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Genetic markers associated with resistance to infectious diseases have no effects on production traits and haematological parameters in Italian Large White pigs

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(Article begins on next page)

1 **Genetic markers associated with resistance to infectious diseases have no effects on production**
2 **traits and haematological parameters in Italian Large White pigs**

3

4 Claudia Geraci^a, Amir Reza Varzandi^a, Giuseppina Schiavo^a, Samuele Bovo^a, Anisa Ribani^a, Valerio
5 Joe Utzeri^a, Giuliano Galimberti^b, Luca Buttazzoni^c, Cristina Ovilo^d, Maurizio Gallo^e, Stefania
6 Dall'Olio^a, Luca Fontanesi^a

7

8 ^aDepartment of Agricultural and Food Sciences, Division of Animal Sciences, University of Bologna,
9 Viale Fanin 46, 40127 Bologna, Italy

10 ^b Department of Statistical Sciences “Paolo Fortunati”, University of Bologna, Via delle Belle Arti
11 41, 40126 Bologna, Italy

12 ^c Consiglio per la Ricerca in agricoltura e l'analisi dell'Economia Agraria (CREA), via Salaria 31,
13 00015 Monterotondo (Roma), Italy

14 ^d Departamento Mejora Genética Animal, INIA, Crta. de la Coruña, km. 7,5, 28040 Madrid, Spain

15 ^e Associazione Nazionale Allevatori Suini (ANAS), Via Nizza 53, 00198, Roma, Italy

16

17 Correspondence:

18 L. Fontanesi; e-mail: luca.fontanesi@unibo.it

19 **Highlights:**

- 20 • Four markers associated with disease resistance were analyzed in several pig populations
- 21 • Two *GBP1* SNPs were not in complete linkage disequilibrium in most pig breeds
- 22 • *MUC4*, *FUT1* and *GBP1* SNPs did not affect any production traits in Italian Large White pigs
- 23 • SNP allele frequencies did not substantially change over 20 years of selection in Italian Large
- 24 White boars
- 25 • Marker-assisted selection based on these SNPs should not affect genetic gain for production
- 26 traits

27 **Abstract**

28 Infectious diseases have large economic impacts on the pig breeding industry worldwide. A few
29 genetic markers associated to disease resistance have been recently identified and used in marker-
30 assisted selection (MAS) in a few pig populations, as part of disease control programs. Neonatal
31 Diarrhea (ND), Post-weaning Diarrhea (PWD), caused by enterotoxigenic *E. coli*, and Porcine
32 Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome, caused by PRRS virus (PRRSV), are diseases with high
33 priority for the pig industry. Since interactions or antagonism between growth, innate immunity and
34 disease resistance traits could exist, this work investigated if four disease resistance gene markers
35 [mucin 4 (*MUC4*), rs338992994 associated with resistance to ND; fucosyltransferase 1 (*FUT1*),
36 rs335979375 associated with resistance to PWD; and guanylate binding protein 1 (*GBP1*),
37 rs340943904 and rs80800372 (also known as WUR10000125) associated with resistance to PRRSV]
38 could affect seven production traits (average daily gain, back fat thickness, lean meat cuts, feed gain
39 ratio, ham weight, visible intermuscular fat and ham weight loss at first salting) and 15 haematological
40 parameters in about 550 performance tested Italian Large White pigs. We also monitored allele
41 frequencies of the same markers on Italian Large White boars sampled under the national selection
42 breeding program over a 20 years-period. Moreover, we evaluated allele frequencies of these
43 polymorphisms in four Italian local pig breeds (Apulo-Calabrese, Casertana, Cinta Senese and Nero
44 Siciliano). The frequency of the resistance-associated alleles for the four polymorphisms was usually
45 higher in all local pig breeds, indirectly supporting a higher rusticity of autochthonous breeds,
46 compared to commercial populations. The two *GBP1* polymorphisms were not in complete linkage
47 disequilibrium in all breeds, except in Apulo-Calabrese. No significant allele frequency change for
48 the investigated markers occurred over 20 years in the Italian Large White boar population in three
49 of these markers. Only *FUT1* showed a modest but significant change of allele frequencies over this
50 period. Association analyses carried out in Italian Large White pigs for production traits, meat quality
51 or haematological parameters under investigation showed no significant effect of any genotyped
52 polymorphisms. Our results indicate that implementing MAS programs in Italian Large White pigs

53 with polymorphisms associated with disease resistance have no direct effects on production traits.
54 The selection program running for this heavy pig breed might not negatively impact disease resistance
55 derived by the investigated major genes.

56

57 **Keywords:** association study; *FUT1*; *GBP1*; *MUC4*; pig breeding; WUR10000125.

58 1. Introduction

59 Infectious diseases are the most important causes of economic losses for the pork industry
60 worldwide. Selection and breeding for disease resistance is considered one possible approach to
61 mitigate this problem (Mellencamp et al., 2008). Based on their relevance and potential
62 responsiveness to genetic selection, diarrhea caused by *Escherichia coli* and Porcine Reproductive
63 and Respiratory Syndrome (PRRS) are classified among the infectious diseases with the highest
64 priorities in pig breeding strategies (Davies et al., 2009).

65 Different Enterotoxigenic *E. coli* (ETEC) strains are among the prevalent etiological agents
66 responsible for the incidence of diarrhea in piglets during the neonatal or post-weaning periods (Chan
67 et al., 2013). Genetic resistance to diarrhea caused by ETEC is determined by the presence or the
68 absence of host intestinal cell surface receptors for bacterial fimbriae which are the most important
69 factors in conferring virulence to *E. coli* strains (Schroyen et al., 2012). Using invasive *in vitro*
70 adhesion assays, resistant pigs can be identified by a much lower number of bacteria attached to the
71 intestinal cell surface compared to susceptible ones (Sellwood et al., 1975). ETEC strains presenting
72 F4 fimbriae with different antigenic variant combinations have been shown to be the most prevalent
73 strains causing Neonatal Diarrhea (ND) in pigs (Moon et al., 1999). A single nucleotide
74 polymorphism (SNP) in intron 7 (rs338992994, NC_010455.5:g.134226654C>G) of the mucin 4
75 (*MUC4*) gene (which encodes a large membrane-bound mucin) is in linkage disequilibrium with the
76 receptor for ETEC strain exhibiting F4 fimbriae with both antigenic variants *ab* or *ac*. Allele G of
77 this marker is associated with the presence of the receptor that confers susceptibility to ND and is
78 presumed to be dominant over the resistance allele C, associated with the absence of the receptor
79 (Jorgensen et al., 2004). This marker, not completely concordant with the adhesion assay results
80 (Rasschaert et al., 2007), still remains the most reliable polymorphism used in marker-assisted
81 selection (MAS) programs to reduce ND incidence in piglets (Goetstouwers et al., 2014).

