Cottonseed: a sustainable contributor to global protein requirements

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Kumar, M., Tomar, M., Punia, S., Grasso, S., Arrutia, F., Choudhary, J., Singh, S., Verma, P., Mahapatra, A., Patil, S., Dhumal, S., Potkule, J. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8126-7027>, Saxena, S. and Amarowicz, R. (2021) Cottonseed: a sustainable contributor to global protein requirements. Trends in Food Science & Technology, 111. pp. 100-113. ISSN 0924-2244 doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tifs.2021.02.058> Available at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/96843/>

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To link to this article DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tifs.2021.02.058>

Publisher: Elsevier

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Highlights

- Physical, chemical, and biological methods for improving utilization of cottonseed as protein source.
- Solvent extraction remains the method of choice.
- Functional properties and amino acid profile for evaluation of quality of cottonseed protein are well discussed.
- Application of cottonseed protein as direct and indirect source of supplement in human nutrition.
- Food safety and regulatory issues for application of cottonseed protein/flour in foods is outlined in the review.

Structured Abstract

Background: Cottonseed is a sustainable source of plant protein, producing ~10 million metric tons of protein globally. This protein has the potential to fulfil the annual protein requirement of more than half a billion people globally. Its functional properties have established the potential of cottonseed protein (CSP) as a candidate for alleviating malnutrition in the Asian and African continents. Regardless of these quality attributes, the inherent association of gossypol with CSP makes it unsuitable for direct human consumption due to its toxicity.

Scope and Approach: The present review elaborates on physical, chemical and biological methods for enhancing the quality and suitability of CSP for human nutrition by reducing the gossypol content to permissible limits (450 ppm) per the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and World Health Organization. Amino acid profiling, functional property (water holding capacity, oil holding capacity, foaming properties, emulsification characteristics, and protein solubility), *in vitro* protein digestibility and molecular weight analyses are the parameters considered important for the application of CSP in foods. This review also highlights the diverse applications of CSP directly in human nutrition or indirectly as animal protein.

Key Findings and Conclusions: Degossypolization is mainly performed by solvent extraction, although gamma irradiation and the use of microorganisms are gaining momentum. CSP is a good candidate for use in food and feed formulations, with a balanced amino acid composition and functional properties comparable to those of soy protein. Integration of both chemical and biological methods might prove to be more efficient for degossypolization and improving the utilization of CSP for human nutrition.

Cottonseed: a sustainable contributor to global protein requirements

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Keywords: Cottonseeds; malnutrition; application; plant protein; food safety and regulation; protein isolate

1. Introduction

1.1. Problem of malnutrition in the African and Asian continents

Malnutrition is an ever-increasing pandemic throughout Africa and Asia. India accounts for 43% of malnourished children under the age of five years, accounting for 61 deaths per thousand births. Bangladesh (41%) is closest-ranked to India, followed by Afghanistan (33%), Pakistan (31%), Nepal (29%), Myanmar (23%), Sri Lanka (22%), Thailand (7%), and China (3%) (Black and Sesikiran, web source: <https://www.nestle.com/sites/default/files/asset-library/documents/creating%20shared%20value/expert-opinions.pdf> accessed on 25/12/2020) (Fig. 1). Similarly, African countries also show a similar problem of malnutrition in children under the age of 5 years. Malnourished children in most other developing and underdeveloped nations range from high (30–39%) to very high (>40%) (United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organization, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, 2020). This problem does not end in childhood, as it also persists in the elderly populations of these countries. There is an urgent need to address the dire problem of malnutrition in the Asian and African continents. Consequently, the UN Sustainable Development Summit in 2015 in New York adopted the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, which consists of 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), out of which 2 SDGs, i.e., goal 2 ‘Zero hunger’ and goal 3 ‘Good health and well-being’, are directly related to alleviating malnutrition. The current review addresses the possible contribution of CSP to accomplishing these goals and alleviating malnutrition.

Fig. 1.

1.2. Cottonseed as a sustainable protein source

The global cottonseed production in 2019/2020 is estimated to be ~44.84 metric million tons (MMT) (Statista, 2020 accessed on 25/07/2020). Cottonseeds contain 17–22% oil, and after oil extraction, cottonseed meal (CSM) is obtained as a coproduct (Hernandez, 2016) (Fig. 2). CSM has the potential to produce ~10 MMT proteins, which could fulfil the annual protein requirements of more than half a billion people globally (Wedegaertner & Rathore, 2015). The cottonseed protein fraction contains the highest content of salt-soluble protein (globulins: 33–63.7%), followed by water-soluble (albumins: 20.8–32.2%) and alkali-soluble (glutelins: 9.2–28%) proteins (Balandrán-Quintana et al., 2019). As evidenced by a recent review, most African and Asian countries have a higher severity of malnutrition and are ranked 90–119 in the Global Hunger Index, 2018 (Rathore et al., 2020). Nevertheless, these are the highest cotton-producing nations of the world, producing more than 1000 tons of cottonseed annually (Rathore et al., 2020). Hence, the successful and efficient utilization of cottonseed as a protein source could be a game changer in mitigating malnutrition in the most severely affected countries.

1.3. Problem of gossypol in cottonseed or cottonseed meal

Gossypol is a toxic polyphenolic compound present throughout cotton (*Gossypium hirsutum*) plants, with the highest concentration (up to 2.4% on a dry weight basis) in cottonseeds. The presence of gossypol in cottonseeds or CSM limits its use both as feed for small ruminants and nonruminants and as a supplement in the human diet. The presence of this toxin in diets has several deleterious effects on the growth, development and reproductive health of animals, limiting the use of CSM as a feed in ruminants (Zhang et al., 2006a). Increasing prices of soy or animal-based proteins in Asian and African countries make CSM a more competitive and sustainable protein source for human nutrition. This protein source can be feasibly utilized if the gossypol content in CSM is reduced to a safe consumption level. The

United States Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have set the limits for free gossypol in CSM-based protein products for safe utilization by nonruminants to 450 ppm.

1.4. Strategies for efficient utilization of cottonseed meal (CSM) as a source of protein

Initially, trials for the removal of gossypol from CSM were executed through traditional physical approaches, e.g., the gland flotation technique, heat treatment, pressure cooking, and the liquid cyclone process. These processes were further found to be non-feasible due to their high processing costs (Rathore et al., 2020). Gamma and electron beam irradiation are some of the recent physical techniques for reducing the gossypol present in the CSM. Both of these irradiations caused similar effects in reducing both free and total gossypol contents in a dose-dependent manner. Further molecular biology tools have been employed to reduce gossypol from cottonseeds, and recently, a group of researchers working at Texas A & M University achieved ultralow gossypol concentrations in cottonseeds using molecular biology tools (Rathore et al., 2020). However, there are several regulatory issues in almost all countries surrounding ensuring the safe release of transgenic products (transgenic cottonseed protein) into the environment and for animal and human health, making the utilization of CSM in human nutrition more difficult. In another work, researchers from the New Mexico Agricultural Experiment station developed a glandless cotton cultivar, 'Numex COT 15 GLS', through back crossing (Zhang et al., 2016).

The chemical-based removal of gossypol from CSM is more feasible for its use as a feed for nonruminants and as a supplement in human nutrition. The application of solvent-based techniques also reduced the gossypol levels in CSM, making it appropriate as feed for fisheries, poultry farms and piggeries (Rathore et al., 2020). Solvents such as ethanol and acetone acidified with phosphoric acid were found to effectively reduce 90–95% of the total

gossypol from the CSM (Pelitire et al., 2014). In another study, an acidified polar solvent containing 2-propanol and water in a ratio of 95:5 v/v with oxalic acid was used to remove gossypol from defatted CSM (Singh et al., 2020). The authors achieved a 95.43% reduction. Both acid and solvent synergistically assist in gossypol extraction. The acids assist in the hydrolysis and release of the bound gossypol, while the solvents solubilize the liberated gossypol. On the other hand, a biological approach using various microbial strains and enzymes is a greener approach for reducing the gossypol content in CSM (Kumar et al., 2019a).

1.5. Application of cottonseed protein as a food supplement: functional characterization and functional properties

The potential of CSP for use in human nutrition was further established by various researchers through protein quality analysis. Amino acid profiling and functional property {(water holding capacity (WHC), oil holding capacity (OHC), foaming capacity (FC), foaming stability (FS), emulsification activity (EA), emulsification stability (ES), and protein solubility (PS)}, *in vitro* protein digestibility (IVPD), and molecular weight analyses are a few parameters that are considered important for the application of CSM in foods.

This review will assess the suitability of using CSP in human food by a) summarizing the currently available methodologies (physical, chemical, and biological) for reducing gossypol levels to legal limits, b) providing updated information on cottonseed protein nutritional and functional properties, and c) reviewing CSP applications as direct and indirect sources of supplements in human nutrition.

