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(54) Title: NUCLEIC ACID CONSTRUCT FOR INCREASING ABIOTIC STRESS TOLERANCE IN PLANTS

(57) Abstract: Provided are nucleic acid constructs which comprise a polynucleotide encoding adenosine phosphate- isopentenyl-transferase (IPT) operably linked to a stress-related promoter. Also provided are host cells transformed with the nucleic acid constructs, transgenic plants expressing the IPT coding sequence under the transcriptional regulation of a stress-related promoter and methods of using same for increasing abiotic stress tolerance of a plant, and biomass of plants under stress or normal conditions.



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NUCLEIC ACID CONSTRUCT FOR INCREASING ABIOTIC STRESS TOLERANCE IN PLANTS

FIELD AND BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5 The present invention, in some embodiments thereof, relates to nucleic acid constructs encoding adenosine phosphate- isopentenyltransferase (IPT) under a stress-related promoter and more particularly, but not exclusively, to methods of using same for generating transgenic plants with increased abiotic stress tolerance and increased yield, biomass and growth rate under normal or stress conditions.

10 Abiotic stress is the primary cause of crop loss worldwide, reducing average yields for most major crop plants by more than 50% and causing losses worth hundreds of million dollars each year. Abiotic stresses lead to a series of morphological, physiological, biochemical and molecular changes that adversely affect plant growth and productivity.

15 Phenotypic symptoms in response to chilling include induced injury such as leaf expansion, wilting, chlorosis, and necrosis. Chilling also severely hampers the reproductive development of plants and plants may suffer from metabolic dysfunction when chilled.

20 Freezing conditions cause severe membrane damage, and reactive oxygen species (ROS) produced in response to freeze stress further contributes to membrane damage.

 Heat Stress disturbs the cellular homeostasis and can lead to severe retardation in growth and development, and even death.

25 High salinity, in particular sodium ions (Na⁺), can dissipate the membrane potential, is toxic to cell metabolism, has deleterious effects on the functioning of some of the plant's enzymes. In addition, high concentrations of Na⁺ cause osmotic imbalance, membrane disorganization, reduction in growth, inhibition of cell division/expansion, can lead to reduction in photosynthesis and production of reactive oxygen species.

30 Harsh drought conditions disrupt the normal bilayer structure of the membrane. In addition to membrane damage, cytosolic and organelle protein may exhibit reduced activity or may even undergo complete denaturation when dehydrated. Drought may

also cause disruption of cellular metabolism and reduction in vegetative growth, in particular shoot growth.

Abscisic Acid (ABA) plays a primary regulatory role in the initiation and maintenance of seed and bud dormancy and in the plant's response to stress (e.g., freezing, salt stress and water stress (deficit of water). In addition, ABA influences many other aspects of plant development by interacting, usually as an antagonist with auxin, cytokinin, gibberellin, ethylene and brassinosteroids.

Studies of the promoters of several stress-induced genes have lead to the identification of specific regulatory sequences of genes involved in different stresses. A conserved sequence in many ABA-responsive genes has been reported to function as an ABA-responsive element (ABAR), which probably binds to transcription factors involved in ABA- regulated gene activation. A second sequence element found in the promoters of these genes is a dehydration response element (DRE) that is involved in the first rapid response to dehydration or salt. Over-expression of a DRE cDNA in transgenic plants was shown to activate the expression of many stress tolerance genes under normal growing conditions and to improve tolerance to drought, salt loading and freezing.

Deficiencies in macronutrients result in stunted growth, reduced biomass production and hastened senescence of older leaves. Suppression in plant growth and reduced biomass production may be attributed to decreased photosynthetic activity. Plants receiving deficient supplies of sulfur (S) and calcium (Ca) show greater suppression in the growth than nitrogen (N)-deficient plants, probably due to fairly immobile nature of S and Ca. Phosphor (P) deficiency in tobacco plants has been shown to decrease sink demands by limiting growth processes. The changes in the sink demands due to mineral nutrient deficiency may influence the partitioning of photosynthates and dry matter distribution leading to decreased shoot/root ratio.

Nutrient deficiency is predicted to be the single most important factor limiting crop yields during the 21st century, especially in developing countries. Soil acidity, alkalinity and salinity, anthropogenic activities, monoculture farming and wind and water erosion processes are the major degradation factors for cultivated soils. The poor productivity of crops grown in acid and salt affected soils is mainly due to combinations of elemental toxicities and deficiencies or unavailability of essential nutrients. Addition

of fertilizers and amendments (particularly lime) are essential in achieving proper nutrient supply and maximizing yields in these soils. However, efficiency of applied fertilizers is very low and varies with crop species and genotype/cultivar within species, and their interactions with the environment. The world's total demand for food is likely to nearly double its present level by 2030, and there is limited new land available for expansion of cultivation to achieve this production level. Therefore, increasing crop yield potentials per unit of land is an urgent concern. The higher nutrient use efficiency in plants must be fully explored to increase food production to feed the growing human population, and this has to be achieved without accelerating environmental degradation from excessive fertilizer use.

Plant senescence, particularly in monocarpic (mostly annuals) species, is a correlatively controlled developmental process encountering at all stages in the life history of plants. However, certain stresses (such as drought and nutrient deficiency) and hormones are able to hasten or repress senescence. During leaf senescence, nutrients are recycled to other parts of the plant such as young leaves or storage tissues. Thus, senescence has a negative impact on yield due to the deterioration of leaf photosynthetic assimilation.

The main players among the plant hormones in the regulation of senescence processes are cytokinin, as the senescence retardant hormone, and ethylene, as the promoting hormone. Cytokinins control various processes in plant growth and development, such as proliferation (promote cell division) and differentiation (e.g., vascular development, leaf expansion, accumulation of chlorophyll and conversion of etioplasts into chloroplasts) of plant cells; they play a role in apical dominance, transduction of nutritional signals, control of shoot-root balance, crop productivity and senescence (delay leaf senescence). Cytokinins are present in all plant tissues and are abundant in root tips, shoot apex and immature seeds. Several studies have shown that a decrease in the flux of cytokinins from the roots up through the xylem is an important factor in the senescence of leaves. The expression level of cytokinin was shown to be highest in new developed tissues and to decrease in mature tissues, enabling senescence initiation.

The biosynthesis of cytokinins is catalyzed by adenosine phosphate-isopentenyltransferase (IPT), and it was found that over-expression of Arabidopsis

thaliana IPT (AtIPT) genes results in phenotypes indicative of cytokinin overproduction as they show developmental and morphological alterations (Miyawaki K. et al. 2004, *Plant J.* 37: 128-38).

Leaf senescence program is accompanied and driven by changes in gene expression. Differential screening of cDNA libraries during senescence demonstrated that the expression of the vast majority of genes is down-regulated, whereas the expression of other genes [senescence-associated genes (SAGs)] is up-regulated (Buchanan-Wollaston V., 1994. *Plant Physiol.* 105: 839-846; Davies KM and Grieson D., 1989. *Planta*, 179: 73-80; Lohman KN, et al, 1994. *Physiologia Plantarum* 92: 322-328; Hajouj T, et al, 2000. *Plant Physiol.* 124: 1305-1314; Gepstein, S., et al, 2003. *The plant journal* 36: 629-642; Buchanan-Wollaston V, et al., 2003. *Plant Biotechnology Journal* 1: 3-22). Among the prominent SAGs are those predicted to be involved in the massive degradation of macromolecules and enzymes for nutrient recycling. Several of the genes which are up-regulated during leaf senescence are also upregulated under abiotic and biotic stresses (Binyamin L, et al, 2000. *Planta*, 211: 591-597; Buchanan-Wollaston V, 1997. *J. Exp. Bot.* 48: 181-199; Gepstein et al, 2003 (Supra); Guo Y, et al, 2004. *Plant, Cell and Environment* 27: 521-549; Hanfrey C, et al, 1996. *Plant Mol Biol.* 30: 597-609; Quirino BF, et al, 1999. *Plant Mol. Biol.* 40: 267-278; Weaver LM, et al, 1997. Leaf senescence: gene expression and regulation. In: Setlow JK, ed. *Genetic engineering*, Vol 19. New York: Plenum Press, 215-234).

The Senescence-Associated Receptor Kinase (SARK) gene was identified in bean leaves (*Phaseolus vulgaris*) as an early SAG. The initiation of SARK expression occurs at late stages of leaf maturation, but appears immediately prior to some symptoms of senescence.

Gan S. and Amasino RM., 1995 (Inhibition of leaf senescence by autoregulated production of cytokinin. *Science* 270: 1986-1988) developed a senescence-inhibition system in which cytokinin production is specifically targeted to the senescence process by transforming plants with a chimeric construct containing the promoter of the highly regulated senescence specific gene- 12 (SAG 12) fused to the IPT coding sequence (PSAG₁₂-IPT). PSAG₁₂-IPT transgenic plants grew normally until the senescence stage, however, while leaf senescence progressed in the wild-type plants, the transgenic plants showed no visible sign of senescence at this stage.

PCT publication No. WO 2006/102559 discloses the generation of transgenic tobacco plant transformed with a construct containing the SARK promoter fused to the IPT gene. SARK-IPT transgenic plants display significant delay in senescence and enhanced tolerance to drought conditions and minimal reduction in biomass and seed yield of the plants when grown under limited water regime, demonstrating extreme resistance to drought conditions by enhanced photosynthetic rates and water use efficiency, provided by cytokinin expression (Rivera RM, et al, 2007. *PNAS* 104: 19631-19636). In addition, the cytokinin production in these plants resulted in protection of biochemical processes associated with photosynthesis and in induction of photorespiration, which may contribute to the protection of photosynthesis during water stress (Rivera RM, et al, 2009. *Plant Physiol.* 150: 1530-40).

Metallothionein (MT) genes encode a family of cysteine-rich, low molecular weight proteins present in a variety of organisms including bacteria, fungi and all eukaryotic plant and animal species which bind heavy metals through the thiol group of their cysteine (Cys) residues. Metallothioneins were found to be induced in several plants by a variety of abiotic stresses (e.g., drought, low temperature), including metal stress [e.g., Cadmium (Cd), ammonium, Copper (Cu) or Zinc (Zn)], following treatment with ABA (Clement., et al., 2008, *Gene*. 426:15-22) or Ethylene, nutrient deprivation, and during senescence (Gepstein et al, 2003, *Supra*). In addition, tobacco plants transformed with the MT gene exhibit enhanced tolerance to low temperature, drought and salt stress (Xue T., 2009, *J. Exp. Bot.* 60:339-49).

Additional background art includes Beinsberger SEI, et al, 1992 [Effects of enhanced cytokinin levels in ipt transgenic tobacco. In: Kaminek M, Mok DWS, Zazimalova E, editors. *Physiology and Biochemistry of Cytokinins in Plants*. The Hague, The Netherlands: SPB Academic Publishing; pp. 77-82].

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to an aspect of some embodiments of the present invention there is provided a nucleic acid construct comprising a polynucleotide encoding adenosine phosphate- isopentenyltransferase (IPT) operably linked to a stress-related promoter.

According to an aspect of some embodiments of the present invention there is provided a nucleic acid construct comprising a polynucleotide encoding adenosine

phosphate- isopentenyltransferase (IPT) operably linked to a Metallothionein (MT) promoter.

According to an aspect of some embodiments of the present invention there is provided a host cell transformed with the nucleic acid construct of some embodiments of the invention.

According to an aspect of some embodiments of the present invention there is provided a transgenic plant comprising the nucleic acid construct of some embodiments of the invention, or the host cell of some embodiments of the invention.

According to an aspect of some embodiments of the present invention there is provided a method of producing a transgenic plant, comprising expressing within the plant the nucleic acid construct of some embodiments of the invention.

According to an aspect of some embodiments of the present invention there is provided a method of increasing abiotic stress tolerance (ABST) of a plant, comprising expressing within the plant the nucleic acid construct of some embodiments of the invention, thereby increasing the abiotic stress tolerance of the plant.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the stress-related promoter comprises at least one copy of a cis regulatory element consisting of a nucleic acid sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the stress-related promoter is an abiotic stress-related promoter.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the stress-related promoter is a promoter of an ABA-related gene.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the abiotic stress-related promoter is selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 20-266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 237, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 70, 71, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 188, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 215, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 120, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 378, 379, 218, 380, 381, 382,

383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399,
400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 314, 405, 77, 78, 301, 82, 83, 406, 407, 90, 408, 93, 95, 96, 97,
409, 322, 323, 410, 411, 412, 413, 100, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 118, 120, 419, 420,
126, 421, 135, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 144, 147, 148, 428, 429, 171, 185, 188,
5 430, 431, 369, 432, 433, 434, 435, 436, 202, 203, 205, 437, 438, 207, 439, 440, 215,
441, 442, 218, 380, 221, 443, 444, 287, 227, 228, 445, 237, 446, 249, 447, 448, 449,
450, 451, 452, 453, 258, 261, 55, 454, 56, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 65, 68, 69, 405, 70, 73,
74, 75, 77, 455, 78, 456, 457, 458, 459, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 89, 90, 91, 92,
93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 322, 410, 460, 461, 462, 463, 413, 102, 103, 104, 110, 112, 117,
10 118, 120, 121, 122, 125, 131, 133, 134, 135, 140, 142, 143, 144, 147, 464, 148, 149,
465, 150, 466, 151, 467, 155, 156, 160, 161, 163, 166, 168, 428, 170, 172, 175, 178,
179, 181, 184, 186, 189, 191, 200, 201, 202, 203, 468, 469, 205, 437, 206, 470, 208, 30,
209, 211, 471, 212, 213, 214, 215, 441, 218, 380, 219, 472, 220, 473, 474, 475, 476,
443, 223, 477, 224, 478, 225, 227, 228, 229, 479, 230, 231, 232, 233, 480, 234, 237,
15 238, 239, 240, 244, 245, 246, 481, 248, 249, 448, 482, 483, 449, 450, 250, 253, 254,
255, 451, 452, 484, 485, 257, 258, 259, 260, 486, 261, 263, 264, 487, 265, 266, 584,
585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 395, 590, 233, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599,
314, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 442, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614,
615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 393, 620, 386, 621, 622, 376, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628,
20 403, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 410, 634, 635, 385, 368, 636, 387, 637, 638, 639, 640,
641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657,
658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 221, 667, and 668.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the promoter of the ABA-
related gene is selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 55, 488, 489, 56,
25 490, 57, 59, 60, 61, 491, 64, 65, 492, 68, 493, 69, 405, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 78, 494,
457, 495, 458, 496, 459, 301, 80, 497, 82, 83, 85, 86, 407, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 95, 96, 97,
409, 99, 498, 460, 461, 462, 413, 102, 104, 105, 106, 499, 500, 108, 501, 111, 502, 113,
503, 114, 504, 505, 418, 506, 118, 119, 120, 121, 507, 122, 123, 508, 509, 510, 511,
125, 126, 127, 512, 421, 513, 514, 515, 516, 131, 134, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522,
30 523, 136, 139, 145, 146, 524, 147, 464, 525, 149, 150, 151, 152, 526, 159, 160, 161,
527, 162, 163, 528, 165, 168, 428, 529, 429, 530, 171, 172, 176, 178, 179, 531, 181,
532, 533, 188, 534, 189, 190, 194, 196, 535, 536, 537, 367, 538, 203, 204, 468, 469,

539, 205, 540, 541, 437, 438, 206, 207, 542, 439, 543, 544, 30, 209, 545, 211, 471, 212, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 442, 218, 380, 551, 472, 552, 553, 554, 555, 473, 556, 557, 221, 474, 476, 222, 443, 477, 224, 558, 559, 478, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 479, 230, 231, 232, 560, 233, 561, 480, 562, 234, 235, 236, 563, 564, 238, 239, 241, 242, 243, 565, 566, 244, 245, 481, 567, 247, 568, 569, 248, 249, 482, 570, 483, 449, 571, 250, 251, 572, 573, 574, 253, 254, 575, 576, 577, 578, 256, 451, 579, 452, 484, 485, 580, 257, 259, 581, 260, 582, 583, 262, 264, and 265.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the stress-related promoter is a Metallothionein (MT) promoter.

10 According to some embodiments of the invention, the Metallothionein (MT) promoter comprises the nucleic acid sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs:686-693.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the Metallothionein (MT) promoter is set forth by SEQ ID NO:693.

15 According to some embodiments of the invention, the IPT comprises an amino acid sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs:673-378.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the polynucleotide encoding the IPT comprises a nucleic acid sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs:679-685.

20 According to some embodiments of the invention, the cell is a plant cell.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the plant cell forms part of a plant.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the abiotic stress is selected from the group consisting of drought, cold stress, chilling stress, heat stress, salinity stress, osmotic stress, freeze stress, nutrient deficiency and heavy metal stress.

25 According to some embodiments of the invention, the method further comprising growing the plant under the abiotic stress.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the host cell of some embodiments of the invention, the plant of some embodiments of the invention, or the method of some embodiments of the invention, wherein the IPT is set forth by SEQ ID NO:694.

30

According to some embodiments of the invention, the nucleic acid construct comprises the nucleic acid sequence set forth by SEQ ID NO:1.

Unless otherwise defined, all technical and/or scientific terms used herein have the same meaning as commonly understood by one of ordinary skill in the art to which the invention pertains. Although methods and materials similar or equivalent to those described herein can be used in the practice or testing of embodiments of the invention, exemplary methods and/or materials are described below. In case of conflict, the patent specification, including definitions, will control. In addition, the materials, methods, and examples are illustrative only and are not intended to be necessarily limiting.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Some embodiments of the invention are herein described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings. With specific reference now to the drawings in detail, it is stressed that the particulars shown are by way of example and for purposes of illustrative discussion of embodiments of the invention. In this regard, the description taken with the drawings makes apparent to those skilled in the art how embodiments of the invention may be practiced.

In the drawings:

FIG. 1 is a schematic illustration depicting the structure of the nucleic acid construct according to some embodiments of the invention. The plasmid pJHA212K which includes the 35S promoter [Yoo, S. Y., Bomblies, K., Yoo, S.K., Yang, J.W., Choi, M.S., Lee, J.S., Weigel, D., Ahn, J.H. (2005). "The 35S promoter used in a selectable marker gene of a plant transformation vector affects the expression of the transgene." *Planta* 221: 523-530] was used as a template in order to generate the expression vector of some embodiments of the invention in which the 35S promoter was replaced by the metallothionein promoter.

FIG. 2 depicts the nucleic acid sequence of the metallothionein promoter-IPT-NOS terminator construct (pM-IPT) according to some embodiments of the invention (SEQ ID NO:1). The metallothionein promoter (shown in blue letters) is set forth by nucleotides 57-1208 of SEQ ID NO:1; the IPT coding sequence (shown in black letters) is set forth by nucleotides 1233-2051 of SEQ ID NO:1; and the NOS terminator (shown in red letters) is set forth by nucleotides 2075-2328 of SEQ ID NO: 1.

FIG. 3 is a histogram depicting IPT expression (in arbitrary units) in transgenic plants expressing the metallothionein-promoter-IPT coding sequence construct (M-IPT8 plants) grown under restricted water regimens. Plants were grown in simulated drought conditions, for 8-14 weeks, watered with 100, 200 and 400 ml of water every two days. 8 weeks (green bars); 10 weeks (red bars); 12 weeks (black bars); and 14 weeks (white bars). IPT expression was examined and quantified relative to the 18s expression. The results are an average of two independent revisions.

FIGs. 4A-C are histograms depicting the effect of the transgene (pM-IPT) on plant height (Figure 4A), number of leaves (Figure 4B) and fresh weight (Figure 4C) under water limiting conditions. Plants (M-IPT7, M-IPT8, and wild type) were grown in various drought conditions, watered with 400 ml (red bars), 200 ml (green bars) and 100 ml (black bars) tap water every two days. Biomass (fresh weight), height and number of leaves of plants grown under these conditions for 2 months were examined. Values are presented as percentage compared to the value in the 400 ml watering treatment as measured in each line (control or transgenic).

FIGs. 5A-C are photographs depicting the growth of wild-type (WT) and pM-IPT transgenic plants in optimal and limited water regimes. Four month old plants grown under various drought conditions, watered with 400, 200 and 100 ml of water every two days. Four hundred ml water is the optimal amount of water for plant growth in this experiment. Decrease in chlorophyll content is an indication for senescence and can be seen in the WT plants much more than in the transgenic plants. In addition, the transgenic plants exhibit increased growth as shown by plant's height and size of leaves (a measure of biomass), which is higher than in WT plants of the same age (4-months old plants).

FIGs. 6A-C are photographs depicting the effect of limited water regimes, on root growth in WT and pM-IPT transgenic plants. At the end of the experiments roots were cleaned from soil of four month old plants grown in simulated drought conditions, watered with 400, 200 and 100 ml of water every two days. Four hundred ml water is the optimal amount of water for plant growth.

FIG. 7 is a histogram depicting seed weight of plants grown in limited water regimes expressed as percentages compared to the optimal water regime. Plants were grown in simulated drought conditions, watered with 400 ml (red bars), 200 ml (green

bars) and 100 ml (black bars) of water every two days. The fruits were left to dry, and weight of mature seeds was checked. Values are presented as percentage compared to the value in the 400 ml watering treatment;

FIGs. 8A-D are photographs depicting the growth of WT and pM-IPT transgenic plants under drought conditions. Watering of mature tobacco plants was stopped for two weeks and was then re-watered. Figure 8A - WT and pM-IPT plants before drought; Figure 8B - WT and pM-IPT plants after two weeks of drought; Figure 8C - WT and pM-IPT plants one day after re-watering. Figure 8D- WT and M-IPT plants three days after re-watering.

FIG. 9 is a histogram depicting biomass of WT and pM-IPT plants (M-IPT7 and M-IPT8) grown in drought conditions. The watering of mature tobacco plants was stopped for two weeks and was then resumed. Biomass of the plants (fresh weight) grown with no water for two weeks was compared to plants grown under optimal water supply.

FIGs. 10A-D are photographs depicting the growth and recovery of M-IPT tobacco plants after heat stress. WT and M-IPT (M-IPT8 and M-IPT7) plants were grown for 1 week under heat stress and then transferred back to room temperature for recovery. Figure 10A - Three week old tobacco plants before stress; Figure 10B - tobacco plants after 1 week of heat stress at 37 °C; Figure 10C- tobacco plants after 1 week of recovery; Figure 10D - tobacco plants after 2 weeks of recovery from heat stress.

FIGs. 11A-D are photographs depicting the growth and recovery of M-IPT tobacco plants after low temperature stress. WT and M-IPT (M-IPT8 and M-IPT7) plants were grown for 1 week under cold stress and then transferred back to room temperature for recovery. Figure 11A - Three week old tobacco plants before stress; Figure 11B- tobacco plants after 1 week of cold stress at 4 °C; Figure 11C - tobacco plants after 2 week of recovery. Description of rows from left to right: first two rows from left - WT; 2 middle rows - M-IPT8; last two rows - M-IPT7; Figure 11D - tobacco plants after 4 week of recovery from cold stress. Note that the M-IPT plants are unexpectedly much larger than the WT plants.

FIGs. 12A-D are photographs depicting the growth and recovery of M-IPT tobacco plants after salt stress. WT and M-IPT (M-IPT8 and M-IPT7) were grown for 3

weeks under salt stress, watered with 300 mM NaCl and then transferred back to normal watering for recovery. Figure 12A - Three week old tobacco plants, before stress; Figure 12B - tobacco plants after 3 weeks of high salinity; Figure 12C - tobacco plants after 1 week of recovery; Figure 12D- tobacco plants after 2 weeks of recovery from salt stress.

FIGs. 13A-C are photographs depicting the growth and recovery of M-IPT tobacco plants (M-IPT8 and M-IPT7) after osmotic stress. WT and M-IPT plant were grown for 3 weeks under salt stress, watered with 20 % PEG 6000, and then transferred back to normal watering for recovery. Figure 13A - Three weeks old tobacco plants, before stress; Figure 13B - tobacco plants after 3 weeks of osmotic stress; Figure 13C - tobacco plants after 2 week of recovery.

FIGs. 14A-C are photographs depicting the recovery of M-IPT tobacco plants (M-IPT8 and M-IPT7) after severe abiotic stresses. WT and M-IPT plants were grown for 1 week under cold stress, for 1 week under heat stress, for 3 weeks under salinity stress (watered with 300 mM of NaCl) and then transferred to room temperature and normal watering for recovery. Figure 14A - WT and M-IPT plants after a 4 weeks recovery period from the cold stress; Figure 14B - WT and M-IPT plants following 4 weeks of recovery from the heat stress; Figure 14C - WT and M-IPT plants following 2 weeks of recovery from the salinity stress.

FIG. 15 is a schematic illustration depicting the SAG12 promoter-IPT construct.

FIG. 16 is a histogram depicting the biomass (in grams) of WT and M-IPT plants grown in optimal (400 ml) and limited (200 or 100 ml) water regimes. Plants (tobacco) were grown in various drought conditions, watered with 400, 200 and 100 ml water every two days. Biomass (fresh weight) of the total leaves per plant grown in these conditions was examined after 2 months. Results represent an average of 3 plants in each treatment.

FIGs. 17A-D are photographs depicting the growth of M-IPT tobacco plants under salt stress. Wild type (WT) and M-IPT 1 transgenic plants were grown for 3 weeks in Petri dishes containing ½ MSO media with or without 150 mM NaCl, for salt stress or normal conditions, respectively. Growth conditions included day length 16\8 (day\night) at 25 °C. Figure 17A - WT without salt stress; Figure 17B - WT with salt stress; Figure 17C - M-IPT 1 without salt stress; Figure 17D - M-IPT 1 with salt stress. Note that the M-IPT construct confers increased tolerance of plants to salt stress.

FIGs. 18A-D are photographs depicting the growth of M-IPT tobacco plants under salt stress. Wild type (WT) and M-IPT2 transgenic plants were grown for 3 weeks in Petri dishes containing ½ MSO media with or without 150 mM NaCl, for salt stress or normal conditions, respectively. Growth conditions included day length 16\8 (day\night) at 25 °C. Figure 18A - WT without salt stress; Figure 18B - WT with salt stress; Figure 18C - M-IPT2 without salt stress; Figure 18D - M-IPT2 with salt stress. Note that the M-IPT construct confers increased tolerance of plants to salt stress.

FIGs. 19A-D are photographs depicting the growth of M-IPT tobacco plants under salt stress. Wild type (WT) and M-IPT5 transgenic plants were grown for 3 weeks in Petri dishes containing ½ MSO media with or without 150 mM NaCl, for salt stress or normal conditions, respectively. Growth conditions included day length 16\8 (day\night) at 25 °C. Figure 19A - WT without salt stress; Figure 19B - WT with salt stress; Figure 19C - M-IPT5 without salt stress; Figure 19D - M-IPT5 with salt stress. Note that the M-IPT construct confers increased tolerance of plants to salt stress.

FIGs. 20A-D are photographs depicting the growth of SARK-IPT tobacco plants under salt stress. Wild type (WT) and SARK-IPT transgenic plants were grown for 3 weeks in Petri dishes containing ½ MSO media with or without 150 mM NaCl, for salt stress or normal conditions, respectively. Growth conditions included day length 16\8 (day\night) at 25 °C. Figure 20A - WT without salt stress; Figure 20B - WT with salt stress; Figure 20C - SARK-IPT without salt stress; Figure 20D - SARK-IPT with salt stress. Note that the SARK-IPT construct fails to confer resistance or increased tolerance of the plants to salt stress.

DESCRIPTION OF SPECIFIC EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION

The present invention, in some embodiments thereof, relates to nucleic acid constructs encoding IPT under a stress-related promoter and more particularly, but not exclusively, to methods of using same for generating transgenic plants with increased abiotic stress tolerance and increased yield, biomass and growth rate under normal or stress conditions.

Before explaining at least one embodiment of the invention in detail, it is to be understood that the invention is not necessarily limited in its application to the details set

forth in the following description or exemplified by the Examples. The invention is capable of other embodiments or of being practiced or carried out in various ways.

The present inventors have uncovered that a nucleic acid construct which comprises the adenosine phosphate- isopentenyltransferase (IPT) coding sequence under the transcriptional regulation of a stress-related promoter can be used to increase tolerance and resistance of transgenic plants expressing same to various abiotic stresses.

Thus, as shown in the Examples section which follows, auto regulated expression of the IPT coding sequence under the regulation of a stress related promoter was higher under limited water regimes than under optimal conditions (Figure 3, Example 1). In addition, transgenic plants transformed with the stress promoter-IPT nucleic acid construct of some embodiments of the invention exhibit increased tolerance to drought stress as shown by the significant less reduction in the number of leaves per plant (Figure 4B, Example 1); maintain a stable biomass under 50% water regimes (Figure 4C, Example 1); a high chlorophyll level and increased biomass for an extended period under drought conditions (Figures 5A-C, Example 1); increased size of root system and weight under drought conditions (Figures 6A-C, Example 1); maintain stable yield (Figure 7, Example 1) under drought stress; recover well from long-term drought stress (Figures 8A-D and Figure 9, Example 1); recover well and fast from heat stress (Figures 10A-D, Example 2), cold stress (Figures 11A-D, Example 2); salinity stress (Figures 12A-D, Example 2); osmotic stress (Figures 13A-C, Example 2) and severe abiotic stress (Figures 14A-C, Example 2) as compared to non- transformed wild type plants under the same growth conditions; and exhibit increased tolerance to salinity stress as evidenced by plant survival and size of leaves as compared to wild type plants under identical conditions (Figures 17-19; Example 6). Altogether, these results suggest the use of a nucleic acid construct which includes the IPT coding sequence under the transcriptional regulation of a stress promoter for increasing tolerance of plants to various abiotic stresses and for increasing biomass and chlorophyll content under normal conditions, even following extended growth period, in which wild type plant usually begin to senesce.

