



## INSTITUTE OF FOREST BIOTECHNOLOGY

### *Comments for the USDA APHIS Genetically Engineered Forest and Fruit Trees Meeting, Riverdale, Maryland July 8 – 9, 2003*

The Institute of Forest Biotechnology is a private, non-profit organization located in Research Triangle Park, NC. Its mission is to work for social, ecological and economic benefits from appropriate uses of biotechnology in forestry worldwide.

We have heard a great deal about the many applications for GM trees, their potential value in production forestry, preservation of threatened species and bioremediation to name a few. Questions and concerns have been raised regarding their impact on the environment and even the necessity of their use. We have heard from a range of voices spanning academia, conservation organizations, forest industry, and environmental groups. Many lessons have been learned from the agricultural biotechnology community. It is clear that forest biotechnology will require new behaviors, new strategies and new partnerships to guide it through development, acceptance and use.

The Institute is constituted to develop these new strategies and partnerships by engaging stakeholders across sectors, provide a synthesis of the diverse points of view, and forge creative responses. This approach is currently underway with our Heritage Trees program that utilizes a multi-stakeholder group to employ biotechnology to help restore threatened and endangered tree species that are important to the heritage, landscape and economy of the country. The Institute provides a neutral forum for multi-stakeholder discussions around the science, application, impact and ethics of forest biotechnology. It convened a meeting last September in Scotland on forest biotechnology in Europe centered on the state-of-the-art of the science, forest conservation, societal and environmental considerations, worldviews and market drivers. The proceedings of this meeting have been published and are available to any interested party. The Institute has two representatives on the IUFRO forest biotechnology Task Force, lead by a social scientist, directed to developing a current overview of the field.

Incorporation of this cross-sector perspective in its core programs is reflected in the make up of the Institute's Board which has representation from Academia/Government, Industry, and Non-governmental and Public Interest organizations. The breadth of the board runs from the International Union of Forest Research Organizations to the Hastings Center; from NC State University to the Institute for Biological Energy Alternatives; and

from Arborgen to the World Resources Institute. This diverse engagement is required to identify and anticipate key issues or areas of attention at the forefront of this technology as opposed to responding to negative outcomes when emotions are high, the consequences are great, and the parties are polarized.

The Institute is happy to be participating in the USDA APHIS process of defining the scope of the regulatory requirements for GM trees. We would also like to offer assistance by providing a platform of continued engagement for the many voices interested in forest biotechnology. In particular, the Institute can work in parallel with APHIS, whose focus is on safety, through its projects addressing societal and cultural issues of forest biotechnology development. This type of collaboration has the potential to afford a balanced perspective to the policy development process.