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(54) **PLANTS AND SEEDS OF CORN**
COMPRISING *BROWN MIDRIB* AND *GT1*
GENES

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435/412

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

According to the invention, there is provided seed and corn
plants comprising brown midrib and gt1 genes conferring
increased digestibility of plants and regrowth following cut-
ting. The invention thus relates to corn plants, seeds and tissue
cultures comprising brown midrib and gt1 genes, and to
methods for producing a corn plant by crossing a corn plant
comprising the brown midrib and gt1 genes with itself or with
another corn plant, such as a plant of another variety. The
invention further relates to corn seeds and plants produced by
crossing plants comprising brown midrib and gt1 genes with
plants of another variety, such as an inbred line.

24 Claims, No Drawings

1

**PLANTS AND SEEDS OF CORN
COMPRISING BROWN MIDRIB AND GT1
GENES**

This application claims benefit of and priority to U.S. Provisional patent Application Ser. No. 60/702,508, filed Jul. 26, 2005, which is herein incorporated by reference in its entirety.

This invention was made with government support under grant number USDA/CSREES 01-CRHF-0-6055 awarded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The government has certain rights in the invention.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to the field of corn breeding. In particular, the invention relates to corn plants and seeds comprising *bm3* and *gt1* genes exhibiting improved growth and composition traits, and derivatives and tissue cultures thereof.

2. Description of Related Art

The goal of field crop breeding is to combine various desirable traits in a single variety/hybrid. Such desirable traits include greater yield, better stalks, better roots, resistance to insecticides, herbicides, pests, and disease, tolerance to heat and drought, reduced time to crop maturity, better agronomic quality, higher nutritional value, and uniformity in germination times, stand establishment, growth rate, maturity, and fruit size.

Corn plants (*Zea mays* L.) can be bred by both self-pollination and cross-pollination. Both types of pollination involve the corn plant's flowers. Corn has separate male and female flowers on the same plant, located on the tassel and the ear, respectively. Natural pollination occurs in corn when wind blows pollen from the tassels to the silks that protrude from the tops of the ear shoot. Breeding techniques take advantage of a plant's method of pollination. Thus, by controlling pollination process, plant breeding allows to production progeny specifically from selected parent plants.

North American farmers plant tens of millions of acres of corn at the present time and there are extensive national and international commercial corn breeding programs. A variety of naturally occurring mutations are known for various corn varieties, but traits that are agronomically advantageous are often accompanied by other undesirable characteristics. One goal of corn plant breeding, therefore, is the introgression of advantageous genes into an agronomically superior genetic background to produce plants that of greater commercial value.

Decreased corn stock lignin content is a desirable trait in corn crops, since plants with decreased lignin can be used to produce fodder with increased digestibility (Vignols et al. 1995). The brown midrib 3 (*bm3*) gene, which is mutant version of the COMT gene encoding caffeic acid O-methyltransferase, confers decreased lignin content to corn plants. For instance, silage from corn plants comprising *bm3* is a preferred diet for ruminants, and can increase milk yield in dairy cows (Oba et al., 2000). Thus, corn comprising *bm3* has greater commercial value than comparable corn varieties lacking *bm3*. A brown midrib 2 (*bm2*) gene has also been described (Burnham and Brink, 1932)

Another desirable corn trait is efficient regrowth potential after cutting. In the lower latitudes plants with enhanced regrowth potential can enable a second crop harvest. Alternatively, in northern latitudes where there is a shorter growing season, regrowth of harvested plants can be used as forage for livestock or allow for harvesting of additional material for

2

fodder. Grassy tiller 1 (*gt1*) is a gene known to alter the phenotype of corn tillers, and to enhance regrowth of plants after cutting. Thus *gt1* expressing plants will also have commercial advantages plants lacking the gene.

While the expression of brown midrib or *gt1* alone is advantageous a plant comprising both genes is of exceedingly high value. Decreased lignin content and increased regrowth after cutting, conferred by brown midrib and *gt1* enables increased production of highly digestible fodder, or forage for live stock. Thus plants comprising both genes can greatly increase the quality and amount of livestock feed that may produced from a given crop field. However, the possibility of breeding such plants regardless of labor was unknown, due to additional complications such as linkage drag and epistasis that occur when attempting to introgress multiple genes into plants. For example, it has been documented that the penetrance and expressivity of the grassy tiller phenotype is variable depending on the genetic background, indicating that successful introgression of the grassy tiller phenotype is unpredictable (Tracy et al., 1982). The combination of the two genes was also unpredictable with respect to the phenotype obtained. Thus, there has been a longstanding but unfulfilled need in the art for corn plants comprising the *gt1* and *bm2* or *bm3* genes displaying reduced lignin content and increased regrowth after cutting.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In one aspect, the present invention provides a corn plant comprising brown midrib and *gt1* genes. Such a plant may be defined as exhibiting reduced lignin content and enhanced regrowth after cutting. The plants may also, in some embodiments, be defined as agronomically elite. In certain embodiments of the invention, corn plants comprising brown midrib gene comprise one or both of the *bm2* and/or *bm3* genes. Plants according to the invention may be homozygous for any one or more of *bm2*, *bm3* and/or *bm2*, as well as for *gt1*. In specific embodiments, a plant of the invention may comprise a brown midrib gene found in the WGRCOMP C2 population described herein. Parts of the corn plant of the present invention are also provided, for example, pollen and ovules obtained from corn plants of the invention.

The invention also concerns seed of corn plants comprising brown midrib and *gt1* genes. In certain embodiments, the corn seed may be provided as an essentially homogeneous population of corn seed, for example seed from the WGRCOMP C2 population of corn plants. Essentially homogeneous populations of seed are generally free from substantial numbers of other seed. The seed population may be separately grown to provide an essentially homogeneous population of corn plants comprising the brown midrib and *gt1* genes.

In certain embodiments of the invention, plants comprising brown midrib and *gt1* may be used as feed for livestock. For example, the plants may be used to make stover or silage. In certain aspects, plants comprising the brown midrib and *gt1* genes could used as feed for dairy cows. Thus, a method for increasing the milk yield of dairy cows is provided herein. Such a method may comprise feeding fodder comprising plants of the invention to dairy cows thereby enhancing milk yield.

In another aspect of the invention, a corn plant comprising the brown midrib and *gt1* genes further comprises an added heritable trait. The added heritable trait may comprise a genetic locus that is a dominant or recessive allele. In one embodiment of the invention, a corn plant comprising the brown midrib and *gt1* genes further comprising a single locus conversion is provided. In specific embodiments of the inven-

tion, an added genetic locus confers one or more traits such as, for example, male sterility, herbicide tolerance, insect resistance, disease resistance, waxy starch, modified fatty acid metabolism, modified phytic acid metabolism, modified carbohydrate metabolism and modified protein metabolism. The trait may be, for example, conferred by a naturally occurring maize gene introduced into the genome of the variety by backcrossing, a natural or induced mutation, or a transgene introduced through genetic transformation techniques. When introduced through transformation, a genetic locus may comprise one or more transgenes integrated at a single chromosomal location.

In yet another aspect of the invention, a corn plant comprising the brown midrib and *gt1* genes is provided, wherein a cytoplasmically-inherited trait has been introduced into said inbred plant. Such cytoplasmically-inherited traits are passed to progeny through the female parent in a particular cross. An exemplary cytoplasmically-inherited trait is the male sterility trait. Cytoplasmic-male sterility (CMS) is a pollen abortion phenomenon determined by the interaction between the genes in the cytoplasm and the nucleus. Alteration in the mitochondrial genome and the lack of restorer genes in the nucleus will lead to pollen abortion. With either a normal cytoplasm or the presence of restorer gene(s) in the nucleus, the plant will produce pollen normally. A CMS plant can be pollinated by a maintainer version of the same variety, which has a normal cytoplasm but lacks the restorer gene(s) in the nucleus, and continue to be male sterile in the next generation. The male fertility of a CMS plant can be restored by a restorer version of the same variety, which must have the restorer gene(s) in the nucleus. With the restorer gene(s) in the nucleus, the offspring of the male-sterile plant can produce normal pollen grains and propagate. A cytoplasmically inherited trait may be a naturally occurring maize trait or a trait introduced through genetic transformation techniques.

In another aspect of the invention, a tissue culture of regenerable cells of a corn plant comprising the brown midrib and *gt1* genes is provided. The tissue culture will preferably be capable of regenerating plants capable of expressing all of the physiological and morphological characteristics of the variety, and of regenerating plants having substantially the same genotype as other plants of the variety. Examples of some of the physiological and morphological characteristics of corn plants comprising the brown midrib and *gt1* genes include, decreased lignin content, increased digestibility and enhanced regrowth after cutting, as compared to plants with an identical genetic background but lacking the brown midrib and *gt1* genes. The regenerable cells in such tissue cultures will preferably be derived from embryos, meristematic cells, immature tassels, microspores, pollen, leaves, anthers, roots, root tips, silk, flowers, kernels, ears, cobs, husks, or stalks, or from callus or protoplasts derived from those tissues. Still further, the present invention provides corn plants regenerated from the tissue cultures of the invention, the plants having all the physiological and morphological characteristics of corn plants comprising the brown midrib and *gt1* genes.

In yet another aspect of the invention, processes are provided for producing corn seeds or plants, which processes generally comprise crossing a first parent corn plant with a second parent corn plant, wherein at least one of the first or second parent corn plants is a plant comprising the brown midrib and *gt1* genes. In one embodiment, the first and/or second parent may be of the WGRCOMP C2 population. These processes may be further exemplified as processes for preparing hybrid corn seed or plants, wherein a first corn plant is crossed with a second corn plant of a different, distinct variety to provide a hybrid that has, as one of its parents, the

corn plant comprising the brown midrib and *gt1* genes. In these processes, crossing will result in the production of seed. The seed production occurs regardless of whether the seed is collected or not.