Thus, according to an aspect of some embodiments of the invention there is provided a nucleic acid construct comprising a polynucleotide encoding adenosine phosphate- isopentenyltransferase (IPT) operably linked to a stress-related promoter.

As used herein the phrase "adenosine phosphate- isopentenyltransferase (IPT)", "isopentenyl transferase" (also known as "tmr") refers to a polypeptide which participates in the biosynthesis of cytokinins. IPT was cloned from various species including plants and bacteria, such as *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* [gi 190014648, 5 GenBank Accession No. YP_001967412.1 (SEQ ID NO: 673), GenelD: 6382121]; NP_396529 (SEQ ID NO: 674, GenelD: 1137335); gi 10955021, GenBank Accession No. NP_059677.1 (SEQ ID NO: 675), GenelD: 1224196], *Glycine max* [GenelD: 547754, GenBank Accession No. AAT28191.1 (SEQ ID NO: 676), GenelD: 547754]; *Zea mays* [GenelD: 100174970; GenBank Accession No. NP_001127753; (SEQ ID 10 NO: 677)], and *Agrobacterium vitis* [GenelD: 7365249, GenBank Accession No. YP_002540151 (SEQ ID NO: 678)]. Accordingly, various polynucleotide coding sequences are available via various sources such as the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) at Hypertext Transfer Protocol://World Wide Web (dot) ncbi (dot) nlm (dot) nih (dot) gov.

15 Non-limiting examples of IPT coding sequences include, AY550884.1 (SEQ ID NO:679), NM_001134281.1 (SEQ ID NO:680), nucleotides 221625-222335 of GenBank Accession No. NC_011982.1 (SEQ ID NO:681 only of the selected region by nucleotide positions), nucleotides 11107-12012 of GenBank Accession No. NC_010929.1 (SEQ ID NO:682 only of the selected region by nucleotide positions), 20 nucleotides 19337-20059 of GenBank Accession No. NC_003065.3 (SEQ ID NO:683 only of the selected region by nucleotide positions), nucleotides 7664-8586 of GenBank Accession NO. NC_002377.1 (SEQ ID NO:684 only of the selected region by nucleotide positions), and nucleotides 52740-53462 of GenBank Accession No. NC_003065.2 (AGR_pTi_50, also known as Tmr, isopentenyl transferase, GenelD 25 1142635; SEQ ID NO:685).

It should be noted that homologous genes encoding a polypeptide at least 80% identical (e.g., by global homology) to the IPT polypeptide selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs:673-678 are also contemplated by some embodiments of the invention.

30 According to some embodiments of the invention, the IPT coding sequence is set forth by SEQ ID NO:694; which includes nucleotides 1233-2051 of SEQ ID NO:1).

As used herein, "operably linked" refers to positioning of a regulatory region (a stress related promoter in this case) relative to a nucleic acid sequence (e.g., a polynucleotide encoding IPT) in such a way so as to permit or facilitate transcription of the nucleic acid sequence in a host cell.

5 As used herein, the term "promoter" refers to a region of DNA to which RNA polymerase binds to initiate transcription of the RNA encoded by the gene. The promoter controls the level of expression of the gene, where the gene is expressed (e.g., which portion/tissue of a plant) and/or when the gene is expressed (e.g., at which stage or condition in the lifetime of an organism).

10 According to some embodiments of the invention, the promoter lies upstream of the transcriptional initiation site of a gene.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the first nucleotide (*i.e.*, the 5'-end) of the promoter sequence is positioned 1-500 base pair (bp) upstream of the translation start site (in most genes, the ATG codon) of the coding nucleic acid sequence operably linked thereto, although it will be appreciated that regulatory sequences can also exert their effect when positioned elsewhere with respect to the coding nucleic acid sequence (e.g., within an intron).

15 According to some embodiments of the invention, the first nucleotide (*i.e.*, the 5'-end) of the promoter sequence is positioned about 1-600 bp, about 1-700 bp, about 1-800 bp, about 1-900 bp, about 1-1000 bp, about 1-1100 bp, about 1-1200 bp, about 1-1300 bp, about 1-1400 bp, about 1-1500 bp, about 1-1600 bp, about 1-1700 bp, about 1-1800 bp, about 1-1900 bp, about 1-2000 bp, about 1-2500 bp, about 1-3000 bp or more upstream of the translation start site of the coding nucleic acid sequence operably linked thereto.

25 As used herein the phrase "stress-related promoter" refers to any promoter which transcriptional promoting activity thereof is upregulated under a stress condition as compared to under normal (e.g., non-stress, optimal) conditions. Accordingly, the expression level of a coding sequence operably linked to the stress-related promoter is higher under the stress condition than under the non-stress conditions.

30 The phrase "stress" used herein refers to any adverse effect in metabolism, growth, biomass, reproduction yield and/or viability of a plant. Accordingly, abiotic stress can be induced by suboptimal environmental growth conditions such as, for

example, salinity, water deprivation, flooding, freezing, low or high temperature, heavy metal toxicity, anaerobiosis, nutrient deficiency (including also nutrient inaccessibility such as due to leaching), atmospheric pollution or UV irradiation. Biotic stress is caused for example by pathogens which are found in the environment such as bacteria, viruses, fungi, parasites, as well as insects and weeds.

According to some embodiments of the invention the abiotic or biotic stress causes a reduction in metabolism, growth, biomass, reproduction yield and/or viability of a plant.

Various promoters are known to be upregulated under stress, *i.e.*, capable of increasing the expression level of a coding sequence operably linked thereto under a stress condition. Such promoters can be identified by monitoring the expression pattern of the endogenous gene being under the transcriptional regulation of the promoter. Thus, if the gene expression is upregulated under a stress condition relative to an expression of the same gene under non-stress conditions (e.g., optimal conditions) then the promoter sequence is considered a stress-related promoter. Some of these promoters share common regulatory sequences (e.g., cis regulatory sequences which are present upstream on the same chromosome as the coding sequence) which serve as binding sites for transcription factors assisting in the transcription of the regulated coding sequence.

Following is a non-limiting list of stress-related cis regulatory elements which are comprised in the stress-related promoter of the nucleic acid construct of some embodiments of the invention: ABRE (ABA response element) - PyACGTG(T/G)C (SEQ ID NO:2) such as TACGTGTC (SEQ ID NO:3), CACGTGGC (SEQ ID NO:4), PyACGTGGC (SEQ ID NO:7), ACGTGTC (SEQ ID NO:10), ACGTGTC (SEQ ID NO:11), ACGTGGC (SEQ ID NO:14); DRE (dehydration response element) - TACCGACAT (SEQ ID NO:5); CCGAC Core Motif - CCGAC (SEQ ID NO:6); CE1 - TGCCACCGG (SEQ ID NO:8); CE3 - ACGCGTGCCTC (SEQ ID NO:9); MYBR - TGGTTAG (SEQ ID NO:12); MYCR - CACATG (SEQ ID NO:13); CRT - GGCCGACAT (SEQ ID NO:15); LTRE - GGCCGACGT (SEQ ID NO:16); NACR - ACACGCATGT (SEQ ID NO:17); ZFHDR; ICER1 -GGACACATGTCAGA (SEQ ID NO:18); ICER2 - ACTCCG (SEQ ID NO:19).

According to some embodiments of the invention, the abiotic stress promoter is a promoter which is active under a salt stress (salinity). Non-limiting examples of salt

stress related promoters which can be used according to some embodiments of the invention include the promoter sequences set forth by SEQ ID NOs:20-266 (Table 2, Example 5 of the Examples section which follows).

According to some embodiments of the invention, the abiotic stress promoter is a promoter which is active (e.g., induces or dictates gene expression) under a cold stress. Non-limiting examples of cold stress related promoters which can be used according to some embodiments of the invention include the promoter sequences set forth by SEQ ID NOs:267, 268, 269, 270, 237, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 70, 71, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 188, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 215, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 120, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 378, 379, 218, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 314, 405, 77, 78, 301, 82, 83, 406, 407, 90, 408, 93, 95, 96, 97, 409, 322, 323, 410, 411, 412, 413, 100, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 118, 120, 419, 420, 126, 421, 135, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 144, 147, 148, 428, 429, 171, 185, 188, 430, 431, 369, 432, 433, 434, 435, 436, 202, 203, 205, 437, 438, 207, 439, 440, 215, 441, 442, 218, 380, 221, 443, 444, 287, 227, 228, 445, 237, 446, 249, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 453, 258, and 261.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the abiotic stress promoter is a promoter which is active under a drought stress. Non-limiting examples of drought stress related promoters which can be used according to some embodiments of the invention include the promoter sequences set forth by SEQ ID NOs: 55, 454, 56, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 65, 68, 69, 405, 70, 73, 74, 75, 77, 455, 78, 456, 457, 458, 459, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 322, 410, 460, 461, 462, 463, 413, 102, 103, 104, 110, 112, 117, 118, 120, 121, 122, 125, 131, 133, 134, 135, 140, 142, 143, 144, 147, 464, 148, 149, 465, 150, 466, 151, 467, 155, 156, 160, 161, 163, 166, 168, 428, 170, 172, 175, 178, 179, 181, 184, 186, 189, 191, 200, 201, 202, 203, 468, 469, 205, 437, 206, 470, 208, 30, 209, 211, 471, 212, 213, 214, 215, 441, 218, 380, 219, 472, 220, 473, 474, 475, 476, 443, 223, 477, 224, 478, 225, 227, 228, 229,

479, 230, 231, 232, 233, 480, 234, 237, 238, 239, 240, 244, 245, 246, 481, 248, 249, 448, 482, 483, 449, 450, 250, 253, 254, 255, 451, 452, 484, 485, 257, 258, 259, 260, 486, 261, 263, 264, 487, 265, and 266.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the abiotic stress promoter is
5 a promoter which is active under a light stress.

As used herein the phrases "light stress" or "photoinhibition" which are interchangeably used herein, refer to a light intensity which causes inhibition of photosynthesis and optionally inhibition of biomass production and plant growth.

Normal light conditions may differ from one plant species to another and such
10 conditions are well known in the art. For example, for tobacco, a normal light intensity is about $250 \mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$. For Arabidopsis, a normal light intensity is about $100 \mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$. A light stress in Arabidopsis can be achieved by exposing plants for a light intensity of $1,000 \mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$ for 1 hour.

Non-limiting examples of light stress related promoters which can be used
15 according to some embodiments of the invention include the promoter sequences set forth by SEQ ID NOs: 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 395, 590, 233, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 314, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 442, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, and 615.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the abiotic stress promoter is
20 a promoter which is active under a osmotic stress. Non-limiting examples of osmotic stress related promoters which can be used according to some embodiments of the invention include the promoter sequences set forth by SEQ ID NOs: 616, 617, 618, 619, 393, 620, 386, 621, 622, 376, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 403, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 410, 634, 635, 385, 368, 636, 387, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645,
25 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 221, 667, and 668.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the stress-related promoter is a promoter which is induced by ABA (an ABA induced promoter). Non-limiting examples of ABA-related promoters which can be used according to some embodiments
30 of the invention include the promoter sequences set forth by SEQ ID NOs: 55, 488, 489, 56, 490, 57, 59, 60, 61, 491, 64, 65, 492, 68, 493, 69, 405, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 78, 494, 457, 495, 458, 496, 459, 301, 80, 497, 82, 83, 85, 86, 407, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 95,

96, 97, 409, 99, 498, 460, 461, 462, 413, 102, 104, 105, 106, 499, 500, 108, 501, 111, 502, 113, 503, 114, 504, 505, 418, 506, 118, 119, 120, 121, 507, 122, 123, 508, 509, 510, 511, 125, 126, 127, 512, 421, 513, 514, 515, 516, 131, 134, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 136, 139, 145, 146, 524, 147, 464, 525, 149, 150, 151, 152, 526, 159, 160, 161, 527, 162, 163, 528, 165, 168, 428, 529, 429, 530, 171, 172, 176, 178, 179, 531, 181, 532, 533, 188, 534, 189, 190, 194, 196, 535, 536, 537, 367, 538, 203, 204, 468, 469, 539, 205, 540, 541, 437, 438, 206, 207, 542, 439, 543, 544, 30, 209, 545, 211, 471, 212, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 442, 218, 380, 551, 472, 552, 553, 554, 555, 473, 556, 557, 221, 474, 476, 222, 443, 477, 224, 558, 559, 478, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 479, 230, 231, 232, 560, 233, 561, 480, 562, 234, 235, 236, 563, 564, 238, 239, 241, 242, 243, 565, 566, 244, 245, 481, 567, 247, 568, 569, 248, 249, 482, 570, 483, 449, 571, 250, 251, 572, 573, 574, 253, 254, 575, 576, 577, 578, 256, 451, 579, 452, 484, 485, 580, 257, 259, 581, 260, 582, 583, 262, 264, and 265.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the stress related promoter is not the Senescence-Associated Receptor Kinase (SARK) promoter.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the nucleic acid construct comprising a polynucleotide encoding adenosine phosphate- isopentenyltransferase (IPT) operably linked to a Metallothionein (MT) promoter.

As used herein the term "Metallothionein" refers to a family of genes encoding cysteine-rich, low molecular weight proteins which bind heavy metals through the thiol group of their cysteine (Cys) residues. Metallothioneins are present in a variety of organisms including bacteria, fungi and all eukaryotic plant and animal species.

In several plants, the expression level of Metallothioneins is induced under a variety of abiotic stresses [e.g., drought, low temperature, nutrient deprivation, metal stress (e.g., Cadmium (Cd), ammonium, Copper (Cu) or Zinc (Zn)) and following treatment with ABA (Clement., et al, 2008, Supra) or Ethylene, and during senescence (Gepstein et al, 2003, Supra).

Non-limiting examples of metallothionein promoters which can be used in the nucleic acid construct of some embodiments of the invention include the following promoter sequences: the promoter of metallothionein- like family 15 protein AT2G23240, which comprises SEQ ID NO:686 (chr2:9896326-9899325 REVERSE); the promoter of *Arabidopsis thaliana* plant EC metallothionein- like family 15 protein

(MT2A, METALLOTHIONEIN 2A) AT3G09390 which comprises SEQ ID NO:687 (chr3:2890 189-2893 188 REVERSE); the promoter of MT2B (METALLOTHIONEIN 2B) AT5G02380 which comprises SEQ ID NO:688 (chr5:507 165-5 10164 REVERSE); the promoter of metallothioneinl AT2G42000 plant EC metallothionein-like family 15 protein [*Arabidopsis thaliana*] NC_003071.7 (17529243.. 17529828, complement) which comprises SEQ ID NO:689 (chr2:17529829-17532828 REVERSE); LOC100283577 metallothionein-like protein type 2 [*Zea mays*]; the promoter of MT1A (METALLOTHIONEIN 1A) copper ion binding / metal ion binding [*Arabidopsis thaliana*] NC_003070.9 (2338904..2339321, complement) which comprises SEQ ID NO:690 (AT1G07600, chr1:2339322-2342321 REVERSE); the promoter of MT3 (METALLOTHIONEIN 3) copper ion binding [*Arabidopsis thaliana*] NC_003074.8 (5180667..5181400, complement) which comprises SEQ ID NO:691 (AT3G15353, chr3:5 18 1326-5 184325 REVERSE); the promoter of mtl2 metallothionein2 *Zea mays* (GenBank Accession No. S57628) which comprises SEQ ID NO:692.

15 According to some embodiments of the invention the metallothionein promoter is as set forth by nucleotides 57-1208 of SEQ ID NO: 1.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the IPT is set forth by SEQ ID NO:693.

20 According to some embodiments of the invention, the stress related promoter sequences of some embodiments of the invention are modified to create variations in the molecule sequences such as to enhance their promoting activities, using methods known in the art, such as PCR-based DNA modification, or standard DNA mutagenesis techniques, or by chemically synthesizing the modified polynucleotides.

25 Accordingly, the stress related promoter sequences of some embodiments of the invention may be truncated or deleted and still retain the capacity of directing the transcription of an operably linked DNA sequence in the host cell. The minimal length of a promoter region can be determined by systematically removing sequences from the 5' and 3'-ends of the isolated polynucleotide by standard techniques known in the art, including but not limited to removal of restriction enzyme fragments or digestion with nucleases.

30

According to some embodiments of the invention, the nucleic acid construct of the invention comprises a functional portion of any of the above described promoter sequences.

As used herein the phrase "functional portion" refers to a minimal nucleic acid sequence which is capable of upregulating (*i.e.*, increasing) transcription of a heterologous sequence under the stress condition.

According to some embodiments of the invention the functional portion includes at least 5, at least 6, at least 7, at least 8, at least 9, at least 10, at least 11, at least 12, at least 13, at least 14, at least 15, at least 16, at least 17, at least 18, at least 19, at least 20, at least about 25, at least about 30, at least about 35, at least about 40, at least about 45, at least about 50, at least about 55 consecutive nucleotides of the stress-related promoter sequence.

Assays for qualifying the ability of candidate functional portion sequences or truncated, deleted or mutated promoter sequences to regulate transcription of a heterologous sequence in a stress-related manner (*i.e.*, to upregulate the transcription of the heterologous sequence under a stress condition) are known in the art (see *e.g.*, Yasunari Fujita, Miki Fujita, Rie Satoh, et al. 2005. AREB1 Is a Transcription Activator of Novel ABRE-Dependent ABA Signaling That Enhances Drought Stress Tolerance in *Arabidopsis*. The plant cell 17:3470-3488; which is fully incorporated herein by reference). For example, the candidate sequence can be placed upstream of a reporter gene in a nucleic acid construct which is transformed into a plant, and the plant is grown under stress or non-stress (*e.g.*, optimal) conditions. The expression level of the reporter gene is monitored under the various conditions and compared between transgenic and non-transgenic plants, and/or between transgenic plants transformed with a nucleic acid construct which comprises the candidate functional portion upstream of the reporter gene and transgenic plants transformed with a nucleic acid construct which comprises a known stress-related promoter upstream of a reporter gene. Examples of known reporter genes which can be used by such assays include, but are not limited to, GUS, luciferase, and GFP (green fluorescent protein).

In another approach, novel hybrid promoters can be designed or engineered by a number of methods. Many promoters contain upstream sequences which activate, enhance or define the strength and/or specificity of the promoter, such as described, for

example, by Atchison [Ann. Rev. Cell Biol. 4:127 (1988)]. T-DNA genes, for example contain "TATA" boxes defining the site of transcription initiation and other upstream elements located upstream of the transcription initiation site modulate transcription levels [Gelvin In: Transgenic Plants (Kung, S.-D. and Us, R., eds, San Diego: Academic Press, pp. 49-87, (1988)]. Another chimeric promoter combined a trimer of the octopine synthase (ocs) activator to the mannopine synthase (mas) activator plus promoter and reported an increase in expression of a reporter gene [Min Ni et al., The Plant Journal 7:661 (1995)]. The stress-related promoter of some embodiments of the invention can be used for the construction of such chimeric or hybrid promoters. Methods for construction of variant promoters include, but are not limited to, combining control elements of different promoters or duplicating portions or regions of a promoter (see for example, U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,110,732 and 5,097,025). Those of skill in the art are familiar with the specific conditions and procedures for the construction, manipulation and isolation of macromolecules (e.g., DNA molecules, plasmids, etc.), generation of recombinant organisms and the screening and isolation of genes, [see for example Sambrook et al., Molecular Cloning: A Laboratory Manual, Cold Spring Harbor Press, (1989); Mailga et al, Methods in Plant Molecular Biology, Cold Spring Harbor Press, (1995); Birren et al, Genome Analysis: volume 1, Analyzing DNA, (1997); volume 2, Detecting Genes, (1998); volume 3, Cloning Systems, (1999); and volume 4, Mapping Genomes, (1999), Cold Spring Harbor, N.Y].

The nucleic acid construct according to some embodiments of the invention further comprises a transcription terminator placed downstream of the IPT coding sequence. Non-limiting examples of such terminators include the NOS terminator, a regulatory sequence from the nopaiin-synthase-gene from *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* (e.g., nucleotides 2075-2328 of SEQ ID NO:1), and ocs3 terminator (octopine synthase terminator; SEQ ID NO:695), mas3 terminator mannopine synthesis terminator (SEQ ID NO:696).

According to some embodiments of the invention, the nucleic acid construct comprises the nucleic acid sequence set forth by SEQ ID NO:1.

The nucleic acid construct of some embodiments of the invention can further include an appropriate selectable marker and/or an origin of replication. According to some embodiments of the invention, the nucleic acid construct utilized is a shuttle

vector, which can propagate both in *E. coli* (wherein the construct comprises an appropriate selectable marker and origin of replication) and be compatible with propagation in cells. The construct according to the present invention can be, for example, a plasmid, a bacmid, a phagemid, a cosmid, a phage, a virus or an artificial
5 chromosome.

The nucleic acid construct of some embodiments of the invention can be utilized to transform a host cell. Non-limiting examples of host cells which can be used along with some embodiments of the invention include plant cells, bacterial cells (e.g., *agrobacteria*), and animal cells.

10 According to some embodiments of the invention, the host cell is a plant cell.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the plant cell forms part of a plant.

According to an aspect of some embodiments of the invention, there is provided a method of producing a transgenic plant, comprising expressing within the plant the
15 nucleic acid construct of some embodiments of the invention.

The phrase "expressing within the plant" as used herein refers to upregulating the expression level within the plant of the exogenous polynucleotide comprised in the nucleic acid construct, by introducing the nucleic acid construct into a plant cell or a plant and expressing by recombinant means, as further described herein below.

20 As used herein "expressing" refers to expression at the mRNA and optionally polypeptide level.

The phrase "exogenous polynucleotide" refers to any nucleic acid sequence which is not naturally expressed within the plant and/or which overexpression in the plant is desired. The exogenous polynucleotide may be an isolated single or double
25 stranded nucleic acid sequence in the form of an RNA sequence, a complementary polynucleotide sequence (cDNA), a genomic polynucleotide sequence and/or a composite polynucleotide sequences (e.g., a combination of the above).

The exogenous polynucleotide may comprise a nucleic acid sequence which is identical or partially homologous to an endogenous nucleic acid sequence of the plant.

30 The term "endogenous" as used herein refers to any polynucleotide or polypeptide which is present and/or naturally expressed within a plant or a cell thereof.

The term "isolated" as used herein refers to at least partially separated from the natural environment e.g., from a plant cell.

As used herein the phrase "complementary polynucleotide sequence" refers to a sequence, which results from reverse transcription of messenger RNA using a reverse transcriptase or any other RNA dependent DNA polymerase. Such a sequence can be
5 subsequently amplified in vivo or in vitro using a DNA dependent DNA polymerase.

As used herein the phrase "genomic polynucleotide sequence" refers to a sequence derived (isolated) from a chromosome and thus it represents a contiguous portion of a chromosome.

10 As used herein the phrase "composite polynucleotide sequence" refers to a sequence, which is at least partially complementary and at least partially genomic. A composite sequence can include some exonal sequences required to encode the polypeptide of the present invention, as well as some intronic sequences interposing therebetween. The intronic sequences can be of any source, including of other genes, and
15 typically will include conserved splicing signal sequences. Such intronic sequences may further include cis acting expression regulatory elements.

The nucleic acid sequences of some embodiments of the invention (e.g., the polynucleotides encoding IPT and/or the stress-related promoter sequences) may be optimized for plant expression. Examples of such sequence modifications include, but
20 are not limited to, an altered G/C content to more closely approach that typically found in the plant species of interest, and the removal of codons atypically found in the plant species commonly referred to as codon optimization.

The phrase "codon optimization" refers to the selection of appropriate DNA nucleotides for use within a structural gene or fragment thereof that approaches codon
25 usage within the plant of interest. Therefore, an optimized gene or nucleic acid sequence refers to a gene in which the nucleotide sequence of a native or naturally occurring gene has been modified in order to utilize statistically-preferred or statistically-favored codons within the plant. The nucleotide sequence typically is examined at the DNA level and the coding region optimized for expression in the plant species determined
30 using any suitable procedure, for example as described in Sardana et al. (1996, Plant Cell Reports 15:677-681). In this method, the standard deviation of codon usage, a measure of codon usage bias, may be calculated by first finding the squared

proportional deviation of usage of each codon of the native gene relative to that of highly expressed plant genes, followed by a calculation of the average squared deviation. The formula used is: $ISDCU = n \ln[(X_n - Y_n)/Y_n]^2 / N$, where X_n refers to the frequency of usage of codon n in highly expressed plant genes, where Y_n to the frequency of usage of codon n in the gene of interest and N refers to the total number of codons in the gene of interest. A Table of codon usage from highly expressed genes of dicotyledonous plants is compiled using the data of Murray et al. (1989, Nuc Acids Res. 17:477-498).

One method of optimizing the nucleic acid sequence in accordance with the preferred codon usage for a particular plant cell type is based on the direct use, without performing any extra statistical calculations, of codon optimization Tables such as those provided on-line at the Codon Usage Database through the NIAS (National Institute of Agrobiological Sciences) DNA bank in Japan [Hypertext Transfer Protocol://World Wide Web (dot) kazusa (dot) or (dot) jp/codon/]. The Codon Usage Database contains codon usage tables for a number of different species, with each codon usage table having been statistically determined based on the data present in GenBank.

By using the above Tables to determine the most preferred or most favored codons for each amino acid in a particular species (for example, rice), a naturally-occurring nucleotide sequence encoding a protein of interest can be codon optimized for that particular plant species. This is effected by replacing codons that may have a low statistical incidence in the particular species genome with corresponding codons, in regard to an amino acid, that are statistically more favored. However, one or more less-favored codons may be selected to delete existing restriction sites, to create new ones at potentially useful junctions (5' and 3' ends to add signal peptide or termination cassettes, internal sites that might be used to cut and splice segments together to produce a correct full-length sequence), or to eliminate nucleotide sequences that may negatively effect mRNA stability or expression.

The naturally-occurring encoding nucleotide sequence may already, in advance of any modification, contain a number of codons that correspond to a statistically-favored codon in a particular plant species. Therefore, codon optimization of the native nucleotide sequence may comprise determining which codons, within the native nucleotide sequence, are not statistically-favored with regards to a particular plant, and

modifying these codons in accordance with a codon usage table of the particular plant to produce a codon optimized derivative. A modified nucleotide sequence may be fully or partially optimized for plant codon usage provided that the protein encoded by the modified nucleotide sequence is produced at a level higher than the protein encoded by the corresponding naturally occurring or native gene. Construction of synthetic genes by altering the codon usage is described in for example PCT Patent Application 93/07278.

Thus, according to some embodiments the invention encompasses nucleic acid sequences described hereinabove; fragments thereof, sequences homologous thereto, sequences orthologous thereto, sequences encoding similar polypeptides with different codon usage, altered sequences characterized by mutations, such as deletion, insertion or substitution of one or more nucleotides, either naturally occurring or man induced, either randomly or in a targeted fashion.

Polynucleotides and polypeptides of the present invention are used for plant expression.

