



Press Release – Minister Ceysens plants first transgene poplar in Flanders

Ghent - Belgium, 6 May 2009

VIB is delighted that the poplar field test is underway

Ghent – This afternoon, Flanders’ Minister of Economy, Enterprise, Science, Innovation and Foreign Trade, Patricia Ceysens, planted the first genetically modified poplar in Flanders. With this action, she has signaled the official start of the VIB field test, which should contribute to the sustainable production of bio-ethanol. The poplars have a modified wood composition that makes them more suitable for the production of bio-ethanol. VIB has long looked forward to – and striven hard for – this moment.

Modified poplars for sustainable bio-fuel

This afternoon, **Patricia Ceysens** planted the first of the transgene poplars that have a modified wood composition that makes them better suited for the production of bio-ethanol. Wood has strong potential as a bio-fuel, as it can be cultivated with very little energy-input and does not compete with food production when it is grown on marginal lands. Today, however, it is still relatively difficult to produce bio-ethanol efficiently from wood. Greenhouse tests have demonstrated that up to 50% more bio-ethanol can be produced from the wood of transgene poplars than from standard poplars.

Field trials are crucial to scientific research

Because greenhouse tests are limited in value, it is of great scientific importance to be able to conduct field trials. It is well-known that plants behave differently in a greenhouse than they do in the field, where they are exposed to weather influences, the changing seasons, and deep soil. So, the field trial is the ultimate test for verifying whether wood from trees that are grown in actual outdoor conditions can also be converted into bio-ethanol in a more efficient way.

Field trial permit: the icing on the cake

The VIB poplars drew a lot of attention after the federal government refused to grant permission for a controlled field trial. However, according to VIB, the government of Flanders, and ultimately the Council of State as well, without valid arguments. After nine months of consultation, the refusal was changed to an authorization, under strict conditions.

René Custers, VIB Regulatory & Communications Manager: ‘Sustainable energy production is one of our most heartfelt aims. That’s why we’re so pleased that we can now test our trees under practical, real-life conditions. But this is also a milestone for Flanders’ biotechnological research in general. Being allowed to conduct field tests progresses the outstanding R&D base in Flanders.’

Background information and photos

For *background information* about poplars, please visit: www.vib.be/populier.

For *photos* of poplars in the greenhouse and of the ceremonial planting, surf to:
<http://matuvu.net/veldproef>.

Note to the Editor

VIB

VIB, the Flanders Institute for Biotechnology, is a non-profit research institute in the life sciences. Some 1100 scientists and technicians conduct strategic basic research on the molecular mechanisms that control the functioning of the human body, plants, and micro-organisms. Through a close partnership with four Flemish universities – Ghent University, the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, the University of Antwerp, and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel – and a solid investment program, VIB unites the forces of 65 research groups in a single institute. Their research aims at fundamentally extending the frontiers of our knowledge. Through its technology transfer activities, VIB strives to convert the research results into products for the benefit of consumers and patients. VIB also develops and distributes a broad range of scientifically substantiated information about all aspects of biotechnology. More info at: www.vib.be.
