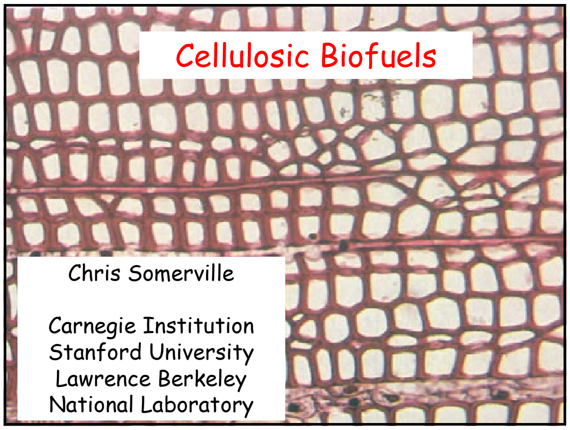


Cellulosic Biofuels

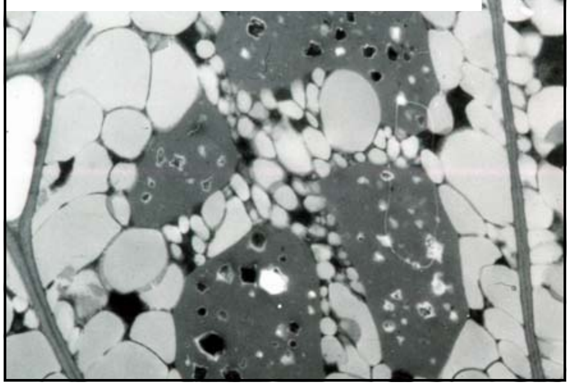
Chris Somerville

Carnegie Institution
Stanford University
Lawrence Berkeley
National Laboratory

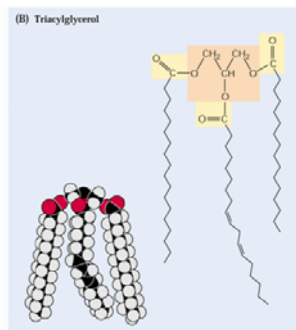
Types of biofuels

- Solid, burned directly
- Diesel
- Sugar to ethanol
- Cellulose to ethanol

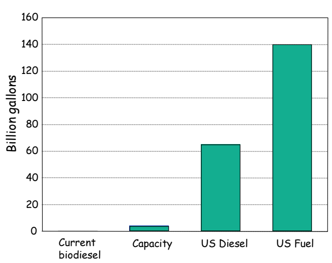
Some plants accumulate oil in seeds or fruits



Plant oils are mostly triacylglycerol



Limited potential of biodiesel



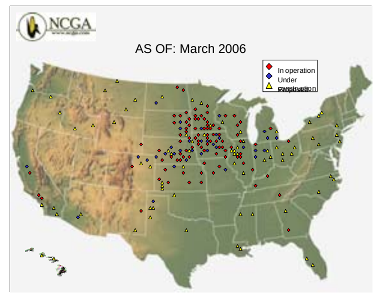
65 biodiesel companies in operation
50 in construction 2006

Oil palm is highly productive
(Best yields ~ 10 tonnes/HA)

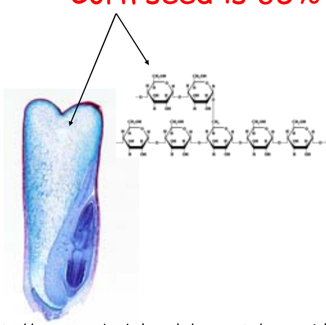
What about algae?

http://news.com.com/Photos+Betting+big+on+biodiesel
/2009-1043_3-5714336.html?tag=st.prev

US Ethanol Plants

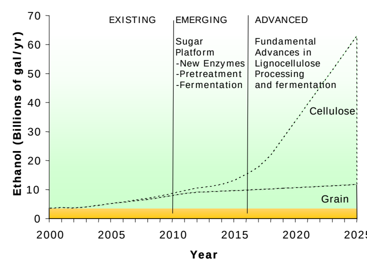


Corn seed is 65% starch



http://www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/monocots/corngrainls.jpg
http://www.scientificpsychic.com/fitness/carbohydrates1.html

A DOE Ethanol Vision



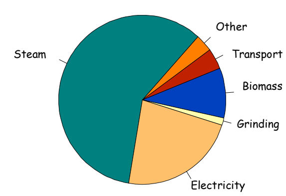
Modified from Richard Bain, NREL

The challenge is efficient conversion

- Burning switchgrass (10 t/ha) yields 14.6-fold more energy than input to produce*
- But, converting switchgrass to ethanol calculated to consume 45% more energy than produced

*Pimentel & Patzek,
Nat Res Res 14,65 (2005)