The term "plant" as used herein encompasses whole plants, ancestors and progeny of the plants and plant parts, including seeds, shoots, stems, roots (including tubers), and plant cells, tissues and organs. The term "plant" also therefore encompasses suspension cultures, embryos, meristematic regions, callus tissue, leaves, gametophytes, sporophytes, pollen, and microspores. Plants that are particularly useful in the methods of the invention include all plants which belong to the superfamily Viridiplantae, in particular monocotyledonous and dicotyledonous plants which are of commercial value, including a fodder or forage legume, ornamental plant, food crop, tree, or shrub selected from the following non-limiting list comprising *Acacia* spp., *Acer* spp., *Actinidia* spp., *Aesculus* spp., *Agathis australis*, *Albizia amara*, *Alsophila tricolor*, *Andropogon* spp., *Arachis* spp., *Areca catechu*, *Astelia fragrans*, *Astragalus cicer*, *Baikiaea plurijuga*, *Betula* spp., *Brassica* spp., *Bruguiera gymnorhiza*, *Burkea africana*, *Butea frondosa*, *Cadaba farinosa*, *Calliandra* spp., *Camella sinensis*, *Canna indica*, *Capsicum* spp., *Cassia* spp., *Cent roema pubescens*, *Chaenomeles* spp., *Cinnamomum cassia*, *Coffea arabica*, *Colophospermum mopane*, *Coronillia varia*, *Cotoneaster serotina*, *Crataegus* spp., *Cucumis* spp., *Cupressus* spp., *Cyathea dealbata*, *Cydonia oblonga*, *Ciyptomeria laponica*, *Cymbopogon* spp., *Cynthea dealbata*, *Cydonia oblonga*, *Dalbergia monetaria*, *Davalila divaricata*, *Desmodium* spp., *Dicksonia squarosa*, *Diheteropogon amplexans*,

Dioclea spp, Dolichos spp., Doiycnium rectum, Echinochloa pyramidalis, Ehrartia spp.,
 Eleusine coracana, Era grestis spp., Erythrina spp., Eucalyptus spp, Euclea schimpen
 Eulalia villosa, Fagopyrum spp., Felloa sellowiana, Fragaria spp., Flemingia spp,
 Freycinetia banksii, Geranium thunbergi, Ginkgo biloba, Glycine javanica, Gliricidia
 5 spp, Gossypium hirsutum, Gre villea spp., Guibourtia coleosperma, Hedysarum spp.,
 Hemarthia altissima, Heteropogon con tortus, Hordeum vulgare, Hyparrhenia rufa,
 Hypericum erectum, Hyperthelia dissoluta, Indigo incarnata, Iris spp., Jatropha curcas,
 Leptarrhena pyrolifolia, Lespediza spp., Lettuca spp., Leucaena leucocephala, Loudetia
 simplex, Lotonus bainesi, Lotus spp., Macrotyloma axifiare, Malus spp., Manihot
 10 esculenta, Medicago sativa, Metasequoia glyptostroboides, Musa sapientum, Nicotianum
 spp., Onobtychis spp., Ornithopus spp., Oryza spp., Peltophorum african urn,
 Pennisetum spp., Persea gratissima, Petunia spp., Phaseolus spp., Phoenix canariensis,
 Phormium cookianum, Photinia spp., Picea glauca, Pinus spp., Pisum sativum,
 Podocarpus totara, Pogonarthria flecki, Pogonarthria squarrosa, Populus spp., Prosopis
 15 cineraria, Pseudotsuga menziesi, Pterolobium stellatum, Pyrus communis, Quercus spp.,
 Rhamphiolepis umbellata, Rhopalostylis sapida, Rhu.s natalensis, Ribes grossularia,
 Ribes spp., Robinia pseudoacacia, Rosa spp., Rub us spp., Salix spp., Schyzachyrium
 sanguineurn, Sciadopitys verticillata, Sequoia sempen'irens, Sequoiadendron giganteum,
 Sorghum bicolor, Spinacia spp., Sporobolus fimbriatus, Stiburus alopecuroides,
 20 Stylosanthos humilis, Tadehagi spp, Taxodium distichum, Themeda triandra, Trifollum
 spp., Triticum spp., Tsuga heterophylla, Vaccinium spp., Vicia spp., Vitis vinifera,
 Watsonia pyramidata, Zantedeschia aethiopica, Zea mays, amaranth, artichoke,
 asparagus, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, canola, carrot, cauliflower, celery,
 collard greens, flax, kale, lentil, oilseed rape, okra, onion, potato, rice, soybean, straw,
 25 sugar beet, sugar cane, sunflower, tomato, squash tea, trees. Alternatively algae and
 other non-Viridiplantae can be used.

The nucleic acid construct of the present invention can be utilized to stably or
 transiently transform plant cells. In stable transformation, the exogenous polynucleotide
 of the present invention is integrated into the plant genome and as such it represents a
 30 stable and inherited trait. In transient transformation, the exogenous polynucleotide is
 expressed by the cell transformed but it is not integrated into the genome and as such it
 represents a transient trait.

There are various methods of introducing foreign genes into both monocotyledonous and dicotyledonous plants (Potrykus, I., *Annu. Rev. Plant. Physiol. Plant. Mol. Biol.* (1991) 42:205-225; Shimamoto et al, *Nature* (1989) 338:274-276).

The principle methods of causing stable integration of exogenous DNA into plant genomic DNA include two main approaches:

(i) *Agrobacterium*-mediated gene transfer: Klee et al. (1987) *Annu. Rev. Plant Physiol.* 38:467-486; Klee and Rogers in *Cell Culture and Somatic Cell Genetics of Plants*, Vol. 6, *Molecular Biology of Plant Nuclear Genes*, eds. Schell, J., and Vasil, L. K., Academic Publishers, San Diego, Calif. (1989) p. 2-25; Gatenby, in *Plant Biotechnology*, eds. Kung, S, and Arntzen, C. J., Butterworth Publishers, Boston, Mass. (1989) p. 93-112.

(ii) Direct DNA uptake: Paszkowski et al., in *Cell Culture and Somatic Cell Genetics of Plants*, Vol. 6, *Molecular Biology of Plant Nuclear Genes* eds. Schell, J., and Vasil, L. K., Academic Publishers, San Diego, Calif. (1989) p. 52-68; including methods for direct uptake of DNA into protoplasts, Toriyama, K. et al. (1988) *Bio/Technology* 6:1072-1074. DNA uptake induced by brief electric shock of plant cells: Zhang et al. *Plant Cell Rep.* (1988) 7:379-384. Fromm et al. *Nature* (1986) 319:791-793. DNA injection into plant cells or tissues by particle bombardment, Klein et al. *Bio/Technology* (1988) 6:559-563; McCabe et al. *Bio/Technology* (1988) 6:923-926; Sanford, *Physiol. Plant.* (1990) 79:206-209; by the use of micropipette systems: Neuhaus et al, *Theor. Appl. Genet.* (1987) 75:30-36; Neuhaus and Spangenberg, *Physiol. Plant.* (1990) 79:213-217; glass fibers or silicon carbide whisker transformation of cell cultures, embryos or callus tissue, U.S. Pat. No. 5,464,765 or by the direct incubation of DNA with germinating pollen, DeWet et al. in *Experimental Manipulation of Ovule Tissue*, eds. Chapman, G. P. and Mantell, S. H. and Daniels, W. Longman, London, (1985) p. 197-209; and Ohta, *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* (1986) 83:715-719.

The *Agrobacterium* system includes the use of plasmid vectors that contain defined DNA segments that integrate into the plant genomic DNA. Methods of inoculation of the plant tissue vary depending upon the plant species and the *Agrobacterium* delivery system. A widely used approach is the leaf disc procedure which can be performed with any tissue explant that provides a good source for initiation of whole plant differentiation. Horsch et al. in *Plant Molecular Biology*

Manual A5, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht (1988) p. 1-9. A supplementary approach employs the *Agrobacterium* delivery system in combination with vacuum infiltration. The *Agrobacterium* system is especially viable in the creation of transgenic dicotyledonous plants.

5 There are various methods of direct DNA transfer into plant cells. In electroporation, the protoplasts are briefly exposed to a strong electric field. In microinjection, the DNA is mechanically injected directly into the cells using very small micropipettes. In microparticle bombardment, the DNA is adsorbed on microprojectiles such as magnesium sulfate crystals or tungsten particles, and the microprojectiles are
10 physically accelerated into cells or plant tissues.

 Following stable transformation plant propagation is exercised. The most common method of plant propagation is by seed. Regeneration by seed propagation, however, has the deficiency that due to heterozygosity there is a lack of uniformity in the crop, since seeds are produced by plants according to the genetic variances governed
15 by Mendelian rules. Basically, each seed is genetically different and each will grow with its own specific traits. Therefore, it is preferred that the transformed plant be produced such that the regenerated plant has the identical traits and characteristics of the parent transgenic plant. Therefore, it is preferred that the transformed plant be regenerated by micropropagation which provides a rapid, consistent reproduction of the
20 transformed plants.

 Micropropagation is a process of growing new generation plants from a single piece of tissue that has been excised from a selected parent plant or cultivar. This process permits the mass reproduction of plants having the preferred tissue expressing the fusion protein. The new generation plants which are produced are genetically
25 identical to, and have all of the characteristics of, the original plant. Micropropagation allows mass production of quality plant material in a short period of time and offers a rapid multiplication of selected cultivars in the preservation of the characteristics of the original transgenic or transformed plant. The advantages of cloning plants are the speed of plant multiplication and the quality and uniformity of plants produced.

30 Micropropagation is a multi-stage procedure that requires alteration of culture medium or growth conditions between stages. Thus, the micropropagation process involves four basic stages: Stage one, initial tissue culturing; stage two, tissue culture

multiplication; stage three, differentiation and plant formation; and stage four, greenhouse culturing and hardening. During stage one, initial tissue culturing, the tissue culture is established and certified contaminant-free. During stage two, the initial tissue culture is multiplied until a sufficient number of tissue samples are produced to meet
5 production goals. During stage three, the tissue samples grown in stage two are divided and grown into individual plantlets. At stage four, the transformed plantlets are transferred to a greenhouse for hardening where the plants' tolerance to light is gradually increased so that it can be grown in the natural environment.

According to some embodiments of the invention, mature transformed plants
10 generated as described above are further selected for the trait of interest (e.g., improved FUE, stress tolerance etc.). Examples of such screening assays are provided hereinbelow and in the Examples section which follows. Thus, for example, transgenic plants may be screened for improved nutritional value (e.g., improved oil, amino acids and/or protein content, as well as N content per se) under normal or stress conditions as
15 will be further described hereinbelow. Alternatively or additionally, transformed and non-transformed (wild type) plants are exposed to an abiotic stress condition, such as water deprivation, suboptimal temperature, nutrient deficiency, or preferably a salt stress condition. Salt stress can be effected in many ways such as, for example, by irrigating the plants with a hyperosmotic solution, by cultivating the plants
20 hydroponically in a hyperosmotic growth solution (e.g., Hoagland solution), or by culturing the plants in a hyperosmotic growth medium (e.g., MS medium). Since different plants vary considerably in their tolerance to salinity, the salt concentration in the irrigation water, growth solution, or growth medium is preferably adjusted according to the specific characteristics of the specific plant cultivar or variety, so as to
25 inflict a mild or moderate effect on the physiology and/or morphology of the plants (for guidelines as to appropriate concentration please see, Bernstein and Kafkafi, Root Growth Under Salinity Stress In: Plant Roots, The Hidden Half 3rd ed. Waisel Y, Eshel A and Kafkafi U. (editors) Marcel Dekker Inc., New York, 2002, and reference therein). Following exposure to the stress condition the plants are frequently monitored until
30 substantial physiological and/or morphological effects appear in wild type plants. Subsequently, transformed plants not exhibiting substantial physiological and/or morphological effects, or exhibiting higher biomass than wild-type plants, are identified

as abiotic stress tolerant plants.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the transformation is stable transformation.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the transformation is transient transformation. Such a transformation can be to leaf cells, meristematic cells or the whole plant.

Transient transformation can be effected by any of the direct DNA transfer methods described above or by viral infection using modified plant viruses.

Viruses that have been shown to be useful for the transformation of plant hosts include CaMV, TMV and BV. Transformation of plants using plant viruses is described in U.S. Pat. No. 4,855,237 (BGV), EP-A 67,553 (TMV), Japanese Published Application No. 63-14693 (TMV), EPA 194,809 (BV), EPA 278,667 (BV); and Gluzman, Y. et al., Communications in Molecular Biology: Viral Vectors, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, New York, pp. 172-189 (1988). Pseudovirus particles for use in expressing foreign DNA in many hosts, including plants, is described in WO 87/06261 .

Preferably, the virus of the present invention is avirulent and thus is incapable of causing severe symptoms such as reduced growth rate, mosaic, ring spots, leaf roll, yellowing, streaking, pox formation, tumor formation and pitting. A suitable avirulent virus may be a naturally occurring avirulent virus or an artificially attenuated virus. Virus attenuation may be effected by using methods well known in the art including, but not limited to, sub-lethal heating, chemical treatment or by directed mutagenesis techniques such as described, for example, by Kurihara and Watanabe (Molecular Plant Pathology 4:259-269, 2003), Gal-on et al. (1992), Atreya et al. (1992) and Huet et al. (1994).

Suitable virus strains can be obtained from available sources such as, for example, the American Type Culture Collection (ATCC) or by isolation from infected plants. Isolation of viruses from infected plant tissues can be effected by techniques well known in the art such as described, for example by Foster and Tatlor, Eds. "Plant Virology Protocols From Virus Isolation to Transgenic Resistance (Methods in Molecular Biology (Humana Press), Vol 81)", Humana Press, 1998. Briefly, tissues of an infected plant believed to contain a high concentration of a suitable virus, preferably young leaves and flower petals, are ground in a buffer solution (e.g., phosphate buffer

solution) to produce a virus infected sap which can be used in subsequent inoculations.

Construction of plant RNA viruses for the introduction and expression of non-viral exogenous polynucleotide sequences in plants is demonstrated by the above references as well as by Dawson, W. O. et al, *Virology* (1989) 172:285-292; 5 Takamatsu et al. *EMBO J.* (1987) 6:307-311; French et al. *Science* (1986) 231:1294-1297; and Takamatsu et al. *FEBS Letters* (1990) 269:73-76.

When the virus is a DNA virus, suitable modifications can be made to the virus itself. Alternatively, the virus can first be cloned into a bacterial plasmid for ease of constructing the desired viral vector with the foreign DNA. The virus can then be 10 excised from the plasmid. If the virus is a DNA virus, a bacterial origin of replication can be attached to the viral DNA, which is then replicated by the bacteria. Transcription and translation of this DNA will produce the coat protein which will encapsidate the viral DNA. If the virus is an RNA virus, the virus is generally cloned as a cDNA and inserted into a plasmid. The plasmid is then used to make all of the constructions. The 15 RNA virus is then produced by transcribing the viral sequence of the plasmid and translation of the viral genes to produce the coat protein(s) which encapsidate the viral RNA.

Construction of plant RNA viruses for the introduction and expression in plants of non-viral exogenous polynucleotide sequences such as those included in the construct 20 of the present invention is demonstrated by the above references as well as in U.S. Pat. No. 5,316,931.

In one embodiment, a plant viral polynucleotide is provided in which the native coat protein coding sequence has been deleted from a viral polynucleotide, a non-native plant viral coat protein coding sequence and a non-native promoter, preferably the 25 subgenomic promoter of the non-native coat protein coding sequence, capable of expression in the plant host, packaging of the recombinant plant viral polynucleotide, and ensuring a systemic infection of the host by the recombinant plant viral polynucleotide, has been inserted. Alternatively, the coat protein gene may be inactivated by insertion of the non-native polynucleotide sequence within it, such that a 30 protein is produced. The recombinant plant viral polynucleotide may contain one or more additional non-native subgenomic promoters. Each non-native subgenomic promoter is capable of transcribing or expressing adjacent genes or polynucleotide

sequences in the plant host and incapable of recombination with each other and with native subgenomic promoters. Non-native (foreign) polynucleotide sequences may be inserted adjacent the native plant viral subgenomic promoter or the native and a non-native plant viral subgenomic promoters if more than one polynucleotide sequence is included. The non-native polynucleotide sequences are transcribed or expressed in the host plant under control of the subgenomic promoter to produce the desired products.

In a second embodiment, a recombinant plant viral polynucleotide is provided as in the first embodiment except that the native coat protein coding sequence is placed adjacent one of the non-native coat protein subgenomic promoters instead of a non-native coat protein coding sequence.

In a third embodiment, a recombinant plant viral polynucleotide is provided in which the native coat protein gene is adjacent its subgenomic promoter and one or more non-native subgenomic promoters have been inserted into the viral polynucleotide. The inserted non-native subgenomic promoters are capable of transcribing or expressing adjacent genes in a plant host and are incapable of recombination with each other and with native subgenomic promoters. Non-native polynucleotide sequences may be inserted adjacent the non-native subgenomic plant viral promoters such that the sequences are transcribed or expressed in the host plant under control of the subgenomic promoters to produce the desired product.

In a fourth embodiment, a recombinant plant viral polynucleotide is provided as in the third embodiment except that the native coat protein coding sequence is replaced by a non-native coat protein coding sequence.

The viral vectors are encapsidated by the coat proteins encoded by the recombinant plant viral polynucleotide to produce a recombinant plant virus. The recombinant plant viral polynucleotide or recombinant plant virus is used to infect appropriate host plants. The recombinant plant viral polynucleotide is capable of replication in the host, systemic spread in the host, and transcription or expression of foreign gene(s) (exogenous polynucleotide) in the host to produce the desired protein.

Techniques for inoculation of viruses to plants may be found in Foster and Taylor, eds. "Plant Virology Protocols: From Virus Isolation to Transgenic Resistance (Methods in Molecular Biology (Humana Pr), Vol 81)", Humana Press, 1998; Maramorosh and Koprowski, eds. "Methods in Virology" 7 vols, Academic Press, New

York 1967-1984; Hill, S. A. "Methods in Plant Virology", Blackwell, Oxford, 1984; Walkey, D. G. A. "Applied Plant Virology", Wiley, New York, 1985; and Kado and Agrawa, eds. "Principles and Techniques in Plant Virology", Van Nostrand-Reinhold, New York.

5 In addition to the above, the polynucleotide of the present invention can also be introduced into a chloroplast genome thereby enabling chloroplast expression.

A technique for introducing exogenous polynucleotide sequences to the genome of the chloroplasts is known. This technique involves the following procedures. First, plant cells are chemically treated so as to reduce the number of chloroplasts per cell to about one. Then, the exogenous polynucleotide is introduced via particle bombardment into the cells with the aim of introducing at least one exogenous polynucleotide molecule into the chloroplasts. The exogenous polynucleotides selected such that it is integratable into the chloroplast's genome via homologous recombination which is readily effected by enzymes inherent to the chloroplast. To this end, the exogenous polynucleotide includes, in addition to a gene of interest, at least one polynucleotide stretch which is derived from the chloroplast's genome. In addition, the exogenous polynucleotide includes a selectable marker, which serves by sequential selection procedures to ascertain that all or substantially all of the copies of the chloroplast genomes following such selection will include the exogenous polynucleotide. Further details relating to this technique are found in U.S. Pat. Nos. 4,945,050; and 5,693,507 which are incorporated herein by reference. A polypeptide can thus be produced by the protein expression system of the chloroplast and become integrated into the chloroplast's inner membrane.

25 Since the traits of the present invention (e.g., abiotic stress tolerance) in plants can involve multiple genes acting additively or in synergy (see, for example, in Quesda et al, Plant Physiol. 130:951-063, 2002), the present invention also envisages expressing a plurality of exogenous polynucleotides in a single host plant to thereby achieve superior abiotic stress tolerance, biomass and/or yield.

30 Expressing a plurality of exogenous polynucleotides in a single host plant can be effected by co-introducing multiple nucleic acid constructs, each including a different exogenous polynucleotide, into a single plant cell. The transformed cell can then be regenerated into a mature plant using the methods described hereinabove.

Alternatively, expressing a plurality of exogenous polynucleotides in a single host plant can be effected by co-introducing into a single plant-cell a single nucleic-acid construct including a plurality of different exogenous polynucleotides. Such a construct can be designed with a single promoter sequence which can transcribe a polycistronic message including all the different exogenous polynucleotide sequences. To enable co-translation of the different polypeptides encoded by the polycistronic message, the polynucleotide sequences can be inter-linked via an internal ribosome entry site (IRES) sequence which facilitates translation of polynucleotide sequences positioned downstream of the IRES sequence. In this case, a transcribed polycistronic RNA molecule encoding the different polypeptides described above will be translated from both the capped 5' end and the two internal IRES sequences of the polycistronic RNA molecule to thereby produce in the cell all different polypeptides. Alternatively, the construct can include several promoter sequences each linked to a different exogenous polynucleotide sequence.

The plant cell transformed with the construct including a plurality of different exogenous polynucleotides, can be regenerated into a mature plant, using the methods described hereinabove.

Alternatively, expressing a plurality of exogenous polynucleotides in a single host plant can be effected by introducing different nucleic acid constructs, including different exogenous polynucleotides, into a plurality of plants. The regenerated transformed plants can then be cross-bred and resultant progeny selected for superior traits such as NUE, abiotic stress tolerance and/or biomass, using conventional plant breeding techniques.

Thus, according to an aspect of some embodiments of the invention, there is provided a transgenic plant comprising the nucleic acid construct of some embodiments of the invention, or the host cell of some embodiments of the invention.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the transgenic plant exogenously expresses the nucleic acid construct of some embodiments of the invention.

As mentioned above and described in Examples 1-2 of the Examples section which follows, transgenic plants overexpressing the nucleic acid construct according to some embodiments of the invention exhibit increased tolerance and/or resistance to various abiotic stresses.

Thus, according to an aspect of some embodiments of the invention there is provided a method of increasing abiotic stress tolerance (ABST) of a plant. The method is effected by expressing within the plant the nucleic acid construct of some embodiments of the invention, thereby increasing the abiotic stress tolerance of the plant.

As used herein the term "increasing" refers to improving or increasing the trait of the transgenic plant of some embodiments of the invention by at least about 2% more, about 3% more, about 4% more, about 5% more, about 10% more, about 20% more, about 30% more, about 40% more, about 50% more, about 60% more, about 70% more, about 80% more, about 90%, about 95%, about 99% more than that of the non-transgenic plant (e.g., mock transfected, naïve, wild type plant(s)).

As used herein the term "trait" refers to a characteristic or quality of a plant which may overall (either directly or indirectly) improve the commercial value of the plant.

The phrase "stress tolerance" as used herein refers to the ability of a plant to endure a stress (abiotic) without suffering a substantial alteration in metabolism, growth, productivity and/or viability.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the genetically engineered plant of the some embodiments of the invention exhibits at least about 2% more, about 3%, more, about 4% more, about 5% more, about 10% more, about 20% more, about 30% more, about 40% more, about 50% more, about 60% more, about 70% more, about 80% more, about 90% more or even higher tolerance to abiotic stress than non-transgenic plants.

The phrase "abiotic stress" as used herein refers to any adverse effect on metabolism, growth, reproduction and/or viability of a plant. Accordingly, abiotic stress can be induced by suboptimal environmental growth conditions such as, for example, salinity, water deprivation, flooding, freezing, low or high temperature, heavy metal toxicity, anaerobiosis, nutrient deficiency, atmospheric pollution or UV irradiation. The implications of abiotic stress are discussed in the Background section.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the abiotic stress can be drought, cold stress, chilling stress, heat stress, salinity stress, osmotic stress, freeze stress, nutrient deficiency, heavy metal stress and/or any combinations thereof.

As used herein the phrase "water use efficiency (WUE)" refers to the level of organic matter produced per unit of water consumed by the plant, i.e., the dry weight of a plant in relation to the plant's water use, e.g., the biomass produced per unit transpiration.

5 As used herein the phrase "fertilizer use efficiency" refers to the metabolic process(es) which lead to an increase in the plant's yield, biomass, vigor, and growth rate per fertilizer unit applied. The metabolic process can be the uptake, spread, absorbent, accumulation, relocation (within the plant) and use of one or more of the minerals and organic moieties absorbed by the plant, such as nitrogen, phosphates and/or potassium.

10 As used herein the phrase "fertilizer-limiting conditions" refers to growth conditions which include a level (e.g., concentration) of a fertilizer applied which is below the level needed for normal plant metabolism, growth, reproduction and/or viability.

As used herein the phrase "nitrogen use efficiency (NUE)" refers to the
15 metabolic process(es) which lead to an increase in the plant's yield, biomass, vigor, and growth rate per nitrogen unit applied. The metabolic process can be the uptake, spread, absorbent, accumulation, relocation (within the plant) and use of nitrogen absorbed by the plant.

As used herein the phrase "nitrogen-limiting conditions" refers to growth
20 conditions which include a level (e.g., concentration) of nitrogen (e.g., ammonium or nitrate) applied which is below the level needed for normal plant metabolism, growth, reproduction and/or viability. Improved plant NUE and FUE is translated in the field into either harvesting similar quantities of yield, while implementing less fertilizers, or increased yields gained by implementing the same levels of fertilizers. Thus, improved
25 NUE or FUE has a direct effect on plant yield in the field. Thus, the polynucleotides and polypeptides of some embodiments of the invention positively affect plant yield, seed yield, and plant biomass. In addition, the benefit of improved plant NUE will certainly improve crop quality and biochemical constituents of the seed such as protein yield and oil yield.

30 As used herein the term "increasing" refers to at least about 2 %, at least about 3 %, at least about 4 %, at least about 5 %, at least about 10 %, at least about 15 %, at least about 20 %, at least about 30 %, at least about 40 %, at least about 50 %, at least about

60 %, at least about 70 %, at least about 80 %, increase in yield, growth rate, biomass, vigor, oil content, abiotic stress tolerance and/or nitrogen use efficiency of a plant as compared to a native plant, i.e., a plant not modified with the biomolecules (polynucleotide or polypeptides) of the invention, e.g., a non-transformed plant of the same species which is grown under the same growth conditions.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the method further comprising growing the plant under the abiotic stress.

Plants are subject to a range of environmental challenges. Several of these, including salt stress, general osmotic stress, drought stress and freezing stress, have the ability to impact whole plant and cellular water availability. Not surprisingly, then, plant responses to this collection of stresses are related. Zhu (2002) *Ann. Rev. Plant Biol.* 53: 247-273 et al. note that "most studies on water stress signaling have focused on salt stress primarily because plant responses to salt and drought are closely related and the mechanisms overlap". Many examples of similar responses and pathways to this set of stresses have been documented. For example, the CBF transcription factors have been shown to condition resistance to salt, freezing and drought (Kasuga et al. (1999) *Nature Biotech.* 17: 287-291). The *Arabidopsis* rd29B gene is induced in response to both salt and dehydration stress, a process that is mediated largely through an ABA signal transduction process (Uno et al. (2000) *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 97: 11632-11637), resulting in altered activity of transcription factors that bind to an upstream element within the rd29B promoter. In *Mesembryanthemum crystallinum* (ice plant), Patharker and Cushman have shown that a calcium-dependent protein kinase (McCDPKI) is induced by exposure to both drought and salt stresses (Patharker and Cushman (2000) *Plant J.* 24: 679-691). The stress-induced kinase was also shown to phosphorylate a transcription factor, presumably altering its activity, although transcript levels of the target transcription factor are not altered in response to salt or drought stress. Similarly, Saijo et al. demonstrated that a rice salt/drought-induced calmodulin-dependent protein kinase (OsCDPKJ) conferred increased salt and drought tolerance to rice when overexpressed (Saijo et al. (2000) *Plant J.* 23: 319-327).

Exposure to dehydration invokes similar survival strategies in plants as does freezing stress (see, for example, Yelenosky (1989) *Plant Physiol* 89: 444-451) and drought stress induces freezing tolerance (see, for example, Siminovitch et al. (1982)

Plant Physiol 69: 250-255; and Guy et al. (1992) Planta 188: 265-270). In addition to the induction of cold-acclimation proteins, strategies that allow plants to survive in low water conditions may include, for example, reduced surface area, or surface oil or wax production. In another example increased solute content of the plant prevents
5 evaporation and water loss due to heat, drought, salinity, osmoticum, and the like therefore providing a better plant tolerance to the above stresses.

It will be appreciated that some pathways involved in resistance to one stress (as described above), will also be involved in resistance to other stresses, regulated by the same or homologous genes. Of course, the overall resistance pathways are related, not
10 identical, and therefore not all genes controlling resistance to one stress will control resistance to the other stresses. Nonetheless, if a gene conditions resistance to one of these stresses, it would be apparent to one skilled in the art to test for resistance to these related stresses. Methods of assessing stress resistance are further provided hereinbelow and in the Examples section which follows.

15 The ability of the transgenic plants of some embodiments of the invention to endure stress is expected to affect plant biomass, vigor and yield. The opposite is also anticipated to present good results, essentially, improved biomass, vigor and/or yield is expected to improve the endurance of transgenic plants of the present invention to stress conditions.

20 Thus, as is further described in Examples 1-3 of the examples section which follows, transgenic plants according to some embodiments of the invention exhibit increased biomass (Figures 4A-C, 9 and 16), growth rate (Figures 5A-C, 6A-C), yield (Figure 7) and chlorophyll content (Figure 16) under abiotic stress conditions and/or non-stress (e.g., optimal) conditions. It should be noted that the increase in number of
25 leaves per plant and/or seeds per plant can predict increase in oil content per plant.

Thus, according to an aspect of some embodiments of the invention, there is provided a method of increasing yield, biomass, vigor, growth rate of a plant, comprising expressing within the plant the nucleic acid construct of some embodiments of the invention, thereby increasing the yield, biomass, oil content, vigor, growth rate of
30 the plant.

As used herein the phrase "plant biomass" refers to the amount (e.g., measured in grams of air-dry tissue) of a tissue produced from the plant in a growing season, which

could also determine or affect the plant yield or the yield per growing area. An increase in plant biomass can be in the whole plant or in parts thereof such as aboveground (harvestable) parts, vegetative biomass, roots and seeds.

As used herein the phrase "growth rate" refers to the increase in plant organ/tissue size per time (can be measured in cm² per day).

As used herein the phrase "plant vigor" refers to the amount (measured by weight) of tissue produced by the plant in a given time. Hence increased vigor could determine or affect the plant yield or the yield per growing time or growing area. In addition, early vigor (seed and/or seedling) results in improved field stand. It should be noted that a plant yield can be determined under stress (e.g., abiotic stress, nitrogen-limiting conditions) and/or non-stress (normal) conditions.

