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(54) Title: COMPOSITIONS AND METHODS FOR PRODUCING TOBACCO PLANTS AND PRODUCTS HAVING ALTERED ALKALOID LEVELS

(57) Abstract: The present disclosure provides the identification of tobacco Nic1 locus. Also provided are tobacco plants with altered total alkaloid and nicotine levels and commercially acceptable leaf grade, their development via breeding or transgenic approaches, and production of tobacco products from these tobacco plants. Also provided are compositions and methods for producing tobacco plants having novel Nic1 mutations or alleles to reduce nicotine levels. Further provided are sequence polymorphisms and molecular markers for breeding tobacco with reduced nicotine or nicotine free while maintaining tobacco leaf grade and tobacco product quality.



Compositions and Methods for Producing Tobacco Plants and Products Having Altered Alkaloid Levels

[0001] The present application claims the benefit of U.S. provisional application No. 62/185,268 filed June 26, 2015 (pending), U.S. provisional application No. 62/186,854, filed June 30, 2015 (pending), U.S. provisional application No. 62/271,780, filed December 28, 2015, and U.S. provisional application No. 62/335,772, filed May 13, 2016 (pending), all of which are hereby incorporated by reference in their entireties.

INCORPORATION OF SEQUENCE LISTING

[0002] A sequence listing contained in the file named "P34319US04.txt" which is 3,579,889 bytes (measured in MS-Windows®) and created on June 24, 2016, comprising 127 nucleotide sequences and 37 amino acid sequences, is filed electronically herewith and incorporated by reference in its entirety.

FIELD

[0003] The present disclosure provides the identification of tobacco Nic1 locus. Also provided are tobacco plants with altered total alkaloid and nicotine levels and commercially acceptable leaf grade, their development via breeding or transgenic approaches, and production of tobacco products from these tobacco plants.

BACKGROUND

[0004] Four major alkaloids are found in tobacco: nicotine, nornicotine, anabasine, and anatabine. Nicotine is the predominant alkaloid, usually accounting for more than 90% of the total alkaloids in commercial tobacco cultivars. Nicotine biosynthesis occurs predominantly in tobacco roots. Tobacco plants then transport nicotine through the vascular bundle to leaves where nicotine is then stored in the vacuoles.

[0005] A variety of factors affect tobacco alkaloid levels including genotype, environment, fertilization, and agronomic practices (for example, nicotine production is stimulated by topping, wounding, and herbivore damage). Low-alkaloid traits initially found in strains of Cuban cigar tobacco varieties were introduced into cigarette varieties through a series of backcrosses. Low-alkaloid tobacco germplasm was subsequently registered in the genetic background of cultivar Burley 21 (Legg *et al.*, *Crop Science*, 10:212 (1970)). Genetic studies using the low alkaloid

Burley 21 (LA BU21) lines indicated that two unlinked loci contribute to nicotine levels in the tobacco leaf. These two loci are referred to as Nic1 and Nic2. The *nic1* and *nic2* mutations in LA BU21 are semidominant. They show dose-dependent effects on nicotine levels, with the effects of *nic1* about 2.4 times stronger than those of *nic2*. Molecular characterization of Nic2 locus has been reported. The *nic2* mutation was shown to contain a deletion of a cluster of transcription factor genes from the ethylene responsive factor (*ERF*) family.

[0006] Reducing total alkaloid content in tobacco can have many benefits. It can increase the value of tobacco as a biomass resource. Increases in nicotinic alkaloid in tobacco plants may play an important role in protecting plants against insects and herbivores.

[0007] Consistent with alkaloids' role in insect defense, LA BU21 was reported to be extremely susceptible to insect damage (Legg *et al.*, *Crop Science*, 10:212 (1970)). A further study comparing isogenic lines of flue-cured tobacco with low total alkaloids percentage (approximately 0.20%) with their "normal" recurring parents (total alkaloids 1.85 to 2.70%) reported that yield, grade index, total N, and reducing sugar content in the low alkaloid lines were lower than in the normal flue-cured cultivars (Chaplin and Weeks, *Crop Science*, 16(3):416-18 (1976)).

[0008] There is a need to identify novel genes that regulate tobacco nicotine levels, and to develop tobacco plants and products that contain altered nicotine levels (*e.g.*, reduced nicotine) while maintaining (if not making superior) tobacco leaf quality.

SUMMARY

[0009] In some aspects, the present disclosure provides tobacco plants, or part thereof, comprising a mutation in Nic1 locus, a mutation in Nic2 locus, or both, wherein the tobacco plant is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value of 50 or more.

[0010] In other aspects, the present disclosure provides tobacco plants, or part thereof, comprising a mutation in Nic1 locus, a mutation in Nic2 locus, or both, wherein the tobacco plant is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value comparable to that of a control plant when grown in similar growth conditions, wherein the control plant shares an essentially identical genetic background with the tobacco plant except the mutation.

[0011] In some aspects, the present disclosure further provides non-transgenic tobacco plants, or part thereof, comprising a nicotine level selected from the group consisting of less than 2.0%, wherein the tobacco plants are capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value of 50 or more.

[0012] In other aspects, the present disclosure also provides a tobacco plant, or part thereof, comprising a non-transgenic mutation, wherein the non-transgenic mutation reduces the nicotine level of the tobacco plant to about 20% or less of the nicotine level of a control plant when grown in similar growth conditions, wherein the tobacco plant is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value comparable to the USDA grade index value of the control plant, and wherein the control plant shares an essentially identical genetic background with the tobacco plant except the non-transgenic mutation.

[0013] In some aspects, the present disclosure provides tobacco plants, or part thereof, comprising a mutation in Nic1 locus, a mutation in Nic2 locus, or both, wherein the tobacco plant comprise a similar level of one or more tobacco aroma compounds selected from the group consisting of 3-methylvaleric acid, valeric acid, isovaleric acid, a labdenoid, a cembrenoid, a sugar ester, and a reducing sugar, compared to a control tobacco plant when grown in similar growth conditions.

[0014] In other aspects, the present disclosure provides tobacco plants, or part thereof, comprising a mutation in Nic1 locus, wherein the mutation is absent from LA Burley 21. In some aspects, tobacco plants provided herein comprise a shorter chromosome deletion at Nic1 locus compared to LA Burley 21. In other aspects, tobacco plants provided herein comprise no deletion of a complete gene or a complete genic coding sequence in Nic1 locus.

[0015] In some aspects, the present disclosure provides tobacco plants, or part thereof, comprising one or more mutations within one or more genes comprising a sequence having at least 80% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 9 to 28, 75 to 82, 86 to 100, 145, and fragments thereof. In some aspects, tobacco plants provided herein comprise one or more non-naturally existing mutant alleles at Nic1 locus which reduce or eliminate one or more gene activity from Nic1 or Nic2 locus. In some aspects, these mutant alleles result in lower nicotine levels.

[0016] In other aspects, the present disclosure provides tobacco plants, or part thereof, comprising one or more mutations within one or more genes comprising a coding sequence having at least 80% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 29 to 48, 83, 101 to 115, 146, and fragments thereof.

[0017] In some aspects, the present disclosure provides tobacco plants, or part thereof, comprising one or more mutations within one or more genes encoding a polypeptide having at least 80% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 49 to 68, 84, 116 to 130, 147, and fragments thereof.

[0018] In other aspects, the present disclosure provides tobacco plants, or part thereof, comprising a heterologous expression cassette comprising a Nic1 inhibitory sequence of a gene comprising a sequence having at least 80% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 9 to 28, 75 to 82, 86 to 100, 145, and fragments thereof, wherein the inhibitory sequence is operably linked to a promoter that is functional in a plant cell, and wherein the inhibitory sequence has at least 90% sequence identity to a fragment of at least 21 nucleotides of the sequence having at least 80% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 9 to 28, 75 to 82, 86 to 100, 145, and fragments thereof.

[0019] In other aspects, the present disclosure provides recombinant DNA constructs comprising a promoter that is functional in a tobacco cell and operably linked to a polynucleotide that encodes an RNA molecule capable of binding to an RNA encoding a polypeptide having an amino acid sequence at least 80% identical to an amino acid sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 49 to 68, 84, 116 to 130, 147, and fragments thereof, and wherein the RNA molecule suppresses the expression of the polypeptide.

[0020] In some aspects, the present disclosure provides recombinant DNA constructs comprising a promoter that is functional in a tobacco cell and operably linked to a polynucleotide that encodes a polypeptide having an amino acid sequence at least 80% identical to an amino acid sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 49 to 68, 84, 116 to 130, 147, and fragments thereof.

[0021] The present disclosure further provides cured tobacco, tobacco blends, tobacco products comprising plant material from tobacco plants, lines, varieties or hybrids disclosed herein.

[0022] The present disclosure also provides methods for breeding tobacco lines, cultivars, or varieties comprising a desirable level of total alkaloid or nicotine, *e.g.*, low nicotine or nicotine free. In some aspects, the present disclosure provides a method of introgressing a low nicotine trait into a tobacco variety, the method comprising: (a) crossing a first tobacco variety comprising a low nicotine trait with a second tobacco variety without the low nicotine trait to produce one or more progeny tobacco plants; (b) genotyping the one or more progeny tobacco plants for a polymorphic marker linked to the low nicotine trait, wherein the polymorphic marker is in a chromosomal interval flanked by any two of polymorphic loci listed in Table 3 or flanked by any two of polymorphic loci listed in Table 4; and (c) selecting a progeny tobacco plant comprising the low nicotine trait.

[0023] In some aspects, the present disclosure provides a method of introgressing a low nicotine trait into a tobacco variety, the method comprising: (a) crossing a first tobacco variety comprising a low nicotine trait with a second tobacco variety without the low nicotine trait to produce one or more progeny tobacco plants; (b) genotyping the one or more progeny tobacco plants for a polymorphic marker linked to the low nicotine trait, wherein the polymorphic marker is within 20 cM of any one of polymorphic loci listed in Tables 3, 4, 16, and 17; and (c) selecting a progeny tobacco plant comprising the low nicotine trait. In one aspect, a polymorphic marker is a SNP marker selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID Nos. 131 to 144.

[0024] In other aspects, the present disclosure provides a method of selecting a tobacco plant having a low nicotine trait, the method comprising: (a) isolating nucleic acids from a collection of tobacco germplasm; (b) assaying the nucleic acids for one or more markers closely linked to Nic1 locus; and (c) selecting a tobacco plant having a low nicotine trait based on the marker assay.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0025] **Figure 1** shows the number of differentially regulated genes for each pairwise comparison within the group of BU21, HI BU21, LI BU21 and LA BU2.

[0026] **Figure 2** shows that Nic1 regulates genes involved in nicotine biosynthesis. Red arrows indicate genes whose expression is upregulated in the presence of Nic1, especially within comparisons (i) BU21vs LA BU21, and (ii) HI BU21 vs LA BU21.

[0027] **Figure 3** shows genotypic and chemistry data of an F₂ population by plotting the chemistry (y axis) of each plant by its genotype (x axis).

[0028] **Figure 4** is identical to Figure 3 except excluding 8 outliers likely due to sampling errors.

[0029] **Figure 5** shows percent nicotine levels of isogenic BU21 low alkaloid series (LA BU21, LI BU21, HI BU21, and BU21) in a 2014 field test.

[0030] **Figure 6** shows percent nicotine levels of isogenic BU21 low alkaloid series (LA BU21, LI BU21, HI BU21, and BU21) in a 2015 field test.

[0031] **Figure 7** shows the relative genomic position of *NDG1* to *NDG15* genes on SEQ ID NO: 85 which is shown in four overlapping segments (from top to bottom, nucleotide 1 to ~100k, ~100k to ~200k, ~200k to ~300k, and ~300k to 425k, respectively).

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEQUENCES

[0032] SEQ ID No: 1 sets forth the sequence of a Nic1 associated deletion, Scaffold0002504, identified from LA BU21.

[0033] SEQ ID No: 2 sets forth the sequence of a Nic2 associated deletion, Scaffold0000549, identified from LA BU21.

[0034] SEQ ID Nos: 3 to 8 set forth primer sequences used for PCR confirmation of identified Nic1 and Nic2 deletions.

[0035] SEQ ID Nos: 9 to 28 set forth genomic sequences of 20 annotated genes in Nic1 associated deletion Scaffold0002504.

[0036] SEQ ID Nos: 29 to 48 set forth cDNA sequences of 20 annotated genes in Nic1 associated deletion Scaffold0002504.

[0037] SEQ ID Nos: 49 to 68 set forth amino acid sequences encoded by 20 annotated genes in Nic1 associated deletion Scaffold0002504.

[0038] SEQ ID Nos: 69 and 70 set forth exemplary transformation cassette sequences for suppressing g100614_Scaffold0002504 and g100631_Scaffold0002504 via RNA interference (RNAi).

- [0039] SEQ ID Nos: 71 and 72 set forth reference TN90 alleles of sequence polymorphisms.
- [0040] SEQ ID No: 73 sets forth the sequence of a tobacco genomic sequence assembly NT2.0-Scaffold4274 which comprises a re-sequenced segment of NT1.0-Scaffold0002504. Specifically, nucleotides 148796 to 282345 of NT2.0-Scaffold4274 correspond to and replace NT1.0-Scaffold0002504 between nucleotides 384701 to 542313 in the minus orientation.
- [0041] SEQ ID No: 74 sets forth the sequence of a tobacco genomic sequence assembly NT2.0-Scaffold14415 which comprises a re-sequenced segment of NT1.0-Scaffold0002504. Specifically, nucleotides 1 to 59671 of NT2.0-Scaffold14415 correspond to and replace NT1.0-Scaffold0002504 between nucleotides 288601 to 363040 in the minus orientation.
- [0042] SEQ ID Nos: 75 and 82 set forth re-sequenced and re-fined genomic sequences of eight annotated genes in *Nic1* associated deletion.
- [0043] SEQ ID Nos: 83 and 84 set forth further annotated cDNA and amino acid sequences of the gene in g100623_Scaffold0002504 based on re-sequencing.
- [0044] SEQ ID No: 85 sets forth the genomic sequence of the complete *Nic1* deletion region in LA BU21.
- [0045] SEQ ID Nos: 86 to 100 set forth genomic sequences of 15 annotated genes in SEQ ID No: 85.
- [0046] SEQ ID Nos: 101 to 115 set forth cDNA sequences of 15 annotated genes in SEQ ID No: 85.
- [0047] SEQ ID Nos: 116 to 130 set forth protein sequences of 15 annotated genes in SEQ ID No: 85.
- [0048] SEQ ID Nos: 131 to 142 set forth 12 SNP marker sequences flanking *nic1* or *nic2* deletion.
- [0049] SEQ ID Nos: 143 and 144 set forth two SNP marker sequences associated with an ERF-39 like gene .
- [0050] SEQ ID Nos: 145 to 147 set forth genomic, cDNA, and protein sequences of an ERF-39 like gene.

[0051] SEQ ID Nos: 148 to 164 set forth sequences of inverted repeat-containing RNAi cassettes targeting NDG1 to NDG15.

[0052] Various sequences disclosed herein include “N” in nucleotide sequences or “X” in amino acid sequences. “N” can be any nucleotide, *e.g.*, A, T, G, C, or a deletion or insertion of one or more nucleotides. In some instant, a string of “N” are shown. The number of “N” does not necessarily correlate with the actual number of undetermined nucleotides at that position. The actual nucleotide sequences can be longer or shorter than the shown segment of “N”. Similarly, “X” can be any amino acid residue or a deletion or insertion of one or more amino acids. Again, the number of “X” does not necessarily correlate with the actual number of undetermined amino acids at that position. The actual amino acid sequences can be longer or shorter than the shown segment of “X”.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0053] Unless defined otherwise, technical and scientific terms used herein have the same meaning as commonly understood by one of ordinary skill in the art. One skilled in the art will recognize many methods can be used in the practice of the present disclosure. Indeed, the present disclosure is in no way limited to the methods and materials described. For purposes of the present disclosure, the following terms are defined below.

[0054] Any references cited herein, including, *e.g.*, all patents and publications are incorporated by reference in their entirety.

[0055] 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.

[0056] The term “about” is used herein to mean approximately, roughly, around, or in the region of. When the term “about” is used in conjunction with a numerical range, it modifies that range by extending the boundaries above and below the numerical values set forth.

[0057] As used herein, a tobacco plant can be from any plant from the *Nicotiana* genus including, but not limited to *Nicotiana tabacum*, *Nicotiana amplexicaulis* PI 271989; *Nicotiana benthamiana* PI 555478; *Nicotiana bigelovii* PI 555485; *Nicotiana debneyi*; *Nicotiana excelsior* PI 224063; *Nicotiana glutinosa* PI 555507; *Nicotiana goodspeedii* PI 241012; *Nicotiana gossei*

PI 230953; *Nicotiana hesperis* PI 271991; *Nicotiana knightiana* PI 555527; *Nicotiana maritima* PI 555535; *Nicotiana megalosiphon* PI 555536; *Nicotiana nudicaulis* PI 555540; *Nicotiana paniculata* PI 555545; *Nicotiana plumbaginifolia* PI 555548; *Nicotiana repanda* PI 555552; *Nicotiana rustica*; *Nicotiana suaveolens* PI 230960; *Nicotiana sylvestris* PI 555569; *Nicotiana tomentosa* PI 266379; *Nicotiana tomentosiformis*; and *Nicotiana trigonophylla* PI 555572.

[0058] In some aspects, the present disclosure provides tobacco plants, or part thereof, comprising a mutation in Nic1 locus, a mutation in Nic2 locus, or both, wherein the tobacco plant is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value of 50 or more. In some aspects, tobacco plants disclosed herein are capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value selected from the group consisting of 55 or more, 60 or more, 65 or more, 70 or more, 75 or more, 80 or more, 85 or more, 90 or more, and 95 or more. In other aspects, tobacco plants disclosed herein are capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value comparable to that of a control plant when grown in similar growth conditions, wherein the control plant shares an essentially identical genetic background with the tobacco plant except the mutation. In further aspects, tobacco plants disclosed herein are capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value of at least about 65%, at least about 70%, at least about 75%, at least about 80%, at least about 85%, at least about 90%, at least about 95%, or at least about 98% of the USDA grade index value of a control plant when grown in similar growth conditions, wherein the control plant shares an essentially identical genetic background with the tobacco plant except the mutation. In further aspects, tobacco plants disclosed herein are capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value of between 65% and 130%, between 70% and 130%, between 75% and 130%, between 80% and 130%, between 85% and 130%, between 90% and 130%, between 95% and 130%, between 100% and 130%, between 105% and 130%, between 110% and 130%, between 115% and 130%, or between 120% and 130% of the USDA grade index value of the control plant. In further aspects, tobacco plants disclosed herein are capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value of between 70% and 125%, between 75% and 120%, between 80% and 115%, between 85% and 110%, or between 90% and 100% of the USDA grade index value of the control plant. In some aspects, tobacco plants disclosed herein comprise nicotine at a level below 1%, below 2%, below 5%, below 8%, below 10%, below 12%, below 15%, below 20%, below 25%, below 30%, below 40%, below 50%, below 60%, below 70%, or below 80% of the nicotine level of a control plant when grown in

similar growth conditions, wherein the control plant shares an essentially identical genetic background with the tobacco plant except the mutation. In other aspects, tobacco plants disclosed herein comprise a nicotine level selected from the group consisting of less than 3%, less than 2.75%, less than 2.5%, less than 2.25%, less than 2.0%, less than 1.75%, less than 1.5%, less than 1.25%, less than 1%, less than 0.9%, less than 0.8%, less than 0.7%, less than 0.6%, less than 0.5%, less than 0.4%, less than 0.3%, less than 0.2%, less than 0.1%, and less than 0.05%. In further aspects, tobacco plants disclosed herein further comprises a transgene or mutation directly suppressing the expression or activity of one or more genes encoding a product selected from the group consisting of PMT, MPO, QPT, BBL, A622, and MATE transporter.

[0059] In some aspects, the present disclosure provides tobacco plants, or part thereof, comprising a mutation in Nic1 locus, a mutation in Nic2 locus, or both, wherein the tobacco plant is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value comparable to that of a control plant when grown in similar growth conditions, wherein the control plant shares an essentially identical genetic background with the tobacco plant except the mutation. In other aspects, tobacco plants disclosed herein are capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value selected from the group consisting of 55 or more, 60 or more, 65 or more, 70 or more, 75 or more, 80 or more, 85 or more, 90 or more, and 95 or more. In other aspects, tobacco plants disclosed herein are capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value selected from the group consisting of between 50 and 95, between 55 and 95, between 60 and 95, between 65 and 95, between 70 and 95, between 75 and 95, between 80 and 95, between 85 and 95, between 90 and 95, between 55 and 90, between 60 and 85, between 65 and 80, between 70 and 75, between 50 and 55, between 55 and 60, between 60 and 65, between 65 and 70, between 70 and 75, between 75 and 80, between 80 and 85, between 85 and 90, and between 90 and 95. In further aspects, tobacco plants disclosed herein are capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value of at least about 65%, at least about 70%, at least about 75%, at least about 80%, at least about 85%, at least about 90%, at least about 95%, or at least about 98% of the USDA grade index value of the control plant. In further aspects, tobacco plants disclosed herein are capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value of between 65% and 130%, between 70% and 130%, between 75% and 130%, between 80% and 130%, between 85% and 130%, between 90% and 130%, between 95% and 130%, between 100% and 130%, between 105% and 130%, between 110% and 130%, between 115% and 130%, or between 120% and

130% of the USDA grade index value of the control plant. In further aspects, tobacco plants disclosed herein are capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value of between 70% and 125%, between 75% and 120%, between 80% and 115%, between 85% and 110%, or between 90% and 100% of the USDA grade index value of the control plant. In other aspects, tobacco plants disclosed herein comprise nicotine at a level below 1%, below 2%, below 5%, below 8%, below 10%, below 12%, below 15%, below 20%, below 25%, below 30%, below 40%, below 50%, below 60%, below 70%, or below 80% of the nicotine level of the control plant when grown in similar growth conditions. In other aspects, tobacco plants disclosed herein further comprises a transgene or mutation directly suppressing the expression or activity of one or more genes encoding a product selected from the group consisting of PMT, MPO, QPT, BBL, A622, and MATE transporter.

[0060] In some aspects, the present disclosure also provides a tobacco variety, cultivar, or line comprising a mutation selected from the group consisting of a *nic1* mutation, a *nic2* mutation, and a combination thereof, wherein the tobacco variety, cultivar, or line has a leaf grade comparable to the leaf grade of a control tobacco variety, cultivar, or line when grown in similar growth conditions, wherein the control tobacco variety shares an essentially identical genetic background with the tobacco variety, cultivar, or line except the mutation.

[0061] In some aspects, the present disclosure further provides non-transgenic tobacco plants, or part thereof, comprising a nicotine level selected from the group consisting of less than 3%, less than 2.75%, less than 2.5%, less than 2.25%, less than 2.0%, less than 1.75%, less than 1.5%, less than 1.25%, less than 1%, less than 0.9%, less than 0.8%, less than 0.7%, less than 0.6%, less than 0.5%, less than 0.4%, less than 0.3%, less than 0.2%, less than 0.1%, and less than 0.05%, wherein the tobacco plants are capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value of 50 or more 55 or more, 60 or more, 65 or more, 70 or more, 75 or more, 80 or more, 85 or more, 90 or more, and 95 or more. In other aspects, such non-transgenic tobacco plants comprise a nicotine level of less than 2.0% and are capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value of 70 or more. In furthers aspects, such non-transgenic tobacco plants comprise a nicotine level of less than 1.0% and are capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value of 70 or more.

[0062] In some aspects, the present disclosure also provides a tobacco plant, or part thereof, comprising a non-transgenic mutation, wherein the non-transgenic mutation reduces the nicotine level of the tobacco plant to below 1%, below 2%, below 5%, below 8%, below 10%, below 12%, below 15%, below 20%, below 25%, below 30%, below 40%, below 50%, below 60%, below 70%, or below 80% of the nicotine level of a control plant when grown in similar growth conditions, wherein the tobacco plant is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value comparable to the USDA grade index value of the control plant, and wherein the control plant shares an essentially identical genetic background with the tobacco plant except the non-transgenic mutation.

[0063] In some aspects, the present disclosure provides tobacco plants, or part thereof, comprising a mutation in Nic1 locus, wherein the mutation is absent from LA Burley 21. In some aspects, tobacco plants provided herein comprise a shorter chromosome deletion at Nic1 locus compared to LA Burley 21. In other aspects, tobacco plants provided herein comprise no deletion of a complete gene or a complete genic coding sequence in Nic1 locus. In some aspects, tobacco plants provided herein are homozygous at Nic1 locus. In other aspects, tobacco plants provided herein are heterozygous at Nic1 locus. In some aspects, tobacco plants provided herein comprise a Nic1 mutation selected from the group consisting of a point mutation, a deletion, an insertion, a duplication, and an inversion. In some aspects, Nic1 mutations in the tobacco plants provided herein are introduced by an approach selected from the group consisting of random mutagenesis and targeted mutagenesis. In other aspects, Nic1 mutations in the tobacco plants provided herein are introduced by a targeted mutagenesis approach selected from the group consisting of meganuclease, zinc finger nuclease, TALEN, and CRISPR.

[0064] In some aspects, tobacco plants provided herein comprise one or more mutations within one or more genes comprising a sequence having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99%, or 100% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 9 to 28, 75 to 82, 86 to 100, 145, and fragments thereof. In some aspects, one or more mutations reduce the expression or activity of one or more genes comprising a sequence having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99%, or 100% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 9 to 28, 75 to 82, 86 to 100, 145, and fragments thereof.

[0065] In some aspects, tobacco plants provided herein comprise one or more mutations within one or more genes comprising a coding sequence having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99%, or 100% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 29 to 48, 83, 101 to 115, 146, and fragments thereof. In some aspects, one or more mutations reduce the expression or activity of one or more genes comprising a coding sequence having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99%, or 100% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 29 to 48, 83, 101 to 115, 146, and fragments thereof.

[0066] In some aspects, tobacco plants provided herein comprise one or more mutations within one or more genes encoding a polypeptide having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99%, or 100% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 49 to 68, 84, 116 to 130, 147 and fragments thereof. In some aspects, one or more mutations reduce the expression or activity of one or more genes encoding a polypeptide having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99%, or 100% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 49 to 68, 84, 116 to 130, 147 and fragments thereof.

[0067] In some aspects, tobacco plants provided herein comprise one or more mutations within one or more genes comprising a sequence having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99%, or 100% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 13, 28, 33, 48, 82, 86, 87, 101, 102, 145, and 146, and fragments thereof. In some aspects, one or more mutations reduce the expression or activity of one or more genes comprising a sequence having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99%, or 100% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 13, 28, 33, 48, 82, 86, 87, 101, 102, 145, and 146, and fragments thereof.

[0068] In some aspects, tobacco plants provided herein comprise one or more mutations within one or more genes comprising a coding sequence having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99%, or 100% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 33, 48, 101, 102, and 146, and fragments thereof. In some aspects, one or more mutations reduce the expression or activity of one or more

genes comprising a coding sequence having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99%, or 100% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 33, 48, 101, 102, and 146, and fragments thereof.

[0069] In some aspects, tobacco plants provided herein comprise one or more mutations within one or more genes encoding a polypeptide having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99%, or 100% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 53, 68, 116, 117, and 147, and fragments thereof. In some aspects, one or more mutations reduce the expression or activity of one or more genes encoding a polypeptide having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99%, or 100% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 53, 68, 116, 117, and 147, and fragments thereof.

[0070] LA Burley 21 is a low total alkaloid tobacco line produced by incorporation of a low alkaloid gene(s) from a Cuban cigar variety into Burley 21 through several backcrosses (Legg *et al.* 1970). It has approximately 0.2% total alkaloids (dry weight) compared to the about 3.5% (dry weight) of its parent, Burley 21. LA BU21 has a leaf grade well below commercially acceptable standards.

[0071] Unless specified otherwise, measurements of alkaloid or nicotine levels or leaf grade index values mentioned herein for a tobacco plant, variety, cultivar, or line refer to average measurements, including, for example, an average of multiple leaves of a single plant or an average measurement from a population of tobacco plants from a single variety, cultivar, or line. A population of tobacco plants or a collection of tobacco leaves for determining an average measurement (*e.g.*, alkaloid or nicotine level or leaf grading) can be of any size, for example, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, or 50. Industry-accepted standard protocols are followed for determining average measurements or grad index values.

[0072] As used herein, “similar growth conditions” refer to similar environmental conditions and/or agronomic practices for growing and making meaningful comparisons between two or more plant genotypes so that neither environmental conditions nor agronomic practices would contribute to or explain any difference observed between the two or more plant genotypes. Environmental conditions include, for example, light, temperature, water (humidity), and nutrition (*e.g.*, nitrogen and phosphorus). Agronomic practices include, for example, seeding,

clipping, undercutting, transplanting, topping, and suckering. See Chapters 4B and 4C of Tobacco, Production, Chemistry and Technology, Davis & Nielsen, eds., Blackwell Publishing, Oxford (1999), pp 70-103.

[0073] “Alkaloids” are complex, nitrogen-containing compounds that naturally occur in plants, and have pharmacological effects in humans and animals. “Nicotine” is the primary natural alkaloid in commercialized cigarette tobacco and accounts for about 90 percent of the alkaloid content in *Nicotiana tabacum*. Other major alkaloids in tobacco include cotinine, nornicotine, myosmine, nicotyrine, anabasine and anatabine. Minor tobacco alkaloids include nicotine-n-oxide, N-methyl anatabine, N-methyl anabasine, pseudooxynicotine, 2,3 dipyridyl and others.

[0074] In some aspects, tobacco plants provided herein comprise a lower level of total alkaloid or an individual alkaloid compared to a control tobacco plant without a Nic1 mutation when grown in similar growth conditions. In other aspects, tobacco plants provided herein comprise a lower level of one or more alkaloids selected from the group consisting of cotinine, nornicotine, myosmine, nicotyrine, anabasine and anatabine, compared to a control tobacco plant when grown in similar growth conditions. In some aspects, a lower alkaloid level refers to an alkaloid level of below 1%, below 2%, below 5%, below 8%, below 10%, below 12%, below 15%, below 20%, below 25%, below 30%, below 40%, below 50%, below 60%, below 70%, or below 80% of the alkaloid level of a control tobacco plant. In other aspects, a lower alkaloid level refers to an alkaloid level of about between 0.5% and 1%, between 1% and 2%, between 2% and 3%, between 3% and 4%, between 4% and 5%, between 5% and 6%, between 6% and 7%, between 7% and 8%, between 8% and 9%, between 9% and 10%, between 11% and 12%, between 12% and 13%, between 13% and 14%, between 14% and 15%, between 15% and 16%, between 16% and 17%, between 17% and 18%, between 18% and 19%, between 19% and 20%, between 21% and 22%, between 22% and 23%, between 23% and 24%, between 24% and 25%, between 25% and 26%, between 26% and 27%, between 27% and 28%, between 28% and 29%, or between 29% and 30% of the alkaloid level of a control tobacco plant. In further aspects, a lower alkaloid level refers to an alkaloid level of about between 0.5% and 5%, between 5% and 10%, between 10% and 20%, between 20% and 30% of the alkaloid level of a control tobacco plant.

[0075] Alkaloid levels can be assayed by methods known in the art, for example by quantification based on gas-liquid chromatography, high performance liquid chromatography, radio-immunoassays, and enzyme-linked immunosorbent assays. For example, nicotinic alkaloid levels can be measured by a GC-FID method based on CORESTA Recommended Method No. 7, 1987 and ISO Standards (ISO TC 126N 394 E. *See also* Hibi *et al.*, *Plant Physiology* 100: 826-35 (1992) for a method using gas-liquid chromatography equipped with a capillary column and an FID detector.

[0076] Alternatively, tobacco total alkaloids can be measured using a segmented-flow colorimetric method developed for analysis of tobacco samples as adapted by Skalar Instrument Co (West Chester, PA) and described by Collins *et al.*, *Tobacco Science* 13:79-81 (1969). In short, samples of tobacco are dried, ground, and extracted prior to analysis of total alkaloids and reducing sugars. The method then employs an acetic acid/methanol/water extraction and charcoal for decolorization. Determination of total alkaloids was based on the reaction of cyanogen chloride with nicotine alkaloids in the presence of an aromatic amine to form a colored complex which is measured at 460 nm. Unless specified otherwise, total alkaloid levels or nicotine levels shown herein are on a dry weight basis (*e.g.*, percent total alkaloid or percent nicotine).

[0077] In some aspects, tobacco plants provided herein comprise a lower level of nicotine compared to a control tobacco plant without a Nic1 mutation when grown in similar growth conditions. In some aspects, a lower nicotine level refers to an average nicotine level of below 1%, below 2%, below 5%, below 8%, below 10%, below 12%, below 15%, below 20%, below 25%, below 30%, below 40%, below 50%, below 60%, below 70%, or below 80% of the average nicotine level of a control tobacco plant. In other aspects, a lower nicotine level refers to an average nicotine level of about between 0.5% and 1%, between 1% and 2%, between 2% and 3%, between 3% and 4%, between 4% and 5%, between 5% and 6%, between 6% and 7%, between 7% and 8%, between 8% and 9%, between 9% and 10%, between 11% and 12%, between 12% and 13%, between 13% and 14%, between 14% and 15%, between 15% and 16%, between 16% and 17%, between 17% and 18%, between 18% and 19%, between 19% and 20%, between 21% and 22%, between 22% and 23%, between 23% and 24%, between 24% and 25%, between 25% and 26%, between 26% and 27%, between 27% and 28%, between 28% and 29%, or between 29% and 30% of the average nicotine level of a control tobacco plant. In further

aspects, a lower nicotine level refers to an average nicotine level of about between 0.5% and 5%, between 5% and 10%, between 10% and 20%, between 20% and 30% of the average nicotine level of a control tobacco plant.