2. Approaches for the efficient utilization of cottonseed meal (CSM) as a protein source

2.1. Physical methods for the degossypolization of CSM

Cottonseed contains 0.002–6.64% gossypol on a dry weight basis depending upon the cotton variety and the region and climatic factors in which the cotton crop is cultivated (Gadelha et al., 2014). The cotton plant has resin glands ranging from 50–400 μm in size. These glands are present in plant petals, leaves, root bark, bolls and seeds and secrete gossypol (Gardner et al., 1976). Gossypol is primarily found in cottonseed kernels at concentrations ranging from 0.8–2% on a dry weight basis. It is biosynthesized in cotton plants and is classified as a dimeric sesquiterpenoid since it is synthesized by dimerization of hemi-gossypol moieties (Cai et al., 2010).

In the past, the extraction/removal of gossypol from cottonseed was achieved using gland flotation (Boatner et al., 1949), liquid cyclone (Smith, 1971), and air classification (Decossas et al., 1982) physical techniques. These methods were based on physical properties such as a difference in density and physical forces such as gravitational force. In both of these method types, the glands containing gossypol were separated from the CSM (Singh et al., 2015). In the gland flotation technique, a density difference between glands containing gossypol and kernel tissues was exploited, and the flakes were agitated in a slurry of solvents having a density less than that of the pigment glands. The glands were then separated by flotation and obtained as a top layer, while the slurry was allowed to stand. In the liquid cyclone process, the cottonseeds were suspended in a mixed solvent with low moisture and then passed through a colloidal mill, where the glands containing gossypol were dispersed without being broken. These resin glands were separated from CSM using gravitational force or sedimentation and/or flotation, depending upon the gravity of the suspending liquid (Smith, 1971). The liquid cyclone process was reported to produce edible CSM with less than 400 ppm free gossypol and more than 65% protein (Gardner et al., 1976). After approval by the USFDA, the liquid cyclone process commercially started production in 1973 in Lubbock, Texas. Despite its merits, this process had limited financial feasibility and thus was non-

operational after a short time period. The air classification process of gossypol separation was developed as an advanced version of the liquid cyclone process. The air classification technique was found to have advantages over the liquid cyclone process and was financially more feasible but was never used for commercial production (Decossas et al., 1982). Numerous patents were granted for the production of edible flour from cottonseeds using physical methods (Rathore et al., 2020; Rathore et al., 2019).

Heat and pressure conditions (Gribbins, 1951) have also been evaluated for reducing the gossypol concentrations in cottonseed kernels. It was established that pressure cooking decreased the gossypol concentration by up to 91.1% in CSM (Gad & El-Zalaki, 1980). However, this method decreased the protein content in the kernels and fatty acid content in the oil, limiting its application for the detoxification of CSM. Later, supercritical CO₂ extraction was also applied to degossypolization. Supercritical CO₂ extraction was employed for the extraction of oil with less than 0.045% gossypol from cottonseeds (Bhattacharjee, 2007). Supercritical CO₂ extraction is the preferred technique because it is highly efficient, needs a shorter extraction time and reduces the requirement for refining, as it reduces the gossypol content in the oil.

Recently, gamma and electron irradiation have been found to be effective in reducing antinutritional factors from various plant-based sources (Nayefi et al., 2014; Shawrang et al. 2011; Ebrahimi-Mahmoudabad & Taghinejad-Roudbaneh, 2011; Fatehi et al., 2020). Bahraini et al. (2017) studied the effects of gamma and electron irradiation (10, 20 and 30 kGy doses) on the protein quality, chemical composition and digestibility of protein from CSM. The results showed that electron irradiation at 30 kGy resulted in a higher reduction in the free gossypol content and total gossypol content compared to gamma irradiation. In another study, the application of 40 kGy electron irradiation was found to be more effective in reducing the free gossypol content (82.37%) compared to gamma irradiation (59.16%) (Nayefi et al.,

2014). A similar reduction was also registered when applying 25 kGy gamma and electron irradiation, making the resultant CSM fit for poultry feeding (Shawrang et al., 2011). The reduction in the gossypol concentration due to irradiation may be due to the formation of bonds between the gossypol units, their crosslinking with other compounds or the oxidation or fragmentation of the gossypol structure (Shawrang et al., 2011). Irradiation presents several advantages over the aforementioned traditional methods, such as the absence of negative environmental effects, the elimination of microbial and fungal contaminants, and the fact that the treatments cause no damage to nutrients or formation of undesirable products (Ghanbari et al., 2012). It is evident that recent physical technologies, including gamma and electron irradiation, can be effectively used to reduce the antinutritional factor gossypol to improve the nutritional profile of cottonseeds or CSM. The operation of this high-energy radiation is simple and economical compared to economically nonviable traditional approaches (air classification and gland flotation). However, gamma and electron irradiation techniques are not efficient enough to decrease the gossypol content to safer levels. In addition, the higher establishment cost and threats associated with gamma and electro-irradiation are major disadvantages of these techniques. Furthermore, the WHO has set a safer dose for gamma irradiation treatment, which is <10 kGy, as no toxicological hazard has been reported at this level. These lower levels, however, improve the overall quality of the foods but are not sufficient for decreasing antinutritional factors from oilseeds or pulses. Hence, more focused research is needed to optimize the conditions for reducing gossypol in cottonseeds or CSM. Recently, solvent extraction has been the most commonly employed method, which is discussed in section 2.2.

2.2. Chemical method for the degossypolization of CSM

In this method, the solute CSM is dissolved in a liquid solvent, which facilitates the close association of gossypol with the solvent. The choice of solvent to be utilized is dependent upon the solubility of the solute in the desired solvent, effectiveness of the process, nontoxicity, reusability, and low cost (Gribbins, 1951, Smith, 1971; Batson et al., 1951; Thurber et al., 1954). The benefits of the solvent extraction technique include the good extraction efficiency of gossypol with very low economic inputs. The factors affecting the extraction technique are the particle size, moisture content, temperature, medium (acidic or neutral), solvent-to-seed ratio and extraction time (Zhang et al., 2018a).

The extraction or removal of gossypol from CSM/cottonseed or cottonseed supplemented with lysine can lead to improved protein quality with increased lysine availability (Gadelha et al., 2014; Saki et al., 2012). Gossypol acts as a toxic material in CSM, as it binds with the lysine of the protein and is converted from free to bound gossypol. The binding of gossypol to arginine and the lysine part of the meal protein occurs due to covalent bonds between the gossypol molecule and epsilon amino groups (Gadelha et al., 2014), as shown in Fig. 3 below.

This bound gossypol protein complex denatures the protein and imparts a dark brownish-black colour to the extracted CSM, which requires further detoxification (Berardi & Frampton, 1957). It has been reported in the literature that solvent extraction of CSM performed at elevated temperatures causes the binding of proteins with gossypol, degrading the nutritive value of the CSP (Hron et al., 1987). Harris et al. (1949) pointed out in their study that a number of useful byproducts of CSM, such as gossypol, fatty acids, protein and phospholipids, can be separated and used as marketable products.

Commonly employed solvents for extraction include light paraffinic petroleum fractions such as pentane (boiling range, 31–36 °C), hexane, heptane (boiling range, 90–99 °C) and octane (boiling range, 102–129 °C). Nonpolar solvents such as hexane have been

found to perform better than polar solvents. Previously, mixed solvents including commercial hexane and ethyl alcohol (Liu et al., 1981), acetone-hexane (Kuk et al., 2005), acetone, cyclohexane and water (Lawhon, 1969), and methylene chloride and ethanol (Jhonson & Lusas et al., 1983) were used for the extraction or removal of gossypol from CSM. Researchers have also explored the removal of gossypol from CSM by multiple extractions with organic solvents, viz. 1-Butanol hydrochloride, dichloromethane, 2-propanol and 1-butanol (Liadakis et al., 1993). However, hexane is now considered a toxic solvent per environmental norms, so various alternative green solvents are currently being utilized. These green solvents include ethanol, methanol and isopropanol, butanol and their combinations (Byrne et al., 2016; Prat et al., 2016). In addition to solvents, the use of calcium hydroxide (2%) and pressure-cooking treatment also reduced the free gossypol content of CSM for application in poultry feed (Nagalakshmi et al., 2002). Furthermore, the addition of dehydrated ferrous-sulfate to CSM at an equal amount to that of free gossypol lowered the free gossypol levels to 0.0001%. Dehydrated ferrous-sulfate mixed CSM was found to be suitable for the consumption of broiler chickens up to 56 days of age. (Tabatabai et al., 2002).

