

FuturaGene to develop further drought and salt resistant poplars for biomass renewable energy with Purdue University

23 November 2009. FuturaGene PLC ("FuturaGene", or the "the Group", AIM: FGN), a leader in plant genetic research and development for global forestry, biofuel and agricultural markets, is to accelerate development of its proprietary drought and salt tolerance gene in poplar trees with another complementary project at Purdue University in the US. The project will receive matching funds from the Consortium for Plant Biotechnology Research (CPBR) following a highly competitive grant selection process.

The focus of the research is on improving drought and salt tolerance of shortrotation poplar as this plant has become widely accepted as a potential source of biomass for use in renewable energy.

Woody biomass is becoming an attractive alternative to fossil fuels as it produces fewer emissions, contributes to local economies, mitigates global climate change, and can increase national energy security. Poplar is also expected to become an important source for liquid biofuels as cellulose-to-ethanol technologies mature over the next few years.

The adaptation of poplars to grow in more environmentally stressful conditions will enable enhanced growth of these trees on marginal lands, which are unusable for food or feedstuff, for large-scale production.

The project at Purdue University is being led by Dr. Richard Meilan.

Dr. Stanley Hirsch, Chief Executive FuturaGene commented:

"Poplar is now widely accepted as a fast growth short rotation crop which is carbon neutral and can be used for energy production by combustion. The project, which complements others we have around the world, aims to develop the tree for large scale planting on land which is unsuitable for food or feedstuff production, frequently because of drought or saline levels".

Dr. Meilan said:

"It is widely believed that poplar will be a key bio-energy crop, not just in the US, but worldwide. However, water quality and availability are important issues that need to be addressed as we move forward. What we learn through our work with poplar will have direct commercial applicability, but this knowledge will also be transferrable to other key bio-energy crops."

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About FuturaGene PLC

FuturaGene is a leader in plant genetic research and development for the global forestry, biofuel, and agricultural markets. The Group develops sustainable, ecologically sound technology to meet the ever increasing demands for fiber, fuel and food crops in the face of declining and deteriorating land and water resources.

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FuturaGene aims to be the leading crop technology company for biomass, second generation biofuel and biopower, through two main technology platforms: Cell Wall Modification, which helps crops grow faster, enhancing yield and processability; and Abiotic Stress Tolerance which enables plants to grow in harsh, dry, salty environments or protects yield when plants are stressed by these factors.

The Group's most advanced technologies are for yield improvement in sustainable industrial forestry and it has strong partnerships with leading international forestry and agriculture companies, such as Suzano, Forage Genetics (Land 'O Lakes), China Academy of Forestry (CAF), AA Alliance and Targeted Growth. The Group has established broad applications of its technology in key crops including eucalyptus, poplar, alfalfa and corn.

More information is available at www.futuragene.com.

About CPBR

The Consortium for Plant Biotechnology Research (CPBR) is a not-for-profit membership corporation comprised of more than 90 U.S. research universities, companies, and trade associations. CPBR speeds the transfer of plant biotechnologies from the research laboratory to the marketplace, expanding economic opportunities through university research and global networking. CPBR operates through a highly competitive project selection process, which includes: Industrial evaluation of research concepts to insure industrial relevance and peer review to insure scientific excellence.

CPBR supports biotechnology research that has practical applications; advances technological innovations based on new understandings and uses of plants and other organisms; provides multidisciplinary training and research opportunities for a new generation of scientists and engineers; and connects industry needs with university and industry suppliers. CPBR is US federally funded.

About Dr. Richard Meilan

Dr. Meilan received a joint Ph.D. in botany (plant molecular biology) and forestry (tree physiology from Iowa State University in 1990. After working as a Rockefeller Foundation-funded post-doctoral research fellow, he joined the faculty in the Department of Biochemistry at the University of Missouri-Columbia. He was on the faculty in the Forest Science Department at Oregon State University for nine years before going to Purdue University (PU) in October 2003. At PU, he is an associate professor of molecular tree physiology.

In his laboratory at Purdue, Meilan uses molecular tools to investigate the genetic mechanisms by which key aspects of tree growth and development are controlled. He is also attempting to domesticate and add value to various tree species by genetically engineering them to express genes that impart environmentally beneficial and commercially important traits.