[0078] In some aspects, tobacco plants provided herein comprise an average nicotine level selected from the group consisting of about 0.01%, 0.02%, 0.05%, 0.75%, 0.1%, 0.15%, 0.2%, 0.3%, 0.35%, 0.4%, 0.5%, 0.6%, 0.7%, 0.8%, 0.9%, 1%, 1.1%, 1.2%, 1.3%, 1.4%, 1.5%, 1.6%, 1.7%, 1.8%, 1.9%, 2%, 2.1%, 2.2%, 2.3%, 2.4%, 2.5%, 2.6%, 2.7%, 2.8%, 2.9%, 3%, 3.1%, 3.2%, 3.3%, 3.4%, 3.5%, 3.6%, 3.7%, 3.8%, 3.9%, 4%, 5%, 6%, 7%, 8%, and 9% on a dry weight basis. In other aspects, tobacco plants provided herein comprise an average nicotine level selected from the group consisting of about between 0.01% and 0.02%, between 0.02% and 0.05%, between 0.05% and 0.75%, between 0.75% and 0.1%, between 0.1% and 0.15%, between 0.15% and 0.2%, between 0.2% and 0.3%, between 0.3% and 0.35%, between 0.35% and 0.4%, between 0.4% and 0.5%, between 0.5% and 0.6%, between 0.6% and 0.7%, between 0.7% and 0.8%, between 0.8% and 0.9%, between 0.9% and 1%, between 1% and 1.1%, between 1.1% and 1.2%, between 1.2% and 1.3%, between 1.3% and 1.4%, between 1.4% and 1.5%, between 1.5% and 1.6%, between 1.6% and 1.7%, between 1.7% and 1.8%, between 1.8% and 1.9%, between 1.9% and 2%, between 2% and 2.1%, between 2.1% and 2.2%, between 2.2% and 2.3%, between 2.3% and 2.4%, between 2.4% and 2.5%, between 2.5% and 2.6%, between 2.6% and 2.7%, between 2.7% and 2.8%, between 2.8% and 2.9%, between 2.9% and 3%, between 3% and 3.1%, between 3.1% and 3.2%, between 3.2% and 3.3%, between 3.3% and 3.4%, between 3.4% and 3.5%, and between 3.5% and 3.6% on a dry weight basis. In further aspects, tobacco plants provided herein comprise an average nicotine level selected from the group consisting of about between 0.01% and 0.1%, between 0.02% and 0.2%, between 0.03% and 0.3%, between 0.04% and 0.4%, between 0.05% and 0.5%, between 0.75% and 1%, between 0.1% and 1.5%, between 0.15% and 2%, between 0.2% and 3%, and between 0.3% and 3.5% on a dry weight basis.

[0079] The present disclosure also provides tobacco plants having altered nicotine levels without negative impacts over other tobacco traits, *e.g.*, leaf grade index value. In one aspect, a low-nicotine or nicotine-free tobacco variety disclosed herein provides cured tobacco of commercially acceptable grade. Tobacco grades are evaluated based on factors including, but not limited to, the leaf stalk position, leaf size, leaf color, leaf uniformity and integrity, ripeness,

texture, elasticity, sheen (related with the intensity and the depth of coloration of the leaf as well as the shine), hygroscopicity (the faculty of the tobacco leaves to absorb and to retain the ambient moisture), and green nuance or cast. Leaf grade can be determined, for example, using an Official Standard Grade published by the Agricultural Marketing Service of the US Department of Agriculture (7 U.S.C. §511). *See, e.g.*, Official Standard Grades for Burley Tobacco (U.S. Type 31 and Foreign Type 93), effective November 5, 1990 (55 F.R. 40645); Official Standard Grades for Flue-Cured Tobacco (U.S. Types 11, 12, 13, 14 and Foreign Type 92), effective March 27, 1989 (54 F.R. 7925); Official Standard Grades for Pennsylvania Seedleaf Tobacco (U.S. Type 41), effective January 8, 1965 (29 F.R. 16854); Official Standard Grades for Ohio Cigar-Leaf Tobacco (U.S. Types 42, 43, and 44), effective December 8, 1963 (28 F.R. 11719 and 28 F.R. 11926); Official Standard Grades for Wisconsin Cigar-Binder Tobacco (U.S. Types 54 and 55), effective November 20, 1969 (34 F.R. 17061); Official Standard Grades for Wisconsin Cigar-Binder Tobacco (U.S. Types 54 and 55), effective November 20, 1969 (34 F.R. 17061); Official Standard Grades for Georgia and Florida Shade-Grown Cigar-Wrapper Tobacco (U.S. Type 62), Effective April 1971. A USDA grade index value can be determined according to an industry accepted grade index. *See, e.g.*, Bowman *et al*, *Tobacco Science*, 32:39-40(1988); Legacy Tobacco Document Library (Bates Document #523267826-523267833, July 1, 1988, Memorandum on the Proposed Burley Tobacco Grade Index); and Miller *et al.*, 1990, *Tobacco Intern.*, 192:55-57 (all foregoing references are incorporated by inference in their entirety). In one aspect, a USDA grade index is a 0-100 numerical representation of federal grade received and is a weighted average of all stalk positions. A higher grade index indicates higher quality. Alternatively, leaf grade can be determined via hyper-spectral imaging. *See e.g.*, WO 2011/027315 (published on March 10, 2011, and incorporated by inference in its entirety).

[0080] In some aspects, tobacco plants provided herein comprise a similar level of one or more tobacco aroma compounds selected from the group consisting of 3-methylvaleric acid, valeric acid, isovaleric acid, a labdenoid, a cembrenoid, a sugar ester, and a reducing sugar, compared to control tobacco plants when grown in similar growth conditions. In other aspects, tobacco plants provided herein comprise a Nic1 mutation, a Nic2 mutation, or a combination thereof having no impact over the level of one or more tobacco aroma compounds selected from

the group consisting of 3-methylvaleric acid, valeric acid, isovaleric acid, a labdenoid, a cembrenoid, a sugar ester, and a reducing sugar.

[0081] As used herein, tobacco aroma compounds are compounds associated with the flavor and aroma of tobacco smoke. These compounds include, but are not limited to, 3-methylvaleric acid, valeric acid, isovaleric acid, cembrenoid and labdenoid diterpenes, and sugar esters. Concentrations of tobacco aroma compounds can be measured by any known metabolite profiling methods in the art including, without limitation, gas chromatography mass spectrometry (GC-MS), Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Spectroscopy, liquid chromatography-linked mass spectrometry. *See* The Handbook of Plant Metabolomics, edited by Weckwerth and Kahl, (Wiley-Blackwell) (May 28, 2013).

[0082] As used herein, “reducing sugar(s)” are any sugar (monosaccharide or polysaccharide) that has a free or potentially free aldehyde or ketone group. Glucose and fructose act as nicotine buffers in cigarette smoke by reducing smoke pH and effectively reducing the amount of “free” unprotonated nicotine. Reducing sugars balances smoke flavor, for example, by modifying the sensory impact of nicotine and other tobacco alkaloids. An inverse relationship between sugar content and alkaloid content has been reported across tobacco varieties, within the same variety, and within the same plant line caused by planting conditions. Reducing sugar levels can be measured using a segmented-flow colorimetric method developed for analysis of tobacco samples as adapted by Skalar Instrument Co (West Chester, PA) and described by Davis, *Tobacco Science* 20:139-144 (1976). For example, a sample is dialyzed against a sodium carbonate solution. Copper neocuproin is added to the sample and the solution is heated. The copper neocuproin chelate is reduced in the presence of sugars resulting in a colored complex which is measured at 460 nm.

[0083] In some aspects, tobacco plants provided herein comprise one or more non-naturally existing mutant alleles at Nic1 or Nic2 locus which reduce or eliminate one or more gene activity from Nic1 or Nic2 locus. In some aspects, these mutant alleles result in lower nicotine levels. Mutant Nic1 or Nic2 alleles can be introduced by any method known in the art including random or targeted mutagenesis approaches.

[0084] Such mutagenesis methods include, without limitation, treatment of seeds with ethyl methylsulfate (EMS) (Hildering and Verkerk, In, The use of induced mutations in plant breeding.

Pergamon press, pp 317-320, 1965) or UV-irradiation, X-rays, and fast neutron irradiation (see, for example, Verkerk, *Neth. J. Agric. Sci.* 19:197-203, 1971; and Poehlman, *Breeding Field Crops*, Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York (3.sup.rd ed), 1987), transposon tagging (Fedoroff *et al.*, 1984; U.S. Pat. No. 4,732,856 and U.S. Pat. No. 5,013,658), as well as T-DNA insertion methodologies (Hoekema *et al.*, 1983; U.S. Pat. No. 5,149,645). EMS-induced mutagenesis consists of chemically inducing random point mutations over the length of the genome. Fast neutron mutagenesis consists of exposing seeds to neutron bombardment which causes large deletions through double stranded DNA breakage. Transposon tagging comprises inserting a transposon within an endogenous gene to reduce or eliminate expression of the gene. The types of mutations that may be present in a tobacco gene include, for example, point mutations, deletions, insertions, duplications, and inversions. Such mutations desirably are present in the coding region of a tobacco gene; however mutations in the promoter region, and intron, or an untranslated region of a tobacco gene may also be desirable.

[0085] In addition, a fast and automatable method for screening for chemically induced mutations, TILLING (Targeting Induced Local Lesions In Genomes), using denaturing HPLC or selective endonuclease digestion of selected PCR products is also applicable to the present disclosure. See, McCallum *et al.* (2000) *Nat. Biotechnol.* 18:455-457. Mutations that impact gene expression or that interfere with the function of genes disclosed herein can be determined using methods that are well known in the art. Insertional mutations in gene exons usually result in null-mutants. Mutations in conserved residues can be particularly effective in inhibiting the function of a protein. In some aspects, tobacco plants disclosed herein comprise a nonsense (*e.g.*, stop codon) mutation in one or more Nic1 genes described herein.

[0086] In some aspects, the present disclosure also provides tobacco lines with altered nicotine levels while maintaining commercially acceptable leaf quality. These lines can be produced by introducing mutations into one or more genes at Nic1 or Nic2 locus via precise genome engineering technologies, for example, Transcription activator-like effector nucleases (TALENs), meganuclease, zinc finger nuclease, and CRISPR-cas9 system. See, *e.g.*, Gaj *et al.*, *Trends in Biotechnology*, 31(7):397-405 (2013).

[0087] The screening and selection of mutagenized tobacco plants can be through any methodologies known to those having ordinary skill in the art. Examples of screening and

selection methodologies include, but are not limited to, Southern analysis, PCR amplification for detection of a polynucleotide, Northern blots, RNase protection, primer-extension, RT-PCR amplification for detecting RNA transcripts, enzymatic assays for detecting enzyme or ribozyme activity of polypeptides and polynucleotides, and protein gel electrophoresis, Western blots, immunoprecipitation, and enzyme-linked immunoassays to detect polypeptides. Other techniques such as *in situ* hybridization, enzyme staining, and immunostaining also can be used to detect the presence or expression of polypeptides and/or polynucleotides. Methods for performing all of the referenced techniques are known.

[0088] The present disclosure also provides compositions and methods for inhibiting the expression or function of one or more polypeptides from Nic1 locus in a plant, particularly plants of the *Nicotiana* genus, including tobacco plants of the various commercial varieties.

[0089] In some aspects, the present disclosure provides tobacco plants, or part thereof, comprising a heterologous expression cassette comprising a Nic1 inhibitory sequence of a gene comprising a sequence having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99%, or 100% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 9 to 28, 75 to 82, 86 to 100, 145,, and fragments thereof, wherein the inhibitory sequence is operably linked to a promoter that is functional in a plant cell, and wherein the inhibitory sequence has at least 90% sequence identity to a fragment of at least 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64 ,65, 66 ,67, 68 ,69, 70, 71,72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, or 80 nucleotides of the sequence having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99%, or 100% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 9 to 28, 75 to 82, 86 to 100, 145, and fragments thereof. In other aspects, the present disclosure provides tobacco plants, or part thereof, comprising a heterologous expression cassette comprising a Nic1 inhibitory sequence of a gene comprising a sequence having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99%, or 100% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 13, 28, 33, 48, 82, 86, 87, 101, 102, 145, and 146, and fragments thereof, wherein the inhibitory sequence is operably linked to a promoter that is functional in a plant cell, and wherein the inhibitory sequence has at least 90% sequence identity to a fragment of at least 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50,

51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, or 80 nucleotides of the sequence having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99%, or 100% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 13, 28, 33, 48, 82, 86, 87, 101, 102, 145, and 146, and fragments thereof. In some aspects, a Nic1 inhibitory sequence is capable of being transcribed as an inhibitory polynucleotide selected from the group consisting of a single-stranded RNA polynucleotide, a double-stranded RNA polynucleotide, and a combination thereof.

[0090] As used herein, the terms “inhibit,” “inhibition,” and “inhibiting” are defined as any method known in the art or described herein that decreases the expression or function of a gene product of interest (*e.g.*, a target gene product). “Inhibition” can be in the context of a comparison between two plants, for example, a genetically altered plant versus a wild-type plant. Alternatively, inhibition of expression or function of a target gene product can be in the context of a comparison between plant cells, organelles, organs, tissues, or plant parts within the same plant or between different plants, and includes comparisons between developmental or temporal stages within the same plant or plant part or between plants or plant parts. “Inhibition” includes any relative decrement of function or production of a gene product of interest, up to and including complete elimination of function or production of that gene product. The term “inhibition” encompasses any method or composition that down-regulates translation and/or transcription of the target gene product or functional activity of the target gene product. In some aspects, the mRNA or protein level of one or more genes from Nic1 locus in a modified plant disclosed herein is less than 95%, less than 90%, less than 80%, less than 70%, less than 60%, less than 50%, less than 40%, less than 30%, less than 20%, less than 10%, less than 5%, less than 4%, less than 3%, less than 2%, or less than 1% of the protein level of the same gene in a plant that is not a mutant or that has not been genetically modified to inhibit the expression of that gene.

[0091] The term “inhibitory sequence” encompasses any polynucleotide or polypeptide sequence capable of inhibiting the expression or function of a gene involved in nicotine biosynthesis regulation from Nic1 locus in a plant, such as full-length polynucleotide or polypeptide sequences, truncated polynucleotide or polypeptide sequences, fragments of polynucleotide or polypeptide sequences, variants of polynucleotide or polypeptide sequences, sense-oriented nucleotide sequences, antisense-oriented nucleotide sequences, the complement of

a sense- or antisense-oriented nucleotide sequence, inverted regions of nucleotide sequences, hairpins of nucleotide sequences, double-stranded nucleotide sequences, single-stranded nucleotide sequences, combinations thereof, and the like. The term “polynucleotide sequence” includes sequences of RNA, DNA, chemically modified nucleic acids, nucleic acid analogs, combinations thereof, and the like.

[0092] Inhibitory sequences are designated herein by the name of the target gene product. Thus, a “Nic1 inhibitory sequence” refers to an inhibitory sequence that is capable of inhibiting the expression of a gene involved in nicotine biosynthesis regulation from Nic1 locus in a plant, for example, at the level of transcription and/or translation, or which is capable of inhibiting the function of a gene product. When the phrase “capable of inhibiting” is used in the context of a polynucleotide inhibitory sequence, it is intended to mean that the inhibitory sequence itself exerts the inhibitory effect; or, where the inhibitory sequence encodes an inhibitory nucleotide molecule (for example, hairpin RNA, miRNA, or double-stranded RNA polynucleotides), or encodes an inhibitory polypeptide (*e.g.*, a polypeptide that inhibits expression or function of the target gene product), following its transcription (for example, in the case of an inhibitory sequence encoding a hairpin RNA, miRNA, or double-stranded RNA polynucleotide) or its transcription and translation (in the case of an inhibitory sequence encoding an inhibitory polypeptide), the transcribed or translated product, respectively, exerts the inhibitory effect on the target gene product (*e.g.*, inhibits expression or function of the target gene product).

[0093] A Nic1 inhibitory sequence disclosed herein can be a sequence triggering gene silencing via any silencing pathway or mechanism known in the art, including, but not limited to, sense suppression/cosuppression, antisense suppression, double-stranded RNA (dsRNA) interference, hairpin RNA interference and intron-containing hairpin RNA interference, amplicon-mediated interference, ribozymes, small interfering RNA, artificial or synthetic microRNA, and artificial trans-acting siRNA. A Nic1 inhibitory sequence may range from at least about 20 nucleotides, about 50 nucleotides, about 70 nucleotides, about 100 nucleotides, about 150 nucleotides, about 200 nucleotides, about 250 nucleotides, about 300 nucleotides, about 350 nucleotides, about 400 nucleotides, and up to the full-length polynucleotide encoding the proteins of the present disclosure, depending upon the desired outcome. In one aspect, a Nic1 inhibitory sequence can be a fragment of between about 50 and about 400 nucleotides, between about 70 and about 350 nucleotides, between about 90 and about 325 nucleotides,

between about 90 and about 300 nucleotides, between about 90 and about 275 nucleotides, between about 100 and about 400 nucleotides, between about 100 and about 350 nucleotides, between about 100 and about 325 nucleotides, between about 100 and about 300 nucleotides, between about 125 and about 300 nucleotides, or between about 125 and about 275 nucleotides in length. In some embodiments, a fragment of a cytochrome P450 polynucleotide is about 50, about 60, about 70, about 80, about 90, about 100, about 125, about 150, about 175, about 200, about 225, about 250, about 275, about 300, about 325, about 350, about 400 nucleotides in length, and other such values between about 70 and about 400 nucleotides.

[0094] The use of the term “polynucleotide” is not intended to limit the present disclosure to polynucleotides comprising DNA. Those of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that polynucleotides can comprise ribonucleotides and combinations of ribonucleotides and deoxyribonucleotides. Such deoxyribonucleotides and ribonucleotides include both naturally occurring molecules and synthetic analogues. The polynucleotides of the present disclosure also encompass all forms of sequences including, but not limited to, single-stranded forms, double-stranded forms, hairpins, stem-and-loop structures, and the like.

[0095] In some aspects, the present disclosure provides recombinant DNA constructs comprising a promoter that is functional in a tobacco cell and operably linked to a polynucleotide that encodes an RNA molecule capable of binding to an RNA encoding a polypeptide having an amino acid sequence at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99% identical to an amino acid sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 49 to 68, 84, 116 to 130, 147, and fragments thereof, and wherein the RNA molecule suppresses the expression of the polypeptide. In some aspects, the RNA molecule is selected from the group consisting of a microRNA, an siRNA, and a trans-acting siRNA. In other aspects, the recombinant DNA construct encodes a double stranded RNA. Also provided are transgenic tobacco plants or part thereof, cured tobacco material, or tobacco products comprising these recombinant DNA constructs. In some aspects, these transgenic plants, cured tobacco material, or tobacco products comprise a lower level of nicotine compared to a control tobacco plant without the recombinant DNA construct. Further provided are methods of reducing the nicotine level of a tobacco plant, the method comprising transforming a tobacco plant with any of these recombinant DNA constructs.

[0096] As used herein, “operably linked” refers to a functional linkage between two or more elements. For example, an operable linkage between a polynucleotide of interest and a regulatory sequence (*e.g.*, a promoter) is a functional link that allows for expression of the polynucleotide of interest. Operably linked elements may be contiguous or non-contiguous.

[0097] As used herein and when used in reference to a sequence, “heterologous” refers to a sequence that originates from a foreign species, or, if from the same species, is substantially modified from its native form in composition and/or genomic locus by deliberate human intervention. The term also is applicable to nucleic acid constructs, also referred to herein as “polynucleotide constructs” or “nucleotide constructs.” In this manner, a “heterologous” nucleic acid construct is intended to mean a construct that originates from a foreign species, or, if from the same species, is substantially modified from its native form in composition and/or genomic locus by deliberate human intervention. Heterologous nucleic acid constructs include, but are not limited to, recombinant nucleotide constructs that have been introduced into a plant or plant part thereof, for example, via transformation methods or subsequent breeding of a transgenic plant with another plant of interest.

[0098] As used herein, “gene expression” refers to the biosynthesis or production of a gene product, including the transcription and/or translation of the gene product.

[0099] Also provided herein are compositions and methods for overexpressing one or more polypeptides from Nic1 locus in a plant, particularly plants of the *Nicotiana* genus, including tobacco plants of the various commercial varieties.

[00100] In some aspects, the present disclosure provides recombinant DNA constructs comprising a promoter that is functional in a tobacco cell and operably linked to a polynucleotide that encodes a polypeptide having an amino acid sequence at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99%, or 100% identical to an amino acid sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 49 to 68, 84, 116 to 130, 147, and fragments thereof. Also provided are transgenic tobacco plants or part thereof, cured tobacco material, or tobacco products comprising these recombinant DNA constructs. In some aspects, these transgenic plants, cured tobacco material, or tobacco products comprise an increased level of nicotine compared to a control tobacco plant without the recombinant DNA construct. Further

provided are methods of increasing the nicotine level of a tobacco plant, the method comprising transforming a tobacco plant with any of these recombinant DNA constructs.

[00101] In some aspects, recombinant DNA constructs or expression cassettes disclosed herein can also comprise a selectable marker gene for the selection of transgenic cells. Selectable marker genes include, but are not limited to, genes encoding antibiotic resistance, such as those encoding neomycin phosphotransferase II (NEO) and hygromycin phosphotransferase (HPT), as well as genes conferring resistance to herbicidal compounds, such as glufosinate ammonium, bromoxynil, imidazolinones, and 2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetate (2,4-D). Additional selectable markers include phenotypic markers such as β -galactosidase and fluorescent proteins such as green fluorescent protein (GFP).

[00102] In some aspects, recombinant DNA constructs or expression cassettes disclosed herein comprise a promoter selected from the group consisting of a constitutive promoter, an inducible promoter, and a tissue-preferred promoter (for example, a leaf-specific or root-specific promoter). Exemplary constitutive promoters include the core promoter of the Rsyn7 promoter and other constitutive promoters disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 6,072,050; the core CaMV 35S promoter (Odell *et al.* (1985) *Nature* 313:810-812); ubiquitin (Christensen *et al.* (1989) *Plant Mol. Biol.* 12:619-632 and Christensen *et al.* (1992) *Plant Mol. Biol.* 18:675-689); pEMU (Last *et al.* (1991) *Theor. Appl. Genet.* 81:581-588); MAS (Velten *et al.* (1984) *EMBO J* 3:2723-2730); ALS promoter (U.S. Pat. No. 5,659,026), and the like. Exemplary chemical-inducible promoters include the tobacco PR-1a promoter, which is activated by salicylic acid. Other chemical-inducible promoters of interest include steroid-responsive promoters (see, for example, the glucocorticoid-inducible promoter in Schena *et al.* (1991) *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 88:10421-10425 and McNellis *et al.* (1998) *Plant J.* 14(2):247-257) and tetracycline-inducible promoters (see, for example, Gatz *et al.* (1991) *Mol. Gen. Genet.* 227:229-237, and U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,814,618 and 5,789,156). Additional exemplary promoters that can be used herein are those responsible for heat-regulated gene expression, light-regulated gene expression (for example, the pea *rbcS-3A*; the maize *rbcS* promoter; the chlorophyll alb-binding protein gene found in pea; or the Arabssu promoter), hormone-regulated gene expression (for example, the abscisic acid (ABA) responsive sequences from the *Em* gene of wheat; the ABA-inducible HVA1 and HVA22, and rd29A promoters of barley and *Arabidopsis*; and wound-induced gene expression (for example, of *wun1*), organ specific gene expression (for example, of the tuber-

specific storage protein gene; the 23-kDa zein gene from maize described by; or the French bean (β -phaseolin gene), or pathogen-inducible promoters (for example, the *PR-1*, *prp-1*, or (β -1,3 glucanase promoters, the fungal-inducible *wirla* promoter of wheat, and the nematode-inducible promoters, *TobRB7-5A* and *Hmg-1*, of tobacco arid parsley, respectively).

[00103] In some aspects, tobacco plants provided herein further comprise increased or reduced expression of activity of genes involved in nicotine biosynthesis or transport. Genes involved in nicotine biosynthesis include, but are not limited to, arginine decarboxylase (ADC), methylputrescine oxidase (MPO), NADH dehydrogenase, ornithine decarboxylase (ODC), phosphoribosylanthranilate isomerase (PRAI), putrescine N-methyltransferase (PMT), quinolate phosphoribosyl transferase (QPT), and S-adenosyl-methionine synthetase (SAMS). Nicotine Synthase, which catalyzes the condensation step between a nicotinic acid derivative and methylpyrrolinium cation, has not been elucidated although two candidate genes (A622 and NBB1) have been proposed. See US 2007/0240728 A1 and US 2008/ 0120737A1. A622 encodes an isoflavone reductase-like protein. In addition, several transporters may be involved in the translocation of nicotine. A transporter gene, named MATE, has been cloned and characterized (Morita *et al.*, *PNAS* 106:2447-52 (2009)).

[00104] In some aspects, tobacco plants provided herein further comprise an increased or reduced level of mRNA, protein, or both of one or more genes encoding a product selected from the group consisting of PMT, MPO, QPT, ADC, ODC, PRAI, SAMS, BBL, MATE, A622, and NBB1, compared to a control tobacco plant. In other aspects, tobacco plants provided herein further comprise a transgene directly suppressing the expression of one or more genes encoding a product selected from the group consisting of PMT, MPO, QPT, ADC, ODC, PRAI, SAMS, BBL, MATE, A622, and NBB1. In other aspects, tobacco plants provided herein further comprise a transgene or mutation suppressing the expression or activity of one or more genes encoding a product selected from the group consisting of PMT, MPO, QPT, ADC, ODC, PRAI, SAMS, BBL, MATE, A622, and NBB1. In other aspects, tobacco plants provided herein further comprise a transgene overexpressing one or more genes encoding a product selected from the group consisting of PMT, MPO, QPT, ADC, ODC, PRAI, SAMS, BBL, MATE, A622, and NBB1.

[00105] Also disclosed herein are the transformation of tobacco plants with recombinant constructs or expression cassettes described herein using any suitable transformation methods known in the art. Methods for introducing polynucleotide sequences into tobacco plants are known in the art and include, but are not limited to, stable transformation methods, transient transformation methods, and virus-mediated methods. “Stable transformation” refers to transformation where the nucleotide construct of interest introduced into a plant integrates into the genome of the plant and is capable of being inherited by the progeny thereof. “Transient transformation” is intended to mean that a sequence is introduced into the plant and is only temporally expressed or is only transiently present in the plant.

[00106] Suitable methods of introducing polynucleotides into plant cells of the present disclosure include microinjection (Crossway *et al.* (1986) *Biotechniques* 4:320-334), electroporation (Shillito *et al.* (1987) *Meth. Enzymol.* 153:313-336; Riggs *et al.* (1986) *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 83:5602-5606), *Agrobacterium*-mediated transformation (U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,104,310, 5,149,645, 5,177,010, 5,231,019, 5,463,174, 5,464,763, 5,469,976, 4,762,785, 5,004,863, 5,159,135, 5,563,055, and 5,981,840), direct gene transfer (Paszkowski *et al.* (1984) *EMBO J.* 3:2717-2722), and ballistic particle acceleration (see, for example, U.S. Pat. Nos. 4,945,050, 5,141,131, 5,886,244, 5,879,918, and 5,932,782; Tomes *et al.* (1995) in *Plant Cell, Tissue, and Organ Culture Fundamental Methods*, ed. Gamborg and Phillips (Springer-Verlag, Berlin); McCabe *et al.* (1988) *Biotechnology* 6:923-926). Also see Weissinger *et al.* (1988) *Ann. Rev. Genet.* 22:421-477; Christou *et al.* (1988) *Plant Physiol.* 87:671-674 (soybean); McCabe *et al.* (1988) *Bio/Technology* 6:923-926 (soybean); Finer and McMullen (1991) *In Vitro Cell Dev. Biol.* 27P: 175-182 (soybean); Singh *et al.* (1998) *Theor. Appl. Genet.* 96:319-324 (soybean); De Wet *et al.* (1985) in *The Experimental Manipulation of Ovule Tissues*, ed. Chapman *et al.* (Longman, N.Y.), pp. 197-209 (pollen); Kaeppler *et al.* (1990) *Plant Cell Reports* 9:415-418 and Kaeppler *et al.* (1992) *Theor. Appl. Genet.* 84:560-566 (whisker-mediated transformation); D'Halluin *et al.* (1992) *Plant Cell* 4:1495-1505 (electroporation).

[00107] In other aspects, recombinant constructs or expression cassettes disclosed herein may be introduced into plants by contacting plants with a virus or viral nucleic acids. Generally, such methods involve incorporating an expression cassette of the present disclosure within a viral DNA or RNA molecule. It is recognized that promoters for use in the expression cassettes disclosed herein also encompass promoters utilized for transcription by viral RNA polymerases.

Methods for introducing polynucleotides into plants and expressing a protein encoded therein, involving viral DNA or RNA molecules, are known in the art. See, for example, U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,889,191, 5,889,190, 5,866,785, 5,589,367, 5,316,931, and Porta *et al.* (1996) *Molecular Biotechnology* 5:209-221.

[00108] Any plant tissue that can be subsequently propagated using clonal methods, whether by organogenesis or embryogenesis, may be transformed with a recombinant construct or an expression cassette disclosed herein. By “organogenesis” is intended the process by which shoots and roots are developed sequentially from meristematic centers. By “embryogenesis” is intended the process by which shoots and roots develop together in a concerted fashion (not sequentially), whether from somatic cells or gametes. Exemplary tissues that are suitable for various transformation protocols described herein include, but are not limited to, callus tissue, existing meristematic tissue (*e.g.*, apical meristems, axillary buds, and root meristems) and induced meristem tissue (*e.g.*, cotyledon meristem and hypocotyl meristem), hypocotyls, cotyledons, leaf disks, pollen, embryos, and the like.

[00109] In some aspects, tobacco plants provided herein are from a tobacco type selected from the group consisting of flue-cured tobacco, air-cured tobacco, dark air-cured tobacco, dark fire-cured tobacco, Galpao tobacco, and Oriental tobacco. In other aspects, tobacco plants provided herein are from a tobacco type selected from the group consisting of Burley tobacco, Maryland tobacco, and dark tobacco.

[00110] Flue-cured tobaccos (also called Virginia or bright tobaccos) amount to approximately 40% of world tobacco production. Flue-cured tobaccos are often also referred to as “bright tobacco” because of the golden-yellow to deep-orange color it reaches during curing. Flue-cured tobaccos have a light, bright aroma and taste. Flue-cured tobaccos are generally high in sugar and low in oils. Major flue-cured tobacco growing countries are Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Tanzania and the U.S. In some aspects, low-alkaloid or low-nicotine tobacco plants or seeds provided herein are in a flue-cured tobacco background selected from the group consisting of CC 13, CC 27, CC 33, CC 37, CC 65, CC 67, CC 700, GF 318, GL 338, GL 368, GL 939, K 346, K 399, K326, NC 102, NC 196, NC 291, NC 297, NC 299, NC 471, NC 55, NC 606, NC 71, NC 72, NC 92, PVH 1118, PVH 1452, PVH 2110, SPEIGHT 168, SPEIGHT 220, SPEIGHT 225, SPEIGHT 227, SPEIGHT 236, and any variety essentially derived from any one

of the foregoing varieties. In other aspects, low-alkaloid or low-nicotine tobacco plants or seeds provided herein are in a flue-cured tobacco background selected from the group consisting of Coker 48, Coker 176, Coker 371-Gold, Coker 319, Coker 347, GL 939, K 149, K326, K 340, K 346, K 358, K 394, K 399, K 730, NC 27NF, NC 37NF, NC 55, NC 60, NC 71, NC 72, NC 82, NC 95, NC 297, NC 606, NC 729, NC 2326, McNair 373, McNair 944, Ox 207, Ox 414 NF, Reams 126, Reams 713, Reams 744, RG 8, RG 11, RG 13, RG 17, RG 22, RG 81, RG H4, RG H51, Speight H-20, Speight G-28, Speight G-58, Speight G-70, Speight G-108, Speight G-111, Speight G-117, Speight 168, Speight 179, Speight NF- 3, Va 116, Va 182, and any variety essentially derived from any one of the foregoing varieties. *See* WO 2004/041006 A1. In further aspects, low-alkaloid or low-nicotine tobacco plants, seeds, hybrids, varieties, or lines disclosed herein are in any flue cured background selected from the group consisting of K326, K346, and NC196.

[00111] Air-cured tobaccos include Burley, Maryland, and dark tobaccos. The common factor is that curing is primarily without artificial sources of heat and humidity. Burley tobaccos are light to dark brown in color, high in oil, and low in sugar. Burley tobaccos are air-cured in barns. Major Burley growing countries are Argentina, Brazil, Italy, Malawi, and the U.S. Maryland tobaccos are extremely fluffy, have good burning properties, low nicotine and a neutral aroma. Major Maryland growing countries include the U.S. and Italy. In some aspects, low-alkaloid or low-nicotine tobacco plants or seeds provided herein are in a Burley tobacco background selected from the group consisting of Clay 402, Clay 403, Clay 502, Ky 14, Ky 907, Ky 910, Ky 8959, NC 2, NC 3, NC 4, NC 5, NC 2000, TN 86, TN 90, TN 97, R 610, R 630, R 711, R 712, NCBH 129, Bu 21×Ky 10, HB04P, Ky 14×L 8, Kt 200, Newton 98, Pedigo 561, Pf561 and Va 509. In further aspects, low-alkaloid or low-nicotine tobacco plants, seeds, hybrids, varieties, or lines disclosed herein are in any Burley background selected from the group consisting of TN 90, KT 209, KT 206, KT212, and HB 4488. In other aspects, low-alkaloid or low-nicotine tobacco plants or seeds provided herein are in a Maryland tobacco background selected from the group consisting of Md 10, Md 40, Md 201, Md 609, Md 872 and Md 341.

[00112] Dark air-cured tobaccos are distinguished from other types primarily by its curing process which gives dark air-cured tobacco its medium- to dark-brown color and distinct aroma. Dark air-cured tobaccos are mainly used in the production of chewing tobacco and snuff. In some aspects, low-alkaloid or low-nicotine tobacco plants or seeds provided herein are in a dark

air-cured tobacco background selected from the group consisting of Sumatra, Jatim, Dominican Cubano, Besuki, One sucker, Green River, Virginia sun-cured, and Paraguayan Passado.

[00113] Dark fire-cured tobaccos are generally cured with low-burning wood fires on the floors of closed curing barns. Their leaves have low sugar content but high nicotine content. Dark fire-cured tobaccos are used for making pipe blends, cigarettes, chewing tobacco, snuff and strong-tasting cigars. Major growing regions for dark fire-cured tobaccos are Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia, USA. In some aspects, low-alkaloid or low-nicotine tobacco plants or seeds provided herein are in a dark fire-cured tobacco background selected from the group consisting of Narrow Leaf Madole, Improved Madole, Tom Rosson Madole, Newton's VH Madole, Little Crittenden, Green Wood, Little Wood, Small Stalk Black Mammoth, DT 508, DT 518, DT 592, KY 171, DF 911, DF 485, TN D94, TN D950, VA 309, and VA 359.

[00114] Oriental tobaccos are also referred to as Greek, aroma and Turkish tobaccos due to the fact that they are typically grown in eastern Mediterranean regions such as Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Syria, Lebanon, Italy, and Romania. The small plant and leaf size, characteristic of today's Oriental varieties, as well as its unique aroma properties are a result of the plant's adaptation to the poor soil and stressful climatic conditions in which it develop over many past centuries. In some aspects, low-alkaloid or low-nicotine tobacco plants or seeds provided herein are in a Oriental tobacco background selected from the group consisting of Izmir, Katerini, Samsun, Basma and Krumovgrad, Trabzon, Thesalian, Tasova, Sinop, Izmit, Hendek, Edirne, Semdinli, Adiyaman, Yayladag, Iskenderun, Duzce, Macedonian, Mavra, Prilep, Bafra, Bursa, Bucak, Bitlis, Balikesir, and any variety essentially derived from any one of the foregoing varieties.

