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(54) **SORGHUM PLANTS HAVING A MUTANT POLYNUCLEOTIDE ENCODING THE LARGE SUBUNIT OF MUTATED ACETOHYDROXYACID SYNTHASE PROTEIN AND INCREASED RESISTANCE TO HERBICIDES**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A sorghum seed comprising in its genome at least one polynucleotide encoding a polypeptide having an alanine to threonine substitution at position 93 of the *sorghum* AHAS protein large subunit. The plant has increased resistance to one or more herbicides, for example from the imidazolinone group, as compared to wild-type sorghum plants. The sorghum plant may comprise in its genome, one, two, three or more copies of a polynucleotide encoding a mutated large subunit of *sorghum* AHAS or a *sorghum* AHAS polypeptide of the invention. In this context, the sorghum plant may be tolerant to any herbicide capable of inhibiting AHAS enzyme activity. For example, the sorghum plant may be tolerant to herbicides of the imidazolinones type, such as imazethapyr, imazapir, and imazapic or to herbicides of the sulfonylurea group.

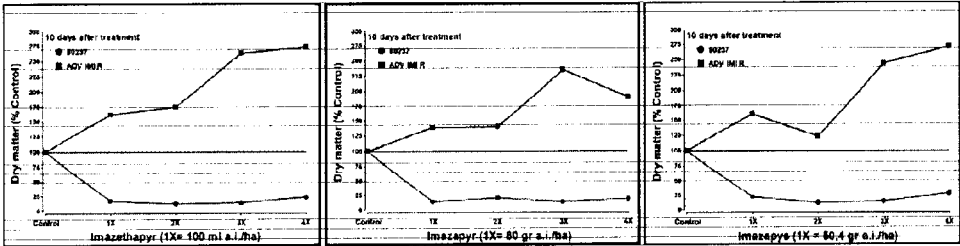


Figure 1

1 SBAHAS-F1 Start Codon 100  
ADV-IM1-R (1) -----  
80237 (1) GTGCCCGCCCAAAACCTCGCCCGCCGCTCCGAGACAGCCGCCGCAACC[REDACTED]GCCACCACCCGCCGCCCGCTGCCGCCCGCTAGCCGGCGCCACTAC  
101 200  
ADV-IM1-R (101) CGCTGGCCCAAGCGAGCGCCGCGSSGCACTCTGTGCGCCGACGGCCGCCCTCGCCCGCCCATCAGGTGCTCAGCGCGCCACCCGGCCAGCGTACGG  
201 300  
ADV-IM1-R (1) -----  
80237 (201) GTGACGGCTCCCGCGCCACCCCGCTCCCGGCGTGGGGCCCGCCAGATCCCGCAAGGGCGCCGACATCTCTGTCGAGGCTTTGAGCGCTGGAGCGTCC  
301 400  
ADV-IM1-R (28) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCAACAGCTCTTCCGCGAGCAAGS  
80237 (301) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCAACAGCTCTTCCGCGAGCAAGS  
401 500  
ADV-IM1-R (128) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCAACAGCTCTTCCGCGAGCAAGS  
80237 (401) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCAACAGCTCTTCCGCGAGCAAGS  
501 600  
ADV-IM1-R (228) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCAACAGCTCTTCCGCGAGCAAGS  
80237 (501) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCAACAGCTCTTCCGCGAGCAAGS  
601 700  
ADV-IM1-R (328) AGTCCACCGCTCCGATCACCAACAATCACTGCTCCGCGAGCTCAGAGCACTCCCGCGCTGTCCGAGCGCTTTCTTATGCTCTCCGCGAGTCC  
80237 (601) AGTCCACCGCTCCGATCACCAACAATCACTGCTCCGCGAGCTCAGAGCACTCCCGCGCTGTCCGAGCGCTTTCTTATGCTCTCCGCGAGTCC  
701 800  
ADV-IM1-R (428) CCGCGGACCGCTCTCTTCTGCAATCCGAGAGCTCCGAGCAGAGATCGCGGTCGCGCTTCCGAGCGCTCCGAGCGCTTTCTTATGCTCTCCGCGAGTCC  
80237 (701) CCGCGGACCGCTCTCTTCTGCAATCCGAGAGCTCCGAGCAGAGATCGCGGTCGCGCTTCCGAGCGCTCCGAGCGCTTTCTTATGCTCTCCGCGAGTCC  
801 900  
ADV-IM1-R (528) CTTCCGAGCGCTCTTCTGCAATCCGAGAGCTCCGAGCAGAGATCGCGGTCGCGCTTCCGAGCGCTCCGAGCGCTTTCTTATGCTCTCCGCGAGTCC  
80237 (601) CTTCCGAGCGCTCTTCTGCAATCCGAGAGCTCCGAGCAGAGATCGCGGTCGCGCTTCCGAGCGCTCCGAGCGCTTTCTTATGCTCTCCGCGAGTCC  
901 1000  
ADV-IM1-R (628) CTTCCGAGCGCTCTTCTGCAATCCGAGAGCTCCGAGCAGAGATCGCGGTCGCGCTTCCGAGCGCTCCGAGCGCTTTCTTATGCTCTCCGCGAGTCC  
80237 (901) CTTCCGAGCGCTCTTCTGCAATCCGAGAGCTCCGAGCAGAGATCGCGGTCGCGCTTCCGAGCGCTCCGAGCGCTTTCTTATGCTCTCCGCGAGTCC  
1001 1100  
ADV-IM1-R (728) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCGAGCAAGS  
80237 (1001) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCGAGCAAGS  
1101 1200  
ADV-IM1-R (828) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCGAGCAAGS  
80237 (1101) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCGAGCAAGS  
1201 1300  
ADV-IM1-R (928) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCGAGCAAGS  
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1301 1400  
ADV-IM1-R (1028) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCGAGCAAGS  
80237 (1301) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCGAGCAAGS  
1401 1500  
ADV-IM1-R (1128) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCGAGCAAGS  
80237 (1401) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCGAGCAAGS  
1501 1600  
ADV-IM1-R (1228) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCGAGCAAGS  
80237 (1501) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCGAGCAAGS  
1601 1700  
ADV-IM1-R (1328) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCGAGCAAGS  
80237 (1601) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCGAGCAAGS  
1701 1800  
ADV-IM1-R (1428) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCGAGCAAGS  
80237 (1701) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCGAGCAAGS  
1801 1900  
ADV-IM1-R (1528) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCGAGCAAGS  
80237 (1801) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCGAGCAAGS  
1901 2000  
ADV-IM1-R (1628) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCGAGCAAGS  
80237 (1901) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCGAGCAAGS  
2001 2100  
ADV-IM1-R (1728) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCGAGCAAGS  
80237 (2001) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCGAGCAAGS  
2101 2200  
ADV-IM1-R (1828) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCGAGCAAGS  
80237 (2101) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCGAGCAAGS  
2201 2274  
ADV-IM1-R (1928) GCGAGCTCTTTCGCTTACCCGCGGCACTGTCCATGAGAGATCCAGAGCACTTACCCCTTCCCGCTCATCCGCGAGCAAGS  
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2274 2274

