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First Seed Sales of Dedicated Energy Crops Begin

THOUSAND OAKS, Calif. — December 11, 2008 — Ceres, Inc. announced today that it has begun booking switchgrass and high-biomass sorghum seed under its Blade Energy Crops label. The highly anticipated launch marks the first seed sales of non-food, low-carbon crops developed specifically as raw materials for biofuels and biopower. The company simultaneously launched a Blade website to support direct-to-farm sales.

The company reported that the first Blade products build on the inherent advantages of these highly efficient crops, offering double-digit biomass yield gains in many cases — a remarkable level of improvement by crop science standards. High yields are needed since widely dispersed sources of biomass are cost-prohibitive to harvest and transport.

Anna Rath, vice president of commercial development, says that switchgrass and high-biomass sorghum can provide new options for growers, especially on underperforming acres. While she expects the bulk of Blade seed to be sold to bioenergy companies this first year, the company has set aside seed for growers interested in gaining experience with these crops as the market for biomass develops.

“With mandates for 21 billion gallons of biofuels from non-corn sources and renewed interest in cleaner-burning alternatives to coal, energy crops could offer farm operators a sizeable opportunity. No doubt growers with experience under their belts will have a head start as bioenergy companies begin looking for larger-scale supplies of biomass, or locations to site new facilities,” Rath suggested. She noted that there are various state and federal initiatives to support growers, including the Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP), which is expected to be introduced soon by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

FIRST SEED PRODUCTS

Blade sales director Frank Hardimon said that many bioenergy producers are looking for a mix of crops to provide flexibility from year to year and mitigate risk. “With a perennial and an annual crop in our product portfolio, we can support a broad range of geographies and production systems,” he said.

Blade seed products include two improved switchgrass seed varieties — EG 1101 and EG 1102 — and two new high-biomass sorghum hybrids — ES 5200 and ES 5201.

EG 1101 is a lowland-type switchgrass bred for greater biomass yields and better establishment. It has high biofuel conversion potential, and has shown superior conversion characteristics for biochemical and thermochemical processes. “It may work well in a 2-cut system in high rainfall areas,” noted Hardimon. A similar cultivar, EG 1102, is adapted farther north than EG 1101. Several switchgrass varieties suited to mid and northern latitudes are also available from Blade.

ES 5200 and ES 5201 are two high-biomass sorghum hybrids that offer high yield potential in single-cut harvest systems. Since the plants generally do not produce grain heads until very late in the season, if at all, they continue growing —and producing more biomass — until early autumn or the first killing freeze. “This offers the potential for tremendous productivity,” said Hardimon. Blade will also have sorghum hybrids suited to multi-cut harvest systems.

Blade will also be the first major brand to package sorghum seed by count rather than weight — an industry practice that has been well received in corn and soy. “This allows producers to purchase only the amount of seed they need rather than having to overbuy to cover variations in seeds per pound,” Hardimon said. Likewise, Blade switchgrass seed will be sold as pounds of pure live seed (PLS) – rather than bulk weight — so customers will purchase only viable seeds.

Hardimon said that he has been encouraged by the early interest he has received from members of the grower community. Brand representatives are now making farm visits and taking over-the-phone bookings, but he encouraged growers to try out the online booking option at the Blade website — a service that has not been widely available in the seed industry. “Our goal is to make our seed as accessible as possible,” he said. Seed will begin shipping as early as January 2009, ahead of spring plantings.

Growers can find more information about these products or book seed at www.BladeEnergy.com.

ABOUT CERES

Ceres, Inc. is a leading developer and marketer of high-yielding energy crops that can be planted as raw materials for cellulosic ethanol production and biopower. Its development efforts cover switchgrass, sorghum, miscanthus, energycane and short-rotation woody crops. The plant breeding and biotechnology company markets its switchgrass seed and sorghum seed under its Blade Energy Crops brand. Ceres holds one of the world’s largest proprietary collections of fully sequenced plant genes. The privately held firm also licenses its technology and traits to other organizations.

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