[00115] In some aspects, low-alkaloid or low-nicotine tobacco plants, seeds, hybrids, varieties, or lines disclosed herein are essentially derived from or in the genetic background of BU 64, CC 101, CC 200, CC 27, CC 301, CC 400, CC 500, CC 600, CC 700, CC 800, CC 900, Coker 176, Coker 319, Coker 371 Gold, Coker 48, CU 263, DF911, Galpao tobacco, GL 26H, GL 350, GL 600, GL 737, GL 939, GL 973, HB 04P, K 149, K 326, K 346, K 358, K394, K 399, K 730, KDH 959, KT 200, KT204LC, KY 10, KY 14, KY 160, KY 17, KY 171, KY 907, KY907LC, KTY14 x L8 LC, Little Crittenden, McNair 373, McNair 944, msKY 14xL8, Narrow Leaf Madole, NC 100, NC 102, NC 2000, NC 291, NC 297, NC 299, NC 3, NC 4, NC 5, NC 6,

NC7, NC 606, NC 71, NC 72, NC 810, NC BH 129, NC 2002, Neal Smith Madole, OXFORD 207, 'Perique' tobacco, PVH03, PVH09, PVH19, PVH50, PVH51, R 610, R 630, R 7-11, R 7-12, RG 17, RG 81, RG H51, RGH 4, RGH 51, RS 1410, Speight 168, Speight 172, Speight 179, Speight 210, Speight 220, Speight 225, Speight 227, Speight 234, Speight G-28, Speight G-70, Speight H-6, Speight H20, Speight NF3, TI 1406, TI 1269, TN 86, TN86LC, TN 90, TN 97, TN97LC, TN D94, TN D950, TR (Tom Rosson) Madole, VA 309, or VA359, Maryland 609, HB3307PLC, HB4488PLC, KT206LC, KT209LC, KT210LC, KT212LC, R610LC, PVH2310, NC196, KTD14LC, KTD6LC, KTD8LC, PD7302LC, PD7305LC, PD7309LC, PD7318LC, PD7319LC, PD7312LC, ShireyLC, or any commercial tobacco variety according to standard tobacco breeding techniques known in the art.

[00116] All foregoing mentioned specific varieties of dark air-cured, Burley, Maryland, dark fire-cured, or Oriental type are only listed for exemplary purposes. Any additional dark air-cured, Burley, Maryland, dark fire-cured, Oriental varieties are also contemplated in the present application.

[00117] Also provided herein are populations of tobacco plants described herein. In one aspect, a population of tobacco plants disclosed herein has a planting density of between about 5,000 and about 8000, between about 5,000 and about 7,600, between about 5,000 and about 7,200, between about 5,000 and about 6,800, between about 5,000 and about 6,400, between about 5,000 and about 6,000, between about 5,000 and about 5,600, between about 5,000 and about 5,200, between about 5,200 and about 8,000, between about 5,600 and about 8,000, between about 6,000 and about 8,000, between about 6,400 and about 8,000, between about 6,800 and about 8,000, between about 7,200 and about 8,000, or between about 7,600 and about 8,000 plants per acre. In another aspect, a population of tobacco plants disclosed herein is in a soil type with low to medium fertility.

[00118] Also provided herein are containers of seeds from tobacco plants described herein. A container of tobacco seeds of the present disclosure may contain any number, weight, or volume of seeds. For example, a container can contain at least, or greater than, about 100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600, 700, 800, 900, 1000, 1500, 2000, 2500, 3000, 3500, 4000 or more seeds. Alternatively, the container can contain at least, or greater than, about 1 ounce, 5 ounces, 10 ounces, 1 pound, 2 pounds, 3 pounds, 4 pounds, 5 pounds or more seeds. Containers of tobacco

seeds may be any container available in the art. By way of non-limiting example, a container may be a box, a bag, a packet, a pouch, a tape roll, a tube, or a bottle.

[00119] Also provided herein is cured tobacco material made from low-alkaloid or low-nicotine tobacco plants described herein. Further provided is cured tobacco material made from tobacco plants described herein with higher levels of total alkaloid or nicotine.

[00120] “Curing” is the aging process that reduces moisture and brings about the destruction of chlorophyll giving tobacco leaves a golden color and by which starch is converted to sugar. Cured tobacco therefore has a higher reducing sugar content and a lower starch content compared to harvested green leaf. In some aspects, green leaf tobacco provided herein can be cured using conventional means, *e.g.*, flue-cured, barn-cured, fire-cured, air-cured or sun-cured. *See*, for example, Tso (1999, Chapter 1 in Tobacco, Production, Chemistry and Technology, Davis & Nielsen, eds., Blackwell Publishing, Oxford) for a description of different types of curing methods. Cured tobacco is usually aged in a wooden drum (*e.g.*, a hogshead) or cardboard cartons in compressed conditions for several years (*e.g.*, two to five years), at a moisture content ranging from 10% to about 25%. *See*, U.S. Patent Nos. 4,516,590 and 5,372,149. Cured and aged tobacco then can be further processed. Further processing includes conditioning the tobacco under vacuum with or without the introduction of steam at various temperatures, pasteurization, and fermentation. Fermentation typically is characterized by high initial moisture content, heat generation, and a 10 to 20% loss of dry weight. *See*, *e.g.*, U.S. Patent Nos. 4,528,993, 4,660,577, 4,848,373, 5,372,149; U.S. Publication No. 2005/0178398; and Tso (1999, Chapter 1 in Tobacco, Production, Chemistry and Technology, Davis & Nielsen, eds., Blackwell Publishing, Oxford). Cure, aged, and fermented tobacco can be further processed (*e.g.*, cut, shredded, expanded, or blended). *See*, for example, U.S. Patent Nos. 4,528,993; 4,660,577; and 4,987,907. In one aspect, the cured tobacco material of the present disclosure is sun-cured. In another aspect, the cured tobacco material of the present disclosure is flue-cured, air-cured, or fire-cured.

[00121] Tobacco material obtained from the tobacco lines, varieties or hybrids of the present disclosure can be used to make tobacco products. As used herein, “tobacco product” is defined as any product made or derived from tobacco that is intended for human use or consumption.

[00122] Tobacco products provided herein include, without limitation, cigarette products (*e.g.*, cigarettes and bidi cigarettes), cigar products (*e.g.*, cigar wrapping tobacco and cigarillos), pipe tobacco products, products derived from tobacco, tobacco-derived nicotine products, smokeless tobacco products (*e.g.*, moist snuff, dry snuff, and chewing tobacco), films, chewables, tabs, shaped parts, gels, consumable units, insoluble matrices, hollow shapes, reconstituted tobacco, expanded tobacco, and the like. *See, e.g.*, U.S. Patent Publication No. US 2006/0191548.

[00123] As used herein, “cigarette” refers a tobacco product having a “rod” and “filler”. The cigarette “rod” includes the cigarette paper, filter, plug wrap (used to contain filtration materials), tipping paper that holds the cigarette paper (including the filler) to the filter, and all glues that hold these components together. The “filler” includes (1) all tobaccos, including but not limited to reconstituted and expanded tobacco, (2) non-tobacco substitutes (including but not limited to herbs, non-tobacco plant materials and other spices that may accompany tobaccos rolled within the cigarette paper), (3) casings, (4) flavorings, and (5) all other additives (that are mixed into tobaccos and substitutes and rolled into the cigarette).

[00124] As used herein, “reconstituted tobacco” refers to a part of tobacco filler made from tobacco dust and other tobacco scrap material, processed into sheet form and cut into strips to resemble tobacco. In addition to the cost savings, reconstituted tobacco is very important for its contribution to cigarette taste from processing flavor development using reactions between ammonia and sugars.

[00125] As used herein, “expanded tobacco” refers to a part of tobacco filler which is processed through expansion of suitable gases so that the tobacco is “puffed” resulting in reduced density and greater filling capacity. It reduces the weight of tobacco used in cigarettes.

[00126] Tobacco products derived from plants of the present disclosure also include cigarettes and other smoking articles, particularly those smoking articles including filter elements, wherein the rod of smokable material includes cured tobacco within a tobacco blend. In an aspect, a tobacco product of the present disclosure is selected from the group consisting of a cigarillo, a non-ventilated recess filter cigarette, a vented recess filter cigarette, a cigar, snuff, pipe tobacco, cigar tobacco, cigarette tobacco, chewing tobacco, leaf tobacco, hookah tobacco, shredded tobacco, and cut tobacco. In another aspect, a tobacco product of the present disclosure is a smokeless tobacco product. Smokeless tobacco products are not combusted and include, but not

limited to, chewing tobacco, moist smokeless tobacco, snus, and dry snuff. Chewing tobacco is coarsely divided tobacco leaf that is typically packaged in a large pouch-like package and used in a plug or twist. Moist smokeless tobacco is a moist, more finely divided tobacco that is provided in loose form or in pouch form and is typically packaged in round cans and used as a pinch or in a pouch placed between an adult tobacco consumer's cheek and gum. Snus is a heat treated smokeless tobacco. Dry snuff is finely ground tobacco that is placed in the mouth or used nasally. In a further aspect, a tobacco product of the present disclosure is selected from the group consisting of loose leaf chewing tobacco, plug chewing tobacco, moist snuff, and nasal snuff. In yet another aspect, a tobacco product of the present disclosure is selected from the group consisting of an electronically heated cigarette, an e-cigarette, an electronic vaporizing device.

[00127] In an aspect, a tobacco product of the present disclosure can be a blended tobacco product. In another aspect, a tobacco product of the present disclosure can be a low nicotine tobacco product. In a further aspect, a tobacco product of the present disclosure may comprise nornicotine at a level of less than about 3 mg/g. For example, the nornicotine content in such a product can be 3.0 mg/g, 2.5 mg/g, 2.0 mg/g, 1.5 mg/g, 1.0 mg/g, 750 µg/g, 500 pg/g, 250 pg/g, 100 pg/g, 75 pg/g, 50 pg/g, 25 pg/g, 10 pg/g, 7.0 pg/g, 5.0 pg/g, 4.0 pg/g, 2.0 pg/g, 1.0 pg/g, 0.5 pg/g, 0.4 pg/g, 0.2 pg/g, 0.1 pg/g, 0.05 pg/g, 0.01 pg/g, or undetectable.

[00128] In some aspects, cured tobacco material or tobacco products provided herein comprise an average nicotine level selected from the group consisting of about 0.01%, 0.02%, 0.05%, 0.75%, 0.1%, 0.15%, 0.2%, 0.3%, 0.35%, 0.4%, 0.5%, 0.6%, 0.7%, 0.8%, 0.9%, 1%, 1.1%, 1.2%, 1.3%, 1.4%, 1.5%, 1.6%, 1.7%, 1.8%, 1.9%, 2%, 2.1%, 2.2%, 2.3%, 2.4%, 2.5%, 2.6%, 2.7%, 2.8%, 2.9%, 3%, 3.1%, 3.2%, 3.3%, 3.4%, 3.5%, 3.6%, 3.7%, 3.8%, 3.9%, 4%, 5%, 6%, 7%, 8%, and 9% on a dry weight basis. In other aspects, cured tobacco material or tobacco products provided herein comprise an average nicotine level selected from the group consisting of about between 0.01% and 0.02%, between 0.02% and 0.05%, between 0.05% and 0.75%, between 0.75% and 0.1%, between 0.1% and 0.15%, between 0.15% and 0.2%, between 0.2% and 0.3%, between 0.3% and 0.35%, between 0.35% and 0.4%, between 0.4% and 0.5%, between 0.5% and 0.6%, between 0.6% and 0.7%, between 0.7% and 0.8%, between 0.8% and 0.9%, between 0.9% and 1%, between 1% and 1.1%, between 1.1% and 1.2%, between 1.2% and 1.3%, between 1.3% and 1.4%, between 1.4% and 1.5%, between 1.5% and 1.6%, between

1.6% and 1.7%, between 1.7% and 1.8%, between 1.8% and 1.9%, between 1.9% and 2%, between 2% and 2.1%, between 2.1% and 2.2%, between 2.2% and 2.3%, between 2.3% and 2.4%, between 2.4% and 2.5%, between 2.5% and 2.6%, between 2.6% and 2.7%, between 2.7% and 2.8%, between 2.8% and 2.9%, between 2.9% and 3%, between 3% and 3.1%, between 3.1% and 3.2%, between 3.2% and 3.3%, between 3.3% and 3.4%, between 3.4% and 3.5%, and between 3.5% and 3.6% on a dry weight basis. In further aspects, cured tobacco material or tobacco products provided herein comprise an average nicotine level selected from the group consisting of about between 0.01% and 0.1%, between 0.02% and 0.2%, between 0.03% and 0.3%, between 0.04% and 0.4%, between 0.05% and 0.5%, between 0.75% and 1%, between 0.1% and 1.5%, between 0.15% and 2%, between 0.2% and 3%, and between 0.3% and 3.5% on a dry weight basis.

[00129] The present disclosure also provides methods for breeding tobacco lines, cultivars, or varieties comprising a desirable level of total alkaloid or nicotine, *e.g.*, low nicotine or nicotine free. Breeding can be carried out via any known procedures. DNA fingerprinting, SNP mapping, haplotype mapping or similar technologies may be used in a marker-assisted selection (MAS) breeding program to transfer or breed a desirable trait or allele into a tobacco plant. For example, a breeder can create segregating populations in a F₂ or backcross generation using F1 hybrid plants disclosed herein or further crossing the F1 hybrid plants with other donor plants with an agronomically desirable genotype. Plants in the F₂ or backcross generations can be screened for a desired agronomic trait or a desirable chemical profile using one of the techniques known in the art or listed herein. Depending on the expected inheritance pattern or the MAS technology used, self-pollination of selected plants before each cycle of backcrossing to aid identification of the desired individual plants can be performed. Backcrossing or other breeding procedure can be repeated until the desired phenotype of the recurrent parent is recovered. A recurrent parent in the present disclosure can be a flue-cured variety, a Burley variety, a dark air-cured variety, a dark fire-cured variety, or an Oriental variety. Other breeding techniques can be found, for example, in Wernsman, E. A., and Rufty, R. C. 1987. Chapter Seventeen. Tobacco. Pages 669-698 In: Cultivar Development. Crop Species. W. H. Fehr (ed.), MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., New York, N.Y., incorporated herein by reference in their entirety.

[00130] Results of a plant breeding program using the tobacco plants described herein includes useful lines, cultivars, varieties, progeny, inbreds, and hybrids of the present disclosure.

As used herein, the term “variety” refers to a population of plants that share constant characteristics which separate them from other plants of the same species. A variety is often, although not always, sold commercially. While possessing one or more distinctive traits, a variety is further characterized by a very small overall variation between individuals within that variety. A “pure line” variety may be created by several generations of self-pollination and selection, or vegetative propagation from a single parent using tissue or cell culture techniques. A variety can be essentially derived from another line or variety. As defined by the International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (Dec. 2, 1961, as revised at Geneva on Nov. 10, 1972; on Oct. 23, 1978; and on Mar. 19, 1991), a variety is “essentially derived” from an initial variety if: a) it is predominantly derived from the initial variety, or from a variety that is predominantly derived from the initial variety, while retaining the expression of the essential characteristics that result from the genotype or combination of genotypes of the initial variety; b) it is clearly distinguishable from the initial variety; and c) except for the differences which result from the act of derivation, it conforms to the initial variety in the expression of the essential characteristics that result from the genotype or combination of genotypes of the initial variety. Essentially derived varieties can be obtained, for example, by the selection of a natural or induced mutant, a somaclonal variant, a variant individual from plants of the initial variety, backcrossing, or transformation. A first tobacco variety and a second tobacco variety from which the first variety is essentially derived, are considered as having essentially identical genetic background. A “line” as distinguished from a variety most often denotes a group of plants used non-commercially, for example in plant research. A line typically displays little overall variation between individuals for one or more traits of interest, although there may be some variation between individuals for other traits.

[00131] In some aspects, the present disclosure provides a method of introgressing a low nicotine trait into a tobacco variety, the method comprising: (a) crossing a first tobacco variety comprising a low nicotine trait with a second tobacco variety without the low nicotine trait to produce one or more progeny tobacco plants; (b) genotyping the one or more progeny tobacco plants for a polymorphic marker linked to the low nicotine trait, wherein the polymorphic marker is in a chromosomal interval flanked by any two of polymorphic loci listed in Table 3 or flanked by any two of polymorphic loci listed in Table 4; and (c) selecting a progeny tobacco plant comprising the low nicotine trait. In other aspects, these methods further comprise backcrossing

the selected progeny tobacco plant with the second tobacco variety. In further aspects, these methods further comprise: (d) crossing the selected progeny plant with itself or with the second tobacco variety to produce one or more further progeny tobacco plants; and (e) selecting a further progeny tobacco plant comprising the low nicotine trait. In some aspects, the step (e) of selecting comprises marker-assisted selection. In some aspects, these methods produce a single gene conversion comprising a low nicotine trait. In some aspects, these methods produce a single gene conversion comprising a Nic1 introgression. In some aspects, the second second tobacco variety is an elite variety. In other aspects, the genotyping step of these methods involve one or more molecular marker assays. In other aspects, the polymorphic marker used this method comprises a polymorphism selected from the group consisting of single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs), insertions or deletions in DNA sequence (Indels), simple sequence repeats of DNA sequence (SSRs), a restriction fragment length polymorphism (RFLP), and a tag SNP. In other aspects, the selected progeny tobacco plant comprises a shorter chromosome deletion at Nic1 locus compared to LA Burley 21.

[00132] In other aspects, the present disclosure provides a method of introgressing a low nicotine trait into a tobacco variety, the method comprising: (a) crossing a first tobacco variety comprising a low nicotine trait with a second tobacco variety without the low nicotine trait to produce one or more progeny tobacco plants; (b) genotyping the one or more progeny tobacco plants for a polymorphic marker linked to the low nicotine trait, wherein the polymorphic marker is within 20 cM of any one of polymorphic loci listed in Table 3 and Table 4; and (c) selecting a progeny tobacco plant comprising the low nicotine trait. In some aspects, this method comprises selecting simultaneously or concurrently for one or more molecular markers associated with or closely linked to Nic1 locus as well as one or more molecular markers associated with or closely linked to Nic2 locus.

[00133] In some aspects, the present disclosure provides a method of selecting a tobacco plant having a low nicotine trait, the method comprising: (a) isolating nucleic acids from a collection of tobacco germplasm; (b) assaying the nucleic acids for one or more markers closely linked to Nic1 locus; and (c) selecting a tobacco plant having a low nicotine trait based on the marker assay. In some aspects, the assayed one or more markers closely linked to Nic1 locus are within about 20 cM, 10 cM, 5 cM, 4 cM, 3 cM, 2 cM, 1 cM, 0.5 cM, or less than 0.5 cM of any one of polymorphic loci listed in Table 3. In other aspects, this method further comprising assaying for

one or more markers closely linked to Nic2 locus. In some aspects, the assayed one or more markers closely linked to Nic2 locus are within about 20 cM, 10 cM, 5 cM, 4 cM, 3 cM, 2 cM, 1 cM, 0.5 cM, or less than 0.5 cM of any one of polymorphic loci listed in Table 4. In some aspects, this method further comprises determining the nicotine level of the selected plant to confirm the low nicotine trait.

[00134] Also disclosed herein is a method of introgressing a low nicotine trait into a tobacco variety, the method comprising: (a) crossing a first tobacco variety comprising a low nicotine trait with a second tobacco variety without the low nicotine trait to produce one or more progeny tobacco plants; (b) genotyping the one or more progeny tobacco plants for a polymorphic marker linked to the low nicotine trait, wherein the polymorphic marker is in a chromosomal interval flanked by any two of polymorphic loci listed in Table 4; and (c) selecting a progeny tobacco plant comprising the low nicotine trait. In some aspects, these methods produce a single gene conversion comprising a low nicotine trait. In some aspects, these methods produce a single gene conversion comprising a Nic2 introgression. In some aspects, the second tobacco variety is an elite variety. In other aspects, the genotyping step of these methods involve one or more molecular marker assays. In other aspects, the polymorphic marker used this method comprises a polymorphism selected from the group consisting of single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs), insertions or deletions in DNA sequence (Indels), simple sequence repeats of DNA sequence (SSRs), a restriction fragment length polymorphism (RFLP), and a tag SNP. In other aspects, the selected progeny tobacco plant comprises a shorter chromosome deletion at Nic2 locus compared to LA Burley 21.

[00135] As used herein, “locus” is a chromosome region where a polymorphic nucleic acid, trait determinant, gene, or marker is located. The loci of this disclosure comprise one or more polymorphisms in a population; *e.g.*, alternative alleles are present in some individuals. As used herein, “allele” refers to an alternative nucleic acid sequence at a particular locus. The length of an allele can be as small as 1 nucleotide base, but is typically larger. For example, a first allele can occur on one chromosome, while a second allele occurs on a second homologous chromosome, *e.g.*, as occurs for different chromosomes of a heterozygous individual, or between different homozygous or heterozygous individuals in a population. As used herein, the term “chromosome interval” designates a contiguous linear span of genomic DNA that resides on a single chromosome.

[00136] As used herein, a centimorgan (“cM”) is a unit of measure of recombination frequency. One cM is equal to a 1% chance that a marker at one genetic locus will be separated from a marker at a second locus due to crossing over in a single generation. Genetic distances referred herein can be calculated from recombination values using the Kosambi function (Kosambi, The estimation of map distances from recombination values. *Annals of Eugenics*, 12:172–75 (1944)).

[00137] As used herein, “closely linked to” or “associated with” means that the marker or locus is within about 20 cM, 10 cM, 5 cM, 1 cM, 0.5 cM, or less than 0.5 cM of another marker or locus. For example, 20 cM means that recombination between the marker and the locus with a frequency of equal to or less than about 20%.

[00138] As used herein, “introgression” or “introgress” refers to the transmission of a desired allele of a genetic locus from one genetic background to another.

[00139] As used herein, “crossed” or “cross” means to produce progeny via fertilization (*e.g.* cells, seeds or plants) and includes crosses between plants (sexual) and self fertilization (selfing).

[00140] As used herein, “backcross” and “backcrossing” refer to the process whereby a progeny plant is repeatedly crossed back to one of its parents. In a backcrossing scheme, the “donor” parent refers to the parental plant with the desired gene or locus to be introgressed. The “recipient” parent (used one or more times) or “recurrent” parent (used two or more times) refers to the parental plant into which the gene or locus is being introgressed. The initial cross gives rise to the F1 generation. The term “BC1” refers to the second use of the recurrent parent, “BC2” refers to the third use of the recurrent parent, and so on. In some aspects, a backcross is performed repeatedly, with a progeny individual of each successive backcross generation being itself backcrossed to the same parental genotype.

[00141] As used herein, “single gene converted” or “single gene conversion” refers to plants that are developed using a plant breeding technique known as backcrossing, or via genetic engineering, wherein essentially all of the desired morphological and physiological characteristics of a variety are recovered in addition to the single gene transferred into the variety via the backcrossing technique or via genetic engineering.

[00142] As used herein, “elite variety” means any variety that has resulted from breeding and selection for superior agronomic performance.

[00143] As used herein, “selecting” or “selection” in the context of marker-assisted selection or breeding refer to the act of picking or choosing desired individuals, normally from a population, based on certain pre-determined criteria.

[00144] As used herein, the term “trait” refers to one or more detectable characteristics of a cell or organism which can be influenced by genotype. The phenotype can be observable to the naked eye, or by any other means of evaluation known in the art, *e.g.*, microscopy, biochemical analysis, genomic analysis, an assay for a particular disease tolerance, etc. In some cases, a phenotype is directly controlled by a single gene or genetic locus, *e.g.*, a “single gene trait.” In other cases, a phenotype is the result of several genes.

[00145] As used herein, “marker assay” means a method for detecting a polymorphism at a particular locus using a particular method, *e.g.*, measurement of at least one phenotype (such as seed color, flower color, or other visually detectable trait), restriction fragment length polymorphism (RFLP), single base extension, electrophoresis, sequence alignment, allelic specific oligonucleotide hybridization (ASO), random amplified polymorphic DNA (RAPD), microarray-based technologies, and nucleic acid sequencing technologies, etc.

[00146] As used herein, “marker assisted selection” (MAS) is a process by which phenotypes are selected based on marker genotypes. “Marker assisted selection breeding” refers to the process of selecting a desired trait or traits in a plant or plants by detecting one or more nucleic acids from the plant, where the nucleic acid is linked to the desired trait, and then selecting the plant or germplasm possessing those one or more nucleic acids.

[00147] As used herein, “polymorphism” means the presence of one or more variations in a population. A polymorphism may manifest as a variation in the nucleotide sequence of a nucleic acid or as a variation in the amino acid sequence of a protein. Polymorphisms include the presence of one or more variations of a nucleic acid sequence or nucleic acid feature at one or more loci in a population of one or more individuals. The variation may comprise but is not limited to one or more nucleotide base changes, the insertion of one or more nucleotides or the deletion of one or more nucleotides. A polymorphism may arise from random processes in nucleic acid replication, through mutagenesis, as a result of mobile genomic elements, from copy

number variation and during the process of meiosis, such as unequal crossing over, genome duplication and chromosome breaks and fusions. The variation can be commonly found or may exist at low frequency within a population, the former having greater utility in general plant breeding and the latter may be associated with rare but important phenotypic variation. Useful polymorphisms may include single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs), insertions or deletions in DNA sequence (Indels), simple sequence repeats of DNA sequence (SSRs), a restriction fragment length polymorphism (RFLP), and a tag SNP. A genetic marker, a gene, a DNA-derived sequence, a RNA-derived sequence, a promoter, a 5' untranslated region of a gene, a 3' untranslated region of a gene, microRNA, siRNA, a tolerance locus, a satellite marker, a transgene, mRNA, ds mRNA, a transcriptional profile, and a methylation pattern may also comprise polymorphisms. In addition, the presence, absence, or variation in copy number of the preceding may comprise polymorphisms.

[00148] As used herein, “SNP” or “single nucleotide polymorphism” means a sequence variation that occurs when a single nucleotide (A, T, C, or G) in the genome sequence is altered or variable. “SNP markers” exist when SNPs are mapped to sites on the genome.

[00149] As used herein, “marker” or “molecular marker” or “marker locus” is a term used to denote a nucleic acid or amino acid sequence that is sufficiently unique to characterize a specific locus on the genome. Any detectable polymorphic trait can be used as a marker so long as it is inherited differentially and exhibits linkage disequilibrium with a phenotypic trait of interest. Each marker is therefore an indicator of a specific segment of DNA, having a unique nucleotide sequence. The map positions provide a measure of the relative positions of particular markers with respect to one another. When a trait is stated to be linked to a given marker it will be understood that the actual DNA segment whose sequence affects the trait generally co-segregates with the marker. More precise and definite localization of a trait can be obtained if markers are identified on both sides of the trait. By measuring the appearance of the marker(s) in progeny of crosses, the existence of the trait can be detected by relatively simple molecular tests without actually evaluating the appearance of the trait itself, which can be difficult and time-consuming because the actual evaluation of the trait requires growing plants to a stage and/or under environmental conditions where the trait can be expressed. In some aspects, markers used herein exhibit LOD scores of 2 or greater, 3 or greater, 4 or greater, 5 or greater, 6 or greater, 7 or

greater, 8 or greater, or 9 or greater with Nic1 or Nic2 loci disclosed herein, measuring using a method known in the art such as Qgene Version 2.23 (1996) and default parameters.

[00150] In one aspect, the present disclosure provides a tobacco plant, or part thereof, comprising a first chromosomal deletion flanked by and not comprising any two of Nic1 Marker Nos. 1 to 207, a second chromosomal deletion flanked by and not comprising any two of Nic2 Marker Nos. 1 to 340, or both said first and said second chromosomal deletions, wherein said tobacco plant is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value of 50 or more, 55 or more, 60 or more, 65 or more, 70 or more, 75 or more, 80 or more, 85 or more, 90 or more, or 95 or more. In another aspect, a tobacco plant comprises a nicotine level selected from the group consisting of less than 3%, less than 2.75%, less than 2.5%, less than 2.25%, less than 2.0%, less than 1.75%, less than 1.5%, less than 1.25%, less than 1%, less than 0.9%, less than 0.8%, less than 0.7%, less than 0.6%, less than 0.5%, less than 0.4%, less than 0.3%, less than 0.2%, less than 0.1%, and less than 0.05%. In one aspect, further provided are a population of the tobacco plants in this paragraph, cured tobacco material made therefrom, a tobacco blend comprising said cured tobacco material, and a tobacco product comprising the cured tobacco material.

[00151] In another aspect, the present disclosure provides a tobacco plant, or part thereof, comprising a mutation selected from the group consisting of a first chromosomal deletion flanked by and not comprising any two of Nic1 Marker Nos. 1 to 207, a second chromosomal deletion flanked by and not comprising any two of Nic2 Marker Nos. 1 to 340, and both said first and said second chromosomal deletions, wherein said tobacco plant is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value comparable to that of a control plant when grown in similar growth conditions, wherein said control plant shares an essentially identical genetic background with said tobacco plant except said mutation. In one aspect, a tobacco plant comprises nicotine at a level below 1%, below 2%, below 5%, below 8%, below 10%, below 12%, below 15%, below 20%, below 25%, below 30%, below 40%, below 50%, below 60%, below 70%, or below 80% of the nicotine level of said control plant when grown in similar growth conditions. In one aspect, further provided are a population of the tobacco plants in this paragraph, cured tobacco material made therefrom, a tobacco blend comprising said cured tobacco material, and a tobacco product comprising the cured tobacco material.

[00152] In one aspect, a first chromosomal deletion is flanked by and not comprising any two of Nic1 Marker Nos. 1 to 20, 21 to 40, 41 to 60, 61 to 80, 81 to 100, 101 to 120, 121 to 140, 141 to 160, 161 to 180, 181 to 200, or 201 to 207. In another aspect, a first chromosomal deletion is flanked by and not comprising any two of Nic1 Marker Nos. 1 to 10, 11 to 20, 21 to 30, 31 to 40, 41 to 50, 51 to 60, 61 to 70, 71 to 80, 81 to 90, 91 to 100, 101 to 110, 111 to 120, 121 to 130, 131 to 140, 141 to 150, 151 to 160, 161 to 170, 171 to 180, 181 to 190, 191 to 200, or 201 to 207.

[00153] In one aspect, a second chromosomal deletion is flanked by and not comprising any two of Nic2 Marker Nos. 1 to 20, 21 to 40, 41 to 60, 61 to 80, 81 to 100, 101 to 120, 121 to 140, 141 to 160, 161 to 180, 181 to 200, 201 to 220, 221 to 240, 241 to 260, 261 to 280, 281 to 300, 301 to 320, or 321 to 340. In another aspect, a second chromosomal deletion is flanked by and not comprising any two of Nic2 Marker Nos. 1 to 10, 11 to 20, 21 to 30, 31 to 40, 41 to 50, 51 to 60, 61 to 70, 71 to 80, 81 to 90, 91 to 100, 101 to 110, 111 to 120, 121 to 130, 131 to 140, 141 to 150, 151 to 160, 161 to 170, 171 to 180, 181 to 190, 191 to 200, 201 to 210, 211 to 220, 221 to 230, 231 to 240, 241 to 250, 251 to 260, 261 to 270, 271 to 280, 281 to 290, 291 to 300, 301 to 310, 311 to 320, 321 to 330, or 331 to 340.

[00154] It is understood that any tobacco plant of the present disclosure can further comprise additional agronomically desirable traits, for example, by transformation with a genetic construct or transgene using a technique known in the art. Without limitation, an example of a desired trait is herbicide resistance, pest resistance, disease resistance; high yield; high grade index value; curability; curing quality; mechanical harvestability; holding ability; leaf quality; height, plant maturation (*e.g.*, early maturing, early to medium maturing, medium maturing, medium to late maturing, or late maturing); stalk size (*e.g.*, a small, medium, or a large stalk); or leaf number per plant (*e.g.*, a small (*e.g.*, 5-10 leaves), medium (*e.g.*, 11-15 leaves), or large (*e.g.*, 16-21) number of leaves), or any combination. In some aspects, low-nicotine or nicotine-free tobacco plants or seeds disclosed herein comprise one or more transgenes expressing one or more insecticidal proteins, such as, for example, a crystal protein of *Bacillus thuringiensis* or a vegetative insecticidal protein from *Bacillus cereus*, such as VIP3 (see, for example, Estruch et al. (1997) *Nat. Biotechnol.*15:137). In other aspects, tobacco plants disclosed herein further comprise an introgressed trait conferring resistance to brown stem rot (U.S. Pat. No. 5,689,035) or resistance to cyst nematodes (U.S. Pat. No. 5,491,081).

[00155] The present disclosure also provides tobacco plants comprising an altered nicotine level but having a yield comparable to the yield of corresponding initial tobacco plants without such a nicotine level alternation. In one aspect, a low-nicotine or nicotine-free tobacco variety disclosed herein provides a yield selected from the group consisting of about between 1200 and 3500, between 1300 and 3400, between 1400 and 3300, between 1500 and 3200, between 1600 and 3100, between 1700 and 3000, between 1800 and 2900, between 1900 and 2800, between 2000 and 2700, between 2100 and 2600, between 2200 and 2500, and between 2300 and 2400 lbs/acre. In another aspect, a low-nicotine or nicotine-free tobacco variety disclosed herein provides a yield selected from the group consisting of about between 1200 and 3500, between 1300 and 3500, between 1400 and 3500, between 1500 and 3500, between 1600 and 3500, between 1700 and 3500, between 1800 and 3500, between 1900 and 3500, between 2000 and 3500, between 2100 and 3500, between 2200 and 3500, between 2300 and 3500, between 2400 and 3500, between 2500 and 3500, between 2600 and 3500, between 2700 and 3500, between 2800 and 3500, between 2900 and 3500, between 3000 and 3500, and between 3100 and 3500 lbs/acre. In further aspects, low-nicotine or nicotine-free tobacco plants disclosed herein provide a yield between 65% and 130%, between 70% and 130%, between 75% and 130%, between 80% and 130%, between 85% and 130%, between 90% and 130%, between 95% and 130%, between 100% and 130%, between 105% and 130%, between 110% and 130%, between 115% and 130%, or between 120% and 130% of the yield of a control plant having essentially identical genetic background except a Nic1 mutation, a Nic2 mutation, a Nic1 transgene, a Nic2 transgene, or combinations thereof. In further aspects, low-nicotine or nicotine-free tobacco plants disclosed herein provide a yield between 70% and 125%, between 75% and 120%, between 80% and 115%, between 85% and 110%, or between 90% and 100% of the yield of a control plant having essentially identical genetic background except a Nic1 mutation, a Nic2 mutation, a Nic1 transgene, a Nic2 transgene, or combinations thereof

[00156] In one aspect, a low-nicotine or nicotine-free tobacco variety disclosed herein is adapted for machine harvesting. In another aspect, a low-nicotine or nicotine-free tobacco variety disclosed herein is harvested mechanically.

[00157] In some aspects, tobacco plants provided herein are hybrid plants. Hybrids can be produced by preventing self-pollination of female parent plants (*e.g.*, seed parents) of a first variety, permitting pollen from male parent plants of a second variety to fertilize the female

parent plants, and allowing F1 hybrid seeds to form on the female plants. Self-pollination of female plants can be prevented by emasculating the flowers at an early stage of flower development. Alternatively, pollen formation can be prevented on the female parent plants using a form of male sterility. For example, male sterility can be produced by male sterility (MS), or transgenic male sterility wherein a transgene inhibits microsporogenesis and/or pollen formation, or self-incompatibility. Female parent plants containing MS are particularly useful. In aspects in which the female parent plants are MS, pollen may be harvested from male fertile plants and applied manually to the stigmas of MS female parent plants, and the resulting F1 seed is harvested.

