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National Institute of Food and Agriculture

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Departments of Agriculture, Energy Partner to Award \$4.9 Million for Bioenergy Research

WASHINGTON, Oct. 21, 2015 – On the Third Annual National Bioenergy Day <<http://energy.gov/eere/bioenergy/events/national-bioenergy-day-2015>>, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) are partnering to announce nearly \$5 million in grants to scientists to study the use of plants to further bioenergy development. The investment is part of the Obama Administration's initiative to broaden and diversify America's energy portfolio and increase the development of new clean energy technologies and enhance rural economies.

"This partnership allows scientists to delve even further into research that will lead America toward economically viable alternative energy sources that are efficiently produced," said Sonny Ramaswamy, Director of the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture, which administers the awards for USDA. "By studying traits that allow biomass plant crops to be produced more abundantly, while becoming more sustainable and more resistant to pests and diseases, bioenergy can potentially become a widely-used energy source."

The \$4.9 million in research grants are awarded under a joint DOE-USDA program that began in 2006. It focuses on fundamental investigations of biomass genomics,

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with the aim of harnessing non-food plant biomass for the production of fuels, such as ethanol or renewable chemical feedstocks. Dedicated feedstock crops tend to require less intensive production practices and can grow on poorer quality land than food crops, making this a critical element in a strategy of sustainable biofuels production that avoids competition with crops grown for food.

Fiscal Year 2015 grants include:

- University of Georgia, Athens, Ga., \$1,000,000
- University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho, \$1,200,000
- North Carolina State University, Raleigh, N.C., \$890,800
- Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y., \$1,000,000
- USDA Agriculture Research Service, Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, \$856,200

Examples of what these grants will focus on include a University of Idaho project targeting specific breeds of poplar trees and developing disease management strategies for them to maximize plant resistance and productivity while minimizing impacts on the surrounding ecological landscape. Willow trees are the focus of Cornell University's study, using hybridization to develop improved, rust-resistant willow varieties with greater yields, allowing for a wider adoption of willow as a form of renewable bioenergy.

More information on the joint DOE-USDA Plant Feedstocks Genomics for Bioenergy research program is available on the Department of Energy website <<http://genomicscience.energy.gov/research/doeusda/>>.

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