The oviduct epithelium undergoes marked morphological and functional changes during the estrous cycle. It has been shown that a dramatic change in the frequencies of ciliated and non-ciliated cells occurs during the estrous cycle. At estrus the epithelium consists of secretory and ciliated cells and at diestrus mainly of ciliated cells. The oviduct provides the microenvironment for sperm capacitation, fertilization, and early cleavage-stage embryonic development. At the molecular level, only a few genes or proteins are known that change during the estrous cycle and which may be important for fertility, so as the bovine oviduct-specific glycoprotein, the major secretory protein in the oviduct. Therefore, we studied systematically the changes in gene expression in bovine ipsilateral oviduct epithelial cells at estrus and diestrus. To identify differentially expressed genes, a combination of subtracted cDNA libraries and cDNA array hybridization was used. Two subtracted libraries were produced to enrich cDNAs of upregulated genes at estrus and at diestrus. A total of 1536 cDNA clones of each library were analyzed with radioactively (33-P) labeled probes generated from the oviduct epithelial cells of six Simmental heifers, three of them slaughtered at Day 0 (estrus) and three at Day 12 after standing heat (diestrus). After normalization of the raw data and statistical analysis, all cDNAs showing significant differences in their expression levels at estrus compared to diestrus were sequenced. Sequencing revealed 84 different cDNAs; 42 of them matched bovine genes or their human/mouse homologs with known functions, and 42 matched genes without a known function. Half of the genes (n = 42) were expressed at a higher level at estrus; for the other (n = 42) expression levels were higher at diestrus. The regulated genes or their products represented a variety of functional classes, such as genes of the secretory pathway, genes involved in transcription regulation, cell-surface proteins, cell–cell interaction proteins, secreted proteins, members of signal transduction pathways, immune-related proteins, and some enzymes. The identification of genes differentially regulated in ipsilateral oviduct epithelial cells at estrus v. diestrus is the first step of a systematic analysis of differential gene expression during the estrous cycle. Further studies will follow, focusing on different compartments of the bovine oviduct and additional times of the estrous cycle.

Developmental abnormalities associated with the cloning process suggest that reprogramming of donor nuclei into an embryonic state may not be fully completed in most of the cloned animals. One of the areas of interest in this respect is the analysis of gene expression patterns in nuclear transfer embryos to dissect the processes that failed and to develop means to overcome the limitations imposed by these factors. In this study, we investigated the expression patterns of histone deacetylase-1,-2,-3 (HDAC-1,-2,-3), DNA methyltransferase-3A (DNMT3A) and octamer binding protein-4 gene (POU5F1) in donor cells with different cloning efficiencies (low: no-pregnancy, medium: pregnancy but no live birth and high: live birth) and nuclear transfer embryos derived from these cell lines using a real time reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) assay with SYBR green chemistry. Employing standard protocols, we produced nuclear transfer embryos from three different cell lines categorized as having varying efficiencies in supporting development to term. Embryos were collected at morula, blastocyst and hatched blastocyst stages and total RNA was extracted from pools of 4–5 embryos using Absolutely RNA nanoprep kit (Stratagene, La Jolla, CA, USA). Relative level of expression at these stages was analyzed using ΔΔCT method with H2A as the reference gene and in vitro-fertilized embryos as the control samples. Statistical analysis was performed on ranked expression data employing SAS statistical analysis software procedure ANOVA. Same set of genes were also analyzed on
All embryos were then transferred to M199 with 10% serum and cultured to 168 hpi. The same Holstein sire was used to produce all embryos. Single

The aim of the current study was to identify the bovine homolog of the murine Ped (preimplantation embryo development) gene, which regulates

Gene Expression
gene expression patterns compared to inefficient cell lines. These results agree with several studies reporting altered gene expression patterns for

nuclear transfer embryos at the compact morula and blastocyst stages. The difference, however, disappeared at the hatched blastocyst stage. There was

232 SEARCH FOR THE BOVINE HOMOLOG OF THE MURINE PED GENE


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The aim of the current study was to identify the bovine homolog of the murine Ped (preimplantation embryo development) gene, which regulates mouse preimplantation embryonic growth, including cleavage rate and embryo survivability, and to characterize the expression pattern of this gene during bovine preimplantation embryo development. Experiment (I): The National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) GenBank/EBI EST databases were searched for bovine-expressed sequence tags (EST) that were homologous with the murine Ped gene (Accession number: NM_010394). The resulting ESTs were aligned and assembled in to one complete sequence (841 bp), which was shown to be homologous with the Murine Ped gene and the Bovine Major Histocompatibility Complex class I 4221.1 gene (Accession No.: AJ010865, length 1090 bp). The expression of the protein product of the Ped gene by bovine tissue was confirmed using Western Blot analysis. Experiment (II): The expression pattern of the Ped gene homolog during in vivo and in vitro bovine preimplantation embryo development was characterized using real time PCR. Embryos at the same stage for age were compared (Day 1: 2-cell; Day 2: 4-cell; Day 3: 8-cell; Day 4: 16-cell; Day 5: early morula; Day 6, compact/late morula; Day 7: blastocyst). The relative transcript abundance was consistently lower in the in vitro-cultured embryos at all stages of preimplantation development the differences were significant on Days 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7. The relative transcript abundance was significantly lower on Days 1, 2, and 3 of in vivo culture than on Days 4, 5, 6, and 7 and was significantly higher in Day 7 blastocysts than in Day 5 early morula. In in vitro-cultured embryos the relative transcript abundance was significantly higher in Day 7 blastocysts compared to all other stages of the preimplantation period. Experiment (III): A quantitative analysis of the Ped gene transcript was carried out on replicates of pools of ten 2-cell embryos collected at 25, 28, 32, and >36 hpi from three different fertilizations. Transcript relative abundance was highest in those embryos that had cleaved by 25 hpi. By 28 hpi abundance had decreased slightly; as time to cleavage increased further to 32 and >36 hpi, the relative abundance decreased significantly. In conclusion, we have successfully identified a potential bovine homolog of the murine Ped gene. Furthermore, we have characterized the expression pattern of this gene during preimplantation embryo development in cattle and we have shown that a greater relative abundance of the gene transcript is associated with embryos of higher quality and greater developmental potential.

233 EXPRESSION OF INSULIN-LIKE GROWTH FACTOR (IGF) MRNA IN BOVINE CONCEPTUSES FROM EMBRYOS PRODUCED IN VIVO OR IN VITRO


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The objective of this study was to determine the effect of in vitro embryo production (IVP) on expression of mRNAs for IGF-1, IGF-2, IGF-1 receptor (IGF-1R), IGF-2R and GADPH in bovine conceptuses at Day 17 of gestation. In vivo embryos (In vivo) were recovered from superovulated Holstein cows. For IVP, Holstein oocytes were matured, fertilized and then cultured in M199 with 10% serum (IVPS) or 1% BSA (IVPSR) to 72 hpi. All embryos were then transferred to M199 with 10% serum and cultured to 168 hpi. The same Holstein sire was used to produce all embryos. Single grade 1 blastocysts were transferred into recipient heifers. On day 10 after transfer, conceptuses were recovered, measured and stored at –80°C prior to extraction of whole cell (wc) RNA and genomic (g) DNA. wcRNA was assessed for quality based on A260/A280 ratio and visualization of 18S and 28S ribosomal RNA. Only complete (intact) conceptuses with at least 10 µg high-quality wcRNA recovered after extraction were included in the analysis (In vivo, n = 8; IVPS n = 8; IVPSR n = 7). Conceptus sex was determined by PCR analysis of gDNA. Semi-quantitative PCR assays were used to assess relative expression of all mRNAs. For each conceptus, 2 µg wcRNA were mixed with 3 pg rabbit globin mRNA, DNase-treated and reverse-transcribed using random hexamers. Conceptus cDNA samples (140 ng each for IGF-1, IGF-2 mRNAs; 100 ng each for IGF-1R, IGF-2R, GADPH and globin mRNAs) were assayed in duplicate within single assays. Relative mRNA expression was calculated as the ratio of band intensities representing the mRNA of interest to globin mRNA. All data were analyzed for effects of treatment (In vivo, IVP, IVPSR or In vivo, IVP), sex, stage of blastocyst development at transfer (early, mid, expanded) and the interactions of treatment sex and treatment stage. Conceptus length (LSM ± SEM mm) did not differ with treatment (In vivo: 182 ± 55; IVPS: 257 ± 47; IVPSR: 310 ± 72). Expression of GADPH mRNA was greater (P = 0.02) in female conceptuses (1.31 ± 0.11) than in males (0.96 ± 0.07) and did not differ (P = 0.14) between treatment groups (In vivo: 1.30 ± 0.11, IVPS: 1.00 ± 0.09, IVPSR: 1.10 ± 0.14). However, when the IVP groups were combined and compared to In vivo controls, expression of GADPH mRNA was both greater (P = 0.002) in females (1.38 ± 0.10) than in males (0.94 ± 0.06) and differed (P = 0.03) with treatment (In vivo: 1.30 ± 0.10, IVP: 1.01 ± 0.07). Expression of IGF-1 and IGF-2 mRNA was not detected in the majority of conceptuses. Expression of IGF-1R mRNA was greater
As a transcription factor, retinoic acid (RA) can activate or silence a wide number of genes, thus inducing differentiation in cell systems and developmentally important gene transcripts in bovine oocytes during in vitro prematuration and/or maturation. Cumulus-oocyte complexes (COCs) were generated from the ovine and bovine Igf2 sequences available in the Genebank database (accession number U00664/X53553). DNA sequencing, sequences of several DNA fragments from the bovine Igf2 gene were identified in samples from bovine uterus and kidney. The primer pairs were generated from the ovine and bovine Igf2 sequences available in the Genebank database (accession number U00664/X53553). DNA fragments identified were from the \( 5' \) untranslated region and the \( 3' \) translated region of the bovine Igf2 gene. All fragments consist of a high number of CG dinucleotides, and computer analysis using the CpGwin program (Anbazhagan R et al., 2001 BioTechniques 30, 110–114) revealed CpG islands within these fragments. Relative abundances of transcriptional products were statistically analyzed using the SigmaStat 2.0 (Jandel Scientific, San Rafael, CA, USA) software package. After testing for normality, an ANOVA followed by multiple pairwise comparisons using the Tukey test was employed. Results from the semi-quantitative RT-PCR analyses revealed no difference (\( P > 0.05 \)) in gene expression pattern of the Igf2r gene, suggesting that the Igf2r gene is biallelically expressed during bovine preimplantation development. In contrast, there was a significant difference (\( P < 0.05 \)) in the relative abundance of mRNA of the Mash2 gene, with a lower relative abundance of transcriptional products in parthenogenetic expanded blastocysts. Thus, in cattle as reported in mice (Guillemot F et al., 1995 Nat. Genet. 9, 235–242), the paternal allele of the Mash2 gene seems to participate in the expression of the gene prior to implantation.

