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Climate Resilient Crops: Innovations in Vegetable Breeding for a Warming World-A Review

D. K. Upadhyay[1]*, Sonam Tripathi[1], Chanchal Tiwari[1], Mansi Awasthi[2]

[1]Department of Vegetable Science, Acharya Narendra Deva University of Agriculture and Technology, Kumarganj, Ayodhya-224229 (UP), India
[2]Department of Genetics and Plant Breeding, Acharya Narendra Deva University of Agriculture and Technology, Kumarganj, Ayodhya-224229 (UP), India
*Corresponding Author

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***Abstract*— *Global vegetable production is changing due to climate change, endangering crop yields and nutritional value. The physiological processes of important vegetable crops are being disrupted by rising temperatures, unpredictable precipitation, and extreme weather events. For example, spinach loses essential nutrients under high CO_2, while tomatoes fail to bear fruit during heatwaves. This synthesis highlights creative adaptation techniques while examining the complex effects of climate change on vegetables. We examine the ways in which wild crop relatives, genomic technologies, and conventional breeding are being used to create cultivars with improved drought resistance, heat tolerance, and stable nutritional profiles. Successful examples highlighted in the analysis include participatory breeding initiatives that preserve agrobiodiversity and CRISPR-edited tomatoes with heat-stable flowering. To guarantee food security, however, agroecological methods and fair access must be combined with technical solutions. In a changing world, climate-resilient vegetable systems can sustain livelihoods, productivity, and nutrition by combining scientific advancements with farmer knowledge and policy support. A thorough adaptation plan for one of agriculture's most climate-vulnerable but nutritionally vital industries is given in this article.*

***Keywords*— Climate, Heat, Breeding and Productivity.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Vegetable crops are far more susceptible to these stressors as climate change accelerates and shows up as excessive heat, erratic rainfall, and shifting seasonal patterns. Although vegetables are essential to diet and livelihoods worldwide, they are especially vulnerable during critical developmental periods due to their moderate stress tolerance. Therefore, improving resilience through specialised breeding techniques is essential for maintaining yields and for guaranteeing food security for an expanding population. Not only is our planet's changing climate generating news, but it is also altering the crops that are grown and served to us. The vegetables we depend on for flavour and nutrition are confronting previously unheard-of difficulties as temperatures continue their relentless rise. Consider spinach that bolts before it is ready to be harvested or tomato plants that drop their blooms during heat waves. These are actual events occurring in fields all around the planet; they are not only hypothetical situations (IPCC, 2021).

The statistics paint a dismal picture: global temperatures have risen by roughly 1.2°C since the Industrial Revolution, and climate models indicate that this trend will only pick up speed (Zhao et al., 2017). According to Myers et al. (2014), vegetable producers must deal with crops that wilt in extreme heat, have trouble setting fruit, or lose their nutritional value as they mature. While certain crops, like lettuce, race to flower before generating edible leaves, others, like tomatoes and peppers, become nearly sterile when temperatures rise beyond 35°C (Sato et al., 2006). However, science provides hope in this situation. Using state-of-the-art gene editing tools, re-discovering hardy traits in wild relatives of our crops, and collaborating directly with farmers, plant breeders around the world are responding with remarkable innovations to create vegetables that can withstand our new climate reality (Lippman et al., 2019; Dempewolf et al., 2017). These initiatives aim to maintain the nutrition, flavour, and texture of our food even when growing conditions change, going beyond simply keeping plants alive (Zhu et al., 2018).

