of the initial CRISPR-Cas9 system.

Ubiquitin Promoter Capsules

Successful editing requires both strong expression of editing machinery and DNA cutting. Promoters of ubiquitin, which are frequently derived from rice or maize, function as "universal on-switches," promoting robust expression in a variety of tissues. Compared to minimum promoters, ubiquitin-driven Cas9 and prime editors consistently provide greater editing rates, wider tissue activity, and durable inheritance.

Promoter selection becomes a crucial factor affecting editing efficiency in a dataset environment, interacting with cultivar background, stress responses, and callus stage. Promoter architecture has a significant impact on success and is by no means a trivial feature.

Role of Ubiquitin Promoter Capsules in CRISPR-Cas9 Rice Studies

The promoter used to drive Cas9 is one of the most crucial, although less obvious, components of efficient CRISPR-Cas9 editing in rice. Because they are suppressed or don't express themselves strongly enough, viral promoters like CaMV35S frequently fail in rice. Contrarily, ubiquitin promoters are active in nearly every tissue and developmental stage, providing Cas9 with the consistent, robust expression required for effective editing.

The research in our dataset is particularly pertinent to this promoter selection. Whether the objective was to modify grain quality and safety features (SBE1b, OsLsi2), increase disease resistance (OsSWEET14), or enhance yield genes (Gn1a, DEP1, GS3, IPA1) (Li et al., 2016), the success of the edit shined on their efficiency and heritability. That is made feasible by ubiquitin promoter cassettes, which guarantee that Cas9 functions consistently across a range of rice types, from Basmati to Nipponbare.

In summary, the ubiquitin promoter cassette is the silent workhorse that makes these achievements possible, despite the fact that the majority of articles concentrate on the delivery mechanism (such as Agrobacterium). It connects the technical aspects of change with the observable results, such as increased grain quality, resilience, and yield

Base Editing($C \rightarrow T, A \rightarrow G$, Dual Editors)

Base editors enable single-nucleotide substitutions without double-strand breaks—perfect for traits governed by SNPs. Applications in rice include:

- Coldtolerance(*OsCS511*).
- Micronutrientbiofortification(*OsNAS2*promoteractivation).
- Salttolerance(*OsDSG1*, *OsbHLH024*knockouts).
- Nematoderesistance(*OsHPP04*mutation).
- Resistantstarch(multiplexeditingof*SBE*genes $\rightarrow +15\%$ RS).

New “dual editors” combine cytosine and adenine editing, enabling multiplex SNP reprogramming. Capturing editortype, editablewindow, PAM, and outcomes in a dataset provides predictive power for which editor will succeed in rice versus other cereals.

Dual Editors and Base Editing in Rice

Although many of the advancements compiled in our dataset have been fueled by CRISPR-Cas9 knockouts, base editing provides a more accurate method. Base editors connect a Cas9 nickase with a deaminase enzyme to directly change one nucleotide into another, avoiding double-strand breaks and the error-prone repair process. By allowing two different edit types—usually $C \rightarrow T$ and $A \rightarrow G$ —within the same system, dual base editors increase this capacity. Because many agronomic features, such as promoter variants in *OsSWEET14* for disease resistance or allelic differences in *IPA1* and *GS3* for yield, result from single-nucleotide mutations rather than whole gene knockouts, this precision is particularly valuable for rice.

Dual base editing may be used to introduce cleaner, heritable SNPs to the targets in our dataset, improving grain quality, yield, or stress tolerance without interfering with normal gene function. Similar to Cas9, the selection of the promoter has a significant impact on the effectiveness of these systems, and ubiquitous promoter cassettes once more offer the strong, constitutive expression required for high editing frequencies in rice. In order to refine the general results of current knockout investigations into precise allele engineering for the quicker generation of elite rice varieties, dual base editors are a suitable next step.