82 Post-Weaning Diarrhea (PWD) is determined by *E. coli* strains exposing F18 fimbriae, that
83 seem more prevalent than ETEC F4 (Moon et al., 1999). A nucleotide substitution in the alpha (1,2)-

84 fucosyltransferase 1 (*FUT1*) gene (rs335979375, NC_010448.4:g.54079560A>G) has been found to
85 be in high linkage disequilibrium with the gene encoding for the receptor for ETEC strain exhibiting
86 F18 fimbriae with *ab* antigenic variant (ETEC F18ab). The recessive A allele is associated with the
87 absence of ETEC F18ab receptor, that in turn, determines resistance to PWD (Meijerink et al., 1997).
88 *FUT1* gene encodes an enzyme that catalyzes an intermediary step in the formation of antigens
89 pertaining to the porcine AO blood group system. The indicated polymorphism in this gene is
90 considered thus the most reliable discovered marker for the identification of PWD resistant pigs and
91 for this reason has been included in MAS programs (Meijerink et al., 1997; Coddens et al., 2007,
92 2008).

93 PRRS is responsible for gross production losses due to by late-term reproductive failure in sows
94 and respiratory illness in growing pigs. The etiological agent is an Arteriviridae positive-sense RNA
95 virus with two main different strains showing only about 60% of sequence identity (Kappes and
96 Faaberg, 2015; Neumann et al., 2005). Genetic variation in the host response to this disease was first
97 observed in the late '90s (Halbur et al., 1998) and was subsequently investigated by a series of
98 challenging studies conducted by the PRRSV Host Genetic Consortium (PHGC) (Lunney et al., 2011)
99 leading to the discovery of an important QTL on porcine chromosome (SSC) 4 responsible for 15%
100 of the genetic variation of the host's immune response to this infection (Boddicker et al., 2012). This
101 QTL region includes five genes encoding guanylate binding protein (GBP) family members, that are
102 mediators of the proinflammatory immune response post viral or bacterial infections (Koltes et al.,
103 2015, Pilla et al., 2014). Two SNPs have been found to be in linkage disequilibrium with this SSC4
104 QTL. One SNP (rs340943904, NC_010446.5:g.127301202G>T), located in intron 9-10 of the *GBP1*
105 gene (encoding a negative regulator of T-cell responses), has been identified as the putative causative
106 mutation responsible of this QTL (Koltes et. al, 2015). The presence at this locus of nucleotide G
107 introduces a splice acceptor site that leads to the addition of 5 nucleotides into intron 9-10. This
108 causes, in turn, the shift of the reading frame and the formation of a premature stop codon in *GBP1*
109 sequence with the transcription of non-functional products. However, only pigs with GG genotype

110 produce entirely non-functional transcripts and are regarded as susceptible, suggesting a dominant
111 effect of the resistance allele T (Koltes et al., 2015). The second SNP, WUR10000125 (rs80800372,
112 NC_010446.5:g.127441677A>G), is a polymorphism located next to a putative polyadenylation site
113 in the 3'-untranslated region of the *GBP1* gene which can potentially affect transcript stability, with
114 consequences on protein synthesis and expression (Gol et al., 2015). A few studies have been carried
115 out in different pig populations to investigate the role of WUR10000125 in PRRSV resistance and its
116 possible impact on performance traits (Boddicker et al., 2014; Niu et al., 2015, 2016; Abella et al.,
117 2016; Dulkenberger et al., 2017a; Waide et al., 2017). This polymorphism is currently included in
118 commercial porcine SNP genotyping chips. Pigs with unfavorable A allele at this marker showed
119 higher viremia and lower weight gain following infection whereas pigs carrying the G variant, which
120 might be the dominant allele, reported a lower viremia and showed higher growth rate under PRRSV
121 infection (Boddicker et al., 2012). The same allele has been also associated with lower porcine
122 circovirus type 2b (PCV2b) virus load and might be useful to improve host response on coinfection
123 of PRRSV with PCV2b (Dunkelberger et al., 2017b).

124 Since previous studies have suggested a negative correlation between growth traits and disease
125 resistance and a few of these markers have been suggested to have antagonistic pleiotropic effects on
126 these economically relevant aspects (Doeschl-Wilson et al., 2009; Fontanesi et al., 2012; Huang et
127 al., 2008), investigating the effects of these markers on growth, carcass and meat quality and
128 production traits is essential for their proper use in MAS programs.

129 In this study, we genotyped *MUC4*, *FUT1* and *GBP1* gene markers i) to compare allele
130 frequencies distribution in Italian local pig breeds and Large White pigs, ii) to retrospectively
131 investigate allele frequency changes of these markers over two decades of selection among Italian
132 Large White boars and iii) to evaluate the effect of these polymorphisms on performance, carcass and
133 meat quality traits and haematological parameters (some of which related to the immune response) in
134 Italian Large White pigs.

136 2. Materials and methods

137 2.1. Animals and traits

138 All animals used in this study were not raised for any experimental purposes. They were kept
139 according to Italian and European legislation for pig production and all procedures described were in
140 compliance with national and European Union regulations for animal care and slaughtering.

141 Three groups of pigs were included in this study. Group 1 was made by Italian local pig breeds.
142 Groups 2 and 3 were made by Italian Large White pigs. Group 1 included a total of 117 unrelated
143 animals of four Italian local pig breeds (Apulo-Calabrese, Casertana, Cinta Senese and Nero
144 Siciliano; 15-30 pigs per breed) that were used for allele frequency analysis and comparison across
145 breeds.