II. HOW DOES CLIMATE CHANGE GIVE RISE TO TEMPERATURE STRESS?

2.1. Increasing average global temperatures because of the emissions of greenhouse gases

For vegetable production systems, the gradual rise in world temperatures brought on by increased concentrations of greenhouse gases (GHGs) such as CO_2, methane, and nitrous oxide offers both opportunities and challenges. The average global temperature has risen by about 1.2°C since the pre-industrial era, and depending on emission scenarios, forecasts suggest that the rise could reach 1.5–4.5°C by 2100 (IPCC, 2021). Vegetable crops are directly impacted by this warming trend in a number of ways, including increased evapotranspiration, changed growing seasons, and the pushing of many kinds above their ideal temperature ranges. Heat stress, for instance, causes premature bolting in lettuce and spinach and decreases tuber formation in potatoes. It can also cause pollen sterility in tomatoes and peppers. Though this benefit is frequently outweighed by related decreases in protein and micronutrient content, high CO_2 levels (now above 420 ppm) can produce a "CO_2 fertilisation effect" that can improve photosynthesis and development in some crops. In response, breeding initiatives are creating novel types with enhanced thermotolerance, such as leafy greens with delayed bolting characteristics and tomatoes that retain pollen viability at higher temperatures. In order to add robustness to commercial varieties, researchers are simultaneously investigating wild crop cousins from naturally hot settings, such as drought-tolerant wild melons or heat-adapted eggplant species from dry regions.

The fact that many traditional vegetable-growing places may become climatically inappropriate for current types within decades emphasises the necessity of these initiatives. In order to maintain vegetable output and its nutritional advantages in a warming environment, strategic breeding for heat endurance in conjunction with adaptive farming techniques like mulching and shade-net gardening will be essential (Zhao et al, 2017). The creation of climate-smart vegetable cultivars is an essential adaptation tactic for ensuring global food security as temperatures continue to rise.

2.2. Increased heatwave frequencies and intensities: A risk to vegetable production and the requirement for Resilient Varieties

The creation of climate-resilient vegetable varieties is a crucial priority for food security since the increasing frequency and severity of heatwaves brought on by climate change represent a serious danger to the world's vegetable crop. Greenhouse gas emissions have caused global temperatures to rise, resulting in longer and more intense heat waves that alter plant physiology, lower yields, and degrade crop quality. Numerous conventional vegetable types, including peppers, tomatoes, and lettuce, are extremely vulnerable to extreme heat and have stress-related symptoms such poor root development, decreased fruit set, and flower abortion. For example, tomatoes' pollen sterility might result from temperatures exceeding 35°C, which significantly reduces yield. In a similar vein, heat stress causes leafy greens like spinach and lettuce to bolt (flower too soon), making them unsellable.

Plant breeders and agricultural experts are using cutting-edge methods like genomic breeding, CRISPR gene editing, and marker-assisted selection to create heat-tolerant vegetable varieties in order to overcome these obstacles. Enhancing characteristics like delayed flowering in hot weather, enhanced water-use efficiency, and thermotolerance are the main goals of these initiatives. In field trials, for instance, novel tomato hybrids that are resistant to heat and have stabilised pollen viability at higher temperatures are already demonstrating promise. To preserve yield stability in rising climes, pepper cultivars that can withstand heat and drought are also being bred (Peet et al., 2000). Additionally, commercial vegetable lines can benefit from the unique genetic resources of wild and indigenous crop cousins that have evolved spontaneously in adverse conditions.

Agronomic measures including mulching, shade netting, and precision irrigation can assist reduce heat stress in addition to breeding. However, as heatwaves get more severe, vegetable output will become more unstable in the absence of genetically tolerant types. Accelerating the creation and use of climate-adapted vegetable crops is essential to the future of sustainable agriculture in order to guarantee food security in a warming world. To protect tomorrow's crops from the growing risks of climate change, it is imperative to invest in heat-tolerant breeding initiatives now.

2.3. Increasing temperature variability and severe cold events: difficulties for vegetables breeding

Extreme cold events are becoming more frequent and unexpected due to climate change, which presents serious difficulties for the production of vegetables. Unpredictable weather patterns, like unexpected frosts and abrupt cold snaps, can destroy heat-adapted crops and damage cold-tolerant cultivars, even though global temperatures are generally rising (Saeed et al., 2023). In important vegetables like tomatoes, peppers, and leafy greens, these variations cause cold injury, decreased germination, flower abortion, and yield losses by interfering with vital growth phases. By using cutting-edge methods like marker-assisted selection and utilising wild crop relatives with innate stress tolerance, breeders are responding by giving priority to the creation of dual-resilient cultivars that can tolerate both heat waves and cold shocks.

For example, frost-resistant brassica crops are being optimised for quicker recovery from temperature extremes, and new cold-tolerant tomato lines are being created utilising DNA from high-altitude wild types. To ensure steady vegetable production in the face of growing environmental instability, such advances must be paired with protective farming techniques as high tunnels and row covers (Sato et al., 2006). Accelerating these breeding efforts to produce vegetable types that can thrive in the unpredictable temperature extremes of a changing climate is essential to the future of sustainable gardening.