Improving early vigor is an important objective of modern rice breeding programs in both temperate and tropical rice cultivars. Long roots are important for proper soil anchorage in water-seeded rice. Where rice is sown directly into flooded fields, and where plants must emerge rapidly through water, longer shoots are associated with vigour. Where drill-seeding is practiced, longer mesocotyls and coleoptiles are important for good seedling emergence. The ability to engineer early vigor into plants would be of great importance in agriculture. For example, poor early vigor has been a limitation to the introduction of maize (*Zea mays* L.) hybrids based on Corn Belt germplasm in the European Atlantic.

As used herein the phrase "plant yield" refers to the amount (as determined by weight or size) or quantity (numbers) of tissues or organs produced per plant or per growing season. Hence increased yield could affect the economic benefit one can obtain from the plant in a certain growing area and/or growing time. It should be noted that a plant yield can be affected by various parameters including, but not limited to, plant biomass; plant vigor; growth rate; seed yield; seed or grain quantity; seed or grain quality; oil yield; content of oil, starch and/or protein in harvested organs (e.g., seeds or vegetative parts of the plant); number of flowers (florets) per panicle (expressed as a ratio of number of filled seeds over number of primary panicles); harvest index; number of plants grown per area; number and size of harvested organs per plant and per area; number of plants per growing area (density); number of harvested organs in field; total leaf area; carbon assimilation and carbon partitioning (the distribution/allocation of

carbon within the plant); resistance to shade; number of harvestable organs (e.g. seeds), seeds per pod, weight per seed; and modified architecture such as increase stalk diameter, thickness or improvement of physical properties (e.g. elasticity).

To analyze the effect of the transgene on plant physiology, one can assess overall yield and biomass, the tolerance of the plants to fertilizer deficiency and to abiotic stresses such as drought, salinity, cold and heat stresses, freezing, etc. Also of great importance is to assess whether the plant at any of its parts contains an increased content of protein, free amino acids, oil and any other metabolic compounds of value. As

used herein the phrase "seed yield" refers to the number or weight of the seeds per plant, seeds per pod, or per growing area or to the weight of a single seed, or to the oil extracted per seed. Hence seed yield can be affected by seed dimensions (e.g., length, width, perimeter, area and/or volume), number of (filled) seeds and seed filling rate and by seed oil content. Hence increase seed yield per plant could affect the economic benefit one can obtain from the plant in a certain growing area and/or growing time; and increase seed yield per growing area could be achieved by increasing seed yield per plant, and/or by increasing number of plants grown on the same given area.

The term "seed" (also referred to as "grain" or "kernel") as used herein refers to a small embryonic plant enclosed in a covering called the seed coat (usually with some stored food), the product of the ripened ovule of gymnosperm and angiosperm plants which occurs after fertilization and some growth within the mother plant.

Seed yield is a particularly important trait, since the seeds of many plants are important for human and animal nutrition. Crops such as corn, rice, wheat, canola and soybean account for over half the total human caloric intake, whether through direct consumption of the seeds themselves or through consumption of meat products raised on processed seeds. They are also a source of sugars, oils and many kinds of metabolites used in industrial processes. Seeds contain an embryo (the source of new shoots and roots) and an endosperm (the source of nutrients for embryo growth during germination and during early growth of seedlings). The development of a seed involves many genes, and requires the transfer of metabolites from the roots, leaves and stems into the growing seed. The endosperm, in particular, assimilates the metabolic precursors of carbohydrates, oils and proteins and synthesizes them into storage macromolecules to fill out the grain.

The phrase "oil content" as used herein refers to the amount of lipids in a given plant organ, either the seeds (seed oil content) or the vegetative portion of the plant (vegetative oil content) and is typically expressed as percentage of dry weight (10 % humidity of seeds) or wet weight (for vegetative portion). It should be noted that oil content is affected by intrinsic oil production of a tissue (e.g., seed, vegetative portion), as well as the mass or size of the oil-producing tissue per plant or per growth period. In one embodiment, increase in oil content of the plant can be achieved by increasing the size/mass of a plant's tissue(s) which comprise oil per growth period. Thus, increased oil content of a plant can be achieved by increasing the yield, growth rate, biomass and vigor of the plant.

As used herein, the phrase "non-stress conditions" refers to the growth conditions (e.g., water, temperature, light-dark cycles, humidity, salt concentration, fertilizer concentration in soil, nutrient supply such as nitrogen, phosphorous and/or potassium), that do not significantly go beyond the everyday climatic and other abiotic conditions that plants may encounter, and which allow optimal growth, metabolism, reproduction and/or viability of a plant at any stage in its life cycle (e.g., in a crop plant from seed to a mature plant and back to seed again). Persons skilled in the art are aware of normal soil conditions and climatic conditions for a given plant in a given geographic location. It should be noted that while the non-stress conditions may include some mild variations from the optimal conditions (which vary from one type/species of a plant to another), such variations do not cause the plant to cease growing without the capacity to resume growth.

Once expressed within the plant cell or the entire plant, the level of the polypeptide encoded by the exogenous polynucleotide can be determined by methods well known in the art such as, activity assays, Western blots using antibodies capable of specifically binding the polypeptide, Enzyme-Linked Immuno Sorbent Assay (ELISA), radio-immuno-assays (RIA), immunohistochemistry, immunocytochemistry, immunofluorescence and the like.

Methods of determining the level in the plant of the RNA transcribed from the exogenous polynucleotide are well known in the art and include, for example, Northern blot analysis, reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) analysis

(including quantitative, semi-quantitative or real-time RT-PCR) and RNA-m situ hybridization.

Plant lines exogenously expressing the polynucleotides of the invention are screened to identify those that show the greatest increase of the desired plant trait. The effect of the transgene (e.g., the nucleic acid construct encoding IPT under the stress-related promoter) on abiotic stress tolerance can be determined using known methods such as detailed below and in the Examples section which follows.

Abiotic stress tolerance - Transformed (i.e., expressing the transgene) and non-transformed (wild type) plants are exposed to an abiotic stress condition, such as water deprivation, suboptimal temperature (low temperature, high temperature), nutrient deficiency, nutrient excess, a salt stress condition, osmotic stress, heavy metal toxicity, anaerobiosis, atmospheric pollution and UV irradiation.

Salinity tolerance assay - Transgenic plants with tolerance to higher levels than the optimal salt concentrations for the wild type are expected to exhibit better germination, seedling vigor or growth in high salt as compared to wild type plants under the same salt concentration. Salt stress can be effected in many ways such as, for example, by irrigating the plants with a hyperosmotic solution, by cultivating the plants hydroponically in a hyperosmotic growth solution (e.g., Hoagland solution), or by culturing the plants in a hyperosmotic growth medium, e.g., 50 % Murashige-Skoog medium (MS medium). Since different plants vary considerably in their tolerance to salinity, the salt concentration in the irrigation water, growth solution, or growth medium can be adjusted according to the specific characteristics of the specific plant cultivar or variety, so as to inflict a mild or moderate effect on the physiology and/or morphology of the plants (for guidelines as to appropriate concentration see, Bernstein and Kafkafi, Root Growth Under Salinity Stress In: Plant Roots, The Hidden Half 3rd ed. Waisel Y, Eshel A and Kafkafi U. (editors) Marcel Dekker Inc., New York, 2002, and reference therein). For example, a salinity tolerance test can be performed by irrigating plants at different developmental stages with increasing concentrations of sodium chloride (for example 50 mM, 100 mM, 200 mM, 400 mM NaCl) applied from the bottom and from above to ensure even dispersal of salt. Following exposure to the stress condition the plants are frequently monitored until substantial physiological and/or morphological effects appear in wild type plants. Thus, the external phenotypic

appearance, degree of wilting and overall success to reach maturity and yield progeny are compared between control and transgenic plants. Quantitative parameters of tolerance measured include, but are not limited to, the average wet and dry weight, growth rate, leaf size, leaf coverage (overall leaf area), the weight of the seeds yielded, the average seed size and the number of seeds produced per plant. Transformed plants not exhibiting substantial physiological and/or morphological effects, or exhibiting higher biomass than wild-type plants, are identified as abiotic stress tolerant plants.

Osmotic tolerance test - Osmotic stress assays (including sodium chloride and mannitol assays) are conducted to discriminate between general osmotic stress phenotype and sodium chloride-specific phenotype. Plants which are tolerant to osmotic stress may have more tolerance to drought and/or freezing. For salt and osmotic stress germination experiments, the medium is supplemented for example with 50 mM, 100 mM, 200 mM NaCl or 100 mM, 200 mM NaCl, 400 mM mannitol.

Drought tolerance assay/Osmoticum assay - Tolerance to drought is performed to identify the genes conferring better plant survival after acute water deprivation. To analyze whether the transgenic plants are more tolerant to drought, an osmotic stress produced by the non-ionic osmolyte sorbitol in the medium can be performed. Control and transgenic plants are germinated and grown in plant-agar plates for 4 days, after which they are transferred to plates containing 500 mM sorbitol. The treatment causes growth retardation, then both control and transgenic plants are compared, by measuring plant weight (wet and dry), yield, and by growth rates measured as time to flowering. Conversely, soil-based drought screens are performed with plants overexpressing the polynucleotides detailed above. Seeds from control Arabidopsis plants, or other transgenic plants overexpressing the polypeptide of the invention are germinated and transferred to pots. Drought stress is obtained after irrigation is ceased accompanied by placing the pots on absorbent paper to enhance the soil-drying rate. Transgenic and control plants are compared to each other when the majority of the control plants develop severe wilting. Plants are re-watered after obtaining a significant fraction of the control plants displaying a severe wilting. Plants are ranked comparing to controls for each of two criteria: tolerance to the drought conditions and recovery (survival) following re-watering.

Cold stress tolerance - To analyze cold stress, mature (25 day old) plants are transferred to 4 °C chambers for 1 or 2 weeks, with constitutive light. Later on plants are moved back to greenhouse. Two weeks later damages from chilling period, resulting in growth retardation and other phenotypes, are compared between both control and transgenic plants, by measuring plant weight (wet and dry), and by comparing growth rates measured as time to flowering, plant size, yield, and the like. **Heat stress tolerance**

- Heat stress tolerance is achieved by exposing the plants to temperatures above 34 °C for a certain period. Plant tolerance is examined after transferring the plants back to 22 °C for recovery and evaluation after 5 days relative to internal controls (non-transgenic plants) or plants not exposed to neither cold or heat stress.

Water use efficiency - can be determined as the biomass produced per unit transpiration. To analyze WUE, leaf relative water content can be measured in control and transgenic plants. Fresh weight (FW) is immediately recorded; then leaves are soaked for 8 hours in distilled water at room temperature in the dark, and the turgid weight (TW) is recorded. Total dry weight (DW) is recorded after drying the leaves at 60 °C to a constant weight. Relative water content (RWC) is calculated according to the following formula: $RWC = (FW - DW) / (TW - DW) \times 100$.

Fertilizer use efficiency - To analyze whether the transgenic plants are more responsive to fertilizers, plants are grown in agar plates or pots with a limited amount of fertilizer, as described, for example, in Yanagisawa et al (Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A. 2004. 101:7833-8). The plants are analyzed for their overall size, time to flowering, yield, protein content of shoot and/or grain. The parameters checked are the overall size of the mature plant, its wet and dry weight, the weight of the seeds yielded, the average seed size and the number of seeds produced per plant. Other parameters that may be tested are: the chlorophyll content of leaves (as nitrogen plant status and the degree of leaf verdure is highly correlated), amino acid and the total protein content of the seeds or other plant parts such as leaves or shoots, oil content, etc. Similarly, instead of providing nitrogen at limiting amounts, phosphate or potassium can be added at increasing concentrations. Again, the same parameters measured are the same as listed above. In this way, nitrogen use efficiency (NUE), phosphate use efficiency (PUE) and potassium use efficiency (KUE) are assessed, checking the ability of the transgenic plants to thrive under nutrient restraining conditions.

Nitrogen use efficiency - To analyze whether the transgenic Arabidopsis plants are more responsive to nitrogen, plants are grown in 0.75- 1.5 mM (nitrogen deficient conditions) or 6-10 mM (optimal nitrogen concentration). Plants are allowed to grow for additional 20 days or until seed production. The plants are then analyzed for their overall size, time to flowering, yield, protein content of shoot and/or grain/ seed production. The parameters checked can be the overall size of the plant, wet and dry weight, the weight of the seeds yielded, the average seed size and the number of seeds produced per plant. Other parameters that may be tested are: the chlorophyll content of leaves (as nitrogen plant status and the degree of leaf greenness is highly correlated), amino acid and the total protein content of the seeds or other plant parts such as leaves or shoots and oil content. Transformed plants not exhibiting substantial physiological and/or morphological effects, or exhibiting higher measured parameters levels than wild-type plants, are identified as nitrogen use efficient plants.

Nitrogen Use Efficiency assay using plantlets - The assay is done according to Yanagisawa-S. et al. with minor modifications ("Metabolic engineering with Dof1 transcription factor in plants: Improved nitrogen assimilation and growth under low-nitrogen conditions" Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA 101, 7833-7838). Briefly, transgenic plants which are grown for 7-10 days in 0.5 x MS (Murashige-Skoog) supplemented with a selection agent are transferred to two nitrogen-limiting conditions: MS media in which the combined nitrogen concentration (NH_4NO_3 and KNO_3) was 0.2 mM or 0.05 mM. Plants are allowed to grow for additional 30-40 days and then photographed, individually removed from the Agar (the shoot without the roots) and immediately weighed (fresh weight) for later statistical analysis. Constructs for which only T1 seeds are available are sown on selective media and at least 25 seedlings (each one representing an independent transformation event) are carefully transferred to the nitrogen-limiting media. For constructs for which T2 seeds are available, different transformation events are analyzed. Usually, 25 randomly selected plants from each event are transferred to the nitrogen-limiting media allowed to grow for 3-4 additional weeks and individually weighed at the end of that period. Transgenic plants are compared to control plants grown in parallel under the same conditions. Mock-transgenic plants expressing the uidA reporter gene (GUS) under the same promoter are used as control.

Nitrogen determination - The procedure for N (nitrogen) concentration determination in the structural parts of the plants involves the potassium persulfate digestion method to convert organic N to NO (Purcell and King 1996 Argon. J. 88.1 11-113, the modified Cd mediated reduction of NO₃ to NO₂ (Vodovotz 1996 Biotechniques 20:390-394) and the measurement of nitrite by the Griess assay (Vodovotz 1996, supra). The absorbance values are measured at 550 nm against a standard curve of NaNO₂. The procedure is described in details in Samonte et al. 2006 Agron. J. 98:168-176.

Germination tests - Germination tests compare the percentage of seeds from transgenic plants that could complete the germination process to the percentage of seeds from control plants that are treated in the same manner. Normal conditions are considered for example, incubations at 22 °C under 22-hour light 2-hour dark daily cycles. Evaluation of germination and seedling vigor is conducted between 4 and 14 days after planting. The basal media is 50 % MS medium (Murashige and Skoog, 1962 Plant Physiology 15, 473-497). Germination is checked also at unfavorable conditions such as cold (incubating at temperatures lower than 10 °C instead of 22 °C) or using seed inhibition solutions that contain high concentrations of an osmolyte such as sorbitol (at concentrations of 50 mM, 100 mM, 200 mM, 300 mM, 500 mM, and up to 1000 mM) or applying increasing concentrations of salt (of 50 mM, 100 mM, 200 mM, 300 mM, 500 mM NaCl). The effect of the transgene on plant's vigor, growth rate, biomass, yield and/or oil content can be determined using known methods. **Plant vigor** - The plant vigor can be calculated by the increase in growth parameters such as leaf area, fiber length, rosette diameter, plant fresh weight and the like per time.

Growth rate - The growth rate can be measured using digital analysis of growing plants. For example, images of plants growing in greenhouse on plot basis can be captured every 3 days and the rosette area can be calculated by digital analysis. Rosette area growth is calculated using the difference of rosette area between days of sampling divided by the difference in days between samples. Evaluation of growth rate can be done by measuring plant biomass produced, rosette area, leaf size or root length per time (can be measured in cm² per day of leaf area).

Relative growth rate area can be calculated using regression coefficient of area along time course (in units of 1/day).

Seed yield - Evaluation of the seed yield per plant can be done by measuring the amount (weight or size) or quantity (i.e., number) of dry seeds produced and harvested from 8-16 plants and divided by the number of plants. For example, the total seeds from 8-16 plants can be collected, weighted using e.g., an analytical balance and the total weight can be divided by the number of plants. Seed yield per growing area can be calculated in the same manner while taking into account the growing area given to a single plant. Increase seed yield per growing area could be achieved by increasing seed yield per plant, and/or by increasing number of plants capable of growing in a given area. In addition, seed yield can be determined via the weight of 1000 seeds. The weight of 1000 seeds can be determined as follows: seeds are scattered on a glass tray and a picture is taken. Each sample is weighted and then using the digital analysis, the number of seeds in each sample is calculated. The 1000 seeds weight is calculated as the number of seed in sample/ sample weight X 1000.

The Harvest Index can be calculated as the average seed yield per plant/ average dry weight.

Grain protein concentration - Grain protein content (g grain protein m⁻²) is estimated as the product of the mass of grain N (g grain N m⁻²) multiplied by the N/protein conversion ratio of k-5.13 (Mosse 1990, supra). The grain protein concentration is estimated as the ratio of grain protein content per unit mass of the grain (g grain protein kg⁻¹ grain).

Fiber length - Fiber length can be measured using fibrograph. The fibrograph system was used to compute length in terms of "Upper Half Mean" length. The upper half mean (UHM) is the average length of longer half of the fiber distribution. The fibrograph measures length in span lengths at a given percentage point (Hypertext Transfer Protocol://World Wide Web (dot) cottoninc (dot) com/ClassificationofCotton/?Pg=4#Length) .

According to some embodiments of the invention, increased yield of corn may be manifested as one or more of the following: increase in the number of plants per growing area, increase in the number of ears per plant, increase in the number of rows per ear, number of kernels per ear row, kernel weight, thousand kernel weight (1000-weight), ear length/diameter, increase oil content per kernel and increase starch content per kernel.

As mentioned, the increase of plant yield can be determined by various parameters. For example, increased yield of rice may be manifested by an increase in one or more of the following: number of plants per growing area, number of panicles per plant, number of spikelets per panicle, number of flowers per panicle, increase in the seed filling rate, increase in thousand kernel weight (1000-weight), increase oil content per seed, increase starch content per seed, among others. An increase in yield may also result in modified architecture, or may occur because of modified architecture.

Similarly, increased yield of soybean may be manifested by an increase in one or more of the following: number of plants per growing area, number of pods per plant, number of seeds per pod, increase in the seed filling rate, increase in thousand seed weight (1000-weight), reduce pod shattering, increase oil content per seed, increase protein content per seed, among others. An increase in yield may also result in modified architecture, or may occur because of modified architecture.

Increased yield of canola may be manifested by an increase in one or more of the following: number of plants per growing area, number of pods per plant, number of seeds per pod, increase in the seed filling rate, increase in thousand seed weight (1000-weight), reduce pod shattering, increase oil content per seed, among others. An increase in yield may also result in modified architecture, or may occur because of modified architecture.

Increased yield of cotton may be manifested by an increase in one or more of the following: number of plants per growing area, number of bolls per plant, number of seeds per boll, increase in the seed filling rate, increase in thousand seed weight (1000-weight), increase oil content per seed, improve fiber length, fiber strength, among others. An increase in yield may also result in modified architecture, or may occur because of modified architecture.

Oil content - The oil content of a plant can be determined by extraction of the oil from the seed or the vegetative portion of the plant. Briefly, lipids (oil) can be removed from the plant (e.g., seed) by grinding the plant tissue in the presence of specific solvents (e.g., hexane or petroleum ether) and extracting the oil in a continuous extractor. Indirect oil content analysis can be carried out using various known methods such as Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (NMR) Spectroscopy, which measures the resonance energy absorbed by hydrogen atoms in the liquid state of the sample [See for example, Conway

TF. and Earle FR., 1963, Journal of the American Oil Chemists' Society; Springer Berlin / Heidelberg, ISSN: 0003-021X (Print) 1558-9331 (Online)]; the Near Infrared (NI) Spectroscopy, which utilizes the absorption of near infrared energy (1100-2500 nm) by the sample; and a method described in WO/2001/023884, which is based on extracting
5 oil a solvent, evaporating the solvent in a gas stream which forms oil particles, and directing a light into the gas stream and oil particles which forms a detectable reflected light.

Thus, the present invention is of high agricultural value for promoting the yield of commercially desired crops (e.g., biomass of vegetative organ such as poplar wood,
10 or reproductive organ such as number of seeds or seed biomass).

Any of the transgenic plants described hereinabove or parts thereof may be processed to produce a feed, meal, protein or oil preparation, such as for ruminant animals.

The transgenic plants described hereinabove, which exhibit an increased oil
15 content can be used to produce plant oil (by extracting the oil from the plant).

The plant oil (including the seed oil and/or the vegetative portion oil) produced according to the method of the invention may be combined with a variety of other ingredients. The specific ingredients included in a product are determined according to the intended use. Exemplary products include animal feed, raw material for chemical
20 modification, biodegradable plastic, blended food product, edible oil, biofuel, cooking oil, lubricant, biodiesel, snack food, cosmetics, and fermentation process raw material.

Exemplary products to be incorporated to the plant oil include animal feeds, human food products such as extruded snack foods, breads, as a food binding agent, aquaculture feeds, fermentable mixtures, food supplements, sport drinks, nutritional food
25 bars, multi-vitamin supplements, diet drinks, and cereal foods.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the oil comprises a seed oil.

According to some embodiments of the invention, the oil comprises a vegetative portion oil.

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As used herein the term "about" refers to $\pm 10\%$.

The terms "comprises", "comprising", "includes", "including", "having" and their conjugates mean "including but not limited to".

The term "consisting of means" "including and limited to".

The term "consisting essentially of" means that the composition, method or structure may include additional ingredients, steps and/or parts, but only if the additional ingredients, steps and/or parts do not materially alter the basic and novel characteristics of the claimed composition, method or structure.

As used herein, the singular form "a", "an" and "the" include plural references unless the context clearly dictates otherwise. For example, the term "a compound" or "at least one compound" may include a plurality of compounds, including mixtures thereof.

Throughout this application, various embodiments of this invention may be presented in a range format. It should be understood that the description in range format is merely for convenience and brevity and should not be construed as an inflexible limitation on the scope of the invention. Accordingly, the description of a range should be considered to have specifically disclosed all the possible subranges as well as individual numerical values within that range. For example, description of a range such as from 1 to 6 should be considered to have specifically disclosed subranges such as from 1 to 3, from 1 to 4, from 1 to 5, from 2 to 4, from 2 to 6, from 3 to 6 etc., as well as individual numbers within that range, for example, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. This applies regardless of the breadth of the range.

Whenever a numerical range is indicated herein, it is meant to include any cited numeral (fractional or integral) within the indicated range. The phrases "ranging/ranges between" a first indicate number and a second indicate number and "ranging/ranges from" a first indicate number "to" a second indicate number are used herein interchangeably and are meant to include the first and second indicated numbers and all the fractional and integral numerals therebetween.

As used herein the term "method" refers to manners, means, techniques and procedures for accomplishing a given task including, but not limited to, those manners, means, techniques and procedures either known to, or readily developed from known manners, means, techniques and procedures by practitioners of the chemical, pharmacological, biological, biochemical and medical arts.

As used herein, the term "treating" includes abrogating, substantially inhibiting, slowing or reversing the progression of a condition, substantially ameliorating clinical or aesthetical symptoms of a condition or substantially preventing the appearance of clinical or aesthetical symptoms of a condition.

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It is appreciated that certain features of the invention, which are, for clarity, described in the context of separate embodiments, may also be provided in combination in a single embodiment. Conversely, various features of the invention, which are, for brevity, described in the context of a single embodiment, may also be provided separately or in any suitable subcombination or as suitable in any other described embodiment of the invention. Certain features described in the context of various embodiments are not to be considered essential features of those embodiments, unless the embodiment is inoperative without those elements.

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Various embodiments and aspects of the present invention as delineated hereinabove and as claimed in the claims section below find experimental support in the following examples.

15

EXAMPLES

Reference is now made to the following examples, which together with the above descriptions illustrate some embodiments of the invention in a non limiting fashion.

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Generally, the nomenclature used herein and the laboratory procedures utilized in the present invention include molecular, biochemical, microbiological and recombinant DNA techniques. Such techniques are thoroughly explained in the literature. See, for example, "Molecular Cloning: A laboratory Manual" Sambrook et al, (1989); "Current Protocols in Molecular Biology" Volumes I-III Ausubel, R. M., ed. (1994); Ausubel et al, "Current Protocols in Molecular Biology", John Wiley and Sons, Baltimore, Maryland (1989); Perbal, "A Practical Guide to Molecular Cloning", John Wiley & Sons, New York (1988); Watson et al, "Recombinant DNA", Scientific American Books, New York; Birren et al. (eds) "Genome Analysis: A Laboratory Manual Series", Vols. 1-4, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, New York (1998); methodologies as set forth in U.S. Pat. Nos. 4,666,828; 4,683,202; 4,801,531; 5,192,659 and 5,272,057; "Cell Biology: A Laboratory Handbook", Volumes I-III Cellis, J. E., ed.

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(1994); "Current Protocols in Immunology" Volumes I-III Coligan J. E., ed. (1994); Stites et al. (eds), "Basic and Clinical Immunology" (8th Edition), Appleton & Lange, Norwalk, CT (1994); Mishell and Shiigi (eds), "Selected Methods in Cellular Immunology", W. H. Freeman and Co., New York (1980); available immunoassays are extensively described in the patent and scientific literature, see, for example, U.S. Pat. Nos. 3,791,932; 3,839,153; 3,850,752; 3,850,578; 3,853,987; 3,867,517; 3,879,262; 3,901,654; 3,935,074; 3,984,533; 3,996,345; 4,034,074; 4,098,876; 4,879,219; 5,011,771 and 5,281,521; "Oligonucleotide Synthesis" Gait, M. J., ed. (1984); "Nucleic Acid Hybridization" Hames, B. D., and Higgins S. J., eds. (1985); "Transcription and Translation" Hames, B. D., and Higgins S. J., Eds. (1984); "Animal Cell Culture" Freshney, R. I., ed. (1986); "Immobilized Cells and Enzymes" IRL Press, (1986); "A Practical Guide to Molecular Cloning" Perbal, B., (1984) and "Methods in Enzymology" Vol. 1-317, Academic Press; "PCR Protocols: A Guide To Methods And Applications", Academic Press, San Diego, CA (1990); Marshak et al, "Strategies for Protein Purification and Characterization - A Laboratory Course Manual" CSHL Press (1996); all of which are incorporated by reference as if fully set forth herein. Other general references are provided throughout this document. The procedures therein are believed to be well known in the art and are provided for the convenience of the reader. All the information contained therein is incorporated herein by reference.

GENERAL MATERIALS AND EXPERIMENTAL METHODS

Construct preparation - The Metallothionein promoter was extracted from *Arabidopsis* genomic DNA using PCR with specific primers for the sequence between the 3' UTR of the previous gene and the 5' UTR of the Metallothionein gene resulting in an 1169 bp long fragment: 5'-GACGATGTTTCTGTGATTGTGATTTTC-3' (SEQ ID NO:669) and 5'-ATTTTCTCGAGAAAATTCAAATTGAAG-3' (SEQ ID NO:670). The promoter was cloned into pGEM plasmid (promega) using normal conditions. The promoter was then cut out and inserted into pBluescript plasmid (Stratagene) using *SmaI*+*PstI*, and then inserted in pJHA212K [Yoo, S. Y., Bomblies, K., Yoo, S.K., Yang, J.W., Choi, M.S., Lee, J.S., Weigel, D., Ahn, J.H. (2005). "The 35S promoter used in a selectable marker gene of a plant transformation vector affects the expression of the transgene." *Planta* 221: 523-530] containing the NOS 3' terminator, using *Bam*HI +

Acc65. Isolation of the IPT gene from pCambia SARK-IPT (Rivera et al. 2007) and addition of a *Bgl*II site was done using PCR with a hi proofreading enzyme- SAWADY Pow DNA Polymerase, with specific primers adding the restriction site on the 5'-gaagatctttctctaataaaaaatcag-3' (SEQ ID NO:671) and 5'-TCTGATCTGAACATGTTATCCAG-3' * (SEQ ID NO:672). The product was cut with *Bgl*II and inserted to the pJHA212K- MT promoter- NOS3' plasmid between the promoter and terminator after cutting it with *Bgl*II+ *Sma*I. The binary plasmid was transformed into *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* using electroporation.