Researchers have investigated the use of trichloroethylene as a solvent to minimise the free gossypol content with minimal denaturation of proteins (Arnold & Juhl, 1955). The solvent extraction yielded a higher soluble protein content from CSM compared to the earlier heating (cooking) method. A substantial reduction in free gossypol was obtained, with a minimum reduction in water-soluble protein fractions when the extraction was carried out at low temperatures of up to 50 °C. Two important factors that are influenced by solvent extraction of CSM are the free gossypol content and meal protein quality. The researchers agreed with the findings that extraction performed at low temperatures can considerably lower free gossypol contents in the residual oils and meals. Rao & Arnold (1958) utilized ethanol as a solvent to remove gossypol from cottonseeds in their pilot plant studies. They used four

different concentrations of ethanol (91.5%, 95.4%, 98% and 99.9%) and three different temperatures (65 °C, 70 °C, and 78.3 °C) with extraction times of 10 to 100 minutes. Dechary et al. (1952) employed ten different solvents, viz. methanol, ethanol, dioxane, butanone, acetone, isopropanol, chloroform, 1,2-di-chloroethane, perchloroethylene and trichloroethylene, for the extraction of gossypol from cottonseeds in their study. The percent removal of free gossypol using different solvent pairs ranged from 7.27% in the case of isopropanol to 79.54% for 90% aqueous butanone. Aqueous dioxane (90%) removed 70.54% of free gossypol, and aqueous butanone (95%) could remove 52.72% of free gossypol from the flakes, while chlorine-substituted hydrocarbons were least effective in removing free gossypol. The extraction temperature and amount of moisture in the extraction system affected the rate of gossypol extraction when butanone-water pairs were employed as solvents. This was attributable to the fact that a higher moisture content in the extraction system resulted in swelling of the flakes, which led to a decrease in the efficiency of solvent extraction. Baliga et al. (1957) found that removing the bound gossypol from meal resulted in an increase in the protein quality and its nutritive value. The bound gossypol was removed using 70% acetone and aniline without heat treatment to obtain a gossypol-CSP complex with 3.25% bound gossypol. The insoluble, inert gossypol-protein complex reduced the loss of nutritive value of the protein. A method was reported for the preparation of cottonseed protein isolate (CSPI) using meal from commercial expeller press-solvent extraction (De. Buckle et al., 1979). Wan et al. (1995), in another study, employed alternate solvents for gossypol removal from cottonseeds, which posed a lower health risk than hexane. Five solvents, viz. n-heptane, neoheptane, cyclopentane, and cyclohexane, were utilized in their study. All these solvents were able to reduce the gossypol levels by different rates. Gossypol was removed utilizing a solvent system consisting of isohexane and 5 to 25% ethanol or isopropyl alcohol (IPA) (Kuk & Hron, 1998). IPA as an extraction solvent was suggested as a promising

alternative to hexane (Lusas et al., 1991). Highly digestible cottonseed flour was obtained using solvent extraction with acidic ethanol, having a 53.8% protein content that makes it suitable for replacing fish meal (Anderson et al., 2016).

The extraction/removal of gossypol involves a two-stage process. In the first stage, the solvent comes into contact with the solid (cottonseed/CSM). The solvent interacts with the resin glands present in the solid, solubilizing gossypol. In the second stage, intense scrubbing of the solid occurs at the solid-liquid interface, causing efficient diffusion of the solute (gossypol) into the bulk liquid phase by molecular diffusion. The extraction now becomes a mass transfer process, which is controlled by the liquid film resistance and internal solid resistance. These resistances need to be countered by the solvent to allow it to penetrate into the solid, dissolve gossypol and diffuse back to the liquid phase. This internal solid resistance is the rate-limiting step. The whole process is explained below with the help of a schematic diagram (Fig. 3). The results of solvent-based degossypolization employed by different researchers are given in Table 1.

The generally recognized as safe (GRAS) status of solvents, e.g., acetone and ethanol (Kumar et al., 2019c), for the production of foodstuffs as per council directive 2009/32/EC (2009) makes them ideal solvents for the removal of gossypol. In addition, these solvents have a higher level of solubility of gossypol, making them suitable for the extraction or removal of gossypol from CSM. The solvents are also replenished during the process, making this method more economically feasible. Findings from the scientific community also suggest that acetone is a relatively better solvent than ethanol and methanol for the extraction or removal of gossypol from CSM. This may be due to the greater interaction of acetone with the hydrophobic structure of the gossypol present in the resin glands, leading to solubilization of gossypol in the solvent system, which ultimately reduces the gossypol content in the CSM.

However, more studies are required to optimize the process of degossypolization to safer limits.

Fig. 3.

Table 1

2.3. Biological method for degossypolization of CSM

A number of physical and chemical methods have been developed by researchers for degossypolization, but there are several limitations associated with these methods. These methods result in an inferior active vitamin content, protein quality and feed palatability with high energy wastage (Zhang et al., 2018b). The residual solvent is difficult to remove in the case of chemical degossypolization from CSM. This residual solvent is also potentially harmful to both ruminants and nonruminants. During oil recovery from CSM, the use of low temperatures and short durations is crucial to maintaining the protein quality and acceptable concentration of free gossypol. Higher temperatures often resulted in a reduced lysine content in the protein. Therefore, it is necessary to develop an approach for degrading free gossypol and preventing its absorption in animal systems. Studies have indicated that some microorganisms belonging to the genera *Candida*, *Torulopsis*, *Aspergillus*, *Mucor*, *Rhizopus* and *Bacillus* could effectively degrade free gossypol. A brief overview of free gossypol detoxification by microorganisms with optimized parameters is presented in Table 2. Detoxification of CSM by microbes may follow two different hypotheses—first, the utilization of gossypol as a carbon source decreases the total gossypol in the CSM, and second, the transformation of free gossypol to bound gossypol decreases the overall toxicity of the CSM due to the action of microbes after the fermentation process (Zhang et al., 2018a). Microbial detoxification of CSM can not only help achieve the desired safety criteria but can

also enhance the protein and amino acid contents. Zhang et al. (2018a) found a significant reduction in free and bound gossypol contents in fermented samples compared to control (uninoculated) samples. A *Bacillus subtilis* strain found in the fluid of cow rumens was isolated and characterized and found to be involved in the biodegradation of gossypol (Zhang et al., 2018b). Short-term (4 days) and long-term (14 days) fermentation using yeast strains was evaluated to improve the overall quality of CSM. It was found that both fermentations caused an increase in both the total essential (highest increment in case of **M** = 44%) and total nonessential amino acid contents (16–18%). Furthermore, fermentation also resulted in the reduction of gossypol by 17%, which could be due to enzymatic or microbial degradation of the gossypol structure (Duodu et al., 2018).

Biodegradation of polyphenolic compounds is an oxidative process that is mediated by enzymes such as oxygenases, hydroxylases, peroxidases and laccases (Mageshwaran et al., 2018). Laccases secreted by wood-degrading fungi have received substantial attention due to their involvement in the transformation of phenolic compounds into their oxidized forms. The exact mechanism behind the biological degradation of gossypol is not yet clear, but Rajarathnam et al. (2001) observed the involvement of laccase in gossypol biodegradation. The authors found that an enzyme extract produced from *Pleurotus florida* on rice straw containing laccase was able to effectively degrade gossypol. An increase in the enzyme concentration caused an increase in gossypol decomposition. The enzyme blank containing boiled extract showed no gossypol degradation. Gossypol is a polyphenolic compound, and laccase, peroxidase and polyphenol oxidase are gossypol-degrading enzymes. A mixed fungal culture was grown on minimal medium containing gossypol, and its crude supernatant was extracted and tested for laccase, peroxidase and polyphenol oxidase activities. Workers observed higher laccase activity and lower polyphenol oxidase and peroxidase activity in the crude supernatant (Mageshwaran et al., 2018). The purified supernatant had 27–35-fold

higher specific activity of laccase. In the gossypol degradation experiment with crude and purified enzyme extracts, the authors found that residual gossypol levels were reduced by 30 and 60%, respectively, which explains the role of laccase in gossypol degradation. The author also confirmed the identity of laccase by molecular mass determination using SDS-PAGE. FTIR analysis of degraded gossypol showed a considerable reduction in the toxic aldehyde stretch of gossypol.

