

# **One-carbon metabolism and epigenetic programming of mammalian development**

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BSc (Hons)

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)**

**September 2020**



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I dedicate this work to my parents.

Without your unconditional love, support and guidance,

I would not have been able to achieve my successes.

Thank you.

## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own and the work herein has not been submitted for any other degree or award. Other sources of information and assistance given to me during the preparation of this thesis have been acknowledged.

Constance Emily Clare

## **Publications associated with this thesis**

Clare CE, Brassington AH, Kwong WY and Sinclair KD (2019) One-Carbon Metabolism: Linking Nutritional Biochemistry to Epigenetic Programming of Long-Term Development. *Annu Rev Anim Biosci.* 7: 263-87

Xu J, Clare CE, Brassington AH, Sinclair KD and Barrett DA (2020) Comprehensive and quantitative profiling of B vitamins. *J. Chromatogr. B.* 1136: 121884

Clare CE, Pestinger V, Kwong WY, Tutt DAR, Xu J, Byrne HM, Barrett DA, Emes RD and Sinclair KD (2021) Interspecific variation in one-carbon metabolism within the ovarian follicle, oocyte and pre-implantation embryo: consequences for epigenetic programming of DNA methylation. *International Journal of Molecular Sciences*. In press.

## **Publications associated with BBSRC-funded PIPS**

Clare C, Cruz M, Papadopoulou E, Savage J, Teperek M, Wang Y, Witowska I and Yeomans J (2019) Engaging Researchers with Data Management: The Cookbook. Open Book Publishers. doi: 10.11647/OBP.0185

C Clare (2019) The Real World of Research Data. Zenodo.  
<http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3584373>

C Clare (2020) Sound bytes: sightless coding. *Nature*. 581(230). doi: 10.1038/d41586-020-01369-7

## **Conference abstracts associated with PhD**

Clare CE, Tutt D, Kwong WY and Sinclair KD (2019) Methionine, one-carbon metabolism and bovine preimplantation embryo development. 12<sup>th</sup> International Conference on One Carbon Metabolism, B Vitamins and Homocysteine. *Understanding their role in health and disease from the womb to old age*. Southern Catalonia, Spain. June 2019

Clare CE, Tutt D, Kwong WY and Sinclair KD (2020) Methionine, one-carbon metabolism and bovine preimplantation embryo development. *Fertility 2020*. Society for Reproduction and Fertility, Edinburgh, UK. January 2020



## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors, Prof. Kevin Sinclair, Prof. David Barrett and Prof. Ramiro Alberio.

**Kevin**, thank you for your unrelenting support, guidance and philosophical discussion over the past four years, and particularly during the current pandemic. You've taught me 'the importance of stupidity in scientific research' and how to become resilient to overcome the many hurdles and knockbacks. I won't forget your words of wisdom, and will try to get my 'ducks in a row' and 'keep my powder dry' in the future.

**David**, your patience, kindness and positive mentoring made learning mass spectrometry a little easier in the early days. Thanks to you and **Cath Ortori** for offering your technical expertise during my time working in the School of Pharmacy.

**Ramiro**, thank you for your scientific input with the embryology work. You lead by example and have been an inspiration to me.

My sincere appreciation goes to my colleagues at the University of Nottingham who have made this work possible.

**Lydia Kwong**, thank you for sharing your knowledge and for assisting with the molecular research, particularly the RRBS and qPCR. On a side note, your birthday cakes are spectacular and I will miss them greatly.

**Des Tutt**, it has been a pleasure to have you as a colleague and more importantly as a friend. Thank you for always finding time to help me, no matter how busy your schedule, and for the deep and meaningful chats over coffee - Long may they continue!

**Richard Emes**, thank you for your help with the bioinformatic analyses. Analysing the DNA methylation data became one of the most enjoyable aspects of my PhD. I think I could be converted to a computational biologist afterall.

To the technical specialists; **Dongfang Li**, **Doris Klisch** and **Kamila Derecka**, thank you all for your help and education in the lab. **Ralph Hourd**, thank you for waking up at the crack of dawn and travelling miles to the abattoir to collect cattle ovaries – this work would not have been possible without you! Also, thanks to **Leigh Silvester** and **Chris Alford** for coming to the rescue with IT support on numerous occasions.

To the good friends I have made during my time at UoN; **Amey Brassington**, **Laura Tennant**, **Sarah Withey**, **Judith Gómez-Martínez**, **Haitham Alhilfi**, **Qifan Zhu**, **Gizem Guven Ates**, **Stuart Bagley**, **Pardeep Pabla**, **James Gillis**, **Chloe Geoghegan**, **Lucy Ross**, **Eleni Papagianni**, **Chloe Sargent** and **Lorrita Chinwendu**, thank you for the laughs and good times (and for keeping me sane!)

I would also like to thank **George Mann** for being a friend and mentor since 2014. Thank you for building my confidence during my undergraduate degree at UoN, and for allowing me to believe that studying for a PhD was even possible for me.

To my colleagues and friends at TU Delft, thank you for welcoming me to the Netherlands and for making me feel like a valued member of your team during my BBSRC-funded internship. I'm excited to join forces with you all again soon.

Finally, thank you to my family for believing in me. Without your love and support I would not have come this far. To my fiancé, **Alex**, thank you for loving and caring for me, for sharing the highs and lows of this journey, and for always giving me courage to pursue my dreams.

## Abstract

One-carbon (1C) metabolism comprises a series of integrated metabolic pathways, including the linked methionine-folate cycles, that provide methyl groups for the synthesis of biomolecules and the epigenetic regulation of gene expression via chromatin methylation. Most of the research investigating the function of 1C metabolism pertains to studies undertaken in the rodent liver. Comparatively little is known about the function of 1C metabolism in reproductive and embryonic cells, particularly in domestic ruminant species. Periconceptional dietary deficiencies in 1C substrates and cofactors are known to lead to epigenetic alterations in DNA methylation in genes that regulate key developmental processes in the embryo. Such modifications can have negative implications on the subsequent development, metabolism and health of offspring. This thesis sought to improve current understanding of the regulation of 1C metabolism in the ruminant liver, ovary and preimplantation embryo through *in vivo* and *in vitro* nutritional supplementation experiments coupled with metabolomic, transcriptomic and epigenetic analyses.

The first part of this thesis (Chapter 2) assessed the metabolic consequences of dietary methyl deficiency using novel mass spectrometry-based methods that were developed for the quantification of B vitamins, folates and 1C-related amines in sheep liver. This study provided the first comparison of the relative abundance of bioactive 1C metabolites in liver harvested from methyl deficient sheep relative to a control study population of abattoir derived sheep. Relevant reductions in dietary methyl availability led to significant alterations in hepatic 1C metabolite concentrations. Large natural variations in the hepatic concentrations of individual metabolites in both sheep study populations reflected the dietary and genetic variation in our chosen outbred model species. These metabolomics platforms will be useful for investigating 1C metabolism and linked biochemical pathways in order to facilitate future dietary and genetic studies of metabolic health and epigenetic regulation of gene expression.

Based on the absence of methionine cycle enzyme transcripts (e.g. *MAT1A* and *BHMT*) in the bovine ovary and preimplantation embryo, the second part of this thesis (Chapter 3 and Chapter 4) addressed the hypothesis that ruminant reproductive and embryonic cells are highly sensitive to methyl group availability and, therefore, epigenetic programming during the periconceptional period. Transcript analyses confirmed *MAT2A* expression in the bovine liver, ovary and at each stage of preimplantation embryo development assessed to Day 8.

Transcripts for *BHMT* isoforms (*BHMT* and *BHMT2*) were detected in the bovine ovary but were weak or absent in embryos, highlighting a key difference in methionine metabolism between hepatic and reproductive cells.

Bovine embryos were produced *in vitro* using custom-made media containing 0 (nonphysiological), 10 (low physiological), 50 (high physiological), and 500  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  (supraphysiological) added methionine (Chapter 3). Gross morphological assessments of embryo stage, grade, cell lineage allocation and primary sex ratio revealed that culture in non- and supraphysiological methionine concentrations was detrimental for embryo development, whilst culture in the high physiological concentration appeared to be best. Reduced representation bisulphite sequencing (RRBS) of inner cell mass (ICM) and trophectoderm (TE) cells immunodissected from Day 8 blastocysts demonstrated that culturing embryos in low physiological methionine led to global hypomethylation within both cell lineages. Bioinformatic analyses of differentially methylated genes included gene set enrichment analyses (GSEA). Gene Ontology (GO) terms and Kyoto Encyclopedia of Genes and Genomes (KEGG) pathways that were enriched within the ICM were associated with protein catabolism and autophagy, and significant terms and pathways enriched within the TE were associated with cellular transport. Of particular biological interest was the loss of methylation within regulatory region (DMR2) of the paternally imprinted gene, *IGF2R*, in the TE following culture in low physiological methionine. Transcript analysis found no significant effect of methionine concentration on the expression of *IGF2R* or the antisense transcript, *AIRN*, in the primary cell lineages of the Day 8 bovine preimplantation embryo. Hypomethylation of *IGF2R* DMR2 has been associated with aberrant *IGF2R* expression and large offspring syndrome (LOS) in cattle and sheep that were subjected to embryo manipulation during assisted reproductive technology (ART) procedures, such as somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT) or non-physiological *in vitro* embryo culture environments.

Chapter 5 sought to evaluate the effect of somatic donor cell type on epigenetic reprogramming via DNA methylation in hepatocytes isolated from cloned sheep. RRBS facilitated the comparison of methylation reprogramming between Finn Dorset (D) clone hepatocytes and their mammary epithelial (OP5) donor cell line; and, Lleyn (L) clone hepatocytes and their Lleyn fetal fibroblast (LFF4) donor cell line. Methylation was most closely correlated between D and L clone hepatocytes than between clones and their respective donor cell lines. In

general, hepatocytes were hypomethylated relative to their somatic donor cell nuclei. GSEA identified genes that encoded transcription factor proteins enriched within the 'Sequence-specific DNA binding' term (GO:0043565) as differentially methylated between clone hepatocytes and their donor cell lines. In addition, imprinted genes, including *IGF2R*, were differentially methylated in clone hepatocytes relative to somatic cell nuclei.

In summary, this thesis promotes and supports the importance of an optimal methyl balance to support periconceptual development in mammals. The experiments detailed herein provide an insight into the metabolic consequences of dietary methyl deficiency (and excess) in outbred populations of domestic ruminants, with a specific focus on the liver, ovary and preimplantation embryo. The results demonstrate that tissue- and species-specific features of 1C metabolism render ruminant embryonic cells sensitive to methionine inputs within a physiological range. The observation that *in vitro* embryo culture and manipulation techniques, such as somatic cell nuclear transfer, can cause epigenetic alterations to DNA methylation during preimplantation development provides a basis for further study into the safety and efficacy of emerging assisted reproductive technologies.

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## List of Abbreviations

1C	One-carbon
5hmC	5-hydroxymethylcytosine
5mC	5-methylcytosine
8-Br-cAMP	8-bromoadenosine 3',5'-cyclic monophosphate
Ab	Abattoir
ACN	Acetonitrile
ANOVA	Analysis of variance
ART	Assisted reproduction technology
ATP	Adenosine triphosphate
$A^{vy}$	Viable yellow agouti
$B_1-^{13}C_3$	Thiamine- $^{13}C_3$
BF	Scottish Blackface
BLAST	Basic Local Alignment Search Tool
BME	Basal Medium Eagle
bp	Base pair
BS	Bisulphite sequencing
BSA	Bovine serum albumin
BWS	Beckwith-Wiedemann syndrome
CC	Cumulus cells
cDNA	Complementary deoxyribonucleic acid
CGI	CpG island
CH <sub>3</sub>	Methyl
Co	Cobalt
CO <sub>2</sub>	Carbon dioxide
COC	Cumulus oocyte complex
CpG	Cytosine-phosphate-guanosine
CV	Coefficient of variation
D	Finn-Dorset
dH <sub>2</sub> O	Distilled water
DM	Dry matter
DMR	Differentially methylated region
DMS	Differentially methylated site
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
DNMT	DNA methyltransferase
DOHaD	Developmental origins of adult health and disease
EAA	Essential amino acid
EGA	Embryonic genome activation
Epi	Epiblast

ESC	Embryonic stem cell
EtBr	Ethidium bromide
FA	Folic acid
FCS	Fetal calf serum
FDR	False discovery rate
GC	Granulosa cells
GC-MS	Gas chromatography-mass spectrometry
gDNA	Genomic DNA
GO	Gene Ontology
GOI	Gene of interest
GSEA	Gene set enrichment analysis
GV	Germinal vesicle
HCl	Hydrochloric acid
HDAC	Histone deacetylase
HHcy	Hyperhomocysteinemia
HIF	Hog intrinsic factor
HILIC	Hydrophilic interaction liquid chromatography
hpi	Hours post-insemination
HPLC	High performance liquid chromatography
Hz	Hertz
IAP	Intracisternal A particle
ICM	Inner cell mass
IETS	International Embryo Technology Society
IS	Internal standard
IVC	<i>In vitro</i> culture
IVF	<i>In vitro</i> fertilisation
IVM	<i>In vitro</i> maturation
IVP	<i>In vitro</i> embryo production
kb	Kilobase
kDa	Kilodalton
KEGG	Kyoto Encyclopedia of Genes and Genomes
$K_m$	Michaelis-Menten constant
L	Lleyn
LC-MS/MS	Liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry
lcrRNA	Long non-coding RNA
LFF4	Lleyn fetal fibroblast cell line
LINE	Long interspersed element
LLOQ	Lower limit of quantification
LOD	Limit of detection
LOI	Loss of imprinting

LOQ	Limit of quantification
LOS	Large offspring syndrome
LPD	Low protein diet
LTR	Long terminal repeat
m/z	Mass/charge
m <sup>6</sup> A	N <sup>6</sup> -methyladenosine
MCE	2-mecaptoethanol
MD	Methyl deficient
MEM	Minimum Essential Medium
MII	Metaphase II
mRNA	Messenger RNA
mtDNA	Mitochondrial DNA
MTX	Methotrexate
NaOH	Sodium hydroxide
NCBI	National Center for Biotechnology Information
NEAA	Non-essential amino acid
NTD	Neural tube defect
NVA	Norvaline
O <sub>2</sub>	Oxygen
°C	Celsius
OP5	Mammary epithelial cell line
PBS	Phosphate buffered saline
PCR	Polymerase chain reaction
PE	Primitive endoderm
PN-d <sub>3</sub>	Pyridoxine hydrochloride methyl-D <sub>3</sub>
PVP	Polyvinylpyrrolidone
Q	Quality score
QC	Quality control
qPCR	Quantitative real-time polymerase chain reaction
REML	Residual maximum likelihood
RNA	Ribonucleic acid
RRBS	Reduced representation bisulphite sequencing
RSD	Relative standard deviation
RT	Reverse transcription
RT-PCR	Reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction
S	Sulphur
S/N	Signal to noise
SAH-d <sub>4</sub>	S-adenosylhomocysteine-d <sub>4</sub>
SCNT	Somatic cell nuclear transfer
SEM	Standard error of mean



SMM	S-methylmethionine
SNP	Single nucleotide polymorphism
SOF	Synthetic oviductal fluid
SSA	5-sulphosalicylic acid
T	Texel
TCM	Tissue culture media
TE	Trophectoderm
tRNA	Transfer ribonucleic acid
UV	Ultraviolet
v/v	Volume to volume
w/v	Weight to volume
xg	Gravitational force

## General Introduction

Evidence from epidemiological cohort studies in humans and mechanistic studies in animals demonstrates that altering key developmental processes *in utero* can predispose offspring to adult-onset non-communicable diseases, such as cancer, dyslipidaemia, type II diabetes and cardiovascular disease ([Barker, 1995](#); [McMillen and Robinson, 2005](#); [Sinclair \*et al.\*, 2016b](#)). These and related observations, originally advanced by David Barker and colleagues at the University of Southampton over thirty years ago ([Barker and Osmond, 1986](#); [Barker and Osmond, 1988](#); [Barker \*et al.\*, 1989](#)), became known as 'The Barker Hypothesis' but are now commonly referred to as the 'Developmental Origins of Health and Disease' (DOHaD) hypothesis ([Wadhwa \*et al.\*, 2009](#)). This theory postulates that environmental factors, such as parental diet or embryo culture media used during assisted reproduction technologies (ART), can act during critical stages of mammalian embryo development to programme physiological and metabolic functions in the fetus, thereby determining its susceptibility to adverse health outcomes in later life ([Stephenson \*et al.\*, 2018](#); [Fleming \*et al.\*, 2018](#)).

Studies of human cohorts exposed to maternal undernutrition at various stages of pregnancy during the Dutch Hunger Winter of 1944-45 (a famine that took place in the German-occupied Netherlands) revealed that people exposed to famine during early gestation were more likely to develop cardiometabolic disease, such as obesity, compared to those who had been exposed to famine in late gestation ([Ravelli \*et al.\*, 1976](#); [Stein \*et al.\*, 2007](#)). Hence, two important conclusions were drawn from these cohort studies: i) intrauterine exposures can have long-lasting effects on adult health; and, ii) the timing of the exposure is critical for the programming of adult health ([Schulz, 2010](#)).

Much of the evidence underpinning DOHaD has since been obtained during direct intervention studies using animal models. The effects of nutrient deprivation (i.e. gross caloric restriction or protein deficiency) in the maternal diet during pregnancy have been well-documented in rodents and sheep ([Langley-Evans, 2006](#); [Sinclair and Singh, 2007](#)). By way of example, feeding rats a maternal low protein diet (LPD) causes a range of sex-specific molecular, metabolic, neuroendocrine and physiological adaptations in offspring that lead to adverse adult health-related phenotypes, such as obesity and hypertension ([Kwong \*et al.\*, 2000](#); [Kwong \*et al.\*, 2006](#); [Kwong \*et al.\*, 2007](#); [Watkins \*et al.\*, 2007](#)).

2008). Similar observations have been also reported in sheep (Edwards and McMillen, 2002; Dunford *et al.*, 2014; Lan *et al.*, 2013).

Whilst animal models confirm that long-term health can be compromised by nutrient deprivation *in utero*, little is known about the effects of specific dietary nutrients and the mechanistic basis underpinning the metabolic programming of development (Sinclair and Singh, 2007). In recent years, B vitamins and methyl (CH<sub>3</sub>) donating metabolites that serve as key substrates and cofactors of one-carbon (1C) metabolism have been identified as molecular mediators responsible for developmental programming (Sinclair *et al.*, 2007; Maloney *et al.*, 2011; Kalhan, 2016). Since 1C metabolic pathways provide a biochemical conduit between parental diet and epigenetic regulation of early development (Clare *et al.*, 2019), it follows that fluctuations in dietary methyl group availability can alter epigenetic regulation of gene expression via biological methylation reactions during critical periods of mammalian development, thereby modifying adult health-related phenotypes in offspring (Maloney *et al.*, 2011; Araújo *et al.*, 2013).

The periconceptional period is the stage of mammalian development considered most environmentally sensitive to perturbations in 1C metabolism and epigenetic programming. This period can be broadly defined as the time before and immediately following conception wherein a diverse range of key biological and molecular processes take place (discussed in Section 1.1.1) (Sinclair *et al.*, 2007; Louis *et al.*, 2008; Maloney *et al.*, 2011; Steegers-Theunissen *et al.*, 2013; Padhee *et al.*, 2015).

The observation that offspring health is programmed by maternal diet during the earliest stages of development emphasises the importance of adequate nutritional status amongst women of reproductive age and, particularly, expectant mothers (Louis *et al.*, 2008; Hambidge *et al.*, 2014; Young *et al.*, 2018). Health surveys demonstrate that the nutritional intake of the general population is suboptimal. According to a recent review of European National Dietary Surveys, World Health Organisation (WHO) Recommended Nutrient Intakes (RNIs) are most notably lacking in women (Rippin *et al.*, 2017). It follows that suboptimal nutritional intakes are likely to prevail in women planning for pregnancy and who are pregnant (Hammiche *et al.*, 2011; Gernand *et al.*, 2016). Since 44% of pregnancies worldwide are unplanned (Bearak *et al.*, 2018), with many women unaware that they are pregnant until the fifth week of pregnancy (Temel *et al.*, 2014), women experiencing unplanned pregnancy are unlikely to

intentionally initiate nutritional health care behaviours to address perinatal risk factors and, therefore, may lack essential vitamin, mineral and micronutrient intakes during their first trimester of pregnancy (Kuroki *et al.*, 2008). Consequently, birth outcomes for unintended pregnancies may place the newborn at increased risk of preterm birth, low weight, congenital abnormalities, and neonatal death (Kost *et al.*, 1998; Gernand *et al.*, 2016).

Worldwide efforts are being undertaken to reduce such adverse pregnancy outcomes with an increasing focus on periconceptional care (Dunlop *et al.*, 2007; Temel *et al.*, 2014). A case in point refers to the public recommendation of periconceptional maternal folic acid (FA) supplementation (400 µg/d) as a dietary intervention to reduce adverse birth outcomes, primarily neural tube defects (NTDs; De-Regil *et al.*, 2010). It is well recognised that maternal folate status is critical for normal neural tube closure and the prevention of NTDs up to day 28 post-conception (McNulty *et al.*, 2000).

With an aim to reduce the incidence of NTDs, the United States and Canada introduced a policy of mandatory fortification of enriched cereal grain products with FA. Since its implementation in 1998, this policy has witnessed a 19-32% decline in the prevalence of NTDs (Crider *et al.*, 2011). Fortification programmes have now been implemented in >81 countries (Wald *et al.*, 2018) and studies have shown a clear reduction in NTDs (Honein *et al.*, 2001; De Wals *et al.*, 2007; Hertrampf and Cortés, 2008). However, there is general resistance to implementation of this within Europe and mandatory FA fortification remains a topic of contention. Concerns revolve around putative adverse effects of unmetabolised FA in the systemic circulation, cognitive decline in the elderly, increased risk of cancer, and masking or exacerbating the effects of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency (Smith and Refsum, 2016; Field and Stover, 2018).

Unfortunately, dietary inadequacies of 1C metabolites prevail in Europe (Gilsing *et al.*, 2010) and pose considerable risk to women of reproductive age (Gernand *et al.*, 2016; Obeid *et al.*, 2016; Ferraro *et al.*, 2017; Table 1). Most of the scientific literature has focused on the association between folate and B vitamin deficiency, and adverse reproductive outcomes in humans (Dasarthy *et al.*, 2010), however, the effect of methionine deficiency on reproductive health is an important line of enquiry. Methionine is often the first rate-limiting amino acid for protein synthesis in animal and human diets (Laurichesse *et al.*, 1998; Schwab and Broderick, 2017). In humans, vegetarians and vegans are at increased risk

of methionine deficiency, since plant proteins tend to be lower in methionine than animal proteins ([McCarty \*et al.\*, 2009](#); [Kim \*et al.\*, 2018](#)).

**Table 1. Effect of maternal dietary deficiency of 1C metabolites during the periconceptional period in humans.**

Dietary 1C metabolite deficiency		Reproductive outcome	Reference(s)
<b>Folate</b>	B9	NTDs Megaloblastic anaemia	<a href="#">Lucock (2000)</a> <a href="#">Beaudin and Stover (2009)</a> <a href="#">Cooper and Lowenstein (1966)</a>
<b>Vitamin B<sub>12</sub></b>	B12	Infertility Recurrent abortion NTDs Pre-term birth Megaloblastic anaemia	<a href="#">Pront <i>et al.</i> (2009)</a> <a href="#">Reznikoff-Etiévant <i>et al.</i> (2002)</a> <a href="#">Lucock (2000)</a> <a href="#">Beaudin and Stover (2009)</a> <a href="#">Cooper and Lowenstein (1966)</a>
<b>Vitamin B<sub>6</sub></b>	B6	Reduced conception rate	<a href="#">Reznikoff-Etiévant <i>et al.</i> (2002)</a> <a href="#">Ronnenberg <i>et al.</i> (2007)</a>
<b>Vitamin B<sub>2</sub></b>	B2	Preeclampsia	<a href="#">Wacker <i>et al.</i> (2000)</a>
<b>Choline</b>	Chol	NTDs	<a href="#">Shaw <i>et al.</i> (2004)</a>
<b>Betaine</b>	TMG	NTDs	<a href="#">Shaw <i>et al.</i> (2004)</a>
<b>Methionine</b>	Met	NTDs	<a href="#">Kalhan (2009)</a> <a href="#">Shoob <i>et al.</i> (2001)</a> <a href="#">Shaw <i>et al.</i> (2004)</a>

Abbreviation(s): NTDs, neural tube defects; TMG, trimethylglycine.

A 5-year, population-based case-control study of 439 women reported a 30-55% lower NTD risk among women whose average daily dietary intake of methionine was greater than the lowest quartile of intake (>1580 mg/d; [Shoob \*et al.\*, 2001](#)). Risks were also lowest for women whose diets were rich in other methionine cycle metabolites, specifically choline and betaine (TMG; [Shaw \*et al.\*, 2004](#)).

It follows that the availability of methionine and other 1C metabolites during critical periods of mammalian development is essential to supply methyl groups for methylation reactions, particularly those that support high rates of maternal and fetal tissue synthesis and deposition during pregnancy and early life ([Rees \*et al.\*, 2006](#); [Kurpad \*et al.\*, 2014](#)). As important is the balance of methionine relative to other metabolites in the maternal diet as fetal growth and development can be retarded by methionine deficiency and excess ([Rees \*et al.\*, 2006](#)).

With accumulating evidence to indicate that dietary imbalances in 1C metabolites are detrimental to health ([Steegers-Theunissen \*et al.\*, 2013](#); [Obeid](#)

[et al., 2017](#)), there is a need for further investigation. Set against this general background is the need to improve our understanding of how 1C metabolism functions within the somatic cells of the mammalian ovary, oocyte and pre-implantation embryo. Extensive research investigating the function of 1C metabolism has been conducted in rodent liver ([Balaghi et al., 1993](#)) with the help of mathematical models ([Finkelstein and Martin, 1986](#); [Finkelstein, 1990](#); [Caudill et al., 2001](#); [Reed et al., 2004](#); [Korendyaseva et al., 2008](#)) but there is limited knowledge of how this series of interlinked metabolic pathways functions within reproductive tissues. Aside tissue-specific differences, there are species-specific differences in 1C metabolism between ruminants and non-ruminants that cannot be disregarded ([Xue and Snoswell, 1985](#); [Snoswell and Xue, 1987](#); [Lambert et al., 2002](#)).

Knowledge of the function of 1C metabolism in ruminants is of particular agricultural and economic importance. Cattle and sheep have a low dietary intake of methyl donors in the post-ruminant state (the developmental stage when the rumen becomes fully functional for microbial fermentation and digestion of food) and are, therefore, sensitive to impairments to 1C metabolic pathways ([Snoswell and Xue, 1987](#)). As the liver is the major site of 1C metabolism ([Lu and Mato, 2012](#); [da Silva et al., 2020](#)), it seems insightful to begin by investigating the function of these pathways in this metabolically active tissue.

Previous studies from our laboratory suggest that methionine metabolism is likely to function differently in reproductive tissues than in the liver as transcripts encoding key methionine cycle enzymes were either absent or expressed at low levels in bovine ovarian cells, oocytes and early embryos ([Kwong et al., 2010](#)). The metabolic implications of this, regarding the provision of dietary 1C substrates and cofactors, together with consequences of polymorphic variances in genes encoding 1C enzymes are not fully understood but are the subject of ongoing investigations. Hence, the broad aims and objectives of this thesis are to enhance our current understanding of the regulation of 1C metabolism in the ruminant liver, ovary and preimplantation embryo, with a specific focus on methionine metabolism and epigenetic programming of mammalian development.

# Chapter 1

## **One-carbon metabolism and epigenetic regulation of periconceptual development**

This chapter provides an overview of the interaction between maternal nutrition, one-carbon (1C) metabolism and epigenetic programming during mammalian embryo development. A detailed description of the biochemistry of hepatic 1C metabolism and related pathways is presented, followed by a summary of what is currently known about the regulation of 1C metabolism in the ovary and early embryo. Thereafter, the review focuses on methionine metabolism and DNA methylation within the preimplantation embryo, culminating in a working hypothesis.

## **1.1 Maternal nutrition, 1C metabolism and pregnancy outcome**

One-carbon metabolism serves as a biochemical conduit between external environment and epigenetic regulation of early development ([Clare \*et al.\*, 2019](#)). It is now generally recognised that reproductive failures and problems associated with epigenetic programming of offspring health are due in no small measure to dietary disturbances in 1C pathways during the periconceptual period.

### **1.1.1 The periconceptual period**

In women, this can be defined as a 5 to 6-month period that encompasses oocyte growth, fertilisation and embryonic development to week 10 of gestation (a stage which coincides with the closure of the secondary palate). The analogous phase in men encompasses the spermatogenic cycle which lasts approximately 75 days ([Steegers-Theunissen \*et al.\*, 2013](#)). Animal models use different timings around conception to define the periconceptual period according to gestation length, however, this stage of development typically includes gametogenesis, pre- and post-implantation embryogenesis and placentation for all model species ([Spencer \*et al.\*, 2004](#); [Padhee \*et al.\*, 2015](#)).

#### **1.1.1.1 Epigenetic reprogramming**

Two critical epigenetic reprogramming events take place during mammalian development. The first ensues after fertilisation when the gametic marks are erased and replaced with embryonic marks important for early embryo development ([Morgan \*et al.\*, 2005](#)). The paternal genome undergoes dynamic epigenetic reprogramming that involves the exchange of protamines for histones, the acquisition of histone modifications (i.e. histone code) and active



demethylation of DNA. In contrast, the maternal genome undergoes passive demethylation via DNA replication during subsequent cleavage stages to the morula stage (Santos *et al.*, 2002; Guo *et al.*, 2014). The embryo remains in a state of transcriptional quiescence that is maintained until a species-specific stage (2-cell in the mouse, 4-cell in the pig, and 8-16 cell in the cow and human) when transcription resumes during a process known as embryonic genome activation (EGA; Morgan *et al.*, 2005). Following EGA, a wave of *de novo* methylation aids the establishment of epigenetic programmes that give rise to the primary cell lineages of the blastocyst; the inner cell mass (ICM) and trophectoderm (TE). These embryonic and extraembryonic cell lineages acquire distinct epigenetic marks required for totipotency and correct initiation of embryonic gene expression patterns required for differentiation (Morgan *et al.*, 2005).

DNA methylation regulates chromatin structure and gene expression during early developmental processes, including X chromosome inactivation and genomic imprinting (Li, 2002). The former phenomenon requires that only one X chromosome is active in each somatic nucleus in females to regulate chromosome dosage relative to males (Barakat and Gribnau, 2012). The latter phenomenon requires that certain genes are monoallelically expressed in a parent-of-origin dependent manner (Barlow and Bartolomei, 2014). Genomic imprints originate in sperm and oocytes and are required for normal fetal and placental development (Peters, 2014). Whilst imprints are generally protected from the first genome-wide epigenetic reprogramming event that occurs during early embryogenesis, they are erased during the second epigenetic reprogramming event that occurs midgestation (Morgan *et al.*, 2005). Extensive demethylation of fetal primordial germ cells restores totipotency in preparation for sex-specific *de novo* methylation that takes place during gametogenesis (Morgan *et al.*, 2005; Zeng and Chen, 2019). As oogenesis takes place during gestation, female mammals are born with the maximum number of oocytes they will have in their lifetime. With respect to maternal diet, oogenesis represents a time when nutritional insults may impact germline reprogramming and ultimately a granddaughter's reproductive health via transgenerational inheritance of epigenetic marks (Padhee *et al.*, 2015).

## 1.1.1.2 Epigenetic effect of diet on periconceptual development

Significant epigenetic modifications to chromatin correspond with abnormal periconceptual development irrespective of the species. Subtle variations in 1C metabolism, including dietary imbalances in 1C metabolites, have been shown to perturb key methylation events that contribute to reproductive failure and poor pregnancy outcomes. A number of studies have identified epigenetic changes associated with dietary methyl supplementation (Table 1.1) or depletion (Table 1.2) during periconceptual development in a number of mammalian species.

**Table 1.1 Methyl supplementation in maternal diet and epigenetic programming of periconceptual development.**

Species	↑ 1C metabolite	Offspring phenotype	Epigenetic changes	Reference(s)
Mouse (Agouti)	Methionine, Folate, B12, Choline, Betaine	Altered coat colour (yellow → brown) ↓ obesity	↑ Methylation A <sup>vy</sup> LTR sequence	<a href="#">Wolff et al. (1998)</a> <a href="#">Cooney et al. (2002)</a> <a href="#">Waterland &amp; Jirtle (2003)</a>
Mouse	Methionine, B12, Choline, Betaine	↓ Tail kinking in axin fused mutants	↑ Methylation Axin(Fu)	<a href="#">Waterland et al. (2006)</a>
Rat	Choline	Altered histone methyltransferase G9a and Suv39h1	↑ H3K9me2, H3K27me3 (repressed chromatin) ↑ Methylation G9a Suv39h1 liver and brain	<a href="#">Davison et al. (2009)</a>
Pig	Betaine	↑ Glucocorticoid receptor mRNA in hippocampus	↑ miR-130b, miR-181a, miR-181d ↑ Methylation GR promoter	<a href="#">Sun et al. (2016)</a>
Cow	B vitamins	↑ Blastocyst development, ↑ Day 8 hatching ↓ Carcinogenesis	↑ H3K27me3 TXNIP promoter, ↓ Txnip stress biomarker	<a href="#">Ikeda et al. (2018)</a>
Human	Folate		↓ Methylation, ↑ miR-203, miR-375 in cervical cancer cell line	<a href="#">Hao et al. (2016)</a>
Human	Folate	Altered DNA methylation	↑ Methylation at ZFP57 DNA methylation regulator in CD4(+) immune cells	<a href="#">Amarasekera et al. (2014)</a>
Human	Folate	Altered imprinting (genomic imprint)	↓ Methylation H19/IGF2 in blood	<a href="#">Hoyo et al. (2011)</a>
Human	Folate	Altered imprinting (genomic imprint)	↑ Methylation IGF2, ↓ PEG3, LINE-1 in blood	<a href="#">Steegers-Theunissen et al. (2009)</a> <a href="#">Haggarty et al. (2013)</a> <a href="#">Jiang et al. (2012)</a>
Human	Choline	Altered fetal HPA axis, cortisol-regulation	↑ Methylation CRH, NR3C1, ↑ H3K9me2 in placenta	
Human	B6	↑ Birth weight (male offspring)	↑ Methylation MEG in blood	<a href="#">McCullough et al. (2016)</a>

Arrows: ↑ increase, ↓ decrease. Abbreviation(s): 1C, one-carbon; A<sup>vy</sup>, agouti viable yellow; Axin(Fu), axin-fused; B12, vitamin B<sub>12</sub>; B6, vitamin B<sub>6</sub>; CD4(+), cluster of differentiation 4; CRH, corticotropin-releasing hormone; GR, glucocorticoid receptor; H19, imprinted maternally expressed transcript; HPA, hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis; IGF2, insulin like growth factor 2; LINE-1, long interspersed nuclear element 1; LTR, long terminal repeat; MEG3, maternally expressed 3; MiR, micro RNA; NR3C1, nuclear receptor subfamily 3 group C member 1; PEG3, paternally expressed 3; TXNIP, thioredoxin interacting protein; ZFP57, zinc finger protein 57 homolog.

**Table 1.2 Methyl deficiency in maternal diet and epigenetic programming of periconceptual development.**

Species	↓ 1C metabolite	Offspring phenotype	Epigenetic changes	Reference(s)
Mouse	Methionine, Folate, Choline	↑ Insulin resistance (male offspring)	-	Maloney <i>et al.</i> (2011)
Mouse	Methionine, Folate, B12, Choline	Altered imprinting (genomic imprint)	↑ <i>Igf2</i> DMR2 in kidney	Waterland <i>et al.</i> (2006b)
Mouse	Methionine	Altered amino acid metabolism	↓ H3K4me3, H3K27me3, H3K4me2 in liver	Mentch <i>et al.</i> (2015)
Mouse	Folate	↓ Plasma glucose, ↑ TAG	↓ Methylation <i>Slc39a4</i> fetal gut zinc transporter gene	McKay <i>et al.</i> (2011) McKay <i>et al.</i> (2014)
Mouse	Folate	-	↑ Methylation <i>Mthfr</i> in liver and brain	Lévesque <i>et al.</i> (2016)
Mouse	Choline	Altered cell cycle	↓ Methylation <i>Cdkn3</i> in brain	Niculescu <i>et al.</i> (2006)
Mouse	Choline	↓ Neural progenitor cell proliferation in hippocampus	↓ H3K9 methylation <i>calbindin 1</i> promoter in brain	Mehedint <i>et al.</i> (2010)
Mouse	Choline, B2	↑ Delayed, small embryos; ↑ cardiac defects	-	Chan <i>et al.</i> (2010)
Rat	Methionine, Choline	Altered DNA methylation	↓ Global methylation in liver	Wilson <i>et al.</i> (1984)
Rat	Choline	Altered DNA methylation and genomic imprinting	↑ <i>Igf2</i> DMR2, ↓ Methylation <i>Dnmt1</i> in liver	Kovacheva <i>et al.</i> (2007)
Sheep	Methionine, Folate, B12	↑ Adiposity, ↑ insulin resistance, altered immune function, hypertension	↑ Methylation of 4% CGIs (>50% affected loci specific to males)	Sinclair <i>et al.</i> (2007)

Arrows: ↑ increase, ↓ decrease. Abbreviation(s): 1C, one-carbon; B12, vitamin B<sub>12</sub>; B2, vitamin B<sub>2</sub>; Cdkn3, cyclin-dependent kinase inhibitor 3; CGIs, CpG islands; DMR2, differentially methylated region 2; Dnmt1, DNA methyltransferase 1; Igf2, insulin like growth factor 2; Mthfr, methyltetrahydrofolate reductase; Slc39a4, solute carrier family 39 member 4; TAG, triacylglyceride.

The relationships between dietary methyl donors and epigenetic modifications became apparent in studies using methylation indicator-mouse models in which changes in DNA methylation give rise to visible, long-lasting offspring phenotypes (Ideraabdullah and Zeisel, 2018). For example, the viable yellow agouti (*A<sup>vy</sup>*) mouse is an epigenetic biosensor for nutritional alterations to the fetal epigenome (Dolinoy, 2008). Agouti mice harbour a metastable epiallele resulting from the insertion of an intracisternal A particle (IAP) retrotransposon upstream of the *Agouti* gene transcription start site. A 'retrotransposon' is a widespread mobile genetic element that replicates through reverse transcription of RNA and integrates the product DNA into the host genome (Cordaux and Batzer, 2009). The IAP retrotransposon is epigenetically regulated. When hypomethylated, the *A<sup>vy</sup>* gene is expressed and mice possess a yellow coat colour, obesity, hyperinsulinemia and increased susceptibility to tumours (Morgan *et al.*, 1999). When hypermethylated, the *A<sup>vy</sup>* gene is repressed and mice are brown in colour with a lean body composition (Wolff *et al.*, 1998).

Methyl donor supplementation to an already nutritionally adequate diet fed to pregnant yellow agouti mice permanently increased DNA methylation and altered the body composition and metabolism of their offspring (Wolff *et al.*, 1998; Waterland and Jirtle, 2003; Table 1.1).

The agouti mouse model provided the first evidence that dietary excesses of 1C metabolites during early development can alter the epigenome and metabolic phenotype of offspring. As discussed above, these epigenetic modifications appear to be transgenerationally heritable due to their incomplete erasure during germline reprogramming meaning epigenetic gene regulation may persist transgenerationally despite lack of continued exposure in subsequent generations (Waterland and Jirtle, 2003). This is of particular importance considering the aforementioned issues raised by mandatory fortification of human diets with folic acid (FA) and the detrimental effects of imbalances 1C metabolites. Moreover, putative metastable epialleles have since been identified in humans and they are correlated with seasonal fluctuation in maternal nutrition around the time of conception (Waterland *et al.*, 2010; Dominguez-Salas *et al.*, 2014).

According to Maloney *et al.* (2011), diets containing an excess of methyl groups are unlikely to be encountered outside an experimental setting other than when taking supplements, such as 400 µg FA. Human diets, especially vegetarian and vegan diets, are more likely to be deficient in methionine and vitamin B<sub>12</sub> leading to a low availability of methyl groups (McCarty *et al.*, 2009; Kim *et al.*, 2018). The Pune Maternal Nutritional Study showed that ~67% of expectant mothers had B12 deficiency whilst folate deficiency affected only one study participant. The offspring of mothers with a combination of high folate and low vitamin B12 concentrations were the most insulin resistant and, therefore, at increased risk of developing type II diabetes (Yajnik *et al.*, 2008). These findings highlight concerns about the masking of B12 deficiency by folate and raise questions regarding suitable dietary intakes of both nutrients to ensure a safe balance between the two is established during pregnancy.

Methyl deficient (MD) diets, in conjunction with single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) in 1C metabolism genes, can lead to epigenetic alterations in DNA and histone methylation that regulate key developmental processes (Xu and Sinclair, 2015). In turn, this can lead to wide-spread metabolic alterations in protein, lipid and carbohydrate metabolism due to the complex relationship

between 1C metabolism and related pathways (Maloney *et al.*, 2007; McNeil *et al.*, 2008; Maloney *et al.*, 2011).

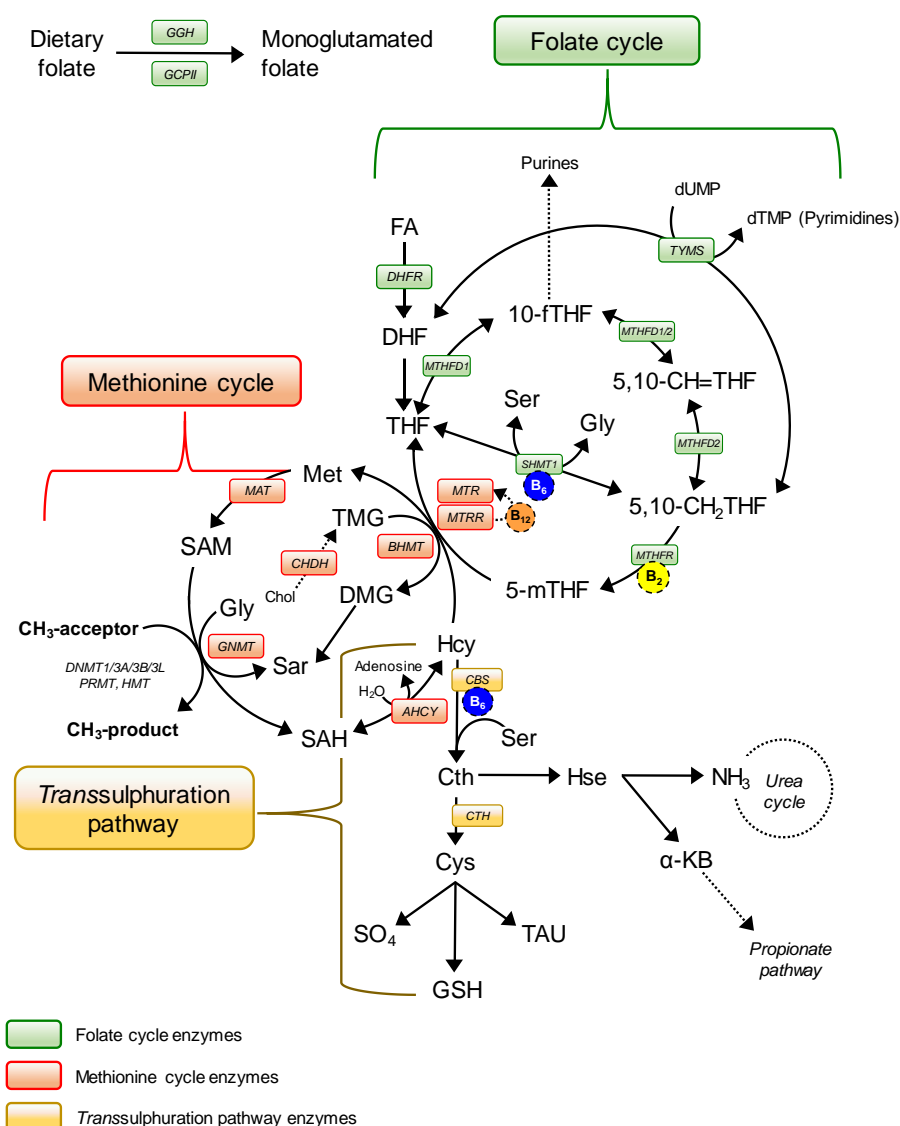
## 1.2 One-carbon (1C) metabolism and related pathways

One-carbon (1C) metabolism comprises the linked methionine-folate cycle and *transsulphuration* pathway (Figure 1.1; Xu and Sinclair, 2015; Clare *et al.*, 2019). This complex metabolic network facilitates 1C transfer in the form of methenyl, formyl and methyl moieties, required for essential cellular processes within the cytoplasm, nucleus and mitochondria (Stover, 2009; Stover and Field, 2011). Such processes include molecular biosynthesis (e.g. nucleotides, proteins, polyamines, phospholipids and creatine); epigenetic regulation of gene expression via methylation of DNA, RNA and histones; and redox defence (Lucock, 2000; Ducker and Rabinowitz, 2017). Dietary constituents such as methionine, folate (vitamin B9), B vitamins (B12, B6, B2) and choline (betaine) are essential 1C enzyme substrates or cofactors (Mason, 2003).

### 1.2.1 Methionine-folate cycles

The linked methionine-folate cycles facilitate transmethylation reactions, including chromatin methylation which plays a pivotal role in epigenetic regulation of gene expression (Razin and Cedar, 1991). Methionine is adenylated by methionine adenosyltransferase (MAT; EC 2.5.1.6) to S-adenosylmethionine (SAM), a universal methyl donor involved in >200 downstream cellular transmethylation reactions (Roje, 2006; Figure 1.1). During methyl (CH<sub>3</sub>) transfer, SAM is converted to S-adenosylhomocysteine (SAH) (Ulrey *et al.*, 2005), which is hydrolysed to homocysteine (Hcy) and adenosine through a reversible reaction catalysed by S-adenosylhomocysteine hydrolase (AHCY; EC 3.3.1.1; Caudill *et al.*, 2001).

Folate-dependent remethylation of Hcy to methionine is catalysed by B12-dependent methionine synthase (MTR; EC 2.1.1.13) to complete the methionine cycle (Škovierová *et al.*, 2016). Methionine synthase reductase (MTRR; EC 1.16.1.8) restores MTR activity by catalysing the reductive methylation of cob(II)alamin to methylcob(III)alamin to maintain adequate levels of bioactive B12 cofactor for Hcy remethylation (Gaughan *et al.*, 2001; Ho *et al.*, 2013). Reductive methylation of cob(II)alamin for MTR restoration is an example of SAM-dependent transmethylation (Ho *et al.*, 2013).



**Figure 1.1 One-carbon (1C) metabolism includes the linked methionine-folate cycle and *transsulphuration* pathway.** Adapted from [Clare et al. \(2019\)](#).

Folate cycle enzymes (green boxes): DHFR, dihydrofolate reductase; GCPH, glutamate carboxypeptidase; GGH, γ-glutamyl hydrolase; MTHFD1/2, methylenetetrahydrofolate dehydrogenase; MTHFR, 5,10-methylenetetrahydrofolate reductase; SHMT, serine hydroxymethyltransferase; TYMS, thymidylate synthase. Methionine cycle enzymes (red boxes): AHCY, S-adenosyl-L-homocysteine hydrolase; BHMT, betaine-homocysteine S-methyltransferase; CHDH, choline dehydrogenase; GNMT, glycine N-methyltransferase; MATI/III, methionine adenosyltransferase; MTR, methionine synthase; MTRR, methionine synthase reductase. Transsulphuration pathway enzymes (yellow boxes): CBS, cystathionine β-synthase; CTH, cystathionine γ-lyase. Key methyltransferase enzymes: DNMT1/3A/3B/3L, *de novo* and maintenance DNA methyltransferases; HMT, histone methyltransferase; PRMT, protein arginine methyltransferase. Enzyme cofactors (coloured circles): vitamin B<sub>2</sub>, B<sub>6</sub>, and B<sub>12</sub>. Substrates: 5,10-CH=THF, 5,10-methylenetetrahydrofolate; 5,10-CH<sub>2</sub>THF, 5,10-methyltetrahydrofolate; 5-mTHF, 5-methyltetrahydrofolate; 10-fTHF, 10-formyltetrahydrofolate; α-KB, α-ketobutyrate; Chol, choline; Cth, cystathionine; Cys, cysteine; DHF, dihydrofolate; DMG, dimethylglycine; dTMP, thymidine monophosphate; dUMP, deoxyuridine monophosphate; FA, folic acid; Gly, glycine; GSH, glutathione; Hcy, homocysteine; Hse, homoserine; Met, methionine; NH<sub>3</sub>, ammonia; SAH, S-adenosylhomocysteine; SAM, S-adenosylmethionine; Sar, sarcosine; Ser, serine; SO<sub>4</sub>, sulphate; TAU, taurine; THF, tetrahydrofolate; TMG, trimethylglycine/betaine.

A parallel folate-independent pathway, catalysed by B6-dependent enzyme, betaine-homocysteine S-methyltransferase (BHMT; EC 2.1.1.5; [Finkelstein and Martin, 1984](#)), involves the transfer of a methyl group from trimethylglycine (TMG), otherwise known as betaine, to generate dimethylglycine (DMG) and methionine ([Li \*et al.\*, 2008](#)). Whilst it is uncertain why animals have two independent pathways for Hcy remethylation, BHMT accounts for up to 50% Hcy remethylation to methionine ([McKeever \*et al.\*, 1991](#); [Garrow, 1996](#); [Chadwick \*et al.\*, 2000](#); [Yamashita \*et al.\*, 2000](#)), emphasising the importance of this pathway in the liver.

Folates (B9) are a family of enzyme cofactors that function as versatile methyl donors in 1C metabolism ([Stover, 2009](#)). Unlike bacteria, animals cannot endogenously synthesise folates, therefore, requirements must be met entirely from dietary sources ([Garratt \*et al.\*, 2005](#)). Due to their hydrophilic nature, folate absorption requires functionally diverse transport mechanisms within the proximal small intestine ([Visentin \*et al.\*, 2014](#)). Such mechanisms involve the reduced folate carrier (RC), proton-coupled folate transporter (PCFT) and folate receptor (FR). Folates are hydrolysed into their monoglutamated forms in the intestinal mucosa by  $\gamma$ -glutamyl hydrolase (GGH; EC 3.4.19.9) and glutamate carboxypeptidase II (GCP II; EC 3.4.17.21) to facilitate absorption ([Zhao \*et al.\*, 2009](#); Figure 1.1).

Upon reaching systemic tissues, folate monoglutamates are converted to 5-methyltetrahydrofolate (5-mTHF); the predominant species in non-hepatic cells and are subsequently polyglutamated for cellular retention and 1C coenzyme function ([Xu and Sinclair, 2015](#)). Folic acid (FA), the synthetic folate supplement, is fully oxidised not a bioactive coenzyme ([Shane, 2008](#)). Folic acid is reduced to dihydrofolate (DHF) and then to the bioactive form, tetrahydrofolate (THF) by dihydrofolate reductase (DHFR; EC 1.5.1.3), before entering the folate cycle ([Ducker and Rabinowitz, 2017](#)). Subsequently, THF is converted to 5,10-methylenetetrahydrofolate (5,10-CH<sub>2</sub>THF) by B6-dependent enzyme, serine hydroxymethyltransferase (SHMT; EC 2.1.2.1) and then irreversibly reduced to 5-mTHF by B2-dependent methylenetetrahydrofolate reductase (MTHFR; EC 1.5.1.20). Alternatively, THF can be converted to 10-formyltetrahydrofolate (10-fTHF) through consecutive reactions catalysed by methylenetetrahydrofolate dehydrogenase enzymes (MTHFD; EC 1.5.1.5). Demethylation of 5-mTHF completes the folate cycle as 1C is donated for remethylation of Hcy to methionine ([Mentch and Locasale, 2016](#)).



### 1.2.2 *Transsulphuration* pathway

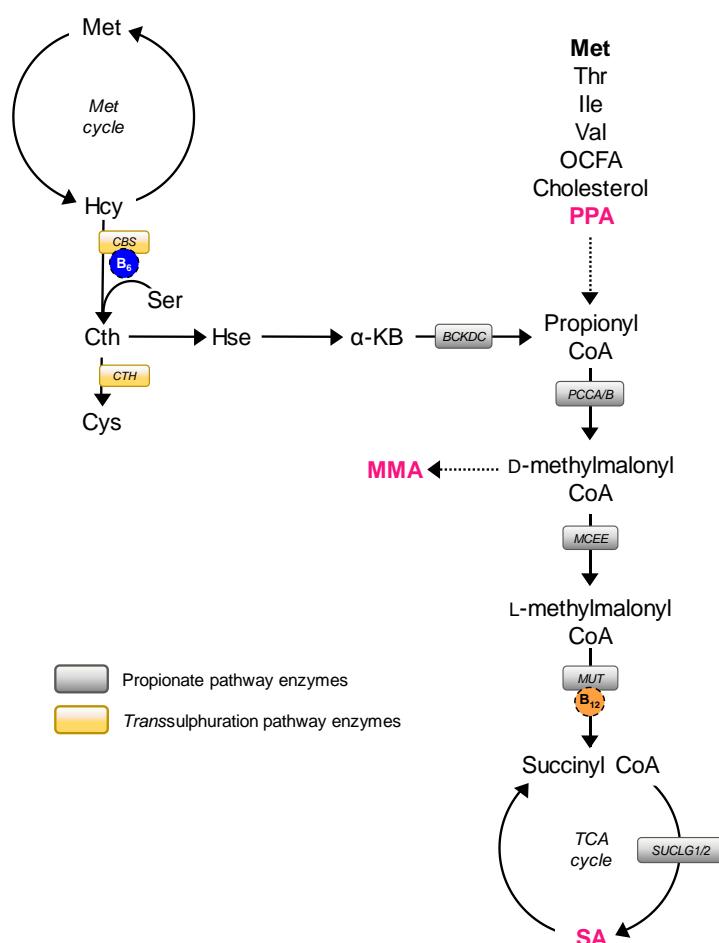
When methionine and folate levels are adequate, SAM allosterically regulates Hcy catabolism via a two-step *transsulphuration* pathway that requires the bioactive B6 cofactor (Figure 1.1). SAM coordinates *transsulphuration* by inhibiting MTHFR and activating cystathionine  $\beta$ -synthase (CBS; EC 4.2.1.22; [Selhub, 1999](#); [Luccock, 2000](#)), the primary enzyme in the *transsulphuration* pathway that catalyses condensation of serine (Ser) with Hcy to produce cystathionine (Cth). The secondary enzyme, cystathionine  $\gamma$ -lyase (CTH; EC 4.4.1.1), yields cysteine (Cys); a precursor for glutathione (GSH) which is a major endogenous antioxidant in cells ([Ebisch et al., 2006](#); [Aquilano et al., 2014](#)).

### 1.2.3 Propionate pathway

Cystathionine (Cth) hydrolysis also yields  $\alpha$ -ketobutyrate ( $\alpha$ -KB), an intermediate that is transformed to propionyl CoA by the branched chain  $\alpha$ -ketoacid dehydrogenase complex (BCKDC; EC 1.2.4.4; EC 2.3.1.168; EC 1.8.1.4; Figure 1.2). Amino acids, such as methionine, threonine (Thr), isoleucine (Ile), valine (Val); odd-chain fatty acids (OCFA), cholesterol and propionate (PPA) are also catabolised to produce propionyl-CoA ([Tretter et al., 2016](#)). In the mitochondria, propionyl-CoA is carboxylated to D-methylmalonyl-CoA by propionyl-CoA carboxylase (PCCA/B; EC 6.4.1.3), an enzyme that requires biotin as a cofactor ([Ballhausen et al., 2009](#)).

D-methylmalonyl-CoA is epimerised to L-stereoisomer by methylmalonyl-CoA epimerase (MCEE; EC 5.1.99.1) before undergoing an intramolecular rearrangement catalysed by B12-dependent methylmalonyl-CoA mutase (MUT; EC 5.4.99.2) to produce succinyl-CoA, an intermediate of the tricarboxylic acid (TCA) cycle ([De Vadder et al., 2016](#)). When vitamin B<sub>12</sub> is absent, L-methylmalonyl-CoA forms methylmalonic acid (MMA), a reliable biomarker of B12 status and 1C metabolic function ([Mendonça et al., 2017](#)).





**Figure 1.2 One-carbon (1C) substrates and cofactors serve as key intermediates of propionate and energy metabolism.** Adapted from [Clare et al. \(2019\)](#).

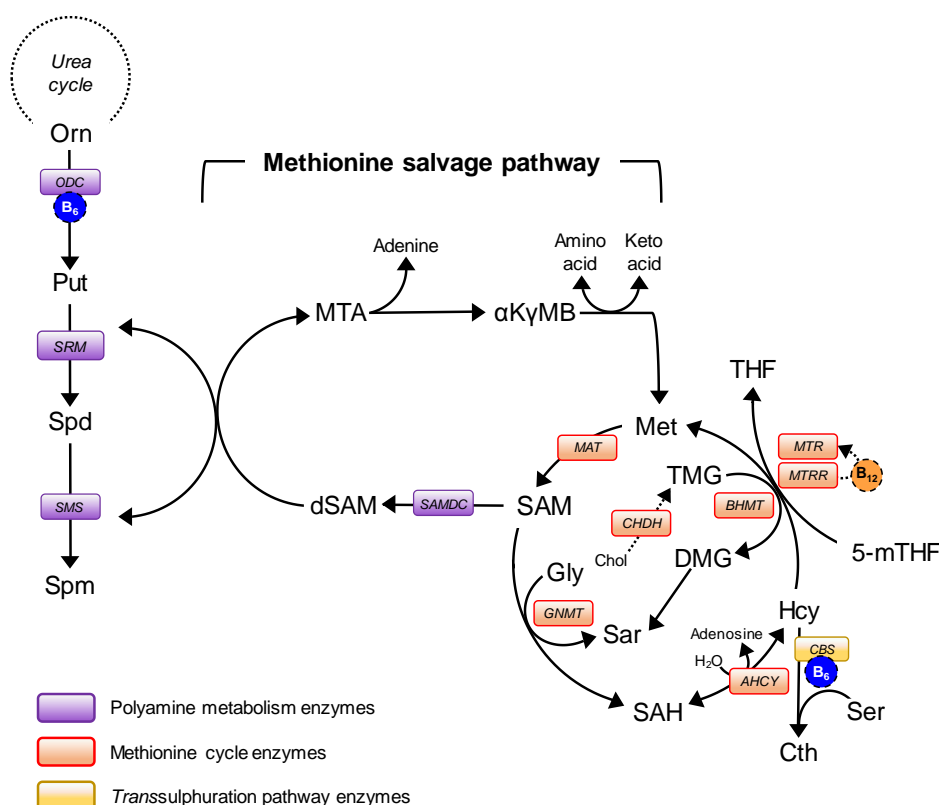
Propionate metabolism enzymes (grey boxes): BCKDC, α-keto acid dehydrogenase; MCEE, methylmalonyl-CoA epimerase; MUT, methylmalonyl-CoA mutase; PCCA/B, propionyl-CoA carboxylase; SUCLG1/2, succinate CoA ligase. Transsulphuration pathway enzymes (yellow boxes): CBS, cystathionine β-synthase; CTH, cystathionine γ-lyase. Enzyme cofactors (coloured circles): vitamin B<sub>6</sub> and B<sub>12</sub>. Substrates: α-KB, α-ketobutyrate; Cth, cystathionine; Hcy, homocysteine; Hse, homoserine; Ile, isoleucine; Met, methionine; MMA, methylmalonic acid; OCFA, odd-chain fatty acids; Ser, serine; Thr, threonine; Val, valine.

#### 1.2.4 Polyamine pathway

Ornithine (Orn) is decarboxylated to the primary polyamine, putrescine (Put), by B<sub>6</sub>-dependent enzyme, ornithine decarboxylase (ODC; EC 4.1.1.17; [Pegg, 2006](#); Figure 1.3). Putrescine is further processed to produce the more abundant polyamines, spermidine (Spd) and spermine (Spm), by aminopropyltransferases, spermidine synthase (SRM; EC 2.5.1.16) and spermine synthase (SMS; EC 2.5.1.22), respectively ([Gamble et al., 2012](#)). After Put production, the second rate-limiting factor for higher polyamine

synthesis is the decarboxylation of SAM to provide the aminopropyl donor, dSAM, required for Spd and Spm synthesis (Pegg, 2016).

Polyamine biosynthesis is linked to the methionine salvage pathway. Sulphur-containing metabolites, such as 5'-methylthioadenosine (MTA), are recycled back to methionine, demonstrating an additional pathway for methionine regulation (Albers *et al.*, 2009; Chou *et al.*, 2014).



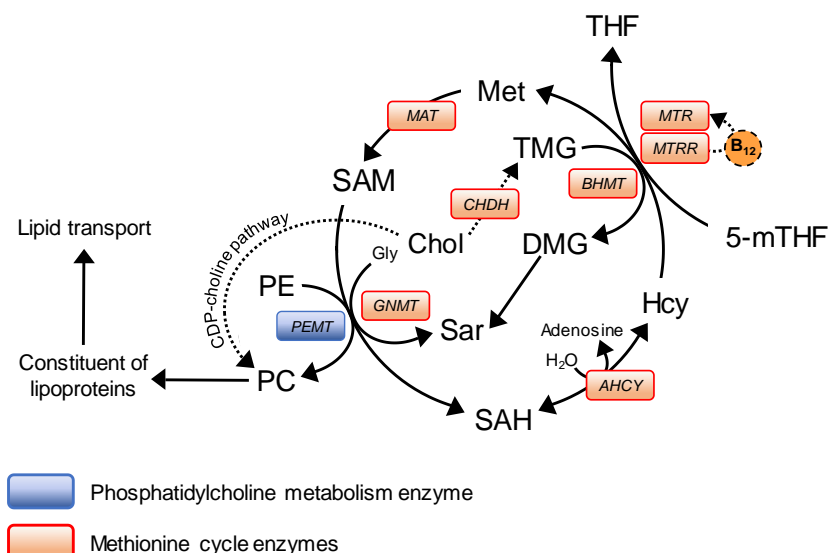
**Figure 1.3 Polyamine synthesis and the methionine salvage pathway requires decarboxylated SAM as an aminopropyl donor.** Adapted from Clare *et al.* (2019).

Polyamine metabolism enzymes (purple boxes): ODC, ornithine decarboxylase; SAMDC, S-adenosylmethionine decarboxylase; SMS, spermine synthase; SRM, spermidine synthase. Methionine cycle enzymes (red boxes): AHCY, S-adenosyl-L-homocysteine hydrolase; BHMT, betaine-homocysteine S-methyltransferase; CHDH, choline dehydrogenase; GNMT, glycine N-methyltransferase; MATI/III, methionine adenosyltransferase; MTR, methionine synthase; MTRR, methionine synthase reductase. Enzyme cofactors (coloured circles): vitamin B6 and B12. Substrates: αKγMB, α-keto-γ-methylolbutyrate; Chol, choline; DMG, dimethylglycine; Gly, glycine; Hcy, homocysteine; Met, methionine; MTA, 5'-methylthioadenosine; Orn, ornithine; Put, putrescine; SAH, S-adenosylhomocysteine; SAM, S-adenosylmethionine; Sar, sarcosine; Spd, spermidine; Spm, spermine; TMG, trimethylglycine/betaine.

### 1.2.5 Phosphatidylcholine pathway

S-adenosylmethionine (SAM) donates three methyl groups to phosphatidylethanolamine (PE) to synthesise phosphatidylcholine (PC), an abundant glycerophospholipid constituent of cell membranes that facilitates lipid

transport in mammalian tissues ([Wright et al., 2004](#); Figure 1.4). This reaction is catalysed by phosphatidylethanolamine methyltransferase (PEMT; EC 2.1.1.17), an enzyme predominantly expressed in the liver ([Kanno et al., 2007](#); [Vance et al., 2013](#)). Alternatively, PC can be synthesised from choline via the cytidine diphosphate (CDP)-choline pathway ([Cole et al., 2012](#)).



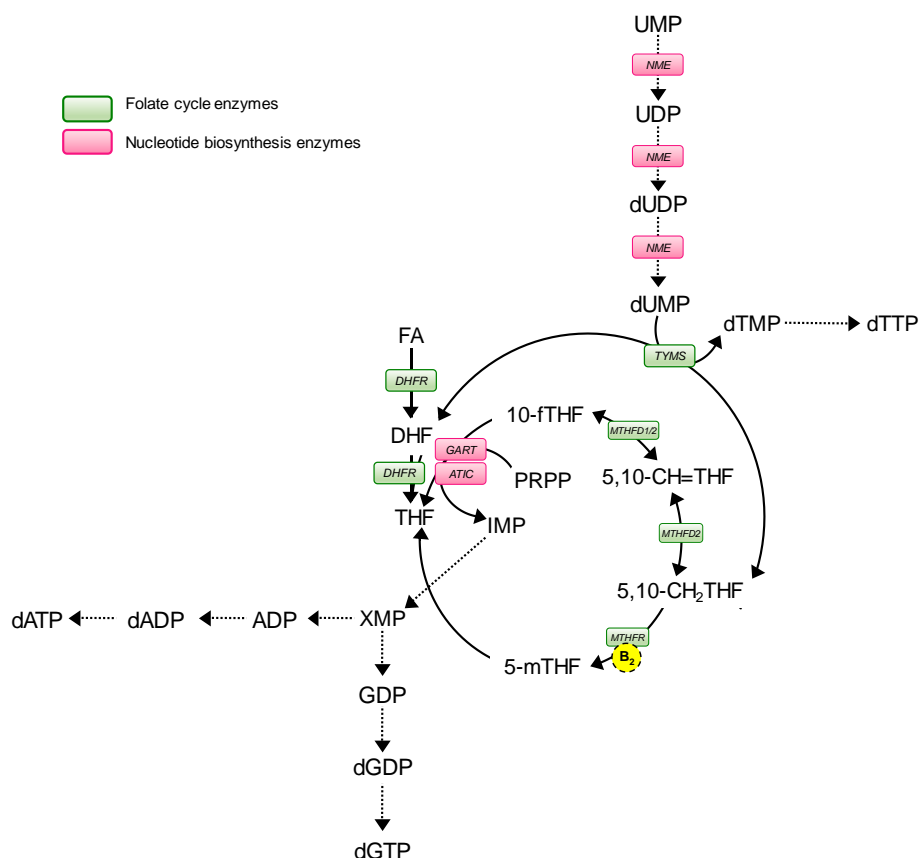
**Figure 1.4 Phosphatidylcholine can be synthesised by choline or via the cytidine diphosphate (CDP)-choline pathway.** Adapted from [Clare et al. \(2019\)](#).

Phosphatidylcholine metabolism enzyme (blue box): PEMT, phosphatidylethanolamine methyltransferase. Methionine cycle enzymes (red boxes): AHCY, S-adenosyl-L-homocysteine hydrolase; BHMT, betaine-homocysteine S-methyltransferase; CHDH, choline dehydrogenase; GNMT, glycine N-methyltransferase; MATI/III, methionine adenosyltransferase. Enzyme cofactor (orange circle): vitamin B<sub>12</sub>. Substrates: Chol, choline; DMG, dimethylglycine; Gly, glycine; Hcy, homocysteine; Met, methionine; PC, phosphatidylcholine; PE, phosphatidylethanolamine; SAH, S-adenosylhomocysteine; SAM, S-adenosylmethionine; TMG, trimethylglycine/betaine.

### 1.2.6 Nucleotide biosynthesis

Inosine-monophosphate (IMP) is the central intermediate for the *de novo* synthesis of purine nucleotides ([Shuvalov et al., 2017](#)). Generation of IMP from phosphoribosyl pyrophosphate (PRPP) requires the sequential organisation of several multifunctional enzymes ([Pedley and Benkovic, 2017](#)). Phosphoribosylglycinamide formyltransferase (GART; EC 2.1.2.2) and phosphoribosylamidazolecarboxamide formyltransferase (ATIC; EC 2.1.2.3) provide C2 and C8 atoms for purine ring synthesis using 10-fTHF as a 1C donor. Next, IMP is oxidised to xanthine monophosphate (XMP), a precursor for adenine and guanine nucleotides ([Pedley and Benkovic, 2017](#)). The precursor for pyrimidine synthesis, uridine monophosphate (UMP), does not require 1C

cofactors. Conversion of UMP to deoxyuridine monophosphate (dUMP) is catalysed by nucleoside diphosphate kinase (NME; EC 2.7.4.6). In a reaction catalysed by thymidylate synthase (TYMS; EC 2.1.45), 5,10-CH<sub>2</sub>-THF donates 1C to convert dUMP to thymidine monophosphate (dTMP) and becomes oxidised to DHF in the process. Subsequently, DHF is reduced to THF to enclose the metabolic loop (Shuvalov *et al.*, 2017; Figure 1.5).



**Figure 1.5 One-carbon (1C) metabolism provides purines (adenine and guanine), and pyrimidine, thymine, for nucleotide biosynthesis.** Adapted from Clare *et al.* (2019).

Nucleotide biosynthesis enzymes (pink boxes): ATIC, phosphoribosylaminoimidazole-carboxamide formyltransferase; GART, phosphoribosylglycinamide formyltransferase; NME, nucleoside diphosphate kinase. Folate cycle enzymes (green boxes): DHFR, dihydrofolate reductase; MTHFD1/2, methylenetetrahydrofolate dehydrogenase; TYMS, thymidylate synthase. Enzyme cofactor (yellow circle): vitamin B<sub>12</sub>. Substrates: 5,10-CH=THF, 5,10-methenyl-tetrahydrofolate; 5,10-CH<sub>2</sub>THF, 5,10-methylenetetrahydrofolate; 10-fTHF, 10-formyl-tetrahydrofolate; ADP, adenosine diphosphate; dADP, deoxyadenosine diphosphate; dATP, deoxyadenosine triphosphate; dGDP, deoxyguanosine diphosphate; dGTP, deoxyguanosine triphosphate; DHF, dihydrofolate; dTMP, thymidine monophosphate; dTTP, thymidine triphosphate; dUDP, deoxyuridine diphosphate; dUMP, deoxyuridine monophosphate; GDP, guanosine diphosphate; IMP, inosine monophosphate; PRPP, phosphoribosyl pyrophosphate; THF, tetrahydrofolate; UDP, uridine diphosphate; UMP, uridine monophosphate; XMP, xanthine monophosphate.

### 1.3 Genetics of 1C metabolism

Inter-individual and ethnic variability in epigenetic regulation of gene expression may arise due to single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) within 1C metabolism and epigenetic regulator genes, and differentially methylated target DNA sequences (Clare *et al.*, 2019). Polymorphic variants can act synergistically with nutritional deficiencies to magnify imbalances which may, in turn, affect methyl donor synthesis and epigenetic regulation of gene expression causing a wide range of reproductive and developmental outcomes in humans (Appendix Table 1.1).

Insight into the function of key 1C enzymes, particularly during periconceptual development, can be obtained from targeted or complete deletions of specific enzymes in the pathways using animal models (Appendix Table 1.2). Whilst gene deletion (or inhibition) does not recapitulate the effect of a SNP, they still offer valuable mechanistic insight into enzyme function and downstream metabolic and developmental consequences.

#### 1.3.1 Hyperhomocysteinemia (HHcy)

Single nucleotide polymorphisms and gene deletions that impair 1C metabolic pathways often lead to hyperhomocysteinemia (HHcy), a condition characterised by elevated Hcy concentrations (Figure 1.1) in plasma. Mild hyperhomocysteinemia is prevalent in subjects polymorphic for a number of enzymes involved in 1C metabolism (Midttun *et al.*, 2007; Tsitsiou *et al.*, 2009; Appendix Table 1.1). In humans, the reference range of Hcy for healthy adults is 5-15  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  (Jacobsen, 1998). Mild, moderate and severe HHcy conditions are characterised by plasma concentrations of 15-25  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ , 25-50  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  and >50  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ , respectively (Brustolin *et al.*, 2010).

Homocysteine is a sensitive biomarker of aberrant 1C metabolic function and an independent risk factor for various diseases, including cancer, cardiovascular disease, and neurological and reproductive disorders (Škovierová *et al.*, 2016). Elevated plasma Hcy has been associated with reduced placental weight, placental abruption, preeclampsia, recurrent pregnancy loss, NTDs, oral clefts, Down's syndrome and small for gestational age babies (Hague, 2003; Brustolin *et al.*, 2010; Bergen *et al.*, 2012; Ganu *et al.*, 2013; Cavallé-Busquets *et al.*, 2020). High concentrations of Hcy in follicular fluid can have a detrimental effect on oocyte and embryo quality (Ebisch *et al.*,

2006), leading to poor *in vitro* fertilisation (IVF) outcomes as reflected by decreased pregnancy and implantation rates in affected patients (Pachiarotti *et al.*, 2007). Consequently, concentrations in follicular fluid or embryo culture media can provide a useful metabolic profiling marker of fertilisation rate, embryo quality and pregnancy outcome in patients undergoing assisted reproduction technology (ART) procedures (Berker *et al.*, 2009; Boyama *et al.*, 2016).

#### 1.3.1.1 HHcy and epigenetics

Several lines of evidence implicate that epigenetic mechanisms underpin Hcy-related pathologies (Škovierová *et al.*, 2016). The bidirectional reaction catalysed by AHCY (Figure 1.1) has a dynamic equilibrium that strongly favours SAH synthesis over hydrolysis (Castro *et al.*, 2003). A rise in Hcy can, therefore, cause accumulation of SAH which is a potent inhibitor of DNA methyltransferase enzymes (DNMTs; Chen *et al.*, 2010). A decreased SAM:SAH ratio is predictive of global DNA hypomethylation with consequences for epigenetic programming (Caudill *et al.*, 2001). Thus, Hcy must be metabolised effectively to prevent SAH accumulation and to normalise 1C metabolic flux (Blom and Smulders, 2011).

Since HHcy is often diagnosed in conjunction with decreased plasma folate and B12 in infertile patients (Dhillon *et al.*, 2007), it may not seem surprising that Hcy concentrations are responsive to dietary intakes of specific 1C nutrients. Plasma Hcy concentrations can be lowered by supplementation with FA, B12 (cobalamin) and B6 (pyridoxine; Malinow *et al.*, 1999; Boxmeer *et al.*, 2008; Boxmeer *et al.*, 2009), whereas methionine supplementation can increase concentrations (Ditscheid *et al.*, 2005). Accordingly, dietary methionine restriction is a potential treatment for patients with Mudd's disease who suffer methionine adenosyltransferase (MAT) deficiency and who exhibit elevated methionine and Hcy concentrations (Chien *et al.*, 2015; Appendix Table 1.1).

The foregoing discussion is further complicated by the fact that 1C metabolism genes are epigenetically regulated by DNA methylation in their own right (Uekawa *et al.*, 2009; Dobbs *et al.*, 2013; Ho *et al.*, 2015). Excluding studies concerned with cancer (Huidobro *et al.*, 2013), there is limited information about the precise nature and clinical significance of such interactions. The extent to which methyl deficiency may affect 1C gene expression warrants further investigation.

## 1.4 Regulation of 1C metabolism in the mammalian embryo

Most of the detailed research concerning the regulation of 1C metabolism is restricted to the mammalian liver ([Okuyama et al., 1976](#); [Balaghi et al., 1993](#); [Shibata et al., 2013](#); [Zhang, 2018](#)) with comparatively little research conducted on reproductive cells and embryos ([Sinclair and Singh, 2007](#); [Kwong et al., 2010](#)). This is surprising given the importance attached to FA supplementation in the diet of intending mothers to prevent congenital abnormalities ([Lucock, 2000](#); [McNulty et al., 2000](#); [Beaudin and Stover, 2009](#); [De-Regil et al., 2010](#)) and the compelling evidence that dietary methyl group availability during periconceptual development can have long-lasting metabolic and developmental health consequences for offspring.

Transcripts for 1C metabolic enzymes have been detected in human embryonic stem cells (hESCs; [Steele et al., 2005](#)), human and bovine germinal vesicle oocytes, and bovine preimplantation embryos ([Bhenkhalifa et al., 2010](#); [Ikeda et al., 2010](#); [Kwong et al., 2010](#)). However, the absence of *methionine adenosyltransferase 1A* (*MAT1A*) and *betaine homocysteine S-methyltransferase* (*BHMT*) transcripts within the bovine follicle-enclosed oocyte and preimplantation embryo indicates that the methionine cycle operates differently in reproductive cells to hepatocytes, perhaps rendering oocytes and embryos more sensitive to methyl availability ([Kwong et al., 2010](#); [Ikeda et al., 2010](#)). The metabolic implications of these tissue-specific transcriptional differences remain unknown.

Aside tissue-specific differences, there are species-specific differences in methionine cycle transcript expression. To contrast observations in cattle, *Bhmt* is transiently expressed within the ICM of the mouse blastocyst ([Lee et al., 2012](#)). *Bhmt* mRNA expression was first detected in morula but protein levels and enzyme activity were not detected until the blastocyst stage. Deletion of *Bhmt* reduced ICM cell number, decreased DNA methylation within the ICM, and increased fetal resorption following embryo transfer ([Lee et al., 2012](#)). Detrimental consequences of *Bhmt* deletion were independently rescued by exogenous methionine and SAM supplementation (200  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ; [Lee et al., 2012](#); [Zhang et al., 2015](#)). Collectively, these findings identify an indispensable role of BHMT in the provision of methyl groups for the establishment of methylation patterns within the murine preimplantation embryo.



## 1.5 Epigenetics and methylation

The three main epigenetic mechanisms that regulate gene expression are DNA methylation, post-translational histone modifications (histone code) and non-coding RNAs (Xu and Sinclair, 2015). Together, these non-genetic covalent modifications to chromatin affect transcription and readout of DNA. This allows genetically identical cells to differ phenotypically within and between cell lineages (Canovas and Ross, 2016; Maldonado *et al.*, 2019). Such epigenetic processes are critical for interpretation of the genome in response to physiological factors and environmental stimuli. Together with other regulatory elements, epigenetic mechanisms contribute to lineage- and tissue-specific gene expression that contributes toward mammalian preimplantation embryo development and differentiation (Hemberger *et al.*, 2009).

### 1.5.1 Genomic DNA (gDNA) methylation

The most extensively studied mechanism of epigenetic gene regulation is genomic DNA (gDNA) methylation (Anderson *et al.*, 2012), a repressive epigenetic modification associated with stable gene silencing (Lande-Diner *et al.*, 2007). DNA methylation depends upon the availability of methyl groups transferred from SAM (Murín *et al.*, 2017; Figure 1.1). SAM-dependent transmethylation of DNA, RNA and proteins (e.g. histones) is catalysed by a family of DNA methyltransferase enzymes (DNMTs; EC 2.1.1.37). DNA methyltransferase 1 (DNMT1) recognises hemimethylated DNA and maintains DNA methylation during mitosis by methylating the unmethylated strand (Leonhardt *et al.*, 1992). Conversely, DNMT3A and DNMT3B do not distinguish between methylated substrates and are responsible for *de novo* methylation (Jurkowska *et al.*, 2011; Jin and Robertson, 2013). DNA methyltransferase-like protein (DNMT3L) lacks the conserved catalytic domain common to DNMTs and, therefore, lacks inherent methyltransferase activity. However, through allosteric cooperation with DNMT3 family enzymes, DNMT3L facilitates germline DNA methylation and specifically genomic imprinting during gametogenesis (Chédin *et al.*, 2002; Hata *et al.*, 2002). DNMT2 also lacks DNA methyltransferase activity but catalyses transfer RNA (tRNA) methylation (Goll *et al.*, 2006; Kaiser *et al.*, 2017).



### 1.5.1.1 CpG methylation

In mammals, the primary site of DNA methylation is the covalent attachment of a methyl ( $\text{CH}_3$ ) group at the fifth carbon position of the pyrimidine ring of cytosine to form 5-methylcytosine (5mC). Cytosine methylation predominantly occurs at the 5'-CpG-3' dinucleotide in mammalian cells, whereby cytosine is linked to guanine by a phosphate bond (Lim and Maher, 2010; Deaton and Bird, 2011). However, in certain cell types, such as embryonic stem cells (ESCs), 5mC also occurs at CHG and CHH sites, where 'H' represents a cytosine (C), thymine (T) or adenine (A) (Feng *et al.*, 2010).

Approximately 60-80% of CpG dinucleotides in the human genome are methylated, whereas <10% are unmethylated and clustered together within short interspersed GC-rich DNA sequences (i.e. 500-2000 base pairs) known as CpG islands (CGIs; Lim and Maher, 2010; Zeng and Chen, 2019). The human genome contains ~30,000 CGIs (Jeziorska *et al.*, 2017), around half of which contain transcription start sites since they are found at the promoters of virtually all protein coding genes, including housekeeping, tissue-specific and developmental regulator genes (Deaton and Bird, 2011). While the majority of CGIs associated with promoters are unmethylated, repetitive sequences (i.e. retrotransposons), centromeric and pericentromeric repeats, and intragenic regions (i.e. gene bodies) are methylated during development. The epigenetic mechanisms by which some CGIs become differentially methylated under such circumstances are not yet understood (Jeziorska *et al.*, 2017; Zeng and Chen, 2019). It follows that 5mC is involved in almost all processes during preimplantation embryo development, including transcriptional regulation, silencing of retrotransposons, X-chromosome inactivation and genomic imprinting (Hochberg *et al.*, 2011; Smith and Meissner, 2013; Messerschmidt *et al.*, 2014).

### 1.5.1.2 Non-CpG methylation

Non-CpG methylation involves the methylation of cytosine followed by adenine (CpA), cytosine (CpC), and thymine (CpT). Like CpG methylation, non-CpG methylation is distributed throughout the genome and catalysed by DNMTs. These methylation marks are restricted to specific cell types, such as ESCs, oocytes, neurones and glial cells, however, knowledge of their cell-specific

function remains incomplete (Patil *et al.*, 2014; Jang *et al.*, 2017; Lee *et al.*, 2017).

Jiang and colleagues (2018) measured detectable levels of non-CpG methylation in early bovine embryos. Non-CpG methylation followed a similar enrichment pattern to CpG methylation and was located within CGIs in and around gene bodies. It is postulated that the co-existence of non-CpG and CpG methylation reflects a state of *de novo* DNMT hyperactivity (Ziller *et al.*, 2011; Smith and Meissner, 2013). Others argue that non-CpG methylation is an important mechanism of controlling gene expression wherein high levels of non-CpG methylation at gene promoters facilitate transcription factor binding and transcriptional repression (Barrès *et al.*, 2009; Patil *et al.*, 2014; Zhang *et al.*, 2017).

### 1.5.2 Mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) methylation

The presence of mitochondrial CpG methylation went undetected in mammalian cells and tissues for many years (Groot and Kroon, 1979; Maekawa *et al.*, 2004). Although not completely characterised, mounting evidence has emerged to support the role of methylation in mitochondrial gene expression and replication (Bellizzi *et al.*, 2013; Castegna *et al.*, 2015; van der Wijst *et al.*, 2017). Firstly, the expression of a mitochondrial *DNMT1* transcript variant alludes to a plausible mechanism by which mtDNA methylation patterns are established (Shock *et al.*, 2011). Secondly, differential CpG and non-CpG mtDNA methylation across cell types reaffirms the notion of cell-specific methylation patterns (Bellizzi *et al.*, 2013). Thirdly, there is a link between mtDNA methylation, and human ageing and disease (van der Wijst *et al.* 2017).

A recent study comparing mtDNA methylation in reproductive tissues found that mtDNA methylation patterns were more conserved in oocytes and blastocysts than in ovarian granulosa cells (Sirard, 2019). This is not surprising given that mitochondria are inherited from oocytes with no paternal transmission (Luo *et al.*, 2018b). Interestingly, it appears that preimplantation embryos inherit mtDNA methylation patterns from oocytes and that mtDNA methylation status can be altered by ovarian environment. Such findings emphasise the sensitivity of gametes and embryos to mtDNA methylation and epigenetic programming of development (Sirard, 2019). Still, the epigenetic role of mtDNA methylation during gametogenesis and embryogenesis is yet to be investigated.

### 1.5.3 Histone modifications

Covalent post-translational histone modifications, such as methylation, acetylation, phosphorylation, ubiquitylation, sumoylation (Bannister and Kouzarides, 2011), influence gene expression by remodelling chromatin architecture or by recruiting histone modifiers. Histone methylation is catalysed by histone lysine *N*-methyltransferases (HMT/KMT) and protein arginine *N*-methyltransferases (PRMT), respectively (Morera *et al.*, 2016). Methylation occurs primarily on the side chains of lysine and arginine residues of histone tails. Lysine may be mono-, di-, or trimethylated on its amine group, whereas arginine may be mono- or di-methylated on its guanidyl group (Lan and Shi, 2009; Ng *et al.*, 2009). These marks are both repressive and facilitative in gene transcription depending on the site and degree of methylation (Bannister *et al.*, 2002). For instance, monomethylation of lysine 9 on histone 3 (H3K9), H3K27, H4K20, H3K79 and H2BK5 is linked to transcriptional activation, whilst trimethylation of H3K27, H3K9 and H3K79 is linked to transcriptional repression (Barksi *et al.*, 2007).

### 1.5.4 RNA methylation

Gene expression can also be regulated via RNA methylation which occurs at cytosine residues in RNA. Amort *et al.* (2017) mapped 5mC modifications in the epitranscriptome of murine brain and ESCs, presenting the first comprehensive dataset of cytosine methylation in mRNA. To date, N<sup>6</sup>-methyladenosine (m<sup>6</sup>A) is the best-studied RNA modification occurring in various eukaryotic RNA species, such as mRNA and long noncoding RNAs (lncRNAs; Willyard, 2017). Methylation of m<sup>6</sup>A is catalysed by a multicomponent complex, including methyltransferase-like 3 (METTL3) and METTL14 enzymes, alongside ancilliary proteins, such as WT1 associated protein (WTAP) in mammals (Lee *et al.*, 2014). Diverse functions of m<sup>6</sup>A include regulation of cellular pluripotency, programming and differentiation; transcript stability, splicing and protein translation; and the cell stress response. Recent work uncovered a protective function of m<sup>6</sup>A in DNA damage repair indicating that RNA methylation offers more than epigenetic regulation (Yue *et al.*, 2015; Xiang *et al.*, 2017).

### 1.5.5 Demethylation machinery

Given that methylation can respond to environmental signals in differentiated tissues, it follows that the biochemical process should be reversible (Szyf *et al.*, 2016). Various epigenetic erasers have been identified, including histone deacetylases (HDACs) and demethylases (e.g. LSD1; Gillette and Hill, 2015). DNA methylation can be passively depleted through DNA replication or actively removed by ten-eleven translocation (TET) enzymes and m<sup>6</sup>A thymine DNA glycosylase-mediated (TDG) base excision repair (Kohli and Zhang, 2013). Two m<sup>6</sup>A demethylases have been identified; fat mass and obesity associated protein (FTO) and alkB homology 5 (ALKBH5; Batista, 2017). These mechanisms facilitate turnover of methyl groups, highlighting the dynamic and plastic nature of epigenetic gene regulation, particularly during mammalian development.

#### 1.5.5.1 Cytosine hydroxymethylation (5hmC)

5-hydroxymethylcytosine (5hmC) is an intermediate product of the DNA demethylation process catalysed by ten-eleven translocation 1 enzyme (TET1; Tahiliani *et al.*, 2009; Xu *et al.*, 2011). The conversion of 5mC to 5hmC significantly reduces the binding of methyl-CpG binding proteins (MBPs) to DNA which, in turn, inhibits the recruitment of histone-modifying enzymes that promote chromatin condensation and inactivation (Valinluck *et al.*, 2004). Hence, 5hmC is an epigenetic signature characteristic of euchromatin and active gene transcription (Shi *et al.*, 2017).

The distribution of 5hmC is influenced by histone modification, binding proteins and chromatin configuration during cell differentiation and specification (Shi *et al.*, 2017). Typically, 5hmC accumulates within gene promoters decorated with dual histone marks required for transcriptional activation and repression. These bivalent domains poise the expression of developmental genes, rendering 5hmC part of the molecular machinery responsible for pluripotency switch in ESCs, neural and cancer cells (Kriaucionis and Heintz, 2009; Thomson and Meehan, 2017).

Whether 5hmC is merely a demethylation product or a functional epigenetic modification during gametogenesis and embryogenesis remains unclear. During the wave of global demethylation that occurs during early embryogenesis, there is a loss of 5mC and a concurrent accumulation of 5hmC

within both parental pronuclei (Wossidlo *et al.*, 2011; Inoue and Zhang, 2011). The distribution and abundance of these methylaton marks is, therefore, expected to change during stage-specific methylation reprogramming of the preimplantation embryo. If these two marks oppose one another, 5hmC may function as a transitional mark of poised chromatin that overcomes gene silencing by 5mC (Song *et al.*, 2011; Ficz *et al.*, 2011). Then, as *de novo* methylation ensues in morula stage embryos, the gradual accumulation of 5mC (and loss of 5hmC) drives cell differentiation and lineage specification (Cao *et al.*, 2014). In Day 12 bovine blastocysts, the enrichment of 5hmC at repeat sequences, such as long interspersed nuclear elements (LINEs) and long terminal repeats (LTRs), implicates a unique regulatory phase of demethylation during trophoctoderm elongation and placental development (de Montera *et al.*, 2013). It is thought that specific 5mCs are likely to be targeted for oxidative demethylation and carboxylation to 5-carboxylcytosine (5caC) for complete excision by thymine DNA glycosylase (TDG; He *et al.*, 2011).

## 1.6 DNA methylation analysis

In the burgeoning field of epigenetics, there are numerous assays available to analyse DNA methylation within cell samples, however, methods vary according to their robustness, high-throughput capabilities and cost (Kurdyukov and Bullock, 2016). In general, methods have been developed to profile genome-wide DNA methylation, or differential methylation at specific gene loci or regulatory regions of interest. An overview of common methods is presented in Table 1.3 and Table 1.4.

**Table 1.3 Methods for profiling whole genome DNA methylation.**

<b>Method</b>	<b>DNA (ng)</b>	<b>Advantage(s)</b>	<b>Limitation(s)</b>	<b>Reference(s)</b>
<b>High performance liquid chromatography</b> (HPLC, HPLC-UV)	300 – 10,000	Measures 5mC/Cytosine ratio	Requires specialised instrumentation	<a href="#">Kuo <i>et al.</i> (1980)</a>
<b>Liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry</b> (LC-MS/MS)	100 – 1,000	Detects ~5% difference, Profiles poor quality DNA (FFPE samples)	Expensive, Requires specialised instrumentation	<a href="#">Song <i>et al.</i> (2005)</a>
<b>Enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay</b> (ELISA)	100 – 1,000	Rapid, Easy-to-use	Variable results, Estimates DNA methylation	<a href="#">Manzardo and Butler (2016)</a>
<b>Amplification/Restriction fragment length polymorphism</b> (AFLP, RFLP)	500	Inexpensive, Suitable for species with limited DNA sequence annotation	Profiles low % of genome, Relies on good PCR band resolution	<a href="#">Paun and Schönswetter (2012)</a>
<b>Luminometric methylation assay</b> (LUMA)	250 – 500	High specificity, Detects low DNA methylation	Requires high quality DNA for enzyme digest	<a href="#">Karimi <i>et al.</i> (2006)</a>
<b>LINE-1 Pyrosequencing</b>	50	High throughput, Detects ~5% difference	Profiles 17% of genome	<a href="#">Estécio <i>et al.</i> (2007)</a>

Abbreviation(s): 5mC, 5-methylcytosine; FFPE, formalin-fixed paraffin-embedded.

**Table 1.4 Methods for profiling differentially methylated regions (DMRs).**

Method	DNA (ng)	Advantage(s)	Limitation(s)	Reference(s)
<b>Methyl-sensitive cut counting</b> (MSCC)	1,000 – 5,000	No BS required, Rapid, Easy-to-use	Requires high quality DNA for enzyme digest	<a href="#">Guo <i>et al.</i> (2011)</a>
<b>Array/Bead hybridisation</b> (Illumina)	>500	Time and cost effective, Targets 5mC-enriched regions, i.e. promoters, UTR	Custom panels required for non- human species, Limited by DNA sequence information	<a href="#">Marabita <i>et al.</i> (2013)</a>
<b>Methylated DNA immunoprecipitation</b> (MethylCap, MeDIP, MIRA)	>50	Profiles poor quality DNA, Provides high coverage – no restriction enzymes required	Requires further interrogation by NGS sequencing methods	<a href="#">Hsu <i>et al.</i> (2014)</a>
<b>Whole genome bisulphite sequencing</b> (WGBS)	<30	Most comprehensive, Profiles 100% CpGs, Low amount of starting material required (125 pg)	Expensive, Requires complex NGS data analysis, Reduced genome complexity makes sequence alignment difficult	<a href="#">Miura and Ito (2015)</a>
<b>Reduced representation bisulphite sequencing</b> (RRBS)	<30	Gold standard, Reduced cost, Reduced NGS data analysis, Profiles ~85% CGIs	Requires high quality DNA for enzyme digest, Reduced genome complexity makes sequence alignment difficult	<a href="#">Meissner <i>et al.</i> (2005);</a> <a href="#">Guo <i>et al.</i> (2015)</a>

Abbreviation(s): BS, bisulphite sequencing; CGIs, CpG islands; MBD, Methyl CpG-binding domain; NGS, next generation sequencing; UTRs, untranslated regions.

### 1.6.1 DNA methylation analysis of preimplantation embryos

Numerous studies assessing DNA methylation in mammalian embryos have used immunofluorescence to detect 5mC using specific antibodies (Dean *et al.*, 2001; Beaujean *et al.*, 2004; Park *et al.*, 2007; Bonilla *et al.*, 2010; Dobbs *et al.*, 2013; Acosta *et al.*, 2016). Although immunostaining techniques are descriptive and provide information about the overall methylation dynamics, they are semi-quantitative and do not provide sequence-specific information about differentially methylated regions (DMRs). Sequence-based approaches, such as the EmbryoGENE DNA Methylation Array, have been developed to study the epigenome of bovine embryos (Salilew-Wondim *et al.*, 2015; O'Doherty *et al.*, 2018; Laskowski *et al.*, 2018). Whilst probe hybridisation techniques are more specific than immunostaining methods, arrays are limited by species-specific DNA sequence information and a finite number of probes in their construction (Duan *et al.*, 2019).

More recently, studies have employed high throughput bisulphite sequencing (BS) techniques to profile the embryonic methylome. Considered the 'gold standard' method (Kurdyukov and Bullock, 2016), BS enables single-cell and single base resolution DNA methylation analysis (Guo *et al.*, 2015; Smallwood *et al.*, 2014). Bisulphite treatment deaminates unmethylated cytosine to uracil (U), and converted residues are read as thymine (T), as determined by PCR amplification and DNA sequencing. As 5mC residues are protected against this conversion, they are read as cytosine (C). Comparing BS reads to untreated DNA samples, or aligning reads to the species reference genome, enables identification of methylated cytosines (Kurdyukov and Bullock, 2016).

With next-generation sequencing (NGS) technologies, BS facilitates DNA methylation analysis across an entire genome. Whole-genome bisulphite sequencing (WGBS) is the most comprehensive of all existing methods (Table 1.4) that has been used to reveal the methylation status of all CpG sites in ESCs, spermatozoa, oocytes, or embryos (Smallwood *et al.*, 2014; Li *et al.*, 2018; Duan *et al.*, 2019; Chan *et al.*, 2019). However, WGBS is costly and requires complex NGS data analysis. Reduced representation bisulphite sequencing (RRBS) is a less expensive approach to profiling the methylome. By sequencing the 5mC-enriched fraction of the genome, RRBS permits increased sequencing coverage and, therefore, enhances precision in identifying DMRs (Kurdyukov and Bullock, 2016; Table 1.4). Base-resolution



methods for profiling DNA methylation facilitate comprehensive assessments of the extent to which the external environment, i.e. nutrition or *in vitro* culture conditions, might impair epigenetic reprogramming of the preimplantation embryo.

## 1.7 Assisted reproductive technology (ART) and epigenetics

Assisted reproductive technologies (ART) and *in vitro* embryo culture can lead to defective fetal programming in humans and animals (Menezo *et al.*, 2010; Menezo *et al.*, 2019; Young *et al.*, 2001; Anckaert and Fair, 2015; Lin *et al.*, 2008). Early studies in sheep and cattle revealed that embryos subjected to embryo manipulation, i.e. somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT), or non-physiological *in vitro* embryo culture environments resulted in the development of unusually large offspring that also exhibited congenital malformations (Young *et al.*, 1998; Sinclair *et al.*, 2000; Young *et al.*, 2001). Aside macrosomia (enlarged body), characteristic malformations included macroglossia (enlarged tongue), visceromegaly and abdominal wall defects (umbilical hernia). Increased incidence of dystocia, and fetal and neonatal losses in affected animals has limited large-scale use of *in vitro* embryo production (IVP) technologies.

This fetal overgrowth phenotype observed in ruminants, referred to as large offspring syndrome (LOS), shares phenotypic and epigenetic similarities with Beckwith-Wiedemann syndrome (BWS) in humans (Maher *et al.*, 2003; Chen *et al.*, 2013; Chen *et al.*, 2015). Both overgrowth syndromes share common features, such as alterations in organ and tissue development, placental anomalies, and loss of methylation at imprinted loci involved in embryonic growth and development. As discussed in Section 1.1.1.1, genomic imprints are vulnerable to epigenetic modifications during the periconceptual period wherein oocytes are matured and fertilised, and embryos are cultured *in vitro* (Young *et al.*, 1998; Sinclair *et al.*, 2000; Young *et al.*, 2001; Chen *et al.*, 2013; Chen *et al.*, 2015). Of relevance is the loss of methylation and expression of the *insulin like growth factor 2 receptor (IGF2R)* gene following ovine embryo culture (Young *et al.*, 2001; Discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4.3.2.6).

In support of the early studies in ruminants, recent evidence found a positive correlation between ART conception, and aberrant methylation of imprinted genes and increased fetal birthweight in humans (Mäkinen *et al.*, 2013; El Hajj

*et al.*, 2017; Cortessis *et al.*, 2018; Berntsen and Pinborg, 2018; Zhang *et al.*, 2019; Hattori *et al.*, 2019). Whilst the environmental factors that programme such disorders have not yet been identified, possible effects may be attributed to suboptimal culture media used during IVP (Velker *et al.*, 2012). Ruminant studies have identified a link between the addition of serum to culture media and LOS (Thompson *et al.*, 1995; Young *et al.*, 2001; Rooke *et al.*, 2007). Nevertheless, as serum contains undefined growth factors and macromolecules the composition of media is unknown with batch-to-batch variation.

Many commercial human embryo culture media are formulated based on research using animal models which raises questions regarding the safety and efficacy of their use for human embryology (Harper *et al.*, 2012). The precise metabolic requirements of embryos, as well as the medium's influence over gene expression during development from the oocyte to blastocyst stage, must be defined in an effort to standardise optimal culture media formulations for different species (Simpoulou *et al.*, 2018). Although ART have proved beneficial for clinical, commercial and research purposes, resulting in more than 7 million births worldwide (Novakovic *et al.*, 2019), there is a plea for a more careful approach to IVP, and a strong case for demanding full transparency concerning the composition and scientific rationale behind the development of 'safe' embryo culture media (Sunde *et al.*, 2016).

### 1.7.1 1C metabolites in *in vitro* embryo production (IVP) media

The composition of 1C metabolites in culture media is essential to our understanding of epigenetic programming via DNA methylation within mammalian cells and embryos during IVP. The wide variation in media composition of 1C substrates and cofactors reflects the high degree of experimentation and little standardisation between embryo production protocols (Table 1.5). Over the past decade, IVP protocols have rapidly transitioned from culturing gametes and embryos in simple salt solutions, such as Earle's or Tyrode's buffers, to complex tissue culture media, such as Hams' F-10 and TCM199 (Sunde *et al.*, 2016).

**Table 1.5 1C metabolites in commercial cell and embryo culture media.**

Adapted from source(s): Sigma Aldrich (<https://www.sigmaaldrich.com>); Morbeck *et al.* (2014).

