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(54) **Titre : PROCÉDES DE GÉNÉRATION DE PLANTES TRANSGÉNIQUES**
(54) **Title: METHODS FOR GENERATING TRANSGENIC PLANTS**

(57) **Abrégé/Abstract:**

This invention provides a method for generating transgenic plants with a low copy number. Plant cells are transformed with polynucleotides containing transcriptional cassettes designed to trigger silencing of a gene which is essential for the plant cell to survive the transformation and regeneration process. The present invention enables the recovery of an increased number of transgenic plants which have only one copy of each desired transcriptional cassette.



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(54) Title: METHODS FOR GENERATING TRANSGENIC PLANTS

(57) **Abstract:** This disclosure provides a method for generating transgenic plants with a low copy number. Plant cells are transformed with polynucleotides containing transcriptional cassettes designed to trigger silencing of a gene which is essential for the plant cell to survive the transformation and regeneration process. The present disclosure enables the recovery of an increased number of transgenic plants which have only one copy of each desired transcriptional cassette.



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METHODS FOR GENERATING TRANSGENIC PLANTS

Cross Reference to Related Application(s)

The following application claims priority to U.S. Provisional Application No. 61/883,607, filed on June 11, 2013 and incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to the field of plant biotechnology. More specifically, the present invention relates to producing an increased number of transformed plants having a single copy of each transcriptional cassette of interest. Specifically, the invention includes compositions and methods for silencing or significantly reducing the expression of a gene which is essential for the plant cell to survive the transformation and regeneration process, so that an increased number of transgenic plants with a single copy of each transcriptional cassette of interest, relative to plants having multiple copies, are generated.

BACKGROUND

Cultivated crops such as maize, soybean, and cotton have substantial commercial value throughout the world. The development of scientific methods useful in improving the quantity and quality of important crops is, therefore, of significant commercial interest. Significant effort has been expended to improve the quality of cultivated crop species by conventional plant breeding. Conventional means for crop and horticultural improvements utilize selective breeding techniques to identify plants having desirable characteristics. However, such selective breeding techniques have several drawbacks, namely that these techniques are often labor intensive and result in plants that often contain heterogeneous genetic components that may not always result in the desirable trait being passed on from the parent plants. Advances in molecular biology have allowed mankind to modify the germplasm of animals and plants. Genetic engineering of plants entails the isolation and manipulation of genetic material (typically in the form of DNA) and the subsequent introduction of that genetic material into a plant's genome. Such technology has the capacity to deliver crops or plants having various improved economic, agronomic or horticultural traits.

The introduction of the foreign genetic material into a plant's genome is typically performed through one of two ways, although other ways are known to those skilled in the art. The first

is biolistic particle bombardment, whereby the foreign DNA, or “transgene,” is coated onto a metal particle, which is then shot into plant tissue. Some of that foreign genetic material is taken up by the plant cells, which are thereby “transformed.” The second method is by *Agrobacterium*-mediated transformation, which involves exposing plant cells and tissues to a suspension of *Agrobacterium* cells that contain certain DNA plasmids. In both methods, the foreign DNA typically encodes for a selectable marker that permits transformed plant cells to grow in the presence of a selection agent, for example an antibiotic or herbicide. These cells can be further manipulated to regenerate into whole fertile transgenic plants.

For both *Agrobacterium*-mediated transformation and biolistic transformation, there is a possibility of the insertion of more than one copy of the transgene in a plant genome. For biolistic transformation, it is known in the art that a significant percentage of transgenic events contain more than one copy of the transgene. For *Agrobacterium*-mediated transformation, the transformation method utilizes a T-DNA (transferred DNA) that incorporates the genetic elements of a transgene and transfers those genetic elements into the genome of a plant. The transgene(s) are constructed in a DNA plasmid vector and are usually bordered by an *Agrobacterium* Ti plasmid right border DNA region (RB) and a left border DNA region (LB). During the process of *Agrobacterium* mediated transformation, the DNA plasmid is nicked by VirD2 endonuclease at the right and left border regions and the T -DNA region is inserted into the plant genome. The integration of the T-DNA into the plant genome generally begins at the RB and continues to the end of the T-DNA, at the LB. However, it has been found that more than one copy of the T-DNA is frequently inserted into the plant genome. (Tzfira et al 2004, *Trends in Genetics*, 20: 375-383; Windels et al , 2008, “*Agrobacterium tumefaciens*-mediated transformation: patterns of T-DNA integration into the host genome.” In *Agrobacterium: from Biology to Biotechnology*, Tzfira, T. and Citovsky, V., Eds. Springer, New York, NY: 441–481, and references within).

It is important to produce transformed plants that have only one copy of the foreign DNA integrated into its genome. Significant resources are directed toward screening transformed plants for the presence of a single copy of the transgene. Methods such as TAQMAN™ analysis and Southern blot analysis are most frequently used. Typically, the initially transformed tissue has gone through several stages of selection and regeneration before it has enough tissue to be sampled for transgene copy number to be accurately ascertained by

TAQMAN.TM Designing constructs to increase the incidence of a single insertion in the genome would be very valuable.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention includes a novel method of generating transgenic plant cells, wherein an increased percentage of plant cells incorporate a single copy of the transgene into the plant genome compared to standard methods. The present invention includes a method of generating transgenic plant cells using a plant transformation process, wherein the T-DNA includes a transcriptional cassette that comprises a sequence that is capable of silencing or substantially inhibiting expression of a gene which is essential for the plant cell to survive the transformation and regeneration process.

The invention also provides for a DNA plasmid comprising an *Agrobacterium* Ti-plasmid which contains one or more T-DNAs, wherein one T-DNA comprises a transcriptional cassette encoding for a polynucleotide which induces silencing of a gene essential for the plant to survive the transformation and regeneration process, such as the silencing of a native gene or a selectable marker.

One aspect of the invention is directed toward a transformation method for generating transgenic plant cells, where an increased percentage of transgenic plant cells carry only one copy of the transcriptional cassettes. This method comprises providing a first transcriptional cassette, wherein the first transcription cassette comprises a selectable marker, providing a second transcriptional cassette comprising a DNA fragment at least 20 polynucleotides in length of a gene which is essential for the plant cell to survive the transformation and regeneration process, and providing at least one transcriptional cassette comprising a trait gene. Next, the cassettes are transformed into a plurality of plant cells to produce a plurality of transgenic plant cells, and the transgenic plant cells are selected for in the presence of a selection agent using the selectable marker. The selected transgenic plant cells are then grown into transgenic tissue. The transgenic plant cells which incorporated at least two copies of the transcriptional cassette comprising a DNA fragment at least 20 polynucleotides in length of a gene which is essential for the plant cell to survive the transformation and

regeneration process have reduced survival rates through the transformation and regeneration process. Therefore, an increased percentage of the transgenic cells which do survive the transformation and regeneration process carry only one copy of each transcriptional cassette, compared to methods which do not include the second transcriptional cassette.

The invention includes a transcriptional cassette which comprises at least a DNA fragment of a gene which is essential for the plant cell to survive the transformation and regeneration process, wherein the DNA fragment is at least 20, at least 30, at least 40, at least 50, at least 100, at least 200, at least 500, or at least 1000 polynucleotides of a gene which is essential for the plant cell to survive the transformation and regeneration process, wherein the transcriptional cassette is used with other transcriptional cassettes in a transformation method for generating transgenic plant cells. For this transformation method, an increased percentage of transgenic plant cells carry only one copy of the transcriptional cassettes.

The invention includes a transcriptional cassette which comprises at least a DNA fragment of a gene which is essential for the plant cell to survive the transformation and regeneration process, wherein the DNA fragment is at least 60%, at least 70%, at least 75%, at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, or at least 98% homologous to a gene which is essential for the plant cell to survive the transformation and regeneration process, wherein the transcriptional cassette is used with other transcriptional cassettes in a transformation method for generating transgenic plant cells. For this transformation method, an increased percentage of transgenic plant cells carry only one copy of the transcriptional cassettes.

The invention includes a transcriptional cassette which comprises at least a DNA fragment of a gene which is essential for the plant cell to survive the transformation and regeneration process, wherein the DNA fragment or the gene is selected from the group comprising ZmEPSPS, empty pericarp2, empty pericarp4, defective endosperm18, embryo defective 12, ameiotic1, ZmWHY1, or viviparous-5, wherein the transcriptional cassette is used with other transcriptional cassettes in a transformation method for generating transgenic plant cells. For this transformation method, an increased percentage of transgenic plant cells carry only one copy of the transcriptional cassettes.

The invention includes a transcriptional cassette which produces an RNA molecule of at least 20 polynucleotides in length, wherein the RNA molecule is sufficient in length and identity to induce reduced expression or silencing of a native gene which is essential for the plant cell to survive the transformation and regeneration process, wherein the transcriptional cassette is used with other transcriptional cassettes in a transformation method for generating transgenic plant cells, where an increased percentage of transgenic plant cells carry only one copy of the transcriptional cassettes.

The invention includes a transcriptional cassette which comprises at least a DNA fragment of a gene which is essential for the plant cell to survive the transformation and regeneration process, wherein the gene encodes for a selectable marker which is used for selecting for transgenic plant cells in the presence of the suitable selection agent and wherein the transcriptional cassette is used with other transcriptional cassettes in a transformation method for generating transgenic plant cells, where an increased percentage of transgenic plant cells carry only one copy of the transcriptional cassettes.

Another aspect of the invention is directed toward an *Agrobacterium*-mediated transformation method for generating transgenic plant cells, where an increased percentage of transgenic plant cells carry only one copy of each transcriptional cassette. This method comprises a T-DNA comprising a first transcriptional cassette, wherein the first transcription cassette comprises a selectable marker, a second transcriptional cassette comprising a DNA fragment at least 20 polynucleotides in length of a gene which is essential for the plant cell to survive the transformation and regeneration process, and at least one transcriptional cassette comprising a trait gene. The cassettes are transformed into a plurality of plant cells by an *Agrobacterium*-mediated method, wherein a plurality of transgenic cells are generated. Transgenic plant cells are selected for in the presence of a selection agent using the selectable marker. The selected transgenic plant cells are then grown into transgenic tissue. The transgenic plant cells which incorporated at least two copies of the transcriptional cassette comprising a DNA fragment at least 20 polynucleotides in length of a gene which is essential for the plant cell to survive the transformation and regeneration process have reduced

survival rates through the transformation and regeneration process. Therefore, an increased percentage of the transgenic cells which do survive the transformation and regeneration process carry only one copy of each transcriptional cassette, compared to methods which do not include the second transcriptional cassette.

Another aspect of the invention is directed toward a transformation method for generating transgenic plant cells, where an increased percentage of transgenic plant cells carry only one copy of each transcriptional cassette. This method comprises providing a first transcriptional cassette, wherein the first transcriptional cassette comprises a gene which is a mutated version or homologue of a native gene, and whose expression confers a selectable phenotype, such that transformed cells grown in the presence of a suitable selection agent survive, and non-transformed cells do not survive. This method also comprises providing at least one transcriptional cassette encoding a trait gene. The cassettes are transformed into a plurality of plant cells to produce a plurality of transgenic plant cells, and transgenic plant cells are selected for in the presence of a selection agent using the introduced mutated version or homologue of a native gene as a selectable marker. The selected transgenic plant cells are then grown into transgenic tissue. The transgenic plant cells that incorporated at least two copies of the transcriptional cassette comprising a gene which is a mutated version or homologue of a native gene have reduced survival rates through the transformation and regeneration process. Therefore, an increased percentage of the transgenic cells which do survive the transformation and regeneration process carry only one copy of each transcriptional cassette, compared to methods which do not include the transcriptional cassette comprising a gene which is a mutated version or homologue of a native gene.

Another aspect of the invention is directed toward a transformation method for generating transgenic plant cells, where an increased percentage of transgenic plant cells carry only one copy of each transcriptional cassette. This method comprises providing a first transcriptional cassette, wherein the first transcriptional cassette comprises an EPSPS polynucleotide sequence which is at least 60% homologous to the native EPSPS of the plant cells being transformed and which produces an EPSPS protein whose activity is not inhibited by glyphosate, and providing at least one transcriptional cassette encoding a trait gene. The cassettes are transformed into a plurality of plant cells to produce a plurality of transgenic

plant cells, and transgenic plant cells are selected for in the presence of a selection agent using EPSPS as a selectable marker. The selected transgenic plant cells are then grown into transgenic tissue. The transgenic plant cells which incorporated at least two copies of the transcriptional cassette comprising the EPSPS polynucleotide sequence have reduced survival rates through the transformation and regeneration process. Therefore, an increased percentage of the transgenic cells which do survive the transformation and regeneration process carry only one copy of each transcriptional cassette, compared to methods which do not include the transcriptional cassette comprising the EPSPS polynucleotide sequence.

Another aspect of the invention is directed toward a transformation method for generating transgenic plant cells with an increased percentage of the transgenic plant cells carrying only one copy of each transcriptional cassette. This method comprises providing a first transcriptional cassette, wherein the first transcriptional cassette comprises a promoter and at least 20 polynucleotides of an exon of a gene which is essential for the plant cell to survive the transformation and regeneration process. The exon has a mutated start codon, so it cannot promote translation. For this transcriptional cassette, the promoter and exon comprise the 5' regulatory sequence of the transcriptional cassette. The 5' regulatory sequence also comprises a translation initiation sequence, such as a Kozak sequence, at its 3' end. This method also comprises providing at least one transcriptional cassette encoding a selectable marker, providing at least one transcriptional cassette comprising a trait gene, and transforming all the cassettes into a plurality of plant cells to produce a plurality of transgenic plant cells. Transgenic plant cells are selected for in the presence of a selection agent using the selectable marker. The selected transgenic plant cells are then grown into transgenic tissue. The transgenic plant cells which incorporated at least two copies of the transcriptional cassette comprising the 5'-regulatory sequence have reduced survival rates through the transformation and regeneration process. Therefore, an increased percentage of the transgenic cells which do survive the transformation and regeneration process carry only one copy of each transcriptional cassette, compared to methods which do not include the transcriptional cassette comprising the 5' regulatory sequence.

Another aspect of the invention is directed toward a transformation method for generating transgenic plant cells with an increased percentage of the transgenic plant cells carrying only one copy of each transcriptional cassette. This method comprises providing a first transcriptional cassette, wherein the first transcriptional cassette comprises a promoter

operably linked to the first exon of a gene which is essential for the plant cell to survive the transformation and regeneration process, which is further operably linked to the first intron or a linker, further operably linked to at least 20 polynucleotides of the second exon of the essential gene. For this transcriptional cassette, the promoter, exon 1, intron 1 or linker, and exon 2 comprise the 5' regulatory sequence of the transcriptional cassette. The 5' regulatory sequence also comprises a translational initiation sequence, such as a Kozak sequence, at its 3' end. In some embodiments, the 5' regulatory sequence is SEQ ID NO: 6. This method also comprises, in addition to providing the first transcriptional cassette, providing a transcriptional cassette encoding a selectable marker, a transcriptional cassette comprising a trait gene, and transforming these cassettes into a plurality of plant cells to produce a plurality of transgenic plant cells. In some embodiments, the first transcriptional cassette comprises SEQ ID NO: 6 operably linked to PMI, and at least one transcriptional cassette comprises a trait gene. Transgenic plant cells are selected for in the presence of a selection agent using the selectable marker. The selected transgenic plant cells are then grown into transgenic tissue. The transgenic plant cells which incorporated at least two copies of the transcriptional cassette comprising the 5'-regulatory sequence have reduced survival rates through the transformation and regeneration process. Therefore, an increased percentage of the transgenic cells which do survive the transformation and regeneration process carry only one copy of each transcriptional cassette, compared to methods which do not include the transcriptional cassette comprising the 5' regulatory sequence.

Another aspect of the invention is directed toward an *Agrobacterium*-mediated transformation method for generating transgenic plant cells with an increased percentage of the transgenic plant cells carrying only one copy each transcriptional cassette of interest. This method comprises providing a first T-DNA polynucleotide comprising all transcriptional cassettes of interest, wherein the first transcriptional cassette comprises a selectable marker and at least one transcriptional cassette comprises a trait gene, and providing a second T-DNA polynucleotide, comprising a transcriptional cassette whose expression induces silencing of the selectable marker. Next, a DNA plasmid for *Agrobacterium*-mediated transformation, comprising the first T-DNA polynucleotide and the second T-DNA polynucleotide, is produced, and *Agrobacterium*-mediated transformation of a plurality of plant cells is performed to produce a plurality of transgenic plant cells. Transgenic plant cells which contain the first T-DNA polynucleotide are selected for in the presence of a selection agent using the selectable marker mentioned above. The selected transgenic plant cells are

then grown into transgenic tissue. The transgenic plant cells which incorporated the second T-DNA polynucleotide have reduced survival rates through the transformation and regeneration process. Therefore, an increased percentage of the transgenic cells which do survive the transformation and regeneration process carry only one copy of each transcriptional cassette from the first T-DNA polynucleotide, compared to methods which do not include the second T-DNA polynucleotide.

Another aspect of the invention includes the step of determining the copy number of each transcriptional cassette encoding a selectable marker or a trait gene introduced into the transgenic tissue produced by any of the transformation methods.

Another aspect of the invention includes the step of growing the transgenic plant cell or tissue produced by any of the transformation methods into a fertile plant.

Another aspect of the invention is a transgenic plant, plant cell, or plant tissue comprising a single copy of the transcriptional cassettes of interest produced by any of the transformation methods for generating transgenic plant cells with an increased percentage of the transgenic plant cells carrying only one copy of each transcriptional cassette.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEQUENCES

A sequence listing in ASCII text format, submitted under 37 C.F.R. § 1.821, entitled “80253 sequence listing_ST25.txt”, 101 kilobytes in size, generated on May 29, 2014 and filed via EFS-Web is provided in lieu of a paper copy. This Sequence Listing is hereby incorporated by reference into the specification for its disclosures.