Figure 2

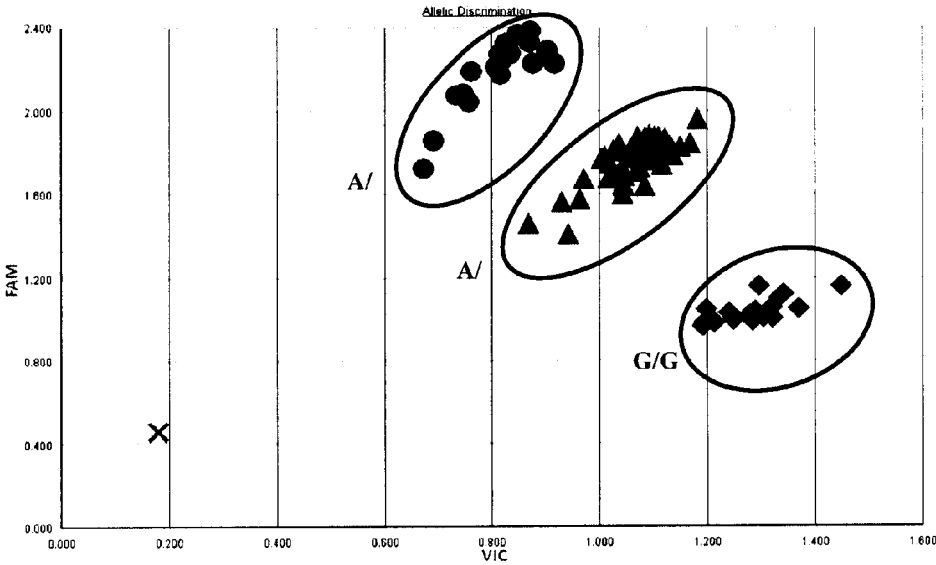


Figure 3

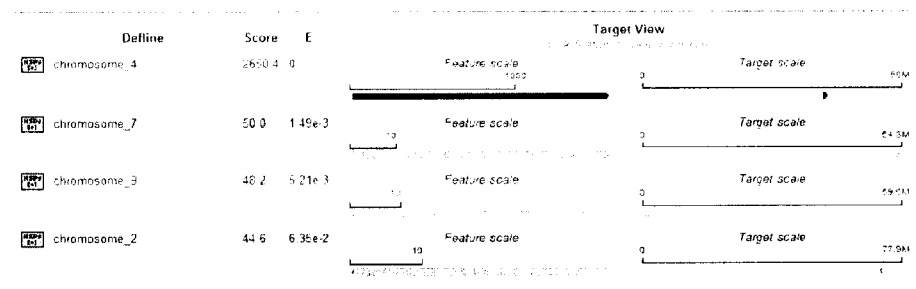


Figure 4

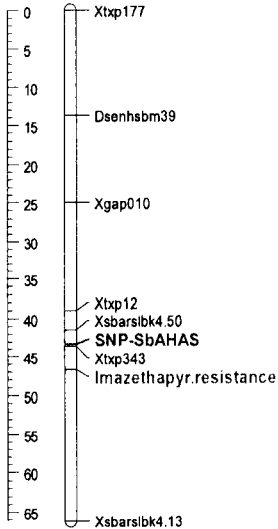


Figure 5

**SORGHUM PLANTS HAVING A MUTANT  
POLYNUCLEOTIDE ENCODING THE LARGE  
SUBUNIT OF MUTATED  
ACETOHYDROXYACID SYNTHASE  
PROTEIN AND INCREASED RESISTANCE TO  
HERBICIDES**

BACKGROUND

[0001] *Sorghum* (*Sorghum* spp.) is a plant genus comprising approximately 20 species of grasses. It is native to tropical and subtropical regions of East Africa and it is grown in every continent for grain for human and animal consumption, being also used as fodder, and for manufacturing alcoholic beverages. As it is gluten-free, *sorghum* is suitable for individuals suffering from celiac disease.

[0002] *Sorghum* is more tolerant to drought and excess soil moisture content than most cereals. It is capable of growing properly under varied soil and weather conditions. Likewise, it responds favorably to irrigation, requiring a minimum of 250 mm during its life cycle, with an optimum irrigation ranging from 400-550 mm.

[0003] The soil must have an appropriate moisture content at the time of planting in order to achieve a rapid and homogeneous emergence and thereby a good crop implantation. The greatest demand of water starts 30 days after emergence and continues until grains are filled, the most critical stages being those of panicle formation and flowering, as water deficiency at this time will result in decreasing yields.

[0004] Furthermore, *sorghum* has the ability of remaining dormant during periods of drought and resumes growth under favorable periods, although these stress situations may affect performance.

[0005] *Sorghum* requires high temperatures for normal development, and consequently it is more sensitive to low temperatures than other crops. A soil temperature of not less than 18° C. is required for germination; and actual active growth of the plant is not achieved until a temperature of 15° C. is reached, the optimum temperature being of about 32° C.

[0006] Acetohydroxyacid synthase (AHAS) is the first enzyme which catalyzes the synthesis of branched amino acids valine, leucine and isoleucine. AHAS is the target of some herbicides such as sulfonylureas, imidazolinones, triazolopyrimidines and pyrimidylxybenzoates. The two former herbicide families are widely used in modern agriculture due to their low toxicity and high efficacy against weeds.

[0007] The imidazolinone family of herbicides comprises imazethapyr, imazaquin, and imazapyr.

Some sulfonylureas present in the market are: metsulfuron-methyl, chlorosulfuron, nicosulfuron, cinosulfuron, imidasulfuron, halosulfuron, rimsulfuron, trisulfuron-methyl, and tribenuron-methyl.

[0008] However, there are plants which are resistant to herbicides of the imidazolinone and/or sulfonylurea families; for example, species such as *Zea mays*, *Arabidopsis thaliana*, *Brassica napus*, *Glycine max*, *Nicotiana tabacum*, and *Oryza sativa* (Sebastian et al., (1989) *Crop Sci.*, 29: 1403-1408; Swanson et al., 1989 *Theor. Appl. Genet.* 78: 525-530; Newhouse et al., (1991) *Theor. Appl. Genet.*, 83: 65-70; Sathasivan et al., (1991) *Plant Physiol.*, 97: 1044-1050; Mourand et al., (1993) *J. Heredity* 84: 91-96; U.S. Pat. No. 5,545,822). A point mutation has been described in sunflower, in the large subunit of AHAS, which confers resistance to herbicides of the type of imidazolinones (WO 2007/0118920).

[0009] Plants resistant to herbicides of the imidazolinone or sulfonylurea type have also been detected. These plants have acquired resistance naturally and have been used for cross-breeding, resulting in herbicide-resistant varieties. From the analysis of resistant plants, a point mutation was determined in the AHAS protein of sunflower resulting in the substitution of the amino acid Ala by Val (White et al., (2003) *Weed Sci.*, 51: 845-853).

[0010] In addition, U.S. Pat. Nos. 4,761,373; 5,331,107; 5,304,732; 6,211,438; 6,211,439; and 6,222,100 disclose plants resistant to imidazolinone herbicides. All these patents generally describe the use of an altered AHAS gene to elicit herbicide resistance in plants, and specifically disclose certain imidazolinone resistant corn lines. U.S. Pat. No. 5,731,180 and U.S. Pat. No. 5,767,361 discuss an isolated gene having a single amino acid substitution in a wild-type monocot AHAS amino acid sequence that results in imidazolinone-specific resistance.

[0011] Patent documents WO 2006/007373 and WO 2006/060634 disclose mutations conferring resistance to herbicides of the imidazolinone type in wheat plants.

[0012] The publication "Amino acids conferring herbicide resistance in tobacco acetohydroxyacid synthase" describes different point mutations in AHAS that confer herbicide resistance (*GM Crops* 1: 2, 62-67; Feb. 16, 2010).

[0013] Patent document U.S. 20100115663 refers to herbicide-resistant sorghum plants achieved by altering acetyl CoA carboxylase genes. Also disclosed are sorghum plants resistant to the herbicide dinitroaniline (U.S. 20100205686) and sorghum plants resistant to the herbicide acetolactate synthase (WO 2008/073800).

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0014] The sorghum plants of the present invention show improved resistance to herbicides, for example herbicides targeting the AHAS enzyme, i.e., imidazolinones and sulfonylureas, as compared to wild-type sorghum plants. In particular, the sorghum plant (*Sorghum bicolor*) of the present invention comprises in its genome at least one polynucleotide. Said polynucleotide encodes a large subunit of AHAS having an alanine to threonine substitution at position 93 of the large subunit of *sorghum* AHAS or an equivalent position, wherein said plant has increased resistance to one or more herbicides, such as herbicides selected from the group of imidazolinones, as compared to wild-type sorghum plants. The sorghum plant may comprise in its genome, one, two, three or more copies of a polynucleotide encoding a mutated large subunit of *sorghum* AHAS or a *sorghum* AHAS polypeptide of the invention. In this context, the sorghum plant may be tolerant to any herbicide capable of inhibiting AHAS enzyme activity, i.e., the sorghum plant may be tolerant to herbicides of the imidazolinone type, such as, without limitation, imazethapyr, imazapyr, and imazapic or to herbicides of the group of sulfonylureas, such as, without limitation, chlorosulfuron, metsulfuron methyl, sulfometuron methyl, chlorimuron ethyl, thiofensulfuron methyl, tribenuron methyl, bensulfuron methyl, nicosulfuron, ethametsulfuron methyl, rimsulfuron, triflurosulfuron methyl, triasulfuron, primisulfuron methyl, cinosulfuron, amidosulfuron, fluzasulfuron, imazosulfuron, pyrazosulfuron ethyl, and halosulfuron.

[0015] In a preferred embodiment, the sorghum plant of the invention which is resistant to herbicides belonging to the group of imidazolinones or sulfonylureas is the sorghum *line*

designated VT11-11331-BK which seeds were deposited with the NCIMB collection under Access No. NCIMB 41870, on Oct. 12, 2011, under the terms of the Budapest Treaty. The mutated VT11-11331-BK plant, parts thereof and its seeds, comprise in their genome the mutated AHAS gene comprising a polynucleotide having the nucleotide sequence set forth in SEQ ID No. 1 encoding the polypeptide or AHAS large subunit having the sequence set forth in SEQ ID No. 2. The amino acid sequence of SEQ ID No. 2 corresponding to the large subunit of AHAS differs in one amino acid from the wild-type amino acid sequence of the large subunit of *sorghum* AHAS (SEQ ID No. 3), said difference comprising an alanine to threonine substitution at position 93 of the large subunit of *sorghum* AHAS, or equivalent positions.

**[0016]** The herbicide-tolerant sorghum plant germoplasm of the invention is useful for introducing the tolerance trait by introgression into other *sorghum* varieties. The sorghum plants of the present invention include progeny and seeds of plants comprising a polynucleotide, where said polynucleotide encodes an AHAS large subunit and has an alanine to threonine substitution at position 93 of said large subunit of *sorghum* AHAS or at an equivalent position, wherein said plant shows an increased resistance to one or more imidazolinone and/or sulfonylurea herbicides as compared to wild-type sorghum plants.