	One-carbon (1C) metabolites* (µmol/L)									
	Met	Chol	Gly	Ser	Cys	GSH	B9	B12	B6	B2
<b>Cell culture</b>										
Lebovitz L-15	502.6	7.2	2664.2	1903.1	990.4	-	2.3	-	4.9	0.2
Waymouth's 752/1 MB	335.1	1790.8	666.0	-	698.7	-	0.9	0.1	4.9	2.7
DMEM	201.1	28.6	399.6	399.7	199.9	-	9.1	-	19.5	1.1
IMDM	201.1	28.6	399.6	399.7	291.3	-	9.1	0.0	22.7	1.1
TCM199	100.5	3.6	66.0	237.9	83.0	0.2	0.0	-	0.2	0.0
MEM	100.5	7.2	99.9	99.9	99.9	-	2.3	-	5.7	0.3
RPMI-1460	100.5	21.5	133.2	285.5	208.2	-	2.3	0.0	4.9	0.5
Williams' E	100.5	10.7	666.0	95.2	413.3	0.2	2.3	1.5	5.7	0.3
McCoy's 5A	100.0	35.8	100.0	250.1	200.1	1.5	22.7	1.5	5.2	0.5
BME	50.3	7.2	-	-	50.0	1.5	2.3	-	5.7	0.3
MDCB	30.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	55.7	-	1.8	0.1	0.3	0.3
Ham's F-10	30.0	5.0	100.0	99.9	222.1	-	3.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Ham's F-12	30.0	100.0	100.0	99.9	222.1	-	3.0	1.0	0.3	0.1
NCTC-109	29.8	9.0	180.0	102.3	1881.7	60.9	0.1	7.4	0.7	0.1
<b>Embryo culture</b>										
InVitroCare IVC1	0.0	-	0.0	0.0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-
InVitroCare IVC3	100.0	-	88.0	88.0	11.0	-	-	-	-	-
Origio ISM1	89.0	-	1312.0	82.0	34.0	-	-	-	-	-
Origio BA	54.0	-	462.0	80.0	24.0	-	-	-	-	-
Vitrolife G-1™	0.0	-	94.0	95.0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-
Vitrolife G-2™	63.0	-	97.0	98.0	47.0	-	-	-	-	-
Sage QACM	0.0	-	89.0	89.0	0.0	-	-	-	-	-
Sage QABM	56.0	-	92.0	89.0	41.0	-	-	-	-	-
Cook SICM	4.0	-	5147.0	81.0	1.0	-	-	-	-	-
Cook SIBM	43.0	-	5226.0	81.0	25.0	-	-	-	-	-
Irvine CSC	53.0	-	43.0	42.0	39.0	-	-	-	-	-
IVFOnline Global	51.0	-	42.0	44.0	43.0	-	-	-	-	-

(-), concentration data not disclosed. Abbreviation(s): BA, BlastAssist; BME, Basal Medium Eagle; CSC, Continuous Single Culture; DMEM, Dulbecco's Modified Eagle's Medium; IMDM, Iscove's Modified Dulbecco's Medium; ISM1, Innovative Sequential Media 1; MEM, Minimum Essential Medium; QABM, Quinn's Advantage Blastocyst Medium; QACM, Quinn's Advantage Cleavage Medium; RPMI, Roswell Park Memorial Institute Medium; SIBM, Sydney IVF Blastocyst Media; SICM, Sydney IVF Cleavage Media; TCM199, tissue culture medium 199. \*1C Metabolites: B2, vitamin B<sub>2</sub>/riboflavin/flavin mononucleotide•Na/flavin adenine dinucleotide•2Na; GSH, glutathione (reduced)/glutathione•Na; B6, vitamin B<sub>6</sub>/pyridoxal•HCl/pyridoxine•HCl; B9, folic acid/foinic acid•Ca; B12, vitamin B<sub>12</sub>/cobalamin; Chol, choline chloride/choline birtartrate; Cys, L-cysteine/cysteine•HCl/L-cystine/cystine•2HCl; Gly, L-glycine; Met, L-methionine; Ser, L-serine.

Evaluation of the potential impacts of culture media composition on embryo development is challenging as commercial media formulations contain an array of constituents, including salts, sugars, amino acids, lipids, vitamins, trace elements, hormones and other bioactive molecules (Chronopoulou and Harper, 2015). These constituents are present in different forms that vary in stability, bioavailability and bioactivity (Schnellbaeche *et al.*, 2019), and their concentration within media formulations are often not fully documented, disclosed or justified (Sunde *et al.*, 2016). Considering the earlier discussion

regarding supplementation of media with serum, the addition of human serum albumin to commercial media exposes the embryo to a more physiological, albeit undefined nutritional and hormonal milieu (Orsi *et al.*, 2005).

In addition, contemporary protocols often combine media from different manufacturers during sequential media systems that aim to meet embryonic requirements according to developmental stage (Biggers and Summers, 2008). For example, the InVitroCare two-step sequential media is devoid of methionine during early cleavage stages (IVC1) and increases to 100  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  during blastocyst development (IVC3; Table 1.5). The advantage of using a two-step culture system over a continuous single culture system (i.e. Irvine CSC) remains under investigation (Dieamant *et al.*, 2017). Of note is the discrepancy in methionine concentrations between cell and embryo culture media, which range from 0 to 500  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  between formulations (Table 1.5). As methionine is the direct precursor to universal methyl donor, SAM (Figure 1.1), it will be important to elucidate the developmental and epigenetic effects of altering its concentration during *in vitro* embryo production.

### 1.7.2 Methionine and epigenetic programming

There is an accumulating body of evidence that methionine directly influences the metabolism of SAM and SAH, with implications for DNA methylation in various mammalian tissues (reviewed by Zhang, 2018). Theoretically, the addition of methionine is expected to increase DNA methylation of genes and down-regulate gene expression. In practice, however, the epigenetic effects of methionine on DNA methylation are not always as predicted. Table 1.6 illustrates that tissue- and species-specific effects of methionine can manifest as global and/or locus-specific alterations to DNA methylation. The aforementioned point is further complicated by the finding that DNA methylation does not always repress but can enhance gene expression (Orsorio *et al.*, 2016).

**Table 1.6 Epigenetic effects of methionine on mammalian cells and embryos.**

Methionine treatment	Species	Intervention stage	Duration	Cell type	Metabolic/epigenetic/transcriptomic effects
Diet (0.3 - 3.0%) <a href="#">Finklestein and Martin (1986)</a>	Rat	250 g	7 d	Liver	↓ SAM:SAH ratio ↓ MTHFR, ↑ MAT, ↑ BHMT, ↑ CBS expression
Diet (0.3 - 2.3%) <a href="#">Rowling et al. (2002)</a>	Rat	54 - 74 g	10 d	Liver	↑ SAM:SAH ratio
Diet (0.3, 2.0%) <a href="#">Amaral et al. (2011)</a>	Rat	35-40 d	6 wk	Kidney	↑ SAH - SAM:SAH ratio
Diet (0, 0.5%) <a href="#">Devlin et al. (2004)</a>	Mouse	50 d	8 wk	Liver/ Brain	↓ SAM:SAH ratio
Injection (6.6 mmol/kg) <a href="#">Tremolizzo et al. (2002)</a>	Mouse	60 d	15 d	Brain	↓ SAM:SAH ratio ↑ <i>Reln</i> promoter methylation ↓ <i>RELN</i> expression
Injection (5.2 mmol/kg) <a href="#">Dong et al. (2005)</a>	Mouse	20 g	3 – 15 d	Brain	↓ <i>RELN</i> , ↓ <i>GAD67</i> expression ↑ MeCP2 binding <i>Reln/Gad67</i> promoter
Diet (0, 1.7%) <a href="#">Yang et al. (2015)</a>	Mouse	42 d	20 wk	Serum	↑ SAM:SAH ratio
Diet (0.172, 0.39%) <a href="#">Tang et al. (2017)</a>	Mouse	After mating (E0.5)	8-14 d (E8.5-14.5)	Embryonic stem cells (SIRT1-KO)	↓ H3K4me3 methylation Met restriction, ↑ <i>Mat2a</i> expression in wildtype mESCs
Diet (0.07, 0.19% DMI) <a href="#">Osorio et al. (2016)</a>	Cow	21 d before parturition	51 d (to 30 d lactation)	Liver	↓ DNA methylation ↑ PPARA promoter methylation ↑ PPARA expression
Diet (0.9 kg/DMI) <a href="#">Batistel et al. (2019)</a>	Cow	28 d before parturition	28 d (to term)	Placenta	↑ 1C metabolites ↑ <i>DNMT3A</i> expression ↓ DNA methylation (females)
Diet (0.08 % DMI) <a href="#">Acosta et al. (2016)</a>	Cow	21 d before parturition	51 d (to 30 d lactation)	Day 7 embryo	↑ Lipid accumulation ↓ DNA methylation
Diet (1.89, 2.43% MP) <a href="#">Peñagaricano et al. (2013)</a>	Cow	Calving until embryo flushing	70 d (post-partum)	Day 7 embryo	276 DEGs (embryo development and immune response)
Embryo culture (0 - 400 µmol/L) <a href="#">Bonilla et al. (2010)</a>	Cow	Zygote (Day 0 IVC)	8 d	Day 8 embryo	DNA methylation unaffected ↑ GSH content without Met
Embryo culture (0 – 10 mmol/L ethionine) Met antagonist <a href="#">Ikeda et al. (2012)</a>	Cow	5-cell (Day 3 IVC)	5 d	Day 8 embryo	↓ SAM with Met restriction ↓ DNA methylation ↑ <i>NANOG</i> , ↑ <i>TEAD4</i> expression
Cell culture (0 – 120 µmol/L) <a href="#">Shiraki et al. (2014)</a>	Human	-	0-48 hr	Embryonic stem cells	↓ SAM, ↓ Hcy with Met restriction ↓ DNA/H3K4me3 methylation ↓ <i>NANOG</i> expression ↑ p53-p38 signaling
Cell culture (3, 100 µmol/L) <a href="#">Dai et al. (2018)</a>	Human	-	25 hr	HCT116 colon cancer cell line	↓ H3K4me3 with Met restriction

Arrows: ↑ increase, ↓ decrease, - no change. (%) Methionine proportion of diet. Intervention stage classified by age, weight or stage of gestation. Abbreviation(s): BHMT, betaine homocysteine S-methyltransferase; CBS, cystathionine β-synthase; DEGs, differentially expressed genes; DMI, dry matter intake; DNMT3A, DNA methyltransferase 3A; GAD<sub>67</sub>, glutamic acid decarboxylase; GSH, glutathione; IVC, *in vitro* culture; MAT, methionine adenosyltransferase; mESCs, murine embryonic stem cells; MTHFR, methylenetetrahydrofolate reductase; NANOG, NANOG homeobox protein; PPARA, Peroxisome proliferator-activator receptor alpha; RELN, reelin; SAH, S-adenosyl homocysteine; SAM, S-adenosylmethionine; SIRT1-KO, Sirtuin 1-knockout; TEAD4, Tea domain transcription factor 4.

Despite the evidence that methionine availability alters the transcriptome of bovine preimplantation embryos *in vivo* (Peñagaricano *et al.*, 2013), the effect of methionine on the methylome of the mammalian embryo remains inconclusive. Surprisingly, dietary supplementation of rumen-protected methionine at a rate of 0.08% of dry matter intake reduced global DNA methylation in bovine embryos (Acosta *et al.*, 2016). *In vitro* studies have shown that methionine inhibition by culturing bovine embryos with antimetabolite ethionine (1-10 mmol/L) reduced DNA methylation (Ikeda *et al.*, 2012). On the contrary, Bonilla and colleagues (2010) found no effect of methionine concentration (0 to 21  $\mu$ mol/L) on DNA methylation in cultured blastocysts. Such findings, however, should be interpreted with caution since all experiments used immunofluorescent detection of 5mC which lacks sensitivity and base-resolution, as discussed previously (Section 1.6.1).

## 1.8 Working hypothesis

The foregoing discussion provides evidence that maternal nutrition during the periconceptual period programs offspring development to a large extent via 1C metabolism, and that dietary inadequacies of 1C substrates and cofactors during this vulnerable period can have long-lasting consequences for adult health and disease.

Most of the research investigating the function of 1C metabolism pertains to studies undertaken in the rodent liver, with limited research conducted in domestic livestock species. It is of agricultural and economic importance to understand the regulation of 1C metabolism in ruminants which have a low dietary intake of methyl nutrients due to their degradation by rumen microorganisms and, therefore, rely on methylneogenesis (transmethylation flux through 1C metabolic pathways) as a source of labile methyl groups (Snowell and Xue, 1987). Furthermore, little is known about how 1C metabolism functions in the mammalian ovary and preimplantation embryo. Previous research has uncovered important species-specific differences in 1C metabolism transcript expression (Section 1.4), however, our understanding of the regulatory aspects and the impact of nutritional perturbations on these pathways in reproductive cell types remains limited.

With this in mind, this thesis first addresses the hypothesis that dietary deficiencies in key 1C substrates and cofactors can perturb 1C metabolism,

potentially leading to an aberrant 1C metabolome within the ruminant liver. As the largest metabolic organ of the body that is responsible for almost 50% of methionine metabolism and 85% of methylation reactions (Lu and Mato, 2012), it is likely that relevant reductions in dietary methyl availability may lead to significant alterations in hepatic 1C metabolite levels. In order to test this hypothesis, novel analytical methods were developed for the simultaneous quantification of B vitamins, folates and 1C-related amines in ovine liver harvested from abattoir-derived (Ab) controls, and methyl-deficient (MD) animals following dietary restriction of 1C metabolites. Hepatic concentrations of individual 1C metabolites were compared between Ab and MD sheep to assess the metabolic burden of dietary methyl deficiency (Chapter 2).

Next, based on the premise that the bovine preimplantation embryo may metabolise methionine differently to hepatocytes (Section 1.4), the hypothesis is advanced that bovine embryonic cells are particularly sensitive to methyl-group availability and, therefore, highly sensitive to epigenetic programming during the preimplantation period. Given that methionine is the first limiting amino acid in dairy cattle nutrition (Wiltbank *et al.*, 2014), and that its variable concentration in the diet and culture media can influence reproductive performance in cows (Toledo *et al.*, 2017), Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 sought to elucidate the developmental and epigenetic implications of altering methionine concentration during *in vitro* production of bovine embryos.

Non-physiological embryo culture conditions and physical manipulation of embryos can lead to heritable alterations to the epigenome that are linked to adverse developmental outcomes (Young *et al.*, 1998; Young *et al.*, 2001; Young *et al.*, 2003). Chapter 5 sought to evaluate the effect of somatic donor cell type on epigenetic reprogramming via DNA methylation in hepatocytes isolated from cloned sheep.

# Chapter 2

**Quantification of folates, B vitamins and 1C-related metabolites in ovine liver by HILIC-MS/MS**



## 2.1 Introduction

The impairment of 1C metabolism can cause disruption to DNA synthesis and repair, and epigenetic regulation of gene expression, all of which can have detrimental effects on the health of an organism (Xu and Sinclair, 2015). The function of 1C metabolic pathways can be monitored by the quantitative measurement of key 1C intermediates in blood or metabolically active tissue, such as liver (Xu *et al.*, 2020).

B vitamins, including folates (vitamin B<sub>9</sub>), B12, B6 and B2, are cofactors of cellular methylation reactions, including Hcy remethylation to methionine, that serve as a reserve storage pool or as direct precursors for the synthesis of 1C coenzymes (Selhub, 2002). Specific 1C-related amines also modulate Hcy status by facilitating its remethylation to methionine or its catabolism via the *transsulphuration* pathway (Finkelstein, 2000; Ueland *et al.*, 2005; Appendix Figure 2.1; Appendix Table 2.1).

Dietary restriction of these 1C metabolites is associated with several metabolic disease conditions in ruminants, such as ill-thrift, pine, white-liver disease and hepatic lipidosis. Such conditions are characterised by anorexia, cachexia, anaemia, compromised immune function and impaired fertility, and are associated with low plasma or liver vitamin B<sub>12</sub> concentrations (Suttle, 2010).

The interrelationship between B12 and folate-mediated 1C metabolism is important in sheep, especially weaned lambs, due to their increased susceptibility to cobalt (Co) deficiency (Grace, 1994). Cobalt is a trace-element required for the microbial synthesis of B12 in the rumen. Levels of Co are normally adequate to meet the metabolic demands of sheep. However, if dietary sources are limiting, Co deprivation can manifest as vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency with adverse consequences for B12-dependent metabolic pathways, including methionine synthesis (Somers and Gawthorne, 1969; McDowell, 2000; Suttle, 2010; Xu *et al.*, 2020).

Most research on 1C metabolism in sheep liver has focused on enzyme activity (Xue and Snoswell, 1985; Xue and Snoswell, 1986; Snoswell and Xue, 1987). Comparative studies of sheep and rat liver identified species-specific differences in methionine metabolism that may explain, at least in part, an adaptation of the ruminant to low dietary methyl group intake. The degradation of choline by rumen microbes leads to low betaine availability. It appears that sheep compensate for low betaine availability by expressing a lower hepatic

capacity of BHMT and a higher capacity of MTR (Neill *et al.*, 1979; Xue and Snoswell, 1985; Snoswell and Xue, 1987). Other enzymatic differences include a lower capacity of glycine *N*-methyltransferase (GNMT) and CBS in sheep liver (Xue and Snoswell, 1986). Collectively, these differences demonstrate an increased reliance on the B12-dependent remethylation of Hcy by MTR, and the preferential partitioning of methyl groups for transmethylation reactions in the ruminant liver.

The effects of feeding a methyl deficient (MD) diet have been investigated in sheep and have system-wide physiological and metabolic consequences. Restricting the supply of B vitamins (B12 and folate) and methionine from the diet of mature ewes caused a significant reduction in plasma B12, methionine and folate concentrations, and elevated plasma Hcy and methylmalonic (MMA) (Kanakparambil *et al.*, 2009). Feeding the same diet during the periconceptual period led to widespread epigenetic modifications to the genome associated with increased adiposity, insulin resistance, altered immune function and hypertension in adult offspring (Sinclair *et al.*, 2007). To our knowledge, however, no study has investigated the effect of dietary methyl deficiency on key 1C metabolite concentrations in sheep liver. Quantitative assessments of 1C intermediates and co-substrates would provide valuable insights into dietary-mediated 1C metabolic function in ruminant species.

Various analytical approaches have been developed for the quantification of 1C metabolites, including microbiological assay, radioimmunoassays, capillary electrophoresis, and HPLC methods coupled with coulometric electrochemical, UV or fluorescence detection (Ndaw *et al.*, 2001; Pfeiffer *et al.*, 2004; Patring *et al.*, 2005; Lebidzińska *et al.*, 2008; Zhou *et al.*, 2012; Forteschi *et al.*, 2016). Although LC-MS/MS methods have been used to quantify B vitamins or folates in plants, animal tissues and biofluids (Garratt *et al.*, 2005; Midttun *et al.*, 2005; Gentili *et al.*, 2008; Midttun *et al.*, 2013; Puts *et al.*, 2015; Oosterink *et al.*, 2015; Phillips, 2015), most methods involve complex and time-consuming sample preparation and are limited to quantifying individual or a subset of metabolites without the capacity to analyse a comprehensive set in one analytical run. In general, studies report the total content of vitamins without measuring the chemically distinct bioactive forms individually. Knowledge of the variation and tissue-specific distribution of individual coenzymes could aid our understanding of the metabolic burden of methyl deficiency and facilitate more accurate deficiency diagnosis in ruminants.

Active variants of B vitamins are present in free and phosphorylated forms at varying concentrations ([Merril and Henderson, 1990](#)), and folates are present as mono- and polyglutamates of varying glutamate chain length ([Garratt \*et al.\*, 2005](#)). All vitamers are susceptible to degradation by light, heat, oxygen and pH ([Monajjemzadeh \*et al.\*, 2014](#)). The diverse physicochemical properties and chemical instability of 1C metabolites presents a significant analytical challenge to develop methods for their simultaneous quantification in complex mammalian tissue. Hence, the objective of the present study was to develop analytical methods for the comprehensive and quantitative profiling of B vitamins, folates and 1C-related amines in sheep liver, and specifically, to investigate the effect of dietary methyl deficiency on key 1C metabolite concentrations in sheep liver.

## 2.2 Materials and methods

### 2.2.1 Animals, treatments and tissue collection

All procedures were conducted in accordance with the requirements of the UK Home Office Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act (1986) and were approved by the University of Nottingham Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Board.

A total of 356 purebred weaned and pubertal Texel lambs were recruited from 11 farms in the UK. Approximately half of these lambs were male. The control cohort ( $n=266$ ) originated from five farms and were slaughtered at regional abattoirs between May and September. The treatment cohort ( $n=90$ ) originated from six farms located in Derbyshire, Devon, Gloucestershire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Worcestershire, and were transported to the University farm at 12 weeks of age to be fed a methyl deficient (MD) diet prior to slaughter. Power equations were used to calculate the sample size for study cohorts.

#### 2.2.1.1 Methyl deficient (MD) cohort

At the start of the study, animals were penned in pairs according to farm origin, sex and body weight. A blood sample was taken by jugular venepuncture on arrival to assess trace-element status (primarily Co) by inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (ICP-MS) analysis using the method described in Appendix 2.1. As it can take several weeks to deplete sheep of endogenous B12 reserves ([Kennedy \*et al.\*, 1994](#)), animals were adjusted to a concentrate diet of Co deficient ( $<0.09$  mg/kg dry matter; DM) and sulphur (S) deficient ( $<1$

mg/kg DM) barley and hay for 4 weeks prior to the introduction of the experimental diet. A reduction in Co and S diminishes the capacity of the rumen microorganisms to synthesise B<sub>12</sub> and sulphur-containing amino acids, respectively (Kanakkaparambil *et al.*, 2009).

Seven MD animals were prematurely withdrawn from the study due to their incapacity to thrive under experimental conditions as newly weaned lambs. For the duration of the study (12 weeks), animals were fed a Co and S deficient concentrate diet *ad libitum* and Co deficient hay at a fixed rate of 200g/lamb/day. The concentrate diet, containing 42% barley, 30% oat feed, 25% maize and 3% urea, was based on that offered previously (Sinclair *et al.*, 2007; Kanakkaparambil *et al.*, 2009) and was designed to meet the requirements for maintenance and growth of recently weaned lambs (ARC, 1980). The mineral composition of the MD diet is presented in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1 Macro and micro mineral composition of methyl deficient (MD) concentrate diet and cobalt (Co) deficient hay.**

	Concentrate diet	Hay
<b>Chemical analyses†</b>		
Dry matter (g/kg)	888	860
Metabolisable energy (MJ/kg DM)	12.9	7.0
Crude protein (g/kg DM)	134	67
<b>Macro mineral, g/kg DM</b>		
Phosphorous (P)	2.2	1.6
Potassium (K)	4.9	12.3
Sodium (Na)	0.07	0.8
Magnesium (Mg)	0.8	1.2
Calcium (Ca)	0.5	3.7
Sulphur (S)	0.8	1.0
<b>Macro mineral, mg/kg DM</b>		
Boron (B)	4.9	9.6
Copper (Cu)	2.5	4.8
Manganese (Mn)	14.6	133.4
Zinc (Zn)	18.0	23.2
Selenium (Se)	0.06	0.03
Cobalt (Co)	0.02	0.2

† Proximate analyses undertaken by Scotland's Rural College (SRUC), Bush Estate, Edinburgh

Feed intakes of the MD diet were recorded for each pen at 3- and 4-day intervals, lamb liveweights were recorded fortnightly and blood samples taken weekly. Lambs remained on the experimental diet until serum B<sub>12</sub> concentrations remained below 200 pmol/L for ≥6 weeks and plasma Hcy had

been rising for  $\geq 4$  weeks to  $\geq 9$   $\mu\text{mol/L}$ . At this experimental endpoint, lambs were slaughtered, and liver samples collected.

#### 2.2.1.2 Tissue collection

Fresh liver samples were harvested immediately after the slaughter of control (abattoir, Ab) and MD animals. However, liver samples were collected from animals in each of the study cohorts at two independent time points and, therefore, were not analysed in parallel. Diced sections ( $5\text{ mm}^3$ ) from the same region of the right lobe of the liver were collected on each occasion and snap frozen in liquid nitrogen within 15 min of exsanguination. Tissue samples were stored at  $-80^\circ\text{C}$  until metabolomic analyses.

#### 2.2.1.3 Blood analysis

Blood samples were collected from lambs weekly by jugular venepuncture into lithium heparin vacutainers, and vacutainers containing no additive. Samples were centrifuged for 15 min at 4,250  $\times g$ . Plasma and serum fractions were stored at  $-20^\circ\text{C}$  until analysed.

##### 2.2.1.3.1 Vitamin B<sub>12</sub>

Serum B12 was measured using the IMMULITE® 2000 system at SRUC, Edinburgh, UK. This solid-phase, competitive chemiluminescent enzyme immunoassay involves an automated alkaline denaturation procedure (catalogue no. L2KVB2). Serum is treated with dithiothreitol (DDT) and sodium hydroxide/potassium cyanide (NaOH/KCN) solution in a reaction tube. Following a 30 min incubation, the sample is transferred to a second tube containing B12-coated polystyrene beads and hog intrinsic factor (HIF). A second 30 min incubation facilitates the release of B12 from endogenous binding proteins by alkaline denaturation. The released B12 competes with immobilised B12 for binding with HIF. During a final 30 min incubation, alkaline phosphatase-labelled anti-hog intrinsic factor is added which binds HIF that is immobilised on the B12-coated bead. Unbound enzyme conjugate is removed by centrifugal wash. The bound conjugate is quantified using chemiluminescent substrate, dioxetane. Light emitted when dioxetane reacts with alkaline phosphatase is detected by a photomultiplier tube. The amount of light emitted is proportional to the concentration of B12 in the sample. A sample volume of

75  $\mu\text{L}$  was required for this assay. The limit of detection (LOD) was 111 pmol/L and the upper limit was 738 pmol/L. The intra-assay coefficient of variation (CV%) was 13.0, 7.0 and 6.2 for low, medium and high-quality control (QC) samples, respectively. The inter-assay CV% was 15.0, 6.0 and 7.9, for low, medium and high QC samples, respectively.

#### 2.2.1.3.2 Homocysteine (Hcy)

Plasma homocysteine (Hcy) was measured using an Imola Autoanalyser (RX Imola; Randox Laboratories Ltd., Antrim, UK) using the Hcy kit (Randox laboratories; catalogue no. HY4036). Bound or dimerised Hcy (oxidised form) is reduced to free Hcy which reacts with serine to form cystathionine, as catalysed by cystathionine  $\beta$ -synthase (CBS). Cystathionine is catabolised by cystathionine  $\beta$ -lyase (CBL) to produce Hcy, pyruvate and ammonia. Pyruvate is converted to lactate by lactate dehydrogenase (LDH), using nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide (NADH) coenzyme. The rate of NADH conversion to  $\text{NAD}^+$  is proportional to the concentration of Hcy ( $\Delta\text{A}_{340\text{ nm}}$ ). The LOD was 1.74  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  and the upper limit was 47.9  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ . The CV% was 9.32, 6.77 and 5.40 for low, medium and high QC samples, respectively.

#### 2.2.1.3.3 Methylmalonic acid (MMA)

Plasma methylmalonic acid (MMA) was measured by gas chromatography-mass spectrometry (GC-MS) following derivatisation and extraction, based on the method of [Kanakkaparambil et al. \(2009\)](#). Briefly, 50  $\mu\text{L}$  plasma and 5  $\mu\text{L}$  internal standard, 4-chlorobutyric acid (CBA; 250  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ), were added to 250  $\mu\text{L}$  12% boron trifluoride methanol ( $\text{BF}_3\text{-MeOH}$ ) in a 2.5 mL screw-capped glass vial. The mixture was vortexed for 30 s and heated at 95°C for 15 min in a heating block. After cooling, 250  $\mu\text{L}$  distilled water and 250  $\mu\text{L}$  dichloromethane ( $\text{CH}_2\text{Cl}_2$ ) was added to the vial. The mixture was vortexed for 30 s and centrifuged for 8 min at 2,500  $\times g$  and 4°C to separate the layers. The lower  $\text{CH}_2\text{Cl}_2$  layer was transferred to a screw-capped autosampler glass vial with insert for GC-MS analysis.

The GC-MS method used a DB-WAX column (crosslinked polyethylene glycol; J&W Scientific Agilent technology; 30 mm x 0.25 mm; 0.15  $\mu\text{m}$  film thickness). The injection volume was 1  $\mu\text{L}$  for SCAN mode for qualification and selected ion monitoring (SIM) mode for quantification, both using splitless mode. The

injection port and MS selective detector interference temperatures were 260°C and 280°C, respectively. The carrier gas (He) was set at a constant flow rate of 0.1 mL/min. The chromatographic conditions were 50°C for 2 min, 8°C min<sup>-1</sup> until 150°C and a final increase of 100°C min<sup>-1</sup> until 220°C. The MS was tuned regularly and operated in electron impact ionisation mode with the ionisation energy of 70 eV. SCAN mode measured at 20-500 m/z. SIM ions were set at 115 m/z for MMA and 105 m/z for CBA. Plasma MMA concentrations were quantified by the method of standard addition using a calibration range from 0.156 to 20 µmol/L and plotting the ratio of peak area of analyte (MMA) to that of the internal standard (CBA). Results were reported as µmol/L plasma. The LOD was 0.15 µmol/L and the CV% was 0.44, 1.03 and 0.83 for low, medium and high QC samples, respectively.

## 2.2.2 Liver 1C metabolite quantification

A total of 37 one-carbon metabolites and related compounds were measured in 356 Texel sheep liver samples. Hydrophilic interaction liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry (HILIC-MS/MS) methods for the quantification of B vitamins and folates were undertaken in collaboration with postdoctoral researcher, Dr Juan Xu (Section 2.2.2.1). High-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) and GC-MS methods for the quantification of related amino acids, polyamines and propionate metabolites were undertaken in collaboration with fellow PhD student, Dr Amey Brassington (Appendix 2.2 to Appendix 2.4).

### 2.2.2.1 HILIC-MS/MS

The 'B vitamin' method measured ten B vitamins and four 1C-related amines (Table 2.2). The 'folate' method measured seven folates and three key methionine cycle analytes (Table 2.3).

#### 2.2.2.1.1 Analytical grade reagents

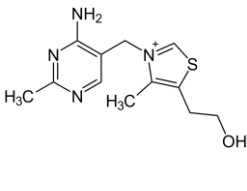
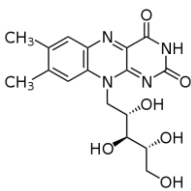
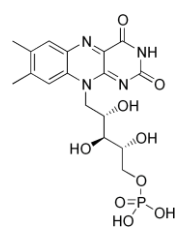
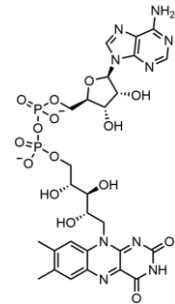
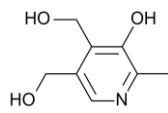
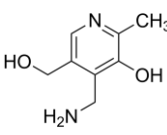
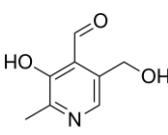
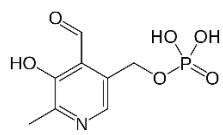
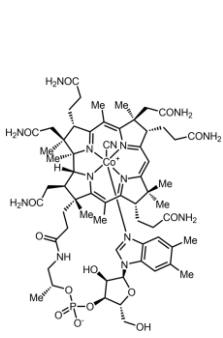
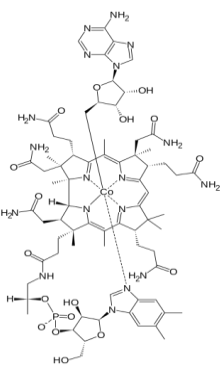
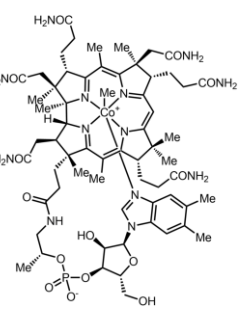
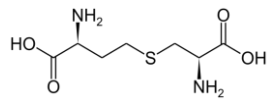
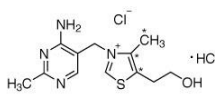
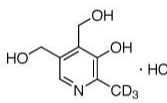
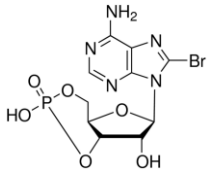
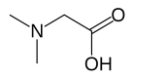
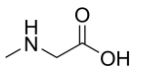
*B vitamin method:* Methanol (MeOH), acetic acid and acetonitrile (ACN) were purchased from Fisher Scientific (Loughborough, UK). Unless otherwise stated, the following reagents were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (Poole, UK); ammonium formate, formic acid and 2-mecaptoethanol (MCE). B vitamin standards; thiamine hydrochloride (B1), (-)-riboflavin (B2), riboflavin 5'-monophosphate sodium salt hydrate (flavin mononucleotide; FMN), flavin

adenine dinucleotide disodium salt hydrate (FAD), pyridoxine hydrochloride (PN), pyridoxamine dihydrochloride (PM), pyridoxal hydrochloride (PL), pyridoxal 5'-phosphate (PLP), vitamin B<sub>12</sub> (CNCbl), coenzyme B<sub>12</sub> (AdoCbl) and methylcobalamin hydrate (MeCbl; Alfa Aesar, Lancashire, UK). One-carbon amine standards; L-cystathionine (Cth), betaine/trimethylglycine (TMG), N,N-dimethylglycine (DMG) and sarcosine (Sar). Internal standards (IS); vitamin B<sub>1</sub> hydrochloride (4,5,4-methyl-<sup>13</sup>C<sub>3</sub>; B<sub>1</sub>-<sup>13</sup>C<sub>3</sub>) and deuterated pyridoxine hydrochloride (methyl-D<sub>3</sub>; PN-d<sub>3</sub>) were purchased from Cambridge Isotope laboratories (Massachusetts, USA), and 8-bromoadenosine 3',5'-cyclic monophosphate (8-Br-cAMP) was purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (Poole, UK). High purity water was produced by a Millipore water purification system (Millipore S.A.S., Molsheim, France).

*Folate method:* Potassium phosphate monobasic (KH<sub>2</sub>PO<sub>4</sub>), potassium phosphate dibasic (K<sub>2</sub>HPO<sub>4</sub>), L-ascorbic acid, citric acid, ammonium carbonate and acetonitrile were purchased from Fisher Scientific (Loughborough, UK). 2-mercaptoethanol (MCE) was purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (Poole, UK). Folate standards were purchased from Schircks Laboratories (Jona, Switzerland) including folic acid (FA), 7-8-dihydrofolic acid (DHF), (6R,S)-5,6,7,8-tetrahydrofolic acid trichloride (THF), (6R,S)-5-formyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydrofolic acid, calcium salt (5-fTHF), (6R,S)-5,10-methenyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydrofolic acid, chloride (CH=THF), (6R,S)-5,10-methylene-5,6,7,8-tetrahydrofolic acid, calcium (CH<sub>2</sub>THF), (6R,S)-5-methyl-5,6,7,8-tetrahydrofolic acid, calcium salt (5-mTHF). S-adenosyl L-methionine (SAM), S-adenosylhomocysteine (SAH), and DL-Homocysteine (Hcy) were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (Poole, UK). Internal standard (IS); methotrexate (MTX), was purchased from Schircks Laboratories and internal standard (IS), S-adenosylhomocysteine-d<sub>4</sub> (SAH-d<sub>4</sub>), was purchased from Cambridge Bioscience (Cambridge, UK).



**Table 2.2 B vitamin and 1C-related amine analytes measured by HILIC-MS/MS.**

<b>B vitamin method</b>			
			
Thiamine (B1)	Riboflavin (RF)	Flavin mononucleotide (FMN)	Flavin adenine dinucleotide (FAD)
			
Pyridoxine (PN)	Pyridoxamine (PM)	Pyridoxal (PL)	Pyridoxal 5'-phosphate (PLP)
			
Cyanocobalamin (CNCbl)	Adenosylcobalamin (AdoCbl)	Methylcobalamin (MeCbl)	Cystathionine (Cth)
			
Vitamin B <sub>1</sub> hydrochloride (B1- <sup>13</sup> C <sub>3</sub> )*	Pyridoxine-d <sub>3</sub> (PN-d <sub>3</sub> )*	8-bromoadenosine 3',5'- cyclic monophosphate (8-Br-cAMP)*	Dimethylglycine (DMG)
			
			Sarcosine (Sar)

\*Internal standard (IS)

**Table 2.3 Folate and methionine cycle analytes measured by HILIC-MS/MS.**

Folate method		
Folic acid (FA)	Dihydrofolate (DHF)	Tetrahydrofolate (THF)
5-Formyltetrahydrofolate (5-fTHF)	5,10-Methylenetetrahydrofolate (CH <sub>2</sub> THF)	5,10-Methenyltetrahydrofolate (CH=THF)
5-Methyltetrahydrofolate (5-mTHF)	S-Adenosyl methionine (SAM)	S-Adenosyl homocysteine (SAH)
Homocysteine (Hcy)	Methotrexate (MTX)*	S-Adenosyl homocysteine-d <sub>4</sub> (SAH-d <sub>4</sub> )*

\*Internal standard (IS)

#### 2.2.2.1.2 Standard preparation and calibration

*B vitamin method:* Stock solutions of B12, B6, B2, B1 and 1C amines were prepared in 0.01 M aqueous HCl at a final concentration of 10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ , except for FAD, Cth, Sar and TMG which were prepared at a final concentration of 1 mmol/L. Methylcobalamin and deuterated IS, PN-d<sub>3</sub>, were prepared in pure MeOH. All stock solutions were stored at  $-80^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Aqueous bovine serum albumin (10% BSA; Sigma Aldrich cat no. A6003) was used as a surrogate matrix for the preparation of eight extracted calibration standards. These were prepared by adding 150  $\mu\text{L}$  ACN buffer (95% ACN, 1% acetic acid, 0.1% ascorbic acid and 0.1% MCE) containing a suitable range of standard concentrations into 50  $\mu\text{L}$  10% BSA containing the IS mix. The final concentration of each IS was 1  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ .

*Folate method:* Stock solutions of folates, SAM, SAH and Hcy standard metabolites, plus IS (MTX and SAH-d<sub>4</sub>), were prepared in potassium phosphate extraction buffer ( $\text{KH}_2\text{PO}_4$  and  $\text{K}_2\text{HPO}_4$ ; 40 mmol/L) containing 0.1% L-ascorbic acid, 0.15% citric acid and 0.1% MCE (adjusted to pH 7 with NaOH), each at a final concentration of 100  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ . All stock solutions were stored at  $-80^{\circ}\text{C}$ . As before, 10% BSA was used for the preparation of eight extracted calibration standards. These were prepared by adding 150  $\mu\text{L}$  extraction buffer to 50  $\mu\text{L}$  10% BSA containing the IS mix. The final concentration of each IS was 100 nmol/L.

#### 2.2.2.1.3 Sample extraction

*B vitamin method:* 50 mg frozen liver were extracted with 300  $\mu\text{L}$  ACN buffer containing 1  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  of IS mix (B<sub>1</sub>-<sup>13</sup>C<sub>3</sub>, PN-d<sub>3</sub> and 8-Br-cAMP). Homogenisation was performed using a TissueLyser (RetschQiagene) with two disruption steps at 25 Hz for 2.5 min, freezing samples between steps. Liver homogenates were incubated at  $50^{\circ}\text{C}$  in a water bath for 15 min, rapidly cooled on ice and centrifuged for 15 min at 2,000  $\times g$  and  $4^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Further deproteination was undertaken by the addition of 100  $\mu\text{L}$  cold ACN to 100  $\mu\text{L}$  liver homogenate. After vortexing for 10 s and a final centrifugation step, the clear supernatant was transferred into an amber HPLC vial for LC-MS/MS analysis.

*Folate method:* 50 mg frozen liver were extracted with 250  $\mu\text{L}$  cold potassium phosphate buffer containing 100 nmol/L of IS mix (MTX and SAH-d<sub>4</sub>). Homogenisation was performed using a TissueLyser (RetschQiagene) with two

disruption steps at 25 Hz for 2.5 min, freezing samples between steps. Liver homogenates were incubated at 100°C in a water bath for 2 min to deactivate the conjugate enzyme responsible for polyglutamation and rapidly cooled in ice. Homogenates were vortexed for 10 s and centrifuged for 10 min at 9,000 xg and 4°C.

For the quantification of folate monoglutamates, 100 µL liver supernatant was transferred to a 0.5 mL Microcon-10kDa centrifugal filter unit with ultracel-10 membrane (Merck Millipore) and centrifuged for 30 min at 16,000 xg and 4°C. The filtrate was transferred to an amber HPLC vial for LC-MS/MS analysis. This extraction procedure was applied to liver and QC samples.

For the quantification of total folates (mono- and polyglutamates), 75 µL potassium phosphate buffer and 25 µL rat serum (Sigma-Aldrich) was added to 100 µL liver supernatant and mixed gently. The contents were incubated at 37°C in a water bath for 2 hours to allow enzymatic cleavage of glutamate residues from folates by  $\gamma$ -glutamyl hydrolase (GGH) in serum. Next, the contents were incubated at 100°C for 1 min to deactivate GGH, rapidly cooled on ice and centrifuged for 5 min at 10,000 xg. The supernatant (100 µL) was transferred to a 0.5 mL Microcon-10kDa centrifugal filter unit and further centrifuged for 30 min at 16,000 xg and 4°C. The filtrate was transferred to an amber HPLC vial for LC-MS/MS analysis.

#### 2.2.2.1.4 LC-MS/MS analysis

LC-MS/MS analyses were performed on a LC-10AD systems (Shimadzu, Kyoto, Japan) equipped with a SIL-HTC autosampler coupled to an ABI 4000 QTRAP tandem mass spectrometer using an electrospray ion source (Turbo Ion Spray™; SCIEX, Foster City, CA) in positive ionisation mode. Chromatographic separation was performed on a Sequant ZIC-pHILIC column (150 × 4.6 mm, 5 µm particle size) with a guard column (Sequant ZIC-pHILIC, 20 × 2.1 mm, 5 µm particle size) maintained at 45°C. The autosampler was maintained at 4°C. Standards and samples were injected at a volume of 10 L with a flow rate of 0.4 mL/min.

Mobile phases for the B vitamin method were composed of aqueous ammonium formate buffer solution (20 mmol/L, adjusted to pH 3.5 with formic acid) for eluent A and 100% ACN for eluent B. Mobile phases for the folate method were composed of aqueous ammonium carbonate buffer solution (20 mmol/L, pH 9.1)

for eluent A and 100% ACN for eluent B. Gradient elution was carried out by the following program: isocratic hold on 80% B for 1 min, next a linear gradient from 80% B to 5% B for 5 min, followed by a linear gradient back to 80% in 2 min, then isocratic hold on 80% for another 5 min. The total run time was 13 min.

MS settings were as follows: ion source temperature (450°C), ion spray voltage (5000 V), curtain gas (25 psig), collision gas (8 psig), ion source gas 1 (20 psig), ion source gas 2 (20 psig) interface heater activated. Analyst software (Applied Biosystems/MDS SCIEX) was used for HPLC system control and data acquisition and processing. The MS/MS acquisition method (multiple reaction monitoring; MRM) was developed and the parameters are shown for the B vitamin method (Table 2.4) and folate method (Table 2.5). Two MRM transitions were monitored for each compound to use the ratio of quantifier and qualifier transition for compound identification. All compounds were quantified by the method of standard addition using an 8-point calibration constructed by plotting the ratio of the peak area of analyte to that of the relevant internal standard. For the B vitamin method, 8-Br-cAMP was used for B12, B2 and 1C amine analytes; PN-d<sub>3</sub> was used for B6 analytes; and, B1-<sup>13</sup>C<sub>3</sub> was used for B1. For the folate method, MTX was used for folate analytes and SAH-d<sub>4</sub> was used for methionine cycle metabolites.

For batch analysis, bulk QC samples were made from homogenised sheep liver spiked with a known concentration of analyte standards. These QC samples were used to monitor assay performance across batches.

**Table 2.4 Mass spectrometer parameters for identification of B vitamins and 1C-related amines.** Adapted from [Xu et al. \(2020\)](#).

Analyte	Retention time (min)	Q1 mass (amu)	Q3 mass (amu)	DP	CE	CXP
<b>B vitamins</b>						
CNCbl	5.82	678.54	147.30	81	63	12
AdoCbl	6.46	790.56	665.50	96	31	16
MeCbl	6.07	673.16	147.20	76	77	12
PN	7.85	169.21	134.10	56	31	10
PM	6.79	170.08	152.00	41	21	10
PL	6.59	168.23	94.20	31	37	6
PLP	7.17	248.06	122.00	31	41	12
RF						
FMN	6.13	457.10	359.10	96	33	12
FAD	6.38	786.27	348.00	111	33	10
B <sub>1</sub>	7.23	265.15	122.10	26	21	8
<b>1C amines</b>						
Cth	7.39	223.10	134.10	56	21	10
TMG	6.33	118.09	59.10	66	27	10
DMG	6.49	104.03	58.20	23	21	2
Sar	6.84	89.87	44.10	36	19	6
<b>Internal standards</b>						
B <sub>1</sub> - <sup>13</sup> C <sub>3</sub>	7.20	267.80	123.00	35	19	10
PN-d <sub>3</sub>	6.80	173.00	136.00	35	25	10
8-Br-cAMP	6.00	407.80	214.00	35	35	10

Abbreviation(s): 8-Br-cAMP, 8-bromoadenosine 3',5'-cyclic monophosphate; AdoCbl, adenosylcobalamin; amu, atomic mass unit; B<sub>1</sub>-<sup>13</sup>C<sub>3</sub>, vitamin B<sub>1</sub> hydrochloride 4,5,4-methyl-<sup>13</sup>C<sub>3</sub>; B<sub>1</sub>, thiamine; CE, collision energy; CNCbl, cyanocobalamin; Cth, cystathionine; CXP, collision cell exit potential; DMG, dimethylglycine DP, declustering potential; FAD, flavin adenine dinucleotide; FMN, flavin mononucleotide; MeCbl, methylcobalamin; PL, pyridoxal; PLP, pyridoxal 5'-phosphate; PN-d<sub>3</sub>, pyridoxine hydrochloride methyl-D<sub>3</sub>; PN, pyridoxine; PM, pyridoxamine; Q1, quadrupole 1; Q2, quadrupole 2; RF, riboflavin; Sar, sarcosine; TMG, trimethylglycine.

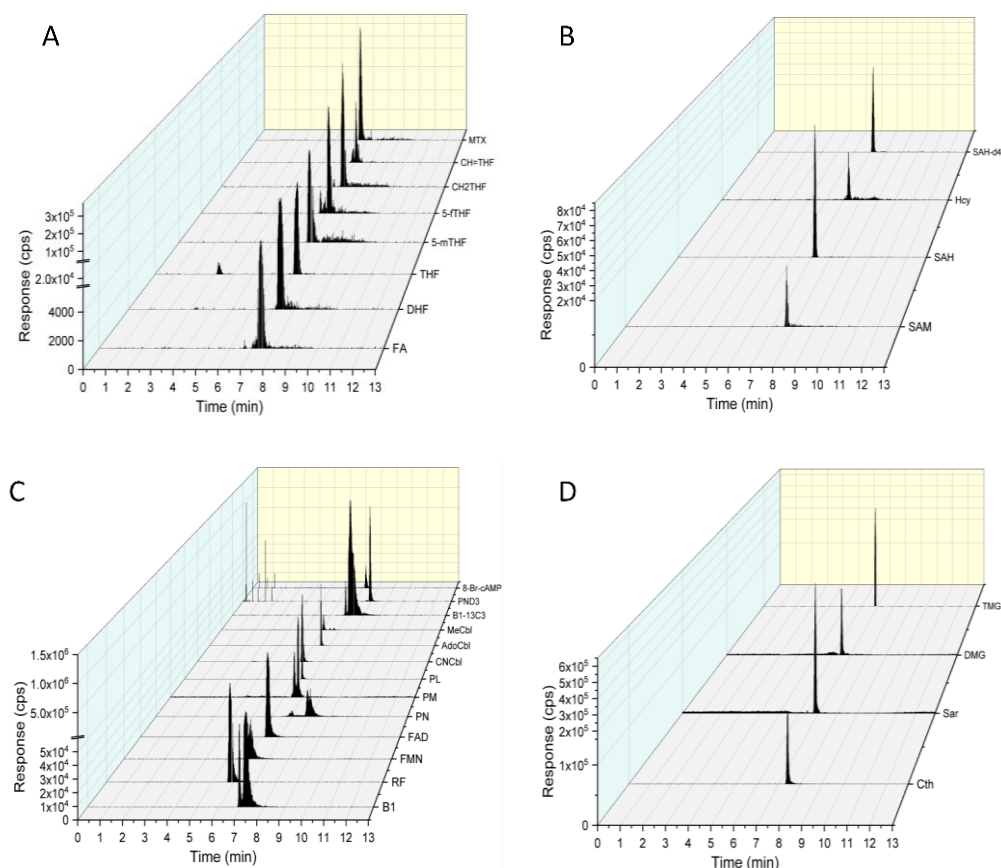
**Table 2.5 Mass spectrometer parameters for identification of folates and methionine cycle metabolites.**

Analyte	Retention time (min)	Q1 mass (amu)	Q3 mass (amu)	DP	CE	CXP
<b>Folates</b>						
FA	7.42	442.23	295.10	71	25	18
DHF	7.36	444.19	178.10	66	19	12
THF	7.23	446.20	299.20	96	29	18
5-fTHF	7.11	474.10	327.20	86	31	10
CH=THF	7.07	456.11	412.20	151	43	12
CH <sub>2</sub> THF	7.09	458.12	311.10	76	29	8
5-mTHF	6.93	460.10	313.20	76	29	18
<b>Met cycle metabolites</b>						
SAM	7.69	399.12	250.10	56	25	16
SAH	7.21	385.13	134.10	71	31	10
Hcy	7.34	136.03	56.10	31	29	8
<b>Internal standards</b>						
MTX	6.60	455.11	308.10	86	29	8
SAH-d <sub>4</sub>	7.23	389.19	138.10	71	29	10

Abbreviation(s): 5-fTHF, 5-formyltetrahydrofolate; 5-mTHF, 5-methyltetrahydrofolate; amu, atomic mass unit; CE, collision energy; CH=THF, 5,10-methenyltetrahydrofolate; CH<sub>2</sub>THF, 5,10-methylenetetrahydrofolate; CXP, collision cell exit potential. DHF, dihydrofolate; DP, declustering potential; FA, folic acid; Hcy, homocysteine; Met, methionine; MTX, methotrexate; Q1, quadrupole 1; Q2, quadrupole 2; SAH-d<sub>4</sub>, S-adenosyl homocysteine-d<sub>4</sub>; SAH, S-adenosyl homocysteine; SAM, S-adenosylmethionine; THF, tetrahydrofolate.

## 2.2.2.1.5 Method validation

Method validation followed standard guidelines for bioanalytical method development (FDA, 2018), based on the method of Xu *et al.* (2020). Briefly, 10% BSA in water was used as a surrogate blank matrix for validation experiments since this gave an equivalent protein load compared with sheep liver. Selectivity was demonstrated by the ability of the assay to differentiate and quantify the specific analytes of interest in the presence of other components (Figure 2.1).



**Figure 2.1 HILIC-MS/MS MRM chromatograms for 1C metabolites quantified in sheep liver.**

Folic acid (FA), dihydrofolate (DHF), tetrahydrofolate (THF), 5-methyltetrahydrofolate (5-mTHF), 5-formyltetrahydrofolate (5-fTHF), 5,10-methylenetetrahydrofolate (CH<sub>2</sub>THF), 5,10-methenyltetrahydrofolate (CH=THF), methotrexate (MTX) (A). S-adenosylmethionine (SAM), S-adenosylhomocysteine (SAH), homocysteine (Hcy), S-adenosylhomocysteine-d<sub>4</sub> (SAH-d<sub>4</sub>) (B). Thiamine (B1), riboflavin (RF), flavin mononucleotide (FMN), flavin adenine dinucleotide (FAD), pyridoxine (PN), pyridoxamine (PM), pyridoxal (PL), cyanocobalamin (CNCbl), adenosylcobalamin (AdoCbl), methylcobalamin (MeCbl), thiamine hydrochloride (B1-13C<sub>3</sub>), pyridoxine-d<sub>3</sub> (PN-d<sub>3</sub>), 8-bromoadenosine 3',5'-cyclic monophosphate (8-Br-cAMP) (C). Cystathionine (Cth), sarcosine (Sar), dimethylglycine (DMG), trimethylglycine (TMG) (D).

Calibration curves were linear ( $r \geq 0.97$ ) over reported concentration ranges for all analytes measured in both methods, except for PLP which did not calibrate accurately and was, therefore, excluded from the study (Table 2.6, Table 2.7). The limit of detection (LOD,  $S/N=3$ ) and quantification (LOQ,  $S/N=10$ ) were determined over three replicates.

**Table 2.6 Validation data for quantification of B vitamins and 1C-related amines in sheep liver.**

Analyte	Linear range (nmol/L)	LOD (pmol/g)	Precision (RSD%)	Slope	R <sup>2</sup>
CNCbl	0.8-100	4.7	30.8	0.03736	0.99
AdoCbl	0.8-100	4.7	29.9	0.01070	0.99
MeCbl	0.8-100	4.7	14.9	0.00551	0.99
PN	0.8-100	4.7	8.8	0.00177	0.99
PM	0.8-100	4.7	9.8	0.00577	0.98
PL	0.8-100	4.7	9.9	0.00368	0.97
RF	3.9-500	23.5	7.8	0.03217	0.99
FMN	3.9-500	23.5	13.3	0.00570	0.99
B1	3.9-500	23.5	7.19	0.00193	0.99
DMG	3.9-500	23.5	8.13	0.02103	0.99
	( $\mu\text{mol/L}$ )	(nmol/g)			
FAD	0.8-250	4.7	29.3	0.00010	0.99
Cth	0.05-7	0.3	26.9	0.00215	0.99
TMG	1.6-100	9.4	9.1	0.00663	0.99
Sar	1.7-150	7.0	11.2	0.00060	0.98

Abbreviation(s): AdoCbl, adenosylcobalamin; B1, thiamine; CNCbl, cyanocobalamin; Cth, cystathionine; DMG, dimethylglycine; FAD, flavin adenine dinucleotide; FMN, flavin mononucleotide; LOD, limit of detection; MeCbl, methylcobalamin; PL, pyridoxal; PM, pyridoxamine; PN, pyridoxine; R<sup>2</sup>, correlation coefficient; RSD%, relative standard deviation; RF, riboflavin; Sar, sarcosine; TMG, trimethylglycine.

**Table 2.7 Validation data for quantification of folates and methionine cycle metabolites in sheep liver.**

Analyte	Linear range (nmol/L)	LOD (pmol/g)	Precision (RSD%)	Slope	R <sup>2</sup>
FA	5-75	0.8	26.0	0.00021	0.99
DHF	20-300	1.5	15.27	0.00011	0.99
THF	10-600	0.8	18.96	0.00007	0.99
5-fTHF	5-150	1.5	19.89	0.00031	0.99
CH=THF	5-150	1.5	12.15	0.00002	0.98
CH <sub>2</sub> THF	5-300	0.8	16.84	0.00042	0.99
5-mTHF	25-1200	0.4	18.34	0.00013	0.99
	( $\mu\text{mol/L}$ )	(nmol/g)			
SAM	0.08-2.4	0.4	16.70	0.00193	0.99
SAH	0.08-9.6	0.4	6.90	0.00897	0.99
Hcy	0.08-9.6	0.4	15.53	0.00001	0.98

Abbreviation(s): 5-fTHF, 5-formyltetrahydrofolate; 5-mTHF, 5-methyltetrahydrofolate; CH=THF, 5,10-methenyltetrahydrofolate; CH<sub>2</sub>THF, 5,10-methylenetetrahydrofolate; DHF, dihydrofolate; FA, folic acid; Hcy, homocysteine; LOD, limit of detection; R<sup>2</sup>, correlation coefficient; RSD%, relative standard deviation; SAH, S-adenosyl homocysteine; SAM, S-adenosylmethionine; THF, tetrahydrofolate.



Precision of the method (RSD%) was determined by analysis of inter-assay QC samples ( $n=3$ ) under the same experimental conditions. For analytes measured using the B vitamin method, the RSD% values were <15%, except for AdoCbl (30.8%), MeCbl (29.9%), FAD (29.3%) and Cth (26.9; Table 2.6). For analytes measured using the folate method, RSD% values were 15-20%, except for FA (26.0%; Table 2.7).

#### 2.2.2.1.6 Statistical data analysis

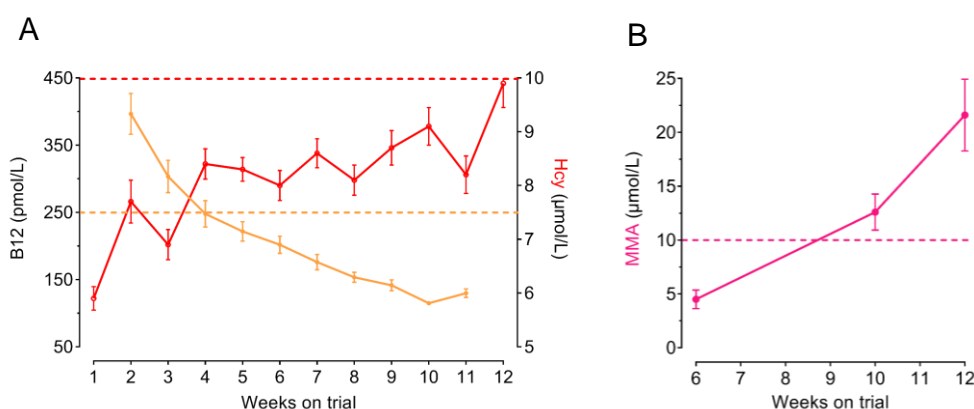
Data analysis was performed using Analyst software version 1.6.3 (Applied Biosystems/MDS, analytical Technologies, Concord, Ontario, Canada). Selectivity graphs were designed using Origin 2018b software (OriginLab Corporation, Massachusetts, (USA)). Statistical analyses were performed within the Genstat statistical package (19th Edition, VSN International, 2011). Data were log-transformed to address issues of homogeneity of variance, additivity and normality as required (following analysis of plotted residuals). Concentrations of individual metabolites were compared between Ab and MD sheep liver by analysis of variance (ANOVA) and a  $P$ -value  $\leq 0.05$  was deemed statistically significant. Concentration data are reported as means ( $\pm$  standard error of means; SEM), and are presented as box plots designed using GraphPad Prism 8 software. Boxplots depict the mean (as the data was analysed using a parametric test, i.e. ANOVA), median and inter-quartile ranges with whiskers set at 1<sup>st</sup> and 99<sup>th</sup> percentiles (for visual depiction).

## 2.3 Results and Discussion

### 2.3.1 Blood biomarkers

Weekly blood sample analysis showed that lambs maintained on the MD diet became B12-deficient during the 12-week trial period. As expected, low dietary Co intakes caused mean serum B12 concentrations to decrease from 397 pmol/L (week 2) to 115 pmol/L by week 10, and concentrations remained low thereafter (Figure 2.2A). These data indicate that lambs were B12-sufficient (>350 pmol/L) at the beginning of the study but became B12-deficient by week 4 when concentrations declined below 250 pmol/L (deficiency threshold; [Suttle, 2005](#)). As B12 decreased, mean plasma Hcy concentrations increased from 5.87  $\mu$ mol/L (week 1) to 9.90  $\mu$ mol/L (week 12), demonstrating marginal B12

deficiency (Figure 2.2A). Plasma methylmalonic acid (MMA) concentrations were unresponsive to B12 ( $<7 \mu\text{mol/L}$ ) until week 6 (Gruner *et al.*, 2004) but increased from 4.5 to  $21.6 \mu\text{mol/L}$ , thereby exceeding the normal plasma concentration of  $<10 \mu\text{mol/L}$  for barley-fed lambs (Figure 2.2B; O'Harte *et al.*, 1989). The inverse relationship between blood vitamin B<sub>12</sub> and biomarkers of B12 deficiency denotes that the MD diet engendered a B12-deficient metabolic state in lambs that would be expected to perturb 1C metabolism, thereby leading to an aberrant metabolome in the liver.



**Figure 2.2 Plasma homocysteine (Hcy) and methylmalonic acid (MMA) concentrations increase as a result of Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency in Texel lambs.**

Serum B12 concentrations (●) and plasma homocysteine (Hcy) concentrations (○) over time ( $n=83$ ) (A). Mean plasma methylmalonic acid (MMA) concentrations (●) over time ( $n=83$ ) (B). Data presented as mean  $\pm$  SEM. Reference concentration for B12 deficiency (---; Suttle, 2005). Reference concentration for normal Hcy (---; Kennedy *et al.*, 1992) and MMA concentration (---; O'Harte *et al.*, 1989).

### 2.3.2 Liver metabolites

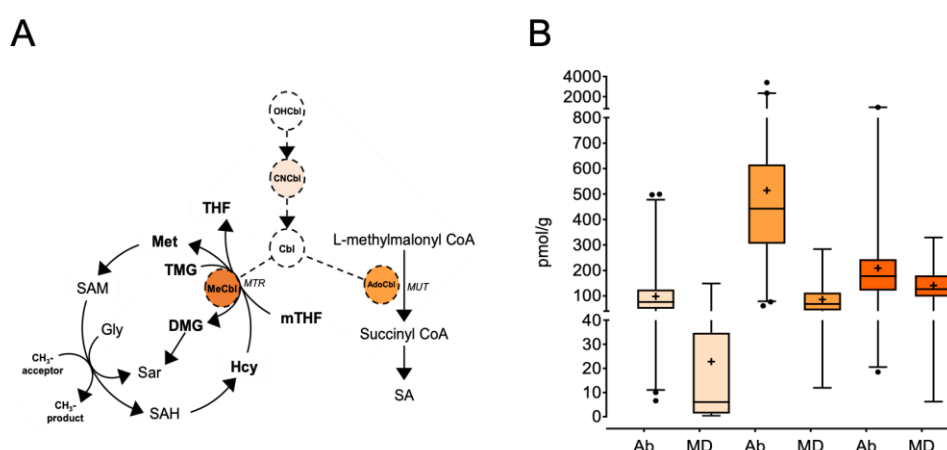
In order to investigate the metabolic burden of dietary methyl deficiency, 1C metabolites and related compounds were quantified by HILIC-MS/MS, HPLC and GC-MS in sheep liver collected from UK abattoirs (Ab;  $n=266$ ) and in methyl deficient sheep liver (MD;  $n=83$ ).

#### 2.3.2.1 Vitamin B<sub>12</sub>

The term 'B12' generically refers to a group of Co-containing, organometallic compounds, known as cobalamins (Takahashi-Iñiguez *et al.*, 2012). The two bioactive forms of cobalamin (Cbl) are methylcobalamin (MeCbl) and adenosylcobalamin (AdoCbl). Cyanocobalamin (CNCbl), the synthetic form of B12 used in dietary supplements (Farquharson and Adams, 1976), is

biologically inert but can be converted to the bioactive forms for coenzyme activity (Martinelli *et al.*, 2011; Figure 2.3A). Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> is released into the cell cytosol in the form of hydroxocobalamin (OHCbl) and reduced to Cbl before binding methionine synthase (MTR; EC 2.1.1.13). Upon binding the enzyme, Cbl is methylated to form MeCbl (Shane, 2008), the cofactor required for re-methylation of homocysteine (Hcy) in the terminal step of methionine synthesis. Alternatively, Cbl can be transported to the mitochondria and converted to AdoCbl, the cofactor required for methylmalonyl-CoA mutase (MUT; EC 5.4.99.2; Figure 2.3A). This enzyme catalyses isomerisation of methylmalonyl-CoA to succinyl-CoA in propionate metabolism (Appendix Figure 2.1), an important step prior to gluconeogenesis in ruminants (Shane, 2008; Forny *et al.*, 2014).

Since Cbl contains one Co atom, it is assumed that the requirement of ruminants for B12 equal the requirement of ruminal microbes for Co (McDowell, 2000). Continuing with the aforementioned discussion (Section 2.1), the Co content of the diet is the primary limiting factor for the synthesis of B12 by rumen microbes. Under Co-deficient conditions, the decline in serum B12 precedes the decline in liver stores (Booth and Spray, 1960). Thus, it is not surprising that the decrease in serum B12 observed amongst Co-deficient animals in the present study (Figure 2.2A) led to a significant decline in all three species of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> in liver ( $P<0.001$ ; Figure 2.3B).



**Figure 2.3 Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> species are decreased in methyl deficient sheep liver.**

B12 cofactors in one-carbon (1C) metabolism (A). Concentrations (pmol/g wet weight liver) of cyanocobalamin, CNCbl (light orange) ( $P<0.001$ ); adenosylcobalamin, AdoCbl (dark orange) ( $P<0.001$ ); methylcobalamin, MeCbl (red-orange) ( $P<0.001$ ) in abattoir-derived (Ab;  $n=266$ ) and methyl deficient (MD;  $n=83$ ) sheep liver (B). Individual vitamer concentrations (colour-coded) between Ab and MD sheep compared by ANOVA. Mean (+), median, interquartile ranges, and 1st and 99th percentiles. Dots in boxplots represent outliers.

The ~4-fold higher mean concentration of CNCbl measured in Ab sheep liver (Ab:  $98.0 \pm 5.14$  vs MD:  $22.8 \pm 3.57$  pmol/g) is likely to be an effect of dietary environment as sheep slaughtered in the abattoir were reared on different farms and fed different diets. In some cases, CNCbl may have been incorporated as a dietary supplement in Ab animals which may account for the large variation of CNCbl concentrations in Ab liver. The concentration range of CNCbl measured in MD liver (0.38 to 148.64 pmol/g) could be explained by the small amount of CNCbl that is synthesised by rumen microbes ([Johnson \*et al.\*, 1956](#)).

Although not statistically tested, adenosylcobalamin (AdoCbl) was the most abundant form of B12 present in Ab sheep liver ( $502.6 \pm 19.74$  pmol/g; Figure 2.3B), measuring 2-fold higher than MeCbl ([Xu \*et al.\*, 2020](#)). These findings are consistent with reports that B12 is stored as AdoCbl in animal tissues ([Shane, 2008](#); [Quadros, 2010](#); [Kelly \*et al.\*, 2006](#)), and that the metabolic demand of sheep for AdoCbl is normally higher than MeCbl due to its involvement in propionic acid (PPA) metabolism for gluconeogenesis in ruminants ([McDowell, 2000](#); [Kelly \*et al.\*, 2006](#)). Indeed, the propionate-succinate pathway (Figure 1.2) appears to be the first rate-limiting pathway in B12 deficiency ([Furlong \*et al.\*, 2010](#)), as characterised by the ~6-fold decrease in AdoCbl (Figure 2.3B), and the marked increase in plasma MMA (Figure 2.2B) and liver MMA concentrations in MD sheep in the present study (discussed later, Section 2.3.2.9). Although not statistically tested, mean hepatic concentrations of MeCbl were higher than AdoCbl in MD sheep. If concentrations of MeCbl are associated with MTR enzyme activity and turnover ([Quadros and Jacobsen, 1995](#)), the altered profile of these two B12 coenzyme forms may directly reflect altered function of the hepatic 1C metabolism under methyl deficient conditions. Perhaps there was an increased demand for the MeCbl cofactor and Hcy remethylation to methionine in MD sheep. Although speculative, these observations identify subtle downstream metabolic effects associated with modest reductions in dietary Co.

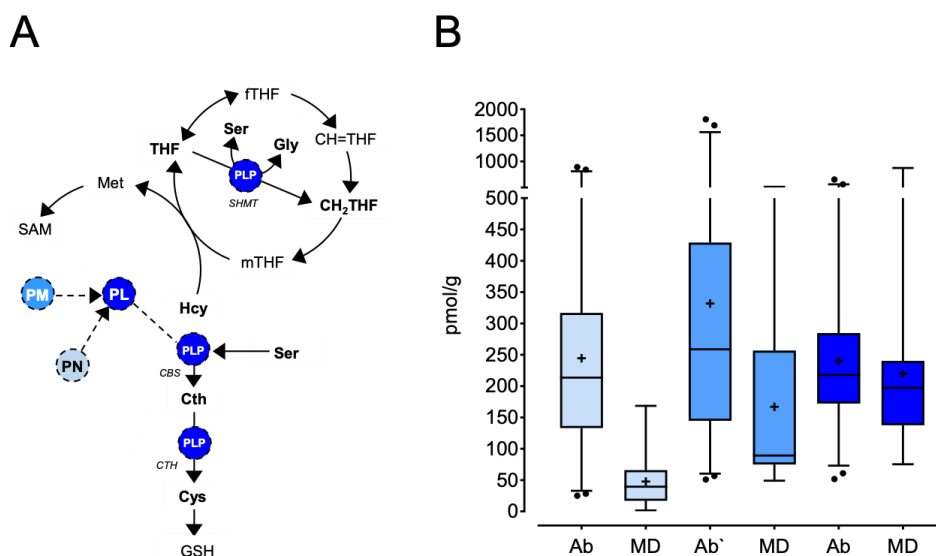
#### 2.3.2.2 Vitamin B<sub>6</sub>

The extended family of vitamin B<sub>6</sub> comprises the alcohol, pyridoxine (PN); the amine, pyridoxamine (PM); the aldehyde, pyridoxal (PL); and, their respective phosphorylated derivatives ([Merril and Henderson, 1990](#); [Colinas and Fitzpatrick, 2016](#)). Dietary B6 compounds are absorbed in the small intestine in their de-phosphorylated forms ([Albersen \*et al.\*, 2013](#)). Pyridoxine (PN), the most

commonly supplemented form of B6 ([Albersen et al., 2013](#)), and PM are rapidly transformed to PL in the intestinal tissues and this is released into the portal blood ([Sakurai et al., 1992](#)). Circulating PL is taken up by the liver, the principal site of B6 metabolism, and re-phosphorylated by pyridoxal kinase (PK; EC 2.7.1.35) before conversion to the bioactive coenzyme, pyridoxal 5'-phosphate (PLP; [Albersen et al., 2013](#)), which functions as a cofactor in >140 catalytic reactions ([Percudani and Peracchi, 2003](#)). In the context of 1C metabolism, PLP is a cofactor for serine hydroxymethyltransferase (SHMT; EC 2.1.2.1), an enzyme that catalyses the simultaneous conversion of serine (Ser) to glycine (Gly) and tetrahydrofolate (THF) to 5,10-methylenetetrahydrofolate (CH<sub>2</sub>THF) in the folate cycle ([Appaji Rao et al., 2003](#)). In addition, PLP is a coenzyme for cystathionine β-synthase (CBS; EC 4.2.1.22) and cystathionine γ-lyase (CTH; EC 4.4.1.1) enzymes of the *transsulphuration* pathway (Figure 2.4A). The former catalyses the conversion of Hcy to cystathionine (Cth) and the latter catalyses the conversion of Cth to cysteine (Cys; [Perry et al., 2007](#)), thus demonstrating the role of B6 in lowering Hcy concentrations ([Miodownik et al., 2007](#)).

All measured B6 species were lower ( $P<0.05$ ) in MD liver than Ab liver (Figure 2.4B). Pyridoxamine was the predominant form of B6 in Ab liver, followed by supplemental form, PN (Figure 2.4B). The large variation in PN and PM concentrations in Ab sheep liver is a likely consequence of the varied diet these sheep received prior to slaughter.

Due to its high instability and susceptibility to degradation ([Mohammed-Ahmed et al., 2017](#)), PLP measured below the limit of detection (<LOD) in MD liver (Section 2.2.2.1.5) and only trace levels were detected in Ab liver ([Xu et al., 2020](#)). Liver PL concentrations were, therefore, used as a proxy measurement of bioactive B6 in the present study. Mean PL concentrations were marginally decreased in the MD liver (Ab:  $240.3 \pm 6.41$  vs MD:  $219.7 \pm 14.61$  pmol/g;  $P=0.019$ ) which may reflect a marginal decrease its bioactive phosphorylated derivative. Since all forms of B6 are interconvertible, it is possible that PN and PM are readily converted to PL for phosphorylation to the bioactive form to maintain B6 coenzyme function ([McCormick and Chen, 1999](#)).



**Figure 2.4 Vitamin B<sub>6</sub> species are decreased in methyl deficient sheep liver.**

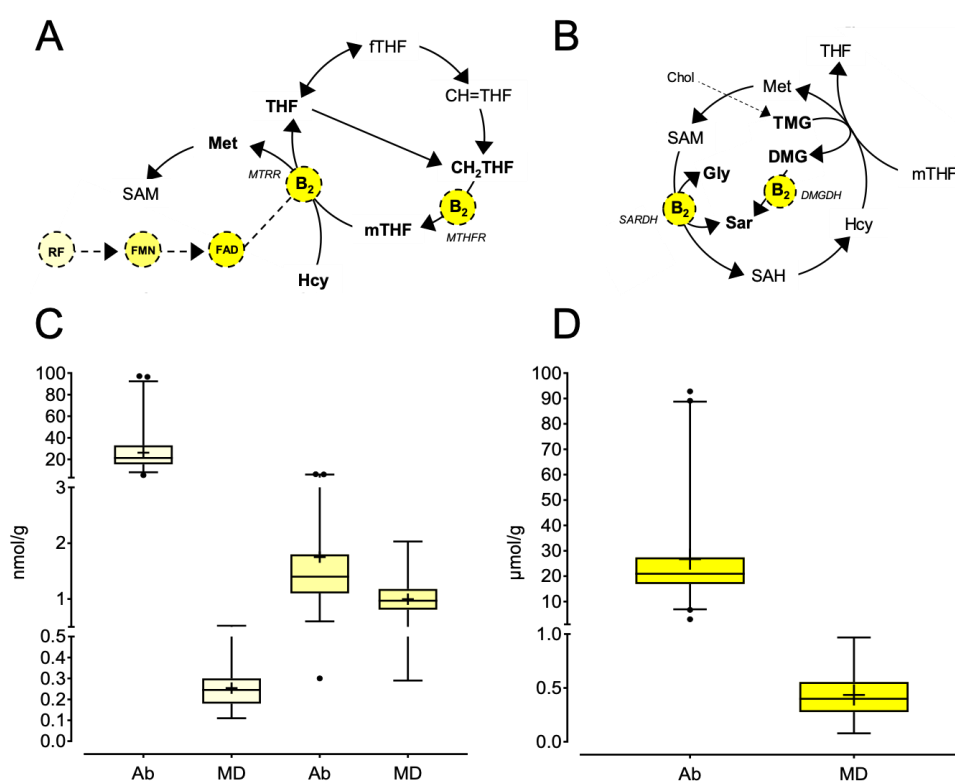
B6 cofactors in one-carbon (1C) metabolism (A). Concentrations (pmol/g wet weight liver) of pyridoxine, PN (P<0.001); pyridoxamine, PM (P<0.001); pyridoxal, PL (P=0.019) in abattoir-derived (Ab; n=266) and methyl deficient (MD; n=83) sheep liver (B). Individual vitamer concentrations (colour-coded) between Ab and MD sheep compared by ANOVA. Mean (+), median, interquartile ranges, and 1st and 99th percentiles. Dots in boxplots represent outliers.

### 2.3.2.3 Vitamin B<sub>2</sub>

Vitamin B<sub>2</sub> exists in nature as riboflavin (RF) and its coenzyme derivatives, flavin mononucleotide (FMN) and flavin adenine dinucleotide (FAD). Only a small amount of B<sub>2</sub> is present in dietary sources as RF whilst the majority (~90%) is present as FAD and, to a lesser degree, FMN (Powers, 2003). Flavin-dependent enzymes use FMN and FAD as cofactors in numerous oxidation-reduction reactions in primary metabolic pathways, including the tricarboxylic acid (TCA) cycle, fatty acid catabolism ( $\beta$ -oxidation) and amino acid degradation (Lienhart *et al.*, 2013). In 1C metabolism, MTHFR requires FAD as a cofactor to convert 5,10-methylenetetrahydrofolate ( $\text{CH}_2\text{THF}$ ) to 5-methyltetrahydrofolate (5-mTHF) in the folate cycle (Figure 2.5A; García-Minguillán *et al.*, 2014). Methionine synthase reductase (MTRR; EC 1.16.1.8) utilises both FMN and FAD as cofactors to reactivate methionine synthase (MTR) via reductive re-methylation of cob(II)alamin to methylcob(III)alamin, thereby facilitating Hcy re-methylation to Met (Figure 2.5A; Leclerc *et al.*, 1998; García-Minguillán *et al.*, 2014). Additionally, two consecutive enzymes in choline metabolism; dimethylglycine dehydrogenase (DMDGH; EC 1.5.99.2) and sarcosine dehydrogenase (SARDH; EC 1.5.99.1), covalently bind the FAD cofactor to

catalyse the oxidative demethylation of dimethylglycine (DMG) to sarcosine (Sar) and Sar to glycine (Gly), respectively (Porter *et al.*, 1985; Figure 2.5B). Both enzymes use THF to capture 1C units released by oxidative demethylation of substrates, yielding CH<sub>2</sub>THF in the process (Lienhart *et al.*, 2013).

Importantly, flavin-dependent enzymes are also involved in the biosynthesis of other B vitamin cofactors. For instance, vitamin B<sub>6</sub> metabolism requires pyridoxine 5'-phosphate oxidase (PNPO; EC 1.4.3.5), an FMN-dependent enzyme that converts phosphorylated PN to its bioactive form, PLP (Choi *et al.*, 1983; Figure 2.4A). It follows that 1C metabolism involves the concerted actions and interactions of various B vitamin cofactors (Sauberlich, 1980).



**Figure 2.5 Vitamin B<sub>2</sub> species are decreased in methyl deficient sheep liver.**

B2 cofactors in one-carbon (1C) metabolism (A). B2 cofactors in choline metabolism (B). Concentrations (nmol/g wet weight liver) of riboflavin, RF (□) ( $P < 0.001$ ); flavin mononucleotide, FMN (■) ( $P < 0.001$ ) (C) and concentrations (μmol/g wet weight liver) of flavin adenine dinucleotide, FAD (■) ( $P < 0.001$ ) in abattoir-derived (Ab;  $n = 266$ ) and methyl deficient (MD;  $n = 83$ ) sheep liver (D). Individual vitamer concentrations (colour-coded) between Ab and MD sheep compared by ANOVA. Mean (+), median, interquartile ranges, and 1st and 99th percentiles. Dots in boxplots represent outliers.

Flavin adenine dinucleotide (FAD) was the major form of B2 in Ab liver (Xu *et al.*, 2020), measuring ~60-fold higher than concentrations in MD liver (Ab:  $26.7 \pm 1.17$  vs MD:  $0.4 \pm 0.02$  μmol/g; Figure 2.5D). Precursors, RF and FMN, were



also significantly reduced in MD liver (Figure 2.5C). The low B<sub>2</sub> concentrations observed in MD lambs may reflect their relatively immature age and stage of rumen development (Luecke *et al.*, 1950; Poe *et al.*, 1972). Adult ruminants do not have a specific dietary requirement for RF due to its microbial synthesis in the rumen, however, RF deficiency has been demonstrated in young ruminants whose rumen microflora is not yet fully established (McDowell, 2000). This may explain, at least in part, the significant decrease in hepatic RF concentrations observed in MD lambs (Ab:  $26.2 \pm 0.97$  vs MD:  $0.3 \pm 0.01$  nmol/g; Figure 2.5C). Moreover, feeding conditions, such as forage to concentrate ratios (Zhang *et al.*, 2017b; Seck *et al.*, 2017), and diet composition (Fonty *et al.*, 1987) can influence microbial synthesis of RF. Thus, the ruminal RF content of the recently weaned lamb during its transition to the MD concentrate diet may be quite different to that of abattoir-derived sheep, which may have been predominantly pasture-fed.

Free RF is absorbed by enterocytes of the small intestine and undergoes phosphorylation to FMN, catalysed by cytosolic flavokinase (EC 2.7.1.26). Flavin mononucleotide is readily converted to FAD by FAD-dependent enzyme, FAD synthetase (EC 2.7.7.2; Powers, 2003; Figure 2.5A). The efficient conversion of FMN to FAD may provide a plausible explanation for why the mean liver FMN concentration does not decrease to the same extent as RF and FAD concentrations in MD sheep liver (Figure 2.5C).

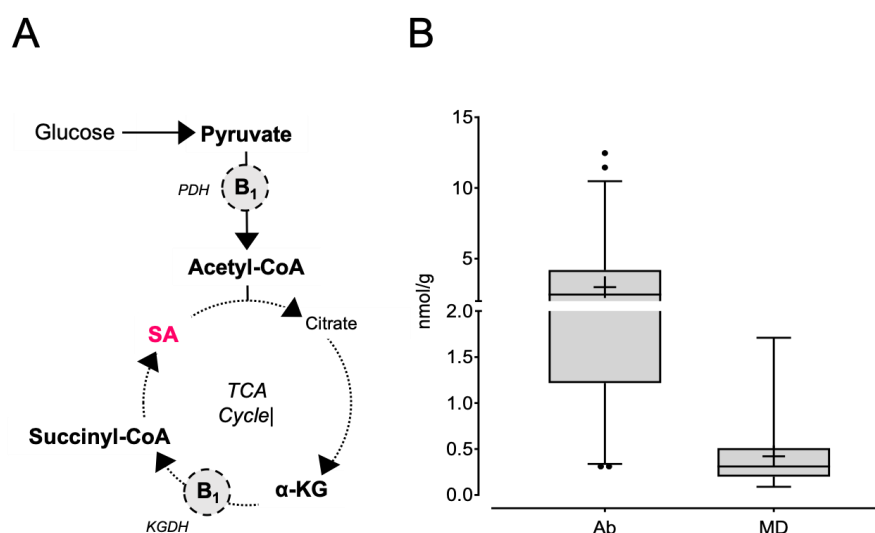
#### 2.3.2.4 Vitamin B<sub>1</sub>

Vitamin B<sub>1</sub> (thiamine) is not directly related to 1C metabolism but is fundamental for energy production (Lonsdale, 2006) and is, therefore, relevant to the present study. The phosphate ester of vitamin B<sub>1</sub>, thiamine pyrophosphate (TPP), is the rate-limiting enzyme cofactor for regulatory enzymes involved in carbohydrate metabolism, including pyruvate dehydrogenase (PDH; EC 1.2.4.1) and  $\alpha$ -ketoglutarate dehydrogenase (KGDH; EC 1.2.4.2; Lonsdale, 2015; Figure 2.6A). The former catalyses the decarboxylation of pyruvate to acetyl CoA (Lonsdale, 2006) whilst the latter converts  $\alpha$ -ketoglutarate ( $\alpha$ -KG) to succinyl-CoA in the TCA cycle (McLain *et al.*, 2011; Figure 2.6A). Thus, it follows that the energy generated from oxidation of glucose is highly dependent on TPP (Lonsdale, 2006).



Thiamine is primarily stored in the liver, however, it is one of the most poorly stored B vitamins and most mammals fed a thiamine-deficient diet will deplete their body reserves within 14-18 days (Oseizagha *et al.*, 2013; Ensminger *et al.*, 1990). In humans, thiamine deficiency can lead to serious neurological conditions, such as Beriberi (Lonsdale, 2015) and delirium (Osiezagha *et al.*, 2013). In ruminants, thiamine deficiency can cause polioencephalomalacia, also referred to as cerebrocortical necrosis (McGuirk, 1987). Considering the interrelationships between B vitamin cofactors mentioned earlier (Section 2.3.2.3), it may not seem surprising that thiamine deficiency is often accompanied by deficiencies of other B vitamins. This is demonstrated in the current study, as MD sheep present with significantly lower concentrations of hepatic B12, B6 and B2 (Figure 2.3 to Figure 2.5) in addition to lower hepatic thiamine (Ab:  $3.0 \pm 0.13$  vs MD:  $0.4 \pm 0.04$  nmol/g;  $P < 0.001$ ; Figure 2.6B).

It is possible that subclinical thiamine deficiency can lead to a reduction in synthesis of other B vitamins since certain strains of bacteria require thiamine to grow and colonise the rumen (McDowell *et al.*, 2000). Thiamine deficiency is common in weaned lambs, particularly those fed high fermentable-starch (i.e. barley-based) diets (Karapinar *et al.*, 2008) such as that fed in the current study.

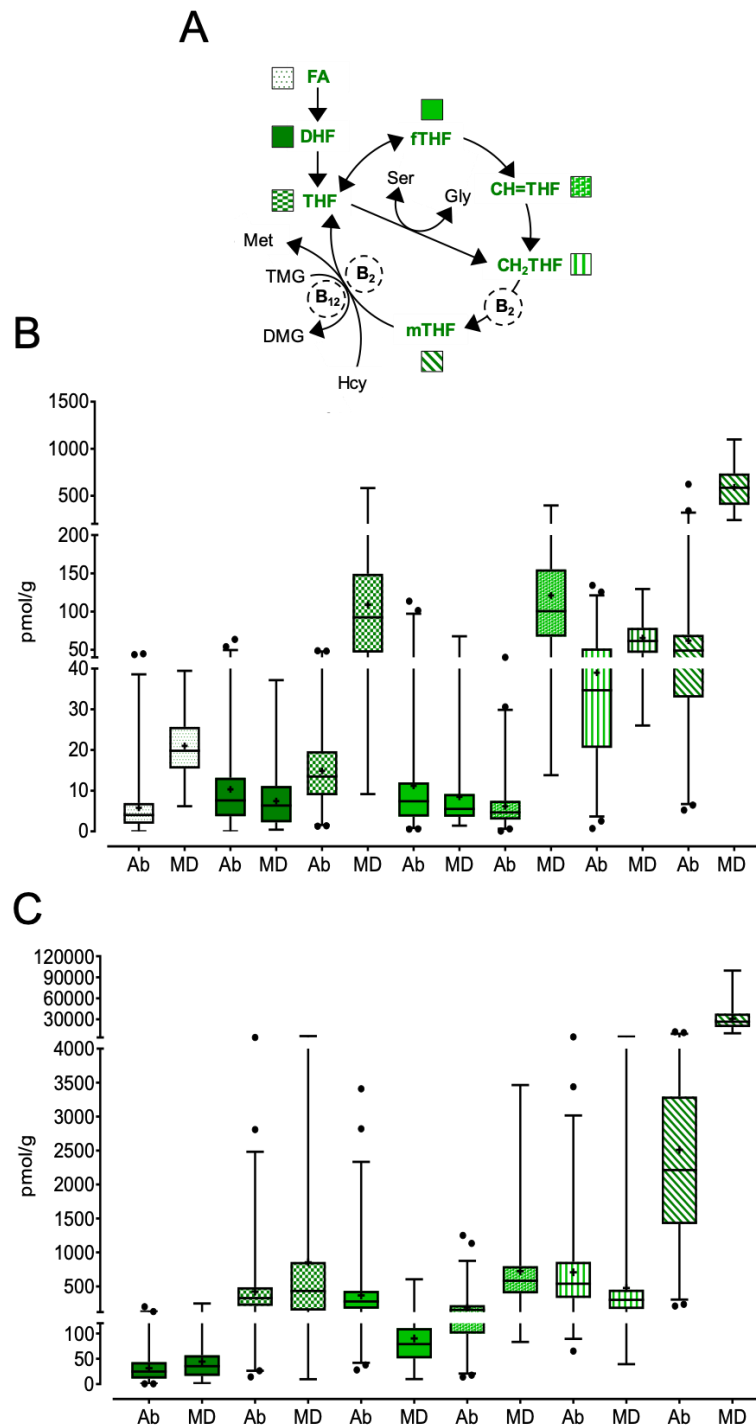


**Figure 2.6 Vitamin B<sub>1</sub> (thiamine) is decreased in methyl deficient sheep liver.**








B1 cofactor in energy metabolism (Tricarboxylic acid cycle) (**A**). Concentrations (nmol/g wet weight liver) of thiamine, B<sub>1</sub> (■) ( $P < 0.001$ ) in abattoir-derived (Ab;  $n=266$ ) and methyl deficient (MD;  $n=83$ ) sheep liver (**B**). Individual vitamer concentrations between Ab and MD sheep compared by ANOVA. Mean (+), median, interquartile ranges, and 1st and 99th percentiles. Dots in boxplots represent outliers.

### 2.3.2.5 Vitamin B<sub>9</sub> (folates)

Natural folates are interconverted between different oxidation states (e.g. methylene, methyl, formyl; [Ducker and Rabinowitz, 2017](#)) and are most abundant in their polyglutamated form within cells (Figure 2.7). Their conjugation to glutamate residues, catalysed by folylpolyglutamate synthetase (FPGS; EC 6.3.2.17), enhances their co-enzyme affinity, cellular retention and stability ([Mehrshahi \*et al.\*, 2010](#)). The synthetic folate, folic acid (FA), exists in monoglutamate form only ([Melse-Boonstra \*et al.\*, 2002](#)). Although hepatic FA concentration ranges were similar in both cohorts, MD sheep exhibited higher mean FA concentrations than Ab sheep (Ab:  $5.8 \pm 0.40$  vs MD:  $21.0 \pm 0.86$  pmol/g;  $P < 0.001$ ; Figure 2.7B). This observation is surprising given that MD sheep were not supplemented with FA during the study, however, this result could be explained by differences in hindgut absorption of FA between cohorts ([Milman, 2012](#)) or it may be an artefact of the assay since the relative standard deviation (RSD%) for FA was high (26%) indicating poor repeatability (Section 2.2.2.1.5).



**Figure 2.7 5-methyltetrahydrofolate accumulates in methyl deficient sheep liver.**

Folate cofactors in one-carbon (1C) metabolism; folic acid, FA ; dihydrofolate, DHF ; tetrahydrofolate, THF ; 5-formyltetrahydrofolate, 5-fTHF ; 5,10-methylenetetrahydrofolate, CH=THF ; 5,10-methylenetetrahydrofolate, CH<sub>2</sub>THF ; 5-methyltetrahydrofolate, 5-mTHF  (A). Concentrations (pmol/g wet weight liver) of monoglutamated folates (B). Concentrations (pmol/g wet weight liver) of total folates (mono- and polyglutamated) folates in abattoir-derived (Ab;  $n=266$ ) and methyl deficient (MD;  $n=83$ ) sheep liver (C). Individual vitamer concentrations (colour-coded) between Ab and MD sheep compared by ANOVA. Mean (+), median, interquartile ranges, and 1st and 99th percentiles. Dots in boxplots represent outliers.

Early investigations in sheep reported that B12 deficiency caused depletion of intracellular folate concentrations in the liver ([Dawbarn \*et al.\*, 1958](#)). According to [Smith and Osborne-White \(1973\)](#), B12-deficient sheep liver were more severely depleted in THF and formyltetrahydrofolate (fTHF) than in 5-mTHF, and this depletion was most pronounced in folate polyglutamates than monoglutamates as deficiency advanced. In contrast, the present study found that dietary methyl deficiency caused an increase of specific folate species in the liver. Both monoglutamate and polyglutamated forms of tetrahydrofolate (THF) and 5,10-methenyltetrahydrofolate (CH=THF) were significantly increased in MD liver ( $P < 0.001$ ; Figure 2.7B and Figure 2.7C).

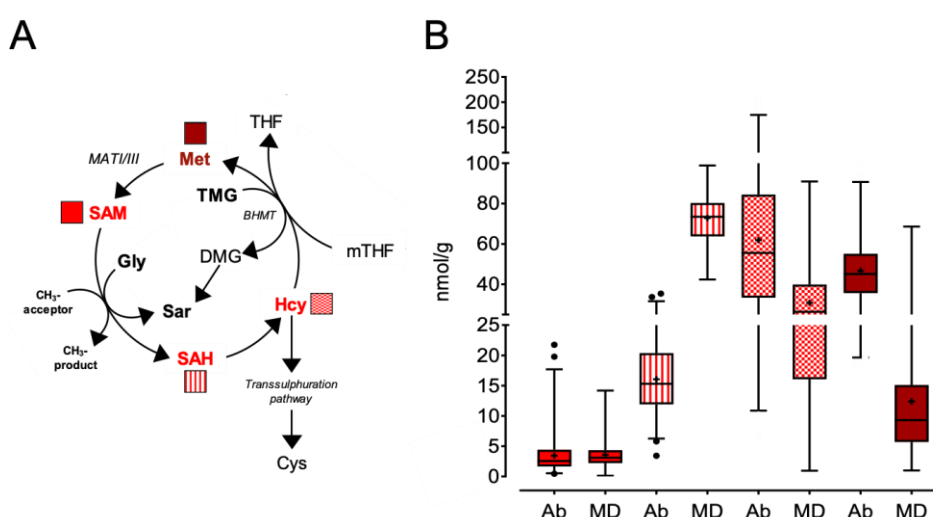
Of particular interest is the >10-fold increase in hepatic 5-mTHF in MD sheep. A central hypothesis to account for this observation is the 'methyl-folate trap' whereby B12 deficiency leads to reduced MTR activity. Consequently, intracellular folate becomes 'trapped' as 5-mTHF because it cannot be converted to THF or revert back to CH<sub>2</sub>THF ([Shane and Stokstad, 1985](#); [Miller \*et al.\*, 2009](#); Figure 2.7A).

Not only does folate accumulate in B12 deficiency, but it can also remain in its monoglutamated form due to an impairment of polyglutamation within the liver ([Smith and Osborne-White, 1973](#)). This impairment may arise due to a lack of suitable substrate for polyglutamate synthesis or a direct requirement for B12 for polyglutamation ([Perry \*et al.\*, 1976](#)). This may explain why concentrations of polyglutamated folates do not increase to the same extent as their monoglutamated counterparts, or why monoglutamate concentrations of CH<sub>2</sub>THF increase whilst polyglutamate concentrations decrease in methyl deficient sheep (Figure 2.7). Another theory is that folylpolyglutamate synthetase (FPGS) activity is upregulated in B12-deficient sheep liver, thereby providing a compensatory mechanism to conserve bioactive folate coenzymes ([Gawthorne and Smith, 1974](#)).

Unlike previous studies in sheep, which examined the effect of B12 deficiency in isolation, the present study examines the effect of methyl deficiency more generally. It is likely that dietary restriction of Co, S and methionine contributes toward system-wide alterations to biochemistry, physiology and metabolism, causing aberrant flux through the folate cycle and the accumulation of several folate intermediates.

### 2.3.2.6 Methionine cycle metabolites

The methionine cycle regulates the balance between methionine and cysteine (Cys) for protein synthesis, provides the substrate for polyamine synthesis (discussed later, Section 2.3.2.8), and facilitates methyl group transfer from 5-mTHF to an array of substrates, thereby constituting the principal mechanism for cellular transmethylation reactions in mammals (Finkelstein, 1990). In the liver, two isoforms of methionine adenosyltransferase (MATI/III; EC 2.5.1.6) catalyse the conversion of methionine to the universal methyl donor, SAM (Martinov *et al.*, 2000). After transfer of a methyl group, SAM is converted to S-adenosylhomocysteine (SAH). Under normal physiological conditions, SAH is hydrolysed to Hcy which is removed via re-methylation to methionine to close the metabolic loop, or by degradation to Cys in the *transsulphuration* pathway (Caudill *et al.*, 2001; Figure 2.8A).



**Figure 2.8 Concentrations of methionine cycle metabolites are altered in methyl deficient sheep liver.**

Methionine metabolism (A). Concentrations (nmol/g wet weight liver) of S-adenosylmethionine, SAM (■) ( $P=0.155$ ); S-adenosylhomocysteine, SAH (▨) ( $P<0.001$ ); homocysteine, Hcy (▤) ( $P<0.001$ ); Methionine, Met (■) ( $P<0.001$ ) in abattoir-derived (Ab;  $n=266$ ) and methyl deficient (MD;  $n=83$ ) sheep liver (B). Individual metabolite concentrations (colour-coded) between Ab and MD sheep compared by ANOVA. Mean (+), median, interquartile ranges, and 1st and 99th percentiles. Dots in boxplots represent outliers.

As an expected consequence of feeding a sulphur-deficient diet, MD sheep exhibited significantly lower hepatic methionine concentrations than Ab sheep (Ab:  $46.7 \pm 0.91$  vs MD:  $12.4 \pm 1.26$  nmol/g;  $P<0.001$ ; Figure 2.8B). The MD diet had no effect on hepatic SAM concentration (Ab:  $3.5 \pm 0.18$  vs MD:  $3.6 \pm 0.25$

nmol/g;  $P=0.155$ ) but caused a significant increase in SAH concentration (Ab:  $16.1 \pm 0.34$  vs MD:  $72.9 \pm 1.32$  nmol/g;  $P<0.001$ ), thereby potentially reducing the SAM:SAH ratio (Figure 2.8A). As discussed earlier (Section 1.3.1.1), the SAM:SAH ratio is commonly used as an indicator of cellular transmethylation potential; a decreased ratio is predictive of reduced methylation capacity (Caudill *et al.*, 2001). As SAH is a potent inhibitor of methyltransferase enzymes, its accumulation leads to cellular hypomethylation and the dysregulation of integral metabolic reactions. Thus, SAH needs to be eliminated from the cell (Finkelstein, 1990). A study in methyl deficient rodents showed that a rise in intracellular SAH was most consistently associated with global DNA hypomethylation, whilst reduced concentrations of SAM alone was not sufficient to affect DNA methylation (Caudill *et al.*, 2001). Therefore, it is possible that elevated SAH was sufficient to cause hypomethylation of DNA in MD sheep hepatocytes, however, this line of enquiry is beyond the scope of the present study.

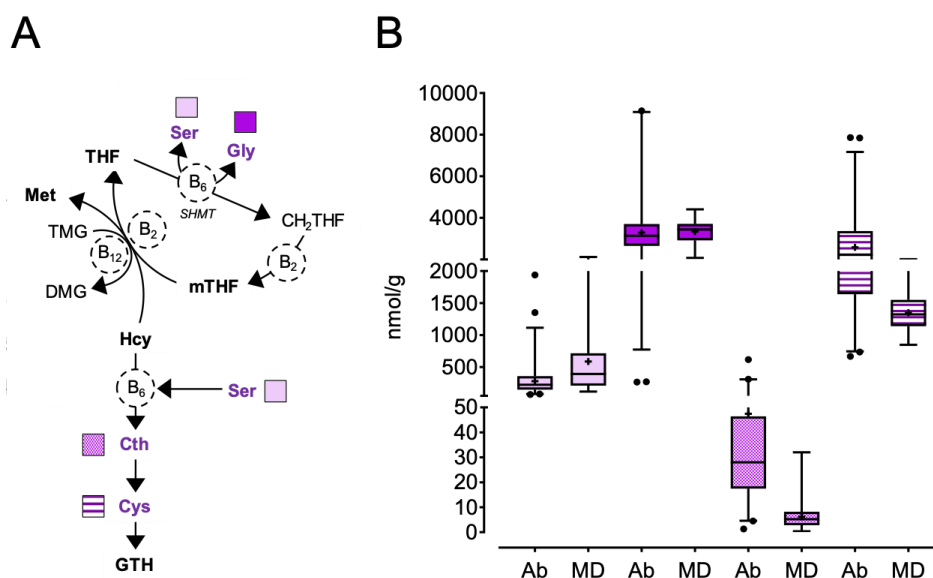
Considering the increase in plasma Hcy (Figure 2.2A) and hepatic SAH, it seems paradoxical that Hcy concentrations should be 2-fold lower in MD than Ab sheep liver (Ab:  $61.9 \pm 2.32$  vs MD:  $30.9 \pm 2.33$  nmol/g;  $P<0.001$ ; Figure 2.8B). There are, however, putative explanations for this decrease; i) animals fed the MD diet became low in S meaning that their capacity to synthesise sulphur-containing amino acids (i.e. Hcy) was reduced (Škovierová *et al.*, 2016); ii) unlike many other tissues, the liver possesses a secondary pathway for Hcy remethylation catalysed by BHMT and, therefore, has an additional level of regulation over Hcy concentrations (Feng *et al.*, 2011); and, iii) intracellular Hcy is readily egressed to maintain concentrations at a low level in order to prevent toxic accumulation of SAH (Finkelstein, 2000; Ulrich *et al.*, 2008). As SAH is not readily transported across the cell membrane, Hcy may serve as an exportable form of SAH to preserve cellular methylation status (Caudill *et al.*, 2001). In support of the hypothesis proposed by Yi *et al.* (2000), plasma Hcy concentrations provide a more reliable biomarker for intracellular SAH and cellular methylation capacity than intracellular Hcy concentrations.

#### 2.3.2.7 1C-related amino acids and derivatives

One-carbon metabolism integrates 1C units from amino acids, including serine (Ser) and glycine (Gly), both of which are nutritionally non-essential amino acids that are biosynthetically linked (Fell and Snell, 1988; Locasale, 2013; Pérez-

Torres *et al.*, 2017; Figure 2.9A). A substantial amount of Ser can be synthesised *de novo* from glucose (Fell and Snell, 1988) and converted to Gly by donation of a 1C unit to THF forming CH<sub>2</sub>THF, thereby driving the folate cycle. This reaction, catalysed by the bidirectional PLP-dependent enzyme, serine hydroxymethyltransferase (SHMT), is at near equilibrium and can be easily reversed (Shane, 2008; Ramos *et al.*, 2017; Figure 2.9A).

Mammals possess two distinct isoforms of SHMT; cytosolic and mitochondrial (Garrow *et al.*, 1993). The mitochondrial isoform is ubiquitously expressed and thought to be responsible for generating the majority of 1C units for cytosolic 1C metabolism (MacFarlane *et al.*, 2008). In contrast, expression of the cytosolic isoform is limited to the liver and kidney where its principal function may be to synthesise Ser from Gly for gluconeogenesis (Shane, 2008).



**Figure 2.9 Amino acids drive folate metabolism and *transsulphuration* in sheep liver.**

Amino acids in one-carbon (1C) metabolism (A). Concentrations (nmol/g wet weight liver) of serine, Ser (P<0.001); glycine, Gly (P=0.233); cystathionine, Cth (P<0.001); cysteine, Cys (P<0.001) (B) in abattoir-derived (Ab; n=266) and methyl deficient (MD; n=83) sheep liver. Individual metabolite concentrations (colour-coded) between Ab and MD sheep compared by ANOVA. Mean (+), median, interquartile ranges, and 1st and 99th percentiles. Dots in boxplots represent outliers.

Hepatic Ser concentrations were significantly increased in MD sheep (Ab: 279.0 ± 12.84 vs MD: 586.4 ± 54.36 nmol/g; P<0.001) but Gly concentrations were unaffected by methyl deficiency (Ab: 3316.8 ± 74.06 vs MD: 3343.8 ± 63.47 nmol/g; P=0.233; Figure 2.9B). It may be that tissue concentrations of Gly are regulated by the mitochondrial glycine cleavage system (GCS), the principal

pathway of Gly catabolism whereby glycine dehydrogenase (GLDC; EC 1.4.1.10) catalyses the degradation of glycine to yield 1C for the methylation of THF (Amelio *et al.*, 2014). It is postulated that the GCS protects cells from Gly toxicity (Kim *et al.*, 2015). Whilst there is no definitive explanation for the increased concentration of Ser in MD sheep liver, it is possible that decreased concentrations of vitamin B<sub>6</sub> observed in MD sheep liver (Section 2.3.2.2) caused a reduction in catalytic activity of SHMT, thereby reducing Ser conversion to Gly (Scheer *et al.*, 2005; Perry *et al.*, 2007). Low B6 could also lead to reduced activity of B6-dependent enzymes in the two-step transsulphuration pathway which may contribute to the accumulation of Ser (Figure 2.9A).

