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# Smart Science for Better Livestock: Nanotechnology in Breeding and Reproduction

**Sreeranjani R[1]*, Jayachandran S[2], Kalaiselvi G[3], Ramesh K[3], Reethika A S[4], Shalini R[4], Tauhida Tabassum[4]**

Ph.D., scholar[1], Professor and Head[2], Assistant Professor[3] and PG scholars[4], Department of Veterinary Physiology, Veterinary College and Research Institute, Namakkal -637002, Tamil Nadu.
*Corresponding author: *sreeranjanivpy@gmail.com*
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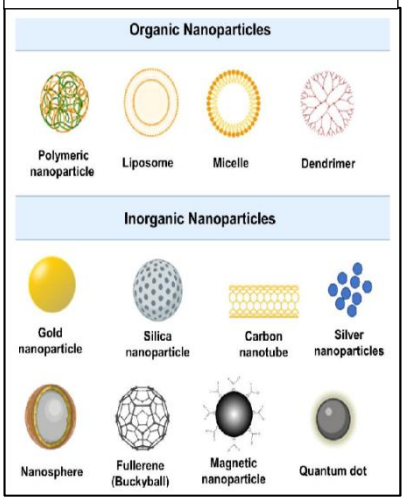
## INTRODUCTION

Nanotechnology is a rapidly growing field of science that involves the design and use of materials at the nanometer scale ($10^{-9}$ m). Nanoparticles are much more effective than ordinary materials because of their extremely small size and large surface area. This allows them to react better, remain stable, work more efficiently in the body and controlled delivery of drug to specific target sites. Reproductive efficiency is a key factor influencing the productivity, profitability and sustainability of livestock production systems. Recent advances in nanotechnology, particularly nano-drug delivery systems, offer promising opportunities to improve the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions and reproductive outcomes in livestock. Nanotechnology has revolutionized animal breeding and reproduction by enabling advancements in diagnostics, therapeutic interventions and biotechnological applications.

## TYPES OF NANOPARTICLES

Nanoparticles are broadly classified into organic and inorganic types. Organic nanoparticles such as polymers, liposomes, micelles and dendrimers are commonly used because of their biocompatibility and flexibility in drug delivery applications. Inorganic nanoparticles such as silver, gold, iron oxide, carbon nanotubes and quantum dots exhibit unique optical, electrical and magnetic properties. These features make them useful in imaging, disease diagnosis and targeted drug delivery. Liposomes are among the most widely used nanoparticles in biomedical applications. They are capable of carrying both water-soluble and fat-soluble drugs which makes them highly valuable in modern drug delivery and genetic research.

**Fig. Types of nanoparticles**




## NANOTECHNOLOGY IN ANIMAL REPRODUCTION

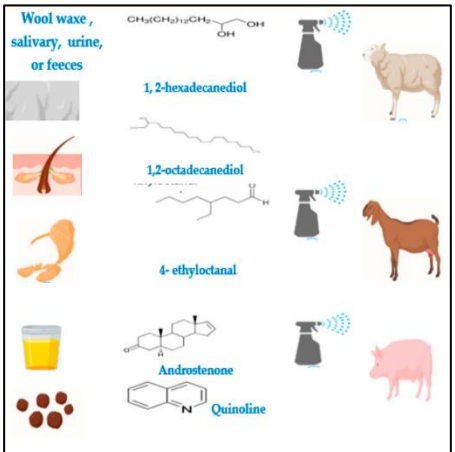



**Fig. Pheromones – Aerosol nano delivery**

### *A. Pheromones – Aerosol Nano Delivery*

Pheromones released by sexually active males play an important role in stimulating reproductive activity in female farm animals, a phenomenon known as the "male effect." Male scents can trigger puberty, synchronize breeding, induce ovulation and shorten the period after birth before females return to heat in species such as sheep, goats, and pigs. Pheromone sprays offer a simple alternative by delivering these natural scent signals in an easy-to-use aerosol form. The pheromones are extracted from sources like wool wax, saliva, urine, feces and skin secretions of males and formulated into sprays. Unlike using live males, whose performance depends on age, health and season and requires extra feeding and care, pheromone sprays can be used year-round and provide a safe, reliable and cost-effective way to improve reproductive performance and farm productivity.