2.3.1. Factors affecting the degradation of gossypol in solid-state fermentation (SSF)

Microorganism-mediated degradation of free gossypol in CSM has been well studied by many researchers using SSF. This method is affected by several input factors for reducing the gossypol concentration to a minimal amount. The initial moisture content in SSFs is one of the most important factors because it largely affects the physical properties of solid substrates. Low moisture levels during fermentation reflect poor solubility of nutrients in substrates with a lower degree of swelling, which ultimately results in poor microorganism growth (Murthy, 1999). In contrast, a higher moisture level decreases the porosity of the substrate, which limits heat and oxygen transfer during fermentation, ultimately decreasing the efficiency of free gossypol degradation (Khalaf et al., 2008; Ohno et al., 1992). Several researchers have found that an initial moisture level of 50–55% is optimal for achieving maximum free gossypol degradation (Khalaf et al., 2008). The metabolic activities of microorganisms are largely affected by the pH value of the medium. For different fungi involved in this process, pH values ranging from 4–6 are optimal for the maximum degradation of free gossypol (Weng & Sun, 2006; Khalaf et al., 2008). A higher pH affects the enzyme activity and growth of the organism.

A favourable incubation temperature is the key for biological degradation of gossypol in a solid medium. The metabolic activities of organisms are markedly affected by

temperature fluctuations during the process. Khalaf et al. (2008) found a significant difference in the biodegradation of free gossypol, with a maximum of 86.5% at 30 °C compared to 81% at 35/25 °C and 57% at 40 °C. Therefore, the incubation temperature and its regulation during the process are important, as much heat production and accumulation occurs during SSF, resulting from the poor heat dissipation property of the solid substrate. The initial load of inoculum is another crucial factor for the biodegradation of free gossypol. A lower inoculum load may produce an insufficient amount of microbial biomass, which may result in poor efficiency of gossypol biodegradation, while a heavier inoculum may produce a much higher biomass, which may lead to poor gossypol-degrading enzyme secretion (Zhang et al., 2006b). Khalaf et al. (2008) investigated the effects of various inoculum levels (10^3 – 10^9 cells per g) on free gossypol reduction and found that a concentration of 1×10^7 cell/g *Candida tropicalis* degraded a maximum of 88.6% free gossypol compared to 1×10^3 cell/g, which could degrade only 56%. He found a decreasing trend in free gossypol as the inoculum level reached beyond 1×10^7 cell/g. Vellaichamy et al. (2016) used mixed cultures of fungi for degossypolization of cottonseed cakes and studied the effect of moisture, inoculum level, temperature, and time period during SSF. The optimum conditions, i.e., 70% moisture content, 30 °C temperature, 15% inoculum level, and 48-h time period, resulted in the maximum detoxification of gossypol. Detoxification of free gossypol (83.6%) was observed in *Pleurotus sajor-caju* with *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, and that of bound gossypol (63.3%) was observed in *Candida tropicalis* with *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*. In another work, a new strain of fungi isolated from soil was identified through molecular biology and morphological techniques. The *Aspergillus* genus demonstrated high degradation of gossypol at an optimum temperature of 30 °C and incubation time of 72 h (Yang et al., 2011).

Furthermore, supplementation with minerals was found to increase the fermentation efficiency (free gossypol detoxification) and protein content. Zhang et al. (2007) found an

increase in the free gossypol detoxification efficiency (from 93.47 to 96.67%) and an enhancement in the crude protein content in the fermented product with the addition of mineral additives. The researchers also found improved levels of lysine, methionine and threonine in the crude proteins compared to the control. The addition of urea resulted in decreased free gossypol levels and improved crude protein amounts. This could be due to the specific role of minerals such as phosphates, which help maintain the buffering capacity of the medium and act as structural components of phospholipids, nucleic acids and coenzymes. The addition of sodium and potassium ions is responsible for maintaining the osmolarity of the medium. Potassium is a major cation found in microbial cells that acts as a cofactor for phosphohexokinase (Caldwell et al., 1973; Durand & Kawashima, 1980). Other minerals, such as Mn^{2+} , Cu^{2+} , Fe^{2+} and Mg^{2+} , also function as cofactors for several metabolic enzymes. The duration of fermentation is another important factor that is mainly decided by characteristics such as the growth rate of the organism and the efficiency of gossypol degradation. Identifying the optimum time of fermentation is crucial. A shorter fermentation time may result in incomplete utilization of the substrate and thus a reduced rate of gossypol degradation, while fermentation beyond the optimum range may result in denaturation and subsequent inactivation of the enzymes involved in gossypol degradation, which results from interaction with the other compounds/byproducts formed during the process (Zhang et al., 2006). Researchers have found that the optimum time of fermentation was 60 h for yeast and 4-6 days for filamentous fungi (Wu & Chen, 1989; Shi et al., 1998; Weng & Sun, 2006).

Degossypolization by biological methods is considered a green strategy, as it employs beneficial microbes. The lower effectiveness of the method in minimising the level of gossypol is the only drawback. Although this method is cheaper and efficient for free gossypol degradation, this process is affected by several parameters, such as the initial moisture content, pH, incubation temperature, inoculum level, mineral additives and duration

of fermentation, which need to be optimized to achieve the minimum level of antinutritional factors in the resultant CSM. There is a need to discover novel strains of microbes and to optimize process conditions for the effective degradation of gossypol to improve the nutritional value of CSM. A combination of physical (gamma or electron irradiation) and solvent-based processes or physical and biological methods, a combination of biological and solvent-based processes, a combination of all three techniques may effectively remove gossypol to reach safer levels for effective utilization of CSM as a sustainable protein source.

Table 2

3. Evaluation of the quality and functional properties of cottonseed protein as a food supplement

It is important to scientifically establish the quality of CSP. The most important factor for the analysis of protein quality is its amino acid composition. The use of CSP in human nutrition not only depends on its amino acid profile but also relies on its ability to be incorporated in foods. Hence, evaluations of functional properties such as the WHC, OHC, FC, FS, EA, ES, PS, *in vitro* digestibility, and molecular weight are important to establish CSP compatibility in food matrices for different types of applications (Ma et al., 2018; Tsaliki et al., 2002). In the next section, the quality of the cottonseed flour/protein will be discussed in detail, followed by various functional properties.

3.1. Evaluation of the quality of cottonseed protein based on the amino acid profile

3.1.1. Amino acid profile

The amino acid profile of CSM was measured by He et al. (2015). Out of the 10 essential amino acids, the **R** content was the highest, amounting to 15-34% of the total protein. Other

essential amino acids represented approximately 5% of the total protein, while **M** and **C** had the lowest presence (1-2%). Of the nonessential amino acids, **E** amounted to 10% of the total protein content. Other nonessential amino acids ranged from 3 to 6% of the total protein. Similarly, the presence of **R** (12.47%) was the highest in essential amino acids, while **E** and **Q** (29.75%) were highest in nonessential amino acids in cottonseed protein hydrolysate obtained from digestion by Alcalase (Song et al., 2020). In another study, CSM was evaluated for the complete profile of both nonessential (**A**, **D**, **C**, **Q**, **G**, **P**, **S**, and **Y**) and essential amino acids (**R**, **H**, **I**, **L**, **K**, **M**, **F**, **T**, **W**, and **V**). The mean values were 1.87% (**A**), 4.51% (**D**), 0.79% (**C**), 9.08% (**Q**), 1.99% (**G**), 1.32% (**P**), 2.09% (**S**), and 1.14% (**Y**) for nonessential amino acids and 5.70% (**R**), 1.34% (**H**), 1.48% (**I**), 2.95% (**L**), 2.15% (**K**), 0.72% (**M**), 3.0% (**F**), 1.55% (**T**), 0.64% (**W**), and 2.15% (**V**) for essential amino acids. The CSP was fed to swine, which showed a good ileal digestibility of 80%, and all the amino acids demonstrated more than 60% digestibility (Ma et al., 2019). Delgado et al. (2019) evaluated salt and alkali-soluble protein fractions from glandless cottonseed. The authors found that essential amino acids, namely, **H**, **I**, **L**, **K**, **M**, **F**, **T** and **V**, constituted 30 and 28.1% of the total amino acids in alkali- and salt-soluble fractions, respectively. The total concentration of essential amino acids in glandless CSM was 26%, which was higher than that in soybean protein (17%) (Delgado et al., 2019). It is evident that cottonseeds have superior protein quality with an ideal balance of amino acids and hence could act as a sustainable alternative source of protein for human nutrition.

3.2. Evaluation of functional properties of the cottonseed proteins

3.2.1. Functional properties

The functional properties of proteins are defined as the overall physicochemical behaviour of foods during processing, storage and consumption. The WHC is a parameter that reflects the

ability of the protein to imbibe and retain water, whereas the OHC is the capacity of the fat particles to bind and integrate with the nonpolar side chain of the proteins. The WHC and OHC of the different samples of CSPI ranged between 1.6–2.9 g/g and 3.0–5.4 g/g, respectively. For soybean protein isolates, the WAC was 2.3 g/g, and the OAC was 4.5 g/g (Ma et al., 2018; Delgado et al., 2019). This implies that the WHC and OHC follow an overlapping pattern for soybean protein. These properties influence the texture and mouthfeel attributes of food products such as baked dough, comminuted meats and analogues (Adebowale et al., 2005).