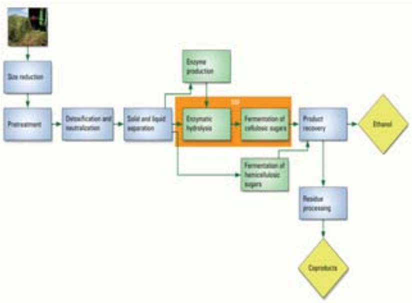
The challenge is efficient conversion



Energy consumption

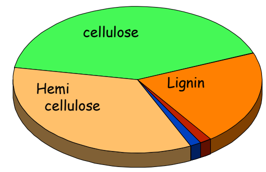
*Pimentel & Patzek
Nat Res Res 14,65 (2005)

Steps in cellulosic ethanol production



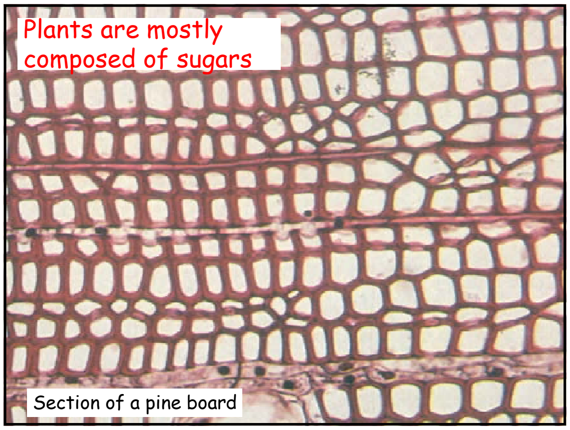
From: Breaking the Biological Barriers to Cellulosic Ethanol

Three major components of biomass



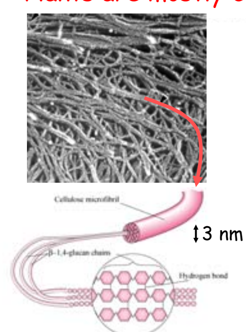
Typical grass
composition

Plants are mostly composed of sugars



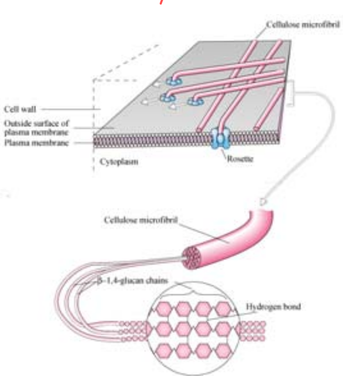
Section of a pine board

Plants are mostly composed of sugars

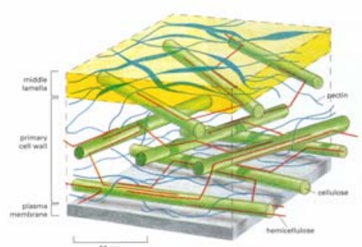


Polymerized glucose

Cellulose is synthesized at the plasma membrane

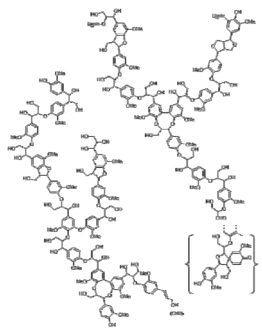


Model of the cellulose/hemicellulose and pectic cell wall networks

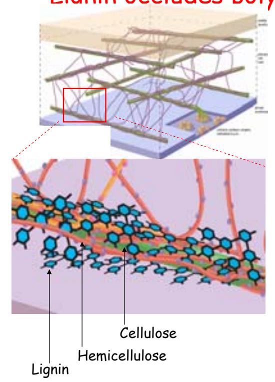


McCann & Roberts (1991) *The Cytoskeletal Basis of Plant Growth and Form*, p. 126

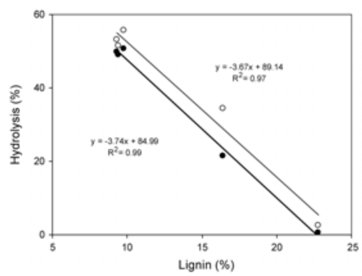
Structure of lignin



Lignin occludes polysaccharides

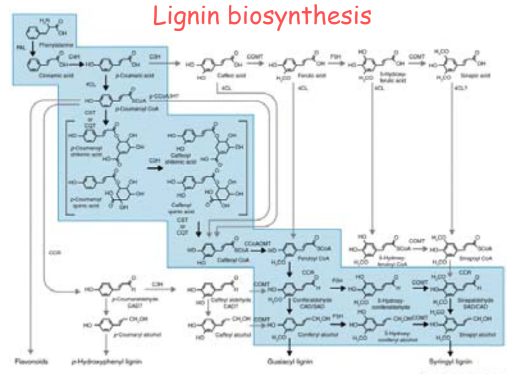


Effect of lignin content on enzymatic recovery of sugars from Miscanthus



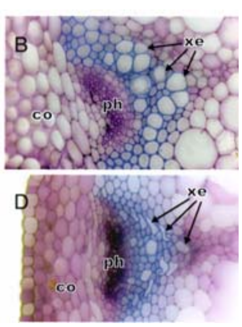
D Vrije et al (2002) Int J Hydrogen Energy 27,1381