In one embodiment of the invention, the first step in "crossing" comprises planting, preferably in pollinating proximity, seeds of a first and second parent corn plant, and preferably, seeds of a first corn plant and a second, distinct inbred corn plant. Where the plants are not in pollinating proximity, pollination can nevertheless be accomplished by transferring a pollen or tassel bag from one plant to the other as described below.

A second step comprises cultivating or growing the seeds of said first and second parent corn plants into plants that bear flowers (corn bears both male flowers (tassels) and female flowers (silks) in separate anatomical structures on the same plant). A third step comprises preventing self-pollination of the plants, i.e., preventing the silks of a plant from being fertilized by any plant of the same variety, including the same plant. This is preferably done by emasculating the male flowers of the first or second parent corn plant, (i.e., treating or manipulating the flowers so as to prevent pollen production, in order to produce an emasculated parent corn plant). Self-incompatibility systems may also be used in some hybrid crops for the same purpose. Self-incompatible plants still shed viable pollen and can pollinate plants of other varieties but are incapable of pollinating themselves or other plants of the same variety.

A fourth step may comprise allowing cross-pollination to occur between the first and second parent corn plants. When the plants are not in pollinating proximity, this is done by placing a bag, usually paper or glassine, over the tassels of the first plant and another bag over the silks of the incipient ear on the second plant. The bags are left in place for at least 24 hours. Since pollen is viable for less than 24 hours, this assures that the silks are not pollinated from other pollen sources, that any stray pollen on the tassels of the first plant is dead, and that the only pollen transferred comes from the first plant. The pollen bag over the tassel of the first plant is then shaken vigorously to enhance release of pollen from the tassels, and the shoot bag is removed from the silks of the incipient ear on the second plant. Finally, the pollen bag is removed from the tassel of the first plant and is placed over the silks of the incipient ear of the second plant, shaken again and left in place. Yet another step comprises harvesting the seeds from at least one of the parent corn plants. The harvested seed can be grown to produce a corn plant or hybrid corn plant.

The present invention also provides corn seed and plants produced by a process that comprises crossing a first parent corn plant with a second parent corn plant, wherein at least one of the first or second parent corn plants is a plant comprising the brown midrib and *gt1* genes. In one embodiment of the invention, corn seed and plants produced by the process are first generation (F_1) hybrid corn seed and plants produced by crossing an inbred in accordance with the invention with another, distinct inbred. The present invention further contemplates seed of an F_1 hybrid corn plant. Therefore, certain exemplary embodiments of the invention provide an F_1 hybrid corn plant and seed thereof.

In still yet another aspect, the present invention provides a method of producing an inbred corn plant derived from a corn plant comprising the brown midrib and *gt1* genes, the method comprising the steps of: (a) preparing a progeny plant derived corn comprising the brown midrib and *gt1* genes, wherein said preparing comprises crossing a plant of the corn comprising the brown midrib and *gt1* genes with a second corn plant; (b) crossing the progeny plant with itself or a second

plant to produce a seed of a progeny plant of a subsequent generation; (c) growing a progeny plant of a subsequent generation from said seed of a progeny plant of a subsequent generation and crossing the progeny plant of a subsequent generation with itself or a second plant; and (d) repeating steps (c) and (d) for an addition 3-10 generations to produce an inbred corn plant comprising the brown midrib and *gt1* genes. In the method, it may be desirable to select particular plants resulting from step (c) for continued crossing according to steps (b) and (c). By selecting plants having one or more desirable traits, an inbred corn plant comprising the brown midrib and *gt1* genes is obtained which possesses the desirable traits of corn comprising the brown midrib and *gt1* genes as well potentially other selected traits.

Embodiments discussed in the context of a methods and/or composition of the invention may be employed with respect to any other method or composition described herein. Thus, an embodiment pertaining to one method or composition may be applied to other methods and compositions of the invention as well.

As used herein the specification, “a” or “an” may mean one or more. As used herein in the claim(s), when used in conjunction with the word “comprising”, the words “a” or “an” may mean one or more than one. As used herein “another” may mean at least a second or more.

Other objects, features and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from the following detailed description. It should be understood, however, that the detailed description and the specific examples, while indicating preferred embodiments of the invention, are given by way of illustration only, since various changes and modifications within the spirit and scope of the invention will become apparent to those skilled in the art from this detailed description.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Corn plants, provided by the invention, comprising brown midrib and *gt1* genes offer significant commercial advantages as compared to other available corn crops. The combination of the two genes confer increased nutritional value and increased regrowth after cutting. Thus, in warmer climates with long growing seasons, crops comprising these genes could enable two corn harvests, each harvest comprising highly digestible material for silage. On the other hand, crops grown in northern latitudes could be harvested and subsequent crop regrowth could provide additional highly digestible silage, or forage for livestock. Thus, in some embodiments corn crops according to the invention would produce increased quantities of feed (fodder) with enhanced nutritional value. This is high advantageous since such plants will increase the per acre yield of corn fields with respect to live stock feed production.

I. Definitions of Plant Characteristics

Barren Plants: Plants that are barren, i.e., lack an ear with grain, or have an ear with only a few scattered kernels.

Brown midrib: The brown midrib3 gene is located on the short arm of chromosome 4 and the recessive *bm3* allele results in plants displaying a reddish brown pigment in the leaf mid-vein starting when there are four to six leaves. The *bm3* allele affects the activity of catechol O-methyl transferase and decreases lignin concentration in corn plants. The *bm3*-modified lignin improves forage digestibility for ruminants. The brown midrib 2 gene is located on the long arm of chromosome 1, and the recessive *bm2* allele confers the same

phenotype as *bm3*. The exact mechanism by which lignin is reduced by the *bm2* allele is unknown.

Ear-Attitude: The attitude or position of the ear at harvest scored as upright, horizontal, or pendant.

Ear-Cob Color: The color of the cob, scored as white, pink, red, or brown.

Ear-Cob Diameter: The average diameter of the cob measured at the midpoint.

Ear-Diameter: The average diameter of the ear at its midpoint.

Ear-Dry Husk Color: The color of the husks at harvest scored as buff, red, or purple.

Ear-Fresh Husk Color: The color of the husks 1 to 2 weeks after pollination scored as green, red, or purple.

Ear-Husk Bract: The length of an average husk leaf scored as short, medium, or long.

Ear-Husk Cover: The average distance from the tip of the ear to the tip of the husks. Minimum value no less than zero.

Ear-Husk Opening: An evaluation of husk tightness at harvest scored as tight, intermediate, or open.

Ear-Length: The average length of the ear.

Ear-Number Per Stalk: The average number of ears per plant.

Ear-Shank Internodes: The average number of internodes on the ear shank.

Ear-Shank Length: The average length of the ear shank.

Ear-Shelling Percent: The average of the shelled grain weight divided by the sum of the shelled grain weight and cob weight for a single ear.

Ear-Silk Color: The color of the silk observed 2 to 3 days after silk emergence scored as green-yellow, yellow, pink, red, or purple.

Ear-Taper (Shape): The taper or shape of the ear scored as conical, semi-conical, or cylindrical.

Ear-Weight: The average weight of an ear.

GDUs: Growing degree units which are calculated by the Barger Method, where the heat units for a 24-h period are calculated as $GDUs = [(Maximum\ daily\ temperature + Minimum\ daily\ temperature) / 2] - 50$. The highest maximum daily temperature used is 86° F. and the lowest minimum temperature used is 50° F.

GDUs to Shed: The number of growing degree units (GDUs) or heat units required for an inbred line or hybrid to have approximately 50% of the plants shedding pollen as measured from time of planting. GDUs to shed is determined by summing the individual GDU daily values from planting date to the date of 50% pollen shed.

GDUs to Silk: The number of growing degree units for an inbred line or hybrid to have approximately 50% of the plants with silk emergence as measured from time of planting. GDUs to silk is determined by summing the individual GDU daily values from planting date to the date of 50% silking.

Grassy tiller1: This gene, located on the short arm of chromosome 1, affects tiller number and morphology. The recessive grassy tiller1 (*gt1*) allele typically increases the number of basal branches. It may also lead to vegetative totipotency in combination with the indeterminate growth1 (*id1*) allele and other factors for perennialism in maize. The *gt1* allele may confer increased regrowth potential after cutting.

Kernel-Aleurone Color: The color of the aleurone scored as white, pink, tan, brown, bronze, red, purple, pale purple, colorless, or variegated.

Kernel-Cap Color: The color of the kernel cap observed at dry stage, scored as white, lemon-yellow, yellow, or orange.

Kernel-Endosperm Color: The color of the endosperm scored as white, pale yellow, or yellow.

Kernel-Endosperm Type: The type of endosperm scored as normal, waxy, or opaque.

Kernel-Length: The average distance from the cap of the kernel to the pedicel.

Kernel-Number Per Row: The average number of kernels in a single row.

Kernel-Pericarp Color: The color of the pericarp scored as colorless, red-white crown, tan, bronze, brown, light red, cherry red, or variegated.

Kernel-Row Direction: The direction of the kernel rows on the ear scored as straight, slightly curved, spiral, or indistinct (scattered).

Kernel-Row Number: The average number of rows of kernels on a single ear.

Kernel-Thickness: The distance across the narrow side of the kernel.

Kernel-Type: The type of kernel scored as dent, flint, or intermediate.

Kernel-Weight: The average weight of a predetermined number of kernels.

Kernel-Width: The distance across the flat side of the kernel.

Leaf-Angle: Angle of the upper leaves to the stalk scored as upright (0 to 30 degrees), intermediate (30 to 60 degrees), or lax (60 to 90 degrees).

Leaf-Color: The color of the leaves 1 to 2 weeks after pollination scored as light green, medium green, dark green, or very dark green.

Leaf-Length: The average length of the primary ear leaf.