Several imprinted genes have been identified in different species such as mouse and man but in cattle imprinting has only been confirmed for the Insulin-like growth factor 2 receptor gene (Igf2r). DNA methylation is one of the most common mechanisms of imprinting. Imprinting is correlated with the methylation of normally unmethylated CpG islands, and aberrations in methylation are thought to be involved in the Large Offspring Syndrome (LOS) which is frequently observed in offspring derived from in vitro-produced and/or cloned embryos. The imprinting of the bovine Insulin-like growth factor 2 gene (Igf2), the Igf2r gene and the Mammalian achaete scute homologue 2 gene (Mash2) was analyzed in bovine preimplantation blastocysts cultured in SOF + BSA. mRNA levels of the Igf2r gene and the Mash2 gene in in vitro-produced (IVP) and parthenogenetic expanded single blastocysts were analyzed by semi-quantitative RT-PCR (Wrenzycki C et al., 2001 Biol. Reprod. 65, 309–317). Genes expressed exclusively from the maternal allele (i.e. paternally methylated) should be represented by a higher relative abundance of transcriptional products in parthenogenetic embryos whereas paternally expressed genes (i.e. maternally methylated) should be correlated with a higher gene expression in IVP embryos carrying one paternal and one maternal allele. For determination of methylation patterns by bisulfite sequencing, sequences of several DNA fragments from the bovine Igf2 gene were identified in samples from bovine uterus and kidney. The primer pairs were generated from the ovine and bovine Igf2 sequences available in the Genebank database (accession number U00664/X53553). DNA fragments identified were from the \( 5' \) untranslated region and the \( 3' \) translated region of the bovine Igf2 gene. All fragments consist of a high number of CG dinucleotides, and computer analysis using the CpGwin program (Anbazhagan R et al., 2001 BioTechniques 30, 110–114) revealed CpG islands within these fragments. Relative abundances of transcriptional products were statistically analyzed using the SigmaStat 2.0 (Jandel Scientific, San Rafael, CA, USA) software package. After testing for normality, an ANOVA followed by multiple pairwise comparisons using the Tukey test was employed. Results from the semi-quantitative RT-PCR analyses revealed no difference (\( P > 0.05 \)) in gene expression pattern of the Igf2r gene, suggesting that the Igf2r gene is biallelically expressed during bovine preimplantation development. In contrast, there was a significant difference (\( P < 0.05 \)) in the relative abundance of mRNA of the Mash2 gene, with a lower relative abundance of transcriptional products in parthenogenetic expanded blastocysts. Thus, in cattle as reported in mice (Guillemot F et al., 1995 Nat. Genet. 9, 235–242), the paternal allele of the Mash2 gene seems to participate in the expression of the gene prior to implantation.

234 IMPRINTING STATUS OF DEVELOPMENTALLY IMPORTANT GENES IN BOVINE PREIMPLANTATION EMBRYOS

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As a transcription factor, retinoic acid (RA) can activate or silence a wide number of genes, thus inducing differentiation in cell systems and playing a role in cell cycle regulation. However, little is known of RA-dependent gene expression in the oocyte. Bovine oocytes and cumulus cells express most RA receptors, and the presence of 9-cis-RA during in vitro maturation (IVM) is beneficial to oocyte development (Duque et al., 2002 Hum. Reprod. 17, 2706–2714; Hidalgo et al., 2003 Reproduction 125, 409–416). The present work analyzes the relative abundance of various developmentally important gene transcripts in bovine oocytes during in vitro prematuration and/or maturation. Cumulus-oocyte complexes (COCs) were manipulated in defined medium with polyvinyl-alcohol (DM-PVA). Those COCs undergoing prematuration were cultured for 24 h in DM-PVA with 25 \( \mu \)M roscovitine. For IVM, some prematurely matured COCs were cultured for 24 h in DM-PVA containing pFSH, LH and E2. Incubations were made at 39°C in an atmosphere of 5% CO\(_2\) in air and high humidity. Within experiments, COCs were cultured with \( nM \) 9-cis-RA 5, in 1% ethanol or 9-cis-RA enhanced cyclin B1 and G6PDH, while reducing cyclin H1 and MnSOD expressions. The presence of 9-cis-RA during both prematuration and maturation processes tended to show more prominent effects than the ones observed when it was present only during prematuration or maturation alone. In our study, the presence of 9-cis-RA during both prematuration and maturation processes, the expression of cyclin B1 and G6PDH tended to increase, while cyclin H1 and MnSOD tended to decrease. However, the differences with the control group without additives were not significant. Our study during both prematuration and maturation processes show that beneficial effects of RA on oocyte developmental competence may not be related to the alteration of mRNA expression of the four genes analyzed. Grant support: Spanish Ministry of Science and Technology (AGL-2002-01175; 2003-05783).

235 RETINOID-DEPENDENT mRNA EXPRESSION IN BOVINE OOCYTES PREMATURED AND/OR MATURED IN VITRO

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As a transcription factor, retinoic acid (RA) can activate or silence a wide number of genes, thus inducing differentiation in cell systems and playing a role in cell cycle regulation. However, little is known of RA-dependent gene expression in the oocyte. Bovine oocytes and cumulus cells express most RA receptors, and the presence of 9-cis-RA during in vitro maturation (IVM) is beneficial to oocyte development (Duque et al., 2002 Hum. Reprod. 17, 2706–2714; Hidalgo et al., 2003 Reproduction 125, 409–416). The present work analyzes the relative abundance of various developmentally important gene transcripts in bovine oocytes during in vitro prematuration and/or maturation. Cumulus-oocyte complexes (COCs) were manipulated in defined medium with polyvinyl-alcohol (DM-PVA). Those COCs undergoing prematuration were cultured for 24 h in DM-PVA with 25 \( \mu \)M roscovitine. For IVM, some prematurely matured COCs were cultured for 24 h in DM-PVA containing pFSH, LH and E2. Incubations were made at 39°C in an atmosphere of 5% CO\(_2\) in air and high humidity. Within experiments, COCs were cultured with \( nM \) 9-cis-RA 5, in 1% ethanol (both as vehicle and inhibitor of endogenous RA synthesis), 3% ethanol, 5% ethanol and untreated. Using Real Time PCR (10 oocytes per group) (Rizos et al., 2003 Biol. Reprod. 68, 236) we examined the relative mRNA expression of genes involved in protection against free oxygen radicals (Mn-superoxide dismutase, MnSOD); glucose metabolism (glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase, G6PDH) and cell cycle events (Cyclin B1 and H1). Data (of 4 replicates) were analyzed by ANOVA and Duncan test (\( P < 0.05 \)) for normality. Regarding immature oocytes, prematuration in 1% ethanol increased cyclin B1 expression and decreased cyclin H1, while 9-cis-RA increased G6PDH. Maturation without additives increased cyclin B1 and G6PDH, but decreased cyclin H1 and MnSOD expression; opposite trends were observed under increasing ethanol dosages (3% and 5%). Maturation with 1% ethanol or 9-cis-RA enhanced cyclin B1 and G6PDH, while reducing cyclin H1 and MnSOD expressions. The presence of 9-cis-RA during both prematuration and maturation processes tended to show more prominent effects than the ones observed when it was present only during prematuration or maturation alone. In our study, in presence of 9-cis-RA during both prematuration and maturation processes, the expression of cyclin B1 and G6PDH tended to increase, while cyclin H1 and MnSOD tended to decrease. However, the differences with the control group without additives were not significant. Our study during both prematuration and maturation processes show that beneficial effects of RA on oocyte developmental competence may not be related to the alteration of mRNA expression of the four genes analyzed. Grant support: Spanish Ministry of Science and Technology (AGL-2002-01175; 2003-05783).
Interferon-tau (IFN-t) is a protein secreted by the conceptus of ruminant species and thought to be the primary signal in maternal recognition of pregnancy. Experiments were conducted to detect IFN-t in bovine oocytes, cumulus cells and embryos by use of immunocytochemistry and laser-scanning confocal microscopy. Embryos were produced by in vitro fertilization of in vitro-matured oocytes. Oocytes and embryos were fixed in formaldehyde at various stages of development, and stored in PBS until staining and microscopy. Cumulus cells were stripped from immature oocytes and cultured in M-199 (10% fetal calf serum) on coverslips treated with poly-D-lysine. They were divided into four treatment groups: (1) without hormones (control), (2) with the addition of FSH, (3) estradiol, or (4) FSH and estradiol. Bovine MDBK cells (ATCC CCL 22) and primary fibroblasts were cultured as controls on coverslips but without addition of hormones. A polyclonal antibody raised against bovine IFN-t was used, followed by a secondary conjugated antibody (AlexaFluor 488, Molecular Probes, Eugene OR). Actin was stained with phalloidin (AlexaFluor 568, Molecular Probes, Eugene OR). Cumulus, MDBK cells and fibroblasts were further stained with propidium iodine to visualize nuclei. Imaging was performed on a Leica laser-scanning confocal microscope. IFN-t was detected in hatched and unhatched Day 7 and Day 9 blastocysts, where its expression was restricted to the trophectoderm. IFN-t was also found in Day 5 and 6 morulae, but not at earlier stages. Furthermore, IFN-t was detected in the cumulus cell masses of oocytes before and after IVM, but not in the oocyte itself. Controls, in which the primary antibody was omitted, were negative regardless of developmental stage. IFN-t was also found in cultured cumulus cells regardless of whether hormones had been added to the medium; however, the protein was localized in the nuclei of cells only if they had been cultured with FSH, whereas in cells cultured with estrogen alone or without hormones IFN-t was restricted to the cytoplasm. In contrast, no IFN-t was detected in MDBK cells or fibroblasts. These results extend previous findings by showing that IFN-t is expressed as early as the morula stage. Moreover, these results demonstrate that IFN-t is also produced by cumulus cells where FSH appears to initiate a translocation of IFN-t into the nucleus, suggesting a role in regulation of gene expression.