**[0017]** In a preferred embodiment, the herbicide-resistant sorghum plant comprises the resistance traits of NCIMB 41870, and may be a plant as described in NCIMB 41870, a progeny of an NCIMB 41870 plant, a mutant of an NCIMB 41870 plant, and a progeny of an NCIMB 41870 mutant. The plant may be transgenic or non-transgenic and belong to any plant species suitable for agronomical use, or for other uses, such as ornamentals.

**[0018]** Further provided is a sorghum seed, comprising in its genome at least one polynucleotide, wherein said polynucleotide encodes a polypeptide having an alanine to threonine substitution at position 93 of the *sorghum* AHAS protein large subunit. The seed germinates and produces a plant having increased resistance to one or more herbicides of the imidazolinone group as compared to wild-type sorghum plants. In a preferred embodiment said seed is the seed deposited as NCIMB 41870.

**[0019]** Further provided is a method for identifying a plant resistant to herbicides from the group of imidazolinones or sulfonylureas, comprising:

**[0020]** a) supplying a nucleic acid sample from a sorghum plant;

**[0021]** b) amplifying a region corresponding to an AHAS gene from a sorghum plant present in said nucleic acid sample;

**[0022]** c) identifying a sorghum plant resistant to herbicides of the imidazolinone group based on the presence of at least one mutation in said amplified nucleic acid sample that confers resistance to imidazolinone herbicides. In a preferred embodiment, plants comprising at least one mutation in AHAS such as the mutation in NCIMB 41870 are selected, where said at least one mutation in the AHAS gene encodes a polypeptide or large subunit of AHAS comprising a Ala93Thr substitution as compared to the wild-type *sorghum* AHAS amino acid sequence. The plant may be a monocot or a dicot. Preferably the plant is a plant of agronomic interest, such as *sorghum*, rice, corn, soybean, wheat, oat, barley, rye, flax, cotton, sugarcane, sunflower, or the like. The method of identification may employ a specific point mutation SNP marker.

**[0023]** The present invention provides a method for controlling weeds in the near proximity of agronomic plants, for example sorghum plants, where said sorghum plants are resistant to herbicides, such as herbicides from the group of imidazolinones and/or sulfonylureas. In a preferred embodiment, the herbicide is an imidazolinone. The imidazolinone herbicide may be imazethapyr, imazapic, or imazapyr. The plant may exhibit resistance traits such as NCIMB 41870, and it may be a derivative, mutant, or progeny plant thereof.

**[0024]** The present invention provides a polypeptide comprising, without limitation, one or more of the following nucleotide sequences:

**[0025]** the sequence set forth in SEQ ID No. 1,

**[0026]** a nucleotide sequence encoding the polypeptide of SEQ ID No. 2,

**[0027]** a nucleotide sequence encoding a polypeptide having at least 95% sequence identity to the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID No. 2, wherein the polypeptide exhibits herbicide-resistant AHAS activity;

**[0028]** a nucleotide sequence having at least 85% identity to the nucleotide sequence set forth in SEQ ID No. 1, wherein the nucleotide sequence encodes a polypeptide comprising a large subunit of AHAS and exhibits herbicide-resistant AHAS activity,

**[0029]** or complementary sequences thereof.

Preferably the polynucleotide encodes a polypeptide of the large unit of AHAS comprising an Ala93Thr substitution.

**[0030]** The present invention also provides an expression cassette comprising at least one polynucleotide having the following nucleotide sequence: SEQ ID No. 1, a nucleotide sequence encoding the polypeptide set forth in SEQ ID No. 2, a nucleotide sequence encoding a polypeptide having at least 95% sequence identity to amino acid sequence SEQ ID No. 2, wherein the polypeptide exhibits herbicide-resistant AHAS activity; a nucleotide sequence having at least 85% identity to the nucleotide sequence set forth in SEQ ID No. 1, wherein the nucleotide sequence encodes a polypeptide comprising a large subunit of AHAS and exhibits herbicide-resistant AHAS activity, or complementary sequences thereof. Preferably, the polynucleotide encodes a polypeptide of the large unit of AHAS comprising an Ala93Thr substitution; said sequences being operably linked to a nucleotide sequence for conducting expression, for example one or more promoters, enhancers or other known regulatory sequences. The promoter may be a promoter for expression in plants, plant tissues, chloroplasts, animal, bacterial, fungal or yeast cells.

**[0031]** The present invention provides a transformation vector comprising at least one polynucleotide having one of the following nucleotide sequences: a) the nucleotide sequence set forth in SEQ ID No. 1, b) a nucleotide sequence encoding the polypeptide set forth in SEQ ID No. 2, c) a nucleotide sequence encoding a polypeptide having at least 95% sequence identity to the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID No.2, where the polypeptide exhibits herbicide-resistant AHAS activity, d) a nucleotide sequence having at least 85% identity to the nucleotide sequence set forth in SEQ ID No.1, where the nucleotide sequence encodes a polypeptide comprising a large subunit of AHAS and exhibits herbicide-resistant AHAS activity; further comprising operably linked sequences driving the expression of the nucleotide sequence and selectable markers. The vector may be used for transforming bacteria, fungi, yeasts, plant cells or animal cells, being adapted for each particular case.



**[0032]** The present invention provides a transformed plant comprising, integrated in its genome, at least one promoter operably linked to a polynucleotide selected from: a) the nucleotide sequence set forth in SEQ ID No. 1, b) a nucleotide sequence encoding the polypeptide set forth in SEQ ID No. 2; c) a nucleotide sequence encoding a polypeptide having at least 95% sequence identity to amino acid sequence SEQ ID No. 2, where the polypeptide exhibits herbicide-resistant AHAS activity; d) a nucleotide sequence having at least 85% identity to the nucleotide sequence set forth in SEQ ID No. 1, where the nucleotide sequence encodes a polypeptide comprising a large subunit of AHAS and having herbicide-resistant AHAS activity; e) a nucleotide sequence fully complementary to one of nucleotide sequences a) to (d), where the vector further comprises a selectable gene and at least one promoter operably linked to a nucleotide sequence that drives the expression of said nucleotide sequence. The promoter is a promoter driving polypeptide expression in plants, for example in plant tissues or chloroplasts. The transformed plants may be monocots, for example *sorghum*, corn, rice, or wheat; or dicots, for example sunflower, *Arabidopsis*, tobacco or oilseed rape. The transformed plant is resistant to herbicides (imidazolinones and sulfonylureas) over the same wild-type plant when equal amounts of said herbicides are applied to both.

**[0033]** The invention also provides a method for obtaining a herbicide-resistant plant or a plant having increased resistance to a herbicide, said method comprising the steps of i) transforming a plant cell with an expression cassette comprising a polynucleotide ii) regenerating the plant cell to obtain a herbicide-resistant plant, said polynucleotide having at least one of the following nucleotide sequences: a) the nucleotide sequence set forth in SEQ ID No. 1, b) a nucleotide sequence encoding the polypeptide set forth in SEQ ID No. 2, c) a nucleotide sequence encoding a polypeptide having at least 95% sequence identity to amino acid sequence SEQ ID No. 2, where the polypeptide exhibits herbicide-resistant AHAS activity, d) a nucleotide sequence having at least 85% identity to the nucleotide sequence set forth in SEQ ID No. 1, where the nucleotide sequence encodes a polypeptide comprising a large subunit of AHAS and has herbicide-resistant AHAS activity and e) a nucleotide sequence fully complementary to one of the nucleotide sequences a) to (d). The DNA expression cassette comprises at least one promoter for driving the expression of the polypeptide in plants, for example in plant tissues or chloroplasts. The transformed plants may be monocots, for example *sorghum*, corn, rice or wheat; or dicots, for example sunflower, *Arabidopsis*, tobacco, soybean, or oilseed rape. The transformed plant is resistant to herbicides (imidazolinones and sulfonylureas) as compared to the wild-type plant when equal amounts of said herbicides are applied to both. The plant comprises the large subunit of AHAS resistant to herbicides.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

**[0034]** FIG. 1 shows dose-response curves of the imidazolinone-resistant mutant *sorghum* line (ADV-IMI-R) and the original endogamic *sorghum* line 80237 or wild-type line. Assayed herbicides were: imazethapyr, imazapyr and imazapic at rates of 0 (control), 1X, 2X, 3X, and 4X. Herbicidal effect was measured as a percentage of dry matter (DM) of aerial tissues as compared to an untreated control; each value being the average of three assays.

**[0035]** FIG. 2 shows the alignment of mutant ADV-IMI-R AHAS nucleotide sequences and those of the original endogamic *sorghum* line 80237 or wild-type line. G to A substitution of nucleotides is indicated at position +277, which distinguishes both sequences. The different primers used for amplifying overlapping amplicon sequences are underlined.