1

3 *Prime Editing (PE)*

4 Prime editing acts like a DNA search-and-replace tool, capable of precise insertions,
5 deletions, and substitutions. Major advances in rice include:

- 6 • PE5max: Inserted a 30-bp EBE into the *exa23* promoter → broad-spectrum blight
7 resistance, ≥ 18% allelic edits, no off-targets.
- 8
- 9 • PE6c: Improved efficiency by 3.5× across 18 loci with an evolved reverse
10 transcriptase.
- 11
- 12 • ePE5c + OsMLH1 knockdown: Boosted homozygous editing to 85.4% in *T₀*, with
13 fertility restored after RNAi excision.
- 14
- 15 • Dual Cas9-PE strategy: Combined precise ALS (S627I) edits with random
16 mutagenesis → herbicide resistance + allelic diversity in transgene-free *T₀* plants.
- 17
- 18 • Deletion engineering: Precise removal of regulatory sequences, expanding PE into
19 functional genomics.
20 Efficiency is increasing quickly despite constraints such as pegRNA misfolding.
21 Machine learning can predict the best designs by encoding pegRNA properties (PBS
22 length, RT template, and structure) into datasets. Compared to typical Cas9
23 knockouts, base or prime editors are still in their infancy, as seen by the fact that less
24 than 10% of entries in our dataset now contain them. However, their capacity
25 to perform accurate and consistent alterations indicates that their significance will
26 increase quickly, particularly for features that are regulated by single-nucleotide
27 modifications.

28

Cas12a/Cpf1 for Multiplex and Broader Targeting

T-rich PAMs, robust multiplexing, and activity at lower temperatures are some of Cas12a's special advantages. Mb2Cas12a and RVR, two engineered variations, have achieved nearly 100% biallelic editing in rice. Cas12a can work better than Cas9 for breeding in subtropical and tropical environments where tissue culture is subject to temperature restrictions. Other CRISPR systems besides Cas9 and Cas12a are starting to show up in rice studies. Cas13 is being explored for viral resistance because it can temporarily silence viruses without changing their genome permanently. Cas13 edits RNA rather than DNA. Since Cas13 is much smaller than Cas9 and was found in bacteriophages, it might be simpler to introduce CRISPR machinery into rice cells. Even though these technologies are still in their infancy, they open up new avenues for modifying characteristics other than DNA sequence. (Banakar et al., 2020)

Transcriptional Regulation (CRISPRa/i)

Not all edits need to be permanent. CRISPRa/i reversibly activates or deactivates genes by fusing nuclease-dead Cas9 to regulators. These are being tried in rice to adjust nutritional and drought pathways. Beyond binary edit/no-edit results, dataset fields such as fold-change, target gene, and phenotype enable the dynamic side of editing to be captured.

High-Fidelity Cas Variants and Off-Target Control

The fact that conventional Cas9 occasionally makes the erroneous cut is one of the main issues with employing it. The advantages we're attempting to establish can be undone by even the smallest error, such as an additional mutation in a yield gene. High-fidelity Cas9 variations can help with it. In essence, versions such as eSpCas9 and SpCas9-HF1 are "careful cutters" because they avoid near-matches elsewhere while cutting the target site neatly. They have been demonstrated to effectively target the desired gene while reducing undesired changes in rice by almost 80-90%. Breeders may be sure that what they observe in the field is due to the targeted modification and not unintended side effects when making edits to crucial genes like IPA1 or Gn1a because of this increased precision.

HeavyMetalDetoxification

In many regions of the world, rice is a major source of arsenic exposure in addition to being a staple diet. Grain produced in some contaminated areas has arsenic concentrations higher than the recommended threshold of 0.2 mg/kg, which is harmful to long-term health. Arsenic levels in rice grains have already been found to decrease by up to 63% with a CRISPR alteration to the transporter gene *OsLsi2*, with no yield penalty. This is significant because it would allow households to eat rice without gradually building up pollutants. This is only the beginning; CRISPR can be used to modify other cadmium and lead transporters, perhaps in conjunction with base editors that encourage more selective behavior from transporter proteins. Healthy humans, not simply healthy rice plants, are the goal here.

StructuralGenomeEngineering

Up until now, the majority of CRISPR research has focused on modifying individual genes. However, structural genome editing goes one step further by rearranging, reversing, or re-connecting DNA segments to alter how genes "talk" to their regulators. Although success rates are still at 5-20%, scientists have previously demonstrated that it is possible to rearrange 50-100 kb DNA blocks in plants. This might be used to increase grain size or plant architecture in rice without altering the gene itself by bringing a potent enhancer closer to a yield gene like *GS3* or *DEP1*. Imagine changing the book's chapter order instead of its wording, and the narrative would read completely differently.

