SHORT COMMUNICATION

Genetic characterisation of CSN2 gene in Girgentana goat breed

Lina Tortorici, Rosalia Di Gerlando, Salvatore Mastrangelo, Maria T. Sardina, Baldassare Portolano
Dipartimento di Scienze Agrarie e Forestali, Università di Palermo, Italy

Abstract

Among calcium sensitive caseins, β-casein is the most abundant in goat milk, representing up to 50% of total casein content. The goat β-casein locus has been widely investigated and at least ten alleles have been identified in different goat breeds. The aim of this work was to investigate the polymorphisms of β-casein gene in Girgentana dairy goat breed in order to assess the genotype distribution and evaluate how frequencies have changed during the last 10 years, as genotype is known to influence technological and nutritional milk properties. Sequencing analysis and alignment of the obtained sequences of β-casein exon 7, showed the presence of C, C1, and A strong alleles, and 0’ null allele, with frequencies of 0.597, 0.326, 0.023, and 0.054, respectively. Seven genotypic classes were found in Girgentana goat breed and the most frequent genotype was C1(0.423) followed by CC (0.326), C1C1 (0.110), and C0 (0.096). No AA nor 0’0’ homozygous individuals were found. The presence of strong alleles at CSN2 gene in Girgentana goat breed could be useful for the production of milk with high protein content and good cheese-making properties. Moreover, food business operators should consider the possibility of reviving interest in Girgentana goat milk using weak and null genotypes at CSN2 locus to make peculiar food products, such as drinking milk.

Introduction

Caseins are the most abundant proteins in milk of ruminants and represent about 80% of total milk proteins, while the remaining part are whey proteins (mainly β-lactoglobulin and α-lactalbumin, although other whey proteins such as immunoglobulins and lactoferrin are also present). It is well known that caseins are encoded by four linked genes which form a unique cluster including κ-casein (CSN1S1), β-casein (CSN2), κ-casein (CSN1S2) and α-caseins (CSN3) genes (Grosclaude et al., 1978; Ferretti et al., 1999; Rijnkels, 2002). Goat casein genes are mapped on chromosome 6 within a region that spans about 250 Kb (Hayes et al., 1993; Popescu et al., 1996). Among caseins, the β-casein is the most abundant in milk, representing up to 50% of total casein content. The goat CSN2 encoding gene consists of nine exons ranging in size from 24 (exon 5) to 492 bp (exon 7) (Roberts et al., 1992; Hayes et al., 1993). At least, ten alleles have been identified in goat CSN2 gene. In particular, seven of these alleles (A, A1, C, C1, E, 0, and 0’) were characterised at DNA level (Rando et al., 1996; Persuy et al., 1999; Chessa et al., 2005, 2008; Cosenza et al., 2005), whereas B and D alleles were described only at protein level (Mahé and Grosclaude, 1993; Galliano et al., 2004). Another variant has been found by Chianese et al. (2007) at protein level but it was not yet characterised. Furthermore, the genetic variants A, A1, B, C, C1, D, and E are associated with a normal β-casein content in milk (about 5 g/L per allele) (Roberts et al., 1992; Mahé and Grosclaude, 1993; Neveu et al., 2002; Galliano et al., 2004; Cosenza et al., 2005; Caroli et al., 2006) while the two null alleles (0 and 0’), are associated with a non-detectable amount of this protein (Ramunno et al., 1995; Persuy et al., 1999).

The Girgentana goat is a Sicilian goat breed reared for its good dairy production. Due to sanitary policies, the size of the Girgentana goat breed decreased of almost 90% in 20 years, and nowadays, only 374 heads are registered (Persuy et al.). Among calcium sensitive caseins, β-casein is the most abundant in milk, representing up to 50% of total casein content. The goat

Materials and methods

Samples collection

A total of 196 samples, all females, of Girgentana goat breed were collected. The animals belonged to 10 different herds located in Sicily, among Agrigento and Palermo provinces. Samples were collected from 15 to 25 unrelated individuals per herd. About 10 mL of blood was used for genomic DNA extraction with a salting out method (Miller et al., 1988). After extraction, the DNA samples were quantified, using a NanoDrop ND-1000 spectrophotometer (NanoDrop Technologies, Wilmington, DE, USA), then they were diluted to a final concentration of 50 ng/µL in ultrapure water and stored at 4°C until use.