**[0036]** FIG. 3 shows genotyping assays for a SNP G/A at codon 93 of *sorghum* AHAS gene. The specific SNP-SbA-HAS marker was analyzed in the genotype of 177 F2 progeny plants from ADV-IMI-R×F2 90523. Three clusters were clearly defined and identified as dots (•) corresponding to homozygous plants for the mutant allele (A/A), triangles (▲) corresponding to heterozygous plants (A/G) and diamonds (◆) for homozygous plants of the wild-type allele (G/G).

**[0037]** FIG. 4 shows the results obtained by matching the nucleotide sequence of the *sorghum* AHAS gene (Access No. GM663363.1) with *sorghum* genomic sequences (*Sorghum bicolor*) deposited with the Phytozome nucleotide sequence database (<http://www.phytozome.net/search.php>). This matching shows that the AHAS GM663363.1 sequence exhibits a highly significant homology (value  $e=0$ ) to an AHAS sequence located at chromosome 4 of *sorghum* genome indicating that the gene of interest is present in this linkage group.

**[0038]** FIG. 5 shows a linkage map of *S. bicolor* chromosome 4. Distances between adjacent markers are given in centimorgans (cM). The chromosomal position of SNP-SbA-HAS and of resistance to imazethapyr with reference to the 7 SSRs in chromosome 4 of the genotype of the 177 F2 plants is indicated. The map was built using JoinMap software, using default parameters of LOD=3 and a maximum Kosambi distance of 50 cM.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

**[0039]** In order to obtain herbicide-tolerant plants, endogamic *sorghum* (*Sorghum bicolor*) line 80237 plants were treated with an aqueous solution of ethyl methanesulfonate (EMS). Treated seeds were planted and left for open pollination. Two hundred and seventy three M1 plants were selected and two seeds of each plant were planted in a nursery, thereby obtaining a total of 546 M2 plants. Pollen from one plant of each pair was collected and used for pollinating the other plant of the pair. M3 seeds obtained from each of the 273 pollinated M2 plants were harvested. A total of 273 furrows were planted with the M3 progeny. Fifty plants from each M3 furrow were sprayed with 100 ml L a.i./ha of imazethapyr. Sixty eight plants from the furrows showed normal growth and absence of symptoms after the treatment with herbicide and were considered as resistant to the herbicide and identified as VT09-9754. The genealogy of the resistant plants from the furrows was identified and they were designated 80237EMS2-192 (hereinafter referred to as ADV-IMI-R). Herbicide-tolerant M7 mutant plants and seeds selected from the original ADV-IMI-R mutant (designated VT11-11331-BK) were obtained and deposited with the NCIMB collection with Access No. NCIMB 41870, under the terms of the Budapest Treaty, on Oct. 12, 2011.

**[0040]** The present invention is not limited to sorghum plants mutated with EMS. Within the scope of the present invention are sorghum plants obtained by other mutation methods, for example methods such as radiation and chemical mutagens. Herbicide-resistant mutant plants can also be obtained by means of a process of selective pressure on cells cultured with a herbicide and selection of resistant cells to

generate a herbicide-resistant plant. Details of mutation and breeding methods can be found in “Principles of Cultivar Development” Fehr, 1993, Macmillan Publishing Company, the disclosure of which is included herein by reference.

[0041] Subsequently, the effect to herbicide spraying on mutant imidazolinone-resistant plants ADV-IMI-R (original mutation) was compared to the response of endogamic *sorghum* line 80237 (Advanta proprietary elite line). To that end, plants were treated on the field with three herbicides belonging to the imidazolinone family: imazethapyr, imazapyr, and imazapic. Four different rates were assayed: 1X, 2X, 3X, and 4X for each of the herbicides. The recommended field application rate (1X) for each herbicide is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Recommended field application rate for each herbicide		
Herbicide	Trade name	Recommended rate (1X)
Imazethapyr	Pivot® (BASF)	100 ml a.i./ha
Imazapyr	Clearsol DF® (BASF)	80 g a.i./ha
Imazapic	Cadre® (BASF)	50.4 g a.i./ha

[0042] Ten days after spraying, all plants were assayed for dry matter (DM) in aerial tissues. The results are shown in FIG. 1.

[0043] The response of the ADV-IMI-R mutant of the invention was compared to that of endogamic line 80237. Table 2 shows the effect of different rates of imazethapyr, imazapyr, and imazapic expressed as a percentage of dry matter as compared to the untreated control (DM % Control). The disclosed values are the average of three experiments.

TABLE 2

Herbicide	Rate	DM % Control	
		80237	ADV-IMI-R
Untreated control	0X	100	100
Imazethapyr	1X	17	162
	2X	12	175
	3X	14	263
	4X	23	273
Imazapyr	1X	14	139
	2X	21	140
	3X	14	235
	4X	19	191
Imazapic	1X	22	161
	2X	13	123
	3X	15	244
	4X	28	272

[0044] These results show that the ADV-IMI-R mutant of the invention is resistant to the three tested herbicides of the imidazolinone group, even at a rate of 4X. On the contrary, the original endogamic line 80237 is clearly sensitive to all the herbicides, even when the recommended rate (1X) is applied.

[0045] As can be seen, the herbicide-resistant sorghum plant of the present invention is resistant to herbicides of the imidazolinone group, such as, imazethapyr, imazapic, or imazapyr.

[0046] The imidazolinone-resistant sorghum plants may be sprayed with amounts which are 4 times the recommended amounts of use of any of the group of known imidazolinone herbicides. The resistant plant may have, for example, the resistance traits as observed in plants from NCIMB 41870

seeds, or it may be a plant derived therefrom, a progeny, or other plants comprising in their genome at least one polynucleotide encoding a polypeptide having an alanine to threonine substitution at position 93 of the sorghum AHAS protein or at an equivalent position, said plant having increased resistance to one or more herbicides from the imidazolinone group as compared to wild-type sorghum plants.

[0047] Furthermore, those of ordinary skill will recognize that such amino acid positions can vary depending on whether amino acids are added or removed, e.g., from the N-terminal end of an amino acid sequence. By “equivalent position” it is intended to mean a position that is within the same conserved region as the exemplified amino acid position.

[0048] In the present invention the terms “tolerant” to a herbicide and “resistant” to a herbicide have the same meaning and an equivalent scope when used in relation to herbicides such as imidazolinones or sulfonylureas.

[0049] The present invention provides plants, plant cells, plant tissues showing resistance to effective amounts of herbicides. By “effective amounts” is meant amounts of herbicide capable of inhibiting the growth of wild-type plants, plant cells or tissues but which do not produce severe effects on resistant plants, plant cells or plant tissues. An effective amount of a herbicide is the recommended amount for eliminating weeds. A wild-type plant, cell or tissue is one that does not exhibit herbicide resistance traits, for example a herbicide belonging to the group of imidazolinones or sulfonylureas. The term “plant” encompasses a plant in any stage, or plant parts, where said plant parts may be seeds, leaves, flowers, stems, tissues or organs, well known to a skilled botanist.

[0050] In order to detect the mutation, the mutated *sorghum* AHAS gene of the invention which encodes a polypeptide having acetohydroxyacid synthase activity was sequenced, wherein said AHAS polypeptide or large subunit is herbicide-resistant.

[0051] A comparison of the AHAS gene DNA sequence from mutated plants with the AHAS gene DNA sequences from wild-type sorghum plants identified a point mutation by which a G nucleotide at nucleotide position +277 changes into A, which distinguishes the original *sorghum* 80237 line (wild-type) from the ADV-IMI-R mutant of the invention. When AHAS amino acid sequences from mutant and wild-type lines were deduced it was observed that the nucleotide substitution (GCG by ACG of SEQ ID No. 1) encoded a mutated polypeptide at codon 93 and produced an alanine to threonine (Ala93Thr) substitution in the polypeptide (SEQ ID No. 2) exhibiting acetohydroxyacid synthase activity and corresponds to the large subunit of *sorghum* AHAS protein of the mutated ADV-IMI-R line.

[0052] Within the scope of the present invention are plants, plant parts, seeds, progeny thereof, transgenic plants or the like comprising a polynucleotide encoding a polypeptide having an alanine-to-threonine (Ala93Thr) substitution at position 93 of said polypeptide or at an equivalent position of another AHAS enzyme belonging to different species.

[0053] Within the scope of the present invention is a polynucleotide or a polypeptide having a sequence identity of at least 85%, 95%, or 98%. Sequence identity percent is determined by alignment of two amino acid sequences or two nucleotide sequences. Alignment percentage between two sequences may be calculated, for example, using the following formula:

$$\left(\frac{\text{amount of identical positions}}{\text{total amount of overlapping positions}}\right) \times 100$$

**[0054]** Alignment percentage between two sequences is determined using different mathematical algorithms, for example, the algorithms included in the NBLAST and XBLAST programs of Altschul et al., (1990) *J. Mol. Biol.* 215: 403. When utilizing BLAST, Gapped BLAST, and PSI-Blast programs, the default parameters of the respective programs (e.g., XBLAST and NBLAST) can be used. See <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov>. Another preferred, non-limiting example of a mathematical algorithm utilized for the comparison of sequences is the algorithm of Myers and Miller (1988) *CABIOS* 4:11-17. Such an algorithm is incorporated into the ALIGN program (version 2.0), which is part of the GCG sequence alignment software package. When utilizing the ALIGN program for comparing amino acid sequences, a PAM120 weight residue table, a gap length penalty of 12, and a gap penalty of 4 can be used. Alignment may also be performed by manual inspection.