### Table 1. Relative abundance (±SEM) of BAX, BCL-XL, and HSP 70.1 transcripts in bovine single in vitro or in vivo-produced embryos with or without α-amanitin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developmental Stage</th>
<th>BAX In Vitro</th>
<th>BAX In Vivo</th>
<th>BCL-XL In Vitro</th>
<th>BCL-XL In Vivo</th>
<th>HSP 70.1 In Vitro</th>
<th>HSP 70.1 In Vivo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early blastocyst</td>
<td>1.4 ± 0.5</td>
<td>1.2 ± 0.4</td>
<td>1.2 ± 0.3</td>
<td>1.3 ± 0.5</td>
<td>0.4 ± 0.1</td>
<td>0.3 ± 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blastocyst</td>
<td>1.3 ± 0.2</td>
<td>1.1 ± 0.4</td>
<td>1.9 ± 0.3</td>
<td>1.1 ± 0.3</td>
<td>0.3 ± 0.1</td>
<td>0.3 ± 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanded blastocyst</td>
<td>1.0 ± 0.3</td>
<td>0.9 ± 0.3</td>
<td>1.5 ± 0.3</td>
<td>1.1 ± 0.6</td>
<td>0.3 ± 0.1</td>
<td>0.5 ± 0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-16 cell control</td>
<td>0.6 ± 0.1</td>
<td>1.0 ± 0.3</td>
<td>1.0 ± 0.3</td>
<td>1.9 ± 0.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-16 cell α-amanitin</td>
<td>0.7 ± 0.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Earlier studies reported that the level of apoptosis in in vitro-produced bovine blastocysts is higher than in in vivo produced blastocysts (Gjorret et al., 2003: Biol. Reprod, in press). The molecular basis for this difference has not yet been studied. The regulation and execution of apoptosis is dependent on a cascade of events in which many proteins are involved. The aim of the present study was to analyze expression of BAX, a pro-apoptotic, and BCL-XL, an anti-apoptotic member of the BCL-2 family, and heat shock protein (HSP 70.1) transcripts in blastocysts cultured in vitro or in vivo. Furthermore, to verify if these transcripts detected in the blastocysts stages were newly expressed from the embryonic genome, a RNA polymerase II specific inhibitor, α-amanitin, was added to the culture medium from the zygote stage onwards, to block transcription. For the in vitro group, embryos were obtained from abattoir oocytes after IVM/IVF and IVC in SOF medium. For the in vivo group, embryos were collected from normally cyclic cows, superovulated with 3000 IU eCG (Intergonan; Intervet, Tönisvorst, Germany) at day 7 po by non-surgical uterine flushing. The developmental stage of the embryos was determined with stereomicroscopy. The expression of BAX gene transcripts was not affected by α-amanitin. Probably the maternally derived transcripts are very stable and not yet degraded at the 8- to 16-cell stage.
238  ESTROGEN RECEPTOR ALPHA AND PROGESTERONE RECEPTOR EXPRESSION FROM REPRODUCTIVE TISSUE AND IN VITRO PRODUCED EMBRYOS OF THE DOMESTIC CAT


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The in vitro production of cat embryos has been reported by several laboratories, and kittens have been born after transfer of embryos derived by IVF, ICSI, and NT. However, evidence accumulating in other species indicates that in vitro-derived embryos exhibit altered gene expression of developmentally important genes. Because the domestic cat genome is not well defined, the lack of primer sequence information poses a challenge for gene expression profiling. Estrogen, in addition to its essential role in the development and function of the female reproductive tract, is important for maturation of the oocyte. The aim of this preliminary study was to evaluate the expression profile of estrogen receptor alpha (ERα) and progesterone receptor (PR) in domestic cat female reproductive tissue and in vitro-produced (IVP) embryos. Embryos were produced in vitro as described by Gomez et al. (2003 Theriogenology 60, 239–251). mRNA was isolated from pools (n = 35–50) of IVP domestic cat embryos at the morula and blastocyst stages (Days 7 and 8) using a modified protocol of the PolyAT Tract System (Promega, Madison, WI, USA). Uterus and ovaries were collected from hysterecomectomized cats and total RNA was isolated from these estrogen-targeted organs (RNasey standard protocol, QIAGEN, Valencia, CA, USA). All RNA was reverse-transcribed and subjected to real-time PCR to evaluate expression of ERα and PR. The housekeeping gene, glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate dehydrogenase (GAPDH), was used as a control for expression in all tissues. Using primers designed to amplify human sequences or multispecies primers, we successfully amplified all three genes from as little as ~100 ng of ovarian or uterine mRNA. We were also able to detect ERα and GAPDH from pools of IVP embryos. Transcripts were cloned and confirmed by sequencing to be homologous to known sequences of the respective genes in a variety of species, including human, mouse, and pig. A 234-bp transcript of ERα (accession #AY349164; GenBank) corresponding to exons 5 through 7 of the human ERα gene (hormone-binding domain) was identified along with a 110-bp sequence of PR and 98-bp sequence of GAPDH. To our knowledge, this is the first description of ERα or PR cloning in the domestic cat. In summary, we have demonstrated that highly sensitive real-time PCR is effective for the assessment of gene expression in cat ovarian and uterine tissue, as well as in embryos, the latter, of which, are known to have a low transcript copy number. Furthermore, these experiments provide the basis for future studies on the effect of exogenous estrogen on gene expression in cat IVM oocytes and IVP embryos.

239  IDENTIFICATION OF DIFFERENTIALLY EXPRESSED GENES IN PORCINE PARTHENOTES AT 2-CELL AND BLASTOCYST STAGES USING ANNEALING CONTROL PRIMER TECHNOLOGY


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Identification of embryo-specific genes will provide insight into early embryonic development. However, the current methods employed to identify genes expressed at specific stages are laborious and produce a high degree of false positives. In the present study we employed an accurate PCR technology controlled by an annealing control primer (ACP, SeeGene, Seoul, Korea) to identify differentially expressed genes in presumptive porcine parthenotes. In vitro-matured porcine oocytes were parthenogenetically activated by square electrical direct current pulses. After 3 h of culture in NCSU 23 medium with 0.4% BSA. Total RNA was prepared from a pool of 200 2-cell stage and a pool of 100 blastocyst-stage porcine parthenotes using a Dynabeads mRNA DIRECT Kit. First-strand cDNA synthesis was carried out using dT-ACP1, wherein the 3′-end core portion comprised a hybridizing sequence complementary to a poly (A) region of mRNA transcripts. Second-strand cDNAs were synthesized using PCR with an arbitrary ACP whereby the 3′-end core portion of the dT-ACP2 was prevented from annealing to the first-strand. The PCR products were electrophoresed on 2% agarose gel and stained with ethidium bromide. The differentially expressed bands were extracted and cloned into a TOPO TA cloning vector (Invitrogen, Seoul, Korea), sequenced and analyzed by BLAST search. To date we have identified 21 differentially expressed genes using 28 arbitrary ACPs. BLAST analysis revealed that most of these genes have strong homology (more than 95%) with known mouse and human genes. Differentially expressed genes in the 2-cell stage include GDP dissociation, putative translation initiation factor (SUI1) and succinate dehydrogenase iron-protein subunit. The blastocyst specific genes include rennin binding proteins, ATPase inhibitor, catenin, ribosomal protein S15a, ribosomal protein large P1, pyruvocin sensitive aminopeptidase, BMPD gene, arginine N-methyltransferase p77 isoform, acylamino acid-releasing enzyme, ribosomal protein S14 and KIAA0630 protein. RT-PCR confirmed the expression of these genes in porcine parthenotes during preimplantation development. In conclusion, ACP technology is a specific and sensitive method to locate differentially expressed genes in preimplantation mammalian embryos.