SEQ ID NO: 1 is the e35S-08-e35S-10-e35S-09-prCMP-xOTPSSUct-01-cZmEPSPSct-01-tNOS-05-01 transcriptional cassette located in binary vector 19096.

SEQ ID NO: 2 is the xOTPSSUct-01-cZmEPSPSct-01-tNOS-05-01 polynucleotide sequence located in binary vector 19094.

SEQ ID NO: 3 is the cZmEPSPS-16-tNOS-05-01 polynucleotide sequence located in binary vector 19095.

SEQ ID NO: 4 is the e35S-08-e35S-10-e35S-09-prCMP-04-xOTPSSUct-01-rZmEPSPSct-01-tNOS-05-01 transcriptional cassette located in binary vector 19120.

SEQ ID NO: 5 is the e35S-08-e35S-10-e35S-09-prCMP-04-OTPSSUct-ΔTG-rZmEPSPSct-02-tNOS-05-01 transcriptional cassette located in binary vector 19122.

SEQ ID NO: 6 is the OsMADS1-05 5' regulatory sequence, which includes the OsMADS1 promoter, first exon, first intron, and part of exon 2. This sequence is referred to as prOsMADS1-05.

SEQ ID NO: 7 is the eFMV-03-e35S-05-prOsMADS1-05-cT6PP-01-tOsMADS1-03 transcriptional cassette located in binary vector 20070.

SEQ ID NO: 8 is the eFMV-03-e35S-05-prOsMADS1-05-tOsMADS1-03 polynucleotide sequence located in binary vector 21099.

SEQ ID NO: 9 is the eFMV-03-e35S-05-prOsMADS2-01-cT6PP-tOsMADS2-01 transcriptional cassette located in binary vector 20096.

SEQ ID NO: 10 is the prUbi1-04-cPMI-01-tNOS-05-01 transcriptional cassette located in binary vector 12678 and in binary vector 12672.

SEQ ID NO: 11 is the prCMP-04-PMIexon-iAtBAF60-01-PMIexon-t35s-08 transcriptional cassette located in binary vector 13481.

SEQ ID NO: 12 is the ZmEPSPS coding sequence with two introduced mutations so that the translated polypeptide is not inhibited by the selection agent glyphosate.

SEQ ID NO: 13 is the coding sequence of the phosphomannose isomerase (PMI) gene.

SEQ ID NO: 14 is the part of SEQ ID NO: 6 which is transcribed, comprising exon 1, intron 1, and part of exon 2 of the OsMADS1 gene.

SEQ ID NO: 15 is the coding sequence of rZmEPSPSct-01, which is found in the transcriptional cassette of SEQ ID NO: 4.

SEQ ID NO: 16 is the transcribed region of SEQ ID NO: 11, comprising a fragment of PMI, the intron iAtBAF60, and a fragment of PMI complementary to the first fragment.

SEQ ID NO: 17 is the eFMV-03-e35S-05-prOsMADS1-05-cPMI-01-tOsMADS1-03 transcriptional cassette located in binary vector 22230.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1: Plasmid map of binary vector 19096.

Figure 2: Plasmid map of binary vector 19094.

Figure 3: Plasmid map of binary vector 19095.

Figure 4: Plasmid map of binary vector 19120.

Figure 5: Plasmid map of binary vector 19122.

Figure 6: Plasmid map of binary vector 20070.

Figure 7: Plasmid map of binary vector 21099.

Figure 8: Plasmid map of binary vector 20096.

Figure 9: Plasmid map of binary vector 12678.

Figure 10: Plasmid map of binary vector 13481.

Figure 11: Plasmid map of binary vector 20516.

Figure 12: Plasmid map of binary vector 12672.

Figure 13: Plasmid map of binary vector 22230.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

This description is not intended to be a detailed catalog of all the different ways in which the invention may be implemented, or all the features that may be added to the instant invention. For example, features illustrated with respect to one embodiment may be incorporated into other embodiments, and features illustrated with respect to a particular embodiment may be deleted from that embodiment. In addition, numerous variations and additions to the various

embodiments suggested herein will be apparent to those skilled in the art in light of the instant disclosure, which do not depart from the instant invention. Hence, the following descriptions are intended to illustrate some particular embodiments of the invention, and not to exhaustively specify all permutations, combinations and variations thereof.

Unless otherwise defined, all technical and scientific terms used herein have the same meaning as commonly understood by one of ordinary skill in the art to which this invention belongs. The terminology used in the description of the invention herein is for the purpose of describing particular embodiments only and is not intended to be limiting of the invention.

All publications, patent applications, patents, and other references mentioned herein are incorporated by reference in their entirety.

As used herein, "a," "an" or "the" can mean one or more than one. For example, a cell can mean a single cell or a multiplicity of cells.

As used herein, "and/or" refers to and encompasses any and all possible combinations of one or more of the associated listed items, as well as the lack of combinations when interpreted in the alternative (or).

Further, the term "about," as used herein when referring to a measurable value such as an amount of a compound or agent, dose, time, temperature, and the like, is meant to encompass variations of $\pm 20\%$, $\pm 10\%$, $\pm 5\%$, $\pm 1\%$, $\pm 0.5\%$, or even $\pm 0.1\%$ of the specified amount.

As used herein, the transitional phrase "consisting essentially of" means that the scope of a claim is to be interpreted to encompass the specified materials or steps recited in the claim and those that do not materially affect the basic and novel characteristic(s) of the claimed invention. Thus, the term "consisting essentially of" when used in a claim of this invention is not intended to be interpreted to be equivalent to "comprising."

It will be understood that, although the terms "first," "second," etc. may be used herein to describe various elements, these elements should not be limited by these terms. These terms are only used to distinguish one element from another. Thus, a "first" element (e.g., a first

promoter sequence) as described herein could also be termed a "second" element (e.g., a second promoter sequence) without departing from the teachings of the present invention.

The term "plant" refers to any plant, particularly to agronomically useful plants (e.g. seed plants), and "plant cell" is a structural and physiological unit of the plant, which comprises a cell wall but may also refer to a protoplast. The plant cell may be in form of an isolated single cell or a cultured cell, or as a part of higher organized units such as for example, a plant tissue, or a plant organ differentiated into a structure that is present at any stage of a plant's development. The promoters and compositions described herein may be utilized in any plant. Examples of plants that may be utilized in contained embodiments herein include, but are not limited to, maize (corn), wheat, rice, barley, soybean, cotton, sorghum, beans in general, rape/canola, alfalfa, flax, sunflower, safflower, millet, rye, sugarcane, sugar beet, cocoa, tea, tropical sugar beet, Brassica spp., cotton, coffee, sweet potato, flax, peanut, clover; vegetables such as lettuce, tomato, cucurbits, cassava, potato, carrot, radish, pea, lentils, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, Brussel sprouts, peppers, and pineapple; tree fruits such as citrus, apples, pears, peaches, apricots, walnuts, avocado, banana, and coconut; and flowers such as orchids, carnations and roses. Other plants useful in the practice of the invention include perennial grasses, such as switchgrass, prairie grasses, Indiangrass, Big bluestem grass, Miscanthus and the like. It is recognized that mixtures of plants can be used.

The term "RNA" includes any molecule comprising at least one ribonucleotide residue, including those possessing one or more natural ribonucleotides of the following bases: adenine, cytosine, guanine, and uracil; abbreviated A, C, G, and U, respectively, modified ribonucleotides, and non-ribonucleotides. "Ribonucleotide" means a nucleotide with a hydroxyl group at the 2' position of the D-ribofuranose moiety.

As used herein, the terms and phrases "RNA," "RNA molecule(s)," and "RNA sequence(s)," are used interchangeably to refer to single-stranded RNA, double-stranded RNA, isolated RNA, partially purified RNA, essentially pure RNA, synthetic RNA, recombinant RNA, intracellular RNA, and also includes RNA that differs from naturally occurring RNA by the addition, deletion, substitution, and/or alteration of one or more nucleotides of the naturally occurring RNA.

As used herein, "heterologous" refers to a nucleotide sequence that either originates from another species or is from the same species or organism but is modified from either its original form or the form primarily expressed in the cell. Thus, a nucleotide sequence derived from an organism or species different from that of the cell into which the nucleotide sequence is introduced, is heterologous with respect to that cell and the cell's descendants. In addition, a heterologous nucleotide sequence includes a nucleotide sequence derived from and inserted into the same natural, original cell type, but which is present in a non-natural state, e.g. present in a different copy number, different location, and/or under the control of different regulatory sequences, than that found naturally in nature.

As used herein, the term "nucleic acid," "nucleic acid molecule," and/or "nucleotide sequence" refers to a heteropolymer of nucleotides or the sequence of these nucleotides from the 5' to 3' end of a nucleic acid molecule and includes DNA or RNA molecules, including cDNA, a DNA fragment, genomic DNA, synthetic (*e.g.*, chemically synthesized) DNA, plasmid DNA, mRNA, and anti-sense RNA, any of which can be single stranded or double stranded. The terms "nucleotide sequence" "nucleic acid," "nucleic acid molecule," "oligonucleotide" and "polynucleotide" are also used interchangeably herein to refer to a heteropolymer of nucleotides. Nucleic acid sequences provided herein are presented herein in the 5' to 3' direction, from left to right and are represented using the standard code for representing the nucleotide characters as set forth in the sequence rules for the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, 37 CFR §1.821 - 1.825, and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) Standard ST.25.

As used herein, the term "gene" is used broadly to refer to any segment of nucleic acid associated with a biological function. Thus, genes include coding sequences and/or the regulatory sequences required for their expression. For example, "gene" refers to a nucleic acid fragment that expresses mRNA or functional RNA, or encodes a specific protein, and which includes regulatory sequences. Genes also include nonexpressed DNA segments that, for example, form recognition sequences for other proteins. Genes can be obtained from a variety of sources, including cloning from a source of interest or synthesizing from known or predicted sequence information, and may include sequences designed to have desired parameters.

“Coding sequence” refers to a DNA or RNA sequence that codes for a specific amino acid sequence and excludes the non-coding sequences. It may constitute an “uninterrupted coding sequence”, i.e., lacking an intron, such as in a cDNA or it may include one or more introns bounded by appropriate splice junctions. An “intron” is a sequence of RNA which is contained in the primary transcript but which is removed through cleavage and re-ligation, or splicing, of the RNA within the cell to create the mature mRNA that can be translated into a protein.

“Operably linked” refers to the association of nucleic acid sequences on a single nucleic acid fragment so that the function of one is affected by the other. For example, a promoter is operably linked to a coding sequence or functional RNA when it is capable of affecting the expression of that coding sequence or functional RNA (i.e., that the coding sequence or functional RNA is under the transcriptional control of the promoter). Coding sequences in sense or antisense orientation can be operably-linked to regulatory sequences.

The terms “complementary” or “complementarity,” or “complement” as used herein, refer to the natural binding of polynucleotides under permissive salt and temperature conditions by base-pairing. For example, the sequence “A-G-T” binds to the complementary sequence “T-C-A.” The term “complementarity” includes within its meaning two single-stranded molecules that are “partial,” in which only some of the nucleotides bind, or where two single-stranded molecules that are complete when total complementarity exists between the single stranded molecules. The degree of complementarity between nucleic acid strands has significant effects on the efficiency and strength of hybridization between nucleic acid strands.

The term “nucleic acid fragment,” “DNA fragment” or a fragment of a gene will be understood to mean a nucleotide sequence of reduced length relative to a reference nucleic acid or nucleotide sequence and comprising, consisting essentially of and/or consisting of a nucleotide sequence of contiguous nucleotides identical or almost identical (e.g., 80%, 81%, 82%, 83%, 84%, 85%, 86%, 87%, 88%, 89%, 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 96%, 98%, 99% identical) to the reference nucleic acid or nucleotide sequence. Such a nucleic acid fragment according to the invention may be, where appropriate, included in a larger polynucleotide of which it is a constituent. In some embodiments, such fragments can comprise, consist essentially of and/or consist of, oligonucleotides having a length of at least

about 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 50, 75, 100, 150, 200, 250, 300, 350, 400, 450, 500, 750, or 1000 consecutive nucleotides of a nucleic acid or nucleotide sequence according to the invention.

An "isolated" nucleic acid of the present invention is generally free of nucleic acid sequences that flank the nucleic acid of interest in the genomic DNA of the organism from which the nucleic acid was derived (such as coding sequences present at the 5' or 3' ends). However, the nucleic acid of this invention can include some additional bases or moieties that do not deleteriously affect the basic structural and/or functional characteristics of the nucleic acid. "Isolated" does not mean that the preparation is technically pure (homogeneous). Thus, an "isolated nucleic acid" is present in a form or setting that is different from that in which it is found in nature and is not immediately contiguous with nucleotide sequences with which it is immediately contiguous (one on the 5' end and one on the 3' end) in the naturally occurring genome of the organism from which it is derived. Accordingly, in one embodiment, an isolated nucleic acid includes some or all of the 5' non-coding (e.g., promoter) sequences that are immediately contiguous to a coding sequence. The term therefore includes, for example, a recombinant nucleic acid that is incorporated into a vector, into an autonomously replicating plasmid or virus, or into the genomic DNA of a prokaryote or eukaryote, or which exists as a separate molecule (e.g., a cDNA or a genomic DNA fragment produced by PCR or restriction endonuclease treatment), independent of other sequences. Thus, a nucleic acid found in nature that is removed from its native environment and transformed into a plant is still considered "isolated" even when incorporated into the genome of the resulting transgenic plant. It also includes a recombinant nucleic acid that is part of a hybrid nucleic acid encoding an additional polypeptide or peptide sequence.

The term "isolated" can further refer to a nucleic acid, nucleotide sequence, polypeptide, peptide or fragment that is substantially free of cellular material, viral material, and/or culture medium (e.g., when produced by recombinant DNA techniques), or chemical precursors or other chemicals (e.g., when chemically synthesized). Moreover, an "isolated fragment" is a fragment of a nucleic acid, nucleotide sequence or polypeptide that is not naturally occurring as a fragment and would not be found as such in the natural state. "Isolated" does not mean that the preparation is technically pure (homogeneous), but it is sufficiently pure to provide the polypeptide or nucleic acid in a form in which it can be used for the intended purpose.

The terms "polypeptide," "protein," and "peptide" refer to a chain of covalently linked amino acids. In general, the term "peptide" can refer to shorter chains of amino acids (*e.g.*, 2-50 amino acids); however, all three terms overlap with respect to the length of the amino acid chain. As used herein, the terms "protein" and "polypeptide" are used interchangeably and encompass peptides, unless indicated otherwise. Polypeptides, proteins, and peptides may comprise naturally occurring amino acids, non-naturally occurring amino acids, or a combination of both. The polypeptides, proteins, and peptides may be isolated from sources (*e.g.*, cells or tissues) in which they naturally occur, produced recombinantly in cells *in vivo* or *in vitro* or in a test tube *in vitro*, or synthesized chemically. Such techniques are known to those skilled in the art. *See, e.g.*, Sambrook *et al.*, Molecular Cloning: A Laboratory Manual 2nd Ed. (Cold Spring Harbor, NY, 1989); Ausubel *et al.* Current Protocols in Molecular Biology (Green Publishing Associates, Inc. and John Wiley & Sons, Inc., NY, 1987).

The term "transgene" as used herein, refers to any nucleic acid sequence used in the transformation of a plant, animal, or other organism. Thus, a transgene can be a coding sequence, a non-coding sequence, a cDNA, a gene or fragment or portion thereof, a genomic sequence, a regulatory element and the like. A "transgenic" organism, such as a transgenic plant, transgenic microorganism, or transgenic animal, is an organism into which a transgene has been delivered or introduced and the transgene can be expressed in the transgenic organism to produce a product, the presence of which can impart an effect and/or a phenotype in the organism. "Transgenic" cells and tissues refer to cells and tissues into which a transgene has been delivered or introduced and the transgene can be expressed in the cells and tissues to produce a product, the presence of which can impart an effect and/or phenotype in the cell or tissue.

Different nucleic acids or polypeptides having homology are referred to herein as "homologues." The term homologue includes homologous sequences from the same and other species and orthologous sequences from the same and other species. "Homology" refers to the level of similarity between two or more nucleic acid and/or amino acid sequences in terms of percent of positional identity (*i.e.*, sequence similarity or identity). Homology also refers to the concept of similar functional properties among different nucleic acids or proteins.

“Expression” refers to the transcription and stable accumulation of mRNA. Expression may also refer to the production of protein.

The terms “transcriptional cassette,” “expression cassette,” or “cassette” as used herein means a DNA sequence capable of directing expression of a particular nucleotide sequence in an appropriate host cell, comprising a promoter operably linked to the nucleotide sequence which is operably linked to termination signals. The expression of the nucleotide sequence in the expression cassette may be under the control of a constitutive promoter or of an inducible promoter that initiates transcription only when the host cell is exposed to some particular external stimulus. Additionally, the promoter can also be specific to a particular tissue or organ or stage of development. The expression cassette also typically comprises sequences required for proper translation of the nucleotide sequence. The coding region usually codes for a protein of interest but may also code for a functional RNA of interest, for example antisense RNA or a nontranslated RNA, in the sense or antisense direction. The transcriptional cassette comprising the nucleotide sequence of interest may be chimeric. “Chimeric” is used to indicate that a DNA sequence, such as a vector or a gene, is comprised of two or more DNA sequences of distinct origin that are fused together by recombinant DNA techniques resulting in a DNA sequence, which does not occur naturally. A transcriptional cassette, expression cassette or cassette can incorporate numerous nucleotide sequences, promoters, regulatory elements, nucleotide sequences of interest, etc.