**[0055]** The present invention comprises polynucleotides and proteins conferring herbicide resistance. It is understood that when reference is made to a herbicide-resistant polynucleotide it means a polynucleotide encoding a herbicide-resistant AHAS protein. Herbicide-resistant AHAS proteins may be natural or mutant and they confer resistance to herbicides belonging to the group of imidazolinones or sulfonyleureas.

**[0056]** Inheritance of resistance to imidazolinones, for example imazethapyr, was assessed in a segregating F2 *sorghum* population generated by crossing an imazethapyr susceptible line with the ADV-IMI-R mutant. The F2 plants thus obtained were sprayed with imazethapyr (Pivot®, BASF) at a rate of 3X, 20 days in stage V6 after emergence and phenotypic symptoms were assessed 10 days after treatment. The results are provided in Table 3.

TABLE 3

Distribution of plants based on phenotypic rating		
Phenotype	Phenotypic rating	Amount of F2 progeny
No damage	1	50
Chlorotic	2	84
Death	3	43
		177

**[0057]** The results show that the F2 plant population could be classified based on visual symptoms according to a phenotype scoring that allowed for grouping individuals into three phenotypic categories: plants with no damage, chlorotic plants and dead plants.

**[0058]** Sequencing showed that the herbicide-tolerant *sorghum* mutant of the invention had a point mutation in the polypeptide having acetohydroxyacid synthase activity or the large subunit of AHAS protein. The nucleotide sequence set forth in SEQ ID No. 1 shows that nucleotide G is changed to A at nucleotide position +277 (corresponding to codon 93) which distinguishes the *sorghum* original endogamic line 80237 (susceptible to herbicides) from the induced ADV-IMI-R mutant of the invention. This molecular marker was designated SNP-SbAHAS.

**[0059]** In order to determine the usefulness of the SNP-SbAHAS marker for detecting potentially herbicide-resistant plants, plant parts or seeds, 177 plants from an F2 population generated by crossing the herbicide-resistant ADV-IMI-R mutant (selection VT09-9754-48-6-BK) with the herbicide-

susceptible endogamic line 90523 (herein designated population ADV-IMI-R×90523 F2) were tested. FIG. 3 shows as an example the allelic discrimination of some plants from the F2 population. The two tested controls were grouped in the expected clusters (ADV-IMI-R mutant and wild-type 90523, homozygous resistant and homozygous susceptible, respectively). These data confirm that the molecular marker SNP-SbAHAS is useful for distinguishing the three allelic combinations at nucleotide position +277 of the polynucleotide encoding a polypeptide having acetohydroxyacid synthase activity or the large subunit of *sorghum* AHAS protein.

**[0060]** Those skilled in the art may, in view of the disclosure of the SNP-SbAHAS marker and its use, identify herbicide-resistant plants, for example to herbicides belonging to the group of imidazolinones and/or sulfonyleureas, e.g., imazethapyr, imazapic, or the like. The identification method may be, in addition to the method described herein, any other known method, see for example ASA (Soleimani et al., (2003) *Plant Mol Biol Rep* 21: 281-288), PAMSA (Gaudet et al., (2007) *Plant Mol Biol Rep* 25: 1-9), SSCP (Germano and Klein (1999) *Theor Appl Genet* 99: 37-49) or TaqMan® (Jones et al., (2008) *Pest Management Science* 64: 12-15).

**[0061]** The correlation between resistance phenotypes and the number of mutant alleles was analyzed using the SNP-SbAHAS marker. To that end, chlorosis and death phenotypes of individual plants from the F2 progeny (ADV-IMI-R×90523) were studied after spraying with imazethapyr. Concomitantly, the genotype of the SNP-SbAHAS marker was studied. The results are shown in Table 4. The correlation between the molecular marker SNP-SbAHAS and resistance to imazethapyr (measured as a rating of phenotypes) was determined using the Chi-square Independence test. The test resulted in a probability  $p=1.948e^{-46}$  indicative of a highly significant correlation between the induced mutation in the AHAS gene (genotyped using the specific SNP-SbAHAS marker) and resistance to imazethapyr in accordance with phenotype and genotype co-segregation.

TABLE 4

Phenotypes and ratings of resistance to Imazethapyr for the ADV-IMI-R × 90523 F2 progeny based on the analysis of SNP-SbAHAS.				
Phenotype	score	Amount of F2 individuals for each genotype		
		A/A	A/G	G/G
No damage	1	37	13	50
Chlorotic	2	1	83	84
Death	3		43	43
		38	96	177

A/A homozygous AHAS mutant;

A/G heterozygous;

G/G wild-type homozygous

**[0062]** Further, genetic mapping of herbicide-resistance and the specific SNP-SbAHAS marker was carried out. Based on the *sorghum* AHAS sequence disclosed in GenBank (Access No. GM663363.1, SEQ ID No. 4), a BLAST analysis was carried out to match *Sorghum bicolor* DNA sequence with the Phytozome database (<http://www.phytozome.net/search.php>). The results shown in FIG. 4 indicate that the AHAS sequence associated with resistance to herbicides belonging to the group of imidazolinones is located in chro-

mosome 4 of *Sorghum bicolor* genome. A fingerprinting (genotyped) procedure based on this information was carried out for the mutated ADV-IMI-R line of the invention and endogamic 90253 line using various SSRs-type DNA molecular markers. Seven polymorphic SSRs located in chromosome 4 were selected for genotyping (Mace, E S et al., *A consensus genetic map of sorghum that integrates multiple component maps and high-throughput Diversity Array Technology (DArT) markers*, *BMC Plant Biology*, 2009, 9: 13; Srinivas, G et al., *Exploration and mapping of microsatellite markers from subtracted drought stress ESTs in Sorghum bicolor* (L.), Moench. *Theor. Appl. Genet.* 2009, 118: 703-717; Ramu, P et al., *In silico mapping of important genes and markers available in the public domain for efficient sorghum breeding*, *Mol Breeding* 2010, 26: 409-418; [http://www.lbk.ars.usda.gov/psgd/sorghum/2009SorghumSEAMs\\_LBKARS.xls](http://www.lbk.ars.usda.gov/psgd/sorghum/2009SorghumSEAMs_LBKARS.xls))

**[0063]** With the results of this procedure it was possible to genetically map both the SNP-SbAHAS marker and the resistant phenotype, showing that the resistance to imidazolinones and the specific SNP-SbAHAS marker were located in chromosome 4 flanked by the previously identified SSRs in chromosome 4 of *Sorghum bicolor* (FIG. 5).

**[0064]** The polynucleotide of the invention (SEQ ID No. 1) may be introduced in plants for obtaining transgenic plants. There are different methods for introducing a polynucleotide in plants, particularly in plants of agronomic interest, e.g., corn, soybean, *sorghum*, wheat, sugarcane, flax, sunflower or other plants; vegetables, trees, or ornamental plants. Methods for introducing polynucleotides to obtain transgenic plants are well-known in the art, and recombinant methods may also be used.

**[0065]** There are different methods for plant transformation, for example using vectors (An, G. et al., (1986) *Plant Physiol.* 81: 301-305; Fry, J., et al., (1987) *Plant Cell Rep.* 6: 321-325; Block, M. (1988) *Theor. Appl. Genet.*, 76: 767-774; Hinchee, et al., (1990) *Stadler. Genet. Symp.*, 203212.203-212; Barcelo, et al., (1994) *Plant J.*, 5: 583-592; Becker, et al., (1994) *Plant J.*, 5: 299-307; Borkowska et al., (1994) *Acta Physiol Plant.*, 16: 225-230; Christou, et al., (1992) *Trends Biotechnol.*, 10: 239-246; D'Halluin, et al., (1992) *Bio/Technol.*, 10: 309-314; Dhir, et al., (1992) *Plant Physiol.*, 99: 81-88; Casas et al., (1993) *Proc. Nat. Acad. Sci. USA* 90: 11212-11216; Dong, J. A. and Mchughen, A. (1993) *Plant Sci.*, 91: 139-148; Golovkin, et al., (1993) *Plant Sci.*, 90: 41-52; *Guo Chin Sci., Bull.*, 38: 2072-2078; Asano, et al., (1994) *Plant Cell Rep.*, 13; Christou, P. (1994) *Agro. Food. Ind. Hi Tech.*, 5: 17-27; Eapen et al., (1994) *Plant Cell Rep.*, 13: 582-586; Hartman, et al., (1994) *Bio-Technology* 12: 919923; Christou, P. (1993) *In Vitro Cell. Dev. Biol.-Plant*; 29P: 119-124; Davies, et al., (1993) *Plant Cell Rep.*, 12: 180-183; Ritala, et al., (1994) *Plant. Mol. Biol.* 24:317-325; and Wan, Y. C. and Lemaux, P. G. (1994) *Plant Physiol.*, 104:3748).