146 Group 2 consisted of 189 Italian Large White boars born and raised from 1992 to 2012 under
147 the national heavy pig selection scheme of this breed (Fontanesi et al., 2015; Schiavo et al., 2016).
148 Heavy pigs are slaughtered at about 160 kg live weight at nine months of age. These boars were used
149 for the evaluation of allele frequency changes over years. The animals were selected among all Italian
150 Large White boars born from 1992 to 2012 ($n = 5983$) and approved for reproduction based on their
151 genetic merit after evaluation by the National Pig Breeders Association (ANAS). The boars were
152 ranked according to the reliability of their estimated breeding values (EBVs; calculated in 2012) and
153 those with the highest reliability ($n = 189$) were selected and used to constitute eight groups ($n = 19$ -
154 28 boars per group) based on the years in which they were born (groups were constituted using 2-4
155 years windows; 2011-2012 did not have boars with high EBV reliability, thus this window was not
156 included in the two-decades representation). More information about these boars are reported in
157 Fontanesi et al. (2015).

158 Group 3 consisted of 557 performance tested Italian Large White pigs (382 gilts and 175
159 castrated males). These animals were used in the association studies between gene markers and
160 phenotypic traits (see below). These pigs were part of the sib-testing program of the Italian Large
161 White population for which triplets of pigs from the same litter (2 females and 1 castrated male) were

individually performance tested at the ANAS Central Test Station for the genetic evaluation of a boar from the same litter (sib-testing). The test period started when piglets were 30-45 days old and ended when they reached 155 ± 5 kg live weight at approximately nine months of age. The nutritive level was *quasi ad libitum*, meaning that about 60% of the pigs were able to ingest the entire supplied ratio (Fontanesi et al., 2008, 2012). During the test period feed intake was recorded daily, body weight was measured bimonthly, and then average daily gain (ADG, in g) and feed:gain ratio (FGR) were calculated. At the end of the testing period, animals were slaughtered in a commercial abattoir after electrical stunning and following standard procedures. These pigs were slaughtered in 18 different days in the years 2012-2013. After slaughtering, weight of lean cuts (LC, the weight of neck and loin in kg), weight of the hams (HW, in kg) and backfat thickness (BFT, determined at the level of *Musculus gluteus medius* and expressed in mm) were measured on the carcasses. Visible intermuscular fat (VIF) was scored on the exposed muscles of the legs as previously described (Fontanesi et al. 2017b; Bertolini et al., 2018). Ham weight loss at first salting (HWLFS, in g) was calculated during the first week of seasoning (Fontanesi et al., 2017a; Bertolini et al., 2018). Haematological parameters were determined on blood samples, collected just after jugulation and exsanguination, in EDTA added tubes (Vacutest Kima s.r.l.). A total of 15 haematological parameters (erythrocyte traits: red blood cell count, haemoglobin, haematocrit, mean corpuscular volume, mean corpuscular haemoglobin, mean corpuscular haemoglobin concentration and red cell distribution width; leukocyte traits: white blood cell count, lymphocyte count, neutrophil count, eosinophil count, basophil count and monocyte count; platelet traits: platelet count and mean platelet volume) were measured on an Olympus AU 400 (Beckman Coulter) automated analyzer at the Veterinary Haematological Laboratory of the University of Bologna under standard procedures.

184

185 **2.2. SNP genotyping**

186 Genomic DNA was extracted from blood using the NucleoSpin[®]Tissue commercial kit
187 (Macherey-Nagel, Düren, Germany). Genotyping was obtained for four SNPs in three genes already

188 reported to be associated with resistance to porcine bacterial or viral determined diseases:
189 rs338992994 (g.134226654C>G) in the *MUC4* gene; rs335979375 (g.54079560A>G) in the *FUT1*
190 gene; rs340943904 (g.127301202G>T) and rs80800372 (WUR10000125 or g.127441677A>G) in
191 the *GBP1* gene. PCR primers and genotyping protocols are reported in Supplementary Table 1. PCR-
192 RFLP was used for the genotyping of three SNPs (rs338992994, rs335979375 and rs340943904)
193 whereas results for the WUR10000125 marker were obtained from the genotyping of the
194 PorcineSNP60 BeadChip (Illumina Co., St. Diego, CA, USA) SNP chip, version 1 (as reported by
195 Fontanesi et al. 2017a,b). PCR was carried on a 2720 Thermal Cycler (Applied Biosystems) in a total
196 volume of 20 μ L that included 10 pmol of each primer, 2.5 mM each dNTP, 2 μ L of KAPA Taq
197 Buffer 10x (containing 1.5 mM of $MgCl_2$ at 1X), 0.5 U of KAPA Taq DNA Polymerase (KAPA
198 Biosystems, Boston, MA, USA). Digested PCR products were visualized by electrophoresis on 2.5%-
199 3.0% agarose gels in TBE (Tris-Borate-EDTA) 1X with the addition of GelRed Nucleic Acid Gel
200 Stain (Biotium Inc., Hayward, CA, USA).

201

202 2.3. Statistical analyses

203 Allele and genotype frequencies were obtained by counting. Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium
204 (HWE) was evaluated using the HWE software program (Linkage Utility Programs, Rockefeller
205 University, New York, NY). For each breed, PLINK software v1.07 (Purcell et al., 2007) was used
206 to calculate the linkage disequilibrium (LD, here reported by using the r^2 measure) and PHASE
207 software v2.1.1 (Stephens et al., 2001) was used to identify haplotypes between the two SNPs
208 (rs340943904 and WUR10000125) genotyped in the *GBP1* gene (1000 iterations were set as
209 parameter for computing haplotypes).

210 Allele frequency changes over years of the genotyped SNPs in the first group of Italian Large
211 White pigs (group 2) was modeled using a logistic regression of the number of copies of the minor
212 allele on time.