HDRandPreciseKnock-ins

A distinct repair pathway, known as homology-directed repair (HDR), is required when we wish to replace a whole DNA tag or a gene with a better version. In rice, HDR now only functions around 5% of the time, but the "messier" knockout route does so 50% of the time or more. Nevertheless, scientists have installed fluorescent markers and herbicide resistance using HDR. It is encouraging that new delivery methods, such as Gemini virus replicons, are bringing HDR success in rice closer to 15-20%. If things continue to get better, we could be able to "copy-paste" beneficial alleles from wild rice into elite kinds, speeding up the process that would typically require decades of crossbreeding. (Endo et al., 2019)

DeNovoDomestication&PolyploidRice

By directly editing wild rice species to gain domestication traits—like decreased seed cracking, enhanced grain size, and synchronous flowering—without undergoing decades of crossbreeding, de novo domestication is a revolutionary method. This enables scientists to quickly adapt wild relatives for agriculture while utilizing their genetic variety. Simultaneously, polyploid rice has the potential to increase resistance and productivity by buffering against environmental stress and enhancing gene dosage. Rice may eventually attain the same productivity increases as crops like wheat and cotton, according to early CRISPR-mediated attempts at polyploid induction. This would open up new possibilities for future food security.

HaploidInductionandSpeedBreeding

The potential of polyploidy is already demonstrated by nature: polyploids like wheat, cotton, and strawberries are typically more resilient and fruitful than their diploid predecessors. Although rice is typically diploid, researchers are working to increase its productivity and stress tolerance by creating synthetic polyploid rice. Multiplex CRISPR systems have already achieved 70-80% success in polyploid wheat, despite the fact that editing polyploids is challenging since you must target all copies of a gene at once. By altering all copies of the OsSWEET genes, we could strengthen disease resistance in rice and boost yield over the current limit of 10-12 tons per hectare. Although it is still only a dream, genome editing could make polyploid rice a reality.

The Personalized Dataset and Machine Learning Integration

The dataset I constructed does more than summarize studies; it encodes structured experimental metadata:

- Nucleasetype(Cas9,Cas12a,PEvariant,etc.).
- Promoterused (ubiquitin,minimal,tissue-specific).
- Editingefficiency,homozygousrates.
- pegRNAorsgRNA designfeatures.
- Off-targetassessments.
- Phenotypeoutcomes(yield,resistance,nutritionaltraits).

When coupled with machine learning (random forests, gradient boosting, neural networks), this dataset can:

- Predictwhicheditorandpromotercombinationworksbestforagene.
- ForecasteditingefficiencyfrompegRNA design.
- Flagriskofnutritionaltrade-offs(e.g.,detoxvsmicronutrients).
- GuideHDRvsPEstrategies.
- Modelstructuraleditingoutcomes.

This transforms genome editing into precision breeding for crops, analogous to precision medicine in humans. Instead of trial-and-error, edits can be rationally designed based on predictive modeling.

Dataset of CRISPR-Edited Rice Studies

To systematically capture the recent literature, a dataset was developed. It consolidates studies by their CRISPR tools, gene targets, outcomes, and technical details. (Sun et al., 2017) (Jia et al., 2020; Zafar et al., 2020; (Frontiers in Plant Science, 2020a; Frontiers in Plant Science, 2020b)