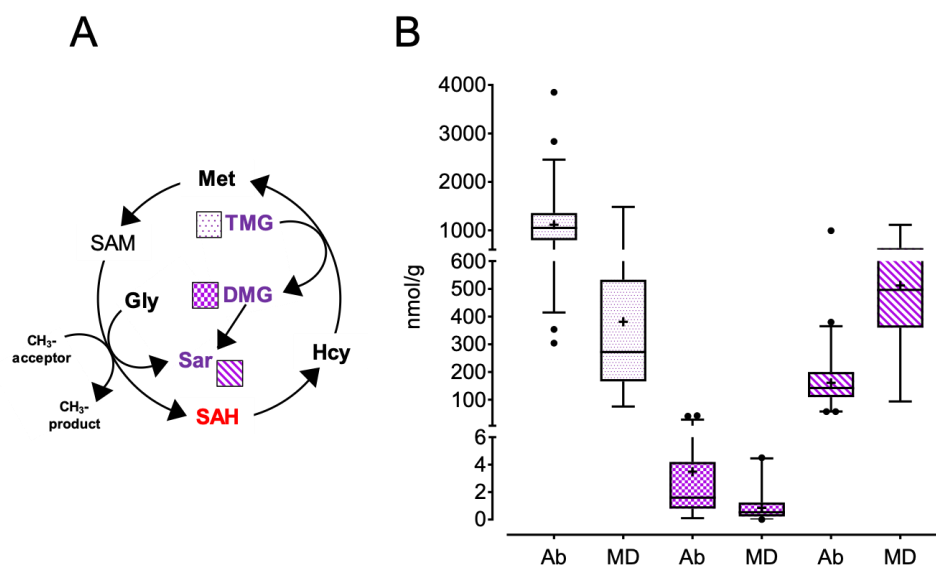
Reduced flux through the *transsulphuration* pathway is reflected by the reduction of intermediates, Cth and Cys, in MD sheep liver compared with Ab sheep liver ( $P < 0.001$ ; Figure 2.9B). Of relevance is the 2-fold reduction of essential amino acid, Cys, in MD lambs that were actively growing a fleece during the study. Wool contains a high content of sulphur-containing amino acid, Cys, and, therefore, requires large amounts of Cys or methionine for the generation of Cys, for its growth (Nezamidoust *et al.*, 2014). The depletion of hepatic Cys and methionine, as limiting amino acids for wool production, was reflected in a subset of MD sheep that exhibited poor quality fleece growth towards the end of the study.

Aside the *transsulphuration* pathway, a parallel pathway for Hcy metabolism is trimethylglycine (TMG)-dependent. Trimethylglycine, otherwise known as betaine, is a methyl donor in the remethylation of Hcy to Met, catalysed by BHMT (Ueland *et al.*, 2005). A product of this remethylation reaction, dimethylglycine (DMG), can be converted to sarcosine (Sar) by dimethylglycine dehydrogenase (DMGDH; EC 1.5.99.2; Obeid, 2013; Figure 2.10A).

Hepatic TMG concentrations are reduced ~3-fold in MD than Ab lambs (Ab:  $1116.3 \pm 27.21$  vs MD:  $381.2 \pm 32.76$  nmol/g;  $P < 0.001$ ). As might be expected, low substrate (TMG) availability lowers product (methionine and DMG) formation (Ab:  $3.5 \pm 0.31$  vs MD:  $1.0 \pm 0.10$  nmol/g;  $P < 0.001$ ; Figure 2.8B, Figure 2.10B). Surprisingly, hepatic sarcosine (Sar) significantly increased in MD lambs (Ab:  $157.8 \pm 3.98$  vs MD:  $512.0 \pm 24.80$  nmol/g;  $P < 0.001$ ). This may be a result of increased glycine-*N*-methyltransferase (GNMT) activity, a hepatic enzyme that converts SAM to SAH whilst generating Sar from Gly (Luka *et al.*, 2009; Figure 2.10A). Based on the elevated concentrations of SAH in MD sheep



liver (Figure 2.8), it is possible that increased flux from SAM to SAH is responsible for the high Sar concentrations measured. It is also possible that lower concentrations of vitamin B<sub>2</sub> cofactor, FAD, measured in MD sheep liver (Figure 2.5D) could reduce the catalytic activity of SARDH enzyme, thereby leading to the reduced catabolism of Sar in MD sheep liver (Figure 2.5B).



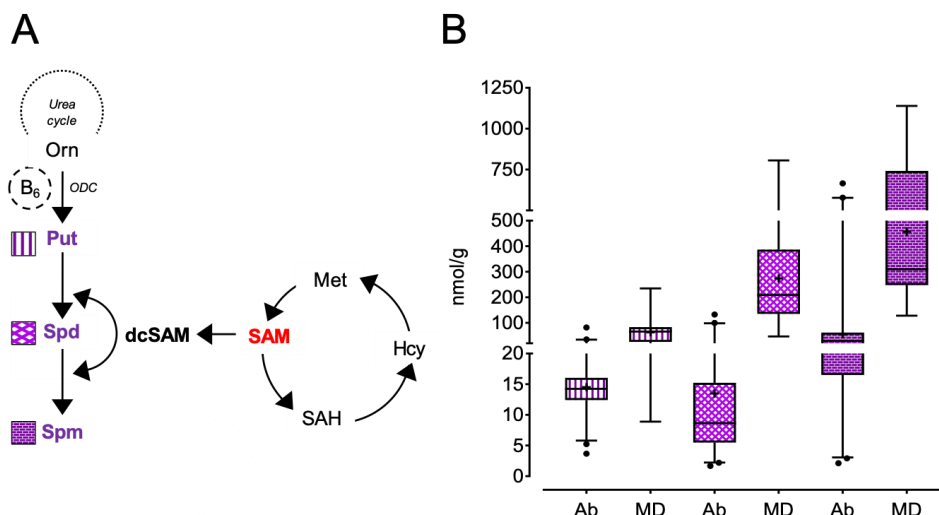
**Figure 2.10 Amino acids facilitate the remethylation of homocysteine (Hcy) to methionine (Met) in sheep liver.**

Amino acids in one-carbon (1C) metabolism (A). Concentrations (nmol/g wet weight liver) of trimethylglycine TMG,  ( $P<0.001$ ); Dimethylglycine, DMG  ( $P<0.001$ ); Sarcosine, Sar  ( $P<0.001$ ); (B) in abattoir-derived (Ab;  $n=266$ ) and methyl deficient (MD;  $n=83$ ) sheep liver. Individual metabolite concentrations (colour-coded) between Ab and MD sheep compared by ANOVA. Mean (+), median, interquartile ranges, and 1st and 99th percentiles. Dots in boxplots represent outliers.

### 2.3.2.8 Polyamine metabolites

S-adenosylmethionine (SAM) is an essential substrate for polyamine biosynthesis (Bistulfi *et al.*, 2010). SAM becomes decarboxylated (dcSAM), as catalysed by S-adenosylmethionine decarboxylase (SAMDC; EC 4.1.1.50) and donates aminopropyl groups for the synthesis of higher polyamines, spermidine (Spd) and spermine (Spm) from precursor, putrescine (Put; Pegg *et al.*, 2006; Gamble *et al.*, 2012; Figure 2.11A). Polyamines are growth factors involved in the proliferation and differentiation of mammalian cells (Canellakis *et al.*, 1989). Whilst they are ubiquitous in all cells, their concentration is greatest in self-renewing and regenerative tissues, such as liver (Pegg *et al.*, 2016; Larqué *et al.*, 2007). Hepatic polyamines were significantly increased in MD sheep; Put (Ab:  $14.5 \pm 0.34$  vs MD:  $62.8 \pm 4.52$  nmol/g;  $P<0.001$ ), Spd (Ab:  $13.5 \pm 0.99$  vs

MD:  $274.0 \pm 20.67$ ;  $P < 0.001$ ) and Spm (Ab:  $55.6 \pm 5.63$  vs MD:  $475.5 \pm 32.85$ ;  $P < 0.001$ ; Figure 2.11B). The present findings agree with those of [Sun et al. \(2002\)](#) who reported that hepatic Spd and Spm concentrations in methyl deficient rats were 58 and 67% higher, respectively, than in controls.



**Figure 2.11 Polyamines increase in methyl deficient sheep liver.**

Polyamine metabolism (**A**). Concentrations (nmol/g wet weight liver) of putrescine, Put (▨) ( $P < 0.001$ ); spermidine, Spd (▤) ( $P < 0.001$ ); spermine, Spm (▥) ( $P < 0.001$ ) (**B**) in abattoir-derived (Ab;  $n=266$ ) and methyl deficient (MD;  $n=83$ ) sheep liver. Individual metabolite concentrations (colour-coded) between Ab and MD sheep compared by ANOVA. Mean (+), median, interquartile ranges, and 1st and 99th percentiles. Dots in boxplots represent outliers.

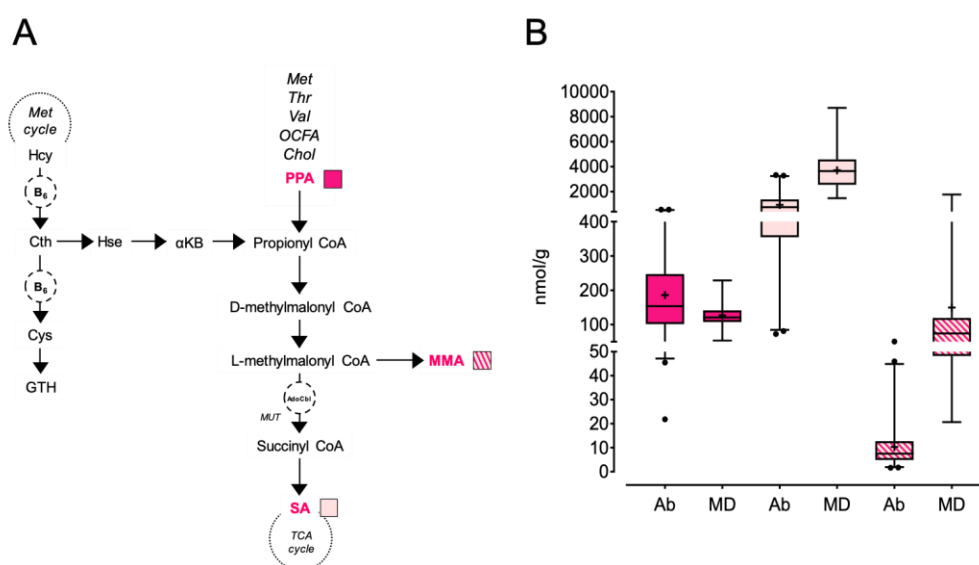
The origin of this increase remains uncertain. It has been proposed that the catalytic activity of rate-limiting enzymes in polyamine biosynthesis, such as ODC and SAMDC, are regulated by the SAM:SAH ratio ([Kramer et al., 1987](#)). As SAH is a competitive inhibitor of most SAM-mediated reactions ([Finkelstein, 1990](#)), the metabolic partitioning of SAM as a methyl donor (transmethylation) or aminopropyl donor (polyamine biosynthesis) is determined by the relative affinity of SAH for the aforementioned decarboxylase and methyltransferase enzymes ([Kramer et al., 1987](#)). Perhaps a reduced SAM:SAH ratio leads to the upregulation of decarboxylase activity which serves to divert available SAM to polyamine biosynthesis at the expense of transmethylation reactions, at least in proliferating cells.

Similarly, methionine deprivation has been reported to induce SAMDC catalytic activity ([Tidsdale, 1981](#)). Together, regulatory controls over polyamine metabolism enzymes evoked by reduced methionine and a decreased

SAM:SAH ratio lends credence to the case for increased liver polyamine concentrations in MD sheep liver.

### 2.3.2.9 Propionate metabolites

Gluconeogenesis is of great importance in ruminants as almost all dietary carbohydrates are fermented to volatile fatty acids (VFA) in the rumen (Young *et al.*, 1977). Whilst propionic acid (PPA) is the only major VFA that contributes to gluconeogenesis (Black *et al.*, 1961; McDowell, 2000), a diverse pool of biomolecules can be catabolised to produce propionyl-CoA (Tretter *et al.*, 2016; Snyder *et al.*, 2015; Figure 2.12A). In the mitochondria, propionyl-CoA is carboxylated to D-methylmalonyl-CoA and epimerised to its L-stereoisomer (Tretter *et al.*, 2016; Ballhausen *et al.*, 2009). In turn, L-methylmalonyl-CoA is converted to succinyl-CoA by AdoCbl-dependent enzyme, methylmalonyl-CoA mutase (MUT). Finally, succinyl-CoA is incorporated into the tricarboxylic acid (TCA) cycle and converted to succinic acid (SA) for use in gluconeogenesis (De Vadder *et al.*, 2016; Figure 2.12A).



**Figure 2.12 The propionate metabolome is altered in methyl deficient sheep liver.**

Propionate metabolism (A). Concentrations (nmol/g wet weight liver) of propionic acid, PPA (■) ( $P<0.001$ ); succinic acid, SA (□) ( $P<0.001$ ); methylmalonic acid, MMA (▨) ( $P<0.001$ ) (B) in abattoir-derived (Ab;  $n=266$ ) and methyl deficient (MD;  $n=83$ ) sheep liver. Individual metabolite concentrations (colour-coded) between Ab and MD sheep compared by ANOVA. Mean (+), median, interquartile ranges, and 1st and 99th percentiles. Dots in boxplots represent outliers.

Hepatic concentrations of PPA were decreased in MD sheep compared with Ab sheep (Ab:  $186.1 \pm 6.92$  vs MD:  $126.8 \pm 3.59$  nmol/g;  $P<0.001$ ) whilst SA and

MMA concentrations were increased ( $P < 0.001$ ; Figure 2.12B). Such findings correspond with those reported by [Kennedy and others \(1991\)](#) where feeding lambs a Co-deficient concentrate diet caused a decrease in ruminal PPA but a 1000-fold increase in SA concentrations, highlighting an imbalance between PPA- and SA-producing microbes. Ruminal SA can be absorbed, leading to elevated plasma SA concentrations in Co-deficient animals ([Kennedy et al., 1991](#)). Thus, absorbed SA can partially overcome the detrimental effects of decreased MUT activity induced by AdoCbl deficiency on gluconeogenesis (Section 2.3.2.1; Figure 2.3B). The ~15-fold increase in hepatic MMA concentrations measured in MD sheep (Ab:  $10.3 \pm 0.51$  vs MD:  $149.6 \pm 27.66$  nmol/g;  $P < 0.001$ ) highlights the metabolic effect of AdoCbl deficiency on MUT enzyme activity. With the aforementioned points considered (Section 2.3.1), plasma MMA is a robust biomarker of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency ([McMullin et al., 2001](#)) and its accumulation in liver has been attributed to AdoCbl deficiency in mammals ([Smith et al., 1969](#); [Toyoshima et al., 1996](#)).

## 2.4 Concluding remarks

The methods described herein are capable of the simultaneous quantification of 1C metabolites and related compounds in a complex tissue matrix, such as sheep liver. The HILIC/MS-MS methods used a simple extraction procedure, a short analytical run time and a simple mobile phase. Such metabolomic platforms will be useful for modelling 1C metabolism and linked biochemical pathways in order to facilitate dietary and genetic studies of metabolic health and epigenetic regulation of gene expression.

The large natural variation in hepatic levels of individual 1C metabolites in our sheep study populations reflects the dietary and genetic variation in our chosen outbred model species. Total 1C metabolite concentrations reported herein agree with those published elsewhere (Appendix Table 2.2), with the exception of vitamin B<sub>6</sub> where concentrations reported in the literature are >10-fold higher. This discrepancy is likely due to differences in analytical methodologies employed. Previous studies converted all B6 vitamers, including their phosphate esters, to free forms ([Williams et al., 2007](#); [Fukuwatari et al., 2008](#)) before measuring total B6 by microbiological assay ([Fukuwatari et al., 2008](#)) or reverse-phase HPLC coupled with electrochemical detection ([Wehling and Wetzel, 1984](#); [Williams et al., 2007](#); [Williams, 2007](#)). Such approaches are

quantitative but do not discriminate between individual free and phosphorylated vitamers ([Zhang et al., 2018](#)).

The present study provides the first comparison of the relative abundance of bioactive 1C metabolites in MD sheep liver. A detailed description of specific coenzyme forms can facilitate a more accurate deficiency diagnosis and a more thorough understanding about the function of 1C metabolism in response to dietary methyl deficiency.

This study, however, was not without its limitations. Although a comprehensive set of metabolites were measured, it was not possible to measure every species present in liver. By way of example, vitamin B<sub>12</sub> comprises hydroxocobalamin (OH-Cbl) and additional analogues (i.e. cobamides and cobinamides). Collectively, these analogues constitute ~50% of sheep liver corrinoids ([Kelly et al., 2006](#)). However, due to their lack of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> activity they were not included.

It is also important to acknowledge that measurements of metabolite pools do not accurately reflect flux through metabolic pathways, but rather provide a 'snapshot in time' of metabolic status. Metabolite pools are not static but are able to exchange with one another via numerous interconversion pathways. This is further complicated by the fact that enzymes within these pathways are activated and/or inhibited by intermediates elsewhere within the metabolic network ([Reed et al., 2004](#)). A case in point refers to the allosteric regulation of methyltransferase and decarboxylase enzymes by SAH (Section 2.3.2.8). The present study did not determine hepatic 1C enzyme expression or catalytic activity (which may arise due to SNPs). Nor did it measure 1C metabolite concentrations in blood which may have provided valuable information about the systemic effects of dietary methyl deficiency.

The metabolomic analyses were conducted for Ab and MD study cohorts separately. Ideally, contemporaneous animals would have been allocated to the control or MD diet, maintained on-study for the same duration, and their liver samples collected, processed and analysed simultaneously, but this was not logistically feasible. Therefore, to avoid artefacts associated with conducting the metabolomic analyses for Ab and MD sheep at two independent time points (i.e. following slaughter at the abattoir for Ab sheep versus following dietary restriction for MD sheep), identical laboratory materials and methods were adopted for both analyses.

In summary, relevant reductions in dietary methyl availability can lead to significant alterations in hepatic 1C metabolite concentrations with downstream consequences for functional metabolism at the cell, tissue and whole organism level. These findings support the concept that 1C metabolism does not operate in isolation but is a central integrator of energy and nutrient status.

Based on the premise that reproductive and embryonic cells metabolise methyl groups differently to hepatocytes, it is possible that the relative concentration of 1C metabolites will differ from those found in liver. Now that these sensitive mass spectrometry-based metabolomic platforms have been developed, future experiments can explore the effects of dietary methyl deficiency and inborn errors of 1C metabolism in various cells, tissues and biofluids of sheep and related ruminant species. Such experiments will bring an unprecedented level of mechanistic insight into nutritional biochemistry-mediated epigenetic modifications that take place during the periconceptual period, particularly in cells of the ruminant ovary and preimplantation embryo.

# Chapter 3

## **Methionine, 1C metabolism and bovine preimplantation embryo development**

### 3.1 Introduction

The developmental potential of the mammalian preimplantation embryo is determined to a large extent by its nutritional environment (Bonilla *et al.*, 2010). Nutritional perturbations brought about by parental diet or embryo culture can affect key developmental and epigenetic programming events that occur during preimplantation development, thereby modifying adult health-related phenotypes in offspring (Xu and Sinclair, 2015). The importance of an optimal environment for early embryonic development is illustrated by the comparison of embryos produced under *in vivo* and *in vitro* conditions. *In vitro* produced cattle embryos can exhibit biochemical and molecular characteristics that compromise their ability to survive cryopreservation and their competency for establishing a pregnancy following embryo transfer (Hansen and Block, 2004). The nutrient composition of *in vitro* embryo production (IVP) media is responsible for at least some of these ultrastructural alterations (Dumoulin *et al.*, 2010; Nelissen *et al.*, 2012; Simpoulou *et al.*, 2018).

As demonstrated in Chapter 1 (Section 1.7.1), the lack of standardisation of IVP media has led to a wide variation in the composition of 1C metabolites (Anckaert *et al.*, 2010). Notably, methionine ranges from 0 to 500  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  between formulations (Table 1.5). Concentrations of methionine in commercially available culture media can be >10-fold higher than concentrations measured in the female reproductive tract (Hugentobler *et al.*, 2007) and >20-fold higher than the methionine requirement of bovine preimplantation embryos (Bonilla *et al.*, 2010; Table 3.1).

**Table 3.1 Methionine concentrations in culture media can be >10-fold higher than those found in physiological fluids.**

	Methionine ( $\mu\text{mol/L}$ )	
	Bovine	Human
Blood plasma/serum	16 – 35	27 – 30
Reproductive tract	31 – 49	7 – 49
Cell/embryo culture media	0 – 500	0 - 500
Embryo requirement	14 – 21	?

Source(s): Hugentobler *et al.* (2007); Bonilla *et al.* (2010); Kermack *et al.* (2015); Tarahomi *et al.* (2019)

It is unknown whether there are nutritional or physiological circumstances which could cause methionine concentrations to decline below  $\sim 30 \mu\text{mol/L}$  in the

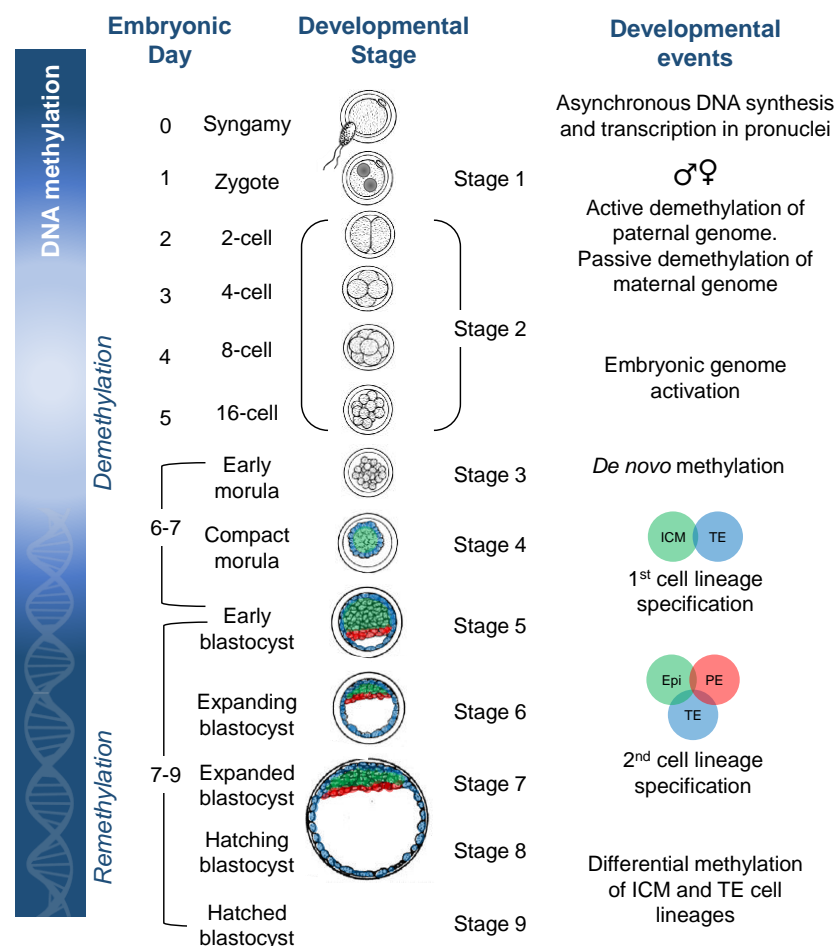


bovine reproductive tract. Even cows fed a diet low in crude protein (14%) had an average plasma concentration of ~21  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  (Piepenbrink *et al.*, 1996). However, due to its microbial degradation within the rumen, methionine is the first rate-limiting amino acid in the diet of dairy cows and is, therefore, often supplemented as a protected formulation (Wiltbank *et al.*, 2014). Feeding rumen-protected methionine to lactating dairy cows is reported to increase plasma concentrations of methionine (Koenig *et al.*, 2002; Ordway *et al.*, 2009; Preynat *et al.*, 2009) with potential benefits for reproductive performance, as characterised by increased embryonic size, embryonic survival and pregnancy maintenance (Acosta *et al.*, 2016; Toledo *et al.*, 2017).

Due to the challenges of studying human embryos, there are few data on methionine metabolism during human pregnancy (Kalhan, 2009; Drábková *et al.*, 2016). Methionine is not endogenously synthesised in sufficient quantities by humans and must be obtained from the diet. As animal proteins are a primary source of methionine in human diets (Shoob *et al.*, 2001), it follows that vegetarians and vegans are at risk of methionine deficiency (Krajčovicová-Kudláčková *et al.*, 2000; McCarty *et al.*, 2009) and, consequently, adverse reproductive outcomes (General Introduction, Table 1). Similarly, methionine-rich diets are associated with reduced risk of NTDs in pregnant women (Shoob *et al.*, 2001; Shaw *et al.*, 2004). Methionine has long been recognised as the most toxic amino acid (Benevenga and Steele, 1984; Garlick, 2006) where excess concentrations can have detrimental effects on embryo development (Rees *et al.*, 2006). Certain pathophysiological conditions lead to excess methionine in humans. A case in point concerns Mudd's disease, a condition caused by mutations in the *MAT1A* gene that is characterised by persistent hypermethioninemia (>2000  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ), aberrant cellular methylation and central nervous system abnormalities (Chien *et al.*, 2015; Nashabat *et al.*, 2018; Figure 1.1, Appendix Table 1.1).

Based on the premise that the bovine preimplantation embryo metabolises methionine differently to hepatocytes (Section 1.4), the present study advances the hypothesis that bovine embryonic cells are particularly sensitive to methionine (i.e. methyl group) availability during the preimplantation period. As a domestic livestock species of commercial relevance, it is important to investigate the effects of altering methionine during *in vitro* production of bovine embryos. Furthermore, the bovine preimplantation embryo provides a suitable model for understanding the development and differentiation of the early human

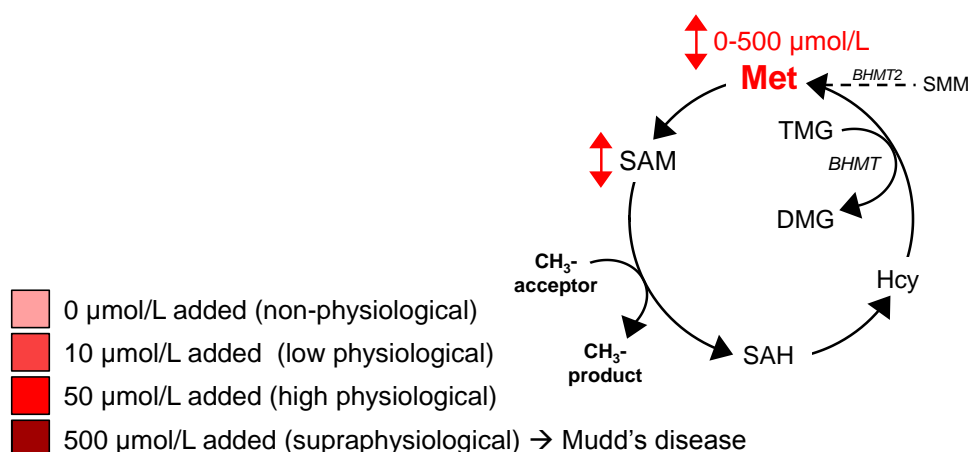
embryo (Shojaei Saadi *et al.*, 2016; Sirard, 2019; Figure 3.1). The cow typically carries a single conceptus and has a similar gestation length to the human (Bebbere *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, the timings of key developmental events that occur during early embryogenesis, including minor and major embryonic genome activation (4-cell and 8-cell stage, respectively) and cell lineage specification, are conserved in both species (Kurosaka *et al.*, 2004; Graf *et al.*, 2014). According to Ménéz and Hérubel (2002), biochemical, metabolic and intrinsic regulatory processes are similar in cattle and human embryo development. Analogous embryo culture systems are used for both species and ART procedures, including IVF and SCNT, are well established in cattle, thereby facilitating reverse genetic studies (Simmet *et al.*, 2018). As an annotated *Bos taurus* genome is available, cattle also offer a useful model to study methylome changes during early development in response to culture conditions (de Montera *et al.*, 2013; See Chapter 4).



**Figure 3.1 Developmental stages and epigenetic events in bovine preimplantation embryos.**

Source: Clare *et al.* (unpublished). Abbreviation(s): DNA, deoxyribonucleic acid; Epi, epiblast; ICM, inner cell mass; PE, primitive endoderm; TE, trophectoderm.

The present study, therefore, comprised two experiments in order to enhance our understanding of methionine metabolism in bovine ovarian cells, oocytes and preimplantation embryos. Given that transcripts encoding methionine cycle enzymes (i.e. *MAT1A* and *BHMT*) were either absent or expressed at low levels in these cell types (Kwong *et al.*, 2010), the first experiment (Methionine cycle enzyme transcripts; Section 3.2.1) sought to confirm the expression of methionine cycle enzyme transcripts; *MAT2A* and *BHMT* isoforms, in somatic cells of the bovine ovary, oocytes and embryos. The *MAT1A* isoform is largely specific to the liver, whereas the low  $K_m$  *MAT2A* isoform is expressed in extrahepatic tissues, including reproductive cells (Finkelstein, 1999). An evolutionary gene duplication event took place at the root of the mammalian clade giving rise to *BHMT* and *BHMT2* paralogs. The BHMT enzyme uses trimethylglycine (TMG/betaine) as a methyl donor substrate for the remethylation of Hcy to methionine, whereas BHMT2 uses S-methylmethionine (SMM; Ganu *et al.*, 2015; Figure 3.2). Genetic variation and functional divergence between BHMT isoforms have been characterised in several mammalian species, including humans, pigs and mice (Appendix Table 3.2), however, little is known about the tissue distribution and function of BHMT2 (Li *et al.*, 2008), particularly in mammalian reproductive cells and embryos. The second experiment (Methionine and embryo development during culture; Section 3.2.2) sought to establish the developmental competence of embryos produced under *in vitro* culture conditions with 0 (non-physiological), 10 (low physiological), 50 (high physiological), and 500 (supraphysiological)  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  added methionine (Figure 3.2). Experimental endpoints involved the assessment of gross morphological and developmental parameters, including blastocyst stage, grade, cell lineage allocation and sex ratio.



**Figure 3.2. Methionine concentrations added during *in vitro* production of bovine blastocysts.**

Enzymes in *italics*; *BHMT*, betaine homocysteine S-methyltransferase; *BHMT2*, betaine homocysteine S-methyltransferase 2. Substrates: DMG, dimethylglycine; Met, methionine; SAH, S-adenosylhomocysteine; SAM, S-adenosylmethionine; SMM, S-methylmethionine; TMG, trimethylglycine.

## 3.2 Materials and methods

### 3.2.1 Methionine cycle enzyme transcripts

The expression of methionine cycle enzyme transcripts; *MAT2A*, *BHMT* and *BHMT2*, were analysed in bovine ovarian granulosa cells (GC), cumulus cells (CC), germinal vesicle (GV) oocytes, metaphase II (MII) oocytes and preimplantation embryos at various developmental stages.

#### 3.2.1.1 Sample collection

##### 3.2.1.1.1 Liver (positive control)

Bovine liver samples were harvested immediately following slaughter. Diced sections (5 mm<sup>3</sup>) were submerged in 2 mL RNA/later® tissue storage reagent (Sigma-Aldrich, Poole, UK). Samples were stored at 4°C overnight and transferred to -20°C for long-term storage.

##### 3.2.1.1.2 Germinal vesicle (GV) oocytes

Ovaries were collected from the abattoir and kept in 39°C pre-warmed phosphate buffered saline (PBS) until arrival at the laboratory. Ovaries were

rinsed with 70% ethanol and washed with PBS (39°C). Non-haemorrhagic small to medium size follicles (3-9 mm) were aspirated using a 19-gauge needle and a 10 mL syringe. The contents of each follicle were deposited into a pre-warmed 50 mL falcon tube and kept at 39°C. Oocytes were graded using a four-point scale adapted from [Goodhand \*et al.\* \(1999\)](#) according to the number of layers of compact cumulus and amount of granulation in cytoplasm (Appendix 3.1).

Grade 1 and 2 cumulus-oocyte complexes (COCs) were transferred to a 35 mm petridish containing warm PBS with 0.1% PVP (w/v) and washed three times. Cumulus-oocyte complexes were incubated in PBS/PVP containing 1 mg/mL hyaluronidase at 39°C for 2 min to aid the removal of granulosa and cumulus cells from oocytes. Cumulus-oocyte complexes were transferred to a 15 ml falcon tube containing 3 mL PBS/PVP and denuded by vortexing for 3 min. The suspension was transferred to a 35 mm petridish to recover the denuded oocytes and the wall of the falcon tube was rinsed with 1 mL PBS/PVP to ensure complete recovery. Recovered oocytes were washed three times in PBS/PVP and groups of 10 oocytes were transferred to 1 mL Eppendorf tubes before centrifugation for 2 min at maximum speed. The supernatant was removed leaving oocytes in a minimal volume (~2 µL) for snap freezing in liquid nitrogen and storage at -80°C until RNA extraction.

#### 3.2.1.1.3 Cumulus cells (CC)

The remaining PBS/PVP suspension used for vortexing and washing oocytes contained cumulus cells (CC) and was pooled into a 15 mL falcon tube. Tubes were centrifuged for 2 min at maximum speed and the supernatant discarded. The cell pellet was resuspended by vortexing in 1 mL fresh PBS/PVP and transferred to a 1 mL Eppendorf tube. The tube was centrifuged for 2 min at maximum speed, the supernatant was discarded, and the pellet was resuspended once again in 100 µL fresh PBS/PVP. Five microliters of cell suspension were added to 5 µL trypan blue (0.4% w/w) and 5 µL PBS and a live/dead cell count was achieved using a haemocytometer to ensure a sufficient number of cells were available for the mRNA extraction kit. Finally, the CC pellet was centrifuged for 2 min at maximum speed and the supernatant was removed before being snap frozen in liquid nitrogen. Cell samples were stored at -80°C until RNA extraction.

#### 3.2.1.1.4 Granulosa cells (GC)

The remaining follicular fluid containing GC was split equally between 15 mL falcon tubes and centrifuged for 2.5 min at 2,000 xg. The supernatant was discarded and the cell pellet resuspended in 1 mL fresh PBS/PVP using a Pasteur pipette. The cell suspensions were centrifuged for 2.5 min at 2,000 xg and the supernatant discarded. Potential erythrocytes were lysed by the addition of 9 mL warm dH<sub>2</sub>O. The cell pellet was quickly mixed before the addition of 1 mL 10X PBS to prevent granulosa cells lysing. The suspension was centrifuged for 2.5 min at 2,000 xg once again, the cell pellet was resuspended in 1 mL fresh PBS/PVP and the suspension passed through a cell strainer (70 µm; Fisher Scientific) to remove debris. The cell suspension was centrifuged for 2 min at 2,000 xg, the supernatant was discarded and the GC pellet was resuspended in 1 mL fresh PBS/PVP. Five microliters of cell suspension was added to 50 µL trypan blue (0.4% w/w) and 145 µL PBS and a live/dead cell count was achieved using a haemocytometer to ensure a sufficient number of cells were available for the mRNA extraction kit. Finally, the GC pellet was centrifuged for 2 min at maximum speed and the supernatant was removed before being snap frozen in liquid nitrogen. Cell samples were stored at -80°C until RNA extraction.

#### 3.2.1.2 *In vitro* embryo production (IVP)

Unless otherwise stated, all reagents were obtained from Sigma-Aldrich (Poole, UK). For a description of all media used for standard bovine IVP, see Appendix 3.2). Morphological assessment of embryos was based on that of [Bó and Mapletoft \(2013\)](#) according to International Embryo Technology Society (IETS) criteria. Evaluation of bovine embryos was achieved with a stereomicroscope at 50 to 100X magnification with the embryo in a small holding dish. Staging and grading of embryos was according to IETS guidelines (Appendix 3.3).

##### 3.2.1.2.1 Metaphase II (MII) oocytes, zygotes and embryos

Graded COCs were matured in groups of ~30 in 400 µL maturation media in 4-well plates under 5% CO<sub>2</sub> in air for 22-24 h. Cumulus-oocyte complexes were transferred to 50 µL drops containing oocyte wash medium under mineral oil. Careful pipetting of COCs allowed for oocyte isolation and a reduction in expanded cumulus cell layers to facilitate fertilisation. After washing, COCs

were transferred to 50  $\mu\text{L}$  drops of pre-equilibrated fertilisation medium ( $39^{\circ}\text{C}$ , 5%  $\text{CO}_2/\text{air}$ ) under mineral oil. Motile spermatozoa from a single bull were added to each drop ( $1 \times 10^6$  spermatozoa per mL fertilisation medium) and fertilisation was performed for 18-20 h. For a detailed description of sperm preparation by swim-up method see Appendix 3.4.

The day of IVF was counted as Day 0 of embryo development. Following IVF, presumptive zygotes were transferred to an Eppendorf containing 0.4 mL pre-equilibrated synthetic oviductal fluid (SOF) HEPES holding medium ( $39^{\circ}\text{C}$ , 5%  $\text{CO}_2/5\% \text{O}_2$ ) and denuded from attached sperm and remaining cumulus cells by vortexing for 1 min. Presumptive zygotes were washed in pre-equilibrated SOF HEPES holding media (35 mm Petri dish) and transferred in groups to 4-well plates containing 400  $\mu\text{L}$  pre-equilibrated SOF culture medium ( $39^{\circ}\text{C}$ , 5%  $\text{CO}_2/5\% \text{O}_2$ ). Embryo culture media was renewed on Day 2, 4 and 6 of culture.

Metaphase II (MII) oocytes were collected following 22-24 h of *in vitro* maturation based on the visual observation of extrusion of the first polar body ([Ikeda et al., 2010](#)). Matured MII oocytes and CC were recovered using the protocols described in Sections 3.2.1.1.2 and 3.2.1.1.3, respectively. Embryos were classified according to their stage of development (Appendix 3.3). Zygotes were collected at Day 1 (~24 h post fertilisation), 2-cell embryos at Day 2 (~48 hpi), 4-cell and 8-cell embryos at Day 3 (~72 hpi), 8-16 cell embryos at Day 4 and Day 5 (96 and 120 hpi), morulae at Day 6 (~144 hpi), early expanding blastocysts, late expanded blastocysts, hatching and hatched blastocysts were collected on Day 7, Day 8 and Day 9 (~168, 192 and 216 hpi). At each sample collection, oocytes and embryos were pooled in groups of 10 in minimal volume (~2  $\mu\text{L}$ ) PBS/PVP, snap frozen in liquid nitrogen and stored at  $-80^{\circ}\text{C}$  until RNA extraction.

### 3.2.1.3 RNA extraction

#### 3.2.1.3.1 Liver and granulosa cells

Total RNA was extracted from bovine liver and granulosa cells using the RNeasy Mini Kit (Qiagen Ltd., West Sussex, UK) following the manufacturer's protocol. Briefly, 20 mg liver were homogenised using a Polytron 4000 on ice in Buffer RLT containing 1% (v/v) 2-mercaptoethanol (600  $\mu\text{L}$ ). Up to  $1 \times 10^7$  granulosa cells were homogenised in the buffer by passing the lysate through a

20-gauge needle and syringe 10 times. Following homogenisation, samples were centrifuged at maximum speed for 3 min. The supernatant was withdrawn, transferred to a new microcentrifuge tube and mixed with 1 volume of 50% ethanol before being passed through a QIAshredder spin column (Qiagen Ltd.). The column containing RNA was successively washed, once with Buffer RW1 (700  $\mu$ L) and twice with Buffer RPE (500  $\mu$ L) before RNA elution using 40  $\mu$ L RNase free water. A 2  $\mu$ L aliquot was taken to determine the concentration of RNA by measuring the absorbance at 260 nm (A<sub>260</sub>) using a Nanodrop Spectrophotometer (ND-1000; UK). For liver, the 260/280 ratio was 2.14. For granulosa cells, the 260/280 ratio was 1.98. Remaining RNA was stored at -80°C. Approximately 900 ng liver RNA was used for reverse transcription. RNA was diluted to 0.1  $\mu$ g/ $\mu$ L before complementary DNA (cDNA) synthesis.

#### 3.2.1.3.2 Cumulus cells, oocytes and blastocysts

Due to the small amount of starting material, Poly A+ RNA was extracted from CC, oocytes (GV and MII) and blastocysts using Dynabeads® mRNA DIRECT™ purification kit (Invitrogen Ltd., Paisley, UK), following the manufacturer's protocol. Ten bovine blastocysts grouped by stage were used per extraction. This method uses short sequences of oligo(dT)<sub>25</sub> which are covalently bound to the surface of the Dynabeads. These oligo-dTs hybridize to the polyA tail of mRNA to allow its magnetic isolation. Samples were lysed in 150  $\mu$ L lysis/binding buffer at room temperature for 20 min. Following lysis, 40  $\mu$ L Dynabeads were added to each sample. The contents were mixed at room temperature for 10 min using a gyratory rocker. One sample was handled at a time while the others were kept on ice. Samples were placed in a magnetic field so that beads were caught by the magnet and the supernatant was discarded. The beads were washed three times in 100  $\mu$ L washing Buffer A and two times with 100  $\mu$ L washing Buffer B. For washing, beads were mixed by gentle vortexing and washing buffers were exchanged using the magnetic field. After the final wash, beads were resuspended in 10  $\mu$ L RNase free water and incubated at 65°C for 2 min. Tubes were immediately cooled on ice for 3 min before transfer to the magnetic field. The supernatant containing mRNA was transferred to a fresh tube and kept on ice. If reverse transcription was not conducted immediately, RNA was stored at -80°C.



### 3.2.1.4 Reverse transcription (RT)

Complementary DNA (cDNA) was synthesised using the QuantiTect® Reverse Transcription kit (Qiagen Ltd.) due to its ability to reverse transcribe very small amounts of RNA (~1 pg). Ten microliters of purified RNA were incubated with 2 µL gDNA Wipeout Buffer (7X) and 2 µL RNase free water at 42°C for 2 min to eliminate contaminating gDNA. Samples were immediately placed on ice and 1 µL the reaction was removed for a negative control (–RT) reaction and the equivalent volume of water added before reverse transcription (RT). The total volume of each PCR (+RT) reaction was 20 µL, containing 1 µL Quantiscript reverse transcriptase, 4 µL Quantiscript RT buffer (5X), 1 µL RT Primer mix (random primers and oligo dT), 1 µL diluted gDNA Wipeout Buffer (1:6) and 13 µL DNase treated RNA. The +RT reaction was mixed by flicking the tube and incubated at 42°C for 30 min followed by incubation at 95°C for 3 min to inactivate the enzyme. Resultant cDNA products were stored at -20°C until amplification by polymerase chain reaction (PCR).

### 3.2.1.5 Polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR)

#### 3.2.1.5.1 Primer design

Transcript expression of methionine cycle enzymes; *MAT2A*, *BHMT* and *BHMT2*, was determined by RT-PCR using the Eppendorf AG 22331 (Hamburg, Germany). All transcripts were visualised relative to the housekeeping gene,  $\beta$ -actin (*ACTB*). Despite the fact that the RT kit effectively eliminates gDNA, primers were designed to span exon-exon boundaries, thereby further minimising the detection of gDNA. Gene-specific primers were designed using Primer Express software version 3.0.1 (Applied Biosystems, Warrington, UK). Since *BHMT* and *BHMT2* gene paralogs have high protein sequence homology (~73%; Li *et al.*, 2008; Appendix Chapter 3), it was important to design primers that specifically amplify each isoform. The *Bos taurus* cDNA sequence for each gene paralog was downloaded using Ensembl genome browser 95 (<https://www.ensembl.org>) and their sequence homology was compared using the ClustalW2 Multiple Sequence Alignment tool (<https://www.ebi.ac.uk>; Appendix 3.5). Primer specificity was confirmed using Primer-BLAST software. Forward and reverse primers for *BHMT* and *BHMT2* were supplied by Sigma-Aldrich (Poole, UK). Primers for *MAT2A* and housekeeping gene, *ACTB*, were

supplied by Eurofins Genomics (GmbH, Anzinger Str. 7A, 85560, Ebersberg, Germany; Table 3.2). All primers were diluted with RNase free water to a final concentration of 10 pmol/ $\mu$ L.

**Table 3.2 Primers used for methionine cycle enzyme transcript expression.**

Gene		Primer sequence (5'-3')	NCBI accession no.
<i>MAT2A</i>	FP	AGTGCCCCAAAAAGCTTAAATATTGA	NM_001101131
	RP	CTTTCCCGCAGAGCTTGAGG	
<i>BHMT</i>	FP	AGAGAAAATATCCGGGCAGAAAG	NM_001011679.1
	RP	TCACACCCCCTGCTACCAAA	
<i>BHMT2</i>	FP	AGCCTGTGGGAAGCTGTAAACA	XM_003586514.5
	RP	CCCCCTGCTACCAAAGCAT	
<i>ACTB</i>	FP	CGTCCGTGACATCAAGGAGAA	NM_173979.3
	RP	CGCGGTGGCCATCTCCTG	

### 3.2.1.5.2 Transcript expression

Polymerase chain reaction was performed in a total volume of 20  $\mu$ L containing 10  $\mu$ L LightCycler® 480 Probes Master 2X (Roche Diagnostic Ltd.), 0.6  $\mu$ L forward and reverse primers, 2  $\mu$ L cDNA template and RNase free water. A negative reagent control (RC) sample was run for each tested primer set using water instead of cDNA template. In order to check for DNA contamination in samples, the –RT reaction was run using *ACTB* primer pair since this does not span an exon-exon junction (Appendix 3.6). The amplification program consisted of denaturation at 95°C for 10 s, followed by 38 cycles as follows: 95°C for 10 s, 58°C for 15 s, 72°C for 15 s, and 72°C for 10 s; with a final hold at 10°C. PCR products (10  $\mu$ L plus 2  $\mu$ L 6X loading dye; promega cat no. G1881) were run on 2.5% agarose gel stained with ethidium bromide (EtBr; 0.5  $\mu$ g/mL) and resultant bands visualised under UV light. Images were captured using the UVP GelDoc-IT imaging system. PCR products were sequenced to confirm primer specificity using liver cDNA by Source Bioscience (Nottingham, UK; Appendix 3.7).

### 3.2.2 Methionine and embryo development during culture

*In vitro* maturation (IVM), fertilisation (IVF) and embryo culture (IVC) media were formulated to contain 0, 10, 50 and 500  $\mu$ mol/L added methionine. All reagents were obtained from Sigma-Aldrich (Poole, UK), except for methionine-free TCM199 41150 media which was formulated by Gibco™ (ThermoFisher Scientific). Methionine-free Basal Eagle's medium (BME) [50X] was formulated

in-house to contain essential amino acids excluding methionine. For full details of custom-made BME and methionine stocks solutions see Appendix 3.8.

### 3.2.2.1 High performance liquid chromatography (HPLC)

Concentrations of methionine and additional amino acids in custom-made IVP media formulations were confirmed by HPLC. Amino acid concentrations in ovarian follicular fluid were also compared to culture media. The method used an Agilent 1100 HPLC and the injection programme is described in Appendix 2.2.

#### 3.2.2.1.1 Analytical grade reagents

Methanol (MeOH), acetonitrile (ACN) and sodium phosphate dibasic ( $\text{Na}_2\text{HPO}_4$ ) were purchased from Fisher Scientific (Loughborough, UK). 5-Sulphosalicylic acid dehydrate (SSA) was purchased from Acros (Fisher Scientific). Amino acid standard powders; L-Asparagine (Asn), L-Glutamine (Gln), L-Citrulline (Cit) and L-Tryptophan (Trp); amino acid standard mix (AAS18) containing L-Alanine (Ala), L-Arginine (Arg), L-Aspartic acid (Asp), L-Cystine, L-Glutamic acid (Glu), L-Leucine (Leu), L-Lysine (Lys), L-Serine (Ser), L-Threonine (Thr), L-Tyrosine (Tyr), L-Valine (L), L-Histidine (His), L-Isoleucine (Ile), L-Methionine (Met), L-Phenylalanine (Phe), Glycine (Gly) and internal standard, Norvaline (NVA) was purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (Poole, UK). Derivatisation reagents, O-phthalaldehyde (OPA) and 3-mercaptopropionic acid (MPA), were also purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (Poole, UK).

#### 3.2.2.1.2 Standard preparation and calibration

Stock solutions of individual amino acids (Asn, Gln, Cit and Trp) and internal standard (NVA) were prepared in water to a final concentration of 10 mmol/L. Amino acid standard mix (AAS18) was aliquoted at 2.5 mmol/L. All stock solutions were stored at  $-20^\circ\text{C}$  to prevent degradation. As IVP media contains fetal calf serum (FCS, 10% v/v) or bovine serum albumin (BSA, <0.6% w/v), water containing 6 mg/mL BSA (Sigma Aldrich cat no. A6003) was used as a surrogate blank matrix for the preparation of extracted calibration standards over a suitable concentration range. The final IS concentration of NVA was 200  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ .

## 3.2.2.1.3 Method validation

Calibration curves were linear over the range of 0-600 µmol/L for all compounds. L-Aspartic acid could not be accurately measured due to co-elution with an interfering peak. Selectivity was demonstrated by the ability of the assay to differentiate and quantify the specific analytes of interest in the presence of other components. The lowest concentration of the analytes with an accuracy of 80–120% was regarded as the lower limit of quantification (LLOQ). Intra-day precision (CV%) was assessed by conducting analyses of at least three replicate QC samples in the analytical batch. Recovery (%) was calculated as measured analyte concentration/standard analyte concentration\*100. Method validation parameters for the determination of amino acids are reported in Table 3.3.

**Table 3.3 Validation data for quantification of amino acids in IVP media and ovarian follicular fluid.**

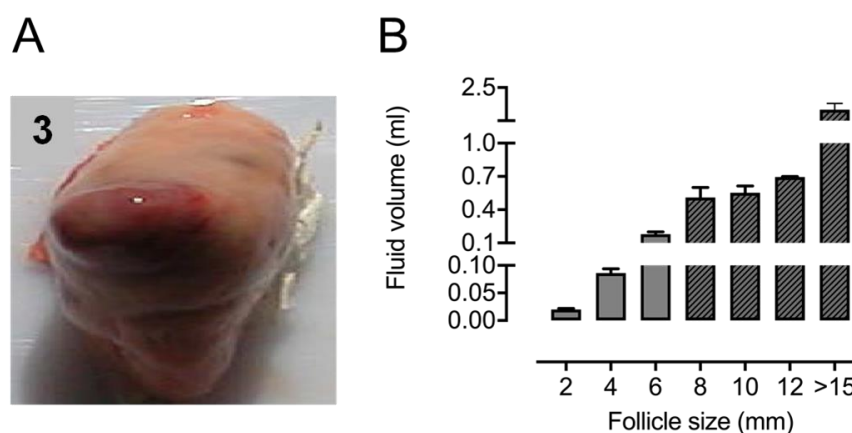
Amino acid analyte	R.T. (min)	LLOQ (µmol/L)	Intra-day precision (CV%)	Slope	R <sup>2</sup>	Recovery (%)
Glu	3.20	5	4.20	0.0022	0.99	99.6
Asn	7.24	25	4.43	0.0020	0.99	93.7
Ser	7.29	25	5.52	0.0044	0.99	98.4
Gln	8.49	25	6.13	0.0035	0.99	100.8
His	8.96	1.25	11.63	0.0027	0.99	117.9
Gly	9.09	5	13.39	0.0087	0.99	100.1
Thr	9.40	25	4.98	0.0032	0.99	98.3
Cit	10.12	25	1.72	0.0040	0.99	103.5
Arg	11.01	25	3.66	0.0073	0.99	93.2
Ala	11.24	50	10.53	0.0023	0.99	85.4
Tyr	13.37	12.5	4.74	0.0032	0.99	84.6
Cys	15.74	2.5	11.28	0.0037	0.98	96.9
Val	15.98	12.5	10.79	0.0041	0.99	104.6
Met	16.36	25	3.25	0.0051	0.99	100.9
NVA*	16.87	-	-	-	-	-
Trp	17.79	12.5	10.61	0.0046	0.99	83.8
Phe	18.32	25	6.99	0.0038	1.00	101.3
Ile	15.57	25	5.45	0.0036	0.99	101.8
Leu	19.60	25	3.15	0.0041	0.99	104.9
Lys	20.86	25	4.26	0.0023	0.99	119.4

\*Norvaline (NVA); internal standard

## 3.2.2.1.4 Follicular fluid collection

Abattoir derived ovaries were rinsed with 70% ethanol and washed with PBS. Upon assessment of ovarian luteal morphology, ten ovaries at oestrous cycle stage III (11-17 days) were selected for aspiration based on criteria defined by [Ireland et al. \(1980\)](#). Stage III ovaries were selected as the mid-range of all oestrus cycle stages (I-IV) and were characterised by absence of a red/brown

colouration leaving the corpus luteum orange/yellow with visible apical vasculature (Figure 3.3A; Orsi *et al.*, 2005; Putluru *et al.*, 2016). Individual follicles were graded on the basis of dominance using follicle size and follicular fluid volume as markers. Based on the method of Orsi *et al.* (2005), fluid from non-dominant (2 to 6 mm diameter) and dominant follicles (6 to >15 mm diameter) was collected in 2 mL syringes fitted with 19-gauge needles and the mean fluid volume recorded (Figure 3.3B).



**Figure 3.3 Ovarian follicular fluid volume increases with follicular dominance.**

Bovine ovary at oestrus cycle stage III (11-17 days). Source: Putluru *et al.* (2016) (A). Fluid volume according to follicle size (2 mm,  $n=60$ ; 4 mm,  $n=12$ ; 6 mm,  $n=5$ ; 8 mm,  $n=2$ ; 10,  $n=2$ ; 12,  $n=2$ ; >15 mm,  $n=3$ ). Non-dominant follicle (<8 mm); dominant follicle (>8 mm) (B). Data presented as mean  $\pm$  SEM.

#### 3.2.2.1.5 IVP media and follicular fluid sample extraction

Due to the aspiration of small follicular fluid volumes from non-dominant follicles (<300  $\mu$ L), aspirant samples were pooled to contain a minimum volume of 500  $\mu$ L for amino acid analysis by HPLC (2 mm,  $n=30$  follicles; 4 mm,  $n=8$ ; 6 mm,  $n=4$ ; 8 mm,  $n=1$ ; 10 mm,  $n=1$ ; 12 mm,  $n=1$ ; >15 mm,  $n=1$ ). Pooled samples were centrifuged for 5 min at 900  $xg$  to remove cell debris and stored at  $-80^{\circ}\text{C}$  until amino acid extraction. Pooled samples were analysed in duplicate or triplicate. For each follicular fluid and IVP media sample to be deproteinized, a microcentrifuge tube was prepared containing 30 mg 5-sulphosalicylic acid (SSA) powder and cooled to  $4^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Ten  $\mu$ L NVA (10 mmol/L) and 490  $\mu$ L each sample was added to the tube containing SSA. The contents were vortexed and kept at  $4^{\circ}\text{C}$  for 1 h. Following protein precipitation, the mixture was centrifuged for 15 min at 14,500  $xg$ . The supernatant was transferred to a 1 mL syringe and filtered using a Millex-GP syringe filter unit, 0.22  $\mu$ m (Merck Millipore). The filtrate was transferred to an amber HPLC vial for HPLC analysis.

### 3.2.2.2 Methionine-adjusted *in vitro* embryo production (IVP)

Bovine embryo production was conducted as described previously (Section 3.2.1.2) but with the following modifications. Grade 1 and 2 COCs were matured in groups of ~30 in 400  $\mu$ L modified maturation medium (0, 10, 50 and 500  $\mu$ mol/L added methionine) for 22 h. Matured COCs were inseminated with frozen thawed bull sperm at a concentration of  $1 \times 10^6$  sperm/mL in modified fertilisation medium (0, 10, 50 and 500  $\mu$ mol/L added methionine). Semen from the same bull was used for all experiments. Presumptive zygotes were denuded, washed in pre-equilibrated methionine-free SOF HEPES holding media and cultured in 400  $\mu$ L modified SOF culture medium supplemented with custom-made BME (0, 10, 50 and 500  $\mu$ mol/L added methionine) until Day 8 post insemination. Media was renewed every 48 h. Cleavage was assessed on Day 2 (48 hpi) and embryo development was assessed on Day 7 and 8. Blastocysts were harvested on Day 8 ( $n=135$ ) to assess gross morphological and developmental parameters (stage, grade, cell lineage allocation and primary sex ratio). Treatments were replicated on a minimum of three occasions.

#### 3.2.2.2.1 Whole-mount immunofluorescence

To investigate the effect of methionine on cell lineage allocation, Day 8 blastocysts ( $n=85$ ) cultured at 0, 10 and 50  $\mu$ mol/L added methionine media were immunostained according to [Nichols et al. \(2009\)](#). Primary antibody rabbit anti-human NANOG (dilution factor 1:400, Peprotech cat no. 500-P236) and secondary antibody Alexa Fluor™ 488 (1:500; Invitrogen cat no. A32790) was used to stain the epiblast (Epi). Primary antibody goat anti-human SOX17 (1:750; R&D cat no. AF1924) and secondary antibody Alexa Fluor™ 647 (1:500; Invitrogen cat no. A21447) was used to stain the primitive endoderm (PE). Fluoroshield™ with DAPI was used to visualise the trophectoderm (TE).

The zona pellucida was removed from blastocysts using Pronase (0.5% w/v) for approximately 1 min. Zona-free blastocysts were washed twice with warm PBS/PVP (0.1% w/v) and fixed using 4% paraformaldehyde for 15 min. Fixed blastocysts were washed three times for 5 min each in PBS/BSA (1% w/v) before permeabilisation in Triton-X100 in PBS (0.1% v/v) at room temperature for 15 min. Blastocysts were washed again, transferred into blocking solution

(containing 82% of 5% PBS/BSA, 9% donkey serum and 9% 3 M glycine) and incubated at room temperature for 1 h. After blocking, blastocysts were transferred to a 96 mini-well plate loaded with primary antibody and incubated at 4°C overnight. To remove unbound primary antibody, blastocysts were washed four times for 10 min each in PBS/BSA (1% w/v) and transferred to a 96 mini-well plate loaded with secondary antibody, and incubated at room temperature for 1 h. Following incubation with secondary antibody, blastocysts were washed again in PBS/BSA (1% w/v) and mounted with minimal volume of medium on slides using Fluoroshield™ with DAPI (Sigma-Aldrich). Mounted blastocysts were covered with a coverslip, sealed with nail varnish and differential staining was visualised using an epifluorescent microscope (Leica, DM4000B; Germany). Images obtained under 40X magnification were used to count total, TE, ICM, Epi and PE cells using FIJI software (Image J with cell counter plug-in).

#### 3.2.2.2.2 Embryo sexing by polymerase chain reaction (PCR)

Day 8 bovine blastocysts ( $n=62$ ) underwent multiplex PCR to investigate the effect of methionine concentration during *in vitro* culture on the primary sex ratio. The zona pellucida was removed from blastocysts using Pronase (0.5% w/v). Zona-free blastocysts were washed three times in PBS/PVP (0.1% v/v) and transferred in minimal volume to PCR tubes. Samples were snap frozen in liquid nitrogen and stored at -80°C until PCR analysis.

Y-chromosome specific (*SRY*) and bovine specific (*BSP*) primers were supplied by Eurofins Genomics (Table 3.4). All primers were diluted with RNase free water to a final concentration of 10 pmol/μL. Polymerase chain reaction was conducted using the Eppendorf AG 22331 in a total volume of 25 μL, containing 12.5 μL Immomix red (Bioline), 0.125 μL forward and reverse *BSP* primers, 1.25 μL forward and reverse *SRY* primers, 7.75 μL RNase free water and 2 μL DNA from single embryos or positive control DNA (1 ng DNA extracted from bovine male liver and female granulosa cells).

The amplification program consisted of an initial step at 95°C for 10 min to lyse embryonic cells, followed by 38 cycles as follows: 95°C for 30 s, 55°C for 30 s, 72°C for 1 min, and 72°C for 7 min; with a final hold at 10°C. PCR products were run on 1.6% agarose gel stained with EtBr (0.5 μg/mL) and resultant

amplification products visualised under UV light. Images were captured using the UVP GelDoc-IT imaging system.

**Table 3.4 Primers used for sex determination of Day 8 bovine blastocysts.**

Gene		Primer sequence (5'-3')	Product (bp)	NCBI accession no.
SRY	FP	TGAAACAAGACCAAAACCGGG	339	EU581861.1
	RP	TCCATGGACTTGCTCTACTGT		
BSP	FP	TTTACCTTAGAACAAACCGAGGCA	538	Rattanasuk <i>et al.</i> (2011)
	RP	TACGGAAAGGAAAGATGACCTGAC		

#### 3.2.2.2.3 Statistical data analysis

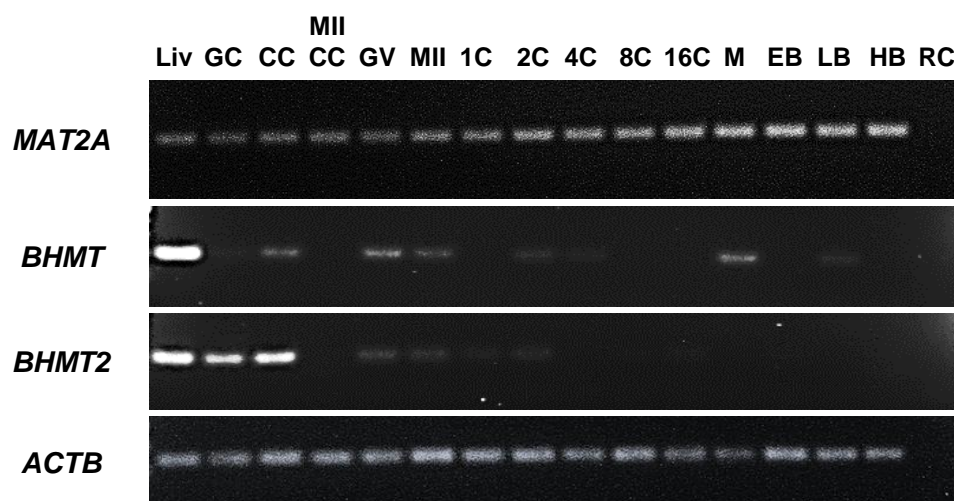
Statistical analyses were performed within the Genstat statistical package (19th Edition, VSN International, 2011). Proportion data were analysed using generalised linear regression models assuming binomial errors and used logit-link functions. Count data were analysed using generalised linear regression models assuming poisson errors and used log-link functions. Data are presented as adjusted means with SEM.

### 3.3 Results and Discussion

#### 3.3.1 Methionine cycle enzyme transcripts

RT-PCR experiments qualitatively revealed the temporal mRNA expression patterns of methionine cycle enzymes (*MAT2A* and *BHMT/2*) in bovine ovarian cells, oocytes and preimplantation embryos. All target enzymes plus the internal control (*ACTB*) were detected in bovine liver which is the principal site of 1C metabolism and a tissue characterised to express the complete set of 1C metabolism enzymes (Mato *et al.*, 2008; Lu and Mato, 2012). In line with previous studies (Kwong *et al.*, 2010; Ikeda *et al.*, 2010), *MAT2A* was detected in ovarian cells, oocytes and embryos throughout all stages of preimplantation development (Figure 3.4).





**Figure 3.4** *MAT2A*, *BHMT* and *BHMT2* transcript expression in bovine ovarian cells, oocytes and preimplantation embryos.

Liver (Liv) positive control; granulosa cells (GC); cumulus cells (CC), matured cumulus cells (MII CC); germinal vesicle oocytes (GV); metaphase II matured oocytes (MII); zygotes (1C); embryos: 2 cell (2C); 4 cell (4C); 8 cell (8C); 8-16 cell (8-16C); morulae (M); Day 7 early blastocysts (EB); Day 8 late blastocysts (LB); Day 9 hatching blastocysts (HB); reagent control (RC).

Interestingly, visible amplification products for *BHMT2* were detected in bovine CC and GC but were not clearly detected in matured CC, oocytes or preimplantation embryos (Figure 3.4). The substrate for BHMT2, S-methylmethionine (SMM), is a natural sulfonium analogue of SAM that is unique to plants and present in high quantities in corn-based diets ([Augspurger et al., 2005](#); Appendix Chapter 3). A fraction of SMM escapes ruminal fermentation and can be used as a source of by-pass methionine and methyl groups in ruminants ([Matsuo et al., 1980](#); [Hegedüs et al., 1995](#); [Augspurger et al., 2005](#)). In addition, SMM is a precursor of the osmolyte, dimethylsufoniopropionate ([Rouillon et al., 1999](#)). The mechanism of uptake and the biological function of SMM within cells of the bovine ovary are unknown and warrant further investigation in order to elucidate the role of BHMT2 within these cell types.

Weak but visible bands detected for both *BHMT* isoforms in GV and MII oocytes could be an experimental artefact due to overexposure of the gel (Figure 3.4). The presence of *BHMT* mRNA, however, supports findings of [Ikeda and colleagues \(2010\)](#) who detected *BHMT* transcript expression in bovine GV and MII oocytes, and [Benkhalifa et al. \(2008\)](#) who detected *BHMT* and *BHMT2* expression in human oocytes. The finding that oocytes express *BHMT* isoforms suggests that these germ cells harbour alternative pathways for methionine production and are, therefore, equipped with a unique methylation machinery

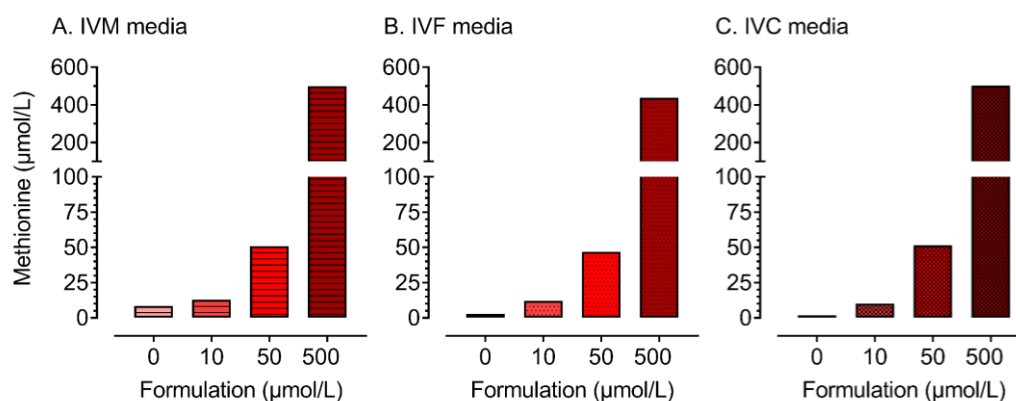
required for the establishment of the oocyte-specific methylome that takes place during the later stages of oogenesis ([Ikeda et al., 2010](#); [Demond, 2020](#)).

The present study detected transient *BHMT* mRNA expression at the morula stage of bovine embryos (Figure 3.4). This observation agrees with previous studies using bovine ([Ikeda et al., 2010](#)) and murine embryos ([Lee et al., 2012](#); Section 1.4). In mice, *Bhmt* mRNA was first expressed in morulae before decreasing in blastocysts, whilst BHMT protein expression and activity was not detected until the blastocyst stage ([Lee et al., 2012](#)). As for mice, it is possible that translation of the *BHMT* transcript does not begin until a later stage of development in bovine embryos. Measuring BHMT enzyme expression and activity was beyond the scope of the current study, however, an experiment of this nature could help to resolve contradictory findings regarding *BHMT* mRNA and enzyme expression, and its putative role in methionine metabolism in the bovine preimplantation embryo ([Ikeda et al., 2010](#); [Kwong et al., 2010](#)).

### 3.3.2 Methionine and embryo development during culture

#### 3.3.2.1 Methionine composition of custom-made IVP media

High performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) analyses confirmed concentrations of methionine in custom-made IVP media formulations (Figure 3.5). Although below the LLOQ, a basal level of methionine was present in all media formulations, including 0  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  added methionine (non-physiological concentration), due to the addition of macromolecules, fetal calf serum (FCS) and bovine serum albumin (BSA), to media (Leibfried-Rutledge *et al.*, 1986). Supplementation of IVM media with 10% FCS contributed  $\sim 3\text{--}4\ \mu\text{mol/L}$  of methionine (Figure 3.5A). Supplementation of IVF and IVC media with 0.6% and 0.3% BSA, respectively, contributed  $<3\ \mu\text{mol/L}$  (Figure 3.5B, Figure 3.5C).

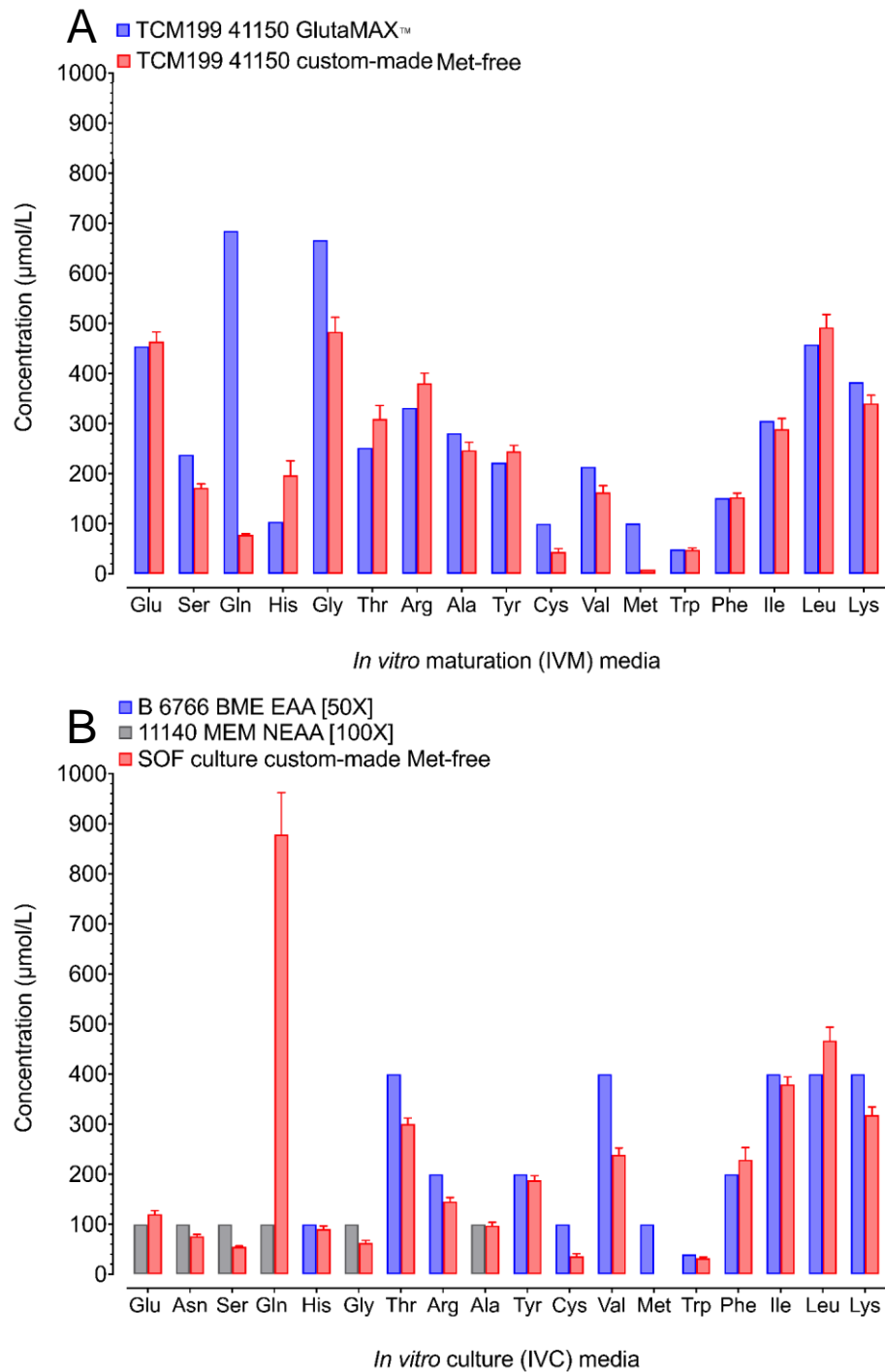


**Figure 3.5 Concentrations of methionine in custom-made *in vitro* embryo production media formulations.**

IVM, *in vitro* maturation media (A). IVF, *in vitro* fertilisation media (B). IVC, *in vitro* culture media (C). Data is based on one replicate to confirm added methionine concentration.

#### 3.3.2.2 Amino acid composition of custom-made IVP media

The amino acid profile of custom-made IVM and IVC media are presented in Figure 3.6. Amino acids were undetected in IVF media as this formulation is not supplemented with amino acids other than through the addition of BSA. The overall profile of amino acids in custom-made methionine-free TCM199 IVM media (Gibco™) was similar to that of the commercial TCM199 GlutaMAX™ formulation routinely used in our laboratory. However, there was a large discrepancy between glutamine (Gln) concentrations disclosed in the commercial formulation and those measured in custom-made media (Figure 3.6A).



**Figure 3.6 Amino acid profile of *in vitro* maturation (IVM) media (A) and *in vitro* culture (IVC) media (B).**

Custom-made media samples analysed over four replicates. Data presented as mean  $\pm$  SEM. Abbreviation(s): Ala, alanine; Arg, arginine; Asn, asparagine; BME, Basal Medium Eagle; Cys, cystine; EAA, essential amino acids; Gln, glutamine; Glu, glutamate; Gly, glycine; His, histidine; Ile, isoleucine; Leu, leucine; Lys, lysine; MEM, Minimum Essential Medium; Met, methionine; NEAA, non-essential amino acids; Phe, phenylalanine; Ser, serine; Thr, threonine; Trp, tryptophan; Tyr, tyrosine; Val, valine.

Due to the high lability of Gln at physiological pH ([Khan and Elia, 1991](#); [Jagušić \*et al.\*, 2016](#)), the GlutaMAX™ supplement is a dipeptide, L-alanine-L-glutamine, which is more soluble and more stable in aqueous solution and, therefore, does not spontaneously degrade. Since it was not possible to measure this dipetide molecule using the HPLC method, concentrations of Gln could not be accurately determined in IVM media (Figure 3.6A).

With respect to embryo culture, the classic subdivision of amino acids is into 'essential' and 'non-essential' groups. This subdivision is an over-simplification and misleading given that all amino acids are essential for protein synthesis and cellular function in the early embryo ([Sturmey \*et al.\*, 2008](#)). During culture, essential amino acids (EAA) are typically supplemented to IVC media through the addition of Basal Eagle's Medium (BME) [50X] vitamin solution (4% v/v). Formulations include amino acids that are classified as essential; histidine (His), arginine (Arg), valine (Val), methionine (Met), tryptophan (Trp), phenylalanine (Phe), isoleucine (Ile), leucine (Leu) and lysine (Lys), as well as non-essential amino acids (NEAA) that become conditionally essential under culture conditions; cystine (Cys), threonine (Thr) and tyrosine (Tyr; [Morbeck \*et al.\*, 2014](#); Figure 3.6B). As discussed above (Section 3.3.2.1), basal levels of methionine present in custom-made methionine-free IVM and IVC media formulations were below the LLOQ (Table 3.3).

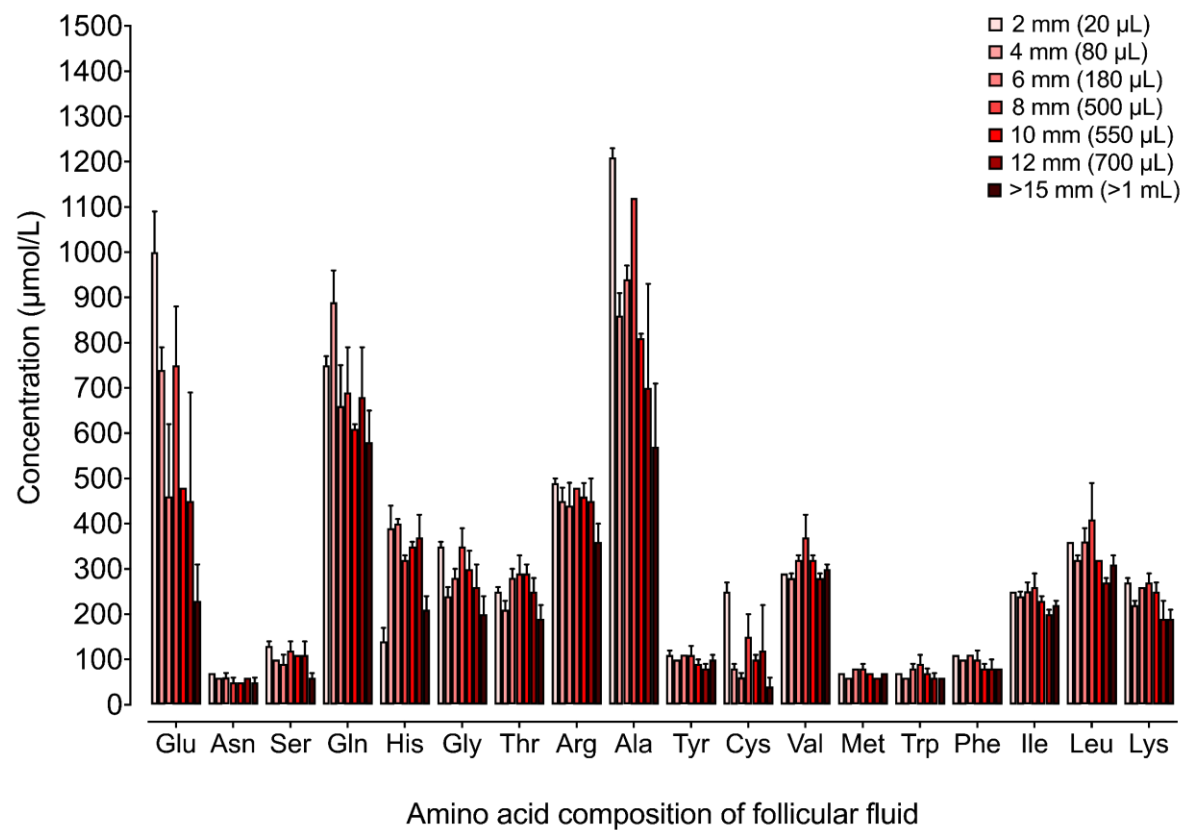
Non-essential amino acids; glutamate (Glu), asparagine (Asn), serine (Ser), glutamine (Gln), glycine (Gly) and alanine (Ala), are typically supplemented to IVC media through the addition of Minimum Essential Medium (MEM) [100X] solution (1% v/v). Glutamine is one of the most abundant amino acids in the female mammalian reproductive tract ([Orsi \*et al.\*, 2005](#); [Harris \*et al.\*, 2005](#)) that has a stimulatory effect on preimplantation embryo growth and development ([Lane and Gardner, 1997](#); [Chen \*et al.\*, 2018](#)). Because the concentration of Gln in MEM is low (~100 µmol/L) and unstable in solution, 1 mmol/L of Gln is routinely added to regular media used in IVF laboratories ([Lane and Gardner, 1993](#); [Lane and Gardner, 1997b](#)). Following its addition to our custom-made IVC media, the final Gln concentration was  $878.3 \pm 84$  µmol/L (Figure 3.6B). As with all amino acids, however, the spontaneous degradation of Gln leads to the accumulation of ammonium ions (urea) in culture media which can change pH and osmolarity with embryo-toxic consequences ([Gardner and Lane, 1993](#); [Orsi and Leese, 2004](#)). Therefore, to avoid ammonium toxicity, it was critical to renew culture media every 48 h.

### 3.3.2.3 Amino acid composition of bovine follicular fluid

Ovarian follicular fluid has been used to support the *in vitro* maturation of bovine oocytes albeit with varying degrees of success (Sirard and First, 1988; Takagi *et al.*, 1998; Heidari *et al.*, 2019). Considering that nutrient concentrations are typically non-physiological in mammalian IVM systems (Nakawaza *et al.*, 1997), the addition of follicular fluid aims to expose COCs to a more physiological hormonal and nutritional milieu (Orsi *et al.*, 2005). Clearly, fluid within the developing antral follicle contains substances required for oocyte maturation and fertilisation (Gérard *et al.*, 2002). Efforts have, therefore, been made to model nutrient profiles of IVM media on that of preovulatory follicular fluid in order to improve oocyte and embryo developmental potential (Krishner and Bavister, 1998).

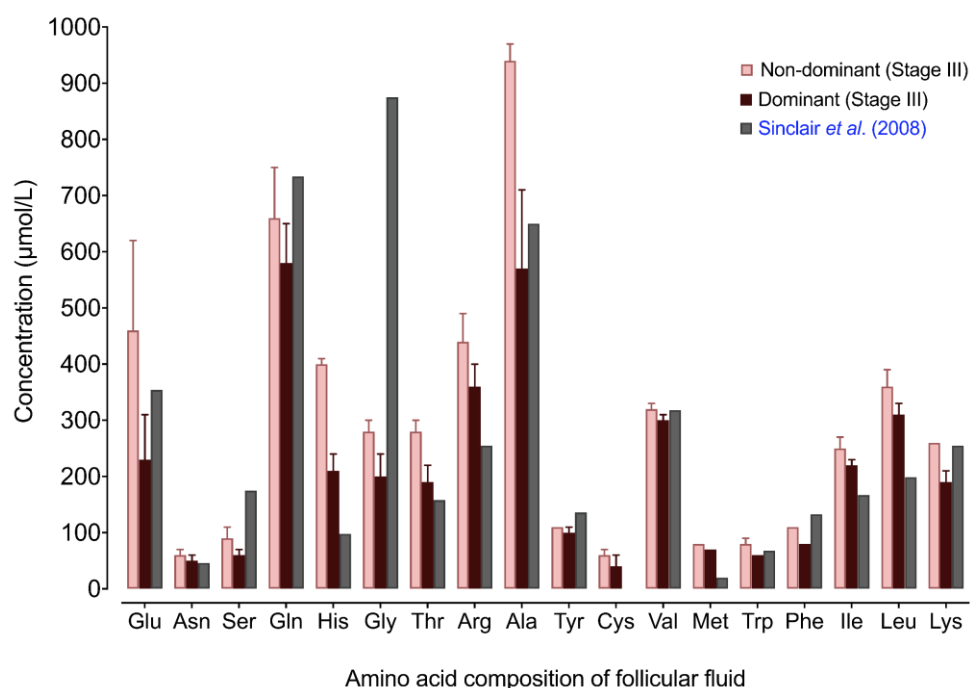
The profile of amino acids in follicular fluid has been characterised in several mammalian species (Leese and Lenton, 1990; Gérard *et al.*, 2002; Sinclair *et al.*, 2008). In cattle, the amino acid composition varies throughout the oestrous cycle and is influenced by follicular dominance. In line with reports by Orsi and others (2005), the present study found that the concentrations of certain amino acids were negatively correlated with follicular fluid volume. In particular, Glu, Gln, Arg and Ala, tend to decrease with follicular dominance (Figure 3.7).

Previous studies investigating the amino acid composition of bovine follicular fluid reported quantitatively similar profiles (Orsi *et al.*, 2005; Sinclair *et al.*, 2008) with Gln, Ala and Gly presenting as the most abundant amino acids (Orsi *et al.*, 2005; Hugentobler *et al.*, 2007; Sinclair *et al.*, 2008). Discrepancies between studies may be accounted for by differences in analytical technique, i.e. HPLC (present study) vs GC-MS (Sinclair *et al.*, 2008) and the absence of follicular segregation according to oestrus stage across studies. By way of example, the present study reports a ~3-fold lower concentration of Gly in follicular fluid than concentrations reported by Sinclair *et al.* (2008) (Figure 3.8). This is not surprising given that Gly concentrations can fluctuate markedly in follicular fluid according to stage of oestrus, starting at >800 µmol/L at Stage I and declining to <300 µmol/L at later stages (Orsi *et al.*, 2005).



**Figure 3.7 Amino acid composition of bovine follicular fluid by follicular size.**

Pooled follicular fluid samples analysed in duplicate. Data presented as mean  $\pm$  SEM. Abbreviation(s): Ala, alanine; Arg, arginine; Asn, asparagine; Cys, cystine; Gln, glutamine; Glu, glutamate; Gly, glycine; His, histidine; Ile, isoleucine; Leu, leucine; Lys, lysine; Met, methionine; Phe, phenylalanine; Ser, serine; Thr, threonine; Trp, tryptophan; Tyr, tyrosine; Val, valine.



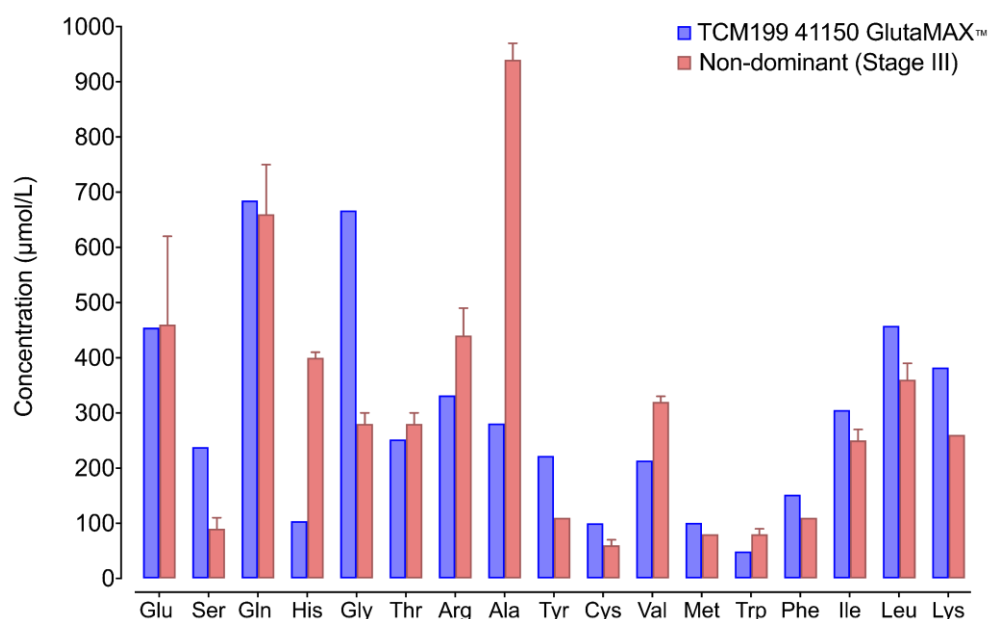
**Figure 3.8 A study comparison of the amino acid profile in bovine follicular fluid aspirated from non-dominant (2 to 6 mm) and dominant (6 to >15 mm) ovarian follicles.**

Pooled follicular fluid samples analysed in duplicate. Data presented as mean  $\pm$  SEM. Abbreviation(s): Ala, alanine; Arg, arginine; Asn, asparagine; Cys, cystine; Gln, glutamine; Glu, glutamate; Gly, glycine; His, histidine; Ile, isoleucine; Leu, leucine; Lys, lysine; Met, methionine; Phe, phenylalanine; Ser, serine; Thr, threonine; Trp, tryptophan; Tyr, tyrosine; Val, valine.

The amino acid profile of custom-made IVM media used for all methionine-adjusted IVP experiments in Chapter 3 was similar to that of Stage III bovine preovulatory follicular fluid (*in vivo*), with the exception of 1C metabolites Gly and Ser which were present at higher concentrations in IVM media than in follicular fluid, and Ala which was 3-fold higher in follicular fluid than in IVM media (Figure 3.9). Glycine is an organic osmolyte required for the regulation of cell volume homeostasis in oocytes and early cleavage stage embryos (Steeves *et al.*, 2003; Tartia *et al.*, 2009; Cao *et al.*, 2016). Both Gly and Ser are required for glutathione (GSH) synthesis and are required to protect oocytes against oxidative stress (Mattaini *et al.*, 2016; Udhe *et al.*, 2018). The interconversion of Ser and Gly catalysed by SHMT in the folate cycle facilitates methyl donation required for nucleotide synthesis (Figure 1.1), hence, both amino acids can be used interchangeably to support cell growth and development during *in vitro* maturation. The higher concentration of Ala in follicular fluid (Figure 3.9) supports observations of Elhassan *et al.* (2001), who found that Ala



concentrations were >3 mmol/L in bovine follicular, oviductal and uterine fluid, thereby exceeding concentrations in IVP media.



**Figure 3.9 A comparison of amino acids in custom-made TCM199 IVM formulation and preovulatory ovarian follicular fluid.**

Data presented as mean  $\pm$  SEM. Abbreviation(s): Ala, alanine; Arg, arginine; Asn, asparagine; Cys, cystine; Gln, glutamine; Glu, glutamate; Gly, glycine; His, histidine; Ile, isoleucine; Leu, leucine; Lys, lysine; Met, methionine; Phe, phenylalanine; Ser, serine; Thr, threonine; Trp, tryptophan; Tyr, tyrosine; Val, valine.

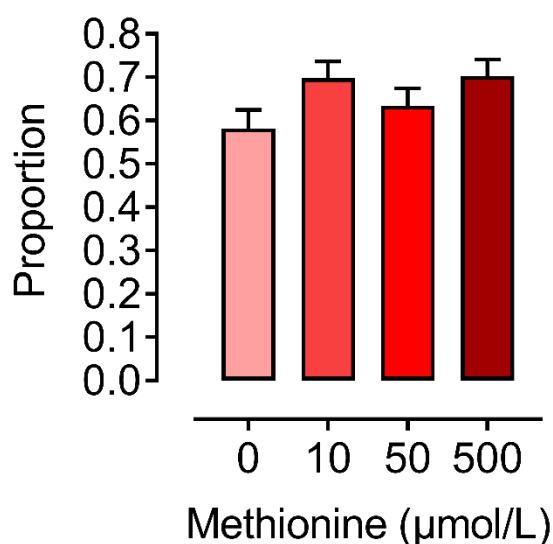
The media concentration of amino acids is one matter, but the ratio of amino acids is another. It is understood that mammalian oocytes and embryos possess an array of specialised amino acid transport systems that each transport a range of related compounds (Van Winkle, 2001; Pelland *et al.*, 2009; Guyader-Joly *et al.*, 1996). Thus, when amino acids are present at the same concentration, competition for transporter binding sites inhibits the entry of some amino acids, leading to disequilibrium within the endogenous pool (Ménézo and Hérubel, 2002). Of particular relevance to the following discussion is the interaction between methionine and Gly. Concentrations of Gly can exceed 1.2 mmol/L in the female bovine reproductive tract; such concentrations are >20-fold higher than those of methionine (Hugentobler *et al.*, 2007; Herrick *et al.*, 2016). The high Gly:Met ratio permits entry of Gly into the cells (Ménézo and Hérubel, 2002) and will be an important consideration for investigating the effects of adding methionine to media formulations during bovine IVP.

### 3.3.2.4 *In vitro* embryo production with added methionine

To our knowledge, this is the first investigation into the effect of altering methionine concentration during *in vitro* maturation, fertilisation and culture of bovine embryos. An earlier study by [Bonilla and colleagues \(2010\)](#) assessed the effects of altering methionine concentration (0-400  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) from the point of embryo culture. However, in the present study, methionine treatments were introduced from the point of oocyte maturation as this more suitably recapitulates the 'physiological' environment. *In vivo*, gametes and embryos encounter moderate fluctuations in methionine ([Hugentobler et al., 2007](#); [Bonilla et al., 2010](#)) rather than extreme concentration changes brought about by *in vitro* culture.

#### 3.3.2.4.1 Gross morphology

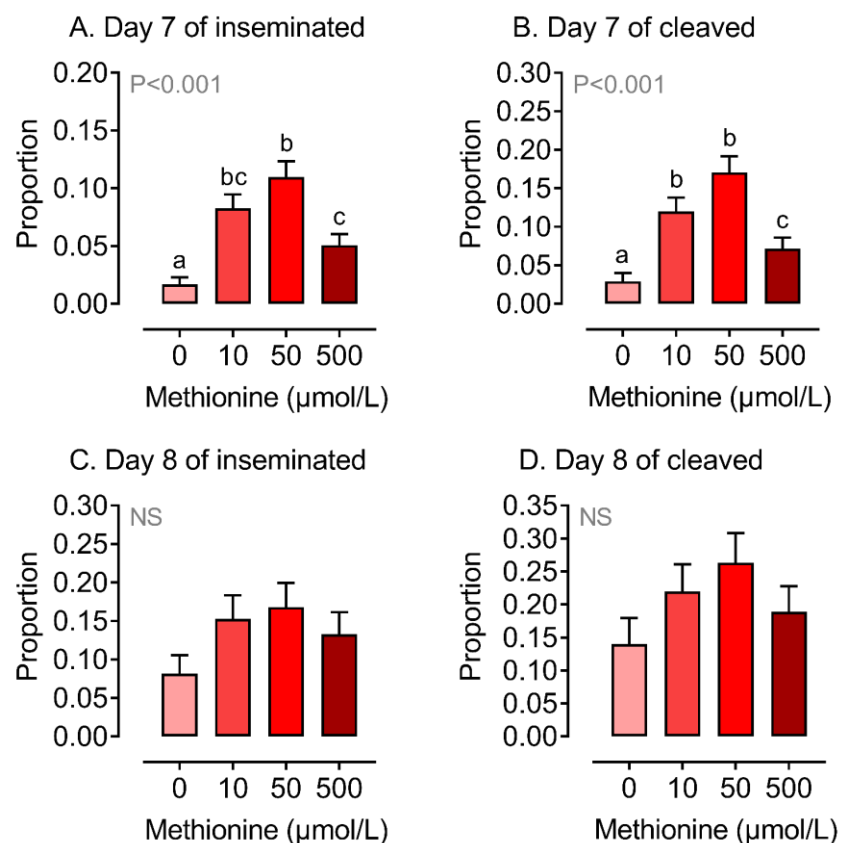
Embryos and blastocysts cultured in modified media containing 0, 10, 50 and 500  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  of added methionine were morphologically assessed according to IETS criteria (Appendix 3.3). Whilst there was a tendency for the proportion of cleaved embryos to be lowest in those cultured in non-physiological medium (0  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  added), there was no significant effect of methionine concentration on the proportion of embryos cleaved on Day 2 (Figure 3.10).



**Figure 3.10 Methionine concentration during bovine IVP had no effect on the proportion of inactivated oocytes that cleaved by Day 2 ( $P=0.147$ ).**

Data obtained over eight experimental replicates and analysed by generalised linear regression assuming binomial errors. Total number of inactivated oocytes ( $n=1,000$ ). Data presented as mean  $\pm$  SEM.

These findings were consistent with those of [Bonilla \*et al.\* \(2010\)](#) and suggest that the methionine requirements of the oocyte, zygote and early cleavage embryo are satisfied by oocyte stores and the increase in protein catabolism that occurs during oocyte maturation. Recent work by [Udhe \*et al.\* \(2018\)](#) reported a ~5-fold increase in media concentrations of methionine during bovine oocyte maturation. This egression of methionine from oocytes indicates that methionine is not limiting but is dispensible during oocyte maturation. Evidence suggests that methionine consumption and incorporation into proteins increases after the 8-cell stage and compaction ([Partridge and Leese, 1996](#)), coinciding with bovine embryonic genome activation (EGA; [Graf \*et al.\*, 2014](#); Figure 3.1). However, protein synthesis in the bovine blastocyst is reported to increase substantially at the blastocyst stage ([Edwards \*et al.\*, 1997](#)). Indeed, results from the present study found an effect ( $P<0.001$ ) of methionine concentration on blastocyst development at Day 7 (Figure 3.11A, Figure 3.11B).

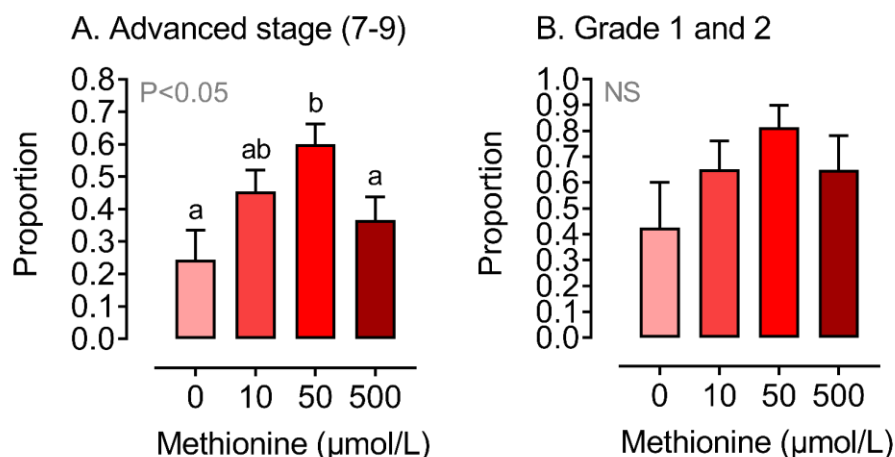


**Figure 3.11 Added methionine increases ( $P<0.001$ ) the proportion of blastocysts by Day 7.**

Data obtained over eight experimental replicates and analysed by generalised linear regression assuming binomial errors. Total number of blastocysts assessed ( $n=135$ ). Data presented as mean  $\pm$  SEM. Means labelled (a, b, c) differ ( $P<0.05$ ).

Embryos cultured in non-physiological media (0  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  added methionine) were least likely to develop to blastocysts on Day 7 ( $P < 0.001$ ). However, albeit small, a proportion of embryos did reach the blastocyst stage by Day 8 ( $0.14 \pm 0.039$ ; Figure 3.11D). There is likely to be some variation in the absolute requirements of individual bovine embryos for methionine (Bonilla *et al.*, 2010). Perhaps the requirements of certain embryos are satisfied by the remethylation of Hcy to methionine (Škovierová *et al.*, 2016) or an increased capacity for methionine uptake under deficient conditions (Guyader-Joly *et al.*, 1997). It follows that amino acid metabolism serves as a biomarker of developmental potential in bovine blastocysts (Sturmey *et al.*, 2010). Similarly, embryos cultured in supraphysiological media (500  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  added methionine) exhibited reduced development to the blastocyst stage (Figure 3.11A, Figure 3.11C). Although not statistically significant, of the physiological methionine concentrations tested, 50  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  of added methionine appears best for blastocyst development (Figure 3.11C, Figure 3.11D).

A small proportion of embryos cultured in non-physiological and supraphysiological concentrations of methionine were advanced in development (i.e. Stage 7-9; late expanded, hatching or hatched from the zona pellucida) on Day 8 ( $P < 0.05$ ; Figure 3.12A; Appendix 3.3). Methionine concentrations are thought to influence blastocyst expansion and hatching by regulating blastocoel cavity size (Bonilla *et al.*, 2010). This role is exerted through the conversion of methionine to methyl donor, SAM, which methylates cell membrane lipids and proteins to mediate their fluidity (Muriel *et al.*, 1993). A prime example is the regulation of the integral membrane protein, Na<sup>+</sup>/K<sup>+</sup>-ATPase. This enzyme is responsible for maintaining cell volume, and intra- and extra-cellular electrolyte balance by catalysing the export and import of sodium and potassium ions, respectively (Lees, 1991). In rodents, maternal hypermethioninemia decreased Na<sup>+</sup>/K<sup>+</sup>-ATPase activity, thereby impairing sodium-potassium exchange in the developing brain of pups (Schweinberger *et al.*, 2014). A similar effect of high methionine within cells of the bovine preimplantation embryo might explain, at least in part, the reduction in cavitation and blastocyst expansion observed at the supraphysiological concentration of methionine used in the present study (Figure 3.12A).



**Figure 3.12 Physiological (10 and 50 µmol/L) methionine increases the proportion ( $P<0.05$ ) of advanced transferable blastocysts.**

Proportion of Day 8 blastocysts that were advanced stage; late expanded, hatching or hatched (**A**) and of grade 1 and 2 transferable quality (**B**). Data obtained over eight experimental replicates and analysed by generalised linear regression assuming binomial errors. Total number of blastocysts ( $n=135$ ). Data presented as mean  $\pm$  SEM. Means labelled (a, b) differ ( $P<0.05$ ).

Although not statistically significant, non-physiological (0 µmol/L added) and supraphysiological (500 µmol/L added) concentrations of methionine during IVP decreased the proportion of Grade 1 and 2 (transferable) blastocysts (Figure 3.12B). The greatest proportion of advanced stage and transferable grade blastocysts were derived during culture in the high physiological methionine concentration (i.e. 50 µmol/L added; Figure 3.12).

With all aforementioned points considered, methionine deficiency and excess appear to be detrimental to bovine preimplantation embryo development. Methionine is recognised as the most toxic amino acid (Benevenga and Steele, 1984; Garlick, 2006) since its catabolism can produce high levels of volatile sulphurous compounds (Komarnisky *et al.*, 2003). Thus, it is not surprising that continual culture at supraphysiological concentrations of methionine reduces embryo viability. As discussed above, the catabolism of amino acids, i.e. methionine, can lead to the production of ammonium ions which is detrimental to embryo development (Gardner and Lane, 1993; Orsi and Leese, 2004). Moreover, excess methionine is diverted towards catabolic pathways which requires other amino acids, such as Gly and Ser (Rees *et al.*, 2006). Methionine is converted to cysteine and further oxidised to sulphate via the *transsulphuration* pathway using CTH and CBS enzymes (Figure 1.1), or via cysteine dioxygenase (CDO; Ueki *et al.*, 2011). However, early studies in

human and rodent fetal liver reported absence of CTH and CDO enzymes, indicating that the developing fetus has a limited capacity to generate sulphate from sulphur-containing amino acids until later stages of gestation (Gaul *et al.*, 1972; Rakoczy *et al.*, 2015).