**[0066]** Some methods for transforming plants and genetic engineering techniques are described in Sambrook, et al., (1989) *Molecular cloning, A laboratory manual*, Cold Spring Harbor Press, Plainview, N.Y.; Ausubel F M, et al., *Current Protocols in Molecular Biology*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, N.Y.

**[0067]** The vector may also be introduced using ballistic particle acceleration techniques such as described in U.S. Pat. No. 4,945,050 and Casas et al., *Proc. Natl. Sci., USA*, 90: 11212, 1993

**[0068]** Plants transformed, for example, with the polynucleotide of the invention express herbicide-resistant AHAS proteins and exhibit resistance traits to herbicides such as imidazolinones and/or sulfonylureas. By "herbicide-resistant AHAS proteins" are meant proteins exhibiting an AHAS activity which is higher than that of wild-type AHAS activity when in the presence of a herbicide interfering with AHAS activity at concentrations at which the herbicide interferes with AHAS activity of the wild-type AHAS protein.

**[0069]** The polynucleotide sequence of the invention may be included in an expression cassette for expressing the resistant AHAS protein in a plant of interest, for example of agronomic interest. The cassette comprises a regulatory sequence operably linked, e.g., to at least one promoter. Promoters are well known in the art, and may be, e.g., constitutive, inducible, tissue-specific, chloroplast-specific promoters, all of them being functional in plants. The cassette further comprises transcriptional termination sequences known in the art. The cassette may comprise various regulatory sequences in order to improve expression efficiency of the herbicide-resistant AHAS polynucleotide, for example enhancers such as introns, viral sequences or the like; or may comprise other polynucleotide sequences of interest different from the polynucleotide of the invention, bound or not to said polynucleotide; or leader sequences.

**[0070]** Promoters include, but are not limited to, constitutive, inducible, tissue- or organelle-specific promoters, such as the 35S promoter, a wound- or chemical-inducible promoter, a heat shock promoter, a tetracycline-inducible promoter or the like (Chao et al. 1999, *Plant Physiol.*, 120: 979; U.S. Pat. No. 5,187,267, U.S. Pat. No. 5,057,422).

**[0071]** Also known by those skilled in the art are suitable transcription terminators which may be of use in plants, see, e.g., Odell, et al., 1985, *Nature* 313: 810; Sanfacon, et al., *Genes Dev.*, 5: 141, 1990; Munroe, et al., 1990 *Gene* 91: 151; Rosenberg et al., 1987, *Gene* 56: 125; Joshi, et al., *Nucleic Acid Res.*, 15: 9627, 1987.

**[0072]** "Operably linked" is intended to refer to a functional linkage between a promoter and a second sequence. The promoter sequence initiates and mediates transcription of the DNA sequence corresponding to the second sequence. The term "operably linked" means that the nucleic acid sequences being linked are contiguous and, where necessary to join two protein coding regions, contiguous and in the same reading frame. The cassette may be a multiple expression cassettes.

**[0073]** The polynucleotide of the invention may be attached to other polynucleotides in the form of a fusion of polynucleotides or separately. The other polynucleotide(s) may encode, e.g., herbicide-resistant, insect-resistant or other plant parts which are well-known by those skilled in the art.

**[0074]** To improve expression in plants, the polynucleotide of the invention may be modified, for example by including plant-preferred codons, deleting sequences such as introns or deleterious sequences. Also, within the scope of the present invention is a polynucleotide encoding the resistant AHAS polypeptide of the invention which has been mutated, and exhibits, e.g., deletions or insertions or other mutations different from the one described herein. By "mutated polynucleotide" is meant a polynucleotide having permanent changes in its nucleotide sequence.

**[0075]** The polynucleotide of the invention may be altered by substitutions, deletions, truncations, and insertions. Methods for such manipulations are generally known in the art.

Methods for mutagenesis and nucleotide sequence alterations are well known in the art (Kunkel (1985) *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci., USA* 82: 488-492; Kunkel et al., (1987) *Methods in Enzymol.*, 154: 367-382; Walker and Gaastra, eds., (1983) *Techniques in Molecular Biology* (MacMillan Publishing Company, New York) and the references cited therein. Amino acid substitutions that do not affect biological activity of the protein of interest may be found in Dayhoff et al., (1978) *Atlas of Protein Sequence and Structure* (Natl. Biomed. Res. Found., Washington, D.C.), herein incorporated by reference. [0076] The DNA comprising the AHAS polynucleotide of the invention may be introduced in different plants as part of a vector. The choice of a suitable vector depends on the method intended to be used for the transformation and the plant to be transformed. Those skilled in the art are well aware of different vectors, e.g., Ti and/or Ri. T-DNA is also used as flanking regions for integrating Ti or Ri vectors (WO 84/02913, Herrera-Estrella et al., 1983, *Nature* 303: 209; Horsch et al., 1984, *Science* 223: 496; Fraley et al., 1983, *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci., USA* 80: 4803).

[0077] The vector may comprise an expression cassette and other nucleotide sequences, for example selectable markers such as markers conferring resistance to antibiotics or herbicides and sequences for driving the expression of polynucleotide(s) of interest in plants, e.g., the AHAS large subunit polypeptide of SEQ ID No. 2.

[0078] A vector comprising a polynucleotide encoding the resistant AHAS polypeptide of the invention may be useful for obtaining a transgenic plant which is resistant to herbicides of the type of imidazolinones and sulfonyleureas. The transformed plants may be any type of plants such as dicots and monocots, among which are, without limitation, plants of agronomic interest such as sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*, *Sorghum vulgare*), maize (*Zea mays*), *Brassica* sp. (e.g., *B. napus*, *B. rapa*, *B. juncea*), alfalfa (*Medicago Sativa*), rice (*Oryza sativa*), rye (*Secale cereale*), millet (*Pennisetum glaucum*), (*Panicum miliaceum*), (*Setaria italica*), (*Eleusine coracana*), sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*), wheat (*Triticum aestivum*, *T. Turgidum* ssp. *durum*), soybean (*Glycine Max*),

On the contrary, it should be clearly understood that other embodiments, modifications and equivalents of the invention may be possible after reading the present description, which someone skilled in the art could suggest without departing from the spirit of the present invention and/or the scope of the appended claims.

## EXAMPLES

### Example 1

#### Mutagenesis of Endogamic *Sorghum* line 80237 and Selection of Imidazolinone-Resistant Mutant 80237EMS2-192

[0080] Thirty two thousand pre-germinated sorghum seeds from endogamic line 80237 were dipped into an aqueous solution of 0.05% v/v ethyl methanesulfonate (EMS) for 16 hours. Treated seeds were planted at the Experimental Station of Advanta Seeds in Venado Tuerto, Province of Santa Fe, Argentina, plot No. 1 (33° 41' 47" S; 61° 58' 45" W) on Dec. 21, 2007, and they were left for open pollination.

[0081] A total of 273 M1 plants were selected and two seeds from each plant were planted on May 23, 2008, at the Experimental Station of Advanta Seeds in Oran, Province of Salta, Argentina (22° 49' 37" S; 64° 20' 14" W) in a nursery and a total of 546 M2 plants was obtained. Pollen from one plant of each pair was collected and used for pollinating the other plant of the pair. M3 seeds obtained from each of the 273 pollinated M2 plants were harvested. A total of 273 furrows of M3 progeny were planted on Dec. 16, 2008, in Venado Tuerto and 50 plants from each M3 furrow were sprayed with 100 ml L a.i./ha of imazethapyr on Dec. 23, 2008. Sixty eight plants from the furrows showed normal growth and absence of symptoms after treatment with herbicide and were considered resistant to the herbicide and identified as VT09-9754. The genealogy of the resistant plants from the furrows was identified and they were designated 80237EMS2-192 (hereinafter referred to as ADV-IMI-R).

[0082] The generational history is shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5

LOCATION-FURROW-SELECTION	GENERATION	GENEALOGY	PLANTING DATE
OR08-323-192	M3	80237EMS2-192	May 23, 2008
VT09-9754-47	M4	80237EMS2-192-47	Dec. 16, 2008
OR09-1305-1	M5	80237EMS2-192-47-1	May 28, 2009
VT10-12793-2R	M6	80237EMS2-192-47-1	Dec. 15, 2009
VT11-11331-BK	M7	80237EMS2-192-47-1-2-(R)	Dec. 7, 2010

OR: Oran;  
VT: Venado Tuerto

tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum*), peanuts (*Arachis hypogaea*), cotton (*Gossypium barbadense*, *Gossypium hirsutum*), sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*), cassava (*Manihot esculenta*), coffee (*Coffea* spp.), coconut (*Cocos nucifera*), safflower (*Carthamus Tinctorius*), pineapple (*Ananas comosus*), citrus trees (*Citrus* spp.), cocoa (*Theobroma cacao*), tea (*Camellia sinensis*), banana (*Musa* spp.), avocado (*Persea americana*), olive (*Olea Europaea*), cashew (*Anacardium occidentale*), almond (*Prunus Amygdalus*), sugar beets (*Beta vulgaris*), potato (*Solanum Tuberosum*), sugarcane (*Saccharum* spp.), vegetables, ornamentals, and trees. Preferably, the plant of the present invention is *sorghum*

[0079] This invention is better illustrated in the following examples, with should not be construed as limiting its scope.