Transformation into Arabidopsis plants - Single colony of *A. tumefaciens* was grown in 5 ml LB containing antibiotics suitable for plasmid resistance at 30°C over two nights. 1 ml of the starter was added to 0.5 liter of LB containing the same antibiotics, and grown over night at 30°C until O.D. measurements showed $O.D_{600} > 2$. The medium was divided into two 250 ml tubes that were centrifuged in Sorvall centrifuge at the velocity of 6000 rpm for 20 minutes. The bacterial pellet were re-suspended with 500 ml transformation medium. 200 µl silwet (Catalogue number L-77, Setre Chemical Company, Memphis, TN, USA) and 44 µl benzylaminopurine (from 0.5 mM stock) were added to the 500 ml transformation buffer.

Arabidopsis plants at the age of 4-6 weeks, with blossoms at the first developmental stages were used for transformation. The *Agrobacterium* re-suspension was placed into glass jars, the flowers of the Arabidopsis plants were placed in the medium. Each plant was transformed for 5 minutes, and was then placed horizontally in a tray. The trays were covered with plastic bags to preserve the humidity, and placed in the growth room. The next day, the plastic bags were removed and the plants were placed vertically. The seeds were collected after maturation.

Transformation into tobacco plants - Single colony of *A. tumefaciens* was grown in 5 ml LB containing antibiotics suitable for plasmid resistance at 30°C over two nights. 10 µl, 20 µl and 50 µl from the *A. tumefaciens* culture were transferred to 50 ml YEB (Yeast Extract Broth; consists of 1.5 gr Yeast extract, 4 gr Bacto Peptone, 20 gr Sucrose, 0.5 gr $MgSO_4$ in water for a 1000 ml solution) without antibiotics and were grown in a 250 ml Erlenmeyer overnight at 30°C. Leaves from 4-8 week old tobacco plants, grown on 1/2 MS (Murashige and skoog) were cut into 1 centimeter square pieces; their bottom side grooved with a scalpel and placed up-side down on

PET medium [consists of: MSO (4.3 gr MS salt 30 gr sucrose, 0.5 MES salt, 10 gr agar), 0.5 mg/l 2-4-Dichlorophenoxyacetic acid, 0.25 mg/l Kinetin) at 25 °C. The next day, a final concentration of 375 µM acetosyringone was added to 25 ml of the *A. tumefaciens* culture that arrived at O.D.₆₀₀ = 0.4-0.8, and poured to Petri dish. The leaf pieces were dipped in the *A. tumefaciens* culture for 1 minute, blot dry on filter paper and were returned to the PET medium for 48 hours.

The leaf pieces were further transferred to RS medium (consists of: MSO, 2 mg/l Zeatin, 0.1 mg/l IAA, 100 mg/l Kan, 200 mg/l carb) containing the appropriate antibiotics at 25 °C. The pieces were transferred into new RS medium every two weeks until callus formation. Big calluses with small shoots were transferred to LZ medium (consists of: MSO, 0.2 mg/l Zeatin, 0.1 mg/l IAA, 100 mg/l Kan, 200 mg/l carb). The plantlets were subcultured every two weeks. Large plantlets with 3-5 leaves were transferred to selective rooting medium (medium consists of MSO medium+ 0.02 mg/l IBA 100 mg/l KAN 200mg/l Carb) containing antibiotics. After root formation, the plants were transferred to water soaked peat pellets (Jiffy 7, Kappa Forenade Well).

Transformation into Tomato plants - 10-14 days after seed germination, the apical tips of the tomato seedling were cut off and the cotyledons were excised and placed in D1 medium [D1 medium composition for preparation of 1 liter, pH 5.8: 4.3 g MS salt, 30 g sucrose, 5 ml B5 Vitamins, 6 g agar, 1 ml zeatin (1 mg/ml), 100 µl IAA (1 mg/ml), 500 mg Carbenicillin] without antibiotics and incubated for 24-48 hours in the dark at 26 °C. For the transformation, *Agrobacterium* culture which includes the construct was poured over the cotyledons and incubated for two days at 26 °C at 16 hour light/8 hours dark, following which the cotyledons were transferred to D1 medium [D1 medium composition for preparation of 1 liter, pH 5.8: 4.3 g MS salt, 30 g sucrose, 5 ml B5 Vitamins, 6 g agar, 1 ml zeatin (1 mg/ml), 100 µl IAA (1 mg/ml), 500 mg Carbenicillin, 10 mg Kanamycin) and incubated for 3 weeks. The cotyledons were then transferred to Petri plates containing D2 medium for shoot organogenesis, and after another 3 weeks, the calluses that were formed, were transferred to a new D2 containing Petri dish. When shoots with true meristems arose, they were transferred to RO-D [rooting media; RO-D medium composition for 1 liter, pH 5.8: 4.3 g MS salt, 15 g sucrose, 5 ml B5 Vitamins, 6 g agar, 20 µl IBA (1 mg/ml), 500 mg Carbenicillin and

100 mg Kanamycin], and after root formation, the plants were transferred to water soaked peat pellets (Jiffy 7, Kappa Forenade Well).

Growth conditions of transgenic and wild type plants - Wild type (WT) and M-IPT transgenic tobacco plants (transgenic plants transformed to express the nucleic acid construct which comprises the metallothionein promoter fused to the IPT coding sequence) were grown with limited amount of water: 400, 200 and 100 ml. 400 ml water treatment is the optimal amount of water for plant growth in this experiment. Thus, the 200 and 100 ml watering treatments were 50% and 25% (respectively) of optimal watering conditions and simulated drought. Samples were taken from the plants every two weeks and RNA was extracted.

EXAMPLE 1

TRANSGENIC PLANTS EXPRESSING IPT UNDER THE METALLOTHIONEIN PROMOTER EXHIBIT INCREASED TOLERANCE TO DROUGHT STRESS AND INCREASED BIOMASS

In a large scale gene identification study the expression level of a metallothionein (a protein involved in plant resistance to metals) was found to increase during senescence of Arabidopsis plants (Gepstein, S., Sabehi, G., Carp, M.J., Hajouj, T., Falah, M., Nesher, O., Yariv, I., Dor, C. and Bassani, M. (2003). "Large scale identification of leaf senescence associated genes." The plant journal 36: 629-642).

In order to create plants with auto-regulated cytokinin level during stress, the metallothionein promoter of the MT2a type (At3g09390) was fused to the IPT gene and transformed to tobacco plants.

The chimeric construct which comprises the metallothionein promoter fused upstream of the IPT coding sequence and followed by the NOS terminator was prepared as described under "General Materials and Experimental Methods" and in Figures 1 and 2.

Experimental Results

Upregulation of M-IPT expression levels in transgenic plants grown under drought conditions - The expression of IPT was examined in the transgenic plants under the different water regimes, and was found to be higher in the plants grown with limited amounts (100 and 200 ml) of water (Figure 3). The expression seemed to increase as the

plants grew older, but still remained highest in plants undergoing severe drought stress. These results indicate up-regulation of IPT expression level under drought stress. In addition, as shown in Figures 5A-C, the chlorophyll content of the stress-induced plants was higher than the plants grown with optimal watering, indicating cytokinin's (CK's) role in delaying senescence in these plants.

M-IPT transgenic plants exhibit a significantly less reduction in the number of leaves per plant due to drought stress as compared to wild type plants - After two months of growth, the fresh leaf biomass was analyzed, weighed and morphological parameters including for example, height and number of leaves of the plants, were measured. The height was equally affected by drought in WT and M-IPT transgenic plants. The 50% watering treatment resulted in 20-25% decrease in height, while the 25% watering treatment resulted in about 55% decrease in plant's height (Figure 4A). Despite the similarity in the plants height, the number of leaves was reduced in WT plants in the 50% and 25% treatments, by 7% and 20%, respectively, as opposed to the transgenic plants that were not affected at the 50% treatment and were only slightly reduced by 6-12% in the 25% watering treatment (Figure 4B).

M-IPT transgenic plants exhibit a significantly less reduction in biomass due to drought stress as compared to wild type plants - In agreement with the reduction in the number of leaves, the biomass (as expressed by fresh weight) of WT plants was significantly reduced in drought conditions. In the treatment of 50% water supply, the biomass declined by 20% and in the 25% water supply, the biomass declined by 51%. Surprisingly, the biomass of the transgenic plants was not reduced, even under 50% less water (Figure 4C). Furthermore, the fresh weight slightly increased in this treatment by 2-8% (Figure 4C). On the other hand, the fresh weight of the 25% watering treatment was severely affected and a decrease of 45-49% (lines pM-IPT 7, 8 respectively) was observed in these plants (Figure 4C). These results further suggest a high resistance to drought conferred by the enhanced level of IPT in the transgenic plants as compared to control plants (wild type plant) not transformed by the biomolecules of some embodiments of the invention when grown under the same conditions.

M-IPT transgenic plants maintain higher chlorophyll levels under drought conditions as compared to wild type plants - As shown in Figures 5A-C while following 4 months the wild type plants started to senesce in all three water regimes, as

demonstrated by the reduction in chlorophyll content, the transgenic plants maintained a higher chlorophyll level especially in the plants that were watered with limited amounts.

The root size of M-IPT transgenic plants is not affected by water regimes - The plant's roots were extracted from the soil and cleaned from soil remnants as best as possible. The weight was not examined since the weight is still affected by the remained soil, but the differences in the root size are clearly seen. While in WT plants there is a clear gradation in the size of the roots and as the amount of watering increases, the root size increases respectively, in the transgenic plants the size of the roots is not correlated to the amount of watering, but rather is highest in the 200 ml treatment where the general biomass was also found to be highest (Figures 6A-C).

Seed yield of M-IPT transgenic plants is highest at 50% water regimes as compared to seed yield of WT plants which is highest at 100% water regime - The shoots and flowers were left to grow for another month (after biomass was collected) to allow the seeds to mature and dry out. The dried seeds were weighed and compared in the different water regimes (Figure 7). The highest yield of WT plants was observed under the 400 ml treatment and was reduced by 15% and 60% respectively in the restricted water supply conditions (200 ml and 100 ml treatments, respectively). The highest yield of the transgenic plants was found in the 200 ml treatment with a 20% increase relative to the 400 ml treatment. The yield of the 100 ml treatment was also reduced but only by 30-40% (as oppose to 60% in the WT plants), in spite of the fact that the biomass of the 100 ml treatment was reduced by 50% in both the transgenic and WT plants.

M-IPT transgenic plants recover well from long term drought as compared to wild type plants - The drought tolerance of pM-IPT tobacco was further examined in long-term drought. Watering of mature WT and pM-IPT plants was stopped for two weeks. Following this period, plants were re-watered for 1 week. pM-IPT plants recovered well from this stress, as opposed to only 30% recovery in the WT plants (Figures 8A-D). The leaf biomass of the plants was harvested one week after re-watering, weighed and compared to plants grown under optimal watering conditions. The biomass (as expressed by fresh weight) of WT plants that were exposed to drought stress was -60% lower than the biomass of plants grown under optimal water regimes

(Figure 9). On the other hand in the pM-IPT plants, the biomass decreased by only 10%-30% (lines 8 and 7 respectfully) in the plants under drought stress (Figure 9).

EXAMPLE 2

5 **TRANSGENIC PLANTS EXPRESSING IPT UNDER THE METALLOTHIONEIN PROMOTER EXHIBIT INCREASED TOLERANCE TO HEAT STRESS, COLD STRESS, HIGH SALINITY AND OSMOTIC STRESS**

Experimental Results

To test the effect of the M-IPT transgene on additional abiotic stresses, three
10 week old tobacco plants were subjected with the following stress treatments: high
salinity, osmotic stress, heat and low temperature.

***M-IPT transgenic plants exhibit increased tolerance and resistance to heat
stress as compared to wild type plants*** - Plants were treated with heat stress by growing
the plants for 1 week at a temperature of 37 °C, following by transferring the plants to
15 room temperature conditions (24 °C) for recovery. The plants growth was severely
affected by this stress and only 40% of the plants survived after one week of heat
treatment. During the recovery of the remaining plants, there were noticeable differences
between the plants: WT plants remained small and although they did not die, their
growth was greatly reduced. However, the recovery of the transgenic plants was faster
20 and they grew better than the WT plants (Figures 10A-D).

***M-IPT transgenic plants exhibit increased tolerance and resistance to cold
stress as compared to wild type plants*** - Plants were subjected to low temperatures by
growing the plants at 4 °C for 1 week and then were transferred to room temperature
conditions (24 °C) for recovery. The growth of plants was delayed during the period at 4
25 °C, but all plants made a full recovery when transferred back to 24 °C, and their size was
only slightly delayed compared to plants grown in normal conditions. Although the size
of the M-IPT and WT plants was similar after one and two weeks of recovery, the M-
IPT plant grew at a faster rate after three weeks of recovery and a significant difference
can be seen especially after 4 weeks of recovery from the cold treatment (Figures 11A-
30 D).

***M-IPT transgenic plants exhibit increased tolerance and resistance to salt
stress as compared to wild type plants*** - Plants were subjected to high salinity by

watering the plant with a 300 mM NaCl solution for 3 weeks, following which the plants were watered with tap water for recovery. The growth of all plants, under the salt treatment was reduced, although the transgenic plants grew better than the WT plants. The recovery of M-IPT plants from the salt stress was extremely fast, and the development and biomass of the transgenic plants was improved. In contrast, the WT grew much slower and did not seem to recover as well (Figures 12A-D).

M-IPT transgenic plants exhibit increased tolerance and resistance to osmotic stress as compared to wild type plants - Plants were watered with a 20% PEG 6000 solution for 3 weeks, and were then watered with tap water for recovery. The PEG treatment was extremely severe on all plants. While WT plants did not grow at all during these 3 weeks the transgenic plants grew only slightly and showed extreme stress symptoms. After recovery none of the WT plants were able to survive. On the other hand, the M-IPT plants did survive but yet did not display full recovery after two weeks of regular watering (Figures 13A-C).

The behavior of the plants in the four abiotic stresses examined was different throughout the stress and the recovery. In spite of these differences, after recovery, plants of all four stresses showed significant differences in the plant growth between the transgenic M-IPT plants and WT plants (Figures 14A-C), suggesting the M-IPT plants exhibit enhanced tolerance to different stress conditions.

Analysis and Discussion

As often found in nature, a combination of abiotic stresses affects plants, and numerous stresses act simultaneously (Mittler, 2006). In desert regions, plants often encounter drought stress that is accompanied with salinity stress, high temperature during the day and low temperatures in the night. For this reason plants that exhibit resistance against multi-abiotic stresses are advantageous.

The M-IPT transgenic plants described herein exhibit enhanced tolerance and resistance to a number of different stress conditions and are therefore useful for multiple agricultural uses.

EXAMPLE 3**TRANSGENIC PLANTS OVER-EXPRESSING IPT UNDER A STRESS RELATED PROMOTER EXHIBIT INCREASED YIELD AND CHLOROPHYLL CONTENT**

As shown in Figure 16 the M-IPT7 and M-IPT8 transgenic plants have 20% higher yield than the WT plants when grown under optimal conditions and 50% higher yield in drought. The senescence is also delayed in the transgenic plant when grown under optimal conditions and therefore the chlorophyll content is higher in mature plants.

EXAMPLE 4**CORE SEQUENCES OBSERVED IN PROMOTER REGIONS OF GENES UPREGULATED UNDER VARIOUS STRESSES**

The present inventors have identified core sequences of stress-related regulatory sequences present in promoters of genes which are upregulated under various stresses such as drought, cold and high-salinity stresses.

ABRE (ABA response element) - PyACGTG(T/G)C (SEQ ID NO:2). Examples include, but are not limited to TACGTGTC (SEQ ID NO:3), CACGTGGC (SEQ ID NO:4).

DRE (dehydration response element) - TACCGACAT (SEQ ID NO:5).

CCGAC Core Motif- CCGAC (SEQ ID NO:6).

Table 1, below, provides non-limiting examples of conserved cis elements which are present in stress-related promoters are provided in Table 1, below.

Table 1
cis-Acting regulatory elements in osmotic- and cold-stress-responsive gene expression

<i>Cis element</i>	<i>Sequence</i>	<i>SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Type of transcription factors that bind to the cis element</i>	<i>Gene Symbol of the gene including the cis element</i>	<i>SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Stress condition</i>
ABRE	PyACGTG GC	7	bZIP	Em, RAB16		Water deficit, ABA
CE1	TGCCACCGG	8	ERF/AP2	HVA1		ABA

<i>Cis element</i>	<i>Sequence</i>	<i>SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Type of transcription factors that bind to the cis element</i>	<i>Gene Symbol of the gene including the cis element</i>	<i>SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Stress condition</i>
CE3	ACGCGT GCCTC	9	Not known	HVA22		ABA
ABRE	ACGTGTC	10	bZIP	Osem		ABA
ABRE	ACGTGG C (SEQ ID NO:14) ACGTGTC (SEQ ID NO:11)	14, 11	bZIP	RD29B		Water deficit, ABA
MYB R	TGGTTAG	12	MYB	RD22		Water deficit, ABA
MYC R	CACATG	13	bHLH	RD22		Water deficit, ABA
DRE	TACCGAC AT	5	ERF/AP2	RD29A		Water deficit, cold
CRT	GGCCGA CAT	15	ERF/AP2	Cor15A		Cold
LTRE	GGCCGA CGT	16	ERF/AP2	BN115		Cold
NACR	ACACGC ATGT	17	NAC	ERD1		Water deficit
ZFHD R	Not yet reported		ZFHD	ERD1		Water deficit
ICEr1	GGACAC ATGTCAG A	18	Not known	CBF2/DRE B1C		Cold
ICEr2	ACTCCG	19	Not known	CBF2/DRE B1C		Cold

Table 1.

EXAMPLE 5**STRESS-RELATED PROMOTERS**

- 5 Identification of stress related promoter sequences was performed using known bioinformatics tools. Genes which are known to be expressed under various stresses were found using the following references: Sottosanto et al. (2004), DNA array analyses of *Arabidopsis thaliana* lacking a vacuolar Na⁺/H⁺ antiporter: impact of AtNHX1 on gene expression, *Plant Journal* 40,752-771); Kreps et al. (2002), Transcriptome Changes
- 10 for *Arabidopsis* in Response to Salt, Osmotic, and Cold Stress. *Plant Physiol*, December

2002, Vol. 130, pp. 2129-2141; Rossel et al. (2002), Global Changes in Gene Expression in Response to High Light in Arabidopsis, Plant Physiol, November 2002, Vol. 130, pp. 1109-1120; Vogel et al. (2005), Roles of the CBF2 and ZAT12 transcription factors in configuring the low temperature transcriptome of Arabidopsis, Plant J. 2005 Jan;41(2):195-211; Matsui et al. (2008), Arabidopsis Transcriptome Analysis under Drought, Cold, High-Salinity and ABA Treatment Conditions using a Tiling Array, Plant and Cell Physiology 2008 49(8):1135-1149; Seki et al. (2001), Monitoring the Expression Pattern of 1300 Arabidopsis Genes under Drought and Cold Stresses by Using a Full-Length cDNA Microarray, Plant Cell. 2001 Jan;13(1):61-72; Seki et al. (2002), Monitoring the expression profiles of 7000 Arabidopsis genes under drought, cold and high-salinity stresses using a full-length cDNA microarray, Plant J. 2002 Aug;31(3):279-92; and Yamaguchi-Shinozaki and Shinozaki (2005), Organization of cis-acting regulatory elements in osmotic- and cold-stress-responsive promoters, Trends in Plant Science 10, 88-94.

The regulatory sequences of these genes were identified as described using the AGRIS (Arabidopsis Gene Regulatory Information Server) which contains two databases, AtTFDB (*Arabidopsis thaliana* transcription factor database) and AtcisDB (*Arabidopsis thaliana* cis-regulatory database) and is described in Davuluri RV., Sun H., et al., 2003 [AGRIS: Arabidopsis Gene Regulatory Information Server, an information resource of Arabidopsis cis-regulatory elements and transcription factors] which is fully incorporated herein by reference. The AGRIS database includes sequences which are located upstream of the translation start site (ATG) of the annotated coding sequences. The upstream sequences include 3000 nucleotides or less. Briefly, the fasta file 'TAIR9_upstream_3000_translation_start_20090619' was downloaded from the Arabidopsis Information Resource (TAIR) database [Hypertext Transfer Protocol://World Wide Web (dot) arabidopsis (dot) org] and relevant sequences extracted according to the gene list produced above using R environment ("R Development Core Team (2010). R: A language and environment for statistical computing. R Foundation for Statistical Computing, Vienna, Austria. ISBN 3-900051-07-0, Hypertext Transfer Protocol://World Wide Web (dot) R-project (dot) org").

Table 2, below, provides a non-limiting list of genes of *Arabidopsis Thaliana* which are upregulated during various stresses (salt stress, cold stress and drought stress), along with the promoter sequences of the indicated stress related genes.

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Table 2
Salt, cold and drought related promoters

<i>Salt stress gene</i>	<i>Salt stress-related promoter SEQID NO:</i>	<i>Cold stress gene</i>	<i>Cold stress-related promoters SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Drought stress gene</i>	<i>Drought stress-related promoters SEQ ID NO:</i>
		Metabolism		Transcription factor	
Atlg74810	20	Atlg62570	267	AT1G06180.1	55
At3g 12520	21	At3g55610	268	AT1G18710.1	454
At3g59030	22	At4g29510	269	AT1G22640.1	56
Atlg08230	23	At5g 15950	270	AT1G74080.1	58
At2g47800	24	Atlg09350	237	AT2G 16720.1	59
At3g53210	25	At2g22190	271	AT2G47 190.1	60
Atlg66760	26	At2g47180	272	AT3G06490.1	61
At2g 16660	27	At3gl7130	273	AT3G09370.1	62
Atlg68570	28	At4g 17090	274	AT3G23250.1	63
At5g02270	29	At4g23920	275	AT3G47600.1	65
At5g65990	30	At4g31 140	276	AT4G05 100.1	68
At5gl4610	31	At4g39800	277	AT4G2 1440.1	69
At2g07734	32	AtSgl 1110	278	AT4G28 110.1	405
At5g09500	33	At5g20830	279	AT4G34990.1	70
At2g27760	34	At5g40390	280	AT5G02320.1	73
At2g40100	35	At2g 19450	281	AT5G04760.1	74
Atlg23020	36	At2g24560	282	AT5G06 100.1	75
Atlg50950	37	At4gl5130	283	AT5G17300.1	77
At4g 11600	38	At4g34650	284	AT5G27610.1	455
At3g03180	39	At3g 12670	285	AT5G37260.1	78
At2g23000	40	At4g34740	286	AT5G52660.1	456
At5g65930	41	Atlg01420	287	AT5G54230.1	457
At5g65370	42	Atlg09240	288	AT5G62470.1	458
At4g04670	43	At2g 16890	289	AT5G67300.1	459
At2g24640	44	At3g 14440	290	AT1G12610.1	79
At3g55150	45	At3g 14690	291	AT1G22 190.1	80
At4g33090	46	At3g53260	292	AT1G22810.1	81
At5g59320	47	At4g 11280	293	AT1G43 160.1	82
At5g09530	48	At4g27570	294	AT1G53910.1	83

<i>Salt stress gene</i>	<i>Salt stress-related promoter SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Cold stress gene</i>	<i>Cold stress-related promoters SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Drought stress gene</i>	<i>Drought stress-related promoters SEQ ID NO:</i>
At4g 16590	49	At4g37320	295	AT1G63030.1	84
Atlg02205	50	At5g 17030	296	AT1G64380.1	85
At3g23670	51	At5g45340	297	AT1G71520.1	86
Atlg26770	52	Transcription		AT1G74930.1	87
Atlgl5570	53	At3g44750	298	AT1G78080.1	89
Atlg48750	54	Atlgl3260	299	AT1G79700.1	90
Transcription factor		Atlgl4580	300	AT2G20880.1	91
AT1G06180.1	55	Atlg21910	301	AT2G38340.1	92
AT1G22640.1	56	Atlg26790	302	AT2G40340.1	93
AT1G72650.1	57	Atlg27730	303	AT3G11020.1	95
AT1G74080.1	58	Atlg46768	304	AT3G15210.1	96
AT2G16720.1	59	Atlg49720	305	AT3G50260.1	97
AT2G47190.1	60	Atlg69570	306	AT3G57600.1	98
AT3G06490.1	61	Atlg76580	307	AT3G61630.1	99
AT3G09370.1	62	Atlg80840	308	AT4G25470.1	322
AT3G23250.1	63	At2g21320	309	AT4G25490.1	410
AT3G30210.1	64	At2g24500	310	AT4G28140.1	460
AT3G47600.1	65	At2g38470	311	AT4G34410.1	461
AT3G50060.1	66	At2g40140	312	AT5G05410.1	462
AT4G01280.1	67	At2g45660	313	AT5G51990.1	463
AT4G05100.1	68	At2g46830	314	AT5G64750.1	413
AT4G21440.1	69	At2g47890	315	AT1G09530.1	102
AT4G34990.1	70	At3g48100	316	AT1G32640.1	103
AT4G37260.1	71	At3g55580	317	AT1G51140.1	104
AT5G01200.1	72	At3g55980	318	AT2G46510.1	110

<i>Salt stress gene</i>	<i>Salt stress-related promoter SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Cold stress gene</i>	<i>Cold stress-related promoters SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Drought stress gene</i>	<i>Drought stress-related promoters SEQ ID NO:</i>
AT5G02320.1	73	At4g01250	319	AT3G22 100.1	112
AT5G04760.1	74	At4g 17490	320	AT5G43650.1	117
AT5G06100.1	75	At4g 18390	321	Protein kinase	
AT5G08520.1	76	At4g25470	322	ATI G482 10.1	118
AT5G17300.1	77	At4g25480	323	AT3G59350.1	120
AT5G37260.1	78	At4g29190	324	AT1G07870.1	121
AT1G12610.1	79	At4g31800	325	AT1G69790.1	122
AT1G22190.1	80	At4g32280	326	AT3G09830.1	125
AT1G22810.1	81	At4g34990	70	AT1G16130.1	131
AT1G43160.1	82	At4g37260	71	AT1G79680.1	133
AT1G53910.1	83	At5g04340	327	AT2G23450.1	134
AT1G63030.1	84	At5g 16040	328	AT5G66790.1	135
AT1G64380.1	85	At5g24470	329	AT4G2 1390.1	140
ATI G7 1520.1	86	At5g47230	330	AT4G23 190.1	142
AT1G74930.1	87	At5g48250	331	AT4G23220.1	143
AT1G75490.1	88	At5g51 190	332	AT2G19190.1	144
AT1G78080.1	89	At5g54470	333	AT4G32300.1	147
AT1G79700.1	90	At5g57660	334	AT5G24080.1	464
AT2G20880.1	91	At5g61600	335	AT3G53810.1	148
AT2G38340.1	92	RNA processing and translation		AT3G59700.1	149
AT2G40340.1	93	At2g03820	336	AT4G02410.1	465
AT2G46310.1	94	At3g 18600	337	AT4G04960.1	150
AT3G1 1020.1	95	At4g 16630	338	AT5G0 1540.1	466

<i>Salt stress gene</i>	<i>Salt stress-related promoter SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Cold stress gene</i>	<i>Cold stress-related promoters SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Drought stress gene</i>	<i>Drought stress-related promoters SEQ ID NO:</i>
AT3G15210.1	96	At4g25630	339	AT5G01550.1	151
AT3G50260.1	97	At4g34910	340	AT5G65600.1	467
AT3G57600.1	98	At5g27120	341	AT1G69270.1	155
AT3G61630.1	99	At3g44260	342	AT2G13790.1	156
AT1G02340.1	100	At4g25500	188	RNA binding protein	
AT1G06150.1	101	At5g54910	343	AT1G13190.1	160
AT1G09530.1	102	Atlg56110	344	AT1G20880.1	161
AT1G32640.1	103	At2g24050	345	AT1G29400.1	163
AT1G51140.1	104	At3g55620	346	AT1G58470.1	166
AT1G59640.1	105	At5g15750	347	AT1G65660.1	168
AT1G68920.1	106	At5g20160	348	AT1G69250.1	428
AT2G31210.1	107	At5g47880	215	AT1G77680.1	170
AT2G31280.1	108	At5g59240	349	AT2G42890.1	172
AT2G43010.1	109	Intercellular communication and signal transduction		AT2G44710.1	175
AT2G46510.1	110	Atlg73480	350	AT3G12640.1	178
AT3G19860.1	111	At5g25110	351	AT3G13224.1	179
AT3G22100.1	112	Atlg66400	352	AT3G20250.1	181
AT3G62090.1	113	Atlg73630	353	AT3G49130.1	184
AT4G29930.1	114	At2g46790	354	AT4G03430.1	186
AT4G37850.1	115	At3g59350	120	AT4G36960.1	189
AT5G38860.1	116	At3g59820	355	AT5G07290.1	191
AT5G43650.1	117	At4g27280	356	AT5G55100.1	200
Protein kinase		At5g27930	357	AT5G61960.1	201