“Trait gene” refers to transgenes of agronomic interest which provide beneficial agronomic traits to crop plants. Trait genes include but are not limited to genetic elements comprising or that relate to herbicide resistance, increased yield, insect control, fungal disease resistance, virus resistance, nematode resistance, bacterial disease resistance, starch production, modified oils production, high oil production, modified fatty acid content, high protein production, fruit ripening, enhanced animal and human nutrition, biopolymers, environmental stress resistance, pharmaceutical peptides, improved processing traits, improved digestibility, industrial enzyme production, improved flavor, nitrogen fixation, hybrid seed production, and biofuel production.

“Intron” refers to an intervening section of DNA which occurs almost exclusively within a eukaryotic gene, but which is not translated to amino acid sequences in the gene product. The introns are removed from the pre-mature mRNA through a process called splicing, which

leaves the exons untouched, to form an mRNA. Various intron sequences have been shown to enhance expression, particularly in monocotyledonous cells. For example, the introns of the maize Adh1 gene have been found to significantly enhance the expression of the wild-type gene under its cognate promoter when introduced into maize cells. Intron 1 of Adh1 was found to be particularly effective and enhanced expression in fusion constructs with the chloramphenicol acetyltransferase gene (Callis et al. 1987, *Genes Develop.* 1: 1183-1200). In the same experimental system, the intron from the maize bronze 1 gene had a similar effect in enhancing expression. Intron sequences have been routinely incorporated into plant transformation vectors, typically within the non-translated leader.

“Linker” refers to a polynucleotide that comprises the connecting sequence between two other polynucleotides. The linker may be at least 1, 3, 5, 8, 10, 15, 20, 30, 50, 100, 200, 500, 1000, or 2000 polynucleotides in length. A linker may be synthetic, such that its sequence is not found in nature, or it may naturally occur, such as an intron.

"Exon" refers to a section of DNA which carries the coding sequence for a protein or part of it. Exons are separated by intervening, non-coding sequences (introns).

“Transit peptides” generally refer to peptide molecules that when linked to a protein of interest directs the protein to a particular tissue, cell, subcellular location, or cell organelle. Examples include, but are not limited to, chloroplast transit peptides, nuclear targeting signals, and vacuolar signals. To ensure localization to the plastids it is conceivable to use, but not limited to, the signal peptides of the ribulose biphosphate carboxylase small subunit (Wolter et al. 1988, *PNAS* 85: 846-850; Nawrath et al., 1994, *PNAS* 91: 12760-12764), of the NADP malate dehydrogenase (Galiardo et al. 1995, *Planta* 197: 324-332), of the glutathione reductase (Creissen et al. 1995, *Plant J* 8: 167-175) or of the R1 protein Lorberth et al. (1998, *Nature Biotechnology* 16: 473-477).

The term "transformation" as used herein refers to the transfer of a nucleic acid fragment into the genome of a host cell, resulting in genetically stable inheritance. In some particular embodiments, the introduction into a plant, plant part and/or plant cell is via bacterial-mediated transformation, particle bombardment transformation, calcium-phosphate-mediated transformation, cyclodextrin-mediated transformation, electroporation, liposome-mediated transformation, nanoparticle-mediated transformation, polymer-mediated transformation,

virus-mediated nucleic acid delivery, whisker-mediated nucleic acid delivery, microinjection, sonication, infiltration, polyethylene glycol-mediated transformation, protoplast transformation, or any other electrical, chemical, physical and/or biological mechanism that results in the introduction of nucleic acid into the plant, plant part and/or cell thereof, or a combination thereof.

Procedures for transforming plants are well known and routine in the art and are described throughout the literature. Non-limiting examples of methods for transformation of plants include transformation via bacterial-mediated nucleic acid delivery (*e.g.*, via bacteria from the genus *Agrobacterium*), viral-mediated nucleic acid delivery, silicon carbide or nucleic acid whisker-mediated nucleic acid delivery, liposome mediated nucleic acid delivery, microinjection, microparticle bombardment, calcium-phosphate-mediated transformation, cyclodextrin-mediated transformation, electroporation, nanoparticle-mediated transformation,, sonication, infiltration, PEG-mediated nucleic acid uptake, as well as any other electrical, chemical, physical (mechanical) and/or biological mechanism that results in the introduction of nucleic acid into the plant cell, including any combination thereof.

General guides to various plant transformation methods known in the art include Miki *et al.* ("Procedures for Introducing Foreign DNA into Plants" in *Methods in Plant Molecular Biology and Biotechnology*, Glick, B. R. and Thompson, J. E., Eds. (CRC Press, Inc., Boca Raton, 1993), pages 67-88) and Rakowoczy-Trojanowska (2002, *Cell Mol Biol Lett* 7:849-858 (2002)).

Thus, in some particular embodiments, the introducing into a plant, plant part and/or plant cell is via bacterial-mediated transformation, particle bombardment transformation, calcium-phosphate-mediated transformation, cyclodextrin-mediated transformation, electroporation, liposome-mediated transformation, nanoparticle-mediated transformation, polymer-mediated transformation, virus-mediated nucleic acid delivery, whisker-mediated nucleic acid delivery, microinjection, sonication, infiltration, polyethyleneglycol-mediated transformation, any other electrical, chemical, physical and/or biological mechanism that results in the introduction of nucleic acid into the plant, plant part and/or cell thereof, or a combination thereof.

Agrobacterium-mediated transformation is a commonly used method for transforming plants because of its high efficiency of transformation and because of its broad utility with many

different species. *Agrobacterium*-mediated transformation typically involves transfer of the binary vector carrying the foreign DNA of interest to an appropriate *Agrobacterium* strain that may depend on the complement of vir genes carried by the host *Agrobacterium* strain either on a co-resident Ti plasmid or chromosomally (Uknes et al 1993, Plant Cell 5:159-169). The transfer of the recombinant binary vector to *Agrobacterium* can be accomplished by a tri-parental mating procedure using *Escherichia coli* carrying the recombinant binary vector, a helper E. coli strain that carries a plasmid that is able to mobilize the recombinant binary vector to the target *Agrobacterium* strain. Alternatively, the recombinant binary vector can be transferred to *Agrobacterium* by nucleic acid transformation (Höfgen and Willmitzer 1988, Nucleic Acids Res 16:9877).

Transformation of a plant by recombinant *Agrobacterium* usually involves co-cultivation of the *Agrobacterium* with explants from the plant and follows methods well known in the art. Transformed tissue is typically regenerated on selection medium carrying an antibiotic or herbicide resistance marker between the binary plasmid T-DNA borders.

Another method for transforming plants, plant parts and plant cells involves propelling inert or biologically active particles at plant tissues and cells. See, e.g., US Patent Nos. 4,945,050; 5,036,006 and 5,100,792. Generally, this method involves propelling inert or biologically active particles at the plant cells under conditions effective to penetrate the outer surface of the cell and afford incorporation within the interior thereof. When inert particles are utilized, the vector can be introduced into the cell by coating the particles with the vector containing the nucleic acid of interest. Alternatively, a cell or cells can be surrounded by the vector so that the vector is carried into the cell by the wake of the particle. Biologically active particles (e.g., dried yeast cells, dried bacterium or a bacteriophage, each containing one or more nucleic acids sought to be introduced) also can be propelled into plant tissue.

Thus, in particular embodiments of the present invention, a plant cell can be transformed by any method known in the art and as described herein and intact plants can be regenerated from these transformed cells using any of a variety of known techniques. Plant regeneration from plant cells, plant tissue culture and/or cultured protoplasts is described, for example, in Evans *et al.* (*Handbook of Plant Cell Cultures*, Vol. 1, MacMilan Publishing Co. New York (1983)); and Vasil I. R. (ed.) (*Cell Culture and Somatic Cell Genetics of Plants*, Acad. Press, Orlando, Vol. I (1984), and Vol. II (1986)). Methods of selecting for transformed transgenic

plants, plant cells and/or plant tissue culture are routine in the art and can be employed in the methods of the invention provided herein.

By "stably introducing" or "stably introduced" in the context of a polynucleotide introduced into a cell is intended the introduced polynucleotide is stably incorporated into the genome of the cell, and thus the cell is stably transformed with the polynucleotide.

"Stable transformation" or "stably transformed" as used herein means that a nucleic acid is introduced into a cell and integrates into the genome of the cell. As such, the integrated nucleic acid is capable of being inherited by the progeny thereof, more particularly, by the progeny of multiple successive generations. "Genome" as used herein also includes the nuclear and the plastid genome, and therefore includes integration of the nucleic acid into, for example, the chloroplast genome. Stable transformation as used herein can also refer to a transgene that is maintained extrachromasomally, for example, as a minichromosome.

Stable transformation of a cell can be detected by, for example, a Southern blot hybridization assay of genomic DNA of the cell with nucleic acid sequences which specifically hybridize with a nucleotide sequence of a transgene introduced into an organism (e.g., a plant). Stable transformation of a cell can be detected by, for example, a Northern blot hybridization assay of RNA of the cell with nucleic acid sequences which specifically hybridize with a nucleotide sequence of a transgene introduced into a plant or other organism. Stable transformation of a cell can also be detected by, e.g., a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) or other amplification reactions as are well known in the art, employing specific primer sequences that hybridize with target sequence(s) of a transgene, resulting in amplification of the transgene sequence, which can be detected according to standard methods. Transformation can also be detected by direct sequencing and/or hybridization protocols well known in the art.

The "transformation and regeneration process" refers to the process of stably introducing a transgene into a plant cell and regenerating a plant from the transgenic plant cell. As used herein, transformation and regeneration includes the selection process, whereby a transgene comprises a selectable marker and the transformed cell has incorporated and expressed the transgene, such that the transformed cell will survive and developmentally flourish in the presence of the selection agent. "Regeneration" refers to growing a whole plant from a plant cell, a group of plant cells, or a plant piece such as from a protoplast, callus, or tissue part.

A “selectable marker” or “selectable marker gene” refers to a gene whose expression in a plant cell gives the cell a selective advantage. “Positive selection” refers to a transformed cell acquiring the ability to metabolize a substrate that it previously could not use or could not use efficiently, typically by being transformed with and expressing a positive selectable marker gene. This transformed cell thereby grows out of the mass of nontransformed tissue. Positive selection can be of many types from inactive forms of plant growth regulators that are then converted to active forms by the transferred enzyme to alternative carbohydrate sources that are not utilized efficiently by the nontransformed cells, for example mannose, which then become available upon transformation with an enzyme, for example phosphomannose isomerase, that allows them to be metabolized. Nontransformed cells either grow slowly in comparison to transformed cells or not at all. Other types of selection may be due to the cells transformed with the selectable marker gene gaining the ability to grow in presence of a negative selection agent, such as an antibiotic or an herbicide, compared to the ability to grow of non-transformed cells. A selective advantage possessed by a transformed cell may also be due to the loss of a previously possessed gene in what is called “negative selection”. In this, a compound is added that is toxic only to cells that did not lose a specific gene (a negative selectable marker gene) present in the parent cell (typically a transgene).

Examples of selectable markers include, but are not limited to, genes that provide resistance or tolerance to antibiotics such as kanamycin (Dekeyser et al. 1989, *Plant Phys* 90: 217-23), spectinomycin (Svab and Maliga 1993, *Plant Mol Biol* 14: 197-205), streptomycin (Maliga et al. 1988, *Mol Gen Genet* 214: 456-459), hygromycin B (Waldron et al. 1985, *Plant Mol Biol* 5: 103-108), bleomycin (Hille et al. 1986, *Plant Mol Biol* 7: 171-176), sulphonamides (Guerineau et al. 1990, *Plant Mol Biol* 15: 127-136), streptothricin (Jelenska et al. 2000, *Plant Cell Rep* 19: 298-303), or chloramphenicol (De Block et al. 1984, *EMBO J* 3: 1681-1689). Other selectable markers include genes that provide resistance or tolerance to herbicides, such as the S4 and/or Hra mutations of acetolactate synthase (ALS) that confer resistance to herbicides including sulfonylureas, imidazolinones, triazolopyrimidines, and pyrimidinyl thiobenzoates; 5-enol-pyrovyl-shikimate-3-phosphate-synthase (EPSPS) genes, including but not limited to those described in U.S. Patent. Nos. 4,940,935, 5,188,642, 5,633,435, 6,566,587, 7,674,598 (as well as all related applications) and the glyphosate N-acetyltransferase (GAT) which confers resistance to glyphosate (Castle et al. 2004, *Science* 304:1151-1154, and U.S. Patent Application Publication Nos. 20070004912, 20050246798,

and 20050060767); BAR which confers resistance to glufosinate (see e.g., U.S. Patent Nos. 5,561,236); aryloxy alkanoate dioxygenase or AAD-1, AAD-12, or AAD-13 which confer resistance to 2,4-D; genes such as *Pseudomonas* HPPD which confer HPPD resistance; Sprotoporphyrinogen oxidase (PPO) mutants and variants, which confer resistance to peroxidizing herbicides including fomesafen, acifluorfen-sodium, oxyfluorfen, lactofen, fluthiacet-methyl, saflufenacil, flumioxazin, flumiclorac-pentyl, carfentrazone-ethyl, sulfentrazone,); and genes conferring resistance to dicamba, such as dicamba monooxygenase (Herman et al. 2005, J Biol Chem 280: 24759-24767 and U.S. Patent No. 7,812,224 and related applications and patents). Other examples of selectable markers can be found in Sundar and Sakthivel (2008, J Plant Physiology 165: 1698-1716), herein incorporated by reference.

Other selection systems include using drugs, metabolite analogs, metabolic intermediates, and enzymes for positive selection or conditional positive selection of transgenic plants. Examples include, but are not limited to, a gene encoding phosphomannose isomerase (PMI) where mannose is the selection agent, or a gene encoding xylose isomerase where D-xylose is the selection agent (Haldrup et al. 1998, Plant Mol Biol 37: 287-96). Finally, other selection systems may use hormone-free medium as the selection agent. One non-limiting example the maize homeobox gene *kn1*, whose ectopic expression results in a 3-fold increase in transformation efficiency (Luo et al. 2006, Plant Cell Rep 25: 403-409). Examples of various selectable markers and genes encoding them are disclosed in Miki and McHugh (J Biotechnol, 2004, 107: 193-232; incorporated by reference).

In some embodiments of the invention, the selectable marker may be plant derived. An example of a selectable marker which can be plant derived includes, but is not limited to, 5-enolpyruvylshikimate-3-phosphate synthase (EPSPS). The enzyme 5-enolpyruvylshikimate-3-phosphate synthase (EPSPS) catalyzes an essential step in the shikimate pathway common to aromatic amino acid biosynthesis in plants. The herbicide glyphosate inhibits EPSPS, thereby killing the plant. Transgenic glyphosate-tolerant plants can be created by the introduction of a modified EPSPS transgene which is not affected by glyphosate (for example, US Patent 6,040,497; incorporated by reference). Other examples of a modified plant EPSPS which can be used as a selectable marker in the presence of glyphosate includes a P106L mutant of rice EPSPS (Zhou et al 2006, Plant Physiol 140: 184-195) and a P106S mutation in goosegrass EPSPS (Baerson et al 2002, Plant Physiol 129: 1265-1275). Other

sources of EPSPS which are not plant derived and can be used to confer glyphosate tolerance include but are not limited to an EPSPS P101S mutant from *Salmonella typhimurium* (Comai et al 1985, Nature 317: 741-744) and a mutated version of CP4 EPSPS from *Agrobacterium* sp. Strain CP4 (Funke et al 2006, PNAS 103: 13010-13015). Although the plant EPSPS gene is nuclear, the mature enzyme is localized in the chloroplast (Mousdale and Coggins 1985, Planta 163:241-249). EPSPS is synthesized as a preprotein containing a transit peptide, and the precursor is then transported into the chloroplast stroma and proteolytically processed to yield the mature enzyme (della-Cioppa et al. 1986, PNAS 83: 6873-6877). Therefore, to create a transgenic plant which has tolerance to glyphosate, a suitably mutated version of EPSPS which correctly translocates to the chloroplast could be introduced. Such a transgenic plant then has a native, genomic EPSPS gene as well as the mutated EPSPS transgene. Glyphosate could then be used as a selection agent during the transformation and regeneration process, whereby only those plants or plant tissue that are successfully transformed with the mutated EPSPS transgene survive.

A “gene which is essential” or an “essential gene” for the plant cell to survive the transformation and regeneration process may be a selectable marker. It may also be but is not limited to a native, endogenous gene essential for cell cycle, housekeeping, embryo development, or tissue differentiation. It may also a gene essential for but not limited to DNA or chromosome dynamics, RNA synthesis, RNA modification, protein synthesis, protein modification, metabolism, essential enzymatic pathways, photosynthesis, cell structure, intracellular transport, transcriptional regulation, chromatin remodeling, or essential signaling pathways. Examples of essential genes in maize include but are not limited to empty pericarp2 (Fu et al 2002, Plant Cell 14: 3119-3132), empty pericarp4 (Gutierrez-Marcos et al. 2007, Plant Cell 19: 196-210), defective endosperm18 (Bernardi et al 2012, Plant Physiology 160: 1318-1328), embryo defective 12 (Shen et al. 2013, Plant J DOI: 10.1111/tpj.12161), ameiotic1 (Pawlowski et al. 2009, PNAS: 3603-3608), ZmWHY1 (Prikryl et al 2008, Nucleic Acids Res 36: 5152-5165), gl8a/gl8b together (Dietrich et al 2005, Plant J 42: 844-61), and viviparous-5 (Hable et al 1998, Mol Gen Genet 257: 167-76). Additional examples of essential maize genes may be found at www.maizegdb.org (Lawrence et al. 2004, Nucleic Acids Research 32: D393-D397). Additional examples of essential plant genes are in Meinke et al., Trends in Plant Sci, 2008, 13: 483-491, herein incorporated by reference.

The term “tissue” refers to a group of living cells which can be but not limited to callus or differentiated into an organ or plant.