Leaf-Longitudinal Creases: A rating of the number of longitudinal creases on the leaf surface 1 to 2 weeks after pollination. Creases are scored as absent, few, or many.

Leaf-Marginal Waves: A rating of the waviness of the leaf margin 1 to 2 weeks after pollination. Rated as none, few, or many.

Leaf-Number: The average number of leaves on primary stalk of a mature plant. Counting begins with the cotyledonary leaf and ends with the flag leaf.

Leaf-Sheath Anthocyanin: A rating of the level of anthocyanin in the leaf sheath 1 to 2 weeks after pollination, scored as absent, basal-weak, basal-strong, weak or strong.

Leaf-Sheath Pubescence: A rating of the pubescence of the leaf sheath. Ratings are taken 1 to 2 weeks after pollination and scored as light, medium, or heavy.

Leaf-Width: The average width of the primary ear leaf measured at its widest point.

Stalk-Anthocyanin: A rating of the amount of anthocyanin pigmentation in the stalk. The stalk is rated 1 to 2 weeks after pollination as absent, basal-weak, basal-strong, weak, or strong.

Stalk-Brace Root Color: The color of the brace roots observed 1 to 2 weeks after pollination as green, red, or purple.

Stalk-Diameter: The average diameter of the lowest visible internode of the stalk.

Stalk-Ear Height: The average height of the ear measured from the ground to the point of attachment of the ear shank of the top developed ear to the stalk.

Stalk-Internode Direction: The direction of the stalk internode observed after pollination as straight or zigzag.

Stalk-Internode Length: The average length of the internode above the primary ear.

Stalk-Nodes With Brace Roots: The average number of nodes having brace roots per plant.

Stalk-Plant Height: The average height of the plant as measured from the soil to the tip of the tassel.

Stalk-Tillers: The average number of tillers on a plants. A tiller is defined as a secondary shoot that has developed and has a tassel capable of shedding pollen.

Tassel-Anther Color: The color of the anthers at 50% pollen shed scored as green-yellow, yellow, pink, red, or purple.

Tassel-Attitude: The attitude of the tassel after pollination scored as open or compact.

Tassel-Branch Angle: The angle of an average tassel branch to the main stem of the tassel scored as upright (less than 30 degrees), intermediate (30 to 45 degrees), or lax (greater than 45 degrees).

Tassel-Branch Number: The average number of primary tassel branches.

Tassel-Glume Band: The closed anthocyanin band at the base of the glume scored as present or absent.

Tassel-Glume Color: The color of the glumes at 50% shed scored as green, red, or purple.

Tassel-Length: The length of the tassel measured from the base of the bottom tassel branch to the tassel tip.

Tassel-Peduncle Length: The average length of the tassel peduncle, measured from the base of the flag leaf to the base of the bottom tassel branch.

Tassel-Pollen Shed: A visual rating of pollen shed determined by tapping the tassel and observing the pollen flow of approximately five plants per entry. Rated on a 1 to 9 scale where 9=sterile, 1=most pollen.

Tassel-Spike Length: The length of the spike measured from the base of the top tassel branch to the tassel tip.

Test Weight: Weight of the grain in pounds for a given volume (bushel) adjusted to 15.5% moisture.

Yield: Yield of grain at harvest adjusted to 15.5% moisture.

II. Other Definitions

Allele: Any of one or more alternative forms of a gene locus, all of which alleles relate to one trait or characteristic. In a diploid cell or organism, the two alleles of a given gene occupy corresponding loci on a pair of homologous chromosomes.

Backcrossing: A process in which a breeder repeatedly crosses hybrid progeny back to one of the parents, for example, a first generation hybrid (F_1) with one of the parental genotypes of the F_1 hybrid.

Crossing: The pollination of a female flower of a corn plant, thereby resulting in the production of seed from the flower.

Cross-pollination: Fertilization by the union of two gametes from different plants.

Diploid: A cell or organism having two sets of chromosomes.

Emasculate: The removal of plant male sex organs or the inactivation of the organs with a chemical agent or a cytoplasmic or nuclear genetic factor conferring male sterility.

F_1 Hybrid: The first generation progeny of the cross of two plants.

Genetic Complement: An aggregate of nucleotide sequences, the expression of which sequences defines the phenotype in corn plants, or components of plants including cells or tissue.

Genotype: The genetic constitution of a cell or organism.

Haploid: A cell or organism having one set of the two sets of chromosomes in a diploid.

Homozygous: Refers to a certain gene being present of each copy of the chromosomes.

Isozymes: Detectable variants of an enzyme, the variants catalyzing the same reaction(s) but differing from each other, e.g., in primary structure and/or electrophoretic mobility. The

differences between isozymes are under single gene, codominant control. Consequently, electrophoretic separation to produce band patterns can be equated to different alleles at the DNA level. Structural differences that do not alter charge cannot be detected by this method.

Linkage: A phenomenon wherein alleles on the same chromosome tend to segregate together more often than expected by chance if their transmission was independent.

Marker: A readily detectable phenotype, preferably inherited in codominant fashion (both alleles at a locus in a diploid heterozygote are readily detectable), with no environmental variance component, i.e., heritability of 1.

Phenotype: The detectable characteristics of a cell or organism, which characteristics are the manifestation of gene expression.

Quantitative Trait Loci (QTL): Genetic loci that contribute, at least in part, certain numerically representable traits that are usually continuously distributed.

Regeneration: The development of a plant from tissue culture.

Self-pollination: The transfer of pollen from the anther to the stigma of the same plant.

Single Locus Converted (Conversion) Plant: Plants which are developed by a plant breeding technique called backcrossing wherein essentially all of the desired morphological and physiological characteristics of an inbred are recovered in addition to the characteristics conferred by the single locus transferred into the inbred via the backcrossing technique.

Tissue Culture: A composition comprising isolated cells of the same or a different type or a collection of such cells organized into parts of a plant.

Transgene: A genetic sequence which has been introduced into the nuclear or chloroplast genome of a maize plant by a genetic transformation technique.

The following examples are included to demonstrate preferred embodiments of the invention. It should be appreciated by those of skill in the art that the techniques disclosed in the examples that follow represent techniques discovered by the inventor to function well in the practice of the invention, and thus can be considered to constitute preferred modes for its practice. However, those of skill in the art should, in light of the present disclosure, appreciate that many changes can be made in the specific embodiments that are disclosed and still obtain a like or similar result without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.

III. The WGRCOMP C2 Corn Plant Population

A. Origin and Breeding History

1. Incorporation of gt1 and Brown Midrib and Development of WGRCOMP C0

Lines comprising gt1, bm2 and bm3 were originally obtained from Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y., and University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis., respectively. Both gt1 and bm3 were backcrossed into inbred lines W64A, W117, and W182BN during the period from 1984-1995. Of these lines, W64A and W117 comprise bm3 genes and W182BN, is believed to contain bm2. During 1996-1997, the three possible line x line crosses (bm3+gt1) were made, as well as the four-way crosses. The resulting line was designated "WGRCOMP Syn0."

2. Selection for Vigorous Regrowth

Seed for WGRCOMP Syn0 was increased by chain sibbing (plant-to-plant crossing whereby each plant is used once as male and once as female), with selection of the most vigorous plants during 1998 and 1999. WGRCOMP C0 Syn2 was

planted in May 15, 2001 and cut back to 2-3" height on Jul. 6, 2001. Approximately 100 bm3+gt1 plants with vigorous regrowth were pollinated by chain-sibbing. At harvest, ears from 28 plants were saved, and seed was composited to make WGRCOMP C1 Syn0. In 2002, WGRCOMP C1 Syn0 was planted on May 1, 2002 and cut back to 2-3" height on Jul. 3, 2002. Approximately 25 bm3+gt1 plants with vigorous regrowth were pollinated by chain-sibbing. At harvest, ears from 12 plants were saved, and seed was composited to form WGRCOMP C2 Syn0. Seed of WGRCOMP C2 Syn0 was planted in the winter nursery for increase by chain-sibbing without selection. The resulting seed was referred to as WGRCOMP C2 Syn1. In 2003 and 2004 there were further seed increases via chain sibbing (2003) and bulk pollination (2004) to create WGRCOMP C2 Syn2 and WGRCOMP C2 Syn3.

Thus, WGRCOMP C2 corn is a narrow base population derived from a three line synthetic (W64A, W182BN, W117) and comprising brown midrib and gt1 genes. It is believed that the population contains bm3 from W64A or W117, but may comprise bm2 from W182BN as bm2 and bm3 are not discernable visibly. Corn population WGRCOMP C2 shows uniformity and stability within the limits of environmental influence for the traits described hereinafter in Table 1. WGRCOMP C2 is an open-pollinated population that has selected for uniformity of plant type to ensure brown midrib and gt1 homozygosity and phenotypic stability

Inbred corn plants can be reproduced by planting the seeds of the WGRCOMP C2 population, growing the resulting corn plants under self-pollinating or sib-pollinating conditions with adequate isolation using standard techniques well known to an artisan skilled in the agricultural arts. Seeds can be harvested from such a plant using standard, well known procedures.

