



Challenges in agri-food chain: biosensors in the meat production system

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Agri-food chain
Meat production
Animal health
Animal welfare
Food safety
Biosensors

ABSTRACT

The complexity of the meat chain is well-known, beginning with the Pre-harvest (feed, farm biosecurity, herd/flock health status, animal welfare, transportation, livestock market/abattoir lairage), followed by Harvest (slaughter, dressing, chilling) and Post-harvest (deboning, meat processing, packaging, distribution, retail, consumer) modules.

Over the previous decade, consumer awareness increased globally towards animal health, animal welfare and food safety issues, including food quality, food fraud, sustainability and climate change impact on meat production. Therefore, consumers demand proper and accurate information on the aforementioned issues in real time for making informed choices when buying their preferred meat/meat products. The transformation of traditional meat value chains towards sustainability needs reliable and affordable tools to optimize such transformation and achieve higher levels of food safety. Sensing systems (biosensors) and their regular use within an integrated meat production chain, from farm-to-fork, can play an important role and be a part of the solution for climate-smart and sustainable agri-food chain considering biosensor function in early and accurate detection of food(meat)-borne pathogens and other food contaminants (residues). The application of biosensors can provide accurate and concentrated data on animal health and welfare, including food borne hazards, to support food safety risk assessment in both, 'traditional' and 'novel' (cell-based meat) meat value chains for the benefit of the global population.

1. Introduction

The meat production chain is a highly complex system that involves various stages and stakeholders, beginning with Pre-harvest (feed, farm biosecurity, herd/flock health status, animal welfare, transportation, livestock market/abattoir lairage), followed by Harvest (slaughter, dressing, chilling) and Post-harvest (deboning, meat processing, packaging, distribution, retail, consumer) modules. Over the previous decade, consumer awareness increased globally towards animal health, animal welfare and

food safety issues and consumers demand proper and accurate information on the aforementioned issues in real-time for making informed choices when buying their preferred meat/meat products. The meat production system is also facing climate change impacts, recognized as the change of trends of global temperatures, precipitations and wind patterns, that are attributed directly or indirectly to human activity (UNFCCC, 1992), with extreme events becoming more frequent, severe and unpredictable. These events may jeopardize food security by influenc-

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Paper received May 16th 2023. Paper accepted May 28th 2023.

Published by Institute of Meat Hygiene and Technology — Belgrade, Serbia

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ing various biological contaminants, including food borne hazards, and altering their occurrence, virulence and distribution and increasing the exposure of consumers (FAO, 2022). For example, the potential association between rising temperatures and increased levels of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in certain zoonotic food (meat) borne pathogens has been observed, e.g., *Campylobacter* spp., *Salmonella* spp., *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Escherichia coli*. Furthermore, these pathogens are showing increased resistance, in particular, to Critically Important Antibiotics (CIA), reducing the efficacy and quality of clinical treatments (Poirel et al., 2018; Van Puyvelde et al., 2019; WHO, 2019). Another challenge related to the meat chain is its sustainability and environmental impact of the livestock production chain which contributes a certain share to anthropogenic Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions (FAO, 2022).

Mitigation strategies that include improvement of animal health and welfare can significantly reduce emissions. To achieve that goal, the specificity of livestock production and local production systems should be taken into consideration (Özkan et al., 2022). A new challenge is related to the process control of cell-based meat, which is based on culturing cells isolated from animals, followed by processing to produce food products that are comparable to the corresponding animal versions. The potential food safety hazards are associated with cell selection (faecal-borne pathogens), production (*Mycoplasma*), harvesting (biological components, such as growth factors and hormones from animal

serum), food processing and formulation (additives, ingredients, nutrients) (FAO, 2022b), but can be tackled more efficiently with smart application of biosensors.

2. Biosensor application in the meat chain

Application of biosensors in the farm-abattoir continuum has a wide range of possibilities and can contribute to and provide significant benefits in the optimization of livestock farm management practices.

2.1. Definition and structure of biosensors

A biosensor is a device which recognizes a target biomarker (e.g. pathogen, stress hormone, acute phase protein, viruses, etc.) via an immobilized sensing element called a bioreceptor (monoclonal antibody, RNA, DNA, aptamer, glycan, lectin, enzyme, tissue, whole cell). It has rapid, sensitive and specific detection capabilities. The typical biosensor system consists of a sensing element with bioreceptor and transducer that converts the signal into a corresponding electrical signal suitable for processing and visualization (Figure 1). The choice of biosensor type depends on the targeted biomarker, the nature of the analyte, the desired sensitivity and the intended application.