Continuing with the earlier discussion (Section 3.3.2.3), the balance of methionine relative to other amino acids is critical for normal embryo metabolism and development. At the same molar concentrations, methionine almost completely prevents Gly entry into the preimplantation embryo due to its high affinity for the same transporter (Gly-specific transport system; Khatchadourian *et al.*, 1994). As demonstrated in Figure 3.6B, the typical Gly concentration of IVC media is 100  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  based on the composition of Minimum Essential Medium (Partridge and Leese, 1996). As a high Gly:Met ratio permits entry of Gly into the cells (Khatchadourian *et al.*, 1994; Ménézo and Hérubel, 2002), culturing embryos in supraphysiological methionine concentrations would shift this ratio, thereby leading to Gly deficiency. Due to the diverse roles of Gly in antioxidant balance and osmoregulation, Gly deficiency is likely to have widespread effects on embryo growth and development (Steeves *et al.*, 2003; Tartia *et al.*, 2009; Cao *et al.*, 2016). Such adverse effects of methionine-induced Gly deficiency have been observed at the whole organism level. Rats fed low protein diets (10% casein) with methionine levels 3- to 4-fold greater than the estimated requirement (0.5-0.6% of the diet) exhibited suppression of voluntary food intake and near-cessation of growth (Harper *et al.*, 1970). However, dietary Gly supplementation can reverse this growth retarded phenotype in animals fed a high-methionine diet (Benevenga and Steele, 1984).

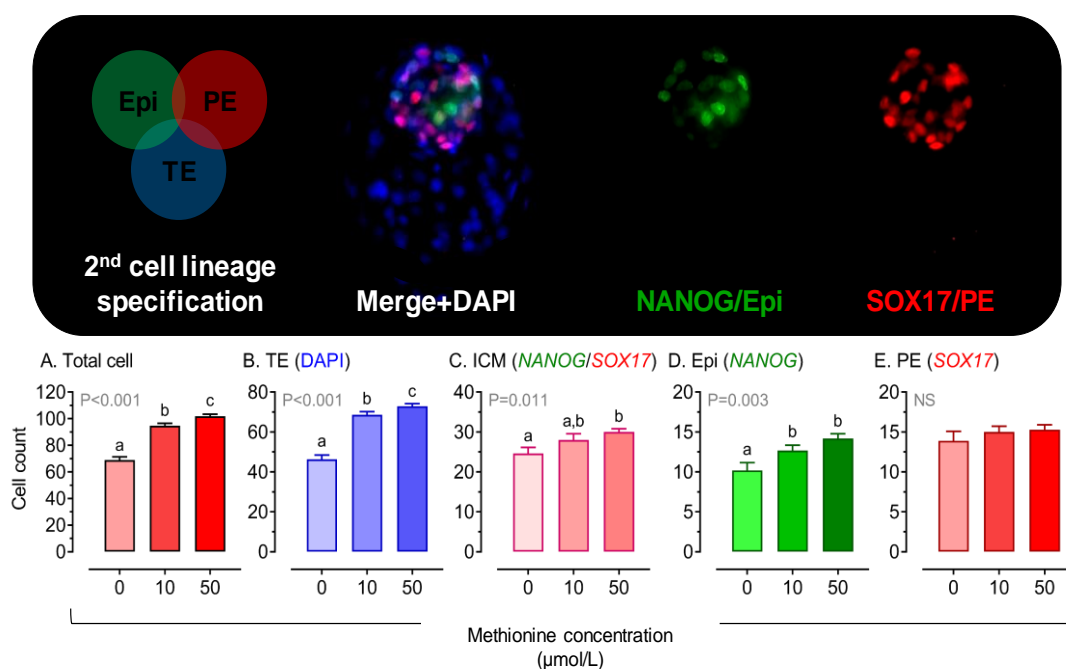
In relation to 1C metabolism, methionine deficiency or excess is likely to perturb intracellular SAM pools with downstream consequences for methyl metabolism in embryos. Shojaei Saadi *et al.* (2016) cultured bovine embryos in a high but non-lethal dose of SAM (2  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) from the 8-cell stage to blastocyst stage, and found that SAM treatment significantly increased blastocyst expansion and hatching on Day 8 (Hatching rate: 82% SAM-treated v 33% controls). Ikeda *et al.* (2012) found that culturing embryos with 10 mmol/L of ethionine, a structural analogue of methionine, inhibited the morula-to-blastocyst transition in bovine embryos but that supplementation of ethionine cultures with SAM (1-2  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) partially restored blastocyst development. Taken together, these findings suggest an important role of methionine in methyl donation during bovine

preimplantation embryo development and remains the focus of further investigation (Chapter 4).

#### 3.3.2.4.2 Cell lineage specification

The proliferation of blastomeres is one of the main factors involved in blastocyst expansion and hatching ([Shojai Saadi et al., 2016](#)). It was, therefore, hypothesised that cell number and allocation to the ICM and TE might differ according to methionine treatment. As the high physiological methionine concentration (50  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  added) yielded the greatest proportion of advanced blastocysts (Figure 3.12A), it was expected that blastocysts cultured in this concentration would have greater cell numbers and have differentiated earlier than those cultured in lower methionine concentrations.

The bovine embryo transits from the morula to blastocyst stage between days 5-8 post fertilisation (Figure 3.1). The final stage of blastocyst formation is characterised by the emergence of the pluripotent Epi and PE cell lineages (within the ICM), and the TE ([Kuijk et al., 2012](#)). NANOG is first expressed in the 8-cell bovine embryo whilst SOX17 expression begins at the 16-32 cell stage. SOX17 is co-expressed with NANOG during early embryogenesis, but these markers become mutually exclusive by the late blastocyst stage; NANOG is expressed in the Epi and SOX17 is expressed in the PE. Thus, immunofluorescence analysis of NANOG and SOX17 were used as reliable readouts of Epi and PE, respectively ([Canizo et al., 2019](#); Figure 3.13).



**Figure 3.13 Blastocyst cell number increases ( $P<0.001$ ) in a dose-dependent manner with methionine.**

Total cell count (**A**); trophectoderm (TE) cell count (**B**); inner cell mass (ICM) cell count (**C**); epiblast (Epi) cell count (**D**); primitive endoderm (PE) cell count (**E**). Data obtained over four experimental replicates and analysed by generalised linear regression assuming poisson errors. Total number of blastocysts ( $n=85$ ). Data presented as mean  $\pm$  SEM. Means labelled (a, b, c) differ ( $P<0.05$ ).

Blastocyst total cell number increased ( $P<0.001$ ) in a dose-dependent manner with increased methionine (Figure 3.13A). This observation was accompanied by significant ( $P<0.001$ ) outgrowth of the TE, the first epithelium formed in development that forms extraembryonic lineages, including the placenta (Figure 3.13B). Non-physiological concentrations of methionine (0  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  added) significantly ( $P=0.011$ ) reduced outgrowth of the ICM (Figure 3.13C). This observation was accompanied by a reduction ( $P=0.003$ ) of cells in the epiblast (Epi); the lineage that will give rise to the embryo proper (Figure 3.13D). Primitive endoderm (PE) cells, which will give rise to the yolk sac, were unaffected by methionine concentration ( $P=0.557$ ; Figure 3.13E).

Previous research has not evaluated the effect of methionine on the allocation of embryonic cells to Epi and PE lineages within the ICM, but methionine deficiency may reduce total cell numbers and skew the ratio of ICM to TE cells within Day 8 bovine blastocysts (Lane and Gardner, 1997). By way of example, culturing bovine embryos with methionine antagonist, ethionine, from the 5-cell stage reduced the total number of blastocyst cells (Ikeda *et al.*, 2012). Similarly, when early cleavage stage bovine embryos (1 to 8-cell) were cultured with the

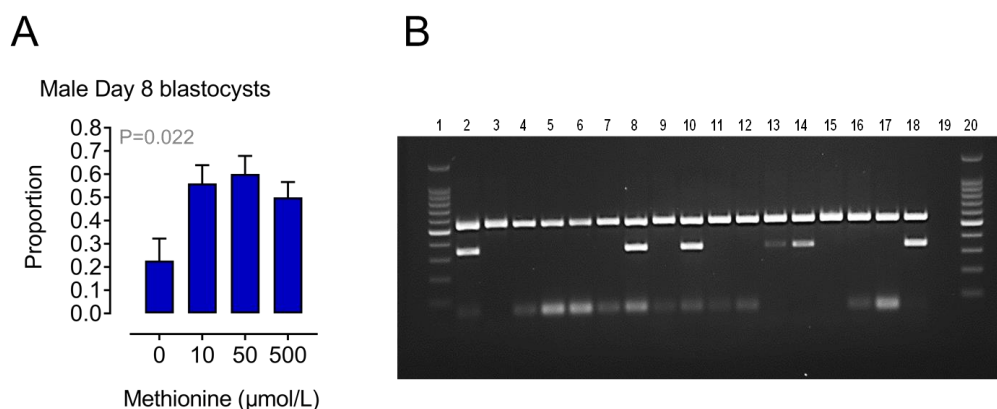


MAT2A inhibitor, fluorinated N,N-dialkylaminostilbene-5 (FIDAS; 10 and 20  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ), ICM and TE cell proliferation was impaired, and blastocoel formation reduced. This inhibitory effect was alleviated by concomitant supplementation with a high concentration of methionine (1 mmol/L; Ikeda *et al.*, 2017). In support of the finding that TE cell proliferation was significantly altered by methionine concentration (Figure 3.13B), Bonilla *et al.* (2010) also reported a numerically lower ratio of TE cells in blastocysts cultured without methionine. According to Houghton *et al.* (2006), the TE consumes more oxygen, produces more ATP, possesses a greater number of mitochondria and has a higher rate of methionine depletion than the ICM. The pluripotent ICM displays relatively quiescent metabolism in comparison to that of the TE. Thus, it is not surprising that these cell lineages proliferate differently in response to methionine concentration.

Collectively, these studies highlight the importance of methionine as the immediate precursor for SAM biosynthesis, and provide evidence of the role of methylation in cell lineage specification within the bovine preimplantation embryo.

#### 3.3.2.4.3 Primary sex ratio

Sex-specific sensitivity to 1C metabolites in the maternal diet or IVP media can affect embryonic development in a sexually dimorphic manner, thereby skewing the ratio of male to female embryos (Sturmei *et al.*, 2010; Sadre-Marandi *et al.*, 2018). Culturing bovine embryos in SAM (2  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) caused a shift in sex ratio in favour of male blastocysts (Shojaei Saadi *et al.*, 2016). It was, therefore, hypothesised that increasing methionine during culture would increase the proportion of male blastocysts. Although not statistically significant, embryo sexing by PCR revealed that physiological methionine concentrations increased the proportion of male blastocysts on Day 8 in a dose-dependent manner up to 50  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ . Interestingly, 0  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  added methionine significantly reduced the proportion ( $P=0.022$ ; Figure 3.14). It appears that male embryos are less developmentally competent following culture in non-physiological methionine (0  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ), whereas female embryos appear to be more tolerant under methionine-deficient conditions (Figure 3.14A). Previous research in cattle embryos showed sexually dimorphic differences in methionine metabolism between male and female embryos, and females showed increased depletion of methionine during *in vitro* culture compared to males (Sturmei *et al.*, 2010).



**Figure 3.14 Non-physiological (0  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) methionine concentration reduces ( $P=0.022$ ) the proportion of male blastocysts.**

Data obtained over three experimental replicates and analysed by generalised linear regression assuming binomial errors. Total number of blastocysts ( $n=62$ ). Data presented as mean  $\pm$  SEM (**A**). PCR gel electrophoresis to determine the effect of methionine on sex of bovine embryos. *BSP* amplicon (X chromosome; 538 bp) and *SRY* amplicon (Y chromosome; 339 bp) (**B**). Lanes 1 and 20: 100 bp marker. 2: Male liver +ve control; 3: Female liver +ve control. Lanes 4 to 19: cleaved embryos. Lane 19: reagent control (RC).

Research examining sexually dimorphic differences in embryonic growth and survival of human embryos demonstrated that female embryos can respond to sub-optimal culture environments by altering the expression of multiple genes and proteins to regulate their growth in an attempt to survive environmental insults. On the contrary, males appear to be less versatile and are, therefore, at higher risk of developmental arrest (Clifton, 2010; Rubessa *et al.*, 2011; Alur, 2019). This example of sexual dimorphism has been observed in natural populations of ruminant species wherein the sex ratio is biased towards female embryo development when nutritional resources are limited. This maternal adaptive strategy is thought to compensate for the high metabolic cost of rearing males during times of nutritional stress (Clutton-Brock *et al.*, 1986; Kruuk *et al.*, 1999).

A sex-specific response to methionine metabolism has been observed previously. In sheep and rats, methionine deficiency caused metabolic programming of obesity, insulin resistance and hypertension in male offspring (Sinclair *et al.*, 2007; Maloney *et al.*, 2011). As male and female embryos differ in their cellular metabolism, developmental rate, gene transcription and epigenetic processes (Mao *et al.*, 2010; Gallou-Kabani *et al.*, 2010; Rubessa *et al.*, 2011), the precise mechanisms underpinning this sex-specific sensitivity to methionine are unclear (Laguna-Barraza *et al.*, 2012). One possible mechanism

relates to the difference in sex chromosome dosage. Phenotypic differences in male and female embryos may be attributed to transcriptional differences resulting from unbalanced expression of X-linked genes and the differential expression of autosomal genes that are regulated by sex chromosomes (Bermejo-Alvarez *et al.*, 2011). Such genes are involved in protein translation, catabolism and transport; epigenetic regulation of gene expression via DNA methylation; and, mitochondrial activity with widespread effects on molecular and metabolic pathways that can influence embryonic survival rate or long-term effects for offspring health (Bermejo-Alvarez *et al.*, 2008; Bermejo-Alvarez *et al.*, 2010; Sturme *et al.*, 2010; Heras *et al.*, 2016).

### 3.4 Concluding remarks

HPLC analyses of custom-made IVP media accurately confirmed concentrations of methionine in treatments used for *in vitro* production of bovine embryos. In addition, the profile of other amino acids in custom-made IVM and IVC media was similar to that of commercial media routinely used in our laboratory. Altering the concentration of methionine within normal physiological ranges (10 and 50  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) during IVP affects bovine preimplantation embryo development. In support of conclusions drawn by Bonilla and others (2010), the methionine requirement of the bovine embryo resides within physiological limits. Of those concentrations tested, the high physiological concentration (50  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  added methionine) appeared to be best for development, yielding the greatest proportion of advanced blastocysts that were expanding, hatching or hatched. Blastocysts cultured at this concentration also had the highest total cell number which was accompanied by a significant increase in TE cells.

Culturing embryos in non-physiological methionine (0  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) reduced the proportion of male blastocysts compared to females. These findings suggest that sexually dimorphic sensitivity to aberrant culture conditions may originate at the earliest stages of periconceptual development. Based on the observation that SAM supplementation also favoured male blastocyst development during bovine embryo culture (Shojaei Saadi *et al.*, 2016), it is hypothesised that epigenetic modifications to DNA methylation are responsible for the sex-specific nutritionally programmed effects of methionine. Methylation is also involved in the regulation of cell proliferation, lineage specification and blastocyst expansion (Muriel *et al.*, 1993; Ikeda *et al.*, 2017), therefore, a

primary function of methionine during early embryogenesis is likely exerted through the production of methyl donor, SAM.

Given that culture media concentrations of methionine range from 0 to 500  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  (Table 1.5), it was important to investigate the developmental effects of culturing embryos in clinically relevant concentrations. As was expected, non-physiological (0  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) and supraphysiological (500  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) concentrations were detrimental to bovine blastocyst development. Even moderate changes to methionine, within physiological limits, affected the gross morphology of preimplantation blastocysts, thereby emphasising the importance of providing an optimal nutritional environment for healthy embryo development. The visual assessment of embryo morphology is an inadequate metric to evaluate the safety and efficacy of the culture media composition of methionine. Hence, an epigenetic assessment provides a valuable adjunct to elucidate the molecular mechanisms that may underpin the observed phenotypic effects of methionine observed during *in vitro* bovine embryo culture.

# Chapter 4

## **Methionine and epigenetic programming of the bovine preimplantation embryo**

## 4.1 Introduction

DNA methylation is an important epigenetic modification that underpins dynamic reprogramming during mammalian embryogenesis ([Morgan et al., 2005](#); [Guo et al., 2014](#)). Primarily, 5-methylcytosine (5mC) is involved in transcriptional regulation of gene expression, retrotransposon silencing, X-chromosome inactivation and genomic imprinting ([Hochberg et al., 2011](#); [Smith and Meissner, 2013](#); [Messerschmidt et al., 2014](#)). The periconceptual nutritional environment, particularly the availability of 1C substrates and cofactors, can induce alterations to the embryonic methylome, which can lead to permanent changes in the phenotype of offspring ([Sinclair et al., 2007](#); [Maloney et al., 2011](#)). Some of the most remarkable examples of modifying epigenetically sensitive genes via maternal diet were demonstrated with metastable epialleles in yellow agouti ( $A^y$ ) mice. Methyl donor supplementation during pregnancy increased DNA methylation and altered body composition, and metabolism of offspring of  $A^y$  mice ([Wolff et al., 1998](#); [Waterland and Jirtle, 2003](#); [Dolinoy, 2008](#); discussed in Section 1.1.1.2).

Studies in ruminants have also shown that methyl donor availability during the periconceptual period can induce epigenetic changes in offspring. Relevant reductions of methionine and other 1C metabolites in the diet of pregnant ewes led to hypomethylation of 88% of loci in offspring fetal liver. As 53% of the affected loci were specific to males, the observed epigenetic response to low methyl group availability appeared to be sex-specific ([Sinclair et al., 2007](#)). On the contrary, feeding methyl rich diets to pregnant ewes increased methylation and altered the expression of imprinted genes, *insulin like growth factor 2 receptor (IGF2R)* and *H19*, in fetal tissues ([Lan et al., 2013](#)). Imprinted genes are differentially methylated to allow parent-of-origin-specific monoallelic expression during fetal development. It follows that this subset of genes are particularly sensitive to aberrant methylation during periconceptual development ([Kappil et al., 2015](#)). It is, therefore, anticipated that exposure to nutritional insult (e.g. low methionine), non-physiological *in vitro* culture environments and embryo manipulations during ART may interfere with the establishment and/or maintenance of genomic imprinting in gametes and preimplantation embryos ([Young et al., 1998](#); [Sinclair et al., 2000](#); [Young et al., 2001](#); [Anckaert et al., 2010](#); [Chen et al., 2013](#); [Chen et al., 2015](#)).

The effect of methionine concentration on the methylome of bovine embryos remains inconclusive. [Peñagaricano and others \(2013\)](#) reported that feeding dairy cattle a marginal difference in maternal dietary methionine (1.89 v 2.43% methionine of metabolisable protein) was sufficient to cause significant changes to the methylome and transcriptome of Day 7 embryos. The expression of 72% of genes that were critical for embryonic development and adult physiological function (i.e. immune response) were decreased at the higher methionine intake as a likely result of increased DNA methylation at CpG islands (CGIs) in the gene promoters ([Peñagaricano et al., 2013](#)). Conversely, [Acosta et al. \(2016\)](#) found that supplementation of the maternal diet with methionine (0.08% of dry matter intake) reduced cytosine methylation in flushed embryos at Day 6.5.

The addition of methionine (0, 7 and 21  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) during *in vitro* culture of bovine embryos was found to have no significant effect on cytosine methylation at Day 8 ([Bonilla et al., 2010](#)). However, the addition of the downstream product of methionine, SAM (2  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ), during culture increased cytosine methylation in Day 8 bovine blastocysts ([Shojaei Saadi et al., 2016](#)). Similarly, the inhibition of methionine by the addition of methionine antagonist, ethionine (1-10  $\text{mmol/L}$ ), during culture reduced cytosine methylation in blastocysts ([Ikeda et al., 2012](#)). These inconsistent findings are likely to be due to different methodologies employed to measure 5mC methylation in embryos. A large number of studies have measured the intensity of fluorescence after labeling with anti-methylcytosine ([Dean et al., 2001](#); [Beaujean et al., 2004](#); [Park et al., 2007](#); [Bonilla et al., 2010](#); [Dobbs et al., 2013](#); [Acosta et al., 2016](#)). Whilst immunostaining techniques are descriptive and can provide information about overall methylation dynamics, they are only semi-quantitative and cannot provide sequence-specific information about differentially methylated regions (DMRs). Thus, determination of the effect of methionine supplementation on specific DNA methylation patterns in developmentally important genes is required in order to understand the functional ramifications for offspring health and physiology.

Based on the observation that altering methionine within physiological ranges during IVP affected the gross morphology of bovine blastocysts (Chapter 3), it was hypothesised that a subtle reduction in physiological methionine during IVP would cause epigenetic changes in preimplantation embryos with implications for altered gene expression. The present study, therefore, sought to compare the cytosine (CpG) methylation status in the ICM and TE of Day 8 bovine

embryos following culture in physiologically high (50  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) and low (10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) concentrations of added methionine using reduced representation bisulphite sequencing (RRBS), a 'gold standard' method that provides genome-wide coverage of dense areas of CpGs methylation (e.g. CGIs) with single-base resolution ([Chatterjee \*et al.\*, 2012](#); [Guo \*et al.\*, 2015](#)).

## 4.2 Materials and methods

### 4.2.1 *In vitro* embryo production

Full details of IVP procedures for bovine embryos were as described in Section 3.2.1.2 using custom-made media supplemented with high (50  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) and low (10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) added methionine (Appendix 3.8). As DNA methylation can be influenced by stage of development, only Day 8 blastocysts that were  $\geq$ Stage 7 (i.e. late expanded, hatching or hatched) were selected for RRBS analysis from each treatment. DNA methylation can also be influenced by embryo sex. As reported in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3.2.4.3), a statistically similar proportion of male blastocysts developed in each physiological concentration (Figure 3.14A). As blastocysts produced for RRBS analysis were not sexed it was assumed that similar proportions of male and female blastocysts were used. It was also confirmed that stage of development on Day 8 was not influenced by embryo sex. Following culture in 50  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  of methionine, 90% of male and 83% of female blastocysts were  $\geq$ Stage 7. At 10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ , 67% of male and 67% of female blastocysts were  $\geq$ Stage 7.

### 4.2.2 Immunodissection of bovine blastocysts

Inner cell mass (ICM) and trophectoderm (TE) cells were isolated from Day 8 bovine blastocysts (Stage 7-9, Grade 1 and 2) by immunodissection based on the method of [Bogliotti \*et al.\* \(2018\)](#) with the following modifications. The zona pellucida was removed using Pronase (0.5% w/v) and embryos were washed twice in warm PVP/PBS (0.1% w/v) before incubation in SOF HEPES holding medium containing 50% anti-bovine serum (Jackson ImmunoResearch) at 38°C for 1 h. Following incubation, blastocysts were washed and incubated in SOF HEPES holding medium containing 50% guinea pig complement (Innovative Research) at 38°C for 3-5 min. Following an additional wash, the ICM was isolated from the TE using a small-bore glass pipette. Matched ICM and TE cell



samples were pooled by lineage ( $n=5$ ; Table 4.1) and transferred to a PCR tube in 1  $\mu\text{L}$  sterile PBS. Cell samples were kept on dry ice until storage at  $-80^{\circ}\text{C}$  until DNA methylation analysis by reduced representation bisulphite sequencing (RRBS).

**Table 4.1 Immunodissected inner cell mass (ICM) and trophectoderm (TE) cells isolated from Day 8 bovine blastocysts were pooled ( $n=5$ ) by lineage for DNA methylation analysis.**

Rep	Methionine ( $\mu\text{mol/L}$ )			
	50		10	
	ICM	TE	ICM	TE
1	5	5	5	5
2	5	5	5	5
3	5	5	5	5

Whole embryos ( $n=5$ ) cultured in each physiological methionine concentration (50 and 10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) immunodissected. Three experimental replicates. Matched ICM and TE samples were pooled. Total number of blastocysts ( $n=30$ ).

### 4.2.3 Validation of cell lineage purity

To assess the purity of the immunodissected cell samples, the relative expression of trophectoderm-specific marker, *GATA3* (Ozawa *et al.*, 2012), was measured in pooled ICM and TE samples by qPCR. This validation experiment was conducted over 5 replicates (each replicate constituted pooled ICM ( $n=15$ ) and pooled TE ( $n=15$ ) samples). Whole blastocysts ( $n=40$ ) were used for optimisation and validation of the qPCR method.

#### 4.2.3.1 RNA extraction and cDNA synthesis

Poly A+ RNA was extracted from pooled whole blastocysts ( $n=40$ ), pooled ICM ( $n=15$ ) and pooled TE ( $n=15$ ) using Dynabeads mRNA DIRECT kit (Invitrogen Ltd., Paisley, UK) and reverse transcription to cDNA was achieved using QuantiTect RT kit (Qiagen Ltd), as described previously (Section 3.2.1.3.2 and 3.2.1.4). Following DNase treatment using the kit, 1  $\mu\text{L}$  was removed for -RT reaction and the equivalent volume of water was added before RT. Blastocyst, ICM and TE cDNA was diluted to a final concentration of 0.1 blastocyst/ $\mu\text{L}$ , 0.25 ICM/ $\mu\text{L}$  and 0.25 TE/ $\mu\text{L}$ , respectively.

## 4.2.3.2 Primer design

Primers for *GATA3* and eight reference genes were designed using Primer Express software version 3.0.1 (Applied Biosystems) and were supplied by Eurofins Genomics (Ebersberg, Germany; Table 4.2). Primers were tested using bovine liver cDNA and PCR products were sequenced by Source Bioscience (Nottingham, UK). Calibration standard curves constituting a 5-fold dilution series of blastocyst cDNA were conducted to verify assay linearity and efficiency of amplification (Appendix 4.1). Data were normalised to the four most stable reference genes (*YWHAZ*, *TBP*, *H2AFZ*, *B2M*) using Reference Gene Selector tool in CFX Maestro™ Software based on GeNorm algorithm (Figure 4.1). Reference gene selection was confirmed using geNorm software based on geNorm M and V values (Appendix 4.2).

**Table 4.2. Primers used for the detection of trophectoderm-specific marker, *GATA3*, and reference genes in bovine blastocysts and immunodissected embryonic cell samples.**

Gene		Primer sequence (5'-3')	Product (bp)	NCBI accession no.
<i>GATA3</i>	FP	AACATCGACGGTCAAGGCAA	217	NM_001076804.1
	RP	GGTGGATGGACGTCTTGGAG		
<i>YWHAZ</i>	FP	GATATCTGCAATGATGTACTGTCTCTTTT	107	NM_174814.2
	RP	CGGTAGTAGTCTCCTTTTCATTTTCAA		
<i>TBP</i>	FP	GAATATAATCCCAAGCGTTTTGCT	103	NM_001075742.1
	RP	TGGCTCCTGTGCACACCAT		
<i>H2AFZ</i>	FP	GCAGGAAATGCATCGAAAGAC	126	NM_174809.2
	RP	AATGACACCACCACCAGCAATT		
<i>B2M</i>	FP	ATCCAGCGTCCTCCAAAGATTC	132	NM_173893
	RP	CTCCCCATTCTTCAGCAAATCG		



**Figure 4.1 Reference gene stability plot using Reference Gene Selector Tool in CFX Maestro™ software.**

**Green:** Reference genes are stable and represent minimal variation across samples tested. Any genes can be selected from this group for use as reference genes. **Yellow:** Reference genes are not ideally stable and represent moderate variation across samples tested. At least three of these reference genes can be used for study analysis.

#### 4.2.3.3 Quantitative real-time PCR

The qPCR reaction contained 10 µL QuantiNova® SYBR® Green (Qiagen Ltd.), 1 µL each primer, 2 µL cDNA template and 6 µL RNase free water. A negative no template control sample was run for each tested primer set using water instead of cDNA template, and minus reverse transcription (–RT) controls were tested to confirm the absence of gDNA. Each 20 µL sample was analysed in duplicate using low profile, non-skirted, clear 96-well plates in the Bio-Rad thermal cycler CFX96 Real-Time System (Bio-Rad, Hercules, CA, USA). The amplification programme included enzyme activation at 95°C for 2 min, followed by 40 cycles of 2-step cycling: 95°C for 5 s (denaturation) and 60°C for 10 s (annealing and extension).

#### 4.2.4 DNA methylation analysis

##### 4.2.4.1 Reagents

Unless otherwise stated, the following reagents were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich. *Lysis buffer*: Tris-HCl (1 M), EDTA (50 mmol/L), Triton X-100, KCl (1M), Nuclease-free PCR water, and Protease (20 mg/mL; Qiagen). *Msp1 digest master mix*, *End-repair/dA tailing master mix* and *adapter ligation mix*: Msp1

restriction endonuclease (Thermo Fisher Scientific), Tango buffer (Thermo Fisher Scientific), unmethylated  $\lambda$ -DNA (Promega), Klenow fragment, exo- (NEB), dNTP set (NEB), Blunt-end/TA DNA ligase master mix (NEB), Methylated adaptors NEBNext® oligo for Illumina methylated adaptor index primer set 1 (NEB) and USER™ enzyme (NEB). *tRNA stock*: yeast tRNA, Binding buffer. *Purification*: Zymo DNA clean and concentrator kit (Zymo), Buffer EB (10 mmol/L Tris; Qiagen). *Bisulphite conversion*: EZ DNA Methylation-Gold™ kit (Cambridge Biosciences). *PCR Library Preparation*: KAPA KiFi HS Uracil+ master mix (Roche), absolute ethanol (Thermo Fisher Scientific), MinElute PCR kit (Qiagen), MinElute gel extraction kit (Qiagen), 50 bp marker (Thermo Fisher Scientific), 100 bp marker (Promega) and Qubit HS dsDNA high-sensitivity assay kit (Thermo Fisher Scientific).

#### 4.2.4.2 Reduced Representation Bisulphite Sequencing (RRBS)

Library preparation for RRBS described by [Guo et al. \(2015\)](#) was optimised in our laboratory by Dr. WY Kwong. Stock and working solutions were prepared as described in Appendix 4.3. To improve the suitability of RRBS for a low number of embryonic cells and to minimise the loss of DNA, the following experimental steps were integrated into a single-tube reaction using 1.5 mL LoBind Eppendorf tubes:

##### 4.2.4.2.1 gDNA purification

Pooled ICM and separately pooled TE cell samples were thawed and briefly centrifuged. Four  $\mu$ L lysis buffer containing protease was added to cell samples to release gDNA. Tube contents were mixed and centrifuged before incubation at 50°C for 3 h and then 75°C for 30 min to inactivate the protease enzyme.

##### 4.2.4.2.2 Restriction enzyme (Msp1) digestion

Each sample was centrifuged once again before the addition of 13  $\mu$ L Msp1 digestion mixture containing restriction endonuclease enzyme. Unmethylated  $\lambda$ -DNA (8 pg/ $\mu$ L) was spiked into all samples before Msp1 digestion to monitor the rate of bisulphite conversion. The digestion mixture was incubated at 37°C for 3 h and then 80°C for 20 min to inactivate Msp1 before another brief centrifugation and storage on ice.

#### 4.2.4.2.3 End-repair and dA tailing

Two  $\mu\text{L}$  end-repair/dA tailing master mix containing Klenow fragment, end-repair dNTP mix and Tango buffer (1X) was added to the Msp1 digestion mixture and incubated at 37°C for 40 min. This was followed by an incubation at 75°C for 15 min to inactivate DNA Polymerase 1, Klenow fragment. Tubes were briefly centrifuged and kept on ice.

#### 4.2.4.2.4 Adapter ligation

Samples were incubated at 20°C for 20 min with 5  $\mu\text{L}$  adapter ligation mix containing 20-fold diluted methylated adapter. Next, 3  $\mu\text{L}$  USER™ (Uracil-Specific Excision Reagent enzyme) was added to each sample. The contents were mixed and centrifuged before incubation at 37°C for 15 min. Samples were centrifuged again and kept on ice. Binding buffer containing 10 ng/ $\mu\text{L}$  tRNA was added to DNA samples and purification was achieved using Zymo DNA clean and concentrator kit. Samples were eluted in 10  $\mu\text{L}$  EB buffer in a 0.2 mL PCR tube and stored at -80°C until bisulphite conversion.

#### 4.2.4.2.5 Bisulphite conversion

Bisulphite conversion of DNA was achieved using the EZ DNA-Methylation Gold™ kit according to the manufacturer's protocol. First, 10  $\mu\text{L}$  water was added to the DNA sample (to achieve a final volume of 20  $\mu\text{L}$ ), followed by 130  $\mu\text{L}$  CT Conversion Reagent. The DNA sample contents were mixed and centrifuged prior to bisulphite conversion. The double-stranded DNA was denatured during incubation at 98°C for 10 min, then at 64°C for 2.5 h to ensure full bisulphite conversion, with a final hold at 4°C. All steps were performed in a PCR thermocycler.

Bisulphite converted DNA was subjected to on-column desulphonation and purification using Zymo-Spin™ column technology using 10 ng tRNA as a protective carrier. Briefly, M-Binding Buffer (600  $\mu\text{L}$ ) plus the converted DNA sample were loaded into a Zymo-Spin™ IC column placed inside a collection tube. The contents were mixed by gentle inversion before centrifugation for 30 s at maximum speed. The flow-through was discarded. Next, 100  $\mu\text{L}$  M-Wash Buffer was added to the column and the contents were centrifuged for 30 s at maximum speed. M-Desulphonation Buffer (200  $\mu\text{L}$ ) was added to the column

and left to incubate at room temperature for 15-20 min. Following incubation, the contents were centrifuged for 30 s, 200 µL M-Wash Buffer was added to the column and the contents were centrifuged once more. This wash step was repeated. The column was placed in a 1.5 mL microcentrifuge tube and 10 µL EB buffer was added directly to the column matrix before centrifugation for 30 s to elute the DNA. Bisulphite treated DNA samples were stored at -80°C until use.

#### i) RRBS Library Preparation

The purified DNA was subjected to amplification by PCR using the RRBS Library Preparation master mix containing KAPA HiFi uracil+ DNA polymerase. The amplification conditions were as follows: 95°C for 45 s, followed by 16 cycles of 15 s at 95°C, 60°C for 30 s, and 72°C for 1 min. PCR products were purified using the MiniElute PCR kit (Qiagen) and DNA was eluted in 12 µL EB buffer. The speed-vac was used for 5 min to remove residual ethanol and 10 µL water was added to each DNA sample.

#### 4.2.4.3 Library quality control (QC)

Following PCR enrichment, 1 µL purified PCR product was quantified using the Qubit HS dsDNA kit and stored at -80°C. The remaining sample volume was sent to Edinburgh genomics (University of Edinburgh, UK) for quality control, pooling and next-generation sequencing. DNA concentration, quality and integrity were confirmed using the Agilent TapeStation. Libraries were pooled and amplified DNA fragments of 200-600 bp were size-selected and primer adapters removed using the BluePippin system.

##### 4.2.4.3.1 Multiplex sequencing

The final 12 quality-ensured libraries were multiplexed and sequenced on one lane of an Illumina NovaSeq™6000 (S1 flow cell) to achieve an average of ~78 million 150 bp paired-end reads. Data were de-multiplexed with bcl2fastq conversion software and quality control was conducted using Sequencing Analysis Viewer (SAV) and FASTQC (Babraham Bioinformatics) software. Sequences met the standard Illumina quality criteria of cluster density, pass filter and quality scores (Q) and were converted to FASTQ files using standard Illumina pipeline (Aspera software).

## 4.2.4.4 Bioinformatic Data Analysis

Raw paired-end FASTQ files were trimmed to remove adapter sequences and low quality bases using skewer with commands (-Q 20, -q 3) (<https://sourceforge.net/projects/skewer>; Table 4.3). Clean reads were aligned to the *Bos taurus* reference genome (Bta.ARS-UCD1.2, April 2018) using bisulphite read mapper with default settings (Bowtie2; Krueger and Andrews, 2011). Duplicate reads were marked using MarkDuplicates (Picard tools) and methylation values extracted using bismark\_methylation\_extractor module (commands --no\_overlap --paired-end). Methylation values were extracted from output Sequence Alignment Map (SAM) files using methylKit v1.4.0 (nolap=TRUE, mincov=5, minqual=20; Akalin et al., 2012). To avoid identification of methylation differences that are related to underlying breed differences, bases at known variant positions (SNPs) were removed.

**Table 4.3 Summary of Bismark final alignment report.**

Cell lineage	ICM		TE	
Methionine (μmol/L)	50	10	50	10
<b>Replicate</b>	64,582,554 <sup>a</sup>	70,125,142 <sup>a</sup>	83,302,871 <sup>a</sup>	102,310,417 <sup>a</sup>
<b>1</b>	18,826,935 <sup>b</sup>	20,930,071 <sup>b</sup>	23,538,817 <sup>b</sup>	31,671,654 <sup>b</sup>
	(29.2) <sup>c</sup>	(29.8) <sup>c</sup>	(28.3) <sup>c</sup>	(31.0) <sup>c</sup>
<b>2</b>	63,884,223 <sup>a</sup>	82,902,050 <sup>a</sup>	77,140,135 <sup>a</sup>	83,057,058 <sup>a</sup>
	18,968,032 <sup>b</sup>	25,559,151 <sup>b</sup>	21,008,778 <sup>b</sup>	24,657,595 <sup>b</sup>
	(29.7) <sup>c</sup>	(30.8) <sup>c</sup>	(27.2) <sup>c</sup>	(29.7) <sup>c</sup>
<b>3</b>	89,320,723 <sup>a</sup>	78,350,625 <sup>a</sup>	59,062,149 <sup>a</sup>	81,772,406 <sup>a</sup>
	26,120,363 <sup>b</sup>	22,750,802 <sup>b</sup>	17,074,286 <sup>b</sup>	23,879,134 <sup>b</sup>
	(29.2) <sup>c</sup>	(29.0) <sup>c</sup>	(28.9) <sup>c</sup>	(29.2) <sup>c</sup>

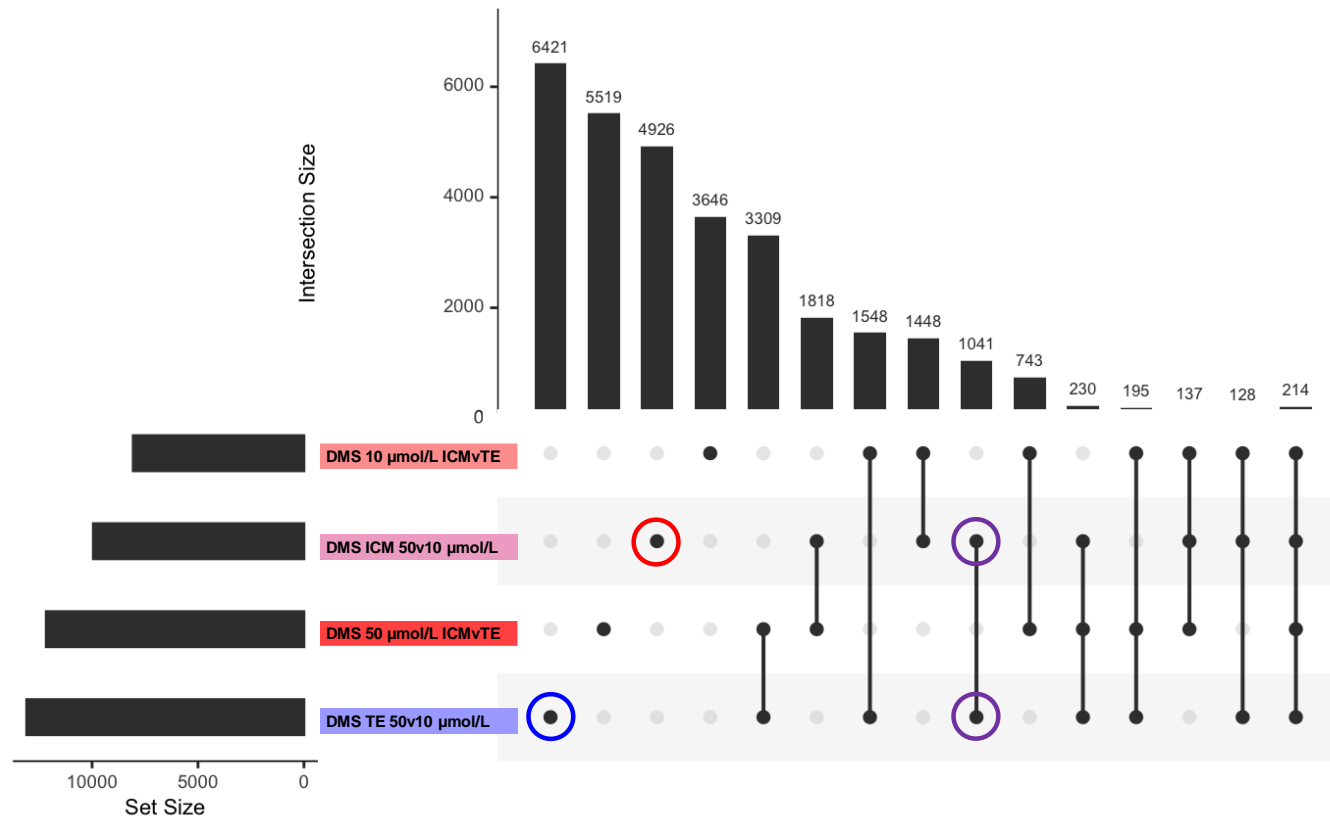
Total sequence pairs read following quality trimming<sup>a</sup>. Number of paired alignments with unique best hit<sup>b</sup>. Mapping efficiency (%): measure of the sequence pairs that map uniquely to the reference genome<sup>c</sup>.

Differentially methylated sites (DMS) between groups were identified using the Chi-squared test in methylKit and annotated using the genomation package (Akalin et al., 2012; Akalin et al., 2015). Due to the inherent level of variability of microarray-based hybridisation techniques that are associated with sample preparation, loading, microarray probes and detection, it is common to introduce a minimum difference threshold to select out DMS with minimal methylation difference between two biological conditions (Du et al., 2010). Therefore, DMS results were filtered for 'in gene/promoter' to remove intergenic regions, and for a 'minimum difference threshold of 20% methylation' between experimental combinations.

#### 4.2.4.4.1 Gene set enrichment analysis (GSEA)

Enrichment of gene ontologies (GO) and pathways using KEGG (Kyoto Encyclopedia of Genes and Genomes) was performed using hypergeometric tests in the (Not) Ingenuity Pathway Analysis (NIPA) tool (<https://github.com/ADAC-UoN/NIPA>). To narrow the number of genes, a sliding window approach was used to identify DMS within candidate genes identified within experimental combinations highlighted in Figure 4.2.





**Figure 4.2 UpSet R plot demonstrates intersection size between the numbers of differentially methylated sites (DMS) across experimental combinations.**

**Blue circle:** DMS affected by methionine concentration in trophoctoderm (TE) only ( $n=6,421$ ). **Red circle:** DMS affected by methionine concentration in inner cell mass (ICM) only ( $n=4,926$ ). **Purple circle(s):** DMS affected by methionine concentration in both embryonic cell lineages ( $n=1,041$ ).

Based on the premise that regulatory regions of the genome that are important for gene transcription contain clusters of CpGs (Li and Zhang, 2014), genes that possessed  $\geq 5$  DMS within a sliding window size of 1 kb were selected for gene set enrichment analysis (GSEA). A total of 401 clusters of DMS in 179 genes were identified in the ICM, and 614 clusters of DMS in 267 genes within the TE (Appendix 4.4). Annotated pathways associated with GO terms, such as 'Biological Process', 'Cellular Component' and 'Molecular Function', and pathways within the KEGG database were identified as significant based on functional enrichment of genes with differentially methylated clusters of CpGs (differentially methylated sites; DMS). The Benjamini Hochberg procedure (Benjamini and Hochberg, 1995) was applied to account for multiple testing. Functional categories with  $FDR \leq 0.05$  were considered significant (Appendix 4.5).

#### 4.2.5 *IGF2R* and *AIRN* transcript expression

Bioinformatic data analysis included the identification of DMS within imprinted genes documented within the Catalogue of Imprinted Genes (University of Otago, NZ; <http://igc.otago.ac.nz/home.html>). A differentially methylated imprinted gene of relevance to the present study was *insulin like growth factor 2 receptor*, *IGF2R* (discussed later; Section 4.3.2.6). Transcript expression analysis was undertaken over four experimental replicates to measure expression levels of *IGF2R* gene and its antisense lncRNA transcript, *AIRN*, in pooled bovine Day 8 blastocysts ( $n=15$  minimum per replicate) that were cultured in physiologically high (50  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  added) and low (10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  added) methionine concentrations.

##### 4.2.5.1 RNA extraction and cDNA synthesis

RNA extraction and reverse transcription and quantitative real-time PCR was performed using the protocol described previously (Sections 3.2.1.3.2 and 3.2.1.4). Blastocyst cDNA was diluted to a final concentration of 0.75 blastocyst/ $\mu\text{L}$ .

##### 4.2.5.2 Quantitative real-time PCR

Primers for *IGF2R* and *AIRN* transcripts were designed using NCBI blast software and were supplied by Eurofins Genomics (Ebersberg, Germany; Table

4.4). Primers were tested using liver cDNA and DNA extracted from bovine ovaries (Appendix 4.6). PCR products were sequenced by Source Bioscience (Appendix 4.7). Calibration standard curves constituting a 5-fold dilution series of liver cDNA (Appendix 4.8) and a 3-fold dilution series of blastocyst cDNA (Appendix 4.9) were conducted to verify assay linearity and efficiency of amplification. Quantitative real-time PCR was conducted as described above (Section 4.2.3.3) and data were normalised to *TBP* and *B2M* reference genes using Reference Gene Selector tool in CFX Maestro™ Software based on GeNorm algorithm (Section 4.2.3.2).

**Table 4.4 Primers used for the detection of *IGF2R* and *AIRN* in bovine blastocysts and immunodissected embryonic cell samples.**

Gene		Primer sequence (5'-3')	Product (bp)	NCBI accession no.
<i>IGF2R</i>	FP	GCAGCCTGTATACCCATCCC	152	NM_174352.2
	RP	ATCAAACACGTACCCGCTGT		
<i>AIRN</i>	FP	GTGATCAACCTGGATTGCTGC	185	NR_104052.1
	RP	AAGCCTGGGATTCTGACTGG		

#### 4.2.6 Statistical data analysis

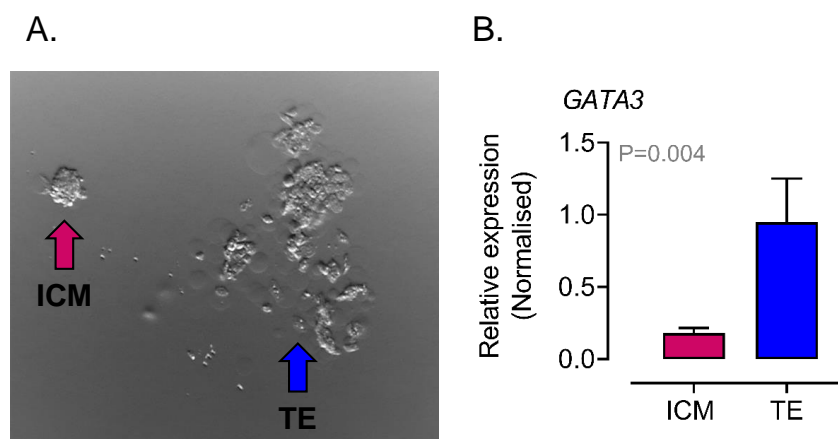
Statistical analyses of gene transcript expression were conducted using ANOVA within the Genstat statistical package (20th Edition, VSN International, 2011). Transcript expression data are reported as means with SEM and presented as histograms using GraphPad Prism 8 software. Differentially methylated sites (DMS) between treatments and sliding windows were identified using the Chi-squared test. Gene ontology terms and pathways with an FDR adjusted *P*-value  $\leq 0.05$  were deemed statistically significant. Mean methylation (%) of genes was determined using linear mixed model (residual maximum likelihood; REML) analysis within Genstat. The fixed model included the terms 'Replicate', 'Lineage' and 'Methionine' (Rep+Lineage\*Met) for comparisons of differential methylation between embryonic cell lineages at two physiological methionine concentrations. The random model included individual DMS. These data are presented as means with SEM.

### 4.3 Results and Discussion

#### 4.3.1 Validation of cell lineage purity

The immunodissection technique offers the advantage of recovering ICM cells from blastocysts without mechanical damage. However, due to the nature of the technique there is a risk of TE contamination in ICM samples ([Handyside and Barton, 1977](#)). To validate cell lineage purity in ICM cell samples used for RRBS analysis, pooled ICM were examined for TE contamination by measuring the relative expression of TE-specific marker, *GATA binding protein 3* (*GATA3*), in immunodissected ICM and TE cell samples.

In the bovine embryo, lineage commitment towards TE cell fate is under the control of transcription factors; YAP1, TEAD4, CDX2 and *GATA3* ([Ozawa et al., 2012](#); [Negrón-Pérez et al., 2017](#)). As a TE regulator that functions downstream of TEAD4 and in parallel with CDX2 ([Wu et al., 2016](#)), *GATA3* is reported to be expressed to a greater extent (2.69-fold) in the bovine TE than in the ICM and, therefore, can be considered a reliable marker of TE lineage ([Ozawa et al., 2012](#)). In the present study, qPCR results showed a 5.27-fold difference in *GATA3* expression between ICM and TE cell lineages, with relative expression values of  $0.18 \pm 0.015$  and  $0.95 \pm 0.160$  for ICM and TE, respectively ( $P=0.004$ ; Figure 4.3B).



**Figure 4.3 Enrichment of bovine embryonic cell populations following immunodissection.**

Microscopy image of immunodissected inner cell mass (ICM) and trophectoderm (TE) cells from Day 8 blastocyst (**A**). Relative expression of TE marker, *GATA3*, in immunodissected ICM and TE ( $n=15$  cell samples pooled over four experimental replicates;  $P=0.004$ ). Relative expression data analysed by ANOVA and presented as mean  $\pm$  SEM (**B**).

A similar pattern of enrichment was observed following immunosurgery in murine blastocysts. Quantitative RT-PCR analysis showed that the ICM expressed significantly less *Gata3* mRNA levels relative to the whole blastocyst (Home *et al.*, 2009). Taken together, these findings confirm that *Gata3/GATA3* expression is selectively upregulated within the TE but not the ICM lineage in bovine and murine blastocysts.

Whilst the expression of *GATA3* was significantly higher for TE than ICM, there are explanations for a reduced enrichment of the primary embryonic cell populations following immunodissection: (i) *GATA3* is expressed at the morula stage of embryo development, thus, there may be residual transcript expression within the ICM on Day 8 (Home *et al.*, 2009); (ii) the small amount of *GATA3* transcript detected in the bovine ICM could be due to polar TE cells adhering to the ICM; and, (iii) the immunodissection technique involves complement-mediated lysis of antibody-coated TE cells, therefore, TE cells are lysed whilst ICM cells remain intact (Kurome *et al.*, 2018; Figure 4.3A). Lysed TE cells can be difficult to recover and the cytotoxic effect of immunodissection on TE cells could lead to mRNA degradation. However, because DNA is more stable than RNA (Wang and Kool, 1995), and because DNA methylation is stable at room temperature (Vilahur *et al.*, 2013), it was hypothesised that the recovery of DNA for methylation analysis was unaffected by the immunodissection technique.

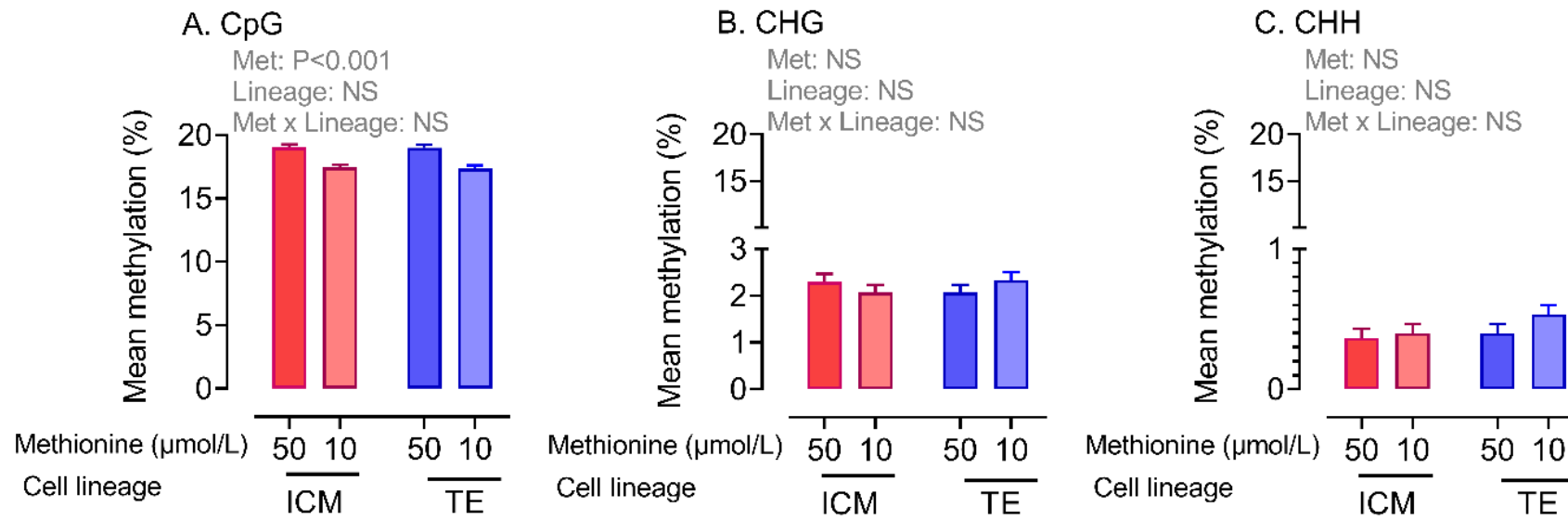
## 4.3.2 DNA methylation analyses by RRBS

### 4.3.2.1 Mean methylation (%)

Reduced representation bisulphite sequencing (RRBS) analyses demonstrated a significant effect of methionine concentration, within physiological limits (50 v 10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  added methionine), on the abundance of CpG methylation within the bovine ICM and TE ( $P < 0.001$ ). However, there was no significant difference in CpG methylation between the two embryonic lineages ( $P = 0.836$ ; Figure 4.4A). Cytosine methylation can also occur at CHG and CHH sites throughout the genome, where 'H' represents a cytosine (C), thymine (T) or adenine (A) nucleotide (de Montera *et al.*, 2013). As discussed earlier (Section 1.5.1.2), non-CpG methylation has been detected in mammalian oocytes (Guo *et al.*, 2014b; Tomizawa *et al.*, 2011), human embryonic stem cells (Lister *et al.*, 2009), and early bovine embryos, and follows a similar enrichment pattern to CpG methylation located within CGIs and gene bodies (Jiang *et al.*, 2018). The

present study detected a relatively low abundance of non-CpG methylation in bovine embryonic cells compared to that of CpG methylation. CHG and CHH methylation was 8-fold and 42-fold lower, respectively (Figure 4.4B, Figure 4.4C).

The abundance of non-CpG methylation was unaffected by methionine concentration and did not differ between the two primary cell lineages (Figure 4.4). As the primary site of DNA methylation that accounts for up to 80% of the total DNA methylation content in mammalian cells ([Lim and Maher, 2010](#); [Ziller \*et al.\*, 2011](#)), cytosine methylation in the CpG dinucleotide context is considered the most relevant methylation mark and is the focus of the forthcoming discussion.



**Figure 4.4 Low methionine significantly reduced mean cytosine methylation (%) in inner cell mass (ICM) and trophectoderm (TE).**

Mean methylation (%) in CpG ( $P < 0.001$ ) (A) CHG ( $P = 0.924$ ) (B) and CHH ( $P = 0.253$ ) context (C). CHG and CHH are cytosine methylation sites where 'H' represents a cytosine (C), thymine (T) or adenine (A) nucleotide. Data presented as mean  $\pm$  SEM.

## 4.3.2.2 Directional methylation

Table 4.5 shows the number of sites (CpGs), transcripts and genes that were differentially methylated between the ICM and TE following embryo culture in each physiological methionine concentration (50 v 10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ), and those that were differentially methylated within each cell lineage (ICM v TE) when the methionine concentration was altered within physiological ranges. There was a greater number of differentially methylated sites (DMS) between the ICM and TE following culture in the high methionine concentration than in the low concentration (12,213 v 8,088 for 50  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  and 10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ , respectively). It follows that the number of differentially methylated transcripts and genes was also increased in the high methionine concentration (Table 4.5). Considering the role of methionine as the direct precursor to the methyl donor, SAM, it was not surprising that culturing embryos at the higher methionine concentration yielded a greater percentage of DMS with increased methylation (54.6% hypermethylated v 45.4% hypomethylated); while culturing under low concentrations yielded a greater percentage of DMS that had decreased methylation (41.6% hypermethylated v 58.4% hypomethylated).

**Table 4.5 A count of differentially methylated sites (DMS), genes and transcripts, and directional methylation for each experimental combination (%).**

Variable	Methionine ( $\mu\text{mol/L}$ )		Cell lineage	
	50	10	ICM	TE
	ICMvTE	ICMvTE	50v10	50v10
DMS count	12,213	8,088	9,991	13,123
↑ Methylation	6,671 (54.6)	3,365 (41.6)	2,449 (24.5)	2,361 (18.0)
↓ Methylation	5,542 (45.4)	4,723 (58.4)	7,542 (75.5)	10,762 (82.0)
Transcripts	1,773	1,427	1,576	1,743
Genes	1,768	1,425	1,573	1,738

Arrows represent direction of methylation; hypermethylation (↑) and hypomethylation (↓). Abbreviation(s): Differentially methylated site, DMS; inner cell mass, ICM; trophectoderm, TE.

A greater number of DMS, transcripts and genes were identified in the TE than within the ICM lineage when methionine was reduced from 50 to 10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  (Table 4.5). This epigenetic asymmetry may be explained by the cell lineage-specific DNA methylation profile that is established within the Day 8 bovine blastocyst. During the wave of *de novo* methylation that coincides with the first

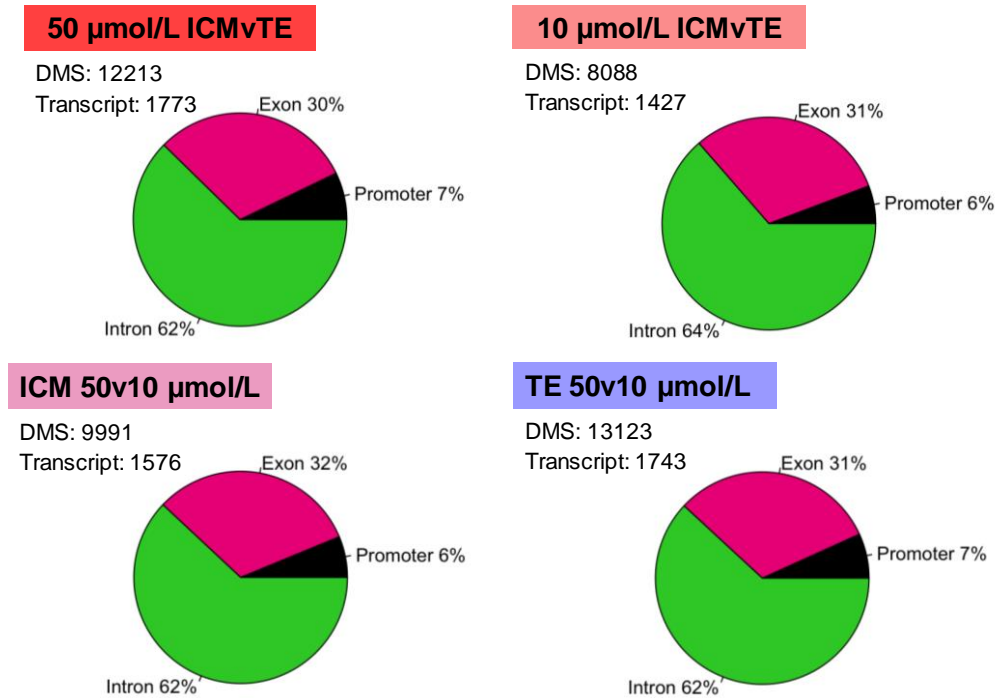


cell lineage specification event (Figure 3.1), TE-specific methylation takes place within the bovine preimplantation embryo culminating in a higher degree of methylation within this extraembryonic cell lineage (Hou *et al.*, 2007; Nakanishi *et al.*, 2012; Dobbs *et al.*, 2013). More than 75% of DMS were hypomethylated in both cell lineages following culture in low methionine (Table 4.5). In support of gross phenotypic observations reported in Chapter 3, the molecular results presented herein demonstrate that subtle alterations to physiological methionine concentration during bovine IVP can epigenetically modify DNA methylation in both primary cell lineages of the Day 8 blastocyst.

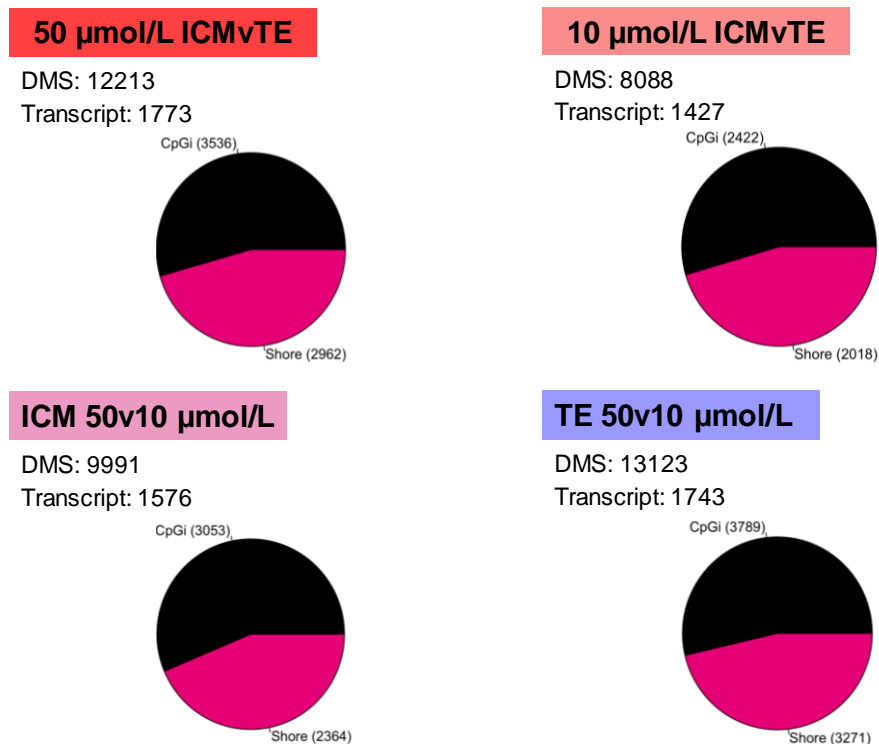
#### 4.3.2.3 Distribution of DMS

The distribution of DMS across genomic regions (promoter, exon, intron, CGI and shore) was similar for each experimental combination analysed. Of the DMS identified, 6-7% were located in gene promoters, 30-32% were located in exons and 62-64% were located in introns (Figure 4.5A). Approximately 54% of DMS were located in CGIs and ~46% were located in CGI shores (Figure 4.5B). Other studies report a similar distribution pattern of CpG methylation within genomic regions in mammalian cells. For example, Wang and Karmideen (2019) used RRBS to map the methylome within porcine testis and found that the lowest percentage of methylated CpGs were located in gene promoters (0.33%), followed by exons (1.71%), introns (5.95%) and intergenic regions (92.01%). The authors also measured more methylated CpGs in CGIs (36.86%) than in CGI shores (21.65%). This common distribution pattern is a consequence of basic gene anatomy and the restriction enzyme-based RRBS method. The utility of the Msp1-based approach is limited to a specific subset of CpG sites in the genome that are predominantly found in promoters and CGIs. These regions are, therefore, selectively enriched whilst others (i.e. CGI shores) are under-represented (Smith *et al.*, 2009; Doherty and Couldrey, 2014). Nevertheless, the RRBS method provides sufficient information to map the global effect of methionine during culture on CpG methylation within the primary cell lineages of the bovine preimplantation embryo.

A.



B.



**Figure 4.5 Distribution of differentially methylated sites (DMS) across genomic regions for each experimental combination.**

Promoter, Intron, Exon (A). CpG island (CGI) and CpG island shore (B). Abbreviation(s): Differentially methylated site, DMS; inner cell mass, ICM; trophectoderm, TE.

Culturing bovine embryos under low physiological concentrations of methionine caused hypomethylation of CpGs within all genomic regions (Table 4.6). The effect of CpG methylation on gene expression depends on the genomic context in which it occurs ([Song \*et al.\*, 2005](#); [Jones, 2012](#)). In the traditional view, gene promoter methylation has been associated with transcriptional silencing ([Niesen \*et al.\*, 2005](#)). In recent years, other genomic regions have been recognised to play critical roles in the regulation of gene transcription. For instance, intragenic methylation can mark intron-exon boundaries, thereby influencing the regulation of alternative transcription start sites, exon usage and splicing ([Yegnasubramanian \*et al.\*, 2011](#); [Messerschmidt \*et al.\*, 2014](#)). Differentially methylated regions (DMRs) are distributed in various functional gene elements, including CGIs, repetitive sequences, non-coding RNAs, exons and introns. Indeed, 50% of intronic DMRs appear to affect transcription elongation. As introns are regions rich in enhancers, intronic methylation can impact transcription factor binding and gene expression ([Brenet \*et al.\*, 2011](#); [Zhao \*et al.\*, 2015](#); [Luo \*et al.\*, 2018](#); [Anastasiadi \*et al.\*, 2018](#)). It is, therefore, important to investigate the effect of methionine on CpG methylation within various functional regions, such as DMRs within genes of interest (discussed later; Section 4.3.2.6).

**Table 4.6 Distribution and direction of differentially methylated sites (DMS) for each experimental combination (%)**

Region	Methionine ( $\mu\text{mol/L}$ )		Cell lineage	
	50	10	ICM	TE
	ICMvTE	ICMvTE	50v10	50v10
<b>Promoter</b>	<b>931</b>	<b>488</b>	<b>656</b>	<b>950</b>
↑ Methylation	557 (59.8)	198 (40.6)	190 (29.0)	163 (17.2)
↓ Methylation	374 (40.2)	290 (59.4)	466 (71.0)	787 (82.8)
<b>Exonic</b>	<b>3,951</b>	<b>2,592</b>	<b>3,322</b>	<b>4,372</b>
↑ Methylation	2,177 (55.1)	1,120 (43.2)	703 (21.2)	723 (16.5)
↓ Methylation	1,774 (44.9)	1,472 (56.8)	2,619 (78.8)	3,649 (83.5)
<b>Intronic</b>	<b>8,082</b>	<b>5,391</b>	<b>6,495</b>	<b>8,655</b>
↑ Methylation	4,421 (54.7)	2,227 (41.3)	1,660 (25.6)	1,592 (18.4)
↓ Methylation	3,661 (45.3)	3,164 (58.7)	4,835 (74.4)	7,063 (81.6)
<b>CGIs</b>	<b>3,536</b>	<b>2,422</b>	<b>3,053</b>	<b>1,709</b>
↑ Methylation	1,719 (48.6)	907 (37.4)	697 (22.8)	354 (20.7)
↓ Methylation	1,817 (51.4)	1,515 (62.6)	2,356 (77.2)	1,355 (79.3)
<b>CGI shores</b>	<b>2,962</b>	<b>2,018</b>	<b>2,364</b>	<b>2,394</b>
↑ Methylation	1,732 (58.5)	906 (44.9)	562 (23.8)	421 (17.6)
↓ Methylation	1,230 (41.5)	1,112 (55.1)	1,802 (76.2)	1,973 (82.4)

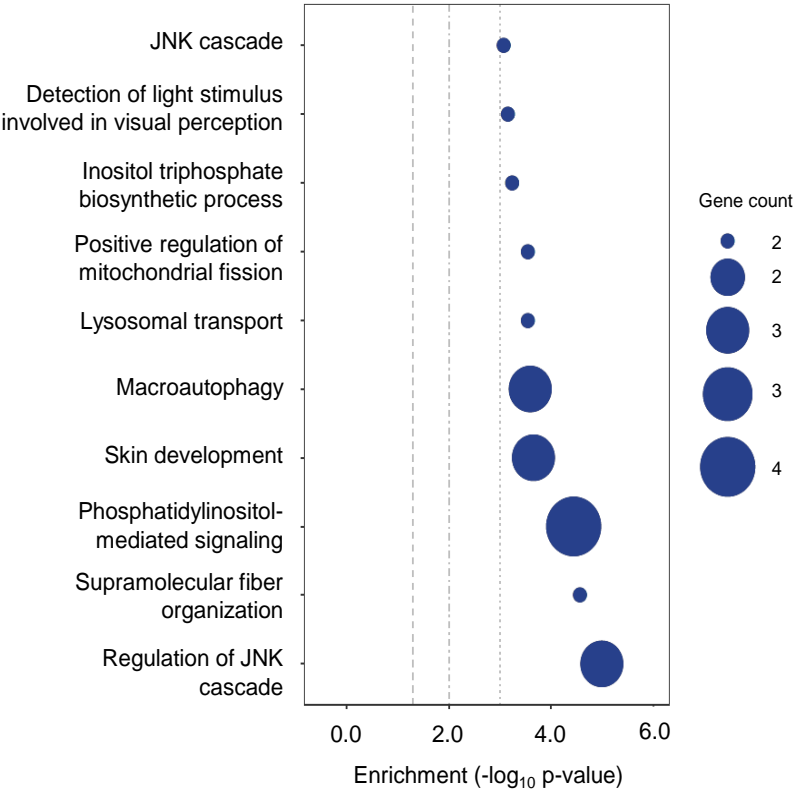
Arrows represent direction of methylation; hypermethylation (↑) and hypomethylation (↓). Abbreviation(s): CGI, CpG island; ICM, inner cell mass; TE, trophectoderm.

#### 4.3.2.4 Enriched pathways and genes

Gene set enrichment analysis (GSEA) revealed Gene Ontology (GO) terms and KEGG pathways that were significantly enriched (FDR <0.05) with differentially methylated genes between the two physiological methionine concentrations (50 v 10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) during bovine embryo culture. Genes harbouring clusters of  $\geq 5$  DMS (within 1 kb) were analysed (ICM = 179 genes, TE = 267 genes; Appendix 4.4). A total of 121 GO terms and 30 KEGG pathways containing genes with DMS clusters were significantly enriched in the ICM, and a total of 144 GO terms and 96 KEGG pathways containing DMS clusters were significantly enriched in the TE (Appendix 4.5). Due to the greater number of DMS, transcripts and genes identified in the TE cell lineage than in the ICM (Table 4.5), it is not surprising that a greater number of enriched terms and pathways were identified within the TE. The top 10 most statistically significant terms and pathways enriched within the ICM and TE are presented in Figure 4.6 to 4.9.

The most significant terms/pathways enriched within the ICM (FDR=0.0002) were 'Regulation of JNK cascade', 'MAP-kinase scaffold activity' and 'Phosphatidylinositol signalling system' (Figure 4.6, Figure 4.7). Collectively, these pathways are involved in cellular processes during embryo development, including cell growth, migration, invasion and apoptosis ([Zhao \*et al.\*, 2016](#); [Zeke \*et al.\*, 2016](#)). In the TE, the most significant terms/pathways (FDR=0.0001) were associated with cellular transport, including 'Calcium ion transmembrane transport into cytosol', 'Secretory granule membrane' and 'Glutamate-gated calcium ion channel activity' (Figure 4.8, Figure 4.9).

A. Biological Process GO (ICM)



B. Cellular Component GO (ICM)

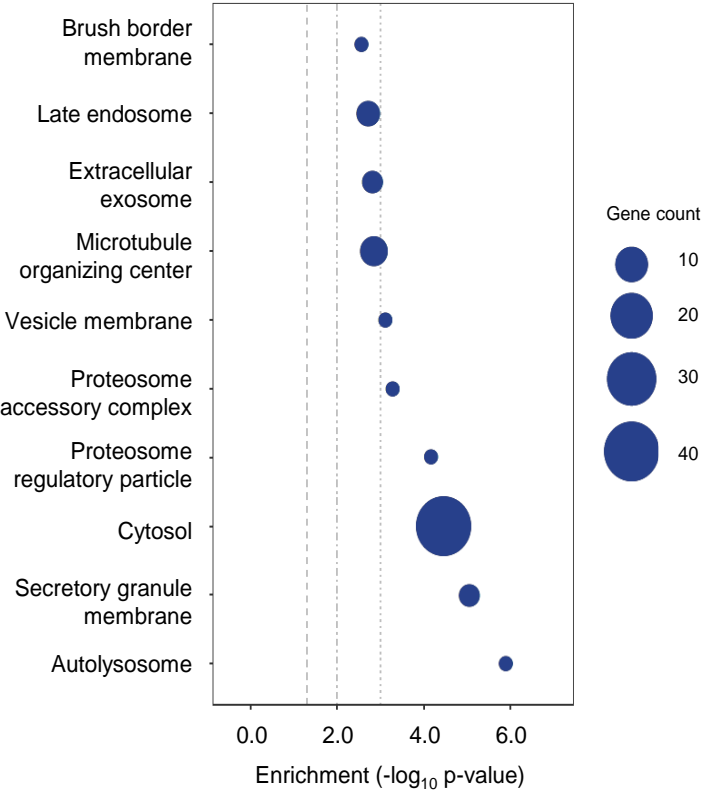
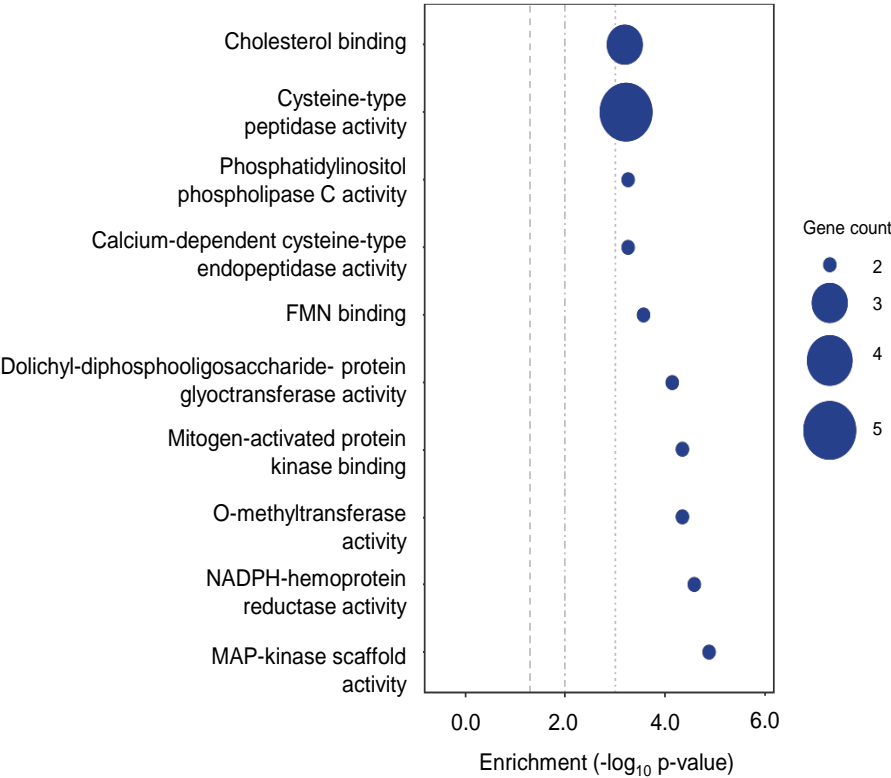


Figure 4.6 Top 10 significantly enriched Biological Process (A) and Cellular Component (B) Gene Ontology (GO) terms in the bovine inner cell mass (ICM) when methionine concentration is reduced within physiological range during IVP.

A. Molecular Function GO (ICM)



B. KEGG Pathways (ICM)

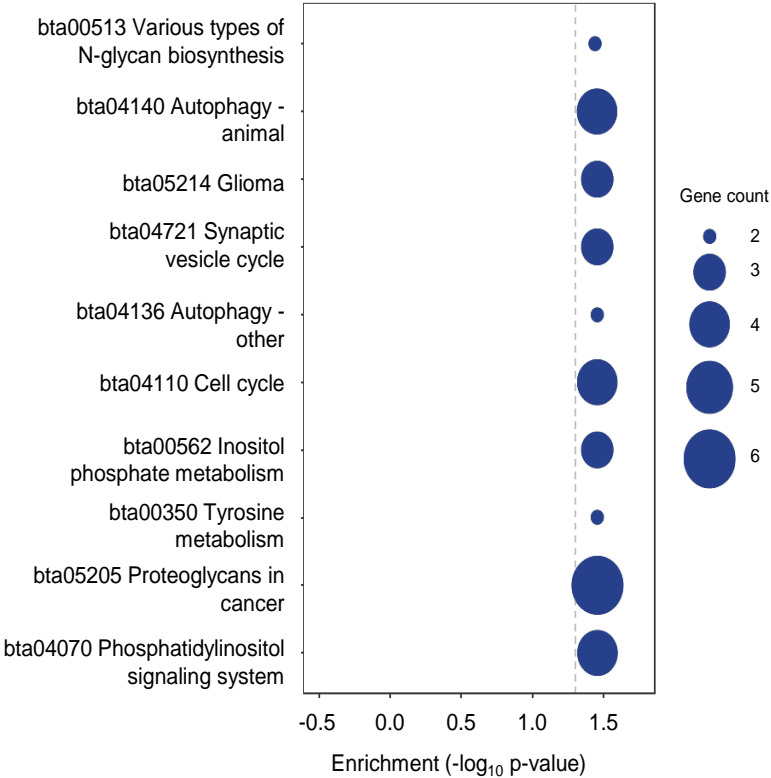
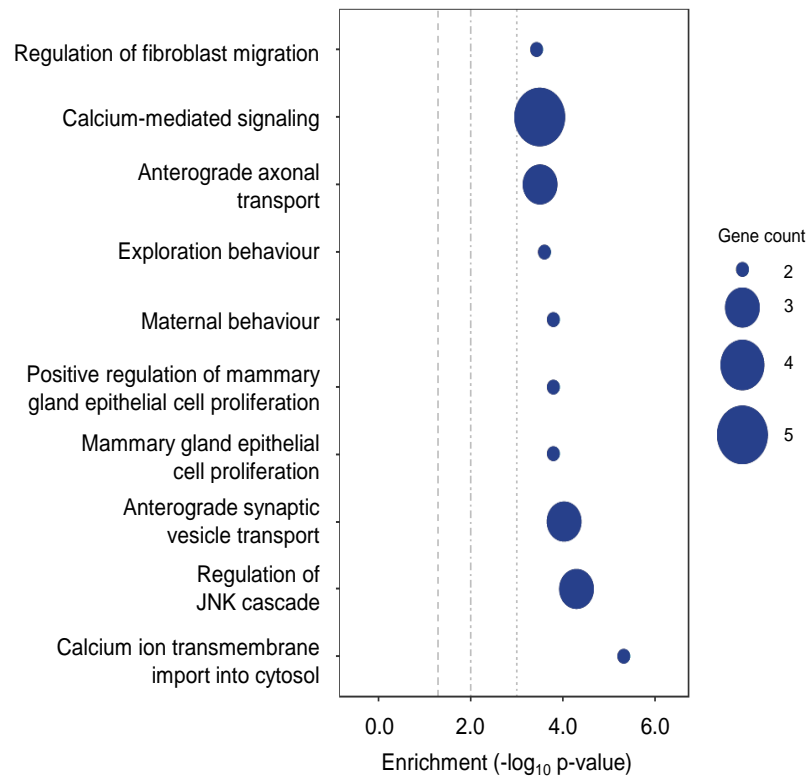
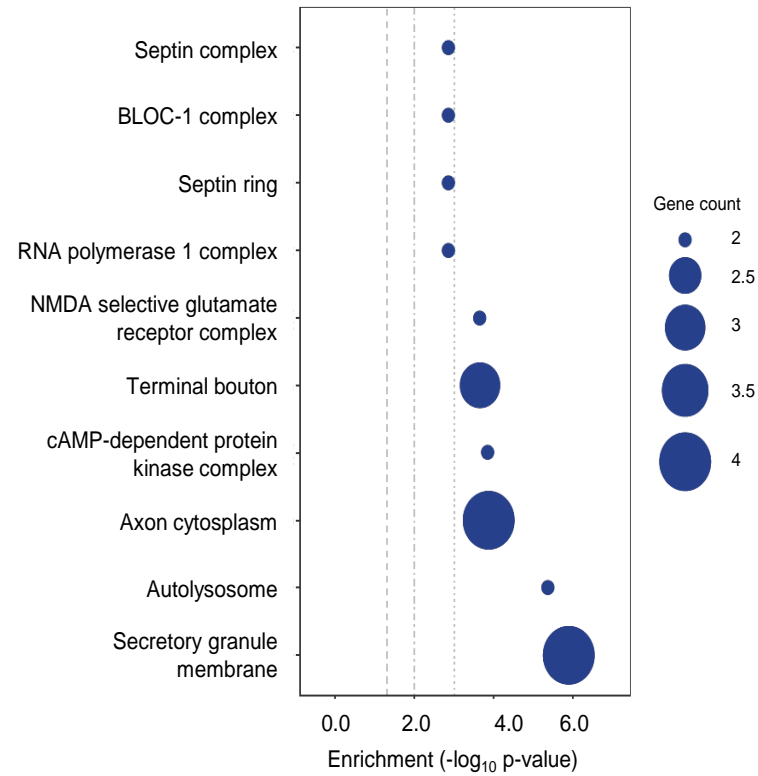


Figure 4.7 Top 10 significantly enriched Molecular Function Gene Ontology (GO) terms (A) and KEGG Pathways (B) in the bovine inner cell mass (ICM) when methionine concentration is reduced within physiological range during IVP.

A. Biological Process GO (TE)



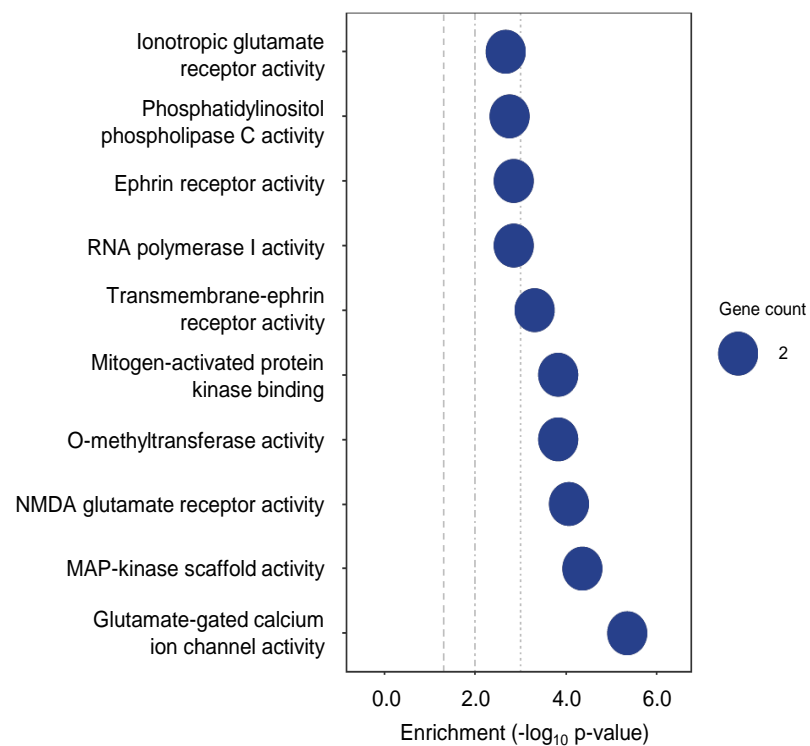
B. Cellular Component GO (TE)



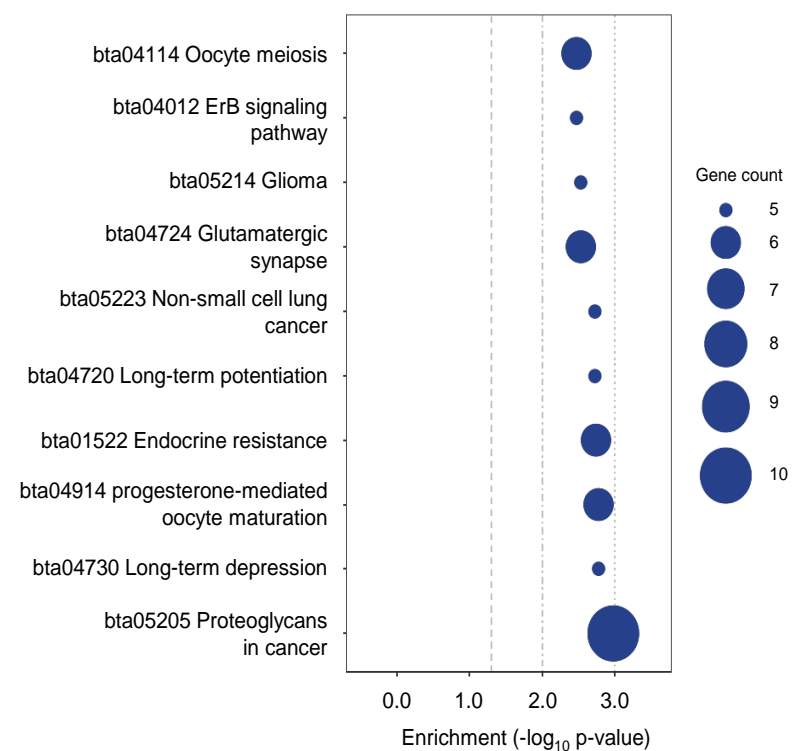
**Figure 4.8 Top 10 significantly enriched Biological Process (A) and Cellular Component (B) Gene Ontology (GO) terms in the bovine trophectoderm (TE) when methionine concentration is reduced within physiological range during IVP.**



## A. Molecular Function GO (TE)



## B. KEGG Pathways (TE)



**Figure 4.9 Top 10 significantly enriched Molecular Function Gene Ontology (GO) terms (A) and KEGG Pathways (B) in the bovine trophectoderm (TE) when methionine concentration is reduced within physiological range during IVP.**

In GSEA, pathways are statistically tested for over-representation in the experimental gene list relative to what is expected by chance. Several common statistical tests consider the number of genes detected in the experiment, their relative ranking and the number of genes annotated to a pathway of interest. Whilst GSEA offers mechanistic insight into large gene lists generated from genomics experiments, it is important to acknowledge that they can be biased towards well-known pathways and can make unrealistic assumptions about statistical independence amongst genes, ignoring the fact that some genes are co-expressed and that some pathways share genes in common ([Reimand et al., 2019](#)). It follows that statistically significant pathways often comprise a small number of differentially methylated genes of interest (GOI). Thus, in order to avoid testing overly narrow categories, the present study analysed the top five GO terms and KEGG pathways that comprised the highest number of differentially methylated GOI (Table 4.7, Table 4.8). Interestingly, pathways with the greatest number of differentially methylated GOI that were enriched in the ICM following altered methionine concentration during embryo culture were broadly associated with protein catabolism and autophagy. The term 'Cytosol' represents 40 GOI and is involved in protein complex formation (Table 4.7B). 'Hydrolase' (18 GOI) and 'Proteolysis' (11 GOI) terms relate to the hydrolysis of proteins into amino acids by the cleavage of peptide bonds (Table 4.8A, Table 4.7A).

In the TE, 'Protein kinase activity' (15 GOI) comprised the greatest number of differentially methylated GOI (Table 4.8A). Responsible for the transfer of phosphates between substrates ([Cheng et al., 2011](#)), protein kinases are vital for cell cycle progression, apoptosis and differentiation, and are implicated in the control of TE development in the mammalian embryo ([Kamei et al., 1997](#); [Yang et al., 2016](#)). Additional terms included 'Cytoskeleton' (13 GOI) and 'Pathways in cancer' (13 GOI; Table 4.7B, Table 4.8B). Similar to cancer cells, TE cells exhibit high rates of protein turnover and energy metabolism ([Houghton et al., 2006](#); [Kelleher et al., 2006](#)). It is, therefore, plausible that differential methylation of genes involved in cell proliferation and differentiation provides an epigenetic mechanism responsible for the significant effect of methionine on TE-specific outgrowth (Chapter 3; Figure 3.13B). Terms and pathways enriched in both cell lineages that had the greatest number of differentially methylated GOI were 'Metabolic pathways' (Table 4.8B) 'Phosphorylation' (Table 4.7A) and 'Kinase activity' (Table 4.8A). These terms were related to others that were

exclusively enriched in the ICM or TE. This is because GSEA pathway boundaries are arbitrary and the identification of multifunctional genes can lead to the enrichment of several related pathways (Reimand *et al.*, 2019).

Genes of interest (GOI) with the highest number of DMS were selected from the first GO term and KEGG pathway in order to illustrate the effects of altering physiological methionine concentrations during bovine embryo culture on specific loci (Table 4.9). Of the pathways presented, *dopamine  $\beta$ -hydroxylase* (*DBH*) had the most differentially methylated CpGs (131 DMS and 146 DMS in the ICM and TE, respectively). The gene that encodes the DBH enzyme is responsible for the conversion of dopamine to noradrenaline, a catecholamine that participates in a number of physiological processes, including the stress response (LeBanc and Ducharme, 2007). In mice, disruption of the *Dbh* gene impaired cardiac development (Osuala *et al.*, 2012) and cellular immunity (Alaniz *et al.*, 1999). *Phospholipase C like 2* (*PLCL2*), a differentially methylated gene that features in multiple cellular pathways within the bovine embryo, is involved in the regulation of immune function by acting as a negative regulator of B cell activation (Takenaka *et al.*, 2003). Whilst Day 8 bovine embryos do not yet have an immune system, differential methylation of key genes could be viewed as an important preparatory step for subsequent embryonic differentiation.

Genes critical for early mammalian embryo development were differentially methylated following reduced methionine. By way of example, *negative elongation factor A* (*NEFLA*), a member of the NEFL complex that regulates RNA polymerase II pausing in gene transcription (Adelman and Lis, 2012), was differentially methylated within the bovine ICM (Table 4.9). Recently, *Nefla* has been identified as a maternal factor that can modulate gene regulatory and metabolic networks within murine ESCs to reprogramme totipotency (Hu *et al.*, 2020), perhaps illuminating a potential role of *NEFLA* in the molecular control of developmental potency within the bovine ICM. *Wnt family member 7A* (*WNT7A*) was another developmentally important gene that was differentially methylated within the bovine TE (Table 4.9). *WNT7A* is an embryokine that mediates cell proliferation, cell fate and patterning, thereby increasing the competence of bovine embryos to develop to the blastocyst stage (Tríbulo *et al.*, 2018) via its involvement in the  $\beta$ -catenin-dependent pathway, and  $\beta$ -catenin independent pathways such as PI3K/Akt, RAC/JNK, and extracellular signal-regulated kinase 5/PPAR- $\gamma$  (Lan *et al.*, 2019).

**Table 4.7 Top five enriched Biological Process (A) and Cellular Component (B) Gene Ontology (GO) terms ranked by number of differentially methylated genes of interest.**

## A. Biological Process GO

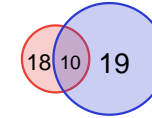


Inner-cell mass ICM ( <i>n</i> =38)	GOI	FDR (q-value)
GO:0006508 Proteolysis	11	0.0456
GO:0050821 Protein stabilisation	5	0.0060
GO:0006914 Autophagy	4	0.0060
GO:0010468 Gene expression	4	0.0433
GO:0046854 Phosphatidylinositol phosphorylation	3	0.0060

Trophectoderm TE ( <i>n</i> =58)	GOI	FDR (q-value)
GO:0035556 Intracellular signal transduction	11	0.0326
GO:0010628 Regulation of gene expression	9	0.0207
GO:0018108 Peptidyl-tyrosine phosphorylation	5	0.0148
GO:0048490 Anterograde synaptic transport	3	0.0013
GO:0008089 Anterograde axonal transport	3	0.0024

ICM and TE ( <i>n</i> =29)	GOI		FDR (q-value)	
	ICM	TE	ICM	TE
GO:0016310 Phosphorylation	10	13	0.0168	0.0256
GO:0048015 Phosphatidylinositol signalling	4	3	0.0006	0.0096
GO:0043410 Regulation of MAPK cascade	3	4	0.0154	0.0149
GO:0045766 Regulation of angiogenesis	3	4	0.0221	0.0233
GO:0019722 Calcium signalling	2	5	0.0367	0.0025

## B. Cellular Component GO



Inner-cell mass ICM ( <i>n</i> =18)	GOI	FDR (q-value)
GO:0005829 Cytosol	40	0.0009
GO:0005815 Microtubule organisation	6	0.0069
GO:0030424 Axon	5	0.0359
GO:0062023 Collagen containing ECM	3	0.0179
GO:0005930 Axoneme	3	0.0150

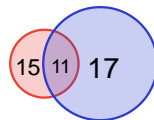
Trophectoderm TE ( <i>n</i> =19)	GOI	FDR (q-value)
GO:0005856 Cytoskeleton	13	0.0393
GO:0005623 Cell	8	0.0397
GO:0030496 Midbody	6	0.0127
GO:0098978 Glutamatergic synapse	6	0.0391
GO:0031514 Motile cilium	4	0.0165

ICM and TE ( <i>n</i> =10)	GOI		FDR (q-value)	
	ICM	TE	ICM	TE
GO:0005770 Late endosome	4	4	0.0089	0.0338
GO:0030667 Secretory granule	3	4	0.0003	0.0001
GO:0070062 Extracellular endosome	3	3	0.0075	0.0268
GO:0030659 Cytoplasmic vesicle	3	3	0.0138	0.0435
GO:1904115 Axon cytoplasm	2	4	0.0149	0.0040

Abbreviation(s): GOI, genes of interest; FDR, false discovery rate; ICM, inner cell mass; TE, trophectoderm. Venn diagram: pathways enriched in ICM (red circle); pathways enriched in TE (blue circle); pathways enriched in ICM and TE (purple intersection).

**Table 4.8 Top five enriched Molecular Function Gene Ontology (GO) terms (A) and KEGG Pathways (B) ranked by number of differentially methylated genes of interest.**

## A. Molecular Function GO

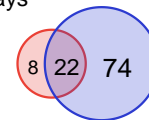


Inner-cell mass ICM ( <i>n</i> =15)	GOI	FDR (q-value)
GO:0016787 Hydrolase activity	18	0.0417
GO:0008233 Peptidase activity	9	0.0186
GO:0008234 Cysteine-type peptidase activity	5	0.0033
GO:0004175 Endopeptidase activity	4	0.0052
GO:0008201 Heparin binding	4	0.0110

Trophectoderm TE ( <i>n</i> =17)	GOI	FDR (q-value)
GO:0004672 Protein kinase activity	15	0.0392
GO:0004713 Protein tyrosine kinase activity	4	0.0447
GO:0004402 Histone acetyltransferase activity	3	0.0106
GO:0004714 Receptor protein tyrosine kinase	3	0.0279
GO:0022849 Glutamate-gated ion channel activity	2	0.0001

ICM and TE ( <i>n</i> =11)	GOI		FDR (q-value)	
	ICM	TE	ICM	TE
GO:0016301 Kinase activity	9	12	0.0291	0.0412
GO:0030165 PDZ domain binding	2	3	0.0225	0.0171
GO:0008081 Phosphoric diester hydrolase	2	3	0.0432	0.0351
GO:0015485 Cholesterol binding	3	2	0.0033	0.0478
GO:0005078 MAP-kinase scaffold	2	2	0.0002	0.0007

## B. KEGG Pathways



Inner-cell mass ICM (n=15)	GO I	FDR (q-value)
bta00562 Inositol phosphate metabolism	3	0.0349
bta04152 AMPK signalling pathway	3	0.0457
bta04136 Autophagy – other	2	0.0349
bta00513 N-Glycan biosynthesis	2	0.0361
bta03050 Proteosome	2	0.0361

Trophectoderm TE (n=17)	GOI	FDR (q-value)
bta05200 Pathways in cancer	13	0.0072
bta04151 PI3K-Akt signalling	10	0.0078
bta04010 MAPK signalling	9	0.0065
bta04014 Ras signalling	8	0.0065
bta05166 HTLV-I infection	8	0.0065

ICM and TE (n=22)	GOI		FDR (q-value)	
	ICM	TE	ICM	TE
bta01100 Metabolic pathways	17	25	0.0457	0.0157
bta05205 Proteoglycans in cancer	6	10	0.0348	0.0010
bta04360 Axon guidance	4	6	0.0449	0.0112
bta04140 Autophagy – animal	4	5	0.0351	0.0133
bta04390 Hippo signalling pathway	4	5	0.0361	0.0161

Abbreviation(s): GOI, genes of interest; FDR, false discovery rate; ICM, inner cell mass; TE, trophectoderm. Venn diagram: pathways enriched in ICM (red circle); pathways enriched in TE (blue circle); pathways enriched in ICM and TE (purple intersection).

**Table 4.9 Genes of interest (GOI) with the highest number of differentially methylated sites (DMS) selected from the first Gene Ontology (GO) term and KEGG Pathway.**

Pathways enriched in ICM		Differentially methylated GOI		CpGs	Promoter	Exon	Intron	CGI	Shore
BP	GO:0006508 Proteolysis	<i>PMPCA</i>	Peptidase, mitochondrial processing alpha subunit	48	1	22	27	24	20
CC	GO:0005829 Cytosol	<i>NELFA</i>	Negative elongation factor complex member A	50	1	15	35	31	10
MF	GO:0016787 Hydrolase	<i>PLCL2</i>	Phospholipase C like 2	92	0	9	85	38	19
KEGG	bta00562 Inositol phosphate metabolism	<i>PLCG1</i>	Phospholipase C gamma 1	24	0	6	18	10	5

Pathways enriched in TE		Differentially methylated GOI		CpGs	Promoter	Exon	Intron	CGI	Shore
BP	GO:0035556 Signal transduction	<i>PLCL2</i>	Phospholipase C like 2	118	0	6	112	51	16
CC	GO:0005856 Cytoskeleton	<i>FARP1</i>	FERM, ARH/RhoGEF and pleckstrin domain protein 1	49	1	3	46	5	17
MF	GO:0004672 Protein kinase	<i>IGF1R</i>	Insulin like growth factor 1 receptor	61	1	19	57	29	11
KEGG	bta05200 Pathways in cancer	<i>WNT7A</i>	Wnt family member 7A	69	0	3	57	16	31

Pathways enriched in ICM and TE		Differentially methylated GOI		CpGs		Promoter		Exon		Intron		CGI		Shore	
				ICM	TE	ICM	TE	ICM	TE	ICM	TE	ICM	TE	ICM	TE
BP	GO:0016310 Phosphorylation	<i>TOLLIP</i>	Toll interacting protein	70	83	4	4	32	31	38	47	23	39	34	34
CC	GO:0005770 Late endosome	<i>IGF2R</i>	Insulin like growth factor 2 receptor	25	51	0	11	7	5	18	46	8	32	10	12
MF	GO:0016301 Kinase activity	<i>PRKAR1B</i>	Protein kinase cAMP-dependent type 1 subunit $\beta$	56	81	0	1	6	15	53	75	35	45	16	32
KEGG	bta01100 Metabolic pathways	<i>DBH</i>	Dopamine $\beta$ -hydroxylase	131	146	5	9	22	24	103	115	38	55	50	61

Abbreviation(s): BP, Biological Process; CC, Cellular Component; CGI, CpG island; ICM, inner cell mass; KEGG, Kyoto Encyclopedia of Genes and Genomes; MF, Molecular Function; TE, trophectoderm. DMS distribution across genomic regions show an excess of annotation due to overlapping genes and inaccurate annotation of promoter regions in *Bos taurus* genome (Bta.ARS-UCD1.2, April 2018).

Insulin-like growth factors, IGF1 and IGF2, are potent mitogens that play a predominant part in embryonic growth and morphogenesis ([Kowalick et al., 1999](#)). It follows that aberrant methylation and expression of their respective receptors can have detrimental consequences for embryo development ([Agrogiannis et al., 2014](#)). Both *IGF1R* and *IGF2R* genes were differentially methylated in the bovine embryo following altered methionine during culture (Table 4.9). Of particular interest is the methylation status of the imprinted locus, *IGF2R*, due to its association with LOS in ruminants (discussed later).

#### 4.3.2.5 Imprinted genes

Genomic imprinting is an epigenetic mechanism that leads to parental allele-specific gene expression ([Barlow and Bartolomei, 2014](#)). Around 150 imprinted genes have been identified in humans and mice, and ~30 have been identified in cattle ([Chen et al., 2016](#); Table 4.10). Imprinted genes play a pivotal role in fetoplacental growth and development, metabolism and postnatal behaviour ([Fowden et al., 2006](#); [Smith et al., 2006](#); [Glenn et al., 1997](#)). Their monoallelic expression is governed by asymmetrical epigenetic marks on either the maternal or paternal allele. Typically, imprinted genes are organised in clusters that are regulated by CpG-rich domains known as imprint control regions and/or DMRs ([Barlow and Bartolomei, 2014](#)). It follows that aberrant CpG methylation within these regulatory domains has been implicated in imprinting disorders. In humans, loss of imprinting (LOI) of *CDKN1C*, *H19* and *IGF2* is associated with Beckwith-Wiedemann syndrome (BWS; [Sinclair et al., 2000](#); [Chen et al., 2013](#)); LOI of *MEST* is associated with Silver-Russell syndrome ([Riesewijk et al., 1998](#)); and, LOI of *UBE3A* and *SNRPN* is associated with Prader-Willi syndrome and Angelman syndrome ([Glenn et al., 1997](#)).

Table 4.10 Monoallelically expressed genes in cattle.