The terms “event,” “transgenic event,” or “transgenic plant event” refers to a transgenic plant produced by transformation and regeneration of a single plant cell with heterologous DNA, such as an expression cassette that includes a gene of interest. The term “event” also refers to progeny produced by the event.

The terms “low copy number” or “low copy” as used herein are in reference to the number of identical copies of a transgene that are present in a transgenic event. An event with a low copy number or low copy has only one complete copy of the T-DNA or introduced polynucleotide of interest incorporated into its genome, with one and only one copy of each transcriptional cassette comprising the T-DNA or introduced polynucleotide of interest and no partial copies. Therefore, the “percent of low copy number” refers to the percentage of transgenic events in a transformation experiment which have incorporated only one complete copy of each transcriptional cassette present in the T-DNA or introduced polynucleotide of interest.

An “interfering RNA” (e.g., siRNA and miRNA) is a RNA molecule capable of post-transcriptional gene silencing or suppression, RNA silencing, and/or decreasing gene expression. Interfering RNAs affect sequence-specific, post-transcriptional gene silencing in animals and plants by base pairing to the mRNA sequence of a target nucleic acid. Thus, the siRNA is at least partially complementary to the silenced gene. The partially complementary siRNA may include one or more mismatches, bulges, internal loops, and/or non-Watson-Crick base pairs (i.e., G-U wobble base pairs).

The terms “gene silencing” “silencing” or “suppression” are used interchangeably to generally describe homology-dependent suppression of transgenes or endogenous nuclear genes. Gene silencing may be transcriptional, when the suppression is due to decreased transcription of the affected genes, or post-transcriptional, when the suppression is due to increased turnover (degradation) of RNA species homologous to the affected genes. (English et al 1996, Plant Cell 8:179-188). This suppression results in substantial and measurable reductions of the amount of the target mRNA available in the cell for binding and decoding by ribosomes. The transcribed RNA can be in the sense orientation to effect what is referred

to as co-suppression, in the anti-sense orientation to effect what is referred to as anti-sense suppression, or in both orientations producing a double-stranded RNA to effect what is referred to as RNA interference. A "silenced" gene includes within its definition a gene that is subject to silencing or suppression of the mRNA encoded by the gene.

While the invention is not meant to be limited to any particular mechanism of action or bound by theory, it is possible that the methods disclosed result in an increase in the integration of a single copy of each transcriptional cassette in the transformed plant cell due to an RNA-dependent mechanism, such as co-suppression or RNAi. Methods for reducing or eliminating the expression of a gene in a plant are well known in the art, and any such method may be used in the methods of the present invention. Co-suppression involves transforming plants with a DNA construct comprising a promoter that drives expression in a plant operably linked to at least a portion of a polynucleotide that complements the transcript of the gene of interest, target gene, or other target sequence. The target gene is typically an endogenous, or native gene, but can also be a transgene. Co-suppression involves a heterologous gene sequence expressed in a plant of interest in the sense orientation to suppress the expression of the target gene in the plant. Co-suppression involves a threshold level, where more copies of the heterologous gene increase the likelihood of co-suppression. The heterologous nucleotide sequence is constructed or chosen to have substantial sequence identity to the sequence of the transcript of the target gene, typically greater than about 60% sequence identity, more typically greater than about 80% sequence identity, more typically greater than about 90% sequence identity, and in some instances greater than about 95% sequence identity.

Generally, sequences of at least about 20 nucleotides, at least about 30 nucleotides, at least about 40 nucleotides, at least about 50 nucleotides, at least about 100 nucleotides, at least about 200 nucleotides, at least about 300, at least about 400, at least about 450, at least about 500, at least about 550, or greater may be used. This mechanism may act in a threshold-type fashion, where more than one copy of a target gene increases the likelihood of co-suppression occurring. Methods for co-suppression are known in the art. See, for example, Taylor 1997, *Plant Cell* 9:1245; Jorgensen 1990, *Trends Biotech.* 8:340-344; Jorgensen et al. 1996, *Plant Mol Biol* 31:957-973; Johansen and Carrington 2001, *Plant Physiol* 126:930-938; Broin et al. 2002, *Plant Cell* 14:1417-1432; Stoutjesdijk et al. 2002, *Plant Physiol* 129:1723-1731; Yu et al. 2003 *Phytochemistry* 63:753-763; Flavell 1994, *PNAS* 91:3490-3496; Finnegan et al. 1994, *Bio/Technology* 12:883-888; Neuhuber et al. 1994, *Mol. Gen. Genet.* 244:230-241; and

U.S. Patent Nos. 5,034,323, 5,283,184, and 5,942,657; all of which are herein incorporated by reference.

In some embodiments of the invention, antisense constructions, in which the transgene is complementary to at least a portion of the messenger RNA (mRNA) for the target sequence, may be utilized. Antisense nucleotides are constructed to hybridize with the corresponding mRNA. Modifications of the antisense sequences may be made as long as the sequences hybridize to and interfere with expression of the corresponding mRNA. In this manner, antisense constructs having at least about 70%, at least about 80%, at least about 85% or higher sequence identity to the corresponding sense sequences may be used. Furthermore, portions of the antisense nucleotides may be used to disrupt the expression of the target gene. Generally, sequences of at least about 20 nucleotides, at least about 30 nucleotides, at least about 40 nucleotides, at least about 50 nucleotides, at least about 100 nucleotides, at least about 200 nucleotides, at least about 300, at least about 400, at least about 450, at least about 500, at least about 550, or greater may be used. Antisense methods are known in the art, See, for example, Sheehy et al. 1988, PNAS 85:8805-8809; and U.S. Patent Nos. 5,107,065; 5,453,566; and 5,759,829, each of which is herein incorporated by reference.

RNA interference (RNAi) can also be used to down-regulate genes. See, generally, Napoli et al. 1990, Plant Cell 2:279-289; U.S. Patent No. 5,034,323; Sharp 1999, Genes Dev 13:139-141; Zamore et al. 2000, Cell 101:25-33; and Montgomery et al. 1998, PNAS 95:15502-15507. In RNAi, long double-stranded RNAs (dsRNAs), typically >200 nucleotides, can be used to silence the expression of a target gene in a plant. Upon introduction, the long dsRNAs enter a cellular pathway that is commonly referred to as the RNA interference (RNAi) pathway. First, the dsRNAs get processed into 20-25 nucleotide (nt) small interfering RNAs (siRNAs) by an RNase III-like enzyme. These siRNAs assemble into endoribonuclease-containing complexes known as RNA-induced silencing complexes (RISCs), unwinding in the process. The siRNA strands subsequently guide the RISCs to complementary RNA molecules, where they cleave and destroy the cognate RNA. Cleavage of cognate RNA takes place near the middle of the region bound by the siRNA strand.

While the invention is not meant to be limited to any particular mechanism of action or bound by theory, it is possible that the methods disclosed result in an increase in the integration of a single copy of each transcriptional cassette in the transformed plant cell due to an RNA-

dependent mechanism, such as co-suppression or RNAi. In some embodiments of the invention, double-stranded RNA (dsRNA) interference may be used. For dsRNA interference, a sense and an antisense RNA molecule that is fully or partially complementary to the sense RNA molecule are expressed in the same cell, resulting in inhibition of the expression of the corresponding messenger RNA. This corresponding mRNA may be a transcript produced from an endogenous native gene or from a second transgene.

The sense and antisense molecules can be expressed from a single or separate expression cassette. Alternatively, multiple plant lines transformed with the dsRNA interference expression cassette or expression cassettes may then be screened to identify plant lines that show the greatest inhibition of gene expression. Methods for using dsRNA interference to inhibit the expression of plant genes are described in Waterhouse et al. 1998, PNAS 95:13959-13964, Liu et al. 2002, Plant Physiol. 129:1732-1743, and WO 99/49029, WO 99/53050, WO 99/61631, and WO 00/49035; each of which is herein incorporated by reference.

In some embodiments of the invention, inhibition of the expression of a gene may be obtained by hairpin RNA (hpRNA) interference or intron-containing hairpin RNA (ihpRNA) interference. A short hairpin RNA (shpRNA) is a sequence of RNA that makes a tight hairpin turn that can be used to silence gene expression. These methods are highly efficient at inhibiting the expression of endogenous genes or other transgenes. See, Waterhouse and Helliwell 2003, Nat Rev Genet 4:29-38 and the references cited therein.

For hpRNA interference, the expression cassette is designed to express an RNA molecule that hybridizes with itself to form a hairpin structure that comprises a single-stranded loop region and a base-paired stem. The base-paired stem region comprises a sense sequence corresponding to all or part of the endogenous messenger RNA encoding the gene whose expression is to be inhibited, and an antisense sequence that is fully or partially complementary to the sense sequence. Thus, the base-paired stem region of the molecule generally determines the specificity of the RNA interference. Generally, sense and antisense sequences of the base-paired stem region of the molecule of at least about 20 nucleotides, at least about 30 nucleotides, at least about 40 nucleotides, at least about 50 nucleotides, at least about 100 nucleotides, at least about 200 nucleotides, at least about 300, at least about 400, at least about 450, at least about 500, at least about 550, or greater may be used. hpRNA

molecules are highly efficient at inhibiting the expression of endogenous genes or other transgenes, and the RNA interference they induce is inherited by subsequent generations of plants. See, for example, Chuang and Meyerowitz 2000, PNAS 97:4985-4990; Stoutjesdijk et al. 2002, Plant Physiol 129:1723-1731; and Waterhouse and Helliwell 2003, Nat Rev Genet 4:29-38. Methods for using hpRNA interference to inhibit or silence the expression of genes are described, for example, in Chuang and Meyerowitz 2000, PNAS 97:4985-4990; Stoutjesdijk et al. 2002, Plant Physiol 129:1723-1731; and Waterhouse and Helliwell 2003, Nat Rev Genet 4:29-38, and U.S. Patent Publication No. 20030175965; each of which is herein incorporated by reference.

Interfering hairpin RNA (ihpRNA) may also be used in the methods of the invention. ihpRNA have the same general structure as for hpRNA, but the RNA molecule additionally comprises an intron that is capable of being spliced in the cell in which the ihpRNA is expressed. The use of an intron minimizes the size of the loop in the hairpin RNA molecule following splicing, thus increasing the efficiency of interference. See, for example, Smith et al. 2000, Nature 407:319-320. Generally, sense and antisense sequences of the base-paired stem region of the molecule of at least about 20 nucleotides, at least about 30 nucleotides, at least about 40 nucleotides, at least about 50 nucleotides, at least about 100 nucleotides, at least about 200 nucleotides, at least about 300, at least about 400, at least about 450, at least about 500, at least about 550, or greater may be used. Methods for using ihpRNA interference to inhibit the expression of endogenous plant genes or other transgenes are described, for example, in Smith et al. 2000, Nature 407:319-320; Wesley et al. 2001, Plant J. 27:581-590; Wang and Waterhouse 2001, Curr Opin Plant Biol 5:146-150; Waterhouse and Helliwell 2003, Nat Rev Genet 4:29-38; Helliwell and Waterhouse 2003, Methods 30:289-295, and U.S. Patent Publication No. 20030180945, each of which is herein incorporated by reference. See also WO 02/00904 where the hpRNA is designed such that the loop region determines the specificity of the RNA interference.

In some embodiments of the invention, RNA interference by expression of a gene encoding a micro RNA (miRNA) may be used. miRNAs are regulatory agents consisting of about 22 ribonucleotides. miRNA are highly efficient at inhibiting the expression of endogenous genes. See, for example Javier et al. 2003, Nature 425: 257-263, herein incorporated by reference. For miRNA interference, the expression cassette is designed to express an RNA molecule that is modeled on an endogenous miRNA gene. The miRNA gene encodes an

RNA that forms a hairpin structure containing about a 22-nucleotide sequence that is complementary to the target transcript. For example, a 22-nucleotide sequence is selected from a target transcript sequence and contains 22 nucleotides of the target sequence in sense orientation and 22 nucleotides of a corresponding antisense sequence that is complementary to the sense sequence. See, for example, US Patent Nos. 8, 137,910 and 8,097,710, each of which is incorporated herein by reference.

The following examples are intended solely to illustrate one or more preferred embodiments of the invention and are not to be construed as limiting the scope of the invention.

EXAMPLES

Example 1: Constructs triggering RNA-dependent silencing of essential native gene increases the number of low copy transgenic events

For this example, constructs 19096, 19094, 19095, 19120, and 19122 (Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, respectively) were synthesized. Construct 19096 consists of two expression cassettes flanked by right and left borders. The first cassette (SEQ ID NO: 1), comprises a synthetic codon engineered maize double mutant EPSPS (ZmEPSPS or cZmEPSPSct-01) operably linked to a sunflower/maize plastid transit peptide which comprises the sunflower rubisco small subunit transit peptide (xOTPSSUct-01; U.S. Patent 6,040,497) under the control of three 35S enhancers (e35S), the CMP promoter sequence (prCMP-04) and further operably linked to the nopaline synthase (NOS) 3' end transcription termination and polyadenylation, or terminator, sequence (tNOS, or tNOS-05-01). The second cassette comprises a maize ubiquitin promoter (prUbi1-10) (Christensen et al, 1992, Plant Mol Biol 18: 675) operably linked to a phosphomannose isomerase (PMI) coding sequence (cPMI, or cPMI-01; US Patent No. 5,767,378, incorporated by reference) further operably linked to the tNOS-05-01 terminator. The prUbi1-10-cPMI-01-tNOS-05-01 transcriptional cassette is also in vectors 19096, 19094, 19095 19120, and 19122, and PMI is used as the selectable marker following transformation of each of the vectors.

The 19096 construct described above served as the control and reference for the remaining constructs. Construct 19094 is the same as 19096, except the cZmEPSPSct-01 cassette in

19094 (which is disclosed as SEQ ID NO: 2) does not contain a promoter or enhancers to drive the expression of the cZmEPSPSct-01 coding sequence. Therefore, the cZmEPSPSct-01 coding sequence was not expected to be expressed. However, if a transcript were to be expressed, the cZmEPSPSct-01 coding region was still operably linked to sunflower/maize xOTPSSUct-01 plastid transit peptide, such that any cZmEPSPSct-01 protein which might be made would target to the chloroplast. Like 19094, the cZmEPSPSct-01 cassette in 19095 also lacks a promoter and enhancers. However, the cZmEPSPS-16 cassette in 19095 (SEQ ID NO: 3) also does not contain the sunflower/maize xOTPSSUct-01 plastid transit peptide. Therefore, if a transcript were to be expressed, any cZmEPSPS-16 protein which might be made would not target to the chloroplast. The rZmEPSPSct-01 cassette in construct 19120, (SEQ ID NO: 4), is similar to 19096 except that the first ATG start codon of the rZmEPSPSct-01 coding region was changed to a TGA stop codon, resulting in a non-sense RNA that would not translate to the EPSPS enzyme. However, the non-sense RNA could still be translated into a polypeptide and translocated into the plastids by the sunflower/maize xOTPSSUct-01 plastid transit peptide. The transcriptional cassette which contains rZmEPSPSct-02 in construct 19122, which is disclosed as SEQ ID NO: 5, is similar to construct 19120 except that the OTPSSUct- Δ TG plastid transit peptide has a two nucleotide deletion (Δ TG), resulting in an out-of-frame transit peptide and downstream rZmEPSPSct-02 coding sequence. In this case, the cassette would express a non-sense RNA that would neither translate to a polypeptide nor translocate to the plastids. To summarize, plants transformed with constructs 19094 or 19095 were expected to produce little to no ZmEPSPS mRNA or protein. Plants transformed with constructs 19120 or 19122 produce mutated ZmEPSPS mRNAs which could not be translated into functional EPSPS proteins. Plants transformed with construct 19096 produce both a functional EPSPS mRNA and protein.

Each of these constructs was introduced into *A. tumefaciens* strain LBA4404, which was used for maize transformation. Immature maize embryos were harvested from surface sterilized immature ears 8 - 12 day after pollination. Embryos were mixed with the suspension of *Agrobacterium* cells harboring the construct of interest, on a co-cultivation medium and allowed to incubate for an additional 5 minutes. Excess *A. tumefaciens* solution was aspirated and embryos were co-cultured with the remaining *A. tumefaciens* at 23°C for 2-3 days in the dark. Embryos were transferred to culture medium supplemented with timentin (200 mg/L; PhytoTechnology Laboratories®), to kill the remaining *A. tumefaciens* and to

promote callus growth of the embryos, and incubated in the dark for 10-14 days. After this stage, the calli are grown in media containing either glyphosate, which is a selection agent for the EPSPS (5-enolpyruvylshikimate-3-phosphate synthase) selectable marker, or a selection agent for the PMI (phosphomannose isomerase) selectable marker, such as mannose. The selection agent is used for selecting the transformed plant cells. After selection, the surviving calluses were transferred to regeneration medium where morphogenesis occurs and tiny shoots develop from the surviving calluses. These tiny shoots were transferred to rooting medium and small putative transgenic plantlets were developed.

DNA from the regenerated plantlets, now referred to as events, was isolated and analyzed using TAQMAN™ qPCR to determine copy number of the introduced PMI gene.

TAQMAN™ assays were performed following standard methodology using JumpStart™ Taq ReadyMix™ (Sigma-Aldrich) and the ABI PRISM® 7900HT sequence detection system. Events were considered low-copy, meaning they were likely to have only one copy of the analyzed sequence, if they had a raw TAQMAN™ copy number value of 0.3 to 1.3. Events with a raw TAQMAN™ number above 1.3 were considered medium to high copy number, and are believed to contain more than one copy of the PMI gene. Transformation frequency is calculated as the percentage of transgenic events for a given construct with a given number of immature embryos used for the transformation. For example, if 100 immature maize embryos were initially transformed, and it was eventually determined that 5 of the events contained full or part of the T-DNA, the transformation frequency would be 5%. Table 1 shows the percentage of low copy events (LC%), based on the results of the TAQMAN™ analysis, and the calculated transformation frequency (TF%) for each of the given constructs.