<i>Salt stress gene</i>	<i>Salt stress-related promoter SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Cold stress gene</i>	<i>Cold stress-related promoters SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Drought stress gene</i>	<i>Drought stress-related promoters SEQ ID NO:</i>
AT1G48210.1	118	At5g54490	358	Transporter	
AT3G17410.1	119	At5g58700	359	AT5G14570.1	202
AT3G59350.1	120	At5g52820	360	AT5G17850.1	203
AT1G07870.1	121	Energy		AT5G1 8840.1	468
AT1G69790.1	122	Atlg77120	361	AT5G 194 10.1	469
AT2G07180.1	123	At4g33070	362	AT5G26340.1	205
AT2G39660.1	124	At2g22500	363	AT5G37500.1	437
AT3G09830.1	125	At4g05020	364	AT5G4 1800.1	206
AT3G55450.1	126	At4g24570	365	AT5G5 1710.1	470
AT4G35600.1	127	Transport		AT5G60790.1	208
AT5G02800.1	128	At5g57110	366	AT5G65990.1	30
AT1G06840.1	129	At5g 14940	367	Protease	
AT1G161 10.1	130	Atlg08920	368	AT1G32940.1	209
AT1G16130.1	131	At4g 17550	369	AT4G2 1320.1	2 11
AT1G16150.1	132	At4g35300	370	AT5G67090.1	471
AT1G79680.1	133	Atlg51610	371	Protein synthesis	
AT2G23450.1	134	Atlg69870	372	AT1G29970.1	212
AT5G66790.1	135	Atlg75370	373	AT2G44070.1	213
AT1G61420.1	136	At2g 16990	374	AT3G22980.1	214
AT1G61460.1	137	At2g28900	375	AT5G47880.1	215
AT3G16030.1	138	Stress related		Plant defense	
AT4G04490.1	139	At2g 17840	376	AT1G14540.1	441
AT4G21390.1	140	Atlg20030	377	AT2G02 100.1	218

<i>Salt stress gene</i>	<i>Salt stress-related promoter SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Cold stress gene</i>	<i>Cold stress-related promoters SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Drought stress gene</i>	<i>Drought stress-related promoters SEQ ID NO:</i>
AT4G23180.1	141	Atlg72940	378	AT2G02120.1	380
AT4G23190.1	142	Atlg75040	379	AT2G22420.1	219
AT4G23220.1	143	At2g02100	218	AT3G49120.1	472
AT2G19190.1	144	At2g02120	380	AT4G31760.1	220
AT5G39030.1	145	At2g35960	381	AT5G05340.1	473
AT1G34300.1	146	At2g43620	382	Energy	
AT4G32300.1	147	At5g06860	383	AT1G07810.1	474
AT3G53810.1	148	At3g05660	384	AT1G59820.1	475
AT3G59700.1	149	Atlg01470	385	AT1G63440.1	476
AT4G04960.1	150	Atlg20440	386	AT1G72700.1	443
AT5G01550.1	151	Atlg20450	387	AT2G24520.1	223
AT5G60270.1	152	Atlg30360	388	AT3G27870.1	477
AT5G60280.1	153	At2g42530	389	AT4G00900.1	224
AT5G48380.1	154	At2g42540	390	Metabolism	
AT1G69270.1	155	At3g50970	391	AT1G01120.1	478
AT2G13790.1	156	At4g02380	392	AT1G01480.1	225
AT3G02130.1	157	At5g15960	393	AT1G02400.1	227
RNA binding protein		At5g52310	394	AT1G02660.1	228
AT1G07350.1	158	At3g22840	395	AT1G03090.1	229
AT1G09230.1	159	At4g14690	396	AT1G04220.1	479
AT1G13190.1	160	At4g36010	397	AT1G05560.1	230
AT1G20880.1	161	Atgl11210	398	AT1G05680.1	231
AT1G27650.1	162	Atgl16850	399	AT1G05790.1	232

<i>Salt stress gene</i>	<i>Salt stress-related promoter SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Cold stress gene</i>	<i>Cold stress-related promoters SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Drought stress gene</i>	<i>Drought stress-related promoters SEQ ID NO:</i>
AT1G29400.1	163	Atlg29395	400	AT1G06570.1	233
AT1G50300.1	164	Atlg67360	401	AT1G07720.1	480
AT1G55310.1	165	Atlg80130	402	AT1G08630.1	234
AT1G58470.1	166	At2g 15970	403	AT1G09350.1	237
AT1G60650.1	167	Transcription factor		AT1G09490.1	238
AT1G65660.1	168	AT1G74840.1	404	AT1G09500.1	239
ATI G71720.1	169	AT2G46830.1	314	AT1G09940.1	240
AT1G77680.1	170	AT4G28110.1	405	AT1G15380.1	244
AT2G21660.1	171	AT5G17300.1	77	AT1G16540.1	245
AT2G42890.1	172	AT5G37260.1	78	ATI G17420.1	246
AT2G43370.1	173	AT1G21910.1	301	AT1G17745.1	481
AT2G43410.1	174	AT1G43160.1	82	AT1G22400.1	248
AT2G44710.1	175	AT1G53910.1	83	AT1G23870.1	249
AT2G46610.1	176	AT1G72360.1	406	AT1G26380.1	448
AT3G01150.1	177	AT1G77640.1	407	AT1G27980.1	482
AT3G12640.1	178	AT1G79700.1	90	AT1G30040.1	483
AT3G13224.1	179	AT2G28550.1	408	AT1G30620.1	449
AT3G13740.1	180	AT2G40340.1	93	AT1G30820.1	450
AT3G20250.1	181	AT3G11020.1	95	AT1G34630.1	250
AT3G27700.1	182	AT3G15210.1	96	AT1G51760.1	253
AT3G45630.1	183	AT3G50260.1	97	AT1G53580.1	254
AT3G49130.1	184	AT3G54990.1	409	AT1G56600.1	255
AT3G52660.1	185	AT4G25470.1	322	AT1G60140.1	451

<i>Salt stress gene</i>	<i>Salt stress-related promoter SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Cold stress gene</i>	<i>Cold stress-related promoters SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Drought stress gene</i>	<i>Drought stress-related promoters SEQ ID NO:</i>
AT4G03430.1	186	AT4G25480.1	323	AT1G60470.1	452
AT4G10610.1	187	AT4G25490.1	410	AT1G63180.1	484
AT4G25500.1	188	AT4G36920.1	411	AT1G64660.1	485
AT4G36960.1	189	AT5G52020.1	412	AT1G67070.1	257
AT4G37120.1	190	AT5G64750.1	413	AT1G67980.1	258
AT5G07290.1	191	AT1G02340.1	100	AT1G68020.1	259
AT5G15390.1	192	AT1G18400.1	414	AT1G70290.1	260
AT5G16260.1	193	AT1G72210.1	415	AT1G71100.1	486
AT5G18110.1	194	AT2G46970.1	416	AT1G71697.1	261
AT5G19960.1	195	AT3G05800.1	417	AT1G72520.1	263
AT5G23080.1	196	AT5G51790.1	418	AT1G72680.1	264
AT5G51120.1	197	Protein kinase		AT1G73370.1	487
AT5G51410.1	198	AT1G48210.1	118	AT1G73880.1	265
AT5G53180.1	199	AT3G59350.1	120	AT1G73920.1	266
AT5G55100.1	200	AT1G07570.1	419		
AT5G61960.1	201	AT2G28930.1	420		
Transporter		AT3G55450.1	126		
AT5G14570.1	202	AT5G35580.1	421		
AT5G17850.1	203	AT5G66790.1	135		
AT5G17860.1	204	AT1G52290.1	422		
AT5G26340.1	205	AT1G53430.1	423		
AT5G41800.1	206	AT1G53440.1	424		
AT5G46050.1	207	AT1G61380.1	425		

<i>Salt stress gene</i>	<i>Salt stress-related promoter SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Cold stress gene</i>	<i>Cold stress-related promoters SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Drought stress gene</i>	<i>Drought stress-related promoters SEQ ID NO:</i>
AT5G60790.1	208	AT1G51800.1	426		
Protease		AT1G51820.1	427		
AT1G32940.1	209	AT2G19190.1	144		
AT1G32950.1	210	AT4G32300.1	147		
AT4G21320.1	211	AT3G53810.1	148		
Protein synthesis		RNA binding protein			
AT1G29970.1	212	AT1G69250.1	428		
AT2G44070.1	213	AT1G78260.1	429		
AT3G22980.1	214	AT2G21660.1	171		
AT5G47880.1	215	AT3G52660.1	185		
AT5G54940.1	216	AT4G25500.1	188		
Plant defense		Transporter			
AT1G19610.1	217	AT3G62150.1	430		
AT2G02100.1	218	AT4G05120.1	431		
AT2G22420.1	219	AT4G17550.1	369		
AT4G31760.1	220	AT4G18210.1	432		
AT5G39580.1	221	AT4G21680.1	433		
Energy		AT4G23700.1		434	
AT1G64200.1	222	AT4G35180.1	435		
AT2G24520.1	223	AT5G01180.1	436		
AT4G00900.1	224	AT5G14570.1	202		
Metabolism		AT5G17850.1		203	
AT1G01480.1	225	AT5G26340.1	205		
AT1G01710.1	226	AT5G37500.1	437		

<i>Salt stress gene</i>	<i>Salt stress-related promoter SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Cold stress gene</i>	<i>Cold stress-related promoters SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Drought stress gene</i>	<i>Drought stress-related promoters SEQ ID NO:</i>
AT1G02400.1	227	AT5G41610.1	438		
AT1G02660.1	228	AT5G46050.1	207		
AT1G03090.1	229	AT5G48410.1	439		
AT1G05560.1	230	Protease			
AT1G05680.1	231	AT5G44530.1	440		
AT1G05790.1	232				
AT1G06570.1	233	Protein synthesis			
AT1G08630.1	234	AT5G47880.1	215		
AT1G08830.1	235	Plant defense			
AT1G08980.1	236	AT1G14540.1	441		
AT1G09350.1	237	AT1G68850.1	442		
AT1G09490.1	238	AT2G02 100.1	218		
AT1G09500.1	239	AT2G02 120.1	380		
AT1G09940.1	240	AT5G39580.1	221		
AT1G12240.1	241	Energy			
AT1G12350.1	242	AT1G72700.1	443		
AT1G12780.1	243	Metabolism			
AT1G15380.1	244	AT1G01390.1	444		
AT1G16540.1	245	ATI G O1420.1	287		
ATI G17420.1	246	AT1G02400.1	227		
AT1G20630.1	247	AT1G02660.1	228		
AT1G22400.1	248	AT1G07240.1	445		
AT1G23870.1	249	AT1G09350.1	237		

<i>Salt stress gene</i>	<i>Salt stress-related promoter SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Cold stress gene</i>	<i>Cold stress-related promoters SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Drought stress gene</i>	<i>Drought stress-related promoters SEQ ID NO:</i>
AT1G34630.1	250	AT1G21050.1	446		
AT1G35580.1	251	AT1G23870.1	249		
AT1G49530.1	252	AT1G24280.1	447		
AT1G51760.1	253	AT1G26380.1	448		
AT1G53580.1	254	AT1G30620.1	449		
AT1G56600.1	255	AT1G30820.1	450		
AT1G58180.1	256	AT1G60140.1	451		
AT1G67070.1	257	AT1G60470.1	452		
AT1G67980.1	258	AT1G64500.1	453		
AT1G68020.1	259	AT1G67980.1	258		
AT1G70290.1	260	AT1G71697.1	261		
AT1G71697.1	261				
AT1G72330.1	262				
AT1G72520.1	263				
AT1G72680.1	264				
AT1G73880.1	265				
AT1G73920.1	266				

Table 2. Arabidopsis Accession numbers of promoter sequences of genes which are upregulated under the indicated stress conditions. "At" - Arabidopsis thaliana, followed by the chromosome number and the "g" for location of the gene on the indicated chromosome. Sequences of the promoters include genomic sequence 3000 bp upstream of the 5'-UTR of the indicated gene.

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Table 3, below, provides a non-limiting list of stress-related genes of Arabidopsis Thaliana which are upregulated during various stresses (light stress and osmotic stress), along with the promoter sequences of the indicated stress related genes.

Table 3
Light and osmotic stress related promoters

<i>Light stress gene</i>	<i>Light stress-related promoter SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Osmotic stress gene</i>	<i>Osmotic stress-related promoter SEQ ID NO:</i>
		At5g52310	394
At1g07890	584	At2g39800	616
At3g09640	585	At2g33380	617
At1g02930	586	At5g15970	618
At2g47730	587	At5g47640	619
At3g09940	588	At5g15960	393
At1g19570	589	At1g60190	620
At3g22840	395	At1g20440	386
At1g08550	590	At1g79520	621
At1g06570	233	At2g22240	622
At5g52570	591	At2g17840	376
At1g74310	592	At4g34000	623
At3g09440	593	At3g61890	624
At2g29500	594	At4g19170	625
At5g42020	595	At2g28690	626
At5g56010	596	At2g45820	627
At5g56030	597	At4g34010	#N/A
At5g56000	598	At2g37170	628
At5g22060	599	At2g15970	403
At2g46830	314	At1g64780	629
At5g65070	600	At4g27830	630
At5g41410	601	At5g57050	631
At1g04400	602	At1g79270	632
At2g37040	603	At2g24540	633
At5g13930	604	At4g25490	410
At3g45140	605	At4g22200	634
At5g11260	606	At4g27410	635
At4g34230	607	At1g01470	385
At1g68850	442	At1g08920	368
At5g20230	608	At3g51900	#N/A
At3g21720	609	At4g35770	636
At4g15210	610	At1g20450	387
At5g24770	611	At1g22710	637
At5g65760	612	At1g72770	638
At3g17800	613	At3g47340	639
At5g61820	614	At3g21670	640
At1g19180	615	At2g38800	641
		At1g05340	642
		At3g47430	643
		At5g61790	644
		At2g02810	645
		At4g08950	646

<i>Light stress gene</i>	<i>Light stress-related promoter SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>Osmotic stress gene</i>	<i>Osmotic stress-related promoter SEQ ID NO:</i>
		At5g08610	647
		At3g10520	648
		At2g27690	649
		At2g30590	650
		At1g59990	651
		At1g65390	652
		At2g31730	653
		At4g12730	654
		At2g38310	655
		At4g22470	656
		At4g12420	657
		At2g34300	658
		At4g30800	659
		At4g26200	660
		At1g10020	661
		At2g33210	662
		At4g27730	663
		At4g37450	664
		At4g02330	665
		At2g28570	666
		At5g39580	221
		At4g25810	667
		At4g21410	668

Table 3. Arabidopsis Accession numbers of promoter sequences of genes which are upregulated under the indicated stress conditions. "At" - Arabidopsis thaliana, followed by the chromosome number and the "g" for location of the gene on the indicated chromosome. Sequences of the promoters include genomic sequence 3000 bp upstream of the 5'-UTR of the indicated gene.

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Table 4, below, provides a non-limiting list of stress-related genes of Arabidopsis Thaliana which are associated with expression of ABA hormone (which is upregulated in stress) along with the promoter sequences of the indicated stress related genes.

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Table 4
ABA-related promoters

<i>ABA related gene</i>	<i>ABA-related promoter SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>ABA related gene</i>	<i>ABA-related promoter SEQ ID NO:</i>
Transcription factor		AT4G18120.1	533
AT1G06180.1	55	AT4G25500.1	188
AT1G09710.1	488	AT4G32440.1	534
AT1G09770.1	489	AT4G36960.1	189
AT1G22640.1	56	AT4G37120.1	190
AT1G67710.1	490	AT5G181 10.1	194
AT1G72650.1	57	AT5G23080.1	196
AT2G 16720.1	59	AT5G46250.1	535
AT2G47 190.1	60	AT5G46840.1	536
AT3G06490.1	6 1		
AT3G24310.1	491	Transporter	
AT3G30210.1	64	AT5G13580.1	537
AT3G47600.1	65	AT5G14940.1	367
AT3G49690.1	492	AT5G17400.1	538
AT4G05 100.1	68	AT5G17850.1	203
AT4G13480.1	493	AT5G17860.1	204
AT4G2 1440.1	69	AT5G1 8840.1	468
AT4G28 110.1	405	AT5G 194 10.1	469
AT4G34990.1	70	AT5G26240.1	539
AT4G37260.1	7 1	AT5G26340.1	205
AT5G01200.1	72	AT5G27 150.1	540
AT5G02320.1	73	AT5G27350.1	541
AT5G04760.1	74	AT5G37500.1	437
AT5G06 100.1	75	AT5G41610.1	438
AT5G37260.1	78	AT5G4 1800.1	206
AT5G49620.1	494	AT5G46050.1	207
AT5G54230.1	457	AT5G48400.1	542
AT5G58900.1	495	AT5G48410.1	439
AT5G62470.1	458	AT5G49890.1	543
AT5G65790.1	496	AT5G64560.1	544
AT5G67300.1	459	AT5G65990.1	30
AT1G21910.1	301		
AT 1G22 190.1	80	Protease	
AT1G33760.1	497	AT1G32940.1	209
AT 1G43 160.1	82	AT2G04 160.1	545
AT1G53910.1	83	AT4G2 1320.1	2 1 1
AT1G64380.1	85	AT5G67090.1	471

<i>ABA related gene</i>	<i>ABA-related promoter SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>ABA related gene</i>	<i>ABA-related promoter SEQ ID NO:</i>
AT1G71520.1	86		
AT1G77640.1	407	Protein synthesis	
AT1G78080.1	89	AT1G29970.1	212
AT1G79700.1	90	AT1G54270.1	546
AT2G20880.1	91	AT1G69410.1	547
AT2G38340.1	92	AT4G27130.1	548
AT2G40340.1	93		
AT3G11020.1	95	Plant defense	
AT3G15210.1	96	AT1G34510.1	549
AT3G50260.1	97	AT1G49570.1	550
AT3G54990.1	409	AT1G68850.1	442
AT3G61630.1	99	AT2G02100.1	218
AT4G13040.1	498	AT2G02120.1	380
AT4G28140.1	460	AT2G41480.1	551
AT4G34410.1	461	AT3G49120.1	472
AT5G05410.1	462	AT3G49960.1	552
AT5G64750.1	413	AT4G33420.1	553
AT1G09530.1	102	AT4G37520.1	554
AT1G51140.1	104	AT4G37530.1	555
AT1G59640.1	105	AT5G05340.1	473
AT1G68920.1	106	AT5G14130.1	556
AT2G22770.1	499	AT5G22410.1	557
AT2G24260.1	500	AT5G39580.1	221
AT2G31280.1	108		
AT2G42280.1	501	Energy	
AT3G19860.1	111	AT1G07810.1	474
AT3G57800.1	502	AT1G63440.1	476
AT3G62090.1	113	AT1G64200.1	222
AT4G14410.1	503	AT1G72700.1	443
AT4G29930.1	114	AT3G27870.1	477
AT5G46760.1	504	AT4G00900.1	224
AT5G50915.1	505	AT4G23710.1	558
AT5G51790.1	418	AT5G44240.1	559
Protein kinase		Metabolism	
AT1G06700.1	506	AT1G01120.1	478
AT1G48210.1	118	AT1G01480.1	225
AT3G17410.1	119	AT1G01710.1	226

<i>ABA related gene</i>	<i>ABA-related promoter SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>ABA related gene</i>	<i>ABA-related promoter SEQ ID NO:</i>
AT3G59350.1	120	AT1G02400.1	227
AT1G07870.1	121	AT1G02660.1	228
AT1G14370.1	507	AT1G03090.1	229
AT1G69790.1	122	AT1G04220.1	479
AT2G07 180.1	123	AT1G05560.1	230
AT2G 17220.1	508	AT1G05680.1	231
AT2G26290.1	509	AT1G05790.1	232
AT2G39 110.1	510	AT1G06290.1	560
AT3G0 1300.1	511	AT1G06570.1	233
AT3G09830.1	125	AT1G06800.1	561
AT3G55450.1	126	AT1G07720.1	480
AT4G35600.1	127	AT1G08510.1	562
AT5G02290.1	512	AT1G08630.1	234
AT5G35580.1	421	AT1G08830.1	235
AT5G47070.1	513	AT1G08980.1	236
AT5G56460.1	514	AT1G09420.1	563
AT5G24010.1	515	AT1G09480.1	564
AT1G16120.1	516	AT1G09490.1	238
AT1G16130.1	131	AT1G09500.1	239
AT2G23450.1	134	ATI G 12240.1	241
AT4G00330.1	517	AT1G12350.1	242
AT3G23750.1	518	AT1G12780.1	243
AT3G24550.1	519	AT1G14290.1	565
AT3G59 110.1	520	AT1G14520.1	566
AT4G0 1330.1	521	AT1G15380.1	244
AT4G34500.1	522	AT1G16540.1	245
AT2G48010.1	523	AT1G17745.1	481
AT 1G6 1420.1	136	AT1G18270.1	567
AT4G04490.1	139	AT1G20630.1	247
AT5G39030.1	145	AT1G22020.1	568
AT1G34300.1	146	AT1G22360.1	569
AT2G19130.1	524	AT1G22400.1	248
AT4G32300.1	147	AT 1G23 870.1	249
AT5G24080.1	464	AT1G27980.1	482
AT3G08870.1	525	AT1G28580.1	570
AT3G59700.1	149	AT1G30040.1	483
AT4G04960.1	150	AT1G30620.1	449
AT5G0 1550.1	151	AT1G31480.1	571
AT5G60270.1	152	AT1G34630.1	250
		AT1G35580.1	251

<i>ABA related gene</i>	<i>ABA-related promoter SEQ ID NO:</i>	<i>ABA related gene</i>	<i>ABA-related promoter SEQ ID NO:</i>
RNA binding protein		AT1G35910.1	572
AT1G03457.1	526	AT1G49670.1	573
AT1G09230.1	159	AT1G50480.1	574
AT1G13190.1	160	AT1G51760.1	253
AT1G20880.1	161	AT1G53580.1	254
AT1G22240.1	527	AT1G54340.1	575
AT1G27650.1	162	AT1G55020.1	576
AT1G29400.1	163	AT1G55850.1	577
AT1G32790.1	528	AT1G55920.1	578
AT1G55310.1	165	AT1G58180.1	256
AT1G65660.1	168	AT1G60140.1	451
AT1G69250.1	428	AT1G60440.1	579
AT1G76460.1	529	AT1G60470.1	452
AT1G78260.1	429	AT1G63180.1	484
AT2G03640.1	530	AT1G64660.1	485
AT2G21660.1	171	AT1G65840.1	580
AT2G42890.1	172	AT1G67070.1	257
AT2G46610.1	176	AT1G68020.1	259
AT3G12640.1	178	AT1G68530.1	581
AT3G13224.1	179	AT1G70290.1	260
AT3G13700.1	531	AT1G70980.1	582
AT3G20250.1	181	AT1G71170.1	583
AT3G52120.1	532	AT1G72330.1	262
		AT1G72680.1	264
		AT1G73880.1	265

Table 4. Arabidopsis Accession numbers of promoter sequences of genes which are associated with ABA expression (*i.e.*, upregulated when ABA level is increased; "AT" - Arabidopsis thaliana, followed by the chromosome number and the "g" for location of the gene on the indicated chromosome. Sequences of the promoters include genomic sequence 3000 bp upstream of the 5'-UTR of the indicated gene.

EXAMPLE 6

TRANSGENIC PLANTS EXPRESSING IPT UNDER THE METALLOTHIONEIN PROMOTER EXHIBIT INCREASED TOLERANCE TO SALT STRESS

Experimental Methods:

Induction of salt stress - One week old seedling of two lines of M-IPT, one line of SARK-IPT and WILD-TYPE were grown in growth chamber at 16/8 (light/dark) at 25°C, in Petri dishes containing 150 mM NaCl for three weeks.

Experimental Results

M-IPT plants exhibit increased tolerance to salt stress - To test the effect of the M-IPT transgene on salt stress, one week old tobacco plants were grown for 3 weeks in Petri dishes in the presence of MSO growth medium with or without salinity stress (150 mM NaCl).

As shown in Figures 17A-D, 18A-D and 19A-D, while the majority of the wild type plants did not survive the salt stress (*i.e.*, failed to grow) and those which grew exhibit relatively small leaves (as compared to the same WT plants which grew under normal conditions), the M-IPT transgenic plants exhibit increased tolerance to the salt stress as shown by a higher survival rate of plants (as compared to the WT plants under the same salinity stress growth conditions), with comparable leaves size (e.g., as shown in Figures 18C-D. These results conclusively show that the M-IPT construct confers increased tolerance to a salinity stress.

SARK-IPT plants do not exhibit tolerance to salt stress as compared to wild type plants - As a control experiment, tobacco plants were transformed with the SARK-IPT construct (as described in WO 2006/102559) and wild type and transgenic plants were subjected to a salinity stress (150 mM NaCl). As shown in Figures 20A-D, under salt stress conditions most of the wild type (Figure 20B) and the SARK-IPT transgenic plants (Figure 20D) failed to grow, and those which survived the salinity stress exhibited a severe growth retardation, e.g., small plants with significantly smaller leaves as compared to the leaves of the same plants when grown under normal conditions [Figures 20A (WT) and 20C (SARK-IPT)]. These results conclusively show that the SARK promoter is not a stress promoter, since it is incapable of regulating the expression of IPT under stress conditions such as a salinity stress.

Although the invention has been described in conjunction with specific embodiments thereof, it is evident that many alternatives, modifications and variations will be apparent to those skilled in the art. Accordingly, it is intended to embrace all such alternatives, modifications and variations that fall within the spirit and broad scope of the appended claims.

All publications, patents and patent applications mentioned in this specification are herein incorporated in their entirety by reference into the specification, to the same

extent as if each individual publication, patent or patent application was specifically and individually indicated to be incorporated herein by reference. In addition, citation or identification of any reference in this application shall not be construed as an admission that such reference is available as prior art to the present invention. To the extent that

5 section headings are used, they should not be construed as necessarily limiting.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A nucleic acid construct comprising a polynucleotide encoding adenosine phosphate- isopentenyltransferase (IPT) operably linked to a stress-related promoter.

2. The nucleic acid construct of claim 1, wherein said stress-related promoter comprises at least one copy of a cis regulatory element consisting of a nucleic acid sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19.

3. The nucleic acid construct of claim 1 or 2, wherein said stress-related promoter is an abiotic stress-related promoter.

4. The nucleic acid construct of claim 1, 2 or 3, wherein said stress-related promoter is a promoter of an ABA-related gene.

5. The nucleic acid construct of claim 3, wherein said abiotic stress-related promoter is selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 20-266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 237, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 70, 71, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 188, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 215, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 120, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 378, 379, 218, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 314, 405, 77, 78, 301, 82, 83, 406, 407, 90, 408, 93, 95, 96, 97, 409, 322, 323, 410, 411, 412, 413, 100, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 118, 120, 419, 420, 126, 421, 135, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 144, 147, 148, 428, 429, 171, 185, 188, 430, 431, 369, 432, 433, 434, 435, 436, 202, 203, 205, 437, 438, 207, 439, 440, 215, 441, 442, 218, 380, 221, 443, 444, 287, 227, 228, 445, 237, 446, 249, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 453, 258, 261, 55, 454, 56, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 65, 68, 69, 405, 70, 73,

74, 75, 77, 455, 78, 456, 457, 458, 459, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 322, 410, 460, 461, 462, 463, 413, 102, 103, 104, 110, 112, 117, 118, 120, 121, 122, 125, 131, 133, 134, 135, 140, 142, 143, 144, 147, 464, 148, 149, 465, 150, 466, 151, 467, 155, 156, 160, 161, 163, 166, 168, 428, 170, 172, 175, 178, 179, 181, 184, 186, 189, 191, 200, 201, 202, 203, 468, 469, 205, 437, 206, 470, 208, 30, 209, 211, 471, 212, 213, 214, 215, 441, 218, 380, 219, 472, 220, 473, 474, 475, 476, 443, 223, 477, 224, 478, 225, 227, 228, 229, 479, 230, 231, 232, 233, 480, 234, 237, 238, 239, 240, 244, 245, 246, 481, 248, 249, 448, 482, 483, 449, 450, 250, 253, 254, 255, 451, 452, 484, 485, 257, 258, 259, 260, 486, 261, 263, 264, 487, 265, 266, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 395, 590, 233, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 314, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 442, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 393, 620, 386, 621, 622, 376, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 403, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 410, 634, 635, 385, 368, 636, 387, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 221, 667, and 668.