213 The second group of Italian Large White performance tested pigs (group 3) was used in the
214 association analysis between the recorded phenotypic traits and the genotyped SNPs. Association
215 with production traits was obtained using Random Residuals (RRs) as defined by Fontanesi et al.
216 (2010) on traits (ADG, BFT, LC, FGR, HW, VIF and HWLFS) measured by ANAS, as described
217 above. RRs were calculated including in the model sex, batch on trial, inbreeding coefficient of the
218 animal, interaction of sex $\times$ age at slaughtering, date of slaughtering as fixed effect, and litter and
219 animal as random effect (Fontanesi et al., 2010). As previously reported, the use of RRs reduces the
220 type I error and the overestimation of the effects that would be obtained by using EBVs (Fontanesi et
221 al., 2013). Haematological parameters were normalized in R (packages “MASS” and “CAR”) by
222 applying the Box–Cox transformation as previously described by Bovo et al. (2016).

223 Association analysis was carried out in GEMMA (Zhou and Stephens, 2012) by fitting linear
224 mixed models, using GEMMA option -lmm and including a centered genomic matrix K (computed
225 with GEMMA software using 45952 SNPs). The assessment of the association between each SNP
226 and trait was obtained by testing the null hypothesis $H_0: \beta = 0$, where β is the effect size of the marker.
227 Additive genetic model, assuming a trend per number of copies of the minor allele, was used to
228 specify the dependency of trait on genotype categories. The model for the (normalized)
229 haematological traits included as covariates sex (coded as dummy variable), date of slaughtering
230 (coded with a set of N-1 dummy variables; N=18) and carcass weight (continuous variables). Because
231 of the estimation of RR for each trait already corrects for possible variables, these covariates were
232 not added while fitting the linear model. *GBP1* haplotypes were not used in the association analysis
233 as recombinant haplotypes were carried by few animals, preventing a correct estimation of their
234 effect. Significance was tested by using the Wald test. SNPs were defined to be significantly
235 associated if their P nominal values were below 5.68×10^{-04} (Bonferroni corrected $P < 0.05$). This
236 threshold was determined by multiplying the four SNPs by the 22 traits under investigation (seven
237 production traits and 15 haematological traits). Suggestively significant results were considered if P
238 nominal values were below 0.05.

239

240 3. Results

241 Allele and genotype frequencies for the investigated SNPs are reported in Table 1. Only *FUT1*
242 polymorphism in the Italian Large White population (group 3 of pigs) significantly deviated ($P <$
243 0.05) from HWE (Supplementary Table 2). All other investigated polymorphisms in the analyzed
244 breeds were in HWE (Supplementary Table 2).

245 Frequency of the *MUC4* C allele (conferring resistance to ND) was 0.57 in the Italian Large
246 White population, the lowest frequency in the analyzed breeds. This allele was always the major allele
247 in all local breeds in which its frequency ranged from 0.72 (Nero Siciliano) to 1.00 (Cinta Senese).

248 Allele A of the *FUT1* marker (the allele associated with resistance to PWD) was the minor
249 allele in all breeds. Its frequency in Italian Large White pigs was similar to that of most local breeds
250 apart Casertana which showed the highest frequency of this allele among all investigated breeds
251 (0.554).

252 The frequency of allele T of the *GBP1* rs340943904 marker (the dominant allele associated
253 with resistance to PRRS) was low (0.087) in the Italian Large White population. Its frequency was
254 higher in the Italian local breeds, except in Apulo-Calabrese where it was 0.125. Cinta Senese was
255 again the breed that showed the highest frequency of the resistance allele (0.437).

256 Allele G of WUR10000125 (*GBP1* rs80800372) SNP (associated with resistance to PRRS) was
257 low in all breeds and ranged from 0.1 (Casertana) to 0.168 (Cinta Senese). It was 0.07 in the
258 commercial Italian Large White breed.

259 The two analyzed *GBP1* SNPs were in complete LD only in Apulo-Calabrese pigs ($r^2 = 1.00$).
260 The value of r^2 was 0.133 in Cinta Senese, 0.698 in Nero Siciliano and 0.722 in Casertana. In the
261 Italian Large White breed r^2 was 0.696. Table 2 reports the *GBP1* haplotype frequencies observed in
262 the analyzed breeds. The haplotype derived by the combination of the two susceptibility alleles (i.e.
263 GA, respectively for rs340943904 and WUR10000125) was, on average, the most frequent overall

264 investigated pigs (0.80). The haplotype derived by the two resistance associated alleles (i.e. TG at the
265 same positions) showed the lowest frequency in the Italian Large White population.

266 Figure 1 shows the frequencies of the resistance associated alleles for the four SNPs under
267 investigation in this study in the Italian Large White boars over two decades. The plot describes a
268 retrospective analysis of frequency changes in this timeframe in the whole Italian Large White
269 population (Fontanesi et al., 2015). This overview might give a general impression of slow reduction
270 of the frequency of the resistance alleles for all analysed markers (Fig. 1). However, the logistic
271 regression model indicated that only for *FUT1* SNP there was a significant change of allele
272 frequencies over the investigated 20 years ($P = 0.027$) with a gradual reduction of the resistance
273 associated allele (0.25 in 1996-1997 and 0.06 in 2008-2010). *MUC4* and *GBP1* rs80800372 and
274 rs340943904 allele frequency distribution did not significantly change in the considered timeframe
275 (Table 3). For these investigated markers, there was a peak for the resistance alleles in the 1996-1997
276 years that was not subsequently confirmed by the trends of the following years (Fig. 1).

277 Overall allele frequencies of all four investigated SNPs in the 2008-2010 window was a little
278 bit lower than the frequency observed in the second group of Italian Large White pigs used in the
279 association studies, which were born in the years 2011-2012 (as they were slaughtered in 2012-2013;
280 Supplementary Table 3). This result may indicate, indirectly, that allele frequencies in the sib-tested
281 population tend to fluctuate, a few years later, around values already observed in the boar population
282 in the considered timeframe.

283 Results of association analysis between the analyzed SNPs and ADG, BFT, FGR, LC, HW,
284 VIF and HWLFS are reported in Table 4. None of the four SNPs was associated with any production
285 traits both considering a Bonferroni corrected threshold (significant association) and a P nominal
286 value of 0.05 (suggestive association).