Table 1: Copy number analysis and calculated transformation frequency of events transformed with EPSPS constructs

Construct	Transcriptional Cassette	# Embryos Transformed	LC%*	TF%
19096	e35S-08-e35S-10-e35S-09-prCMP-04-xOTPSSUct-01-cZmEPSPSct-01-tNOS-05-01	943	64.20 ^a	22.35
19094	xOTPSSUct-01-cZmEPSPSct-01-tNOS-05-01	536	39.68 ^b	12

19095	cZmEPSPS-16-tNOS-05-01	520	40.58 ^b	26.54
19120	e35S-08-e35S-10-e35S-09-prCMP-04-xOTPSSUct-01-rZmEPSPSct-01-tNOS-05-01	829	57.63 ^a	7.12
19122	e35S-08-e35S-10-e35S-09-prCMP-04-OTPSSUct-ΔTG-rZmEPSPSct-02-tNOS-05-01	515	62.07 ^a	33.79

*Different letters indicate significant differences in a two tailed student's t test ($p < 0.05$).

Results indicate that constructs 19120 and 19122, which would produce a mutated ZmEPSPS mRNA that would not translate into a functional ZmEPSPS protein, resulted in an event population that had a similar percentage of low copy events as events transformed with 19096, which produced both a functional ZmEPSPS mRNA and protein. The population of events transformed with 19094 or 19095, which lacked a promoter and enhancers to express the ZmEPSPS transgene, have a significantly lower percentage of low copy events. These results show that the ZmEPSPS mRNA is an important factor in increasing the amount of low-copy events.

To determine what the mRNA and protein levels were for ZmEPSPS for each of the constructs, qRT-PCR and quantitative ELISA assays were performed using standard techniques known in the art. To perform qRT-PCR analysis, RNA was extracted from leaf samples followed by DNA digestion. TaqMan assays were selected based on the target of interest which consists of a forward and reverse primer and a FAM-labeled probe that were specific to the target sequence. A species specific, TET-labeled reference target was also employed for each sample for relative expression calculation. One-step RT-PCR reactions were set up in triplicate (3 for endogenous reference gene, 3 for target gene) in 384 well PCR plates. A wild type control and no-RT negative control were included on each plate to test for non-specific amplification and DNA contamination, respectively. Results were captured on a real-time thermocycler, where threshold values are set by the analyzer for each reporter and the resulting data is reported. Relative expression ($2^{-\Delta Ct}$ where $\Delta Ct = \text{target Ct} - \text{reference Ct}$) was calculated for each sample. Results for qRT PCR were calculated as relative expression level for the gene of interest (the “target”) compared to an endogenous reference gene.

For quantitative ELISA, leaf extracts were prepared and were quantitatively analyzed for ZmEPSPS by ELISA (Tjissen, 1985, Practice and Theory of Enzyme Immunoassays) using Protein A purified rabbit anti-rice EPSPS and monoclonal 17 anti-soy EPSPS. The lower limit of quantification of the double-sandwich ELISA was estimated based on the lowest concentration of pure reference protein lying on the linear portion of the standard curve, the maximum volume of a control extract that could be analyzed without background interference, and the corresponding weight of the sample that the aliquot represented. Results for ELISAs are expressed as nanogram EPSPS protein per milligram total solution protein (TSP).

Table 2: ZmEPSPS RNA and Protein Accumulation

Construct	Transcriptional Cassette	ZmEPSPS RNA Accumulation	ZmEPSPS Protein Accumulation (ng/mg TSP)
19096	e35S-08-e35S-10-e35S-09-prCMP-04-xOTPSSUct-01-cZmEPSPSct-01-tNOS-05-01	1957.42 $\pm$ 518.08	2.45 $\pm$ 0.31
19094	xOTPSSUct-01-cZmEPSPSct-01-tNOS-05-01	3.75 $\pm$ 0.20	0.00
19095	cZmEPSPS-16-tNOS-05-01	10.98 $\pm$ 0.75	0.00
19120	e35S-08-e35S-10-e35S-09-prCMP-04-xOTPSSUct-01-rZmEPSPSct-01-tNOS-05-01	7120.67 $\pm$ 2089.77	0.00
19122	e35S-08-e35S-10-e35S-09-prCMP-04-OTPSSUct- Δ TG-rZmEPSPSct-02-tNOS-05-01	5056.11 $\pm$ 574.57	0.00

The results of Table 2 confirm that the constructs performed as expected. Very little ZmEPSPS mRNA was produced in events transformed with constructs 19094 or 19095, which lacked a promoter to express the ZmEPSPS transgene. Additionally, no ZmEPSPS protein was detected in events transformed with constructs 19094, 19095, 19120, or 19122.

The results of Table 1 and Table 2 indicate that ZmEPSPS RNA transcripts were needed for an increase in low copy number transformants, but the protein was not. This suggests an RNA-dependent mechanism, such as silencing or co-suppression, may be involved. As stated above, plants have a native, genomic copy of an EPSPS gene, and the ZmEPSPS cassette is introduced transgenically. One scenario consistent with the results, but is not to be construed as limiting the scope of the invention, is where multiple copies of the ZmEPSPS cassette trigger co-suppression of all copies, such that the transformed cell can no longer synthesize the EPSPS enzyme, whereas tissue or plants having a single copy of the ZmEPSPS cassette do not trigger co-suppression. Because EPSPS is essential, a cell wherein EPSPS expression is suppressed would not survive the transformation and regeneration process.

Example 2: Constructs containing OsMADS1 promoter and 5' genomic sequence increase the number of low copy transgenic events

For this example, constructs 20070 and 21099 (Figures 6 and 7, respectively) were produced. Construct 20070 comprises two expression cassettes between the right and left borders of the T-DNA. The first cassette contains a 7.9kb promoter based on the OsMADS1 gene, from *Oryza sativa* (GenBank accession AF204063; U.S. Patent 8,129,588). This promoter construct, prOsMADS1-05 (SEQ ID NO: 6), comprises the OsMADS1 promoter, operably linked to the 5'-nontranscribed sequence, exon 1, intron 1 and part of exon 2 of the OsMADS1 gene. Exon 1 contains a mutated ATG to ACA so that no translation initiates from the OsMADS1 exon 1. prOsMADS1-05 contains a maize optimized Kozak sequence at its 3' end to promote translation of a coding sequence. In construct 20070, prOsMADS1-05 is operably linked at the 5' end to enhancers from Figwort mosaic virus (eFMV-03) and the 35S promoter of Cauliflower Mosaic Virus (e35S-05). prOsMADS1-05 is operably linked at its 3' end to the coding sequence of an *Oryza sativa* trehalose-6-phosphate phosphatase (cT6PP-01) gene, further operably linked to the tOsMADS terminator (tOsMADS1-03; U.S. Patent 8,129,588). The eFMV-03-e35S-05-prOsMADS1-05-cT6PP-01-tOsMADS1-03 transcriptional cassette is disclosed as SEQ ID NO: 7. The second expression cassette comprises a maize ubiquitin promoter (prUbi1-10) operably linked to a PMI coding sequence (cPMI-01) further operably linked to a maize ubiquitin 3' end terminator sequence (tUbi1-01). Construct 21099 is similar to construct 20070. However, the first expression cassette comprising the prOsMADS1-05 promoter operably linked to the tOsMADS1-03 terminator

does not contain the coding sequence of the rice T6PP (SEQ ID NO: 8). The second cassette is identical to the PMI cassette of 20070, as described above.

Each of the above described constructs was introduced into *A. tumefaciens*, transformed into maize, and transformants were grown on PMI selectable media as described in Example 1. DNA from the regenerated plantlets, now referred to as events, was isolated and analyzed using TAQMAN™ qPCR to determine copy number of the introduced PMI gene, as described in Example 1. Results from copy number analysis and the calculated transformation frequency for each event population transformed with each construct are shown in Table 3. Results were compared to previous results using comparable constructs containing PMI (PMI). These constructs also contain a PMI transcriptional cassette and an additional transcriptional cassette which did not have the OsMADS1-05 promoter.

Table 3: Copy number analysis and calculated transformation frequency of events transformed with OsMADS1-05 promoter constructs

Construct	Transcriptional Cassette	# Events Tested	LC%*	TF%
20070	eFMV-03-e35S-05-prOsMADS1-05-cT6PP-01-tOsMADS1-03	103	62.16 ^a	6.788
21099	eFMV-03-e35S-05-prOsMADS1-05-tOsMADS1-03	235	62.65 ^a	19.7
PMI	prUbi1-10-cPMI-01-tNOS-05-01	462	41.36 ^b	22.5

*Different letters indicate significant differences in a two tailed student's t test ($p < 0.05$).

Results shown in Table 3 indicate that the number of low copy events was not dependent upon the cT6PP-01 coding sequence, suggesting that the OsMADS1-05 promoter plays an important role in the relatively low number of successfully transformed events and the high number of those events which have a single T-DNA insertion. One possible mechanism for this phenomenon is co-suppression of a maize MADS-box homologous gene or genes which play an essential role for the plant cell to survive the transformation and regeneration process. MADS-box genes encode transcription factors which are typically involved in regulating the

processes of development and signal transduction in eukaryotic organisms. In addition to flower development, MADS-box gene family members have been shown to be involved in fruit ripening, embryo development, and development of vegetative organs such as root and leaf (Riechmann and Meyerowitz, 1997, *Biol Chem* 378: 1079-101; Alvarez-Buylla et al. 2000, *Plant J*: 4: 457-466; Ng and Yanofsky, 2001, *Nat Rev Genet* 2: 186-195). While the invention is not meant to be limited to any particular mechanism of action or bound by theory, it is possible that the introduction of the prOsMADS1-05 promoter construct, which is comprised of the OsMADS1 promoter itself operably linked to 5'-nontranscribed sequence, exon 1, intron 1 and part of exon 2 of the OsMADS1 gene, triggers co-suppression of one or more native, genomic maize genes when the prOsMADS1-05 element is present in more than one copy in the transformed plant cell. This proposed mechanism is non-limiting to the invention.

To determine if a similar number of low copy events could be obtained if the OsMADS1-05 promoter was operably linked to a different coding sequence, constructs 12672 (Figure 12) and 22230 (Figure 13) were designed and tested. Construct 22230 is similar to construct 20070. However, the expression cassette comprising the prOsMADS1-05 promoter is operably linked to the coding sequence of PMI, further operably linked to to the tOsMADS1-03 terminator (SEQ ID NO: 17). Additionally, a separate second expression cassette comprises the coding sequence for a cyan fluorescent protein (Clontech Laboratories), operably linked to an ubiquitin promoter at the 5' end and operably linked to an ubiquitin terminator at the 3' end. Construct 12672 comprises two expression cassettes. One cassette comprises an ubiquitin promoter operably linked to the coding sequence of a cyan fluorescent protein (Clontech Laboratories), operably linked to the NOS terminator sequence. The second cassette comprises the prUbi1-04 promoter operably linked to the coding sequence of PMI (cPMI-01), operably linked to the tNOS-05-01 terminator sequence (SEQ ID NO: 10).

To determine if the LC% effect observed with OsMADS1 promoter and 5' genomic sequence is specific for OsMADS1, construct 20096 (Fig 8) was produced. Like 20070, 20096 comprises the coding sequence for a rice trehalose-6-phosphate phosphatase (cT6PP-01) gene. They differed in their 5' regulatory regions and terminator sequences. The cT6PP-01 transcriptional cassette for construct 20096 comprises the terminator from *Orzya sativa* OsMADS2 (tOsMADS-01; GenBank accession AF095645). The 5' regulatory region of construct 20096 comprises the OsMADS2 promoter (GenBank accession AF095645), the 5'

non-transcribed sequence, exon 1, intron 1, and part of exon 2. This eFMV-03-e35S-05-prOsMADS2-01-cT6PP-01-tOsMADS2-01 cassette is disclosed as SEQ ID NO: 9. Similar to 20070, the ATG start codon in exon 1 of the OsMADS2-01 promoter in construct 20096 has been mutated to prevent translation, and the prOsMADS2-01 is operably linked to a maize-optimized Kozak sequence at its 3' end. Like 20070, 20096 has a second expression cassette, comprising a maize ubiquitin promoter (prUbi1-10) operably linked to the coding sequence of PMI (cPMI-01), operably linked to the maize tUbi1-01 terminator sequence (Figure 9).

Constructs 12672, 22230, 20070, 20096, and construct 20070 were introduced into *A. tumefaciens*, transformed into maize, and transformants were grown on PMI selectable media as described in Example 1. DNA from the regenerated plantlets, now referred to as events, was isolated and analyzed using TAQMAN™ qPCR to determine copy number of the introduced PMI gene, as described in Example 1. Results from copy number analysis and the calculated transformation frequency for each event population transformed with each construct is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Copy number analysis and calculated transformation frequency of events transformed with OsMADS1 promoter constructs

Construct	Transcriptional Cassette	# Events Tested	LC%*	TF%
22230	eFMV-03-e35S-05-prOsMADS1-05-cPMI-01-tOsMADS1-03	83	47.11 ^a	21.00 ^a
21099	eFMV-03-e35S-05-prOsMADS1-05-tOsMADS1-03	407	47.68 ^a	17.44 ^a
20070	eFMV-03-e35S-05-prOsMADS1-05-cT6PP-01-tOsMADS1-03	215	35.01 ^a	10.16 ^b
20096	eFMV-03-e35S-05-prOsMADS2-01-cT6PP-01-tOsMADS2-01	133	28.51 ^b	11.34
12672	prUbi1-20-cPMI-01-tNOS-05-01	2483	24.44 ^b	42.65 ^a

*Different letters indicate significant differences in a two tailed student's t test ($p < 0.05$).

As can be seen from Table 4, significantly more of the events comprising constructs 22230, 21099, and 20070 were low-copy events. Additionally, results in Table 4 show that the 5' regulatory regions in prOsMADS2-01 do not confer the same increase in the percent of low copy events observed with the 5' regulatory region in prOsMADS1-05 (see Table 4). This may be due to insufficient homology between the OsMADS2 gene and a maize MADS gene which is essential for the maize plant cell to survive the transformation and regeneration process.

Example 3: A construct designed to trigger RNA-mediated silencing of the selectable marker increases the number of single copy events recovered in *Zea mays* *Agrobacterium*-mediated transformation

For this example, constructs 12678, 13481 and 20516 (Figs 9, 10, and 11) were synthesized. Construct 12678 comprises a single transcriptional cassette comprising a maize ubiquitin promoter (prUbi1-10) (Christensen et al. 1992 Plant Mol Biol 18: 675) operably linked to a PMI coding sequence (cPMI-01) further operably linked to a nopaline synthase (NOS) 3' end transcription termination and polyadenylation, or terminator, sequence (tNOS-05-01). This single transcriptional cassette (SEQ ID NO: 10) is located between right and left T-DNA borders (bNRB and bNLB, respectively) on a binary vector, which also contains appropriate antibiotic selectable markers, origins of replication, and *Agrobacterium* genes known in the art to be typical for a binary vector (Fig 9). This construct served as a control for the RNAi constructs. Construct 13481 comprises a PMI cassette within the right and left T-DNA borders, similar to 12678. In addition, a second PMI RNAi-type cassette (SEQ ID NO: 11) was introduced in the vector backbone region. This RNAi-type cassette comprises a Cestrum yellow leaf curl virus (CMP) promoter sequence (prCMP-04; U.S. Pat. No. 7,166,770), operably linked to a 481 bp fragment from the PMI gene in the sense orientation (PMI exon), operably linked to an *Arabidopsis thaliana* BAF60 intron (iAtBAF60-01), operably linked to a second 481 bp fragment from the PMI gene that was complementary to the first 481 bp PMI fragment, in the anti-sense orientation (PMI exon), operably linked to a 35S terminator sequence (t35s-08). The binary plasmid 20516 comprises a PMI cassette and a PMI RNAi-type cassette identical to those of 13481. However, in the 20516 construct each cassette is flanked by right and left T-DNA borders. Specifically, in 20516 the PMI RNAi-type cassette

is between a right T-DNA border in proximity to the prCMP-04 promoter sequence and a left T-DNA borders in proximity to the t35S-08 terminator sequence.

Each of the above described constructs was introduced into *A. tumefaciens*, transformed into maize embryos and transformants were grown on PMI selectable media as described in Example 1. DNA from the regenerated plantlets, now referred to as events, was isolated and analyzed using TAQMAN™ qPCR to determine copy number of the introduced PMI gene, as described in Example 1. Results from copy number analysis and the calculated transformation frequency for each event population transformed with each construct are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Copy number analysis and calculated transformation frequency of events transformed with PMI RNAi-type constructs

Construct	Cassettes flanked by right and left T-DNA borders	# Embryos Transformed	LC%	TF%
12678	prUbi1-10-cPMI-01-tNOS-05-01	388	53.60 ^a	47.55
13481	prUbi1-10-cPMI-01-tNOS-05-01	256	51.54 ^a	32.85
20516	prUbi1-10-cPMI-01-tNOS-05-01; prCMP-04-PMIexon-iAtBAF60-01- PMIexon-t35s-08	170	76.21 ^b	21.60

*Different letters indicate significant differences in a two tailed student's t test ($p < 0.05$).

As shown in Table 5, construct 13481, which had the PMI RNAi-type cassette outside of the T-DNA borders, did not provide an improvement in the percent of events which were low-copy. However, the transformation frequency decreased significantly. It is known in the art that during transfer of the T-DNA into the host cell, read-through can occur such that information beyond the left border, where the PMI RNAi-type cassette was located, may be transferred into the host as well. Because the PMI RNAi-type cassette is designed to trigger silencing of PMI, the events where this occurred would not survive on PMI selectable media. This may be why the transformation frequency decreased for the 13481 events. The events transformed with construct 20516 resulted in both an increase in the number of low copy events and a significant decrease in the transformation frequency. The decrease in transformation frequency is likely due to a mechanism similar to that in events transformed

with 13481. Because 20516 has the PMI RNAi-type cassette as a T-DNA, then those events which integrated both the PMI cassette and the PMI RNAi-type cassette could have silencing of PMI triggered, so that they would not survive on PMI selectable media. However, it is important to recognize that events with the 20516 construct also have a significantly greater percentage of the desirable low-copy events. Taken together, the data indicates that of the 20516 events which survive on PMI-selectable media, a much greater percentage are desirable low-copy events compared to events transformed with either the control 12678 construct or the 13481 construct.