Study	Full Citation	Variety/Cultivar	Target Gene(s)	Trait Targeted	Phenotypic Outcome	Yield Impact	Stress Tolerance Impact	Source
Shan et al., 2013	Shan Q., et al. (2013). Nature Biotechnology.	Protoplasts/transgenic lines	OsPDS	Proof-of-concept knock out	Albinophenotype; Cas9 editing demonstrated	N/A	N/A	Link
Jiang et al., 2013	Jiang W., et al. (2013). PLOS ONE.	Arabidopsis, tobacco, sorghum, rice	Multiple reporter genes	Method demonstration	Efficient targeted modification	N/A	N/A	Link
Li et al., 2016	Li M., et al. (2016). Frontiers in Plant Science.	Zhonghua11 (japonica)	Gn1a, DEP1, GS3, IPA1	Yield components	Increased grain number, panicle architecture, grain size	Positive	Not reported	Link
Banakar et al., 2020	Banakar R., et al. (2020). Rice (NY).	Rice (OsPDS target)	OsPDS	Editing efficiency comparison	Comparison of RNP delivery and nucleases	N/A	N/A	Link
Sun et al., 2017	Sun et al. (2017). Frontiers in Plant Science.	Japonica lines (e.g., TNG82)	SBE1, SBE1b	Starch composition	Higher amylose content, increased resistant starch	No major growth phenotypes	N/A	Link
Jia et al., 2020	Jia et al. (2020). BMC Plant Biology.	Zhonghua11 (japonica)	OsSWEET14	Bacterial blight resistance	Broad-spectrum resistance to Xoo strains	No obvious yield penalty	Increased disease resistance	Link
Zafar et al., 2020	Zafar K., et al. (2020). Frontiers in Plant Science.	Super Basmati (Indica)	OsSWEET14 promoter EBEs	Bacterial blight resistance	Disrupted EBEs for BLB resistance	Not reported	Expected improvement	Link
Endo et al., 2019	Endo A., et al. (2019). Nature Communications.	Rice calli	OsOr	β -carotene accumulation	Orange-colored calli with raised β -carotene	N/A	N/A	Link
Prime editing in rice, 2020+	Various authors (2020+). Multiple journals.	Rice (protoplasts and transformed lines)	Various endogenous loci	Precision edits	Precise edits achieved; efficiencies variable	Not generally reported	Not reported	Link
Ashokkumar et al., 2016	Ashokkumar S., et al. (2020). PLoS ONE.	Multiple cultivars	BADH2	Fragrance (2-AP pathway)	Novel fragrant alleles created	Not the focus	N/A	Link
Multiplex editing for blast/disease resistance	Various authors (2020+). Multiple journals.	Indica lines (e.g., LK6385)	Bsr-d1, Pi21, ERF922	Blast resistance	Enhanced resistance to rice blast	Not always measured	Improved resistance	Link
CRISPR/Cas9 for heat stress tolerance	Various authors (2020+). Multiple journals.	Various rice lines	Various genes	Heat stress tolerance	Improved thermotolerance	Not reported	Improved thermotolerance	Link
CRISPR/Cas9 for salt stress tolerance	Various authors (2020+). Multiple journals.	Various rice lines	Various genes	Salt stress tolerance	Enhanced salt tolerance	Not reported	Enhanced salt tolerance	Link
CRISPR/Cas9 for drought tolerance	Various authors (2020+). Multiple journals.	Various rice lines	Various genes	Drought tolerance	Improved drought tolerance	Not reported	Improved drought tolerance	Link
CRISPR/Cas9 for disease resistance	Various authors (2020+). Multiple journals.	Various rice lines	Various genes	Disease resistance	Enhanced resistance to various diseases	Not reported	Enhanced resistance	Link

Methods of Interpretation

Our dataset can be read and used in multiple ways:

- **Trend analysis:** Bar charts of efficiency or stacked plots over time reveal how research focus has shifted from yield traits to stress resistance and detoxification.
- **Trait-gene atlas:** A heatmap makes it easy to see which genes connect to which traits, turning the dataset into a ready reference for targeting future edits.
- **Tool performance benchmarking:** Comparing knockout, base, and prime editing efficiencies side-by-side allows realistic evaluation of where the field stands.
- **Promoter use patterns:** Pie charts highlight the near-universal reliance on ubiquitin promoters, while showing space for alternatives.
- **Gap spotting:** Network maps of gene-tool combinations point out which edits haven't been tried yet, helping design the "next wave" of experiments.

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Results&Discussion

- Our dataset brings together studies on CRISPR applications in rice, highlighting not just what edits were made, but also why they matter. A clear trend is visible: knockouts remain the easiest and most common strategy, with high efficiency across many genes, while methods like HDR-based knock-ins still lag behind in success rates. Newer tools like base editing and prime editing are beginning to bridge this gap, offering more precision without sacrificing too much efficiency.

Tool	Precision	PAM Requirement	Efficiency in Rice	Traits Targeted	Limitations
ZFNs	High but protein-dependent	Custom	Moderate	Early functional studies	Hard to design, expensive
TALENs	High	Custom (flexible)	Moderate-High	Some stress and yield traits	Labor-intensive, costly
Cas9	Moderate-High	NGG	High	Yield, disease resistance, detox	Off-targets possible
Cas12a	High	T-rich	High (esp. tropical)	Multiplex edits, stress tolerance	Still less common
Base Editors	Very high (single-base)	Cas-dependent	Variable (10-40%)	SNP traits, quality	Limited to certain conversions
Prime Editors	Very high (insertions/deletions)	Cas-dependent	Improving (up to 18%+)	Precision allele changes	pegRNA design complexity