287 Association study for the haematological traits showed only four suggestive associations (P
288 nominal value < 0.05 ; Supplementary Table 4). Table S5 reports β estimates and Standard Errors (SE)
289 for each association. *MUC4* was suggestively associated with mean platelet volume and lymphocyte

count, *FUT1* was suggestively associated with red blood cell count and *GBP1* rs80800372 was suggestively associated with monocyte count.

4. Discussion

A few gene markers have been already shown to be associated with resistance to some of the most important diseases that have a negative economic impact on the pig production chain worldwide (Vögeli et al., 1997; Huang et al., 2008; Boddicker et al., 2012, Schroyen et al., 2016). Based on these works that prompted the use of polymorphisms in the *MUC4*, *FUT1* and *GBP1* genes in MAS to increase disease resistance in several pig populations, it is important to first evaluate allele frequency distribution in other populations that were not part of these investigations and to verify if these markers are associated with other production traits. This is essential to evaluate if antagonist effects of these genes might reduce the genetic progress on economic traits that are currently used in the breeding program of commercial populations.

This study investigated the allele frequency distribution of *MUC4*, *FUT1* and *GBP1* polymorphisms in an important heavy pig breed (Italian Large White) and in several Italian local breeds (Apulo-Calabrese, Casertana, Cinta Senese and Nero Siciliano) which complemented the results on the commercial breed. The limited number of animals analysed in the local breeds might provide a first allele frequency distribution that should be further investigated in larger samples. The Italian Large White breed was also investigated to evaluate if allele frequencies of the analyzed markers changed over a period of 20 years of selection for animals with carcass and meat quality traits more adapted to the dry-cured ham production chain (Bosi and Russo, 2004). None of the four investigated SNPs were associated with any traits included in the national selection program of the Italian Large White breed. In addition, none of the haematological traits (some of which might be important to define indirectly the potential immune response of the animals) was significantly associated with the same markers, suggesting that other biological mechanisms might be involved in explaining the reported effect on disease resistance.

316 The results of the association studies with production traits are in line with the general stable
317 allele frequencies of these markers over two decades of selection in the Italian Large White breed that
318 significantly increased average daily gain and improved all meat and carcass traits needed for the
319 production of dry-cured hams (Fontanesi et al., 2015). Had the analyzed gene markers strongly
320 affected the traits already used in the selection programs of this breed, a strong allele frequency
321 modification over time should have been expected. This was already found for other gene markers
322 already shown to be associated with important production traits (i.e. *IGF2*, *FTO*, *MC4R* and *VRTN*;
323 Fontanesi et al. 2015). Only the *FUT1* showed a significant allele frequency change in the investigated
324 timeframe, probably due to genetic drift or a small effect (not detected in the association analysis) on
325 traits under direct or indirect selection in this population. In this context, despite the results were not
326 statistically significant, it is worth to note that there was a general, even small, decrease, of allele
327 frequency of the resistance associate alleles at all loci. Considering that there would be no detrimental
328 effect on any production traits (according to the results obtained in the association study we carried
329 out), it should be important to re-consider the selection program of this breed to reverse this trend by
330 adopting a targeted MAS program that aims to increase the frequency of the favorable alleles
331 (associated to resistance to ND, PWD and PRRS) at these markers and, indirectly, increase disease
332 resistance in this population. This could be important considering that the favorable allele at these
333 markers was in almost all cases the minor allele in the Italian Large White population (except for the
334 *MUC4* SNP). In contrast, in most local breeds, the favorable allele usually showed a higher frequency
335 than in the Italian Large White population. This aspect might confirm the higher rusticity (partly
336 derived by a lower susceptibility to infection diseases) that is usually attributed to local pig breeds
337 compared to commercial populations. In these autochthonous breeds, the effect of natural selection,
338 and thus adaptation to harsh environmental conditions, could have increased the frequency of disease
339 resistance alleles.

340 In a previous study that was based on extremely divergent Italian Large White pigs for
341 estimated breeding values for a few production traits, the same *MUC4* SNP showed a significant

342 association between ADG and the resistance allele that was more frequent in slow-growing pigs
343 (Fontanesi et al., 2012). The design of that experiment was probably more powerful and was able to
344 capture more subtle effect on growth traits that were not evident in the current study which was based
345 on animals coming from a more homogeneous sib-tested population (born in the years 2011-2012).
346 The general direction of the effect seems however, even not significant, the same as that previously
347 observed (Fontanesi et al., 2012), i.e. genotype CC grew slower than the other genotypes (data not
348 shown). In another study, Yan et al. (2009) reported faster growth rates during the fattening period
349 for animals presenting ETEC F4ab and F4ac receptors. Yan et al. (2009) also indicated that
350 susceptible pigs with F4abR demonstrated higher values of ADG during the suckling period. These
351 results might confirm, to some extent, a small or population dependent effect of this marker on
352 production traits.

353 The *FUT1* marker that, in this study, did not affect any traits in the Italian Large White
354 population was, instead, associated with growth rate (with a positive effect of allele A) in a Swiss pig
355 population (Kadarmideen, 2008). Similar results were also obtained by Bao et al. (2012) in a study
356 on Sutan pigs (hybrids of Duroc and Meishan pigs) where animals with the AA genotype had the
357 highest ADG value before weaning.

358 Allele frequencies of the WUR10000125 (*GBP1* rs80800372) polymorphism obtained in this
359 study were similar to those reported by other works which showed that the unfavorable A allele is the
360 most frequent one in commercial lines selected for increased growth rate (ranging from 0.7 to 0.9;
361 Boddicker et al., 2012; Abella et al., 2016). In a recent study on nonchallenged animals, Dunkelberger
362 et al. (2017a) estimated the effect of WUR10000125 on traits under selection in four different
363 purebred pig lines. Even if the effect of this marker acted differently among commercial lines,
364 nonsignificant effect was reported for most of the traits and for overall selection index value,
365 suggesting that selecting for the resistance allele should result in pig resistant to PRRS without
366 consequences on productive traits in nonchallenging conditions.