240  OVINE PREPUBERTAL OOCYTE SHOWS ALTERATE GENE EXPRESSION AND LOW DEVELOPMENTAL COMPETENCE


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The aim of this work was to evaluate developmental competence and gene expression of prepubertal and adult ovine oocytes. GV prepubertal and adult oocytes were matured, fertilized and cultured in vitro until blastocyst stage; the time (days) needed to reach this stage was recorded. Blastocysts
developed on different days were cultured for hatching to evaluate their quality in relation to cleavage rate. Adult and prepubertal GV oocytes and blastocyst-stage embryos produced, respectively, at 6 and 7 days were compared for quantitative expression of poly(A) polymerase (poly(A)-P), glucose transporter I (Glut-I), desmocollin II (desmoII), plakoglobin (plak) and heat shock protein 70.1 (HSP70) genes. Confirming previous results (Ledda et al., 1996 Zygote 4, 343–348), fertilized prepubertal ovine oocytes developed to blastocyst stage at lower rates than the adult ones (19.9 v. 51.3%, respectively, P < 0.001) and this stage was delayed 24 h in prepubertal compared to adult embryos (P < 0.01), reflecting a lower quality (Fenwick et al., 2002 Hum. Reprod. 17, 407–412) of the culture. In fact, 44.7, 25.0, 30.3 and 0% of adult blastocysts were obtained after 6, 7, 8 and 9 days, respectively, of postfertilization culture compared to 0, 48.4, 34.3 and 17.2% of prepubertal ones. Faster-developed blastocysts showed higher hatching rate in both prepubertal (54.8%, 7 days of culture) and adult (89.8%, 6 days). Hatching rate dropped to 18.2% when blastocysts were obtained at 8–9 days in prepubertal and to 54.5% and 32.5% at 7 and 8 days, respectively, in adult embryos. Analysis of gene expression showed that HSP70, plakoglobin and desmo genes were not expressed in GV oocytes, and Glut-I mRNA was lower in prepubertal GV oocytes than in the adult ones (P < 0.01). All genes were expressed in blastocysts; we found that Glut-I was at lower levels (P < 0.01) in prepubertal-derived blastocysts whereas HSP70 was highly expressed (P < 0.05) in prepubertal blastocysts than in those derived from adult oocytes. In conclusion this work shows that prepubertal ovine oocytes have a lower developmental competence compared to the adult ones, correlated to an altered gene expression during the growth phase of the oocyte and early embryonic development. Supported by MIUR (cofin).

### 241 POLYADENYLATION STATUS OF mRNAs CODING FOR PRDX-6, GDF-9, G6PDH AND CYCLIN B1 BEFORE AND AFTER IN VITRO MATURATION OF BOVINE OOCYTES: REAL-TIME PCR RESULTS AFTER REVERSE TRANSCRIPTION WITH Oligo(dT) OR WITH HEXAMERS

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Changes in length of the polyA tail of an mRNA is determinant for its stability and translation. During oocyte maturation, although some genes are specifically polyadenylated, an important decrease of polyadenylated mRNA is generally observed. Both degradation and de-adenylation can be responsible for this decline but little information about these processes is available yet for in vitro-matured bovine oocytes. Total RNA was extracted using hexamers and normalized with the histone H2A value did not show a decrease during the maturation process. In conclusion, deadenylation, as a reporter for the efficiency of extraction and RT; (2) histone H2A, an endogenous gene reporter for RNA quantity and quality in each pool.

Table 1. Ratio of the PCR signals obtained after RT with oligo(dT) v. hexamers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oocyte status</th>
<th>Cyclin B1</th>
<th>PRDX-6</th>
<th>GDF-9</th>
<th>G6PDH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immature</td>
<td>2.9 ± 0.65*</td>
<td>3.75 ± 0.7</td>
<td>3.05 ± 1.06</td>
<td>5.48 ± 1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature</td>
<td>1.6 ± 0.02</td>
<td>0.71 ± 0.13</td>
<td>0.51 ± 0.15</td>
<td>0.69 ± 0.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Values ± SEM.

### 242 GLUTATHIONE CONTENT AND EXPRESSION OF ANTIOXIDANT ENZYME mRNAs IN SHEEP OOCYTES

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Reactive oxygen species (ROS) are normal products of embryo metabolism; however, oxidative injury may negatively impact development if ROS production exceeds antioxidant defense mechanisms. Protection of the embryo against ROS is dependent, in part, upon the pool of antioxidant enzyme mRNA and products stored in the oocyte. Previous work has demonstrated that retinol administration to superovulated ewes, followed by nutritional service, resulted in embryos with improved competence to develop in vitro. In other cell systems, retinoids have been shown to participate in the antioxidant network and redox system. The objectives of this study were to analyze glutathione content and characterize antioxidant enzyme mRNA.
expression in mature ovine oocytes and test the hypothesis that retinol administration affects levels of these products. Ewes were superovulated and administered retinol on the first and last day of FSH injection. Oocytes were collected from oviducts 60 h later and either prepared for glutathione (GSH) analysis or subjected to RNA isolation. Glutathione was quantified by the recycling assay of the enzyme 5,5'-dithiobis-(2-nitrobenzoic acid)-glutathione reductase using a total of more than 260 oocytes. Transcripts encoding for manganese superoxide dismutase (Mn-SOD), copper zinc superoxide dismutase (Cu-Zn SOD), glutathione synthetase (GS) and glutathione transferase pi (GSTp) were analyzed in a total of 86 single oocytes by semi-quantitative RT-PCR using a histone H2a transcript as the internal control. Chi-square analysis was performed to detect differences due to treatments. Glutathione content did not differ significantly between oocytes collected from retinol-treated (6.78 ± 3.81 pmol/oocyte) and control (6.38 ± 1.58 pmol/oocyte) ewes. Transcripts encoding for Mn-SOD, Cu-Zn SOD, GS and GSTp were detected in greater than 95% of the oocytes analyzed. Relative abundance of these transcripts did not differ between treatments. For the first time, glutathione content and antioxidant enzymes mRNA expression has been analyzed in in vivo-matured sheep oocytes. Retinol treatment did not appear to affect the expression of these products. Results demonstrate the existence of endogenous antioxidant defense products, stored as mRNA and protein, in sheep oocytes.

243 TEMPORAL DIVERGENCE IN THE PATTERN OF mRNA EXPRESSION IN BOVINE EMBRYOS CULTURED FROM THE ZYGOTE TO BLASTOCYST STAGE IN VITRO OR IN VIVO


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The objective of this study was to examine the time during the post-fertilization culture period that gene expression patterns of in vitro cultured bovine embryos diverge from those in their in vivo cultured counterparts. Presumptive bovine zygotes were produced by IVM/IVF of immature oocytes collected from the ovaries of slaughtered animals. At approximately 20 h post-insemination (hpi), presumptive zygotes were randomly divided into two culture groups, either in vitro in synthetic oviduct fluid or in vivo, and transferred into the ewe oviduct. Embryos were recovered from both systems at approximately 30 hpi (2-cell), two (4-cell), three (8-cell), four (16-cell), five (early morula), six (compact morula) or seven (blastocyst) days pi and snap-frozen for the analysis of transcription abundance using real-time PCR. The transcripts studied were interferon-tau, apoptosis regulator box-a (Bax), connexin 43, sarcoine oxidase, glucose transporter 5, mitochondrial Mn-superioxide dismutase, insulin-like growth factor II, and insulin-like growth factor-I receptor, most of which are known from our previous work to be differentially transcribed in blastocysts derived from culture in vitro or in vivo. Analysis was done on pools of 10 embryos. Data were analyzed using one-way repeated measures ANOVA. The relative abundance of the transcripts studied varied throughout the preimplantation period and was strongly influenced by the culture environment. For example, transcripts for interferon-tau were detected from the 8-cell stage onwards in in vitro-cultured embryos but not until the early morula stage in those cultured in vivo. Levels of this transcript increased significantly at the compact morula and blastocyst stages in both groups but were significantly higher (P < 0.05) in in vitro-cultured embryos at both stages. mRNA for Bax was not detected before the 8-cell stage in in vitro cultured embryos and not until the 16-cell stage in in vivo cultured embryos. The abundance of this transcript increased significantly thereafter up to the blastocyst stage in both groups. The level of expression was significantly higher (P < 0.05) at all stages of development in in vitro-cultured embryos than those cultured in vivo. The relative abundance of Cx43 transcripts decreased in both in vitro- and in vivo-cultured embryos at the 8- to 16-cell stage. Levels remained low thereafter in the in vitro-cultured embryos but significantly increased in those cultured in vivo. Transcript abundance was significantly higher in in vivo cultured embryos from Day 4 onwards with a ten-fold difference presence at the blastocyst stage. Differences also existed for the other transcripts studied. These data demonstrate that changes in transcript abundance in blastocyst stage embryos are in many cases a consequence of perturbed transcription earlier in development. Depending on the transcript, these differences may be evident in as short as 10 h of culture.