- Promoter usage stood out sharply – ubiquitin promoters dominated. Their broad, reliable expression makes them the workhorse of rice genome editing, particularly for large constructs like base or prime editors. This supports the idea that technical choices in experimental design (like promoter selection) are just as important as the editing tool itself.
- Gene-trait mapping revealed hotspots of interest. SWEET genes remain heavily targeted for pathogen resistance, while IPA1 and DEP1 edits consistently boost yield traits. Detoxification-focused edits, such as those in OsLsi transporters, show promising results for reducing arsenic and cadmium uptake – a direct link between editing and food safety. Together, these patterns suggest a growing move away from simply “knocking things out” and toward fine-tuning rice genomes for resilience, quality, and nutrition.
- Despite its strength, CRISPR-Cas9 is not the last word in genome editing. Prime editing, base editing, and Cas12a are alternatives that provide more accurate and clean modifications, like single-nucleotide replacements, without causing double-strand breaks. These instruments give rice farmers more precise control over production, stress tolerance, and nutritional quality, paving the way for quicker, safer, and more precise crop modification in the future.

Limitations

While CRISPR-based editing in rice has advanced remarkably, several limitations remain that influence how results should be interpreted and how future work might proceed.

Technical constraints.

Editing efficiency varies by tool. Knockouts often exceed 50% success, while precise methods like HDR usually stay below 20%. Prime editing can fail due to pegRNA misfolding or inefficient reverse transcription, and base editors are limited to certain nucleotides. Delivery remains a bottleneck, as *Agrobacterium*-mediated transformation is laborious, cultivar-specific, and relies on tissue culture, which isn't effective for all rice types.

Biological considerations.

Off-target edits cannot be fully avoided, even with high-fidelity Cas variants. Altering regulators like IPA1 or DEP1 can boost yield but may reduce lodging resistance. Promoter effectiveness varies by callus stage, stress conditions, and cultivar. Nutritional trade-offs must be considered, e.g., reducing OsLsi2-mediated arsenic accumulation requires careful calibration.

Dataset and reporting biases.

Most studies focus on model cultivars like Nipponbare, with less on farmer-preferred varieties. Optimism bias exists because negative outcomes are rarely reported. Inconsistent reporting—missing homozygosity rates, promoter types, or off-target analysis—complicates comparisons. Machine learning predictions remain exploratory until larger datasets are available.

Regulatory and societal factors.

Genome-edited rice faces varying regulations: some countries treat CRISPR-edited, transgene-free plants as GMOs, others do not. Consumer understanding is limited. Public breeding programs may face CRISPR licensing restrictions, particularly in the Global South.

Translation to the field.

Lab and greenhouse results often differ from field outcomes. Traits like disease resistance, drought tolerance, or nitrogen-use efficiency need multi-season, multi-location testing. Complex traits may require combining conventional breeding with genome editing for sustainable improvements.

Cost and Economic Impact

From the farm gate to international markets, CRISPR-edited rice has economic ramifications. At the farm level, disease resistance characteristics like OsSWEET14 cut pesticide expenditures by an estimated 20-40%, while yield gains of 10-25% from changes in Gn1a, DEP1, GS3, and IPA1 lower the cost per kilogram of grain produced. By adding market value through detoxification and nutritional modifications, rice is positioned as a premium health crop in addition to a staple. Higher productivity increases food security and lessens dependency on rice imports at the national level, whereas genome-edited rice may help keep prices stable internationally in the face of climate shocks. Therefore, the advantages of CRISPR extend beyond biology and have an impact on consumer markets, farmer livelihoods, and the larger agricultural economy.

Health Benefits and Biofortification

CRISPR-enabled rice has implications for public health in addition to production. In populations that rely on rice, changes in OsLsi2 directly lessen the risk of cancer and developmental problems by reducing the buildup of arsenic in grains by up to 63%. Modifications to SBE1b and other nutritional adjustments raise resistant starch by about 15%, which lowers the glycemic index and improves metabolic health. In order to combat widespread malnutrition, parallel approaches in iron and zinc biofortification—by triggering genes like OsNAS2 for improved micronutrient uptake—show promise. When taken as a whole, these approaches elevate rice from a staple to a functional diet that can enhance long-term health outcomes.

