

# Genetically Engineered Trees

By [Global Justice Ecology Project](#)

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## **Genetically Engineered Tree Company ArborGen Decides Not to Go Public with Stocks**

Public and Scientific Doubts Cause Confidence in GE Trees to Decline

SUMMERVILLE, SC - May 13 - The genetically engineered tree (GE tree) company ArborGen, a joint project of timber corporations International Paper (NYSE: IP), MeadWestvaco (NYSE: MWV) and Rubicon (NZSE: RBC.NZ), decided suddenly yesterday to change its plans and not sell shares in ArborGen publicly on the NASDAQ exchange. [1]

On July 1, 2010, three member organizations of the STOP GE Trees Campaign (Global Justice Ecology Project, Dogwood Alliance and Sierra Club) teamed up with attorneys at the Center for Biological Diversity and the Center for Food Safety to sue the US Department of Agriculture over their approval of a series of field trials involving more than a quarter of a million GE cold tolerant eucalyptus trees because the Environmental Assessment the USDA used to approve the field trials was inadequate. The lawsuit demands that the USDA prepare a full Environmental Impact Statement regarding the field trials because of their potential impacts on forests, ground water, wildlife and endangered or threatened species. [2]

The groups that filed the suit charge that GE trees carry serious social and ecological risks; and that these risks were either downplayed or outright ignored in the USDA's Environmental Assessment.

"This lawsuit against the USDA over their approval of GE eucalyptus trees is just one of a series of lawsuits that has been filed against the USDA by the Center for Food Safety, the Sierra Club and others," stated Dr. Neil Carman, a plant scientist with the Sierra Club. "The USDA's Environmental Assessments on GMO plants are totally inadequate. Their science is completely flawed. Litigation has revealed this time and time again in court. I think ArborGen has good right to worry that they will never get commercial approval for their GE trees, based on the legal precedents so far," he added.

Even industry is acknowledging the chilling effect of the numerous lawsuits against GMOs. In an article from April 29, 2011 in Biomass Power and Thermal Magazine, Karen Batra, director of communications for the Biotechnology Industry Organization stated, "Obviously, the litigious environment we have seen in the past couple years is representing a tremendous deterrent to investment in [biotechnology]..." Batra says. "It's making it very hard to get investments and to see their way through what could be five and 10 years in development of a product, if when you finally do get to a point where you're close to commercialization, you're going to have to deal with litigation. It is creating a huge barrier."

[3]

“According to the CEO of Rubicon, one of ArborGen’s parent companies, ArborGen plans to sell half a billion GE eucalyptus trees annually just in the US South,” stated Anne Petermann, Executive Director of Global Justice Ecology Project and North American Focal Point of The Netherlands-based Global Forest Coalition. “This could devastate forest ecosystems, especially when you consider that one of ArborGen’s eucalyptus species is an engineered variant of a species known to be invasive in Florida. In addition, eucalyptus trees are both explosively flammable and extremely water intensive. And now they’ve modified them to be cold tolerant, so they can spread throughout the US South. It’s a disaster waiting to happen. GE eucalyptus trees are like kudzu, only flammable.” [4] There are also several engineered species of native trees that are in the field trial stage-like poplar and loblolly pine that could irreversibly contaminate native forests with their engineered traits. [5]

In September 2009 the USDA rejected ArborGen’s initial application for permission to release millions of their GE eucalyptus trees commercially.

“In addition to the detrimental impacts of escape or contamination of forests by GE trees is the fact that International Paper stated that they anticipate the use of GE trees will vastly expand the acreage of tree plantations in the South,” stated Scot Quaranda, Campaign Director of the Dogwood Alliance. “Where is all of this land going to come from? Native forests will have to be clearcut to make room for GE tree plantations. Commercial release of GE eucalyptus trees will devastate the biologically rich native hardwood forests of the South, which is why Dogwood Alliance is so strongly opposed to them.” [6]

Organizing to stop the commercialization of genetically engineered trees has been going on since 2000, with The STOP GE Trees Campaign founded in 2004 by thirteen groups including Global Justice Ecology Project, Dogwood Alliance and Sierra Club. The Campaign has since grown to include 145 organizations worldwide-with many based in Latin America. [7]

The court is expected to produce a ruling shortly on the lawsuit to stop ArborGen’s eucalyptus field trials.

If you have not yet signed the petition to the USDA opposing GE eucalyptus trees, you can do so by clicking here.

### What differentiates Global Justice Ecology Project from most groups is our holistic approach to organizing. We believe that the compartmentalization of issues is enabling corporations and conservative forces to keep movements for change divided and powerless. We strive to identify and address the common roots to the issues of social injustice, ecological destruction and economic domination as a means to achieve a fundamental transformation toward a society based on egalitarian ideals and grounded in ecology.

**Anne Petermann**, Global Justice Ecology Project, (802) 482-2689 Scot Quaranda, Dogwood Alliance, (828) 251-2525 x 18 Dr. Neil Carman, Sierra Club (512) 663-9594 mobile

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