[00158] Plants can be used to form single-cross tobacco F1 hybrids. Pollen from a male parent plant is manually transferred to an emasculated female parent plant or a female parent plant that is male sterile to form F1 seed. Alternatively, three-way crosses can be carried out wherein a single-cross F1 hybrid is used as a female parent and is crossed with a different male parent. As another alternative, double-cross hybrids can be created wherein the F1 progeny of two different single-crosses are themselves crossed. Self-incompatibility can be used to particular advantage to prevent self-pollination of female parents when forming a double-cross hybrid.

[00159] In one aspect, a low-nicotine or nicotine-free tobacco variety disclosed herein is male sterile. In another aspect, a low-nicotine or nicotine-free tobacco variety disclosed herein is cytoplasmic male sterile. Male sterile tobacco plants may be produced by any method known in the art. Methods of producing male sterile tobacco are described in Wernsman, E. A., and Rufty, R. C. 1987. Chapter Seventeen. Tobacco. Pages 669-698 In: Cultivar Development. Crop Species. W. H. Fehr (ed.), MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., New York, N.Y. 761 pp.

[00160] In further aspects, tobacco parts provided herein include, but are not limited to, a leaf, a stem, a root, a seed, a flower, pollen, an anther, an ovule, a pedicel, a fruit, a meristem, a cotyledon, a hypocotyl, a pod, an embryo, endosperm, an explant, a callus, a tissue culture, a shoot, a cell, and a protoplast. In one aspect, tobacco part provided herein does not include seed. In one aspect, this disclosure provides tobacco plant cells, tissues, and organs that are not reproductive material and do not mediate the natural reproduction of the plant. In another aspect, this disclosure also provides tobacco plant cells, tissues, and organs that are reproductive

material and mediate the natural reproduction of the plant. In another aspect, this disclosure provides tobacco plant cells, tissues, and organs that cannot maintain themselves via photosynthesis. In another aspect, this disclosure provides somatic tobacco plant cells. Somatic cells, contrary to germline cells, do not mediate plant reproduction.

[00161] The provided cells, tissues and organs may be from seed, fruit, leaf, cotyledon, hypocotyl, meristem, embryos, endosperm, root, shoot, stem, pod, flower, inflorescence, stalk, pedicel, style, stigma, receptacle, petal, sepal, pollen, anther, filament, ovary, ovule, pericarp, phloem, vascular tissue. In another aspect, this disclosure provides a tobacco plant chloroplast. In a further aspect, this disclosure provides epidermal cells, stomata cell, leaf or root hairs, a storage root, or a tuber. In another aspect, this disclosure provides a tobacco protoplast.

[00162] Skilled artisans understand that tobacco plants naturally reproduce via seeds, not via asexual reproduction or vegetative propagation. In one aspect, this disclosure provides tobacco endosperm. In another aspect, this disclosure provides tobacco endosperm cells. In a further aspect, this disclosure provides a male or female sterile tobacco plant, which cannot reproduce without human intervention.

[00163] In some aspects, the present disclosure provides a nucleic acid molecule comprising at least about 40%, 45%, 50%, 55%, 60%, 65%, 70%, 75%, 80%, 85%, 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 96%, 97%, 98%, 99%, or 100% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 9 to 48, 75 to 82, 86 to 115, and 131 to 146, and fragments thereof. In other aspects, the present disclosure provides a nucleic acid molecule comprising at least about 40%, 45%, 50%, 55%, 60%, 65%, 70%, 75%, 80%, 85%, 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 96%, 97%, 98%, 99%, or 100% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 13, 28, 33, 48, 82, 86, 87, 101, 102, 145, 146, and fragments thereof. In some aspects, the present disclosure provides a polypeptide or protein comprising at least about 40%, 45%, 50%, 55%, 60%, 65%, 70%, 75%, 80%, 85%, 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 96%, 97%, 98%, 99%, or 100% identity to an amino acid sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 49 to 68, 116 to 130, and 147. In other aspects, the present disclosure provides a polypeptide or protein comprising at least about 40%, 45%, 50%, 55%, 60%, 65%, 70%, 75%, 80%, 85%, 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 96%, 97%, 98%, 99%, or 100% sequence similarity to an amino acid sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 49 to

68, 116 to 130, and 147. In other aspects, the present disclosure provides a biologically active variant of a protein having an amino acid sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 49 to 68, 116 to 130, and 147. A biologically active variant of a protein of the present disclosure may differ from that protein by as few as 1-15 amino acid residues, as few as 10, as few as 9, as few as 8, as few as 7, as few as 6, as few as 5, as few as 4, as few as 3, as few as 2, or as few as 1 amino acid residue. Also provided herein are orthologous genes or proteins of genes or proteins from Nic1 locus. "Orthologs" are genes derived from a common ancestral gene and which are found in different species as a result of speciation. Orthologs may share at least 60%, 70%, 75%, 80%, 85%, 90%, 91%, 92%, 93%, 94%, 95%, 96%, 97%, 98%, 99%, or greater sequence identity or similarity at the nucleotide sequence and/or the protein sequence level. Functions of orthologs are often highly conserved among species.

[00164] As used herein, the term "sequence identity" or "identity" in the context of two polynucleotides or polypeptide sequences makes reference to the residues in the two sequences that are the same when aligned for maximum correspondence over a specified comparison window. When percentage of sequence identity is used in reference to proteins it is recognized that residue positions which are not identical often differ by conservative amino acid substitutions, where amino acid residues are substituted for other amino acid residues with similar chemical properties (*e.g.*, charge or hydrophobicity) and therefore do not change the functional properties of the molecule. When sequences differ in conservative substitutions, the percent sequence identity may be adjusted upwards to correct for the conservative nature of the substitution. Sequences that differ by such conservative substitutions are said to have "sequence similarity" or "similarity."

[00165] Nucleic acid molecules, polypeptides, or proteins provided herein can be isolated or substantially purified. An "isolated" or "purified" nucleic acid molecule, polypeptide, protein, or biologically active portion thereof, is substantially or essentially free from components that normally accompany or interact with the polynucleotide or protein as found in its naturally occurring environment. For example, an isolated or purified polynucleotide or protein is substantially free of other cellular material, or culture medium when produced by recombinant techniques, or substantially free of chemical precursors or other chemicals when chemically synthesized.

[00166] The present disclosure further provides a method manufacturing a tobacco product comprising tobacco material from tobacco plants disclosed herein. In some aspects, methods disclosed herein comprise conditioning aged tobacco material made from tobacco plants disclosed herein to increase its moisture content from between about 12.5% and about 13.5% to about 21%, blending the conditioned tobacco material to produce a desirable blend. In one aspect, the method of manufacturing a tobacco product disclosed herein further comprises casing or flavoring the blend. Generally, during the casing process, casing or sauce materials are added to blends to enhance their quality by balancing the chemical composition and to develop certain desired flavor characteristics. Further details for the casing process can be found in *Tobacco Production, Chemistry and Technology*, Edited by L. Davis and M. Nielsen, Blackwell Science, 1999.

[00167] Tobacco material provided herein can be also processed using methods including, but not limited to, heat treatment (e.g., cooking, toasting), flavoring, enzyme treatment, expansion and/or curing. Both fermented and non-fermented tobaccos can be processed using these techniques. Examples of suitable processed tobaccos include dark air-cured, dark fire cured, burley, flue cured, and cigar filler or wrapper, as well as the products from the whole leaf stemming operation. In some aspects, tobacco fibers include up to 70% dark tobacco on a fresh weight basis. For example, tobacco can be conditioned by heating, sweating and/or pasteurizing steps as described in U.S. Publication Nos. 2004/0118422 or 2005/0178398.

[00168] Tobacco material provided herein can be subject to fermentation. Fermenting typically is characterized by high initial moisture content, heat generation, and a 10 to 20% loss of dry weight. See, e.g., U.S. Patent Nos. 4,528,993; 4,660,577; 4,848,373; and 5,372,149. In addition to modifying the aroma of the leaf, fermentation can change either or both the color and texture of a leaf. Also during the fermentation process, evolution gases can be produced, oxygen can be taken up, the pH can change, and the amount of water retained can change. See, for example, U.S. Publication No. 2005/0178398 and Tso (1999, Chapter 1 in *Tobacco, Production, Chemistry and Technology*, Davis & Nielsen, eds., Blackwell Publishing, Oxford). Cured, or cured and fermented tobacco can be further processed (e.g., cut, expanded, blended, milled or comminuted) prior to incorporation into the oral product. The tobacco, in some cases, is long cut fermented cured moist tobacco having an oven volatiles content of between 48 and 50 weight percent prior to mixing with the copolymer and optionally flavorants and other additives.

[00169] In some aspects, tobacco material provided herein can be processed to a desired size. In certain aspects, tobacco fibers can be processed to have an average fiber size of less than 200 micrometers. In some aspects, tobacco fibers are between 75 and 125 micrometers. In other aspects, tobacco fibers are processed to have a size of 75 micrometers or less. In some aspects, tobacco fibers include long cut tobacco, which can be cut or shredded into widths of about 10 cuts/inch up to about 110 cuts/inch and lengths of about 0.1 inches up to about 1 inch. Double cut tobacco fibers can have a range of particle sizes such that about 70% of the double cut tobacco fibers falls between the mesh sizes of -20 mesh and 80 mesh.

[00170] Tobacco material provided herein can be processed to have a total oven volatiles content of about 10% by weight or greater; about 20% by weight or greater; about 40% by weight or greater; about 15% by weight to about 25% by weight; about 20% by weight to about 30% by weight; about 30% by weight to about 50% by weight; about 45% by weight to about 65% by weight; or about 50% by weight to about 60% by weight. Those of skill in the art will appreciate that “moist” tobacco typically refers to tobacco that has an oven volatiles content of between about 40% by weight and about 60% by weight (e.g., about 45% by weight to about 55% by weight, or about 50% by weight). As used herein, “oven volatiles” are determined by calculating the percentage of weight loss for a sample after drying the sample in a pre-warmed forced draft oven at 110°C for 3.25 hours. The oral product can have a different overall oven volatiles content than the oven volatiles content of the tobacco fibers used to make the oral product. The processing steps described herein can reduce or increase the oven volatiles content.

[00171] The following paragraphs provide a list of exemplary embodiments.

[00172] Embodiment 1. A tobacco plant, or part thereof, comprising a mutation in Nic1 locus, a mutation in Nic2 locus, or both, wherein said tobacco plant is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value of 50 or more.

[00173] Embodiment 2. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 1, wherein said tobacco plant is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value selected from the group consisting of 55 or more, 60 or more, 65 or more, 70 or more, 75 or more, 80 or more, 85 or more, 90 or more, and 95 or more.

[00174] Embodiment 3. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 1, wherein said tobacco plant is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value comparable to

that of a control plant when grown in similar growth conditions, wherein said control plant shares an essentially identical genetic background with said tobacco plant except said mutation.

[00175] Embodiment 4. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 1, wherein said tobacco plant is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value of at least about 65%, at least about 70%, at least about 75%, at least about 80%, at least about 85%, at least about 90%, at least about 95%, or at least about 98% of the USDA grade index value of a control plant when grown in similar growth conditions, wherein said control plant shares an essentially identical genetic background with said tobacco plant except said mutation.

[00176] Embodiment 6. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 1, wherein said tobacco plant comprises a nicotine level selected from the group consisting of less than 3%, less than 2.75%, less than 2.5%, less than 2.25%, less than 2.0%, less than 1.75%, less than 1.5%, less than 1.25%, less than 1%, less than 0.9%, less than 0.8%, less than 0.7%, less than 0.6%, less than 0.5%, less than 0.4%, less than 0.3%, less than 0.2%, less than 0.1%, and less than 0.05%.

[00177] Embodiment 7. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 1, wherein said tobacco plant further comprises a transgene or mutation directly suppressing the expression or activity of one or more genes encoding a product selected from the group consisting of PMT, MPO, QPT, BBL, A622, and MATE transporter.

[00178] Embodiment 8. A tobacco plant, or part thereof, comprising a mutation in Nic1 locus, a mutation in Nic2 locus, or both, wherein said tobacco plant is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value comparable to that of a control plant when grown in similar growth conditions, wherein said control plant shares an essentially identical genetic background with said tobacco plant except said mutation.

[00179] Embodiment 9. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 8, wherein said tobacco plant is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value selected from the group consisting of 55 or more, 60 or more, 65 or more, 70 or more, 75 or more, 80 or more, 85 or more, 90 or more, and 95 or more.

[00180] Embodiment 10. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 8, wherein said tobacco plant is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value of at least about

65%, at least about 70%, at least about 75%, at least about 80%, at least about 85%, at least about 90%, at least about 95%, or at least about 98% of the grading index of said control plant.

[00181] Embodiment 11. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 8, wherein said tobacco plant comprises nicotine at a level below 1%, below 2%, below 5%, below 8%, below 10%, below 12%, below 15%, below 20%, below 25%, below 30%, below 40%, below 50%, below 60%, below 70%, or below 80% of the nicotine level of said control plant when grown in similar growth conditions.

[00182] Embodiment 12. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 8, wherein said tobacco plant further comprises a transgene or mutation directly suppressing the expression or activity of one or more genes encoding a product selected from the group consisting of PMT, MPO, QPT, BBL, A622, and MATE transporter.

[00183] Embodiment 13. A plant of a tobacco variety comprising a mutation selected from the group consisting of a *nic1* mutation, a *nic2* mutation, and a combination thereof, wherein said tobacco variety has a leaf grading index comparable to the leaf grading index of a control tobacco variety when grown in similar growth conditions, wherein said control tobacco variety shares an essentially identical genetic background with said tobacco variety except said mutation.

[00184] Embodiment 14. A non-transgenic tobacco plant, or part thereof, comprising a nicotine level selected from the group consisting of less than 3%, less than 2.75%, less than 2.5%, less than 2.25%, less than 2.0%, less than 1.75%, less than 1.5%, less than 1.25%, less than 1%, less than 0.9%, less than 0.8%, less than 0.7%, less than 0.6%, less than 0.5%, less than 0.4%, less than 0.3%, less than 0.2%, less than 0.1%, and less than 0.05%, wherein said tobacco plant is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value of 50 or more 55 or more, 60 or more, 65 or more, 70 or more, 75 or more, 80 or more, 85 or more, 90 or more, and 95 or more.

[00185] Embodiment 15. The non-transgenic tobacco plant, or part thereof, of claim 14, wherein said non-transgenic tobacco plant comprises a nicotine level of less than 2.0% and is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value of 70 or more.

[00186] Embodiment 16. The non-transgenic tobacco plant, or part thereof, of claim 14, wherein said non-transgenic tobacco plant comprises a nicotine level of less than 1.0% and is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value of 70 or more.

[00187] Embodiment 17. A tobacco plant, or part thereof, comprising a non-transgenic mutation, wherein said non-transgenic mutation reduces the nicotine level of said tobacco plant to below 1%, below 2%, below 5%, below 8%, below 10%, below 12%, below 15%, below 20%, below 25%, below 30%, below 40%, below 50%, below 60%, below 70%, or below 80% of the nicotine level of a control plant when grown in similar growth conditions, wherein said tobacco plant is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value comparable to the USDA grade index value of said control plant, and wherein said control plant shares an essentially identical genetic background with said tobacco plant except said non-transgenic mutation.

[00188] Embodiment 18. A population of the tobacco plants of any one of Embodiments 1 to 17.

[00189] Embodiment 19. Cured tobacco material from the tobacco plant of any one of claims 1 to 17.

[00190] Embodiment 20. The cured tobacco material of Embodiment 19, wherein said cured tobacco material is made by a curing process selected from the group consisting of flue curing, air curing, fire curing, and sun curing.

[00191] Embodiment 21. A tobacco blend comprising the cured tobacco material of claim 19.

[00192] Embodiment 22. The tobacco blend of Embodiment 21, wherein the cured tobacco material constitutes about at least 10%, at least 15%, at least 20%, at least 25%, at least 30%, at least 35%, at least 40%, at least 45%, at least 50%, at least 55%, at least 60%, at least 65%, at least 70%, at least 75%, at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, or at least 95% of cured tobacco in said tobacco blend by weight.

[00193] Embodiment 23. The tobacco blend of Embodiment 21, wherein the cured tobacco material constitutes about at least 10%, at least 15%, at least 20%, at least 25%, at least 30%, at least 35%, at least 40%, at least 45%, at least 50%, at least 55%, at least 60%, at least 65%, at least 70%, at least 75%, at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, or at least 95% of cured tobacco in said tobacco blend by volume.

[00194] Embodiment 24. A tobacco product comprising the cured tobacco material of claim 19.

[00195] Embodiment 25. The tobacco product of Embodiment 24, wherein the tobacco product is selected from the group consisting of a cigarette, a cigarillo, a non-ventilated recess filter cigarette, a vented recess filter cigarette, a cigar, snuff, pipe tobacco, cigar tobacco, cigarette tobacco, chewing tobacco, leaf tobacco, shredded tobacco, and cut tobacco.

[00196] Embodiment 26. The tobacco product of Embodiment 24, wherein the tobacco product is a smokeless tobacco product.

[00197] Embodiment 27. The tobacco product of Embodiment 26, wherein the smokeless tobacco product is selected from the group consisting of loose leaf chewing tobacco, plug chewing tobacco, moist snuff, and nasal snuff.

[00198] Embodiment 28. A reconstituted tobacco comprising the cured tobacco material of claim 19.

[00199] Embodiment 29. A tobacco plant, or part thereof, comprising a mutation in Nic1 locus, wherein said mutation is absent from a LA Burley 21 variety.

[00200] Embodiment 30. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 29, wherein said tobacco plant comprises a shorter chromosome deletion at Nic1 locus compared to said LA Burley 21 variety.

[00201] Embodiment 31. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 29, wherein said tobacco plant comprises a lower level of nicotine compared to a control tobacco plant without said mutation when grown in similar growth conditions.

[00202] Embodiment 32. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 29, wherein said tobacco plant comprises nicotine at a level below 1%, below 2%, below 5%, below 8%, below 10%, below 12%, below 15%, below 20%, below 25%, below 30%, below 40%, below 50%, below 60%, below 70%, or below 80% of the nicotine level in a control tobacco plant without said mutation when grown in similar growth conditions.

[00203] Embodiment 33. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 29, wherein said tobacco plant comprises a lower level of total alkaloid compared to a control tobacco plant without said mutation when grown in similar growth conditions.

[00204] Embodiment 34. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 29, wherein said tobacco plant comprises a lower level of one or more alkaloid selected from the group consisting of nicotine, nornicotine, anabasine, and anatabine, compared to a control tobacco plant without said mutation when grown in similar growth conditions.

[00205] Embodiment 35. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 29, wherein said tobacco plant comprises a similar level of one or more compounds selected from the group consisting of 3-methylvaleric acid, valeric acid, isovaleric acid, a labdenoid, a cembrenoid, a sugar ester, and a reducing sugar, compared to a control tobacco plant without said mutation when grown in similar growth conditions.

[00206] Embodiment 36. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 29, wherein said mutation is homozygous.

[00207] Embodiment 37. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 29, wherein said mutation is heterozygous.

[00208] Embodiment 38. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 29, wherein said mutation is selected from the group consisting of a point mutation, a deletion, an insertion, a duplication, and an inversion.

[00209] Embodiment 39. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 29, wherein said mutation is introduced by an approach selected from the group consisting of random mutagenesis and targeted mutagenesis.

[00210] Embodiment 40. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 39, wherein said targeted mutagenesis is mediated by meganuclease, zinc finger nuclease, TALEN, or CRISPR.

[00211] Embodiment 41. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 29, wherein said tobacco plant further comprises a mutation in Nic2 locus.

[00212] Embodiment 42. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 29, wherein said mutation is located within a gene comprising a sequence having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 9 to 28, 75 to 82, 86 to 100, 145, and fragments thereof.

[00213] Embodiment 43. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 29, wherein said mutation reduces the expression or activity of said gene.

[00214] Embodiment 44. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 29, wherein said mutation is located within a gene comprising a sequence having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 13, 28, 33, 48, 82, 86, 87, 101, 102, 145, and 146, and fragments thereof.

[00215] Embodiment 45. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 29, wherein said mutation is located within a sequence having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 13, 28, 33, 48, 82, 86, 87, 101, 102, 145, and 146, and fragments thereof.

[00216] Embodiment 46. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 29, wherein said mutation is located within a gene comprising a coding sequence having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 33, 48, 101, 102, and 146, and fragments thereof.

[00217] Embodiment 47. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 29, wherein said mutation is located within a sequence having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 33, 48, 101, 102, and 146, and fragments thereof.

[00218] Embodiment 48. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 29, wherein said mutation is located within a gene encoding a polypeptide having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 53, 68, 116, 117, 147, and fragments thereof.

[00219] Embodiment 49. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 29, wherein said plant further comprises a reduced level of mRNA, protein, or both of one or more genes encoding a product selected from the group consisting of PMT, MPO, QPT, BBL, MATE, and

A622, compared to a tobacco plant without said mutation when grown in similar growth conditions.

[00220] Embodiment 50. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 29, wherein said plant further comprises a transgene or mutation suppressing the expression or activity of one or more genes encoding a product selected from the group consisting of PMT, MPO, QPT, BBL, A622, and MATE transporter.

[00221] Embodiment 51. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 29, wherein said tobacco plant is a hybrid.

[00222] Embodiment 52. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 29, wherein said part is selected from the group consisting of a leaf, a stem, a root, a seed, a flower, pollen, an anther, an ovule, a pedicel, a fruit, a meristem, a cotyledon, a hypocotyl, a pod, an embryo, endosperm, an explant, a callus, a tissue culture, a shoot, a cell, and a protoplast.

[00223] Embodiment 53. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 29, wherein said tobacco plant is from a variety selected from the group consisting of flue-cured tobacco, air-cured tobacco, dark fire-cured tobacco, and Galpao tobacco, and Oriental tobacco.

[00224] Embodiment 54. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 29, wherein said tobacco plant is from a variety selected from the group consisting of Burley tobacco, Maryland tobacco, and dark air-cured tobacco.

[00225] Embodiment 55. A population of the tobacco plants of Embodiment 29.

[00226] Embodiment 56. Cured tobacco material from the tobacco plant of Embodiment 29.

[00227] Embodiment 57. The cured tobacco material of Embodiment 56, wherein said cured tobacco material comprises a lower level of nicotine compared to cured tobacco material from a control tobacco plant without said mutation.

[00228] Embodiment 58. The cured tobacco material of Embodiment 56, wherein said tobacco plant comprises nicotine at a level between 0.2% and 0.6%.

[00229] Embodiment 59. The cured tobacco material of Embodiment 56, wherein said tobacco plant comprises nicotine at a level between 1.0% and 3.0%.

[00230] Embodiment 60. The cured tobacco material of Embodiment 56, wherein said cured tobacco material is made by a curing process selected from the group consisting of flue curing, air curing, fire curing, and sun curing.

[00231] Embodiment 61. A tobacco blend comprising the cured tobacco material of claim 56.

[00232] Embodiment 62. A tobacco product comprising the cured tobacco material of claim 56.

[00233] Embodiment 63. The tobacco product of Embodiment 62, wherein the tobacco product is selected from the group consisting of a cigarette, a cigarillo, a non-ventilated recess filter cigarette, a vented recess filter cigarette, a cigar, snuff, pipe tobacco, cigar tobacco, cigarette tobacco, chewing tobacco, leaf tobacco, shredded tobacco, and cut tobacco.

[00234] Embodiment 64. The tobacco product of Embodiment 62, wherein the tobacco product is a smokeless tobacco product.

[00235] Embodiment 65. The tobacco product of Embodiment 64, wherein the smokeless tobacco product is selected from the group consisting of loose leaf chewing tobacco, plug chewing tobacco, moist snuff, and nasal snuff.

[00236] Embodiment 66. A reconstituted tobacco comprising the cured tobacco material of claim 56.

[00237] Embodiment 67. A recombinant DNA construct comprising a promoter that is functional in a tobacco cell and operably linked to a polynucleotide that encodes a polypeptide having an amino acid sequence at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99% identical to an amino acid sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 49 to 68, 84, 116 to 130, 147, and fragments thereof.

[00238] Embodiment 68. A tobacco plant, or part thereof, comprising the recombinant DNA construct of claim 67.

[00239] Embodiment 69. A tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 68, wherein said tobacco plant comprises a higher level of nicotine compared to a control tobacco plant without said recombinant DNA construct.

[00240] Embodiment 70. Cured tobacco material from the tobacco plant of Embodiment 68.

[00241] Embodiment 71. A tobacco product comprising the cured tobacco material of claim 70.

[00242] Embodiment 72. A method of increasing the nicotine level of a tobacco plant, said method comprising transforming a tobacco plant with the recombinant DNA construct of claim 67.

[00243] Embodiment 73. A recombinant DNA construct comprising a promoter that is functional in a tobacco cell and operably linked to a polynucleotide that encodes an RNA molecule capable of binding to an RNA encoding a polypeptide having an amino acid sequence at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99% identical to an amino acid sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NO: 49 to 68, 84, 116 to 130, 147, and fragments thereof, and wherein said RNA molecule suppresses the expression of said polypeptide.

[00244] Embodiment 74. A tobacco plant, or part thereof, comprising the recombinant DNA construct of claim 73.

[00245] Embodiment 75. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 74, wherein said RNA molecule is selected from the group consisting of a microRNA, an siRNA, and a trans-acting siRNA.

[00246] Embodiment 76. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 74, wherein said polynucleotide encodes a double stranded RNA.

[00247] Embodiment 77. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 74, wherein said tobacco plant comprises a lower level of nicotine compared to a control tobacco plant without said recombinant DNA construct.

[00248] Embodiment 78. Cured tobacco material from the tobacco plant of Embodiment 74.

[00249] Embodiment 79. A tobacco product comprising the cured tobacco material of claim 78.

[00250] Embodiment 80. A method of reducing the nicotine level of a tobacco plant, said method comprising transforming a tobacco plant with the recombinant DNA construct of claim 73.

[00251] Embodiment 81. A tobacco plant, or part thereof, comprising a heterologous expression cassette comprising a Nic1 inhibitory sequence of a gene comprising a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 9 to 28, 75 to 82, 86 to 100, 145, and fragments thereof, wherein said inhibitory sequence is operably linked to a promoter that is functional in a plant cell, and wherein said inhibitory sequence has at least 90% sequence identity to a fragment of at least 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, or 80 nucleotides of sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 9 to 28, 75 to 82, 86 to 100, 145, and fragments thereof.

[00252] Embodiment 82. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 81, wherein said Nic1 inhibitory sequence is capable of being transcribed as an inhibitory polynucleotide selected from the group consisting of a single-stranded RNA polynucleotide, a double-stranded RNA polynucleotide, and a combination thereof.

[00253] Embodiment 83. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 81, wherein said promoter is selected from the group consisting of a constitutive promoter, an inducible promoter, and a tissue-preferred promoter.

[00254] Embodiment 84. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 81, wherein said promoter is a root-specific promoter.

[00255] Embodiment 85. A tobacco plant, or part thereof, comprising a heterologous expression cassette comprising a Nic1 inhibitory sequence of a gene comprising a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 13, 28, 33, 48, 82, 86, 87, 101, 102, 145, and 146, and fragments thereof, wherein said inhibitory sequence is operably linked to a promoter that is functional in a plant cell, and wherein said inhibitory sequence has at least 90% sequence identity to a fragment of at least 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, or 80 nucleotides of sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 13, 28, 33, 48, 82, 86, 87, 101, 102, 145, and 146, and fragments thereof.

[00256] Embodiment 86. A method of introgressing a low nicotine trait into a tobacco variety, said method comprising:

- a. crossing a first tobacco variety comprising a low nicotine trait with a second tobacco variety without said low nicotine trait to produce one or more progeny tobacco plants;
- b. genotyping the one or more progeny tobacco plants for a polymorphic marker linked to said low nicotine trait, wherein said polymorphic marker is in a chromosomal interval flanked by any two of polymorphic loci listed in Table 3 or flanked by any two of polymorphic loci listed in Table 4; and
- c. selecting a progeny tobacco plant comprising the low nicotine trait.

[00257] Embodiment 87. The method of Embodiment 86, wherein the method further comprises backcrossing said selected progeny tobacco plant with said second tobacco variety.

[00258] Embodiment 88. The method of Embodiment 86, wherein the method further comprises:

- d. crossing the selected progeny plant with itself or with the second tobacco variety to produce one or more further progeny tobacco plants; and
- e. selecting a further progeny tobacco plant comprising the low nicotine trait.

[00259] Embodiment 89. The method of Embodiment 88, wherein the step (e) of selecting comprises marker-assisted selection.

[00260] Embodiment 90. The method of Embodiment 86, wherein the method produces a single gene conversion comprising said low nicotine trait.

[00261] Embodiment 91. The method of Embodiment 86, wherein the second tobacco variety is an elite variety.

[00262] Embodiment 92. The method of Embodiment 86, wherein the genotyping involves one or more molecular marker assays.

[00263] Embodiment 93. The method of Embodiment 86, wherein the polymorphic marker comprises a polymorphism selected from the group consisting of single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs), insertions or deletions in DNA sequence (Indels), simple sequence

repeats of DNA sequence (SSRs), a restriction fragment length polymorphism (RFLP), and a tag SNP.

[00264] Embodiment 94. The method of Embodiment 86, wherein the genotyping comprises assaying for the presence or absence of a nucleic acid sequence located within a sequence having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 9 to 28, 75 to 82, 86 to 100, 145, and fragments thereof.

[00265] Embodiment 95. The method of Embodiment 86, wherein the genotyping comprises assaying for the presence or absence of a nucleic acid sequence located within a sequence having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID Nos: 13, 28, 33, 48, 82, 86, 87, 101, 102, 145, and 146, and fragments thereof.

[00266] Embodiment 96. The method of Embodiment 86, wherein the first tobacco variety is LA Burley 21.

[00267] Embodiment 97. The method of Embodiment 86, wherein the selected progeny tobacco plant comprises a shorter chromosome deletion at Nic1 locus compared to LA Burley 21.

[00268] Embodiment 98. A method of introgressing a low nicotine trait into a tobacco variety, said method comprising:

- a. crossing a first tobacco variety comprising a low nicotine trait with a second tobacco variety without said low nicotine trait to produce one or more progeny tobacco plants;
- b. genotyping the one or more progeny tobacco plants for a polymorphic marker linked to said low nicotine trait, wherein said polymorphic marker is within 20 cM of any one of polymorphic loci listed in Table 3 and Table 4, or is any one of SEQ ID Nos. 131 to 144; and
- c. selecting a progeny tobacco plant comprising the low nicotine trait.

[00269] Embodiment 99. The method of Embodiment 98, wherein the genotyping comprises assaying for the presence or absence of a nucleic acid sequence located within a sequence having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99%

identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 9 to 28, 75 to 82, 86 to 100, 145, and fragments thereof.

[00270] Embodiment 100. The method of Embodiment 98, wherein the genotyping comprises assaying for the presence or absence of a nucleic acid sequence located within a sequence having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 13, 28, 33, 48, 82, 86, 87, 101, 102, 145, and 146, and fragments thereof.

[00271] Embodiment 101. A method of selecting a tobacco plant having a low nicotine trait, said method comprising:

- a. isolating nucleic acids from a collection of tobacco germplasm;
- b. assaying the nucleic acids for one or more markers closely linked to Nic1 locus or Nic2 locus; and
- c. selecting a tobacco plant having a low nicotine trait based on the marker assay.

[00272] Embodiment 102. The method of Embodiment 101, wherein the one or more markers are within about 20 cM, 10 cM, 5 cM, 4 cM, 3 cM, 2 cM, 1 cM, 0.5 cM, or less than 0.5 cM of any one of polymorphic loci listed in Table 3 and Table 4, or any one of SEQ ID Nos. 131 to 144.

[00273] Embodiment 103. The method of Embodiment 101, wherein the assaying comprises assaying for the presence or absence of a nucleic acid sequence located within a sequence having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 9 to 28, 75 to 82, 86 to 100, 145,, and fragments thereof.

[00274] Embodiment 104. The method of Embodiment 101, wherein the assaying comprises assaying for the presence or absence of a nucleic acid sequence located within a sequence having at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, at least 95%, at least 97%, at least 98%, at least 99% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 13, 28, 33, 48, 82, 86, 87, 101, 102, 145, and 146, and fragments thereof.

[00275] Embodiment 105. The method of Embodiment 101, wherein the method further comprises determining the nicotine level of said selected plant to confirm said low nicotine trait.

[00276] Embodiment 106. The method of Embodiment 101, wherein the collection of tobacco germplasm is a haploid breeding population.

[00277] Embodiment 107. A tobacco plant, or part thereof, comprising a first chromosomal deletion flanked by and not comprising any two of Nic1 Marker Nos. 1 to 207, a second chromosomal deletion flanked by and not comprising any two of Nic2 Marker Nos. 1 to 340, or both said first and said second chromosomal deletions, wherein said tobacco plant is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value of 50 or more, 55 or more, 60 or more, 65 or more, 70 or more, 75 or more, 80 or more, 85 or more, 90 or more, or 95 or more.

[00278] Embodiment 108. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 107, wherein said tobacco plant comprises a nicotine level selected from the group consisting of less than 3%, less than 2.75%, less than 2.5%, less than 2.25%, less than 2.0%, less than 1.75%, less than 1.5%, less than 1.25%, less than 1%, less than 0.9%, less than 0.8%, less than 0.7%, less than 0.6%, less than 0.5%, less than 0.4%, less than 0.3%, less than 0.2%, less than 0.1%, and less than 0.05%.

[00279] Embodiment 109. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 107, wherein said first chromosomal deletion is flanked by and not comprising any two of Nic1 Marker Nos. 1 to 20, 21 to 40, 41 to 60, 61 to 80, 81 to 100, 101 to 120, 121 to 140, 141 to 160, 161 to 180, 181 to 200, or 201 to 207.

[00280] Embodiment 110. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 107, wherein said first chromosomal deletion is flanked by and not comprising any two of Nic1 Marker Nos. 1 to 10, 11 to 20, 21 to 30, 31 to 40, 41 to 50, 51 to 60, 61 to 70, 71 to 80, 81 to 90, 91 to 100, 101 to 110, 111 to 120, 121 to 130, 131 to 140, 141 to 150, 151 to 160, 161 to 170, 171 to 180, 181 to 190, 191 to 200, or 201 to 207.

[00281] Embodiment 111. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 107, wherein said second chromosomal deletion is flanked by and not comprising any two of Nic2 Marker Nos. 1 to 20, 21 to 40, 41 to 60, 61 to 80, 81 to 100, 101 to 120, 121 to 140, 141 to 160, 161 to 180, 181 to 200, 201 to 220, 221 to 240, 241 to 260, 261 to 280, 281 to 300, 301 to 320, or 321 to 340.