Future Directions

Notwithstanding these obstacles, rice genome editing is unquestionably on the rise. Improvements in delivery techniques may lessen the need for tissue culture and open editing to a larger variety of cultivars, while further tool development like prime editors and high-fidelity Cas variants promises more accurate and consistent changes. Stronger predictive modeling will also be made possible by expanding the dataset to include hundreds of experiments, assisting researchers in predicting which tactics will be most effective in particular situations. Priorities outside of the lab include integrating several changes to address complicated features like drought resilience, evaluating modified lines in the field, and making sure that nutritional improvements don't come at the expense of unintended trade-offs. New breeding possibilities could be made possible by developments in structural genome editing, polyploid rice, and de novo domestication. (Ashokkumar et al., 2016)

Farmers&Society

But in the end, farmers' fields—rather than labs—will be used to assess how well these advances work. Gains in output and less reliance on pesticides directly translate into safer working conditions and increased incomes for smallholders. Consumers' faith in local rice markets is strengthened by nutritional and detoxifying changes that increase food safety. The extent to which these advantages are experienced on a larger scale will depend on fair access to modified seeds and encouraging regulatory environments. However, issues with access still exist. While well-funded labs in Asia are responsible for many of the CRISPR innovations in rice, smallholders in South Asia and Africa, who are the populations most reliant on rice, frequently lack the means to take advantage of these advancements. Intellectual property restrictions on CRISPR tools and transformation technologies can also limit public-sector breeding programs. Ensuring that genome editing reaches beyond experimental plots into farmer-preferred varieties is thus as essential as the science itself.

UNDER PEER REVIEW

Recent Innovations in Rice Genome Editing

Through advancements that go beyond conventional knockouts, the CRISPR toolset is growing. Single-nucleotide precision is now possible thanks to base editors, which is perfect for adjusting allelic variations without impairing gene function. Prime editing enables targeted insertions and deletions that create opportunities for resistance against developing pathogens; in rice, it has already achieved >18% biallelic success. Under rice tissue culture, engineered nucleases such as Cas12a variants (Mb2Cas12a, RVRR) overcome heat barriers and provide editing efficiency of about 100% under tropical circumstances. CRISPR can quickly transform wild rice into cultivars suitable for farmers or change entire plant architectures, as demonstrated by structural genome editing and de novo domestication initiatives. These improvements ensure that rice breeding is no longer bound by the sluggish cycles of conventional selection but instead moves at the pace of molecular design.

CRISPR-Cas9 is unique in rice genome editing mostly due to its ease of use and versatility in comparison to previous methods. Although methods like TALENs and zinc finger nucleases (ZFNs) were significant first steps, they necessitated time-consuming protein modification for each target location. Because of this, they were accurate but impractical for widespread use. The system may be reprogrammed considerably more quickly and easily with CRISPR since it only requires a brief guide RNA to locate its target. Higher throughput, faster trait improvement, and wider application have resulted from this in rice research. While off-target effects still need careful management, CRISPR has become the go-to method for genome editing in rice because it combines efficiency with accessibility in a way older technologies never quite managed.

Finding away to get the editing tools into the cells in the first place is a major step in getting CRISPR to function in plants like rice. Vectors such as the *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* Ti plasmid are useful in this situation. Due to its ability to naturally transfer DNA fragments into plant genomes, the Ti plasmid has been a dependable delivery method in plant biology for many years. In contrast to techniques like particle bombardment, researchers have re-engineered it to be extremely successful and safe, enabling steady integration with fewer undesired copies. The Ti plasmid is particularly appealing due to its familiarity and track record; it is well recognized, somewhat easy to use, and consistently effective across a wide variety of plant species. The Ti plasmid continues to be the mainstay in the majority of rice genome editing efforts, while more recent strategies such as viral vectors or direct delivery of CRISPR proteins are being investigated.

Conclusion

Rice genome editing is no longer theoretical—it is actively reshaping one of humanity's most essential crops. From base editing (precise SNPs) to prime editing (insertions, deletions, substitutions), from Cas12a multiplexing to transcriptional regulation, and from detoxification to nutritional enhancement, the toolbox is expanding at unprecedented speed. But tools alone are insufficient. Without structured knowledge, each study risks reinventing the wheel. By curating a personalized dataset and applying machine learning, we can extract generalizable rules and accelerate rice improvement across ecological contexts. As climate shocks intensify, rice faces pressures unlike any seen before. Genome editing, combined with predictive datasets, offers a way to keep pace with these challenges—helping breeders design crops that are resilient, nutritious, and sustainable. For billions who depend on rice daily, these innovations are not optional; they are central to future food security. The convergence of molecular precision and data intelligence offers a path toward resilient, nutritious, and sustainable rice varieties. With these advances, rice will continue to nourish humanity—even under the extraordinary pressures of the 21st century.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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