

April 2009 International Biochar Initiative News

Notes from the Executive Director: Good News, Bad News

By Steve Brick. Steve@biochar-international.org



I had hoped to write something monumental for my first installment in this space ... a real stem-winder to rally the troops and build strength for the cause. Get 'em out of their seats. Etcetera.

Sadly, it turns out I'm more inclined to the prosaic. A friend calls it day to day blocking and tackling. I hate sports metaphors as a rule, but this one works for me. Everyone knows Bret Favre. Can you name one right tackle? I'd like to see Favre complete a pass without protection.

We have lots of basic blocking and tackling to do to bring biochar into the mainstream-which, by the way, continues to emerge as shorthand for IBI's mission. (Note to self: define mainstream, define biochar).

Well, I've got some good news and some bad news.

The good news is that there is rapidly growing awareness of biochar and its role in solving the world's environmental, energy and agricultural problems. A cadre of highly-credentialed scientists has identified biochar as a potential weapon in the battle against global warming. Some others have gone so far as to suggest that biochar can singlehandedly solve the climate problem, that it is a panacea.

The bad news is that this is not true; there are no panaceas, especially when it comes to decarbonizing the global economy. The bad news is that we have fewer actual answers than we need to make a watertight case for biochar, especially in a climate context. The bad news is that the world is full of incipient critics, looking for something to criticize-and a few of them have decided to focus on biochar as their particular object of derision.

So why don't sit on the sidelines and wait until we know the whole story? Simple. We don't have that luxury. We know enough about biochar's benefits-waste reduction, energy production, soil improvement and carbon sequestration-to want to insure a role for it in our environmental and agricultural future. The policy world in particular is moving ahead quickly, and if we don't make a place in it for biochar now, it will be much harder to do so later. So what's the plan?

I think we have a pretty good sense for what our basic blocking and tackling involves, and as IBI Executive Director, it's my job to make sure we maintain laser focus on these objectives:

First, we must promote the basic science needed on biochar production and utilization. What is biochar? How should we classify it? Which production systems and techniques make the best biochar? Which feedstocks should be promoted and which avoided?

Second, we need to advocate for policies that allow for the emergence of a biochar industry, recognizing its multi-faceted benefits. This means working simultaneously in environmental, energy, and agricultural policy arenas. This means working regionally, nationally, and internationally. Most challenging, this means

arguing for policies before we have answers to the many research questions.

Third, we need many more well designed and monitored projects to produce and use biochar. We need these projects across the full range of production technologies and feedstocks. And we need them now.

Finally, we have to help the rapidly growing biochar community communicate with each other, learn from others, and succeed.

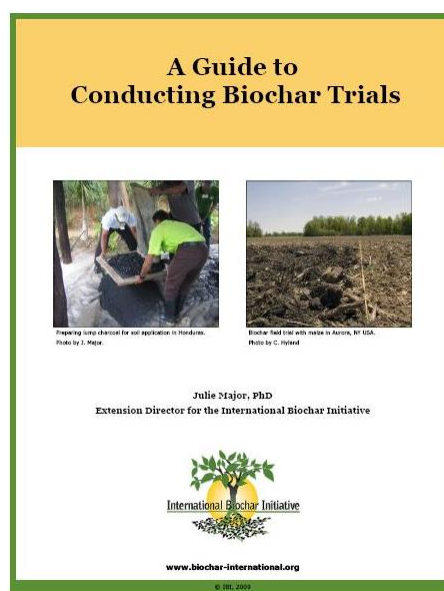
I would like to hear your views on all four of these priorities, but especially the last one. How can IBI help you succeed? Send me an email, better yet, pick up the phone and give me a call at 1-608-277-0599 (United States).

In the coming months, I'll use this space to unpack these priorities a bit more. More blocking and tackling, I know, but I'm convinced that good, basic blocking and tackling is what we need to win.

IBI Unveils Guide to Conducting Field Trials

This Guide by IBI Extension Director Julie Major will help you design a scientifically valid biochar experiment at any scale ranging from a few pots in a greenhouse to a large farm. The Guide contains data sheets to record the details of your design setup and your results. To download the guide and forms, go to:

<http://www.biochar-international.org/projectsandprograms.html>



Presentations from 2008 SSSA Conference Now Available on IBI Website

In October 2008, the joint meeting of the Soil Science Society of America (SSSA) with the Geological Society of America in Houston, TX included a three-day symposium entitled "Black Carbon in Soils and Sediments: Formation, Stabilization, Abundance, and Environmental Function".

Nearly 40 presentations were given by authors from nine countries in four oral sessions and one poster session. Topics addressed included "Classification, Formation, and Occurrence", "Identification and Characteristics", "Environmental Function", "Stability and Carbon Sequestration Potential", and "Black Carbon and Soil Organic Matter". Primary sponsors of the symposium were the Soil Chemistry Division of SSSA (David Laird, Chair) and the International Humic Substances Society (Paul Bloom, President). Symposium organizers were Jim Amonette and Dan Oik.