[00282] Embodiment 112. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 107, wherein said second chromosomal deletion is flanked by and not comprising any two of Nic2 Marker Nos. 1 to 10, 11 to 20, 21 to 30, 31 to 40, 41 to 50, 51 to 60, 61 to 70, 71 to 80, 81 to 90, 91 to 100, 101 to 110, 111 to 120, 121 to 130, 131 to 140, 141 to 150, 151 to 160, 161 to 170, 171 to 180, 181 to 190, 191 to 200, 201 to 210, 211 to 220, 221 to 230, 231 to 240, 241 to 250, 251 to 260, 261 to 270, 271 to 280, 281 to 290, 291 to 300, 301 to 310, 311 to 320, 321 to 330, or 331 to 340.

[00283] Embodiment 113. A tobacco plant, or part thereof, comprising a mutation selected from the group consisting of a first chromosomal deletion flanked by and not comprising any two of Nic1 Marker Nos. 1 to 207, a second chromosomal deletion flanked by and not comprising any two of Nic2 Marker Nos. 1 to 340, and both said first and said second chromosomal deletions, wherein said tobacco plant is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value comparable to that of a control plant when grown in similar growth conditions, wherein said control plant shares an essentially identical genetic background with said tobacco plant except said mutation.

[00284] Embodiment 114. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of Embodiment 113, wherein said tobacco plant comprises nicotine at a level below 1%, below 2%, below 5%, below 8%, below 10%, below 12%, below 15%, below 20%, below 25%, below 30%, below 40%, below 50%, below 60%, below 70%, or below 80% of the nicotine level of said control plant when grown in similar growth conditions.

[00285] Embodiment 115. A population of the tobacco plants of any one of Embodiments 107 to 114.

[00286] Embodiment 116. Cured tobacco material from the tobacco plant of any one of claims 107 to 114.

[00287] Embodiment 117. The cured tobacco material of Embodiment 116, wherein said cured tobacco material is made by a curing process selected from the group consisting of flue curing, air curing, fire curing, and sun curing.

[00288] Embodiment 118. A tobacco blend comprising the cured tobacco material of claim 116.

[00289] Embodiment 119. The tobacco blend of Embodiment 118, wherein the cured tobacco material constitutes about at least 10%, at least 15%, at least 20%, at least 25%, at least 30%, at least 35%, at least 40%, at least 45%, at least 50%, at least 55%, at least 60%, at least 65%, at least 70%, at least 75%, at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, or at least 95% of cured tobacco in said tobacco blend by weight.

[00290] Embodiment 120. The tobacco blend of Embodiment 118, wherein the cured tobacco material constitutes about at least 10%, at least 15%, at least 20%, at least 25%, at least 30%, at least 35%, at least 40%, at least 45%, at least 50%, at least 55%, at least 60%, at least 65%, at least 70%, at least 75%, at least 80%, at least 85%, at least 90%, or at least 95% of cured tobacco in said tobacco blend by volume.

[00291] Embodiment 121. A tobacco product comprising the cured tobacco material of claim 116.

[00292] Embodiment 122. The tobacco product of Embodiment 121, wherein the tobacco product is selected from the group consisting of a cigarette, a cigarillo, a non-ventilated recess filter cigarette, a vented recess filter cigarette, a cigar, snuff, pipe tobacco, cigar tobacco, cigarette tobacco, chewing tobacco, leaf tobacco, shredded tobacco, and cut tobacco.

[00293] Embodiment 123. The tobacco product of Embodiment 121, wherein the smokeless tobacco product is selected from the group consisting of loose leaf chewing tobacco, plug chewing tobacco, moist snuff, and nasal snuff.

[00294] Having now generally described the disclosure, the same will be more readily understood through reference to the following examples that are provided by way of illustration, and are not intended to be limiting of the present disclosure, unless specified.

EXAMPLES

Example 1: Whole genome sequencing of tobacco lines having low alkaloid.

[00295] Whole genome sequencing was used to determine the genetic lesion underlying the *nic1* mutation in Low Alkaloid (LA) Burley 21. Four tobacco lines were sequenced. These are LA Burley 21 (*nic1 nic2*, Average nicotine ~0.3% on a dry weight basis (Range~ 0.2-0.6%)), Low Intermediate (LI) Burley 21 (*nic1 Nic2*, Average nicotine ~2.3% (Range~ 1.5-3.0%)), High Intermediate (HI) Burley 21(*Nic1 nic2*, Average nicotine ~3.7% (Range~ 2.5-5.0%)), and wild-

type Burley 21 (also referred to as “BU21”) (Nic1 Nic2, Average nicotine ~4.7% (Range~ 4.0-6.0%)). LA Burley 21 (also referred to as “LA BU21”) is a low total alkaloid line produced by incorporation of a low alkaloid gene(s) from a Cuban cigar variety into Burley 21 through several backcrosses (Legg *et al.* 1970).

[00296] Genomic DNA samples were prepared from tobacco leaves. Green leaf tissue from three plants each belonging to BU21 and LA BU21, as well as the High and Low Intermediates (HI BU21 and LI BU21, respectively) were collected. The tissue was flash frozen in liquid nitrogen and stored at -80°C. The stored tissue was ground in liquid Nitrogen and equal amount of tissue from the three plants belonging to each of the four lines was pooled together (~10 g total final weight) for sequencing.

[00297] DNA library preparation and sequencing were performed following standard industry protocols, which include, *e.g.*, shearing of DNA to create paired end libraries with average insert size of 500 bp. The raw sequences were mapped to a proprietary TN90 genome, and Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms (SNPs) as well as Insertions and Deletions (InDels) were identified using a whole genome variant detection pipeline. The variant detection pipeline performs trimming and filtering of raw sequencing data based on sequence quality, followed by selection of reads with minimum length of 75 bp and maximum number of 2 unknown bases. These reads were then mapped to Altria’s proprietary tobacco (TN90) genome using the software gaMap v2.0.0 (BETA). Only mapped reads with a quality score of at least 40 were further used in SNP and InDel detection using software gaVariant v.2.0.0 BETA. Only SNPs and InDels with a minimum variant quality of 37, genotype quality of 85 and a coverage depth of 7x were included for further analyses. The number of paired end sequencing reads, filtered reads, mapped reads, as well as percentage of mapped reads for each of the four lines are provided in Table 1. The mean coverage for the 4 varieties ranges between 22- 40x, which exceeds the recommended coverage for variant detection (approximately 20x). Table 2 provides details on the number of SNPs and InDels detected in each of the four lines.

Table 1: Whole-genome sequencing statistics of the four sequenced Burley lines.

Sample	Raw reads	Reads filtered	reads mapped	% Filtered	% Mapped
BU21	1,030,266,578	987,988,031	815,146,282	95.9	82.51
HI BU21	928,747,952	889,038,519	738,942,909	95.72	83.12
LI BU21	838,709,526	800,400,171	663,625,600	95.43	82.91
LA BU21	792,837,196	755,706,369	621,019,698	95.32	82.18
Total	3,590,561,252	3,433,133,090	2,838,734,489	95.59	82.68

Table 2: Genotyping statistics of the four sequenced Burley lines.

Sample	SNPs	Insertions	Deletions	%SNPs	%Insertions	%Deletions
BU21	2,349,123	304,814	397,514	76.984	9.98915	13.02705
HI BU21	2,253,395	292,635	386,493	76.842	9.97895	13.17954
LI BU21	2,138,321	276,921	371,838	76.723	9.93588	13.34149
LA BU21	2,083,729	265,561	358,655	76.949	9.80674	13.24455
Total	8,824,568	1,139,931	1,514,500	76.8745	9.92768	13.19816

Example 2: Analysis of the genome sequences to identify Nic1 and Nic2 loci.

[00298] The genome sequences from Example 1 were analyzed to identify the *nic1* and *nic2* mutations in LA BU21. The sequences were first analyzed at Nic2 locus. The Nic 2 locus was previously reported by Shoji *et. al* (2010) to comprise a deletion of 7 Ethylene Response Factor (ERF) genes. These deleted ERF genes were mapped to a single contiguous region of the TN90 genome. We scanned the sequencing data of BU21, HI BU21, LI BU21 and LA BU21 and identified that the variant profile in this region of the genome consists of homozygous reference (TN90) allele genotypes across BU21 and LI BU21, and missing data across HI BU21 and LA BU21. This indicates that Nic2 deletion is represented in the variant genotypes as missing data.

[00299] Previous literature suggests that Nic1 and Nic2 loci likely contain duplicated genes each originating from one of the progenitor species, *Nicotiana tomentosiformis* or *N. sylvestris* (Hibi *et al.*, 1994). Further, Shoji *et al.* (2010) reported that Nic2 locus is derived from *N. tomentosiformis*, and that *nic2* is a deletion. The similar nature of their origin suggested that *nic1* may also be a deletion. A custom perl script was written to detect a pattern of homozygous or heterozygous reference allele calls in BU21 and HI BU21, and missing data in LI BU21 and LA BU21. The custom perl script detected a total of 14035 scaffolds with nearly 37916 variants sites total that match the pattern of missing data in LA BU21 and LI BU21 and homozygous

genotypes in HI BU21 and BU21. The mean number of variants observed per scaffold is nearly 3 (2.701). One contiguous region or scaffold (Scaffold0002504, SEQ ID No: 1) contains 207 variant sites with this pattern (Table 3). Hence, this outlier scaffold has 76.67 times the number of variants with the specified pattern compared to the mean number of variants across the remaining scaffolds. Scaffold0002504 provides the first indication of the location of Nic1 locus.

[00300] Based on the coverage of the reads across scaffolds, no sequencing bias was observed to account for the absence of reads in LI BU21 and LA BU21. Further, at the known Nic2 locus (Scaffold0000549, SEQ ID No: 2), a similar pattern was observed where LA BU21 and HI BU21 show missing data and BU21 and LI BU21 show homozygous reference allele calls (340 sites on Scaffold0000549 compared to 2.49 sites observed in all scaffolds exhibiting such a pattern of variant sites) (Table 4).

Table 3: Polymorphic sites in a Nic1 deletion segment, NT1.0-Scaffold0002504. POS indicates the nucleotide position of each polymorphic site on Scaffold0002504. REF refers to the sequence of a reference TN90 allele. ALT refers to a sequence polymorphism found in K326, Narrow Leaf Madole, or Oriental type. “0/0” refers to homozygous for the reference TN90 allele while “./.” refers to missing data (*e.g.*, deletion).

Nic1 Marker No.	POS	REF	ALT	BU21	HI	LI	LA
1	240	T	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
2	1750	CA	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
3	2064	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
4	2671	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
5	2678	G	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
6	5174	G	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
7	5176	A	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
8	5781	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
9	5812	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
10	6312	G	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
11	6349	T	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
12	6373	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
13	8028	T	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
14	12004	AT	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
15	12668	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
16	12939	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.

Nic1 Marker No.	POS	REF	ALT	BU21	HI	LI	LA
17	13171	G	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
18	13644	G	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
19	14078	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
20	14085	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
21	29126	G	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
22	46969	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
23	54856	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
24	54923	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
25	63743	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
26	69020	G	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
27	78215	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
28	87817	T	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
29	91989	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
30	92936	C	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
31	104894	G	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
32	108471	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
33	108492	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
34	108503	A	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
35	109907	A	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
36	112193	A	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
37	114778	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
38	114852	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
39	117178	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
40	123634	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
41	130508	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
42	130966	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
43	131000	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
44	131045	C	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
45	134007	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
46	134046	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
47	136601	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
48	136884	GT	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
49	150080	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
50	150585	T	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
51	153975	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
52	159146	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.

Nic1 Marker No.	POS	REF	ALT	BU21	HI	LI	LA
53	162586	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
54	163446	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
55	163641	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
56	167356	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
57	171095	A	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
58	181539	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
59	182327	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
60	190959	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
61	198368	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
62	198393	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
63	204573	G	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
64	205220	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
65	205252	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
66	206301	C	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
67	206500	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
68	206634	A	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
69	207061	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
70	207101	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
71	207131	T	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
72	207181	T	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
73	207204	C	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
74	207512	C	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
75	208518	A	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
76	208522	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
77	208556	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
78	208572	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
79	209297	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
80	209315	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
81	209661	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
82	209674	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
83	210485	T	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
84	211269	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
85	216116	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
86	222130	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
87	224309	G	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
88	224568	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.

Nic1 Marker No.	POS	REF	ALT	BU21	HI	LI	LA
89	232343	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
90	238580	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
91	239069	T	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
92	242812	A	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
93	243675	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
94	244449	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
95	244950	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
96	245176	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
97	254755	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
98	255169	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
99	259166	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
100	271206	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
101	272201	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
102	273944	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
103	276518	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
104	276838	T	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
105	281675	G	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
106	284726	G	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
107	286609	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
108	286915	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
109	286966	T	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
110	286987	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
111	293036	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
112	300478	G	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
113	300631	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
114	300759	A	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
115	301119	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
116	303538	A	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
117	304744	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
118	306236	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
119	308259	C	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
120	313448	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
121	317046	C	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
122	318876	GGGG GGT	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
123	320878	G	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.

Nic1 Marker No.	POS	REF	ALT	BU21	HI	LI	LA
124	321339	T	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
125	321361	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
126	321363	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
127	321532	A	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
128	324556	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
129	324990	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
130	329545	T	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
131	349886	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
132	350146	A	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
133	350163	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
134	350515	T	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
135	351620	A	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
136	353656	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
137	354639	CT	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
138	366150	AG	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
139	388388	T	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
140	390555	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
141	391708	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
142	392358	G	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
143	392712	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
144	401096	G	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
145	401445	G	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
146	404189	A	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
147	406610	T	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
148	407131	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
149	411268	A	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
150	412538	T	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
151	412550	G	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
152	413003	A	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
153	413373	A	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
154	413437	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
155	415425	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
156	415449	A	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
157	415458	T	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
158	417103	A	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
159	418099	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.

Nic1 Marker No.	POS	REF	ALT	BU21	HI	LI	LA
160	418558	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
161	423778	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
162	430030	G	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
163	437935	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
164	440647	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
165	440664	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
166	442849	T	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
167	445778	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
168	446871	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
169	447998	A	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
170	450145	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
171	452523	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
172	452968	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
173	452987	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
174	453033	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
175	453112	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
176	453174	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
177	453188	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
178	454399	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
179	456245	A	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
180	466990	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
181	473415	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
182	479185	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
183	481321	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
184	481329	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
185	481922	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
186	485778	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
187	486466	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
188	487632	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
189	495057	TA	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
190	496107	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
191	496129	G	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
192	498389	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
193	502623	G	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
194	515727	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
195	517529	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.

Nic1 Marker No.	POS	REF	ALT	BU21	HI	LI	LA
196	521866	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
197	525885	AAAA AAAA AAAA AAAA AAAA AAAA AAAA AAAA AAAA AAAA AAAA AAAA AAAA AAAA AAAA AAAA AAAA AAAA CTTT (SEQ ID NO: 71)	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
198	528989	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
199	542757	A	G	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
200	542859	C	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
201	543285	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
202	543440	G	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
203	543565	G	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
204	543749	C	T	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
205	543771	T	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
206	543941	C	A	0/0	0/0	./.	./.
207	543958	G	C	0/0	0/0	./.	./.

Table 4: Polymorphic sites in a Nic2 deletion segment, NT1.0- Scaffold0000549. REF refers to the sequence of a reference TN90 allele. ALT refers to a sequence polymorphism found in K326, Narrow Leaf Madole, or Oriental type. “0/0” refers to homozygous for the reference TN90 allele while “./.” refers to missing data (*e.g.*, deletion).

Nic2 Marker No.	POS	REF	ALT	BU21	HI	LI	LA
1	8514	T	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
2	12287	A	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
3	15020	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
4	20105	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
5	21133	G	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
6	21182	A	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
7	25267	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
8	27211	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
9	27965	T	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
10	28780	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
11	28800	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
12	28976	T	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
13	29013	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
14	31000	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
15	31074	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
16	31118	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
17	31136	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
18	31930	T	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
19	32523	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
20	33617	A	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
21	33661	A	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
22	35656	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
23	35674	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
24	44008	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
25	62895	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
26	62916	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
27	64381	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
28	77284	A	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
29	77363	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
30	77909	G	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
31	77975	A	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
32	77985	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.

Nic2 Marker No.	POS	REF	ALT	BU21	HI	LI	LA
33	80196	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
34	87731	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
35	87799	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
36	89358	G	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
37	92022	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
38	92542	C	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
39	92675	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
40	92695	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
41	94612	C	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
42	94683	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
43	103131	G	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
44	108577	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
45	108967	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
46	113914	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
47	118142	A	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
48	118151	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
49	119780	A	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
50	121195	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
51	135236	G	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
52	135239	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
53	135401	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
54	135683	T	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
55	136546	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
56	136553	T	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
57	137241	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
58	137643	CT	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
59	138384	C	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
60	138450	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
61	138457	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
62	138663	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
63	138791	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
64	152981	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
65	152994	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
66	158500	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
67	159059	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
68	159855	A	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.

Nic2 Marker No.	POS	REF	ALT	BU21	HI	LI	LA
69	162242	C	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
70	162272	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
71	162616	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
72	162698	A	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
73	163071	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
74	163389	T	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
75	163549	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
76	169105	A	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
77	169578	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
78	170180	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
79	170221	G	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
80	170292	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
81	176741	TG	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
82	177610	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
83	189973	C	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
84	190622	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
85	192179	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
86	192203	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
87	192520	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
88	198596	A	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
89	210148	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
90	211238	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
91	211276	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
92	211298	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
93	213281	C	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
94	221865	T	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
95	224164	T	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
96	226470	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
97	228965	C	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
98	230571	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
99	232100	C	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
100	232459	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
101	234537	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
102	241822	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
103	244741	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
104	246403	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.

Nic2 Marker No.	POS	REF	ALT	BU21	HI	LI	LA
105	246519	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
106	247174	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
107	252132	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
108	252717	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
109	252728	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
110	255099	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
111	257486	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
112	258008	C	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
113	258101	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
114	260634	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
115	260944	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
116	261816	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
117	264558	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
118	265660	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
119	275884	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
120	277012	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
121	278708	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
122	278762	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
123	278781	G	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
124	281156	A	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
125	282192	G	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
126	285956	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
127	286075	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
128	290957	G	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
129	295851	C	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
130	297396	G	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
131	298942	G	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
132	299095	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
133	300592	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
134	301121	C	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
135	301147	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
136	306986	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
137	310002	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
138	314892	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
139	324211	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
140	327796	T	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.

Nic2 Marker No.	POS	REF	ALT	BU21	HI	LI	LA
141	330726	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
142	331046	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
143	332636	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
144	336046	G	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
145	338147	C	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
146	340868	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
147	341170	T	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
148	359439	T	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
149	359447	C	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
150	362131	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
151	363467	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
152	365467	T	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
153	367311	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
154	370267	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
155	384941	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
156	393244	G	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
157	394169	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
158	394200	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
159	394213	A	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
160	394228	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
161	396927	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
162	404142	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
163	404761	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
164	406475	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
165	406481	T	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
166	410940	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
167	411032	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
168	411069	T	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
169	411317	GA	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
170	413027	C	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
171	413058	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
172	414268	C	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
173	416798	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
174	417540	G	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
175	420742	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
176	421259	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.

Nic2 Marker No.	POS	REF	ALT	BU21	HI	LI	LA
177	426709	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
178	427690	G	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
179	430705	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
180	431773	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
181	433900	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
182	442372	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
183	451131	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
184	454572	C	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
185	460976	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
186	461460	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
187	464177	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
188	465089	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
189	465495	T	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
190	468266	C	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
191	474980	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
192	480131	A	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
193	483164	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
194	484777	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
195	485948	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
196	486626	G	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
197	494004	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
198	494393	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
199	495953	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
200	496552	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
201	499298	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
202	499947	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
203	501352	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
204	505470	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
205	509926	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
206	511336	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
207	513808	TC	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
208	515055	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
209	516444	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
210	519420	A	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
211	521028	G	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
212	521834	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.

Nic2 Marker No.	POS	REF	ALT	BU21	HI	LI	LA
213	524240	A	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
214	524256	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
215	524317	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
216	524986	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
217	526266	A	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
218	526905	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
219	526987	C	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
220	530341	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
221	531695	A	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
222	541587	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
223	541648	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
224	544386	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
225	545716	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
226	546047	C	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
227	546372	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
228	546416	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
229	546434	T	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
230	546775	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
231	547015	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
232	554248	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
233	554496	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
234	556239	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
235	558480	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
236	562524	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
237	563642	A	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
238	563802	T	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
239	563862	G	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
240	573521	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
241	573552	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
242	574370	C	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
243	576866	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
244	577137	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
245	582336	T	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
246	585822	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
247	586808	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
248	592379	A	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.

Nic2 Marker No.	POS	REF	ALT	BU21	HI	LI	LA
249	594088	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
250	594122	T	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
251	594128	C	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
252	596697	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
253	599034	G	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
254	609636	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
255	610500	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
256	610533	T	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
257	610938	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
258	614216	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
259	614885	TTA	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
260	617065	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
261	621974	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
262	623585	T	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
263	645256	C	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
264	645263	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
265	646476	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
266	652446	AT	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
267	660505	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
268	667339	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
269	668081	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
270	669231	T	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
271	680482	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
272	680899	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
273	681503	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
274	681579	TA	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
275	685669	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
276	687781	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
277	690142	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
278	696619	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
279	696973	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
280	699014	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
281	699059	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
282	699441	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
283	699482	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
284	699507	A	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.

Nic2 Marker No.	POS	REF	ALT	BU21	HI	LI	LA
285	699568	AC	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
286	699991	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
287	701221	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
288	701338	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
289	704968	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
290	705347	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
291	708907	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
292	710281	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
293	711996	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
294	714019	C	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
295	714445	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
296	714483	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
297	714491	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
298	716492	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
299	716551	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
300	721681	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
301	722271	T	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
302	723002	G	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
303	732955	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
304	734117	T	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
305	743601	TA	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
306	745383	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
307	745938	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
308	747238	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
309	750673	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
310	751683	G	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
311	751702	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
312	762212	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
313	762934	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
314	765864	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
315	768978	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
316	770377	T	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
317	773111	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
318	773112	T	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
319	773155	A	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
320	778101	C	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.

Nic2 Marker No.	POS	REF	ALT	BU21	HI	LI	LA
321	778231	T	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
322	779756	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
323	780381	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
324	780398	A	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
325	782275	A	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
326	782502	T	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
327	788379	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
328	788416	T	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
329	789721	C	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
330	795120	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
331	797627	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
332	799891	A	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
333	800525	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
334	801525	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
335	802686	ATGC CATG TGGT TTAT ATTA TTGG CACG TGAG TTGT CCGT GCGA GTCC AGAT ATTT ATAC TATA GC (SEQ ID NO: 72)	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
336	802777	A	T	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
337	807008	T	C	0/0	./.	0/0	./.

Nic2 Marker No.	POS	REF	ALT	BU21	HI	LI	LA
338	808634	T	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
339	813994	G	A	0/0	./.	0/0	./.
340	817957	A	G	0/0	./.	0/0	./.

Example 3: Confirmation of the identified Nic1 locus by genetic segregation analysis.

[00301] To help confirm the identity of the region identified as Nic1 locus, an F₂ population segregating for Nic1 and Nic2 loci was developed with the aim of observing markers for *nic1* and *nic2* segregating with the phenotype. The F₂ population was developed from a cross between TN90 with LA BU21, and has a population size of 173. DNA was extracted from green leaf tissue of individual F₂ plants as well as the parental lines and the four known Burley lines (BU21, HI BU21, LI BU21, and LA BU21) using a customized sbeadex maxi plant kit (LGC genomics, LLC, Beverly, MA) on the automated DNA extraction instrument, Oktopure (LGC genomics, LLC, Beverly, MA). Ninety (90) out of the 173 individuals were randomly chosen from this population to be genotyped at both Nic1 and Nic2 locus along with a control locus. The identified Nic1 deletion was confirmed by PCR amplification of a selected region of the identified deletion. PCR primers were designed for the Nic1 locus using Primer3 web V. 4.0.0 and are shown in Table 5. Primer sequences for Nic2 locus, and the control locus were obtained from Shoji et al. (2010), and are also provided in Table 5.

[00302] PCR was performed in a 30 µL reaction with 5 µl of ~10 ng/µl DNA, 15 µl of 2x AmpliTaq Gold® 360 MasterMix (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA), 1.2 µl of 10 µM Forward primer, 1.2 µl of 10 µM Reverse primer, and 7.6 µl of ddH₂O. PCR reactions proceeded with an initial denaturation at 95°C for 5 min, followed by 35 cycles, with a temperature profile of 94°C for 20 s, 20 s at the optimal annealing temperature (Table 5), and 72°C for 1 minute. This was followed by a 7-minute final elongation period at 72 ° C, and an indefinite hold at 4° C.

Table 5: Table listing primer sequences and annealing temperature used for PCR

Locus	Specific Gene	Primer	Primer Sequence (SEQ ID)	PCR T _m
Nic1	g100614_Scaffold 0002504	F	CAACCTAGCCACTGGTCCAT (SEQ ID No: 3)	62
		R	TCAAACCAAGAGCGAGGAGT (SEQ ID No: 4)	
Nic2	ERF 189	F	GGGCAATGGAAATGAATCTAGC (SEQ ID No: 5)	55
		R	CTTCCTTCCTTTCACATAG (SEQ ID No: 6)	
Control	ERF 199	F	CCATTCATTTTCATCCAAACCC (SEQ ID No: 7)	55
		R	CGGAGTACTTTTCATGGGATTC (SEQ ID No: 8)	

[00303] PCR products were then visualized on eGene (Qiagen N. V., Venlo, Netherlands), with presence of a PCR product band of desirable size scored as presence of a locus and its absence noted as deletion of the locus. The primer for gene ERF199 (Table 5) served as control, and its absence indicated issues with DNA quality and if absent the sample was removed from further analyses. Alkaloid measurements of nicotine, nornicotine, anatabine and anabasin were also made on each individual plant from leaf samples collected 2 weeks after topping (Table 6), using a GC-FID method based on CORESTA Recommended Methods (CRM N0. 7) and ISO Standards (ISO TC 126N 394 E.). Alkaloid measurements served as an additional confirmation for the *nic1* and *nic2* genotype.

[00304] All 90 F₂ individuals as well as TN90, BU21, HI BU21, LI BU21 and LA BU21 showed successful amplification of the control ERF 199 primers. A deletion of Nic2 locus was observed in 19 out of the 90 F₂ individuals, as well as in HI BU21 and LA BU21. A deletion of Nic1 locus was seen in 21 out of the 90 F₂ individuals, as well as in LI BU21 and LA BU21. Also, both Nic1 and Nic2 loci were seen to be deleted in 5 out of the 90 F₂ plants, along with LA BU21. Table 6 provides information on the genotype calls for 90 out of the 173 F₂ individual. Table 7 provides the observed and expected number of plants for each genotype given a segregation ratio of 9:3:3:1 for the two loci. Average percent total alkaloid levels for each of the four genotypes observed in the F₂ segregating population ((LA Burley 21 x TN 90 LC) (X)) are shown in Table 8.

Table 6: Nic1 and Nic 2 genotypes and alkaloid measurements of individual plants of the F₂ population segregating for *nic1* and *nic2* ((LA Burley 21 x TN 90 LC) (X)). The absence of Nic1 and Nic2 genotype information indicate that those plants were not genotyped. BLQ: below level of quantification.

Plant	Nic1 Genotype (Present=1, Absent=0)	Nic2 Genotype (Present=1, Absent=0)	Percent Total Alkaloid	Percent Nicotine
Plant 1	1	0	3.0011	2.8628
Plant 2	1	1	2.6729	2.5628
Plant 3	0	1	2.2933	2.2051
Plant 4	0	0	BLQ	BLQ
Plant 5	1	1	3.1597	3.0139
Plant 6	1	1	2.9731	2.8266
Plant 7	0	0	BLQ	BLQ
Plant 8	1	1	2.8809	2.763
Plant 9	1	1	4.1221	3.9034
Plant 10	1	1	3.994	3.8198
Plant 11	1	1	3.7119	3.5467
Plant 12	1	1	3.6687	3.5089
Plant 13	1	1	4.2203	4.0304
Plant 14	1	0	3.2027	3.0498
Plant 15	1	1	3.7481	3.5971
Plant 16	0	1	BLQ	BLQ
Plant 17	1	1	4.422	4.1744
Plant 18	1	1	2.8292	2.7127
Plant 19	1	0	2.7538	2.6094
Plant 20			1.9167	1.8179
Plant 21	1	1	4.3081	4.0381
Plant 22	1	1	3.6128	3.4443
Plant 23	1	1	BLQ	BLQ
Plant 24	1	1	BLQ	BLQ
Plant 25	0	1	1.9377	1.8346
Plant 26	1	1	2.8042	2.6369
Plant 27	1	1	3.2544	3.1033
Plant 28	1	1	3.4886	3.3306
Plant 29	1	1	2.7115	2.5954
Plant 30	1	1	BLQ	BLQ
Plant 31	1	1	4.1091	3.9219
Plant 32	1	1	3.2426	3.1062
Plant 33	0	1	1.9005	1.7845
Plant 34			BLQ	BLQ

Plant	Nic1 Genotype (Present=1, Absent=0)	Nic2 Genotype (Present=1, Absent=0)	Percent Total Alkaloid	Percent Nicotine
Plant 35	0	1	3.0363	2.8753
Plant 36	1	1	3.6491	3.4489
Plant 37	0	1	1.7179	1.6199
Plant 38	1	0	2.8954	2.7684
Plant 39	1	1	3.5936	3.4294
Plant 40	0	1	2.8582	2.7421
Plant 41	1	0	BLQ	BLQ
Plant 42			4.4196	4.2055
Plant 43			BLQ	BLQ
Plant 44	0	1	1.6122	1.5324
Plant 45	1	1	2.4573	2.3326
Plant 46	1	1	3.4145	3.1655
Plant 47	1	1	3.5314	3.3588
Plant 48	1	1	3.7216	3.5305
Plant 49	1	0	3.9067	3.7233
Plant 50	1	0	3.0601	2.9073
Plant 51	1	1	3.8504	3.6463
Plant 52	0	1	BLQ	BLQ
Plant 53	1	1	4.759	4.47
Plant 54			3.6204	3.4389
Plant 55	0	0	0.5823	0.5489
Plant 56	1	1	3.5092	3.3467
Plant 57			4.107	3.9257
Plant 58	0	1	2.4405	2.3477
Plant 59	0	0	0.4188	0.3927
Plant 60	1	1	3.8854	3.7403
Plant 61	1	1	5.0457	4.8093
Plant 62	0	1	2.1401	2.0358
Plant 63	1	1	3.5212	3.3729
Plant 64	1	1	5.1868	4.9157
Plant 65			2.1012	1.9855
Plant 66	1	0	0.3436	0.3282
Plant 67			2.3158	2.2265
Plant 68	1	1	4.5611	4.3195
Plant 69	1	0	3.5517	3.4176
Plant 70	1	1	3.945	3.7651
Plant 71	0	1	3.8097	3.6456
Plant 72	1	0	4.1787	3.9818

Plant	Nic1 Genotype (Present=1, Absent=0)	Nic2 Genotype (Present=1, Absent=0)	Percent Total Alkaloid	Percent Nicotine
Plant 73	1	0	5.8965	5.5549
Plant 74			3.5723	3.393
Plant 75	1	1	5.6703	5.3808
Plant 76	1	1	3.1131	2.9747
Plant 77	1	1	4.2168	4.0215
Plant 78	0	1	2.9419	2.79
Plant 79	1	1	4.2109	3.9834
Plant 80			4.3812	4.1685
Plant 81	1	0	0.7258	0.6868
Plant 82	1	0	4.0284	3.8092
Plant 83	0	1	2.076	1.9724
Plant 84	1	1	5.1348	4.8334
Plant 85	1	1	5.6781	5.3311
Plant 86	1	1	4.3462	4.1069
Plant 87	1	1	4.0997	3.8974
Plant 88	1	1	3.47	3.3158
Plant 89	0	1	2.7871	2.6465
Plant 90			3.5846	3.4166
Plant 91			2.3103	2.187
Plant 92			2.8975	2.7746
Plant 93			3.5385	3.3521
Plant 94			5.2231	4.9531
Plant 95			0.5855	0.5538
Plant 96			2.6133	2.4813
Plant 97			4.3772	4.1254
Plant 98			5.453	5.0786
Plant 99			3.5055	3.2963
Plant 100			2.0902	1.9902
Plant 101			4.5207	4.2845
Plant 102			2.0429	1.943
Plant 103			BLQ	BLQ
Plant 104			3.448	3.3
Plant 105			4.3806	4.1605
Plant 106			4.3696	4.1293
Plant 107			4.0754	3.8637
Plant 108			4.1516	3.8525
Plant 109			3.6425	3.4421
Plant 110			4.5431	4.3192

Plant	Nic1 Genotype (Present=1, Absent=0)	Nic2 Genotype (Present=1, Absent=0)	Percent Total Alkaloid	Percent Nicotine
Plant 111			4.4435	4.1513
Plant 112			3.9523	3.737
Plant 113			3.4997	3.3269
Plant 114			3.8171	3.638
Plant 115			3.4582	3.3031
Plant 116	1	1	3.5845	3.4243
Plant 117			3.945	3.7507
Plant 118	0	1	2.5889	2.4632
Plant 119	1	1	3.5472	3.3747
Plant 120	0	1	2.4497	2.3085
Plant 121	1	1	4.1965	3.9772
Plant 122	1	0	3.8719	3.6731
Plant 123	1	1	4.5964	4.3886
Plant 124	1	1	3.8232	3.667
Plant 125			4.7023	4.4466
Plant 126			3.4026	3.2343
Plant 127			3.2645	3.1016
Plant 128			2.842	2.7461
Plant 129			3.8524	3.6496
Plant 130			4.7094	4.4891
Plant 131			0.4548	0.4254
Plant 132			3.3652	3.211
Plant 133			3.2598	3.1137
Plant 134			BLQ	BLQ
Plant 135			3.3438	3.2074
Plant 136			3.7641	3.5279
Plant 137			3.6367	3.4453
Plant 138	0	0	0.4207	0.3995
Plant 139			2.2626	2.0909
Plant 140			4.102	3.8806
Plant 141			4.4366	4.2298
Plant 142			4.386	4.1759
Plant 143			5.7992	5.4971
Plant 144			BLQ	BLQ
Plant 145			2.8282	2.6992
Plant 146			2.7978	2.6543
Plant 147			3.6949	3.5188
Plant 148			2.3355	2.2257

Plant	Nic1 Genotype (Present=1, Absent=0)	Nic2 Genotype (Present=1, Absent=0)	Percent Total Alkaloid	Percent Nicotine
Plant 149			1.7436	1.6735
Plant 150			BLQ	BLQ
Plant 151			1.2908	1.2512
Plant 152			2.09	1.999
Plant 153			3.2661	3.1309
Plant 154			BLQ	BLQ
Plant 155			2.9794	2.8095
Plant 156			5.3031	5.0703
Plant 157			3.6654	3.4826
Plant 158			3.7191	3.5198
Plant 159			3.5148	3.359
Plant 160			3.0729	2.9446
Plant 161			4.0171	3.8311
Plant 162			2.4201	2.3083
Plant 163			4.4837	4.2994
Plant 164			3.5759	3.4229
Plant 165			3.8303	3.6354
Plant 166			4.0415	3.8397
Plant 167			2.3684	2.2563
Plant 168			3.5194	3.3464
Plant 169			4.3816	4.1756
Plant 170			3.7741	3.5736
Plant 171			2.1715	2.0453
Plant 172			6.5454	6.1323
Plant 173			6.9723	6.6948

Table 7: The observed segregation ratio for *nic1* and *nic2* in the studied F₂ population are not significantly different from the expected segregation ratio of 9:3:3:1 at a significance threshold of 0.05 ($\chi^2=0.9827$, df=3, *P* value =0.1944).

