

Discovery of plant gene lays groundwork for improved biofuel processing

Since 2007, researchers at the BioEnergy Science Center, one of three U.S. Department of Energy-funded research centers, have partnered to figure out how to break down plants so that they easily release the simple sugars that can be processed into biofuels. It's a breakthrough that could make biofuels cost competitive with gasoline.

Now, University of Georgia researchers who are part of the team have taken an important step toward that goal by identifying a previously uncharacterized gene that plays a major role in cell wall development of Arabidopsis plants, a discovery that promises to help turn plants into biofuel more efficiently.

The team of researchers found that the gene GXMT1 is responsible for directing a key step in the development of the plant polymer xylan, a principal component of cell walls in woody biomass that make it resistant to biofuel conversion.

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