### Example 2

#### Analysis of Response Rate to Treatment with Imidazolinones in Resistant ADV-IMI-R Mutant as Compared to the Original *Sorghum* Endogamic Line 80237

[0083] *Sorghum* line 80237 (Advanta's proprietary elite line) and imidazolinone-resistant ADV-IMI-R mutant of the present invention (original mutation) were sprayed on the field with three herbicides from the group of imidazolinones: imazethapyr, imazapyr, and imazapic. Four different rates were assayed for each of the herbicides: 1X, 2X, 3X, and 4X (being 1X the recommended application rate) (see Table 1 above):

**[0084]** Field experiments were carried out in Venado Tuerto, and planting took place on Dec. 1, 2010. The herbicide was sprayed 20 days after emergence (stage V6). All treatments were compared to their respective untreated controls. The experimental design consisted of plots divided into 3 replicates (main plot: treatment with herbicide; sub-plots: line).

**[0085]** Ten days after spraying, all plants were assayed for dry matter (DM) in aerial tissues. Herbicide response was assessed as a DM percentage in aerial tissue of the respective untreated control.

**[0086]** Thus, the line sensitive to herbicides  $i$  for each rate  $j$  was expressed as:

$$DM_{ij} \% \text{ Control} = (DM_{ij} * 100) / DM \text{ Control}$$

**[0087]**  $DM_{ij} \% \text{ Control}$  is the mean value of 3 experiments for each treatment from each line.

### Example 3

#### Sequencing of a *Sorghum* AHAS Gene Encoding the Mutated Polypeptide of the Invention having Acetohydroxyacid Synthase Activity and which is Imidazolinone-Resistant

**[0088]** Sequencing studies were made on leaf tissue from ADV-IMI-R mutant (VT11-11331-BK selection) and wild-type endogamic line 80237. Genomic DNA was isolated and resuspended in water at a final concentration of 100 ng/ $\mu$ l. Sequencing of the acetohydroxyacid synthase (AHAS) gene from ADV-IMI-R mutant and from *sorghum* line 80237, specific primers were designed for amplification by the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) based on the *sorghum* AHAS sequence disclosed in GenBank under Access No. GM663363.1. The primers were designed so as to generate 5 overlapping DNA segments (amplicons) representing the complete AHAS coding sequence. Sequences of designed primers are:

1 <sup>st</sup> amplicon (544 bp)	SbAHAS-F1	CTCGCGCCGCCTCCGAGA (SEQ ID No. 5)
	SbAHAS-R1	ATGCGCCGCGAACCTGT (SEQ ID No. 6)
2 <sup>nd</sup> amplicon (579 bp)	SbAHAS-F2	TGCTCGACTCCGTCC (SEQ ID No. 7)
	SbAHAS-R2	CATCAAACCGCACACC (SEQ ID No. 8)
3 <sup>rd</sup> amplicon (511 bp)	SbAHAS-F3	ATGCATGGCACGGTG (SEQ ID No. 9)
	SbAHAS-R3	CAGCAGCCGGCAAAC (SEQ ID No. 10)
4 <sup>th</sup> amplicon (529 bp)	SbAHAS-F4	CACAGGTGTTGGGCA (SEQ ID No. 11)
	SbAHAS-R4	CTTGAAAGCCCAACA (SEQ ID No. 12)
5 <sup>th</sup> amplicon (666 bp)	SbAHAS-F5	GGAGCTAGCTATGATCCGAA (SEQ ID No. 13)
	SbAHAS-R5	CAGAACCACCTGCATAGCA (SEQ ID No. 14)

**[0089]** The PCR mixture had a final volume of 25  $\mu$ l and the following components: 1X reaction buffer (Invitrogen) 0.2 mM dNTPs (GE Healthcare), 2.5 mM MgCl<sub>2</sub> (Invitrogen), 0.2  $\mu$ M of each primer, 0.5  $\mu$ l Platinum Taq (5 U/ $\mu$ l) (Invitro-

gen) and 100 ng of genomic DNA. The PCR reaction was performed in a GeneAmp PCR System 9700 thermocycler (Perkin-Elmer) and amplification conditions were as follows: a step of initial denaturation at 94° C. for 1 minute followed by 35 cycles at 94° C. for 45 seconds, 57° C. for 45 seconds, and 72° C. for 70 seconds, and a final elongation step at 72° C. for 10 minutes.

**[0090]** No amplification products were obtained when the SbAHAS-F1 and SbAHAS-R1OLD1-R2 primers were used, both with ADV-IMI-R products as well as the original *sorghum* line 80237.

**[0091]** In order to overcome this problem, two new primers were designed to generate a sixth amplicon:

6 <sup>th</sup> amplicon (6289 bp)	SbAHAS-F1-2	TCGAGGCTCTTGAGCGCTG (SEQ ID No. 15)
	SbAHAS-R1-2	ATGCGCCGCGAACCTGT (SEQ ID No. 16)

**[0092]** The same PCR conditions as those described above were used to obtain the 6<sup>th</sup> amplicon.

**[0093]** Two  $\mu$ l of each DNA product resulting from amplification by PCR were examined by agarose gel electrophoresis to analyze fragment sizes and estimated DNA concentration with reference to the molecular weight marker Low DNA Mass Ladder (Invitrogen). The remaining PCR products were purified using Wizard® SV gel (Promega) and PCR Clean-Up System (Promega). Purified DNA was sequenced using BigDye® Terminator v3.1 Cycle Sequencing System (Applied Biosystems) according to the manufacturer's instructions.

**[0094]** Sequencing files for acetohydroxyacid synthase obtained with each amplicon were assembled using CAP3 Sequence Assembly Program (<http://pbil.univ-lyon1.fr/cap3.php>). The resulting DNA sequences of the acetohydroxyacid synthase gene were aligned using the Clustal W version 2.1 program (<http://www.clustal.org>).

### Example 4

#### Inheritance of Imazethapyr Resistance in a Segregating F2 *Sorghum* Population Generated by Crossing an Imazethapyr-Susceptible Line with the Resistant ADV-IMI-R Mutant

**[0095]** A targeted crossing was carried out between *sorghum* line 90523 (Advanta proprietary elite line, susceptible to imidazolinones) and the imidazolinone-resistant ADV-IMI-R mutant (VT09-9754-48-6-BK selection). The resulting F1 plants were auto-pollinated and F2 seeds were harvested. The F2 seeds were planted in the field in Venado Tuerto, in October 2010. The F2 plants (177 plants) were sprayed with imazethapyr (Pivot®, BASF) at a rate of 3X (where 1X is the rate recommended by the manufacturer for commercial use which is equivalent to 100 ml a.i./ha). Before spraying, leaf tissue from each of the 177 F2 plants from both ADV-IMI-R mutant (VT09-9754-48-6-BK selection) and wild-type line 90523 were collected to isolate genomic DNA, which was resuspended in water at a final concentration of 100 ng/ $\mu$ l for use in genotypic analysis.

**[0096]** Herbicide was sprayed 20 days after emergence (stage V6). The plants were assessed ten days after spraying,

and the herbicidal effect was classified into three categories by visually assessed symptoms according to the following phenotypic scoring:

- [0097] 1=no damage
- [0098] 2=chlorotic
- [0099] 3=death

Example 5

Development of DNA Markers Specific for SNP-SbAHAS

[0100] A single point mutation in the AHAS gene replacing nucleotides G by A at nucleotide position +277 (codon 93) distinguishes the original endogamic *sorghum* line 80237 (herbicide-susceptible) from the induced ADV-IMI-R mutant. A molecular marker (designated herein as SNP-SbAHAS) was designed using the following group of dual labeled primers and probes:

Primer/Probe	Sequence	Modification
Forward primer	CCGCGACGTCTTCGC (SEQ ID No. 17)	-
Reverse primer	TGCCTGGTGGATCTCCAT (SEQ ID No. 18)	-
Probe 1	TACCCCGCGGCACG (SEQ ID No. 19)	5' FAM-3' BHQ
Probe2	TACCCCGCGGCACG (SEQ ID No. 20)	5' VIC-3' BHQ

[0101] Genotyping was performed by a real time PCR allelic discrimination assay using an AB 7500 thermocycler (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, Calif., US). A PCR reaction mix was prepared in a final volume of 25 µl comprising: 12.5 µl 2X Perfecta® qPCR Supermix (Quanta Biosciences, Gaithersburg, Md., US), 0.08 µM primers (forward and reverse), 0.4 µM probes (1 and 2), 10 µl genomic DNA and DNase-free water to make up the final volume. Amplification conditions: one initial denaturation cycle at 95° C. for 10 min, followed by 50 denaturation cycles at 92° C. for 15 seconds and hybridization/extension at 60° C. for 1 min. The results of the allelic discrimination assay were analyzed after amplifi-

cation using the AB Sequence Detection System (SDS) 7500 1.4 software program (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, Calif., US).