244 REAL TIME PCR EVALUATION OF EXPRESSION PROFILES OF SOME MATERNAL-SOURCED GENE TRANSCRIPTS IN IN VITRO PRODUCED PRE-IMPLANTATION STAGE BOVINE EMBRYOS

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Gene expression profiling data collected in a time series and quality related parameters are important for understanding the developmental mechanisms carried out in a developing embryo, and are also a source to enrich the knowledge base of embryo development. However, such data are frequently constrained by limitation and handling of the sample as well as cost associated with generating such data. Cumulatively, these factors have contributed to the existing insufficient data compared to the large need stemming from a drive to control and guide optimum embryo development. In this ongoing study, with objectives to quantify and evaluate gene transcripts identified from certain developmental stages, expression profiles of two ESTs (C256 and C112), derived from an oocyte cDNA library, were analyzed from the above perspectives to understand the change in the level of these gene transcripts throughout the pre-implantation stage of embryo development. For this analysis, pools of oocytes and embryos were prepared by balancing the amount proportional to the number of cells present. mRNA was isolated separately from each pool of matured oocytes, 2-cell, 4-cell, 8-cell, and 16-cell stages, as well as morula and blastocyst stages by using Dynal beads Oligo (dt)32 (Dynabeads, Dynal Biotech, Oslo, Norway) following the manufacturer's recommendations. These mRNAs were checked for DNA contamination and, when proved free, first-strand cDNA was synthesised by reverse transcription at 42°C for 2 h following standard laboratory procedures. Transcript quantification was performed by real-time PCR using gene-specific primers, equal amounts of cDNA from each sample and SYBR Green universal master mix. Following this analysis, both transcripts were found to be expressed in a wave-like manner being highly expressed in mature oocytes, declining gradually as the development stage advanced, with the lowest level at the 16-cell stage, and then reviving in level thereafter until it reached blastocyst stage. Taking the 16-cell stage as calibrator
for both, C256 was 26.4, 23.2, 8.5, 1.7, 2.4 and 2.7 times more expressed in oocyte, 2-cell, 4-cell, 8-cell, morula and blastocyst stages, respectively. Similarly, C112 was 110.7, 169.2, 9.8, 2.5, 4.1 and 7.3 times more expressed in oocyte, 2-cell, 8-cell, morula and blastocyst stages, respectively. These expression patterns suggest the probable origin of these transcripts initially to be maternal. C256 is strongly similar to human retinoid X receptor beta (RXRβ) gene (NM_021976.3), which is involved in transcriptional functions and in increasing DNA binding, whereas C112 is strongly similar to TATA box-binding protein-associated factor gene (AY189986.1), which is also involved in transcriptional functions. As seen from their functions, these transcripts can be vital for developing the embryo and the variations at different developmental stages shows their most probable role as part of genes contributing to developmental competence in pre-implantation development stages.

245 RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OF HSP 70 mRNA IN BOVINE EMBRYOS PRODUCED IN VITRO USING DIFFERENT EMBRYO/VOLUME RATIOS IN CULTURE


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In spite of in vitro embryo production systems having been greatly improved over recent years, employing a variety of culture conditions (media, protein sources, gas atmosphere, etc.), we still do not know much about the real necessity of embryos to develop under the same conditions as occur in vivo. These differences between in vivo and in vitro culture at preimplantation embryonic stages can produce deviations in gene expression and in normal fetal development (large offspring syndrome). Heat shock proteins (Hsp) are engaged in cell response to regulatory signals or perturbations in the microenvironment and can be used as a sensitive indicator of stress caused by suboptimal culture conditions (Wrenzycki et al., 2001 Hum. Reprod. 16, 893–901). Hsp act as chaperones in facilitating protein folding and assembly and stabilize damaged proteins to prevent aggregation of fragments, thereby allowing repair or degradation. The aim of the present study was to investigate the effects of different embryo/volume ratios on bovine embryo development and the relative abundance of Hsp 70.1 gene transcripts. In this experiment, oocytes were isolated from slaughterhouse ovaries and cultured and fertilized and cultured in groups of 5, 10, 20 or 30 per each drop of 100 µL. The oocytes were matured in TCM 199 supplemented with 0.4% BSA. After maturation, oocytes were fertilized in TALP medium, using frozen/thawed sperm, selected using a percoll density gradient. The zygotes were cultured to the morula or Day 7 blastocyst stage employing SOF supplemented with 0.4% BSA. Developmental check points were cleavage rate (Day 3 pi), blastocyst formation (Day 8 pi) and hatching (Day 11 pi). A semi-quantitative RT-PCR assay was used to determine the relative levels of gene transcripts in single embryos at morula (Day 6) and blastocyst (Day 7) stages (Wrenzycki et al., 2001 Biol. Reprod. 65, 309–317). Data of cleavage, blastocyst formation and hatching rates were analyzed using chi-square test. Relative abundance (RA) of Hsp 70.1 mRNA were compared in tested groups using ANOVA followed a Tukey test. Differences at P < 0.05 were considered significant. Results show that no significative difference in hatching rate per blastocyst produced was detected among the four groups. Cleavage rate and blastocyst formation were significantly higher in groups with 5, 10 and 20 embryos compared with drops containing 30 embryos. Hsp transcripts were detected in morula and blastocyst stages in all groups. In morula stage, no differences were observed in the RA of Hsp 70.1 mRNA among groups with 5, 10, 20 and 30 embryos cultured per drop. However, in blastocyst stage, the RA was significantly increased in the group with 20 embryos per drop as compared to the group with 5 embryos. The results show that different embryo/volume ratios in culture influence not only cleavage rate, blastocyst formation and hatching rate, but also expression of Hsp 70.1 gene. Further studies changing other culture conditions and using in vivo-derived bovine embryos will aid in elucidating which culture systems are ideal to produce bovine embryos in vitro. This research was supported by CAPES/DAAD program and CNPq.

246 IMPROVEMENT OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL CAPACITY OF OOCYTES FROM PREPUBERTAL CATTLE BY INTRAOVARIAN IGF-I APPLICATION

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The developmental potential of oocytes from prepubertal cattle is lower compared to their adult counterparts. Differences between oocytes from calves and cows have been found with regard to size, ultrastructural characteristics and metabolism. GH and IGF-I receptor mRNA have been identified in the cumulus cells and in oocytes (Izadyar F et al. 1997 Mol. Reprod. Dev. 47, 175–180; Armstrong D. et al., 2002 Reproduction 123 (6), 789–797). It is known that IGF-I and GH affect mRNA expression of glucose transporter 1 (Glut1) as well as glucose uptake by embryos. The goal of this study was to improve the developmental capacity of oocytes from prepubertal cattle and to determine whether an induced increase of GH and IGF-I levels affects the mRNA expression pattern of Glut1, UB1 and eIF1A. Holstein calves (n = 30), 6–7 months old, were randomly divided into three groups. One group received a single s.c. injection of 500 mg of somatotrophin (rBST Posilac, Monsanto Company, St. Louis, MO, USA) and during the subsequent 2 weeks their follicles were aspirated 4 times via transvaginal ultrasound-guided ovum pick-up (OPU). The second group received an intraovarian injection of 6 μg rhIGF-I (R&D Systems, Wiesbaden-Nordenstadt, Germany). The third group served as control and received an intraovarian injection of 0.6 mL of 10 mM acetic acid. All animals were i.m. injected with 60 mg FSH (Follitropin®; Vetrepharm Inc., Ontario, Canada) 48 h prior to aspiration. The treatments were made with the same animal groups at the ages of 9–10, 11–12 and 14–15 months. Five adult cows were i.m. injected each with 100 mg FSH. For mRNA expression analysis (RT-PCR), embryos were collected with 2–4 cells, 8–16 cells and as blastocysts. The relative abundance of mRNA for Glut 1 and eIF1A was higher (P < 0.05) in 8–16 cell embryos from IGF-I-treated calves and cows than in control and rBST treated calves. The in vitro embryo production (IVP) results are shown in the Table 1. Our data show that IGF-I increased mRNA expression of Glut1 and eIF1A which may improve the developmental capacity of embryos produced from calves.
The mammalian relative of DNAJ (MRJ), a member of the molecular chaperones that are known as heat shock proteins, plays an important role in the process of murine chorioallantoic fusion. The objective of this study was to determine the expression pattern of MRJ in the bovine endometrium during early and mid-pregnancy using quantitative RT-PCR. Twenty-eight Japanese Black cows, aged between 1.2 and 15.2 years, with normal estrous cycles, were used in this study. Twenty-one cows were used for study of the level of MRJ during pregnancy. They were artificially inseminated, and their endometrial tissues were collected on Days 16 to 21 (n = 7), 30 to 36 (n = 6), 48 to 49 (n = 4) and 74 to 140 (n = 4) of pregnancy. Seven cows were used as controls for the study of cyclic level of MRJ, and their endometrial tissues were collected on Days 13 to 14 (n = 4) and 17 to 20 (n = 3) of the estrous cycle. The caruncles and the intercaruncles were isolated from the endometrial tissues. All tissues were frozen immediately after collection.