B. Phenotypic Description

In accordance with another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a corn plant having the physiological and morphological characteristics of a corn plant comprising brown midrib and gt1 genes as exemplified in WGRCOMP C2. A description of exemplary physiological and morphological characteristics of representative corn plants of WGRCOMP C2 is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Physiological and Morphological Traits for WGRCOMP C2*			
	CHARACTERISTIC	VALUE	
1.	STALK		
	Plant Height cm.	200.7	
	Diameter (width) cm.	2.3	
	Ear height cm.	82.9	
	Nodes With Brace Roots	1	
	Internode Length cm.	13.4	
	Internode Direction	Straight	
	Anthocyanin	Absent	
	Brace Root Color	Variable	
	Plants expressing gt1	100%	
	Tillers	5.4	
	2.	LEAF	
		Color	Medium green
Length cm.		83.4	
Width cm.		6.9	
Angle		Lax	
Number		11.9	
Sheath Anthocyanin		Absent ¹	
Sheath Pubescence		Light	
Plants Expressing brown midrib		100%	
Marginal Waves		Few	
Longitudinal Creases	Absent		

TABLE 1-continued

<u>Physiological and Morphological Traits for WGRCOMP C2*</u>	
CHARACTERISTIC	VALUE
3. TASSEL	
Attitude	Open
Length cm.	41.0
Spike Length cm.	40.9
Peduncle Length cm.	5.6
Branch Number	14.2
Branch Angle	Lax
Anther Color	Green-yellow
Glume Color	Variable
Glume Band	Variable
Pollen Shed	5
4. EAR	
Attitude	Pendant
Silk Color	Green-yellow
Number Per Stalk	2.8
Length cm.	12.6
Shape	Cylindrical
Diameter cm.	3.8
Weight gm.	83.9
Shank Length cm.	24.1
Shank Internodes	6.6
Husk Bract	Medium
Husk Cover cm.	2.5
Husk Opening	Intermediate
Husk Color Fresh	Green
Husk Color Dry	Buff
Cob Diameter cm.	2.2
Cob Color	Red to dark red
Shank Length cm.	24.1
Shelling Percent	84.5
5. KERNEL	
Row Number	16.5
Number Per Row	21.2
Row Direction	Straight
Type	Dent
Cap Color	Yellow
Length (depth) mm.	1.0
Thickness	0.6
Weight of 1000 K gm.	202.3
Width cm.	0.6
Endosperm Type	Normal
Endosperm Color	Yellow
Aleurone Color	Colorless
Pericarp Color	Colorless
6. GROWING DEGREE UNITS	
Pollen Shed	1270
Silk Emergence	1285

*These are typical values. Values may vary due to environment. Other values that are substantially equivalent are also within the scope of the invention.

¹The brown midrib3 allele causes the leaf mid-vein to acquire a reddish-brown color as the plant develops, starting at about the four-leaf stage.

C. Deposit Information

Applicant has made a deposit of at least 2500 seeds of corn population WGRCOMP C2 with the American Type Culture Collection (ATCC), 10801 University Boulevard, Manassas, Va. 20110-2209 U.S.A., which was assigned ATCC Accession No. PTA-6805. The seeds were deposited with the ATCC on Jun. 24, 2005. Access to this deposit will be available during the pendency of the application to the Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks and persons determined by the Commissioner to be entitled thereto upon request. The deposit will be maintained in the ATCC Depository, which is a public depository, for a period of 30 years, or 5 years after the most recent request, or for the enforceable life of the patent, whichever is longer, and will be replaced if it becomes nonviable during that period. Applicant does not waive any

infringement of their rights granted under this patent or under the Plant Variety Protection Act (7 U.S.C. 2321 et seq.).

IV. Further Embodiments of the Invention

In certain further aspects, the invention provides plants modified to include at least a first desired heritable trait. Such plants may, in one embodiment, be developed by a plant breeding technique called backcrossing, wherein essentially all of the desired morphological and physiological characteristics of a variety are recovered in addition to a genetic locus transferred into the plant via the backcrossing technique.

Backcrossing methods can be used with the present invention to improve or introduce a trait into a variety. The term backcrossing as used herein refers to the repeated crossing of a hybrid progeny back to one of the parental corn plants. The parental corn plant which contributes the locus or loci for the desired trait is termed the nonrecurrent or donor parent. This terminology refers to the fact that the nonrecurrent parent is used one time in the backcross protocol and therefore does not recur.

The parental corn plant to which the locus or loci from the nonrecurrent parent are transferred is known as the recurrent parent as it is used for several rounds in the backcrossing protocol (Poehlman et al., 1995; Fehr, 1987; Sprague and Dudley, 1988). In a typical backcross protocol, the original parent of interest (recurrent parent) is crossed to a second variety (nonrecurrent parent) that carries the genetic locus of interest to be transferred. The resulting progeny from this cross are then crossed again to the recurrent parent and the process is repeated until a corn plant is obtained wherein essentially all of the desired morphological and physiological characteristics of the recurrent parent are recovered in the converted plant, in addition to the transferred locus from the nonrecurrent parent. The backcross process may be accelerated by the use of genetic markers, such as SSR, RFLP, SNP or AFLP markers to identify plants with the greatest genetic complement from the recurrent parent.

The selection of a suitable recurrent parent is an important step for a successful backcrossing procedure. The goal of a backcross protocol is to add or substitute one or more new traits in the original variety and progeny therefrom. To accomplish this, a genetic locus of the recurrent parent is modified or substituted with the desired locus from the non-recurrent parent, while retaining essentially all of the rest of the desired genetic, and therefore the desired physiological and morphological constitution of the original plant. The choice of the particular nonrecurrent parent will depend on the purpose of the backcross; one of the major purposes is to add some commercially desirable, agronomically important trait to the plant. The exact backcrossing protocol will depend on the characteristic or trait being altered to determine an appropriate testing protocol. Although backcrossing methods are simplified when the characteristic being transferred is a dominant allele, a recessive allele may also be transferred. In this instance it may be necessary to introduce a test of the progeny to determine if the desired characteristic has been successfully transferred.

Many traits have been identified that are not regularly selected for in the development of a new variety but that can be improved by backcrossing techniques. A genetic locus conferring the traits may or may not be transgenic. Examples of such traits known to those of skill in the art include, but are not limited to, male sterility, waxy starch, herbicide resistance, resistance for bacterial, fungal, or viral disease, insect resistance, male fertility and enhanced nutritional quality. These genes are generally inherited through the nucleus, but

may be inherited through the cytoplasm. Some known exceptions to this are genes for male sterility, some of which are inherited cytoplasmically, but still act as a single locus trait.

Direct selection may be applied where a genetic locus acts as a dominant trait. An example of a dominant trait is the herbicide resistance trait. For this selection process, the progeny of the initial cross are sprayed with the herbicide prior to the backcrossing. The spraying eliminates any plants which do not have the desired herbicide resistance characteristic, and only those plants which have the herbicide resistance gene are used in the subsequent backcross. This process is then repeated for all additional backcross generations.

Many useful traits are those which are introduced by genetic transformation techniques. Methods for the genetic transformation of corn are known to those of skill in the art. For example, methods which have been described for the genetic transformation of corn include electroporation (U.S. Pat. No. 5,384,253), electrotransformation (U.S. Pat. No. 5,371,003), microprojectile bombardment (U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,550,318; 5,736,369, 5,538,880; and PCT Publication WO 95/06128), *Agrobacterium*-mediated transformation (U.S. Pat. No. 5,591,616 and E.P. Publication EP672752), direct DNA uptake transformation of protoplasts (Omirulleh et al., 1993) and silicon carbide fiber-mediated transformation (U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,302,532 and 5,464,765).

It is understood to those of skill in the art that a transgene need not be directly transformed into a plant, as techniques for the production of stably transformed corn plants that pass single loci to progeny by Mendelian inheritance are well known in the art. Such loci may therefore be passed from parent plant to progeny plants by plant breeding techniques. Examples of traits that may be introduced into a corn plant according to the invention are provided below.

A. Male Sterility

Examples of genes conferring male sterility include those disclosed in U.S. Pat. Nos. 3,861,709, 3,710,511, 4,654,465, 5,625,132, and 4,727,219, each of the disclosures of which are specifically incorporated herein by reference in their entirety. The use of herbicide-inducible male sterility genes is described in U.S. Pat. No. 6,762,344. Male sterility genes can increase the efficiency with which hybrids are made, in that they eliminate the need to physically emasculate the corn plant used as a female in a given cross.

Where one desires to employ male-sterility systems with a corn plant in accordance with the invention, it may be beneficial to also utilize one or more male-fertility restorer genes. For example, where cytoplasmic male sterility (CMS) is used, hybrid seed production requires three inbred lines: (1) a cytoplasmically male-sterile line having a CMS cytoplasm; (2) a fertile inbred with normal cytoplasm, which is isogenic with the CMS line for nuclear genes ("maintainer line"); and (3) a distinct, fertile inbred with normal cytoplasm, carrying a fertility restoring gene ("restorer" line). The CMS line is propagated by pollination with the maintainer line, with all of the progeny being male sterile, as the CMS cytoplasm is derived from the female parent. These male sterile plants can then be efficiently employed as the female parent in hybrid crosses with the restorer line, without the need for physical emasculation of the male reproductive parts of the female parent.

The presence of a male-fertility restorer gene results in the production of fully fertile F₁ hybrid progeny. If no restorer gene is present in the male parent, male-sterile hybrids are obtained. Such hybrids are useful where the vegetative tissue of the corn plant is utilized, e.g., for silage, but in most cases, the seeds will be deemed the most valuable portion of the crop, so fertility of the hybrids in these crops must be restored.

Therefore, one aspect of the current invention concerns corn plants comprising brown midrib and *gt1* genes further comprise a genetic locus capable of restoring male fertility in an otherwise male-sterile plant. Examples of male-sterility genes and corresponding restorers which could be employed with the plants of the invention are well known to those of skill in the art of plant breeding and are disclosed in, for instance, U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,530,191; 5,689,041; 5,741,684; and 5,684,242, the disclosures of which are each specifically incorporated herein by reference in their entirety.

B. Herbicide Resistance

Numerous herbicide resistance genes are known and may be employed with the invention. An example is a gene conferring resistance to a herbicide that inhibits the growing point or meristem, such as an imidazalinone or a sulfonyleurea. Exemplary genes in this category code for mutant ALS and AHAS enzyme as described, for example, by Lee et al., (1988); Gleen et al., (1992) and Miki et al., (1990).