Genotype	Ratio Expected	Number of Plants Expected	Number of Plants Observed
Nic1 Nic2	9/16	50.625	55
Nic1 <i>nic2</i>	3/16	16.875	14
<i>nic1</i> Nic2	3/16	16.875	16
<i>nic1 nic2</i>	1/16	5.625	5

Table 8: Average percent total alkaloid levels for each of the four genotypes observed in the F₂ segregating population ((LA Burley 21 x TN 90 LC) (X)). Both the mean and standard deviation are shown. Number indicates the number of plants for each genotype for which alkaloid levels were measured. The number of plants for each genotype differs from those listed in Table 7 because plants with alkaloid levels below level of quantification (BLQ) are excluded here.

Genotype	Number	Mean	Std Dev	Std Err Mean	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Nic1 Nic2	49	3.8419	0.74094	0.10585	3.6291	4.0547
Nic1 <i>nic2</i>	13	3.18588	1.43233	0.39726	2.3203	4.0514
<i>nic1</i> Nic2	15	2.43933	0.58525	0.15111	2.1152	2.7634
<i>nic1 nic2</i>	3	0.47393	0.09385	0.05419	0.2408	0.7071

Example 4: Identification of genes in Nic1 deletion based on the expression pattern of genes in the identified Nic1 deletion segment.

[00305] The identified Nic1 deletion segment, NT1.0-Scaffold0002504, has at least 20 annotated genes. Their expression patterns were analyzed in tobacco roots based on a Root RNASeq dataset. The Root RNASeq dataset were constructed based on RNA-sequencing and transcriptional profiling of root tissues from four varieties: BU21, HI BU21, LI BU21 and LA BU21.

[00306] Tobacco plants of these four varieties were grown in the greenhouse until a majority of the lines started budding, and then root and leaf tissue samples were harvested. Root tissue (~100 mg) from 15 plants each of the four varieties, from untopped plants and topped plants were collected. Table 9 provides details of the number of samples, time points and conditions at which sample was collected from these plants. Roots from each genotype were harvested at various time points. RNA was extracted from the roots and pooled together to form two separate pooled samples for each genotype; one before topping and one after. Specifically, tobacco roots were flash frozen in liquid nitrogen and then macerated using 2000 Geno/Grinder Spex sample prep. The macerated tissue was further used for RNA extraction on the automated Maxwell ® 16 systems (Promega, Madison, WI), using the tissue RNA extraction kit (Promega, Madison, WI). The isolated RNA was quantified using a Nanodrop1000 to confirm that all samples met the minimum yield required for 2x100 bp paired end sequencing using HiSeq2000.

[00307] After sequencing, the raw RNASeq reads were trimmed and further filtered. The filtered RNASeq reads were then mapped to ALCS's proprietary tobacco genome using the transcriptome mapping application in CLC genomics workbench v.7.1 (Qiagen, N.V., Velno,

The Netherlands). The raw expression of a gene is measured as the number of mapped reads for each of the 204,695 annotated genes within the tobacco genome. The gene expression value for each gene was then normalized using the reads per kilobase of transcript per million mapped reads (RPKM) values to obtain relative levels of gene expression.

[00308] Among the 20 genes annotated in the identified Nic1 deletion segment, NT1.0-Scaffold0002504, 18 genes show no expression in any of the varieties at any condition. Only 2 genes were expressed in the root (Table 10). They are g100614_Scaffold0002504 and g100631_Scaffold0002504 (having genomic sequences of SEQ ID NOs: 28 and 13, cDNA sequences of SEQ ID NOs: 48 and 33, protein sequences of SEQ ID NOs: 68 and 53, respectively). Both expressed genes are annotated as “late blight resistance protein homolog”. Similar expression patterns were also observed for genes at Nic2 locus (Table 11).

Table 9: Tissue sampling designs for RNAseq-based transcriptional profiling of tobacco roots.

Genotype	Number of plants sampled					
	Condition	Time point				
		30 mins	2 hrs	6 hrs	24 hrs	72 hrs
Burley 21	Before Topping	3	3	3	3	3
	After Topping	3	3	3	3	3
HI Burley 21	Before Topping	3	3	3	3	3
	After Topping	3	3	3	3	3
LI Burley 21	Before Topping	3	3	3	3	3
	After Topping	3	3	3	3	3
LA Burley 21	Before Topping	3	3	3	3	3
	After Topping	3	3	3	3	3

Example 5: Identification of genes regulated by Nic1 and Nic2.

[00309] The Root RNASeq dataset from Example 4 also allowed the identification of genes, the expression of which is regulated by Nic1 or Nic2. Pairwise comparisons of gene expression in four varieties: BU21, HI BU21, LI BU21 and LA BU21 were performed. Figure 1 shows the number of genes identified as up or down regulated between each possible pairwise combination of varieties at false discovery rate (FDR) corrected *P* value of 0.05.

[00310] The comparisons of BU21 vs LA BU21 and that of HI BU21 vs LA BU21 are the most informative, with identification of all genes in the Nicotine biosynthesis pathway post

formation of Putrescine. The effects of *Nic1* locus (present in BU21 and HI BU21, but absent in LA BU21) were also confirmed. Figure 2 indicate some of the genes upregulated in presence of *Nic1*.

Example 6: Development of molecular markers at or near *Nic1* and *Nic2* deletion segments.

[00311] The identified *Nic1* deletion segment, NT1.0-Scaffold0002504, has a length of at least 544,860 bps. Within this segment, at least 207 variant sites were detected between a reference TN90 genome sequence and BU21 lines representing a pattern of deletion (Table 3)

[00312] The identified *Nic2* deletion segment within scaffoldNT1.0-Scaffold0000549 (total length of NT1.0-Scaffold0000549 =1,142,469 bps), has a length of at least 820,000 bps. Within this segment, at least 340 polymorphic sites were detected between a reference TN90 genome sequence and Burley 21 lines representing a pattern of deletion (Table 4)

Example 7: Breeding of tobacco varieties containing low nicotine

[00313] The identified *nic1* deletion segment, genes within, and molecular markers associated therewith are used to breed and produce low nicotine tobacco hybrids, varieties, and lines which comprise a *nic1* deletion or partial deletion. These genes and markers are also used to screen for additional *nic1* and *nic2* alleles from various *Nicotiana* germplasm, for example, different *Nicotiana* species or *Nicotiana tabacum* lines. A collection of forty-three *Nicotiana* species, forty-nine *Nicotiana rustica* lines, and approximately six hundred *Nicotiana tabacum* lines that can be screened is provided in Table 8 of U.S. Patent No. 7,700,834.

[00314] Germplasm identified as having novel *nic1* or *nic2* alleles is used as source material for breeding with cultivated tobaccos. Interspecific or intraspecific hybridization methods combined with standard breeding methods, such as backcrossing or the pedigree method, may be used to transfer a desirable *nic1* or *nic2* mutant allele from the donor source to cultivated tobaccos. For example, a low-nicotine variety comprising a *nic1*, *nic2*, or both mutant alleles (e.g., a donor parent such as LA Burley 21) is crossed to an elite high-nicotine variety having a desirable genetic background and agronomically elite traits. F₁ progeny plants from this cross is optionally assayed for one or more molecular markers exemplified in Tables 9 and 10. An F₁ progeny plant is then backcrossed with the parent elite high-nicotine variety (recurrent parent). Plants from the BC₁ generation are genotyped using molecular markers exemplified in Tables 9

and 10 to select for tobacco plants with smaller *nic1* or *nic2* deletion segments. After multiple rounds of backcrossing (*e.g.*, 5-7 generations), an new elite tobacco variety is obtained comprising both a low-nicotine trait and other desirable traits from the recurrent parent elite line. This new elite tobacco variety is also free to any genetic drag associated with the low-nicotine trait due to genetic recombination events around *Nic1* and *Nic2* loci. These recombination events unlink *nic1* and *nic2* mutations from any associated detrimental mutations and thus reduce or avoid genetic drag. Using the above breeding and marker-assisted selection strategy, one can also achieve the pyramiding or stacking of a low-nicotine trait with other transgenes or natural alleles that reduce nicotine or normicotine levels.

[00315] Low-nicotine tobacco hybrids, varieties, or lines can be made as a Burley type, a dark type, a flue-cured type, a Maryland type or an Oriental type tobacco, or can be essentially derived from BU 64, CC 101, CC 200, CC 27, CC 301, CC 400, CC 500, CC 600, CC 700, CC 800, CC 900, Coker 176, Coker 319, Coker 371 Gold, Coker 48, CU 263, DF911, Galpao tobacco, GL 26H, GL 350, GL 600, GL 737, GL 939, GL 973, HB 04P, K 149, K 326, K 346, K 358, K394, K 399, K 730, KDH 959, KT 200, KT204LC, KY 10, KY 14, KY 160, KY 17, KY 171, KY 907, KY907LC, KTY14 x L8 LC, Little Crittenden, McNair 373, McNair 944, msKY 14xL8, Narrow Leaf Madole, NC 100, NC 102, NC 2000, NC 291, NC 297, NC 299, NC 3, NC 4, NC 5, NC 6, NC7, NC 606, NC 71, NC 72, NC 810, NC BH 129, NC 2002, Neal Smith Madole, OXFORD 207, 'Perique' tobacco, PVH03, PVH09, PVH19, PVH50, PVH51, R 610, R 630, R 7-11, R 7-12, RG 17, RG 81, RG H51, RGH 4, RGH 51, RS 1410, Speight 168, Speight 172, Speight 179, Speight 210, Speight 220, Speight 225, Speight 227, Speight 234, Speight G-28, Speight G-70, Speight H-6, Speight H20, Speight NF3, TI 1406, TI 1269, TN 86, TN86LC, TN 90, TN 97, TN97LC, TN D94, TN D950, TR (Tom Rosson) Madole, VA 309, or VA359, Maryland 609, HB3307PLC, HB4488PLC, KT206LC, KT209LC, KT210LC, KT212LC, R610LC, PVH2310, NC196, KTD14LC, KTD6LC, KTD8LC, PD7302LC, PD7305LC, PD7309LC, PD7318LC, PD7319LC, PD7312LC, ShireyLC, or any commercial tobacco variety according to standard tobacco breeding techniques known in the art.

Table 10: Genes annotated in a Nic1 deletion scaffold, NT1.0-Scaffold0002504 (**SEQ ID No. 1**). “Start” and “End” denote the starting and ending nucleotide positions of the annotated genes on scaffold NT1.0-Scaffold0002504. Only two bolded genes (g100631_Scaffold0002504 and g100614_Scaffold0002504) were observed to express in the root of BU21 and HI BU21 both before and after topping. No expression of these two genes were detected in LI BU21 or LA BU21 roots. All other listed genes show no root expression in BU21, HI BU21, LI BU21, or LA BU21 based on the Root RNASeq dataset. The asterisk (*) indicates that SEQ ID Nos. 83 and 84 correspond to refined cDNA and amino acid sequences of SEQ ID NO. 80, respectively.

Gene	Blast Hit Description	Start	End	Genomic sequence (SEQ ID)	Refined genomic sequence (SEQ ID)	cDNA sequence (SEQ ID)	Amino acid sequence (SEQ ID)
g100624_Scaffold0002504	gi 113205363 gb AAT66771.2 Putative polyprotein, identical [<i>Solanum demissum</i>]	23574	44762	9		29	49
g100616_Scaffold0002504	gi 113205363 gb AAT66771.2 Putative polyprotein, identical [<i>Solanum demissum</i>]	49007	62258	10		30	50
g100619_Scaffold0002504	gi 460410342 ref XP_004250589.1 PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC101263780 [<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>]	63561	67079	11		31	51
g100629_Scaffold0002504	gi 113205363 gb AAT66771.2 Putative polyprotein, identical [<i>Solanum demissum</i>]	72790	84448	12		32	52
g100631_Scaffold0002504	gi 460370553 ref XP_004231117.1 PREDICTED: putative late blight resistance protein homolog R1A-10-like [<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>]	124722	127361	13		33	53
g100627_Scaffold0002504	gi 113205316 gb ABI34339.1 Polyprotein, 3'-partial, putative [<i>Solanum demissum</i>]	130345	131552	14		34	54
g100630_Scaffold0002504	gi 113205316 gb ABI34339.1 Polyprotein, 3'-partial, putative [<i>Solanum demissum</i>]	146435	147770	15		35	55
g100633_Scaffold0002504	gi 113205316 gb ABI34339.1 Polyprotein, 3'-partial, putative [<i>Solanum demissum</i>]	174793	179215	16		36	56
g100620_Scaffold0002504	NA	186534	189120	17		37	57
g100625_Scaffold0002504	gi 460395064 ref XP_004243109.1 PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC101263429 [<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>]	247160	250636	18		38	58

Gene	Blast Hit Description	Start	End	Genomic sequence (SEQ ID)	Refined genomic sequence (SEQ ID)	cDNA sequence (SEQ ID)	Amino acid sequence (SEQ ID)
g100615_Scaffold00002504	gi 113205363 gb AAT66771.2 Putative polyprotein, identical [<i>Solanum demissum</i>]	263965	268932	19		39	59
g100618_Scaffold00002504	gi 460410504 ref XP_004250667.1 PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC101267192 [<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>]	282902	284495	20		40	60
g100622_Scaffold00002504	NA	305097	306605	21	75	41	61
g100617_Scaffold00002504	gi 113205345 gb AAT38783.2 hypothetical protein SDM1_46t00006 [<i>Solanum demissum</i>]	351391	354310	22	76	42	62
g100621_Scaffold00002504	gi 113205363 gb AAT66771.2 Putative polyprotein, identical [<i>Solanum demissum</i>]	385927	388324	23	77	43	63
g100632_Scaffold00002504	NA	421150	422045	24	78	44	64
g100628_Scaffold00002504	NA	427647	432434	25	79	45	65
g100623_Scaffold00002504	gi 89179421 gb ABD63156.1 Retrotransposon gag protein [<i>Asparagus officinalis</i>]	471868	472786	26	80*	46	66
g100626_Scaffold00002504	gi 147845547 emb CAN78493.1 hypothetical protein VITISV_037041 [<i>Vitis vinifera</i>]	477222	483825	27	81	47	67
g100614_Scaffold00002504	gi 460406698 ref XP_004248798.1 PREDICTED: putative late blight resistance protein homolog R1B-14-like [<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>]	530011	535390	28	82	48	68

Table 11: Genes annotated in a Nic2 deletion scaffold, NT1.0-Scaffold0000549 (**SEQ ID No. 2**). “Start” and “End” denote the starting and ending nucleotide positions of the annotated genes on scaffold NT1.0-Scaffold0002504. Only three bolded genes (g3885_Scaffold0000549, g38878_Scaffold0000549 and g38864_Scaffold0000549) were observed to express in the root of BU21 and LI BU21 both before and after topping. No expression of these three genes were detected in HI BU21 or LA BU21 roots. All other listed genes show no root expression in BU21, HI BU21, LI BU21, or LA BU21 based on the Root RNASeq dataset.

Gene	Blast Hit Description	Start	End
g38875_Scaffold0000549	gi 47824950 gb AAT38724.1 Putative retrotransposon protein, identical [<i>Solanum demissum</i>]	1064	2604
g38854_Scaffold0000549	gi 460414233 ref XP_004252477.1 PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC101245629 [<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>]	12488	12827
g38847_Scaffold0000549	gi 460407027 ref XP_004248959.1 PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC101266468 [<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>]	40706	42338
g38857_Scaffold0000549	gi 460410342 ref XP_004250589.1 PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC101263780 [<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>]	63740	66314
g38861_Scaffold0000549	gi 460395064 ref XP_004243109.1 PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC101263429 [<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>]	69289	71053
g38873_Scaffold0000549	gi 460407027 ref XP_004248959.1 PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC101266468 [<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>]	71359	78187
g38871_Scaffold0000549	gi 460415745 ref XP_004253217.1 PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC101263890 [<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>]	99417	112568
g38850_Scaffold0000549	NA	136925	137758
g38855_Scaffold0000549	NA	141858	144628
g38872_Scaffold0000549	NA	147982	150752
g38849_Scaffold0000549	gi 147865536 emb CAN81563.1 hypothetical protein VITISV_019697 [<i>Vitis vinifera</i>]	151800	153027
g38866_Scaffold0000549	gi 460407027 ref XP_004248959.1 PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC101266468 [<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>]	159812	161152
g38853_Scaffold0000549	gi 460407027 ref XP_004248959.1 PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC101266468 [<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>]	165374	166727
g38868_Scaffold0000549	NA	205238	206813
g38884_Scaffold0000549	gi 460406842 ref XP_004248867.1 PREDICTED: putative ribonuclease H protein Atlg65750-like [<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>]	223785	228636
g38876_Scaffold0000549	NA	246679	246970

Gene	Blast Hit Description	Start	End
g38856_Scaffold00000549	NA	263028	264922
g38859_Scaffold00000549	NA	267551	269920
g38848_Scaffold00000549	gi 460410377 ref XP_004250606.1 PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC101247390 [<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>]	274617	278325
g38885_Scaffold00000549	gi 296278604 gb ADH04266.1 ERF1 [<i>Nicotiana benthamiana</i>]	279007	279583
g38862_Scaffold00000549	NA	281949	283475
g38877_Scaffold00000549	gi 147773804 emb CAN60970.1 hypothetical protein VITISV_026408 [<i>Vitis vinifera</i>]	313840	316312
g38869_Scaffold00000549	gi 147775355 emb CAN65719.1 hypothetical protein VITISV_020846 [<i>Vitis vinifera</i>]	320254	322003
g38881_Scaffold00000549	gi 460410342 ref XP_004250589.1 PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC101263780 [<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>]	336602	338552
g38852_Scaffold00000549	gi 113205363 gb AAT66771.2 Putative polyprotein, identical [<i>Solanum demissum</i>]	352315	358329
g38886_Scaffold00000549	gi 460387720 ref XP_004239522.1 PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC101244956 [<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>]	359255	372066
g38878_Scaffold00000549	gi 296278604 gb ADH04266.1 ERF1 [<i>Nicotiana benthamiana</i>]	372621	375461
g38860_Scaffold00000549	gi 460366233 ref XP_004228993.1 PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC101255727 [<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>]	386045	387443
g38864_Scaffold00000549	gi 296278604 gb ADH04266.1 ERF1 [<i>Nicotiana benthamiana</i>]	416812	419577
g38863_Scaffold00000549	NA	449315	449560
g38865_Scaffold00000549	NA	449684	449943
g38879_Scaffold00000549	gi 470132088 ref XP_004301918.1 PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC101298139 [<i>Fragaria vesca</i> subsp. <i>vesca</i>]	456673	458830
g38867_Scaffold00000549	gi 460395064 ref XP_004243109.1 PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC101263429 [<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>]	550298	551726
g38883_Scaffold00000549	NA	666517	668921
g38846_Scaffold00000549	NA	679387	681160
g38843_Scaffold00000549	gi 113205316 gb ABI34339.1 Polyprotein, 3'-partial, putative [<i>Solanum demissum</i>]	696597	697503
g38880_Scaffold00000549	gi 4406792 gb AD20101.1 putative retroelement pol polyprotein [<i>Arabidopsis thaliana</i>] gi 156603850 ref XP_001618917.1 hypothetical protein NEMVEDRAFT_vlg68789 [<i>Nematostella vectensis</i>] gi 156200895 gb EDO26817.1 predicted protein [<i>Nematostella vectensis</i>]	748082	752804
g38870_Scaffold00000549		766567	768613

Gene	Blast Hit Description	Start	End
g38874 Scaffold00000549	gi 460415871 ref XP_004253277.1 PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC101244169 [<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>]	769094	773060
g38844 Scaffold00000549	gi 460415745 ref XP_004253217.1 PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC101263890 [<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i>]	781866	785313

Example 8: Development of tobacco varieties with desirable nicotine levels via a transgenic approach.

[00316] Both overexpression and suppression approaches are taken to investigate the function of Nic1 genes. Two sets of transgenic plants are generated, one using the full length coding sequence and the other using an RNAi sequence. For expression of the full length coding sequence or the RNAi sequence, an expression vector can be constructed to have a CsVMV promoter and a NOS terminator, as well as a cassette having a Kanamycin selection marker (NPT II) under direction of an actin2 promoter and having a NOS terminator. Exemplary transformation cassette sequences of RNAi constructs targeting genes in Nic deletion segment can be found in SEQ ID Nos: 69 and 70. One of ordinary skill in the art understands that other target sequences can be used in constructing RNAi constructs or other transgenic approach for gene silencing (*e.g.*, artificial microRNA, trans-acting siRNA, etc.).

[00317] Nucleic acid constructs carrying transgenes of interest are introduced into tobacco leaf disc using DNA bombardment or a biolistic approach. *See*, for example, Sanford *et al.*, 1993, *Methods Enzymol.*, 217:483-510; and Okuzaki and Tabei, 2012, *Plant Biotechnology*, 29:307-310. Briefly, the plasmid DNA containing the transformation cassette is coated on 1 μ m gold particles (DNA/gold) as follows. The 1 μ m gold particles are baked at 180°C for 12 hours, and a stock solution (40 mg/ml) is prepared. To make a mixture for 10 shots, 100 μ l of the stock solution is mixed with 40 μ l of expression vector DNA (1 μ g/ μ l), 100 μ l of 2.5 M CaCl₂, and 40 μ l of 0.1 M spermidine in a 1.5-ml tube. The mixture is centrifuged for 30 s at 13,000 \times g, and the pellet is washed with 500 μ l 100% ethanol. The DNA/gold mixture is suspended in 100 μ l of water, and 10 μ l is applied onto a macrocarrier, dried, and then bombarded. Two shots are bombarded per plate using a 1,100 psi rupture disc under partial vacuum (711 mmHg) in a PDS-1000/He system (Bio-Rad Laboratories, Hercules, CA, USA). Narrow Leaf Madole (NLM) and Tennessee 90 (TN90) tobacco leaf discs are used for transformation with the RNAi constructs, and with the full length gene constructs. Whole tobacco leaf (about 45 \times 30 mm in length) is placed on the MS medium overnight, and the leaf disc is bombarded with the construct on the second day. Leaves are then cut into small pieces (about 5 \times 5 mm) and replaced on the TOM medium (MS medium with 20 g sucrose/L; 1 mg/L IAA and 2.5 mg/L BAP) to grow at 27°C for 3-5 days, then transferred to TOM medium to grow, which contains 300 mg/l Kanamycin (TOM-Kan). Tissues are transferred to new TOM-Kan plates every 2-3 weeks for 4–6 weeks (27°C, 16

h light). Kanamycin-resistant primary shoots are regenerated at 4–6 weeks after bombardment. Shoots are transferred to MS-Kanamycin plates to grow root. The leaves and/or roots from T1 plants (and subsequent generations) are then evaluated to determine the amount of one or more alkaloids and/or one or more TSNAs.

Example 9: Development of novel *nic1* mutations via random mutagenesis

[00318] Random mutagenesis of tobacco plants are performed using Ethyl methanesulfonate (EMS) mutagenesis or fast neutron bombardment. EMS mutagenesis consists of chemically inducing random point mutations over the length of the genome. Fast neutron mutagenesis consists of exposing seeds to neutron bombardment which causes large deletions through double stranded DNA breakage.

[00319] For EMS mutagenesis, one gram (approximately 10,000 seeds) of Tennessee 90 tobacco (TN90) seeds are washed in 0.1% Tween for fifteen minutes and then soaked in 30 ml of ddH₂O for two hours. One hundred fifty (150) µl of 0.5% EMS (Sigma, Catalogue No. M-0880) is then mixed into the seed/ddH₂O solution and incubated for 8-12 hours (rotating at 30 rpm) under a hood at room temperature (RT; approximately 20°C). The liquid then is removed from the seeds and mixed into 1 M NaOH overnight for decontamination and disposal. The seeds are then washed twice with 100 ml ddH₂O for 2-4 hours. The washed seeds were then suspended in 0.1% agar solution.

[00320] The EMS-treated seeds in the agar solution are evenly spread onto water-soaked Carolina's Choice Tobacco Mix (Carolina Soil Company, Kinston, NC) in flats at ~2000 seeds/flat. The flats are then covered with plastic wrap and placed in a growth chamber. Once the seedlings emerge from the soil, the plastic wrap is punctured to allow humidity to decline gradually. The plastic wrap is completely removed after two weeks. Flats are moved to a greenhouse and fertilized with NPK fertilizer. The seedlings are plugged into a float tray and grown until transplanting size. The plants are subsequently transplanted into a field. During growth, the plants self-pollinate to form M1 seeds. At the mature stage, five capsules are harvested from each plant and individual designations are given to the set of seeds from each plant. This forms the M1 population. A composite of M1 seed from each M0 plant are grown, and leaves from M1 plants are collected for DNA extraction. Target genes are amplified and sequenced for mutation identification.

Example 10: Development of novel *nic1* mutations via targeted mutagenesis

[00321] Tobacco lines with low nicotine while maintaining high leaf quality are produced by introducing mutations into *Nic1* locus via precise genome engineering technologies, for example, Transcription activator-like effector nucleases (TALENs), meganuclease, zinc finger nuclease, and CRISPR. Genome modifications are made in commercial tobacco varieties such as TN90, K326 and Narrow Leaf Madole.

[00322] For example, specific target sequences from *Nic1* genes can serve as TALEN target binding regions. The TALEN sites are specific for the single gene or a DNA segment from *Nic1* locus. TALEN regions 1 and 2 would be used to disrupt a critical region of *Nic1* and partial fuse together to create long stretch deletion but smaller than entire *Nic1* deletion region. The plants created will be expected to have low nicotine contents but high leaf quality.

[00323] Based on target DNA sequences, sequences for transcription activator like (TAL) effector proteins are synthesized and cloned into plant expression vectors to serve as entry vectors. Depending on the purpose, different protocols are used to generate mutagenic tobacco lines: 1) one or more entry vectors (pALCS1 containing the target TALs) are directly transformed into tobacco protoplasts to generate random sequence deletion or insertion mutagenic tobacco lines; 2) a donor sequence (*e.g.*, a reporter gene, *e.g.*, the GUS gene) flanked on the left and right side with sequences that are homologous with the target insertion sequence is co-transformed into tobacco protoplasts with one or more entry vectors (pALCS1 containing the target TALs) to generated mutagenic tobacco lines containing a reporter gene; and 3) a donor sequence containing target TALs that have a point mutation is co-transformed into tobacco protoplasts with one or more entry vectors (pALCS1 containing the target TALs) to generated mutagenic tobacco lines having a point mutation; 4) a donor sequence containing a tissue specific promoter sequence to generate mutant tobacco lines that express the endogenous gene in a tissue specific manner; and 5) a donor sequence containing a combination of the aforementioned donor sequences with a reporter gene construct to facilitate mutant tobacco screening.

[00324] Tobacco protoplasts are isolated from TN90 tobacco leaves growing in Magenta boxes in a growth chamber. Well-expanded leaves (5 cm) from 3–4-week-old plants are cut into 0.5 to 1-mm leaf strips from the middle part of a leaf. Leaf strips are transferred into the

prepared enzyme solution (1% cellulase R10, 0.25% macerozyme R10, 0.4 M mannitol, 20 mM KCl, 20 mM MES (pH 5.7), 10 mM CaCl₂, 0.1% BSA) by dipping both sides of the strips. Leaf strips are vacuum infiltrated for 30 min in the dark using a desiccator with continuing digestion in the dark for 4 hour to overnight at room temperature without shaking. Protoplasts are filtered in 100 µm nylon filter and purified with 3 ml Lymphoprep. Protoplasts are centrifuged and washed with W5n solution (154 mM NaCl, 125 mM CaCl₂, 5 mM KCl, 2 mM MES, 991 mg/l glucose pH 5.7) and suspended in W5n solution at the concentration of 5x 10⁵/ml. Protoplasts are kept on ice for 30 min to settle at the bottom of the tube by gravity. W5n solution was moved and protoplasts were re-suspended in P2 solution at room temperature. 50 µl DNA (10–20 µg of plasmid), 500 µl protoplasts (2x10⁵ protoplasts) and 550 µl of PEG solution (40%, v/v 10 ml 4 g PEG4000, 0.2 M mannitol, 0.1 M CaCl₂) are mixed gently in a 15-ml microfuge tube, and the mixture incubated at room temperature for 5 min.

[00325] Protoplasts are pelleted and re-suspended with 1 ml 2X 8EN1 (8EN1: MS salt without NH₄NO₃, MS vitamin, 0.2% myo-Inositol, 4 mM MES, 1 mg/l NAA, 1 mg/l IAA, 0.5 M mannitol, 0.5 mg/l BAP, 1.5% sucrose). Transformed protoplasts are jellified with equal amount of low-melting agarose (LMA), and 0.2 ml of protoplast-LAM is dropped to form a bead. 10 ml 8EN1 is added to the bead, and in 7 days, 5 ml 8EN1 is taken out and 5 ml 8EN2 (8EN1 with 0.25 M mannitol) is added; after another 7 days (14 day), 10 ml 8EN2 is taken out and 10 ml 8EN2 is added; in another 7 days (21 day), 5 ml 8EN2 is taken out and 5 ml 8EN3 (8EN1 with 3% sucrose and without mannitol) is added; after another 7 days (28 day), 10 ml 8EN3 is taken out and 10 ml 8EN3 is added. Protoplasts are kept for two weeks until micro-callus growth. Callus is transferred to NCM solid media until it reaches about 5 mm (usually about two weeks). Callus was transferred to TOM-Kan solid media to grow shoots, and transformed tobacco plants were regenerated using the methods described herein.

Example 11: Further genetic confirmation of the identified Nic1 lesion.

[00326] A genetic segregation analysis was conducted in an F₂ population of 522 plants from a cross between TN90 with LA BU21 (Table 12). This F₂ population ((LA Burley 21 x TN 90 LC) (X)) was subject to PCR-based genotyping of the Nic1 and Nic2 loci as described in Example 3. The percent total alkaloid and percent nicotine levels of each plant were also measured as in Example 3. Briefly, tobacco samples were collected at an intermediate growth

stage (layby stage) for genotyping. The plants were topped at an elongated bud stage. Samples for chemistry analysis were taken two weeks after topping of the plants.

[00327] The genotypic data again confirm a segregation ratio of 9:3:3:1 for the Nic1 and Nic2 loci in the F₂ population. Average percent total alkaloid and average percent nicotine levels in each of the four genotypes are also consistent with the segregation data and the earlier observation that *nic1* has a stronger effect than *nic2* over the total alkaloid and nicotine levels (Tables 13 and 14). The genotype and chemistry data of this F₂ population are further shown in Figures 3 and 4 by plotting the chemistry (y axis) of each plant by its genotype (x axis). Figure 4 differs from Figure 3 in its exclusion of 8 plants that were likely switched due to sampling or processing errors.

[00328] Moreover, groups of isogenic BU21 low alkaloid series germplasm (LA BU21, LI BU21, HI BU21, and BU21) were tested across two years. The low alkaloid trait is not affected by year-to-year variations in leaf alkaloid levels. Shown in Figures 5 and 6, the percent reduction of nicotine content appeared consistent across two years, illustrating that the low alkaloid trait is not impacted by environmental factors or field conditions.

Table 12: Nic1 and Nic2 genotypes and alkaloid measurements of individual plants of a larger F₂ population segregating for *nic1* and *nic2* ((LA Burley 21 x TN 90 LC) (X)). N/S represent no sample. Asterisks represent four pairs (8 total having plant Nos: 163 and 164, 174 and 175, 361 and 362, 481 and 482, also in bold) of adjacent plants where DNA or leaf samples were likely switched during either sampling, processing or analysis stage. Each of the four pairs of plants were side by side in the field.