There are different types of biosensors based on the biological recognition element (bioreceptor) and the transducer used. For example, *electrochemical biosensors*, *piezoelectric biosensors*, *field-effect transistor (FET) biosensors* and *magnetic biosensors*.

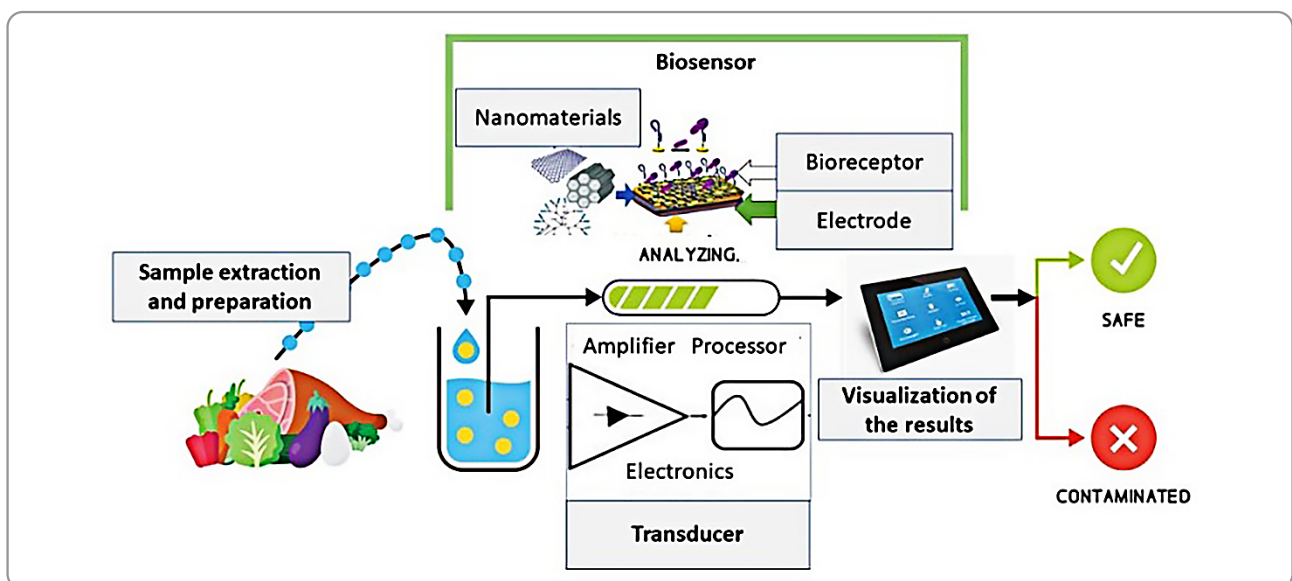


Figure 1. Biosensor with biosensing electrode (bioreceptor) and transducer that convert targeted biosignal to electrical one

2.2. Biosensors application in the farm-abattoir continuum

Biosensors, as point-of-care (PoC) devices, have the potential to detect and quantify physiological, immunological and behavioural responses of livestock and multiple animal species (Neethirajan *et al.*, 2017) in the farm-abattoir continuum. They present the lab-on-a-chip concept as an alternative to the commonly used methods such as enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) and/or reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) that require adequate environment and space, specifically trained personnel and are time-demanding and more expensive.

2.2.1 Biosensors on the farm

Application of biosensors on-farm has a wide range of technically available opportunities related to behavioural aspects of livestock connected with their feeding dynamics, e.g. *mechanical sensors* (jaw movement) (Rutter, 2000) or *acceleration sensors* (feeding behaviour) (Herinaina *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, biosensors able to detect metabolic conditions are available, such as *perspiration metabolite biosensors* (e.g., physical stress via analysis of sweat for sodium and lactate levels) (Schazmann *et al.*, 2010), *biosensors for salivary detection of metabolites* (cortisol) (Yamaguchi *et al.*, 2013) or *tears analysis biosensors* (glucose sensor) (La Belle *et al.*, 2014) or *breath analyses biosensors* (detection of Volatile Organic Compounds — VOCs, e.g. ketosis) (Leopold *et al.*, 2014), Bovine Respiratory Diseases (BRD) (Burciaga-Robles *et al.*, 2009), brucellosis (Knobloch *et al.*, 2009), bovine tuberculosis (Fend *et al.*, 2005), Johne's diseases (Kumanan *et al.*, 2009), ketoacidosis (Mottram *et al.*, 1999), foot and mouth (FMD) disease (Christensen *et al.*, 2011). Other biosensors for the detection of animal disease include detection of H7N1 antibodies for Avian Influenza virus (AIV) (Wang *et al.*, 2009) or detection of specific acute phase proteins such as biosensor for detection of mastitis (based on haptoglobin detection) (Martins *et al.*, 2019). Biosensors for the detection of stress in fish also have been developed to respond to stressors (changes in water chemistry, dissolved oxygen content, pH and metal toxicity) associated with water pollution and changes in climate, including behavioural changes (attacking behaviour and visual irritation) (Wu *et al.*, 2015a).