The FC is the capacity of the continuous phase of protein to hold air, whereas the FS is its ability to retain air in the continuous phase for a 30-minute duration (Tsaliki et al., 2002). The FC and FS are preferred functional properties for whipping and aeration in food systems. The FC and FS values of CSPI were evaluated for a pH range of 4–7. The FC and FS were minimal at pH 5 and ranged from 15.1–31.1% and 38.8–89.0%, respectively, since this pH was close to the isoelectric points of the proteins in CSPI. The highest FC (50.0–81.5%) and FS (73.3–96.9%) were observed at pH 7.0 (Ma et al., 2018; Delgado et al., 2019). Tsaliki et al. (2002) also reported the highest values of FC and FS at pH 7.0. The ability to form foam with good foaming stability makes CSP an excellent ingredient for application in ice cream, mousses, and marshmallows.

The hydrophilic and hydrophobic constituents of proteins act as effective surface-active agents, making them suitable for use as emulsifiers in food colloids. The potential of cottonseed proteins to develop and maintain emulsions is considered important for their multifaceted application in food systems. The emulsification properties of the proteins are evaluated on the basis of the EC and ES (Tsaliki et al., 2004). The EC is the maximum amount of oil that is emulsified under controlled conditions by a specific amount of protein. The ES is measured in terms of the amount of oil and/or cream separated from an emulsion

during a certain period of time at a specific temperature and gravitational field (Pearce & Kinsella, 1978). The CSPI showed the EC varying from 13.3–23.1 m²/g, whereas the ES ranged between 17.3–29.6 minutes. These values were higher than the peanut protein isolate EC (14.8 m²/g) and ES (15.2 minutes). Due to the high EC and ES values, CSPI has been successfully used to manufacture bakery products, sausages, sweetmeats and other emulsified products (Ma et al., 2018).

The PS is the amount of protein that is dissolved in a solution under specific conditions. It is the chief determinant for use in food systems. The solubility of cottonseed protein at various pH values (3–11) is the measure of its performance when added to food matrices. Furthermore, it is also an important indicator of protein denaturation under heating and chemical processing (Horax et al., 2006). CSPI displayed maximum and minimum PS values at pH 11 and pH 5, respectively. Soybean protein isolates also showed a similar solubility profile, with a maximum at pH 11. It was suggested that the weakened interaction between water and protein resulted in increased protein-protein interactions, which ultimately caused aggregation and precipitation of CSPI (Ma et al., 2018).

3.2.2. *In vitro* protein digestibility (IVPD)

Protein digestibility is an important factor in determining protein availability for absorption in the intestinal tract. IVPD is a universally accepted assay to estimate the parameters related to protein digestibility. The IVPD assay mimics conditions similar to those of the human digestive tract by using different proteolytic enzymes (e.g., the papain system or pepsin-pancreatin enzyme system). This helps analyse the amount of hydrolysed proteins (Hur et al., 2011). This assay is more rapid, affordable and equivalently efficient than other *in vivo* assays. The existing literature is focused on animal digestion of CSM (Can et al., 2011; Heim & Krebs, 2018; Yue et al., 2007). There is, therefore, a research gap for future work that could

address the digestibility of CSM or cottonseed protein from the perspective of human digestion.

3.2.3. Molecular weight

The most commonly used technique for molecular size analysis of cottonseed protein is sodium dodecyl sulfate-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (SDS-PAGE). This technique separates protein polypeptides on the basis of their molecular size. CSPIs from seven different sources were compared with those of peanut and soybean protein isolates through molecular weight profiling using SDS-PAGE under reducing and nonreducing conditions. Under nonreducing conditions, CSPI showed two high-intensity bands at 50 and 45 kDa, implying that these two fractions are the main constituents (Delgado et al., 2019; Ma et al., 2018). Under nonreducing conditions, these protein subunits include the salt soluble fraction (globulins), i.e., globulin 9S (Sun et al., 2012). In contrast, reducing conditions showed that many minor protein bands appeared between 35 and 14 kDa, suggesting the existence of disulfide bonds between the peptides of the CSPIs (Delgado et al., 2019; Ma et al., 2018). These protein subunits include both salt- (globulins 5S: 24 and 22 kDa) and water-soluble fractions (albumins; albumin 2S: 20, 15 and 14 kDa) (Sun et al., 2012). In another study, out of 4 protein fractions, globulins reached a maximum (33–63.7%), followed by albumins (20.8–32.2%), glutelins (9.1–28%), and prolamins at the lowest concentration (Singh & Kaur, 2019). The molecular weights of polypeptides in cottonseed protein from *Gossypium arboreum* and *Gossypium hirsutum* lines were found to be in the range of 10–122 kDa (Singh & Kaur, 2019). The molecular weight of the alkali-soluble protein fraction varied from 10–54 kDa in both species. Water- and alkali-soluble cottonseed protein profiling was performed by He et al. (2018). They found molecular weights of CSP in the range of 10–381 kDa.

3.2.4. Rheological properties

The rheological behaviour of protein helps with the modelling and design of products, the development of food products, sensory evaluation, quality control, acceptability to consumers and long-term stability (Erçelebi & Ibanoglu, 2009). Various protein extraction processes disrupt chemical bonds, such as electrostatic interactions, hydrogen bonds, hydrophobic, hydrophilic and covalent bonds, and structure and aggregations of protein molecules and affect the viscosity and rheological behaviour of proteins (Turker Saricaoglu, 2019). He et al. (2016) studied the rheological behaviour of CSM, CSPI and water-washed CSM at different pH values. The adhesive strength of CSPI decreases with storage time and is ineffective in water-washed CSM at pH 6, 7.5 and 9. The viscosity depends on the shear rate, and the highest viscosity was obtained at pH 9 for water-washed CSM and pH 7.5 for CSPI. The viscosity remained unaltered in CSPI, but the viscosity of water-washed CSM increased with time. The storage and loss modulus values are two viscosity parameters that indicate the strength of gels. A high storage modulus increases the aggregation of CSPI molecules due to repulsive force reduction. A high pH and low ionic strength form a gel with thick strands and large aggregates and pores; however, a low pH and high ionic strength form a gel with a fine structure and small aggregates and pores. The ionic strength (NaCl) and pH affected the gel formation and rheological behaviour of CSPI (Zhou et al., 2015). The rheological behaviour of CSPIs provides many applications in food, such as protein-based gels and edible packaging films.

3.2.5. Surface hydrophobicity (SH)

The SH represents the number of hydrophobic groups present on the surface of a protein. The surface hydrophobicity shows the subsequent aggregation and partial denaturation of hydrophobic groups of protein molecules. The SH increases with the number of hydrophobic

groups largely exposed on the surface. Ma et al. (2018) studied the SH of CSM and CSPI extracted with different methods. The maximal SH was obtained in the proteins isolated using subcritical extraction from CSM (727.5), followed by insect-resistant CSM (615.7), colour CSM (561.7), XinLiang CSM (128.1), YiHai CSM (120.5), JingGu CSM (110.5) and Tiankang CSM (103.7). A higher SH was found in soybean protein isolates than in proteins isolated from CSM with different extraction methods. The results suggested that the hot-pressing method of protein extraction unfolds CSP aggregations, and other methods of CSP extraction cause conformational changes. The SH of protein is closely related to its emulsifying properties and protein solubility. The SH of CSP enhances the emulsifying activity of CSP due to strong bonding between oil droplets and emulsifiers. CSPIs with better surface hydrophobicity have improved uses in the food industry.

The amino acid profile of the CSP showed a balanced ratio of essential amino acids, with the highest content of **R** amino acids. The evaluation of various food functional properties of CSP established the application of CSP in numerous food products as a preservative, foaming agent, and emulsifier. The predominance of salt and water-soluble proteins with excellent rheological properties further suggests the potential application of CSPs in foods.

