Private Landowner Perception and Willingness to Grow Short-Rotation Hybridized Sweetgum in the Western Gulf

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In the forests of the eastern half of the United States, sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) has long been disregarded, either as a 'trash tree' of little economic value or seen as a competitor for higher value species that must be controlled in the landscape at a cost to the forest landowner. However, with the transition of the fiber market from fine paper to craft paper and biofuels, the value of sweetgum is being given a second look. New breeding programs that combine the native sweetgum species of North America with its Asian counterparts, such as the Formosan gum (*Liquidambar formosana*) have yielded some promising results for the industry. Now the question arises, will landowners be willing to plant and grow hybrid sweetgum as a short-rotation woody crop? In a joint undertaking, researchers with Oklahoma State University and Louisiana State University Agricultural Center are studying the growth potential of several hybrid sweetgum varieties and attempting to quantify if landowners in the Western Gulf region would be willing to consider these varieties as options for timber production in the future. This synopsis will cover landowner perceptions and their willingness to convert to hybrid sweetgum. As a result of the survey, it was determined that 1/3 of the landowners were interested hybrid sweetgum production. The majority of these same landowners currently manage their lands for pine production and indicated a need for further information on growing and managing hybrid sweetgum as well as a reliable market before fully committing to conversion.