2.2.2 Biosensors in the abattoir

The regulatory-based or routine usage of biosensors for the purposes of meat production control and monitoring is not available. However, the recent advancement in design of biosensors enabled rapid and reliable qualitative and quantitative detection of food(meat)borne pathogens, such as lateral flow aptamer-based biosensors for point-of-care detection of *Salmonella enteritidis* and *Escherichia coli* O157:H7 with sensitivity level of 10^1 CFU/ml, respectively (Fang *et al.*, 2014; Wu *et al.*, 2015b), *Campylobacter* in meat (poultry) samples with detection level of 1.5×10^1 CFU/g (DNA-based sensor) (Manzano *et al.*, 2015), toxins of *Clostridium perfringens* (mammalian cell-based sensors) (Yoo *et al.*, 2016), *Escherichia coli* (antibody-based or conductometric-based biosensors) at detection levels from 1 to 10^3 CFU/mL (Jaffrezic-Renault *et al.*, 2007; El Ichi *et al.*, 2014). Biosensors in the abattoir can be also used for environmental control/monitoring of the condition of abattoir wastewater via detection of Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD), which is a widely used parameter to describe the level of organic pollution in water and wastewaters (Chee *et al.*, 1999). However, the performance of biosensors in the farm-abattoir continuum is constrained *in vitro* with the enriched bacterial suspensions encountered, and there is scarcity of data regarding the matrix (e.g. straw, faeces, blood) from the real operational environment (farm, abattoir), which requires further and deeper research.

2.3. Biosensors, meat production and climate change

Livestock is a potential climate change driver, generating up to 14.5% of total anthropogenic GHG emissions (Cheng *et al.*, 2022). The conclusions drawn from similar studies should be taken with precaution, having in mind that these studies mainly considered the intensive farming livestock production systems and not extensive systems (e.g., rotational grazing system), which might even have a positive environmental impact by allowing vegetation to recover and reducing gas emissions via enhancing carbon storage and reducing the need for intensive feed production. Biosensing technology, integrated in precision livestock farming, can be an important tool in monitoring solutions for reduction of GHG emissions that originate from intensive livestock farming and, thus, facilitating the climate change mitigation, including environmen-

tal and agricultural sustainability (Griesche and Baemmer, 2020; Wang et al., 2022). This type of biosensor technology should become the key component of climate-smart agriculture and “4th revolution” in the agri-food chain (FAO, 2015).

2.4. Biosensors and cell-based meat

The in-line monitoring of the bio-process of meat cultivation in bioreactors can improve the efficiency and consistency of cell-based (‘cultured’ or ‘cultivated’ or ‘clean’) meat production. Recently, cell-based food production (growing animal-based agricultural products directly from cell cultures), has been explored as a sustainable alternative to the conventional livestock and food of animal origin system, to satisfy the needs of increasing global demand for animal-source protein (OECD-FAO, 2022; FAO/

WHO, 2023). The prototype biosensors are under development to enable in-situ measurements of biomass, nutrient and metabolite quantities in specific growth media (Good Food Institute, 2020).

3. Conclusions

The regular and routine introduction of biosensors can facilitate the transformation of the whole food (meat) value chain ‘from farm to fork’ (via advanced Food Chain Information flow in the farm-abattoir continuum), by enabling continuous monitoring and/or early detection of animal disease and food safety hazards, so providing more sustainable and climate-friendly meat production, by reducing GHG emissions (via optimized nutrition, animal health and welfare), and by reduction of food waste.

Disclosure statement: No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding: This work was supported by Technology Transfer Programme of the Innovation Fund, Republic of Serbia within the project “Development and Integration of Multiplex Microfluidic Biosensors for Meat Safety monitoring in farm-to-slaughterhouse continuum (DIBMES)” [Grant Agreement TTP 1125] & programme ‘IDEAS’ of the Science Fund, Republic of Serbia, project “Microfluidic Lab-on-a-Chip platform for fast detection of pathogenic bacteria using novel electrochemical aptamer-based biosensors (MicroLabAptaSense)” [Grant Agreement No. 7750276].

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