



Edited on	06 June 2021
Date of 1st publication on IRRI website	16 February 2021
Title of the Application	Methods of Increasing Outcrossing Rates in Gramineae (hereinafter “2020 HO Provisional”)
Application Date	Provisional: 18 August 2020
Application Number	Provisional: 202021035587
Publication Number	Not yet applicable
Publication Date	Not yet applicable
Publication Link in the WIPO Website	Not yet applicable

BRIEF BACKGROUND

Heterosis (also called *hybrid vigor*) is the phenomenon in which F_1 hybrids derived from diverse parents show superiority over their parents. Hybrid varieties with heterosis are popular in many crops, including vegetables. Hybrid rice varieties also have remarkable strengths such as high grain yield compared to inbred rice cultivars.

However, the production cost of F_1 hybrid seeds in rice is much higher compared to other crops because of the unfavorable rice flower structures for outcrossing. Hence, in spite of the advantages of hybrid rice varieties, hybrid cultivars seeds are more expensive compared to the seeds of inbred varieties. Enhancement of outcrossing rates is a major challenge to provide superior F_1 hybrid variety seeds to rice farmers with relatively lower cost and price.

It would be beneficial to develop rice female parental lines with improved outcrossing rates, useful for increasing hybrid seed production. However, domesticated rice is a self-pollinating (inbreeding) crop, with very low rates of outcrossing. The low rate of outcrossing causes poor hybrid seed production (seed set of ~20%), resulting in high costs for hybrid rice seeds. One of the major reasons for the low outcrossing rate in rice is the morphological weakness of stigma (head of the pistil). To produce hybrid F₁ seeds, eventually the stigma of the female parents should capture pollen grains from the male donor plants for fertilization, but the stigma of cultivated rice is short and stays inside the hull during pollination, limiting pollen access.

IRRI has engaged in an ambitious research project aiming at developing rice female lines with a long-exserted stigma, a desirable phenotype for high outcrossing rate. A long-exserted stigma trait was found from the wild relative of rice, *Oryza longistaminata*, which favors outcrossing in nature, unlike the self-pollinating cultivated rice species *O. sativa*. Recently, the genetic element controlling the long-exserted stigma phenotype from the *O. longistaminata* was successfully identified through genetic analysis, and was transferred to popular hybrid parental lines using marker-assisted selection.

In initial field trials, the new parental lines exhibiting a long-exserted stigma showed a significant high outcrossing rate. Fine mapping and gene validation experiments using transgenic approaches allowed cloning the single dominant gene controlling the stigma phenotype from *O. longistaminata*.

This invention has the potential to improve the production of elite hybrid rice seeds that would be affordable for use by smallholder farmers. The invention would greatly facilitate the development of new rice female lines with long-exserted stigma.

NEED FOR FURTHER INVESTMENT

Further breeding and testing investments are needed. In particular:

- The HO trait needs to be introgressed in a number of elite female lines representing a wider range of genotypes from both two-line and three-line hybrid systems, to be used for the production of new hybrid rice varieties; and
- Hybrid seed production trials should be performed in a number of different agro climatic conditions and with a number of different genotypes, to produce robust data on the improved hybrid seed production caused by the HO trait.
- Horizontal transfer of the long-exserted stigma gene originated from *O. longistaminata* into wheat for testing functionality of the gene in wheat for use in hybrid wheat production. (If unnecessary, please remove this paragraph).

Several years will be necessary to produce the new female lines and generate the data from production trials. Additional financial resources and testing capacities are required which are beyond IRRI's capacity. For these reasons, IRRI seeks to attract partner organizations that can contribute financial and technical support for further development and utilization of the HO trait. The same partners, and others, will be asked to use the invention for scaling up, for the benefit of rice growers in developing countries.

PATENT APPLICATION

In 2020, IRRI applied for a provisional patent based on scientific results recently obtained at IRRI and functional identification of the gene from *Oryza longistaminata* causing increased stigma lengths (“HO trait”). The patent applications, and the patent claims do not restrict access to the original material that was the source of the HO trait. Materials used to develop the HO trait came from in-trust germplasm of the multilateral system (MLS).

This patent application, [part of a patent application family](#) applied in 2016, is expected to create incentives for seed companies and other organizations to partner with IRRI and invest 1) in additional and expanded research and development of the HO trait, as well as 2) to produce and introduce HO hybrids at production scale. Through these partnerships, the research and development of the HO trait will be accelerated, and the eventual commercialization of less expensive hybrids will allow farmers to benefit from affordable hybrid seeds.

IRRI intends to provide non-exclusive, royalty-free licenses to NARES partners and non-exclusive commercial licenses for private companies, with a commitment to impact assessment and impact acceleration. IRRI licensees will be bound to comply with all obligations of the SMTA. In addition, as per IRRI’s IP and Commercialization Policy, private licensees will be requested to activate their voluntary contribution to the Benefit-Sharing Fund of the Treaty.

In addition, and as per IRRI’s policy, royalties paid by future licensees to IRRI shall be shared on a voluntary basis, with the benefit-sharing fund of the [International Treaty for Plant Genetics for Food and Agriculture \(ITPGRFA\)](#).

As a non-profit international organization, IRRI promotes responsible technology transfer and intellectual property management in accordance with its [Intellectual Property and Commercialization Policy \(IP&C Policy\)](#) and with the [CGIAR Principles on the Management of Intellectual Assets \(“IA Principles”\)](#). This patent application conforms with the IA Principles concerning intellectual property applications in furtherance of the CGIAR Vision.