All publications and patent applications mentioned in the specification are indicative of the level of skill of those skilled in the art to which this invention pertains. All publications and patent applications are herein incorporated by reference to the same extent as if each individual publication or patent application was specifically and individually indicated to be incorporated by reference.

Although the foregoing invention has been described in some detail by way of illustration and example for purposes of clarity of understanding, it will be obvious that certain changes and modifications may be practiced within the scope of the list of the foregoing embodiments and the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. An *Agrobacterium*-mediated transformation method for making transgenic plant cells, comprising:

- a. providing a first T-DNA polynucleotide comprising at least two transcriptional cassettes of interest, wherein the first transcriptional cassette comprises a selectable marker and at least one transcriptional cassette comprises a gene of agronomic interest;
- b. providing a second T-DNA polynucleotide comprising a transcriptional cassette, wherein said transcriptional cassette is transcribed into RNA and whose expression induces reduced expression or silencing of said selectable marker;
- c. providing a DNA plasmid for *Agrobacterium*-mediated transformation, comprising said first T-DNA polynucleotide and said second T-DNA polynucleotide;
- d. performing *Agrobacterium*-mediated transformation on a plurality of cells to produce a plurality of transgenic plant cells;
- e. selecting for transgenic plant cells which only contain said first T-DNA polynucleotide using a selection agent for said selectable marker; and
- f. regenerating transgenic tissues from said transgenic plant cells of step (e),

wherein transgenic plant cells with the second T-DNA polynucleotide of step (b) have reduced survivability through the transformation and regeneration process, and an increased percentage of said transgenic cells carrying only one copy of each transcriptional cassette within the first T-DNA polynucleotide of step (a) is generated compared to methods without step (b).

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the transcriptional cassette of step (b) has at least 60%, at least 70%, at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90% or at least 95% sequence identity to said selectable marker, or a fragment thereof.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein the second T-DNA polynucleotide further comprises a first polynucleotide fragment of the selectable marker, wherein said first polynucleotide

fragment is at least 20 nucleotides in length, operably linked to a polynucleotide linker, operably linked to a second polynucleotide fragment at least 20 polynucleotides in length which is complementary to the first polynucleotide fragment.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein the selectable marker is an acetolactate synthase (ALS) S4 and/or Hra mutations, 5-enol-pyrovyl-shikimate-3-phosphate-synthase (EPSPS), glyphosate N-acetyltransferase (GAT), Bialaphose resistance gene (BAR), aryloxy alkanoate dioxygenase gene (AAD-1, AAD-12, or AAD-13), 4-hydroxyphenylpyruvate dioxygenase (HPPD), protophorphyrinogen oxidase (PPO) mutants or variants, or dicamba monooxygenase.
5. The method of claim 1, wherein the selectable marker is phosphomannose isomerase gene (PMI).
6. The method of claim 1, wherein said transcriptional cassette of step (b) comprises SEQ ID NO: 15.
7. A DNA plasmid comprising the first and second T-DNA polynucleotides as defined in claim 1.
8. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of determining the copy number of each transcriptional cassette of interest comprised in said transgenic tissues.
9. The method of claim 8, further comprising the step of selecting a transgenic tissue comprising a single copy of the transcriptional cassettes and growing the plant tissue into a plant.
10. A transgenic plant cell made by the method of claim 1 comprising the first and second T-DNA polynucleotides as defined in claim 1.