Example 6

Correlating Herbicide Resistance with AHAS Mutation in ADV-IMI-R Mutants

[0102] Individual F2 progeny plants obtained by a ADV-IMI-Rx90523 crossing were phenotypically classified (no damage, chlorosis and death) after spraying with imazethapyr (using the method of Example 4) and then genotypically classified using the molecular marker SNP-SbAHAS which is specific of the induced mutation in AHAS (using the method described in Example 5).

Example 7

Genetic Mapping of Herbicide-Resistance and the Specific SNP-SbAHAS Marker

[0103] Herbicide-resistance and the specific SNP-SbAHAS marker were genetically mapped. Based on the *sorghum* AHAS sequence disclosed in GenBank (Access No. GM663363.1, a BLAST analysis was carried out matching it with *Sorghum bicolor* genomic DNA sequences deposited in the Phytozome database (<http://www.phytozome.net/search.php>).

[0104] Genotyping (fingerprinting) of the mutated ADV-IMI-R line and the endogamic line 90253 was carried out using a group of SSR-type molecular markers. Seven polymorphic SSRs located in chromosome 4 of *Sorghum bicolor* genome were selected for genotyping (Mace, E S et al., *A consensus genetic map of sorghum that integrates multiple component maps and high-throughput Diversity Array Technology (DArT) markers*, *BMC Plant Biology*, 2009, 9: 13; Srinivas, G et al., *Exploration and mapping of microsatellite markers from subtracted drought stress ESTs in Sorghum bicolor* (L.), *Moench. Theor. Appl. Genet.* 2009, 118: 703-717; Ramu, P et al., *In silico mapping of important genes and markers available in the public domain for efficient sorghum breeding*, *Mol Breeding* 2010, 26: 409-418; [http://www.lbk.ars.usda.gov/psgd/sorghum/2009SorghumSEAMs\\_LB KARS.xls](http://www.lbk.ars.usda.gov/psgd/sorghum/2009SorghumSEAMs_LB KARS.xls))

The 7 selected polymorphic SSRs were:

SSR in chromosome 4	Forward primer	Reverse primer
Xtxp12	AGATCTGGCGCAACG (SEQ ID No. 21)	AGTCACCCATCGATCATC (SEQ ID No. 22)
Xtxp177	GCCGGTTGTGACTTG (SEQ ID No. 23)	TTAAAGCGATGGGTGTAG (SEQ ID No. 24)
Xtxp343	CGATTGGACATAAGTGTTT (SEQ ID No. 25)	TATAAACATCAGCAGAGGTG (SEQ ID No. 26)
Dsenhsbm39	TCAGTGATACAGCCGTCCAG (SEQ ID No. 27)	ATGCATAAACCCAGGCTGTG (SEQ ID No. 28)
Xgap010	GTGCCGCTTTGCTCGCA (SEQ ID No. 29)	TGCTATGTTGTTTCTTCTCCCTTCTC (SEQ ID No. 30)

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The 7 selected polymorphic SSRs were:

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SSR in chromosome	Forward primer	Reverse primer
Xsbarslbk4.50	GTGAAGCATCCCAACCCTTA (SEQ ID No. 31)	GCCTTTTCCGTCTTCGAG (SEQ ID No. 32)
Xsbarslbk4.13	TCGGGTATTAGCCCTTTGTG (SEQ ID No. 33)	ACACCTCCTCTTGGTGGATG (SEQ ID No. 34)

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**[0105]** The resulting PCR fragments from each of the tested SSRs were resolved by capillary electrophoresis using an automated sequencer ABI3130xl (Applied Biosystems). Genotyping of these 7 SSRs was carried out in 177 individuals of the F2 progeny resulting from the ADV-IMI-R×90523 crossing. In addition, these same 177 F2 progeny plants were analyzed as to the presence of the SNP-SbAHAS marker

specific for the induced mutation in the AHAS gene. The results were classified according to phenotypic rating upon application of imazethapyr on F2 progeny plants and analyzed using the computer program JoinMap (Van Ooijen, J W and Voorrips, R E, JoinMap 3.0 Software for the calculation of genetic linkage maps, Plant Research International, 2001, Wageningen, The Netherlands).

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1. A non-transgenic sorghum plant comprising in its genome at least one polynucleotide, wherein said polynucleotide encodes a polypeptide having an alanine to threonine substitution at position 93 of the large subunit of *sorghum* AHAS protein, said plant having increased resistance to one or more herbicides as compared to wild-type sorghum plants.

2. The sorghum plant according to claim 1, wherein the herbicide is selected from the group consisting of imidazolinone and sulfonylurea

3. The sorghum plant according to claim 2, wherein the imidazolinone herbicide is selected from the group consisting of imazethapyr, imazapir, and imazapic.

4. The sorghum plant according to claim 1, wherein at least one polynucleotide comprises SEQ ID No. 1.

5. The sorghum plant according to claim 1, wherein the encoded polypeptide comprises SEQ ID No. 2.

6. The sorghum plant according to claim 1, comprising a mutation in the AHAS gene as set forth in NCIMB 41870.

7. The sorghum plant according to claim 1, wherein said sorghum plant comprises increased resistance traits to one or more herbicides of the imidazolinone group as the resistance set forth for NCIMB 41870.

8. The sorghum plant according to claim 6, wherein said sorghum plant with increased resistance to one or more herbicides is useful for introducing the resistance trait by introgression into another sorghum plant.

9. (canceled)

10. (canceled)

11. A herbicide-resistant sorghum plant comprising the resistance traits of NCIMB 41870, wherein the sorghum plant is selected from the group consisting of a plant such as NCIMB 41870, a progeny of the NCIMB 41870 plant, an NCIMB 41870 mutant plant and a progeny of the NCIMB 41870 mutant.

12. The sorghum plant according to claim 11, wherein the herbicide belongs to the group of imidazolinones.

13. (canceled)

14. (canceled)

**15.** A sorghum seed, comprising in its genome at least one polynucleotide, wherein said polynucleotide encodes a polypeptide having an alanine to threonine substitution at position 93 of the large subunit of *sorghum* AHAS protein.

**16.** The seed according to claim **15**, wherein said seed generates a plant having increased resistance to one or more herbicides from the group of imidazolinones as compared to wild-type sorghum plants.

**17.** The seed according to claim **15**, wherein said seed comprises a mutation in the AHAS gene as shown in the deposited seed NCIMB 41870.

**18.** A seed of a plant according to claim **1**.

**19.** A seed of the plant according to claim **11**.

**20.** A method for identifying a herbicide-resistant plant, comprising:

- a) providing a nucleic acid sample from a non-transgenic sorghum plant;
- b) amplifying a region corresponding to the AHAS gene present in said nucleic acid sample from a sorghum plant;
- c) identifying a herbicide-resistant plant based on the presence of at least one mutation in the amplified nucleic acid sample, where said mutation confers resistance to herbicides from the imidazolinone group.

**21.** The method according to claim **20**, wherein the nucleic acid sample comprises at least one mutation such as the mutation present in NCIMB 41870.

**22.** The method according to claim **20**, wherein said at least one mutation comprises an Ala93Thr substitution in the encoded polypeptide, wherein said polypeptide has acetoxyacid synthase activity.

**23.** The method according to claim **20**, wherein the nucleic acid sample comprises SEQ ID No. 1.

**24.** The method according to claim **22**, wherein the polypeptide comprises SEQ ID No. 2.

**25.** The method according to claim **20** wherein the plant is a monocot.

**26.** The method according to claim **20** wherein the plant is a dicot.

**27.** (canceled)

**28.** (canceled)

**29.** The method according to claim **20**, wherein the herbicide is selected from the group of imidazolinones and sulfonylureas.

**30.** A method of weed control in close proximity to crop plants, comprising applying an effective amount of a herbicide from the group of imidazolinones or sulfonylurea to weed and crop plants.

**31.** The method according to claim **30**, wherein the imidazolinone herbicide is selected from the group consisting of imazethapyr, imazapic, and imazapyr.

**32.** The method according to claim **30**, wherein the crop plant is selected from the group consisting of

- a) a sorghum plant comprising in its genome at least one polynucleotide, wherein said polynucleotide encodes a polypeptide having an alanine to threonine substitution at position 93 of the *sorghum* AHAS protein, wherein said plant has increased resistance to one or more herbicides from the group of imidazolinone or sulfonylurea as compared to wild-type sorghum plants;
- b) a sorghum plant comprising a mutation in the AHAS gene such as in NCIMB 41870;
- c) a sorghum plant comprising increased resistance traits to one or more herbicides from the group of imidazolinone or sulfonylurea such as the resistance shown by NCIMB 41870.
- d) a plant, progeny, derivative or mutant of sorghum plants a) to c).

**33-60.** (canceled)

\* \* \* \* \*