Table 1. OPU/IVP-Results for calves (6–15 months old) in comparison with cows

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>*COC/aspiration</th>
<th>*COC usable/aspiration</th>
<th>(%) dividing to 2 cell stage</th>
<th>No. blastocysts (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control (n = 80)</td>
<td>(622) 7.3(ab)</td>
<td>(343) 4.3(a)</td>
<td>55b</td>
<td>38 (11b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGF-I (n = 79)</td>
<td>(670) 8.4(a)</td>
<td>(351) 4.4(ab)</td>
<td>65a</td>
<td>92 (26b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rbST (n = 77)</td>
<td>(442) 5.3(b)</td>
<td>(218) 2.8(b)</td>
<td>75b</td>
<td>34 (16b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cows (n = 50)</td>
<td>(444) 8.9(a)</td>
<td>(270) 5.4(a)</td>
<td>76b</td>
<td>68 (25b)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Tukey Test (a,b) P < 0.05, chi square (a,b) P < 0.05, n = total number of aspirations.

248 EXPRESSION AND LOCALIZATION OF VASCULAR ENDOTHELIAL GROWTH FACTOR AND VASCULAR ENDOTHELIAL GROWTH FACTOR RECEPTOR 2 IN EQUINE FOLLICLES


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Ovarian follicles undergo pronounced morphological changes, alternating between periods of growth and regression. The equine follicle will grow to an average of 45 mm in diameter at ovulation, and during the phase of growth, there is an increase in blood supply to the follicle. Vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF) is a cytokine that interacts with tyrosine kinase receptors to stimulate angiogenesis, endothelial cell proliferation and vascular permeability. The aim of the study was to evaluate the expression and localization of VEGF and the VEGF-receptor 2 (VEGF-R2) in equine follicles. Ovaries were collected from a slaughterhouse. Granulosa cells from follicles were pooled regardless of the size of the follicles. Western blots were performed using protein extracted from granulosa cells and follicular fluid. Blots were probed with rabbit anti-human VEGF and rabbit anti-mouse VEGF-R2, respectively. Immunofluorescence experiments performed on dissected equine follicles localized VEGF to the granulosa cell layer and sporadically to the theca cell layer. VEGF-R2 co-localized with VEGF in the granulosa cells, and was relatively absent in the theca layer. The present study detected novel expression patterns for VEGF and VEGF-R2 in equine ovarian follicles. The results of these experiments suggest an extra-vascular role for the VEGF family in follicle development. Future studies will be directed at studying the genomic and proteonomic profiles of follicles during the selection of the dominant follicle in mares.
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249  **BOVINE GRANULOSA CELLS siRNA EXPRESSION OF PEROXISOME PROLIFERATOR-ACTIVATED RECEPTOR-α AND THE PROTO-ONCOGENE c-Fos**


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PPARαs and c-Fos are involved in regulation of gene expression and are known to be dependent on retinoic acid (RA), which in turn influences oocyte growth and development competence (Duque et al., 2002 Hum. Reprod. 17, 2706–2714; Hidalgo et al., 2003. Reproduction 125, 409–416), probably acting in part through granulosa cells. Peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor-α (PPARα) heterodimerizes with the retinoid receptor X (RXR), while c-Jun/c-Fos heterodimerizes with liganded retinoic acid receptors (RARs), then preventing formation of transcription factor activator protein 1 (AP-1) complexes capable of DNA binding. Cellular retinoic acid binding protein (CRABP) limits RA excess and regulates the transcriptional potential of RA; CRABP II has been detected in rat granulosa cells from mature follicles and luteal cells. The aim of this study was to investigate PPARαs, c-Fos and CRABP I mRNA expression in bovine granulosa cells. In parallel, other genes whose expression can be influenced by RA were analyzed: luteinizing hormone receptor (LHr), follicle stimulating hormone receptor (FSHr), aromatase and growth hormone (GH). Ovaries were collected at a local abattoir and kept in saline at 30–35 °C. Granulosa cells were obtained by aspirating 2- to 7-mm antral follicle contents, pelleted at 700g for 4 min and resuspended in RNA-later (Ambion®). Total RNA was isolated with a NucleoSpin® RNAII kit (Macherey-Nagel), and mRNA was reverse transcribed into single-stranded cDNA using a 1st Strand cDNA Synthesis Kit for RT-PCR (AMV) (Roche). A PCR standard method was made using 1 µl of the cDNA as a template. All PCR primer couples were designed on the basis of the bovine sequence, but c-Fos and CRABP II primers were designed based on the human-murine sequences. Primers within the couple were located in different exons to distinguish DNA from RNA amplification. CRABP II was further investigated in bovine whole ovary, corpus luteum (CL) and liver, in a search for positive controls. Bovine β-actin, 18S and 28S were examined in each sample as positive controls for RNA isolation and cDNA synthesis efficiency. Ten µl of product were loaded into an agarose 2% gel in TBE buffer containing ethidium bromide, and were separated by horizontal electrophoresis. Gels were visualized with ultraviolet light and photographed using a digital camera. Gene expression in granulosa was demonstrated for PPARαs, c-Fos, LHR, FSHr, aromatase, GH and controls (β-actin, 18S and 28S) but CRABP II gene did not express in granulosa cells, whole ovary, CL or liver under our experimental conditions. While lacking CRABP II expression remains intriguing, the expressed genes support a role of retinoid pathway within granulosa cells under both in vivo and in vitro conditions, because granulosa cells used in the present experiments were derived from follicles providing oocytes for IVM-IVF. Grant support: Spanish Ministry of Science and Technology (AGL-2002-01175).

250  **SPECIFIC GENE KNOCK DOWN OF OCT-4 IN MOUSE PREIMPLANTATION EMBRYOS USING SHORT INTERFERENCE RNA**


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RNA interference is used to specifically and effectively inhibit the expression of cognate genes. In the present study we investigated the inhibitory effect of gene expression in mouse embryos developing in vitro by injecting short interference RNA (siRNA). Fertilized mouse zygotes were obtained from mated females 20–24 h after hCG injection. Chemically synthesized 21-nt siRNA was commercially obtained and injected into mouse zygotes. The zygotes were then cultured in KSOM medium supplemented with 4% BSA at 37 °C. Semi-quantitative RT-PCR was used to examine Octamer-binding transcription factor (Oct-4) gene expression in a single mouse embryo developing in vitro following siRNA-injection. In order to determine the expression and distribution of Oct-4 in mouse embryos, the mouse embryos were fixed in 4% paraformaldehyde for 20 min and permeabilized with 0.2% triton x-100 for 10 min. Embryos were then incubated with rabbit Oct-4 polyclonal antibody for 1 h and with FITC-labeled goat anti-rabbit antibody. Propidium iodide was used for DNA staining. siRNA injection did not retard the development of mouse zygotes. The number of blastocyst cells and the ICM/TE ratio did not differ in the siRNA injected blastocysts and the non-injected control group. Semi-quantitative RT-PCR revealed that Oct-4 expression was decreased at the 4-cell embryo stage and was significantly high at the morula and blastocyst stages. Injection of siRNA into oocytes inhibited RNA expression of Oct-4 and Nanog, but not of E-cadherin and Heat shock protein 70.1. Immunocytochemical staining showed inhibition of Oct-4 expression of the morula and blastocysts following injection of siRNA. After culture of the embryos in the ES cell-derived conditioned medium, the embryos were stained for alkaline phosphatase (AP), a marker specific to pluripotent cells. AP was not detected in the inner cell mass of blastocysts following siRNA injection. These results suggest that siRNA injection into a mouse zygote specifically inactivates Oct-4 in mouse embryos developing in vitro.