Plant No.	Nic1 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Nic2 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Percent Nicotine	Percent Total Alkaloids
1	1	1	1.33	1.389
2	1	1	1.59	1.66
3	0	1	0.72	0.7511
4	1	1	2.59	2.753
5	1	0	0.81	0.8422
6	1	1	1.04	1.096
7	1	1	1.76	1.843
8	1	1	1.07	1.121
9	1	0	1.85	1.938
10	1	1	1.58	1.662
11	1	0	1.1	1.147

Plant No.	Nic1 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Nic2 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Percent Nicotine	Percent Total Alkaloids
12	1	0	0.68	0.7045
13	1	1	1.33	1.39
14	1	0	1.77	1.828
15	1	1	1.83	1.93
16	1	1	3.34	3.513
17	0	0	0.059	0.0643
18	1	1	3.36	3.543
19	0	0	0.062	0.0661
20	1	1	2.31	2.437
21	1	0	1.23	1.286
22	1	0	1.61	1.701
23	1	1	1.18	1.241
24	0	0	0.106	0.1099
25	0	1	1.41	1.487
26	1	1	2.47	2.6
27	1	1	2.16	2.245
28	1	1	2.22	2.334
29	1	0	2.54	2.667
30	1	1	1.37	1.429
31	1	1	1.86	1.956
32	1	1	1.68	1.762
33	1	0	1.91	1.996
34	1	1	2.89	3.051
35	0	1	1.15	1.205
36	1	1	2.92	3.064
37	1	0	2.84	3.005
38	0	1	1.49	1.566
39	0	0	0.17	0.1796
40	1	0	3.02	3.211
41	1	0	1.29	1.35
42	1	1	1.73	1.805
43	1	0	1.37	1.469
44	1	1	2.18	2.279
45	0	0	0.16	0.1719
46	1	0	2.38	2.495
47	1	1	2.34	2.455
48	1	0	1.39	1.455

Plant No.	Nic1 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Nic2 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Percent Nicotine	Percent Total Alkaloids
49	1	0	2.9	3.044
50	0	1	2.18	2.307
51	0	1	1.34	1.393
52	1	0	1.9	1.98
53	1	1	1.49	1.566
54	1	1	2.22	2.347
55	1	1	3.21	3.359
56	1	1	3.67	3.862
57	1	1	2.07	2.17
58	0	1	0.83	0.8704
59	1	1	2.37	2.492
60	1	1	2.25	2.395
61	1	1	2.53	2.678
62	1	1	2.19	2.326
63	1	1	1.92	1.997
64	1	1	3.06	3.229
65	1	1	3.2	3.369
66	1	1	2.83	2.997
67	1	1	4.07	4.257
68	1	1	2.4	2.498
69	0	1	1.66	1.734
70	1	1	1.93	2.045
71	1	1	3.79	3.99
72	0	0	0.079	0.0849
73	1	1	2.17	2.289
74	1	0	3.58	3.778
75	1	1	2.63	2.76
76	0	1	1.52	1.603
77	1	1	3.04	3.211
78	1	1	2.82	2.979
79	1	1	2.6	2.74
80	1	1	2.48	2.597
81	1	1	1.88	1.977
82	1	1	2.98	3.106
83	0	1	0.99	1.0255
84	0	0	0.3	0.3194
85	1	1	1.79	1.873

Plant No.	Nic1 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Nic2 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Percent Nicotine	Percent Total Alkaloids
86	1	1	2.37	2.477
87	1	1	2.79	2.932
88	1	1	2.14	2.301
89	1	1	4.35	4.588
90	0	0	0.09	0.0972
91	0	1	1.59	1.67
92	1	0	1.71	1.789
93	1	1	3.94	4.114
94	1	1	2.65	2.755
95	0	1	1.14	1.211
96	1	0	2.14	2.248
97	1	1	2.62	2.743
98	1	0	0.95	0.9865
99	1	1	2.61	2.729
100	1	1	3.33	3.485
101	1	0	2.77	2.878
102	1	1	2.31	2.424
103	0	1	0.49	0.5099
104	1	1	2.5	2.611
105	0	1	0.97	1.012
106	1	1	2.29	2.404
107	1	1	1.11	1.16
108	1	0	1.87	1.947
109	0	1	0.95	1
110	1	1	3.05	3.209
111	1	0	3.28	3.437
112	1	0	3.46	3.637
113	1	1	4.33	4.594
114	1	1	4.35	4.552
115	1	1	3.56	3.746
116	0	1	1.85	1.93
117	1	1	5.94	6.305
118	0	1	1.47	1.559
119	1	1	3.8	4.028
120	0	1	1.9	2.007
121	1	0	3.38	3.573
122	0	0	0.3	0.3191

Plant No.	Nic1 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Nic2 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Percent Nicotine	Percent Total Alkaloids
123	1	1	4.04	4.245
124	1	1	3.4	3.622
125	0	1	1.09	1.141
126	1	0	2.71	2.828
127	1	1	4.93	5.178
128	1	0	2.65	2.801
129	1	1	1.62	1.693
130	1	0	2.13	2.232
131	0	1	2.64	2.789
132	1	1	3.17	3.329
133	0	1	1.99	2.108
134	1	1	2.28	2.377
135	1	1	3.85	4.019
136	1	1	3.62	3.792
137	1	0	3.19	3.355
138	0	1	1.49	1.565
139	1	1	4.33	4.516
140	1	1	3.88	4.097
141	1	1	5.68	6.003
142	1	1	3.15	3.292
143	1	0	2.35	2.456
144	1	0	3.63	3.786
145	1	1	3.32	3.532
146	1	1	3.26	3.407
147	1	1	3.37	3.507
148	1	0	3.21	3.388
149	1	1	3.7	3.873
150	0	0	0.4	0.4279
151	1	1	1.41	1.482
152	1	1	2.18	2.273
153	1	1	2.58	2.725
154	0	1	2.89	3.088
155	1	1	1.51	1.593
156	0	1	2.03	2.143
157	0	1	2.03	2.151
158	1	0	1.27	1.323
159	1	1	1.62	1.734

Plant No.	Nic1 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Nic2 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Percent Nicotine	Percent Total Alkaloids
160	1	1	4.48	4.67
161	1	1	1	1.045
162	1	1	3.17	3.309
163*	1	1	0.18	0.1906
164*	0	1	2.38	2.493
165	1	1	3.62	3.745
166	1	1	N/S	N/S
167	1	0	2.62	2.717
168	1	1	2.31	2.428
169	1	0	2.52	2.645
170	1	1	4.35	4.527
171	1	0	1.66	1.741
172	1	0	3.03	3.159
173	1	0	3.2	3.343
174*	1	1	0.059	0.0653
175*	0	0	4.03	4.197
176	1	1	2.85	3.01
177	1	1	2.91	3.086
178	1	1	4.21	4.395
179	1	1	1.09	1.154
180	0	1	1.15	1.206
181	1	0	3.2	3.345
182	1	1	3.28	3.406
183	1	1	3.17	3.324
184	1	0	3.24	3.392
185	1	1	0.94	0.987
186	1	1	3.95	4.123
187	1	0	0.68	0.7094
188	0	1	1.94	2.007
189	1	1	0.46	0.4809
190	0	1	2.28	2.356
191	1	1	2.25	2.336
192	1	0	2.74	2.842
193	1	1	3.9	4.091
194	1	1	3.39	3.578
195	1	0	2.59	2.698
196	0	0	0.131	0.1383

Plant No.	Nic1 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Nic2 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Percent Nicotine	Percent Total Alkaloids
197	1	1	2.28	2.365
198	1	0	2.27	2.395
199	0	0	0.1	0.1063
200	1	1	2.39	2.496
201	0	1	1.02	1.09
202	1	1	1.99	2.09
203	1	1	3.44	3.594
204	1	1	3.05	3.167
205	0	1	0.85	0.8839
206	0	1	2.18	2.331
207	1	1	1.89	1.971
208	1	1	1.37	1.445
209	1	1	3.26	3.432
210	1	1	1.28	1.3224
211	0	1	1.86	1.966
212	1	1	1.53	1.59
213	0	0	0.142	0.1513
214	1	1	2.22	2.331
215	1	1	2.94	3.075
216	0	1	1.72	1.801
217	1	1	3.89	4.044
218	1	1	4.47	4.691
219	0	1	1.63	1.696
220	1	0	3.28	3.432
221	1	0	1.14	1.193
222	1	1	3.91	4.089
223	1	0	0.87	0.9002
224	1	1	1.8	1.891
225	1	1	2.25	2.369
226	1	0	2.59	2.738
227	0	1	0.89	0.933
228	0	1	0.64	0.669
227B	1	1	1.38	1.439
228B	1	1	3.25	3.421
229	1	0	3.57	3.71
230	0	1	2.43	2.583
231	1	1	3.23	3.398

Plant No.	Nic1 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Nic2 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Percent Nicotine	Percent Total Alkaloids
232	1	1	4.85	5.187
233	0	1	1.09	1.138
234	0	0	0.24	0.2521
235	1	1	2.49	2.597
236	1	1	4.07	4.327
237	0	1	1.17	1.235
238	0	0	0.16	0.1683
239	1	1	3.18	3.323
240	1	0	2.39	2.5
241	1	1	1.72	1.805
242	0	1	0.95	0.992
243	0	1	0.75	0.787
244	1	1	2.28	2.398
245	1	1	1.89	1.989
246	1	0	3.91	4.084
247	1	0	2.53	2.648
248	0	1	0.68	0.7146
249	1	1	2.82	2.966
250	1	1	1.76	1.841
251	0	0	0.18	0.1936
252	1	1	1.39	1.452
253	1	1	3.54	3.722
254	1	1	4.05	4.247
255	1	1	2.09	2.192
256	1	1	1.47	1.551
257	1	0	2.54	2.677
258	1	1	3.83	4.002
259	1	0	1.23	1.301
260	1	1	1.92	2.017
261	1	1	2.17	2.323
262	1	0	2.41	2.552
263	1	0	2.3	2.435
262B	1	0	1.34	1.408
263B	1	1	3.39	3.577
264	0	1	1.98	2.093
265	0	1	0.8	0.854
266	1	1	1.76	1.863

Plant No.	Nic1 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Nic2 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Percent Nicotine	Percent Total Alkaloids
267	1	1	1.87	1.989
268	0	0	0.19	0.2031
269	0	0	0.12	0.1293
270	0	1	0.57	0.607
271	0	0	0.139	0.1481
272	1	0	1.81	1.893
273	1	0	2.13	2.244
274	0	1	0.52	0.5523
275	0	1	1.7	1.805
276	1	0	1.83	1.922
277	1	1	2	2.101
278	0	1	0.91	0.9535
279	1	1	3.25	3.439
280	1	1	3.45	3.586
281	1	1	4.62	4.807
282	1	1	3.41	3.566
283	0	1	1.34	1.407
284	1	1	2.43	2.556
285	1	1	1.44	1.514
286	1	1	2.49	2.614
287	0	0	0.137	0.1445
288	1	1	1.78	1.863
289	0	1	0.53	0.5681
290	1	1	N/S	N/S
291	0	1	0.73	0.775
292	1	1	1.43	1.504
293	1	1	1.92	2.012
294	0	1	0.51	0.5388
295	1	0	2.07	2.181
296	1	1	1.4	1.463
297	1	1	4.21	4.548
298	1	0	3.11	3.225
299	1	1	3.93	4.158
300	1	1	1.99	2.062
301	0	1	0.56	0.5858
302	1	1	1.93	2.018
303	1	1	1.06	1.114

Plant No.	Nic1 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Nic2 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Percent Nicotine	Percent Total Alkaloids
304	1	1	6.89	7.302
305	1	0	2.25	2.366
306	1	0	1.42	1.479
307	1	0	2.39	2.591
308	1	1	2.52	2.635
309	1	0	1.84	1.933
310	1	1	2.29	2.412
311	1	1	1.62	1.707
312	0	1	1.89	1.988
313	1	1	2.48	2.577
314	0	0	1.01	1.056
315	1	1	2.21	2.334
316	1	1	1.54	1.617
317	1	1	N/S	N/S
318	0	1	0.65	0.6821
319	1	1	3.32	3.493
320	1	0	2.68	2.8
321	1	1	2.71	2.835
322	1	0	1.97	2.068
323	1	1	2.76	2.905
324	1	0	3.92	4.122
325	1	0	2.56	2.724
326	1	1	3.18	3.355
327	0	1	2.08	2.165
328	1	0	2.77	2.89
329	1	1	2.11	2.216
330	1	0	1.81	1.878
331	0	0	0.2	0.2096
332	1	1	1.8	1.894
333	0	1	0.75	0.7875
334	1	0	2.78	2.92
335	0	0	0.19	0.2044
336	1	1	2.2	2.31
337	1	1	1.54	1.606
338	0	0	0.19	0.1986
339	1	1	2.05	2.153
340	1	0	1.57	1.644

Plant No.	Nic1 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Nic2 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Percent Nicotine	Percent Total Alkaloids
341	1	1	2.64	2.768
342	1	1	2.4	2.522
343	1	1	2.1	2.213
344	1	1	2.83	2.989
345	1	0	2.77	2.899
346	1	1	1.44	1.509
347			2.89	3.042
348	1	1	1.76	1.841
349	0	1	0.59	0.6235
350	1	1	3.62	3.804
351			0.67	0.707
352	1	0	2.25	2.352
353	1	1	1.7	1.786
354	1	1	2.36	2.463
355	1	1	N/S	N/S
356	1	1	3.36	3.549
357	1	1	1.63	1.706
358	0	1	0.84	0.887
359	0	1	0.5	0.5223
360	1	1	2.44	2.568
361*	0	1	1.86	1.931
362*	0	0	2.98	3.122
363	0	0	0.072	0.0754
364	0	1	1.64	1.739
365	1	1	3.4	3.602
366	1	0	2.72	2.872
367	0	1	1.12	1.205
368	1	1	3	3.207
369	1	1	1.45	1.542
370	1	1	4.65	4.975
371	1	1	3.1	3.271
372	1	1	1.2	1.252
373	1	1	1.94	2.049
374	0	0	0.24	0.2523
375	1	1	3.4	3.528
376	1	0	2.73	2.863
377	0	1	0.57	0.5979

Plant No.	Nic1 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Nic2 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Percent Nicotine	Percent Total Alkaloids
378	1	1	2.34	2.447
379	1	1	2.9	3.073
380	1	1	2.03	2.156
381	1	1	2.07	2.177
382	0	1	1.23	1.301
383	1	1	2.42	2.554
384	1	1	3.32	3.518
385	1	1	2.18	2.293
386	1	1	1.58	1.668
387	0	1	1.21	1.285
388	0	0	0.074	0.0789
389	1	1	1.65	1.725
390	1	1	2.36	2.507
391	1	1	1.94	2.055
392	1	1	2	2.102
393	1	1	2.61	2.705
394	0	1	1	1.06
395	1	1	2.53	2.641
396	1	1	1.03	1.081
397	0	0	0.136	0.1417
398	1	1	0.99	1.033
399	1	1	1.96	2.062
400	0	0	0.113	0.1193
401	1	1	1.75	1.841
402	1	1	2.34	2.442
403	1	1	1.92	2.002
404	1	1	3.87	4.06
405	1	1	2.94	3.068
406	1	1	1.15	1.204
407	1	1	3.15	3.359
408	1	1	1.83	1.923
409	1	1	2.28	2.402
410	1	1	2.76	2.906
411	1	1	1.88	1.994
412	1	1	1.28	1.342
413	1	1	1.12	1.175
414	0	1	1.28	1.341

Plant No.	Nic1 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Nic2 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Percent Nicotine	Percent Total Alkaloids
415	1	1	2.22	2.334
416	0	1	1.05	1.099
417	1	1	3.01	3.148
418	1	1	3.27	3.444
419	1	1	1.77	1.86
420	1	1	1.44	1.497
421	0	1	0.55	0.5777
422	1	0	2.7	2.825
423	1	1	1.24	1.315
424	1	1	2.95	3.106
425	0	1	0.63	0.6607
426	1	1	2.88	3.014
427	1	1	2.31	2.455
428	1	0	1.92	1.994
429	1	1	3.05	3.232
430	1	1	1.76	1.88
431	0	0	0.11	0.1164
432	0	1	0.78	0.8129
433	0	1	2.01	2.134
434	1	1	1.98	2.095
435			1.71	1.801
436	1	0	3.27	3.447
437	0	1	0.89	0.944
438	1	1	2.9	3.049
439	0	0	0.18	0.1905
440	1	1	4.12	4.367
441	0	1	1.53	1.623
442	1	1	4.07	4.315
443	0	1	1.35	1.429
444	1	0	2.98	3.12
445	1	1	4.98	5.272
446	0	1	1.22	1.288
447	1	1	4.34	4.578
448	1	1	2.89	3.028
449	1	1	5.8	6.135
450	1	1	4.34	4.553
451	1	0	3.6	3.791

Plant No.	Nic1 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Nic2 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Percent Nicotine	Percent Total Alkaloids
452	1	1	4.67	4.947
453	0	1	1.83	1.918
454	1	1	2.6	2.692
455	1	1	5.03	5.301
456	1	1	4.41	4.695
457	1	0	2.62	2.741
458	0	0	0.133	0.1425
459	0	1	0.53	0.5534
460	0	1	0.63	0.6663
461	0	1	2.78	2.943
462	1	1	2.64	2.785
463	0	1	1.23	1.296
464	0	1	1.55	1.629
465	1	1	2.49	2.626
466	1	1	2.8	2.936
467	0	0	0.19	0.2026
468	0	1	1.91	2.029
469	1	1	1.37	1.442
470	0	1	1.29	1.375
471	1	1	3.74	3.919
472	0	1	1.67	1.78
473	1	1	1.39	1.479
474	1	1	0.88	0.926
475			2.53	2.679
476	1	1	3.59	3.756
477	1	1	3.96	4.196
478	1	1	1.59	1.679
479	0	1	2.27	2.385
480	0	0	0.108	0.1147
481*	0	1	2.21	2.363
482*	1	1	0.54	0.5726
483	1	1	1.76	1.854
484	1	1	3.34	3.512
485	1	1	1.4	1.468
486	1	0	0.87	0.9085
487	0	1	0.38	0.3976
488	1	1	2.53	2.662

Plant No.	Nic1 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Nic2 (Present=1, Deleted=0)	Percent Nicotine	Percent Total Alkaloids
489	0	1	1.34	1.412
490	0	1	1.17	1.246
491	0	1	0.43	0.4505
492	1	0	3.55	3.741
493	0	1	2.16	2.294
494	1	1	2.6	2.736
495	1	1	2.73	2.905
496	1	1	2.46	2.591
497	1	1	1.8	1.906
498	0	1	0.75	0.7913
499	1	1	1.37	1.461
500	1	0	1.63	1.731
501	1	1	1.34	1.417
502	1	0	0.98	1.0156
503	1	1	0.79	0.8276
504	1	0	1.75	1.812
505	1	1	1.49	1.571
506	0	0	0.084	0.0892
507	1	1	1.2	1.247
508	1	0	1.98	2.081
509	1	0	1.03	1.0704
510	1	0	1.4	1.475
511	1	0	0.76	0.791
512	1	1	1.4	1.491
513	1	1	2.29	2.402
514	1	1	1.14	1.19
515	1	1	1	1.044
516	1	1	1.26	1.356
517	0	1	0.52	0.5535
518	1	1	0.45	0.4786
519	1	0	1.59	1.651
520	1	1	1.59	1.667
521	0	1	0.46	0.4803
522	1	0	1.1	1.162

Table 13: Genetic segregation of an F₂ segregating population ((LA Burley 21 x TN 90 LC) (X)) and average percent total alkaloid and percent nicotine levels in each of the four segregating genotypes. Both the mean and standard deviation are shown. Three plants with missing samples are excluded rendering the total number of plants analyzed to be 518.

Genotype	Ratio Expected	Number of Plants Expected	Number of Plants Observed	Average Percent Nicotine	Std Dev (Nicotine)	Average Percent Total Alkaloid	Std Dev (Total Alkaloid)
Nic1 Nic2	9/16	291.9	288	2.55	1.08	2.68	1.14
Nic1 <i>nic2</i>	3/16	97.3	96	2.25	0.83	2.36	0.87
<i>nic1</i> Nic2	3/16	97.3	97	1.30	0.61	1.37	0.65
<i>nic1 nic2</i>	1/16	32.4	37	0.36	0.78	0.38	0.81

Table 14: A re-analysis of the segregation population in Table 12 further excluding the four plant pairs which were likely switched (plant Nos: 163 and 164, 174 and 175, 361 and 362, 481 and 482) and rendering the total plant number to be 510.

Genotype	Ratio Expected	Number of Plants Expected	Number of Plants Observed	Average Percent Nicotine	Std Dev (Nicotine)	Average Percent Total Alkaloid	Std Dev (Total Alkaloid)
Nic1 Nic2	9/16	286.88	285	2.57	1.06	2.71	1.11
Nic1 <i>nic2</i>	3/16	95.63	96	2.25	0.83	2.36	0.87
<i>nic1</i> Nic2	3/16	95.63	95	1.28	0.60	1.35	0.64
<i>nic1 nic2</i>	1/16	31.88	34	0.18	0.16	0.19	0.17

Example 12: Genome re-sequencing to validate and refine sequences in the identified Nic1 lesion.

[00329] Genomic sequences of the identified Nic1 scaffold and annotated genes were re-sequenced using PacBio's SMRT sequencing technology (NT2.0). Sequence quality of Nic1 locus region (NT1.0-Scaffold0002504) was improved. Briefly, base pairs (bps) 1 to 133,550 of NT2.0-Scaffold4274 (SEQ ID No: 73) correspond to and replace NT1.0-Scaffold0002504 between bps 384,701 to 542,313 in the minus orientation. Base pairs 1 to 59,671 of NT2.0-Scaffold14415 (SEQ ID No: 74) correspond to and replace NT1.0-Scaffold0002504 between bps 288,601 to 363,040 in the minus orientation.

[00330] Additional genomic sequence data are provided in SEQ ID Nos: 75 to 82 for the 8 genes previously identified in SEQ ID Nos: 21 to 28, respectively. A new set of cDNA and

protein sequences of “g100623_Scaffold0002504” are also identified (new sequences of SEQ ID No: 83 and 84 relative to previous sequences of SEQ ID No: 46 and 66, respectively).

[00331] Each and every U.S. or foreign patent, publication of patent application, non-patent literature or any other reference mentioned in this application is incorporated by reference in its entirety.

Example 13: Complete sequencing of the *Nic1* lesion region using Bacteria Artificial Chromosome sequencing.

[00332] A bacterial artificial chromosomes (BAC) walking method was used to generate the complete sequence around the *Nic1* locus and further identify boundary sequences of the genomic deletion. Briefly, 21 BAC clones associated with whole-genome profiling (WGP) contigs were identified and pooled to form 3 pools of 7 BACs each. Each pool was sequenced separately on separate SMRT cells (PacBio). The sequences were assembled into 14 contigs, which were further assembled into one contig based on overlapping sequence information obtained by blasting 1000 bps on either end of each contig. The resulting reference contig was used to re-map resequencing data from BU21, HI, LI, and LA BU21 lines. A contiguous 425,001 bp region (SEQ ID NO: 85) that spans the entire *Nic1* deletion was identified. Table 15 provides details of the fifteen identified gene models with functional information for the encoded proteins based on the best BLAST hit. The relative position of these fifteen genes on SEQ ID NO: 85 can be found in Figure 7. The genomic sequences (SEQ ID NOs: 86 to 100), coding sequences (CDS; SEQ ID NOs: 101 to 115) and protein sequences (SEQ ID NOs: 116 to 130) are provided for the fifteen *Nic1* Deletion Genes (NDG1 to NDG15). Among these, genomic sequence data provided in SEQ ID NOs: 86, 87, and 90 to 100 correspond to the 13 gene models previously identified in SEQ ID NOs: 28, 13, 20, 22, 11, 17, 23, 26, 21, 27, 14, 25, and 24, respectively. RNAi constructs are designed to silence NDG1 to NDG15 and are also used to make transgenic tobacco plants with lower alkaloid levels.

Example 14: Development of additional SNP markers for selecting *nic1* and *nic2*.

[00333] To provide more efficient selection of plants that harbor *nic1* and *nic2* mutations, 12 SNPs (6 SNPs for each locus) flanking *nic1* and *nic2* deletions were identified to develop co-dominant markers. Three SNPs upstream and 3 SNPs downstream of each deletion region are used. Each of the SNP polymorphisms is less than 100kb from the corresponding deleted region.

Table 16 provides more details on the relative location and sequence polymorphism for each SNP, and also provides sequence information for 60 bps upstream and downstream of each SNP. High throughput Kompetitive Allele Specific PCR™ or KASPT™ assays (LGC Genomics, Beverly, Massachusetts) are designed based on the identified SNPs for genotyping. These SNP markers can be used to detect plants that are heterozygous for a *nic1* or *nic2* deletion and can also distinguish a true homozygous deletion from a bad PCR reaction. The effectiveness of two SNP markers (Seq ID Nos. 135 and 137) for genotyping the F₂ population ((LA Burley 21 x TN 90 LC) (X)) of Example 11 (see plant No. 1 to 72 of Table 12) is shown in Table 18.

Example 15: Identification of an ERF gene associated with *nic1*.

[00334] An ERF gene, named as “ERF-39 like” was identified 307,823 bps downstream of the Nic1 deletion region. Given this gene’s close proximity, two adjoining SNP markers (SEQ ID Nos. 143 and 144) were identified for genotyping and tracking purposes. The details of the two SNPs are provided in Table 17. The genomic, cDNA, and protein sequence of the ERF-39 like gene are provided in SEQ ID Nos: 145 to 147, respectively. Plants that overexpress or downregulate the ERF-39 gene (*e.g.*, via RNAi, artificial miRNA, chemical mutagenesis, or targeted genome editing) are made and assess the effect of this gene on plant nicotine levels.

Example 16: Development of low-alkaloid tobacco plants via gene silencing and genome editing

[00335] Tobacco lines with low nicotine while maintaining high leaf quality are produced by introducing loss-of-function or null mutations into Nic1 locus or Nic2 locus via targeted genome editing technologies. Examples of genome editing techniques are Transcription activator-like effector nucleases (TALENs), meganuclease, zinc finger nuclease, and CRISPR, as described in Example 10. Genome modifications are made in commercial tobacco varieties such as TN90, K326 and Narrow Leaf Madole. Additional tobacco lines with suppressed expression of one or more NDGs, one or more ERF genes at Nic2 locus, or a combination thereof are generated via gene silencing (*e.g.*, RNAi, artificial/synthetic microRNA or other small RNA-mediated techniques). Exemplary RNAi cassette sequences targeting NDG1 to NDG15 are listed in Table 15.

[00336] For example, protoplasts are prepared as described in Example 10. One or more entry vectors containing sequences for transcription activator like effector proteins, specific for the

target sequences of Nic1 (*e.g.*, *NDG1* or *NDG2*), ERF-39 like, and Nic2 (*e.g.*, ERF189 or another ERF gene from Table 11) are synthesized and transformed into the isolated protoplasts. Protoplasts are cultured into calli. Alternatively, Nic1 and Nic2 loci mutations are achieved through CRISPR and without the use of plasmids. In this case, protoplasts are transformed with Cas9, guide RNA and polyethylene glycol (PEG).

[00337] The plants created contain a gene mutation (*e.g.*, null mutation or deletion) in Nic1, Nic2, or both loci, and constitute a low-nicotine variety. Alternatively, a variety containing a Nic1 mutant allele is crossed to another variety containing a Nic2 mutant allele. This cross will result in cultivars with desirable genetic backgrounds having an even lower nicotine content but high leaf quality. As an alternate option, gene silencing and genome editing techniques can be utilized as described in Example 10 to introduce Nic1 and Nic2 mutations or deletions at the same time.

Table 15: Details of the location of the coding sequence (CDS) within Nic1 locus, and BLAST hit with the lowest E-value of the corresponding protein are provided in this Table. Sequences of inverted repeat-containing RNAi cassettes are listed as SEQ ID Nos. The T-DNA cassette sequences of the RNAi vector can be found in SEQ ID Nos. 69 and 70.

Name	Position coordinates on SEQ ID NO: 85	BLAST Hit Description	Blast Hit ID	Genomic sequence (SEQ ID)	cDNA sequence (SEQ ID)	Amino acid sequence (SEQ ID)	Corresponding genes from Table 10	RNAi cassette sequence (SEQ ID)
NDG1	join(385015..385449,387135..387299,387383..387795,387857..389264)	PREDICTED: putative late blight resistance protein homolog R1A-3 [<i>Nicotiana tomentosiformis</i>]	XP_009624787.1	86	101	116	g100614_Scaff old0002504	148 and 149
NDG2	complement(join(73886..74311,74491..74680,74794..74934,75026..76149,76285..76524))	PREDICTED: putative late blight resistance protein homolog R1B-16 [<i>Nicotiana tomentosiformis</i>]	XP_009589795.1	87	102	117	g100631_Scaff old0002504	150 and 151
NDG3	join(323943..323949,324085..324464)	PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC104090758 [<i>Nicotiana tomentosiformis</i>]	XP_009594228.1	88	103	118		152
NDG4	315634..316095	PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC104106516 [<i>Nicotiana tomentosiformis</i>]	XP_009613372.1	89	104	119		153
NDG5	complement(join(179863..179982,180074..180152,180839..181455))	PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC104091789 [<i>Nicotiana tomentosiformis</i>]	XP_009595504.1	90	105	120	g100618_Scaff old0002504	154
NDG6	complement(join(233956..234093,234729..235030,235166..235378,235496..236068,236374..236438,236633..236874))	PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC104093328 [<i>Nicotiana tomentosiformis</i>]	XP_009597352.1	91	106	121	g100617_Scaff old0002504	155
NDG7	join(36266..36629,36753..36911,37083..37384,37655..37736,37857..38347,39697..39783)	PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC107001234 [<i>Solanum pennellii</i>]	XP_015054850.1	92	107	122	g100619_Scaff old0002504	156
NDG8	join(114418..114612,115436..115956,116268..116427,116558..116749,116833..117003)	PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC104086561 [<i>Nicotiana tomentosiformis</i>]	XP_009589152.1	93	108	123	g100620_Scaff old0002504	157

Name	Position coordinates on SEQ ID NO: 85	BLAST Hit Description	Blast Hit ID	Genomic sequence (SEQ ID)	cDNA sequence (SEQ ID)	Amino acid sequence (SEQ ID)	Corresponding genes from Table 10	RNAi cassette sequence (SEQ ID)
NDG9	complement(join(26259 9..262791,264178..264 595,264677..264995))	PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC107029976 [<i>Solanum pennellii</i>]	XP_015086886.1	94	109	124	g100621_Scaff old0002504	158
NDG10	335270..336187	PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC104217532 [<i>Nicotiana sylvestris</i>]	XP_009766114.1	95	110	125	g100623_Scaff old0002504	159
NDG11	complement(join(19678 7..197330,197459..197 772,197860..198026,19 8131..198293))	PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC104107887 [<i>Nicotiana tomentosiformis</i>]	XP_009615097.1	96	111	126	g100622_Scaff old0002504	160
NDG12	complement(join(34062 6..340850,340943..341 242,341377..342443,34 2827..342891,345833.. 346446,346782..34722 8))	PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC104225535 [<i>Nicotiana sylvestris</i>]	XP_009775660.1	97	112	127	g100626_Scaff old0002504	161
NDG13	join(79509..79744,7986 3..80141,80301..80715)	PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC104095512 [<i>Nicotiana tomentosiformis</i>]	XP_009599950.1	98	113	128	g100627_Scaff old0002504	162
NDG14	complement(join(29760 6..297727,299439..299 551,300249..300331,30 0629..300802,301088.. 301258,301326..30145 0,301535..301636,3017 31..301859,301942..30 2392))	PREDICTED: uncharacterized protein LOC104215965 [<i>Nicotiana sylvestris</i>]	XP_009764210.1	99	114	129	g100628_Scaff old0002504	163
NDG15	join(291110..291242,29 1376..291556,291665.. 292004)	PREDICTED: DNA ligase 1- like [<i>Nicotiana sylvestris</i>]	XP_009785055.1	100	115	130	g100632_Scaff old0002504	164

Table 16: SNP markers flanking Nic1 or Nic2 deletion region. REF refers to the sequence of a reference TN90 allele. ALT refers to an alternative allele associated with the corresponding deletion region. Genotype in the 4 varieties (BU21, HI, LI, and LA) are shown where “00” refers to homozygous for the reference TN90 allele while “11” refers to homozygous for the ALT allele. The polymorphic site in the sequence is denoted by an “X”.

SNP Marker (SEQ ID No.)	Assc'd Locus	Relative Position to the deletion	REF	ALT	BU21	HI	LI	LA	Sequence
131	Nic1	Upstream	C	A	00	00	11	11	ATCATGTCTAATTGATTAAATTGCTGTATTGCTCAAACTGCCTT ATTTGGACTATGTGAXACATGCTAGGTTAGAAATATATGTTTAA ACTTGGTGTGAAATTTAATTTAATTGAGTATT (SEQ ID NO. 131)
132	Nic1	Upstream	C	T	00	00	11	11	GCGGCTGTATACCATTTTGTACGGACCCGAGTGGGCTCACCGTG GCCTCAATCGAGTTTGXGCGGTTTCATAAAGATGGGGTTCAGA GAGTTGGGAGTTTAGAGATTAAAGACCAATACGGT (SEQ ID NO. 132)
133	Nic1	Upstream	T	G	00	00	11	11	GGAAAGCACTCAAGCATCCACTCTTGGAGGTGGTGGGGAGGGT CTGGAATATTATCATTTGXCCTGGTGGCTTCTCCTTTGTCTTTGAG GTACAAATAGGAACCTCATCATCAATATGTCAT (SEQ ID NO. 133)
134	Nic1	Downstream	T	C	00	00	11	11	ACGAAAGGATAAAGTGTGGGTAGCAGAAACAATAATGCCTTCGT CATTCAGTCTTTAACAXATGCCAAGTGCAACAACAATACAATTAA AATTTGTAGTCTCTCTGTATGGTGTGGACTTAC (SEQ ID NO. 134)
135	Nic1	Downstream	C	T	00	00	11	11	ACACCTTCTCCGGGTTAACAGAAATCCATACCTCGGATTCTGG TTCGCAGACTGTAAATAXGGAGTCAATCTTTCTCCTCGATTGGGA TTTGAACCGGTGATTGGGAAATCATAAATTATC (SEQ ID NO. 135)
136	Nic1	Downstream	A	G	00	00	11	11	TAGCTAACAAAGGAATTGGATCAATTGAGAGATTGATTAAACCCA ATTAAAGAGTTTAAACCTXGAGATAGTAAACAACATGACTTGAGCT CTTATCAACAGTTTGGTTGATACCTTTTGGTCT (SEQ ID NO. 136)
137	Nic2	Upstream	T	C	00	11	00	11	TTACATAAATATAAAGTTTAAATGAAAAGTTATACCTTTTGGTC AAACACAAATACCGTAXCAAAATAGTTCGATACGGTTAGGTAT TTTCTTGTGTGGTTCGGTACGGCTTCGATATTAT (SEQ ID NO. 137)
138	Nic2	Upstream	G	A	00	11	00	11	GAAAATACCGACCCGAAAACGGTCGAAAATAACATATTTTAA TTATTCACACCGACTTCXGTCGGTTTGTAAAGATTTAAAAAGAA ATGCAAAATATCACATAAATATATTCCGACCCG (SEQ ID NO. 138)

SNP Marker (SEQ ID No.)	Asse'd Locus	Relative Position to the deletion	REF	ALT	BU21	HI	LI	LA	Sequence
139	Nic2	Upstream	G	A	00	11	00	11	GTCTGCACCTTTTCTTATTGCTTATTGTTTACCCGAAAAATGGATA GAGTTGAAJTTTATACXTAGTCTTTAAAGGGTATGTGGTATAATTTA ATACAAATCGTAAAGAAATAAGTAGAAATATCAA(SEQ ID NO. 139)
140	Nic2	Downstream	G	A	00	11	00	11	TAGGATTTTGACCGTGGTTGGAACTATGTGAAGACAACTCCGG AATAGAGTTTATGTGCTGCTTCTGTAGCTCCATTAGATGATTTTGG ACTTAGGGGCGTGTCGGGATTATGTTTTGGAG(SEQ ID NO. 140)
141	Nic2	Downstream	A	G	00	11	00	11	GTCCCTTACGAAATTTGTCTTCAAATTGATATACTTCTCTTGCTAAA ACACCAACGATCCTTAXCCACAACTCACCCACGAAACCCCTAGCAT AGAACCAACAACCCCTACGGCCCTTAAGAAAC(SEQ ID NO. 141)
142	Nic2	Downstream	T	C	00	11	00	11	GCCTCCCAGCTTAGCAAGAGTTTCATCCGGCATTTTCATTTTCGAT GCTACAAAGGTATCAXGGCAATCCGTCTCATGTGTGGGATTTC GCTCAGTCCAGTTGGACAAGGATCTATCTTAT(SEQ ID NO. 142)

Table 17: SNP markers flanking the ERF-39 like gene which is associated with Nic1 deletion region. Listed are relative position (Pos, Upstream/Downstream), Reference allele in TN90 (REF), Alternate allele (ALT), Genotype in the 4 varieties (BU21, HI, LI and LA BU21), and sequence of the SNP with flanking position are provided in this table. “00” refers to homozygous for the reference TN90 allele while “11” refers to homozygous for the ALT allele and “01” refers to heterozygous. The polymorphic site in the sequence is denoted by an “X”.