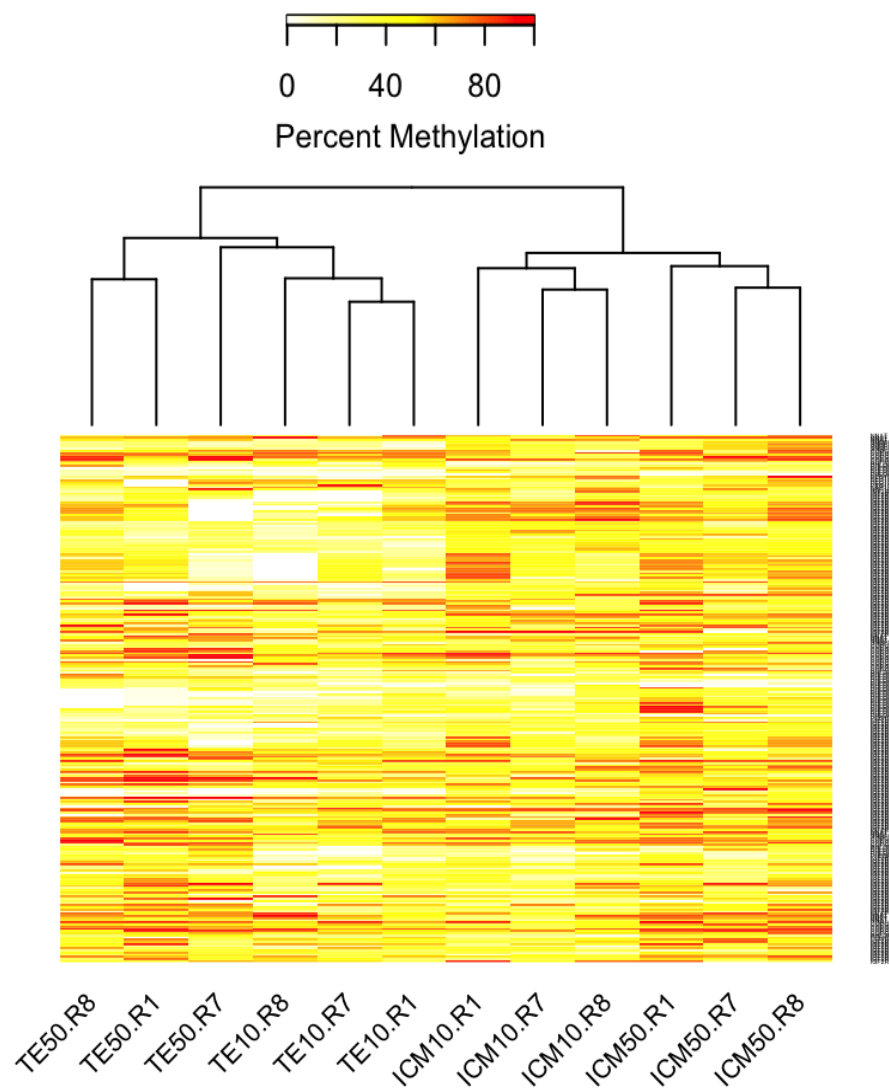
Imprinted genes			Non-imprinted		
Chr	Gene		Chr	Gene	
4	<b>PEG10</b>	♀	18	PEG3/USP29	♂
4	PON3	♂	18	ITUP1	♀
4	MEST	♀	18	PEG3	♀
6	<b>NAP1L5</b>	♀	18	ZIM2	♂
9	<b>IGF2R</b>	♂	21	GTL2/MEG3	♂
9	PLAGL1	♀	21	<b>SNRPN</b>	♀
13	GNAS	♂	21	MEG8	♂
13	<b>NNAT</b>	♀	21	MIRG/MEG9	♂
14	DGAT1	?	21	MKRN3	♂
18	MIMT1	♂	21	UBE3A	♂
18	USP29	♂	21	XLOC	♀
21	RTL1	♀	29	CDKN1C	?
21	PERK10/MEG8	♂	29	H19	♂
29	IGF2	♀	29	<b>PHLDA2</b>	♂
X	XIST	♀	?	MAGEL2	♀
?	COPG2IT1	♂	?	TSSC4	♂
4	<b>ASB4</b>		?		
4	<b>MAGI2</b>				
5	<b>SLC38A4</b>				
5	<b>DCN</b>				
12	<b>HTR2A</b>				
15	<b>SDHD</b>				
18	<b>ZFP264</b>				
22	<b>COPG2</b>				
26	<b>IMPP5F-v2</b>				
?	<b>CD81</b>				
?	<b>OSBPL5</b>				

Adapted from the Catalogue of Imprinted Genes (<http://igc.otago.ac.nz/home.html>), Chen *et al.* (2015) and Chen *et al.* (2016).

Imprinted genes with DMS coloured in **blue**. Imprinted genes associated with fetal overgrowth phenotype in humans and animals shaded in **grey**. Paternally imprinted gene (♂), maternally imprinted gene (♀). Non-imprinted genes that are monoallelically expressed or classified as imprinted in other species coloured in **red**.



In the present study, six imprinted genes (*PEG10*, *NAP1L5*, *IGF2R*, *NNAT*, *SNRPN* and *PHLDA2*) were differentially methylated in Day 8 bovine embryos as a consequence of reduced methionine (50 v 10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) during IVP (Table 4.10). In both embryonic cell lineages, DMS were generally hypomethylated following culture in the low physiological methionine concentration (10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) relative to the high concentration (50  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ; Figure 4.10).



**Figure 4.10 Low physiological methionine concentration during culture decreases CpG methylation of six imprinted genes within the primary cell lineages of the Day 8 bovine preimplantation embryo.**

Colours indicate methylation level (%) from low (white) to high (red) of differentially methylated sites (DMS) within imprinted genes enriched within the trophectoderm (TE) and inner cell mass (ICM) at physiologically high (50  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) and low (10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) methionine concentration during *in vitro* embryo culture.

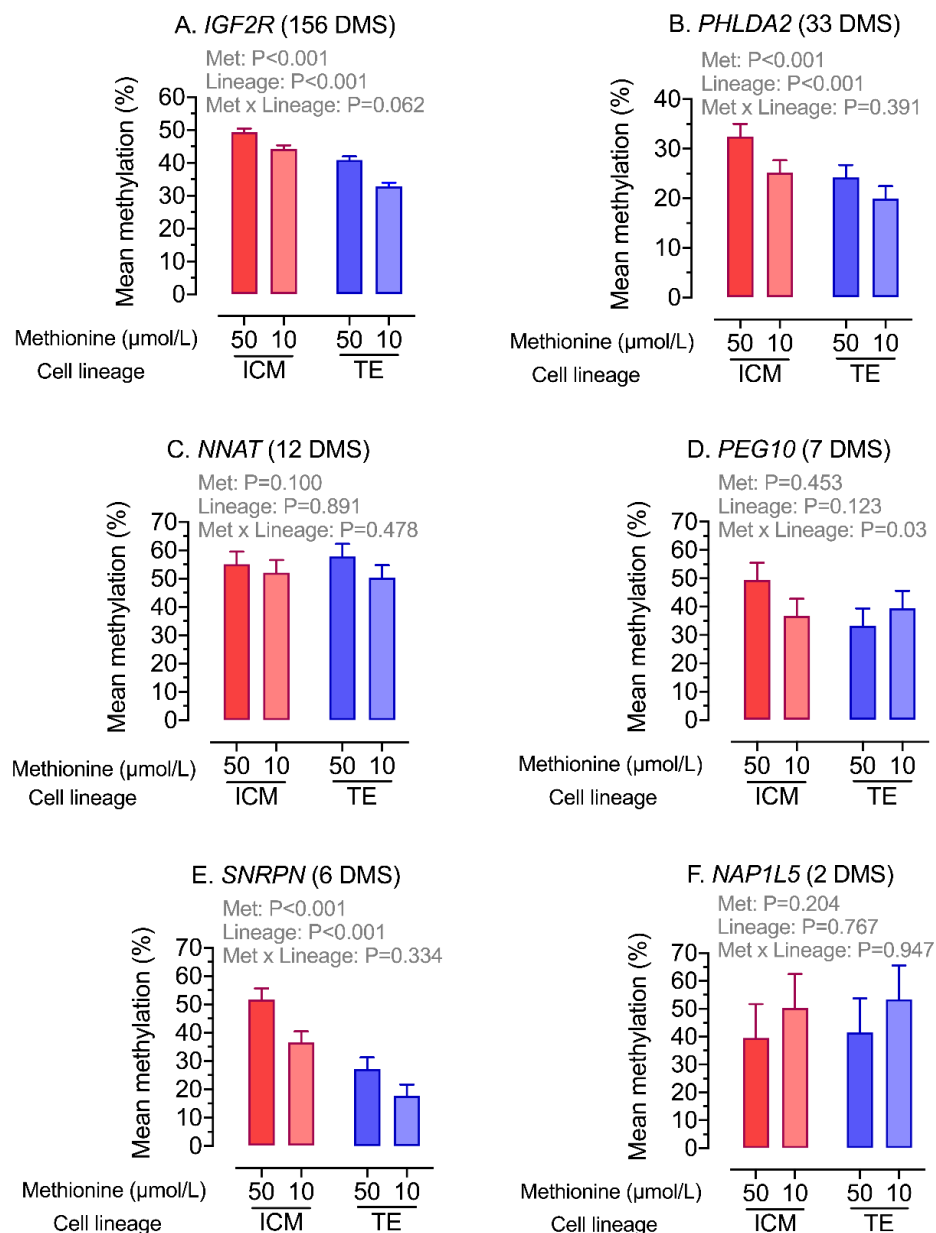
The *insulin-like growth factor 2 receptor (IGF2R)* had the greatest number of CpGs (156 DMS) that were significantly ( $P<0.001$ ) hypomethylated in the ICM and TE as a consequence of reduced physiological methionine (50 v 10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) during IVP (Figure 4.11A). Since reduced methylation of *IGF2R* appears to be causative of the fetal overgrowth phenotype, known as large offspring syndrome (LOS) in ruminants exposed to ART procedures (Young *et al.*, 2001; Young *et al.*, 2003; Section 1.7), this gene was selected for further investigation into the effect of low methionine during bovine embryo culture on the methylation status of CpGs within a specific regulatory region of the *IGF2R* gene (Section 4.3.2.6).

*Small nuclear ribonucleoprotein polypeptide (SNRPN)* is another imprinted gene implicated in LOS in cattle (Smith *et al.*, 2015) that was hypomethylated in both embryonic cell lineages due to low methionine ( $P<0.001$ ; Figure 4.11E). Demethylation of the maternal *SNRPN* DMR in embryonic and extraembryonic tissues of *in vitro* and SCNT derived bovine embryos indicates that embryo manipulations can induce epigenetic alterations in imprinted genes that persist beyond implantation (>Day 19; Lucifero *et al.*, 2006; Suzuki *et al.*, 2009).

Imprinted genes that are specifically important for the regulation of placental growth were differentially methylated in the present study. Cytosine methylation of the paternally imprinted *pleckstrin homology-like domain family A member 2 (PHLDA2)* gene was significantly reduced in both cell lineages following culture in 10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  methionine ( $P<0.001$ ; Figure 4.11B). Reduced expression of *PHLDA2* in the bovine placenta is associated with placentomegaly following SCNT (Guillomot *et al.*, 2010). Similar observations have been reported in *Phlda2*-null mice that exhibited placental overgrowth (Frank *et al.*, 2002). In contrast, LOI of *PHLDA2* in human placenta is linked to intrauterine growth restriction (Salas *et al.*, 2004; Diplas *et al.*, 2009). These findings support the conclusion that *PHLDA2* serves as a regulator of placental growth in mammals. There was a significant interaction between methionine concentration and cell lineage on the methylation status of *paternally expressed 10 (PEG10)*;  $P=0.03$ ; Figure 4.11D). A functional study of *Peg10* using a knockout mouse model caused early embryonic lethality owing to placental defects (Ono *et al.*, 2006). Similarly, silencing of *PEG10* in human placental extracts inhibited trophoblast proliferation and invasion (Chen *et al.*, 2015), thereby supporting its critical role in normal placental formation.

Although not statistically significant, *neuronatin (NNAT)* had 12 DMS that were generally hypomethylated in both cell lineages following culture in low

physiological methionine ( $P=0.075$ ; Figure 4.11C) and *nucleosome assembly protein 1-like 5* (*NAP1L5*) had 2 DMS that were hypermethylated in low physiological methionine ( $P=0.204$ ; Figure 4.11F). Both of these genes are maternally imprinted and paternally expressed in multiple fetal tissues in cattle, including the brain, lung, liver, kidney, intestine, muscle, ovary and eye (Zhaitoun and Khatib, 2006), suggesting broad roles of these imprinted genes in fetal development.



**Figure 4.11 Mean methylation (%) of six differentially methylated imprinted genes in bovine inner cell mass (ICM) and trophectoderm (TE) following culture in physiologically high (50  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) and low (10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) methionine.**

#### 4.3.2.6 *Insulin-like growth factor 2 receptor (IGF2R)*

The *IGF2R* gene, otherwise known as the cation-dependent mannose-6-phosphate receptor, encodes a multifunctional protein that is involved in lysosomal trafficking, tumour suppression, T-cell mediated immunity and fetal growth (Wang *et al.*, 1994; Lau *et al.*, 1994; Motyka *et al.*, 2000; Killian *et al.*, 2001). Its involvement in regulating fetal growth is facilitated through binding IGF2 for degradation and removing the potent mitogen from the circulation (Barker *et al.*, 1993; Wang *et al.*, 1994). The imprinted expression of *IGF2R* is conserved across diverse mammalian species, including cattle (Long and Cai, 2007), sheep (Young *et al.*, 2001), pigs (McElroy *et al.*, 2007), mice (Barlow *et al.*, 1991), rats (Vu *et al.*, 2006), dogs (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 2007), kangaroos (Yandell *et al.*, 1999) and opossums (Weidman *et al.*, 2006). *IGF2R* does not appear to be imprinted in monotremes or primates (Kalscheuer *et al.*, 1993; Killian *et al.*, 2001) and its imprinted expression in humans remains ambiguous. Adult human tissues lack imprinted expression (Kalscheuer *et al.*, 1993; Ogawa *et al.*, 1993) whereas fetal tissues and Wilm's tumours are imprinted in some cases, however, the trait is highly polymorphic (Yotova *et al.*, 2008). This broad conservation across eutherian mammals reinforces the proposed link between genomic imprinting and parental-specific control of fetoplacental growth and development (Haig, 2004; Killian *et al.*, 2000). It follows that the fetal overgrowth phenotype exhibited by cattle and sheep that is caused by aberrant *IGF2R* imprinting is also conserved. In mice, disrupted *Igf2r* expression also leads to excessive fetal and placental growth, cardiac abnormalities, cleft palate and increased perinatal mortality. It is assumed that reduced *Igf2r* stimulates fetal growth because of impaired IGF2 clearance from the circulation (Baker *et al.*, 1993; Lau *et al.*, 1994; Wang *et al.*, 1994; Melnick *et al.*, 1998). However, plasma levels of IGF2 in sheep fetuses with LOS were not significantly higher than controls (Young *et al.*, 2001), thus, the physiological and epigenetic mechanisms of *IGF2R* imprinting are postulated to differ across species.

Most of the research investigating the regulation of *IGF2R* imprinting pertains to studies with mice, with relatively little research conducted in cattle. In both species, the *Igf2r/IGF2R* gene is paternally imprinted and transcribed exclusively from the maternal allele in all fetal and adult tissues examined (heart, liver, kidney, lung, skeletal muscle and placenta), with the exception of the brain (Yotova *et al.*, 2008; Bebbere *et al.*, 2013). In both species, *Igf2r/IGF2R* imprinting is developmental stage- and tissue-specific. Initially,

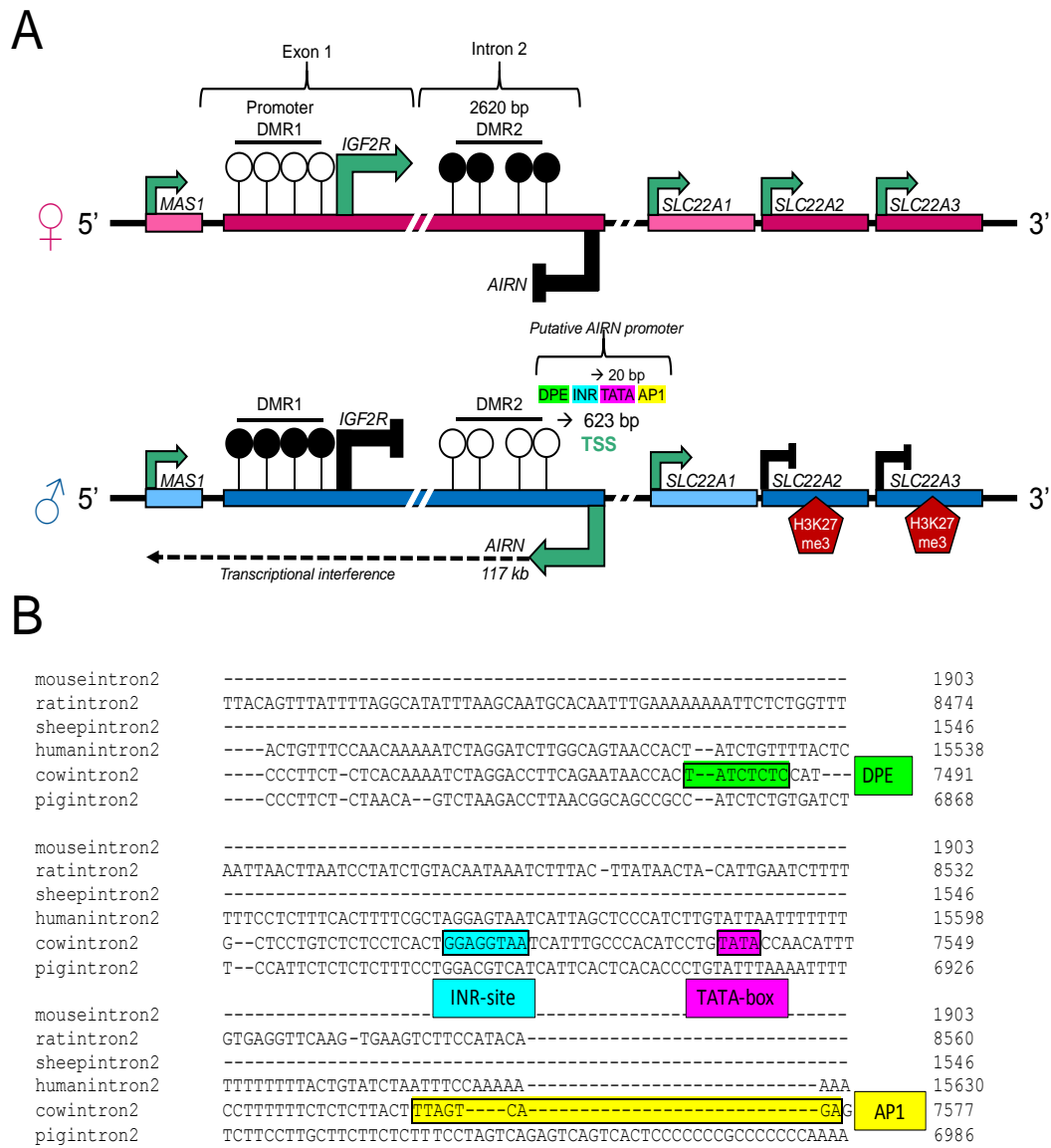
*Igf2r/IGF2R* expression levels are biallelic and switch to maternal expression after implantation (Lerchner and Barlow, 1997; Long and Cai, 2007). In cattle, the degree to which paternal *IGF2R* is repressed differs between tissues of endodermal (liver and lung), mesodermal (heart, skeletal muscle) and ectodermal origin (brain). Moreover, the expression of *IGF2R* was reported to be 3- to 4-fold higher in bovine placenta than in fetal tissues. This is reflective of 'partial imprinting' in extraembryonic tissues (Bebbere *et al.*, 2013), a mechanism whereby both parental alleles are differently expressed instead of the complete silencing of one parental allele and full expression of the other (Baran *et al.*, 2015). Expression of both parental *IGF2R* alleles in the TE may provide a plausible explanation for the significantly lower CpG methylation measured in this lineage relative to the ICM in both methionine treatments ( $P < 0.001$ ; Figure 4.11A).

#### 4.3.2.6.1 Regulation of *IGF2R* imprinting

The *IGF2R* gene comprises 48 exons and is part of an imprinted cluster that contains maternally expressed *SLC22A2* and *SLC22A3*, and paternally expressed long non-coding ncRNA (lncRNA), *Airn/AIRN* (Antisense to *Igf2r* RNA Noncoding), in addition to non-imprinted genes; *SLC22A1*, *MAS1*, and *PLG* (Stöger *et al.*, 1993; Wutz *et al.*, 1997; Latos *et al.*, 2012). In mice, this imprinted cluster spans 500 kb on chromosome 17 (Yotova *et al.*, 2008). In cattle, the analogous cluster is located on chromosome 9 (Farmer *et al.*, 2016). In both species, the *Igf2r/IGF2R* gene encodes two reciprocally imprinted transcripts, each of which is associated with a DMR (Wutz *et al.*, 1997; Long and Cai, 2007). DMR1 encompasses the *Igf2r/IGF2R* promoter CGI that is methylated on the paternally inherited allele. DMR2 is located within intron 2 of the *Igf2r/IGF2R* gene and encompasses the *Airn/AIRN* promoter CGI that is methylated on the maternally inherited allele (Wutz *et al.*, 1997; Long and Cai, 2007; Figure 4.12A).

In cattle, DMR2 is 2,620 bp in length. Bovine *AIRN* is an unspliced, polyadenylated lncRNA that is 117 kb long and transcribed from the paternal allele in the antisense orientation from the transcription start site located 623 bp upstream of DMR2. *AIRN* transcription extends into intron 1 of the neighbouring gene, *MAS1*, thereby overlapping *IGF2R* and silencing its expression by transcriptional interference (Farmer *et al.*, 2016; Latos *et al.*, 2012; Figure 4.12A). How *AIRN* silences non-overlapped imprinted genes *SLC22A2* and

*SLC22A3*, remains disputed. Recently, it was proposed that *AIRN* targets distant promoters and recruits repressive chromatin complexes. Whilst such interactions are lost once silencing is established, silenced genes are covered with H3K27me3 modifications on the repressed paternal allele ([Andergassen et al., 2019](#); Figure 4.12A).



**Figure 4.12 Bovine *IGF2R* gene is imprinted by antisense transcript, *AIRN*.**

Source: [Clare et al. \(unpublished\)](#). Bovine genomic region on Chromosome 9 specific to *IGF2R* and *AIRN* (A). Multiple sequence alignment for *Igf2r/IGF2R* intron 2 with putative transcription initiation site and consensus binding site of core promoter elements in the bovine genomic region. Nucleotide numbers refer to location on chromosomes (B). Abbreviation(s): AP1, activator protein 1; DPE, downstream promoter element; INR, initiation response element.

The *AIRN* promoter region was identified by analysing the bovine *IGF2R* sequence (<https://www.ensembl.org/>; ENSBTAG00000002402) in an antisense direction upstream of DMR2 for possible core promoter elements (Figure 4.12B). In accordance with consensus sequences reported by Farmer and colleagues (2016), a TATA-box was identified 20 bp upstream of the transcription start site; an activator protein-1 (AP1) binding site was identified upstream of the TATA-box (Suslov *et al.*, 2010); and, an initiation response element (INR-site) and down-stream promoter element (DPE) was identified downstream of the TATA-box (Burke and Kadonaga, 1997). This clustering of four initiation sequences within 200 bp of the bovine *AIRN* promoter has also been observed in the murine *Airn* promoter sequence (Lyle *et al.*, 2000), suggesting that DMR2 encompasses the promoter in both species. Putative DMR2 regions have also been identified in sheep (Young *et al.*, 2003), pigs (Shen *et al.*, 2012), rats (Killian *et al.*, 2000), and humans (Reisewijk *et al.*, 1995), however, the nucleotide sequence homology and core promoter elements differ between species (Figure 4.12B; discussed later).

#### 4.3.2.6.2 Loss of methylation in DMR2

The present study identified two clusters of DMS that were hypomethylated within DMR2 in the TE of bovine embryos following culture in low physiological methionine (50 v 10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ; Figure 4.13). Only one DMS was hypermethylated at nucleotide position 96221634 (Figure 4.13B). The methylation status of each DMS located within the second intron of *IGF2R* in the TE lineage can be found in Appendix 4.10. In the ICM, DMR2 methylation was relatively unaffected by the reduction in methionine as demonstrated by the hypomethylation of only one DMS (Figure 4.13A).

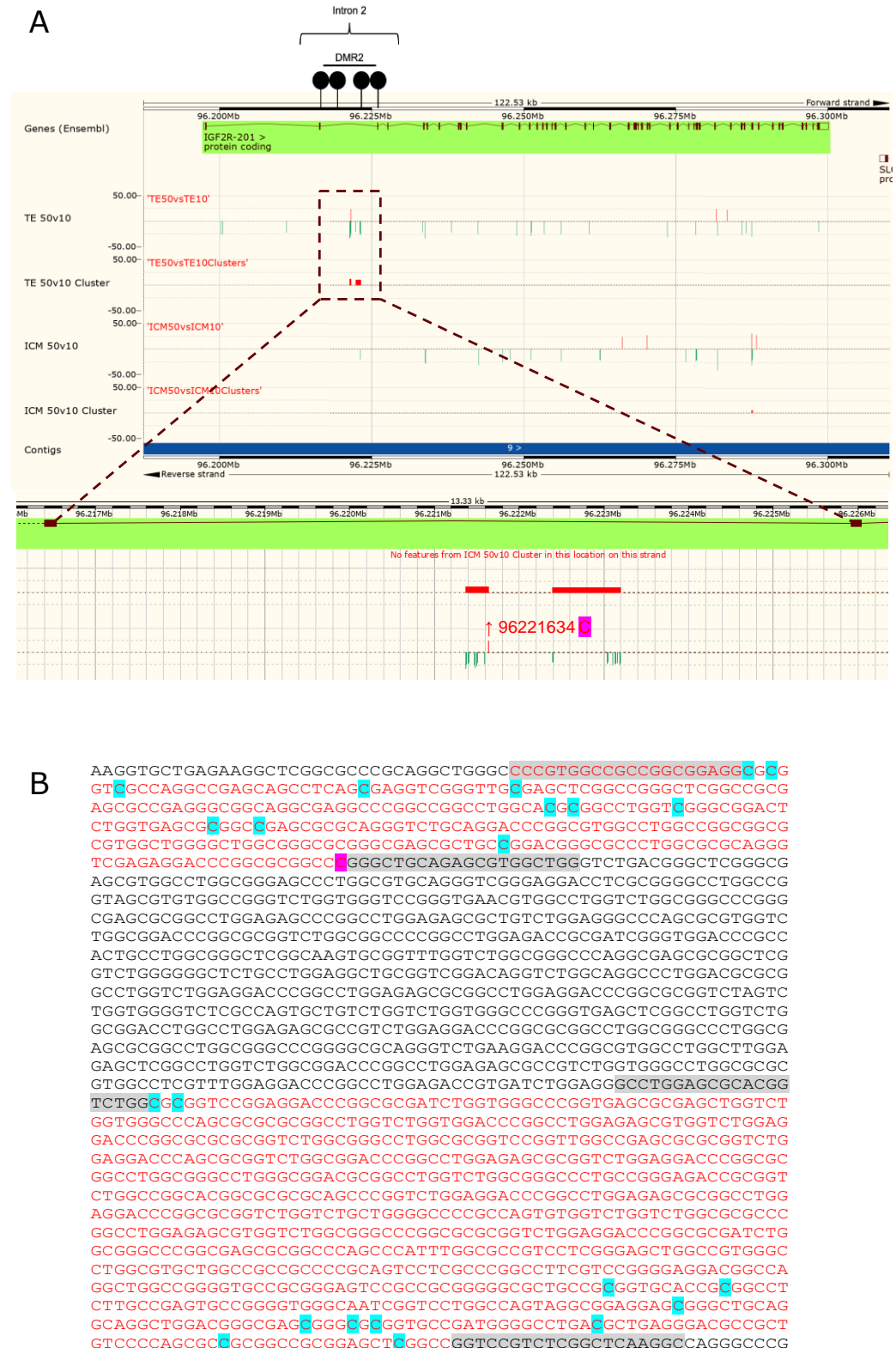
Little is understood about the loss of DMR2 methylation in bovine placenta since previous studies have focused on DMR2 methylation in fetal tissues following ART procedures. Long and Cai (2007) reported that tissue-specific variation in DMR2 methylation levels in the liver, brain, heart and lung of normal bovine fetuses ranged from 54 to 99%. These levels were disrupted in tissues from cloned fetuses, and methylation levels decreased to 25% in the heart. In addition, loss of DMR2 methylation on the maternal allele in LOS bovine fetuses following SCNT was associated with decreased *IGF2R* transcript abundance (Chen *et al.*, 2017). Similar observations have been reported in sheep. Ovine *IGF2R* DMR2 had strongly reduced levels of DNA methylation in tongue tissue



following SCNT (Young *et al.*, 2003) and hypomethylation of this regulatory region was correlated with reduced expression of *IGF2R* by 30-60% in LOS fetuses relative to controls (Young *et al.*, 2001). Collectively, these results show that *IGF2R* was not fully reprogrammed during early development after nuclear transfer and that this locus may be similarly dysregulated in ruminant species.

Multiple sequence alignment revealed high *IGF2R* gene sequence homology between cattle and sheep (91.9%). However, intron 2 was less conserved (45.8%) and the two cluster regions within DMR2 did not align despite the phylogenetic similarity between the two species (Appendix 4.11). Intriguingly, intron 2 was more conserved between cattle and pigs (74%), and the first and second DMS clusters were 87.1 and 88.0% homologous between the two species, respectively. Cytosine residues that were differentially methylated in cattle embryos within the second cluster were highly conserved between cattle and pigs (90.9%). A high percentage of cytosines in the second cluster were conserved in humans (81.8%; Appendix 4.11). Whilst DMR2 harbours a maternal-specific methylation imprint in pigs and humans (Shen *et al.*, 2012; Reisewijk *et al.*, 1995), there is no evidence for paternal *AIRN* transcription in either species (Braunschweig, 2012; Oudejans *et al.*, 2001), highlighting evolutionary differences in nucleotide sequence and imprinting status of *IGF2R* between species (Killian *et al.*, 2000).



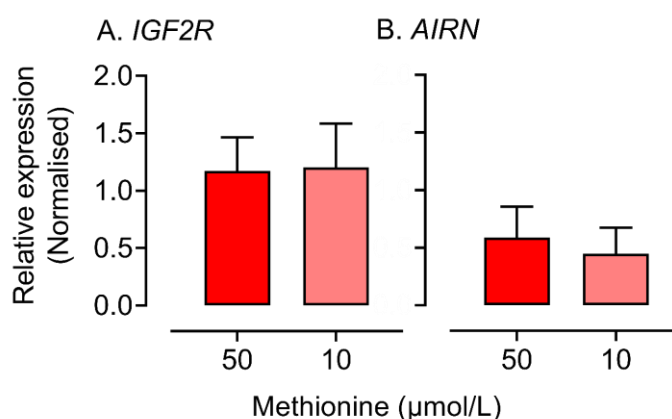


**Figure 4.13** Two clusters of DMS were hypomethylated within DMR2 of the *IGF2R* gene in the trophectoderm (TE) lineage following bovine embryo culture in low physiological methionine (50 v 10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ).

Bedgraphs demonstrate loss ( $\downarrow$ , hypomethylation) and gain ( $\uparrow$ , hypermethylation) of methylation at individual cytosine residues, and location of DMS clusters (A). Nucleotide sequence showing the two clusters in red. Hypomethylated cytosines in blue and hypermethylated cytosine (position 96221634) in pink (B).

4.3.2.6.3 *IGF2R* and *AIRN* transcript expression

It was hypothesised that culturing bovine embryos in low physiological methionine (10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) would cause loss of methylation within DMR2 of *IGF2R* (on the maternal allele) which, in turn, would cause biallelic expression of antisense transcript, *AIRN*, thereby causing repression of *IGF2R* gene expression from both parental alleles. Whilst there was a significant difference between *IGF2R* and *AIRN* transcript expression ( $P < 0.001$ ), there was no significant effect of methionine during embryo culture ( $P = 0.405$ ; Figure 4.14). There are several explanations for why the loss of methylation observed had no effect on *IGF2R/AIRN* imprinted expression in the present study.



**Figure 4.14** Relative transcript expression of *IGF2R* (A) and antisense transcript, *AIRN* (B) in Day 8 bovine blastocysts cultured at physiologically high and low methionine concentrations.

Relative expression data analysed by ANOVA and presented as mean  $\pm$  SEM. Significant difference between *IGF2R* and *AIRN* transcript expression ( $P < 0.001$ ); no effect of physiological methionine concentration ( $P = 0.405$ ). Abbreviation(s): *AIRN*, Antisense to *IGF2R* RNA noncoding; *IGF2R*, insulin like growth factor 2 receptor.

Studies have reported that *IGF2R* expression levels in preimplantation cattle embryos are biallelic and switch to maternal expression after implantation (Lerchner and Barlow, 1997; Long and Cai, 2007) at which stage the gene is only partially imprinted in the placenta (Bebbere *et al.*, 2013). Indeed, Farmer *et al.* (2013) reported absence of *AIRN* in pools (2 to 11) of bovine embryos until Day 18, a stage of development that coincides with implantation and maternal recognition of pregnancy (Thatcher *et al.*, 1984). Albeit 2- to 3-fold lower than *IGF2R* expression, the present study measured detectable levels of *AIRN* in pools (15 to 28) of Day 8 preimplantation blastocysts. It is important to acknowledge that developmental stage, cell lineage and inter-individual genetic

variation may lead to variability in the degree of imprinting between embryos that cannot be identified by measuring transcript abundance in pools of embryos. A solution would be to measure transcript expression in individual embryos, or in immunodissected ICM and TE cells, however, the qPCR methods used in this study were not adequately sensitive to measure these low abundance transcripts with accuracy and reliability. Another factor to consider is that it was not possible to determine the parental origin of methylation using pools of embryos.

Whilst hypomethylation of DMR2 has been associated with decreased *IGF2R* expression in cattle fetuses, it is not necessarily downregulated by *AIRN*. As discussed earlier (Section 4.3.2.6.2), [Chen et al. \(2017\)](#) correlated loss of DMR2 methylation with loss of *IGF2R* expression in skeletal muscle of LOS fetuses, however, *AIRN* was biallelically expressed in LOS and control fetuses. The precise function of DMR2 in regulating imprinted expression of *IGF2R* by *AIRN* remains unclear. It has been proposed that the CGI within DMR2, located at the 5'-end of the *AIRN* transcription start site (Figure 4.12), is required for RNA polymerase II transcript initiation, elongation and processivity. However, it is the CGI sequence (i.e. tandem direct repeats) rather than its methylation status that correlates with efficiency of *AIRN* transcription ([Koerner et al., 2012](#)). Furthermore, additional regulatory elements, such as DMR1 methylation and histone modifications, are likely to operate in synergy with *AIRN* to repress paternal *IGF2R* ([Sleutels et al., 2002](#); [Long and Cai, 2007](#)).

It is uncertain whether the TE-specific loss of DMR2 methylation in Day 8 bovine preimplantation embryos as a consequence of reduced methionine during embryo culture is sufficient to affect *IGF2R* gene dosage at later stages of development. These results illustrate that subtle reductions in physiological methionine levels alone can influence the methylation status of *IGF2R*, thereby raising questions about the safety and efficacy of current *in vitro* embryo production protocols, particularly those involving invasive embryo manipulation techniques (e.g. SCNT), extended culture periods or non-physiological methionine concentrations.

#### 4.4 Concluding remarks

The findings presented herein support the conclusion that altering the concentration of methionine, within physiological limits (50 v 10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ), during

the periconceptional period can lead to epigenetic alterations to DNA methylation of genes that regulate developmental processes in the bovine preimplantation embryo. Specifically, culturing gametes and embryos in low physiological methionine (10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) reduced CpG methylation within key genomic regions of the ICM and TE, demonstrating that both primary cell lineages of the Day 8 blastocyst are sensitive to subtle reductions in methionine during the first week of preimplantation development. Given that methionine is a rate-limiting amino acid in maternal diets ([Laurichesse \*et al.\*, 1998](#); [Schwab and Broderick, 2017](#)) and that concentrations in commercial embryo culture media range from 0 to 500  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  in ART procedures (Table 1.5) these findings are of concern regarding the safety and efficacy of dietary and culture media supplementation of methionine during early embryonic development.

Methionine supplementation during *in vitro* embryo culture was previously reported to have no effect on DNA methylation in whole blastocysts ([Bonilla \*et al.\*, 2010](#)). This conclusion, however, was drawn using an insensitive and non-specific immunocytochemistry approach to quantification. To date, no study has examined the effect of methionine on the methylome within the ICM and TE independently. Reduced representation bisulphite sequencing (RRBS) analyses of CpG methylation within immunodissected embryonic cell samples provides a high level of refinement in this regard. The methodology was sufficiently sensitive to reveal lineage- and sequence-specific methylation differences in response to a moderate decrease in methionine. The observation that the TE had a greater number of hypomethylated DMS than the ICM following culture in low physiological methionine reaffirmed that the primary cell lineages acquire distinct methylation marks during preimplantation development ([Morgan \*et al.\*, 2005](#)) and that the contribution made by these two embryonic cell types to methionine metabolism in the blastocyst is different. It has been postulated that the TE has a higher metabolic rate and methionine turnover relative to the ICM ([Houghton \*et al.\*, 2006](#)). Moreover, GSEA identified that statistically significant GO terms and pathways enriched within the ICM were associated with protein catabolism and autophagy, whereas significant terms and pathways enriched within the TE were associated with cellular transport. The differential methylation of imprinted genes, principally *IGF2R*, between the ICM and TE also highlights epigenetic, transcriptomic and functional metabolic differences between the embryonic and extraembryonic lineages that could not have been identified by analysing methylation in intact blastocysts.

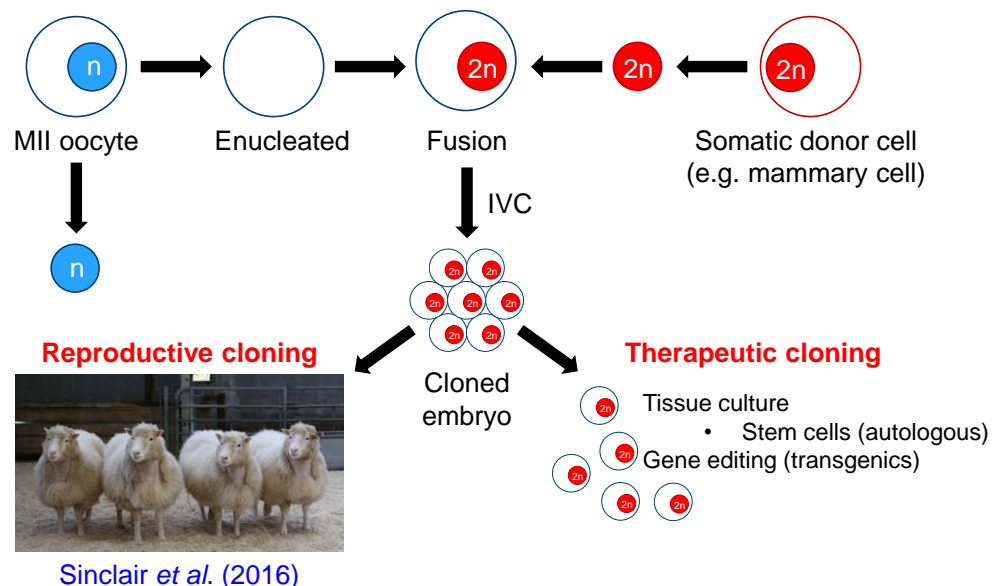
Despite the fact that RRBS enriches functional regions of the genome by selectively targeting CpG-rich regions (i.e. CGIs/DMRs) for sequencing at single-nucleotide resolution ([Chatterjee \*et al.\*, 2012](#)), the approach is limited by restriction enzymes that cleave DNA at specific sites. This biased sequence selection means that CpG-poor regions are under-represented in the library ([Doherty and Couldrey, 2014](#)). Moreover, the method cannot distinguish between 5mC and 5hmC methylation. Although 5hmC has been detected in bovine embryos and is enriched at repeat sequences, such as LINEs and LTRs ([de Montera \*et al.\*, 2013](#)), its precise role in regulating gene transcription during embryo development is unknown. Future experiments assessing the effect of methionine on the embryonic methylome could employ oxidative bisulphite sequencing ([Booth \*et al.\*, 2013](#)) to elucidate the function and interplay between 5mC and 5hmC modifications during early development.

# Chapter 5

**Donor cell type and epigenetic reprogramming of cloned sheep hepatocytes**

## 5.1 Introduction

July 2021 will mark the 25th anniversary of the birth of 'Dolly', the first mammal to be cloned from an adult cell by somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT; [Wilmut \*et al.\*, 1997](#)). The potential of SCNT to induce pluripotency in terminally differentiated cells has since been demonstrated in more than 20 mammalian species ([Matoba and Zhang, 2018](#)), including human cells ([Tachibana \*et al.\*, 2013](#); [Yamada \*et al.\*, 2014](#)). Aside basic research, SCNT has many applications that promise to benefit livestock production and regenerative medicine, such as reproductive and therapeutic cloning (i.e. transgenic animal and autologous stem cell production) ([Niemann and Lucas-Hahn, 2012](#); Figure 5.1).



**Figure 5.1 Procedure and potential applications of somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT).**

Abbreviation(s):  $2n$ , diploid; IVC, *in vitro* culture; MII, metaphase II;  $n$ , haploid.

Despite recent technological advances in SCNT ([Ogura \*et al.\*, 2013](#)), its practical use is limited by low efficiency (1-5%; [Gouveia \*et al.\*, 2020](#); [Wang \*et al.\*, 2020](#)) which is exemplified by early pregnancy and/or perinatal losses of reconstructed cloned embryos ([Hill \*et al.\*, 1999](#); [Rhind \*et al.\*, 2003](#)). Incomplete epigenetic reprogramming of somatic cell nuclei leads to aberrant DNA methylation ([Wang \*et al.\*, 2020](#)). Studies have reported that cloned embryos only partially demethylate their genomes and begin the *de novo* methylation process earlier than their *in vivo*-derived counterparts, which means that donor cell methylation is maintained ([Dean \*et al.\*, 2001](#); [Kang \*et al.\*, 2003](#)). This can

result in the continuous expression of tissue-specific genes and inefficient activation of genes critical for embryonic development, thereby reducing the developmental competence of cloned embryos (Peat and Reik, 2012; Niemann, 2016). Epigenetic perturbations associated with SCNT may contribute to embryonic mortality and congenital abnormalities in offspring. Such abnormalities include organ defects (e.g. kidney and heart), enlarged placentomes and enlarged umbilical cords, high-birth weight and LOS (Kang *et al.*, 2003; Rhind *et al.*, 2003; Smith *et al.*, 2012). As discussed in Chapter 4 (Section 4.3.2.5), there is an association between SCNT, aberrant methylation of imprinted genes and LOS in ruminant fetuses. By way of illustration, loss of methylation at *IGF2R* DMR2 is correlated with aberrant *IGF2R* expression in tissues derived from cloned sheep and cattle (Young *et al.*, 2001; Chen *et al.*, 2017).

Several factors are believed to affect the efficiency of epigenetic reprogramming following SCNT. Such factors include oocyte source and quality; cell cycle synchronisation between donor cells and recipient oocytes; timing of fusion and activation; *in vitro* embryo culture conditions of the reconstructed cloned embryo; and, donor cell type (Campbell and Alberio, 2003; Kato and Tsunoda, 2010; Akagi *et al.*, 2014). Various different somatic cell types have been used for nuclear transfer, including mammary epithelial cells (Wilmut *et al.*, 1997), fetal fibroblasts (Rathbone *et al.*, 2010), sertoli cells (Ogura *et al.*, 2000), ovarian cumulus cells, macrophages (Wakayama and Yanagimachi, 2001) and leukocytes (Galli *et al.*, 1999). However, there is limited information available with regard to the effect of donor cell type on cloning efficiency.

The epigenetic status of the donor cell genome, which encompasses a tissue-specific DNA methylome and chromatin structure, varies according to cell phenotype and genotype (Inoue *et al.*, 2003). In support of comparative mouse cloning experiments that used early blastomeres, ESCs and terminally differentiated cells (Oback and Wells, 2007), it has been postulated that nuclear reprogramming and cloning efficiency can be increased by selecting less terminally differentiated cell types as nuclear donors. For example, the reprogrammability of early blastocysts appears to be higher than that of somatic cells (Oback and Wells, 2007). It has not been determined conclusively whether differentiation status of the donor cell affects efficiency of epigenetic reprogramming after SCNT. The present study, therefore, sought to investigate the effect of donor cell type on cloning efficiency by measuring DNA methylation



in hepatocytes isolated from cloned Finn Dorset (D) and Lleyn (L) sheep derived from mammary epithelial (OP5) and fetal fibroblast (LFF4) donor cells, respectively. Finn Dorset and L sheep breeds were selected as they have both been used for SCNT experimentation and were used to investigate the healthy ageing of cloned sheep ([Sinclair \*et al.\*, 2016](#)). Three experimental comparisons assessed cytosine methylation reprogramming between: i) hepatocytes derived from cloned sheep (DvL); ii) Finn Dorset hepatocytes and their mammary epithelial donor cell line (DvOP5); and, iii) Lleyn hepatocytes and their fetal fibroblast donor cell line (LvLFF4).

## 5.2 Materials and methods

### 5.2.1 Animals, treatments and tissue collection

All procedures were conducted in accordance with the requirements of the UK Home Office Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act (1986) and were approved by the University of Nottingham Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Board.

Animals used for this study were the same as those used to assess the healthy ageing of cloned sheep by [Sinclair \*et al.\* \(2016\)](#). Four Finn-Dorset clones (D1 to D4) born in July 2007 were derived from the same mammary epithelial cell line (OP5) used as the somatic cell nuclear donor for the cloning of 'Dolly', as reported by [Wilmut \*et al.\* \(1997\)](#). Five Lleyn clones (L1 to L5) born in June 2008 were derived from the primary fetal fibroblast cell line (LFF4), as reported by [Rathbone \*et al.\* \(2010\)](#).

#### 5.2.1.1 Donor cell culture

Ovine mammary epithelial cells were isolated from a 6-year-old Finn Dorset ewe in the last trimester of pregnancy and cultured for three to six passages in TCM199 and F12 (supplemented with mammogenic hormones) before use as OP5 somatic cell nuclear donors ([Finch \*et al.\*, 1996](#); [Wilmut \*et al.\*, 1997](#)). Ovine primary fetal fibroblasts were isolated from a Day 30 fetus obtained from a purebred Lleyn ewe and cultured for two passages in Dulbecco's modified eagle's medium (DMEM) supplemented with FCS before use as LFF4 somatic cell nuclear donors ([Rathbone \*et al.\*, 2010](#)).

### 5.2.1.2 Somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT)

All procedures were based on those of [Campbell \*et al.\* \(1996\)](#). Briefly, MII arrested oocytes were stripped of cumulus cells by vortexing, washed in SOF HEPES holding medium and enucleated using a glass micropipette. Enucleated oocytes were cultured in maturation medium supplemented with 10 mmol/L caffeine for 6 h (18-24 h post-onset of maturation). At 24 h post-onset of maturation, somatic donor cell nuclei (OP5 or LFF4) were fused with an enucleated oocyte using two DC pulses. Fused couplets were activated by a 5 min exposure to 5 mmol/L calcium ionophore and a 5 h incubation in modified SOF medium. After activation, reconstructed embryos were cultured under mineral oil in pre-equilibrated SOF culture medium (39°C, 5% CO<sub>2</sub>/5% O<sub>2</sub>). Cleavage was assessed on Day 2 and blastocyst development on Day 7. Up to three blastocysts were surgically transferred into the uterus of synchronised surrogate ewes. The genetic identity of cloned offspring was confirmed using 21 microsatellite markers, including those recommended by the International Society of Animal Genetics ([Sinclair \*et al.\*, 2016](#)).

### 5.2.1.3 Isolation of hepatocytes

Fresh liver samples were harvested immediately following the slaughter of cloned Finn Dorset (D;  $n=4$ ) and Lleyen (L;  $n=5$ ) ewes. Primary ovine hepatocytes were isolated using a two-step collagenase perfusion method based on the method of [Shibany \*et al.\* \(2016\)](#). For D clones, the average cell yield was  $15.3 \pm 2.05 \times 10^7$  cells/g perfused liver tissue, and the viability and purity of cell samples were  $94.6 \pm 1.47\%$  and  $97.4 \pm 0.41\%$ , respectively. For L clones, the average cell yield was  $99.2 \pm 9.14 \times 10^6$  cells/g perfused liver tissue, and the viability and purity of cell samples were  $96.6 \pm 0.44\%$  and  $97.1 \pm 0.78\%$ , respectively.

### 5.2.2 DNA methylation analysis

Reduced representation bisulphite sequencing (RRBS) was conducted to measure cytosine (CpG) methylation in hepatocytes isolated from cloned Finn Dorset (D) and Lleyrn (L) sheep, and their respective somatic donor cell lines (OP5 and LFF4). The RRBS method employed was similar to that described in Chapter 4 (Section 4.2.4) but with the following modifications. DNA was extracted from homogenised hepatocyte cell samples and somatic donor cell lines using the Qiagen DNeasy kit. For each sample, DNA was eluted in 150  $\mu$ L EB buffer and concentrated by ethanol precipitation. Briefly, 405  $\mu$ L ice cold ethanol (100% v/v) and 13.5  $\mu$ L sodium acetate (3M) was added to each DNA sample and the contents were incubated at -80°C for 1 hour. Samples were centrifuged for 20 min at 13,000 xg in the cold room. The supernatant was removed, washed with 500  $\mu$ L ethanol (75% v/v) twice. The samples were centrifuged for 20 min at 13,000 xg after each wash. The supernatant was removed and the DNA pellet was air-dried until clear for 10-15 min at room temperature. The pellet was resuspended in 25  $\mu$ L RNase free water and stored 20°C until bisulphite conversion. Full details of working and stock solutions and methods used for Msp1 restriction enzyme digestion, end-repair and dA tailing, adapter ligation, bisulphite conversion and RRBS library preparation are listed in Appendix 5.1.

#### 5.2.2.1 Library quality control (QC)

Quality control, pooling and next-generation sequencing of bisulphite converted DNA samples was conducted by Deep Seq (The University of Nottingham, UK). DNA concentration, quality and integrity were confirmed using the Agilent TapeStation. Libraries were pooled and amplified DNA fragments of 200-400 bp were size-selected and primer adapters removed using the BluePippin system.

#### 5.2.2.2 Multiplex sequencing

The final 11 quality-ensured libraries were multiplexed and sequenced on an Illumina NextSeq 500 to achieve an average of ~33 million 75 bp paired-end reads. Data were de-multiplexed with bcl2fastq conversion software and quality control was conducted using Sequencing Analysis Viewer (SAV) and FASTQC

(Babraham Bioinformatics) software. Sequences met the standard Illumina quality criteria of cluster density, pass filter and quality scores (Q), and were converted to FASTQ files using standard Illumina pipeline (Aspera software).

### 5.2.2.3 Bioinformatic Data Analysis

Analysis was conducted as described in Chapter 4 (Section 4.2.4.4) but with the following modifications. Briefly, raw paired-end FASTQ files were trimmed to remove adapter sequences and low quality bases (-Q 20, -q 3) and reads were aligned to the *Ovis aries* reference genome (Oar v3.1, April 2012) using bisulphite read mapper with default settings (Bowtie2; [Krueger and Andrews, 2011](#); Table 5.1). Duplicate reads were marked and methylation values extracted as described above (Section 4.2.4.4). To avoid identification of methylation differences that are related to Finn Dorset and Lleyn breed differences, bases at known variant positions (SNPs) were removed. Differentially methylated sites (DMS) between groups were identified and results were filtered for a 'minimum difference threshold of 10% methylation' between experimental combinations.

**Table 5.1 Summary of Bismark final alignment report.**

Replicate	Hepatocytes		Donor cell	
	Finn Dorset (D)	Lleyn (L)	Mammary (OP5)	Fibroblast (LFF4)
1	26,934,703 <sup>a</sup>	23,161,065 <sup>a</sup>	11,447,143 <sup>a</sup>	104,679,515 <sup>a</sup>
	11,918,193 <sup>b</sup>	9,841,851 <sup>b</sup>	10,088,425 <sup>b</sup>	48,790,696 <sup>b</sup>
	(44.2) <sup>c</sup>	(42.5) <sup>c</sup>	(44.9) <sup>c</sup>	(46.6) <sup>c</sup>
2	24,237,849 <sup>a</sup>	31,918,792 <sup>a</sup>	-	-
	11,534,956 <sup>b</sup>	14,447,491 <sup>b</sup>	-	-
	(47.6) <sup>c</sup>	(45.3) <sup>c</sup>	-	-
3	30,487,827 <sup>a</sup>	26,430,474 <sup>a</sup>	-	-
	14,787,691 <sup>b</sup>	10,552,266 <sup>b</sup>	-	-
	(48.5) <sup>c</sup>	(39.9) <sup>c</sup>	-	-
4	30,408,350 <sup>a</sup>	26,693,119 <sup>a</sup>	-	-
	13,827,199 <sup>b</sup>	11,803,131 <sup>b</sup>	-	-
	(45.5) <sup>c</sup>	(44.2) <sup>c</sup>	-	-
5	-	27,433,294 <sup>a</sup>	-	-
	-	12,286,345 <sup>b</sup>	-	-
	-	(44.8) <sup>c</sup>	-	-

Total sequence pairs read following quality trimming<sup>a</sup>. Number of paired alignments with unique best hit<sup>b</sup>. Mapping efficiency (%): measure of the sequence pairs that map uniquely to the reference genome<sup>c</sup>.

#### 5.2.2.3.1 Gene set enrichment analysis (GSEA)

Enrichment of gene ontologies (GO) was performed using hypergeometric tests in the (Not) Ingenuity Pathway Analysis (NIPA) tool (<https://github.com/ADAC-UoN/NIPA>). As before, genes that possessed clusters of DMS ( $\geq 5$  DMS within a sliding window size of 1 kb) were selected for gene set enrichment analysis (GSEA). A total of 545 clusters of DMS in 409 genes were identified between Finn Dorset and Lleyn hepatocytes (DvL); 7,846 clusters of DMS in 3,569 genes were identified between Finn Dorset hepatocytes and their mammary epithelial donor cell line (DvOP5); and, 10,581 clusters of DMS in 4,486 genes were identified between Lleyn hepatocytes and their fetal fibroblast donor cell line (LvLFF4). Annotated pathways associated with 'Biological Process', 'Cellular Component' and 'Molecular Function' GO terms were identified as significant based on functional enrichment of genes with clusters of differentially methylated sites (DMS).

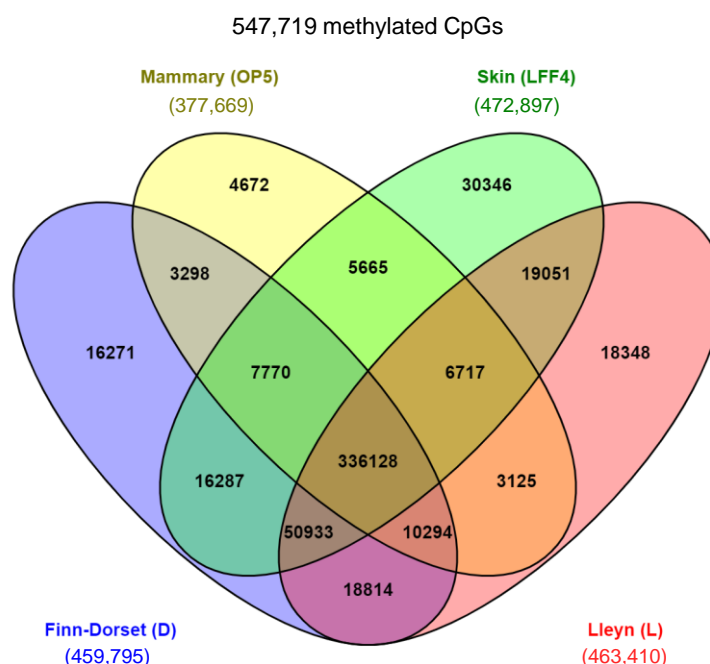
### 5.2.3 Statistical data analysis

Differentially methylated sites (DMS) between experimental comparisons and sliding windows were identified using the Chi-squared test. Gene ontology terms with an FDR adjusted  $P$ -value  $\leq 0.05$  were deemed statistically significant. Differences in mean methylation (%) of genes between isolated hepatocytes and founder somatic cells for each clonal group were determined using linear mixed model (REML) analysis within Genstat. The fixed model included the terms 'Dolly' (Finn Dorset) and 'Lleyn' for comparisons of differential methylation between each founder cell line and their respective clonal population of isolated hepatocytes, and the random model included individual DMS. These data are presented as means with SEM.

## 5.3 Results and Discussion

### 5.3.1 Overall CpG methylation

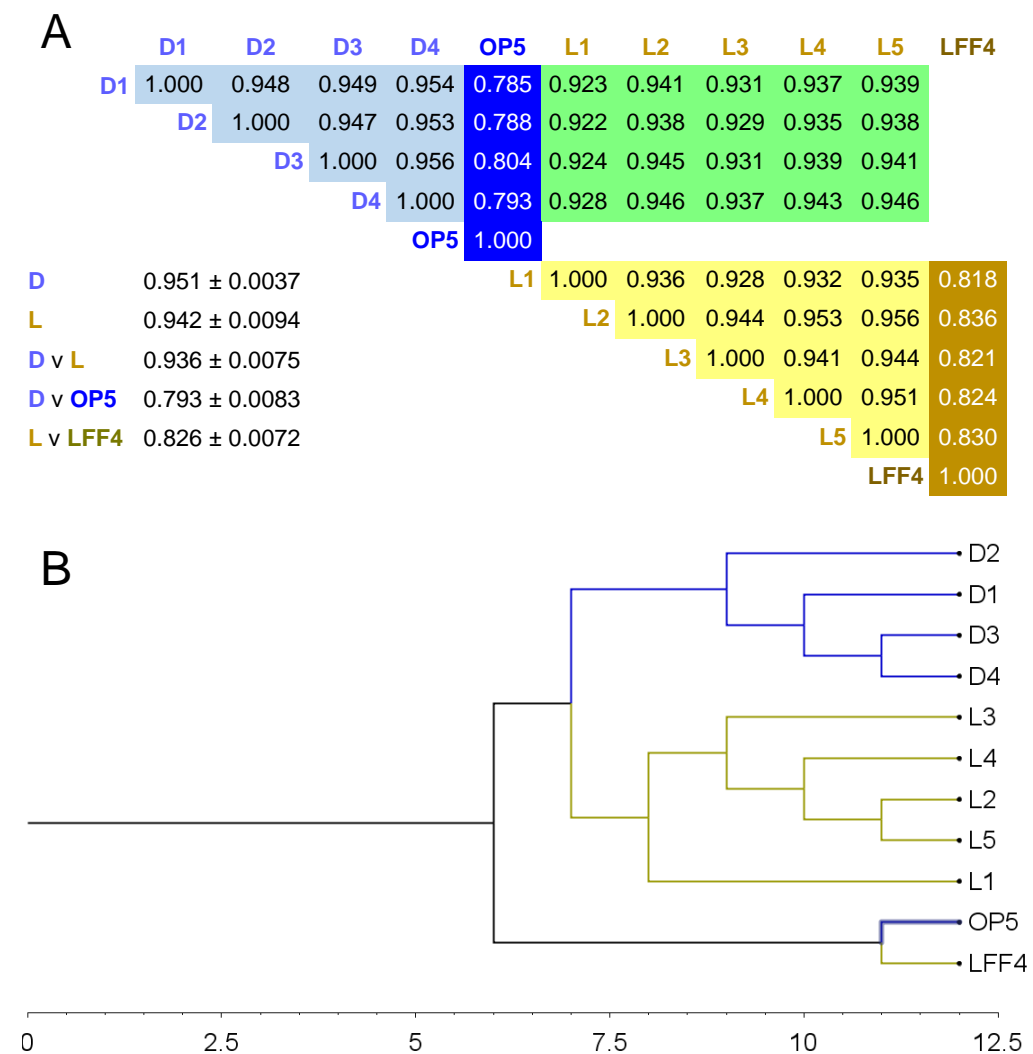
RRBS analyses identified a total of 609,854 CpGs in all samples (D, L, OP5 and LFF4), of which 547,719 CpGs were identified as methylated (Figure 5.2). The majority of CpGs ( $n=336,128$ ) were methylated to some degree in all four cell types, however, a subset of methylated CpGs were unique to each cell type, thereby highlighting the presence of cell type-specific DNA methylation signatures (Varley *et al.*, 2013). The fetal skin fibroblast (LFF4) cell line had the greatest number of methylated CpGs ( $n=472,897$ ), whereas the mammary epithelial cell line (OP5) had the lowest number ( $n=377,669$ ). The number of methylated CpGs was greater in Lleyen than Finn Dorset hepatocytes (463,410 v 459,795, respectively). This modest difference in global methylation between hepatocytes derived from D and L clones could be due to genotype (DvL) or the donor cell line (OP5vLFF4) from which they were derived.



**Figure 5.2 Distribution of methylated CpGs across hepatocyte cell samples derived from cloned Finn Dorset (D) and Lleyen (L) sheep, and their respective somatic donor cell lines.**

Source: Venny 2.1.0, bioinfogp (<https://bioinfogp.cnb.csic.es/tools/venny/index.html>). Number of methylated CpGs in parentheses.

Pearson correlation coefficients were established for comparisons between samples using percent methylation values (Figure 5.3). Methylation was most strongly correlated (0.951) between hepatocytes isolated from D clones, closely followed by L clones (0.942; Figure 5.3A). Finn Dorset and L clone hepatocytes were more highly correlated (0.936) with one another than they were with their respective donor cell lines (D v OP5: 0.793; L v LLF4: 0.826). Taken together, these findings suggest that global CpG methylation is largely influenced by cell phenotype and function rather than epigenetic reprogramming following nuclear transfer.



**Figure 5.3 Correlation of CpG methylation (%) between cell samples ( $n=11$ ).**

Correlation matrix shows conservation of methylated CpGs between hepatocytes isolated from cloned sheep and their derivative cell lines (**A**). Cladogram plot shows clustering of cell types based on methylation similarity (**B**). Abbreviation(s): D1 to D4, Finn-Dorset clone hepatocyte samples; L1 to L5, Lley clone hepatocyte cell samples; LFF4, Lley fetal fibroblast; OP5, mammary donor cell line.

### 5.3.2 Directional methylation

Table 5.2 shows the number of CpGs and genes that were differentially methylated between D and L clone hepatocytes, and their respective donor cell lines at the 10% minimum difference threshold. It was not surprising that the hepatocytes shared the lowest count of DMS ( $n=22,984$ ) and differentially methylated genes ( $n=8,047$ ) given that they are the same cell type. As stated earlier, differential methylation of CpGs between D and L clone hepatocytes is confounded by difference in genotype (DvL) and donor cell line (OP5vLFF4).

There was a greater number of DMS and differentially methylated genes between L hepatocytes and their LFF4 donor cell line, than between D hepatocytes and their OP5 donor cell line (Table 5.2). Such findings suggest that the level of CpG methylation within the mammary epithelial cells is more similar to those of clone hepatocytes than is the case for the fetal fibroblasts. In both comparisons, a higher percentage of DMS are hypomethylated in clone hepatocytes relative to the donor cell line (DvOP5: 54.9% and LvLFF4: 62.1%, respectively) demonstrating that, in general, these somatic donor cells lose methylation during epigenetic reprogramming to become hepatocytes.

**Table 5.2 A count of differentially methylated sites (DMS) and genes, and directional methylation for each experimental combination (%).**

Variable	<u>D</u> v L	<u>D</u> v OP5	<u>L</u> v LFF4
DMS count	22,984	112,937	152,869
↑ Methylation	10,134 (44.1)	50,934 (45.1)	57,935 (37.9)
↓ Methylation	12,850 (55.9)	62,003 (54.9)	94,934 (62.1)
Genes	8,047	13,966	15,807

Arrows represent direction of methylation (hypermethylation, ↑; hypomethylation, ↓) in cell sample as represented by underlined abbreviation (D relative to L/OP5, and L relative to LFF4). Abbreviation(s): Differentially methylated site, DMS; Finn Dorset (D); Lleyn (L); LFF4, Lleyn fetal fibroblast; OP5, mammary donor cell line.



### 5.3.3 Distribution of DMS

A similar genomic distribution pattern of CpG methylation was observed across experimental comparisons. Around 8-9% of DMS were located in gene promoters, 13-15% were located in exons and 34-39% were located in introns. Around ~17% of DMS were located in CGIs and ~23% were located in CGI shores (Table 5.3). As discussed in Chapter 4 (Section 4.3.2.3), this pattern of methylation is commonly observed in studies using RRBS due to basic gene anatomy and the method of DNA methylation analysis which enriches a representative sample of the genome. The percentages of hyper- and hypomethylated CpGs were similar for each genomic region studied (Table 5.3).

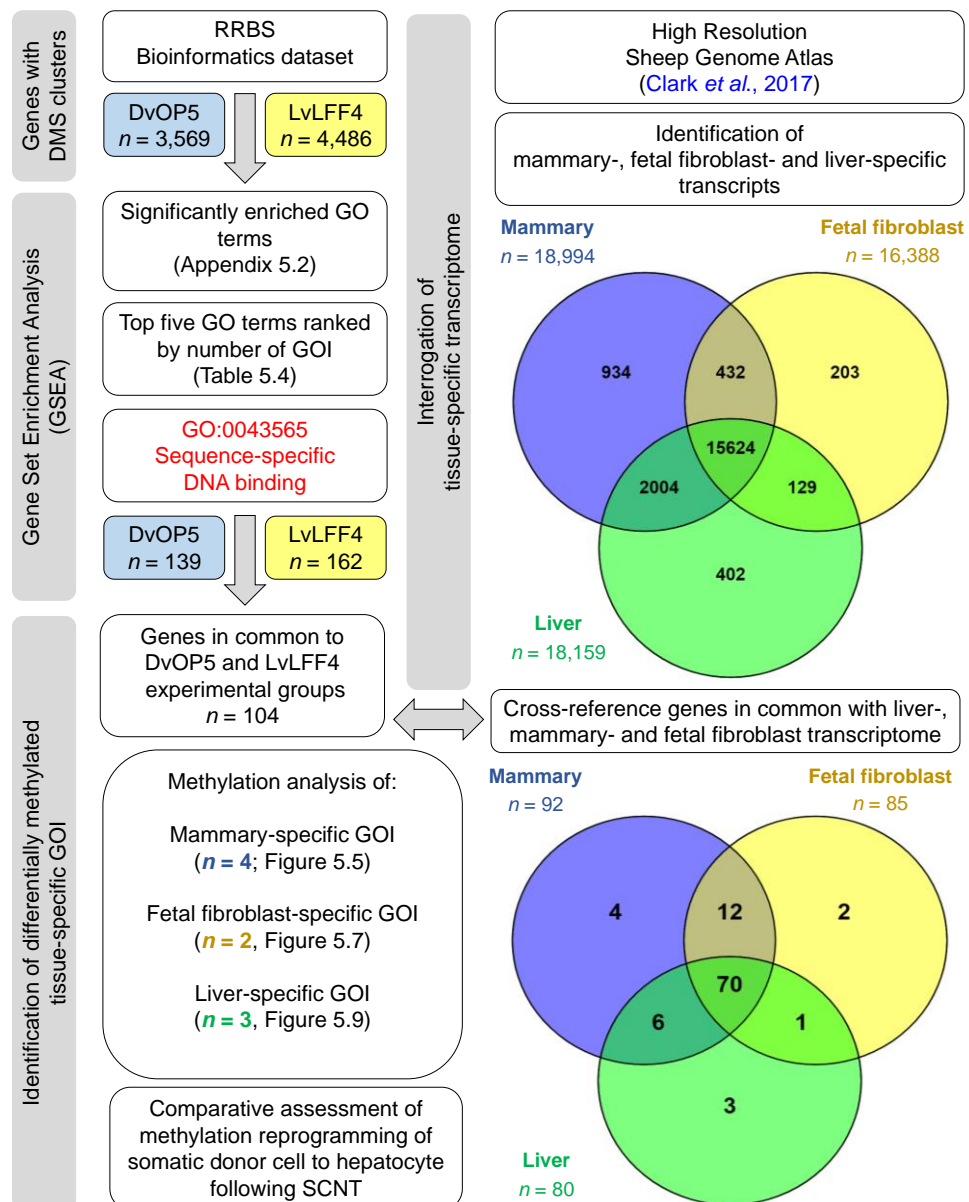
**Table 5.3 Distribution of differentially methylated sites (DMS) for each experimental combination (%).**

Region	<u>D</u> v L	<u>D</u> v OP5	<u>L</u> v LFF4
<b>Promoter</b>	<b>1,874 (8.2)</b>	<b>9,800 (8.7)</b>	<b>13,486 (8.8)</b>
↑ Methylation	833 (44.5)	3,621 (36.9)	3,600 (26.7)
↓ Methylation	1,041 (55.5)	6,179 (63.1)	9,886 (73.3)
<b>Exonic</b>	<b>3,366 (14.6)</b>	<b>15,182 (13.4)</b>	<b>21,021 (13.8)</b>
↑ Methylation	1,378 (40.9)	5,533 (36.4)	6,327 (30.1)
↓ Methylation	1,988 (59.1)	9,649 (63.6)	14,694 (69.9)
<b>Intronic</b>	<b>8,874 (38.6)</b>	<b>42,337 (37.5)</b>	<b>58,329 (38.2)</b>
↑ Methylation	3,646 (41.1)	18,467 (43.6)	22,896 (39.3)
↓ Methylation	5,228 (58.9)	23,870 (56.4)	35,433 (60.7)
<b>CGIs</b>	<b>4,005 (17.4)</b>	<b>20,103 (17.8)</b>	<b>24,728 (16.2)</b>
↑ Methylation	1,903 (47.5)	7,008 (34.9)	6,303 (25.5)
↓ Methylation	2,102 (52.5)	13,095 (65.1)	18,425 (74.5)
<b>CGI shores</b>	<b>5,123 (22.3)</b>	<b>26,151 (23.1)</b>	<b>34,946 (22.9)</b>
↑ Methylation	2,014 (39.3)	11,274 (43.1)	12,393 (35.5)
↓ Methylation	3,109 (60.7)	14,877 (56.9)	22,553 (64.5)

Arrows represent direction of methylation (hypermethylation, ↑; hypomethylation, ↓) in cell sample as represented by underlined abbreviation (D relative to L/OP5, and L relative to LFF4). Abbreviation(s): Differentially methylated site, DMS; Finn Dorset (D); Lleyen (L); LFF4, Lleyen fetal fibroblast; OP5, mammary donor cell line.

### 5.3.4 Enriched pathways and genes

The flowchart summarises the systematic methodology of GSEA and the selection of GOI for comparative methylation analysis (Figure 5.4). As clusters of methylated CpGs appear to be important for the regulation of gene transcription (Li and Zhang, 2014), genes that possessed  $\geq 5$  DMS within 1 kb were selected for GSEA (DvOP5: 3,569 genes; LvLFF4: 4,486 genes).



**Figure 5.4 Flowchart of the methodology used to select differentially methylated tissue-specific genes ( $n=9$ ) between donor cell lines and clone hepatocytes.**

Mammary-specific genes ( $n=4$ ); fetal fibroblast-specific genes ( $n=2$ ); liver-specific genes ( $n=3$ ) were selected for detailed methylation analysis. Abbreviation(s): D, Finn Dorset; DMS, differentially methylated site; GO, gene ontology; GOI, genes of interest; L, Lleyn; LFF4, Lleyn fetal fibroblast; OP5, mammary donor cell line; RRBS, reduced representation bisulphite sequencing; SCNT, somatic cell nuclear transfer.

All GO terms associated with 'Biological Process', 'Cellular Component' and 'Molecular Function' significantly enriched within DvOP5 and LvLFF4 experimental comparisons are presented in Appendix 5.2. The top five terms were ranked by number of GOI (Table 5.4). Biological Process GO terms with the greatest number of differentially methylated GOI were involved in 'anterior/posterior pattern specification' (33 GOI) and 'Negative regulation of fat cell differentiation' (15 GOI) for DvOP5 and LvLFF4 experimental comparisons, respectively (Table 5.4A).

The 'Sequence-specific DNA binding' Molecular Function GO term was selected for further investigation as it was significantly enriched in both experimental comparisons and comprised a high number of differentially methylated GOI (DvOP5: 139 genes, LvLFF4: 162 genes; Table 5.4C). Of those GOI, 104 genes were common to both DvOP5 and LvLFF4 comparisons (Appendix 5.3). Due to the high number of common genes, a reductionist approach was taken to minimise the number of genes to a manageable list for comparative methylation analysis. In order to do so, common genes ( $n=104$ ) were cross-referenced with the 'high resolution atlas of gene expression in the domestic sheep (*Ovis aries*)' published by the Roslin Institute, Edinburgh, UK (Clark *et al.*, 2017; Dataset S2: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgen.1006997.s005>).

Interrogation of the atlas revealed 18,994 genes expressed in the mammary gland of an adult Texel ewe; 16,388 genes expressed in the 35 Day Texel x Scottish Blackface (TxBF) sheep fetal fibroblast; and 18,159 genes expressed in the adult Texel liver. Of those, 934 genes were specific to the mammary gland; 203 genes were specific to the fetal fibroblast; and, 402 genes were specific to the liver (Figure 5.4). Although transcriptomic differences between sheep genotypes (e.g. Finn Dorset v Texel and Lleyn v TxBF) were expected, the tissue-specific transcriptome data published by Clark *et al.* (2017) provided suitable gene candidates for comparative DNA methylation analysis in the present study.

Of those 104 common genes enriched within the 'Sequence-specific DNA binding' GO term, 92 are expressed in the mammary gland; 85 in the fetal fibroblast; and, 80 in the liver (Figure 5.4). Tissue-specific genes were selected to compare methylation reprogramming between clone hepatocytes and their respective donor cell lines (mammary,  $n=4$ ; fetal fibroblast,  $n=2$ ; liver,  $n=3$ ) based on the hypothesis that expressed genes would exhibit a different degree and pattern of methylation than genes repressed in specific-tissues.

**Table 5.4 Top five enriched Gene Ontology (GO) terms ranked by number of differentially methylated genes of interest (GOI).****A. Biological Process GO**

<b>Finn-Dorset (D) v OP5 cell line (n=186)</b>	<b>GOI</b>	<b>FDR (q-value)</b>	<b>Lleyn (L) v LFF4 cell line (n=193)</b>	<b>GOI</b>	<b>FDR (q-value)</b>
GO:0009952 Anterior/posterior patterning	33	0.0019	GO:0045599 Regulation of fat cell differentiation	15	0.0471
GO:0060021 Roof of mouth development	21	0.0275	GO:0035115 Embryonic forelimb morphogenesis	13	0.0435
GO:0042472 Inner ear morphogenesis	19	0.0060	GO:0010596 Endothelial cell differentiation	11	0.0050
GO:0006909 Phagocytosis	15	0.0403	GO:0030878 Thyroid gland development	10	0.0426
GO:0001656 Metanephros development	14	0.0001	GO:0032331 Chondrocyte differentiation	9	0.0255

**B. Cellular Component**

<b>Finn-Dorset (D) v OP5 cell line (n=7)</b>	<b>GOI</b>	<b>FDR (q-value)</b>	<b>Lleyn (L) v LFF4 cell line (n=12)</b>	<b>GOI</b>	<b>FDR (q-value)</b>
GO:0044309 Neurone spine	3	0.04782	GO:0033093 Weibel-Palade body	3	0.0000
GO:0098839 Postsynaptic density membrane	3	0.04782	GO:0035976 TF AP-1 complex	3	0.0000
GO:0005610 Laminin-5 complex	2	0.0000	GO:0005608 Laminin-3 complex	2	0.0000
GO:0005899 Insulin receptor complex	2	0.0000	GO:0005899 Insulin receptor complex	2	0.0000
GO:0031095 Platelet dense tubular network	2	0.0000	GO:0017109 Glutamate-cysteine ligase complex	2	0.0000

**C. Molecular Function**

<b>Finn-Dorset (D) v OP5 cell line (n=30)</b>	<b>GOI</b>	<b>FDR (q-value)</b>	<b>Lleyn (L) v LFF4 cell line (n=43)</b>	<b>GOI</b>	<b>FDR (q-value)</b>
GO:0003700 DNA binding TF activity	160	0.0227	GO:0043565 Sequence-specific DNA binding	162	0.0040
GO:0043565 Sequence-specific DNA binding	139	0.0004	GO:0005089 Rho guanyl-NT exchange factor	14	0.0023
GO:0000981 DNA binding TF activity, RNAPII	37	0.0169	GO:0071889 14-3-3 protein binding	8	0.0380
GO:0005089 Rho guanyl-nucleotide exchange	13	0.0008	GO:0001972 Retanoic acid binding	7	0.0074
GO:0001972 Retanoic acid binding	8	0.0001	GO:0004668 Protein-arginine deaminase activity	5	0.0000

Abbreviation(s): FDR, false discovery rate; GOI, genes of interest; LFF4, Lleyn fetal fibroblast; OP5, mammary donor cell line.

#### 5.3.4.1 Mammary-specific genes

Figure 5.5 shows mammary-specific genes (*POU5F1*, *BARHL2*, *SOX30*, *LMX1A*) enriched within the 'Sequence-specific DNA binding' GO term ranked according to their total number of DMS clusters. In general, DMS within these mammary specific genes were hypermethylated in the OP5 and LFF4 somatic donor cell lines relative to the clone hepatocytes. Furthermore, their degree of hypermethylation was significantly greater in the OP5 mammary cell line relative to the D clone hepatocyte, than in the LFF4 cell line relative to the L clone hepatocyte ( $P < 0.001$ ; Figure 5.5B, Figure 5.5D). The exception to this rule was *LIM Homeobox Transcription Factor 1 Alpha* (*LMX1A*) which was generally hypermethylated in the D clone hepatocyte relative to the OP5 mammary cell line. Out of 14 DMS identified in the *LMX1A* gene sequence, six DMS located at the 5'-end were hypomethylated in the D clone hepatocyte, whereas eight located towards the 3'-end of were hypermethylated in the D clone hepatocyte relative to the OP5 mammary cell line (Figure 5.5E).

The *POU class 5 homeobox 1* (*POU5F1*) gene had the greatest number of DMS clusters ( $n=3$ ) in both DvOP5 and LvLFF4 experimental combinations (Figure 5.5A). The *POU5F1* gene encodes octamer-binding transcription factor-4 (OCT4), a protein that establishes and maintains pluripotency during embryonic development and serves as a core molecular marker of stem cells (Shi and Jin, 2010). Although silenced in the vast majority of terminally differentiated somatic cell types, expression of *POU5F1* is upregulated in the lactating mammary gland, thereby highlighting a potential role of the pluripotency gene network in mammary stem cell self-renewal that drives the remodelling of the gland into a fully mature milk-secretory organ (Hassiotou et al., 2013).

The five-exon structure of *POU5F1* is conserved across mammalian orthologs (Medvedev et al., 2008). However, little is known about epigenetic regulation of *POU5F1* gene expression in sheep, thus, its regulatory regions have not been fully deciphered. The present study found clusters of DMS within the *POU5F1* gene that were located around the exon-intron 1 junction in both DvOP5 and LvLFF4 experimental comparisons (Figure 5.6). A study in rabbit blastocysts reported progressive methylation within the 5' regulatory region and the first exon that accompanied cellular differentiation and the gradual repression of *POU5F1* (Canon et al., 2018). Whilst the biological relevance of this pattern of differential methylation is uncertain in the absence of complementary

transcriptomic data, it follows that methylation within this region may be responsible for the transcriptional regulation of *POU5F1*.

In humans, the *POU5F1* gene comprises three main isoforms (*OCT4A*, *OCT4B* and *OCT4B1*) that are generated by alternative splicing. These variants are different at the 5'-end and identical at the 3'-end as exon 1 is present in *OCT4A* but is spliced in *OCT4B* and *OCT4B1* (Wang and Dai, 2010). If similar *POU5F1* transcript variants exist in sheep, perhaps the sharp transition in methylation that surrounds the exon-intron 1 boundary (Figure 5.6) marks the regulatory region for alternative splicing of the ovine *POU5F1* gene.

#### 5.3.4.2 Fetal fibroblast-specific genes

Figure 5.7 presents the differential methylation of fetal fibroblast-specific genes enriched within the 'Sequence-specific DNA binding' GO term between somatic donor cell lines and clone hepatocytes. *Paired like homeodomain 1* (*PITX1*) and *Paired box protein Pax-7* (*PAX7*) are transcription factors involved in the reprogramming of fetal fibroblasts into skeletal muscle progenitor cells (Ito et al., 2017). Differentially methylated sites identified within both genes were hypermethylated in the LFF4 donor cell line relative to the L clone hepatocytes (Figure 5.7B, Figure 5.7C). However, DMS within the *PAX7* gene were hypomethylated in the OP5 mammary cell line relative to the D clone hepatocyte (Figure 5.7C).

Methylation analysis of individual DMS across the *PITX1* gene shows that DMS at the 5'-end of the sequence tend to be hypermethylated in the somatic donor cell lines relative to the clone hepatocytes, whilst those at the 3'-end of the sequence tend to be hypomethylated in the donor cells relative to clone hepatocytes (Figure 5.7B, Figure 5.8). This pattern of differential methylation along the gene sequence was similar for both DvOP5 and LvLFF4 experimental comparisons. However, the degree of differential methylation was greater between D and OP5, than between L and LFF4 (Figure 5.7B, Figure 5.8). The observation that CpG methylation was altered in the same direction at common sites for both experimental comparisons suggests that their specific methylation status may be, at least in part, important for cell fate reprogramming to produce hepatocytes irrespective of the somatic donor cell type.

A recent assessment of the DNA methylation profile of the *PITX1* gene in the goat mammary gland revealed that methylation of a CGI located within the 3'-

flanking region of the gene was correlated with lactation performance. A reduction in methylation was observed within this region during lactation, however, the gene was not expressed in the mammary gland during the dry or lactational period (Zhao *et al.*, 2019). Since differential methylation was observed within the 3' region of *PITX1* between the OP5 mammary cell line and D clone hepatocytes in the present study, it is plausible that methylation within this genomic region could provide an epigenetic marker of cell phenotype and function (e.g. indicator of lactational performance) independent of mRNA transcript expression.

Genetic markers in the form of SNPs and copy-number variations have been identified and associated with complex production traits in livestock (König *et al.*, 2009). It is, however, accepted that genomic information alone does not account for all of the heritable variation in traits of interest. A review by Ibeagha-Awemu and Zhao (2015) discusses the potential of epigenetic marker-assisted selection (eMAS) in livestock production programmes. Essentially, this entails the use of stable and transgenerationally inherited epigenetic marks (e.g. DNA methylation) that can be used as prognostic tools for certain phenotypic traits and disease aetiology (Flintoft, 2010). The characterisation of stable and functional epigenetic modifications could not only prove useful for eMAS in selective breeding at the DNA level (Zhao *et al.*, 2019), but may also prove useful targets to further investigate and evaluate the economic, health and wellbeing traits of cloned animals.

#### 5.3.4.3 Liver-specific genes

The differential methylation of liver-specific genes between the somatic donor cell lines and clone hepatocytes is presented in Figure 5.9. *Lim homeobox 5* (*LHX5*) is involved in patterning and differentiation of diverse cell types during embryonic development, primarily cells within the central nervous system (Zhao *et al.*, 2000; Figure 5.9D). Forkhead box transcription factors (*FOXA2* and *FOXN4*) are critical for the development of numerous endodermal tissues, including the liver (Lee *et al.*, 2005; Gosalia *et al.*, 2015; Figure 5.9B, Figure 5.9C). In particular, the *Forkhead box A2* (*FOXA2*) is a 'pioneer' transcription factor meaning that it recognises binding sites on nucleosomal DNA and alters chromatin structure to permit the recruitment of downstream transcription factors during endoderm differentiation (Cernilogar *et al.*, 2019).



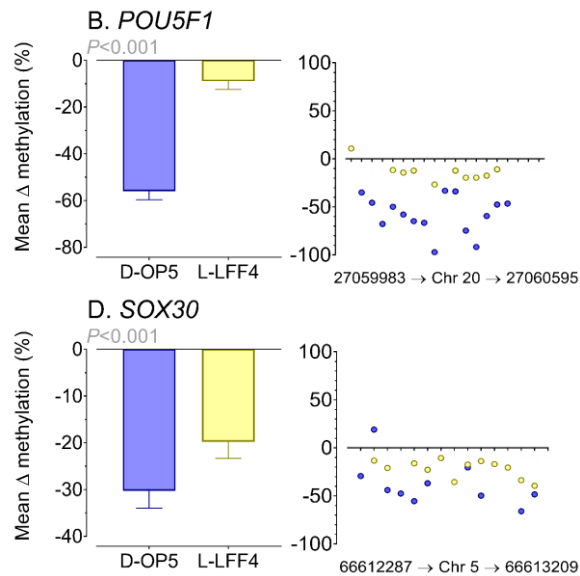
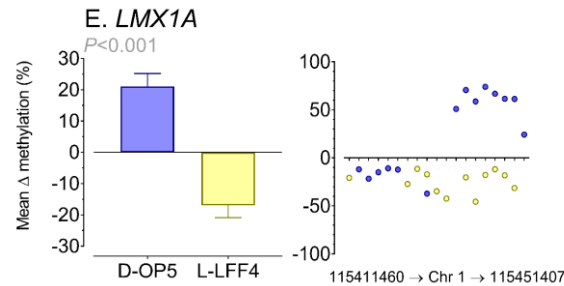
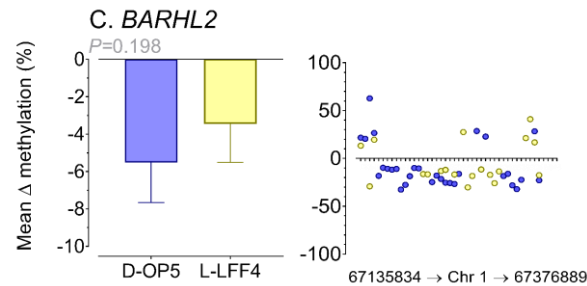
Differentially methylated sites identified within the *FOXA2* gene were generally hypomethylated in OP5 and LFF4 donor cell lines relative to D and L clone hepatocytes (Figure 5.9B, Figure 5.10). It may seem paradoxical that tissue-specific genes, such as *FOXA2*, that are expressed exclusively in the liver (and not in the mammary cell or fetal fibroblast) have DMS that were hypermethylated in clone hepatocytes but hypomethylated in the OP5 and LFF4 cell lines. An unexpected methylation pattern was also described by [Halpern and others \(2014\)](#), who found a CGI within the promoter region of the human *FOXA2* gene that displayed high levels of methylation in expressing tissues, but low levels in non-expressing tissues. The authors postulated that the lack of CpG methylation permitted the binding of repressive proteins, such as Polycomb complexes, which in turn inhibited *FOXA2* gene expression ([Halpern et al., 2014](#)).

Figure 5.10 shows that the majority of DMS that were hypermethylated in the liver (and hypomethylated in the donor cell line) were common to both experimental comparisons (DvOP5 and LvLFF4) and were located within the exon 2 of the *FOXA2* gene. Whilst it is well-accepted that the enrichment of DNA methylation within gene bodies is positively correlated with gene expression ([Yang et al., 2014](#)), the functional significance of CpG hypermethylation within the final exon of *FOXA2* with respect to gene transcription is unknown.



A. Mammary-specific genes

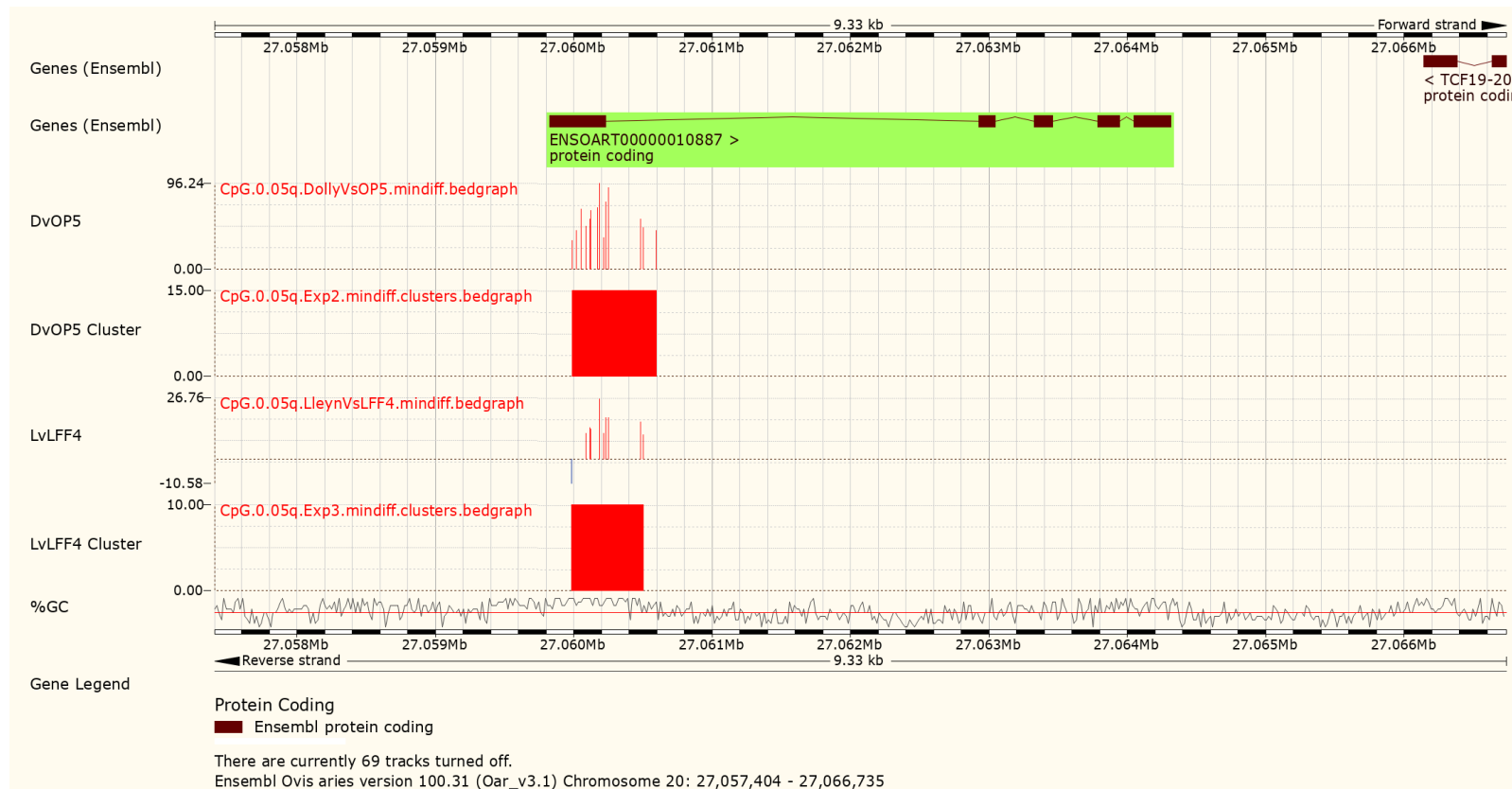
GOI with DMS clusters (n=4)	DvOP5		LvLFF4	
	Cluster count	DMS count	Cluster count	DMS count
<i>POU5F1</i>	3	15	3	10
<i>BARHL2</i>	3	30	2	19
<i>SOX30</i>	2	10	2	12
<i>LMX1A</i>	1	14	1	12



Data analysed using REML analysis. Bars represent mean  $\pm$  SEM. Scatter plots represent mean difference ( $\Delta$ ) in methylation between clone hepatocyte and donor cell line (D-OP5, L-LFF4) at individual DMS in 5' → 3' orientation along gene sequence.

Abbreviation(s): *BARHL2*, BarH Like Homeobox 2 ; Chr, chromosome; D, Finn Dorset; DMS, differentially methylated site; GOI, gene of interest; L, Lleyn; LFF4, Lleyn fetal fibroblast; *LMX1A*, LIM Homeobox Transcription Factor 1 Alpha; OP5, mammary donor cell line; *POU5F1*, POU class 5 homeobox 1; *SOX30*, SRY-Box Transcription Factor 30.

Figure 5.5 Differential methylation of mammary-specific genes (n=4) between clone sheep hepatocytes and their somatic donor cell lines.



**Figure 5.6 Clusters of differentially methylated sites (DMS) in the *POU5F1* gene are hypermethylated in somatic donor cell line (OP5 and LFF4) relative to clone hepatocyte (D and L).**

Bedgraphs demonstrate loss (↓, hypomethylation) and gain (↑, hypermethylation) of methylation at individual cytosine residues, and location of DMS clusters. Abbreviation(s): D, Finn Dorset; L, Lleyen; LFF4, Lleyen fetal fibroblast; OP5, mammary donor cell line; *POU5F1*, *POU* class 5 homeobox 1.

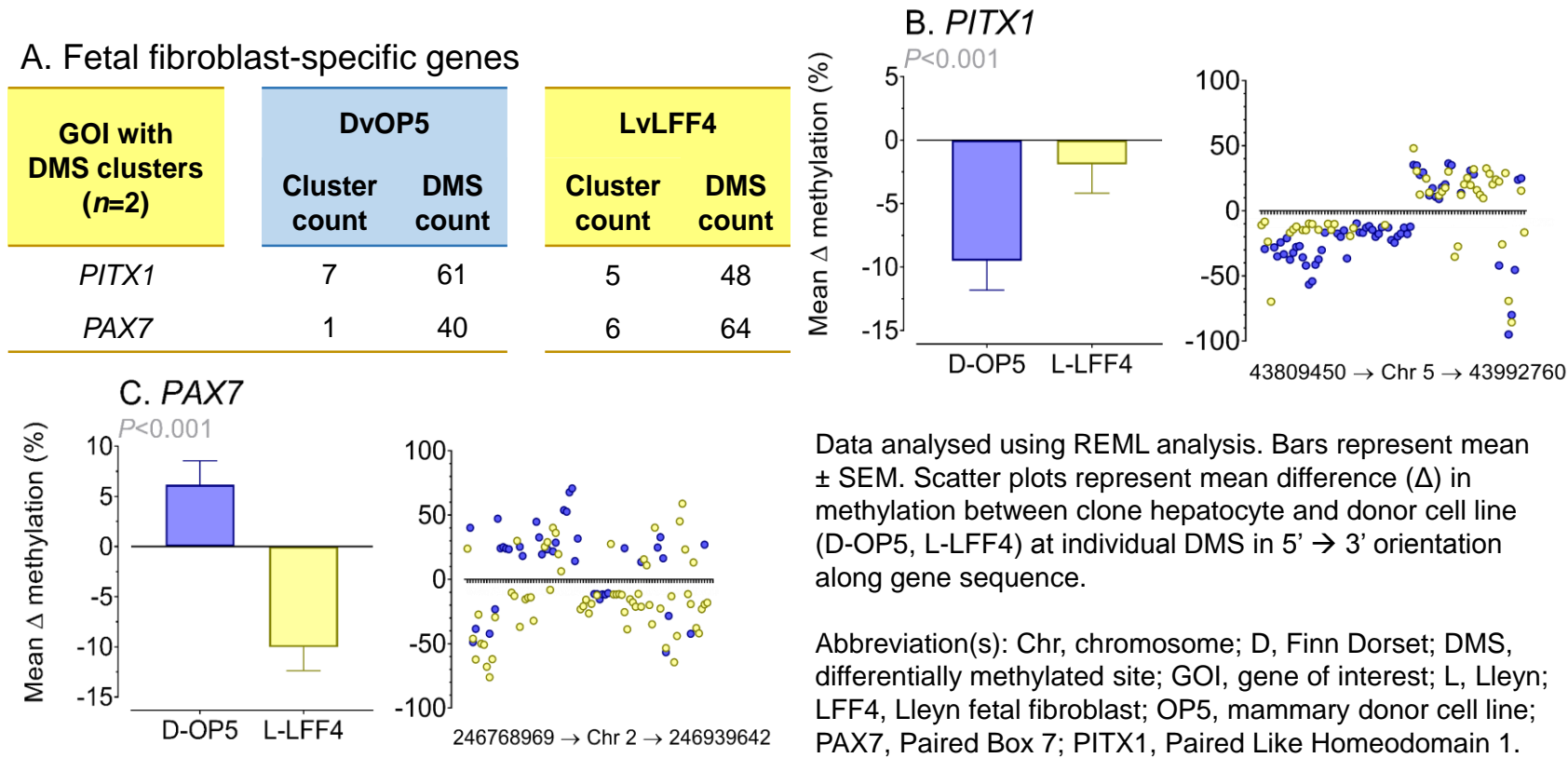
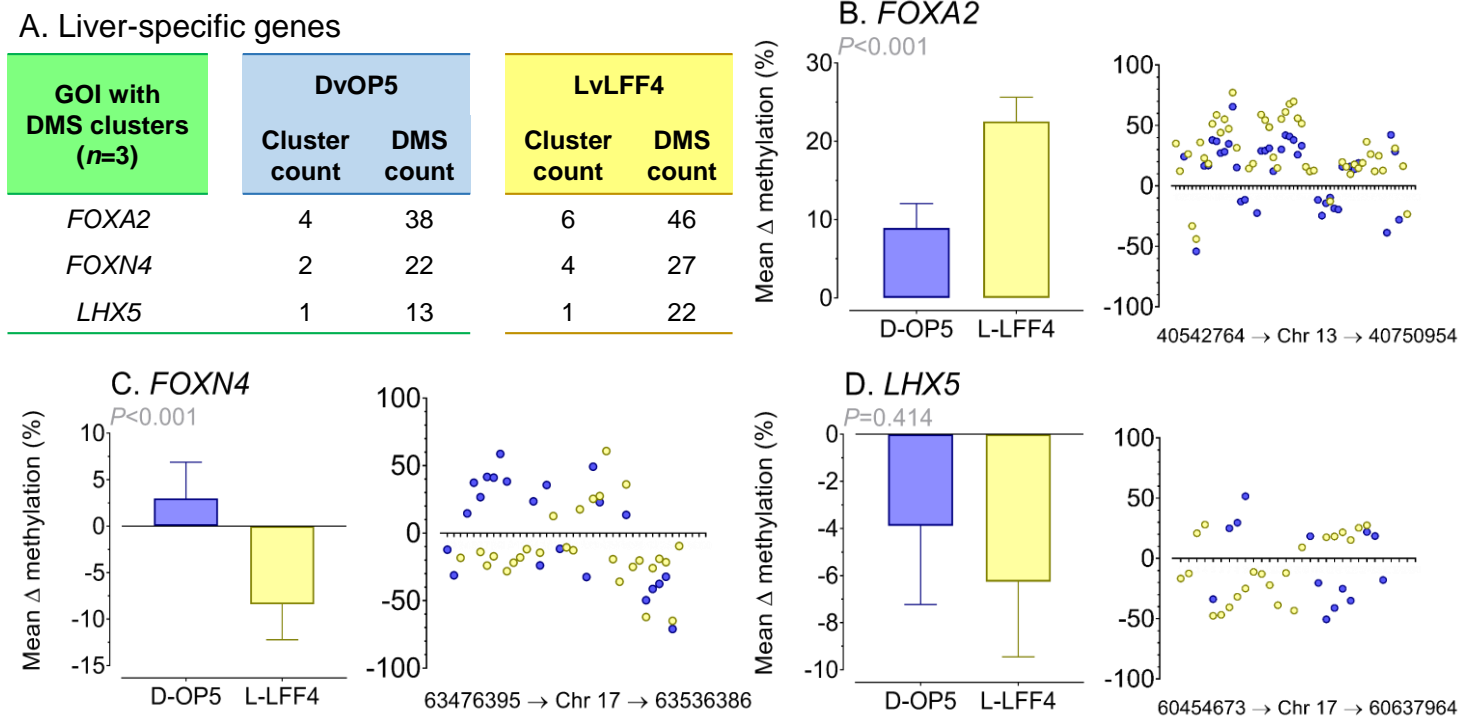


Figure 5.7 Differential methylation of fetal fibroblast-specific genes (n=2) between clone sheep hepatocytes and their somatic donor cell lines.



**Figure 5.8 Clusters of differentially methylated sites (DMS) in the *PITX1* gene are hypermethylated in somatic donor cell line (OP5 and LFF4) relative to clone hepatocyte (D and L).**

Bedgraphs demonstrate loss (↓, hypomethylation) and gain (↑, hypermethylation) of methylation at individual cytosine residues, and location of DMS clusters. Abbreviation(s): D, Finn Dorset; L, Lleyn; LFF4, Lleyn fetal fibroblast; OP5, mammary donor cell line; *PITX1*, Paired like Homeodomain 1.



**Figure 5.9 Differential methylation of liver-specific genes ( $n=3$ ) between clone sheep hepatocytes and their somatic donor cell lines.**

Data analysed using REML analysis. Bars represent mean  $\pm$  SEM. Scatter plots represent mean difference ( $\Delta$ ) in methylation between clone hepatocyte and donor cell line (D-OP5, L-LFF4) at individual DMS in 5'  $\rightarrow$  3' orientation along gene sequence. Abbreviation(s): Chr, chromosome; D, Finn Dorset; DMS, differentially methylated site; FOXA2, Forkhead box protein A2; FOXN4, Forkhead Box N4; GOI, gene of interest; L, Lleyn; LFF4, Lleyn fetal fibroblast; LHX5, LIM homeobox 5; OP5, mammary donor cell line.



**Figure 5.10 Clusters of differentially methylated sites (DMS) in the *FOXA2* gene are hypomethylated in somatic donor cell line (OP5 and LFF4) relative to clone hepatocyte (D and L).**

Bedgraphs demonstrate loss (↓, hypomethylation) and gain (↑, hypermethylation) of methylation at individual cytosine residues, and location of DMS clusters. Abbreviation(s): D, Finn Dorset; FOXA2, Forkhead Box A2; L, Lleyn; LFF4, Lleyn fetal fibroblast; OP5, mammary donor cell line.