Resistance genes for glyphosate (resistance conferred by mutant 5-enolpyruvyl-3 phosphikimate synthase (EPSP) and *aroA* genes, respectively) and other phosphono compounds such as glufosinate (phosphinothricin acetyl transferase (PAT) and *Streptomyces hygroscopicus* phosphinothricin-acetyl transferase (*bar*) genes) may also be used. See, for example, U.S. Pat. No. 4,940,835 to Shah, et al., which discloses the nucleotide sequence of a form of EPSPS which can confer glyphosate resistance. Examples of specific EPSPS transformation events conferring glyphosate resistance are provided by U.S. Pat. No. 6,040,497.

A DNA molecule encoding a mutant *aroA* gene can be obtained under ATCC accession number 39256, and the nucleotide sequence of the mutant gene is disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 4,769,061 to Comai. European patent application No. 0 333 033 to Kumada et al., and U.S. Pat. No. 4,975,374 to Goodman et al., disclose nucleotide sequences of glutamine synthetase genes which confer resistance to herbicides such as L-phosphinothricin. The nucleotide sequence of a phosphinothricin-acetyltransferase gene is provided in European application No. 0 242 246 to Leemans et al. DeGreef et al., (1989), describe the production of transgenic plants that express chimeric *bar* genes coding for phosphinothricin acetyl transferase activity. Exemplary of genes conferring resistance to phenoxy propionic acids and cyclohexones, such as sethoxydim and haloxyfop are the *Acct-S1*, *Acct-S2* and *Acct-S3* genes described by Marshall et al., (1992).

Genes are also known conferring resistance to a herbicide that inhibits photosynthesis, such as a triazine (*psbA* and *gs+* genes) and a benzonitrile (nitrilase gene). Przibila et al., (1991), describe the transformation of *Chlamydomonas* with plasmids encoding mutant *psbA* genes. Nucleotide sequences for nitrilase genes are disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 4,810,648 to Stalker, and DNA molecules containing these genes are available under ATCC Accession Nos. 53435, 67441, and 67442. Cloning and expression of DNA coding for a glutathione S-transferase is described by Hayes et al., (1992).

C. Waxy Starch

The waxy characteristic is an example of a recessive trait. In this example, the progeny resulting from the first backcross generation (BC 1) must be grown and selfed. A test is then run on the selfed seed from the BC1 plant to determine which BC1 plants carried the recessive gene for the waxy trait. In other recessive traits additional progeny testing, for example growing additional generations such as the BC1S1, may be required to determine which plants carry the recessive gene.

D. Disease Resistance

Plant defenses are often activated by specific interaction between the product of a disease resistance gene (R) in the plant and the product of a corresponding avirulence (Avr) gene in the pathogen. A plant line can be transformed with cloned resistance gene to engineer plants that are resistant to specific pathogen strains. See, for example Jones et al., (1994) (cloning of the tomato Cf-9 gene for resistance to *Cladosporium fulvum*); Martin et al., (1993) (tomato Pto gene for resistance to *Pseudomonas syringae* pv.); and Mindrinos et al., (1994) (*Arabidopsis* RSP2 gene for resistance to *Pseudomonas syringae*).

A viral-invasive protein or a complex toxin derived therefrom may also be used for viral disease resistance. For example, the accumulation of viral coat proteins in transformed plant cells imparts resistance to viral infection and/or disease development effected by the virus from which the coat protein gene is derived, as well as by related viruses. See Beachy et al., (1990). Coat protein-mediated resistance has been conferred upon transformed plants against alfalfa mosaic virus, cucumber mosaic virus, tobacco streak virus, potato virus X, potato virus Y, tobacco etch virus, tobacco rattle virus and tobacco mosaic virus. Id.

A virus-specific antibody may also be used. See, for example, Tavladoraki et al., (1993), who show that transgenic plants expressing recombinant antibody genes are protected from virus attack.

Logemann et al., (1992), for example, disclose transgenic plants expressing a barley ribosome-inactivating gene have an increased resistance to fungal disease.

E. Insect Resistance

One example of an insect resistance gene includes a *Bacillus thuringiensis* protein, a derivative thereof or a synthetic polypeptide modeled thereon. See, for example, Geiser et al., (1986), who disclose the cloning and nucleotide sequence of a Bt δ -endotoxin gene. Moreover, DNA molecules encoding δ -endotoxin genes can be purchased from the American Type Culture Collection, Manassas, Va., for example, under ATCC Accession Nos. 40098, 67136, 31995 and 31998. Another example is a lectin. See, for example, Van Damme et al., (1994), who disclose the nucleotide sequences of several *Clivia miniata* mannose-binding lectin genes. A vitamin-binding protein may also be used, such as avidin. See PCT application US93/06487, the contents of which are hereby incorporated by reference. This application teaches the use of avidin and avidin homologues as larvicides against insect pests.

Yet another insect resistance gene is an enzyme inhibitor, for example, a protease or proteinase inhibitor or an amylase inhibitor. See, for example, Abe et al., (1987) (nucleotide sequence of rice cysteine proteinase inhibitor), Huub et al., (1993) (nucleotide sequence of cDNA encoding tobacco proteinase inhibitor I), and Sumitani et al., (1993) (nucleotide sequence of *Streptomyces nitrosporeus* α -amylase inhibitor). An insect-specific hormone or pheromone may also be used. See, for example, the disclosure by Hammock et al., (1990), of baculovirus expression of cloned juvenile hormone esterase, an inactivator of juvenile hormone.

Still other examples include an insect-specific antibody or an immunotoxin derived therefrom and a developmental-arrestive protein. See Taylor et al., (1994), who described enzymatic inactivation in transgenic tobacco via production of single-chain antibody fragments.

F. Modified Fatty Acid, Phytate and Carbohydrate Metabolism

Genes may be used conferring modified fatty acid metabolism. For example, stearyl-ACP desaturase genes may be

used. See Knutzon et al., (1992). Various fatty acid desaturases have also been described, such as a *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* OLE1 gene encoding Δ 9-fatty acid desaturase, an enzyme which forms the monounsaturated palmitoleic (16:1) and oleic (18:1) fatty acids from palmitoyl (16:0) or stearoyl (18:0) CoA (McDonough et al., 1992); a gene encoding a stearoyl-acyl carrier protein delta-9 desaturase from castor (Fox et al. 1993); Δ 6- and Δ 12-desaturases from the cyanobacteria *Synechocystis* responsible for the conversion of linoleic acid (18:2) to gamma-linolenic acid (18:3 gamma) (Reddy et al. 1993); a gene from *Arabidopsis thaliana* that encodes an omega-3 desaturase (Aronel et al. 1992)); plant Δ 9-desaturases (PCT Application Publ. No. WO 91/13972) and soybean and Brassica Δ 15 desaturases (European Patent Application Publ. No. EP 0616644).

Phytate metabolism may also be modified by introduction of a phytase-encoding gene to enhance breakdown of phytate, adding more free phosphate to the transformed plant. For example, see Van Hartingsveldt et al., (1993), for a disclosure of the nucleotide sequence of an *Aspergillus niger* phytase gene. In corn, this, for example, could be accomplished by cloning and then reintroducing DNA associated with the single allele which is responsible for corn mutants characterized by low levels of phytic acid. See Raboy et al., (2000).

A number of genes are known that may be used to alter carbohydrate metabolism. For example, plants may be transformed with a gene coding for an enzyme that alters the branching pattern of starch. See Shiroza et al., (1988) (nucleotide sequence of *Streptococcus mutants* fructosyltransferase gene), Steinmetz et al., (1985) (nucleotide sequence of *Bacillus subtilis* levansucrase gene), Pen et al., (1992) (production of transgenic plants that express *Bacillus licheniformis* α -amylase), Elliot et al., (1993) (nucleotide sequences of tomato invertase genes), Sergaard et al., (1993) (site-directed mutagenesis of barley α -amylase gene), and Fisher et al., (1993) (maize endosperm starch branching enzyme II). The Z10 gene encoding a 10 kD zein storage protein from maize may also be used to alter the quantities of 10 kD Zein in the cells relative to other components (Kirihiro et al., 1988).

G. Illustrative Procedures for Introduction of a Desired Trait

As described above, techniques for the production of corn plants with added traits have been described (see, e.g., Poehlman et al., 1995; Fehr, 1987; Sprague and Dudley, 1988). A non-limiting example of such a procedure one of skill in the art would use for preparation of a corn plant comprising brown midrib and gt1 genes and an added trait is as follows:

- (a) crossing a corn plant, comprising brown midrib and gt1 genes, for example, a WGRCOMP C2 plant, to a second (nonrecurrent) corn plant comprising a locus to be converted in the corn plant comprising brown midrib and gt1 genes;
- (b) selecting at least a first progeny plant resulting from the crossing that comprises the locus and brown midrib and gt1 genes;
- (c) crossing the selected progeny to a corn plant comprising brown midrib and gt1 genes; and
- (d) repeating steps (b) and (c) until a plant comprising brown midrib and gt1 genes is obtained that further comprises the locus.

Following these steps, essentially any locus may be introduced into corn variety that comprises brown midrib and gt1 genes. For example, molecular techniques allow introduction of any given locus, without the need for phenotypic screening of progeny during the backcrossing steps.

PCR and Southern hybridization are two examples of molecular techniques that may be used for confirmation of the

presence of a given locus and thus conversion of that locus. The techniques are carried out as follows: Seeds of progeny plants are grown and DNA isolated from leaf tissue (see Sambrook et al., 2001; Shure et al. 1983). Approximately one gram of leaf tissue is lyophilized overnight in 15 ml polypropylene tubes. Freeze-dried tissue is ground to a powder in the tube using a glass rod. Powdered tissue is mixed thoroughly with 3 ml extraction buffer (7.0 urea, 0.35 M NaCl, 0.05 M Tris-HCl pH 8.0, 0.01 M EDTA, 1% sarcosine). Tissue/buffer homogenate is extracted with 3 ml phenol/chloroform. The aqueous phase is separated by centrifugation, and precipitated twice using 1/10 volume of 4.4 M ammonium acetate pH 5.2, and an equal volume of isopropanol. The precipitate is washed with 75% ethanol and resuspended in 100-500 μ l TE (0.01 M Tris-HCl, 0.001 M EDTA, pH 8.0). The DNA may then be screened as desired for presence of the locus.