6. The nucleic acid construct of claim 4, wherein said promoter of said ABA-related gene is selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 55, 488, 489, 56, 490, 57, 59, 60, 61, 491, 64, 65, 492, 68, 493, 69, 405, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 78, 494, 457, 495, 458, 496, 459, 301, 80, 497, 82, 83, 85, 86, 407, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 95, 96, 97, 409, 99, 498, 460, 461, 462, 413, 102, 104, 105, 106, 499, 500, 108, 501, 111, 502, 113, 503, 114, 504, 505, 418, 506, 118, 119, 120, 121, 507, 122, 123, 508, 509, 510, 511, 125, 126, 127, 512, 421, 513, 514, 515, 516, 131, 134, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 136, 139, 145, 146, 524, 147, 464, 525, 149, 150, 151, 152, 526, 159, 160, 161, 527, 162, 163, 528, 165, 168, 428, 529, 429, 530, 171, 172, 176, 178, 179, 531, 181, 532, 533, 188, 534, 189, 190, 194, 196, 535, 536, 537, 367, 538, 203, 204, 468, 469, 539, 205, 540, 541, 437, 438, 206, 207, 542, 439, 543, 544, 30, 209, 545, 211, 471, 212, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 442, 218, 380, 551, 472, 552, 553, 554, 555, 473, 556, 557, 221, 474, 476, 222, 443, 477, 224, 558, 559, 478, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 479, 230, 231, 232, 560, 233, 561, 480, 562, 234, 235, 236, 563, 564, 238, 239, 241, 242, 243, 565, 566, 244, 245, 481, 567, 247, 568, 569, 248, 249, 482, 570, 483, 449,

571, 250, 251, 572, 573, 574, 253, 254, 575, 576, 577, 578, 256, 451, 579, 452, 484, 485, 580, 257, 259, 581, 260, 582, 583, 262, 264, and 265.

7. The nucleic acid construct of claim 1, wherein said stress-related promoter is a Metallothionein (MT) promoter.

8. A nucleic acid construct comprising a polynucleotide encoding adenosine phosphate- isopentenyltransferase (IPT) operably linked to a Metallothionein (MT) promoter.

9. The nucleic acid construct of claim 7 or 8, wherein said Metallothionein (MT) promoter comprises the nucleic acid sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs:686-693.

10. The nucleic acid construct of claim 7 or 8, wherein said Metallothionein (MT) promoter is set forth by SEQ ID NO:693.

11. The nucleic acid construct of any of claims 1-10, wherein said IPT comprises an amino acid sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs:673-378.

12. The nucleic acid construct of any of claims 1-10, wherein said polynucleotide encoding said IPT comprises a nucleic acid sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs:679-685.

13. A host cell transformed with the nucleic acid construct of any of claims 1-12.

14. The host cell of claim 13, wherein said cell is a plant cell.

15. The host cell of claim 14, wherein said plant cell forms part of a plant.

16. A transgenic plant comprising the nucleic acid construct of any of claims 1-12, or the host cell of claim 13.

17. A method of producing a transgenic plant, comprising expressing within the plant the nucleic acid construct of any of claims 1-12.

18. A method of increasing abiotic stress tolerance (ABST) of a plant, comprising expressing within the plant the nucleic acid construct of any of claims 1-12, thereby increasing the abiotic stress tolerance of the plant.

19. The method of claim 18, wherein said abiotic stress is selected from the group consisting of drought, cold stress, chilling stress, heat stress, salinity stress, osmotic stress, freeze stress, nutrient deficiency and heavy metal stress.

20. The method of claim 18 or 19, further comprising growing the plant under the abiotic stress.

21. The nucleic acid construct of any of claims 1-12, the host cell of any of claims 13-15, the plant of claim 16 or the method of any of claims 17-20, wherein said IPT is set forth by SEQ ID NO:694.

22. The nucleic acid construct of claim 8, the host cell of any of claims 13-15, the plant of claim 16 or the method of any of claims 17-20, wherein said nucleic acid construct comprises the nucleic acid sequence set forth by SEQ ID NO: 1.

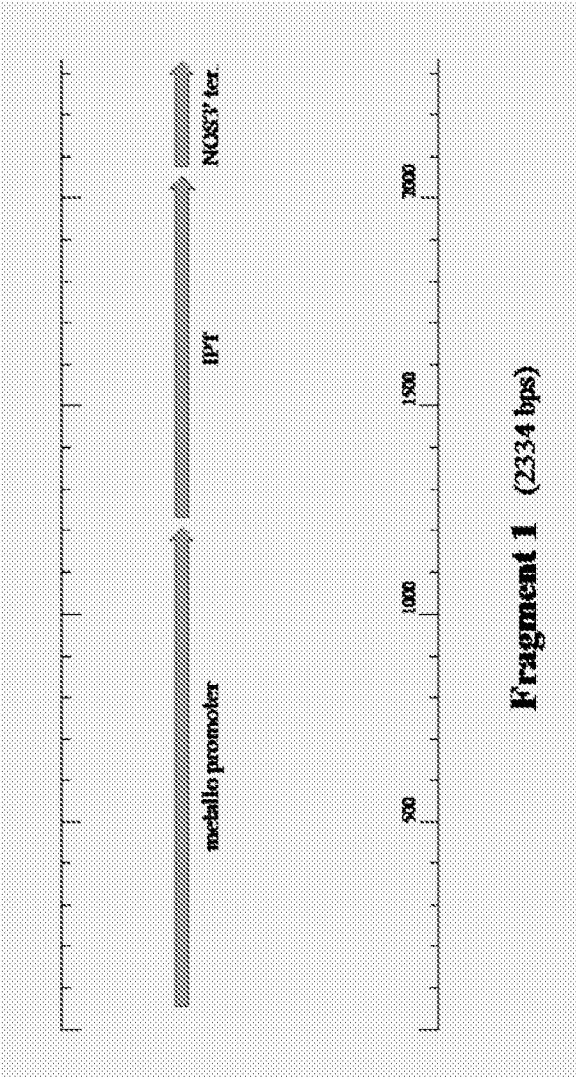


FIG. 1

Nucleic acid sequence of the Metallo promoter-IPT-NOS terminator construct

```

1  gtacggggcc cccctcgag gtgcacggta tgcataagct tgcctgcagg ttcactatgt atgacgatgt ttctgtgatt
101  gtgatttcac ttgaagggaag aatttgaga tcttccatgt gaatactaatt cttttgaaga gactcttact aaagtaactt ttagaattga ttcaatctttt
201  ttagaataga tttttttttt ttttttttgg atttcgctga ggttttacca ttttgttact cagcatattt taacgatgtt gcatttctgt cccaatatatc
301  gttatttgta gtgaaaaata taatgtaaga ataatttata taactatcct actagcaaa ctaacgcaaa ttttgaacac gaactttagt taccgtgaat
401  gaaaataaca gacttgaact ttataatact cgtagtatac gtaatttttg ctttttgcag atacttttct cactaataaa gtcataaatt ttatattttc
501  ataaactata gttatacact tttagactaaa caacaaaaat cgttttagca aaagaaaaaag ttacttttct gatgaactag gataaggaat tcggaactga
601  attttggctac gttctctctg gaccacacac actgaacacc cttttaagat tttctccttc tctttttcaa cgtaatttat cttttgatca gaaaacgacaa
701  aaaaggaagtc taacaatata aaaaattttt tttatagata tttttcctgc taattttatc tagttagac aaacccaaat atacgattat
801  tataaaaaa cgaatatacca agtggacgac tgggtttaat agatctagcc gtagaataaa gatctgcattg aaaggcgtg agaattctaaa cgtgtgataag
901  accataaacac acggaacatc ggtacgctct cgaacgtaca agaactcgac acacacaaac actccacaat tatttgaaca ctggacaatt attgaaccca
1001  cgtacgagaa tcaatgcgtt gagggtaaaag acgtaaaatga agaactagtt ttggagataa gagcggagaa agattgcac acatgtatgg tcaatattaa
1101  tctcatttag cttataaatt tgggagcttc ctctatcatt aatttccatt cataaattt tcttcaattt gaattttctc gagaaaaata tcgaattccc
1201  gcggccgcga ttgcacaggaa agacgacgac cgtgatatgt cttgcccagc agacagggtc tccagtccct tcgcttgatc ggttccaatg ctgtccctcaa
1301  cgtatcaaccg gaagcggacg accaacagtg gaagaactga aaggaacgac gogtctctac cttgatgac ggctctggtt ggagggtatc atcgacgcca
1401  agcaagctca tcataggctg atcagaggag tgtataatca tgaggccaac ggcgggctta ttcttgagg aggatccacc tcgttgctca actgcatggc
1501  gcgaaacagc tattggagtg cagatttttcg ttggcatatt attcgccaca agttaccca ccaagagacc ttcatgaaag cggccaagcc cagagttaaag
1601  cagatgttgc acccgcgtgc aggccattct attattcaag agttggttta tctttggaat gaacctcgcc tgaggcccat tctgaaagag atcgatggat
1701  atcgatatgc catgttgttt gctagccaga accagatcac ggcagatatg ctattgcac ttgacgcaaa tatggaaggt aagttgatta atgggatcgc
1801  tcaggagtat ttcatccatg cgcgcaaca ggaacagaaa ttcccccaag ttaacgcagc cgttttcgac ggattcgaag gtcatccggt cggaaatgtat
1901  taggtttacg cagccctgcg tcgcacctgt cttcatctgg ataagatgtt cagatcagag ggcgagctcg aattgatcgt tcaaacattt ggcaataaaag
2001  tttcttaaga ttgaatcctg ttgcgggtct tgggatgatt atcatataat ttctgtttgaa ttaegttaaag catgtataa ttacatgtat atgcattgacg
2101  ttatttatga gatgggtttt tatgattaga gtcccgcaat tatacatatta atacgcgata gaaaaaaaaa tatagcgcgc aaactaggat aaattatcgc
2201  ggcgggtgtc atctatgta ctatgacaga tccc
  
```

(SEQ ID NO:1)

FIG. 2

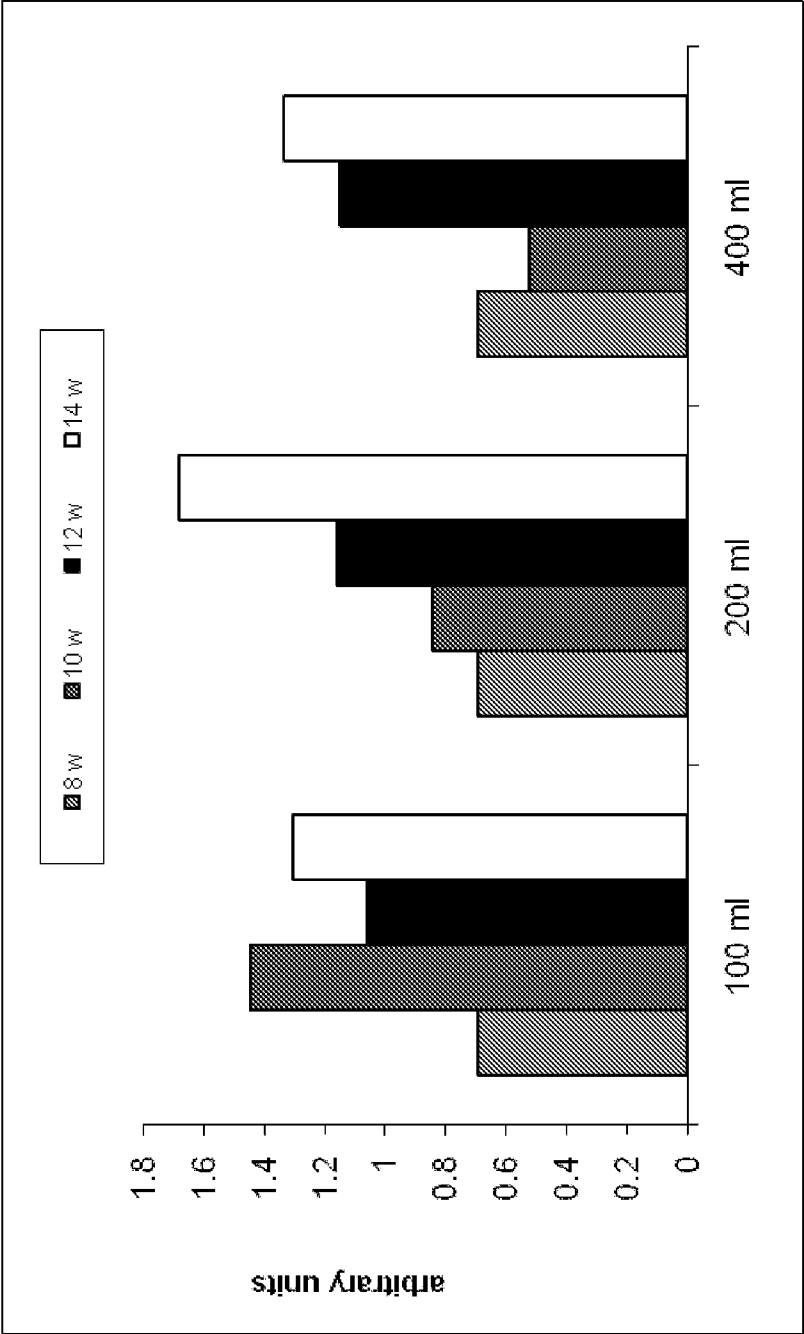


FIG. 3

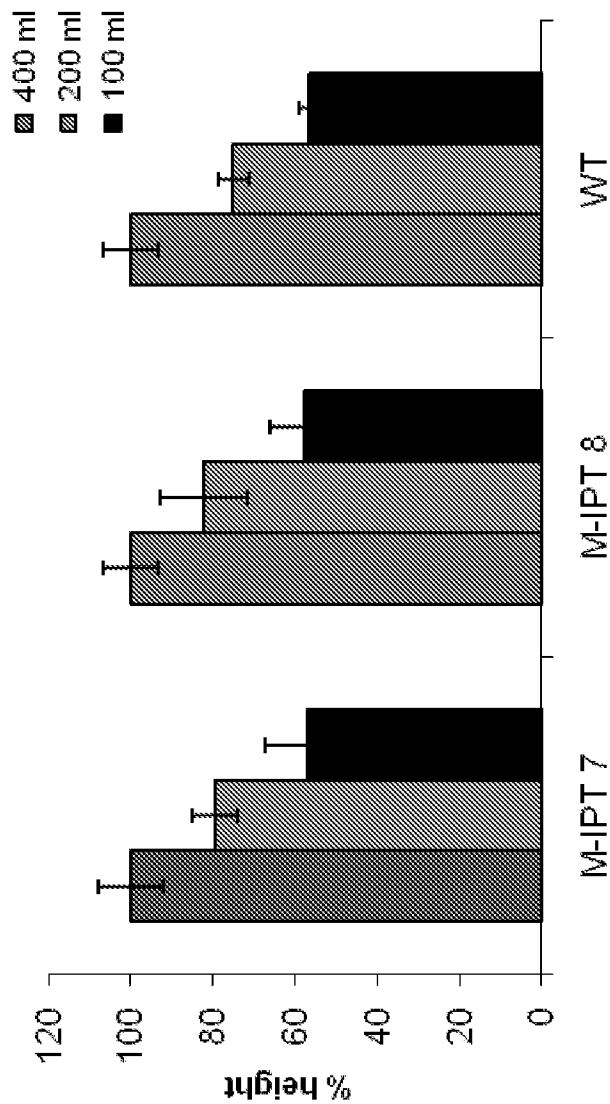


FIG. 4A

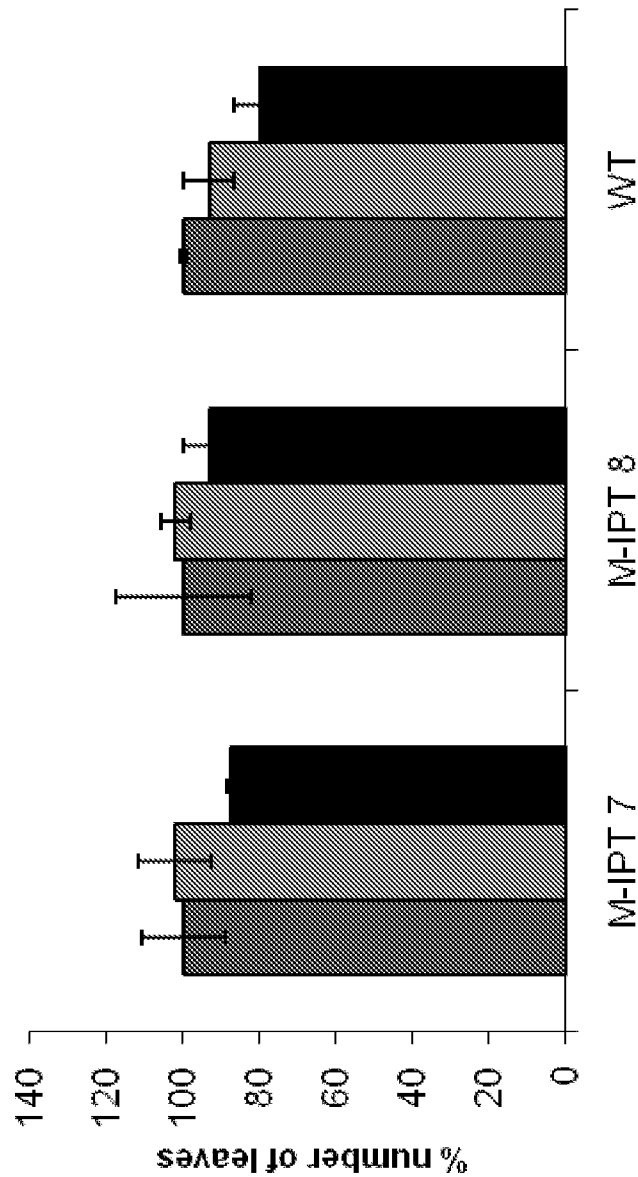


FIG. 4B

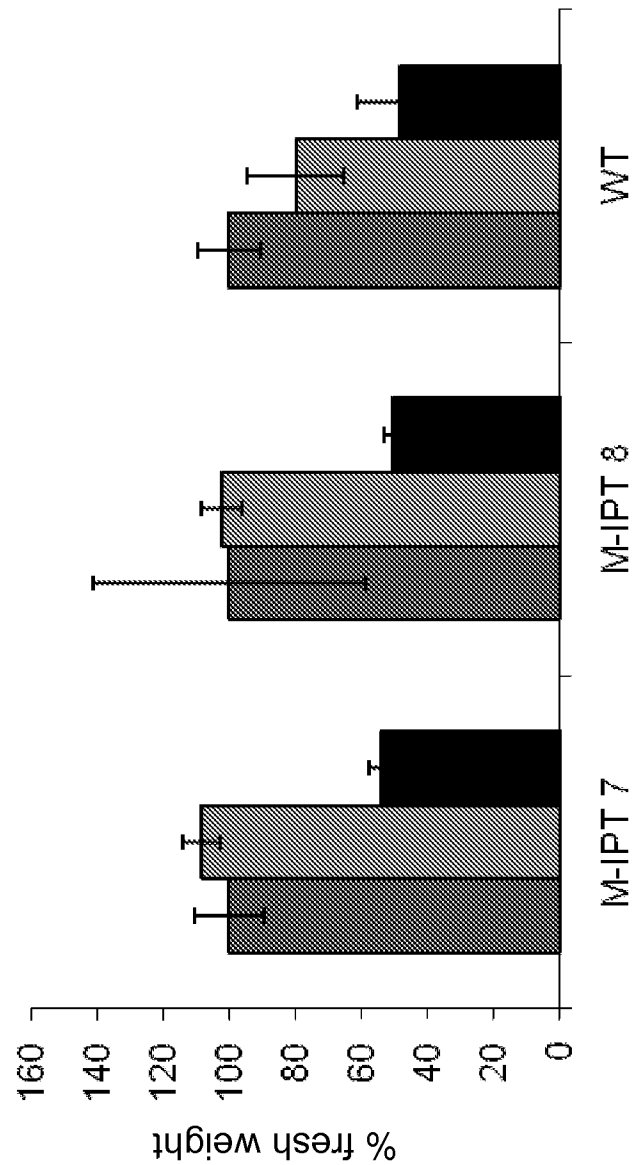


FIG. 4C

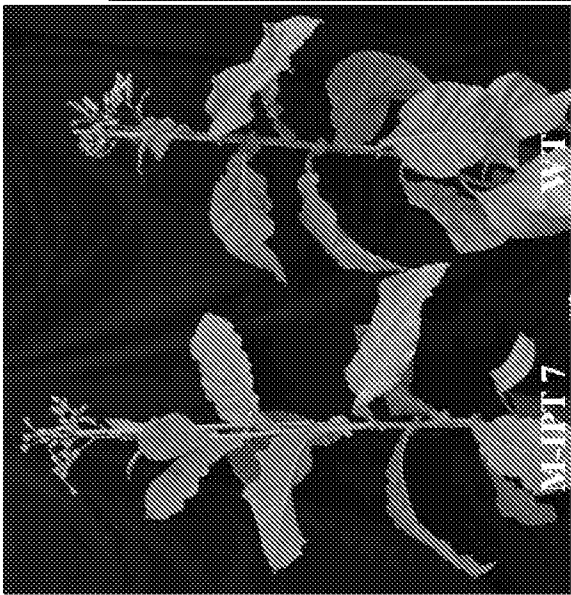


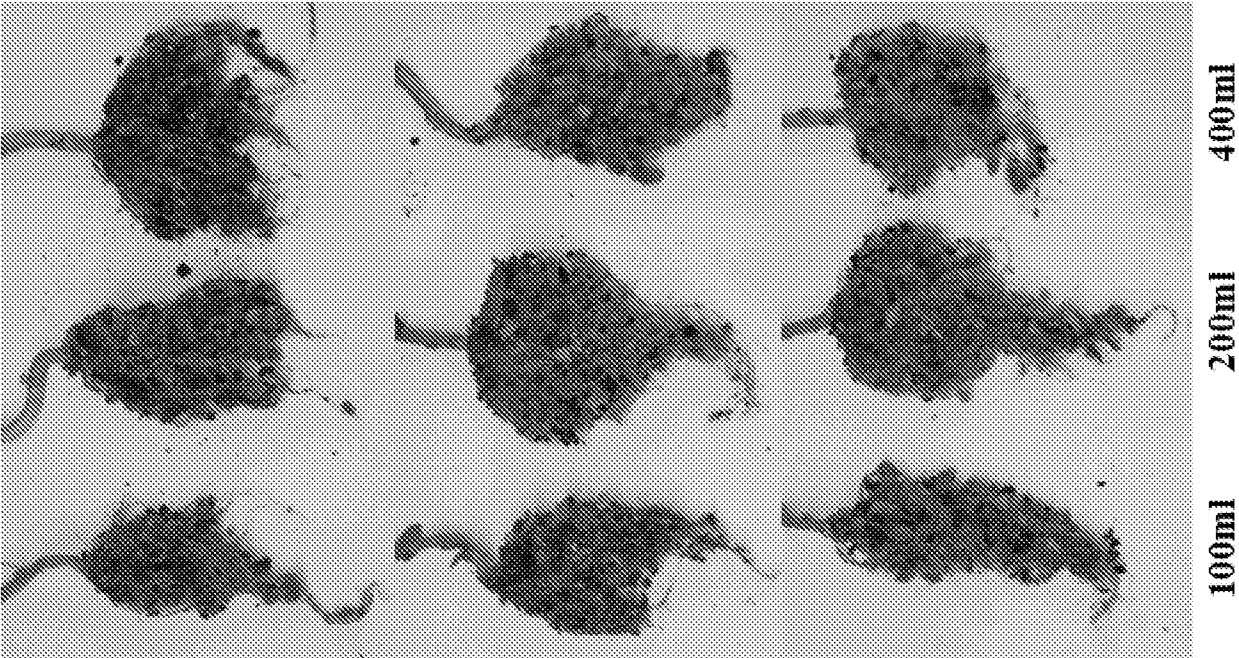
FIG. 5A



FIG. 5B



FIG. 5C



WT

FIG. 6A

M-IPT7

FIG. 6B

M-IPT8

FIG. 6C

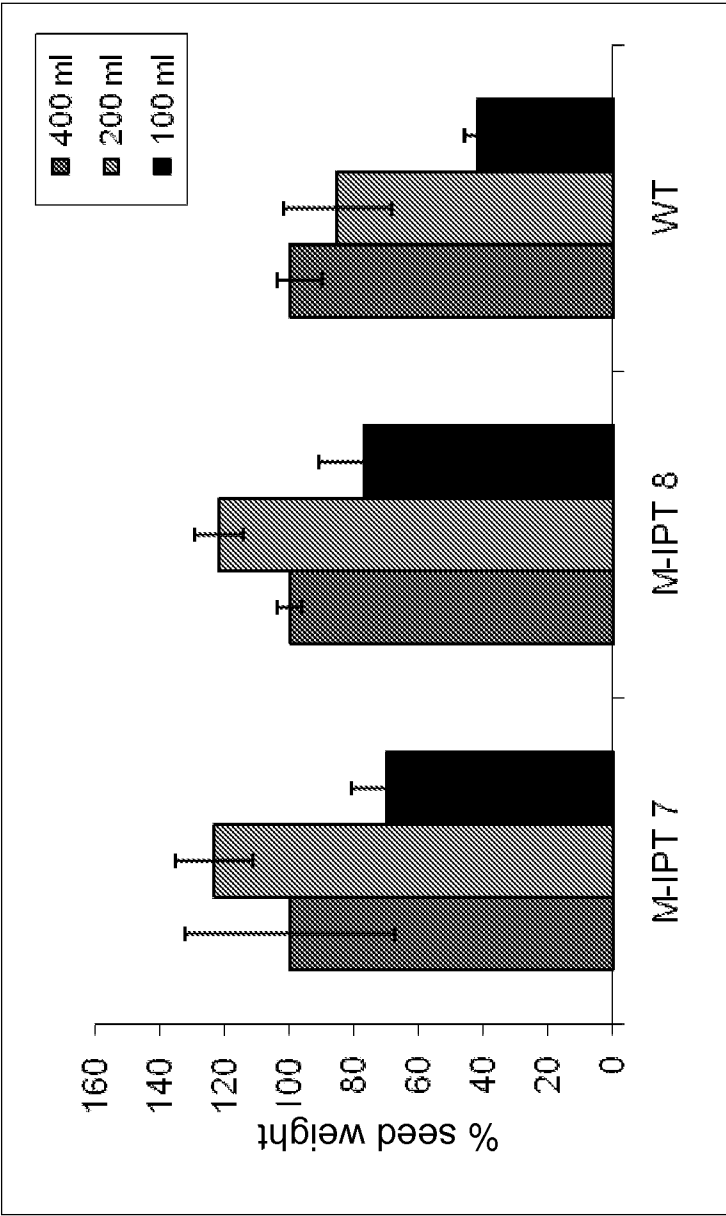


FIG. 7

FIG. 8D

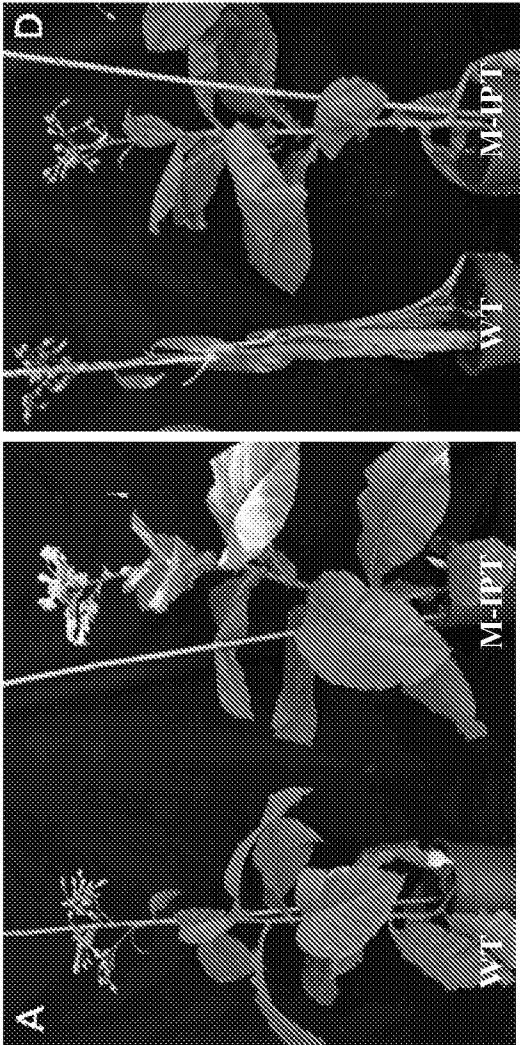


FIG. 8C

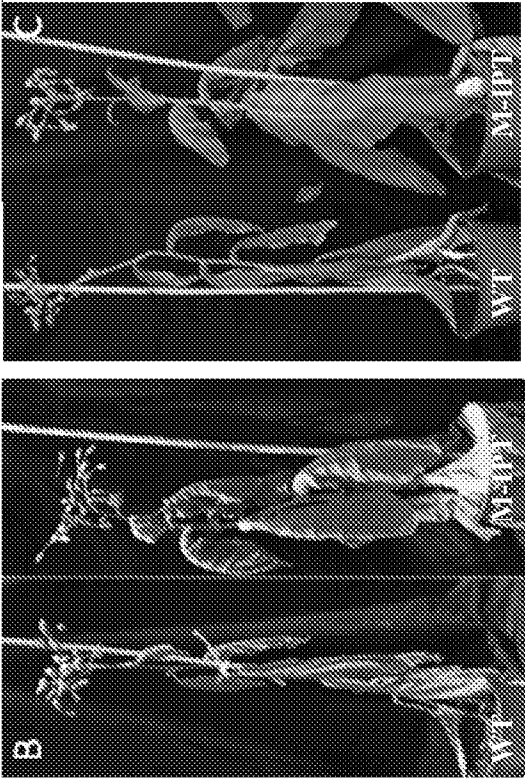
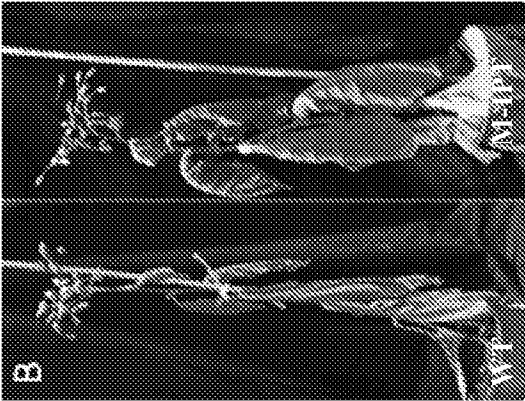