3.2.6. Surface, structure, and peptide characterization of cottonseed protein (CSP)

The functional properties of protein isolates depend on the chemical composition and other surface characteristics. The surface properties of CSM and water-soluble and alkali-soluble CSP were evaluated by He et al. (2017) using scanning electron microscopy (SEM), energy dispersive spectrometry (EDS), and X-ray diffraction. Alkali- and water-soluble proteins showed similar surface properties. SEM analysis of CSP showed irregular wrinkling with light spongy porous structures, which was attributed to the presence of polysaccharide

components. Other CSPs by the same authors reflected flatter areas, tight surfaces and sharp angles (Kumar et al., 2021). EDS analysis of CSP reflected the presence of Ca, Cu, Na, Mg, K, and P, whereas C and O were detected as major elements due to the organic nature of the sample. The XRD pattern reflected the structure of CSP, which was reported by the same authors. XRD showed peaks at 2θ of approximately 9.4° and 20° . This XRD pattern was found to be similar to that of soybean protein powder, reflecting α -helix and β -sheet structures of protein molecules, respectively (He et al., 2018). The water- and alkali-soluble CSPs were extracted sequentially, and mass spectrometric analysis showed the presence of 70 polypeptides with molecular weights ranging from 10 to 381 kDa. The most abundant peptides in the fraction were legumin A (58 kDa), B (59 kDa), vicilin C72 (70 kDa), vicilin GC72-A (71 kDa), and vicilin-like antimicrobial peptides (62 kDa) (He et al., 2018). This information is crucial for the application of CSP as a functional food additive.

4. Food and non-food application of cottonseed protein

Plant based-proteins are gaining importance due to their renewable and sustainable nature. Kumar et al., (2021a) summarized various methods of extraction of plant proteins for possible utilization as food supplement. Cottonseeds are traditionally used as the chief ingredient in a widely popular Indian ethnic beverage popularly known as Paruthi Paal (Kumar, 2019b). Owing to the presence of superior-quality proteins, essential fatty acids and sugars, CSP is regarded as a 'triple nutrient'. It has been reported to have many health benefits, such as healing stomach ulcers, preventing polycystic ovary syndrome, regulating the menstrual cycle, modulating blood pressure, and improving neurological health. Food products made from cottonseeds were served to soldiers at the time of World War II due to the unavailability of various other nutritional sources. Additionally, cottonseed soup has been traditionally used as food in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh in the Asian continent and in Nigeria, Uganda,

Burkina Faso, Zambia, Tanzania, and ten other countries in the African continent. These countries are chief cotton producers but at the same time face the menace of protein calorie malnutrition (Kumar, 2019b). The use of CSP either directly or indirectly in place of animal protein can help overcome the problem of malnutrition. Apart from food applications, there are numerous non-food applications of CSP or CSM. Applications such as packaging (films and coating) of agriculturally based products, adhesives, bioplastic, interfacial and emulsifying applications, hydrogels, and other applications are discussed in section 4.2.

4.1. Food applications of cottonseed meal (CSM) and cottonseed protein (CSP)

4.1.1. CSP as a direct source of protein for human nutrition

CSPI and flours have been widely used to develop various food products and are prevalently accepted as nutritional and functional ingredients in baked foods and meat products (Zhuge et al., 1988). In the past, Cater et al. (1977) established the potential of CSPs in a variety of food systems. The authors reported that CSP had been used in the US as a food additive since the 1930s. Less than 5% of defatted cottonseed flour was added to cookies, doughnuts and chocolate candies due to the functional properties of the CSP rather than its nutritional attributes. This was also confirmed by Spadaro et al. (1979), who referred to a product named “Proflo”, which was mainly used to give functional characteristics to bakery and confectionery products. Both Spadaro et al. (1979) and Cater et al. (1977) reported in the late 1950s and the 1960s that a low-cost and highly nutritious food product called INCAP vegetable mixture or “Incaparina” was popular in Guatemala and Colombia and used 2 million pounds of cottonseed in 1964.

Spadaro et al. (1979) reviewed numerous food applications of CSP concentrate, including meat products (such as beef burgers, meatballs, fresh sausages and frankfurters), extruded cereal-type products (such as snacks and textured vegetable proteins), and baked

goods (such as cookies, doughnuts, cakes and breads). De Buckle et al. (1979) also reported that cottonseed flours could be texturized in a way similar to that of soybean flour, simultaneously reducing the free gossypol content to safe levels. The same authors also produced a CSPI with 90% protein, which had a white creamy colour and a bland flavour. Zhuge et al. (1988) processed CSM through extrusion, drying, grinding and air classification and obtained a low-gossypol product. The final coarse product had a particle size larger than 84 µm and a protein content of 36.6–45.2%. Alford et al. (1996) reviewed several human studies using dietary CSPs and concluded that these proteins assist in ameliorating the health of malnourished or undernourished children and adult women. In addition to CSM, glandless cottonseed kernels were used for the development of the nut-like snack ‘Tamunuts’ using a dry roasting technique standardized by Texas A & M University, Texas, USA. These nuts were preferred over ‘soy nuts’ by the tasting panel (Dowd, 2015; Lusas et al., 1978; Rathore et al., 2020).

Although much research was carried out in the late 1970s and 1980s on CSP and its incorporation into foods, interest in this protein gradually declined. Only a few studies have been conducted on cottonseed as a food since the early 2000s, and a few of these studies on beef and extruded snacks are elaborated upon below. CSM was incorporated into ground beef at 0–3% (Rhee et al., 2001). The 3% CSM added to beef served as a highly effective antioxidant, decreasing 2-thiobarbituric acid-reactive substances (TBARS) by 77–91% compared to the cottonseed-free control beef. Reyes-Jáquez et al. (2012) produced extruded snacks using CSM. The optimal inclusion level was found to be 10% CSM, and the resulting snack had less fat and more protein than the control snacks. In another study, the peptide fractions obtained from the **alcalase** enzyme treatment of CSP demonstrated novel properties. It was found that the higher content of positively charged amino acids (**K**, **R** & **H**) and lower content of negatively charged amino acids (**D**, **E**) resulted in higher antioxidant and

antibacterial activities. Later, cottonseed protein hydrolysates underwent *in vitro* digestion (Song et al., 2020). These isolates showed no antibacterial activity before or after *in vitro* digestion, although they exhibited some antioxidant activities. One peptide retained high natural antibacterial activity even after 6 h of digestion (Song et al., 2020). He et al. (2020) evaluated water-soluble fractions of lab scale-produced CSP from glandless, glanded, and pilot-scale-produced glanded CSP. Pilot scale-produced protein showed the maximum antioxidant activity using the DPPH assay (70.6%), while both lab scale-processed fractions exhibited comparable antioxidant properties. The superior antioxidant activity of pilot scale-produced protein fractions was higher due to the presence of an increased number of peptide fragments with exposed hydrophobic amino acids (**W**). The improved hydrophobic nature of the pilot scale-produced protein peptides allowed them to act as antioxidants by improving their solubility in nonpolar solvents, subsequently enhancing their interactions with free radicals (Kim et al., 2007). These findings are valuable, as they show the potential to develop peptides that could be used in functional food formulations from low-value cottonseeds. In a study, detoxified CSP protein obtained from alkali-salt based method was evaluated critical quality standards as per the guidelines of Food Safety and Standards Regulation, 2011 (Kumar et al., 2021b). It was concluded that lyophilised protein powder obtained at optimised conditions have higher crude protein content (93.1%), lower free (0.03%) and total gossypol (0.27%) with no presence of food borne pathogens. It is evident that cottonseeds have a balanced ratio of amino acids and can be a sustainable source of protein in countries where cotton is grown as the predominant crop.

4.1.2. Cottonseed/cottonseed meal (CSM) as an indirect source of protein for human nutrition

In addition to having direct applications as a food supplement in human nutrition,

degossypolized CSM can indirectly be used for alleviating protein energy malnutrition. Low-gossypol CSM can be effectively used as feed in both the poultry and aquaculture industries. These animals can effectively convert feed protein into edible animal protein (Rathore et al. 2020). Several protein conversion ratios (PCRs: feed protein used/edible animal protein produced) have been established for the conversion of ultralow gossypol CSP into animal-based protein for human nutrition. For example, poultry for egg production is reported as the most efficient means of converting plant protein to edible animal protein with a PCR of 2.6. Chicken meat production with a PCR of 4.7 is superior to that of other animal-based protein sources, such as pigs (5.7), fish (4.6–5.7) and prawns (7.7) (Rathore et al., 2020). Several authors have recently investigated the effect of CSP, CSF, CSC and CSPI on feed diets in aquacultural species (Anderson et al, 2016; Wang et al, 2020; Ye et al, 2020; Yin et al, 2018), pigs (Li et al, 2019), and lambs (Moretti et al, 2019). Delgado et al., (2021) studied the functional properties of the extruded shrimp feed containing CSM with ultra-low gossypol content. It was concluded that use of ultra-low gossypol CSM as fishmeal substitute is a feasible alternative to reduce the costs of the shrimp feed while showing a balanced content of minerals, amino acids, protein, and essential fatty acids. In an independent study, degossypolised CSP was evaluated for the energy and nutrient digestibility and as a source of supplement in the nursery pigs (Wang et al., 2019). It was concluded that degossypolised CSP can be utilised as a supplement in nursery pig diets at the proportion of 5 and 10% within two and after two-weeks of weaning, respectively. CSP can be effectively metabolized by poultry, fish, and pigs to convert plant protein into animal protein. Hence, cottonseed may serve as an indirect source of protein for nonvegetarians. The conversion of CSP into animal protein also reduces the risk of gossypol, which is otherwise associated with direct consumption of CSP.