### *B. Nanoparticles in Semen Cryopreservation*

Nanotechnology has markedly improved cryopreservation methods by reducing freezing-induced damage to spermatozoa and embryos, thereby increasing their survival after thawing. Nanopurification is an emerging technique that helps separate damaged sperm from healthy and functional ones, thereby improving semen quality for artificial insemination. Magnetic nanoparticles are coated with specific antibodies such as ubiquitin or lectins that recognize surface markers of abnormal sperm. These nanoparticles bind selectively to defective sperm cells, allowing them to be removed easily using a magnetic field. Other nanoparticles, including selenium (Se-NPs), zinc oxide (nano-ZnO), lipid-core nano particle encapsulating melatonin and vitamin E- loaded nanoparticle act as powerful antioxidants that shield sperm from oxidative stress, preserve DNA integrity and maintain membrane and mitochondrial function across species such as cattle, sheep, goats, camels, deer and buffalo. Plant-based nanoparticles derived from turmeric (curcumin), black cumin (thymoquinone), moringa, alder and Echinacea species further enhance semen quality when used at optimal doses.

### *C. NANOPARTICLES IN EMBRYO CRYOPRESERVATION*

Nanotechnology is also helping to protect and improve the development of embryos. Hydroxyapatite nanoparticles help to reduce ice crystal formation during vitrification, which prevents physical damage to oocytes. Nanoparticles with protective functions help to maintain the viability of gametes, particularly during cryopreservation. Magnetite nanoparticles help in improving embryonic development. This results in better embryo survival, higher implantation success, and improved pregnancy rates after embryo transfer. When these advances are combined with microfluidic "lab-on-a-chip" systems for accurate hormone testing, gentle sperm and egg sorting and controlled embryo culture. Nanomaterial-based microfluidic technologies have enhanced both reproductive diagnostics and gamete analysis.

### *D. Nanotechnology in Hormone Delivery*

Hormones play a vital role in assisted reproductive technologies such as artificial insemination, superovulation and estrus synchronization in livestock. The conventional delivery methods often face challenges like low bioavailability and short duration of action. Recent advances in nanotechnology have revolutionized hormone delivery by improving solubility, stability, controlled release and therapeutic efficiency. Engineered nanoparticles, polymeric nanofibers and biodegradable carriers such as pullulan, zein, and chitosan enable sustained and targeted delivery of key reproductive hormones including progesterone, FSH and GnRH resulting in better regulation of reproductive cycles and improved fertility outcomes. Innovations such as progesterone-loaded nanofibers for intravaginal use, GnRH-encapsulated chitosan nanoparticles that mimic natural pulsatile hormone release and FSH nanocarriers for precise ovarian stimulation have shown promising results in managing conditions like anestrus and irregular estrous cycles.

### *E. NANOSENSORS IN LIVESTOCK:*

Nanotechnology is providing smart and reliable methods to detect estrus, one of the major challenges in livestock breeding. Tiny devices called nanosensors can detect biological signals related to hormones, infections and metabolic changes in animals. In dairy cattle, special carbon nanotubes placed just under the skin can measure the level of the hormone estradiol in the blood during estrus and send this information as a fluorescence signal to a computer. Researchers have developed a simple color-based test using silver nanoparticles coated with L-tyrosine to detect estrus in cows. These nanoparticles react with natural sex pheromones such as acetic acid and propionic acid, causing a visible color change from yellow to reddish-brown. This easy-to-use method can help farmers to accurately identify the right time for insemination without complex equipment.

## CONCLUSION

Nanotechnology is emerging as a powerful new tool in animal reproduction, offering exciting possibilities to improve fertility management and livestock productivity. From smart hormone delivery systems and antioxidant-based cryoprotectants to biosensors for early estrus detection and advanced reproductive diagnostics, nano-enabled technologies are reshaping assisted reproductive techniques and making breeding programs more precise and efficient. At the same time, important challenges related to nanoparticle safety, cost, regulation and large-scale application must be carefully addressed. With continued research and responsible development, nanotechnology is poised to become a cornerstone of sustainable, high-performance livestock reproduction in the years ahead.

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