SNP Marker (SEQ ID No.)	Assc'd Locus	Relative Position to ERF-39	REF	ALT	BU21	HI	LI	LA	Sequence
143	ERF-39	Upstream	A	G	00	00	01	01	CCAAATTATTTTGACTGTTTGACCA AATAGCGACCAACGTTGGTCGCCA TTTTGATCXTTTGACCAAAATGGCG ACCAACTTTGGTCGCTATATTTGAA AATAAATAAATAAAATAAT (SEQ ID NO. 143)
144	ERF-39	Downstream	TG	T	00	00	11	11	TGTTTCTCAAGAAAATCAGCATCG ATCTTTTCTTTATTATAAAGGTAAT ATAGATGCTXXGGGTATTAAAAGAG GACAAAATATTCTGGCATCATTTGA GATTGCTGAGTGCAATAACA (SEQ ID NO. 144)

Table 18: A comparison of gene-specific primers and flanking SNP markers for genotyping the F₂ population of Example 11 (segregating for *nic1* and *nic2* ((LA Burley 21 x TN 90 LC) (X)), F2_1 to F2_72 plants refer to plant No. 1 to 72 of Table 12). * genotype not resolved; ^a homozygous for either *nic1* or *nic2*; ^b heterozygous for either *nic1* or *nic2*. Shaded cells show plants where genotyping results match between gene-specific primers and flanking SNPs.

Genotyping of Nic1 locus using gene-specific primers for g100614_Scaffold0002504 as in Table 5.									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
A	F2_1	F2_9	F2_17 ^a	F2_25 ^a	F2_33	F2_41	F2_49	F2_57	F2_65
B	F2_2	F2_10	F2_18	F2_26	F2_34	F2_42	F2_50 ^a	F2_58 ^a	F2_66
C	F2_3 ^a	F2_11	F2_19 ^a	F2_27	F2_35 ^a	F2_43	F2_51 ^a	F2_59	F2_67
D	F2_4	F2_12	F2_20	F2_28	F2_36	F2_44	F2_52	F2_60	F2_68
E	F2_5	F2_13	F2_21	F2_29	F2_37	F2_45 ^a	F2_53	F2_61	F2_69 ^a
F	F2_6	F2_14	F2_22	F2_30	F2_38 ^a	F2_46	F2_54	F2_62	F2_70
G	F2_7	F2_15	F2_23	F2_31	F2_39 ^a	F2_47	F2_55	F2_63	F2_71
H	F2_8	F2_16	F2_24 ^a	F2_32	F2_40	F2_48	F2_56	F2_64	F2_72 ^a
KASP genotyping of Nic1 using SNP marker SEQ ID No. 135									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
A	F2_1*	F2_9 ^b	F2_17 ^a	F2_25 ^a	F2_33	F2_41 ^b	F2_49	F2_57 ^b	F2_65*
B	F2_2 ^b	F2_10 ^b	F2_18	F2_26	F2_34	F2_42 ^b	F2_50 ^a	F2_58 ^a	F2_66 ^b
C	F2_3 ^a	F2_11 ^b	F2_19 ^a	F2_27	F2_35 ^a	F2_43 ^b	F2_51 ^a	F2_59 ^b	F2_67 ^b
D	F2_4	F2_12 ^b	F2_20	F2_28 ^b	F2_36 ^b	F2_44 ^b	F2_52 ^b	F2_60 ^b	F2_68 ^b
E	F2_5 ^b	F2_13 ^b	F2_21 ^b	F2_29 ^b	F2_37	F2_45 ^a	F2_53 ^b	F2_61 ^b	F2_69 ^a
F	F2_6 ^b	F2_14	F2_22 ^b	F2_30	F2_38 ^a	F2_46 ^b	F2_54 ^b	F2_62	F2_70 ^b
G	F2_7*	F2_15 ^b	F2_23 ^b	F2_31 ^b	F2_39 ^a	F2_47 ^b	F2_55 ^b	F2_63 ^b	F2_71 ^b
H	F2_8 ^b	F2_16*	F2_24*	F2_32 ^b	F2_40 ^b	F2_48 ^b	F2_56*	F2_64 ^b	F2_72 ^a

Genotyping of Nic2 locus using gene-specific primers for ERF 189 as in Table 5.									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
A	F2_1	F2_9 ^a	F2_17 ^a	F2_25	F2_33 ^a	F2_41 ^a	F2_49 ^a	F2_57	F2_65
B	F2_2	F2_10	F2_18	F2_26	F2_34	F2_42	F2_50	F2_58	F2_66
C	F2_3	F2_11 ^a	F2_19 ^a	F2_27	F2_35	F2_43 ^a	F2_51	F2_59	F2_67
D	F2_4	F2_12 ^a	F2_20	F2_28	F2_36	F2_44	F2_52 ^a	F2_60	F2_68
E	F2_5 ^a	F2_13	F2_21 ^a	F2_29 ^a	F2_37 ^a	F2_45 ^a	F2_53	F2_61	F2_69
F	F2_6	F2_14 ^a	F2_22 ^a	F2_30	F2_38	F2_46 ^a	F2_54	F2_62	F2_70
G	F2_7	F2_15	F2_23	F2_31	F2_39 ^a	F2_47	F2_55	F2_63	F2_71
H	F2_8	F2_16	F2_24 ^a	F2_32	F2_40 ^a	F2_48 ^a	F2_56	F2_64	F2_72 ^a
KASP genotyping of Nic2 using SNP marker SEQ ID No. 137									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
A	F2_1*	F2_9 ^a	F2_17 ^a	F2_25	F2_33 ^b	F2_41 ^a	F2_49 ^a	F2_57 ^b	F2_65
B	F2_2 ^b	F2_10 ^b	F2_18 ^b	F2_26 ^b	F2_34 ^a	F2_42 ^b	F2_50 ^b	F2_58 ^b	F2_66 ^b
C	F2_3 ^b	F2_11 ^a	F2_19 ^a	F2_27	F2_35	F2_43 ^a	F2_51 ^b	F2_59 ^b	F2_67 ^b
D	F2_4	F2_12 ^a	F2_20 ^b	F2_28	F2_36 ^b	F2_44 ^b	F2_52 ^a	F2_60	F2_68 ^b
E	F2_5 ^a	F2_13 ^b	F2_21 ^a	F2_29 ^a	F2_37 ^b	F2_45 ^a	F2_53 ^b	F2_61	F2_69
F	F2_6*	F2_14 ^a	F2_22 ^a	F2_30 ^b	F2_38	F2_46 ^a	F2_54 ^b	F2_62 ^b	F2_70
G	F2_7	F2_15 ^b	F2_23 ^b	F2_31	F2_39 ^a	F2_47 ^b	F2_55 ^b	F2_63	F2_71 ^b
H	F2_8 ^b	F2_16 ^b	F2_24*	F2_32 ^b	F2_40 ^b	F2_48 ^a	F2_56*	F2_64 ^b	F2_72*

CLAIMS

1. A tobacco plant, or part thereof, comprising a mutation in Nic1 locus, a mutation in Nic2 locus, or both, wherein said tobacco plant is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value of at least about 65% of the USDA grade index value of leaves of a control plant when grown in similar growth conditions, wherein said control plant shares an essentially identical genetic background with said tobacco plant except said mutation.
2. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of claim 1, wherein said tobacco plant is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value of 50 or more.
3. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of claim 1, wherein said tobacco plant comprises nicotine at a level below 25% of the nicotine level of a control plant when grown in similar growth conditions, wherein said control plant shares an essentially identical genetic background with said tobacco plant except said mutation.
4. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of claim 1, wherein said tobacco plant comprises a nicotine level less than 2.0%.
5. A tobacco plant, or part thereof, comprising one or more mutations within one or more genes encoding a polypeptide having at least 80% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 49 to 68, 84, 116 to 130, 147, and fragments thereof, wherein said tobacco plant comprises a lower level of nicotine compared to a control tobacco plant without said one or more mutation when grown in similar growth conditions, wherein said mutation is absent from a LA Burley 21 variety.
6. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of claim 5, wherein said tobacco plant comprises nicotine at a level below 20% of the nicotine level in a control tobacco plant without said one or more mutations when grown in similar growth conditions.
7. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of claim 5, wherein said tobacco plant further comprises a mutation in Nic2 locus.

8. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of claim 5, wherein said one or more genes encode a polypeptide having at least 90% identity to a sequence selected from the group consisting of SEQ ID NOs: 53, 68, 116, 117, 147, and fragments thereof.
9. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of claim 5, wherein said tobacco plant is from a variety selected from the group consisting of cigar tobacco, flue-cured tobacco, air-cured tobacco, dark fire-cured tobacco, Galpao tobacco, and Oriental tobacco.
10. A population of the tobacco plants of claim 5.
11. Cured tobacco material from the tobacco plant of claim 5.
12. The cured tobacco material of claim 11, wherein said cured tobacco material comprises a lower level of nicotine compared to cured tobacco material from a control tobacco plant without said mutation.
13. The cured tobacco material of claim 11, wherein said tobacco plant comprises nicotine at a level between 0.2% and 0.6%.
14. The cured tobacco material of claim 11, wherein said cured tobacco material is made by a curing process selected from the group consisting of flue curing, air curing, fire curing, and sun curing.
15. A tobacco product comprising the cured tobacco material of claim 11.
16. The tobacco product of claim 15, wherein said tobacco product is selected from the group consisting of a cigarette, a cigarillo, a non-ventilated recess filter cigarette, a vented recess filter cigarette, a cigar, snuff, pipe tobacco, cigar tobacco, cigarette tobacco, chewing tobacco, leaf tobacco, shredded tobacco, and cut tobacco.
17. The tobacco product of claim 15, wherein said tobacco product is a smokeless tobacco product.
18. A tobacco plant, or part thereof, comprising a mutation selected from the group consisting of a first chromosomal deletion flanked by and not comprising any two of Nic1 Marker Nos. 1

to 207, a second chromosomal deletion flanked by and not comprising any two of Nic2 Marker Nos. 1 to 340, and both said first and said second chromosomal deletions, wherein said tobacco plant is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value comparable to that of leaves of a control plant when grown in similar growth conditions, wherein said control plant shares an essentially identical genetic background with said tobacco plant except said mutation.

19. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of claim 18, wherein said tobacco plant comprises nicotine at a level below 10% of the nicotine level of said control plant when grown in similar growth conditions.
20. The tobacco plant, or part thereof, of claim 18, wherein said tobacco plant is capable of producing leaves having a USDA grade index value of 50 or more.

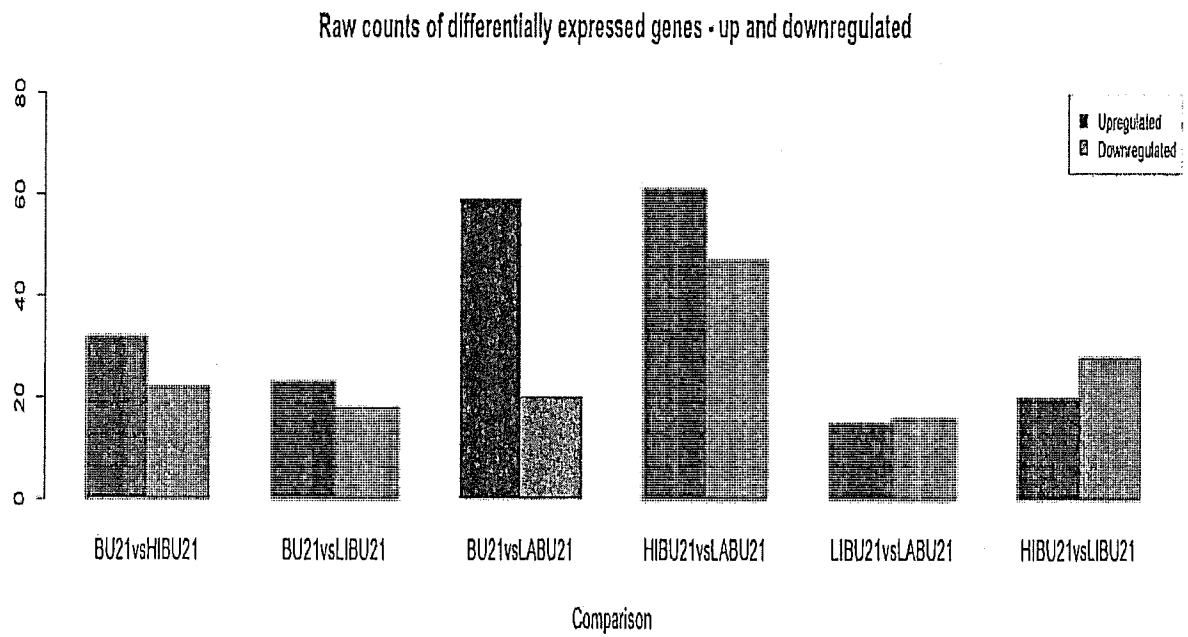
Figure 1

Figure 2

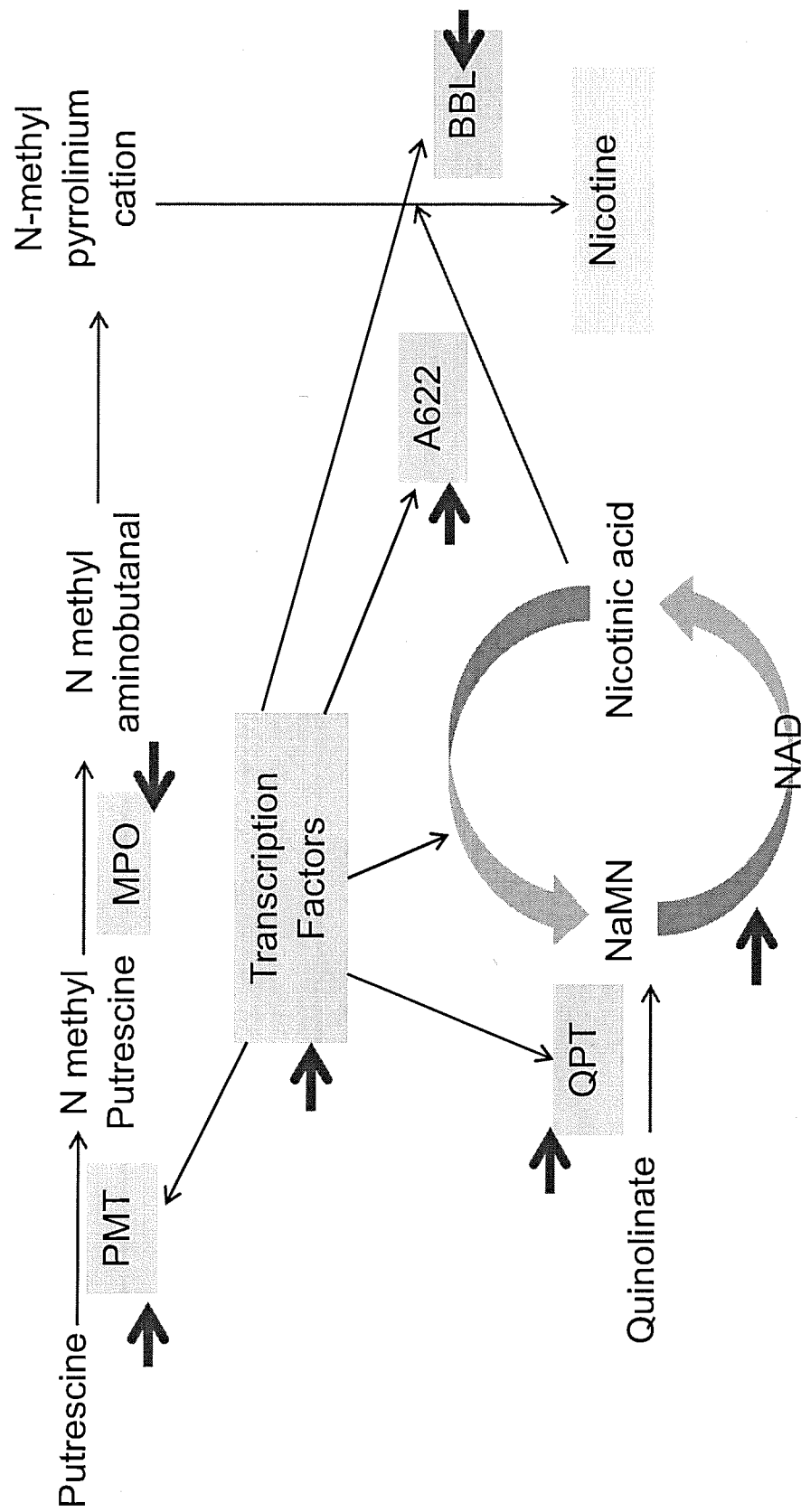


Figure 3

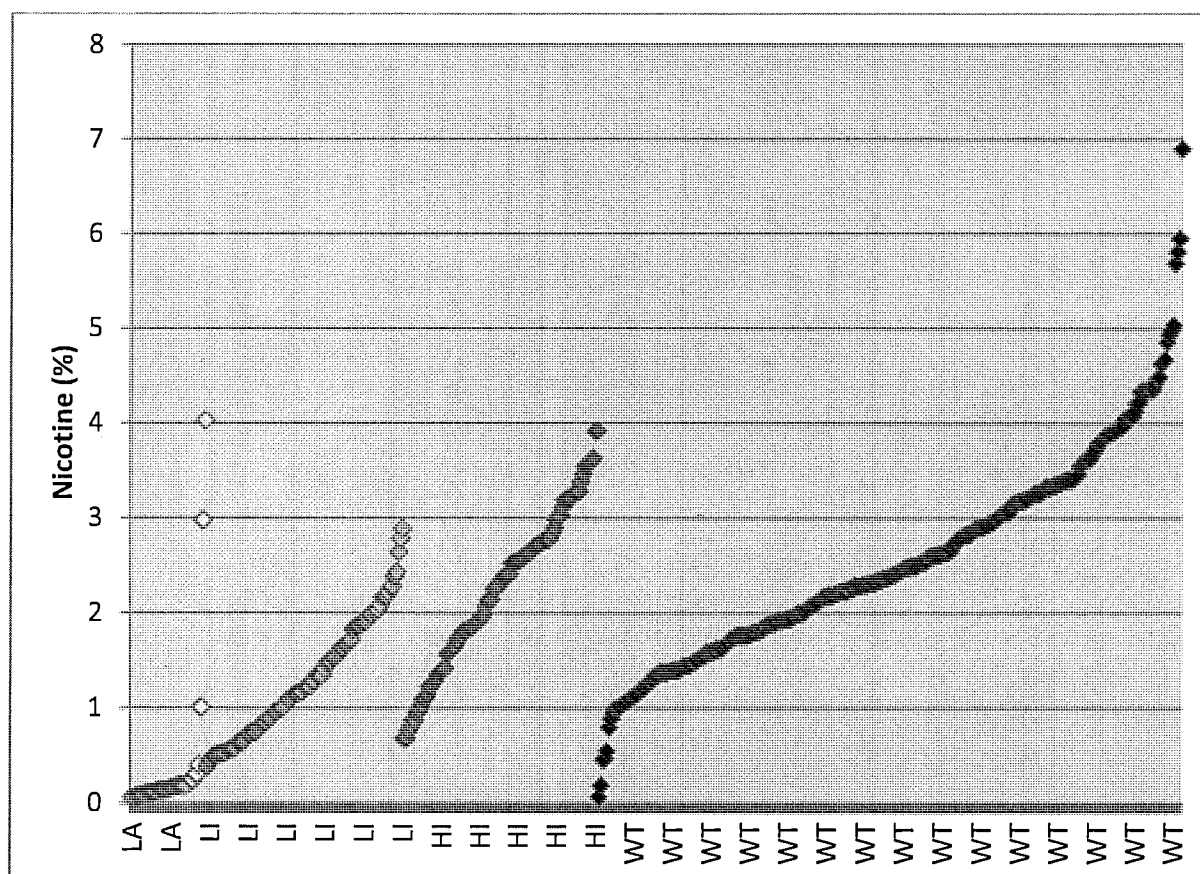


Figure 4

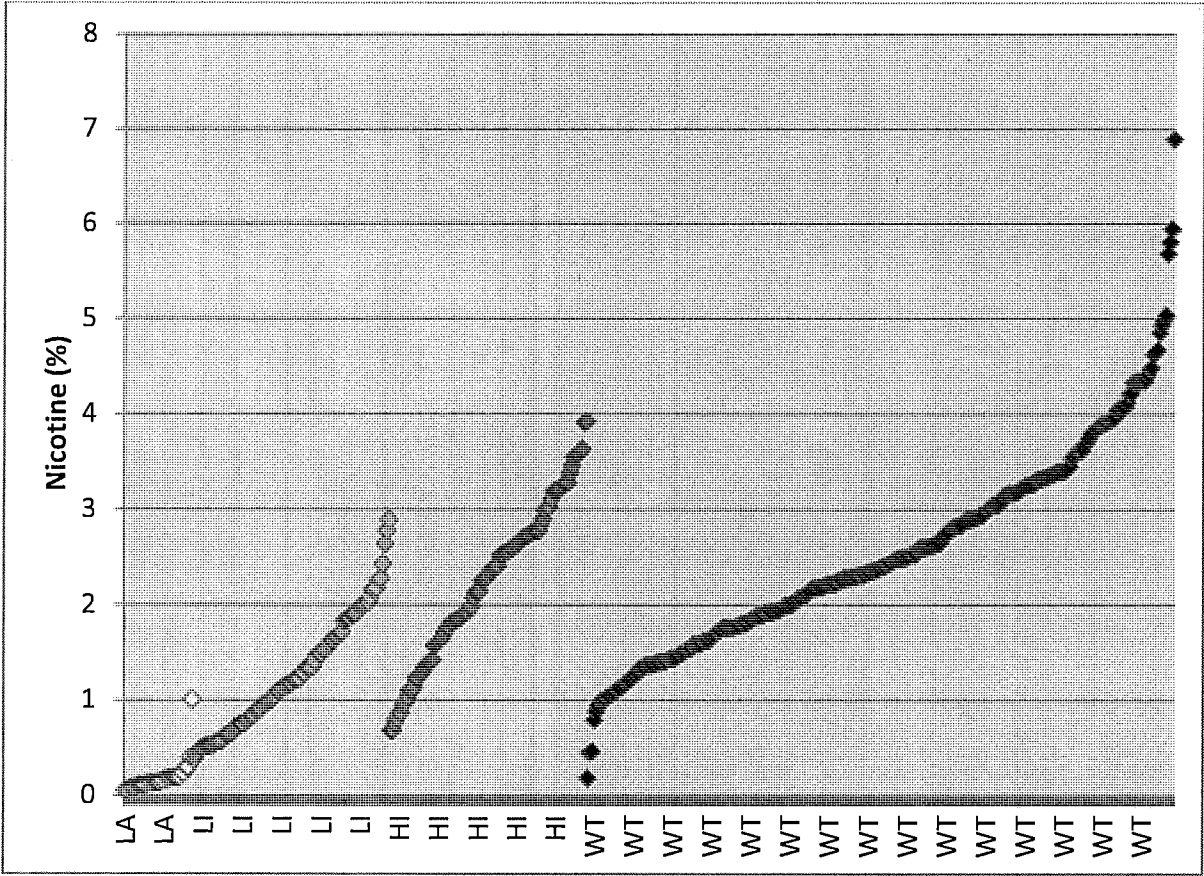
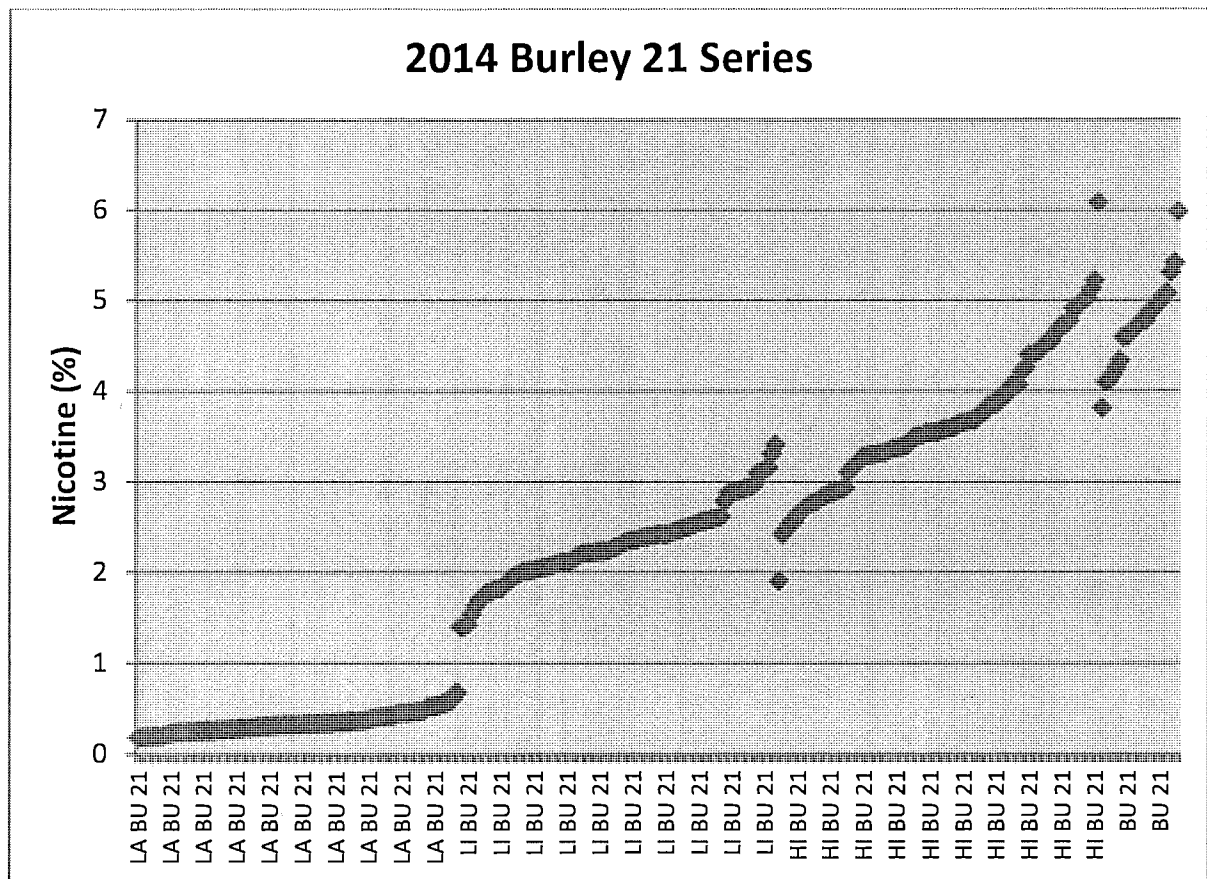


Figure 5



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Figure 6

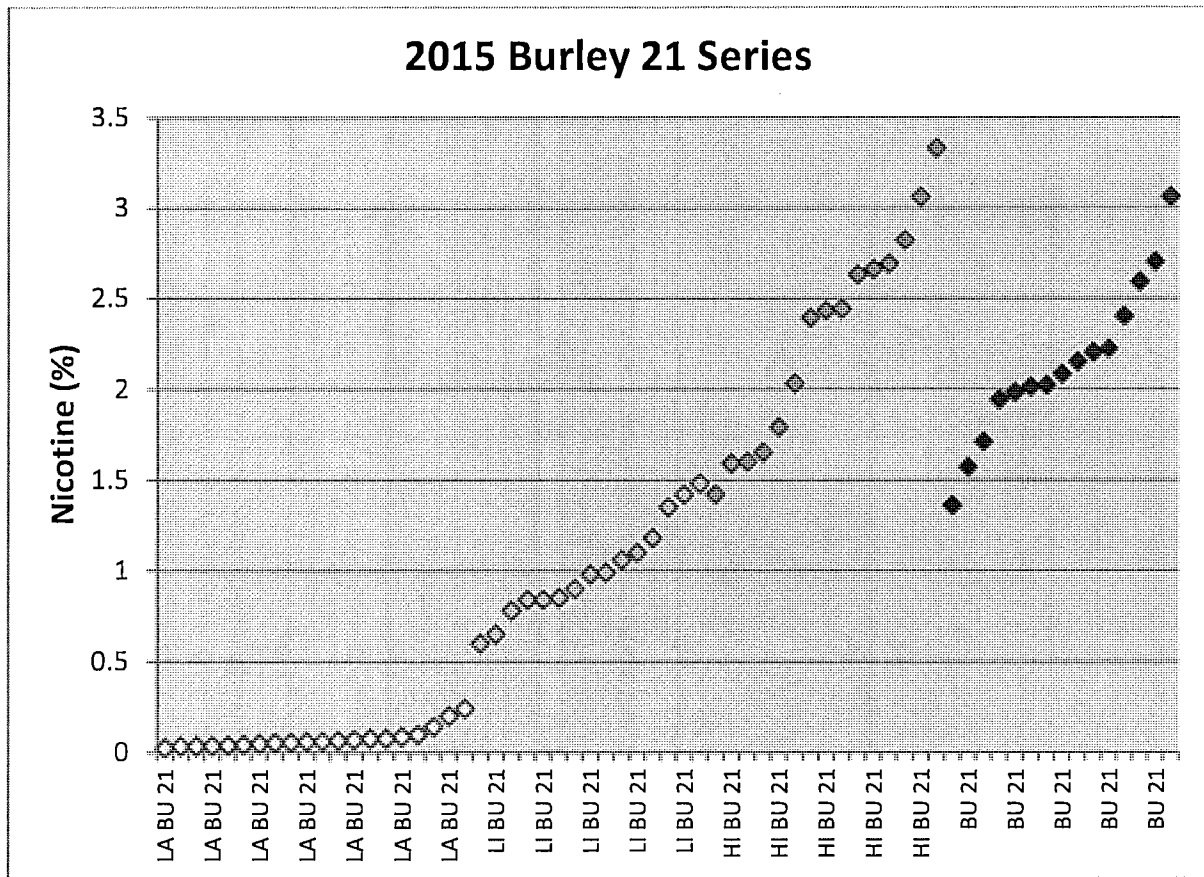
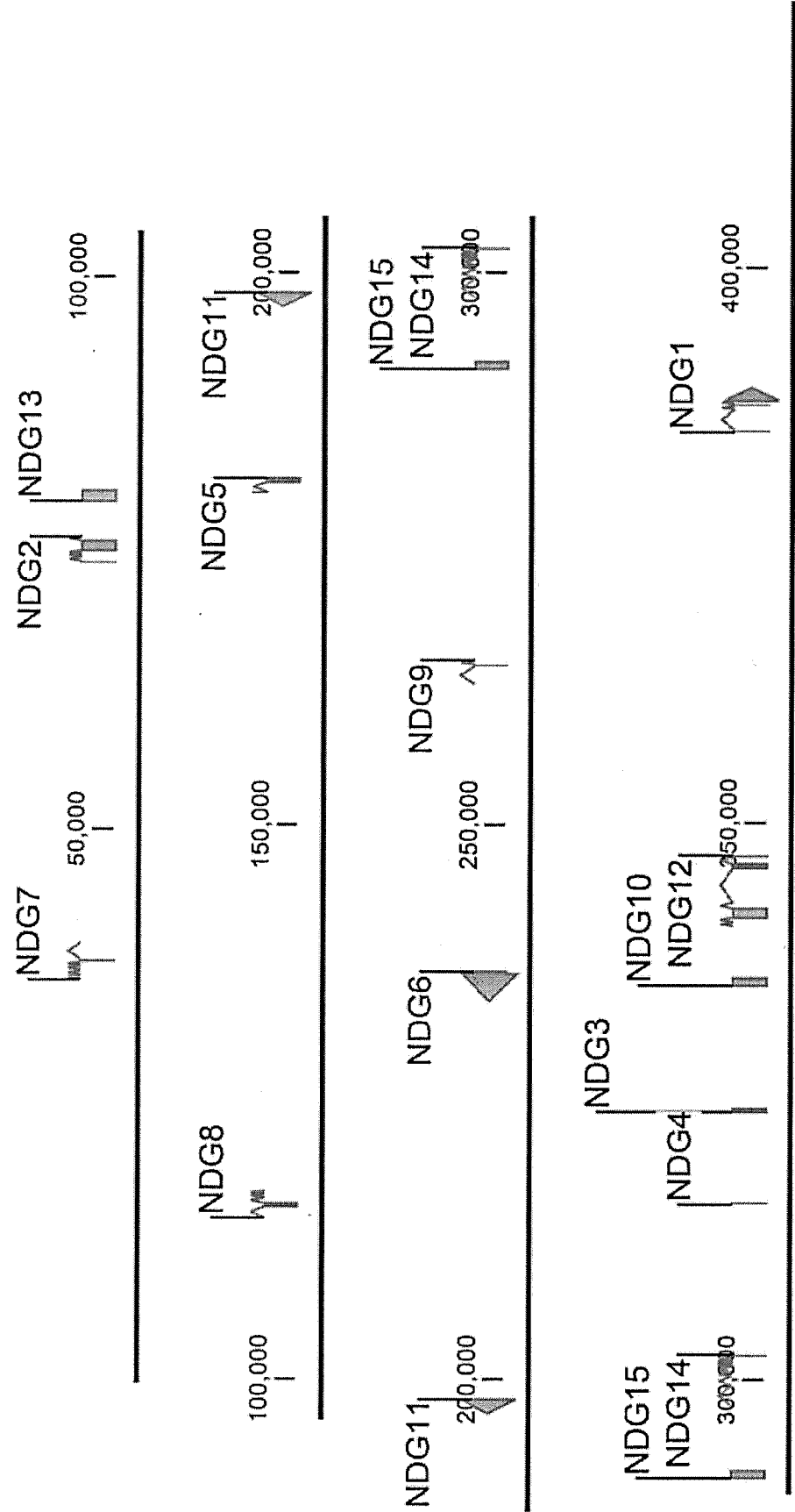


Figure 7



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No

PCT/US2016/039322

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

INV. A01H5/12 C12N15/82
ADD.

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

A01H C12N

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, BIOSIS, Sequence Search, EMBASE, WPI Data

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	HIBI N ET AL: "GENE EXPRESSION IN TOBACCO LOW-NICOTINE MUTANTS", THE PLANT CELL, AMERICAN SOCIETY OF PLANT BIOLOGISTS, US, vol. 6, no. 5, 1 May 1994 (1994-05-01), pages 723-735, XP001027057, ISSN: 1040-4651, DOI: 10.1105/TPC.6.5.723 cited in the application the whole document; table 1 ----- -/--	1-3, 5-12, 14-18,20



Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.



See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents :

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

30 August 2016

Date of mailing of the international search report

09/09/2016

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Kania, Thomas

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/US2016/039322

C(Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
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A	DEBORAH G REED ET AL: "The A and B loci of Nicotiana tabacum have non-equivalent effects on the mRNA levels of four alkaloid biosynthetic genes", PLANT SCIENCE, vol. 167, no. 5, 1 November 2004 (2004-11-01), pages 1123-1130, XP055298397, IE ISSN: 0168-9452, DOI: 10.1016/j.plantsci.2004.06.006 -----	1-20
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A	TSUBASA SHOJI ET AL: "Smoking out the masters: transcriptional regulators for nicotine biosynthesis in tobacco", PLANT BIOTECHNOLOGY, vol. 30, no. 3, 1 January 2013 (2013-01-01), pages 217-224, XP055298278, JP ISSN: 1342-4580, DOI: 10.5511/plantbiotechnology.13.0221a -----	1-20

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Information on patent family members

International application No

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