For PCR, two hundred to 1000 ng genomic DNA from the progeny plant being screened is added to a reaction mix containing 10 mM Tris-HCl pH 8.3, 1.5 mM MgCl₂, 50 mM KCl, 0.1 mg/ml gelatin, 200 μ M each dATP, dCTP, dGTP, dTTP, 20% glycerol, 2.5 units Taq DNA polymerase and 0.5 μ M each of forward and reverse DNA primers that span a segment of the locus being converted. The reaction is run in a thermal cycling machine 3 minutes at 94 C, 39 repeats of the cycle 1 minute at 94 C, 1 minute at 50 C, 30 seconds at 72 C, followed by 5 minutes at 72 C. Twenty μ l of each reaction mix is run on a 3.5% NuSieve gel in TBE buffer (90 mM Tris-borate, 2 mM EDTA) at 50V for two to four hours. The amplified fragment is detected using an agarose gel. Detection of an amplified fragment corresponding to the segment of the locus spanned by the primers indicates the presence of the locus.

For Southern analysis, plant DNA is restricted, separated in an agarose gel and transferred to a Nylon filter in 10 \times SCP (20 SCP: 2M NaCl, 0.6 M disodium phosphate, 0.02 M disodium EDTA) according to standard methods (Southern, 1975). Locus DNA or RNA sequences are labeled, for example, radioactively with ³²P by random priming (Feinberg & Vogelstein, 1983). Filters are prehybridized in 6 \times SCP, 10% dextran sulfate, 2% sarcosine, and 500 μ g/ml denatured salmon sperm DNA. The labeled probe is denatured, hybridized to the filter and washed in 2 \times SCP, 1% SDS at 65 $^{\circ}$ for 30 minutes and visualized by autoradiography using Kodak XAR5 film. Presence of the locus is indicated by detection of restriction fragments of the appropriate size.

V. Tissue Cultures and In Vitro Regeneration of Corn Plants

A further aspect of the invention relates to tissue cultures of a corn plant comprising brown midrib and gt1 genes. As used herein, the term "tissue culture" indicates a composition comprising isolated cells of the same or a different type or a collection of such cells organized into parts of a plant. Exemplary types of tissue cultures are protoplasts, calli and plant cells that are intact in plants or parts of plants, such as embryos, pollen, flowers, kernels, ears, cobs, leaves, husks, stalks, roots, root tips, anthers, silk, and the like. In a preferred embodiment, the tissue culture comprises embryos, protoplasts, meristematic cells, pollen, leaves or anthers derived from immature tissues of these plant parts. Means for preparing and maintaining plant tissue cultures are well known in the art (U.S. Pat. No. 5,538,880; and U.S. Pat. No. 5,550,318, each incorporated herein by reference in their entirety). By way of example, a tissue culture comprising organs such as tassels or anthers has been used to produce regenerated plants

(U.S. Pat. No. 5,445,961 and U.S. Pat. No. 5,322,789; the disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference).

One type of tissue culture is tassel/anther culture. Tassels contain anthers which in turn enclose microspores. Microspores develop into pollen. For anther/microspore culture, if tassels are the plant composition, they are preferably selected at a stage when the microspores are uninucleate, that is, include only one, rather than 2 or 3 nuclei. Methods to determine the correct stage are well known to those skilled in the art and include mitramycin fluorescent staining (Pace et al., 1987), trypan blue (preferred) and acetocarmine squashing. The mid-uninucleate microspore stage has been found to be the developmental stage most responsive to the subsequent methods disclosed to ultimately produce plants.

Although microspore-containing plant organs such as tassels can generally be pretreated at any cold temperature below about 25 $^{\circ}$ C., a range of 4 to 25 $^{\circ}$ C. is preferred, and a range of 8 to 14 $^{\circ}$ C. is particularly preferred. Although other temperatures yield embryoids and regenerated plants, cold temperatures produce optimum response rates compared to pretreatment at temperatures outside the preferred range. Response rate is measured as either the number of embryoids or the number of regenerated plants per number of microspores initiated in culture. Exemplary methods of microspore culture are disclosed in, for example, U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,322,789 and 5,445,961, the disclosures of which are specifically incorporated herein by reference.

Although not required, when tassels are employed as the plant organ, it is generally preferred to sterilize their surface. Following surface sterilization of the tassels, for example, with a solution of calcium hypochloride, the anthers are removed from about 70 to 150 spikelets (small portions of the tassels) and placed in a preculture or pretreatment medium. Larger or smaller amounts can be used depending on the number of anthers.

When one elects to employ tassels directly, tassels are preferably pretreated at a cold temperature for a predefined time, preferably at 10 $^{\circ}$ C. for about 4 days. After pretreatment of a whole tassel at a cold temperature, dissected anthers are further pretreated in an environment that diverts microspores from their developmental pathway. The function of the preculture medium is to switch the developmental program from one of pollen development to that of embryoid/callus development. An embodiment of such an environment in the form of a preculture medium includes a sugar alcohol, for example mannitol or sorbitol, inositol or the like. An exemplary synergistic combination is the use of mannitol at a temperature of about 10 $^{\circ}$ C. for a period ranging from about 10 to 14 days. In a preferred embodiment, 3 ml of 0.3 M mannitol combined with 50 mg/l of ascorbic acid, silver nitrate, and colchicine is used for incubation of anthers at 10 $^{\circ}$ C. for between 10 and 14 days. Another embodiment is to substitute sorbitol for mannitol. The colchicine produces chromosome doubling at this early stage. The chromosome doubling agent is preferably only present at the preculture stage.

It is believed that the mannitol or other similar carbon structure or environmental stress induces starvation and functions to force microspores to focus their energies on entering developmental stages. The cells are unable to use, for example, mannitol as a carbon source at this stage. It is believed that these treatments confuse the cells causing them to develop as embryoids and plants from microspores. Dramatic increases in development from these haploid cells, as high as 25 embryoids in 10⁴ microspores, have resulted from using these methods.

To isolate microspores, an isolation media is preferred. An isolation media is used to separate microspores from the

anther walls while maintaining their viability and embryonic potential. An illustrative embodiment of an isolation media includes a 6% sucrose or maltose solution combined with an antioxidant such as 50 mg/l of ascorbic acid, 0.1 mg/l biotin, and 400 mg/l of proline, combined with 10 mg/l of nicotinic acid and 0.5 mg/l AgNO₃. In another embodiment, the biotin and proline are omitted.

An isolation media preferably has a higher antioxidant level where it is used to isolate microspores from a donor plant (a plant from which a plant composition containing a microspore is obtained) that is field grown in contrast to greenhouse grown. A preferred level of ascorbic acid in an isolation medium is from about 50 mg/l to about 125 mg/l and, more preferably, from about 50 mg/l to about 100 mg/l.

One can find particular benefit in employing a support for the microspores during culturing and subculturing. Any support that maintains the cells near the surface can be used. An illustrative embodiment of a solid support is a TRANSWELL® culture dish. Another embodiment of a solid support for development of the microspores is a bilayer plate wherein liquid media is on top of a solid base. Other embodiments include a mesh or a millipore filter. Preferably, a solid support is a nylon mesh in the shape of a raft. A raft is defined as an approximately circular support material which is capable of floating slightly above the bottom of a tissue culture vessel, for example, a petri dish, of about a 60 or 100 mm size, although any other laboratory tissue culture vessel will suffice. In an illustrative embodiment, a raft is about 55 mm in diameter.

Culturing isolated microspores on a solid support, for example, on a 10 mm pore nylon raft floating on 2.2 ml of medium in a 60 mm petri dish, prevents microspores from sinking into the liquid medium and thus avoiding low oxygen tension. These types of cell supports enable the serial transfer of the nylon raft with its associated microspore/embryoids ultimately to full strength medium containing activated charcoal and solidified with, for example, GELRITE™ (solidifying agent).

The liquid medium passes through the mesh while the microspores are retained and supported at the medium-air interface. The surface tension of the liquid medium in the petri dish causes the raft to float. The liquid is able to pass through the mesh; consequently, the microspores stay on top. The mesh remains on top of the total volume of liquid medium.

The culture vessels can be further defined as either (1) a bilayer 60 mm petri plate wherein the bottom 2 ml of medium are solidified with 0.7% agarose overlaid with 1 mm of liquid containing the microspores; (2) a nylon mesh raft wherein a wafer of nylon is floated on 1.2 ml of medium and 1 ml of isolated microspores is pipetted on top; or (3) TRANSWELL® plates wherein isolated microspores are pipetted onto membrane inserts which support the microspores at the surface of 2 ml of medium.

Examples of processes of tissue culturing and regeneration of corn are described in, for example, European Patent Application 0 160 390, Green and Rhodes (1982) and Duncan et al. (1985), Songstad et al. (1988), Rao et al. (1986), Conger et al. (1987), PCT Application WO 95/06128, Armstrong and Green, 1985; Gordon-Kamm et al., 1990, and U.S. Pat. No. 5,736,369.

VI. Processes of Preparing Corn Plants and the Corn Plants Produced by Such Crosses

The present invention provides processes of preparing novel corn plants and corn plants produced by such processes.

