

For Immediate Release

Contact: Thayer Tomlinson, IBI Communications Director

info@biochar-international.org

October 24, 2012

IBI Biochar Sustainability Survey Ranks Highest Priority Needs for Sustainable Biochar Systems

The global biochar community ranks the greatest potential benefits from biochar requiring high priority attention at this time as beneficial soil effects, increased water retention in droughty soils, increased soil stability, biochar effects on plant disease and pest resistance, and biochar's effectiveness in increasing fertilizer efficiency. Additionally, the community ranks the greatest potential risks from biochar to include negative impacts on soil ecosystem species, the cost of biochar technology, and the lack of sustainability monitoring, reporting and verification methodologies. These results are reported in a recent survey conducted by the IBI as part of its efforts to develop global sustainability guidelines for biochar production and utilization.

IBI is releasing some of the results from the recent survey, which asked members of the IBI network to rank the issues that affect the sustainability of biochar systems, prioritize specific biochar systems for sustainability analysis, and identify resources for assessing and monitoring the sustainability of biochar systems.

The survey is part of an open, transparent, public process currently underway by IBI to create international guidelines for the sustainable production and use of biochar. The process began in June 2012 and is projected for completion in May 2013. The resulting *IBI Biochar Sustainability Guidelines* are intended as a practical tool for biochar users, producers, markets and regulators to assist in monitoring and evaluating the sustainability of existing or proposed biochar systems. IBI is committed to creating a benchmarking tool for biochar system sustainability evaluation that is adaptable to many different regions, feedstocks, technologies, environments and communities, and that will promote continued improvements to biochar systems.

The survey was undertaken in September 2012 and 89 respondents from 29 countries participated. Slightly more than half the respondents were IBI members, and an additional 40% were non-paying subscribers to the IBI newsletter and electronic network. One third of the respondents were academic researchers. The respondents also included consultants, farmers, biochar producers, NGOs and engineers, among others.

The survey questions supplied important feedback on the progress of the effort to date and addressed crucial information needs for completing the *IBI Biochar Sustainability Guidelines*. The initial focus of the guidelines process produced twelve *IBI Biochar Sustainability Principles*, which a majority of survey respondents (74%) thought were “very comprehensive without being redundant”. Sixty percent of respondents found the Principles to be “very useful” and an additional 24% thought they were “somewhat useful”.

Questions that will help identify useful case studies for the effort asked respondents to rank the most important feedstocks and technologies for sustainable biochar systems. The feedstocks that were judged most likely to be ecologically and economically sustainable included timber mill/wood waste, urban green waste, crop residues, and fruit and nut pits and shells.

Respondents were asked to identify the most promising technologies applicable at different scales. Biochar-making cookstoves dominated household-scale technology; retorts were identified as the top farm scale technologies; multiple hearth and gasifier technologies were deemed to hold the most promise at the small industrial scale; and fast pyrolysis bio-oil systems and auger-driven continuous kilns were seen as the top technologies for large industrial systems.

For more overall information on IBI’s development of sustainability guidelines for the biochar community, please see:
<http://www.biochar-international.org/sustainability>.

-end-