367 The linkage between the two *GBP1* markers associated to PRRS resistance (i.e. rs340943904
368 and rs80800372) was previously evaluated only by Koltes et al. (2015) in a commercial crossbred
369 population who reported that the two markers were in perfect LD. Our results contrast with what was
370 reported by Koltes et al. (2015). LD varied among breeds with extreme values in local pig populations
371 ($r^2 = 1.00$ in Apulo-Calabrese and $r^2 = 0.133$ in Cinta Senese). Therefore, more than two haplotypes
372 were identified in Italian Large White, Casertana, Cinta Senese and Nero Siciliano breeds suggesting
373 that previous association studies based on WUR10000125 should be revised including the genotyping
374 of the other associated *GBP1* SNP in populations in which these two markers are not in complete LD.
375

376 5. Conclusions

377 This study showed that implementing a MAS program in the Italian Large White pig breed,
378 aiming to indirectly increase disease resistance, might not have any relevant adverse effect on all
379 other performance, carcass and meat quality traits included in the genetic merit index used in the
380 Italian national selection scheme. The alleles in the *MUC4*, *FUT1* and *GBP1*, that have been shown
381 by other studies to be associated to disease resistance, did not have any negative effects on the
382 investigated traits. In our case, before implementing MAS based on these genes, further studies should
383 be carried out to investigate their effect on reproduction traits in this heavy pig breeds that is usually
384 used as maternal line in the heavy pig breeding programs. Other studies are also needed to evaluate
385 the level of LD between *GBP1* SNPs and the effect of their haplotypes on production traits for the
386 subsequent use of these markers in MAS to reduce susceptibility to PRRS.

387

388 Conflict of interest statement

389 The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this work.

390

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394

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571 **Table 1.** Allele and genotype frequencies of the analyzed polymorphisms in the Italian Large White population and in the autochthonous pig breeds.

	<i>MUC4</i> rs338992994						<i>FUT1</i> rs335979375						<i>GBP1</i> rs340943904						<i>GBP1</i> rs80800372					
Breeds	No. of Pigs	Allele Frequency		Genotype Frequency			No. of pigs	Allele Frequency		Genotype Frequency			No. of pigs	Allele Frequency		Genotype Frequency			No. of pigs	Allele Frequency		Genotype Frequency		
		C	G	CC	CG	GG		A	G	AA	AG	GG		T	G	TT	TG	GG		G	A	GG	AG	AA
Italian Large White ²	500	0.575	0.425	0.328	0.494	0.178	510	0.115	0.885	0.026	0.178	0.796	557	0.087	0.913	0.013	0.149	0.838	557	0.070	0.930	0.009	0.120	0.871
Apulo Calabrese ³	15	0.830	0.170	0.000	0.333	0.667	25	0.060	0.940	0.000	0.120	0.880	28	0.125	0.875	0.000	0.250	0.750	28	0.125	0.875	0.000	0.250	0.750
Casertana ³	27	0.910	0.090	0.000	0.185	0.815	28	0.554	0.446	0.393	0.321	0.286	30	0.134	0.866	0.000	0.267	0.733	30	0.100	0.900	0.000	0.200	0.800
Cinta Senese ³	22	1.000	0.000	1.000	0.000	0.000	29	0.069	0.931	0.000	0.862	0.138	16	0.437	0.563	0.188	0.500	0.312	16	0.168	0.832	0.000	0.188	0.812
Nero Siciliano ³	30	0.720	0.280	0.100	0.366	0.534	23	0.108	0.892	0.000	0.217	0.783	26	0.230	0.770	0.077	0.308	0.615	26	0.160	0.840	0.077	0.192	0.731

572 ¹Frequencies reported from Fontanesi et al. (2012) except for Italian Large White pigs, which are from this study.

573 ²Total individuals were 557 but for *MUC4* and *FUT1* genotyping was missing for some individuals. Allele and genotype frequencies were reported here only for the second group of Italian Large White pigs, which

574 included performance tested pigs born in the years 2011-2012.

575 ³Genotyping results in the local breeds were obtained for 15-30 pigs each.

576 **Table 2.** Haplotype frequencies in the Italian Large White and Italian local pig breeds for the two
577 markers in the *GBP1* gene.

Breed ¹	<i>GBP1</i> haplotypes ²	Haplotype frequency
Italian Large White (557)	TG	0.066
	TA	0.024
	GG	0.005
	GA	0.905
Apulo Calabrese (28)	TG	0.125
	GA	0.875
Casertana (30)	TG	0.100
	TA	0.033
	GA	0.867
Cinta Senese (16)	TG	0.094
	TA	0.343
	GA	0.563
Nero Siciliano (26)	TG	0.173
	TA	0.058
	GA	0.769

578 ¹ The number of pigs is included in parenthesis.

579 ² The first and the second nucleotides are for the rs340943904 and rs80800372 SNPs, respectively.

582 **Table 3.** Effect of time on resistance allele frequency changes in candidate boars over 20 years.

Gene/SNPs	Allele	Chi square value	P value
<i>MUC4</i> / rs338992994	C	0.600	0.423
<i>FUT1</i> / rs335979375	A	5.000	0.027
<i>GBP1</i> / rs340943904	T	1.260	0.263
<i>GBP1</i> /rs80800372	G	0.650	0.422