Lignin biosynthesis



Humphreys and Chapple, Curr Opin Plant Biol 5,224

Lignin-deficient mutants have weak tissues

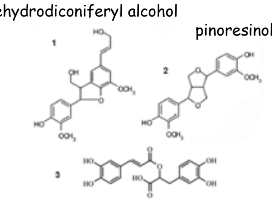


Turner and Somerville Plant Cell 9,689

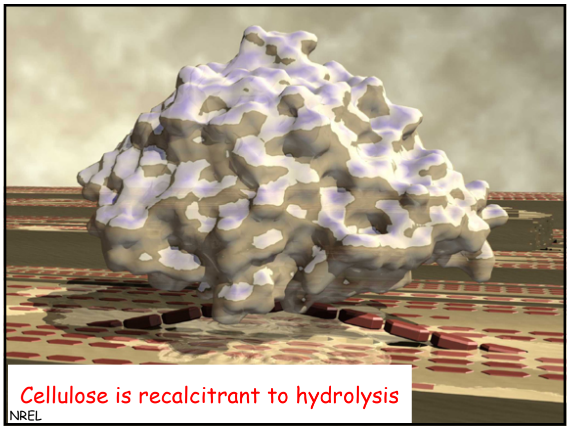
A cleavable lignin precursor would fundamentally alter preprocessing

dehydrodiconiferyl alcohol

pinoresinol



rosmarinic acid



Cellulose is recalcitrant to hydrolysis

NREL

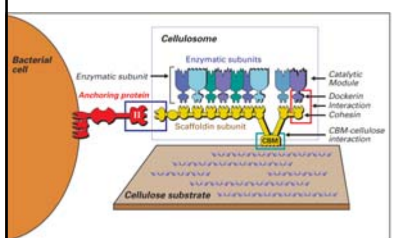
Possible routes to improved catalysts

- Explore the enzyme systems used by termites (and ruminants) for digesting lignocellulosic material
- Compost heaps and forest floors are poorly explored

Possible routes to improved catalysts

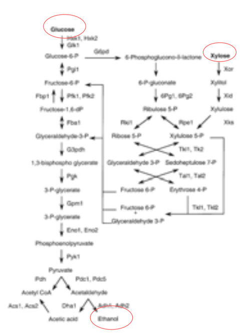
- In vitro protein engineering of promising enzymes
- Develop synthetic organic catalysts (for polysaccharides and lignin)

Some cellulytic enzymes are components of a "molecular machine"



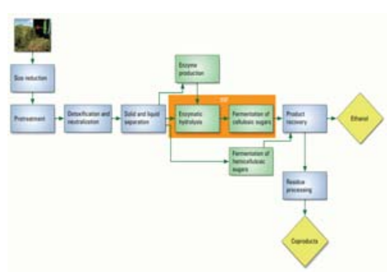
From: Breaking the Biological Barriers to Cellulosic Ethanol

Fermentation of all sugars is essential



Jeffries & Shi Adv Bioch Eng 65,118

Steps in cellulosic ethanol production

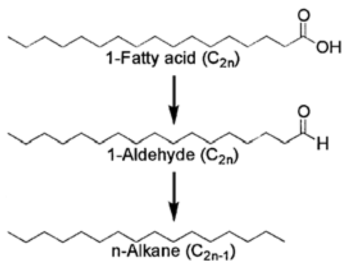


From: Breaking the Biological Barriers to Cellulosic Ethanol

Nature offers many alternatives to ethanol

- Plants, algae, and bacteria synthesize alkanes, alcohols, waxes
- Production of hydrophobic compounds would reduce toxicity and decrease the energy required for dehydration

Many organisms make alkanes



Summary of priorities

- Modify plant composition to minimize energy required for depolymerization
- Identify or create more active catalysts for conversion of biomass to sugars

Summary of priorities

- Develop industrial microorganisms that ferment all sugars
- Develop new types of microorganisms that produce and secrete hydrophobic compounds

Questions

- How challenging are the technical problems?
- What is the timeframe for development of cost-competitive cellulosic fuels?
- Why not other technologies such as solar, wind, photovoltaics?
- Are there risks?