2.4. Effect on biodiversity and ecosystems: consequences for climate-resilient vegetable breeding

With cascading effects on pollinators, soil microbiomes, and relatives of wild crops—all of which are essential for creating climate-resilient vegetable varieties—climate change is upsetting ecosystems and biodiversity at a rate never seen before. The survival of wild plant species that act as genetic reservoirs for the breeding of stress-tolerant crops is under jeopardy due to habitat changes brought about by rising temperatures, changing precipitation patterns, and extreme weather events. For example, wild Andean tomatoes or cousins of drought-adapted squash from arid locations have beneficial characteristics like deep root systems or heat-stable enzymes that may be included into commercial varieties. But even before these genetic resources can be completely explored or exploited, they are being depleted by habitat loss and ecosystem fragmentation.

Furthermore, the production of vegetables is at risk due to the reduction of pollinator populations brought on by pesticide exposure and floral mismatches caused by climate change, especially for crops that depend on insect pollination, such as eggplants, cucumbers, and zucchini. In order to lessen reliance on pollinators, breeding projects are currently investigating self-pollinating or parthenocarpic (seedless) cultivars; nonetheless, preserving biodiversity is still essential for long-term agricultural resilience. The microbial populations that support nutrient cycle and plant health are disrupted by heatwaves and droughts, endangering soil biodiversity equally. In response, scientists are choosing vegetable cultivars that promote advantageous soil symbioses, such mycorrhiza-associated tomatoes that have better drought resilience (Myers et al., 2014).

The loss of agro-biodiversity emphasises how urgent it is to preserve traditional landraces and wild crop relatives using in-situ preservation and seed banks. At the same time, adaptive features from wild species are being transferred into high-yielding cultivars using contemporary breeding methods, such as gene editing and genomic selection. Scientists can create next-generation climate-resilient vegetables that not only withstand extreme weather conditions but also aid in the repair of damaged ecosystems by combining ecological conservation with sophisticated breeding. In a warming world, preserving biodiversity is not only essential for the ecosystem, but also for long-term food security.

2.5 Importance of climate-resilient vegetables for agriculture and food security

Rising temperatures, unpredictable rainfall, and extreme weather events are just a few of the increasing effects of climate change on global agriculture that are endangering vegetable production systems globally, with serious ramifications for food and nutritional security. Under forecasted climatic scenarios, vegetables—which are especially prone to climatic stressors—face production decreases of 30–50% for important crops including tomatoes, onions, and leafy greens, which could exacerbate micronutrient deficiencies in vulnerable populations. Long-term droughts limit the yield of water-intensive vegetables like cauliflower and cabbage, whereas heat stress hinders pollination and fruit development in solanaceous crops. Studies have shown that staple crops are losing important minerals including protein, zinc, and iron as a result of rising CO_2 levels, which is also changing the nutritional value of many vegetables (Zhu et al., 2018). With warmer winters enabling the development of invasive species like the tomato leaf miner (Tuta absoluta) and illnesses like late blight, these problems are made worse by the expanded ranges of pests and diseases.

As a result, creating and implementing climate-resilient vegetable cultivars has emerged as a top concern for preserving world food systems. In order to create cultivars with improved heat and drought tolerance, disease resistance, and stable nutritional profiles, breeding efforts are concentrating on several resilience traits at once. For instance, drought-adapted okra cultivars with deep root systems are sustaining harvests with 30% less water, while new tomato hybrids with enhanced thermotolerance may set fruit at temperatures 3-5°C higher than normal kinds. In order to defend against production shocks, urban and peri-urban farming systems are implementing these resilient cultivars in conjunction with climate-smart techniques like protected cultivation and precision irrigation. It is still difficult to guarantee that everyone has equal access to these technologies, especially smallholder farmers who grow more than 70% of the world's veggies. Local seed systems are being strengthened and resilient seeds are being dispersed through farmer networks by international collaborations, while producers are being involved in the development of context-appropriate varieties through participatory breeding programs. In order to protect rural livelihoods and the nutritional security of expanding urban populations, it will be essential to accelerate the breeding and distribution of climate-resilient vegetables as climate change continues to upset agricultural stability. We must be able to adjust vegetable production to a more variable environment while preserving the variety and nutritional value that make these crops vital to human health if we are to create sustainable food systems in the future.