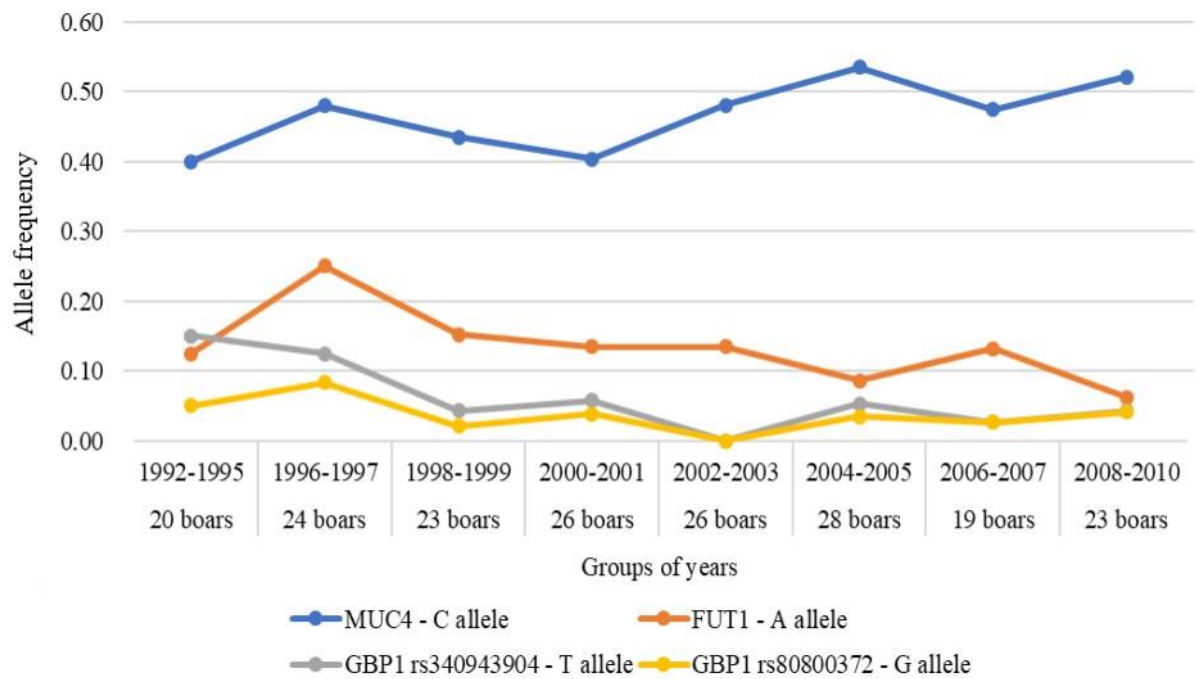
583

584 **Table 4.** Results of the association study between the analyzed markers and production, carcass and
585 meat quality traits in the second group of Italian Large White pigs. The table reports the calculated P
586 nominal value.

Traits ¹	<i>MUC4</i> rs338992994	<i>FUT1</i> rs335979375	<i>GBP1</i> rs340943904	<i>GBP1</i> rs80800372
ADG	0.420	0.337	0.291	0.101
BFT	0.068	0.730	0.118	0.236
LC	0.133	0.534	0.768	0.633
FGR	0.577	0.308	0.738	0.605
HW	0.910	0.878	0.639	0.976
VIF	0.678	0.143	0.731	0.953
HWLFS	0.388	0.491	0.160	0.261

587 ¹ADG: average daily gain, BFT: back fat thickness; LC: lean meat cuts; FGR: feed gain ratio; HW:
588 ham weight; VIF: visible intermuscular fat; HWLFS: ham weight loss at first salting.

589 **Figure 1.** Allele frequency trends of four single nucleotide polymorphisms associated to disease
 590 resistance in Italian Large White boars under the national selection program over about two decades.
 591 *GBP1* haplotype frequency changes were not evaluated due to the low frequencies of three haplotypes
 592 out of four reported in this population (see Table 2 for the haplotype frequencies in this breed).



604 **Supplementary Table 1.** PCR conditions and genotyping protocols.

Genes/markers	PCR primers	Temp. ¹	Product size ²	RFLP ³
<i>FUT1</i>	F:5'-CTTCCTGAACGTCTATCAAGACC-3' R:5'-CTTCAGCCAGGGCTCCTTTAAG-3'	62.5	421	<i>Hha</i> I; Allele A: 328+93; Allele G: 241+93+87
<i>MUC4</i>	F:5'-GTGCCTTGGGTGAGAGGTTA-3' R:5'-CACTCTGCCGTTCTCTTTCC-3'	57.0	367	<i>Xba</i> I; Allele C: 367; Allele G: 216+151
<i>GBP1</i> rs340943904 ⁴	F:5'-TCCTGATAGAATCTTTGCCGC-3' R:5'-GGAGGGAGAAGGATGGGTAC-3'	60.0	218	<i>Fsp</i> BI; Allele T: 113+29+23; Allele G: 136+29

605 ¹ Annealing temperature in °C.

606 ² Amplified fragment size (in bp).

607 ³ Restriction enzymes used in the RFLP methods are indicated together with the resulted fragments of the two alleles obtained after enzyme
608 digestion (in bp).

609 ⁴ The *GBP1* rs80800372 marker was analyzed using the Illumina PorcineSNP60 BeadChip.

610 **Supplementary Table 2.** Hardy-Weinberg Equilibrium (HWE) test for all gene markers genotyped in five pig breeds. Numbers of animals are reported
611 in the correspondence of the SNP genotypes.

Gene marker	Genotypes	Italian Large White	Apulo-Calabrese	Casertana	Cinta Senese	Nero Siciliano
<i>MUC4</i>	GG	89	10	22	0	16
	CG	247	5	5	0	11
	CC	164	0	0	22	3
	<i>P</i> value	0.810	0.315	0.474	-	0.599
<i>FUT1</i>	GG	406	22	8	25	18
	AG	91	3	9	4	5
	AA	13	0	11	0	0
	<i>P</i> value	0.012	0.661	0.062	0.586	0.434
<i>GBP1</i> rs340943904	GG	467	21	22	5	16
	TG	83	7	8	8	8
	TT	7	0	0	3	2
	<i>P</i> value	0.168	0.316	0.266	0.949	0.508
<i>GBP1</i> rs80800372	AA	485	21	24	13	19
	AG	67	7	6	3	5
	GG	5	0	0	0	2
	<i>P</i> value	0.162	0.316	0.413	0.577	0.127

612

613 **Supplementary Table 3.** Resistance allele frequency values of four gene markers in Italian Large White boars under the national selection
614 program over about two decades.

Groups of years	<i>MUC4</i> – C rs338992994	<i>FUT1</i> – A rs335979375	<i>GBP1</i> - T rs340943904	<i>GBP1</i> – G rs80800372
1992-1995	0.40	0.13	0.15	0.05
1996-1997	0.48	0.25	0.13	0.08
1998-1999	0.43	0.15	0.04	0.02
2000-2001	0.40	0.13	0.06	0.04
2002-2003	0.48	0.13	0.00	0.00
2004-2005	0.53	0.09	0.05	0.03
2006-2007	0.47	0.13	0.03	0.03
2008-2010	0.52	0.06	0.04	0.04

615

616 **Supplementary Table 4.** Results of the association study between the analyzed gene markers and haematological traits in the second group of
617 Italian Large White pigs. The table reports the calculated P nominal value.

