



Press Release: IBI Response to Recent Guardian Article on Biochar

March 25, 2009: For Immediate Release:

IBI has taken note of an [article by George Monbiot](#) in the UK Guardian on March 24, 2009 that questioned the validity of biochar as a climate mitigation tool and the scientists and others who support the development of biochar.

The Guardian has published responses from several of those biochar supporters mentioned by Mr. Monbiot, including [James Hansen](#), [Chris Goodall](#), and [James Lovelock](#).

IBI sent The Guardian the response below written by IBI staff members Stephen Brick and Debbie Reed.

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George Monbiot is right on the mark about our seemingly irresistible tendency for embracing miracle cures. And it is refreshing to have the press remind us that the laws of thermodynamics will continue to apply in our quest to reduce global carbon emissions. But his diatribe against biochar-like most such screeds-would have us throw the baby out with the bathwater.

This has been said often, but it needs to be said again: there is no magical pathway for cutting global carbon emissions. There is only a collection of steps-complex, costly, and, politically challenging. Put another way, there is no single remedy for the whole problem; but there are, very likely, one hundred different actions that can each bear one percent of the burden. Serious people have understood this for some time, and this would include, we believe, a large fraction of the general public that Mr. Monbiot presumably wishes to warn.

Biochar, produced and used appropriately, should be considered amongst the hundred. Done right,

biochar produces four value streams: waste reduction, energy production, soil fertilization and carbon sequestration. Biochar can be made from animal manures and food processing wastes. These residuals are costly to those who produce them, and create greenhouse gas emissions if left untreated. Bio-gas and oil can be used for heating, generating electricity and transportation. Biochar can reduce the need for conventional, fossil-fuel based fertilizers. Finally, biochar can lock up carbon in the soils for extended time periods.

We don't have all the answers on biochar production and utilization; indeed, the mission of the International Biochar Initiative is to seek these answers, objectively and quickly. We know that there are bad ways to make biochar, that crop monoculture for producing feedstock is not a good idea, and that biochar does not affect all soils equally. None of this should rule biochar out of court, however, as we also are assembling a body of knowledge on how to produce and use biochars that are beneficial. In this way, biochar resembles many other carbon-cutting technologies that face uncertainties. In our case, all we seek is an opportunity to be heard fairly as we move towards Copenhagen.

We have no doubt that exaggerating the benefits of biochar is not helpful. On the other hand, the potential of biochar deserves serious consideration. Mr Monbiot's glib dismissal of this potential is unwarranted.

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