2.6. Social and health impacts on humans: The crucial function of climate-resilient vegetables

The interruption of vegetable production brought on by climate change has serious repercussions for socioeconomic stability and human health, especially for vulnerable groups. Millions of people are at increased risk of malnutrition and diet-related illnesses as a result of rising temperatures and extreme weather events that lower vegetable yields and nutritional quality. In climate-vulnerable areas, vegetables—which are vital sources of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants—are already becoming harder to find, which exacerbates micronutrient deficiencies associated with weakened immunity, stunting in children, and heightened vulnerability to chronic illnesses. For example, research indicates that by 2050, climate change may cause a 10–20% decrease in the global availability of essential nutrients like vitamin A and folate from vegetables, which would have a particularly negative effect in low-income nations where there are few other options (Fanzo et al., 2018).

The socioeconomic consequences are as worrisome. When heat waves destroy crops or unexpected rains spoil harvests, smallholder farmers—who produce the majority of the world's vegetables—face crippling financial losses, a trend that exacerbates rural poverty and migration. Recurrent heat stress in India has reduced tomato production by 40–50%, leading to price increases that are burdensome for both farmers and consumers. Because of the increased labour and decreased crop diversity caused by climate variability, women, who frequently oversee household nutrition gardens, are disproportionately affected. Urban people, especially those living in food deserts, must contend with the exorbitant costs of nutrient-dense vegetables, which exacerbates disparities in the quality of their diets (Saeed et al., 2023).

Therefore, it is both economically and public health vital to breed vegetable types that are climate robust. In warming areas, nutrient-dense, heat-tolerant types, such as drought-resistant leafy greens or iron-biofortified beans, can help maintain inexpensive nutrition. Urban agricultural projects combined with policies that promote fair access to resilient seeds could act as a buffer against shocks to the food chain. Investing in resilient vegetable varieties is essential to sustainable development because, in the absence of swift adaptation, climate change will continue to undermine the health advantages of vegetables as well as the livelihoods of those who farm them.

III. BREEDING STRATEGIES FOR CLIMATE RESILIENCE IN VEGETABLE CROPS

3.1. Climate resilience through the utilisation of wild genetic resources

The enormous genetic diversity inherent in traditional landraces and wild crop cousins is a priceless resource for creating vegetables that can withstand climate change. With their innate tolerance to heat, salinity, drought, and pests, these untapped genetic pools have evolved over millennia to thrive in harsh settings. Wild tomato species, such as Solanum pennellii from the Atacama Desert, for example, have unique root structures and wax coatings on their leaves that reduce water loss, giving them exceptional drought resistance. Similarly, genes for deep root systems and effective water-use mechanisms are found in wild melons (Cucumis melo ssp. agrestis) from desert parts of Africa (Jinek et al., 2012). These days, high-throughput phenotyping tools that integrate automated stress-response monitoring, spectral analysis, and drone imagery are being used by modern breeding programs to routinely screen over 7.4 million accessions in seed banks worldwide. The "Veggie Genebank" of the World Vegetable Centre alone has 65,000 accessions of 442 vegetable species, and scientists are discovering new characteristics such as flood resistance in wild cucurbits and heat-stable photosynthesis in wild eggplants. But because of habitat degradation, many wild relatives are in danger of going extinct, thus it is crucial to save and characterise them. By identifying the specific chromosomal regions causing these adaptive traits, sophisticated methods such as genome-wide association studies (GWAS) are facilitating their transfer into elite cultivars through marker-assisted backcrossing while reducing linkage drag of undesirable wild characteristics (Schafleitner et al., 2011).