Haematological traits ¹	<i>MUC4</i> rs338992994	<i>FUT1</i> rs335979375	<i>GBP1</i> rs340943904	<i>GBP1</i> rs80800372
HGB	0.927	0.205	0.876	0.408
HCT	0.942	0.119	0.869	0.498
RBC	0.823	0.030	0.881	0.414
MCV	0.917	0.662	0.764	0.821
MCHC	0.971	0.485	0.939	0.660
MCH	0.898	0.647	0.701	0.912
RDW	0.322	0.416	0.108	0.537
MPV	0.012	0.703	0.584	0.463
PLT	0.222	0.977	0.343	0.454
WBC	0.577	0.803	0.992	0.154
LINFO	0.012	0.821	0.142	0.216
EOSINO	0.069	0.677	0.803	0.447
NEUTRO	0.750	0.931	0.466	0.558
BASO	0.436	0.697	0.329	0.112
MONO	0.622	0.252	0.309	0.017

618 ¹ HGB: Hemoglobin; HCT: Hematocrit; RBC: Red blood cell count; MCV: Mean corpuscular volume; MCHC: Mean corpuscular
619 hemoglobin concentration; MCH: Mean corpuscular hemoglobin; RDW: Red cell distribution width; MPV: Mean platelet volume;
620 PLT: Platelet count; WBC: White blood cell count; LINFO: Lymphocyte count; EOSINO: Eosinophil count; NEUTRO: Neutrophil
621 count; BASO: Basophil count; MONO: Monocyte count.

622

623 **Supplementary Table 5.** Statistic parameters obtained in the association analyses: β estimates and Standard Errors (SE) for each
624 analyzed trait.

Traits ¹	MUC4 rs338992994		FUT1 rs335979375		GBP1 rs340943904		GBP1 rs80800372	
	β estimate	SE	β estimate	SE	β estimate	SE	β estimate	SE
ADG	3.78E+00	4.69E+00	-6.36E+00	6.62E+00	-7.67E+00	7.25E+00	-1.38E+01	8.41E+00
BFT	-6.17E-01	3.38E-01	1.63E-01	4.71E-01	-8.07E-01	5.15E-01	-7.31E-01	6.16E-01
LC	2.46E-01	1.63E-01	-1.37E-01	2.21E-01	-7.16E-02	2.43E-01	-1.44E-01	3.01E-01
FGR	-9.15E-03	1.64E-02	2.36E-02	2.31E-02	-8.49E-03	2.53E-02	1.54E-02	2.97E-02
HW	9.02E-03	7.93E-02	-1.67E-02	1.08E-01	5.58E-02	1.19E-01	4.45E-03	1.45E-01
VIF	-9.94E-03	2.39E-02	-4.92E-02	3.36E-02	1.27E-02	3.68E-02	2.56E-03	4.33E-02
HWLFS	1.85E+00	2.14E+00	-2.06E+00	2.98E+00	4.60E+00	3.27E+00	4.36E+00	3.88E+00
HGB	9.12E-02	9.93E-01	1.81E+00	1.42E+00	-2.38E-01	1.53E+00	1.45E+00	1.75E+00
HCT	-4.79E-01	6.62E+00	1.49E+01	9.58E+00	-1.69E+00	1.03E+01	7.92E+00	1.17E+01
RBC	-5.81E+07	2.59E+08	7.98E+08	3.67E+08	5.93E+07	3.96E+08	3.72E+08	4.55E+08
MCV	-9.67E+01	9.23E+02	-5.66E+02	1.29E+03	-4.18E+02	1.39E+03	-3.66E+02	1.62E+03
MCHC	-2.01E+00	5.60E+01	-5.68E+01	8.13E+01	-6.70E+00	8.70E+01	4.35E+01	9.88E+01
MCH	-3.37E+00	2.63E+01	-1.69E+01	3.70E+01	-1.53E+01	3.97E+01	-5.11E+00	4.61E+01
RDW	-1.33E-06	1.35E-06	1.55E-06	1.90E-06	3.29E-06	2.04E-06	1.46E-06	2.37E-06
MPV	3.05E-04	1.22E-04	6.68E-05	1.75E-04	1.03E-04	1.88E-04	1.60E-04	2.17E-04
PLT	-3.73E+03	3.05E+03	-1.29E+02	4.42E+03	4.49E+03	4.73E+03	4.04E+03	5.39E+03
WBC	1.15E-01	2.06E-01	7.29E-02	2.92E-01	-3.12E-03	3.14E-01	-5.18E-01	3.62E-01
LINFO	3.41E-01	1.35E-01	4.43E-02	1.96E-01	-3.09E-01	2.10E-01	-2.99E-01	2.41E-01
EOSINO	4.09E-02	2.25E-02	-1.41E-02	3.37E-02	-9.00E-03	3.60E-02	-3.06E-02	4.02E-02
NEUTRO	-2.68E-01	8.42E-01	1.04E-01	1.21E+00	9.43E-01	1.29E+00	-8.72E-01	1.49E+00
BASO	1.06E-02	1.36E-02	-7.73E-03	1.98E-02	-2.07E-02	2.12E-02	-3.83E-02	2.41E-02
MONO	4.99E-03	1.01E-02	-1.69E-02	1.47E-02	-1.61E-02	1.58E-02	-4.25E-02	1.79E-02

625 ¹ ADG: average daily gain, BFT: back fat thickness; LC: lean meat cuts; FGR: feed gain ratio; HW: ham weight; VIF: visible intermuscular fat;
626 HWLFS: ham weight loss at first salting; HGB: Hemoglobin; HCT: Hematocrit; RBC: Red blood cell count; MCV: Mean corpuscular volume;
627 MCHC: Mean corpuscular hemoglobin concentration; MCH: Mean corpuscular hemoglobin; RDW: Red cell distribution width; MPV: Mean

628 platelet volume; PLT: Platelet count;WBC: White blood cell count; LINFO: Lymphocyte count; EOSINO: Eosinophil count; NEUTRO: Neutrophil
629 count; BASO: Basophil count; MONO: Monocyte count.