### 5.3.5 Imprinted genes

As referred to earlier (Section 5.1), SCNT has been linked to aberrant methylation of imprinted genes and developmental anomalies in mammalian offspring (Young *et al.*, 2001; Chen *et al.*, 2017). The present study identified 16 genes that are recognised as imprinted in sheep or cattle (Catalogue of Imprinted Genes; <http://igc.otago.ac.nz/home.html>) that were differentially methylated between DvOP5 and/or LvLFF4 experimental comparisons (Table 5.5).

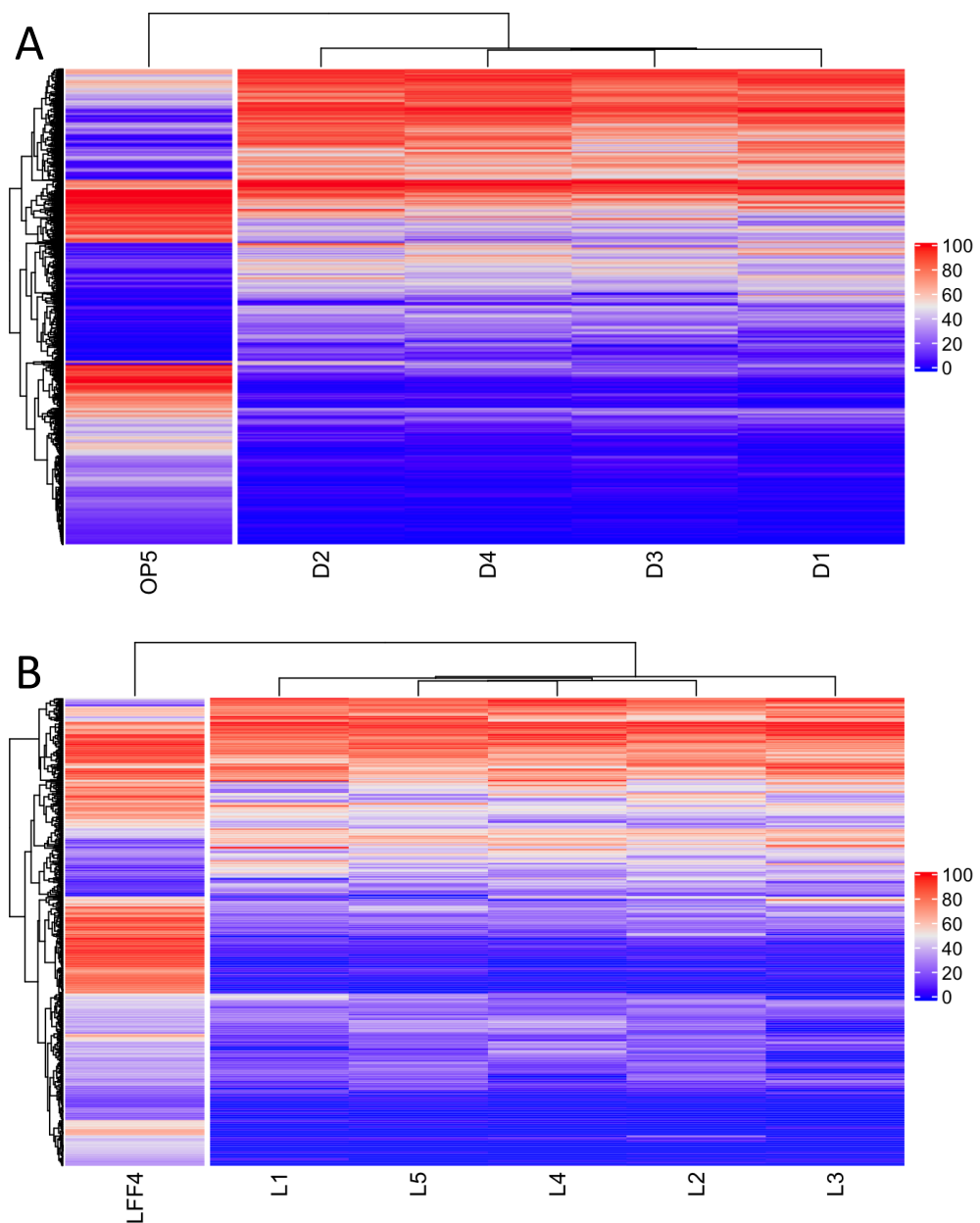
**Table 5.5 Imprinted genes in sheep and/or cattle that were differentially methylated between clone hepatocytes and donor cell lines.**

Gene		DvOP5		LvLFF4	
		Cluster count	DMS count	Cluster count	DMS count
<i>DLK1</i>	♂	7	65	6	64
<i>GRB10</i>	♂	4	39	9	69
<i>IGF2R</i>	♂	3	41	5	61
<i>SLC6A3</i>	♂	3	28	1	26
<i>IGF2</i>	♀	2	18	5	29
<i>GNAS</i>	♂	1	7	7	39
<i>USP29</i>	♂	1	8	1	8
<i>UBE3A</i>	♂	1	5	1	5
<i>PLAGL1</i>	♂	1	6	-	5
<i>PEG10</i>	♀	-	2	3	23
<i>MKRN3</i>	♂	-	17	2	28
<i>MAGEL2</i>	♀	-	2	1	5
<i>NAP1L5</i>	♀	-	1	-	-
<i>PON3</i>	♂	-	1	-	4
<i>MAGI2</i>	♂	-	1	-	3
<i>NNAT</i>	♀	-	1	-	3

Adapted from the Catalogue of Imprinted Genes (<http://igc.otago.ac.nz/home.html>). Abbreviation(s): D, Finn Dorset; DMS, differentially methylated site; L, Lleyn; LFF4, Lleyn fetal fibroblast; OP5, mammary donor cell line. Imprinted genes with differentially methylated sites (DMS). Paternally imprinted gene (♂), maternally imprinted gene (♀). Genes in white represent 6 of 20 records in ovine catalogue. Genes shaded in grey: 10 of 45 records in bovine catalogue.

Clear differences in CpG methylation of imprinted genes between D clone hepatocytes and their founder OP5 mammary cell line were observed (Figure 5.11A). Likewise, patterns of methylation in imprinted genes were distinct between L clone hepatocytes and the LFF4 cell line (Figure 5.11B). Differences in methylation of imprinted genes between D and L hepatocytes are likely due to differences in genotype (Figure 5.11). As genomic imprinting is species-, tissue- and stage-specific, with some genes partially imprinted in certain tissues (Bebbere *et al.*, 2013; O'Doherty *et al.*, 2015), it is uncertain whether the differential methylation measured between clone hepatocytes and their donor

cell lines had any effect on the imprinted status of these genes in the cell types studied. Moreover, without methylation assessment of positive control hepatocytes isolated from an uncloned (i.e. naturally conceived) Finn Dorset and Lleyen sheep, it was not possible to determine the effect of the SCNT procedure on the methylation status of imprinted genes in the liver of cloned sheep.



**Figure 5.11 CpG methylation levels of imprinted genes ( $n=16$ ) differ between the OP5 donor cell line and D clone hepatocytes (A), and between the LFF4 donor cell line and L clone hepatocytes (B).**

Colours indicate methylation level (%) from low (blue) to high (red) of differentially methylated sites (DMS) within imprinted genes enriched within mammary cell (OP5), Lleyen fetal fibroblast (LFF4), Finn Dorset hepatocyte (D) and Lleyen hepatocyte (L).

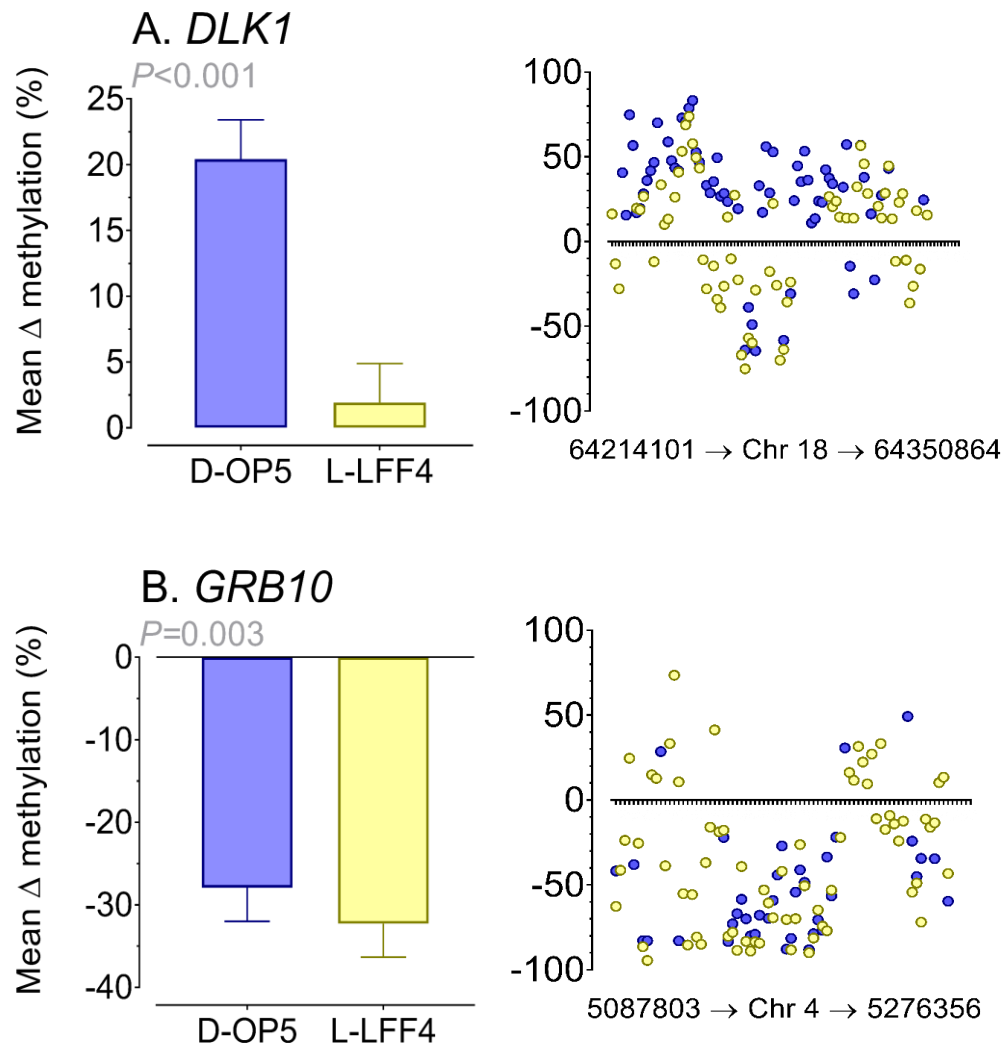


### 5.3.5.1 *Delta-like 1 (DLK1)* and *Growth factor receptor bound protein 10 (GRB10)*

Imprinted genes that harboured the greatest number of DMS between DvOP5 and LvLFF4 experimental comparisons were *Delta-like 1 (DLK1)* and *Growth factor receptor bound protein 10 (GRB10)*, respectively (Table 5.5; Figure 5.12). The *DLK1* gene encodes a ligand that promotes fetal growth and restricts adipose deposition, whereas *GRB10* encodes a signalling protein that restricts fetal growth and promotes adipose deposition (Madon-Simon *et al.*, 2014). Both genes are reciprocally imprinted and antagonistically expressed to define a mammalian growth axis independent of the *insulin-like growth factor (IGF)* pathway (Madon-Simon *et al.*, 2014). It follows that genetic and epigenetic dysregulation of these genes can lead to disproportionate fetal growth, and impaired energy metabolism (Charalambous *et al.*, 2003; Madon-Simon *et al.*, 2014). In sheep, a SNP (A-to-G substitution) located within the *DLK1-DIO3* imprinted gene cluster on ovine chromosome 18 imposes a distinct hypomethylation mark in *cis* orientation that leads to long-range intergenic transcription and ectopic expression of *DLK1* in skeletal muscle which, in turn, results in the ‘callipyge’ muscular hypertrophy phenotype (Takeda *et al.*, 2006; O’Doherty *et al.*, 2015). In mice, mutant studies have associated LOI of *DLK1* with adult-onset obesity and metabolic syndrome (Peters, 2014).

Like many imprinted genes, *DLK1* and *GRB10* share complex tissue-specific expression patterns, however, most of the research pertains to studies in mice where both genes are imprinted in the liver (Gagne *et al.*, 2014), embryonic fibroblasts (Tran *et al.*, 2014) and mammary epithelial cells (Cowley *et al.*, 2014; Hanin and Ferguson-Smith, 2020). The present study found that DMS located within the *DLK1* gene were generally hypermethylated in clone hepatocytes relative to their respective donor cell lines. In particular, the methylation difference between the D clone hepatocyte and the OP5 cell line was significantly greater than the difference between the L clone hepatocyte and the LFF4 cell line ( $P < 0.001$ ; Figure 5.12A). Conversely, Figure 5.12B shows that DMS located within *GRB10* were typically hypomethylated in clone hepatocytes compared to their donor cell lines. Because monoallelic bivalent chromatin domains (i.e. parent allele-specific histone modifications) have been implicated in the regulation of expression of *GRB10* and other imprinted genes (Sanz *et al.*, 2008), CpG methylation alone cannot explain tissue-specific differences in

genomic imprinting nor can it explain the full effect of SCNT on the epigenetic reprogramming of imprinted genes.



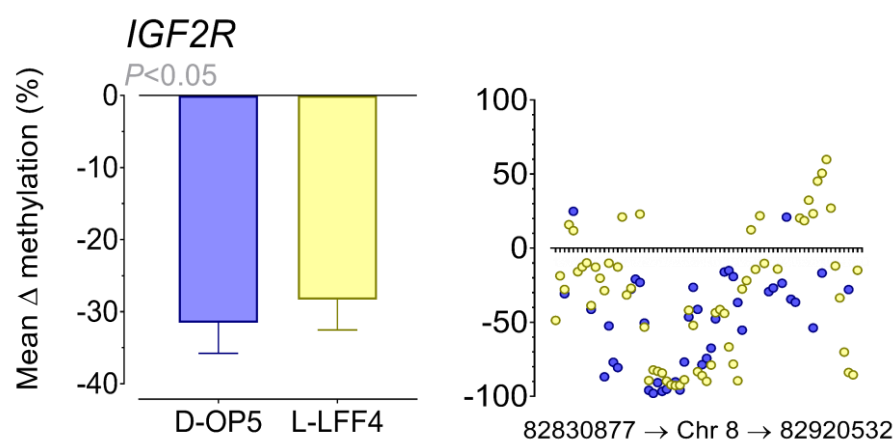
**Figure 5.12 Differential methylation of imprinted genes, *DLK1* and *GRB10*, between clone sheep hepatocytes and their somatic donor cell lines.**

Data analysed using REML analysis. Bars represent mean  $\pm$  SEM. Scatter plots represent mean difference ( $\Delta$ ) in methylation between clone hepatocyte and donor cell line (D-OP5, L-LFF4) at individual DMS in 5'  $\rightarrow$  3' orientation along gene sequence.

Abbreviation(s): Chr, chromosome; D, Finn Dorset; *DLK1*, Delta-like 1; DMS, differentially methylated site; *GRB10*, Growth factor receptor bound protein 10; L, Lley; LFF4, Lley fetal fibroblast; OP5, mammary donor cell line.

### 5.3.5.2 *Insulin-like growth factor 2 receptor (IGF2R)*

In keeping with the previous discussion concerning nuclear transfer and aberrant imprinted expression of *IGF2R*, the present study identified clusters of CpGs located within the *IGF2R* gene that were differentially methylated between DvOP5 and LvLFF4 experimental comparisons (Table 5.5; Figure 5.13). The majority of the DMS were hypomethylated in clone hepatocytes relative to their donor cell lines. However, methylation differences were significantly greater between D clone hepatocytes and the OP5 cell line, than between L clone hepatocytes and the LFF4 cell line ( $P < 0.05$ ; Figure 5.13). Differentially methylated sites were located in several exonic and intronic regions of the gene. Only one CpG (nucleotide position 82885570) was differentially methylated within intron 2 which is the genomic region comprising the putative regulatory region, DMR2 (Figure 5.14).



**Figure 5.13 Differential methylation of *IGF2R* gene between clone sheep hepatocytes and their somatic donor cell lines.**

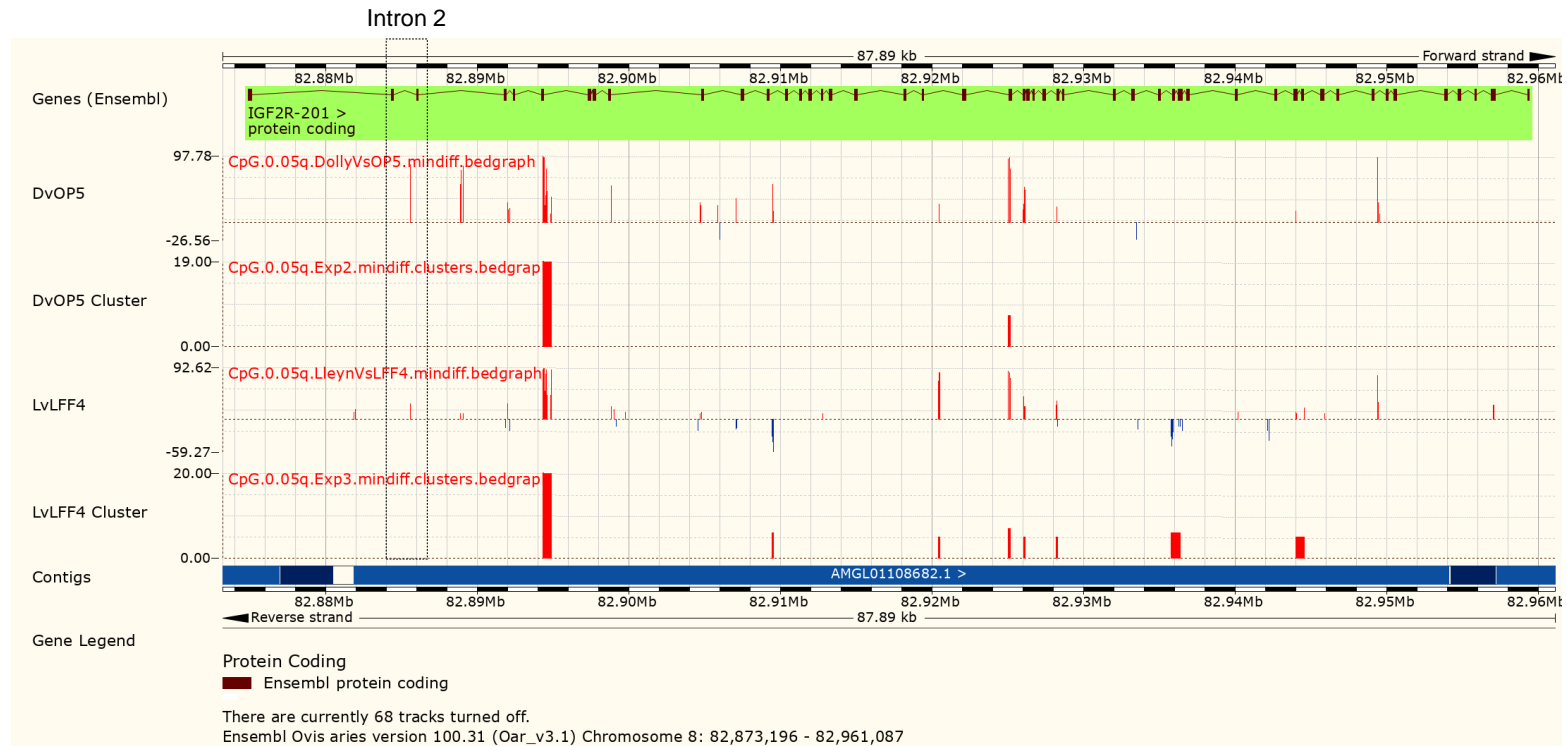
Data analysed using REML analysis. Bars represent mean  $\pm$  SEM. Scatter plots represent mean difference ( $\Delta$ ) in methylation between clone hepatocyte and donor cell line (D-OP5, L-LFF4) at individual DMS in 5'  $\rightarrow$  3' orientation along gene sequence.

Abbreviation(s): Chr, chromosome; D, Finn Dorset; IGF2R, insulin-like growth factor 2 receptor; L, Lleyen; LFF4, Lleyen fetal fibroblast; OP5, mammary donor cell line.

In sheep, *IGF2R* is thought to be paternally imprinted and maternally expressed in adult somatic tissues (Table 5.5; Killian *et al.*, 2001). As mentioned previously, it is uncertain whether the differential methylation detected between clone hepatocytes and their donor cell lines affects the imprinted status of *IGF2R* in these cell types. As discussed in Section 4.3.2.6.3, a plethora of chromatin structural features, such as histone modifications, operate in

conjunction with differential methylation to distinguish the parental alleles at the imprint control region (Sleutels *et al.*, 2002; Long and Cai, 2007). Thus, with respect to genomic imprinting, development and long-term health, DNA methylation is only a small part of the complex story.

Hypomethylation within *IGF2R* DMR2 has been associated with SCNT and LOS in sheep (Young *et al.*, 2001; Young *et al.*, 2003). However, *IGF2R* methylation levels appeared normal in adult somatic tissues derived from cloned calves that died within 24 h of birth relative to healthy clones and animals born by artificial insemination (Smith *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, maternal *IGF2R* DMRs in tissues isolated from *in vivo*-derived or cloned individuals were consistently hypermethylated, irrespective of whether the clones were born in good health. Yet, the finding that biallelic *IGF2R* expression was higher in *in vivo*-derived animals than in clones implies that an alternative epigenetic mechanism may be responsible for altering its expression following nuclear transfer (Smith *et al.*, 2015).



**Figure 5.14 Clusters of differentially methylated sites (DMS) in the *IGF2R* gene between somatic donor cell line (OP5 and LFF4) and clone hepatocyte (D and L).**

Bedgraphs demonstrate loss (↓, hypomethylation) and gain (↑, hypermethylation) of methylation at individual cytosine residues, and location of DMS clusters. Abbreviation(s): D, Finn Dorset; IGF2R, insulin-like growth factor 2 receptor; L, Lley; LFF4, Lley fetal fibroblast; OP5, mammary donor cell line.

## 5.4 Concluding remarks

Reduced representation bisulphite sequencing (RRBS) analyses revealed cell type-specific DNA methylation signatures between clone hepatocytes and their respective somatic donor cell lines. The finding that methylation was more closely correlated between D and L clone hepatocytes than between clones and their founder cells indicated that the hepatic methylome was driven primarily by cell phenotype and function, rather than by methylation reprogramming errors following SCNT. Given that the cloned animals used in the present study developed to term and aged healthily according to measured musculoskeletal, metabolic and blood pressure parameters ([Sinclair \*et al.\*, 2016](#)), it may be assumed that epigenetic reprogramming was successfully achieved to facilitate their normal development to an advanced age.

The present study measured a higher degree of differential methylation between L clone hepatocytes and their LFF4 donor cell line, than between D clone hepatocytes and their OP5 donor cell line. The LFF4 cell line was more hypermethylated relative to the L clone hepatocyte (Table 5.2). Whether or not this greater difference in somatic donor cell type methylation had any bearing on the efficiency of epigenetic reprogramming remains inconclusive. Measuring the effect of donor cell type on methylation reprogramming of isolated hepatocytes following SCNT was confounded by the fact that donor cells were derived from two different sheep breeds. Although nucleotide bases at known SNP positions were removed during bioinformatic analyses in order to avoid methylation differences that were related to genotype, it is plausible that there was a minor effect of genotype on epigenetic regulation of gene expression via DNA methylation. Hepatocytes isolated from a contemporaneous group of naturally conceived sheep that were of the same age, genotype (D and L) and environment would, therefore, have served as ideal positive control samples to accurately assess whether the methylation status of clone hepatocytes was due to aberrant epigenetic reprogramming or cell type.

Gene set enrichment analysis identified a subset of genes that encoded transcription factor proteins involved in 'Sequence-specific DNA binding' as differentially methylated between clone hepatocytes and their donor cell lines. This was not surprising given that transcription factors govern the complex system of gene expression control that permits cellular differentiation and development in multicellular organisms ([Davidson, 2010](#)). In addition to

investigating the differential methylation between clone hepatocytes and their respective donor cell lines (DvOP5, LvLFF4), it may be interesting to explore differential methylation of these transcription factor genes between the two donor cell lines (OP5vLFF4) to determine the methylation difference between them. Replicate samples of somatic donor cell lines would be required for DNA methylation analysis in order to do this accurately and reliably.

As the present study did not measure the transcriptome of the clone hepatocytes and their respective donor cell lines, it was useful to select tissue-specific GOI for detailed methylation analyses using the Sheep Genome Atlas ([Clark \*et al.\*, 2017](#)). As the largest open access resource of any livestock species, the atlas provides RNA-seq libraries from cells and tissues that represent the major organ systems from prenatal, neonatal, juvenile and adult developmental time points. Whilst reuse of the atlas spared time, duplication of effort and financial expense, there are a number of caveats which concern the validity of its use to assess cell type-specific methylation in the current study. Firstly, transcriptomic data published in the atlas is restricted to Texel and TxBF sheep with no available data for D or L genotypes. Secondly, the data is representative of isolated cell populations (e.g. mammary gland, embryonic fibroblast) rather than cell lines (e.g. OP5, LFF4) which could be epigenetically different if methylation differences are induced by cell culture. Thirdly, it is important to acknowledge that methylation differences between cell types do not necessarily correlate with transcriptional (or translational) differences. Future work could, therefore, measure mRNA transcript abundance of the nine mammary-, fetal fibroblast- and liver-specific transcription factor genes that were differentially methylated between clone hepatocytes and donor cells.

Several imprinted genes were differentially methylated between clone hepatocytes and donor cells. Since imprinted genes affect various livestock production traits, including milk yield, carcass quality, fat and muscle deposition, and embryonic development ([Smith \*et al.\*, 2015](#)), an improved understanding of their functional sequences, methylation status, and transcriptional/translational control in different ruminant tissues is warranted to assess the merit of cloning as a safe and efficacious reproductive technology of the future. Studies investigating the involvement of imprinted genes in the aetiology of fetal overgrowth following SCNT could compare the methylome of donor cells with cell types (cardiovascular, neural) commonly affected in LOS in cloned animals.

# Chapter 6

## Discussion and Conclusion



## 6.1 General discussion

One-carbon metabolism serves as a biochemical conduit between external environment and epigenetic regulation of early development (Clare *et al.*, 2019). The periconceptual period is highly sensitive to the availability of methionine and other key 1C metabolites for the provision of methyl donors for methylation reactions (Sinclair *et al.*, 2007; Louis *et al.*, 2008; Maloney *et al.*, 2011; Steegers-Theunissen *et al.*, 2013; Padhee *et al.*, 2015). It is well-documented that reproductive failures and problems associated with epigenetic programming of offspring health are due to disturbances in 1C pathways during periconceptual development. It follows that altering the levels of 1C substrates and cofactors (e.g. methionine) in the maternal diet (*in vivo*) or in embryo culture media (*in vitro*) can affect epigenetic programming of mammalian development via changes to DNA methylation (Chapter 1; Table 1.6). In addition, embryo manipulation procedures during ART (e.g. IVP and SCNT) can lead to heritable alterations to the epigenome that are linked to subsequent development and late-onset chronic disease (Young *et al.*, 1998; Young *et al.*, 2001; Young *et al.*, 2003; Kohda and Ishino, 2013).

Whilst 1C metabolite status during periconceptual development has an important impact on pregnancy outcome (Chapter 1; Section 1.1.1.2), most of the research investigating the function of 1C metabolic pathways pertains to studies undertaken in the liver where the full complement of 1C metabolism enzymes are expressed (Balaghi *et al.*, 1993). Comparatively little research has been conducted in reproductive cells and embryos, however, the literature suggests that 1C metabolism is functional in these cell types (Steele *et al.*, 2005; Bhenkhalifa *et al.*, 2010; Ikeda *et al.*, 2010; Lee *et al.*, 2012). Due to the absence or low expression of specific methionine cycle enzyme transcripts (*MAT1A* and *BHMT*) in bovine ovarian and embryonic cells (Kwong *et al.*, 2010), it has been proposed that 1C metabolism functions differently in these cell types compared to the liver. Species- and tissue-specific differences in 1C metabolism mean that mathematical models based on the rodent liver are not entirely suitable to model 1C metabolic function in all mammalian species and tissue types. In addition, the complexity and multitude of allosteric interactions involved in 1C metabolism makes it a considerable challenge to evaluate the impact of nutritional or environmental perturbation to 1C pathways within different cell types.

Understanding the function of 1C metabolism in ruminants is of considerable economic importance to the livestock production industry. Cattle and sheep have low dietary intake of methyl donors in the post-ruminant state and are, therefore, sensitive to perturbations to 1C metabolic pathways (Snoswell and Xue, 1987). Moreover, ART procedures that involve the *in vitro* handling of gametes and embryos have been employed to achieve genetic improvement in domestic ruminant species (Chakravarthi and Sri Balaji, 2010). Since embryonic manipulation and non-physiological *in vitro* culture environments can lead to defective epigenetic reprogramming and fetal overgrowth in livestock species (Young *et al.*, 2001), the widespread application of these technologies remains limited. This thesis, therefore, sought to improve current understanding of the regulation of 1C metabolism in the ruminant liver, ovary and preimplantation embryo through *in vivo* and *in vitro* nutritional supplementation experiments coupled with metabolomic, transcriptomic and epigenetic analyses.

## 6.2 Summary of key findings

Most of the research investigating 1C metabolism in ruminants have used enzyme activity assays in sheep liver (Xue and Snoswell, 1985; Xue and Snoswell, 1986; Snoswell and Xue, 1987). However, the function of 1C metabolism can also be monitored by the quantitative measurement of hepatic 1C metabolic intermediates (Xu *et al.*, 2020). As the liver is the largest metabolic organ of the body responsible for 50% of methionine metabolism and 85% of methylation reactions (Lu and Mato, 2012), it was hypothesised that relevant reductions in dietary methyl group availability would lead to significant alterations to hepatic 1C metabolite concentrations. The study reported in Chapter 2 addressed this hypothesis in sheep, and provided an unprecedented insight into the metabolic burden of methyl deficiency in an outbred population of domestic ruminant species. Not only are sheep a species of clinical interest with respect to methyl group (i.e. vitamin B<sub>12</sub>) deficiency, but they are a suitable model for humans.

There was a considerable heterogeneity in hepatic levels of individual 1C metabolites measured in Ab and MD sheep study populations which reflected the dietary and genetic variation in the chosen model species. Importantly, there was a significant difference in hepatic levels of B vitamins, folates and 1C-related amines between Ab and MD sheep. Diminished methionine and B vitamins (primarily B<sub>12</sub>), caused an accumulation of 5-mTHF in liver during a

physiological response to impending methyl deficiency known as the 'methyl-folate trap'. In particular, the marked reduction in B vitamins, which serve as bioactive coenzymes or as a reserve pool for coenzyme synthesis, had a cumulative 'knock-on' effect throughout linked 1C metabolism pathways in MD liver. This 'knock-on' effect was illustrated by a decrease in amino acid intermediates, and concurrent increase in polyamines and propionate metabolites in MD liver. This study confirmed that moderate reductions to dietary inputs can have a global impact on 1C metabolism and related pathways in sheep liver, ultimately leading to system-wide alterations to biochemistry and physiology.

Extending from ruminant hepatocytes to reproductive cells, Chapter 3 investigated the effect of altering methyl group (i.e. methionine) availability on bovine preimplantation embryo development. The first experiment confirmed that cells of the bovine follicle-enclosed oocyte and preimplantation embryo lack specific methionine cycle enzymes and may, therefore, be particularly sensitive to methionine supply. In accordance with previous studies, *MAT2A* was detected in the somatic cells of the ovary, oocyte and preimplantation embryo (Ikeda *et al.*, 2010; Kwong *et al.*, 2010), and *BHMT* was detected in oocytes and morulae (Benkhalifa *et al.*, 2008; Ikeda *et al.*, 2010; Lee *et al.*, 2012). It is possible that transient expression of *BHMT* at the morula stage precedes protein translation at the blastocyst stage in bovine embryos, however, further research is required for clarity. This study was the first to detect *BHMT2* in somatic cells of the bovine ovary and the oocyte, suggesting that reproductive cells are equipped to use S-methylmethionine (SMM) to generate methionine (Chapter 3; Section 3.3.1). However, the levels of this substrate in follicular fluid, ovarian cells and oocytes have not been measured and the mechanisms of uptake in reproductive cells are unknown.

The second experiment of Chapter 3 sought to establish the developmental competence of bovine embryos produced under *in vitro* culture conditions containing 0, 10, 50 and 500  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  of added methionine. Although previous studies introduced variable methionine concentrations from the point of embryo culture (Bonilla *et al.*, 2010), no such study had investigated the effect of altering methionine from the point of oocyte maturation. This study reported that altering methionine throughout all stages of IVP had a significant effect on embryo development. Embryos cultured in non-physiological (0  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  added) or supraphysiological (500  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  added) methionine concentrations exhibited

reduced development to blastocyst stage, and a low proportion of these embryos were developmentally advanced relative to embryos cultured at physiological concentrations. Of those tested, the high physiological concentration of methionine (50  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  added) appeared to be optimal for development, as reflected by the increased proportion of advanced, grade 1 (transferable quality) blastocysts that possessed the greatest total cell number and TE outgrowth.

In addition to the observed phenotypic effects, Chapter 4 found that reducing methionine within physiological limits (from 50 to 10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  added) during IVP significantly reduced DNA methylation within the primary cell lineages of Day 8 bovine blastocysts. Although both cell lineages were hypomethylated following culture in low methionine, the TE had a greater number of DMS compared to the ICM. Moreover, different GO terms and KEGG pathways were significantly enriched between the cell lineages following culture in low methionine. Terms enriched within the ICM were involved in protein catabolism and autophagy, whereas terms enriched within the TE were involved in cellular transport and cell cycle progression. Taken together, these findings imply that the contribution of the two primary cell lineages to methionine metabolism within the whole blastocyst is different and warrants further investigation.

Six imprinted genes, including *IGF2R*, were differentially methylated in bovine blastocysts in response to low physiological methionine. Loss of methylation within DMR2 of *IGF2R* appears to be causative of LOS in ruminants exposed to ART procedures (Young *et al.*, 2001; Young *et al.*, 2003). Detailed methylation analysis of this regulatory region identified two clusters of DMS within DMR2 that were hypomethylated in the TE of Day 8 bovine blastocysts following culture in low physiological methionine. Considering that *IGF2R* expression is not imprinted by the paternal *AIRN* transcript until the postimplantation stage (Day 18), it was not surprising that methionine concentration had no effect on *IGF2R* and *AIRN* transcript expression in Day 8 bovine blastocysts. Repeating these methylation and transcriptomic analyses in cell lineages isolated from postimplantation stage embryos would help to illuminate the putative role of DMR2 methylation on imprinted expression of *IGF2R* by *AIRN*.

In addition to the nutrient composition of culture media, accumulating evidence suggests that embryonic manipulation during ART procedures, such as SCNT, can alter the epigenome of embryos with adverse effects for offspring health

and development (Kang *et al.*, 2003; Rhind *et al.*, 2003; Smith *et al.*, 2012). One-carbon metabolic pathways provide a biochemical conduit between environment and epigenetic regulation of mammalian development by supplying methyl groups for methylation reactions. It follows that perturbations to 1C pathways, brought about by embryo manipulation or nonphysiological culture environments used in SCNT, can disrupt the dynamic methylation reprogramming events that take place during early embryo development (Figure 3.1). In some cases, this can lead to the developmental failure of cloned embryos. As discussed earlier (Section 5.1), it has been reported that cloned embryos only partially demethylate their genomes and begin the *de novo* methylation process earlier than their *in vivo*-derived counterparts (Dean *et al.*, 2001; Kang *et al.*, 2001). If donor cell methylation patterns are maintained this can result in the continuous expression of tissue-specific genes and inefficient activation of genes critical for embryonic development, thereby reducing the competence of reconstructed embryos (Peat and Reik, 2012; Niemann *et al.*, 2016).

With this in mind, Chapter 5 investigated the effect of somatic donor cell type (e.g. OP5, mammary; LFF4, fetal fibroblast) on reprogramming efficiency by measuring CpG methylation in hepatocytes isolated from Finn Dorset (D) and Lleyn (L) cloned sheep. In general, somatic cell nuclei were hypermethylated relative to clone hepatocytes, and the difference in methylation was greatest between LFF4 donor cells and L clone hepatocytes. A subset of imprinted genes, and genes encoding transcription factors in mammary, fetal fibroblast and liver cells, were differentially methylated between donor cells and clone hepatocytes. However, in the absence of a positive control (i.e. hepatocytes isolated from naturally conceived D and L sheep), it was not possible to determine whether the differential methylation between donor cells and clone hepatocytes was a consequence of SCNT. Likewise, without measuring transcript abundance to corroborate methylation data, it was not possible to determine whether differential methylation had any effect on gene expression in the cell types analysed.

### 6.3 Clinical impact

The outcomes of this thesis provide evidence that relevant reductions in the dietary provision of methyl groups can perturb epigenetic programming of mammalian development. As a central integrator of nutrient status, insults to 1C

metabolism, particularly during the periconceptional period, can exert a global impact on cellular biochemistry and epigenetics, with implications for long-term health and disease. Whilst the primary objective of this research was to investigate the function of 1C metabolism within cells of the ruminant liver, ovary and preimplantation embryo, the experimental findings can be translated to humans. Cattle and sheep are valuable models for biomedical research due to their physiological parallels with humans, especially during preimplantation embryo development ([Ménézo and Hérubel, 2002](#); [Sirard, 2019](#)).

It follows that dietary restriction of 1C metabolites is associated with several serious health conditions in humans and ruminants which, if left untreated, can result in death ([Suttle, 2010](#); [Hannibal \*et al.\*, 2016](#)). It follows that accurate deficiency diagnosis is critical. It has been established that measuring standalone biomarkers of methyl deficiency, such as total serum B12 or MMA, has limited diagnostic value ([Hannibal \*et al.\*, 2016](#)). Therefore, the commercialisation of simple analytical platforms that can quantify a comprehensive suite of chemically distinct, bioactive 1C metabolites in complex mammalian biofluids and tissues are required. Metabolomic platforms, such as those developed in Chapter 2, could be used in corroboration with epigenomic and transcriptomic studies to facilitate dietary and genetic studies of metabolic health in humans and animals. Such platforms may also prove useful for the quantitative profiling of 1C metabolites in commercial cell and embryo culture media, or in spent culture media as a non-invasive method of evaluating the function of 1C metabolism.

The implications emerging from the studies presented herein emphasise the importance of methionine for the mammalian preimplantation embryo. In support of findings reported by [Bonilla \*et al.\* \(2010\)](#), a lower proportion of bovine embryos that were cultured in nonphysiological or supraphysiological concentrations of methionine developed to blastocyst stage, and fewer blastocysts were developmentally advanced (i.e. late expanded, hatching or hatched) at these concentrations. Taken together, these findings indicate that bovine preimplantation embryo development is sensitive to methionine during the first week of development. The MAT2A enzyme, which is responsible for SAM biosynthesis from methionine, has been detected in bovine embryos of various developmental stages up to Day 8 (Chapter 3; [Ikeda \*et al.\*, 2010](#); [Kwong \*et al.\*, 2010](#)). The low  $K_m$  range of MAT2A (4-10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ) means that the maximal rate ( $V_{\text{max}}$ ) of reaction is reached at physiological methionine concentrations (i.e.

<50  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ; [Frau et al., 2013](#)). Thus, it appears that bovine embryonic cells are not well-equipped to metabolise concentrations outside of this range. In addition, subtle reductions in methionine during IVP caused global hypomethylation within the primary cell lineages of bovine blastocysts. The epigenetic effect of methionine in mammalian cells and embryos has been well-documented (Section 1.7.2; Table 1.6). More specifically, [Ikeda et al. \(2012\)](#) reported that culturing bovine embryos in the presence of methionine antagonist, ethionine, reduced DNA methylation, and, *in vivo* dietary supplementation of methionine altered the transcriptome of bovine embryos ([Peñagaricano et al., 2013](#)).

The sensitivity of the mammalian preimplantation embryo to small fluctuations in methionine is relevant for several reasons. Firstly, methionine deficiency and excess have been implicated in adverse reproductive health outcomes in humans (General Introduction, Table 1) and animals ([Rees et al., 2006](#)).

Secondly, methionine is not endogenously synthesised by mammals and, therefore, must be obtained in the diet ([Shoob et al., 2001](#)). As a rate-limiting amino acid in both human and animal diets ([Laurichesse et al., 1998](#); [Wiltbank et al., 2014](#); [Schwab and Broderick, 2017](#)), more attention must be paid to the dietary inclusion of methionine, particularly during the periconceptual period. As discussed above (General Introduction), most of the research concerning periconceptual nutrition has focused on the preventative effect of folic acid supplementation against NTDs ([De-Regil et al., 2010](#)). Yet, as animal proteins are a primary source of methionine in human diets, vegetarian and vegans may be at increased the risk of methionine (and B12) deficiency ([Krajcovicová-Kudláčková et al., 2000](#); [McCarty et al., 2009](#)) and, consequently, adverse reproductive outcomes during periconceptual development. As increasing concerns over health, environment and economic consequences of a diet rich in animal produce focuses the attention on those who exclude these foods from their diet ([Appelby and Key, 2015](#)), it is important to investigate the health effects of methionine (and methyl group) deficiency in this subpopulation. In dairy cattle diets, the supplementation of rumen-protected methionine results in higher milk production, better metabolic health, and improved reproductive performance ([Toledo et al., 2017](#)). Thus, determining the optimal level of methionine in metabolisable protein for maximising milk protein production, fertility and reproduction is required to maximise profitability within the industry ([Cho et al., 2007](#); [Morton et al., 2017](#)).



Thirdly, the concentration of methionine in cell and embryo culture media varies dramatically between formulations, ranging from 0 to 500  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  (Section 1.7.1; Table 1.5). This wide variation in concentration reflects the lack of standardisation between embryo production protocols with respect to IVP media formulations, thereby raising questions for the safety and efficacy of their commercial use. As media concentrations of key 1C substrates and cofactors, including folate (B9) and vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, are not routinely measured or disclosed (Sunde *et al.*, 2016; Table 1.5), knowledge of their interaction with methionine and other 1C metabolites during the consecutive stages of IVP is unknown. In keeping with the earlier discussion concerning the comprehensive profiling of 1C metabolites, robust analytical platforms to enable their simultaneous quantification could form part of a robust quality control and efficacy evaluation of commercial cell and embryo culture media.

This thesis also confirmed that *in vitro* embryo culture conditions and manipulation procedures used during ART can disturb 1C metabolism in gametes and preimplantation embryos, causing epigenetic alterations to DNA methylation affecting developmentally important genes. A case in point refers to the differential methylation of imprinted genes, such as *IGF2R*, following *in vitro* culture at low physiological methionine (Section 4.3.2.6) and following SCNT (Section 5.3.5.2). Several factors are thought to affect the epigenetic reprogramming of cloned embryos, including donor cell type, oocyte quality, timing of fusion and activation, and *in vitro* culture conditions of the reconstructed cloned embryo (Campbell and Alberio, 2003; Kato and Tsunoda, 2010; Akagi *et al.*, 2014). With this in mind, the potential adverse impact of exposure to nonphysiological concentrations of 1C metabolites during embryo culture is confounded by the invasive nuclear transfer technique, and extensive handling of gametes and embryos thereafter.

The processes underlying the epigenetic reprogramming of cloned embryos and IVP embryos are different, thus, it is likely that cloned embryos have different physiology and nutritional requirements as they undergo reconstruction (Mastromonaco *et al.*, 2004; Cordova *et al.*, 2017). It follows that media must be developed according to the special physiology and metabolic requirements of cloned embryos. However, studies evaluating suitable culture conditions for the successful reprogramming of cloned embryos are limited.

Investigation into the effect of adding protein macromolecules during the culture of cloned bovine embryos found that supplementation of SOF media with BSA



and FCS promoted development of cloned embryos to blastocyst stage (Choi *et al.*, 2002). Yet, as discussed in Chapter 1 (Section 1.7), the addition of serum to media has been implicated in fetal overgrowth in ruminants (Thompson *et al.*, 1995; Young *et al.*, 2001; Rooke *et al.*, 2007). The development of BSA- and serum-free culture media for cloned embryos is, therefore, important to avoid postnatal complications associated with exposure to these macromolecules *in vitro*.

Similarly, supplementation of culture media with antioxidants, such as vitamin C and flavones, improved the developmental competence of cloned embryos as evidenced by enhanced morulae compaction, blastocyst production and the expression of developmentally important genes (Li *et al.*, 2014; Su *et al.*, 2014). In addition, co-culture with buffalo rat liver, and bovine oviduct, cumulus and granulosa cells have been shown to improve the development of cloned embryos (Saikhun *et al.*, 2002; Lu *et al.*, 2005; Li *et al.*, 2007). Despite the efforts taken to develop suitable culture media, successful *in vitro* preimplantation development does not necessarily contribute to improving pregnancy outcomes following embryo transfer (Cordova *et al.*, 2017).

To our knowledge, no study has specifically investigated the effect of supplementing embryo culture media with 1C metabolites on the development of cloned embryos. There is, however, evidence to suggest that the addition of epigenetic modifying agents, such as DNMT1 and HDAC inhibitors (i.e. 5-aza-2'-deoxycytidine, trichostatin A, scriptaid and valproic acid), can improve genomic methylation reprogramming and transcript expression in embryos following SCNT (Zhao *et al.*, 2010; Costa-Borges *et al.*, 2010; Xu *et al.*, 2013). In accordance with the findings presented in Chapter 4, it is hypothesised that adding methionine to media may alter the methylation reprogramming of reconstructed embryos. This would be a promising 'non-chemical' (nutrient-based) alternative to using chemical epigenetic modifiers for improving SCNT efficiency.

Although the effect of 1C metabolite concentrations on the epigenetic reprogramming of cloned embryos remains to be elucidated, the effect is likely to vary according to species as oocytes from different species have different developmental competencies. For example, results by Lu *et al.* (2005) reported that bovine oocytes directed cloned embryo development more effectively than buffalo oocytes when buffalo adult fibroblasts were used as donor cells. Likewise, the effect of 1C metabolites on cloned embryo development is likely

to vary according to donor cell type as donor cells have different metabolic demands (Rakha, 2015). Studies in mice demonstrated that where cumulus cells were used as nuclear donors, a higher yield of blastocysts were produced in Whitten's medium (or Whitten's medium followed by potassium simplex optimisation medium; KSOM) owing to its high glucose concentration relative to other media (Chung *et al.*, 2002). Because normal embryos do not require glucose during the early cleavage stages, these results reveal unusual medium requirements that are indicative of altered kinetics, metabolism and physiology of cloned embryos. Sequential media that is tailored to respond to the changing requirements of reconstructed embryos may improve efficiency of epigenetic reprogramming following SCNT.

Aside optimising culture media for reconstructed embryos, another approach is to optimise donor cell culture. A recent study showed that folic acid deprivation of bovine fetal fibroblast donor cells for 6 days prior to SCNT improved epigenetic reprogramming of cloned embryos by inducing DNA hypomethylation (Jozi *et al.*, 2020). It follows that altering levels of 1C metabolites during donor cell culture can modulate epigenetic signatures in terminally differentiated somatic cell nuclei, thereby improving the efficiency of SCNT for agricultural and biomedical purposes.

#### **6.4 General conclusions and future research**

Tissue- and species-specific differences in the function of 1C metabolism render some cell types more sensitive to dietary and environmental perturbations of 1C metabolism. This thesis demonstrates that 1C metabolic pathways are tightly regulated within physiological methionine concentration ranges within the mammalian preimplantation embryo. Subtle alterations to methionine concentration were sufficient to trigger nutrient-mediated phenotypic and molecular epigenetic changes to DNA methylation in Day 8 bovine embryos with potential implications for long-term offspring health. Collectively, the findings presented herein emphasise the importance of optimal methionine status during the periconceptual period and ART procedures. Whilst future research priorities have been mentioned throughout this thesis, an elaborative summary is provided here.

The detection of genes encoding *BHMT* isoforms in ovarian cells, oocytes and morulae (Chapter 3) suggests that mammalian reproductive and embryonic

cells harbour alternative pathways for methionine metabolism and are, therefore, equipped with a unique methylation machinery required for the establishment of a cell type-specific methylome. To elucidate the relationship between *BHMT/2* mRNA transcription, protein translation and enzyme activity, a combination of assays could be employed using somatic, germ and embryonic cells of various stages of mammalian development.

Protein expression could be determined by Western blot analysis. However, due to the high amino acid sequence homology between BHMT and BHMT2 proteins (Li *et al.*, 2008; Ganu *et al.*, 2011; Appendix Table 3.1), it would be vital that the primary antibody recognises an epitope comprising an amino acid sequence unique to each BHMT isoform in order to ensure their specific binding and detection. Radiochemical enzyme activity assays could be used to assess the catalytic activity of BHMT isoforms. BHMT enzyme activity could be measured using the method of Garrow *et al.* (1996) which uses [methyl-<sup>14</sup>C]betaine as a radiolabelled substrate. The method is based on detecting the transfer of [<sup>3</sup>H]methyl groups from [<sup>14</sup>C]betaine (TMG) to Hcy, thereby producing [<sup>3</sup>H]dimethylglycine (DMG) and [<sup>3</sup>H]methionine reaction products. As described by Szegedi and others (2008), BHMT2 enzyme activity could be measured using the same method but with [methyl-<sup>14</sup>C]-S-methylmethionine as the radiolabelled substrate. Using the sensitive mass spectrometry-based platforms developed in Chapter 2, the quantification of BHMT/2 enzyme substrates, betaine (TMG) and SMM, would provide a useful adjunct to corroborate the aforementioned transcriptomic and proteomic assays. Extending these analyses to non-ruminant species, such as rodents and pigs, could help to illuminate tissue- and species-specific differences in methionine metabolism.

Future experiments could use these mass spectrometry-based platforms to investigate the effects of dietary methyl deficiency and inborn errors of 1C metabolism by measuring a comprehensive suite of 1C metabolites in reproductive cells, tissues and biofluids of various mammalian species. Such integrated metabolomic analyses would bring an unprecedented level of mechanistic insight into the nutritional biochemistry-mediated epigenetic modifications that take place during the periconceptional period, particularly in cells of the mammalian ovary and preimplantation embryo. Furthermore, as the suppliers of culture media do not typically disclose concentrations of 1C metabolites, such as FA and vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, it would be of merit to measure their abundance, if present, in commercial formulations. It would then be possible to

compare media concentrations with physiological concentrations measured in bovine follicular and uterine fluid.

Once culture medium-specific concentration ranges have been established, it would be of value to extend the observations reported in Chapters 3 and 4 by investigating the effect of altering methionine in the presence of altered FA and B12 concentrations during bovine embryo culture. As B12 is the cofactor for methionine synthase (MTR); the enzyme responsible for the generation of methionine from Hcy, it would be interesting to ascertain whether media supplementation of B12 can rescue the gross phenotypic and epigenetic effects of methionine deficiency observed in the present study. Similarly, as B12 deficiency reduces MTR activity, thereby causing the ‘methyl-folate trap’ (Chapter 2; Section 2.3.2.5), it would be interesting to investigate whether FA supplementation rescues the effect of a methionine and/or B12 deficiency in mammalian embryos. A possible experimental design is detailed in Table 6.1.

**Table 6.1 Experimental design for methyl supplementation study.**

Treatment groups ( <i>n</i> =3)			Control group
Methionine (0 µmol/L added)	Vitamin B <sub>12</sub> (pmol/L)	Folic acid (nmol/L)	Methionine (50 µmol/L added)
-	+	-	+
-	-	+	+
-	+	+	+

Concentration units based on normal blood reference ranges. Culture media composition deplete in 1C metabolite (-); culture media composition replete in 1C metabolite (+).

Based on the observation that the high physiological concentration of methionine (50 µmol/L) appeared to be the best for bovine embryo development (Chapter 3), this concentration could be used to culture control embryos (Table 6.1). Preliminary research would be required in order to make a judicious decision regarding the concentrations of B12 and FA to be added to methionine-deficient culture media based on: i) levels measured in culture media formulations; ii) physiological levels measured in bovine reproductive fluids; and, iii) supraphysiological levels reached following dietary supplementation in humans (e.g. 400 µg/d FA). Gross morphological embryo assessments coupled with epigenomic and transcriptomic data would provide an unprecedented insight into the importance of methyl donor supplementation during the periconceptional period and ART.

Although strictly beyond the scope of the present study, which focused on the impact of maternal diet and embryo culture media composition on epigenetic programming of embryo development, there is compelling evidence that paternal diet programmes offspring health via sperm and seminal plasma-specific pathways. *In vivo* dietary trials have found that feeding male mice a low protein diet (LPD) or a methyl-deficient diet is associated with negative pregnancy outcomes (e.g. congenital defects), and cardiovascular and metabolic dysfunction in offspring (Lambrot *et al.*, 2013; Watkins and Sinclair, 2014; Watkins *et al.*, 2018). Recently, Morgan *et al.* (2020) reported that feeding a LPD supplemented with methyl donors had a significant impact on testicular morphology by increasing seminiferous tubule luminal area in male mice. The underlying mechanisms for how sub-optimal paternal diet elicits poor offspring development is an emerging field of research. Specifically, the effects of methyl supplementation on semen parameters during IVF have not been explored. Whilst the exposure of male gametes to the *in vitro* environment is short (<24h) relative to oocytes and embryos, the effect of altering methionine and additional 1C metabolites on sperm physiology and epigenomics during IVF cannot be disregarded and warrants further investigation.

The developmental, epigenomic and transcriptomic analyses presented in this thesis used pools of bovine embryos. However, considering the human-like genetic heterogeneity of outbred ruminant species, inter-individual and inter-breed (i.e. ethnic) variation in 1C metabolism and tolerance to methyl deficiency is expected. It will be important to extend future research to include multiomics analyses using individual embryos in order to evaluate how SNPs within key 1C enzymes (Appendix Table 1.1) interact with diet to confer risk to NTDs and other developmental anomalies in embryos and adults. Single-cell and parental allele-specific multiomics sequencing techniques, such as those detailed by Guo *et al.* (2017), would facilitate a thorough investigation into the effect of gene-nutrient interactions on the epigenomic reprogramming of mammalian embryonic development and offspring health. In particular, single-cell techniques would be suitable for the analyses of genome-scale chromatin state and DNA methylation dynamics in ICM and TE cells immunodissected from individual embryos. Moreover, a parental allele-specific assessment of DNA methylation would enhance current understanding of the epigenetic regulation of imprinted genes, such as *IGF2R*, in distinct embryonic cell lineages.

This thesis demonstrated that culturing bovine preimplantation embryos to Day 8 in low physiological methionine caused significant hypomethylation of CpGs located within DMR2 of the *IGF2R* gene. Since loss of methylation within this imprint control region has been associated with LOS in ruminants following ART procedures (Young *et al.*, 2001; Young *et al.*, 2003; Section 1.7), the imprinting status of *IGF2R* remains an important line of enquiry. The *IGF2R* gene is not paternally imprinted by antisense transcript, *AIRN*, until ~Day 18 in bovine embryos. Hence, a temporal and tissue-specific multiomic analysis using individual postimplantation stage embryos would be useful to: i) illuminate the role of DMR2 methylation in *IGF2R* imprinting by *AIRN* in embryonic and extraembryonic lineages; and, ii) evaluate the persistent effect, if any, of methionine on *IGF2R* imprinting during protracted periods of embryo culture.

Chapter 5 assessed the effect of donor cell type on the efficiency of reprogramming following SCNT by measuring DNA methylation in hepatocytes isolated from cloned sheep. Without positive control hepatocyte samples isolated from a contemporaneous group of naturally conceived sheep, it was not possible to ascertain whether the methylation status of clone hepatocytes was due to aberrant epigenetic reprogramming following SCNT or a mere consequence of cell type. Therefore, further investigation including control hepatocyte samples would help to confirm the findings of this study. Given that hepatocytes were isolated from healthy, aged cloned sheep, it can be assumed that epigenetic reprogramming was successfully achieved to permit their normal development into old age. In order to understand the effect of donor cell type used during SCNT on epigenetic reprogramming specifically during embryo development, future experiments could analyse the methylome of preimplantation embryos cloned from mammary epithelial (OP5) and fetal fibroblast (LFF4) donor cells, using the methylome of embryos produced by IVP and/or natural conception as a comparison. Future assessments of the embryonic methylome could use oxidative bisulphite sequencing (Booth *et al.*, 2013) to elucidate the complex interplay between 5mC and 5hmC modifications during early development.

Advancing the hypothesis that cloned embryos have unique metabolic and nutritional demands and, therefore, require specialist media formulations to support their reconstruction and epigenetic reprogramming (discussed earlier), particular focus should be given to the development and optimisation of safe and efficacious culture media for cloned embryos. Such experiments would also

present an opportunity to improve culture media for downstream applications, such as regenerative medicine. Immunodissection of the ICM is effective in the derivation of ESC lines for cell replacement therapy, disease modelling and basic research (Bogliotti *et al.*, 2018). Since embryo culture media composition affects ESC derivation efficiency (Chen *et al.*, 2009), it would be beneficial to evaluate the epigenetic and transcriptomic effect of *in vitro* blastocyst culture conditions on isolated ICM cells used for stem cell culture.

In summary, the findings of this thesis promote and support the importance of 1C metabolism and the provision of an optimal methyl balance for reproductive biology in mammals. The variety of experimental approaches (biochemical, molecular and genetic) to study the regulation of 1C metabolism in the ruminant liver, ovary and preimplantation embryo highlight important species- and tissue-specific differences in methionine metabolism. Such differences must be considered in order to provide an optimal nutritional environment to support healthy *in vivo* and *in vitro* growth and development of mammalian cells and embryos.

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# Appendices

## Appendix Chapter 1

**Appendix Table 1.1 One-carbon (1C) metabolism, epigenetic regulator gene variants and developmental outcomes in humans.** Adapted from [Clare et al. \(2019\)](#).

1C metabolism gene	Variant	Risk association (↑ increase, ↓ decrease)	Effect of diet (↑ supplementation, ↓ restriction)	Ethnic population (n)	Reference(s)
<i>Methionine synthase</i> <span>MTR</span>	A2756G	↑ Orofacial clefts (OR=2.195)	-	Polish (122 cases, 82 controls)	<a href="#">Mostowska et al. (2006)</a>
		↑ NTDs (OR=1.664), CCGA haplotype ↓ risk	-	Chinese Han (152 cases, 169 controls)	<a href="#">Cao et al. (2018)</a>
<i>Methionine synthase reductase</i> <span>MTRR</span>	A66G	↑ Congenital heart disease (OR=1.35)	-	Mixed ethnicity (914 cases, 964 controls)	<a href="#">Cai et al. (2014)</a>
		↓ Multiple birth defects	-	Chinese North (250 cases, 420 controls)	<a href="#">Zhang et al. (2014)</a>
<i>Methionine adenosyltransferase 1A</i> <span>MAT1A</span>	G791A	↑ Mudd's disease (CNS abnormalities) ↑ Hcy (hyperhomocysteinemia) ↑ Met (hypermethioninemia)	↑ B6 adverse ↓ Met and ↑ SAM inconclusive	American (32 cases, 32 controls)	<a href="#">Chien et al. (2015);</a> <a href="#">Pérez-Mato et al. (2001)</a>
<i>Methionine adenosyltransferase 2A</i> <span>MAT2A</span>	A1031C, G1067A	↑ FTAAD, congenital bicuspid aortic valve defects	-	Family with autosomal dominance of FTAAD (n = 18)	<a href="#">Guo et al. (2015)</a>
<i>Glycine N-methyltransferase</i> <span>GNMT</span>	C1298T	↑ Hcy	↓ Folate ↑ plasma Hcy in TT	Mixed/American (n = 114)	<a href="#">Beagle et al. (2005)</a>
		↑ Prostate cancer (OR=1.62)	-	Mixed ethnicity (661 cases, 656 controls)	<a href="#">Chen et al. (2014)</a>



Appendix Table 1.1 continued

1C metabolism gene	Variant	Risk association (↑ increase, ↓ decrease)	Effect of diet (↑ supplementation, ↓ restriction)	Ethnic population (n)	Reference(s)
<i>S-adenosylhomocysteine hydrolase</i> AHCY	G336A, A428G	↑ Congenital myopathy, delayed development	↓ Met, ↑ creatine, ↑ PC improves condition	AHCY-deficient (n = 1)	<a href="#">Barić et al. (2005)</a>
	C145T, A257G	↑ Infant mortality, congenital myopathy, delayed development, ↑ Hcy, SAM, Met and creatine kinase	-	AHCY-deficient (n = 1)	<a href="#">Vugrek et al. (2009)</a>
<i>Betaine homocysteine S-methyltransferase</i> BHMT	G742A	↑ NTDs	-	Caucasian American families (n = 304)	<a href="#">Boyles et al. (2006)</a>
		↑ Down's syndrome (OR=4.96)	Pre-conceptional folate ↑ risk	Indian (228 cases, 200 controls)	<a href="#">Jaiswal et al. (2017)</a>
<i>Choline dehydrogenase</i> CHDH	G432T	↑ Impaired spermatogenesis	-	Greek (200 oligospermic, 250 controls)	<a href="#">Lazaros et al. (2012)</a>
<i>Methylene-tetrahydrofolate reductase</i> MTHFR	C677T	↓ DNA methylation in TT individuals	-	TT (105 cases), CC (187 controls)	<a href="#">Friso et al. (2002)</a>
		↑ Male infertility (OR=1.39)	-	Mixed ethnicity (5575 cases, 5447 controls)	<a href="#">Gong et al. (2015)</a>
<i>Dihydrofolate reductase</i> DHFR	19-bp del	↓ NTDs (RR=0.59)	-	Irish (283 cases, 256 controls)	<a href="#">Parle-McDermott et al. (2007)</a>
		↑ Pre-term delivery (OR=3.0)	↓ Folate ↑ risk (OR=5.5)	Mixed ethnicity (n=324)	<a href="#">Johnson et al. (2005)</a>

Appendix Table 1.1 continued

1C metabolism gene	Variant	Risk association (↑ increase, ↓ decrease)	Effect of diet (↑ supplementation, ↓ restriction)	Ethnic population (n)	Reference(s)
Serine hydroxymethyltransferase <span>SHMT1</span>	C1420T	↑ NTDs	-	Indian (372 cases, 552 controls)	<a href="#">Prasoon et al. (2017)</a>
Methylene-tetrahydrofolate dehydrogenase <span>MTHFD</span>	G1958A	↑ NTDs	-	Indian (360 cases, 540 controls)	<a href="#">Prasoon et al. (2016)</a>
		↑ Second trimester pregnancy loss (OR=1.64)	-	Irish (125 cases, 625 controls)	<a href="#">Parle-McDermott et al. (2005)</a>
Thymidylate synthase <span>TYMS</span>	6bp(del/del)	↑ Pre-term delivery, ↓ birth weight, fetal death, ↑ Hcy	-	Indian (209 cases, 194 controls)	<a href="#">Tiwari et al. (2017)</a>
Cystathionine-β-synthase <span>CBS</span>	C699T	↑ Ischemia, late-onset preeclampsia (OR=2.1)	-	Norwegian (99 cases, 99 controls)	<a href="#">Koning et al. (2013)</a>
	T833C	↑ Non-syndromic cleft lip and palate (OR=18.7)	-	Italian (n=134)	<a href="#">Rubini et al. (2005)</a>
	C4673G	↓ Congenital heart disease (OR=0.85)	-	Chinese (2340 cases, 2270 controls)	<a href="#">Zhao et al. (2013)</a>
Cystathionine-γ-lyase <span>CTH</span>	A426G	↑ Preeclampsia (OR=18.03)	-	Caucasian Polish (60 cases, 120 controls)	<a href="#">Mrozikiewicz et al. (2015)</a>
Phosphatidylethanolamine N-methyltransferase <span>PEMT</span>	G774C	↑ Impaired spermatogenesis	-	Greek (200 oligospermic, 250 controls)	<a href="#">Lazaros et al. (2012)</a>

Appendix Table 1.1 continued

1C metabolism gene	Variant	Risk association (↑ increase, ↓ decrease)	Effect of diet (↑ supplementation, ↓ restriction)	Ethnic population (n)	Reference(s)
<i>Phosphatidylethanolamine N-methyltransferase</i> <b>PEMT</b>	G523A	↑ Idiopathic male infertility (OR=7.91)	-	Swedish (153 cases, 184 controls)	<a href="#">Murphy et al. (2011)</a>
		↑ NAFLD	-	Mixed ethnicity (28 cases, 59 controls)	<a href="#">Song et al. (2005)</a>
<i>DNA methyltransferase 1 DNMT1</i>	rs4804490	↑ Male infertility	-	Chinese (833 cases, 410 controls)	<a href="#">Tang et al. (2017)</a>
<i>DNA methyltransferase 3B DNMT3B</i>	G579T	↑ Recurrent spontaneous abortion	-	Slovenian (146 cases, 149 controls)	<a href="#">Barišić et al. (2017)</a>
	<u>R832Q,</u> <u>S828P</u>	↑ ICF syndrome	-	Japanese (n=3)	<a href="#">Shirohzu et al. (2002)</a>
<i>Histone methyltransferase EHMT1</i>	C2426T	↑ Kleefstra syndrome (hypotonia, developmental delay, brachycephaly, CHD, macroglossia and prognathism)	-	Patients (n=2)	<a href="#">Blackburn et al. (2017)</a>
<i>Reduced folate carrier RFC1/SLC19A1</i>	A80G	↑ Autism, DNA hypomethylation in mothers	-	Mixed ethnicity (529 cases, 566 controls)	<a href="#">James et al. (2010)</a>

Appendix Table 1.1 continued

1C metabolism gene	Variant	Risk association (↑ increase, ↓ decrease)	Effect of diet (↑ supplementation, ↓ restriction)	Ethnic population (n)	Reference(s)
<i>Folate receptor alpha</i> <i>FOLRα</i>	1816C/delC,  G1841A	↑ Pregnancy loss in heterozygotes	-	Estonian (439 cases, 225 controls)	<a href="#">Laanpere et al. (2011)</a>
<i>Transcobalamin receptor</i> <i>TCbIR/CD320</i>	rs2336573, rs9426	↑ NTDs (RR=6.59, 6.71)	-	Irish (551 cases, 999 controls)	<a href="#">Pangilinan et al. (2010)</a>

Gene variants reported as nucleotide base substitutions; deletions (del), amino acid variant or RefSNP (rs) ID. Abbreviations: CHD, congenital heart defects; CNS, central nervous system; FTAAD, familial thoracic aortic aneurysms and dissections; ICF, immunodeficiency, centromeric instability and facial anomalies; NAFLD, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease; NTDs, neural tube defects; OR, odds ratio; RR, relative risk dissections. One-carbon (1C) substrates: Hcy, homocysteine, SAM, S-adenosylmethionine; Met, methionine; PC, phosphatidylcholine.

**Appendix Table 1.2 Epigenetic and developmental consequences of targeted 1C metabolism gene deletions (or inhibition) in animal models.**Adapted from [Clare et al. \(2019\)](#).

1C metabolism gene	Function	KO effect	Epigenetic/Developmental consequences	Supplementation effect	Reference(s)
<i>Methionine synthase (Mtr)</i> <div>MTR</div>	B <sub>12</sub> -dependent Hcy re-methylation  Demethylation of 5-mTHF to THF	-/+ mice exhibit ~50-60% ↓ enzyme activity and ↑ plasma Hcy  -/- embryos die <i>in utero</i> before E9.5	↑ Hcy, ↓ Met and ↑ 5-mTHF, folate trapping perturbs 1C-metabolism and DNA synthesis during early embryogenesis	Folate, methionine, choline, betaine, hypoxanthine, inositol, threonine during pregnancy does not rescue MTR-deficient phenotype	<a href="#">Swanson et al. (2001)</a>
<i>Methionine synthase reductase (Mtrr)</i> <div>MTRR</div>	Reductive reactivation of MTR by methylation of cob(I)alamin cofactor	KO results in embryonic lethality  MTRR deficiency adversely impacts reproductive outcomes and cardiac development in mice	↑ Hcy, ↓ Met, ↑ 5-mTHF, folate trapping impairs growth in males, -/- dams have ↑ fetal resorptions, smaller placentae and embryos with myocardial hypoplasia and ventricular septal defects	Periconceptional supplementation with folic acid may reduce risk	<a href="#">Elmore et al. (2007)</a> <a href="#">Deng et al. (2008)</a>
<i>Methionine adenosyltransferase 1A/2A (Mat1a/Mat2a)</i> <div>MAT1A</div> <div>MAT2A</div>	SAM biosynthesis from Met	<i>Mat2a</i> inhibition reduces bovine blastocyst development  <i>Mat2a</i> KO causes developmental defects in zebrafish embryos  <i>Mat1a</i> KO mice are susceptible to acute liver injury	↓ Cell proliferation and blastocoel formation  ↑ Pericardial oedema, malformed eyes, and short tail or no tail development  ↑ Met, ↓ SAM, metabolic switch to <i>Mat2a</i> expression associated with rapid liver growth and differentiation	Met substrate alleviated reduction in blastocyst development  Choline-deficient diet induced macrovesicular steatosis in mutant mice	<a href="#">Ikeda et al. (2017)</a> <a href="#">Guo et al. (2015)</a> <a href="#">Lu et al. (2001)</a>




Appendix Table 1.2 continued

1C metabolism gene	Function	KO effect	Epigenetic/Developmental consequences	Supplementation effect	Reference(s)
<i>Glycine N-methyltransferase (Gnmt)</i> <div>GNMT</div>	Synthesis of Sar from Gly (using SAM as methyl donor)  Regulates methylation via maintenance of SAM:SAH ratio	-/- mice have exhibit aberrant methylation pattern in liver, chronic hepatitis, glycogen storage disease and risk of hepatocellular carcinoma	↑ Met, ↑ SAM, ↑ SAM:SAH ratio causes global <b>DNA hypermethylation</b> , ↓ gluconeogenesis, hypoglycaemia, ↑ serum cholesterol	- - -	<a href="#">Luka et al. (2006)</a> <a href="#">Liu et al. (2007)</a> <a href="#">Liao et al. (2009)</a>
<i>S-adenosylhomocysteine hydrolase (AHCY)</i> <div>AHCY</div>	Reversible hydrolysis of SAH to adenosine and Hcy	<i>Ahcy</i> KO causes embryonic lethality in mice	↑ SAH inhibits <b>DNA methylation</b> reactions, ↓ ICM proliferation and differentiation	-	<a href="#">Miller et al. (1994)</a>
Betaine-homocysteine S-methyltransferase ( <i>Bhmt</i> ) <div>BHMT</div>	Re-methylation Hcy to Met and DMG using TMG (betaine)	<i>Bhmt</i> KO decreases blastocyst development  -/+ mice have reduced body weight and ↑ susceptibility to fatty liver and hepatic carcinoma	↓ 40% in ICM cell number, ↓ OCT4 and NANOG expression ↑ HHcy, ↓ SAM:SAH ratio, ↓ 75% in cellular methylation, ↑ hepatic TMG and DMG, ↓ Chol and PC in several tissues, ↑ hepatic CHDH and GNMT	Blastocyst development and ICM number rescued by Met supplementation	<a href="#">Lee et al. (2012)</a> <a href="#">Teng et al. (2011)</a>

Appendix Table 1.2 continued


1C metabolism gene	Function	KO effect	Epigenetic/Developmental consequences	Supplementation effect	Reference(s)
Choline dehydrogenase ( <i>Chdh</i> ) <span>CHDH</span>	Oxidation of chol to TMG (betaine)	<i>Chdh</i> KO male mice are infertile	↑ HHcy, ↑ Chol and PC, ↓ testicular TMG, ↓ sperm motility, abnormal mitochondria in liver, heart, kidney and testes	Sperm motility doubled in -/- mice with TMG supplementation	<a href="#">Johnson et al. (2010)</a>
Methylene-tetrahydrofolate reductase ( <i>Mthfr</i> ) <span>MTHFR</span>	Conversion of 5,10-CH <sub>2</sub> THF to 5-mTHF (methyl donor for Hcy re-methylation to Met)	-/- mice have severe birth defects and die within 2 weeks post-partum  -/- BALB/c mice have abnormal spermatogenesis and infertility	↑ HHcy, ↓ SAM in tissues (except liver), ↑ SAH, <b>DNA hypomethylation</b> in brain and ovaries, developmental retardation, ↓ body weight, short or kinked tail with kyphosis, facial abnormalities	-  Post-weaning TMG supplementation improved fertility parameters	<a href="#">Chen et al. (2001)</a>  <a href="#">Kelly et al. (2005)</a>
Dihydrofolate reductase ( <i>Dhfr</i> ) <span>DHFR</span>	Reduction of DHF to THF Reduction of FA to DHF	<i>Dhfr</i> KO impairs embryonic development in zebrafish	↑ Congenital cardiovascular defects ↓ Transcription factors in cardiac development	-	<a href="#">Sun et al. (2011)</a>
Serine hydroxymethyltransferase ( <i>Shmt1</i> ) <span>SHMT1</span>	Conversion of SER to GLY and THF to 5,10-CH <sub>2</sub> THF (substrate for thymidylate synthesis)	SHMT-deficiency causes NTDs in mice	Impairs <i>de novo</i> thymidylate biosynthesis by reducing TYMS enzyme concentrations (via <i>Pax3</i> interaction)	Mutant mice exhibit exencephaly in response to maternal folate- and choline-deficient diet	<a href="#">Beaudin et al. (2011)</a>

Appendix Table 1.2 continued

1C metabolism gene	Function	KO effect	Epigenetic/Developmental consequences	Supplementation effect	Reference(s)
Methylene-tetrahydrofolate dehydrogenase ( <i>Mthfd1/1L</i> ) 	Production of 10-fTHF and THF used for synthesis of purines ( <i>Mthfd1</i> ; mitochondrial formate production)	Loss of <i>MTHFD1 synthetase</i> causes embryo loss by E10.5 in mice, MTHFD1L-deficient mice are growth restricted with NTDs	Abnormal embryo development, ↓ <i>de novo</i> purine synthesis, ↓ cellular proliferation, craniorachischisis, exencephaly and/or a wavy neural tube.	Maternal supplementation with sodium formate partially rescues growth defect phenotype	<a href="#">Momb et al. (2013)</a> <a href="#">Christensen et al. (2013)</a>
Cystathionine-β-synthase ( <i>Cbs</i> ) 	B <sub>6</sub> -dependent condensation of Hcy and Ser to Cth	CBS-deficient female mice have impaired fertility, homocysteinuria with mild hepatopathy, hypercoagulation, IUGR and die within 5 weeks post-partum	Irregular oestrus cycle, ↓ embryo growth, ↓ placental mass with morphological abnormalities, ↓ viable embryos, ↑ Hcy, ↑ Met, ↑ SAH, ↑ Cth and ↓ Cys, enlarged and multinucleated hepatocytes with microvesicular lipid droplets	Transplantation of CBS-deficient ovaries into normal ovariectomised recipient restores fertility, TMG treatment lowers Hcy and SAH levels, ameliorates hypercoagulation and reduces CTH	<a href="#">Guzmán et al. (2006)</a> <a href="#">Maclean et al. (2010)</a> <a href="#">Watanabe et al. (1995)</a>
Cystathionine-γ-Lyase ( <i>Cth</i> ) 	Catabolism of Cth to Cys, α-KB and NH <sub>3</sub>	CTH-deficient mice have ↓ hydrogen sulphide (H <sub>2</sub> S) production	↓ vasodilation leading to hypertension  Dysregulation of H <sub>2</sub> S metabolism impairs oviductal transport of embryos, ↑ risk of ectopic pregnancy	- -	<a href="#">Yang et al. (2008)</a> <a href="#">Ning et al. (2014)</a>



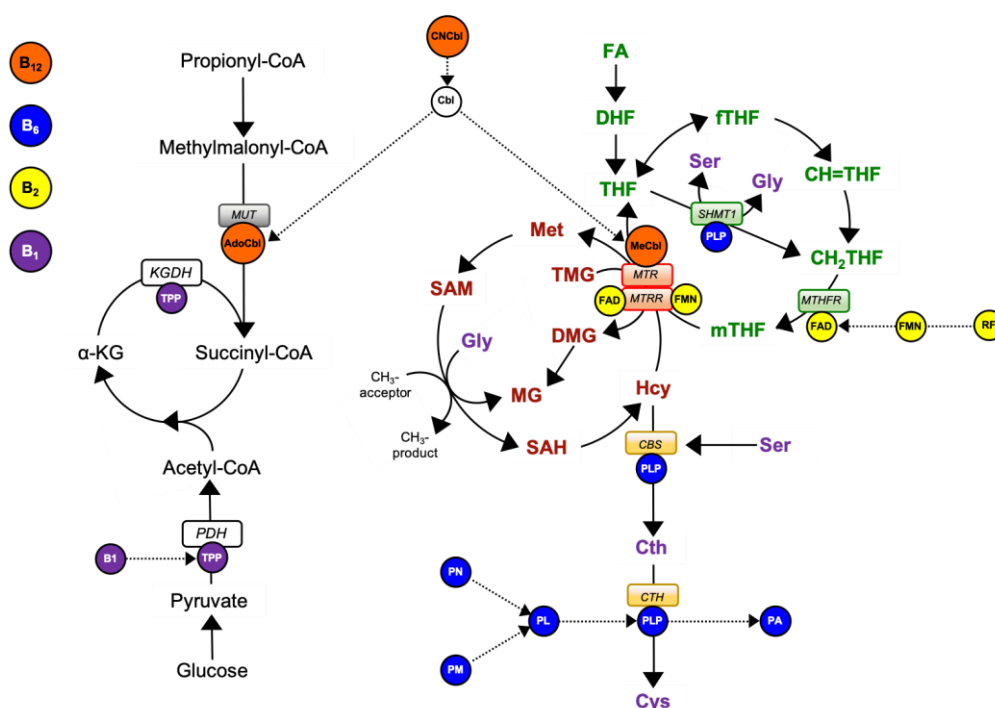
Appendix Table 1.2 continued

1C metabolism gene	Function	KO effect	Epigenetic/Developmental consequences	Supplementation effect	Reference(s)
Phosphatidylethanolamine N-methyltransferase ( <i>Pemt</i> ) 	<i>De novo</i> synthesis of chol Conversion of PE to PC in liver	-/- mice die when deprived of chol, ↑ progenitor cell mitosis in brain of -/- mice at E17	↑ SAM, ↑ <b>Hypermethylation</b> of proteins and <b>DNA</b> , ↓ DHA (C22:6; n-6) and AA (C24:4; n-3) PUFAs in membrane phospholipids, ↑ hepatic steatosis, ↑ Histone H3 phosphorylation	Chol supplementation rescues some but not all KO phenotypes	<a href="#">Walkey et al. (1997)</a> <a href="#">Watkins et al. (2003)</a> <a href="#">Zhu et al. (2003)</a> <a href="#">Zhu et al. (2004)</a>
DNA methyltransferase 1 ( <i>Dnmt1</i> )	Maintenance of DNA methylation in mammalian cells	<i>Dnmt1</i> KO causes embryonic lethality in mice	↓ Reduction in 5mC, ↓ cell proliferation, ↓ embryo growth and delayed development	-	<a href="#">Li et al. (1992)</a>
DNA methyltransferase 3 ( <i>Dnmt3a/Dnmt3b/Dnmt3L</i> )	<i>De novo</i> methylation of DNA during mammalian development	<i>Dnmt3a/3b</i> deletion causes embryonic lethality in mice <i>Dnmt3L</i> -/- male mice infertile, +/- females die mid-gestation	<i>De novo</i> methylation blocked, DNMT3B KO causes <b>hypomethylation of pericentromeric repeats</b> . <i>Dnmt3L</i> -/- males lack germ cells, +/- females have abnormal imprinted genes	- -	<a href="#">Okano et al. (1999)</a> <a href="#">Bourc'his et al. (2001)</a>
Arginine N-methyltransferase ( <i>Prmt</i> )	Methylation of arginine residues in proteins, e.g. histones	<i>Prmt</i> KO causes post-natal lethality in mice due to impaired CNS development, -/- mutant embryos fail to develop beyond E6.5	Post-natal growth retardation, reduced nuclei in white matter tracts, hypomyelination and <b>hypomethylation of histone</b> proteins	- -	<a href="#">Hashimoto et al. (2016)</a> <a href="#">Pawlak et al. (2000)</a>

Appendix Table 1.2 continued

1C metabolism gene	Function	KO effect	Epigenetic/Developmental consequences	Supplementation effect	Reference(s)
Reduced folate carrier ( <i>Rfc1/Slc19a1</i> )	Carrier-mediated internalisation of major blood folates (e.g. 5-mTHF) into mammalian cells	RFC null embryos <i>in utero</i> before E9.5; 10% of -/- dams supplemented with FA gave birth to live pups but pups died within 12 days	Impaired development of hematopoietic organs; absent erythropoiesis in bone marrow and spleen; ↓ liver lymphoid in splenic white pulp and thymus; impaired renal and seminiferous tubule development	Near normal development sustained in -/- embryos at E18.5 when dams are supplemented with 1 mg FA daily	<a href="#">Zhao et al. (2001)</a>
Folate binding protein 1/2, Folate receptor alpha ( <i>Folbp1/2, Folr1</i> )	High affinity internalisation and delivery of folate into cell cytoplasm by Folbp1; Folbp2 binds folate poorly	<i>Folbp1</i> -/- embryos die <i>in utero</i> by E10; <i>Folbp2</i> -/- embryos develop normally	↓ Plasma folate, delayed embryonic development, ↓ number of somites, failed neural tube closure at E9.5, ↑ risk of NTDs, craniofacial anomalies, abdominal wall defects and congenital heart defects	Supplementation of Folbp1-deficient dams with folinic acid (5-fTHF) and 5-mTHF rescues most embryos from premature death in dose-dependent manner, irrespective of folate form	<a href="#">Piedrahita et al. (1999)</a> <a href="#">Spiegelstein et al. (2004)</a> <a href="#">Zhu et al. (2007)</a>
Transcobalamin receptor ( <i>TCblR, CD320</i> )	Cellular uptake of transcobalamin-bound Cbl (B12)	-/- mice develop normally but exhibit depleted Cbl in CNS and neuropathologic changes	↑ Hcy, ↑ MMA, ↓ SAM:SAH ratio, <b>global DNA hypomethylation</b> in brain, normal accumulation of Cbl in liver and kidney suggests separate Cbl uptake mechanisms exist in these tissues (i.e. Megalin)	- -	<a href="#">Lai et al. (2013)</a> <a href="#">Arora et al. (2017)</a>













## Appendix Chapter 2



**Appendix Figure 2.1 B vitamins, folates and 1C-related amines in one-carbon (1C) metabolism and propionate metabolism.** Adapted from [Xu et al. \(2020\)](#).

Abbreviation(s): Folate cycle enzymes (green boxes): MTHFR, 5,10-methylenetetrahydrofolate reductase; SHMT1, serine hydroxymethyltransferase. Methionine cycle enzymes (red boxes): MTR, methionine synthase; MTRR, methionine synthase reductase. Transsulfuration pathway enzymes (yellow boxes): CBS, cystathionine β-synthase; CTH, cystathionine γ-lyase. Propionate pathway enzyme (grey box): MUT, methylmalonyl-CoA mutase. Tricarboxylic acid cycle enzymes (white boxes): KGDH, α-ketoglutarate dehydrogenase; PDH, pyruvate dehydrogenase. Vitamin B1 cofactors (purple circles): B1, thiamine; TPP, thiamine pyrophosphate. Vitamin B2 cofactors (yellow circles): RF, riboflavin; FMN, flavin mononucleotide; FAD, flavin adenine dinucleotide. Vitamin B6 cofactors (blue circles): PN, pyridoxine; PM, pyridoxamine; PL, pyridoxal; PLP, pyridoxal 5'-phosphate; PA, 4-pyridoxic acid. Vitamin B12 cofactors (orange circles): CNCbl, cyanocobalamin; MeCbl, methylcobalamin; AdoCbl, adenosylcobalamin. White circle: Cbl, cobalamin. Substrates: Cys, cysteine; CH=THF, 5,10-methenyltetrahydrofolate; CH2THF, 5,10-methylenetetrahydrofolate; Cth, cystathionine; DHF, dihydrofolate; DMG, dimethylglycine; FA, folic acid; fTHF, 10-formyltetrahydrofolate; Gly, glycine; Hcy, homocysteine; Met, methionine; MG, methylglycine; mTHF, 5-methyltetrahydrofolate; SAH, S-adenosylhomocysteine; SAM, S-adenosylmethionine; Ser, serine; THF, tetrahydrofolate; TMG, trimethylglycine; α-KG, α-ketoglutarate. Solid arrows demonstrate flux through metabolic pathways. Dotted arrows demonstrate interconversion and interaction of B vitamin species with metabolic pathways.

**Appendix Table 2.1 Function of B vitamin cofactors involved in 1C metabolism and related pathways.**

	<b>Cyanocobalamin (B12)</b> Synthetic form of vitamin B <sub>12</sub> that is biologically inert but converted to bioactive cofactors; AdoCbl and MeCbl ( <a href="#">Farquharson and Adams, 1976</a> ; <a href="#">Martinelli et al., 2011</a> )		<b>Pyridoxine (B6)</b> Alcohol form of vitamin B <sub>6</sub> that is commonly found in food and dietary that is readily converted to bioactive forms ( <a href="#">Albersen et al., 2013</a> )
	<b>Adenosylcobalamin (B12)</b> Cofactor for mitochondrial MUT enzyme that catalyses isomerisation of methylmalonyl-CoA to succinyl-CoA in propionate metabolism ( <a href="#">Shane, 2008</a> )		<b>Pyridoxamine (B6)</b> Amine form of vitamin B <sub>6</sub> that is readily transformed to PL ( <a href="#">Sakurai et al., 1992</a> )
	<b>Methylcobalamin (B12)</b> Cofactor for MTR enzyme that catalyses remethylation of Hcy to Met in methionine cycle ( <a href="#">Shane, 2008</a> )		<b>Pyridoxal (B6)</b> Aldehyde form of vitamin B <sub>6</sub> that is phosphorylated to form the bioactive cofactor, PLP ( <a href="#">Albersen et al., 2013</a> )
	<b>Riboflavin (B2)</b> Dietary form of vitamin B <sub>2</sub> that serves as a precursor for formation of bioactive forms. RF is phosphorylated to FMN ( <a href="#">Powers, 2003</a> )		<b>Pyridoxal 5'-phosphate (B6)</b> Cofactor for SHMT enzyme that catalyses simultaneous conversion of Ser to Gly, and THF to CH <sub>2</sub> THF in the folate cycle ( <a href="#">Appaji Rao et al., 2003</a> ) Cofactor for CBS and CTH enzymes that catalyse the conversion of Hcy first to Cth and then to Cys in the transsulphuration pathway ( <a href="#">Perry et al., 2007</a> )
	<b>Flavin mononucleotide (B2)</b> Cofactor for MTRR enzyme that restores MTR activity for remethylation of Hcy to Met in methionine cycle ( <a href="#">García-Minguillán et al., 2014</a> )		<b>Thiamine (B1)</b> Form of vitamin B <sub>1</sub> that is rapidly phosphorylated to bioactive form, TPP ( <a href="#">de Jong et al., 2004</a> )
	<b>Flavin adenine dinucleotide (B2)</b> Cofactor for MTHFR enzyme that catalyses conversion of CH <sub>2</sub> THF to 5-methyltetrahydrofolate 5-mTHF in the folate cycle Cofactor for MTRR enzyme that restores MTR activity for remethylation of Hcy to Met in methionine cycle ( <a href="#">García-Minguillán et al., 2014</a> )		<b>Thiamine pyrophosphate (B1)</b> Cofactor for enzymes involved in oxidative phosphorylation; PDH catalyses the decarboxylation of pyruvate to acetyl-CoA and KGDH catalyses the conversion of α-KG to succinyl-CoA in the TCA cycle ( <a href="#">Lonsdale, 2015</a> ; <a href="#">McLain et al., 2011</a> )

## **Appendix 2.1 Sheep blood plasma trace-element analysis by ICP-MS**

Inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (ICP-MS) was used to measure trace-elements, primarily cobalt (Co), in sheep blood samples. No sample preparation step was required. Multi-element analysis was undertaken (Thermo-Fisher iCAP-Q) with a 'Flatpole collision cell' charged with 7% H<sub>2</sub> in He gas) upstream of the analytical quadrupole to reduce polyatomic interferences. Samples and calibration standards were diluted (0.5 mL into 20 mL) in a diluent containing 0.1% ionic surfactant containing Triton X-100 and anti-foam-B (Sigma Aldrich), plus 2% methanol (MeOH) and 1% nitric acid (HNO<sub>3</sub>; Trace analysis grade, Fisher Scientific, 1 mL/min). Internal standards were scandium (Sc; 50 µg/L), germanium (Ge; 20 µg/L), rhodium (Rh; 10 µg/L) and iridium (Ir; 5 µg/L). Samples were introduced via a covered autosampler (Cetac ASX-520) through a concentric glass venturi nebuliser (Thermo-Fisher Scientific; 1 mL/min). Calibration standards ranged from 0 to 100 µg/L. Sample processing was conducted using Qtegra software (Thermo-Fisher Scientific).

## **Appendix 2.2 Sheep liver amino acid analysis by HPLC**

Primary amino acids were quantified in sheep liver by high performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) with online derivitisation, based on the method of [Henderson \*et al.\* \(2000\)](#) with the following modifications. Briefly, 150 mg frozen liver were extracted with 150 µL 80% MeOH by homogenisation for 2 min. After centrifugation for 15 min at 14,500 xg, 120 µL supernatant and 3 µL internal standard, norvaline (NVA, 40 mmol/L), was transferred to a 2.5 mL screw-capped glass autosampler vial for HPLC analysis.

The method used an Agilent 1100 HPLC equipped with a binary solvent delivery system and gradient controller. Chromatographic separation was performed on a ZORBAX Eclipse-AAA column (4.6 x 150 mm, 3.5 µm) protected by a guard column and maintained at 40°C. The flow rate was set at 1.75 mL/min. The injection program was as follows:

1. Draw 2.5 µL from vial 1 (borate buffer, 0.5 M, pH 8.0)
2. Draw 0.5 µL from sample
3. Mix 3 µL "in air", max speed, 2x
4. Wait 0.5 min

5. Draw 0  $\mu\text{L}$  from vial 2 (needle wash using water in uncapped vial)
6. Draw 0.5  $\mu\text{L}$  from vial 3 (10 mg/mL OPA + 20 mg/mL MPA, in ACN)
7. Mix 3.5  $\mu\text{L}$  "in air", max speed, 6x
8. Draw 0  $\mu\text{L}$  from vial 2 (needle wash using water in uncapped vial)
9. Draw 0.5  $\mu\text{L}$  from vial 4 (ACN)
10. Mix 4  $\mu\text{L}$  "in air", max speed, 6x
11. Draw 0  $\mu\text{L}$  from vial 6 (needle wash using ACN in uncapped vial)
12. Draw 16  $\mu\text{L}$  from vial 5 (water)
13. Mix 10  $\mu\text{L}$  "in air", max speed, 2x
14. Inject 10  $\mu\text{L}$  of sample

Mobile phases were composed of  $\text{Na}_2\text{HPO}_4$  (40 mmol/L, pH 7.8) for eluent A and ACN: MeOH: water (45:45:10, w/w/w) for eluent B. The total run time was 30 min. Gradient elution was carried out by the following program:

**Mobile phase gradients for analysis of liver amino acids.**

Time (min)	Eluent A (%)	Eluent B (%)
0	100	0
2	100	0
24	56	44
25	0	100
26	0	100
27	100	0
30	100	0

A fluorometer was used to monitor the elution of amino acids from the column (excitation wavelength=340 nm, emission wavelength=450 nm). Limits of quantification (LOQ) and inter-assay CV% was determined for all amino acids measured.

**Limits of quantification and inter-assay CV% for amino acids.**

Amino Acid	LOQ (nmol/g)	CV (%)
Aspartate (Asp)	31.3	14.7
Glutamate (Glu)	1250	3.9
Asparagine (Asn)	31.3	2.5
Serine (Ser)	31.3	5.5
Glutamine (Gln)	15.6	5.1
Histidine (His)	15.6	5.1
Glycine (Gly)	1250	6.1
Threonine (Thr)	15.6	5.7
Citrulline (Cit)	31.25	1.9
Tyrosine (Tyr)	15.6	4.8
Cystine (Cys)	62.5	18.8
Valine (Val)	15.6	6.6
Methionine (Met)	15.6	7.2
Tryptophan (Trp)	15.6	6.7
Phenylalanine (Phe)	15.6	4.7
Isoleucine (Ile)	31.3	2.7
Leucine (Leu)	31.3	2.1
Lysine (Lys)	31.3	3.2

Methionine coloured in red and relevant 1C-related amino acids coloured in purple.

### Appendix 2.3 Sheep liver polyamine analysis by HPLC

Primary polyamines; putrescine (Put), spermidine (Spd) and spermidine (Spm), were quantified in sheep liver by HPLC based on the methods of [Sabri \*et al.\* \(1989\)](#) and [Magnes \*et al.\* \(2014\)](#). Briefly, 50 mg frozen liver were extracted with 500  $\mu$ L cold distilled water and 40  $\mu$ L perchloric acid (4M) by homogenisation for 2 min. After cooling on ice for 10 min, the homogenate was centrifuged for 15 min at 14,500 xg and 400  $\mu$ L supernatant was transferred to an Eppendorf tube. The pH of the supernatant was adjusted to 9.0 by the addition of 28  $\mu$ L potassium hydroxide (KOH, 4M). The sample was vortexed for 30 s and centrifuged for 10 min at 14,500 xg before 20  $\mu$ L were transferred to a new Eppendorf tube for derivatisation.

Twelve microliters of borate buffer (0.2 M) and 4  $\mu$ L 1,6-diaminohexane (DAH, 100  $\mu$ mol/L) were added to the 20  $\mu$ L sample. After brief vortexing, 40  $\mu$ L 9-fluorenylmethyl chloroformate (FMOC, 0.01 M in acetone) was added. The sample was vortexed for 1 min and left for 10 min at room temperature to allow derivitisation to proceed. After the addition of 48  $\mu$ L glycine reagent (0.04 M glycine in 0.2 M sodium borate, pH 9.0), the sample was vortexed for 30 s and left at room temperature for a further 2 min. Finally, 40  $\mu$ L dilution buffer (0.015 M NaOAc in ACN) was added, vortexed for 10 s and 100  $\mu$ L were transferred to a glass autosampler vial containing 400  $\mu$ L dilution buffer for HPLC analysis.

Using the Agilent 1100 HPLC (Appendix 2.2), 10  $\mu$ L sample was injected onto the Zorbax C18 HPLC column (250 x 4.6 mm, 5  $\mu$ m) protected by a guard column and maintained at 40°C. The flow rate was set at 1.2 mL/min. Mobile phases were composed of Na<sub>2</sub>HPO<sub>4</sub> (40 mmol/L, pH 7.8) for eluent A and ACN: MeOH: water (45:45:10, w/w/w) for eluent B. The total run time was 30 min. Gradient elution was carried out by the following program:

#### Mobile phase gradients for analysis of liver polyamines.

Time (min)	Eluent A (%)	Eluent B (%)
0	50	50
5	50	50
28	0	100
28.5	0	100
29	50	50
30	50	50

A fluorometer was used to monitor the elution of polyamines from the column (excitation wavelength = 264, emission wavelength = 310). The LOD was 0.625

nmol/g for all three polyamines and the CV% was 2.08, 3.09 and 3.24 for Put, Spd and Spm QC samples, respectively.

## Appendix 2.4 Liver propionate metabolites by GC-MS

Methylmalonic acid (MMA) and succinic acid (SA) concentrations were quantified in sheep liver by gas chromatography-mass spectrometry (GC-MS) based on the method of [Kanakkaparambail \*et al.\* \(2009\)](#) with the following modifications. Briefly, 50 mg frozen liver were extracted with 250  $\mu$ L 80% MeOH by homogenisation for 2 min. Samples were cooled on ice for 10 min. After centrifugation for 15 min at 14,500 xg, 200  $\mu$ L supernatant and 4  $\mu$ L internal standard (1 mmol/L 4-chlorobutyric acid in 1 mmol/L HCl) were transferred to a 2.5 mL screw-capped glass autosampler vial. To this, 250  $\mu$ L 12% boron trifluoride-methanol ( $\text{BF}_3$ -MeOH) were added and the sample was vortexed for 1 min and heated for 15 min at 95°C in a heating block. After cooling, 250  $\mu$ L distilled water and 250  $\mu$ L dichloromethane ( $\text{CH}_2\text{Cl}_2$ ) were added to the vial, vortexed for 30 s and centrifuged for 10 min at 14,500 xg to separate the layers. The lower  $\text{CH}_2\text{Cl}_2$  layer was transferred to a screw capped glass auto-sampler vial with insert for GC-MS analysis. The GC-MS method used was identical to the method described in Section 2.2.1.3.3. The LOD was 0.75 nmol/g for both MMA and SA and CV% was 8.37 and 10.98 for MMA and SA, respectively.

Propionic acid (PPA) concentrations were quantified by GC-MS based on the method of [Pouteau \*et al.\* \(2001\)](#). Briefly, 150 mg frozen liver were extracted with 750  $\mu$ L 5-sulfosalicylic acid (SSA, 0.04 mg/mL) by homogenisation for 2 min. Samples were cooled on ice for 2 min. After centrifugation for 15 min at 14,500 xg, 200  $\mu$ L supernatant was added to 20  $\mu$ L internal standard, 2-methylbutyric acid (MBA, 400  $\mu$ mol/L), 3.5  $\mu$ L HCl (37%) and 1 mL diethylether. The sample mixture was vortexed for 2 min and centrifuged for 10 min at 14,500 xg to separate the layers. From the upper layer, 600  $\mu$ L were transferred to a screw capped glass vial containing 3.5  $\mu$ L 1-(tert-butyldimethylsilyl)imidazole (TBDMS, 97%). The sample was vortexed for 2 min and heated for 30 min at 60°C. After cooling, the sample was analysed by GC-MS.

The GC-MS method used a DB-5MS column (J&W Scientific Agilent technology, 30 m x 0.25 mm; 0.25  $\mu$ m film thickness). The injection volume was 5  $\mu$ L for SCAN and SIM mode, both using splitless mode. The injection port and MS selective detector interference temperatures were 260°C and 250°C,



respectively. The carrier gas (He) was set at a constant flow rate of 1.3 mL/min. The chromatographic conditions were 40°C for 1 min, 70°C min<sup>-1</sup> until 60°C, 15°C min<sup>-1</sup> until 110°C, and a final increase of 70°C min<sup>-1</sup> until 250°C. The MS operated in electron impact ionisation mode with the ionisation energy of 70 eV. SCAN mode measured at m/z: 30-300. SIM ions were set at 131 for PPA and 159 for MBA. Liver PPA concentrations were quantified by the method of standard addition using a calibration range from 19.5 nmol/g to 5 µmol/g and plotting the ratio of peak area of analyte (PPA) to that of the internal standard (MBA). The LOD was 19.5 nmol/g and the CV% was 10.4, 6.3 and 6.5 for low, medium and high QCs, respectively. The inter-assay CV% was 4.7%.

**Appendix Table 2.2 Total concentration ranges of 1C metabolites and related compounds in animal tissues.**

	Concentration			Reference(s)
	Liver (pmol/g)	Muscle (pmol/g)	Blood (pmol/L)	
<b>Vitamin B<sub>12</sub></b>				
Sheep (total)	569-766 <b>*79-3027</b> <b>**64-734</b>	0.6-7.0	164-2,757	Indyk <i>et al.</i> (2002); Ortigues-Marty <i>et al.</i> (2005); Sinclair <i>et al.</i> (2007); Mitchell <i>et al.</i> (2007); Williams <i>et al.</i> (2007); Hassan <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Cow	342-1,266	3-8	70-102	Ortigues-Marty <i>et al.</i> (2005); Williams <i>et al.</i> (2007); Hassan <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Deer	428-1,024	20-21	-	Tremain-Boon <i>et al.</i> (2002); Hassan <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Pig	149-183	3-4	50-127	Matte <i>et al.</i> (2010); Hassan <i>et al.</i> (2012); Guay <i>et al.</i> (2002)
Rat	50-100	-	3,000-7,180	Fukuwatari <i>et al.</i> (2008); Shibata <i>et al.</i> (2013)
Chicken	132-133	2-3	-	Hassan <i>et al.</i> (2012)
<b>Vitamin B<sub>9</sub> (Folates)</b>				
Sheep (total)	5,000-28,076 <b>*10,355-211,847</b> <b>**186,25-118,290</b>	44	4,300-6,900	Smith and Osborne-White (1973); Kleppa and Stuen (2003); Williams (2007)
Cow	6312	22-261	24,000-6,1000	Williams (2007); Graulet <i>et al.</i> (2007); Müller (1993)
Deer	-	-	-	-
Pig	2,300,000	22-261	30,000-52,000	Müller (1993); Stangl <i>et al.</i> (2000); Halsted <i>et al.</i> (2002)
Rat	243,000-277,000	79,000-86,000	71,000-136,000	Crivello <i>et al.</i> (2010)
Chicken	10,720,000	101,000	54,300,000	Müller (1993); McCann <i>et al.</i> (1994)
<b>Vitamin B<sub>6</sub></b>				
Sheep (free forms)	28,937 <b>*181-5,228</b> <b>**175-1,250</b>	5,371-43,678	-	Williams <i>et al.</i> (2007); Hassan <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Cow	40,402	8,190-28,390	-	Williams <i>et al.</i> (2007); Hassan <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Deer	28,937	10,374	-	Hassan <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Pig	34,942	12,558	-	Hassan <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Rat	20,000-48,900	-	1.0-2.1	Fukuwatari <i>et al.</i> (2008); Shibata <i>et al.</i> (2013)
Chicken	43,668	20,747	-	Hassan <i>et al.</i> (2012)
<b>Vitamin B<sub>2</sub></b>	<b>(nmol/g)</b>	<b>(nmol/g)</b>	<b>(pmol/L)</b>	
Sheep (Riboflavin)	74-93 <b>*5-97</b> <b>**0.1-1.1</b>	4-7	-	Fukuwatari <i>et al.</i> (2008); Shibata <i>et al.</i> (2013); Williams <i>et al.</i> (2007); Hassan <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Cow	74-128	3-6	-	Williams <i>et al.</i> (2007); Hassan <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Deer	69-70	6-7	-	Hassan <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Pig	75-76	3-4	-	Hassan <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Rat	70-100	-	0.169	Fukuwatari <i>et al.</i> (2008); Shibata <i>et al.</i> (2013)
Chicken	90-91	4-5	-	Hassan <i>et al.</i> (2012)
<b>Vitamin B<sub>1</sub></b>				
Sheep (Thiamine)	9-15 <b>*0.3-12.5</b> <b>**0.09-1.71</b>	3-6	-	Williams <i>et al.</i> (2007); Hassan <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Cow	8-12	1-4	-	Williams <i>et al.</i> (2007); Hassan <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Deer	12-13	3-4	-	Hassan <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Pig	16-17	15-16	-	Hassan <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Rat	30-40	-	0.3-0.4	Hassan <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Chicken	23-24	5-6	-	Hassan <i>et al.</i> (2012)

Total concentration range (per g of tissue wet weight) reported in present study in red.