In accordance with such a process, a first parent corn plant may be crossed with a second parent corn plant wherein at least one of the first and second corn plants comprises brown midrib and *gt1* genes. One application of the process is in the production of F₁ hybrid plants. Another important aspect of this process is that it can be used for the development of novel inbred lines. For example, a corn plant comprising brown midrib and *gt1* genes could be crossed to any second plant, and the resulting hybrid progeny each selfed for about 5 to 7 or more generations, thereby providing a large number of distinct, pure-breeding inbred lines. These inbred lines could then be crossed with other inbred or non-inbred lines and the resulting hybrid progeny analyzed for beneficial characteristics. In this way, novel inbred lines conferring desirable characteristics could be identified.

Corn plants (*Zea mays* L.) can be crossed by either natural or mechanical techniques. Natural pollination occurs in corn when wind blows pollen from the tassels to the silks that protrude from the tops of the recipient ears. Mechanical pollination can be effected either by controlling the types of pollen that can blow onto the silks or by pollinating by hand. In one embodiment, crossing comprises the steps of:

- planting in pollinating proximity seeds of a first and a second parent corn plant, and preferably, seeds of a first inbred corn plant and a second, distinct inbred corn plant;
- cultivating or growing the seeds of the first and second parent corn plants into plants that bear flowers;
- emasculating flowers of either the first or second parent corn plant, i.e., treating the flowers so as to prevent pollen production, or alternatively, using as the female parent a male sterile plant, thereby providing an emasculated parent corn plant;
- allowing natural cross-pollination to occur between the first and second parent corn plants;
- harvesting seeds produced on the emasculated parent corn plant; and, where desired,
- growing the harvested seed into a corn plant, preferably, a hybrid corn plant.

Parental plants are typically planted in pollinating proximity to each other by planting the parental plants in alternating rows, in blocks or in any other convenient planting pattern. Where the parental plants differ in timing of sexual maturity, it may be desired to plant the slower maturing plant first, thereby ensuring the availability of pollen from the male parent during the time at which silks on the female parent are receptive to pollen. Plants of both parental parents are cultivated and allowed to grow until the time of flowering. Advantageously, during this growth stage, plants are in general treated with fertilizer and/or other agricultural chemicals as considered appropriate by the grower.

At the time of flowering, in the event that plant comprising brown midrib and *gt1* genes is employed as the male parent, the tassels of the other parental plant are removed from all plants employed as the female parental plant to avoid self-pollination. The detasseling can be achieved manually but also can be done by machine, if desired. Alternatively, when the female parent corn plant comprises a cytoplasmic or nuclear gene conferring male sterility, detasseling may not be required. Additionally, a chemical gametocide may be used to sterilize the male flowers of the female plant. In this case, the parent plants used as the male may either not be treated with the chemical agent or may comprise a genetic factor which causes resistance to the emasculating effects of the chemical agent. Gametocides affect processes or cells involved in the development, maturation or release of pollen. Plants treated with such gametocides are rendered male sterile, but typically

remain female fertile. The use of chemical gametocides is described, for example, in U.S. Pat. No. 4,936,904, the disclosure of which is specifically incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

Following emasculation, the plants are then typically allowed to continue to grow and natural cross-pollination occurs as a result of the action of wind, which is normal in the pollination of grasses, including corn. As a result of the emasculation of the female parent plant, all the pollen from the male parent plant is available for pollination because tassels, and thereby pollen bearing flowering parts, have been previously removed from all plants of the inbred plant being used as the female in the hybridization. Of course, during this hybridization procedure, the parental varieties are grown such that they are isolated from other corn fields to minimize or prevent any accidental contamination of pollen from foreign sources. These isolation techniques are well within the skill of those skilled in this art.

Both parental inbred plants of corn may be allowed to continue to grow until maturity or the male rows may be destroyed after flowering is complete. Only the ears from the female inbred parental plants are harvested to obtain seeds of a novel F_1 hybrid. The novel F_1 hybrid seed produced can then be planted in a subsequent growing season in commercial fields or, alternatively, advanced in breeding protocols for purposes of developing novel inbred lines.

Alternatively, in another embodiment of the invention, both first and second parent corn plants can comprise brown midrib and *gt1* genes. Thus, any corn plant produced using a corn plant comprising brown midrib and *gt1* genes forms a part of the invention. As used herein, crossing can mean selfing, backcrossing, crossing to an inbred, crossing to populations, and the like. All corn plants produced using the a corn plant comprising brown midrib and *gt1* genes as a parent are, therefore, within the scope of this invention.

A. F_1 Hybrid Corn Plant and Seed Production

One beneficial use of the instant corn plants is in the production of hybrid seed. Any time a corn plant comprising brown midrib and *gt1* genes is crossed with another, different, corn inbred, a first generation (F_1) corn hybrid plant is produced. As such, an F_1 hybrid corn plant can be produced by crossing a plant comprising brown midrib and *gt1* genes with any second maize plant. Essentially any other corn plant can be used to produce a hybrid corn plant comprising brown midrib and *gt1*. All that is required is that the second plant be fertile, which corn plants naturally are, and that the plant is not corn comprising brown midrib and *gt1* genes.

The goal of the process of producing an F_1 hybrid is to manipulate the genetic complement of corn to generate new combinations of genes which interact to yield new or improved traits (phenotypic characteristics). A process of producing an F_1 hybrid typically begins with the production of one or more inbred plants. Those plants are produced by repeated crossing of ancestrally related corn plants to try to combine certain genes within the inbred plants.

Corn has a diploid phase which means two conditions of a gene (two alleles) occupy each locus (position on a chromosome). If the alleles are the same at a locus, there is said to be homozygosity. If they are different, there is said to be heterozygosity. In a completely inbred plant, all loci are homozygous. Because many loci when homozygous are deleterious to the plant, in particular leading to reduced vigor, less kernels, weak and/or poor growth, production of inbred plants is an unpredictable and arduous process. Under some conditions, heterozygous advantage at some loci effectively bars perpetuation of homozygosity.

A single cross hybrid corn variety is the cross of two inbred plants, each of which has a genotype which complements the genotype of the other. Typically, F_1 hybrids are more vigorous than their inbred parents. This hybrid vigor, or heterosis, is manifested in many polygenic traits, including markedly improved yields, better stalks, better roots, better uniformity and better insect and disease resistance. In the development of hybrids only the F_1 hybrid plants are typically sought. An F_1 single cross hybrid is produced when two inbred plants are crossed. A double cross hybrid is produced from four inbred plants crossed in pairs ($A \times B$ and $C \times D$) and then the two F_1 hybrids are crossed again $(A \times B) \times (C \times D)$.

Thousands of corn varieties are known to those of skill in the art, any one of which could be crossed with a corn plant comprising brown midrib and *gt1* genes to produce a hybrid plant. For example, the U.S. Patent & Trademark has issued more than 300 utility patents for corn varieties. Estimates place the number of different corn accessions in genebanks around the world at around 50,000 (Chang, 1992). The Maize Genetics Cooperation Stock Center, which is supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, has a total collection approaching 80,000 individually pedigreed samples ([//w3.ag.uiuc.edu/maize-coop/mgc-info.html](http://w3.ag.uiuc.edu/maize-coop/mgc-info.html)).

B. Development of Corn Varieties Using Plants Comprising Brown Midrib and *gt1* Genes

The development of new varieties using one or more starting populations is well known in the art. In accordance with the invention, novel varieties may be created by crossing a corn plant comprising brown midrib and *gt1* genes, for example WGRCOMP C2, followed by multiple generations of breeding according to such well known methods. New varieties may be created by crossing corn plants comprising brown midrib and *gt1* genes with any second plant. In selecting such a second plant to cross for the purpose of developing novel inbred lines, it may be desired to choose those plants which either themselves exhibit one or more selected desirable characteristics or which exhibit the desired characteristic(s) when in hybrid combination. Examples of potentially desired characteristics include reduced lignin content, enhanced regrowth after cutting, greater yield, better stalks, better roots, resistance to insecticides, herbicides, pests, and disease, tolerance to heat and drought, reduced time to crop maturity, better agronomic quality, higher nutritional value, and uniformity in germination times, stand establishment, growth rate, maturity, and fruit size.

Once initial crosses have been made with corn comprising brown midrib and *gt1* genes, inbreeding takes place to produce new inbred varieties or populations. Inbreeding requires manipulation by human breeders. Even in the extremely unlikely event inbreeding rather than crossbreeding occurred in natural corn, achievement of complete inbreeding cannot be expected in nature due to well known deleterious effects of homozygosity and the large number of generations the plant would have to breed in isolation. The reason for the breeder to create inbred plants is to have a known reservoir of genes whose gametic transmission is predictable.

The pedigree breeding method involves crossing two genotypes. Each genotype can have one or more desirable characteristics lacking in the other; or, each genotype can complement the other. If the two original parental genotypes do not provide all of the desired characteristics, other genotypes can be included in the breeding population. Superior plants that are the products of these crosses are selfed and selected in successive generations. Each succeeding generation becomes more homogeneous as a result of self-pollination and selection. Typically, this method of breeding involves five or more

generations of selfing and selection: $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$; $S_2 \rightarrow S_3$; $S_3 \rightarrow S_4$; $S_4 \rightarrow S_5$, etc. After at least five generations, the inbred plant is considered genetically pure.

Backcrossing can also be used to improve an inbred plant. Backcrossing transfers a specific desirable trait from one inbred or non-inbred source to an inbred that lacks that trait. This can be accomplished, for example, by first crossing a superior inbred (A) (recurrent parent) to a donor inbred (non-recurrent parent), which carries the appropriate locus or loci for the trait in question. The progeny of this cross are then mated back to the superior recurrent parent (A) followed by selection in the resultant progeny for the desired trait to be transferred from the non-recurrent parent. After five or more backcross generations with selection for the desired trait, the progeny are heterozygous for loci controlling the characteristic being transferred, but are like the superior parent for most or almost all other loci. The last backcross generation would be selfed to give pure breeding progeny for the trait being transferred.