FIG. 8A



FIG. 8B



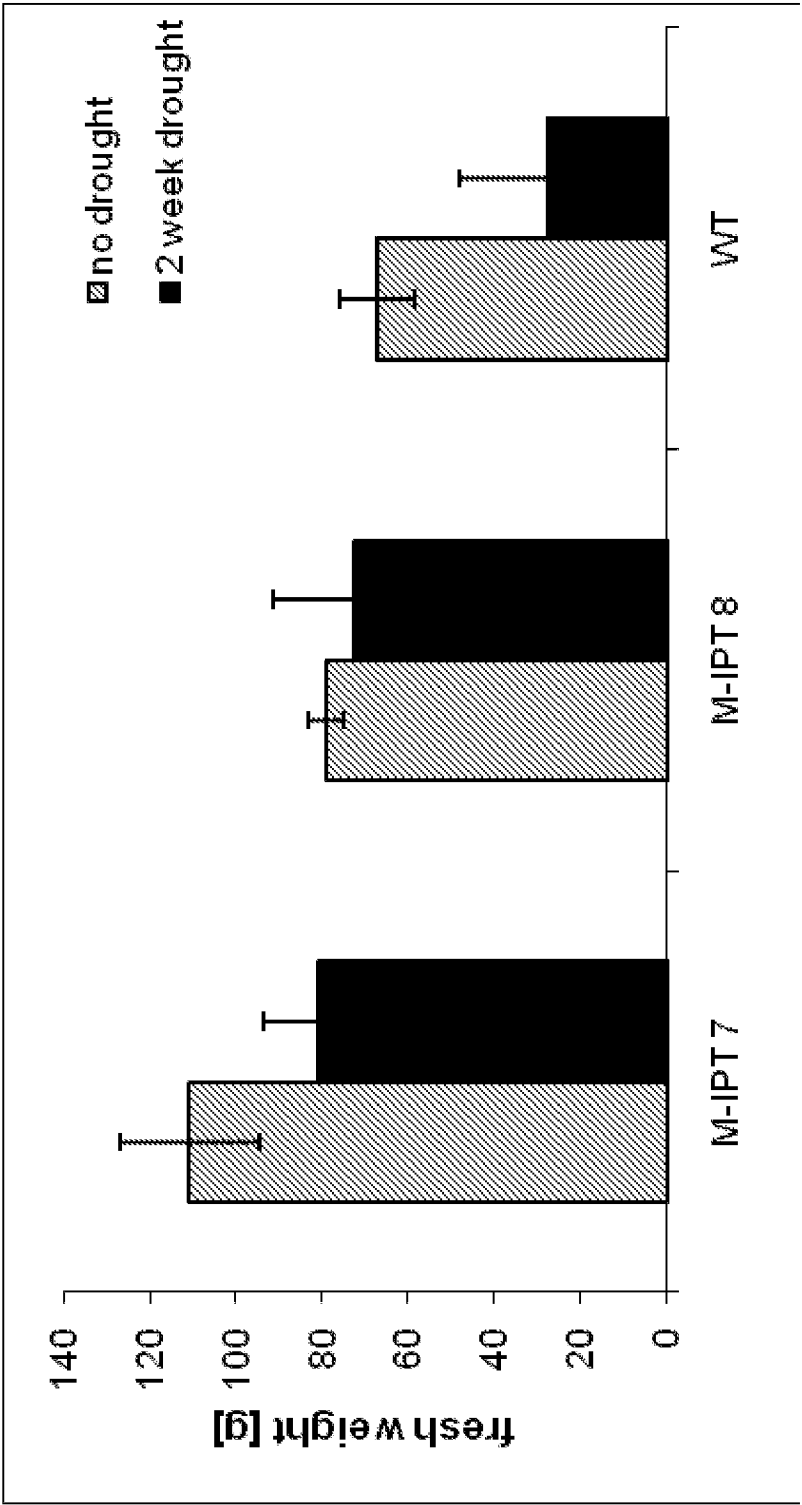


FIG. 9

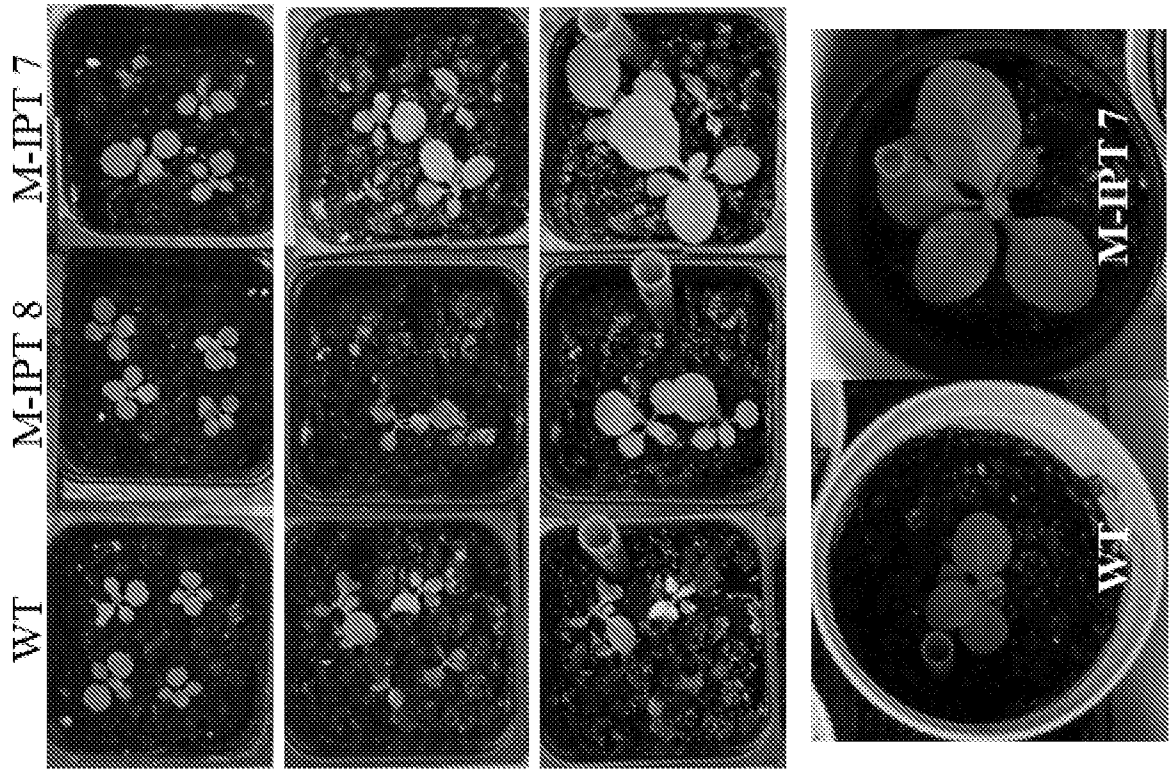


FIG. 10A

FIG. 10B

FIG. 10C

FIG. 10D

FIG. 11A

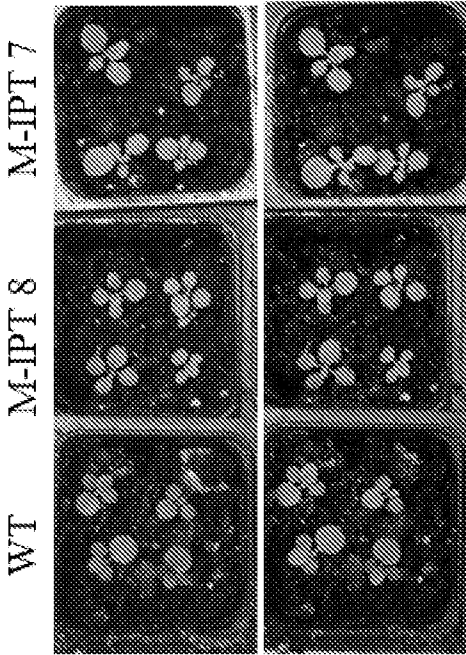


FIG. 11B



FIG. 11C

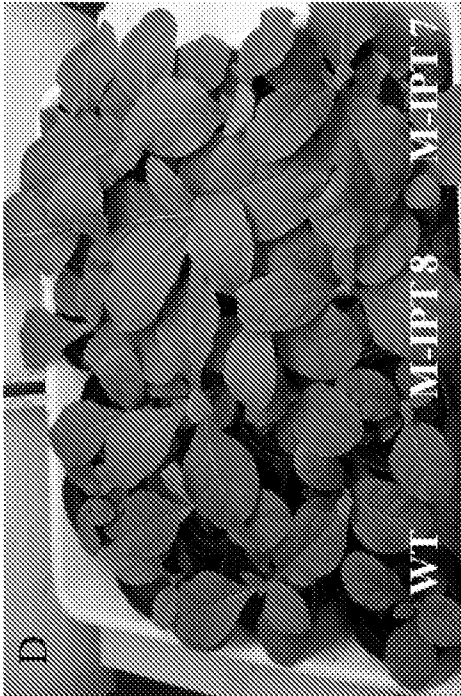


FIG. 11D

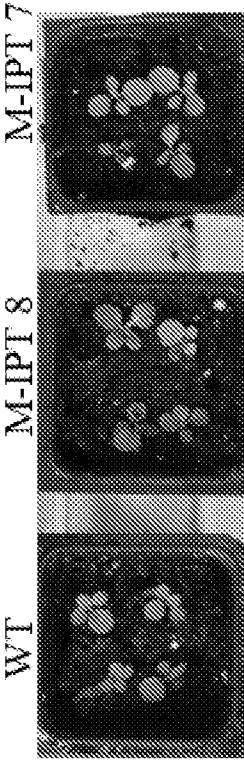


FIG. 12A

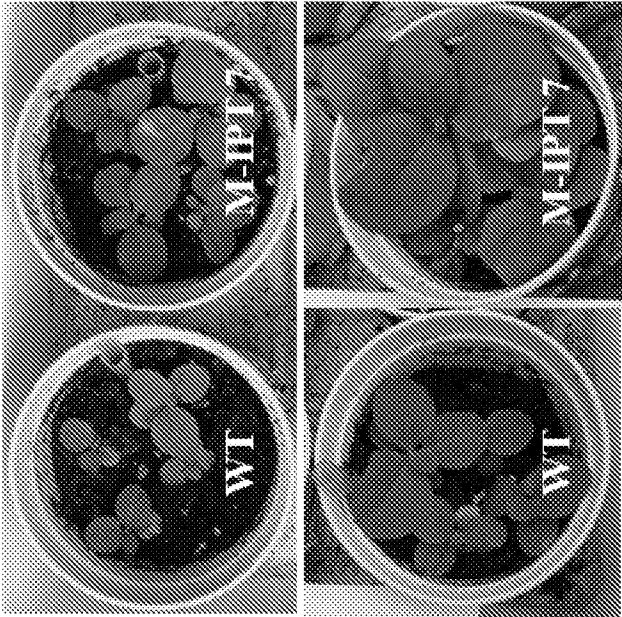


FIG. 12B

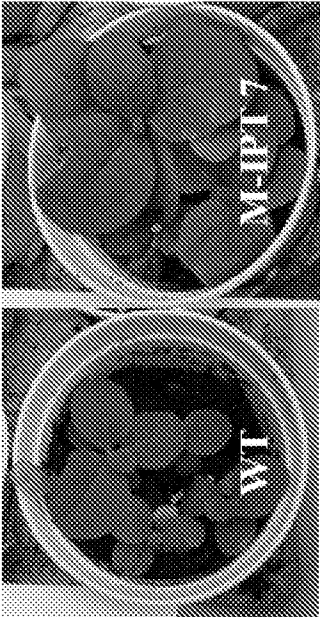


FIG. 12C

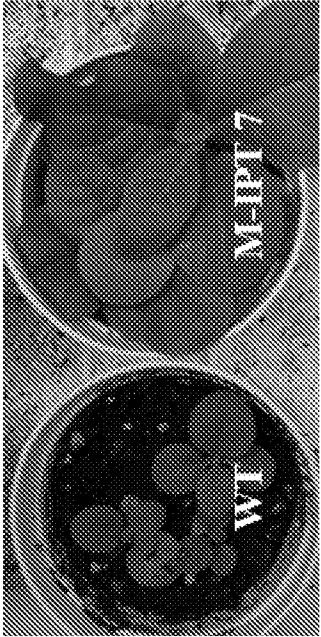


FIG. 12D

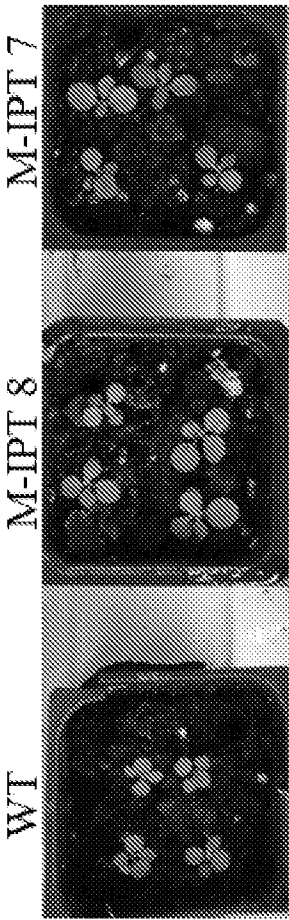


FIG. 13A

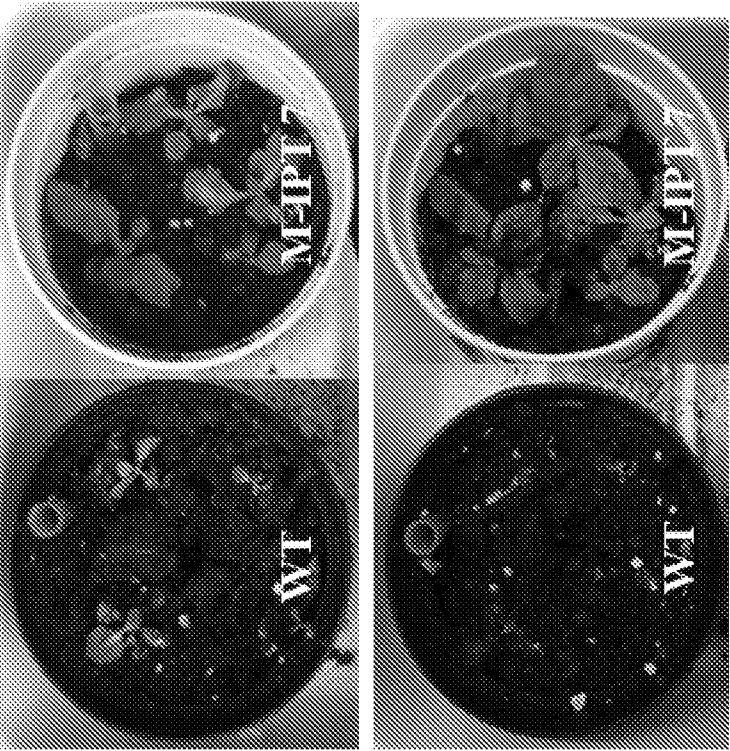


FIG. 13B

FIG. 13C

WT M-IPT 8 M-IPT 7

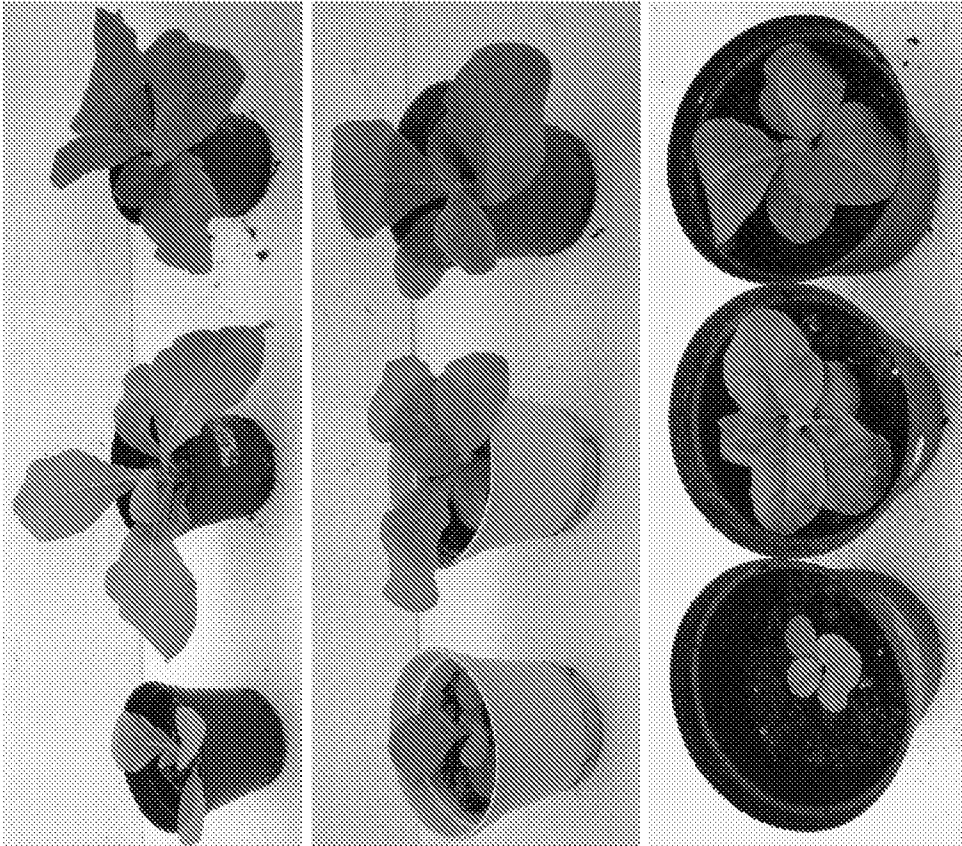


FIG. 14A

FIG. 14B

FIG. 14C

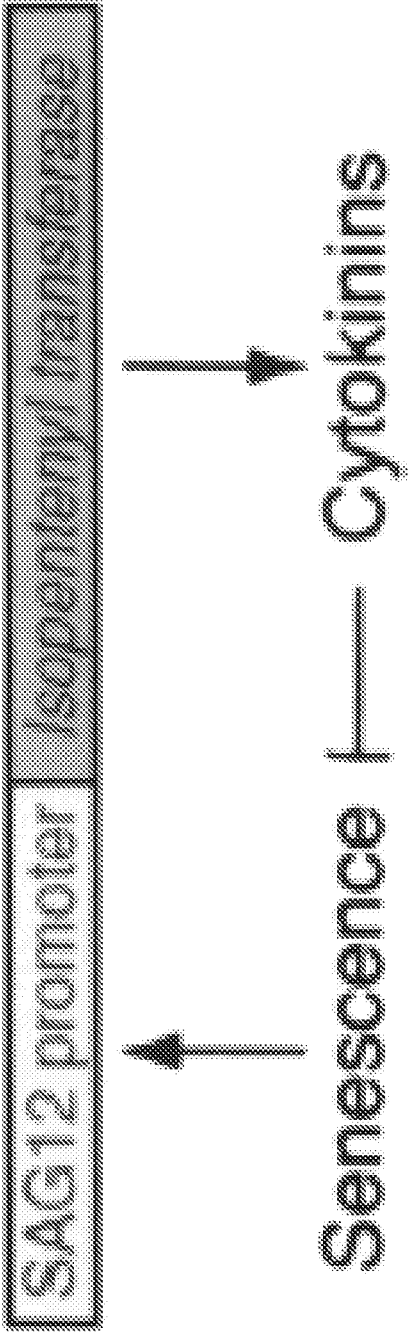


FIG. 15

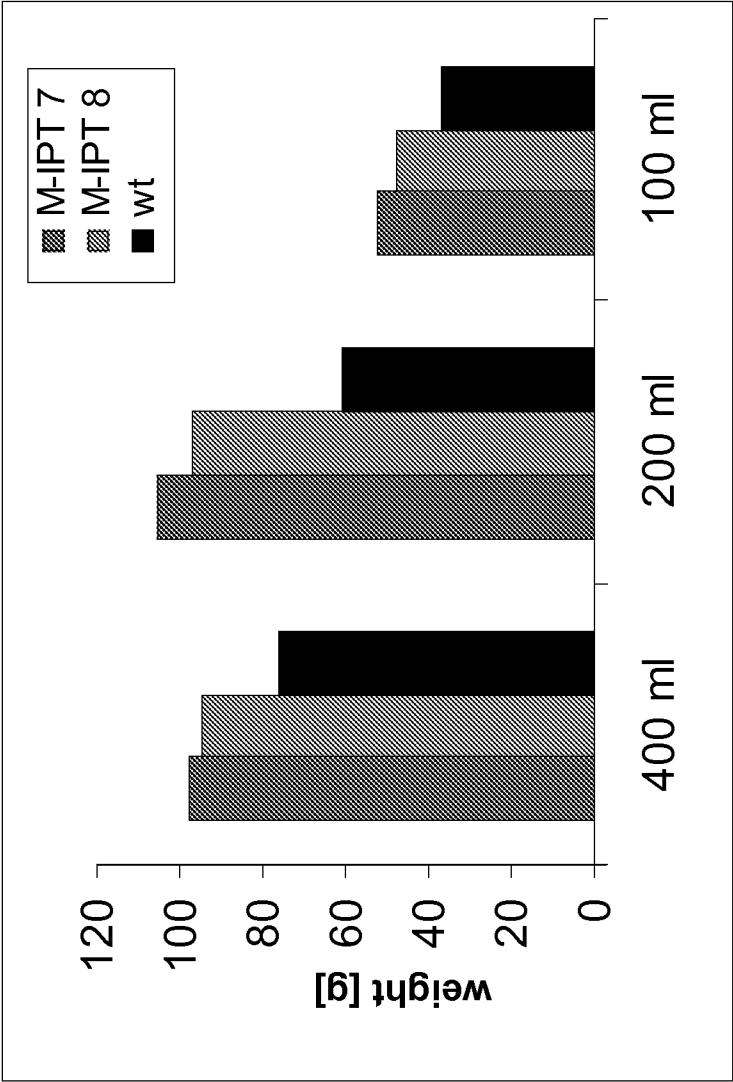


FIG. 16

FIG. 17B

FIG. 17D

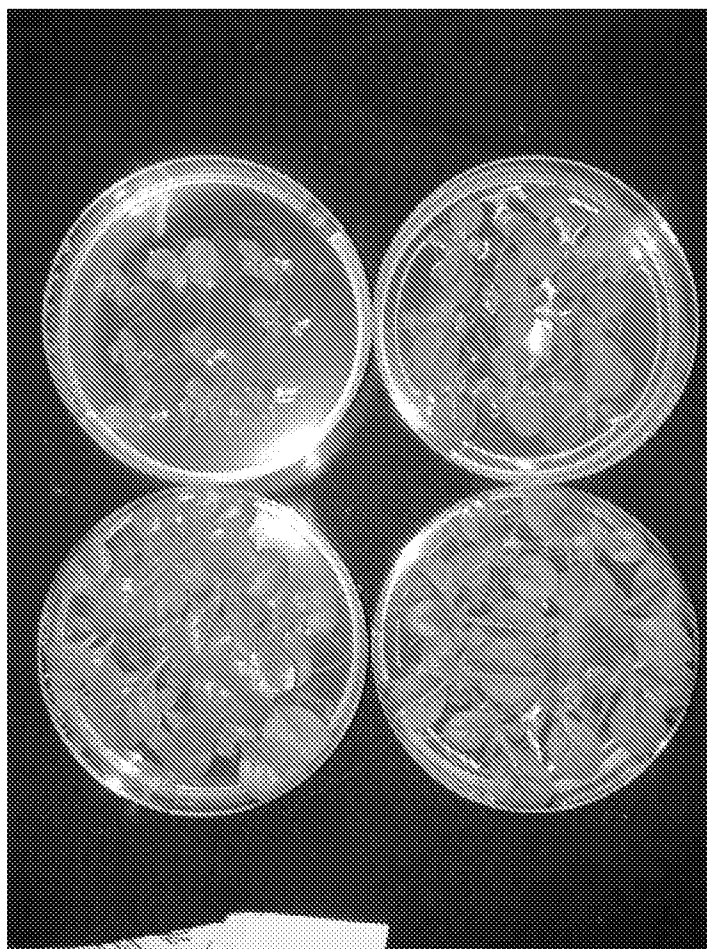


FIG. 17A

FIG. 17C

FIG. 18B

FIG. 18D

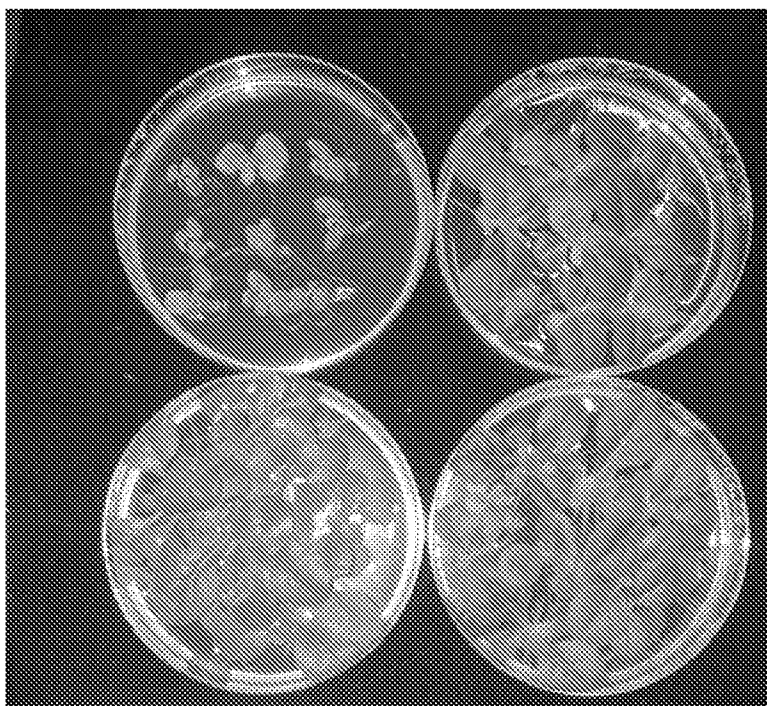


FIG. 18A

FIG. 18C

FIG. 19B

FIG. 19D



FIG. 19A

FIG. 19C

FIG. 20B

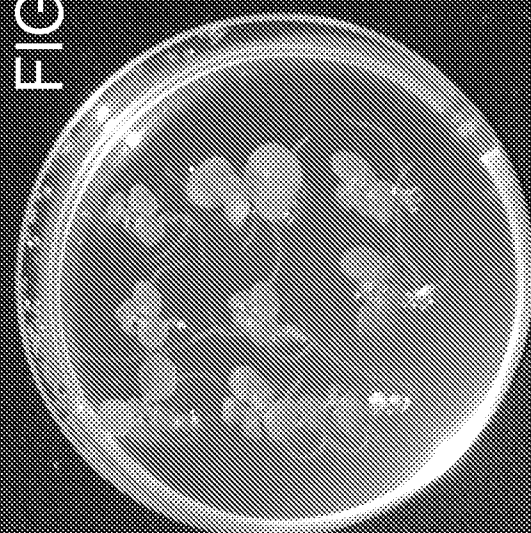


FIG. 20D

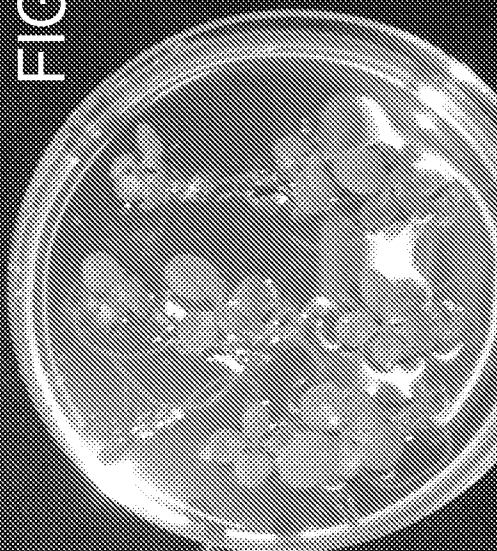


FIG. 20A



FIG. 20C