4.2. Nonfood application of cottonseed meal (CSM) and cottonseed protein (CSP)

The mechanical properties, water solubility, plasticizing characteristics, crosslinking behaviour, and 3D structure of cottonseed protein contribute to many non-food applications. These applications include packaging, adhesive, bioplastic, hydrogel, interfacial material, and emulsifying applications (Cheng et al., 2020). The application of CSP as a wood adhesive has been established in the recent past, and it has been reported that the combination of CSP and phosphoric acid is even more effective as a wood adhesive than soy protein (Cheng et al., 2017). Li et al. (2019) evaluated the effects of dipotassium hydrogen phosphate, phosphoric acid, calcium oxide and calcium hydrogen phosphate on the adhesive strength of CSP at 20 to 80 mM concentrations. The authors found that CSP with 40 mM phosphoric acid treatment resulted in higher adhesive strength with high water resistance, indicating CSP as an eco-friendly adhesive in the wood industry. CSM in combination with urea formaldehyde is also used as a green and environmentally friendly adhesive in wood-based composites (Liu et al., 2018). Cheng et al. (2017) used CSP in combination with different acids as a paper additive and studied the resulting characteristics by Fourier transform-infrared (FTIR) spectroscopy and SEM analysis. The results suggested that CSP interacted with acids and paper fibres to enhance the strength. Similarly, CSP was evaluated by thermogravimetric analysis and SEM and FTIR analysis to study its characteristics as a strength enhancer. The results suggest that CSPs interact with cotton fibres and increase the strength in nonwoven fabric (Villalpando et al., 2018). Vigorous blending enhances water- and alkali-soluble CSP recovery and quality, providing good characteristics and enabling industrial applications (He et al., 2013).

Films and coatings are used in the packaging of Agri-based products such fruits and vegetables to enhance their shelf life. Glycerol, urea and aldehyde were used as additives in bioplastic preparations. These crosslinking agents enhance the mechanical strength, water absorption resistance, and thermal stability of the products (Cheng et al., 2020). CSP was plasticized with glycerol and embedded with biodegradable material through extrusion and

thermosetting. The study established that glycerol plays a crucial role in making CSP thermoplastic through a 54 °C increase in the thermal denaturation temperature. Attention to the development of edible protein films has increased recently surrounding applications in food packaging (Chen et al., 2019).

5. Food safety and regulatory issues

Food Safety and Standards Regulations (FSSR), 2011 (version IV, published on 9/11/2017), suggests that cottonseed flour or protein can be utilized as a food ingredient if it follows certain standards. These quality parameters include the moisture content (< 8%), crude protein (> 47%), free gossypol content (< 0.06%), total gossypol content (< 1.2%), ash insoluble content (< 0.35%), total ash content (< 5.0%), available lysine content greater than 3.6 g/100 g of crude protein, crude fibre content (< 5.0%), and fat content less than 1.5% dry weight. In addition to these parameters, the microbial count, i.e., the total bacterial count, should be less than 50000/g. The *Coliform* bacterial count should be less than 10/g, and the *Salmonella* bacterial count should be nil in 25 g. The European Union has provided specific guidelines on the concentration of gossypol for applications as feed for ruminants and nonruminants. The maximum free gossypol concentration for cottonseed is 5,000 ppm, that for CSM or cake is 1,200 ppm, that for laying hens and piglets is 20 ppm, that for rabbits and pigs is 60 ppm, that for poultry and calves is 100 ppm and that for cattle, sheep, and goats is 500 ppm. According to the **USFDA**, CSPs and their food products can be considered edible if they contain less than 0.045% and 0.8% free gossypol and bound gossypol, respectively (Ma et al., 2018). Numerous pulse and oilseed proteins can act as potent allergens, causing an undesirable immune response in susceptible individuals. To address this concern, the **USFDA** has identified 8 major allergens, **e.g.**, eggs, milk, shellfish, crustaceans, peanuts, tree nuts, soybean, and wheat, that cause 90% of allergic reactions in susceptible individuals (Rathore et

al., 2020). These rules are followed by most countries, and allergens need to be compulsorily mentioned by food manufacturers on food labels. In contrast, cottonseed is not reported to instigate any allergic or hypersensitive immune response. This is because its protein profile is very similar to the proteins present in a variety of legumes, peanuts, and tree nuts. All the mentioned quality parameters are achievable by following eco-friendly and cost-effective methods for the extraction of protein from CSM. The protein recovered can potentially be used as a supplement in human nutrition.

6. Conclusion and future perspectives

Gossypol chemically binds to cottonseed proteins during cottonseed processing and reduces their nutritive value. Different separation methods, e.g., physical, chemical and biological, have been used to reduce or extract gossypol from cottonseeds. Using biotechnological and breeding strategies for degossypolization strips the plants of their major defence against insect and pest predation. Thus, current efforts are focused on reducing gossypol levels in cottonseed products after harvesting and decreasing their oral bioavailability in feeds. The separation of gossypol from CSM can render a large amount of high-quality edible protein to be effectively utilized as animal rations and for human consumption. Toxicological studies have revealed that gossypol is fatal for animals and young ruminants if it is present in animal feed in large amounts beyond the permissible limit of 450 ppm. Gamma irradiation is emerging as a novel degossypolyzation physical methodology, replacing traditional approaches (gland flotation, cyclone, heat and pressure treatment and CO₂ supercritical extraction) burdened with some drawbacks (low protein yields and quality, inefficient detoxification, use of toxic reagents and environmental risks). Gamma irradiation is a greener technique that preserves the protein quality. However, gossypol contents below the permissible limit have not yet been reached, and therefore solvent extraction remains the

method of choice, despite the presence of residual solvent in CSP. The use of gossypol-degrading microorganisms appears promising but is still in need of process optimization.

Recent advances in feed technology have resulted in lower gossypol levels in feed and higher awareness of acute gossypol poisoning. Thus, the development of sustainable detoxification techniques and the isolation of edible high-quality proteins should be the focus of future research. A number of recent techniques, such as ultrafine grinding and pulsed magnetic field treatment, achieved an 83% reduction in the free gossypol content. Other nonconventional technologies, including microwave-assisted, ultrasound-assisted, subcritical or supercritical removal of gossypol, can be used in the future to further improve the utilization of CSM for human nutrition. Functional characterization of CSP indicates a superior amino acid profile with excellent functional properties, making it a suitable candidate for application in the food industry. Nevertheless, interest in this protein has decreased since the 2000s. Emerging greener degossypolization strategies seem to justify future revisitation of the use of CSP as a direct or indirect source of protein for the alleviation of hunger, which will also assist in achieving the UN sustainable development goals.

Conflict of interest

None

Acknowledgement

The work has been supported by the Science for Equity, Empowerment and Development Division of Department of Science and Technology, Government of India, under grant no. SP/YO/476/2018.

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Figures:

Fig. 1. The problem of malnutrition in South-East Asian countries in the age group of under 5 years. (Black and Sesikiran, web source: <https://www.nestle.com/sites/default/files/asset-library/documents/creating%20shared%20value/expert-opinions.pdf> accessed on 25/12/2020).

Fig. 2. Flow chart describing the stages required for the use of cottonseed protein in food and feed. A) Deoiling of cottonseed to produce cottonseed meal (CSM) with 45–55% protein. CSM at this stage can only be utilized as feed for large ruminant animals due to the presence of the toxic polyphenol gossypol. B) Degossypolization of CSM by physical, chemical, and biological methods resulted in its improved utilization as feed for both small ruminants and nonruminants. C) Extraction of protein from CSM resulted in wider applications, as gossypol levels further reduced gossypol in the obtained protein. D) Applications of cottonseed protein as a supplement in various food products.

Fig. 3. Schematic diagram showing the mechanism of physical, chemical and biological methods for degossypolization. A) Physical techniques—the application of gamma irradiation to cottonseed and cottonseed meal (CSM) resulted in a reduction in the overall gossypol content due to degradation or dimerization or an unknown mechanism. B) Chemical methods mainly use solvents that interact with the resin glands present in cottonseed or CSM, solubilizing gossypol. Intense scrubbing of solids occurs at the solid-liquid interface, causing efficient diffusion of the solute (gossypol) into the bulk liquid phase by molecular diffusion. C) The biological method of degossypolization mainly involves the use of solid-state fermentation by employing a microbial consortium. The exact mechanism of nullifying the effect of gossypol in CSM is unknown; however, laccase action is correlated with detoxification of the CSM by degrading or oxidizing the toxic aldehyde groups in the gossypol structure.