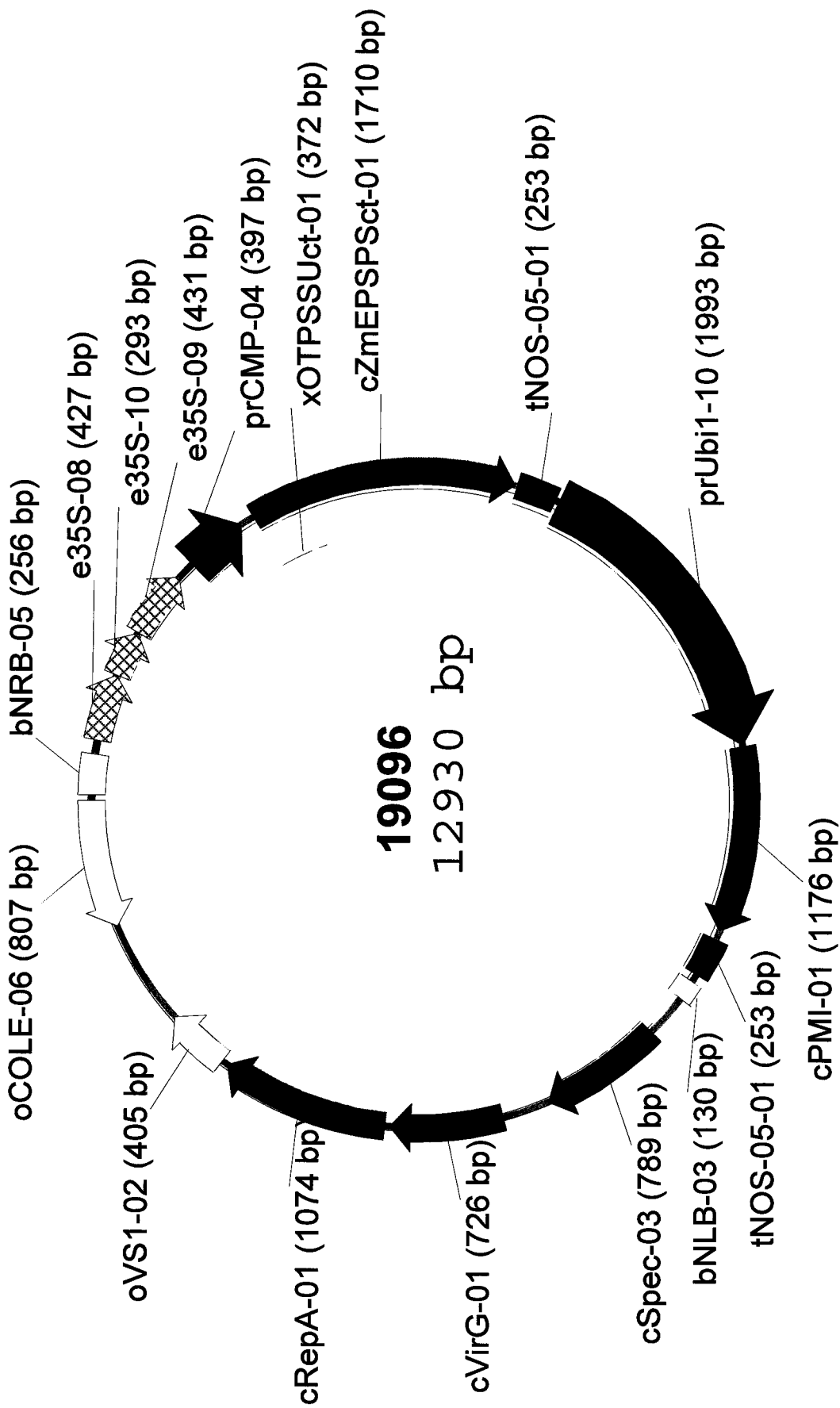


Figure 1

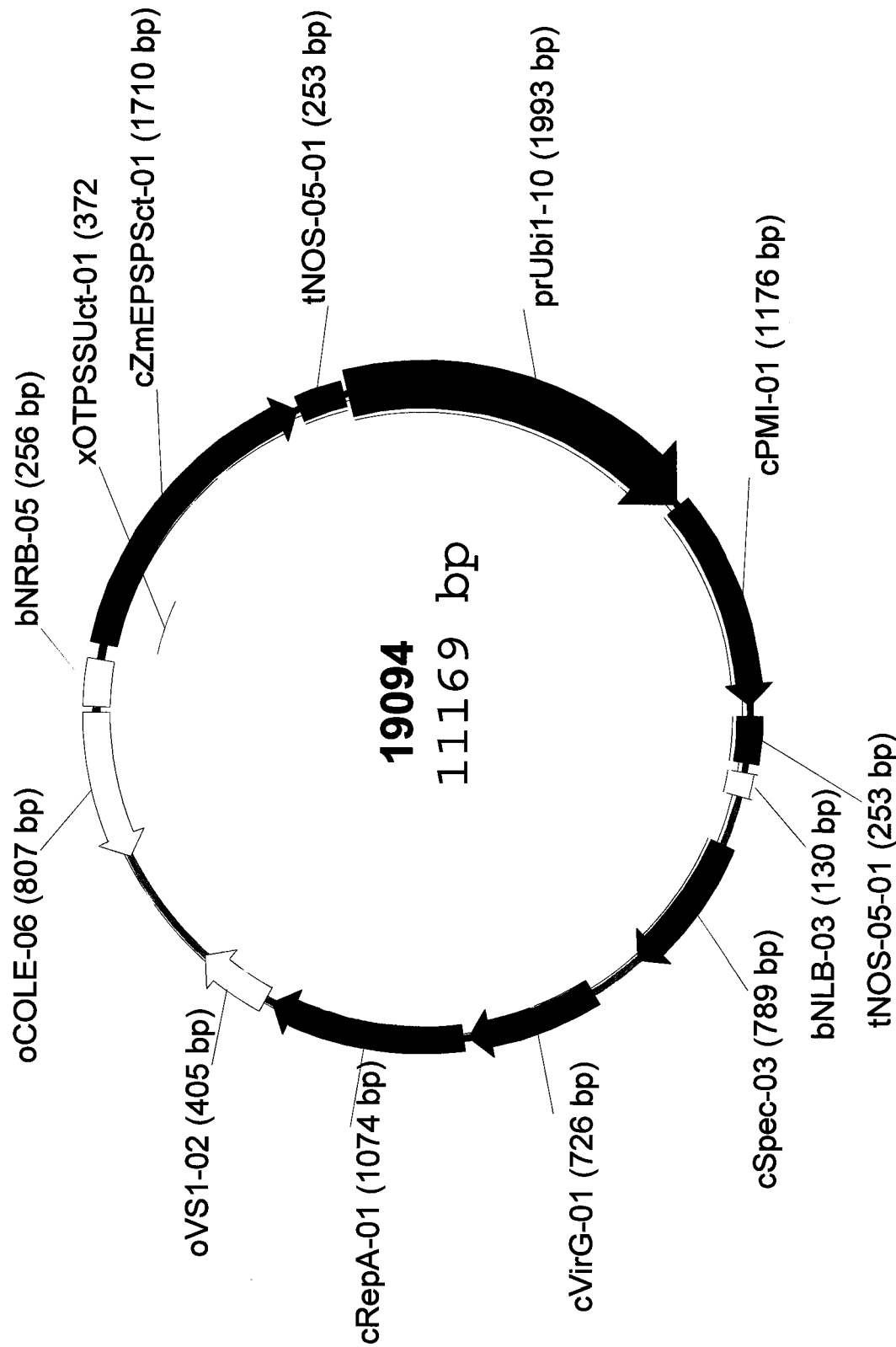


Figure 2

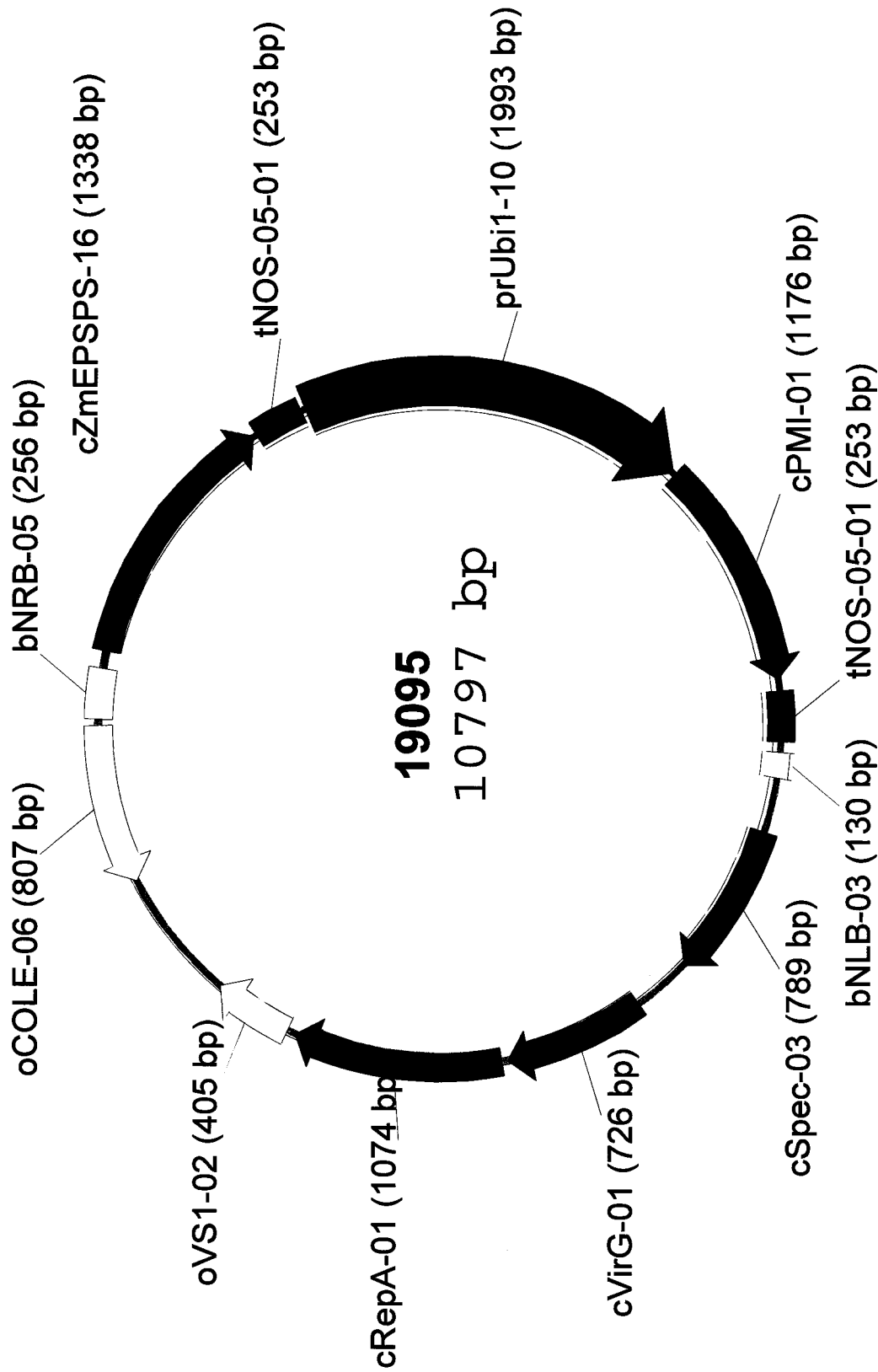


Figure 3

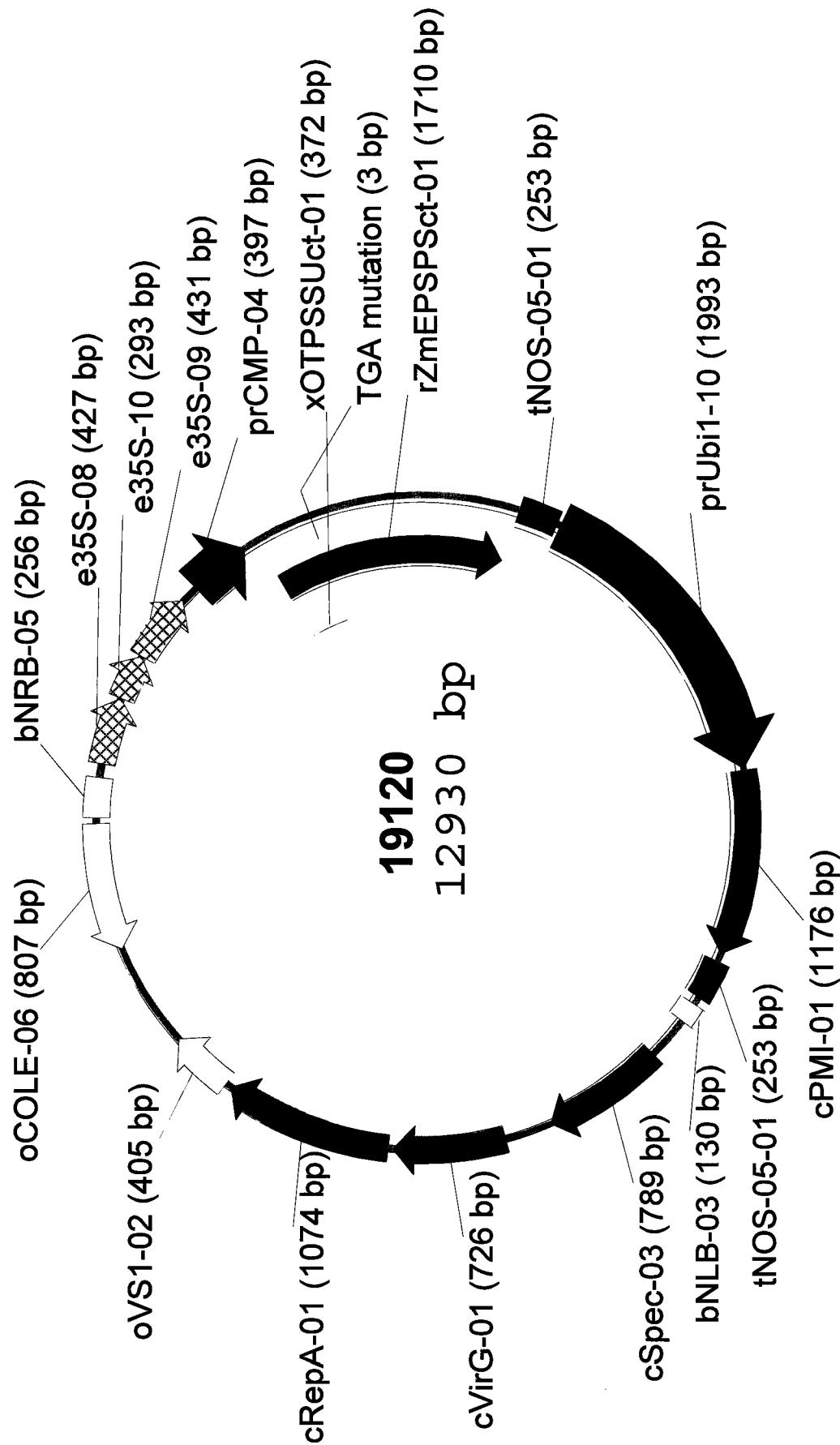


Figure 4

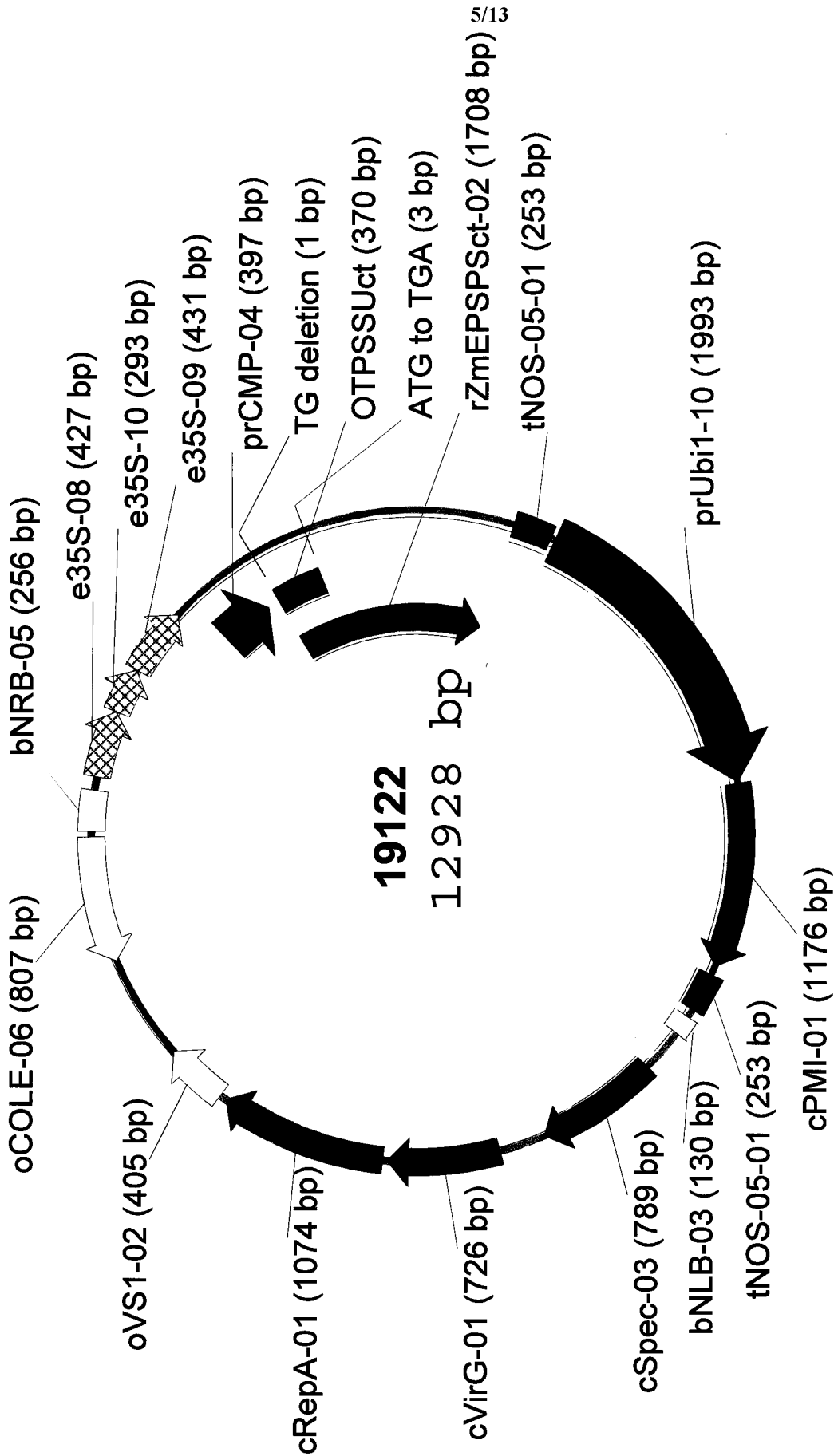


Figure 5

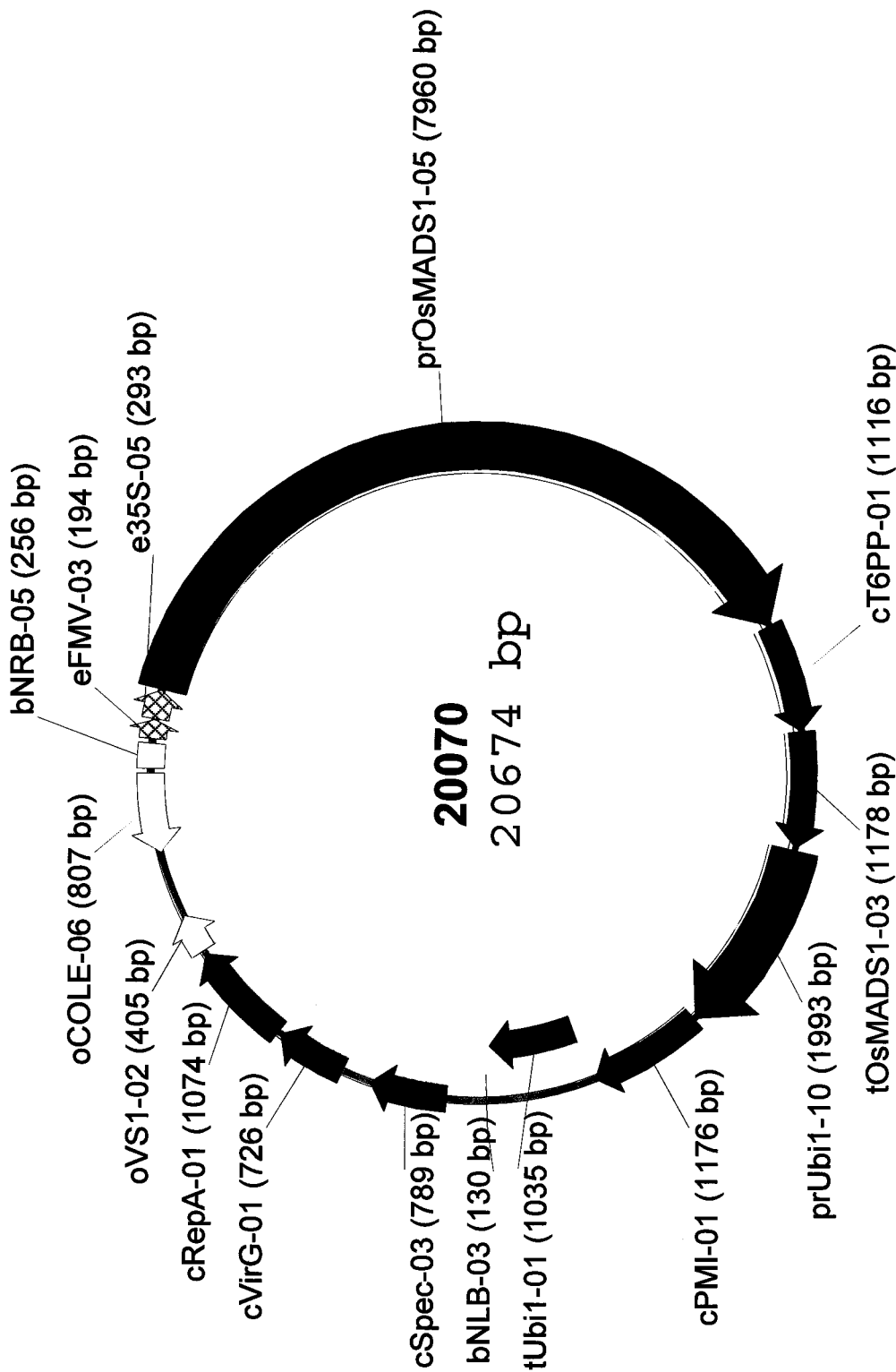


Figure 6

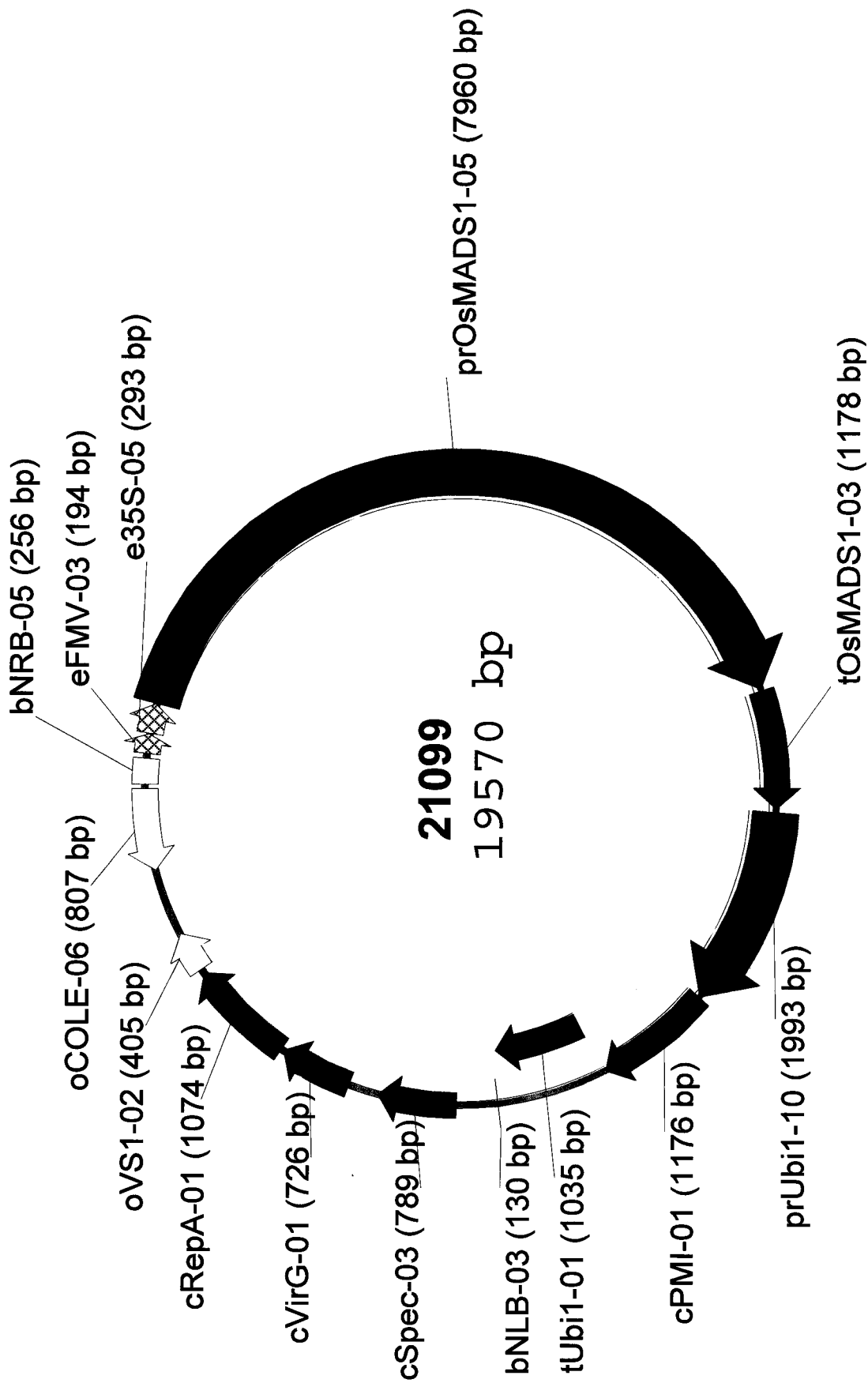