The development of a hybrid corn variety involves three steps: (1) the selection of plants from various germplasm pools; (2) the selfing of the selected plants for several generations to produce a series of inbred plants, which, although different from each other, each breed true and are highly uniform; and (3) crossing the selected inbred plants with unrelated inbred plants to produce the hybrid progeny (F_1). During the inbreeding process in corn, the vigor of the plants decreases. Vigor is restored when two unrelated inbred plants are crossed to produce the hybrid progeny (F_1). An important consequence of the homozygosity and homogeneity of the inbred plants is that the hybrid between any two inbreds is always the same. Once the inbreds that give a superior hybrid have been identified, hybrid seed can be reproduced indefinitely as long as the homogeneity of the inbred parents is maintained. Conversely, much of the hybrid vigor exhibited by F_1 hybrids is lost in the next generation (F_2). Consequently, seed from hybrid varieties is not used for planting stock. It is not generally beneficial for farmers to save seed of F_1 hybrids. Rather, farmers purchase F_1 hybrid seed for planting every year.

The development of inbred plants generally requires at least about 5 to 7 generations of selfing. Inbred plants are then cross-bred in an attempt to develop improved F_1 hybrids. Hybrids are then screened and evaluated in small scale field trials. Typically, about 10 to 15 phenotypic traits, selected for their potential commercial value, are measured. A selection index of the most commercially important traits is used to help evaluate hybrids.

During the next several years, a progressive elimination of hybrids occurs based on more detailed evaluation of their phenotype. Eventually, trials are conducted to formally compare the experimental hybrids being developed with other hybrids, some of which were previously developed and generally are commercially successful. That is, comparisons of experimental hybrids are made to competitive hybrids to determine if there was any advantage to further development of the experimental hybrids.

C. Performance Comparisons

As mentioned above, plants are progressively eliminated following detailed evaluations of their phenotype, including formal comparisons with other commercially successful varieties. Trials are used to compare the phenotypes of plants grown in as many environments as possible. They are performed in many environments to assess overall performance of the new plants and to select optimum growing conditions. Because the corn is grown in close proximity, environmental factors that affect gene expression, such as moisture, tem-

perature, sunlight, and pests, are minimized. For a decision to be made to commercialize a variety, it is not necessary that the plant be better than all other plants. Rather, significant improvements must be shown in at least some traits that would create improvements in some niches.

All of the compositions and methods disclosed and claimed herein can be made and executed without undue experimentation in light of the present disclosure. While the compositions and methods of this invention have been described in terms of the foregoing illustrative embodiments, it will be apparent to those of skill in the art that variations, changes, modifications, and alterations may be applied to the composition, methods, and in the steps or in the sequence of steps of the methods described herein, without departing from the true concept, spirit, and scope of the invention. More specifically, it will be apparent that certain agents that are both chemically and physiologically related may be substituted for the agents described herein while the same or similar results would be achieved. All such similar substitutes and modifications apparent to those skilled in the art are deemed to be within the spirit, scope, and concept of the invention as defined by the appended claims.

REFERENCES

The following references, to the extent that they provide exemplary procedural or other details supplementary to those set forth herein, are specifically incorporated herein by reference.

- U.S. Pat. No. 3,710,511
- U.S. Pat. No. 3,861,709
- U.S. Pat. No. 4,654,465
- U.S. Pat. No. 4,727,219
- U.S. Pat. No. 4,769,061
- U.S. Pat. No. 4,810,648
- U.S. Pat. No. 4,936,904
- U.S. Pat. No. 4,940,835
- U.S. Pat. No. 4,975,374
- U.S. Pat. No. 5,302,532
- U.S. Pat. No. 5,322,789
- U.S. Pat. No. 5,371,003
- U.S. Pat. No. 5,384,253
- U.S. Pat. No. 5,445,961
- U.S. Pat. No. 5,464,765
- U.S. Pat. No. 5,492,547
- U.S. Pat. No. 5,530,191
- U.S. Pat. No. 5,538,880
- U.S. Pat. No. 5,550,318
- U.S. Pat. No. 5,591,616
- U.S. Pat. No. 5,625,132
- U.S. Pat. No. 5,684,242
- U.S. Pat. No. 5,689,041
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5 What is claimed is:

1. A corn plant comprising brown midrib and gt1 genes, wherein the brown midrib gene is either the brown midrib 3 (bm3) gene or both the brown midrib 2 (bm2) and bm3 genes, and wherein the corn plant exhibits decreased lignin content and enhanced regrowth after cutting as compared to corn plants of the same genotype lacking said brown midrib and gt1 genes.

10 2. The corn plant of claim 1, wherein the source of said brown midrib genes is WGRCOMP C2, wherein a representative sample of seed of population WGRCOMP C2 has been deposited under ATCC Accession No. PTA-6805.

15 3. A plant part of the plant of claim 1.

4. The plant part of claim 3, further defined as a seed.

5. The plant part of claim 3, further defined as pollen, a protoplast, an ovule or a cell.

20 6. A tissue culture of cells obtained from the plant of claim 1.

7. The tissue culture of claim 6, wherein the cells are from a tissue selected from the group consisting of leaf, pollen, embryo, root, root tip, anther, silk, flower, kernel, ear, cob, husk, stalk and meristem.

25 8. The corn plant of claim 1, further defined as a plant of population WGRCOMP C2, wherein a representative sample of seed of population WGRCOMP C2 has been deposited under ATCC Accession No. PTA-6805.

9. A method for producing corn seed comprising growing the plant of claim 1 until seed is produced and collecting the seed.

30 10. The method of claim 9, comprising crossing the plant of claim 1 with a second, different corn plant.

11. A seed produced by the method of claim 9, wherein the seed comprises brown midrib and gt1 genes, wherein the brown midrib gene is either the bm3 gene or both the bm2 and bm3 genes.

40 12. A method of introducing a heritable trait selected from the group consisting of male sterility, herbicide tolerance, insect resistance, disease resistance, waxy starch, modified fatty acid metabolism, modified phytic acid metabolism, modified carbohydrate metabolism and modified protein metabolism into a corn plant of claim 1 comprising the steps of:

(a) crossing a first corn plant according to claim 1 with another corn plant that heritably carries the trait to produce F₁ progeny plants, at least some of which heritably carry the trait;

(b) selecting progeny plants that heritably carry the trait;

(c) crossing the selected progeny plants with another plant according to claim 1 to produce next-generation progeny plants at least some of which heritably carry the trait;

(d) selecting next-generation progeny plants that heritably carry the trait and exhibit the characteristics of a plant according to claim 1; and

(e) repeating steps (c) and (d) three or more times to produce selected progeny plants that comprise the trait and the decreased lignin content and enhanced regrowth after cutting characteristics of a plant according to claim 1 when grown under the same environmental conditions.

55 13. The method of claim 12, wherein the first corn plant is WGRCOMP C2, wherein a representative sample of seed of WGRCOMP C2 have been deposited under ATCC Accession No. PTA-6805.

65

27

14. A plant produced by the method of claim 12, wherein the plant comprises the brown midrib and gt1 genes and decreased lignin content and enhanced regrowth after cutting characteristics according to claim 1, when grown under the same environmental conditions.

15. The plant of claim 14, wherein the heritable trait is herbicide tolerance and the tolerance is conferred to a herbicide selected from the group consisting of: imidazolinone, sulfonylurea, glyphosate, glufosinate, L-phosphinothricin, triazine and benzonitrile.

16. The plant of claim 14, wherein the heritable trait is insect resistance and the insect resistance is conferred by a transgene encoding a *Bacillus thuringiensis* endotoxin.

17. The plant of claim 14, wherein the heritable trait is male sterility and the trait is conferred by a cytoplasmic nucleic acid molecule that confers male sterility.

18. The plant of claim 14, wherein the heritable trait is modified fatty acid metabolism and the trait is conferred by a transgene encoding a fatty acid desaturase.

19. The plant of claim 14, wherein the heritable trait is modified carbohydrate metabolism and the trait is conferred by a transgene encoding a fructosyltransferase, levansucrase, alpha-amylase, invertase or starch branching enzyme.

20. A method of introducing a heritable trait selected from the group consisting of male sterility, herbicide tolerance, insect resistance, disease resistance, waxy starch, modified fatty acid metabolism, modified phytic acid metabolism, modified carbohydrate metabolism and modified protein metabolism into a first corn plant according to claim 1, comprising introducing a transgene conferring the trait into the plant.

28

21. The method of claim 20, wherein the first corn plant is WGRCOMP C2, wherein a representative sample of seed of WGRCOMP C2 has been deposited under ATCC Accession No. PTA-6805.

22. A plant produced by the method of claim 20, wherein the plant comprises the transgene and the characteristics of a plant according to claim 1 when grown under the same environmental conditions.

23. A method of producing an inbred corn plant comprising brown midrib and gt1 genes, the method comprising the steps of:

- (a) preparing a progeny plant comprising brown midrib and gt1 genes by crossing a first corn plant according to claim 1 with a second corn plant;
- (b) crossing the progeny plant with itself or a second plant to produce a seed of a progeny plant of a subsequent generation;
- (c) selecting a progeny plant of the subsequent generation comprising the brown midrib and gt1 genes;
- (d) growing the progeny plant of a subsequent generation from said seed and crossing the progeny plant of a subsequent generation with itself or a second plant; and
- (e) repeating steps (b) through (d) for an additional 3-10 generations to produce an inbred corn plant comprising the brown midrib and gt1 genes, said inbred corn plant exhibiting the characteristics of decreased lignin content and enhanced regrowth after cutting of a plant according to claim 1, wherein the brown midrib gene is either the bm3 gene or both the bm2 and bm3 genes.

24. The method of claim 23, wherein the first corn plant is a WGRCOMP C2 plant, wherein a sample of the seed of WGRCOMP C2 was deposited under ATCC Accession No. PTA-6805.

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