251  **SEARCH FOR GENES INVOLVED IN DEVELOPMENTAL COMPETENCE IN MOUSE OOCYTES USING SUPPRESSION SUBTRACTIVE HYBRIDIZATION**

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During the first month after birth, synchronous follicular growth occurs in the ovary of immature mice (first wave). Previously, we showed that mouse oocytes during the first wave were more competent developmentally in older females (Suzuki et al., 2002 Theriogenology 57, 628 abst), although the numbers of mature oocytes did not differ with female age (17, 18, and 24 days old). In this study, we examined the genetic factors that affect the developmental competence of mouse oocytes during the first wave using suppression subtractive hybridization (SSH). Oocytes collected from 17- and 24-day-old B6D2F1 females (D17 and D24, respectively) without hormonal treatment were matured in Waymouth medium supplemented with 0.2% triton x-100 for 10 min. Embryos were then incubated with rabbit Oct-4 polyclonal antibody for 1 h and with FITC-labeled goat anti-rabbit antibody. Propidium iodide was used for DNA staining. siRNA injection did not retard the development of mouse zygotes. The number of blastocyst cells and the ICM/TE ratio did not differ in the siRNA injected blastocysts and the non-injected control group. Semi-quantitative RT-PCR revealed that Oct-4 expression was decreased at the 4-cell embryo stage and was significantly high at the morula and blastocyst stages. Injection of siRNA into oocytes inhibited RNA expression of Oct-4 and Nanog, but not of E-cadherin and Heat shock protein 70.1. Immunocytochemical staining showed inhibition of Oct-4 expression of the morula and blastocysts following injection of siRNA. After culture of the embryos in the ES cell-derived conditioned medium, the embryos were stained for alkaline phosphatase (AP), a marker specific to pluripotent cells. AP was not detected in the inner cell mass of blastocysts following siRNA injection. These results suggest that siRNA injection into a mouse zygote specifically inactivates Oct-4 in mouse embryos developing in vitro.
A comparative analysis of mRNA expression patterns between embryos produced under different in vitro and in vivo culture systems allows the

Austin, TX, USA). Some of the total RNA from each independent group was pooled by age (total of RNA from approximately 100 oocytes per

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quantity, Cyclin B1 mRNA level was quantified by real-time PCR (Lightcycler, Roche, Indianapolis, IN, USA) in cold, warm or warm

2h 30 min oocytes in GV (oocytes left for an additional 2 h and 30 min at room temperature). To assess for variation in mRNA

2h

in vitro (Ponsuksili et al., 2002, Theriogenology 57, 1611–1624) or in vivo- (Moesslacher et al., 2001 Reprod. Dom. Anim. 32, 37) produced bovine 2-, 4-, 8-, 16-cell, morula and blastocyst stage embryos using real time PCR technology. Poly(A) RNA was isolated from four separate individual embryos from each developmental stage and embryo group (in vitro or in vivo) using Dynabeads mRNA kit (Dynal, Oslo, Norway). After reverse transcription, quantitative PCR was performed with sequence specific primers in an ABI PRISM® 7000 Sequence Detection System instrument (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA, USA) using SYBR® Green as a double-strand DNA-specific fluorescent dye. Standard curves were generated for target and endogenous genes using serial dilutions of plasmid DNA. Final quantification was done using the relative standard curve method, and results were reported as relative expression or $n$-fold difference to the calibrator cDNA (i.e., the blastocyst stage) after normalization with the endogenous control (Histone2a). Data were analyzed using SAS version 8.0 (SAS Institute Inc., NC, USA) software package. Analysis of variance was performed with the main effects being the developmental stage and embryo source (in vitro or in vivo) and their interactions followed by multiple pairwise comparisons using Tukey's test. No significant difference was observed in the relative abundance of the PSCD2 gene between the two embryo groups. However, its expression was higher (20-fold) ($P < 0.05$) at the 8-cell stage than the other developmental stages among in vitro embryos. Higher expression ($P < 0.05$) of NADH-subunit mRNA was detected in vivo than in vitro at the 2-cell stage of development. The TCF7L2 mRNA was expressed in the in vitro embryos but not in the in vivo ones. PAIP1 mRNA was higher ($P < 0.05$) in vitro (1500-fold) than in the in vivo embryos (500-fold) at the 2-cell developmental stage compared to the calibrator. The novel transcript was also detected at higher level ($P < 0.05$) in the in vitro than in the in vivo embryos at the 2-cell stage of development. However, the PAIP1 and the novel transcript showed no significant difference in their expression between the two embryo groups beyond the 2-cell developmental stage. Both PAIP1 and the novel transcript were detected only up to 8-cell stage in both embryo groups, suggesting their maternal origin. In conclusion, the variations in the expression of studied genes between in vitro and in vivo may reflect the effect of the two culture systems on the transcriptional activity of early embryos.

252 A COMPARATIVE EXPRESSION ANALYSIS OF GENES IN PREIMPLANTATION DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF BOVINE EMBRYOS PRODUCED IN VITRO OR IN VIVO

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A comparative analysis of mRNA expression patterns between embryos produced under different in vitro and in vivo culture systems allows the isolation of genes associated with embryo quality and investigation of the effect of culture environment on the embryonic gene expression. In this study, expression analysis of four known (PSCD2, TCF7L2, NADH-subunit and PAIP1) genes and one novel transcript, derived from differential display PCR, was performed in in vitro (Ponsuksili et al. 2002, Theriogenology 57, 1611–1624) or in vivo- (Moesslacher et al., 2001 Reprod. Dom. Anim. 32, 37) produced bovine 2-, 4-, 8-, 16-cell, morula and blastocyst stage embryos using real time PCR technology. Poly(A) RNA was isolated from four separate individual embryos from each developmental stage and embryo group (in vitro or in vivo) using Dynabeads mRNA kit (Dynal, Oslo, Norway). After reverse transcription, quantitative PCR was performed with sequence specific primers in an ABI PRISM® 7000 Sequence Detection System instrument (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA, USA) using SYBR® Green as a double-strand DNA-specific fluorescent dye. Standard curves were generated for target and endogenous genes using serial dilutions of plasmid DNA. Final quantification was done using the relative standard curve method, and results were reported as relative expression or $n$-fold difference to the calibrator cDNA (i.e., the blastocyst stage) after normalization with the endogenous control (Histone2a). Data were analyzed using SAS version 8.0 (SAS Institute Inc., NC, USA) software package. Analysis of variance was performed with the main effects being the developmental stage and embryo source (in vitro or in vivo) and their interactions followed by multiple pairwise comparisons using Tukey's test. No significant difference was observed in the relative abundance of the PSCD2 gene between the two embryo groups. However, its expression was higher (20-fold) ($P < 0.05$) at the 8-cell stage than the other developmental stages among in vitro embryos. Higher expression ($P < 0.05$) of NADH-subunit mRNA was detected in vivo than in vitro at the 2-cell stage of development. The TCF7L2 mRNA was expressed in the in vitro embryos but not in the in vivo ones. PAIP1 mRNA was higher ($P < 0.05$) in vitro (1500-fold) than in the in vivo embryos (500-fold) at the 2-cell developmental stage compared to the calibrator. The novel transcript was also detected at higher level ($P < 0.05$) in the in vitro than in the in vivo embryos at the 2-cell stage of development. However, the PAIP1 and the novel transcript showed no significant difference in their expression between the two embryo groups beyond the 2-cell developmental stage. Both PAIP1 and the novel transcript were detected only up to 8-cell stage in both embryo groups, suggesting their maternal origin. In conclusion, the variations in the expression of studied genes between in vitro and in vivo may reflect the effect of the two culture systems on the transcriptional activity of early embryos.

253 BOVINE OOCYTE CYCLIN B1 mRNA UNDERGOES CYTOPLASMIC POLYADENYLATION BEFORE THE BEGINNING OF IN VITRO MATURATION

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Maternal oocyte Cyclin B1 mRNA is known to be stored in the cytoplasm with a short poly(A) tail and be translationally dormant at GV stage. During maturation, Cyclin B1 poly(A) tail is elongated by a process called cytoplasmic polyadenylation and driven by A/U-rich cis-acting elements in its 3’ untranslated region (UTR) known as cytoplasmic polyadenylation elements (CPEs). The objective of this study was to elucidate whether GV-stage bovine oocytes possess a stockpile of Cyclin B1 mRNA stored with a short poly(A) tail that is elongated during maturation by CPE regulation. The mRNA poly(A) tail length was measured by Rapid Amplification of cDNA Ends Polyadenylation test (Race-PAT) on oocytes ($n = 100$) at the GV stage and 3, 5, 8, 10, 15, 20, and 25 h of in vitro maturation. The mRNA poly(A) tail length was also measured in triplicate ($n = 20$) on cold oocytes in GV (all manipulations on ice), warm oocytes in GV (ovaries transported in warm saline and manipulations on ice) and warm + 2 h 30 min oocytes in GV (oocytes left for an additional 2 h and 30 min at room temperature). To assess for variation in mRNA quantity, Cyclin B1 mRNA level was quantified by real-time PCR (Lightcycler, Roche, Indianapolis, IN, USA) in cold, warm or warm + 2 h
The main objective of this project was to isolate and identify important genes specifically expressed in oocytes. These genes are characterized and transcription factors are possibly present in the oocyte in their mRNA form, and their translation could enhance the maternal-to-zygotic transition. During the first stages of bovine embryonic development, until the 8- to 16-cell stage, the zygote is maintained by the mRNA and proteins stored in the oocyte. New embryonic transcription is reported to begin only at the 8- to 16-cell stage even if some minor transcription is detected from the 2-cell stage. In order for this to occur, several factors are required to remodel the chromatin and activate the transcription machinery. Some regulating transcription factors studied are found at higher levels in pre-MZT embryos and at lower levels in subsequent stages. For HMGN2 and MSY2, there is a significant decrease in expression as development progresses.

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The most interesting clones to date are #1518, a gene associated with pluripotency; #1776, a cDNA associated with stem cells in mouse, and #1906, a protein that interacts with chromatin. Since they are conserved across species, the chances that their function is important are quite high. A validation step with RT-PCR analysis will need to be performed on genes identified as oocyte-specific, and the functionality of these genes will be determined with the RNAi technique. WEB page http://www.begc.cbr.ulaval.ca/ (Supported by NSERC.)