Figure 7

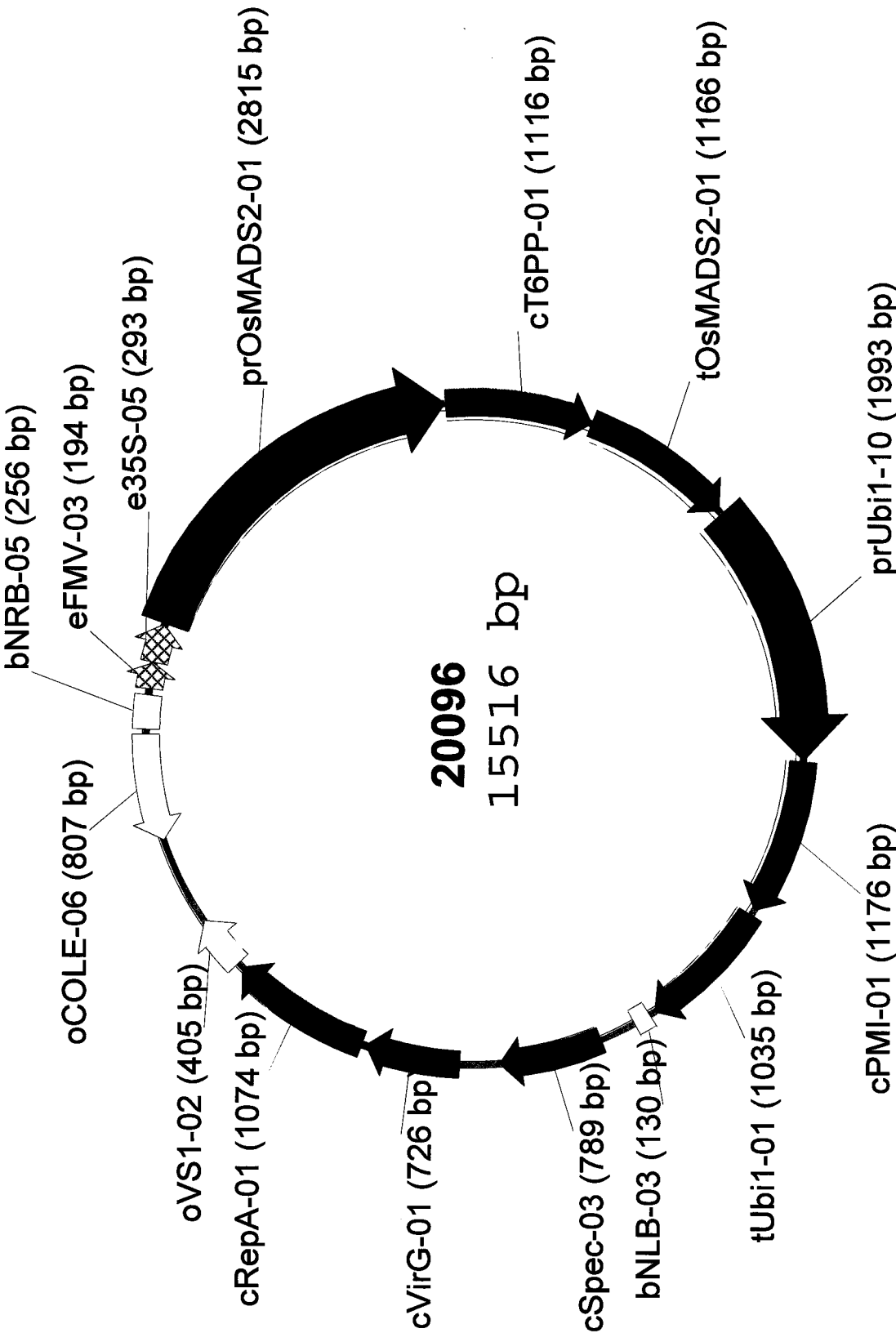


Figure 8

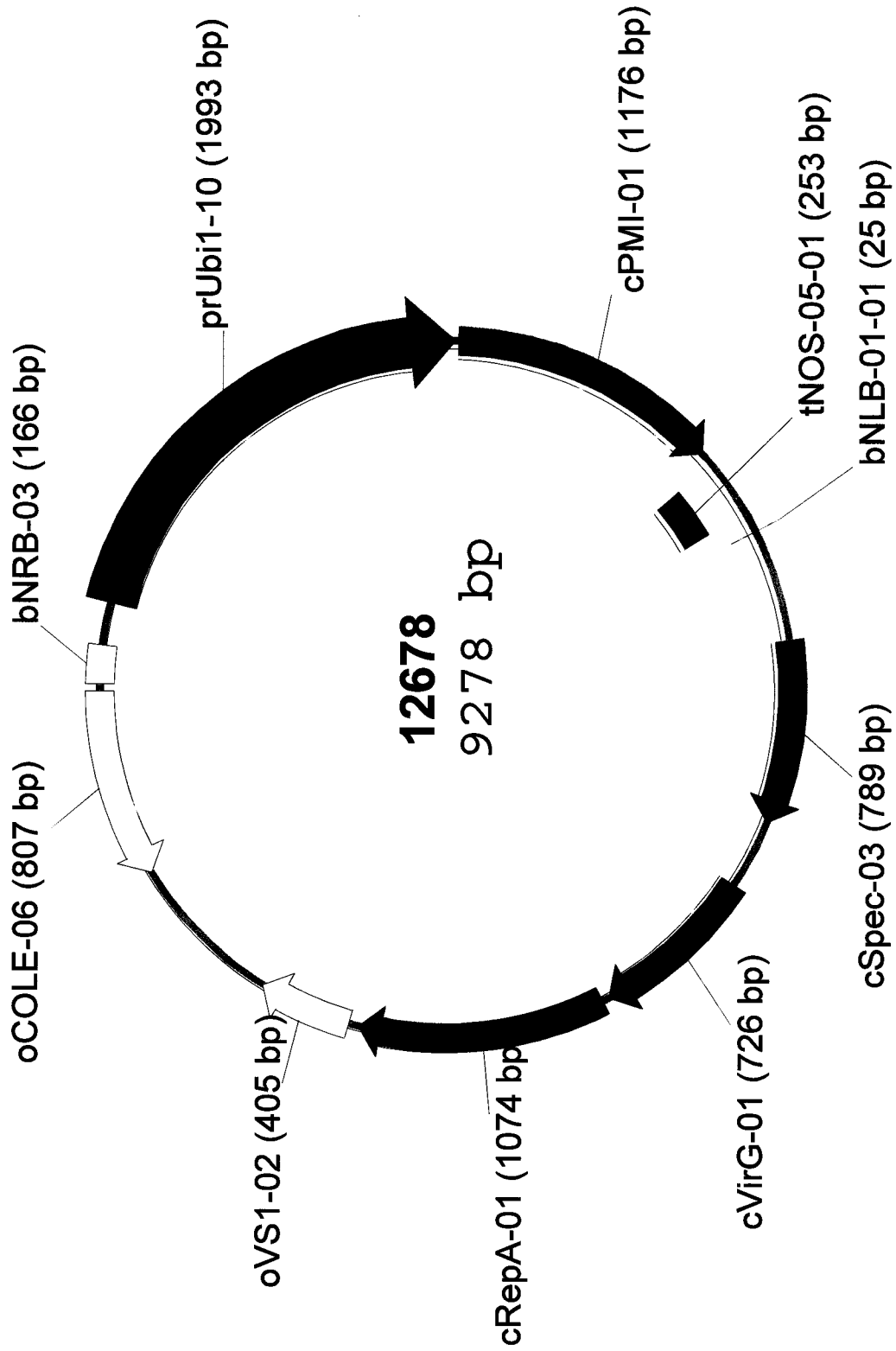


Figure 9

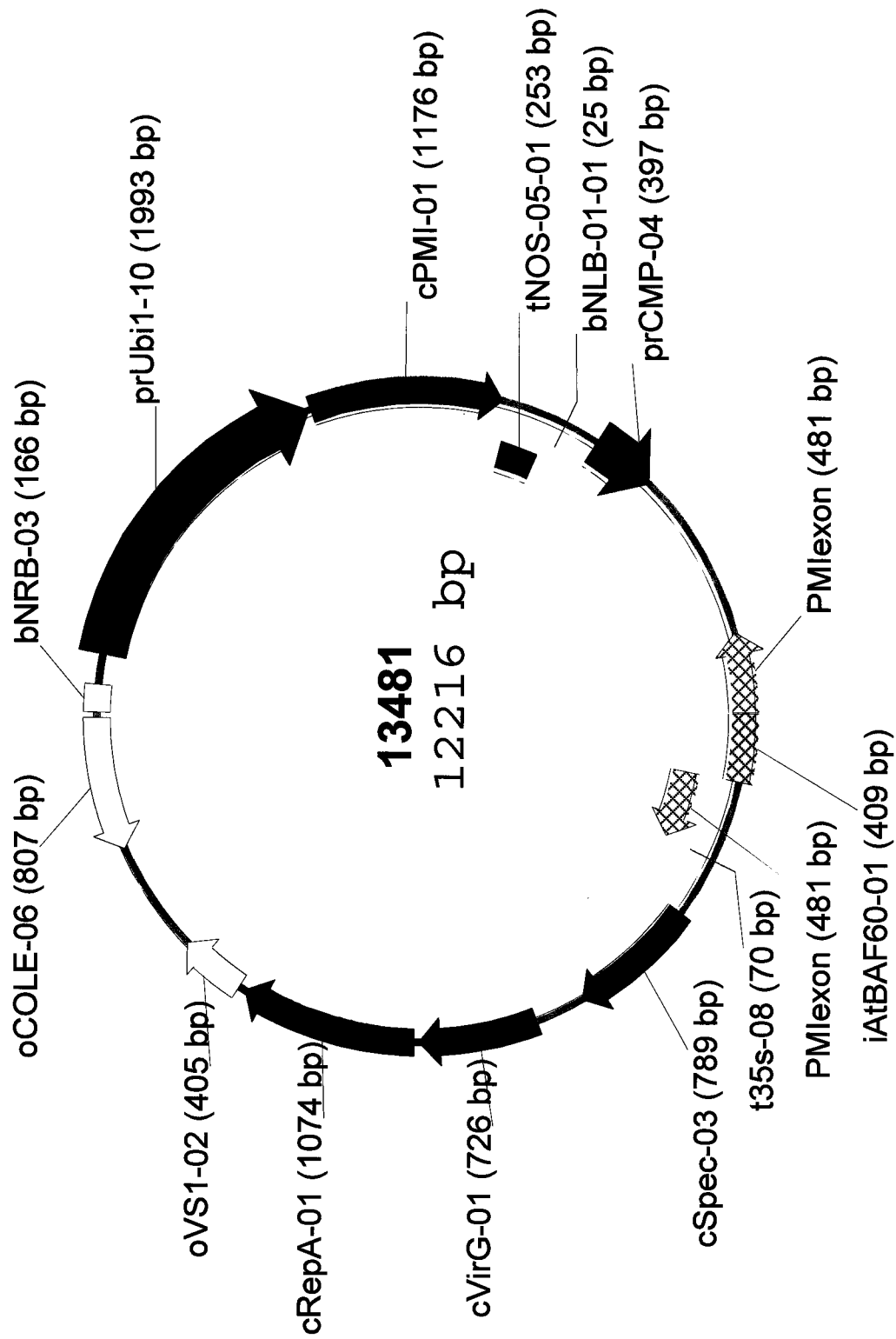


Figure 10

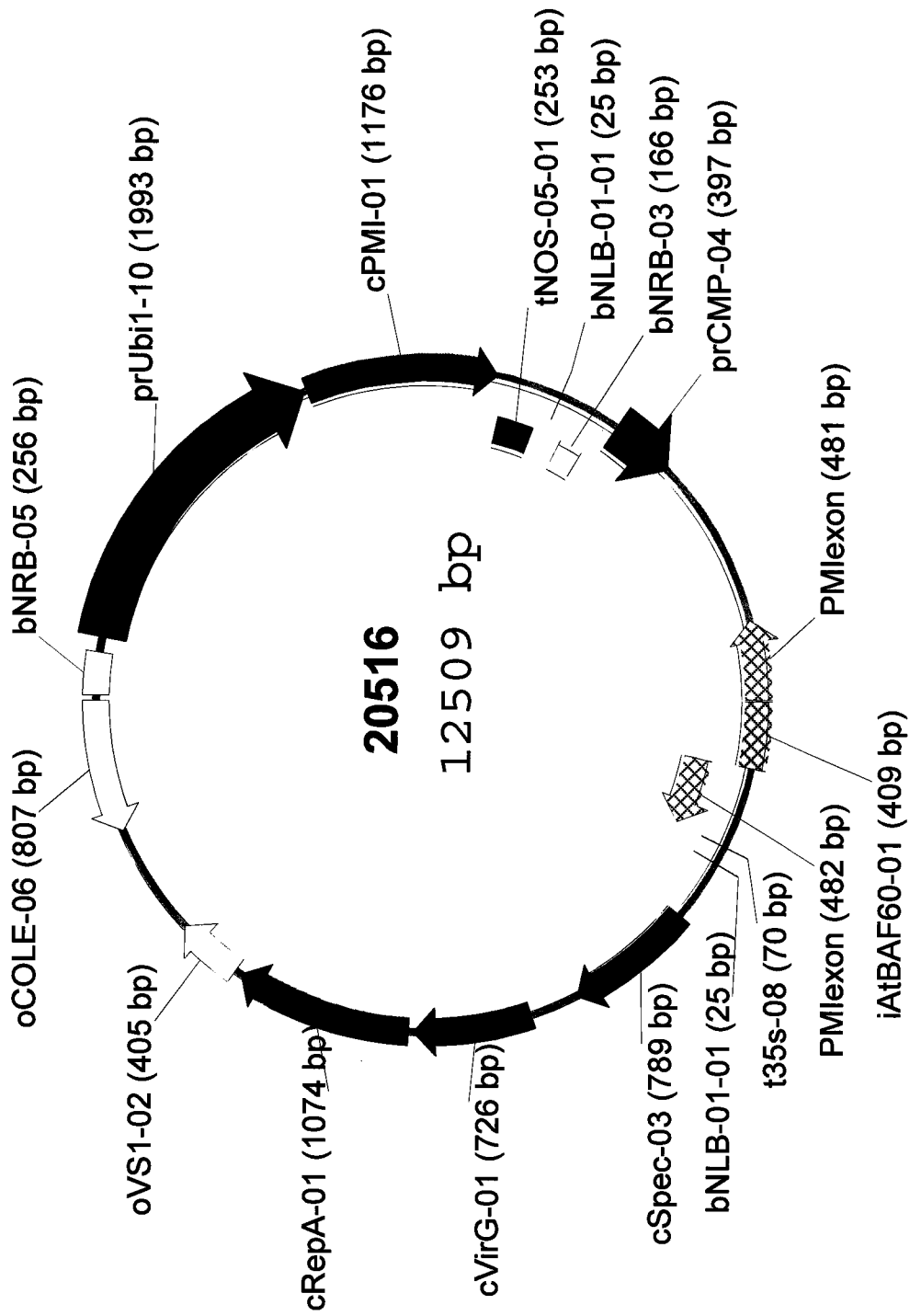


Figure 11

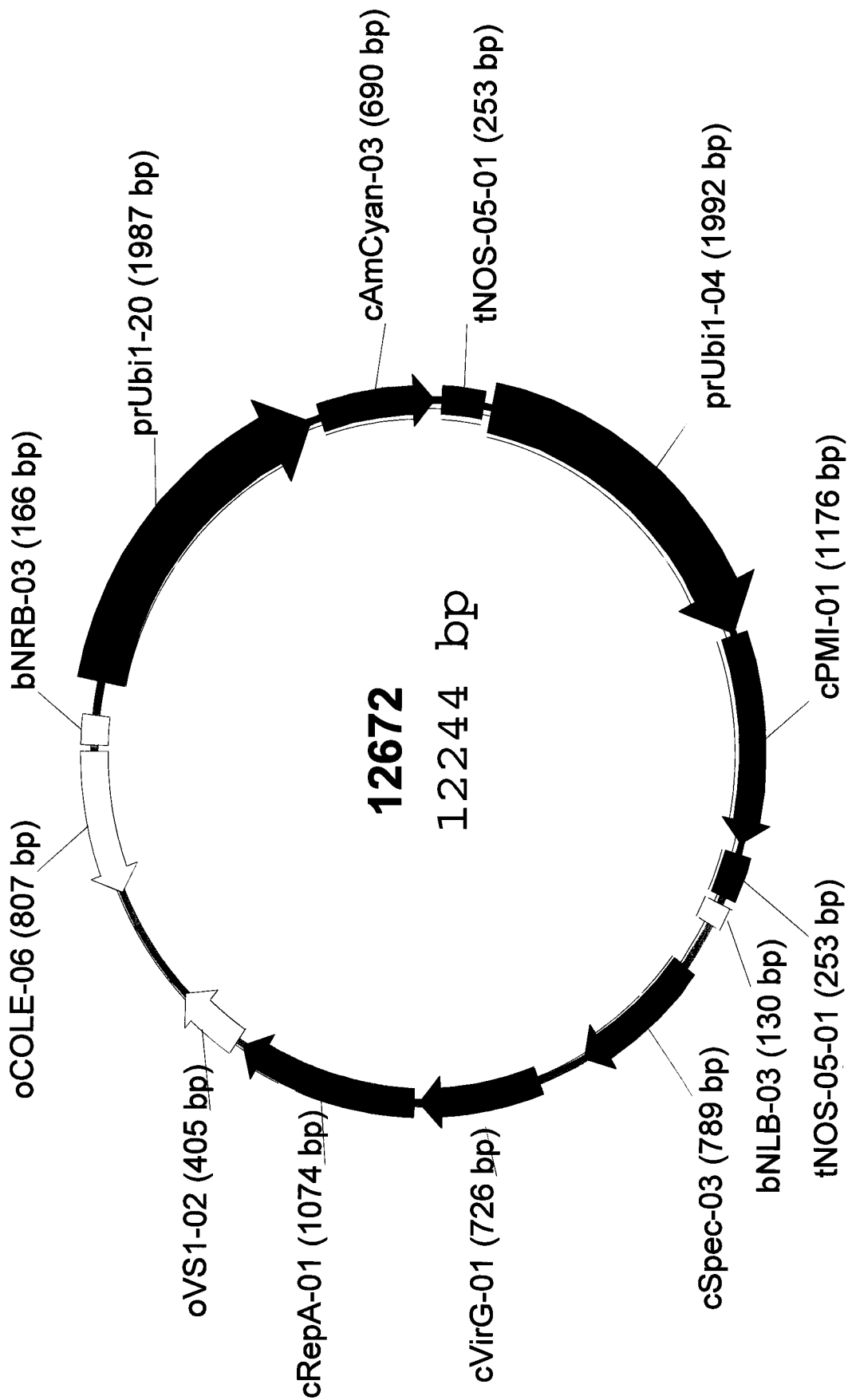


Figure 12

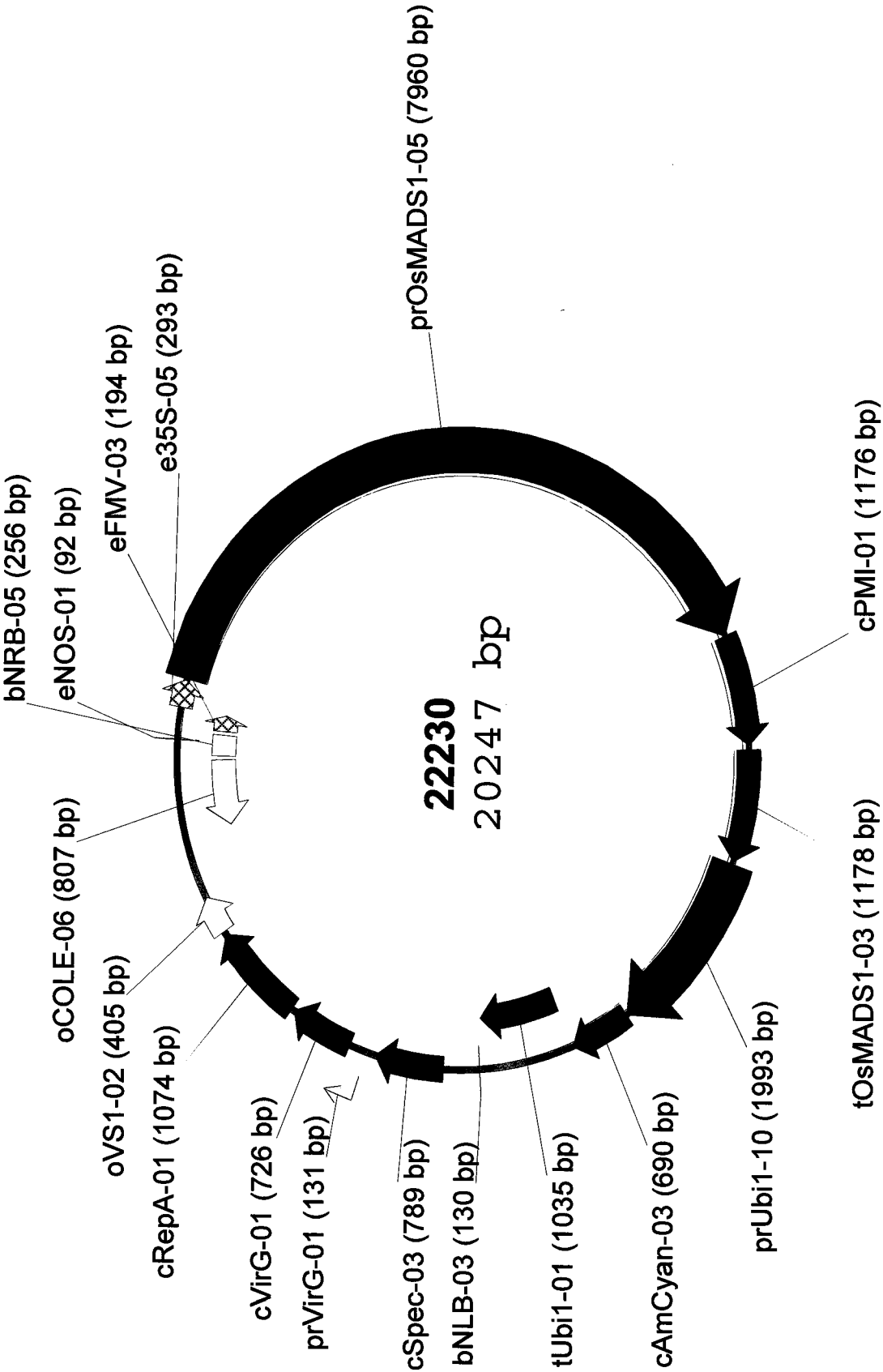


Figure 13