Amplification protocols

Different polymerase chain reaction (PCR) protocols were used to genotype A, A1, C, C1, E, and 0’ alleles of goat CSN2 gene in Girgentana goat breed. The 0 allele was not genotyped because it has been identified only in Creole and Pyrenean goat breeds (Persuy et al., 1999). The first protocol was used to amplify a 374 bp fragment of exon 7 using primers and PCR conditions by Chessa et al. (2005) in order to discriminate AA1, C1C1, E, and 0’ alleles. The second protocol was used to discriminate allele C to C1 amplifying a 325 bp fragment of exon 9 using primers by Chessa et al. (2008) and PCR conditions by Chessa et al. (2005) with an annealing temperature of 56°C. Finally, the polymerase chain reaction restriction fragment length polymorphism (PCR-RFLP) protocol proposed by Cosenza et al. (2005) was used to discriminate allele A to A1. All PCR products were checked by electrophoresis on 2% agarose gel stained with SYBR Safe (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA, USA).

Sequencing protocol

The PCR products were purified using PCR Product Clean-Up protocol as suggested by Fermentas (Hanover, MD, USA) using 10 U of
Results and discussion

Sequencing analysis and alignment of the obtained sequences showed the presence of A/A1, C, C1, and 0′ alleles (Table 1) in *Girgentana* goat breed. All the individuals carrying A/A1 allele (n=9) were genotyped with PCR-RFLP protocol (Cosenza et al., 2005), but the A1 allele was not found in our samples. Among the analysed samples and within the sequenced regions, no new polymorphisms were detected. The most frequent allele was C (0.597) followed by C1 (0.326), 0′ (0.054), and A (0.023) (Table 2). These results are in agreement with those reported by Chessa et al. (2005) and Gigli et al. (2008) who described the predominance of C allele (together with C1 allele) in Italian and Sicilian goat breeds, respectively. Similar results were reported in Czech (Sztankóová et al., 2008), Turkish and Indian goat breeds (Chessa et al., 2007) for the C allele frequency. In a previous study, Marletta et al. (2005) reported only A* (A+B+C) and 0′ alleles in *Girgentana* goat breed. In contrast to Italian goat breeds, the A allele was the most frequent in West African (Caroli et al., 2007) and some Turkish, Indian and Sudanese (Chessa et al., 2007) goat breeds.

The results of our study showed the presence of the silent allele C1 with high frequency (0.326) in *Girgentana* goat breed. Some differences could be highlighted between our data and those reported by Gigli et al. (2008) for this goat breed, and in particular for A and 0′ allele frequencies that showed lower frequencies in our samples. Considering that the number of flocks and their geographical distribution have changed during these last years, the individual samples are not the same of previous works (Marletta et al., 2005; Gigli et al., 2008). These differences could be probably due to different number of analysed samples belonging to different herds.

Table 2 shows the seven genotypic classes found in *Girgentana* goat breed. The most frequent genotype was C1 (0.423), followed by CC (0.326), C1C1 (0.110), and C0′ (0.096). No AA nor 0′0′ homozygous individuals were found. The average values of Ho and He, and P value associated with the null hypothesis of Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium (HWE) were estimated. The *Girgentana* goat breed is not in HWE (P<0.05) at this locus and this could be probably due to relatively high heterozygosity (He=0.4337 vs Ho=0.5663), or to high level of inbreeding (Fis=0.140) due to the presence of local bottlenecks (Mastrangelo et al., 2013).

Conclusions

Our study showed the predominance of C and C1 strong alleles with high frequency (0.926) in *Girgentana* goat breed as previously reported in other studies (Chessa et al., 2005; Gigli et al., 2008); hence, our results could be considered as an upgrade of previous results. The presence of strong alleles at CSN2 gene in *Girgentana* goat breed could be useful for the production of milk with high protein content and good cheese-making properties (Ramunno et al., 2007). Food business operators should consider the possibility of reviving interest in *Girgentana* goat milk using weak and null genotypes at CSN2 locus to make peculiar food products, such as drinking milk. Furthermore, considering that CSN2 locus is closely linked to CSN1S1, CSN1S2, and CSN3 loci, further studies are needed to determine the relationship among alleles at CSN2 locus and at the three other casein loci in order to include haplotype information in breeding programmes for conservation of *Girgentana* goat breed.
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