254 IDENTIFICATION OF OOCYTE SPECIFIC GENES USING SSH AND MICROARRAY ANALYSIS

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The main objective of this project was to isolate and identify important genes specifically expressed in oocytes. These genes are characterized and may uncover the molecular mechanisms related to the unique functions found in the oocyte. Total RNA (1 µg) from denuded germinal vesicle-stage (GV) oocytes and somatic tissues were used for cDNA production. The mRNAs were reverse-transcribed and the cDNAs were amplified using the Smart cDNA amplification kit (Clontech, BD Biosciences, San Jose, CA, USA). SSH was performed with the PCR-Select cDNA Subtraction Kit (Clontech). Briefly, pools consisted of oocyte-specific genes for the tester and bovine somatic tissues for the driver. The same procedure was repeated with mouse and xenopus tissues. All of the 3500 subtracted PCR products generated by SSH were cloned, PCR amplified and sequenced. The resulting sequences were compared against the GenBank database using online computer BLASTn program. For microarray analysis, purified PCR products were spotted on GAPPS II glass slides (Corning, Corning, NY, USA) using a VersArray Chip WriterPro robot (BioRad, Hercules, CA, USA). Forward- and reverse-subtracted PCR products were used as probes labeled with Cy-3 and Cy-5 dyes (Amersham, Piscataway, NJ, USA) using the Amino Alkylation Kit (Ambion, Austin, TX, USA). Slides were scanned and analyzed using the ChipReader and ArrayPro Analyser software (Media Cybernetics, Carlsbad, CA, USA). Detection of the oocyte-specific zona pellucida (ZP), growth differentiation factor-9 (GDF-9), hors morphogenetic protein 15 (BMP15), H1 histone family, member O, oocyte-specific (H1oo), and cyclin B1 transcript in the oocyte subtracted library increased confidence in the validity of the subtraction procedure. All of these transcripts account for 12 % of the clones for the mouse subtracted oocyte library. Microarray analysis performed with the mouse arrays revealed that 33 % (382) of the clones were differentially expressed (ratio > 10) in the oocyte for the mouse library. Of the 139 clones (12%) that seemed to be present only in the oocyte, 65 were found to be expressed in both the bovine and the xenopus subtracted oocyte library. The most interesting clones to date are #1518, a gene associated with pluripotency; #1776, a cDNA associated with stem cells in mouse, and #1906, a protein that interacts with chromatin. Since they are conserved across species, the chances that their function is important are quite high. A validation step with RT-PCR analysis will need to be performed on genes identified as oocyte-specific, and the functionality of these genes will be determined with the RNAi technique. WEB page http://www.begc.cbr.ulaval.ca/ (Supported by NSERC.)

255 EXPRESSION OF TRANSCRIPTION FACTORS PRIOR TO THE MATERNAL-TO-ZYGOTIC TRANSITION IN BOVINE EMBRYOS

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During the first stages of bovine embryonic development, until the 8- to 16-cell stage, the zygote is maintained by the mRNA and proteins stored in the oocyte. New embryonic transcription is reported to begin only at the 8- to 16-cell stage even if some minor transcription is detected from the 2-cell stage. In order for this to occur, several factors are required to remodel the chromatin and activate the transcription machinery. Some regulating transcription factors are possibly present in the oocyte in their mRNA form, and their translation could enhance the maternal-to-zygotic transition (MZT). In our study, we observed the expression patterns of five transcription factors (ATF2, HMGN2, HMGB2, HUEL and MSY2) in bovine oocytes. Pooled GV or MII oocytes, and 2-, 4-, 8-cell and blastocyst-stage embryos (n = 40/stage) were washed in PBS and frozen at −80°C. Each pool was spiked with 1 pg of GFP RNA containing a poly(A) tail. The RNA was extracted using the Absolutely RNA Micro Prep Kit (Stratagene, La Jolla, CA, USA), co-precipitated with linear acrylamide (Ambion, Austin, TX, USA) and reverse-transcribed with Omniscript (Quiagen). The quantitative amplification of the transcription factors was performed in triplicate using the equivalent of 1 oocyte or embryo per reaction on a Lightcycler (Roche, Indianapolis, IN, USA). Data were normalized with the GFP levels found in each pool and a Least-Significant-Difference method was used for statistical analysis. Immunocytochemistry studies were performed on oocytes and embryos fixed and permeabilized in a solution of parafomaldehyde and Triton X-100, and results were observed on a confocal microscope. Our results show that the transcripts of the transcription factors studied are found at higher levels in pre-MZT embryos and at lower levels in subsequent stages. For HMGN2 and MSY2, there
Array technology is a widely used tool for gene expression profiling, providing the possibility to monitor expression levels of an unlimited number of genes in various biological systems including preimplantation embryos. The objective of the present study was to develop and validate a bovine cDNA array and to compare expression profiles of embryos derived from different origins. A bovine blastocyst cDNA library was generated. Poly(A⁺) RNA was extracted from in vitro-produced embryos using a Dynabead mRNA purification kit. First-strand synthesis was performed with SacIT21 primer followed by randomly primed second-strand synthesis with a DOP primer mix (Roche) and a global PCR with 35 cycles using SacIT21 and DOP primers. Complementary DNA fragments from 300 to 1500 bp were extracted from the gel and normalized via reassocation and hydroxyapatite chromatography. Resulting cDNAs were digested with SacI and XhoI, ligated into a pBks vector, and transfected into competent bacteria (Stratagene). After blue/white colony selection, plasmids were extracted and the inserts were subjected to PCR using vector specific primers. Average insert size was determined by size identification on agarose gels stained with ethidium bromide. After purification via precipitation and denaturation, 192 cDNA probes were double-spotted onto a nylon membrane and bound to the membrane by UV cross linking. Amplified RNA (aRNA) probes from pools of three or single blastocysts were generated as described recently (Brambrink et al., 2002 BioTechniques, 33, 3–9) and hybrized to the membranes. Expression profiles of in vitro-produced blastocysts cultured in either SOF plus BSA or TC732C plus serum were compared with those of diploid parthenogenetic ones generated by chemical activation. Thirty-three probes have been sequenced and, after comparison with public data bases, 26 were identified as cDNAs or genes. Twelve out of 192 (6%) seem to be differentially expressed within the three groups; 7/12 (58%) were up-regulated, 3/12 (25%) were up-regulated in SOF-derived embryos, and 2/12 (20%) were up-regulated in parthenogenetic blastocysts compared to their in vitro-generated counterparts. Three of these genes involved in calcium signaling (calmodulin, calreticulin) and regulation of actin cytoskeleton (dextrin) were validated by semi-quantitative RT-PCR (Wrenzycki et al., 2001 Biol. Reprod. 65, 309–317) employing poly(A⁺) RNA from a single blastocyst as starting material. No differences were detected in the relative abundance of the analysed gene transcripts within the different groups. These findings were confirmed employing the aRNA used for hybridization in RT-PCR and showed a good representativity of the selected transcripts. Results indicate that it is possible to construct a homologous cDNA array which could be used for gene expression profiling of bovine preimplantation embryos. Supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG Ni 256/18-1).

257 DIFFERENTIAL GENE EXPRESSION IN GERMINAL VESICLE AND METAPHASE II MOUSE OOCYTES.


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The present study was conducted to identify oocyte-specific genes according to developmental stage. We used an accurate Annealing Control Primer (ACP, SeeGene, Seoul, Korea)-based GeneFishing technology. This new and innovative method has developed 120 ACPs so far to locate differentially expressed genes. This method is more specific and sensitive than differential display-PCR that is labor-intensive and results in a high degree of false positives. To identify genes differentially expressed in germinal vesicle (GV)- and metaphase II (MII)-stage oocytes, fully grown GV-intact and MII oocytes were obtained. The addition of 0.2 mM IBMX in the collection medium inhibited GV breakdown. The mRNA samples were prepared from the same number of GV and MII oocytes using a Dynabeads mRNA DIRECT Kit. GeneFishing system utilizes a two-stage PCR to fish out authentic differentially expressed genes by regulating binding of each portion of ACP at a different stage of PCR. The differentially expressed bands were extracted and cloned into a TOPO TA cloning vector (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA, USA), sequenced, and analyzed by BLAST search. To confirm the differential expression of selected transcripts, RT-PCR and immunofluorescence staining were conducted. Using 12 different ACPs, we isolated 27 differentially expressed bands from GV and MII oocytes. BLAST results indicated that most of these bands had strong homology with known genes. We confirmed that pleckstrin homology, protein kinase D2 (PKD), and COP9 (constitutive photomorphogenic) homologs were GV-specific, while minichromosome maintenance deficient 2 mitotin (MCM2), malate dehydrogenase, soluble Mor2, growth arrest specific 6 (Gas-6), Bel-2 homolog (Diva), and suppressor of cytokine signaling 4 were expressed highly in MII. Immunofluorescence staining results confirmed higher expression of Gas-6 protein in MII oocytes compared to GV oocytes. Immunohistochemistry results with ovarian tissues demonstrated that MCM2 protein was expressed genes in the axis of a newly identified PKD signaling system. Therefore, further investigation of the functions of each gene identified in this study will provide a basis for understanding the mechanism of oocyte maturation.