3.2. Breeding revolutionised by cutting-edge technologies

The production of climate-adapted vegetable varieties is being significantly accelerated by the incorporation of cutting-edge biotechnological technologies. With breeders employing SNP chips to monitor beneficial alleles such as the HsfA1 transcription factor, which increases thermotolerance, or the ERECTA gene in tomatoes, which increases water-use efficiency, marker-assisted selection has become essential. For complicated polygenic characteristics like drought tolerance, genomic selection—which uses machine learning algorithms to anticipate breeding values based on whole-genome markers—is proving very useful (Pathania et al., 2025). By cutting breeding cycles from eight to three years, the NextGen Cassava project proved the effectiveness of this strategy. By enabling precise alterations, such as editing the SP5G gene in tomatoes to minimise heat-induced blossom drop or knocking out the NCED gene in watermelon to promote drought tolerance without yield penalties, CRISPR-Cas9 gene editing is setting new standards (Lippman et al., 2019). Up to six generations of crops, including rice and wheat, may now be produced annually using speed breeding platforms that use LED-optimized light spectra and controlled conditions. Similar procedures have been modified for vegetables. The African Orphan Crops Consortium, for instance, uses rapid cycling and genomic prediction to increase climate resilience in traditional crops like African eggplant and amaranth (Crossa et al., 2017). These technologies are being implemented in integrated pipelines. However, public acceptance and regulatory barriers still stand in the way of widespread adoption, especially for gene-edited variety in some areas.

3.3. Developing all-around multi-stress resilience

Contemporary breeding paradigms acknowledge that the linked stressors posed by climate change necessitate comprehensive solutions. Modern breeding strategies provide variants with stacked resilience to concurrent abiotic and biotic stressors, whereas classical breeding concentrated on single qualities. This strategy is demonstrated by the "Climate-Smart Beans" effort, which combines disease resistance (against anthracnose and angular leaf spot), heat stability (via increased pollen viability at high temperatures), and drought tolerance (through smaller leaves and deeper roots). In a similar vein, the tomato breeding program at the AVRDC has created lines that resist viruses spread by whiteflies that thrive in warmer climates while maintaining fruit set at 38°C. This multi-trait approach necessitates accurate field conditions and complex phenotyping. These days, research stations use "stress cubes" that can accurately regulate CO_2, temperature, and humidity levels while enforcing controlled salinity or drought regimes. By deciphering genotype-by-environment-by-management (G×E×M) interactions, sophisticated statistical models can be used to find cultivars that thrive in a range of agroecologies. The effectiveness of this strategy is demonstrated by the EU's BRESOV project, which screened more than 1,200 tomato, snap bean, and broccoli accessions in 14 countries to find genotypes that perform consistently under a range of climatic stressors. The way robust varieties preserve physiological function is being revealed by emerging technologies such as metabolomic profiling. For example, heat-tolerant peppers exhibit consistent amounts of defensive chemicals like flavonoids and capsaicinoids despite severe temperatures.

3.4. Democratizing Breeding Through Farmer Participation

In order to ensure that developed varieties satisfy genuine grower needs under climate change, participatory breeding approaches are bridging the gap between formal research and on-farm realities. Growers in South Asia participate in farmer field schools for chilli peppers, where they choose lines based on practical standards such as market-preferred fruit traits and heat tolerance during flowering. Smallholders in East Africa are evaluating a variety of tomato and kale varieties under the "Seeds for Needs" program. Crowdsourced data shows surprising climate adaptations, such as some local landraces outperforming improved kinds during erratic dry spells. Farmers can provide phenotypic observations through digital platforms such as the "FarmDrive" app, which informs breeding choices. Community seed banks serve as living laboratories for assessing stress tolerance in addition to conserving genetic material that has been modified locally. Through such grassroots initiatives, the Navdanya network in India has discovered drought-resistant okra types, which are currently being included in official breeding programs. For vegetables cultivated in intricate agroecological niches, where traditional breeding may miss important but subtle adaption features, these methods are especially beneficial (Scheelbeek et al., 2018). However, there are still issues with guaranteeing fair benefit-sharing when farmer-selected cultivars are introduced to commercial markets and scaling participatory approaches while upholding scientific rigour.