Fig. 4. Illustration showing the amino acid profile, functional properties, molecular size, food safety and regulatory issues, and application of cottonseed protein (CSP). A) The quality of the CSP is mostly determined by the amino acid composition. It can be seen from the figure that CSP has a nice balance of essential and nonessential amino acids. B) The functional properties of the CSP prompted its application in the preparation of baked dough, comminuted meat, marshmallows, mousses, ice creams, bakery products, and sausage. C) Based on the nutritional and functional properties of cottonseed, various products have been developed, such as Paruthi Paal, Proflo, Incaparina, and Tamunuts, and used as functional ingredients in food products. D) In addition to a direct source of protein, CSP is also utilized as an indirect source of protein. The protein conversion ratio of eggs (2.6) is the most efficient in converting cottonseed protein into animal protein for human nutrition. E) Molecular weight studies of CSP showed that salt-soluble proteins are found in maximum concentrations, whereas alcohol-soluble proteins are minimal. F) The application of cottonseed flour or protein in food products should follow food safety and regulatory issues. The most critical parameters considered for application in foods are presented in the illustration.

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1332 **Table 1.** Use of solvent extraction and other methods for the extraction/removal of gossypol

1333 from cottonseed meal/flakes

Cottonseed material used	Solvent utilized	% Gossypol removal (GR)/ % yield of gossypol	Remaining gossypol in seed/flakes/oil/Meal (%)	Reference
Defatted cottonseed flakes	90% aqueous butanone	79.54 % FG (flakes swell more)	0.225% gossypol in flakes	(Dechary et al., 1952)
Defatted cottonseed	Solvent extraction with pure ethanol	61.55 % gossypol	Less than 0.04% gossypol	(Saxena et al., 2012)
Cottonseed meal	Acidic Ethanol; Ethanol-Water [95:5] with 1.4 M phosphoric acid, 2hr (solvent wash only)	94.53% gossypol, Dry matter yield high	5.47% gossypol	(Pelitire et al., 2014)
Cottonseed meal	Acidic Ethanol; Ethanol-Water [95:5] with 1.4 M oxalic acid, 2hr (solvent and water wash)	93.07% total gossypol, Dry matter yield medium	6.92% TG	(Pelitire et al., 2014)
Cottonseed meal	Acidic Ethanol; Ethanol-Water [95:5] with 1.0 M sulphuric acid, 2hr (solvent and water wash)	95.7% gossypol but dry matter yields lowest	4.3% TG	(Pelitire et al., 2014)
Cottonseed meal	Gamma and electron radiation	Free gossypol reduction 59.16%, 82.37% TG reduction-40%	-	(Nayefi et al., 2014)
Cottonseed	Acidic solvent extraction using butanol-ethanol-water	94.73 % total gossypol	5.27 % TG	(Singh et al., 2019)
Cottonseed flour	SC CO ₂ with 5% co-solvent iso- propanol/ Ethanol	-	0.02% gossypol in oil	(Kuk & Hron, 1994)
Cottonseed	Liquid cyclone process	-	0.04-0.07% FG & 0.30% TG	(Smith, 1971)
Cottonseed meal	Ethanol and hexane	TG reduced to 0.32 to 0.55 %	FG from 0.013-0.044%	(Liu et al., 1981)
Cottonseed meal	95% Ethanol	More than 50% TG and 90% aflatoxin	-	(Hron et al., 1994)]
Cottonseed flakes	Solvent extraction with heptane	-	0.23% gossypol with heptane	[(Wan et al., 1995)
Cottonseed flakes	Solvent extraction with isohexane	-	0.29% gossypol with isohexane	(Wan et al., 1995)
Hexane miscella of Cottonseed	Solvent extraction miscella + adsorption with Mag. Silicate	96% gossypol	-	(Kuk & Tetlow, 2005)
Cottonseed meal	Iso-hexane 75% Ethanol 25%	89.3% FG 42.8% TG	0.11/1.03 FG 0.6/1.05 TG	(Kuk & Hron, 1998)
Cottonseed flakes	Solvent extraction with isohexane and alcohol	70% FG & 45% TG	0.41-0.72% FG & 0.11-0.30 % TG	(Kuk & Hron, 1998)
Cottonseed gums	MEK with phosphoric acid and acid hydrolysis	47% gossypol recovery from gums; Yield: 41% pure gossypol (98%)		(Pons et al., 1959)

1334 The table enumerates amounts of reduction in free (FG) and total gossypol (TG) from cottonseed materials using different solvents/methods

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1339 **Table 2.** Brief overview of free gossypol detoxification by microbes using solid-state
 1340 fermentation.

Microorganism	Optimum conditions				Inoculum level (cells/g)	Free gossypol removed (%)	Improvement in protein content (%)	Reference
	IMC (%)	pH	Temp (°C)	Fermentation time (h)				
<i>Bacillus subtilis</i> GH38	50	6.5	39	72	10 ⁷	78.86	4.98	(Zhang et al., 2018a)
<i>Candida tropicalis</i>	55	5.2	30	48	10 ⁷	88.6	15.24	(Khalaf et al., 2008)
<i>C. tropicalis</i> ZD-3	50		30	48	10 g mycelia/Kg substrate	94.6	10.76	(Zhang et al., 2007)
<i>C. tropicalis</i> ZAU- 1	55	6.0	30	72	10 ⁷	92.29	-	(Weng & Sun, 2006)
<i>Saccharomyces</i> <i>cerevisiae</i> ZD-5	50		30	48	5 mL yeast inoculum	88.51	11.09	(Zhang et al., 2007)
<i>Aspergillus niger</i> ZD-8	50		30	48	10 g mycelia/Kg substrate	85.15	22.23	(Zhang et al., 2007)

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Figure 1

Figure 2 [Click here to access/download;Figure;Fig. 2.eps](#)

Figure 3

A Amino acid profile of CSP
Alanine (1.87%)	Aspartate (4.51%)	Cysteine (0.79%)	Serine (2.09%)	Proline (1.32%)	Tyrosine (1.14%)	Glycine (1.99%)	Glutamine (9.08%)
Methionine (0.72%)	Tryptophan (0.64%)	Leucine (2.95%)	Isoleucine (1.48%)	Threonine (1.55%)	Valine (2.15%)	Histidine (1.34%)	
Key finding by He et al., (2015): Arginine was highest amounting to 15-34% of the total protein while Methionine and Cysteine were lowest with 1-2%. Glutamate was the most abundant non-essential amino acid amounting to 10% of total protein content				Phenylalanine (3.00%)	Lysine (2.15%)	Arginine (5.70%)	

B Functional properties of the CSP (Ma et al., 2018, Tsaliki et al., 2002, 2004)	
Functional properties	Application
WAC: 1.6-2.9 g/g OAC: 3.0-5.4 g/g	Baked dough Comminated meat
FC ₅ : 15.1-31.1% FC ₇ : 50.0-81.5% FS ₅ : 38.8-89.0%	Marshmallow Mousses Ice cream
EC: 13.3-23.1 m ² /g ES: 17.3-23.6 minute	Bakery products Sausage
PS: Highest at pH 11 & Lowest at pH 5

E Food safety and regulatory issues
<p>These quality parameters include</p> <p>Moisture content < 8%</p> <p>Crude protein > 47%</p> <p>Free gossypol content (FGC) < 0.06%</p> <p>Total gossypol content (TGC) < 1.2%</p> <p>Ash insoluble content < 0.35%</p> <p>Total ash content < 5.0%</p> <p>Available lysine > 3.6g/100g of crude protein</p> <p>Crude fibre content < 5.0%</p> <p>Fat content < 1.5% dry weight basis</p> <p>Microbial count</p> <p>Total bacterial count < 50000/g</p> <p>Coliform bacterial count < 10/g</p> <p>Salmonella bacterial count < nil in 25g</p> <p>Hexane < 10 ppm</p>

C Cottonseed/ cottonseed protein as direct
Paruthi Paal
Proflo
Incaparina
Tamunuts
Food additive nutritional and functional ingredient

D Cottonseed/cottonseed meal as an indirect source
4.7
2.6
5.7
20
5.7-4.6
7.7

E Molecular weight of CSP	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-reducing conditions: 50 and 45 kDa Reducing conditions: Additional bands between 35 and 14 kDa Type of protein: Protein contains salt soluble (globulins; 60-70%), water soluble (albumins), alkali soluble (gliadins), and alcohol soluble fractions (prolamines) with balanced ratio of essential amino acids