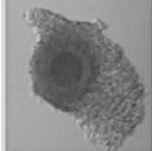
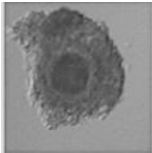
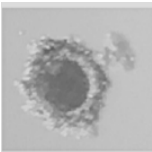
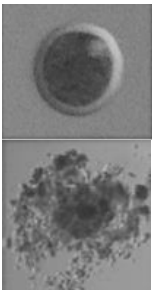
\*Abattoir derived (Ab) sheep liver; \*\* methyl deficient (MD) sheep liver.

## Appendix Chapter 3

**Appendix Table 3.2 A summary of betaine homocysteine S-methyltransferase (BHMT) enzyme isoforms and their methyl donor substrates.**

Isoform	Betaine-homocysteine S-methyltransferase (BHMT; EC 2.1.1.5)	Betaine-homocysteine S-methyltransferase 2 (BHMT2; EC 2.1.1.10)
<b>Reaction</b>	Uses betaine/trimethylglycine (TMG) as methyl donor substrate to remethylate Hcy to methionine, generating dimethylglycine (DMG) by-product ( <a href="#">Ganu et al., 2015</a> ).	Uses S-methylmethionine (SMM) as a methyl donor substrate to remethylate Hcy to generate two molecules of methionine ( <a href="#">Mládková et al., 2012</a> ).
<b>Inhibition</b>	Dimethylglycine (DMG) is a strong inhibitor ( <a href="#">Szegedi et al., 2008</a> ).	SAM is a weak inhibitor; methionine is a stronger inhibitor of BHMT2 than BHMT ( <a href="#">Szegedi et al., 2008</a> ).
<b>Species</b>	Sea urchins, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals ( <a href="#">Ganu et al., 2015</a> ).	Mammals (all monotreme, marsupial and placental species examined; <a href="#">Ganu et al., 2015</a> ).
<b>Gene</b>	Human <i>BHMT</i> gene maps to chromosome 5q13.1-5q15, spans ~20 kb, consists of 8 exons and 7 introns ( <a href="#">Li et al., 2008</a> ).	<i>BHMT2</i> gene is adjacently located on chromosome 5 ~22.3 kb upstream of <i>BHMT</i> due to tandem gene duplication event ( <a href="#">Li et al., 2008</a> ).
<b>Homology</b>	73-78% amino acid sequence homology ( <a href="#">Li et al., 2008</a> ; <a href="#">Ganu et al., 2011</a> ). Crystal structures identical at nucleotide level and 94% identical at amino acid level ( <a href="#">Pajares and Pérez-Sala, 2006</a> ).	reveal mammalian BHMT proteins are highly conserved, e.g. Human and porcine BHMT are 84% identical at nucleotide level and 94% identical at amino acid level ( <a href="#">Pajares and Pérez-Sala, 2006</a> ).
<b>Protein Structure</b>	406-7 amino acids (45 kDa; <a href="#">Chadwick et al., 2000</a> ; <a href="#">Szegedi et al., 2008</a> ). Forms a dimer of dimers (tetramer of monomer units; <a href="#">Ganu et al., 2015</a> ). Zn <sup>2+</sup> atom linked to 3 essential Cys residues (217, 299, 300). First 318 residues of ORF encode a (β/α) <sub>8</sub> barrel that contains Cys residues of catalytic site and Gln159 invariant residue for Hcy binding ( <a href="#">Ganu et al., 2013</a> ). Residues 319-406/7 encode <i>oligomerisation domain</i> of C-terminus including dimerization arm, hook, flexible linker and C terminal α-helix ( <a href="#">Ganu et al., 2015</a> ).	Monomeric protein comprising 373 amino acids (40 kDa; <a href="#">Li et al., 2008</a> ; <a href="#">Szegedi et al., 2008</a> ). Lacks 34 amino acids that encode the <i>oligomerisation domain</i> , therefore, BHMT2 does not oligomerise. Both isoforms may oligomerise into a tetramer of BHMT-BHMT2 dimers ( <a href="#">Ganu et al., 2015</a> ). Heterodimerisation may partially stabilise BHMT2, thereby preserving its activity and preventing its rapid degradation following expression ( <a href="#">Mládková et al., 2012</a> ; <a href="#">Szegedi et al., 2008</a> ).
<b>Tissue distribution</b>	High abundance in liver and kidney, pancreas ( <a href="#">Ganu et al., 2015</a> ; <a href="#">Pajares and Pérez-Sala, 2006</a> ), eye lens, cochlea, brain, skeletal and cardiac muscle ( <a href="#">Pérez-Miguelsanz et al., 2017</a> ). <i>BHMT</i> expression in mouse oocyte promotes ICM development and DNA methylation ( <a href="#">Anas et al., 2008</a> ; <a href="#">Lee et al., 2012</a> ; <a href="#">Zhang et al., 2015</a> ). <i>BHMT</i> expressed in human ESCs ( <a href="#">Steele et al., 2005</a> ). Contradictory findings report detection of <i>BHMT</i> mRNA in bovine embryos of all developmental stages, except for 8-cell stage ( <a href="#">Ikeda et al., 2010</a> ), and complete absence of transcript in bovine ovary, oocyte and embryo ( <a href="#">Kwong et al., 2010</a> ). Conventionally understood to be cytoplasmic but nuclear subcellular distribution of BHMT has been recently discovered ( <a href="#">Pérez-Miguelsanz et al., 2017</a> ).	<i>BHMT2</i> mRNA tissue distribution patterns thought to reflect those of BHMT ( <a href="#">Ganu et al., 2015</a> ; <a href="#">Chadwick et al., 2000</a> ). Less information on tissue specific BHMT2 activity. Determining whether BHMT2 is expressed in compensation for lack of BHMT, particularly in reproductive tissues, is critical to enhance current understanding of how 1C/Met metabolism behaves in these cell types. <i>BHMT2</i> expression has been reported in human oocyte ( <a href="#">Benkhalifa et al., 2008</a> ; <a href="#">Benkhalifa et al., 2010</a> ). Low expression of <i>BHMT</i> isoforms in tissues other than liver and kidney could be due to CpG island methylation of their promoter region ( <a href="#">Ganu et al., 2011</a> ).
<b>Other function(s)</b>	BHMT as a 'moonlighting protein': 1) osmotic support/maintains tonicity via betaine concentrations ( <a href="#">Ganu et al., 2013</a> ); 2) structural protein; 3) Scaffold for enzyme function ( <a href="#">Pérez-Miguelsanz et al., 2017</a> ); 4) Eye lens as ψ-crystallin ( <a href="#">Vansantha et al., 1998</a> ).	
<b>Substrate</b>	<b>Betaine (N,N,N-trimethylglycine/TMG)</b>	<b>S-methylmethionine (SMM), S-methylmethionine Sulphonium Chloride, 'Vitamin U'</b>
<b>Source</b>	Wheat, germ/bran, spinach, shellfish, sugarbeet. Mitochondrial oxidation of choline ( <a href="#">Hogeveen et al., 2013</a> ).	Yeast and criciferous plants ( <a href="#">Ganu et al., 2015</a> ). Cannot be synthesised by mammals as they lack methyltransferase (MMT) enzyme ( <a href="#">Bourgis et al., 1999</a> ; <a href="#">Kovatscheva and Popova, 1977</a> ) but is bioavailable in the animal diets ( <a href="#">Augspurger et al., 2005</a> ).
<b>Specificity</b>	BHMT can use SMM in vitro at low affinity Km/Kcat 5-fold lower than that for betaine ( <a href="#">Szegedi et al., 2008</a> ).	BHMT2 cannot use TMG/betaine (lacks 9 amino acids within N-terminus that confer specificity to BHMT; <a href="#">Ganu et al., 2015</a> ).
<b>Kinetics</b>	Porcine liver BHMT Km for betaine = 0.023 mmol/L ( <a href="#">Garrow, 2006</a> ).	Km for SMM = 0.94 mmol/L and similar turnover (Kcat) value to BHMT ( <a href="#">Szegedi et al., 2008</a> ).
<b>Function</b>	Osmolyte ( <a href="#">Burg and Ferraris, 2008</a> )	SMM is a precursor of the osmolyte, dimethylsulfoniopropionate ( <a href="#">Rouillon et al., 1999</a> ).

### Appendix 3.1 Bovine COC grade and morphological description

Cumulus oocyte complex (COC) grade		Morphological description Adapted from source: <a href="#">Goodhand et al. (1999)</a>	
1	Excellent/Good		>4 layers of compact, light or transparent cumulus with a clear, even cytoplasm.
2	Fair		Less compact, <4 layers cumulus and/or cytoplasm generally homogenous but with coarser appearance.
3	Poor		<4 layers cumulus and/or cytoplasm of irregular appearance with dark areas.
4	Denuded/ Degenerate		Completely denuded or strongly expanded degenerate cumulus with dark spots.

### Appendix 3.2 *In vitro* embryo production (IVP) media

#### Stock components for *in vitro* bovine embryo production media

All stock components dissolved in tissue grade culture (TCG) water, sterile filtered and stored at 4°C or -20°C.

Component	MWt.	Mass (g)	Volume (mL)	Conc.	Storage
CaCl <sub>2</sub>	147.02	0.58808	20	200 mM	4°C
KCl	74.55	0.5964	50	160 mM	4°C
MgCl <sub>2</sub> .6H <sub>2</sub> O	203.30	1.10165	50	100 mM	4°C
NaCl	58.44	6.72	50	2.3 M	4°C
NaHCO <sub>3</sub>	84.01	2.1	100	250 mM	4°C
NaH <sub>2</sub> PO <sub>4</sub> .H <sub>2</sub> O	137.98	0.2346	50	34 mM	4°C
Na lactate	-	-	-	60% syrup	4°C
HEPES	249.30	12.465	50	1 M	4°C
Na pyruvate	110.00	0.044	20	20 mM	-20°C
L-Glutamine	146.15	0.14615	10	100 mM	-20°C
KH <sub>2</sub> PO <sub>4</sub>	136.09	1.3609	50	200 mM	4°C
MgSO <sub>4</sub> .7H <sub>2</sub> O	246.47	2.4647	50	200 mM	4°C
D(+)-Glucose	180.20	0.3604	10	200 mM	4°C
Na <sub>2</sub> EDTA.2H <sub>2</sub> O	372.24	0.372	10	100 mM	4°C
Trisodium citrate	294.10	2.95	50	200 mM	4°C
Myoinositol	180.16	2.5	50	278 mM	4°C
Heparin	-	0.05	5	10 mg/mL	-20°C
Hypotaurine+ Epinephrine	-	0.005	10	0.5 mg/mL	-20°C
Caffeine	194.19	0.485	50	50 mM	4°C

Search and collection medium (50 mL working solution)

47.5 mL TCM199 (HEPES), 2.5 mL FCS (5% v/v), 200  $\mu$ L glutamine (100 mM), 500  $\mu$ L penicillin/streptomycin. pH 7.3-7.4. Osmolarity: 290-300 mOsm. Filtered and stored at 4°C for up to 1 week. Warmed to 37°C 1 h before use.

Maturation medium (10 mL working solution)

9 mL TCM199, 1 mL FCS (10% v/v), 100  $\mu$ L glutamine (100 mM), 100  $\mu$ L Na Pyruvate (20 mM), 100  $\mu$ L penicillin/streptomycin, 40  $\mu$ L Pluset (LH/FSH stock, 5 IU/mL). pH 7.3-7.4, Osmolarity: 290-300 mOsm. Prepared day before use. Filtered and equilibrated in 5% CO<sub>2</sub> in air overnight.

Tyrode albumin lactate pyruvate (TALP) base medium (50 mL stock solution)

40 mL TCG water, 5 mL NaHCO<sub>3</sub> (250 mM), 2.17 mL NaCl (2.3 M), 550  $\mu$ L MgCl<sub>2</sub> (100 mM), 500  $\mu$ L CaCl<sub>2</sub> (200 mM), 500  $\mu$ L NaH<sub>2</sub>PO<sub>4</sub> (34 mM), 160  $\mu$ L KCl (1 M), 152  $\mu$ L Na lactate (60% syrup). Store in fridge for up to 1 week.

TALP oocyte wash medium (10 mL working solution)

10 mL TALP base, 30 mg BSA fatty acid free (FAF), 100  $\mu$ L Na pyruvate (20 mM), 250  $\mu$ L HEPES (1M), 100  $\mu$ L penicillin/streptomycin. pH 7.3. Osmolarity: 275-285 mOsm. Filtered and stored at 4°C for up to 1 week. Warmed to 37°C 1 h before use.

TALP capacitation medium (10 mL working solution)

10 mL TALP base, 60 mg BSA FAF, 52  $\mu$ L Na pyruvate (20 mM), 100  $\mu$ L HEPES (1M), 100  $\mu$ L penicillin/streptomycin. pH 7.4. Osmolarity: 295-305 mOsm. Filtered and stored at 4°C for up to 1 week. Warmed to 37°C 1 h before use.

TALP fertilisation medium (10 mL working solution)

10 mL TALP base, 60 mg BSA FAF, 100  $\mu$ L Na pyruvate (20 mM), 100  $\mu$ L penicillin/streptomycin, 400  $\mu$ L caffeine (50 mM), 10  $\mu$ L heparin (10 mg/mL), 10  $\mu$ L hypotaurine+epinephrine (0.5 mg/mL). pH 7.4. Osmolarity: 290-300 mOsm. Filtered and stored at 4°C for up to 1 week. Pre-equilibrated in 5% CO<sub>2</sub> in air overnight.

Synthetic oviductal fluid (SOF) base medium (50 mL stock solution)

46 mL TCG water, 2.38 mL NaCl (2.3 M), 600  $\mu$ L CaCl<sub>2</sub> (200 mM), 360  $\mu$ L KCl (1M), 175  $\mu$ L MgSO<sub>4</sub> (200 mM), 100  $\mu$ L trisodium citrate (200 mM), 100  $\mu$ L

phenol red (0.5% v/v), 50  $\mu$ L glucose (200 mM), 38  $\mu$ L Na lactate (60% syrup). Store in fridge for up to 1 week.

SOF HEPES holding medium (10 mL working solution)

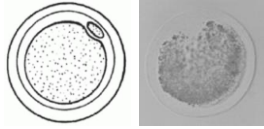
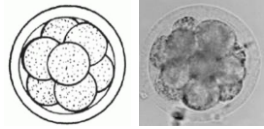
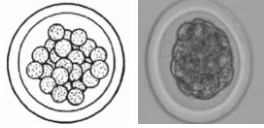
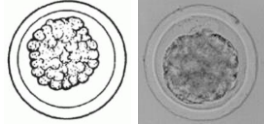
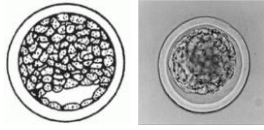
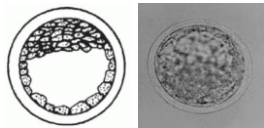
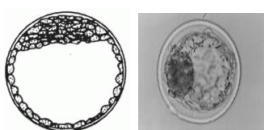
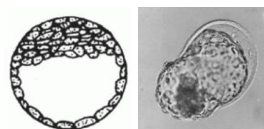
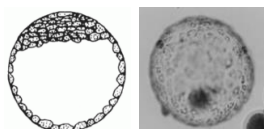
10 mL SOF base, 30 mg BSA FAF, 150  $\mu$ L  $\text{NaHCO}_3$  (250 mM), 100  $\mu$ L BME amino acids [50X], 50  $\mu$ L MEM amino acids [100X], 100  $\mu$ L Na pyruvate (20 mM), 100  $\mu$ L glutamine (100 mM), 250  $\mu$ L HEPES (1M), 100  $\mu$ L penicillin/streptomycin. pH 7.4. Osmolarity: 270-290 mOsm. Filtered and stored at 4°C for up to 1 week. Warmed to 37°C 1 h before use.

SOF culture medium (10 mL working solution)

10 mL SOF base, 30 mg BSA FAF, 1 mL  $\text{NaHCO}_3$  (250 mM), 400  $\mu$ L BME amino acids [50X], 100  $\mu$ L MEM amino acids [100X], 100  $\mu$ L Na pyruvate (20 mM), 100  $\mu$ L glutamine (100 mM), 100  $\mu$ L penicillin/streptomycin. pH 7.4. Osmolarity: 270-290 mOsm. Filtered and stored at 4°C for up to 1 week. Pre-equilibrated in 39°C, 5%  $\text{CO}_2$ /5%  $\text{O}_2$  overnight.

### Appendix 3.3 Bovine embryo stage and morphological description

Adapted from [Bó and Mapletoft \(2013\)](#)

Embryo	Stage code	Morphological description
	1	<b>1-cell unfertilized ovum.</b> Dead or degenerate.
	2	<b>2- to 12-cell embryo.</b> Dead or degenerate.
	3	<b>Early morula</b> containing at least 16 cells. Individual blastomeres difficult to discern from one another. Cellular mass of the embryo occupies most of the perivitelline space.
	4	<b>Compact morula.</b> Individual blastomeres have coalesced forming a compact mass. The embryo mass occupies 60-70% of the perivitelline space.
	5	<b>Early blastocyst.</b> Embryo has formed a blastocoele and gives the appearance of a signet ring. The embryo mass occupies 70-80% of perivitelline space. Quality assessment may prove challenging as it is difficult to differentiate between inner cell mass from trophectoderm cells.
	6	<b>Mid blastocyst.</b> Pronounced differentiation of the trophoblast layer and of the darker and compact inner cell mass. The blastocoele is well-defined and the embryo occupies most of the perivitelline space. Visual differentiation of inner cell mass and trophectoderm is possible.
	7	<b>Late expanded blastocyst.</b> Overall diameter of the embryo dramatically increases. Zona pellucida thins to ~one-third of its original thickness.
	8	<b>Hatched blastocyst.</b> Embryos are hatching or have completely shed zona pellucida. Hatched blastocysts may be spherical with a prominent blastocoele (signet ring appearance) or may be collapsed.
	9	<b>Expanded hatched blastocyst.</b> Identical in appearance to hatched stage 8 blastocyst but is significantly larger in diameter.



**Appendix 3.4 Sperm preparation by swim-up method**

For each IVF cycle, one straw containing 250  $\mu$ L frozen bull semen was rapidly thawed at 37°C in a water bath. Straw contents were released into a pre-warmed, sterile 1.5 mL Eppendorf tube and immediately layered under 1 mL of pre-warmed capacitation media in a 7 mL universal container. The container was transferred to a CO<sub>2</sub> incubator for 1 h to allow spermatozoa to swim up to the top of the capacitation media. Following incubation, the supernatant layer containing motile sperm was carefully transferred to a sterile pre-warmed 1.5 mL Eppendorf tube, leaving dead sperm within the diluent layer at the bottom. The motile sperm fraction was centrifuged for 20 min at 300 xg. Following centrifugation, the supernatant was carefully removed and the sperm pellet was resuspended in ~70  $\mu$ L capacitation medium. To count sperm using a haemocytometer, 10  $\mu$ L sperm suspension was added to 90  $\mu$ L water (1:10 dilution). A final concentration of  $1 \times 10^6$  spermatozoa/mL was added to each 50  $\mu$ L fertilisation drop containing matured COCs.

## Appendix 3.5 *BHMT* and *BHMT2* multiple sequence alignment

### *BHMT* and *BHMT2* multiple sequence alignment (Clustal W2)

CLUSTAL O(1.2.4) multiple sequence alignment (bovine BHMT isoforms)

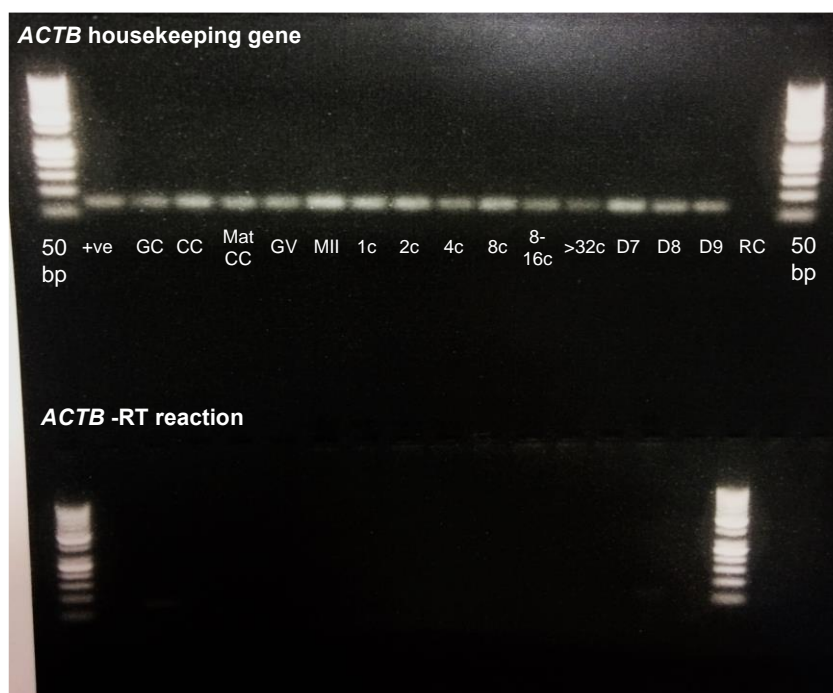
```

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BHMT       ATGGCACC GGCTGGGGGCAAAAATGTCAAGAAAGCGCATCCTAGAACGGCTAAACTCTGGA
          *** * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
BHMT2      GAGGTTGTGGTTGGAGATGGCAGCTTCCTCCTAACTCTGGAGAAGAGGGGCTACGTGAAG
BHMT       GAGGTCATCATCGGAGACGGAGGGTTTGTCTTTGCGCTGGAGAAGAGGGGCTACGTGAAG
          ***** * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
BHMT2      GCCGGGCTCTGGACTCCAGAAGCCGTAGTAGAGCATCCAAACGCAAGCGATGATTAATGCG
BHMT       GCAGGGCCCTGGACCCCAAGAGCTGCTGTGGAACACCCAGAAGCAATTCGC-----CAA
          ** * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
BHMT2      TCTCATATGGAATTCTTGAGGGTGGGATCAGATGTCATGCAGACTTTCACTTTCTGCCC
BHMT       CTTTCATCGAGAGTTCTTCAGAGCTGGCTCGAATGTCATGCAGACCTTCACCTTCTATGCC
          *** * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
BHMT2      AGTGAGAACAATATGGAAAGCCTTTGGGAAG-----CT
BHMT       AGTGAAGACAAGCTGGAGAACAGGGGGAAGTATGTTGCAGAGAAAATATCTGGCAGAAA
          ***** * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
BHMT2      GTAAACAACCACTGCCTGTGACCTCGCCAGAGAAGTAGCCAACAAGGGGATGCTTTGGTA
BHMT       GTCAATGAAGCCGCTTGTGACATTGCCCGGCAAGTGGCTGATGAAGGAGATGCTTTGGTA
          ** * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
BHMT2      GCAGGGGGGATCTGCCGGACATCGTTGTACGCACACCACAAGGATGAAGTTAGAAATTAA
BHMT       GCAGGGGGGATCTGCCGGACATCGTTGTACGCACACCACAAGGATGAAGTTAGAAATTAA
          ***** * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
BHMT2      AAGCTTTTTCGACTACAGCTAGAGATTTTGGCAGGAAAAATGTAGATTTCTTGATTGCA
BHMT       AAAGTCTTTTCAGCAACAGTTAGAGGCTTCGTAAGAAGAACGTTGACTTCTTGATTGCA
          * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
BHMT2      GAGTATTTTGAACACGCTG-----TAGAAGTCTTAAAGAATCTGGA
BHMT       GAGTATTTTGAACATGTTGAAGAGGCTGTATGGGCAGTTGAAGCCTTGAAAGCATCAGGG
          ***** * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
BHMT2      GAGCCTGTGGCAGCCACTATGTGTATCGGCCAGAGGGAGACATGCATGGTGTAAACCTT
BHMT       AAACCAGTGGCGGCAACTATGTGCATCGGCCAGAGGGAGACTTGCACAGCGTGACCCCT
          * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
BHMT2      GGGAATGTGCTGTGAAGCTGGTGAAGGCAAGGGCCTCAGTTGTTGTGTGAAGTCCGA
BHMT       GGCGAGTGTGCAGTGCAGCTGGTTAAAGCAAGGCTTCCATCGTGGGGGTAAACTGCCAT
          ** * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
BHMT2      TTTGGGCCCTGGACCAGCCTGAAGACAATGAGCCTCATGAAGGAAGCCGACAGGCTGCA
BHMT       TTTGACCCCACAATTAGCTTACAGACAGTGAAGCTCATGAAGAAGGCTGGAGGTTGCC
          ***** * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
BHMT2      GAGCTGAAAGGCCCTTGATGGTGTGGTCCCTGGGGTTCCACATGCCCGACTGTGGCAAA
BHMT       GGACTGAAAGCCACCTCATGAGCCAGCCCTTGGCCTACCCACTCTGACTGCGGCAAG
          * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
BHMT2      GGAGGGTTTCTGGATCTCCCTGAATATCCCTTTGCTGGAGCCCAGAGTTGCAACCAGA
BHMT       CAGGGGTTTATGACCTGCCAGAATCCCTTTGACTGGAACCCAGAGTTGCAACCAGA
          ***** * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
BHMT2      TGGGATATTCAAAGAAGCCAGAGAAGCCTACAACCTGGGGGTGAGGTACATAGGCGGG
BHMT       TGGGATATTCAAAGTATGCCAGAGAGGCCCTACAACCTGGGGGTGAGGTACATAGGTTGG
          ***** * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
BHMT2      TGCTGTGGCTTTGAGCCCTATCACATCAGAGCGATTGCAGAGGAGCTGGCCCCAGAGAAG
BHMT       TGCTGTGGATTGAACCTACCACATCAGGGCAATTGCAGAGGAGCTGGCTCCGGAGAGG
          ***** * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
BHMT2      GGATTTTGTACCAGCTTCAGAAAAACATGGCAGCTGGGGAAGTGGTCTCAATATGCAC
BHMT       GGATTTTGTCCACTGGCTTCAGAAAAACATGGCAGCTGGGGAAGTGGTCTCAATATGCAC
          ***** * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
BHMT2      ACCAAACCCTGGATTAGAGCCAACACAGGGCTAGAAGGGAGTATTGGGAGAATCTGCGG
BHMT       ACCAAACCCTGGATTAGAGCCAACGCGAGGAAGGA-----ATACTGGGAGAATCTTCAG
          ***** * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
BHMT2      CTGGCTTCTGGCAGACCTGT---CCTTCATGTGCAAGCCAGATGCCCTAA-----
BHMT       ATCGCCTCGGGCAGGCGGTACAACCCTCCATGTCAAAGCCGACGCTGGGGAGTGACC
          * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
BHMT2      -----
BHMT       AAAGGAACAGCCGAGCTTATGCAGCAGAAGGAAGCCACAACGGAGCAGCAGCTGAGAGAG
BHMT2      -----

```

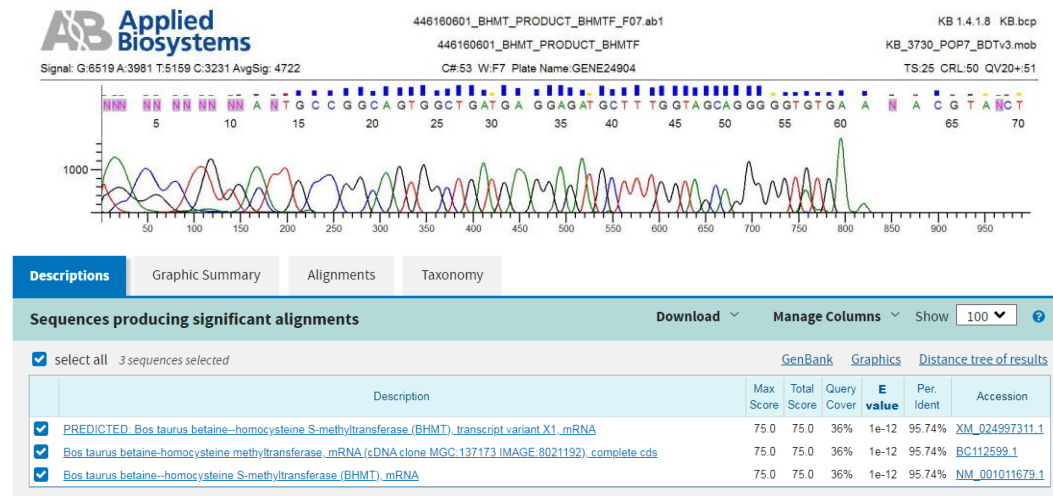
Red: Exon-Exon junction; Yellow: Forward Primers; Green; Reverse Primers.

### Appendix 3.6 Minus reverse transcription (-RT) for $\beta$ -Actin (*ACTB*)

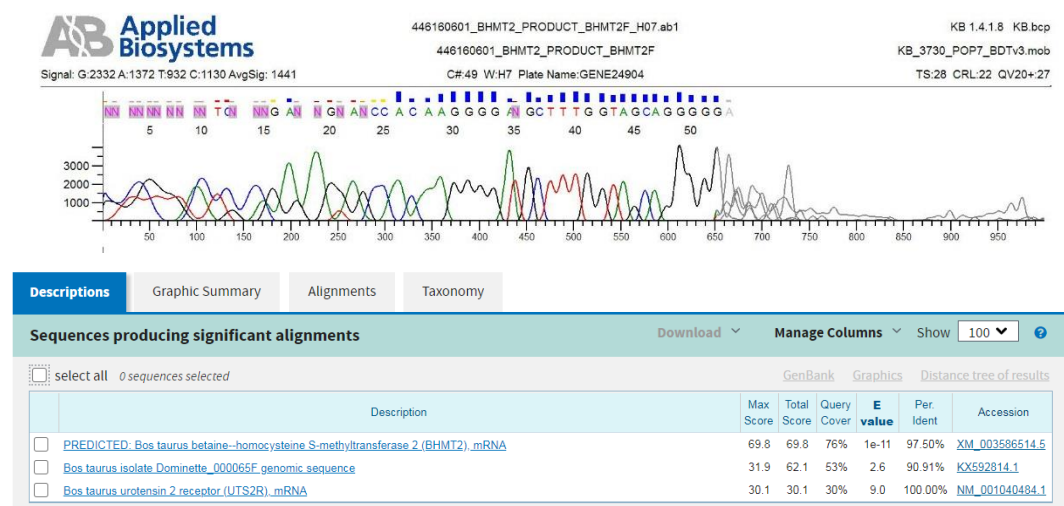


### Appendix 3.7 Amplicon purification for sequencing

Pre-sequencing DNA purification was achieved using Zymo-Spin™ DNA purification kit. Briefly, cDNA fragments were excised from agarose gel using a razor blade and transferred to a 1.5 mL microcentrifuge tube. Gel samples were weighed and 3 volumes of Agarose Dissolving Buffer (ADB) were added to each gel slice. Samples were incubated at 55°C for 10 min until gel slices were completely dissolved. The melted agarose solution was transferred to a Zymo-Spin™ column in a collection tube and after centrifugation for 75 s at 10-16,000 xg, the flow-through was discarded. The column was washed twice by addition of 200  $\mu$ L DNA Wash Buffer and centrifugation for 45 s, discarding the flow-through each time. The column was placed into a 1.5 mL tube, 13  $\mu$ L DNA elution buffer (Buffer EB, Tris-Cl, pH 8.5; Qiagen Ltd.) was added directly to the column matrix and centrifuged for 75 s to elute the cDNA. The concentration of excised cDNA was measured using Nanodrop spectrophotometry and cDNA was diluted to 10 ng/ $\mu$ L. Primers were diluted to 3.2 pmol/ $\mu$ L. PCR products were sequenced by Source Bioscience (Nottingham, UK).

**BHMT12 Amplicon sequencing (Source Biosciences, Nottingham, UK)**

Bovine *BHMT* forward primer sequence and NCBI Blast output.



Bovine *BHMT2* forward primer sequence and NCBI Blast output.

### Appendix 3.8 Custom-made IVP formulations and methionine stock solutions

#### Methionine-free maturation medium (10 mL working solution)

9 mL Methionine-free TCM199, 1 mL FCS (10% v/v), 100 µL Na Pyruvate (20 mM), 100 µL Penicillin/Streptomycin (P/S), 40 µL Pluset (LH/FSH stock, 5 IU/mL). pH 7.3-7.4, Osmolarity: 290-300 mOsm. Prepared day before use. Filtered and equilibrated in 5% CO<sub>2</sub> in air overnight.

#### Methionine-free Basal Eagle's Medium (BME) [50X]

In-house formulation based on commercial BME. To be added to modified Hepes-buffered synthetic oviductal fluid (SOF) holding media and SOF culture media.

Amino Acid Component B 6766 BME [50X]	MWt.	Mass (g)	BME [50X] conc. (mmol/L)	IVC media conc. (µmol/L)
L-Arginine monochloride	210.66	1.05	5	200
L-Cystine	240.30	0.6	2.5	100
L-Histidine	155.15	0.4	2.6	100
L-Isoleucine	131.18	1.3	9.9	400
L-Leucine	131.17	1.3	9.9	400
L-Lysine monohydrochloride	182.65	1.849	10.1	405
L-Phenylalanine	165.19	0.825	5.0	200
L-Threonine	119.12	1.2	10.1	400
L-Tryptophan	204.23	0.2	1.0	40
L-Tyrosine	181.19	0.9	5.0	200
L-Valine	117.15	1.175	10.0	400
<b>L-Methionine*</b>	<b>149.21</b>	<b>0.375</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>100</b>

\*Typical methionine concentration in B 6766 BME [50X] formulation. Custom-made BME was formulated to exclude **methionine**.

Methionine stock solutions

*Stock A (50 mmol/L): add 26.81 mL water to 0.2 g methionine*

*Stock B (5 mmol/L): add 2 mL Stock A to 18 mL water*

*Stock C (1 mmol/L): add 0.4 mL of Stock A to 19.6 mL water*

Custom-made IVP media with added methionine (2.5 mL)

*To make 500  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  IVP formulation: add 25  $\mu\text{L}$  Stock A to 2.475 mL methionine-free media*

*To make 50  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  IVP formulation: add 25  $\mu\text{L}$  Stock B to 2.475 mL methionine-free media*

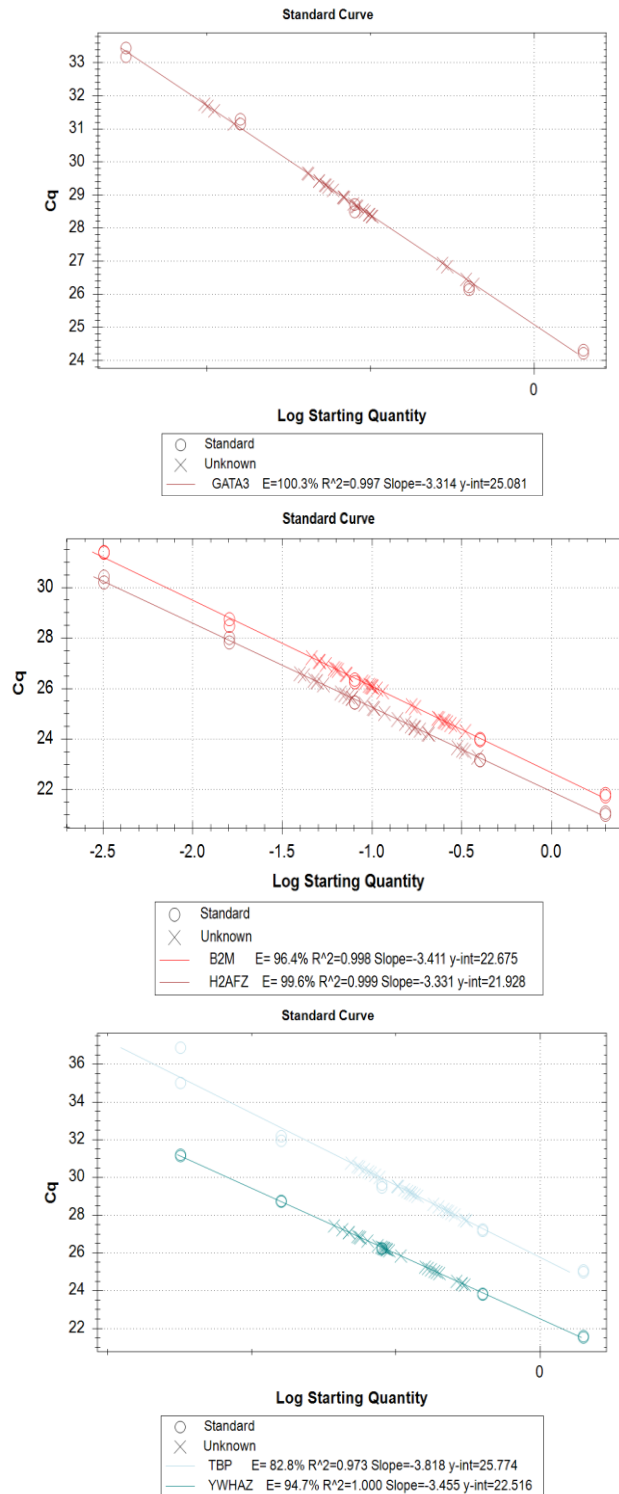
*To make 10  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  IVP formulation: add 25  $\mu\text{L}$  Stock C to 2.475 mL methionine-free media*

*To make 0  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  IVP formulation: 2.5 mL methionine-free media only*

## Appendix Chapter 4

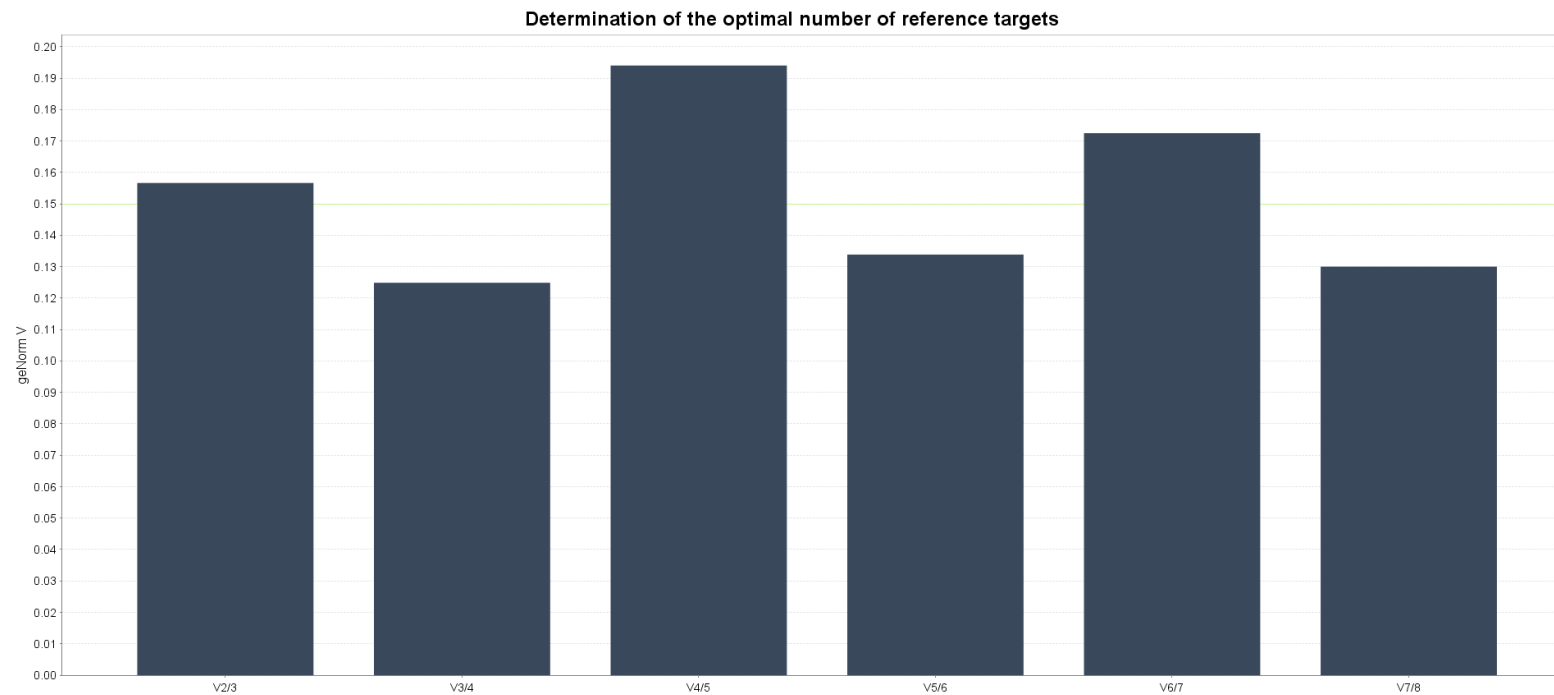
### Appendix 4.1 Calibration standard curves for qPCR

#### GATA3 validation experiment



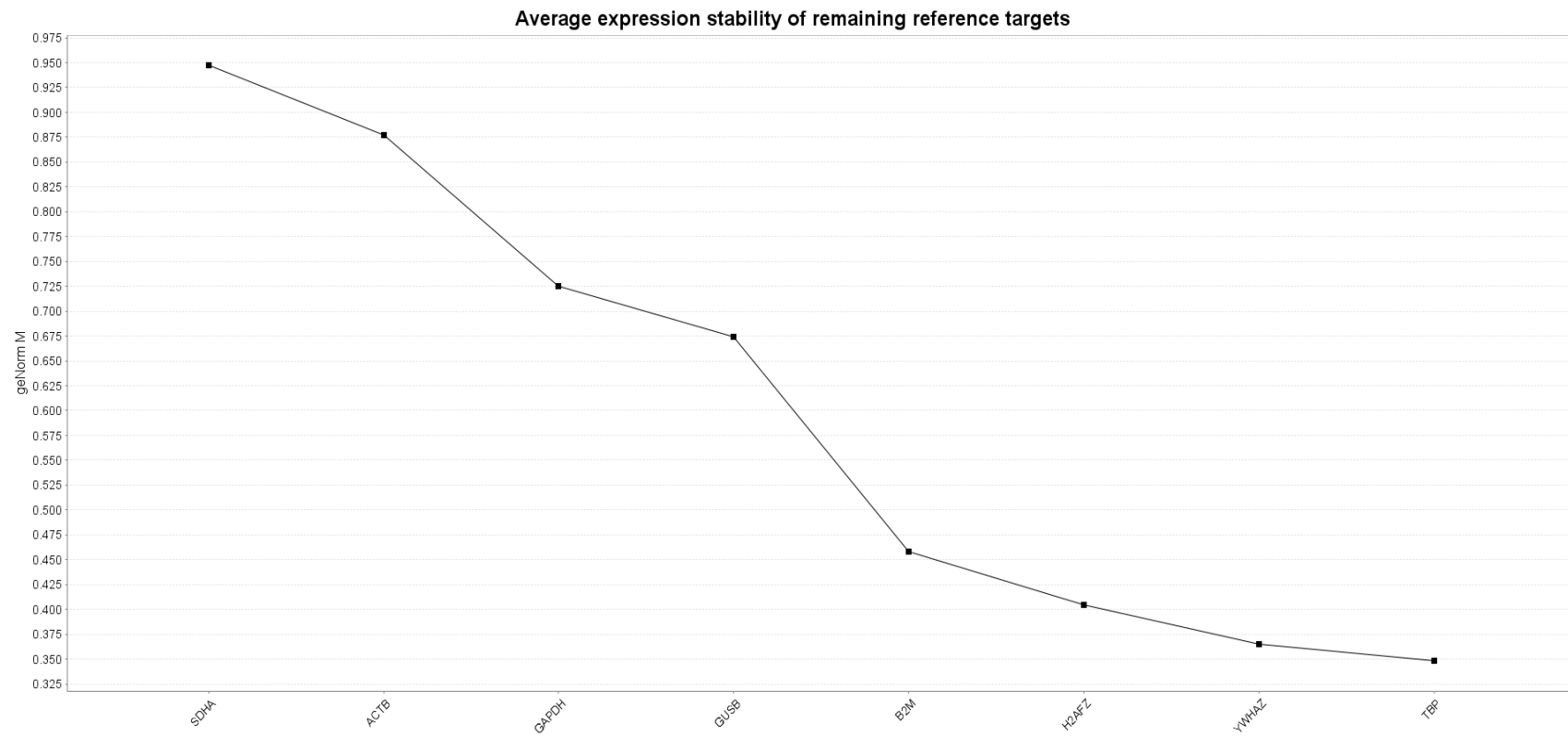
## Appendix 4.2 Reference gene selection using geNorm

### Reference gene selection using geNorm: Determination of the optimal number of reference genes



geNorm analysis was initiated on 3 samples (inner cell mass, trophoctoderm and blastocysts) using 8 candidate reference genes. *Optimal reference target selection:* The optimal reference target in this experimental situation is 3 (geNorm  $V < 0.15$ ) when comparing a normalisation factor based on 3 or 4 most stable targets.



**Reference gene selection using geNorm: Average expression stability of reference genes**

geNorm analysis was initiated on 3 samples (inner cell mass, trophectoderm and blastocysts) using 8 candidate reference genes. *Reference target stability:* High reference target stability (average geNorm  $M \leq 0.5$ )

### Appendix 4.3 Stock and working solutions for RRBS analysis

#### gDNA Purification:

##### Protease (20 mg/mL) stock solution

Soak 20 mg lyophilised protease in 1 mL glycerol (50% v/v). Dissolve at 4°C for 30 min with occasional mixing. Aliquots of 200 µL stored at -20°C for 6 months.

##### EDTA (50 mmol/L) stock solution

Add 10 µL EDTA (0.5 M) to 90 µL nuclease-free PCR water.

##### Triton X-100 (10% v/v) stock solution

Add 10 µL Triton X-100 to 90 µL nuclease-free PCR water.

##### Lysis buffer working solution

Lysis buffer component	Volume (1 reaction, µL)	Final concentration
Tris-HCl (1 M)	0.1	20 mmol/L
EDTA (50 mmol/L)	0.1	2 mmol/L
KCl (1 M)	0.1	20 mmol/L
Triton X-100 (10% v/v)	0.15	0.3%
Protease (20 mg/mL)	0.25	1 mg/mL
Nuclease-free PCR water	3.2	-

#### Msp1 digest:

##### Unmethylated λ-DNA (8 pg/µL) stock solution

Add 5 µL λ-DNA (551 ng/µL) to 495 µL nuclease-free PCR water to make 5.51 ng/µL (Stock A). Add 5 µL Stock A to 29.4 µL of nuclease-free PCR water (Stock B).

##### Msp1 digest working solution

Msp1 digest component	Volume (1 reaction, µL)	Final concentration
10 U/µL Msp1	0.9	9 U
Tango buffer (10X)	1.8	1X
Unmethylated λ-DNA (8 pg/µL, Stock B)	1	8 pg
Nuclease-free PCR water	9.3	-

**End-repair/dA tailing:**End-repair dNTP stock solution

Add 100  $\mu\text{L}$  10 mmol/L dATP, 10  $\mu\text{L}$  10 mmol/L dGTP and 10  $\mu\text{L}$  dCTP to 880  $\mu\text{L}$  PCR water. Aliquots of 200  $\mu\text{L}$  stored at  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$  for 6 months.

End-repair/dA tailing master mix (working solution)

End-repair/dA tailing mix component	Volume (1 reaction, $\mu\text{L}$ )	Final concentration
5U/ $\mu\text{L}$ Klenow fragment exo-	1	5 U
Tango buffer (10X)	0.2	1X
End-repair dNTP mix	0.8	dATP 40 $\mu\text{mol/L}$ dGTP 4 $\mu\text{mol/L}$ dCTP 4 $\mu\text{mol/L}$

**Adaptor ligation:**Ligation mix working solution

Ligation mix component	Volume (1 reaction, $\mu\text{L}$ )
Diluted methylated adaptor (20-fold, NEB)	1
Blund end/TA ligase mastermix (NEB)	2
Tango buffer (10X)	0.5
Nuclease-free PCR water	1.5

tRNA (10 ng/ $\mu\text{L}$ ) stock solution

Add 10 mg tRNA to 1 mL nuclease-free PCR and leave at room temperature for 10 min to dissolve. Aliquots of 200  $\mu\text{L}$  stored at  $-80^{\circ}\text{C}$  for 6 months.

Zymo DNA clean and concentrator working solution

Zymo DNA clean and concentrator mix component	Volume (1 reaction, $\mu\text{L}$ )
Binding buffer	139
tRNA (10 ng/ $\mu\text{L}$ )	1
DNA (sample)	28

**Library Preparation (PCR):**KAPA HiFi uracil + mix working solution

<b>KAPA HiFi uracil + mix component</b>	<b>Volume (1 reaction, µL)</b>
KAPA HiFi uracil + mix	25
Universal primer stock	2
Index primer stock	2
Bisulphite converted DNA	10
Nuclease-free PCR water	11

## Appendix 4.4 Differentially methylated genes in bovine ICM and TE

**Genes with clusters of differentially methylated sites (DMS) in bovine ICM following *in vitro* culture in altered methionine concentration**

Genes with clusters of DMS (ICM, <i>n</i> =179)		Cluster count	DMS count
<i>MAD1L1</i>	Mitotic Arrest Deficient 1 Like 1	19	222
<i>RCC2</i>	Regulator of Chromosome Condensation 2	15	182
<i>TBC1D22A</i>	Tbc1 Domain Family Member 22A	12	77
<i>DBH</i>	Dopamine Beta-Hydroxylase	9	131
<i>MRPS25</i>	Mitochondrial Ribosomal Protein S25	7	37
<i>MST1</i>	Macrophage Stimulating 1	6	36
<i>TAF45</i>	Tafa Chemokine Like Family Member 5	6	127
<i>PAXX</i>	Paxx Non-Homologous End Joining Factor	6	34
<i>NUP210</i>	Nucleoporin 210	5	85
<i>MICAL2</i>	Mical Like 2	5	38
<i>PRKAR1B</i>	Protein Kinase Camp-Dependent Type I Regulatory Subunit Beta	5	56
<i>PPP2R5B</i>	Protein Phosphatase 2 Regulatory Subunit B/Beta	5	38
<i>COMT</i>	Catechol-O-Methyltransferase	5	39
<i>ZADH2</i>	Zinc Binding Alcohol Dehydrogenase Domain Containing 2	5	26
<i>TSPO</i>	Translocator Protein	5	82
<i>MOB2</i>	Mob Kinase Activator 2	4	58
<i>MAMDC4</i>	Mam Domain Containing 4	4	26
<i>SPATA7</i>	Spermatogenesis Associated 7	4	25
<i>SELENOO</i>	Selenoprotein O	4	44
<i>PIPOX</i>	Pipecolic Acid and Sarcosine Oxidase	4	32
<i>LYRM4</i>	Lyr Motif Containing 4	4	73
<i>TOLLIP</i>	Toll Interacting Protein	4	70
<i>LPCAT1</i>	Lysophosphatidylcholine Acyltransferase 1	4	58
<i>DPYSL4</i>	Dihydropyrimidinase Like 4	4	31
<i>PLCL2</i>	Phospholipase C Like 2	4	92
<i>CFD</i>	Complement Factor D	4	17
<i>TSSK1B</i>	Testis Specific Serine Kinase 1B	4	28
<i>PANK4</i>	Pantothenate Kinase 4	4	44
<i>BAP1</i>	Brca1 Associated Protein 1	3	11
<i>SORCS3</i>	Sortilin Related Vps10 Domain Containing Receptor 3	3	98
<i>MAPK8IP3</i>	Mitogen-Activated Protein Kinase 8 Interacting Protein 3	3	32
<i>OSBP2</i>	Oxysterol Binding Protein 2	3	39
<i>PPP6R1</i>	Protein Phosphatase 6 Regulatory Subunit 1	3	21
<i>SIVA1</i>	Siva1 Apoptosis Inducing Factor	3	21
<i>NUBP2</i>	Nucleotide Binding Protein 2	3	16
<i>SLC25A47</i>	Solute Carrier Family 25 Member 47	3	15
<i>TPRA1</i>	Transmembrane Protein Adipocyte Associated 1	3	39
<i>NELFA</i>	Negative Elongation Factor Complex Member A	3	50
<i>COMP</i>	Cartilage Oligomeric Matrix Protein	3	38
<i>AMH</i>	Anti-Mullerian Hormone	3	12
<i>ATG4B</i>	Autophagy Related 4B Cysteine Peptidase	3	34
<i>IGF1R</i>	Insulin Like Growth Factor 1 Receptor	3	52
<i>C21H14orf180</i>	Chromosome 21 C14orf180 Homolog	3	24
<i>ERF</i>	Ets2 Repressor Factor	3	11
<i>GTF3C4</i>	General Transcription Factor Iiic Subunit 4	3	21
<i>MUL1</i>	Mitochondrial E3 Ubiquitin Protein Ligase 1	3	10
<i>TMEM206</i>	Transmembrane Protein 206	3	22
<i>FKRP</i>	Fukutin Related Protein	3	28
<i>TRIM11</i>	Tripartite Motif Containing 11	3	42
<i>BMP2K</i>	Bmp2 Inducible Kinase	2	13
<i>ASPG</i>	Asparaginase	2	29
<i>EVPL</i>	Envoplakin	2	20
<i>CTU2</i>	Cytosolic Thiouridylase Subunit 2	2	28
<i>PI4KB</i>	Phosphatidylinositol 4-Kinase Beta	2	8
<i>COA8</i>	Cytochrome C Oxidase Assembly Factor 8	2	11
<i>C17H4orf45</i>	Chromosome 17 C4orf45 Homolog	2	9
<i>DTNBP1</i>	Dystrobrevin Binding Protein 1	2	23
<i>IL21R</i>	Interleukin 21 Receptor	2	15
<i>GATA2</i>	Gata Binding Protein 2	2	14
<i>ACTN3</i>	Actinin Alpha 3	2	10
<i>PAFAH1B3</i>	Platelet Activating Factor Acetylhydrolase 1B Catalytic Subunit 3	2	22
<i>MED10</i>	Mediator Complex Subunit 10	2	24
<i>DNAJC30</i>	Dnaj Heat Shock Protein Family (Hsp40) Member C30	2	6
<i>VASN</i>	Vasorin	2	23
<i>VPS26B</i>	Vps26, Retromer Complex Component B	2	13

	Genes with clusters of DMS continued (ICM, n=179)	Cluster count	DMS count
<i>CRELD2</i>	Cysteine Rich with Egf Like Domains 2	2	17
<i>MFAP4</i>	Microfibril Associated Protein 4	2	13
<i>NNAT</i>	Neuronatin	2	8
<i>PACSN1</i>	Protein Kinase C and Casein Kinase Substrate In Neurons 1	2	18
<i>REEP6</i>	Receptor Accessory Protein 6	2	10
<i>RABL6</i>	Rab, Member Ras Oncogene Family Like 6	2	20
<i>SULT2B1</i>	Sulfotransferase Family 2B Member 1	2	6
<i>PLCG1</i>	Phospholipase C Gamma 1	2	24
<i>LENG1</i>	Leukocyte Receptor Cluster Member 1	2	16
<i>CLBA1</i>	Clathrin Binding Box of Aftiphilin Containing 1	2	26
<i>DGCR8</i>	Dgcr8 Microprocessor Complex Subunit	2	18
<i>WNT7A</i>	Wnt Family Member 7A	2	64
<i>GPX4</i>	Glutathione Peroxidase 4	2	10
<i>WWOX</i>	Ww Domain Containing Oxidoreductase	2	57
<i>TWIST2</i>	Twist Family Bhlh Transcription Factor 2	2	31
<i>SLC1A7</i>	Solute Carrier Family 1 Member 7	2	19
<i>CELSR3</i>	Cadherin Egf Lag Seven-Pass G-Type Receptor 3	2	20
<i>CAPN7</i>	Calpain 7	2	28
<i>CCND1</i>	Cyclin D1	2	32
<i>IMPA1</i>	Inositol Monophosphatase 1	2	15
<i>C14H8orf33</i>	Chromosome 14 C8orf33 Homolog	2	12
<i>NXN</i>	Nucleoredoxin	2	9
<i>PWWP2B</i>	Pwwp Domain Containing 2B	2	17
<i>SRSF4</i>	Serine and Arginine Rich Splicing Factor 4	2	16
<i>CHTF18</i>	Chromosome Transmission Fidelity Factor 18	2	25
<i>ARHGEF12</i>	Rho Guanine Nucleotide Exchange Factor 12	1	5
<i>TCIRG1</i>	T Cell Immune Regulator 1, Atpase H+ Transporting V0 Subunit A3	1	16
<i>CAPN2</i>	Calpain 2	1	13
<i>MARK4</i>	Microtubule Affinity Regulating Kinase 4	1	9
<i>SLC36A4</i>	Solute Carrier Family 36 Member 4	1	8
<i>VPS51</i>	Vps51 Subunit of Garp Complex	1	9
<i>CNGA3</i>	Cyclic Nucleotide Gated Channel Subunit Alpha 3	1	6
<i>UNC5D</i>	Unc-5 Netrin Receptor D	1	12
<i>ZSWIM7</i>	Zinc Finger Swim-Type Containing 7	1	18
<i>CRB1</i>	Crumbs Cell Polarity Complex Component 1	1	17
<i>ASMTL</i>	Acetylserotonin O-Methyltransferase Like	1	13
<i>GTF2A1L</i>	General Transcription Factor Iia Subunit 1 Like	1	8
<i>DUSP7</i>	Dual Specificity Phosphatase 7	1	8
<i>PSMD6</i>	Proteasome 26S Subunit, Non-Atpase 6	1	12
<i>TMCO3</i>	Transmembrane and Coiled-Coil Domains 3	1	21
<i>SLC27A4</i>	Solute Carrier Family 27 Member 4	1	10
<i>GRIN2B</i>	Glutamate Ionotropic Receptor Nmda Type Subunit 2B	1	13
<i>PIN1</i>	Peptidylprolyl Cis/Trans Isomerase, Nima-Interacting 1	1	10
<i>AGO2</i>	Argonaute Risc Catalytic Component 2	1	25
<i>POR</i>	Cytochrome P450 Oxidoreductase	1	18
<i>NOS3</i>	Nitric Oxide Synthase 3	1	20
<i>SNRNP25</i>	Small Nuclear Ribonucleoprotein U11/U12 Subunit 25	1	18
<i>TBL3</i>	Transducin Beta Like 3	1	11
<i>PIK3R4</i>	Phosphoinositide-3-Kinase Regulatory Subunit 4	1	11
<i>KIF17</i>	Kinesin Family Member 17	1	22
<i>URB1</i>	Urb1 Ribosome Biogenesis 1 Homolog (S. Cerevisiae)	1	21
<i>DDHD2</i>	Ddhd Domain Containing 2	1	8
<i>LNX2</i>	Ligand of Numb-Protein X 2	1	15
<i>CPLX1</i>	Complexin 1	1	11
<i>ADAMTS2</i>	Adam Metallopeptidase with Thrombospondin Type 1 Motif 2	1	27
<i>MAPK8IP2</i>	Mitogen-Activated Protein Kinase 8 Interacting Protein 2	1	19
<i>LRPAP1</i>	Ldl Receptor Related Protein Associated Protein 1	1	20
<i>STIP1</i>	Stress Induced Phosphoprotein 1	1	8
<i>IL17A</i>	Interleukin 17A	1	10
<i>SLC9A3</i>	Solute Carrier Family 9 Member A3	1	17
<i>TUBG2</i>	Tubulin Gamma 2	1	5
<i>NCAPH2</i>	Non-Smc Condensin Ii Complex Subunit H2	1	15
<i>NBAS</i>	Neuroblastoma Amplified Sequence	1	20
<i>IGF2R</i>	Insulin Like Growth Factor 2 Receptor	1	25
<i>PMPCA</i>	Peptidase, Mitochondrial Processing Alpha Subunit	1	48
<i>RADIL</i>	Rap Associating ith Dil Domain	1	25
<i>EFHC1</i>	Ef-Hand Domain Containing 1	1	9
<i>ACADSB</i>	Acyl-CoA Dehydrogenase Short/Branched Chain	1	5
<i>USP12</i>	Ubiquitin Specific Peptidase 12	1	11
<i>ADARB2</i>	Adenosine Deaminase Rna Specific B2 (Inactive)	1	21
<i>MBP</i>	Myelin Basic Protein	1	18
<i>ITGBL1</i>	Integrin Subunit Beta Like 1	1	5
<i>IPO4</i>	Importin 4	1	9
<i>STT3B</i>	Stt3 Oligosaccharyltransferase Complex Catalytic Subunit B	1	24

	Genes with clusters of DMS continued (ICM, $n=179$ )	Cluster count	DMS count
<i>TTC7A</i>	Tetratricopeptide Repeat Domain 7A	1	13
<i>KDM8</i>	Lysine Demethylase 8	1	6
<i>GNAT2</i>	G Protein Subunit Alpha Transducin 2	1	7
<i>LONP1</i>	Lon Peptidase 1, Mitochondrial	1	8
<i>YDJC</i>	Ydj C hitooligosaccharide Deacetylase Homolog	1	14
<i>ACTL7A</i>	Actin Like 7A	1	7
<i>LAMP1</i>	Lysosomal Associated Membrane Protein 1	1	19
<i>SPACA7</i>	Sperm Acrosome Associated 7	1	38
<i>MAP1LC3B</i>	Microtubule Associated Protein 1 Light Chain 3 Beta	1	11
<i>ANXA4</i>	Annexin A4	1	6
<i>TEX29</i>	Testis Expressed 29	1	26
<i>MCM7</i>	Minichromosome Maintenance Complex Component 7	1	5
<i>NLRP5</i>	Nlr Family Pyrin Domain Containing 5	1	14
<i>ERRF1</i>	ErbB Receptor Feedback Inhibitor 1	1	6
<i>ATPAF2</i>	Atp Synthase Mitochondrial F1 Complex Assembly Factor 2	1	20
<i>LRRC61</i>	Leucine Rich Repeat Containing 61	1	5
<i>EFCC1</i>	Ef-Hand and Coiled-Coil Domain Containing 1	1	11
<i>ASB1</i>	Ankyrin Repeat and Socs Box Containing 1	1	10
<i>CLCN1</i>	Chloride Voltage-Gated Channel 1	1	5
<i>ARHGDIG</i>	Rho Gdp Dissociation Inhibitor Gamma	1	15
<i>ANKRD13B</i>	Ankyrin Repeat Domain 13B	1	16
<i>TMEM184A</i>	Transmembrane Protein 184A	1	10
<i>PSMC5</i>	Proteasome 26S Subunit, Atpase 5	1	5
<i>CLPTM1</i>	Clptm1 Regulator of Gaba Type A Receptor Forward Trafficking	1	10
<i>TRMT61A</i>	Trna Methyltransferase 61A	1	6
<i>TADA2B</i>	Transcriptional Adaptor 2B	1	12
<i>CASKIN2</i>	Cask Interacting Protein 2	1	38
<i>OVOL3</i>	Ovo Like Zinc Finger 3	1	15
<i>RPN1</i>	Ribophorin I	1	16
<i>JAZF1</i>	Jazf Zinc Finger 1	1	15
<i>DFFA</i>	Dna Fragmentation Factor Subunit Alpha	1	16
<i>AMN</i>	Amnion Associated Transmembrane Protein	1	33
<i>ASAP3</i>	Arfgap With Sh3 Domain, Ankyrin Repeat and Ph Domain 3	1	10
<i>PSKH1</i>	Protein Serine Kinase H1	1	18
<i>ABL1</i>	Abl Proto-Oncogene 1, Non-Receptor Tyrosine Kinase	1	19
<i>GPATCH3</i>	G-Patch Domain Containing 3	1	7
<i>IGLON5</i>	Iglon Family Member 5	1	18
<i>SAMM50</i>	Samm50 Sorting and Assembly Machinery Component	1	10
<i>CHGA</i>	Chromogranin A	1	18
<i>DGKD</i>	Diacylglycerol Kinase Delta	1	41

### Genes with clusters of differentially methylated sites (DMS) in bovine TE following *in vitro* culture in altered methionine concentration

Genes with clusters of DMS (TE, n=267)		Cluster count	DMS count
<i>MAD1L1</i>	Mitotic Arrest Deficient 1 Like 1	18	217
<i>RCC2</i>	Regulator of Chromosome Condensation 2	15	222
<i>COMT</i>	Catechol-O-Methyltransferase	14	73
<i>TBC1D22A</i>	Tbc1 Domain Family Member 22A	13	82
<i>SORCS3</i>	Sortilin Related Vps10 Domain Containing Receptor 3	12	154
<i>DBH</i>	Dopamine Beta-Hydroxylase	11	146
<i>TSPO</i>	Translocator Protein	10	130
<i>VAC14</i>	Vac14 Component of Pikfyve Complex	9	79
<i>NUP210</i>	Nucleoporin 210	9	113
<i>PANK4</i>	Pantothenate Kinase 4	8	54
<i>LPCAT1</i>	Lysophosphatidylcholine Acyltransferase 1	8	76
<i>TAF4A5</i>	Tafa Chemokine Like Family Member 5	7	124
<i>PMPCA</i>	Peptidase, Mitochondrial Processing Alpha Subunit	7	73
<i>AGXT</i>	Alanine--Glyoxylate And Serine--Pyruvate Aminotransferase	7	54
<i>DGKD</i>	Diacylglycerol Kinase Delta	7	65
<i>TOLLIP</i>	Toll Interacting Protein	7	83
<i>MST1</i>	Macrophage Stimulating 1	6	41
<i>PLCL2</i>	Phospholipase C Like 2	5	118
<i>LYRM4</i>	Lyr Motif Containing 4	5	77
<i>PRKAR1B</i>	Protein Kinase Camp-Dependent Type I Regulatory Subunit Beta	5	81
<i>NPAS1</i>	Neuronal Pas Domain Protein 1	5	21
<i>OSBP2</i>	Oxysterol Binding Protein 2	5	50
<i>MOB2</i>	Mob Kinase Activator 2	5	71
<i>CRELD2</i>	Cysteine Rich with Egf Like Domains 2	5	27
<i>MAPK8IP2</i>	Mitogen-Activated Protein Kinase 8 Interacting Protein 2	5	43
<i>PIPOX</i>	Pipecolic Acid and Sarcosine Oxidase	5	45
<i>RADIL</i>	Rap Associating with Dil Domain	4	44
<i>WWOX</i>	Ww Domain Containing Oxidoreductase	4	84
<i>NELFA</i>	Negative Elongation Factor Complex Member A	4	54
<i>TPRA1</i>	Transmembrane Protein Adipocyte Associated 1	4	49
<i>DTNBP1</i>	Dystrobrevin Binding Protein 1	4	44
<i>TMEM204</i>	Transmembrane Protein 204	4	38
<i>RPP40</i>	Ribonuclease P/Mrp Subunit P40	4	52
<i>PLCXD1</i>	Phosphatidylinositol-Specific Phospholipase C, X Domain Containing 1	4	76
<i>PAXX</i>	Paxx Non-Homologous End Joining Factor	4	35
<i>TWIST2</i>	Twist Family Bhlh Transcription Factor 2	4	54
<i>SELENOO</i>	Selenoprotein O	4	51
<i>TMEM129</i>	Transmembrane Protein 129	4	37
<i>ZNF784</i>	Zinc Finger Protein 784	4	28
<i>LRPAP1</i>	Ldl Receptor Related Protein Associated Protein 1	3	38
<i>MED10</i>	Mediator Complex Subunit 10	3	30
<i>YDJC</i>	YdjC Chitooligosaccharide Deacetylase Homolog	3	21
<i>ADCK1</i>	Aarf Domain Containing Kinase 1	3	26
<i>IGF1R</i>	Insulin Like Growth Factor 1 Receptor	3	61
<i>ING5</i>	Inhibitor of Growth Family Member 5	3	25
<i>RNASEH1</i>	Ribonuclease H1	3	19
<i>RABL6</i>	Rab, Member Ras Oncogene Family Like 6	3	25
<i>VPS26B</i>	Vps26, Retromer Complex Component B	3	24
<i>LAMP1</i>	Lysosomal Associated Membrane Protein 1	3	26
<i>RECQL4</i>	Recq Like Helicase 4	3	15
<i>FERMT3</i>	Fermitin Family Member 3	3	17
<i>AMH</i>	Anti-Mullerian Hormone	3	11
<i>ANKRD13B</i>	Ankyrin Repeat Domain 13B	3	22
<i>SPACA7</i>	Sperm Acrosome Associated 7	3	41
<i>SEPTIN2</i>	Septin 2	3	25
<i>PKP1</i>	Plakophilin 1	3	37
<i>CCND1</i>	Cyclin D1	3	30
<i>C9H6orf120</i>	Chromosome 9 C6orf120 Homolog	3	34
<i>FKRP</i>	Fukutin Related Protein	3	20
<i>IFT43</i>	Intraflagellar Transport 43	3	19
<i>DPYSL4</i>	Dihydropyrimidinase Like 4	3	46
<i>SLC25A47</i>	Solute Carrier Family 25 Member 47	3	25
<i>PWWP2B</i>	Pwwp Domain Containing 2B	3	7
<i>ANKH</i>	Ankh Inorganic Pyrophosphate Transport Regulator	3	59
<i>IRX4</i>	Iroquois Homeobox 4	3	16
<i>TCIRG1</i>	T Cell Immune Regulator 1, Atpase H+ Transporting V0 Subunit A3	3	28
<i>IGF2R</i>	Insulin Like Growth Factor 2 Receptor	3	51
<i>MAPK1</i>	Mitogen-Activated Protein Kinase 1	3	41
<i>TSSK1B</i>	Testis Specific Serine Kinase 1B	3	27



	Genes with clusters of DMS continued (TE, n=267)	Cluster count	DMS count
<i>ABRAXAS2</i>	Abraxas 2, Brisc Complex Subunit	2	15
<i>ULK3</i>	Unc-51 Like Kinase 3	2	12
<i>MYADML2</i>	Myeloid Associated Differentiation Marker Like 2	2	11
<i>NSUN5</i>	Nop2/Sun Rna Methyltransferase 5	2	13
<i>GTF3C4</i>	General Transcription Factor Iiic Subunit 4	2	19
<i>PSMC4</i>	Proteasome 26S Subunit, Atpase 4	2	19
<i>ACTL7A</i>	Actin Like 7A	2	9
<i>P2RY11</i>	Purinergic Receptor P2Y11	2	19
<i>TEX29</i>	Testis Expressed 29	2	27
<i>SUSD2</i>	Sushi Domain Containing 2	2	19
<i>AP3D1</i>	Adaptor Related Protein Complex 3 Subunit Delta 1	2	9
<i>CAPN7</i>	Calpain 7	2	24
<i>LRRC47</i>	Leucine Rich Repeat Containing 47	2	10
<i>DHRS11</i>	Dehydrogenase/Reductase 11	2	7
<i>CPLX1</i>	Complexin 1	2	27
<i>LENG1</i>	Leukocyte Receptor Cluster Member 1	2	20
<i>ERF</i>	Ets2 Repressor Factor	2	10
<i>MMAB</i>	Metabolism of Cobalamin Associated B	2	17
<i>ERMARD</i>	Er Membrane Associated Rna Degradation	2	31
<i>SNRNP25</i>	Small Nuclear Ribonucleoprotein U11/U12 Subunit 25	2	26
<i>MARK4</i>	Microtubule Affinity Regulating Kinase 4	2	10
<i>TAF6L</i>	Tata-Box Binding Protein Associated Factor 6 Like	2	11
<i>EVPL</i>	Envoplakin	2	21
<i>WNT7A</i>	Wnt Family Member 7A	2	69
<i>PTBP1</i>	Polypyrimidine Tract Binding Protein 1	2	10
<i>COL13A1</i>	Collagen Type Xiii Alpha 1 Chain	2	20
<i>MRPL41</i>	Mitochondrial Ribosomal Protein L41	2	18
<i>PTK7</i>	Protein Tyrosine Kinase 7 (Inactive)	2	19
<i>CCNF</i>	Cyclin F	2	10
<i>SARM1</i>	Sterile Alpha and Tir Motif Containing 1	2	11
<i>SART1</i>	Spliceosome Associated Factor 1, Recruiter Of U4/U6.U5 Tri-Snmp	2	17
<i>VASN</i>	Vasorin	2	28
<i>AGO2</i>	Argonaute Risc Catalytic Component 2	2	32
<i>IFITM3</i>	Interferon Induced Transmembrane Protein 3	2	14
<i>PPP2R5B</i>	Protein Phosphatase 2 Regulatory Subunit B'Beta	2	33
<i>TOMM6</i>	Translocase of Outer Mitochondrial Membrane 6	2	13
<i>TUBB6</i>	Tubulin Beta 6 Class V	2	14
<i>MAP1LC3B</i>	Microtubule Associated Protein 1 Light Chain 3 Beta	2	12
<i>CASKIN2</i>	Cask Interacting Protein 2	2	53
<i>ORM1</i>	Orosomucoid 1	2	18
<i>TXNDC5</i>	Thioredoxin Domain Containing 5	2	35
<i>ATP5F1E</i>	Atp Synthase F1 Subunit Epsilon	2	9
<i>WDR45B</i>	Wd Repeat Domain 45B	2	11
<i>DGCR8</i>	Dgcr8 Microprocessor Complex Subunit	2	26
<i>RPN1</i>	Ribophorin I	2	19
<i>COMP</i>	Cartilage Oligomeric Matrix Protein	2	37
<i>PPP6R1</i>	Protein Phosphatase 6 Regulatory Subunit 1	2	18
<i>MICAL2</i>	Mical Like 2	2	31
<i>TRIM67</i>	Tripartite Motif Containing 67	2	14
<i>MYDGF</i>	Myeloid Derived Growth Factor	2	11
<i>HEBP2</i>	Heme Binding Protein 2	2	19
<i>CCDC70</i>	Coiled-Coil Domain Containing 70	2	18
<i>EPHA2</i>	Eph Receptor A2	2	21
<i>SLC1A7</i>	Solute Carrier Family 1 Member 7	2	16
<i>TRIM11</i>	Tripartite Motif Containing 11	2	37
<i>ERRFI1</i>	ErbB Receptor Feedback Inhibitor 1	2	12
<i>MYO10</i>	Myosin X	2	24
<i>PLCG1</i>	Phospholipase C Gamma 1	2	39
<i>TMEM184A</i>	Transmembrane Protein 184A	2	21
<i>YARS</i>	Tyrosyl-Trna Synthetase	2	10
<i>ZADH2</i>	Zinc Binding Alcohol Dehydrogenase Domain Containing 2	2	21
<i>CITED4</i>	Cbp/P300 Interacting Transactivator With Glu/Asp Rich Carboxy-Terminal Domain 4	1	15
<i>ALKBH4</i>	Alkb Homolog 4, Lysine Demethylase	1	11
<i>LRRC61</i>	Leucine Rich Repeat Containing 61	1	8
<i>ASPG</i>	Asparaginase	1	21
<i>LNX2</i>	Ligand of Numb-Protein X 2	1	16
<i>DFFA</i>	Dna Fragmentation Factor Subunit Alpha	1	19
<i>ANTXR1</i>	Antxr Cell Adhesion Molecule 1	1	10
<i>GUCY2D</i>	Guanylate Cyclase 2D, Retinal	1	6
<i>DISP2</i>	Dispatched Rnd Transporter Family Member 2	1	10
<i>EFCC1</i>	Ef-Hand and Coiled-Coil Domain Containing 1	1	17
<i>GGA3</i>	Golgi Associated, Gamma Adaptin Ear Containing, Arf Binding Protein 3	1	9
<i>SELEN0V</i>	Selenoprotein V	1	6
<i>PTK2</i>	Protein Tyrosine Kinase 2	1	32

	Genes with clusters of DMS continued (TE, n=267)	Cluster count	DMS count
<i>POLR2L</i>	Rna Polymerase II Subunit L	1	17
<i>C17H4orf45</i>	Chromosome 17 C4orf45 Homolog	1	16
<i>PKIG</i>	Camp-Dependent Protein Kinase Inhibitor Gamma	1	7
<i>UNC13B</i>	Unc-13 Homolog B	1	10
<i>COG4</i>	Component of Oligomeric Golgi Complex 4	1	26
<i>WNT6</i>	Wnt Family Member 6	1	6
<i>ASMTL</i>	Acetylserotonin O-Methyltransferase Like	1	13
<i>ABL1</i>	Abl Proto-Oncogene 1, Non-Receptor Tyrosine Kinase	1	16
<i>GNA12</i>	G Protein Subunit Alpha 12	1	35
<i>SLC30A3</i>	Solute Carrier Family 30 Member 3	1	15
<i>JPH3</i>	Junctophilin 3	1	22
<i>MAPK8IP3</i>	Mitogen-Activated Protein Kinase 8 Interacting Protein 3	1	37
<i>ZNF703</i>	Zinc Finger Protein 703	1	10
<i>RMI2</i>	Recq Mediated Genome Instability 2	1	23
<i>BOK</i>	Bcl2 Family Apoptosis Regulator Bok	1	11
<i>TADA2B</i>	Transcriptional Adaptor 2B	1	20
<i>IMPA1</i>	Inositol Monophosphatase 1	1	10
<i>KLF10</i>	Kruppel Like Factor 10	1	6
<i>PNMT</i>	Phenylethanolamine N-Methyltransferase	1	7
<i>CDC16</i>	Cell Division Cycle 16	1	5
<i>RXRA</i>	Retinoid X Receptor Alpha	1	14
<i>NAT10</i>	N-Acetyltransferase 10	1	20
<i>SNX30</i>	Sorting Nexin Family Member 30	1	7
<i>OLFM1</i>	Olfactomedin 1	1	26
<i>RBPJL</i>	Recombination Signal Binding Protein for Immunoglobulin Kappa J Region Like	1	5
<i>FOXN4</i>	Forkhead Box N4	1	21
<i>SLX4IP</i>	Slx4 Interacting Protein	1	21
<i>SYCE1</i>	Synaptonemal Complex Central Element Protein 1	1	14
<i>GNG3</i>	G Protein Subunit Gamma 3	1	6
<i>HABP2</i>	Hyaluronan Binding Protein 2	1	10
<i>SERP2</i>	Stress Associated Endoplasmic Reticulum Protein Family Member 2	1	12
<i>BTBD17</i>	Btb Domain Containing 17	1	24
<i>SLC39A13</i>	Solute Carrier Family 39 Member 13	1	16
<i>KLHL36</i>	Kelch Like Family Member 36	1	6
<i>ACTN3</i>	Actin Alpha 3	1	14
<i>CES2</i>	Carboxylesterase 2	1	5
<i>NFKBIB</i>	Nfkb Inhibitor Beta	1	14
<i>CRHR1</i>	Corticotropin Releasing Hormone Receptor 1	1	5
<i>PPP1R37</i>	Protein Phosphatase 1 Regulatory Subunit 37	1	20
<i>C14H8orf33</i>	Chromosome 14 C8orf33 Homolog	1	7
<i>SEPTIN5</i>	Septin 5	1	14
<i>CRIP2</i>	Cysteine Rich Protein 2	1	7
<i>ASB1</i>	Ankyrin Repeat and Socs Box Containing 1	1	12
<i>BMP2K</i>	Bmp2 Inducible Kinase	1	7
<i>C11H2orf49</i>	Chromosome 11 C2orf49 Homolog	1	7
<i>ASIP</i>	Agouti Signaling Protein	1	6
<i>EXT2</i>	Exostosin Glycosyltransferase 2	1	15
<i>TMEM248</i>	Transmembrane Protein 248	1	6
<i>CUX2</i>	Cut Like Homeobox 2	1	15
<i>TIMM13</i>	Translocase of Inner Mitochondrial Membrane 13	1	6
<i>CLPTM1L</i>	Clptm1 Like	1	18
<i>DMP1</i>	Dentin Matrix Acidic Phosphoprotein 1	1	5
<i>MGC137055</i>	Uncharacterized Protein Mgc137055	1	6
<i>ATXN10</i>	Ataxin 10	1	18
<i>PMEPA1</i>	Prostate Transmembrane Protein, Androgen Induced 1	1	11
<i>IGSF3</i>	Immunoglobulin Superfamily Member 3	1	9
<i>SYT10</i>	Synaptotagmin 10	1	5
<i>TAGLN</i>	Transgelin	1	6
<i>AKAP2</i>	Paralemmin 2	1	8
<i>MFAP4</i>	Microfibril Associated Protein 4	1	11
<i>ARAF</i>	A-Raf Proto-Oncogene, Serine/Threonine Kinase	1	9
<i>IPO4</i>	Importin 4	1	9
<i>GPX4</i>	Glutathione Peroxidase 4	1	11
<i>AMFR</i>	Autocrine Motility Factor Receptor	1	14
<i>DHRS7B</i>	Dehydrogenase/Reductase 7B	1	10
<i>PACSL1</i>	Protein Kinase C and Casein Kinase Substrate in Neurons 1	1	37
<i>TBC1D17</i>	Tbc1 Domain Family Member 17	1	11
<i>PRKACA</i>	Protein Kinase Camp-Activated Catalytic Subunit Alpha	1	8
<i>EXOSC6</i>	Exosome Component 6	1	12
<i>CEBPD</i>	Ccaat Enhancer Binding Protein Delta	1	7
<i>RUFY4</i>	Run and Fyve Domain Containing 4	1	24
<i>CXCR5</i>	C-X-C Motif Chemokine Receptor 5	1	11
<i>COA8</i>	Cytochrome C Oxidase Assembly Factor 8	1	11
<i>GATA2</i>	Gata Binding Protein 2	1	17

Genes with clusters of DMS continued (TE, n=267)		Cluster count	DMS count
<i>NKD1</i>	Nkd Inhibitor of Wnt Signaling Pathway 1	1	15
<i>CD3EAP</i>	Cd3E Molecule Associated Protein	1	10
<i>EAF1</i>	E11 Associated Factor 1	1	12
<i>CCZ1</i>	Ccz1 Homolog, Vacuolar Protein Trafficking and Biogenesis Associated	1	8
<i>CHRNA4</i>	Cholinergic Receptor Nicotinic Alpha 4 Subunit	1	14
<i>NOS3</i>	Nitric Oxide Synthase 3	1	21
<i>PABPC4</i>	Poly(A) Binding Protein Cytoplasmic 4	1	11
<i>MRPS25</i>	Mitochondrial Ribosomal Protein S25	1	25
<i>DCAF7</i>	Ddb1 And Cul4 Associated Factor 7	1	7
<i>INTS9</i>	Integrator Complex Subunit 9	1	21
<i>KAT5</i>	Lysine Acetyltransferase 5	1	1
<i>OVOL1</i>	Ovo Like Transcriptional Repressor 1	1	10
<i>CTU2</i>	Cytosolic Thiouridylase Subunit 2	1	30
<i>PPP5C</i>	Protein Phosphatase 5 Catalytic Subunit	1	19
<i>PIN1</i>	Peptidylprolyl Cis/Trans Isomerase, Nima-Interacting 1	1	8
<i>PAFAH1B3</i>	Platelet Activating Factor Acetylhydrolase 1B Catalytic Subunit 3	1	20
<i>HS1BP3</i>	Hcls1 Binding Protein 3	1	16
<i>CCDC3</i>	Coiled-Coil Domain Containing 3	1	7
<i>PYGB</i>	Glycogen Phosphorylase B	1	14
<i>TMEM151A</i>	Transmembrane Protein 151A	1	14
<i>SAMM50</i>	Samm50 Sorting and Assembly Machinery Component	1	13
<i>GRIN2C</i>	Glutamate Ionotropic Receptor Nmda Type Subunit 2C	1	19
<i>RPRD1B</i>	Regulation of Nuclear Pre-Mrna Domain Containing 1B	1	8
<i>RPA2</i>	Replication Protein A2	1	5
<i>ATG4B</i>	Autophagy Related 4B Cysteine Peptidase	1	29
<i>TMEM206</i>	Transmembrane Protein 206	1	13
<i>CELSR3</i>	Cadherin Egf Lag Seven-Pass G-Type Receptor 3	1	15
<i>ARHGDIG</i>	Rho Gdp Dissociation Inhibitor Gamma	1	1
<i>CABP4</i>	Calcium Binding Protein 4	1	8
<i>PARD6B</i>	Par-6 Family Cell Polarity Regulator Beta	1	22
<i>FARP1</i>	Ferm, Arh/Rhogef And Pleckstrin Domain Protein 1	1	49
<i>MAMDC4</i>	Mam Domain Containing 4	1	22
<i>TBL3</i>	Transducin Beta Like 3	1	12
<i>EPHA10</i>	Eph Receptor A10	1	9
<i>SLC9A3</i>	Solute Carrier Family 9 Member A3	1	25
<i>NDUFS8</i>	Nadh: Ubiquinone Oxidoreductase Core Subunit S8	1	6
<i>PRLH</i>	Prolactin Releasing Hormone	1	12
<i>RAB26</i>	Rab26, Member Ras Oncogene Family	1	19
<i>GRIN2B</i>	Glutamate Ionotropic Receptor Nmda Type Subunit 2B	1	13
<i>CHPF2</i>	Chondroitin Polymerizing Factor 2	1	9
<i>AMN</i>	Amnion Associated Transmembrane Protein	1	43
<i>GALNTL5</i>	Polypeptide N-Acetylgalactosaminyltransferase Like 5	1	46
<i>ARHGEF17</i>	Rho Guanine Nucleotide Exchange Factor 17	1	9
<i>SERPIND1</i>	Serpin Family D Member 1	1	18
<i>TENM3</i>	Teneurin Transmembrane Protein 3	1	18
<i>RHOF</i>	Ras Homolog Family Member F, Filopodia Associated	1	7
<i>NLRP5</i>	Nlr Family Pyrin Domain Containing 5	1	19
<i>NDUFA4L2</i>	Ndufa4 Mitochondrial Complex Associated Like 2	1	27
<i>BLOC1S3</i>	Biogenesis of Lysosomal Organelles Complex 1 Subunit 3	1	6
<i>TPPP</i>	Tubulin Polymerization Promoting Protein	1	21

## Appendix 4.5 GO terms enriched in bovine ICM and TE

### Biological Process GO terms enriched in bovine ICM

	Biological Process GO (ICM, n=67)	FDR (q-value)
GO:0046328	Regulation of Jnk Cascade	0.00017
GO:0097435	Supramolecular Fiber Organization	0.00043
GO:0048015	Phosphatidylinositol-Mediated Signaling	0.00056
GO:0043588	Skin Development	0.00204
GO:0016236	Macroautophagy	0.00233
GO:0007041	Lysosomal Transport	0.00252
GO:0090141	Positive Regulation of Mitochondrial Fission	0.00252
GO:0032959	Inositol Trisphosphate Biosynthetic Process	0.00377
GO:0050908	Detection of Light Stimulus Involved in Visual Perception	0.00377
GO:0007254	Jnk Cascade	0.00426
GO:0007257	Activation of Jun Kinase Activity	0.00500
GO:0018279	Protein N-Linked Glycosylation Via Asparagine	0.00500
GO:0001932	Regulation of Protein Phosphorylation	0.00500
GO:0010634	Positive Regulation of Epithelial Cell Migration	0.00500
GO:0006914	Autophagy	0.00601
GO:0048286	Lung Alveolus Development	0.00601
GO:0046854	Phosphatidylinositol Phosphorylation	0.00601
GO:0050821	Protein Stabilization	0.00601
GO:0120163	Negative Regulation of Cold-Induced Thermogenesis	0.00791
GO:0006986	Response to Unfolded Protein	0.00885
GO:0008542	Visual Learning	0.00885
GO:0032456	Endocytic Recycling	0.00885
GO:0050804	Modulation of Chemical Synaptic Transmission	0.00944
GO:0006936	Muscle Contraction	0.00972
GO:0007052	Mitotic Spindle Organization	0.01036
GO:0032465	Regulation of Cytokinesis	0.01036
GO:0060173	Limb Development	0.01036
GO:0060349	Bone Morphogenesis	0.01036
GO:0031648	Protein Destabilization	0.01394
GO:0043410	Positive Regulation Of Mapk Cascade	0.01545
GO:0006898	Receptor-Mediated Endocytosis	0.01590
GO:0030199	Collagen Fibril Organization	0.01590
GO:0016310	Phosphorylation	0.01679
GO:0007613	Memory	0.01679
GO:0043666	Regulation of Phosphoprotein Phosphatase Activity	0.01679
GO:0030097	Hemopoiesis	0.01776
GO:0030512	Negative Regulation of Transforming Growth Factor Beta Receptor Signaling Pathway	0.01776
GO:0060041	Retina Development in Camera-Type Eye	0.01995
GO:0030855	Epithelial Cell Differentiation	0.02077
GO:0016485	Protein Processing	0.02196
GO:0048812	Neuron Projection Morphogenesis	0.02196
GO:0051209	Release of Sequestered Calcium Ion into Cytosol	0.02196
GO:0045766	Positive Regulation of Angiogenesis	0.02206
GO:0030030	Cell Projection Organization	0.02261
GO:0051216	Cartilage Development	0.02493
GO:0060079	Excitatory Postsynaptic Potential	0.02892
GO:0007266	Rho Protein Signal Transduction	0.02989
GO:0031647	Regulation of Protein Stability	0.02989
GO:0001503	Ossification	0.03200
GO:0007626	Locomotor Behavior	0.03302
GO:0090502	Rna Phosphodiester Bond Hydrolysis, Endonucleolytic	0.03302
GO:0016042	Lipid Catabolic Process	0.03302
GO:0009791	Post-Embryonic Development	0.03422
GO:0050790	Regulation of Catalytic Activity	0.03536
GO:0019722	Calcium-Mediated Signaling	0.03671
GO:0042147	Retrograde Transport, Endosome to Golgi	0.03671
GO:0008033	Trna Processing	0.03959
GO:0030163	Protein Catabolic Process	0.03959
GO:0032508	Dna Duplex Unwinding	0.04089
GO:0090630	Activation of Gtpase Activity	0.04264
GO:0010468	Regulation of Gene Expression	0.04327
GO:0008104	Protein Localization	0.04387
GO:0007420	Brain Development	0.04492
GO:0006508	Proteolysis	0.04564
GO:0001666	Response to Hypoxia	0.04654
GO:0006821	Chloride Transport	0.04654
GO:0006812	Cation Transport	0.04984

**Cellular Component GO terms enriched in bovine ICM**

Cellular Component GO (ICM, <i>n</i> =28)		FDR (q-value)
GO:0044754	Autolysosome	0.000041
GO:0030667	Secretory Granule Membrane	0.000257
GO:0005829	Cytosol	0.000891
GO:0005838	Proteasome Regulatory Particle	0.001495
GO:0022624	Proteasome Accessory Complex	0.004420
GO:0012506	Vesicle Membrane	0.004759
GO:0005815	Microtubule Organizing Center	0.006897
GO:0070062	Extracellular Exosome	0.007543
GO:0005770	Late Endosome	0.008864
GO:0031526	Brush Border Membrane	0.010992
GO:0045171	Intercellular Bridge	0.012532
GO:0030659	Cytoplasmic Vesicle Membrane	0.013846
GO:0030139	Endocytic Vesicle	0.014871
GO:1904115	Axon Cytoplasm	0.014871
GO:0005930	Axoneme	0.015040
GO:0001917	Photoreceptor Inner Segment	0.016150
GO:0062023	Collagen-Containing Extracellular Matrix	0.017891
GO:0005902	Microvillus	0.020115
GO:0045335	Phagocytic Vesicle	0.025913
GO:0098685	Schaffer Collateral - Ca1 Synapse	0.025913
GO:0001726	Ruffle	0.030742
GO:0031901	Early Endosome Membrane	0.031968
GO:0030424	Axon	0.035881
GO:0005777	Peroxisome	0.039584
GO:0005635	Nuclear Envelope	0.043227
GO:0045177	Apical Part Of Cell	0.045588
GO:0000502	Proteasome Complex	0.046953
GO:0072686	Mitotic Spindle	0.046953

**Molecular Function GO terms enriched in bovine ICM**

Molecular Function GO (ICM, <i>n</i> =26)		FDR (q-value)
GO:0005078	Map-Kinase Scaffold Activity	0.00024
GO:0003958	Nadph-Hemoprotein Reductase Activity	0.00046
GO:0008171	O-Methyltransferase Activity	0.00071
GO:0031434	Mitogen-Activated Protein Kinase Kinase Binding	0.00071
GO:0004579	Dolichyl-Diphosphooligosaccharide-Protein Glycotransferase Activity	0.00096
GO:0010181	Fmn Binding	0.00208
GO:0004198	Calcium-Dependent Cysteine-Type Endopeptidase Activity	0.00303
GO:0004435	Phosphatidylinositol Phospholipase C Activity	0.00303
GO:0008234	Cysteine-Type Peptidase Activity	0.00326
GO:0015485	Cholesterol Binding	0.00326
GO:0015299	Solute: Proton Antiporter Activity	0.00463
GO:0004175	Endopeptidase Activity	0.00517
GO:0005520	Insulin-Like Growth Factor Binding	0.00577
GO:0003725	Double-Stranded Rna Binding	0.00768
GO:0019894	Kinesin Binding	0.00882
GO:0050661	Nadp Binding	0.00948
GO:0048365	Rac Gtpase Binding	0.01020
GO:0008201	Heparin Binding	0.01098
GO:0003727	Single-Stranded Rna Binding	0.01103
GO:0050660	Flavin Adenine Dinucleotide Binding	0.01206
GO:0008233	Peptidase Activity	0.01864
GO:0030165	Pdz Domain Binding	0.02254
GO:0016301	Kinase Activity	0.02915
GO:0001664	G Protein-Coupled Receptor Binding	0.03597
GO:0016787	Hydrolase Activity	0.04172
GO:0008081	Phosphoric Diester Hydrolase Activity	0.04324

**KEGG GO terms enriched in bovine ICM**

	<b>KEGG Pathway (ICM, <i>n</i>=30)</b>	<b>GOI</b>	<b>FDR (q-value)</b>
bta04070	Phosphatidylinositol signalling	4	0.0348
bta05205	Proteoglycans in cancer	6	0.0348
bta00350	Tyrosine metabolism	2	0.0349
bta00562	Inositol phosphate metabolism	3	0.0349
bta04110	Cell cycle	4	0.0349
bta04136	Autophagy - other	2	0.0349
bta04721	Synaptic vesicle cycle	3	0.0349
bta05214	Glioma	3	0.0349
bta04140	Autophagy - animal	4	0.0351
bta00513	Various types of N-glycan bios	2	0.0361
bta03050	Proteasome	2	0.0361
bta04216	Ferroptosis	2	0.0361
bta04390	Hippo signaling pathway	4	0.0361
bta00510	N-Glycan biosynthesis	2	0.0421
bta00565	Ether lipid metabolism	2	0.0421
bta04933	AGE-RAGE signaling pathway in	3	0.0421
bta04066	HIF-1 signaling pathway	3	0.0449
bta04360	Axon guidance	4	0.0449
bta04370	VEGF signaling pathway	2	0.0449
bta04659	Th17 cell differentiation	3	0.0449
bta00140	Steroid hormone biosynthesis	2	0.0457
bta01100	Metabolic pathways	17	0.0457
bta04114	Oocyte meiosis	3	0.0457
bta04142	Lysosome	3	0.0457
bta04152	AMPK signaling pathway	3	0.0457
bta04510	Focal adhesion	4	0.0457
bta04722	Neurotrophin signaling pathway	3	0.0457
bta05223	Non-small cell lung cancer	2	0.0457
bta04728	Dopaminergic synapse	3	0.0467
bta05321	Inflammatory bowel disease (IB	2	0.0467

**Biological Process GO terms enriched in bovine TE**

<b>Biological Process GO (TE, n=87)</b>		<b>FDR (q-value)</b>
GO:0097553	Calcium Ion Transmembrane Import into Cytosol	0.000069
GO:0046328	Regulation of Jnk Cascade	0.000714
GO:0048490	Anterograde Synaptic Vesicle Transport	0.001308
GO:0033598	Mammary Gland Epithelial Cell Proliferation	0.002119
GO:0033601	Positive Regulation of Mammary Gland Epithelial Cell Proliferation	0.002119
GO:0042711	Maternal Behavior	0.002119
GO:0035640	Exploration Behavior	0.002255
GO:0008089	Anterograde Axonal Transport	0.002446
GO:0019722	Calcium-Mediated Signaling	0.002472
GO:0010762	Regulation of Fibroblast Migration	0.002869
GO:0014059	Regulation of Dopamine Secretion	0.005088
GO:0032434	Regulation of Proteasomal Ubiquitin-Dependent Protein Catabolic Process	0.005306
GO:2000463	Positive Regulation of Excitatory Postsynaptic Potential	0.005306
GO:0060079	Excitatory Postsynaptic Potential	0.007047
GO:0042113	B Cell Activation	0.007193
GO:0060291	Long-Term Synaptic Potentiation	0.007193
GO:0035249	Synaptic Transmission, Glutamatergic	0.007495
GO:0090502	Rna Phosphodiester Bond Hydrolysis, Endonucleolytic	0.007676
GO:0030500	Regulation of Bone Mineralization	0.007857
GO:0032959	Inositol Trisphosphate Biosynthetic Process	0.007857
GO:0071333	Cellular Response to Glucose Stimulus	0.007857
GO:0061640	Cytoskeleton-Dependent Cytokinesis	0.009465
GO:0070527	Platelet Aggregation	0.009465
GO:0048015	Phosphatidylinositol-Mediated Signaling	0.009634
GO:0006360	Transcription by Rna Polymerase I	0.009634
GO:0007254	Jnk Cascade	0.009634
GO:0007566	Embryo Implantation	0.009634
GO:0035094	Response to Nicotine	0.009634
GO:0060425	Lung Morphogenesis	0.009634
GO:0090630	Activation of Gtpase Activity	0.010983
GO:0007585	Respiratory Gaseous Exchange by Respiratory System	0.011160
GO:0043627	Response to Estrogen	0.011160
GO:0007613	Memory	0.011693
GO:0016573	Histone Acetylation	0.011813
GO:0030512	Negative Regulation of Transforming Growth Factor Beta Receptor Signaling Pathway	0.011813
GO:0030316	Osteoclast Differentiation	0.011813
GO:0035019	Somatic Stem Cell Population Maintenance	0.011813
GO:0035235	Ionotropic Glutamate Receptor Signaling Pathway	0.012635
GO:0043001	Golgi To Plasma Membrane Protein Transport	0.012635
GO:0001932	Regulation of Protein Phosphorylation	0.014141
GO:0048286	Lung Alveolus Development	0.014426
GO:0071310	Cellular Response to Organic Substance	0.014426
GO:0051209	Release of Sequestered Calcium Ion into Cytosol	0.014633
GO:0018108	Peptidyl-Tyrosine Phosphorylation	0.014778
GO:0043410	Positive Regulation of Mapk Cascade	0.014940
GO:0009749	Response to Glucose	0.016839
GO:0017157	Regulation of Exocytosis	0.016839
GO:0050890	Cognition	0.017679
GO:0000045	Autophagosome Assembly	0.019002
GO:0030282	Bone Mineralization	0.019614
GO:0120163	Negative Regulation of Cold-Induced Thermogenesis	0.019614
GO:0010628	Positive Regulation of Gene Expression	0.020741
GO:0007266	Rho Protein Signal Transduction	0.020741
GO:0007612	Learning	0.020741
GO:0000422	Autophagy of Mitochondrion	0.022415
GO:0006986	Response to Unfolded Protein	0.022415
GO:0042177	Negative Regulation of Protein Catabolic Process	0.022415
GO:0043588	Skin Development	0.022415
GO:0001503	Ossification	0.023104
GO:0045766	Positive Regulation of Angiogenesis	0.023335
GO:0016236	Macroautophagy	0.024114
GO:0048013	Ephrin Receptor Signaling Pathway	0.024114
GO:0016310	Phosphorylation	0.025626
GO:0007173	Epidermal Growth Factor Receptor Signaling Pathway	0.025709
GO:0060173	Limb Development	0.025709
GO:0060349	Bone Morphogenesis	0.025709
GO:0050804	Modulation of Chemical Synaptic Transmission	0.028875
GO:0007043	Cell-Cell Junction Assembly	0.029565
GO:0034446	Substrate Adhesion-Dependent Cell Spreading	0.029565
GO:2000300	Regulation of Synaptic Vesicle Exocytosis	0.031472
GO:0035556	Intracellular Signal Transduction	0.032589
GO:0008544	Epidermis Development	0.033407
GO:0048856	Anatomical Structure Development	0.035231
GO:0050885	Neuromuscular Process Controlling Balance	0.035231
GO:0030968	Endoplasmic Reticulum Unfolded Protein Response	0.037458

Biological Process GO continued (TE, n=87)		FDR (q-value)
GO:0042060	Wound Healing	0.037458
GO:0006898	Receptor-Mediated Endocytosis	0.038790
GO:0008630	Intrinsic Apoptotic Signaling Pathway in Response to Dna Damage	0.038790
GO:0031532	Actin Cytoskeleton Reorganization	0.038790
GO:0043666	Regulation of Phosphoprotein Phosphatase Activity	0.041338
GO:0048666	Neuron Development	0.041338
GO:0090501	Rna Phosphodiester Bond Hydrolysis	0.041338
GO:0009267	Cellular Response to Starvation	0.043233
GO:0006979	Response to Oxidative Stress	0.044099
GO:0010976	Positive Regulation of Neuron Projection Development	0.048129
GO:0060041	Retina Development in Camera-Type Eye	0.048129

### Cellular Component GO terms enriched in bovine TE

Cellular Component GO (TE, n=29)		FDR (q-value)
GO:0030667	Secretory Granule Membrane	0.000052
GO:0044754	Autolysosome	0.000151
GO:1904115	Axon Cytoplasm	0.004027
GO:0005952	Camp-Dependent Protein Kinase Complex	0.004027
GO:0043195	Terminal Bouton	0.004138
GO:0017146	Nmda Selective Glutamate Receptor Complex	0.004138
GO:0005736	Rna Polymerase I Complex	0.011818
GO:0005940	Septin Ring	0.011818
GO:0031083	Bloc-1 Complex	0.011818
GO:0031105	Septin Complex	0.011818
GO:0000159	Protein Phosphatase Type 2A Complex	0.012503
GO:0030496	Midbody	0.012720
GO:0031514	Motile Cilium	0.016495
GO:0080008	Cul4-Ring E3 Ubiquitin Ligase Complex	0.018130
GO:0010008	Endosome Membrane	0.018130
GO:0031901	Early Endosome Membrane	0.026043
GO:0070062	Extracellular Exosome	0.026768
GO:0005938	Cell Cortex	0.027347
GO:0098839	Postsynaptic Density Membrane	0.028391
GO:0031526	Brush Border Membrane	0.029588
GO:0030672	Synaptic Vesicle Membrane	0.033627
GO:0045171	Intercellular Bridge	0.033757
GO:0005770	Late Endosome	0.033757
GO:0098978	Glutamatergic Synapse	0.039119
GO:0005856	Cytoskeleton	0.039261
GO:0030139	Endocytic Vesicle	0.039722
GO:0005623	Cell	0.039722
GO:0005834	Heterotrimeric G-Protein Complex	0.043310
GO:0030659	Cytoplasmic Vesicle Membrane	0.043501



**Molecular Function GO terms enriched in bovine TE**

<b>Molecular Function (TE, n=28)</b>		<b>FDR (q-value)</b>
GO:0022849	Glutamate-Gated Calcium Ion Channel Activity	0.000075
GO:0005078	Map-Kinase Scaffold Activity	0.000696
GO:0004972	Nmda Glutamate Receptor Activity	0.001317
GO:0008171	O-Methyltransferase Activity	0.002084
GO:0031434	Mitogen-Activated Protein Kinase Kinase Binding	0.002084
GO:0005005	Transmembrane-Ephrin Receptor Activity	0.003686
GO:0001054	Rna Polymerase I Activity	0.007726
GO:0005003	Ephrin Receptor Activity	0.007726
GO:0004435	Phosphatidylinositol Phospholipase C Activity	0.008366
GO:0004970	Ionotropic Glutamate Receptor Activity	0.010041
GO:0004402	Histone Acetyltransferase Activity	0.010637
GO:0030165	Pdz Domain Binding	0.017129
GO:0005520	Insulin-Like Growth Factor Binding	0.017501
GO:0008066	Glutamate Receptor Activity	0.017501
GO:0015276	Ligand-Gated Ion Channel Activity	0.018367
GO:0032266	Phosphatidylinositol-3-Phosphate Binding	0.023008
GO:0019894	Kinesin Binding	0.027568
GO:0004714	Transmembrane Receptor Protein Tyrosine Kinase Activity	0.027881
GO:0000993	Rna Polymerase Ii Complex Binding	0.029888
GO:0048365	Rac Gtpase Binding	0.029888
GO:0017048	Rho Gtpase Binding	0.034467
GO:0008081	Phosphoric Diester Hydrolase Activity	0.035140
GO:0005109	Frizzled Binding	0.039200
GO:0004672	Protein Kinase Activity	0.039200
GO:1904315	Transmitter-Gated Ion Channel Activity	0.040853
GO:0016301	Kinase Activity	0.041234
GO:0004713	Protein Tyrosine Kinase Activity	0.044652
GO:0015485	Cholesterol Binding	0.047796

**KEGG GO terms enriched in bovine TE**

<b>KEGG Pathway continued (TE, n=96)</b>		<b>GOI</b>	<b>FDR (q-value)</b>
bta05205	Proteoglycans in cancer	10	0.001044
bta04914	Progesterone-mediated oocyte maturation	6	0.00167
bta04730	Long-term depression	5	0.00167
bta01522	Endocrine resistance	6	0.001811
bta04720	Long-term potentiation	5	0.001862
bta05223	Non-small cell lung cancer	5	0.001862
bta04724	Glutamatergic synapse	6	0.002932
bta05214	Glioma	5	0.002932
bta04114	Oocyte meiosis	6	0.003363
bta04012	ErbB signaling pathway	5	0.003363
bta04370	VEGF signaling pathway	4	0.004547
bta04010	MAPK signaling pathway	9	0.006456
bta04014	Ras signaling pathway	8	0.006456
bta05166	HTLV-I infection	8	0.006456
bta04713	Circadian entrainment	5	0.006456
bta04916	Melanogenesis	5	0.006456
bta00350	Tyrosine metabolism	3	0.006456
bta05033	Nicotine addiction	3	0.006456
bta05216	Thyroid cancer	3	0.006456
bta05224	Breast cancer	6	0.006634
bta05218	Melanoma	4	0.006727
bta05219	Bladder cancer	3	0.006727
bta05200	Pathways in cancer	13	0.007228
bta05220	Chronic myeloid leukemia	4	0.007761
bta04151	PI3K-Akt signaling pathway	10	0.007835
bta04919	Thyroid hormone signaling pathway	5	0.007835
bta04721	Synaptic vesicle cycle	4	0.007835
bta01521	EGFR tyrosine kinase inhibitor resistance	4	0.007909
bta04722	Neurotrophin signaling pathway	5	0.008258
bta05030	Cocaine addiction	3	0.008258
bta04142	Lysosome	5	0.008336
bta04360	Axon guidance	6	0.011247
bta04728	Dopaminergic synapse	5	0.011247
bta05010	Alzheimer's disease	6	0.011267
bta04910	Insulin signaling pathway	5	0.012792

	KEGG Pathway continued (TE, n=96)	GOI	FDR (q-value)
bta04062	Chemokine signaling pathway	6	0.013289
bta04140	Autophagy - animal	5	0.013289
bta04371	Apelin signaling pathway	5	0.013289
bta04658	Th1 and Th2 cell differentiation	4	0.013289
bta05215	Prostate cancer	4	0.013289
bta05213	Endometrial cancer	3	0.013289
bta01100	Metabolic pathways	25	0.01572
bta04933	AGE-RAGE signaling pathway in diabetic complications	4	0.01572
bta05012	Parkinson's disease	5	0.015987
bta04390	Hippo signaling pathway	5	0.016067
bta04723	Retrograde endocannabinoid signaling	5	0.016067
bta05020	Prion diseases	2	0.016067
bta04066	HIF-1 signaling pathway	4	0.017916
bta05221	Acute myeloid leukemia	3	0.017916
bta05031	Amphetamine addiction	3	0.018347
bta04015	Rap1 signaling pathway	6	0.018877
bta04310	Wnt signaling pathway	5	0.018877
bta04659	Th17 cell differentiation	4	0.018877
bta04725	Cholinergic synapse	4	0.018877
bta03030	DNA replication	2	0.018877
bta04726	Serotonergic synapse	4	0.019673
bta04071	Sphingolipid signaling pathway	4	0.022283
bta04611	Platelet activation	4	0.022298
bta05212	Pancreatic cancer	3	0.022298
bta05034	Alcoholism	6	0.023158
bta04110	Cell cycle	4	0.023158
bta03008	Ribosome biogenesis in eukaryotes	3	0.027602
bta04976	Bile secretion	3	0.027602
bta00260	Glycine, serine and threonine metabolism	2	0.027602
bta05203	Viral carcinogenesis	6	0.027993
bta04068	FoxO signaling pathway	4	0.027993
bta04270	Vascular smooth muscle contraction	4	0.028613
bta04216	Ferroptosis	2	0.028613
bta05210	Colorectal cancer	3	0.032587
bta04550	Signaling pathways regulating pluripotency of stem cells	4	0.032913
bta04540	Gap junction	3	0.032913
bta00190	Oxidative phosphorylation	4	0.033271
bta04962	Vasopressin-regulated water reabsorption	2	0.033674
bta04510	Focal adhesion	5	0.034402
bta05016	Huntington's disease	5	0.034402
bta04666	Fc gamma R-mediated phagocytosis	3	0.034402
bta05222	Small cell lung cancer	3	0.034723
bta04340	Hedgehog signaling pathway	2	0.034723
bta05014	Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)	2	0.034723
bta03015	mRNA surveillance pathway	3	0.03514
bta00565	Ether lipid metabolism	2	0.035272
bta03460	Fanconi anemia pathway	2	0.035272
bta04072	Phospholipase D signaling pathway	4	0.036981
bta04921	Oxytocin signaling pathway	4	0.036981
bta04070	Phosphatidylinositol signaling system	3	0.036981
bta05231	Choline metabolism in cancer	3	0.036981
bta04913	Ovarian steroidogenesis	2	0.036981
bta04150	mTOR signaling pathway	4	0.038497
bta04660	T cell receptor signaling pathway	3	0.044967
bta03013	RNA transport	4	0.046089
bta05160	Hepatitis C	4	0.046089
bta04213	Longevity regulating pathway - multiple species	2	0.047228
bta05217	Basal cell carcinoma	2	0.048274
bta04024	cAMP signaling pathway	5	0.048962
bta04080	Neuroactive ligand-receptor interaction	7	0.049791
bta04145	Phagosome	4	0.049791

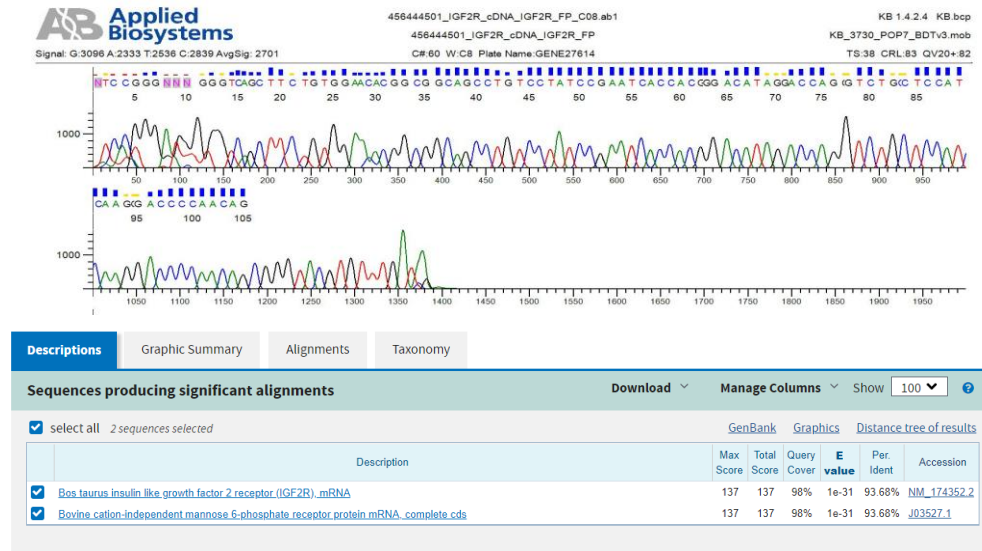
**Appendix 4.6 *IGF2R* and *AIRN* primer test by RT-PCR**

Lanes 1 and 12: 50 bp marker. 2: no product. 3: *IGF2R* bovine ovary DNA. 4: *IGF2R* bovine ovary DNA RC. 5: *IGF2R* bovine liver cDNA. 6: *IGF2R* bovine liver cDNA RC. 7: *AIRN* bovine ovary DNA. 8: *AIRN* bovine ovary DNA RC. 9: *AIRN* bovine liver cDNA. 10: *AIRN* bovine liver cDNA RC. 11: no product.