3.5. Fortifying Nutritional Stability under Climate Stress

Breeding programs are working quickly to overcome the severe decreases in vegetable nutritional quality brought on by climate change. Protein and micronutrient concentrations in many crops are decreased by elevated CO_2 levels, which are predicted to reach 550 ppm by 2050. In these crops, wheat and rice lose 5–15% of their zinc and iron content. Vegetables are showing similar trends. While tomato antioxidant content significantly decreases beyond 32°C, lettuce exhibits 30% lower folate levels when grown at high temps. Breeding projects are using a variety of tactics to combat this. Zinc-enhanced tomatoes and iron-rich beans that retain nutrient density under stress have been created by HarvestPlus' biofortification method. For instance, tomato lines with upregulated genes for flavonoid biosynthesis that maintain antioxidant production during heat waves are examples of "nutritionally resilient" cultivars created by metabolic pathway engineering. In order to preserve mineral content during drought, researchers are also looking for steady nutrient uptake mechanisms, such as carrots that are effective in calcium. By quickly screening thousands of samples for stable nutrient profiles using mass spectrometry and near-infrared spectroscopy, the Nutritional Breeding Consortium is leading the way in "nutri-metabolic" phenotyping. This research has shown unexpected genetic relationships between some drought-tolerant pepper landraces and their remarkably steady vitamin C levels under stress. Such nutrition-focused breeding will become more and more important as climate impacts worsen in order to prevent "hidden hunger" in disadvantaged people that rely on meals high in vegetables.

3.6. Rewriting Crop Calendars Through Phenological Adaptation

Breeders are being forced to re-engineer vegetable developmental cycles as a result of climate change's disruption of typical growth seasons. Nowadays, a lot of crops have "phenological mismatches," in which fruit development takes place during periods of intense heat or flowering occurs amid drought. In response, breeding efforts are modifying important phenological characteristics. New "photoperiod-insensitive" pumpkin varieties in Bangladesh enable planting outside of the typical monsoon windows, reducing the risk of flooding. Wild cousins are introducing temperature-stable blooming genes; for example, wild tomatoes' SFT gene stops floral abortion during heat spikes. Changes to root architecture are assisting crops in tracking fluctuating water tables; eggplant is receiving the DRO1 gene, which was first discovered in rice, to produce deeper-rooted cultivars (Khan et al., 2025). Most inventively, breeders are creating "plastic" types that may modify their growth patterns in response to erratic circumstances. In order to sustain consistent harvests, the "Climate-Adaptive Brassica" research has produced kale lines that delay development during heat waves but increase leaf production during chilly seasons. To forecast future phenological requirements, advanced modelling combines crop growth simulations with climate projections. Breeders can use the CGIAR's "Crop Calendar Adaptation Tool" to prioritise features for climate scenarios that are projected to occur between 2030 and 2050. By synchronising their life cycles with an increasingly unpredictable climate, these efforts are producing vegetables that can "tell time" in radically new ways, preserving quality and production for both farmers and customers (Dempewolf et al., 2017).

IV. CONCLUSION

Our vegetable crops face serious and immediate dangers from climate change, including heat waves that kill delicate plants, erratic rainfall that submerge fields, and changing seasons that interfere with growth cycles. Nevertheless, we discover incredible fortitude and inventiveness in the face of these difficulties. In order to protect our crops, farmers and scientists from all across the world are collaborating to reimagine how we raise our food by fusing modern technologies with traditional knowledge. We have real hope because of the solutions that are developing. Drought-resistant beans stretch roots deeper to obtain water, while new tomato varieties may now bear fruit in scorching heat. The nutritious value of leafy greens does not diminish as CO_2 levels increase. These discoveries demonstrate that we may modify our food systems without compromising nutrition, flavour, or yield. However, technology is insufficient on its own. Making sure these developments get to the community gardens and small farmers where they are most needed is the true test. The goal is to establish networks that allow local people, growers, and researchers to exchange seeds and knowledge. It's about honouring generations of farming expertise as well as laboratory research. Our relationship with the land must change as temperatures increase further. It's possible that veggies of the future may need to be more resilient, adaptable, and possibly even different in appearance from those of today. But we can maintain and even improve the variety, richness, and sustenance that our crops offer if we are careful and creative. This is about maintaining cultures, livelihoods, and health, not just about protecting plants. This delicate balance between innovation and tradition, between global concerns and local answers, is what will shape our food in the future. We can guarantee that tasty, fresh veggies will continue to flourish on our warming globe and feed future generations by carefully maintaining this balance.

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