Upon learning that the presentations would not be posted by the SSSA after the conference, the organizers sought permission from the SSSA and from the authors to post them on the IBI website. To see the full agenda and read the presentations, go to:

Practitioner's Profile

Mantria Industries LLC: Turning Biomass Waste into Revenue**

Mantria Industries LLC, based outside of Philadelphia, is a real estate development and investment company with a focus on sustainability. Recently, Mantria started developing 6,000 acres in Central Tennessee with the aim to create a community that conforms to the Mantria Green principles-principles that call for offsetting all carbon emissions and use of green design throughout the new developments.



Working to design and build a sustainable community required Mantria to consider how to store and dispose of biomass waste onsite and ideally, to turn it into something useful. After researching its options, Mantria realized that turning this waste into bio-products could not only deal with the waste sustainably, but could also create a valuable product, biochar. This biochar could then be used in the gardens and landscaping at the development and the remainder sold to the public.

Mantria has partnered with Carbon Diversion, Inc. (CDI) out of Hawaii, to produce the biochar, called EternaGreen™. CDI already has one unit up and running in Hawaii, and in July 2009, Mantria will unveil the CDI BioRefinery, located in Sequatchie County, Tennessee-near the housing development. Troy Wragg, Founder and CEO of Mantria estimates that the CDI BioRefinery will be able to produce 7,000 pounds of biochar per hour by August 2009 and 20,000 pounds per hour by December 2009.

CDI Biorefinery in Hawaii, Photo courtesy of Mantria Industries LLC

**November 17, 2009: Please note, this article was written in good faith based on press releases and other information supplied by Mantria; readers are advised to consider recent developments (<http://www.sec.gov/news/press/2009/2009-247.htm>) before entering into any business dealings with Mantria.

Updates on Regional Biochar Groups

If your group is not listed on the website, please send your information to info@biochar-international.org so you can be included in future reports. The groups listed below are both new groups and those who have sent updates (all information is also be posted on the IBI website at:

<http://www.biochar-international.org/regionalbiochargroups.html>).

New Zealand Biochar Network

There has been an increasing amount of activity in biochar research and production in New Zealand in recent months and this is set to increase. Dr Marta Camps, Massey University's Associate Professor of Biochar and Soil Science, has just completed a 3-city biochar seminar series of the North Island and a further one is planned for the South Island in the near future, in conjunction with Drs Leo Condron and Robert Hill at Lincoln University. A NZ Biochar Network website is under construction (www.biochar.org.nz) but in the meantime, information on the New Zealand Biochar Research Centre is available at <http://soils-earth.massey.ac.nz/>.

New Zealand's first wood-to-bio-oil plant is being commissioned this month - and backers say it has the potential to vastly increase forest profitability while saving the climate. The Pukekohe plant, using a pyrolysis process, is a joint venture between New Zealand company Alternative Energy Solutions, Malaysia-based forest owner Ernslaw One, and the government's energy efficiency and conservation authority, EECA.

Pacific Northwest Biochar Initiative (United States)

The PNW group is holding its next regional gathering at the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL) in Richland, Washington on May 21st-22nd. The meeting will include a technical session with an emphasis on biochar properties, the potential for climate change mitigation, and an overview of biochar production from sophisticated systems to backyard char barrels. We will also be addressing a framework for sustainability protocols including a carbon offset presentation by The Climate Trust. Finally we will be taking a biochar technology tour of laboratories and a cornfield plot, finishing with a visit to a local winery. More information is at the <http://groups.google.com/group/pnw-biochar?hl=en>

Northeast Carbon-Negative Network (United States)

The US Northeast Carbon-Negative Network announces two upcoming events. The Northeast Biochar Roundtable, Strategy & Planning for a Carbon Negative Future, will take place on Saturday, May 9 at Pony Farm in Temple, NH. The event will include roundtable conversations on the topics of biochar, farming, food and energy.

Save the date for the Biochar Symposium on Friday, November 13, 2009 at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, MA. This will be a day of professional presentations on practical steps to sequester carbon, produce renewable energy, create sustainably fertile soil and grow nutrient-dense food. More information on both events can be found at <http://carbon-negative.us>

IBI and Biochar in the News in April 2009

General

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Web Diary, <http://webdiary.com.au/cms/?q=node/2783>

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Canadian Driver, <http://www.canadiandriver.com/2009/04/26/ontario-company-produces-gasoline-from-biomass.htm>

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Terra Economica, <http://www.terra-economica.info/Du-charbon-vert-pour-rechauffer-l,4626.html>

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Online Opinion, <http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=8792>

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Qual Energia, <http://qualenergia.it/view.php?id=913&contenuto=Articolo>

16 April 2009, Third-World Stove Soot Is Target in Climate Fight
New York Times, www.nytimes.com/2009/04/16/science/earth/16degrees.html

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climatic catastrophe
The Guardian, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/cif-green/2009/apr/15/geoengineering-emissions-reduction>

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The Scotsman, <http://news.scotsman.com/scotland/Secrets-of-the-Amazon-may.5127623.jp>

Industry Press Releases

NOTE: If you would like your company's press release to appear in this space, please send it to:
kelpie@dishmail.net

April 2009, Edward Someus of Terra Humana Clean Technology Development winner of the Eco Innovation Award of the EU.

Getting Innovations to market (No. 27 page 32)

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