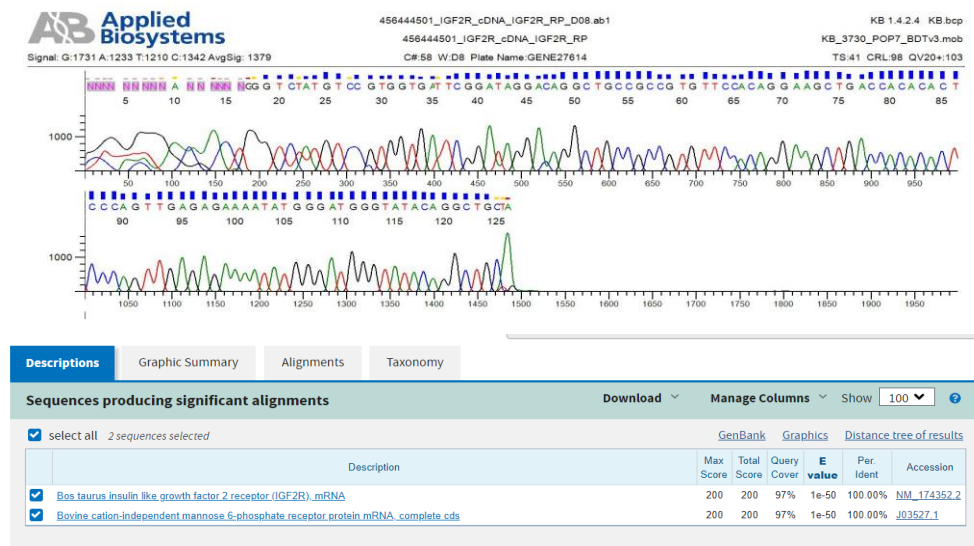
No *IGF2R* transcript detected in bovine ovary DNA as primers were designed to be exon spanning and, therefore, detect cDNA only. *AIRN* is a long non-coding RNA (lncRNA) antisense transcript transcribed from genomic DNA and, therefore, is detected in bovine ovary DNA and liver cDNA sample.

**Source Biosciences, Nottingham, UK**





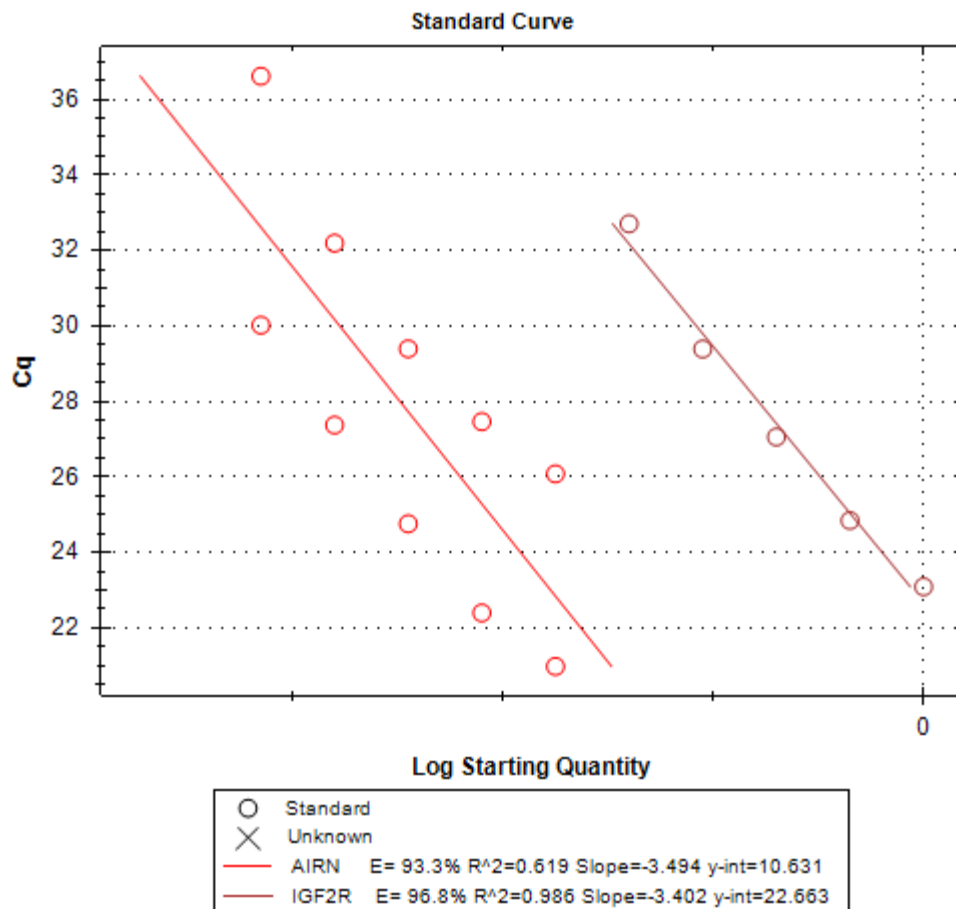
Bovine *IGF2R* forward primer sequence and NCBI Blast output.



Bovine *IGF2R* reverse primer sequence and NCBI Blast output.

## Appendix 4.8 Calibration standard curves for qPCR (liver)

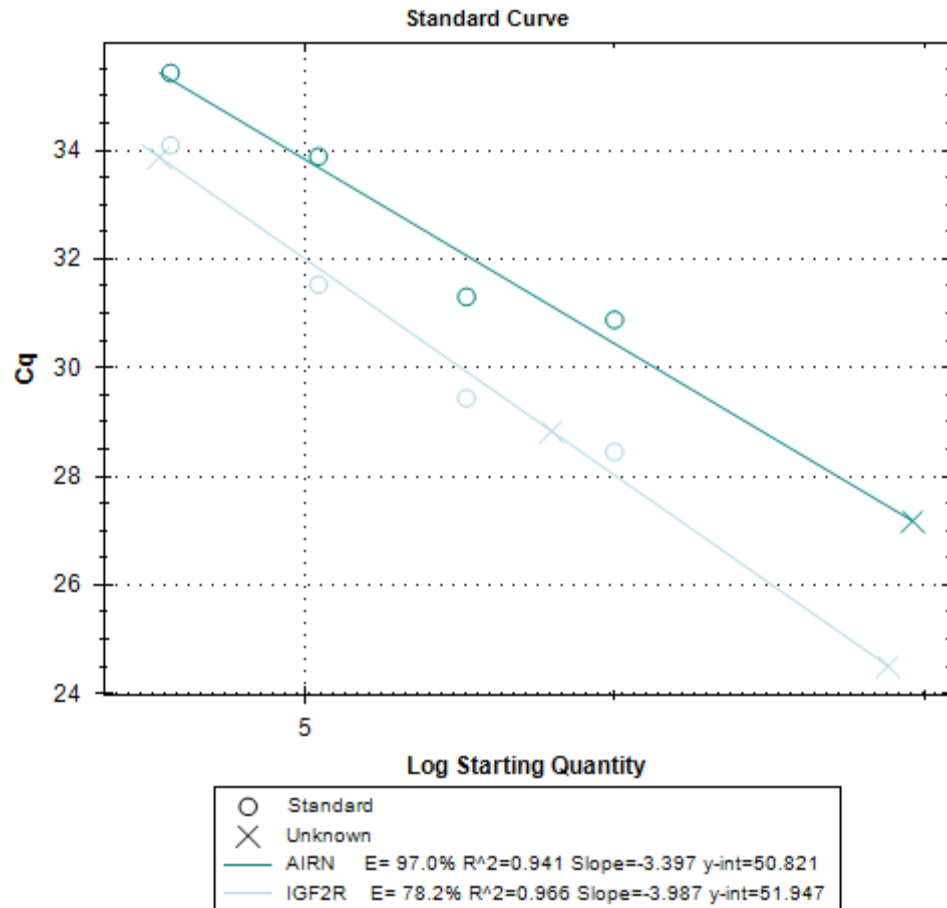
*IGF2R*/*AIRN* transcript expression conducted using bovine liver



Slope ( $R^2$ ) for *AIRN* primers low in bovine liver (0.619) but suitable in blastocyst (0.941; Appendix 4.9). This could be a combination of effects associated with primer design, inaccurate sample/reagent pipetting or analysis of the standard curve.

## Appendix 4.9 Calibration standard curves for qPCR (blastocysts)

### *AIRN* transcript expression conducted using bovine blastocysts



Amplification efficiency for *IGF2R* primers low in bovine blastocysts (78.2%) but suitable in liver (96.8%; Appendix 4.8). This could be a combination of effects associated with primer design, inaccurate sample/reagent pipetting and the low abundance of starting material (mRNA transcript) extracted from bovine blastocysts compared with a high abundance extracted from liver.

#### Appendix 4.10 Position and methylation (%) of each DMS within *IGF2R* intron 2 DMR.

Cluster 1 contains 13 DMS highlighted in yellow. Cluster 2 contains 11 DMS highlighted in green.

MethStart	Av.TE.50	Av.TE.10	Av.meth.diff	Av.meth%
96221369	32.31	13.18	19.13	decreased
96221371	41.76	7.97	33.79	decreased
96221375	34.25	8.94	25.30	decreased
96221396	32.40	8.14	24.26	decreased
96221409	29.19	4.87	24.32	decreased
96221472	34.83	26.47	8.35	decreased
96221474	44.17	30.79	13.38	decreased
96221483	41.42	25.75	15.68	decreased
96221503	36.25	25.23	11.02	decreased
96221507	30.79	21.25	9.55	decreased
96221588	41.26	24.91	16.35	decreased
96221634	11.71	36.87	-25.16	increased
96222398	47.78	30.64	17.15	decreased
96222400	44.53	24.95	19.58	decreased
96223037	50.07	23.74	26.33	decreased
96223047	52.44	29.86	22.58	decreased
96223103	41.34	16.48	24.87	decreased
96223131	42.96	25.00	17.96	decreased
96223135	40.43	23.75	16.68	decreased
96223137	42.01	25.00	17.01	decreased
96223156	34.39	14.58	19.81	decreased
96223184	41.95	22.92	19.03	decreased
96223199	42.50	23.89	18.61	decreased



**Appendix 4.11 ClustalW2 multiple sequence alignment: *IGF2R* nucleotide sequence homology (%) between species.**

Species	Reference genome	<i>IGF2R</i> location (Chr: bases)	Protein- coding transcripts	Transcripts (bp)	Protein (aa)	<i>IGF2R</i> identity %	Intron 2 %	DMR2 cluster region %	DMR2 cluster 1 %	DMR2 cluster 2 %	DMS cluster 1 %	DMS cluster 2 %
<i>Bos taurus</i>	ARS-UCD1.2	9: 96197493-96300017	1/1	9058	2499	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Ovis aries</i>	Oar_v3.1	8: 82874886-82959397	1/1	7389	2463	91.9	45.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Sus scrofa</i>	Hampshire_pig_v1	LUXS01016444.1: 25529918-26587436	3/3	9008 8846 8837 803 245	2488 2434 2431 - -	68.6	74.0	89.4	87.1	88.0	75.0	90.9
<i>Homo sapiens</i>	GRCh38.p13	6: 159969099- 160113507	2/6	14044 762 597 6468 2755 355	2491 185 - - - -	60.3	52.3	49.5	51.8	47.3	50.0	81.8
<i>Mus musculus</i>	GRCm38.p6	17: 12682406-12769664	1/3	8887 803 245	2483 - -	49.7	45.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Rattus rattus</i>	Rnor_6.0	1: 48176106-48264477	1/1	8787	2481	49.7	44.4	39.1	33.1	44.5	33.3	63.6

**% Identity key**

100	
90-100	
80-90	
70-80	
60-70	
50-60	
40-50	
30-40	

Source(s): Ensembl Genome Browser (<https://www.ensembl.org>); ClustalW2 1.2.4, EMBL-EBI (<https://www.ebi.ac.uk/Tools/msa/clustalw2/>).  
Abbreviation(s): aa, amino acids, bp, base pairs Chr, chromosome; DMR2, differentially methylated region 2; DMS, differentially methylated site (cytosine). Nucleotide sequence percentage similarity with cattle (%).

## Appendix 4.12 Multiple sequence alignment of *IGF2R* DMR2 clusters

### Multiple sequence alignment of *IGF2R* - DMR2 cluster 1

(ClustalW2 1.2.4, EMBL-EBI; <https://www.ebi.ac.uk/Tools/msa/clustalw2/>)

CLUSTAL O(1.2.4) multiple sequence alignment

```

mouseintron2 ----- 1903
ratintron2   TCTTATAGATCCCAGGACTACCGGCCAACCCAGAGATGGCACCACAAAGGGCTAGGCC 5875
sheepintron2 ----- 1546
humanintron2 TGCGGTAGGCAGGAGGGCTGCCTGTGAAGTACAGGATACCAGGCTTTGTGGCTTCAAGGA 13002
cowintron2   CAGGCTGGGCCCCGTGGCCGCCCGCGGAGGGGGGTGGCCAGGCCGAGCAGCTCAGCGA 4864
pigintron2   AGCGCTGGACCCCGAGGCCGCGGGCGGAGTGGGATGGCCAGGCTGGCAGCCTCAGGA 4232

mouseintron2 ----- 1903
ratintron2   TTCCCGTTGATCACTAATTGAG---AAAATGCCTTATAGC---TGGATTTCATGGAG 5927
sheepintron2 ----- 1546
humanintron2 GGCCAAATCATCATGGGCTTGCTTGGGCTTGGAGGTGCGACCTGGTGGGCTGCAGAAATG 13062
cowintron2   GGTCCGGTTTCGAGCT---CGGCCGGGCTCGGCCGCGAGCGC--CGAGGGCGGCAGGCCA 4919
pigintron2   GACCGAGTTGGAGCT---CGGCCGGGCTCGGCCGCGGACGC--CGAGGGTGGCAGGCCA 4287

mouseintron2 ----- 1903
ratintron2   GTGTTTCTCAATTGAGA---CTCCTCTTCTCTAGTGATTCTAGCTTGTGTCTAGGTGA 5984
sheepintron2 ----- 1546
humanintron2 CGACTTGGTGGCTGACTGAGCAGCACTGAGGGCCTGGTGCAGCCTGGCATGGTGGTAC 13122
cowintron2   GGCCCGGCCGGCC-----TGGCAGCGGGCCTGGTGGGCGGACTCTGGTGAGCGGG 4971
pigintron2   GGCCGGGCAGGCC-----CGGATCGCGCCTGGTGGACGGGCTCTGGTGAGCGGG 4339

mouseintron2 ----- 1903
ratintron2   CACAAAACCAGCCAGTATAACAGGGGAA-G-TGGAACAATGTCTGATTGATTACCAG 6042
sheepintron2 ----- 1546
humanintron2 CATT-GAG-AGCGTGGCCTAGAGGGCTCCGAGGTGCAGCCTGGCCAGTGTGGTCTGGAGG 13180
cowintron2   CCGA-GCG-CGCAGGGTCTGCAGGACCC---GGCGTGGCCTGGCCGGCGGGCGCGTGGCTG 5026
pigintron2   CTTG-GTG-CGCAGGGTCTGCAGGACCC---GGCGGGCCTGGCCGGGAGAGCGTGGCCG 4394

mouseintron2 ----- 1903
ratintron2   GGTTTTGGACCGGGTGCTAGGA-----ACTACTAGGCTCTTAGTGACT---G 6087
sheepintron2 ----- 1546
humanintron2 GGTCTGGCAAGCGCTATCTGGAGCACTAGAGGTGTGGCCTGTTTTCCG----- 13230
cowintron2   GGGCTGGCGGGCGGGCGAGCGCTGCCGGACGGGCGCCCTGGCGCGCAGGGTCGAGAGG 5086
pigintron2   GGTGGGGCGGGCACGGGCGAGTGGGCGG---GCGGGCCTGGCGCGCAGGGTCTGGAGG 4451

mouseintron2 ----- 1903
ratintron2   AGAATAGGAGTGTGTGATGAGAACTGGTGGGTTGTTAAAAGAGCT-GGTGTAGTATTCT 6146
sheepintron2 ----- 1546
humanintron2 -----GGTGGGTCTAGTGAGTGTAGCTTGGAGTGCTG-----GGTGGTGTGGC 13273
cowintron2   ACCCGGCGCGGCCGGGCTGCAGAGCGTGGGTCTGACGGGCTCGGGCGAGCGTGGC 5146
pigintron2   ACCCGGCGCGGCTGGACTGTGGAGCGTGGCTGGTCTGGCGGGCGGGCGAGCATGGC 4511

```

First cluster of DMS in DMR2 of *IGF2R* intron 2 that were differentially methylated within the trophectoderm (TE) of bovine embryos cultured in low physiological methionine concentration (50 v 10 µmol/L).

Start of DMR2 cluster 1 in grey. DMS cluster 1 region nucleotide sequence in red. Hypomethylated cytosine residues in bovine sequence in blue. Hypermethylated cytosine residue in bovine sequence in purple. Cytosine residues conserved between species in green. Nucleotide numbers refer to location on chromosomes.

**Multiple sequence alignment (ClustalW2 1.2.4) - DMR2 cluster 2**(ClustalW2 1.2.4, EMBL-EBI; <https://www.ebi.ac.uk/Tools/msa/clustalw2/>)

mouseintron2	-----	1903
ratintron2	CCTGCCCTTCTTTTCTGCAACGCGGCACTTTTGAGCG--CGCCTCCTCCT--GCAACGCGA	6799
sheepintron2	-----	1546
humanintron2	--GGAGCTTGGGGTCTGCAGTGTGGGAGGCCGAGGCTGGATGTTGGGGACAG-----	14003
cowintron2	--GGAGACCGTGATCTGGAGGGCCTGGAGCGCACGGTCTGGGGGGTCCGGAGGACCCGG	5882
pigintron2	--GGAGACCGTGGTCTGGAGGACCTGGCGCGTGCGGCCTGGGGGGTCCGGAGGACCCGG	5247
mouseintron2	-----	1903
ratintron2	TACTTTTGAGTGCGCCCTTCTGCAACGCGCGGTCTGATCATAGAACCCTTCGAATCCT	6859
sheepintron2	-----	1546
humanintron2	----GTCTTGGGAGCTGACTGG--GGGCTTGGCGTGGTGGCGGCAGCCCGCAGTCCCT	14055
cowintron2	CGCGATCTGGTGGGCGCGGTGAGCG--CGAGCTGGTCTGGTGGGCGCGCGCGGCCT	5941
pigintron2	CGCGATCTGGCGGGGCGCGGCGAGCG--CGGACTGGTCTGGCGGGCCAGCGAGCGCGGCCT	5306
mouseintron2	-----	1903
ratintron2	CCCTTT--GTGCAGCTTTGTACCCCTTAGGATAA---CTCGGAACCT---CT---G	6905
sheepintron2	-----	1546
humanintron2	GCCT-----GGCC-----CTTGTCTGG-----	14072
cowintron2	GGTCTGGTGGACCCGCGCTGGAGAGCGTGGTCTGGAGGACCGGCGCGCGGCTCTGGCG	6001
pigintron2	GGTCTGGCTGACCCGCGTTGGAGAGCGTGGTCTGGAGGACCTGGCGCGCGGCTCTGACG	5366
mouseintron2	-----	1903
ratintron2	AACCTTCCCTTCTCCTCCCTCCCTCCCTCCCTCCCTCCGCACTCAACACCGGAA	6965
sheepintron2	-----	1546
humanintron2	--GAGGCCGCGTTCTCTGCGGCC-----TCTCGCCGTTGCGCCCTTGGCCACTGGGG	14124
cowintron2	GGCCTGGCGCGGTCCGGTTGGC-----A--GCGCGCGGTCCGGCGGGCCAGCGCGC	6023
pigintron2	GGCCTGGCGCGGTCCGGCGGGCCC-----A--GCGCGCGGTCCGGCGGGCCAGCGCGC	5418
mouseintron2	-----	1903
ratintron2	TCACGCTAAAACTCCGAACCTCGGGCAGCGCGCATCTGGCTCGCGCAGTGCCTGCT	7025
sheepintron2	-----	1546
humanintron2	TGCGAGGAA--GCCGCGAGGAGT--GGG-----TGTGCGCCCGCCCGGCTCT	14169
cowintron2	-----CGAGCGCGCGGTCTGGAGGA	6043
pigintron2	GGTCTGGAGGACCCAGCGCGGCTCTGGCGGGC-----CCAGCGCGCGGTCTGGTGGA	5471
mouseintron2	-----	1903
ratintron2	GGAATCGCGCGCTAAAACTTCCGAACCTTGAGCAGCGCGCACCTGGCTCACAGTGC	7085
sheepintron2	-----	1546
humanintron2	ACCGGCGAGGGATGCAGTGGCCG--CCAGCGTGGCCGTGCGGC-----TG	14212
cowintron2	CCCAGCGCGGTCTGGCGGACCG--GCCTG--GAGAGCGCGGT-----CT	6084
pigintron2	CCCAGCGCGGTCTGGCGGACCG--GCCTG--GGGAGCGCGGT-----CT	5512
mouseintron2	-----	1903
ratintron2	CGCGGAACCTTCTGAACCTCCGAACCTCCCTTCTTGTAGCTTGCACCCTCAGGATAG	7145
sheepintron2	-----	1546
humanintron2	GGTCACTCCCTT-CCCGCTTCCAGGGCC-----TT-----TTTCTGCCTCCTTTT-----	14256
cowintron2	GGAGGACCCGCG--GCGGCTGGCGGGCTGGCGG-----ACGCGGCTGGTCTGGCGGG	6138
pigintron2	GGAGGACCCGCG--GCGGCTGGCGGGCTGGCGGA-----GCGCGGCTGGTCTGGCGGG	5566
mouseintron2	-----	1903
ratintron2	CTCGGAACCTCTAAACGTTCTCTCCCTCCCTCTTG-----CCACACGGCA	7194
sheepintron2	-----	1546
humanintron2	-----CAGGACGTGACCCGCACATTATGAGGGACC	14286
cowintron2	CCCTGCGCGG--AGACCGCGGTCTGGCGGGCAGCGCGCGCAGCCCGGTCTGGAGGACC	6196
pigintron2	CCCGCGCGG--AGACCGCGGTCTGGCGGGCTGGCGCGCGCAGCTGGTCTGGAGGACC	5624

Second cluster of DMS in DMR2 of *IGF2R* intron 2 that were differentially methylated within the trophectoderm (TE) of bovine embryos cultured in low physiological methionine concentration (50 v 10 µmol/L).

DMS cluster 2 region nucleotide sequence in **red**. Hypomethylated cytosine residues in bovine sequence in **blue**. Cytosine residues conserved between species in **green**. Nucleotide numbers refer to location on chromosomes.

**DMR2 cluster 2 – multiple sequence alignment continued**(ClustalW2 1.2.4, EMBL-EBI; <https://www.ebi.ac.uk/Tools/msa/clustalw2/>)

mouseintron2	-----	1903
ratintron2	CAACCAGAAATCACAGCACAAACAGGAATCACATTAAAAATCCTCCGAA-----CCTTTGGG	7249
sheepintron2	-----	1546
humanintron2	CGTAGGGGCTCTTGACACAGAGG-GGTACCCCTATGTGTGAACAGGTACGAGGTTGGGG	14345
cowintron2	<b>CGGCCTGGAGAGCGCGGCCTGGAGGACCCGGCGCGGTCTGGTCTGCTGG--GGCCCCGC</b>	6253
pigintron2	CGGCCGGGAGAGCGCGGCCTGGAGGACCCGGCGCGGTCTGGTCTGGTGG--GGCCCCGC	5681
mouseintron2	-----	1903
ratintron2	CAGCGGCACCTGGCTCGCGCAGT-----GCCGCGG-----	7280
sheepintron2	-----	1546
humanintron2	GCTTGGCTTCTGAACTTGCCAGGAAACACCGCATCCCTTTTCTGTCAGCGGCCGCC-CCC	14404
cowintron2	<b>CAGTGTGGTCTGGTCTGGCGCGCCCGCCTGGAGAGCGTGGTCTGGCGGGCCCGCGCGC</b>	6313
pigintron2	CAGTGCCTGTGGTCTGGCGGACCCGCGCTGGAGAGCGTGGTCTGGCGGGCCCGCGCGC	5741
mouseintron2	-----	1903
ratintron2	-----AATCCTCAGAAATCCCGCTTGCCCGCA-----AACACGGATTGTGCAG	7323
sheepintron2	-----	1546
humanintron2	--CATCCCCACCCGCCCATTT-----CTCTCCCCCTCCCCAATTGCAG	14445
cowintron2	<b>GGTCTGGAGGACCCGGCGCATCTGGCGGGCCCGCGAGCGCGGCCAGCCCATTTGGCG</b>	6373
pigintron2	GGTCTGGAGGACCCGGCGCGGTCTGGCGGGCCCGCGAGCGCGGCCAGCCCATTTGGCG	5801
mouseintron2	-----	1903
ratintron2	AAATCCTCCGACCCCGGT-----CCCCACAGTAGCGTGGTGCA	7364
sheepintron2	-----	1546
humanintron2	CCTTCCGCGCCTCCTTGCCCTCGAGCCTCCCTGGGTCCCTGCACCTCCCATGTCCC	14505
cowintron2	<b>CCGTCTCGGGAGCTGG-----CCGTGGGCTGGCGTGTGTC</b>	6411
pigintron2	CCGTCTCGGGAGCTGG-----CCGTGGGCTGGCGTGTGTC	5839
mouseintron2	-----	1903
ratintron2	GCCCGGAGTAGAACCCCTCCCCCTTTCGAGCGTGACACTCGTGTGGATCGCC	7424
sheepintron2	-----	1546
humanintron2	CCACGACTCCTAGGCTCTCGCGCTTCC-----CCAGGACCCCGCGCA-----TCCT----	14552
cowintron2	<b>CGCCGCCCGCAGTCTCGCCCGCCTTCGT-CCGGGGAGGACGGCCA--GGCT--</b>	6462
pigintron2	CGCCGCCCGCAGTCTCGCCCGCTCTGGT-CCGGGGAGGACGGCCA--GGCT--	5890
mouseintron2	-----	1903
ratintron2	AGTAACCTCTGGAGCCTTACCCTTGCGTATAGCAGGACGGCGCGAGGACCTCCCTC	7484
sheepintron2	-----	1546
humanintron2	---GGGCTCTTGCGCCTCCCGGTCTTCAGCGCCTCCTCGGCCGCGTGCCTCCCGCA	14609
cowintron2	<b>---GGCCGGGGTGCC--GCGGGAGTCCGCGCGGGGGCGCTGCCGCGGTGCACCGGGCC</b>	6517
pigintron2	---GGCCGGTTGCCG--CGGTT--GTCTGCGCGGTTCACTGCCGCGGTGCATGCGGCC	5943
mouseintron2	-----	1903
ratintron2	CCTTCTCCTCTTGCTGACGCGCA-----TGGCGGTGCGCGGCTCTTGACGGCCCTCG	7539
sheepintron2	-----	1546
humanintron2	CCTTTT---GCGCCTCATGGGGCTCCCGGTGCCTTCTGCCCGCCGCTCGCGCGCCCC-	14665
cowintron2	<b>TCTTGGCGAGTGCCGGGTGGGCAATCGGTCTGGCCAGTAGGCGGAGGAGGGGTGC-</b>	6576
pigintron2	TGTCCCGAGTGCCGAGTCCGCGAGCGCGGTCCCGCCGCCAGGTGAGCGGGCAG-AGG-	6001
mouseintron2	-----	1903
ratintron2	TGTAGTTTGGAACCTCGTGAGCTGCGGGGGAACCGAGTGCTGAGTCTCATGCAGCTCG	7599
sheepintron2	-----	1546
humanintron2	-----TCGCCT-CCTCATGCCCCCTCGCGGCC-----CATACCTCCCCAACC-----T	14708
cowintron2	<b>-----AGGCAGGCTGGACGGCGAGCGGGCGCGGTGCCGATGGGGCTGACGCTAGGG</b>	6630
pigintron2	-----AAGAAGCAAGATGGACAGGAGGCGGATGCCGATGGGGCTGACGCTAGGG	6055
mouseintron2	-----	1903
ratintron2	GAAACCTTCACCC-----TGCGCTGAACCTCAAGCGGGGAGCCTTTG-----C	7644
sheepintron2	-----	1546
humanintron2	GTGCCTCTCTGCCTATCCCTGTACACCCGGCATCCTCCGTGCCCCATGCG-----C	14761
cowintron2	<b>ACGCCGCTGTCCCGAGCGCGCGCCCGGAGCTCG-GCCGGTCCGTCTCGGCTCAAGGC</b>	6689
pigintron2	ATGCCGCGGCCCGCTCCGCGCGG--CAGAGGTGGCCGATCCCTCTCGGCCCTGGC	6113

Second cluster of DMS in DMR2 of *IGF2R* intron 2 that were differentially methylated within the trophectoderm (TE) of bovine embryos cultured in low physiological methionine concentration (50 v 10 µmol/L).

End of DMR2 cluster 2 in grey. DMS cluster 2 region nucleotide sequence in red. Hypomethylated cytosine residues in bovine sequence in blue. Cytosine residues conserved between species in green. Nucleotide numbers refer to location on chromosomes.

## Appendix Chapter 5

### Appendix 5.1 Working solutions and methodology for RRBS

#### Msp1 digest:

##### Msp1 digest working solution

Msp1 digest component	Volume (1 reaction, $\mu$ L)
Msp1 (NEB R0106T)	4
Smart cut buffer	4
Unmethylated $\lambda$ -DNA (37.5 $\mu$ g)	1
	(14.7x diluted DNA)
Nuclease-free PCR water	12
DNA sample (5 $\mu$ g)	20

Msp1 digest mix 2	Volume (1 reaction, $\mu$ L)
Msp1 (NEB R0106T)	1
Smart cut buffer	1
DNA sample (5 $\mu$ g)	8

The digestion mixture was incubated at 37°C for 2 h before the addition of 10  $\mu$ L Msp1 enzyme digest mix 2. The contents were vortexed and centrifuged briefly before the addition of 10  $\mu$ L Msp1 enzyme and incubation at 37°C for 14 h. After the addition of 10  $\mu$ L Msp1 enzyme digest mix 2 the contents were vortexed, centrifuged and incubated at 37°C again for 4 h (total 20 h). Samples were incubated at 80°C for 20 min to inactivate Msp1 before another brief centrifugation and storage on ice. The digestion product was purified using Quiaquick PCR kit (Qiagen 28104).

#### End-repair:

##### End-repair master mix (working solution)

End-repair mix component	Volume (1 reaction, $\mu$ L)
Large Klenow fragment	1
T4 ligase buffer + ATP	10
End-repair dNTP mix (10 mM each)	4
T4 DNA Polymerase	5
T4 PNK	5
Purified Msp1 cut DNA	28
Nuclease-free PCR water	47

End-repair reaction mix was incubated at 20°C for 30 min. The product was purified using Qiaquick PCR kit. The sample was eluted in 37  $\mu$ L EB buffer.

**dA-tailing:**dA-tailing master mix (working solution)

<b>dA-tailing mix component</b>	<b>Volume (1 reaction, <math>\mu</math>L)</b>
DNA sample	32
NEB2 buffer	5
dATP (1 mM)	10
Klenow fragment exo-	3

dA-tailing reaction mix was incubated at 37°C for 30 min followed by a hold at 4°C. The product was purified using Qiagen MinElute PCR kit and the sample was eluted in 12  $\mu$ L EB buffer.

**Adaptor ligation:**Ligation mix working solution

<b>Ligation mix component</b>	<b>Volume (1 reaction, <math>\mu</math>L)</b>
DNA sample	10
Methylated adapter (NEB, 15 $\mu$ M)	2.5
Blunt/TA ligase master mix (2X, NEB)	12.5

Methylated adaptor ligation mix was incubated at 20°C for 20 min and 3  $\mu$ L USER™ (Uracil-Specific Excision Reagent enzyme) was added before incubation at 37°C for 15 min. The product was purified using Qiagen MinElute PCR kit and the sample was eluted in 12  $\mu$ L EB buffer.

Methylated adaptor ligation product purification

Next, 3  $\mu$ L loading dye (6X, promega cat no. G1881) was added to 10  $\mu$ L the purified methylated adaptor ligated product and concentrated using a SpeedVac Vacuum Concentrator at the low heat setting for 10 min to remove residual ethanol. Four microliters of water were added to concentrated samples and they were run on 2% agarose gel containing GelGreen Nucleic acid gel stain (10,000X). Product bands of 200-400 bp in length were excised from the gel to isolate adaptor ligated DNA (this fragment length equates to 80-280 bp plus 124 bp methylated adaptor). The DNA was extracted using Qiagen MinElute gel extraction kit and the sample was eluted in 14  $\mu$ L EB buffer.

**Bisulphite conversion:**

Bisulphite conversion of DNA was achieved using the EZ DNA methylation Kit (Zymo) according to the manufacturer's protocol. The sample was incubated with M-dilution buffer mix at 37°C for 15 min. Then, 100 µL CT Conversion Reagent was added.

M-dilution buffer mix working solution

<b>M-dilution buffer mix component</b>	<b>Volume (1 reaction, µL)</b>
DNA sample	4
M-dilution buffer	5
Nuclease-free PCR water	41

The DNA sample contents were mixed and centrifuged prior to bisulphite conversion. The bisulphite conversion protocol took approximately 20 h and the conditions were as follows: 95°C for 30 s, followed by 19 cycles of 60 min at 50°C and a final hold at 4°C. All steps were performed in a PCR thermocycler. Bisulphite converted DNA was purified according to the manufacturer's protocol and samples were eluted in a final volume of 20 µL.

**RRBS Library Preparation:**Library preparation mix working solution

<b>Library preparation mix component</b>	<b>Volume (1 reaction, µL)</b>
Pfu Turbo Buffer	2.5
dNTP (Turbo)	0.6
Universal primer stock (NEB)	0.75
Pfu Turbo enzyme	0.5
Bisulphite converted DNA sample	1
Nuclease-free PCR water	18.9

The purified DNA was subjected to amplification by PCR using the RRBS Library Preparation master mix. The amplification conditions were as follows: 95°C for 5 min, followed by 12 cycles of 95°C for 15 s, 61°C for 30 s, and 72°C for 7 min with a final hold at 4°C. PCR products were purified using the MiniElute PCR kit (Qiagen) and DNA was eluted in 12 µL nuclease-free PCR water. The speed-vac was used for 5 min (low heat) to remove residual ethanol. Water was added to each sample to make the final volume to 10 µL. DNA samples were transferred to Deep Seq (The University of Nottingham) for bisulphite sequencing analysis.

## Appendix 5.2 GO terms enriched in DvOP5 and LvLFF4

### Biological Process GO terms enriched in DvOP5

Biological Process GO (DvOP5, n=186)		FDR (q-value)
GO:0010544	Negative Regulation Of Platelet Activation	0.00000
GO:0045199	Maintenance Of Epithelial Cell Apical/Basal Polarity	0.00000
GO:0046533	Negative Regulation Of Photoreceptor Cell Differentiation	0.00000
GO:0010172	Embryonic Body Morphogenesis	0.00000
GO:0021544	Subpallium Development	0.00000
GO:0034653	Retinoic Acid Catabolic Process	0.00000
GO:0071376	Cellular Response To Corticotropin-Releasing Hormone Stimulus	0.00000
GO:0007442	Hindgut Morphogenesis	0.00000
GO:0021543	Pallium Development	0.00000
GO:0021914	Regulation Of Smoothened Signaling Pathway In Ventral Spinal Cord Patterning	0.00000
GO:0034334	Adherens Junction Maintenance	0.00000
GO:0060708	Spongiotrophoblast Differentiation	0.00000
GO:0061314	Notch Signaling Involved In Heart Development	0.00000
GO:0072034	Renal Vesicle Induction	0.00000
GO:0072049	Comma-Shaped Body Morphogenesis	0.00000
GO:0072050	S-Shaped Body Morphogenesis	0.00000
GO:0072162	Metanephric Mesenchymal Cell Differentiation	0.00000
GO:1903936	Cellular Response To Sodium Arsenite	0.00000
GO:0002790	Peptide Secretion	0.00000
GO:0003357	Noradrenergic Neuron Differentiation	0.00000
GO:0003401	Axis Elongation	0.00000
GO:0006222	Ump Biosynthetic Process	0.00000
GO:0006572	Tyrosine Catabolic Process	0.00000
GO:0006657	Cdp-Choline Pathway	0.00000
GO:0007501	Mesodermal Cell Fate Specification	0.00000
GO:0010512	Negative Regulation Of Phosphatidylinositol Biosynthetic Process	0.00000
GO:0010957	Negative Regulation Of Vitamin D Biosynthetic Process	0.00000
GO:0014015	Positive Regulation Of Gliogenesis	0.00000
GO:0015697	Quaternary Ammonium Group Transport	0.00000
GO:0015746	Citrate Transport	0.00000
GO:0016577	Histone Demethylation	0.00000
GO:0021526	Medial Motor Column Neuron Differentiation	0.00000
GO:0021559	Trigeminal Nerve Development	0.00000
GO:0021568	Rhombomere 2 Development	0.00000
GO:0021681	Cerebellar Granular Layer Development	0.00000
GO:0021782	Glial Cell Development	0.00000
GO:0021891	Olfactory Bulb Interneuron Development	0.00000
GO:0021893	Cerebral Cortex Gabaergic Interneuron Fate Commitment	0.00000
GO:0021913	Transcription From RNAPII Promoter In Spinal Cord Interneuron Specification	0.00000
GO:0021937	Cerebellar Purkinje Cell In Regulation Of Granule Cell Precursor Cell Proliferation	0.00000
GO:0021986	Habenula Development	0.00000
GO:0030431	Sleep	0.00000
GO:0030852	Regulation Of Granulocyte Differentiation	0.00000
GO:0031103	Axon Regeneration	0.00000
GO:0032286	Central Nervous System Myelin Maintenance	0.00000
GO:0032401	Establishment Of Melanosome Localization	0.00000
GO:0032770	Positive Regulation Of Monooxygenase Activity	0.00000
GO:0032823	Regulation Of Natural Killer Cell Differentiation	0.00000
GO:0032912	Negative Regulation Of Transforming Growth Factor Beta2 Production	0.00000
GO:0033058	Directional Locomotion	0.00000
GO:0033082	Regulation Of Extrathymic T Cell Differentiation	0.00000
GO:0034124	Regulation Of Myd88-Dependent Toll-Like Receptor Signaling Pathway	0.00000
GO:0035295	Tube Development	0.00000
GO:0042136	Neurotransmitter Biosynthetic Process	0.00000
GO:0042942	D-Serine Transport	0.00000
GO:0043370	Regulation Of Cd4-Positive, Alpha-Beta T Cell Differentiation	0.00000
GO:0045586	Regulation Of Gamma-Delta T Cell Differentiation	0.00000
GO:0045608	Negative Regulation Of Inner Ear Auditory Receptor Cell Differentiation	0.00000
GO:0045659	Negative Regulation Of Neutrophil Differentiation	0.00000
GO:0046885	Regulation Of Hormone Biosynthetic Process	0.00000
GO:0048385	Regulation Of Retinoic Acid Receptor Signaling Pathway	0.00000
GO:0048563	Post-Embryonic Animal Organ Morphogenesis	0.00000
GO:0048871	Multicellular Organismal Homeostasis	0.00000
GO:0050954	Sensory Perception Of Mechanical Stimulus	0.00000
GO:0051136	Regulation Of Nk T Cell Differentiation	0.00000
GO:0060026	Convergent Extension	0.00000
GO:0060067	Cervix Development	0.00000
GO:0060083	Smooth Muscle Contraction Involved In Micturition	0.00000
GO:0060221	Retinal Rod Cell Differentiation	0.00000
GO:0060302	Negative Regulation Of Cytokine Activity	0.00000
GO:0060434	Bronchus Morphogenesis	0.00000
GO:0060675	Ureteric Bud Morphogenesis	0.00000
GO:0060775	Planar Cell Polarity Pathway Involved In Gastrula Mediolateral Intercalation	0.00000
GO:0061771	Response To Caloric Restriction	0.00000
GO:0071657	Positive Regulation Of Granulocyte Colony-Stimulating Factor Production	0.00000
GO:0072011	Glomerular Endothelium Development	0.00000
GO:0072086	Specification Of Loop Of Henle Identity	0.00000
GO:0072108	Mesenchymal To Epithelial Transition In Metanephros Morphogenesis	0.00000
GO:0072190	Ureter Urothelium Development	0.00000
GO:0072289	Metanephric Nephron Tubule Formation	0.00000
GO:0072674	Multinuclear Osteoclast Differentiation	0.00000
GO:0090076	Relaxation Of Skeletal Muscle	0.00000
GO:0090218	Positive Regulation Of Lipid Kinase Activity	0.00000



Biological Process GO continued (DvOP5, n=186)		FDR (q-value)
GO:0097340	Inhibition Of Cysteine-Type Endopeptidase Activity	0.00000
GO:0097535	Lymphoid Lineage Cell Migration Into Thymus	0.00000
GO:0099039	Sphingolipid Translocation	0.00000
GO:1900625	Positive Regulation Of Monocyte Aggregation	0.00000
GO:1901382	Regulation Of Chorionic Trophoblast Cell Proliferation	0.00000
GO:1901991	Negative Regulation Of Mitotic Cell Cycle Phase Transition	0.00000
GO:1902871	Positive Regulation Of Amacrine Cell Differentiation	0.00000
GO:1902963	Metalloendopeptidase Activity In Amyloid Precursor Protein Catabolic Process	0.00000
GO:1903539	Protein Localization To Postsynaptic Membrane	0.00000
GO:1904956	Regulation Of Midbrain Dopaminergic Neuron Differentiation	0.00000
GO:1905167	Positive Regulation Of Lysosomal Protein Catabolic Process	0.00000
GO:1905521	Regulation Of Macrophage Migration	0.00000
GO:1990927	Calcium Ion Regulated Lysosome Exocytosis	0.00000
GO:2000041	Negative Regulation Of Planar Cell Polarity Pathway Involved In Axis Elongation	0.00000
GO:2000392	Regulation Of Lamellipodium Morphogenesis	0.00000
GO:2000563	Positive Regulation Of Cd4-Positive, Alpha-Beta T Cell Proliferation	0.00000
GO:2000675	Negative Regulation Of Type B Pancreatic Cell Apoptotic Process	0.00000
GO:2000981	Negative Regulation Of Inner Ear Receptor Cell Differentiation	0.00000
GO:001656	Metanephros Development	0.00012
GO:0021796	Cerebral Cortex Regionalization	0.00139
GO:0051246	Regulation Of Protein Metabolic Process	0.00139
GO:0072197	Ureter Morphogenesis	0.00139
GO:0009952	Anterior/Posterior Pattern Specification	0.00191
GO:0042474	Middle Ear Morphogenesis	0.00426
GO:0035019	Somatic Stem Cell Population Maintenance	0.00561
GO:0018101	Protein Citrullination	0.00561
GO:0032808	Lacrimal Gland Development	0.00561
GO:0070848	Response To Growth Factor	0.00561
GO:0090084	Negative Regulation Of Inclusion Body Assembly	0.00561
GO:1900748	Positive Regulation Of Vascular Endothelial Growth Factor Signaling Pathway	0.00561
GO:2001046	Positive Regulation Of Integrin-Mediated Signaling Pathway	0.00561
GO:0042472	Inner Ear Morphogenesis	0.00595
GO:0048546	Digestive Tract Morphogenesis	0.00647
GO:0048557	Embryonic Digestive Tract Morphogenesis	0.00647
GO:0048665	Neuron Fate Specification	0.00647
GO:0048856	Anatomical Structure Development	0.00647
GO:0006536	Glutamate Metabolic Process	0.00751
GO:0021520	Spinal Cord Motor Neuron Cell Fate Specification	0.00751
GO:0032330	Regulation Of Chondrocyte Differentiation	0.00751
GO:0060707	Trophoblast Giant Cell Differentiation	0.01514
GO:0090190	Positive Regulation Of Branching Involved In Ureteric Bud Morphogenesis	0.01514
GO:0048646	Anatomical Structure Formation Involved In Morphogenesis	0.01644
GO:0035987	Endodermal Cell Differentiation	0.01726
GO:0001709	Cell Fate Determination	0.01925
GO:0090179	Planar Cell Polarity Pathway Involved In Neural Tube Closure	0.01925
GO:0097320	Plasma Membrane Tubulation	0.01925
GO:0021983	Pituitary Gland Development	0.02056
GO:0030879	Mammary Gland Development	0.02056
GO:0060037	Pharyngeal System Development	0.02160
GO:0001839	Neural Plate Morphogenesis	0.02160
GO:0003170	Heart Valve Development	0.02160
GO:0008595	Anterior/Posterior Axis Specification, Embryo	0.02160
GO:0010518	Positive Regulation Of Phospholipase Activity	0.02160
GO:0014905	Myoblast Fusion Involved In Skeletal Muscle Regeneration	0.02160
GO:0014910	Regulation Of Smooth Muscle Cell Migration	0.02160
GO:0021555	Midbrain-Hindbrain Boundary Morphogenesis	0.02160
GO:0021615	Glossopharyngeal Nerve Morphogenesis	0.02160
GO:0030050	Vesicle Transport Along Actin Filament	0.02160
GO:0030323	Respiratory Tube Development	0.02160
GO:0030858	Positive Regulation Of Epithelial Cell Differentiation	0.02160
GO:0038170	Somatostatin Signaling Pathway	0.02160
GO:0043374	Cd8-Positive, Alpha-Beta T Cell Differentiation	0.02160
GO:0045061	Thymic T Cell Selection	0.02160
GO:0046546	Development Of Primary Male Sexual Characteristics	0.02160
GO:0048341	Paraxial Mesoderm Formation	0.02160
GO:0048570	Notochord Morphogenesis	0.02160
GO:0060033	Anatomical Structure Regression	0.02160
GO:0060363	Cranial Suture Morphogenesis	0.02160
GO:0060676	Ureteric Bud Formation	0.02160
GO:0061138	Morphogenesis Of A Branching Epithelium	0.02160
GO:0061309	Cardiac Neural Crest Cell Development Involved In Outflow Tract Morphogenesis	0.02160
GO:0061312	Bmp Signaling Pathway Involved In Heart Development	0.02160
GO:0071709	Membrane Assembly	0.02160
GO:0072107	Positive Regulation Of Ureteric Bud Formation	0.02160
GO:0072201	Negative Regulation Of Mesenchymal Cell Proliferation	0.02160
GO:0086015	Sa Node Cell Action Potential	0.02160
GO:1900020	Positive Regulation Of Protein Kinase C Activity	0.02160
GO:1903979	Negative Regulation Of Microglial Cell Activation	0.02160
GO:2001137	Positive Regulation Of Endocytic Recycling	0.02160
GO:0042795	Snrna Transcription By Rna Polymerase Ii	0.02262
GO:0001893	Maternal Placenta Development	0.02486
GO:0006646	Phosphatidylethanolamine Biosynthetic Process	0.02486
GO:0016188	Synaptic Vesicle Maturation	0.02486
GO:0021953	Central Nervous System Neuron Differentiation	0.02486
GO:0035239	Tube Morphogenesis	0.02486
GO:0038066	P38Mapk Cascade	0.02486
GO:0048702	Embryonic Neurocranium Morphogenesis	0.02486
GO:0060426	Lung Vasculature Development	0.02486
GO:0060430	Lung Sacculi Development	0.02486
GO:1902732	Positive Regulation Of Chondrocyte Proliferation	0.02486
GO:2000394	Positive Regulation Of Lamellipodium Morphogenesis	0.02486
GO:2000810	Regulation Of Bicellular Tight Junction Assembly	0.02486

Biological Process GO continued (DvOP5, n=186)		FDR (q-value)
GO:0010719	Negative Regulation Of Epithelial To Mesenchymal Transition	0.02715
GO:0043542	Endothelial Cell Migration	0.02715
GO:0060021	Roof Of Mouth Development	0.02750
GO:0071542	Dopaminergic Neuron Differentiation	0.02893
GO:0042476	Odontogenesis	0.03172
GO:0060349	Bone Morphogenesis	0.03172
GO:0023019	Signal Transduction Involved In Regulation Of Gene Expression	0.03909
GO:0035050	Embryonic Heart Tube Development	0.03909
GO:0035909	Aorta Morphogenesis	0.03909
GO:0045668	Negative Regulation Of Osteoblast Differentiation	0.04003
GO:0006909	Phagocytosis	0.04030

### Cellular Component GO terms enriched in DvOP5

Cellular Component GO (DvOP5, n=7)		FDR (q-value)
GO:0005610	Laminin-5 Complex	0.00000
GO:0005899	Insulin Receptor Complex	0.00000
GO:0031095	Platelet Dense Tubular Network Membrane	0.00000
GO:0048787	Presynaptic Active Zone Membrane	0.00000
GO:0065010	Extracellular Membrane-Bounded Organelle	0.00000
GO:0044309	Neuron Spine	0.04782
GO:0098839	Postsynaptic Density Membrane	0.04782

### Molecular Function GO terms enriched in DvOP5

Molecular Function GO (DvOP5, n=30)		FDR (q-value)
GO:0008401	Retinoic Acid 4-Hydroxylase Activity	0.00000
GO:0044323	Retinoic Acid-Responsive Element Binding	0.00000
GO:0001515	Opioid Peptide Activity	0.00000
GO:0002153	Steroid Receptor Rna Activator Rna Binding	0.00000
GO:0003958	Nadph-Hemoprotein Reductase Activity	0.00000
GO:0004067	Asparaginase Activity	0.00000
GO:0004144	Diacylglycerol O-Acyltransferase Activity	0.00000
GO:0004305	Ethanolamine Kinase Activity	0.00000
GO:0005250	A-Type (Transient Outward) Potassium Channel Activity	0.00000
GO:0008481	Sphinganine Kinase Activity	0.00000
GO:0008934	Inositol Monophosphate 1-Phosphatase Activity	0.00000
GO:0009374	Biotin Binding	0.00000
GO:0015651	Quaternary Ammonium Group Transmembrane Transporter Activity	0.00000
GO:0016520	Growth Hormone-Releasing Hormone Receptor Activity	0.00000
GO:0017050	D-Erythro-Sphingosine Kinase Activity	0.00000
GO:0034988	Fc-Gamma Receptor I Complex Binding	0.00000
GO:0050436	Microfibril Binding	0.00000
GO:0052832	Inositol Monophosphate 3-Phosphatase Activity	0.00000
GO:0052834	Inositol Monophosphate Phosphatase Activity	0.00000
GO:0001972	Retinoic Acid Binding	0.00010
GO:0043565	Sequence-Specific Dna Binding	0.00042
GO:0005089	Rho Guanyl-Nucleotide Exchange Factor Activity	0.00082
GO:0004668	Protein-Arginine Deiminase Activity	0.00404
GO:0032050	Clathrin Heavy Chain Binding	0.00404
GO:0000981	Dna-Binding Transcription Factor Activity, Rna Polymerase Ii-Specific	0.01688
GO:0004994	Somatostatin Receptor Activity	0.01688
GO:0016208	Amp Binding	0.01688
GO:0038036	Sphingosine-1-Phosphate Receptor Activity	0.01908
GO:0048185	Activin Binding	0.01908
GO:0003700	Dna-Binding Transcription Factor Activity	0.02271

**Biological Process GO terms enriched in LvLFF4**

Biological Process GO (LvLFF4, n=193)		FDR (q-value)
GO:0018101	Protein Citrullination	0.00000
GO:0045199	Maintenance Of Epithelial Cell Apical/Basal Polarity	0.00000
GO:0051918	Negative Regulation Of Fibrinolysis	0.00000
GO:0003170	Heart Valve Development	0.00000
GO:0045061	Thymic T Cell Selection	0.00000
GO:0006021	Inositol Biosynthetic Process	0.00000
GO:0021914	Regulation Of Smoothed Signaling Pathway In Ventral Spinal Cord Patterning	0.00000
GO:0031077	Post-Embryonic Camera-Type Eye Development	0.00000
GO:0034334	Adherens Junction Maintenance	0.00000
GO:0045064	T-Helper 2 Cell Differentiation	0.00000
GO:0045446	Endothelial Cell Differentiation	0.00000
GO:0048793	Pronephros Development	0.00000
GO:0060414	Aorta Smooth Muscle Tissue Morphogenesis	0.00000
GO:0060743	Epithelial Cell Maturation Involved In Prostate Gland Development	0.00000
GO:0061314	Notch Signaling Involved In Heart Development	0.00000
GO:0072034	Renal Vesicle Induction	0.00000
GO:0072676	Lymphocyte Migration	0.00000
GO:0097553	Calcium Ion Transmembrane Import Into Cytosol	0.00000
GO:1902255	Positive Regulation Of Intrinsic Apoptotic Signaling Pathway By P53 Class Mediator	0.00000
GO:1902474	Positive Regulation Of Protein Localization To Synapse	0.00000
GO:1903936	Cellular Response To Sodium Arsenite	0.00000
GO:0000294	Nuclear-Transcribed Mrna Catabolic Process, Endonucleolytic Cleavage-Dependent Decay	0.00000
GO:0001838	Embryonic Epithelial Tube Formation	0.00000
GO:0002415	Immunoglobulin Transcytosis In Epithelial Cells Mediated	0.00000
GO:0002418	Immune Response To Tumor Cell	0.00000
GO:0003253	Cardiac Neural Crest Cell Migration Involved In Outflow Tract Morphogenesis	0.00000
GO:0003335	Corneocyte Development	0.00000
GO:0003401	Axis Elongation	0.00000
GO:0003415	Chondrocyte Hypertrophy	0.00000
GO:0006222	Ump Biosynthetic Process	0.00000
GO:0006534	Cysteine Metabolic Process	0.00000
GO:0006572	Tyrosine Catabolic Process	0.00000
GO:0006972	Hyperosmotic Response	0.00000
GO:0008050	Female Courtship Behavior	0.00000
GO:0010734	Negative Regulation Of Protein Glutathionylation	0.00000
GO:0010899	Regulation Of Phosphatidylcholine Catabolic Process	0.00000
GO:0010957	Negative Regulation Of Vitamin D Biosynthetic Process	0.00000
GO:0015705	Iodide Transport	0.00000
GO:0015746	Citrate Transport	0.00000
GO:0016577	Histone Demethylation	0.00000
GO:0017038	Protein Import	0.00000
GO:0019100	Male Germ-Line Sex Determination	0.00000
GO:0021546	Rhombomere Development	0.00000
GO:0021681	Cerebellar Granular Layer Development	0.00000
GO:0021740	Principal Sensory Nucleus Of Trigeminal Nerve Development	0.00000
GO:0021782	Glial Cell Development	0.00000
GO:0021891	Olfactory Bulb Interneuron Development	0.00000
GO:0021913	Transcription From RNAP II Promoter In Ventral Spinal Cord Interneuron Specification	0.00000
GO:0021937	Cerebellar Purkinje Regulation Of Granule Cell Precursor Cell Proliferation	0.00000
GO:0021986	Habenula Development	0.00000
GO:0030431	Sleep	0.00000
GO:0030852	Regulation Of Granulocyte Differentiation	0.00000
GO:0032232	Negative Regulation Of Actin Filament Bundle Assembly	0.00000
GO:0032286	Central Nervous System Myelin Maintenance	0.00000
GO:0032401	Establishment Of Melanosome Localization	0.00000
GO:0032770	Positive Regulation Of Monooxygenase Activity	0.00000
GO:0032902	Nerve Growth Factor Production	0.00000
GO:0032912	Negative Regulation Of Transforming Growth Factor Beta2 Production	0.00000
GO:0032959	Inositol Trisphosphate Biosynthetic Process	0.00000
GO:0033058	Directional Locomotion	0.00000
GO:0034616	Response To Laminar Fluid Shear Stress	0.00000
GO:0035459	Vesicle Cargo Loading	0.00000
GO:0035926	Chemokine (C-C Motif) Ligand 2 Secretion	0.00000
GO:0035989	Tendon Development	0.00000
GO:0036343	Psychomotor Behavior	0.00000
GO:0036413	Histone H3-R26 Citrullination	0.00000
GO:0042420	Dopamine Catabolic Process	0.00000
GO:0043370	Regulation Of Cd4-Positive, Alpha-Beta T Cell Differentiation	0.00000
GO:0048170	Positive Regulation Of Long-Term Neuronal Synaptic Plasticity	0.00000
GO:0048194	Golgi Vesicle Budding	0.00000
GO:0048385	Regulation Of Retinoic Acid Receptor Signaling Pathway	0.00000
GO:0048562	Embryonic Organ Morphogenesis	0.00000
GO:0048563	Post-Embryonic Animal Organ Morphogenesis	0.00000
GO:0048871	Multicellular Organismal Homeostasis	0.00000
GO:0050779	Rna Destabilization	0.00000
GO:0051046	Regulation Of Secretion	0.00000
GO:0051389	Inactivation Of Mapk Activity	0.00000
GO:0051656	Establishment Of Organelle Localization	0.00000
GO:0055005	Ventricular Cardiac Myofibril Assembly	0.00000
GO:0060023	Soft Palate Development	0.00000
GO:0060026	Convergent Extension	0.00000
GO:0060067	Cervix Development	0.00000
GO:0060073	Micturition	0.00000
GO:0060157	Urinary Bladder Development	0.00000
GO:0060214	Endocardium Formation	0.00000

Biological Process GO continued (LvLFF4, n=193)		FDR (q-value)
GO:0060221	Retinal Rod Cell Differentiation	0.00000
GO:0060421	Positive Regulation Of Heart Growth	0.00000
GO:0060434	Bronchus Morphogenesis	0.00000
GO:0060545	Positive Regulation Of Necroptotic Process	0.00000
GO:0060775	Planar Cell Polarity Pathway Involved In Gastrula Mediolateral Intercalation	0.00000
GO:0061032	Visceral Serous Pericardium Development	0.00000
GO:0061146	Peyer'S Patch Morphogenesis	0.00000
GO:0061771	Response To Caloric Restriction	0.00000
GO:0070141	Response To Uv-A	0.00000
GO:0070563	Negative Regulation Of Vitamin D Receptor Signaling Pathway	0.00000
GO:0071305	Cellular Response To Vitamin D	0.00000
GO:0071477	Cellular Hypotonic Salinity Response	0.00000
GO:0071642	Positive Regulation Of Macrophage Inflammatory Protein 1 Alpha Production	0.00000
GO:0071896	Protein Localization To Adherens Junction	0.00000
GO:0072086	Specification Of Loop Of Henle Identity	0.00000
GO:0072179	Nephric Duct Formation	0.00000
GO:0072190	Ureter Urothelium Development	0.00000
GO:0072289	Metanephric Nephron Tubule Formation	0.00000
GO:0072674	Multinuclear Osteoclast Differentiation	0.00000
GO:0072752	Cellular Response To Rapamycin	0.00000
GO:0090118	Receptor-Mediated Endocytosis Involved In Cholesterol Transport	0.00000
GO:0090164	Asymmetric Golgi Ribbon Formation	0.00000
GO:0097049	Motor Neuron Apoptotic Process	0.00000
GO:0097340	Inhibition Of Cysteine-Type Endopeptidase Activity	0.00000
GO:0098698	Postsynaptic Specialization Assembly	0.00000
GO:0099039	Sphingolipid Translocation	0.00000
GO:1901228	Regulation Of Transcription From Rna Polymerase Ii Promoter Involved In Heart Development	0.00000
GO:1901382	Regulation Of Chorionic Trophoblast Cell Proliferation	0.00000
GO:1901991	Negative Regulation Of Mitotic Cell Cycle Phase Transition	0.00000
GO:1902513	Regulation Of Organelle Transport Along Microtubule	0.00000
GO:1902595	Regulation Of Dna Replication Origin Binding	0.00000
GO:1902991	Regulation Of Amyloid Precursor Protein Catabolic Process	0.00000
GO:1902995	Positive Regulation Of Phospholipid Efflux	0.00000
GO:1903401	L-Lysine Transmembrane Transport	0.00000
GO:1903539	Protein Localization To Postsynaptic Membrane	0.00000
GO:1903984	Positive Regulation Of Trail-Activated Apoptotic Signaling Pathway	0.00000
GO:1905167	Positive Regulation Of Lysosomal Protein Catabolic Process	0.00000
GO:2000276	Negative Regulation Of Oxidative Phosphorylation Uncoupler Activity	0.00000
GO:2000329	Negative Regulation Of T-Helper 17 Cell Lineage Commitment	0.00000
GO:2000392	Regulation Of Lamellipodium Morphogenesis	0.00000
GO:2000563	Positive Regulation Of Cd4-Positive, Alpha-Beta T Cell Proliferation	0.00000
GO:2000675	Negative Regulation Of Type B Pancreatic Cell Apoptotic Process	0.00000
GO:2000677	Regulation Of Transcription Regulatory Region Dna Binding	0.00000
GO:2001257	Regulation Of Cation Channel Activity	0.00000
GO:0006536	Glutamate Metabolic Process	0.00153
GO:0010596	Negative Regulation Of Endothelial Cell Migration	0.00495
GO:0046902	Regulation Of Mitochondrial Membrane Permeability	0.00495
GO:0051246	Regulation Of Protein Metabolic Process	0.00495
GO:0072197	Ureter Morphogenesis	0.00495
GO:1902732	Positive Regulation Of Chondrocyte Proliferation	0.00495
GO:2000394	Positive Regulation Of Lamellipodium Morphogenesis	0.00495
GO:0001709	Cell Fate Determination	0.01114
GO:0001776	Leukocyte Homeostasis	0.01584
GO:0003337	Mesenchymal To Epithelial Transition Involved In Metanephros Morphogenesis	0.01584
GO:0009410	Response To Xenobiotic Stimulus	0.01584
GO:0010757	Negative Regulation Of Plasminogen Activation	0.01584
GO:0015812	Gamma-Aminobutyric Acid Transport	0.01584
GO:0060390	Regulation Of Smad Protein Signal Transduction	0.01584
GO:0061304	Retinal Blood Vessel Morphogenesis	0.01584
GO:0070100	Negative Regulation Of Chemokine-Mediated Signaling Pathway	0.01584
GO:0070508	Cholesterol Import	0.01584
GO:0071371	Cellular Response To Gonadotropin Stimulus	0.01584
GO:0072189	Ureter Development	0.01584
GO:0098719	Sodium Ion Import Across Plasma Membrane	0.01584
GO:2000647	Negative Regulation Of Stem Cell Proliferation	0.01584
GO:2000669	Negative Regulation Of Dendritic Cell Apoptotic Process	0.01584
GO:2001046	Positive Regulation Of Integrin-Mediated Signaling Pathway	0.01584
GO:0014067	Negative Regulation Of Phosphatidylinositol 3-Kinase Signaling	0.02493
GO:0030836	Positive Regulation Of Actin Filament Depolymerization	0.02493
GO:0032330	Regulation Of Chondrocyte Differentiation	0.02493
GO:0034115	Negative Regulation Of Heterotypic Cell-Cell Adhesion	0.02493
GO:0034383	Low-Density Lipoprotein Particle Clearance	0.02493
GO:0070166	Enamel Mineralization	0.02493
GO:2000178	Negative Regulation Of Neural Precursor Cell Proliferation	0.02493
GO:0032331	Negative Regulation Of Chondrocyte Differentiation	0.02549
GO:0042474	Middle Ear Morphogenesis	0.02549
GO:0030878	Thyroid Gland Development	0.04259
GO:0035115	Embryonic Forelimb Morphogenesis	0.04348
GO:0045599	Negative Regulation Of Fat Cell Differentiation	0.04707
GO:0001957	Intramembranous Ossification	0.04941
GO:0002819	Regulation Of Adaptive Immune Response	0.04941
GO:0008595	Anterior/Posterior Axis Specification, Embryo	0.04941
GO:0010172	Embryonic Body Morphogenesis	0.04941
GO:0010518	Positive Regulation Of Phospholipase Activity	0.04941
GO:0010907	Positive Regulation Of Glucose Metabolic Process	0.04941
GO:0021615	Glossopharyngeal Nerve Morphogenesis	0.04941
GO:0030050	Vesicle Transport Along Actin Filament	0.04941
GO:0030859	Polarized Epithelial Cell Differentiation	0.04941
GO:0034653	Retinoic Acid Catabolic Process	0.04941
GO:0035087	SiRNA Loading Onto Risc Involved In Rna Interference	0.04941
GO:0035456	Response To Interferon-Beta	0.04941
GO:0035754	B Cell Chemotaxis	0.04941

Biological Process GO continued (LvLFF4, n=193)		FDR (q-value)
GO:0043304	Regulation Of Mast Cell Degranulation	0.04941
GO:0043374	Cd8-Positive, Alpha-Beta T Cell Differentiation	0.04941
GO:0048341	Paraxial Mesoderm Formation	0.04941
GO:0055012	Ventricular Cardiac Muscle Cell Differentiation	0.04941
GO:0060033	Anatomical Structure Regression	0.04941
GO:0060040	Retinal Bipolar Neuron Differentiation	0.04941
GO:0060509	Type I Pneumocyte Differentiation	0.04941
GO:0061309	Cardiac Neural Crest Cell Development Involved In Outflow Tract Morphogenesis	0.04941
GO:0071376	Cellular Response To Corticotropin-Releasing Hormone Stimulus	0.04941
GO:0072107	Positive Regulation Of Ureteric Bud Formation	0.04941
GO:0072207	Metanephric Epithelium Development	0.04941
GO:0072284	Metanephric S-Shaped Body Morphogenesis	0.04941
GO:0072383	Plus-End-Directed Vesicle Transport Along Microtubule	0.04941
GO:0086015	Sa Node Cell Action Potential	0.04941
GO:0090129	Positive Regulation Of Synapse Maturation	0.04941
GO:2000391	Positive Regulation Of Neutrophil Extravasation	0.04941

## Cellular Component GO terms enriched in LvLFF4

Cellular Component GO (LvLFF4, n=12)		FDR (q-value)
GO:0033093	Weibel-Palade Body	0.00000
GO:0035976	Transcription Factor Ap-1 Complex	0.00000
GO:0005608	Laminin-3 Complex	0.00000
GO:0005899	Insulin Receptor Complex	0.00000
GO:0017109	Glutamate-Cysteine Ligase Complex	0.00000
GO:0031095	Platelet Dense Tubular Network Membrane	0.00000
GO:0036501	Ufd1-Npl4 Complex	0.00000
GO:0043256	Laminin Complex	0.00000
GO:0048787	Presynaptic Active Zone Membrane	0.00000
GO:0062157	Mitochondrial Atp-Gated Potassium Channel Complex	0.00000
GO:0065010	Extracellular Membrane-Bounded Organelle	0.00000
GO:0097059	Cntrf-Clc1 Complex	0.00000

## Molecular Function GO terms enriched in LvLFF4

Molecular Function GO (LvLFF4, n=43)		FDR (q-value)
GO:0004668	Protein-Arginine Deiminase Activity	0.00000
GO:0005332	Gamma-Aminobutyric Acid:Sodium Symporter Activity	0.00000
GO:0016208	Amp Binding	0.00000
GO:0004704	Nf-Kappab-Inducing Kinase Activity	0.00000
GO:0016614	Oxidoreductase Activity, Acting On Ch-Oh Group Of Donors	0.00000
GO:0022849	Glutamate-Gated Calcium Ion Channel Activity	0.00000
GO:0044323	Retinoic Acid-Responsive Element Binding	0.00000
GO:0002153	Steroid Receptor Rna Activator Rna Binding	0.00000
GO:0003958	Nadph-Hemoprotein Reductase Activity	0.00000
GO:0004067	Asparaginase Activity	0.00000
GO:0004140	Dephospho-Coa Kinase Activity	0.00000
GO:0004144	Diacylglycerol O-Acyltransferase Activity	0.00000
GO:0004305	Ethanolamine Kinase Activity	0.00000
GO:0004345	Glucose-6-Phosphate Dehydrogenase Activity	0.00000
GO:0004357	Glutamate-Cysteine Ligase Activity	0.00000
GO:0004445	Inositol-Polyphosphate 5-Phosphatase Activity	0.00000
GO:0008481	Sphinganine Kinase Activity	0.00000
GO:0008934	Inositol Monophosphate 1-Phosphatase Activity	0.00000
GO:0009374	Biotin Binding	0.00000
GO:0015111	Iodide Transmembrane Transporter Activity	0.00000
GO:0016520	Growth Hormone-Releasing Hormone Receptor Activity	0.00000
GO:0017050	D-Erythro-Sphingosine Kinase Activity	0.00000
GO:0019911	Structural Constituent Of Myelin Sheath	0.00000
GO:0030298	Receptor Signaling Protein Tyrosine Kinase Activator Activity	0.00000
GO:0034188	Apolipoprotein A-I Receptor Activity	0.00000
GO:0034988	Fc-Gamma Receptor I Complex Binding	0.00000
GO:0036313	Phosphatidylinositol 3-Kinase Catalytic Subunit Binding	0.00000
GO:0052832	Inositol Monophosphate 3-Phosphatase Activity	0.00000
GO:0052834	Inositol Monophosphate Phosphatase Activity	0.00000
GO:0072345	Naadp-Sensitive Calcium-Release Channel Activity	0.00000
GO:0090556	Phosphatidylserine Floppase Activity	0.00000
GO:0098808	Mrna Cap Binding	0.00000
GO:1905573	Ganglioside Gm1 Binding	0.00000
GO:0005089	Rho Guanyl-Nucleotide Exchange Factor Activity	0.00228
GO:0043565	Sequence-Specific Dna Binding	0.00404
GO:0001972	Retinoic Acid Binding	0.00739
GO:0005123	Death Receptor Binding	0.01149
GO:0071889	14-3-3 Protein Binding	0.03797
GO:0004966	Galanin Receptor Activity	0.03797
GO:0004972	Nmda Glutamate Receptor Activity	0.03797
GO:0005222	Intracellular Camp-Activated Cation Channel Activity	0.03797
GO:0034186	Apolipoprotein A-I Binding	0.03797
GO:0047961	Glycine N-Acyltransferase Activity	0.03797

## Appendix 5.3 Enriched 'Sequence-specific DNA binding' GO term

### Common differentially methylated genes enriched in GO:0043565

GO:0043565 Transcription factor genes in common (n=104)		
ENSOARG00000000046	LHX1	Lim Homeobox 1
ENSOARG00000000266	BCL11B	Baf Chromatin Remodeling Complex Subunit Bcl11B
ENSOARG00000000544	ELF3	E74 Like Ets Transcription Factor 3
ENSOARG00000000992	VSX2	Visual System Homeobox 2
ENSOARG00000002241	CSRNP1	Cysteine And Serine Rich Nuclear Protein 1
ENSOARG00000002366	RXRA	Retinoid X Receptor Alpha
ENSOARG00000002449	SP5	Sp5 Transcription Factor
ENSOARG00000002613	SHOX2	Short Stature Homeobox 2
ENSOARG00000002740	HSF4	Heat Shock Transcription Factor 4
ENSOARG00000002778		
ENSOARG00000003151	FOXI1	Forkhead Box I1
ENSOARG00000003363		
ENSOARG00000003437	PITX2	Paired Like Homeodomain 2
ENSOARG00000003669	ZFHX3	Zinc Finger Homeobox 3
ENSOARG00000003822	IRF4	Interferon Regulatory Factor 4
ENSOARG00000003928	HNF4A	Hepatocyte Nuclear Factor 4 Alpha
ENSOARG00000004153	NKX2-5	Nk2 Homeobox 5
ENSOARG00000004347	MSX2	Msh Homeobox 2
ENSOARG00000004745	USF2	Upstream Transcription Factor 2, C-Fos Interacting
ENSOARG00000004750	LHX3	Lim Homeobox 3
ENSOARG00000004863	TBXT	T-Box Transcription Factor T
ENSOARG00000005070	FOXA2	Forkhead Box A2
ENSOARG00000005301	HLF	Hlf Transcription Factor, Par Bzip Family Member
ENSOARG00000005572	DLX4	Distal-Less Homeobox 4
ENSOARG00000005637	ETV4	Ets Variant Transcription Factor 4
ENSOARG00000006012		
ENSOARG00000006034	SIX2	Six Homeobox 2
ENSOARG00000006249	TBX3	T-Box Transcription Factor 3
ENSOARG00000006262	BCL2	Bcl2 Apoptosis Regulator
ENSOARG00000006541	LONP1	Lon Peptidase 1, Mitochondrial
ENSOARG00000006553	SPI1	Spi-1 Proto-Oncogene
ENSOARG00000006704	ETV3	Ets Translocation Variant 3
ENSOARG00000007034	HOXB5	Homeobox B5
ENSOARG00000007078	LHX5	Lim Homeobox 5
ENSOARG00000007106	HOXB3	Homeobox B3
ENSOARG00000007140	HNF4G	Hepatocyte Nuclear Factor 4 Gamma
ENSOARG00000007388	MSX1	Msh Homeobox 1
ENSOARG00000007984	NR4A2	Nuclear Receptor Subfamily 4 Group A Member 2
ENSOARG00000008034	MAF	Maf Bzip Transcription Factor
ENSOARG00000008192	FOXA1	Forkhead Box A1
ENSOARG00000008269	GATA6	Gata Binding Protein 6
ENSOARG00000008350	ISL1	Isl Lim Homeobox 1
ENSOARG00000008922	ANHX	Anomalous Homeobox
ENSOARG00000009439	EVX1	Even-Skipped Homeobox 1
ENSOARG00000009717		
ENSOARG00000009789		
ENSOARG00000009797	HOXA3	Homeobox A3
ENSOARG00000009842	HOXA2	Homeobox A2
ENSOARG00000009878	MEF2A	Myocyte Enhancer Factor 2A
ENSOARG00000010006	POU5F1	Pou Class 5 Homeobox 1
ENSOARG00000010167		
ENSOARG00000010199	EGR3	Early Growth Response 3



GO:0043565 Transcription factor genes in common continued (n=104)		
ENSOARG00000010587	PAX7	Paired Box 7
ENSOARG00000010741	FOXO3	Forkhead Box O3
ENSOARG00000010751	SPDEF	Sam Pointed Domain Containing Ets Transcription Factor
ENSOARG00000011193	FOXE1	Forkhead Box E1
ENSOARG00000011249	VAX2	Ventral Anterior Homeobox 2
ENSOARG00000011324	LMX1A	Lim Homeobox Transcription Factor 1 Alpha
ENSOARG00000011785	PPARD	Peroxisome Proliferator Activated Receptor Delta
ENSOARG00000012314		
ENSOARG00000012459		
ENSOARG00000012571	SOX30	Sry-Box Transcription Factor 30
ENSOARG00000013030	SNAI2	Snail Family Transcriptional Repressor 2
ENSOARG00000013052	GLI2	Gli Family Zinc Finger 2
ENSOARG00000013102	ETS1	Ets Proto-Oncogene 1, Transcription Factor
ENSOARG00000013174	SNAI1	Snail Family Transcriptional Repressor 1
ENSOARG00000013206		
ENSOARG00000013245	DMRT2	Doublesex And Mab-3 Related Transcription Factor 2
ENSOARG00000013693		
ENSOARG00000013742	LHX2	Lim Homeobox 2
ENSOARG00000013779	SOX9	Sry-Box Transcription Factor 9
ENSOARG00000013941	GATA3	Gata Binding Protein 3
ENSOARG00000014119	RARA	Retinoic Acid Receptor Alpha
ENSOARG00000014239	NFATC2	Nuclear Factor Of Activated T Cells 2
ENSOARG00000014473	SOX8	Sry-Box Transcription Factor 8
ENSOARG00000014532	ETS2	Ets Proto-Oncogene 2, Transcription Factor
ENSOARG00000014667	PITX1	Paired Like Homeodomain 1
ENSOARG00000015228	GATA4	Gata Binding Protein 4
ENSOARG00000015328	MTA2	Metastasis Associated 1 Family Member 2
ENSOARG00000015356	ELF4	E74 Like Ets Transcription Factor 4
ENSOARG00000015439	LHX9	Lim Homeobox 9
ENSOARG00000015662	BARHL2	Barh Like Homeobox 2
ENSOARG00000015980	NR5A2	Nuclear Receptor Subfamily 5 Group A Member 2
ENSOARG00000016041	FOXN4	Forkhead Box N4
ENSOARG00000016067	MKX	Mohawk Homeobox
ENSOARG00000016074	ZNF281	Zinc Finger Protein 281
ENSOARG00000016191	PAX6	Paired Box 6
ENSOARG00000016331	HOXC10	Homeobox C10
ENSOARG00000017214	NR4A1	Nuclear Receptor Subfamily 4 Group A Member 1
ENSOARG00000017237	PRDM16	Pr/Set Domain 16
ENSOARG00000017472	HOXD3	Homeobox D3
ENSOARG00000017581	KDM6B	Lysine Demethylase 6B
ENSOARG00000017630	NR2F6	Nuclear Receptor Subfamily 2 Group F Member 6
ENSOARG00000017964	IRX3	Iroquois Homeobox 3
ENSOARG00000018027	IRX6	Iroquois Homeobox 6
ENSOARG00000018238	TEF	Tef Transcription Factor, Par Bzip Family Member
ENSOARG00000018550	EMX2	Empty Spiracles Homeobox 2
ENSOARG00000018722	HDAC4	Histone Deacetylase 4
ENSOARG00000018997	GSX2	Gs Homeobox 2
ENSOARG00000019395	ALX3	Alx Homeobox 3
ENSOARG00000019427	PPARA	Peroxisome Proliferator Activated Receptor Alpha
ENSOARG00000020097	OTX1	Orthodenticle Homeobox 1
ENSOARG00000021060	RORC	Rar Related Orphan Receptor C
ENSOARG00000021129	SIX1	Six Homeobox 1
ENSOARG00000000046	LHX1	Lim Homeobox 1
ENSOARG00000000266	BCL11B	Baf Chromatin Remodeling Complex Subunit Bcl11B
ENSOARG00000000544	ELF3	E74 Like Ets Transcription Factor 3
ENSOARG00000000992	VSX2	Visual System Homeobox 2
ENSOARG00000002241	CSRNP1	Cysteine And Serine Rich Nuclear Protein 1

GO:0043565 Transcription factor genes in common continued (n=104)		
ENSOARG00000002366	<i>RXRA</i>	<i>Retinoid X Receptor Alpha</i>
ENSOARG00000002449	<i>SP5</i>	<i>Sp5 Transcription Factor</i>
ENSOARG00000002613	<i>SHOX2</i>	<i>Short Stature Homeobox 2</i>
ENSOARG00000002740	<i>HSF4</i>	<i>Heat Shock Transcription Factor 4</i>
ENSOARG00000002778		
ENSOARG00000003151	<i>FOXI1</i>	<i>Forkhead Box I1</i>
ENSOARG00000003363	<i>FOXN3</i>	<i>Forkhead box N3</i>
ENSOARG00000003437	<i>PITX2</i>	<i>Paired Like Homeodomain 2</i>
ENSOARG00000003669	<i>ZFHX3</i>	<i>Zinc Finger Homeobox 3</i>
ENSOARG00000003822	<i>IRF4</i>	<i>Interferon Regulatory Factor 4</i>
ENSOARG00000003928	<i>HNF4A</i>	<i>Hepatocyte Nuclear Factor 4 Alpha</i>
ENSOARG00000004153	<i>NKX2-5</i>	<i>Nk2 Homeobox 5</i>
ENSOARG00000004347	<i>MSX2</i>	<i>Msh Homeobox 2</i>
ENSOARG00000004745	<i>USF2</i>	<i>Upstream Transcription Factor 2, C-Fos Interacting</i>
ENSOARG00000004750	<i>LHX3</i>	<i>Lim Homeobox 3</i>
ENSOARG00000004863	<i>TBXT</i>	<i>T-Box Transcription Factor T</i>
ENSOARG00000005070	<i>FOXA2</i>	<i>Forkhead Box A2</i>
ENSOARG00000005301	<i>HLF</i>	<i>Hlf Transcription Factor, Par Bzip Family Member</i>
ENSOARG00000005572	<i>DLX4</i>	<i>Distal-Less Homeobox 4</i>
ENSOARG00000005637	<i>ETV4</i>	<i>Ets Variant Transcription Factor 4</i>
ENSOARG00000006012	<i>FOXO1</i>	<i>Forkhead box O1</i>
ENSOARG00000006034	<i>SIX2</i>	<i>Six Homeobox 2</i>
ENSOARG00000006249	<i>TBX3</i>	<i>T-Box Transcription Factor 3</i>
ENSOARG00000006262	<i>BCL2</i>	<i>Bcl2 Apoptosis Regulator</i>
ENSOARG00000006541	<i>LONP1</i>	<i>Lon Peptidase 1, Mitochondrial</i>
ENSOARG00000006553	<i>SPI1</i>	<i>Spi-1 Proto-Oncogene</i>
ENSOARG00000006704	<i>ETV3</i>	<i>Ets Translocation Variant 3</i>
ENSOARG00000007034	<i>HOXB5</i>	<i>Homeobox B5</i>
ENSOARG00000007078	<i>LHX5</i>	<i>Lim Homeobox 5</i>
ENSOARG00000007106	<i>HOXB3</i>	<i>Homeobox B3</i>
ENSOARG00000007140	<i>HNF4G</i>	<i>Hepatocyte Nuclear Factor 4 Gamma</i>
ENSOARG00000007388	<i>MSX1</i>	<i>Msh Homeobox 1</i>
ENSOARG00000007984	<i>NR4A2</i>	<i>Nuclear Receptor Subfamily 4 Group A Member 2</i>
ENSOARG00000008034	<i>MAF</i>	<i>Maf Bzip Transcription Factor</i>
ENSOARG00000008192	<i>FOXA1</i>	<i>Forkhead Box A1</i>
ENSOARG00000008269	<i>GATA6</i>	<i>Gata Binding Protein 6</i>
ENSOARG00000008350	<i>ISL1</i>	<i>Isl Lim Homeobox 1</i>
ENSOARG00000008922	<i>ANHX</i>	<i>Anomalous Homeobox</i>
ENSOARG00000009439	<i>EVX1</i>	<i>Even-Skipped Homeobox 1</i>
ENSOARG00000009717	<i>HOXA5</i>	<i>Homeobox protein Hox-A5</i>
ENSOARG00000009789	<i>HOXA4</i>	<i>Homeobox A4</i>
ENSOARG00000009797	<i>HOXA3</i>	<i>Homeobox A3</i>
ENSOARG00000009842	<i>HOXA2</i>	<i>Homeobox A2</i>
ENSOARG00000009878	<i>MEF2A</i>	<i>Myocyte Enhancer Factor 2A</i>
ENSOARG00000010006	<i>POU5F1</i>	<i>Pou Class 5 Homeobox 1</i>
ENSOARG00000010167	<i>NR2F2</i>	<i>Nuclear receptor subfamily 2, group F, member 2</i>
ENSOARG00000010199	<i>EGR3</i>	<i>Early Growth Response 3</i>
ENSOARG00000010587	<i>PAX7</i>	<i>Paired Box 7</i>
ENSOARG00000010741	<i>FOXO3</i>	<i>Forkhead Box O3</i>
ENSOARG00000010751	<i>SPDEF</i>	<i>Sam Pointed Domain Containing Ets Transcription Factor</i>
ENSOARG00000011193	<i>FOXE1</i>	<i>Forkhead Box E1</i>
ENSOARG00000011249	<i>VAX2</i>	<i>Ventral Anterior Homeobox 2</i>
ENSOARG00000011324	<i>LMX1A</i>	<i>Lim Homeobox Transcription Factor 1 Alpha</i>
ENSOARG00000011785	<i>PPARD</i>	<i>Peroxisome Proliferator Activated Receptor Delta</i>
ENSOARG00000012314	<i>EN1</i>	<i>Engrailed homeobox 1</i>
ENSOARG00000012459	<i>PDX1</i>	<i>Pancreatic and duodenal homeobox 1</i>
ENSOARG00000012571	<i>SOX30</i>	<i>Sry-Box Transcription Factor 30</i>



GO:0043565 Transcription factor genes in common continued (n=104)		
ENSOARG00000013030	<i>SNAI2</i>	<i>Snail Family Transcriptional Repressor 2</i>
ENSOARG00000013052	<i>GLI2</i>	<i>Gli Family Zinc Finger 2</i>
ENSOARG00000013102	<i>ETS1</i>	<i>Ets Proto-Oncogene 1, Transcription Factor</i>
ENSOARG00000013174	<i>SNAI1</i>	<i>Snail Family Transcriptional Repressor 1</i>
ENSOARG00000013206	<i>HLX</i>	<i>H2.0-like homeobox</i>
ENSOARG00000013245	<i>DMRT2</i>	<i>Doublesex And Mab-3 Related Transcription Factor 2</i>
ENSOARG00000013693		
ENSOARG00000013742	<i>LHX2</i>	<i>Lim Homeobox 2</i>
ENSOARG00000013779	<i>SOX9</i>	<i>Sry-Box Transcription Factor 9</i>
ENSOARG00000013941	<i>GATA3</i>	<i>Gata Binding Protein 3</i>
ENSOARG00000014119	<i>RARA</i>	<i>Retinoic Acid Receptor Alpha</i>
ENSOARG00000014239	<i>NFATC2</i>	<i>Nuclear Factor Of Activated T Cells 2</i>
ENSOARG00000014473	<i>SOX8</i>	<i>Sry-Box Transcription Factor 8</i>
ENSOARG00000014532	<i>ETS2</i>	<i>Ets Proto-Oncogene 2, Transcription Factor</i>
ENSOARG00000014667	<i>PITX1</i>	<i>Paired Like Homeodomain 1</i>

## PIPS Reflective Statement

### Note to examiners:

This statement is included as an appendix to the thesis in order that the thesis accurately captures the PhD training experienced by the candidate as a BBSRC Doctoral Training Partnership student.

The Professional Internship for PhD Students is a compulsory 3-month placement which must be undertaken by DTP students. It is usually centred on a specific project and must not be related to the PhD project. This reflective statement is designed to capture the skills development which has taken place during the student's placement and the impact on their career plans it has had.

### My statement:

From June to September 2019, I undertook my professional internship at Delft University of Technology (TU Delft). My project aimed to publicise the efforts and achievements of the 'Data Champions'. The Data Champions are members of the research community at TU Delft who share a passion for knowledge exchange and a desire to build a collaborative and researcher-led community to drive the uptake of Open Science within their departments and institutes.

Currently, there are more than 50 Data Champions who volunteer their discipline-specific expertise, promote 'FAIR data' principles, advocate for good research data management (RDM) and advise academics about the proper handling of research data. In order to reward and recognise their exemplary work, I conducted one-to-one interviews with 11 Data Champions to learn about: i) their personal research; ii) how they effectively engage with researchers; iii) their motivations for joining the Data Champions programme; and, iv) their future goals and aspirations. Following each interview, I wrote, illustrated and published their personal stories as written case studies on the '[Open Working](#)' blog.

The case studies were shared on social media channels (Twitter and LinkedIn), and after receiving positive feedback from my colleagues I was asked to write a 'toolkit' to inspire and educate other institutions about how to implement a community-based model for RDM support. In collaboration with research support staff from TU Delft, the University of Cambridge (UK) and EPFL (Switzerland), the case studies and toolkit were published as an open access book titled '[The Real World of Research Data](#)'.

During my internship, I was invited to participate in a booksprint; a 3-day writing exercise alongside seven authors and editors. '[Engaging Researchers with Data Management: The Cookbook](#)' is a collection of 24 case studies drawn from institutions across the globe that demonstrate how to engage the research community with RDM. These case studies illustrate the variety of innovative strategies that institutions have developed to engage with their researchers about data management. To share our collective experience of the booksprint, I published a [blog article](#) to the Research Data Alliance (RDA) website.

Based on the success of my internship at TU Delft, I was invited to give a keynote talk about '[Community-based models to engage researchers with data management](#)' at the University of Vienna (Austria) in September 2019. In addition, I received an early career researcher grant to present my work at the 'RDA 14<sup>th</sup> Plenary' held in Helsinki (Finland) the following month (<https://rd-alliance.org/>). After writing about my internship in a Springer Nature article, '[Open Science Opens Doors: How #SciData18 helped me unlock career](#)

[opportunities](#)', I was invited to the 'Better Science through Better Data' #SciData19 Conference' held in London in November to give a [lightning talk](#).

I developed many personal and professional skills during my internship. Whilst both exhilarating and daunting, the opportunity to travel and work in the Netherlands for three months enabled me to leave my comfort zone and experience a new culture (although cycling and learning the Dutch language weren't my forte!)

I enjoyed the social aspect of my role in science communication and took great satisfaction in helping academic researchers share their personal stories with a wider audience. I developed my verbal and written skills whilst interviewing researchers, and was able to gather and assimilate relevant information to write articles to meet strict deadlines. I also found my creative confidence to produce illustrations to accompany my written articles.

I realised the importance of building collaborative networks and cooperating as part of a multidisciplinary team. Scientific research can often be lonely and isolating, with many academics working in silos. By working with the grass roots community of Data Champions, I learned ways to lure researchers from their disciplinary comfort zones and encourage them to work together, and to share knowledge and resources in order to achieve the common goal of 'Better Science'.

From October 2020, I look forward to starting my new position as [4TU.ResearchData](#) Community Manager at TU Delft. The primary focus of my role will be to promote the use of the 4TU.ResearchData repository nationally and internationally, and to stimulate the creation and reuse of research data in specific subject areas.

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