



Christmas - Presents and the future

Christmas trees, holly, ivy and mistletoe make great festive decorations, but plants can also provide the materials to make future Christmas gifts, biodegradable packaging and the energy to light the fairy lights and cook the dinner. As part of the EPOBIO project an international group of scientists is investigating how plants can provide sustainable alternatives to fossil fuels so future Christmases have less impact on the environment, and maybe even our pockets. The project is led by CNAP, a research centre at the University of York.

A plant-based future?

Sustainability is a major goal for the future and will be achieved by using renewable resources to replace the use of finite resources such as oil.

Plants offer a sustainable solution to achieve the renewable revolution. They are 'green factories' using energy from sunlight to make useful products such as replacement plastics, biofuel and energy. The EPOBIO project is evaluating how plant products and plants themselves can best be used to replace products made using oil.

EPOBIO Director Professor Dianna Bowles said "There is an ever-increasing need to search for renewable alternatives to fossil fuels. Realising the potential of plant-based products offers real benefits to society at any time of year. By assessing the potential of using renewable resources, we can contribute to developing a sustainable society."

The EPOBIO project is a partnership between experts in plant science, environmental impact assessment, economic analysis and social expectations and combines these strengths to identify the plant-based products that offer greatest benefit to society in the next 10-15 years.

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Editor Notes:

1. The EPOBIO project released its first series of reports on the potential of plants on 23rd November 2006. Full versions of the reports and executive summaries are available to download from www.epobio.net, along with further supporting information and images:
Biopolymers flagship report - Alternative sources of natural rubber
Plant Cell Walls flagship report - Cell wall saccharification
Plant Oils flagship report - Production of wax esters in Crambe

2. Contact details for press information:

EPOBIO Director	Professor Dianna Bowles Director, CNAP, University of York	e-mail: djb32@york.ac.uk tel: +44 (0)1904 328780
EPOBIO Co-ordinator	David Clayton CNAP, University of York	e-mail: dc530@york.ac.uk tel: +44 (0)7795 315069

3. EPOBIO stands for “realising the Economic POtential of sustainable resources - BIOproducts from Non-Food Crops.”
EPOBIO is an international project to realise the economic potential of plant-derived raw materials and establish the priorities for bioscience research in order to deliver bio-based products for the market place in 10-15 years. The EPOBIO project involves a consortium of 12 European and US partners and is led by the Centre for Novel Agricultural Products at the University of York, UK. The project is funded as part of the European Commission’s Sixth Framework Programme, receiving just under £1million, with co-operation from the United States Department of Agriculture.
4. CNAP, the Centre for Novel Agricultural Products, is a research centre in the Department of Biology at the University of York and was established through a benefaction from the Garfield Weston Foundation and funding from UK Government. The University of York was awarded a Queen’s Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education in 2006 for its work in CNAP. The aim of CNAP’s research is to realise the potential of plant- and microbial-based renewable resources through gene discovery to make products needed by society. CNAP research in plant and microbial sciences is supported by the UK Research Councils, particularly the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), as well as the DTI and DEFRA, and funding from European and US organisations.
5. For general enquires about EPOBIO, please contact Dr Louisa Wright on 01904 328802 or 07795 315036, e-mail: lw15@york.ac.uk. For general enquiries about the University of York, please contact David Garner on 01904 432153, University of York Communications Office.