Without a doubt, the greatest hurdle for biochar to become accepted as significant is the ability to make it a commercial product.

Commercialization involves several factors, but the main hurdles involve establishing a value, proving you can provide a consistent quality product, and supplying the volume that is required by the marketplace.

Most importantly, it is critical not to “overhype” the product. There are some amazing benefits that chars provide; it is not necessary to exaggerate them.
While biochar itself has been around for centuries, it has been in the past 12 years or so that it has been truly “rediscovered.”

With this renewed interest has come a flurry of testing and research, as well as a great deal of interest and support from a variety of organizations.

These are all important steps in the process, but there is a huge leap from R & D and testing to the actual development of a commercial product.
ECOCHEAR
COMMERCIALIZATION

• That final step to commercialization is by far the most difficult, and requires a significantly different approach.

• The commercialization of a “new” product makes the task even more difficult.

• The need to show value and, at the same time, demonstrate quality control and volume of product is almost an impossible task.

• It is the “chicken and egg” scenario – you need an established value to justify producing large volumes of product, but you can’t establish value until you can show quality and quantity of production.
Once that has been accomplished, the path to commercialization is still not over.

The decision needs to be made whether you are going to handle the production and quality control, or simply focus on marketing the product.

Our development of Ecochar has encountered additional hurdles.

Early in our development, we made the decision to focus on feedstocks other than wood.

While we can easily gasify wood, the opportunities and benefits from processing other materials are much greater.
Producing Ecochar from feedstocks such as manures means we have a unique product, though not one that was initially recognized by people familiar with biochar.

This is evident by the fact that IBI itself developed a standard for “biochar” that completely excluded any chars made from higher ash materials, such as manures.

Ecochar also has characteristics that make it perform differently than wood chars.

I tell people that we have good news and bad news:

- The good news is that we really don’t have any competition in marketing Ecochar, as there are not any other large scale manure char facilities.
- The bad news is that we really don’t have any competition – that means all of the research and data collection on a large scale is up to us.
• Assuming that the product can be made consistently and of good quality, there are still many issues to face.
• Ecochar has some amazing characteristics; having multiple applications, however, can be a blessing or a curse.
• It can be used as a soil amendment, feed supplement, water filtration medium, odor control device, animal bedding component, and in heavy metal remediation.
• We have also tested it successfully as a component in a formulated fertilizer, and as a partial replacement for peat moss in mushroom substrate casing. There are also various uses that others are finding for chars as activated carbon replacements.
• So, if you are developing a commercial product, which of these do you develop? There is a cost associated with each, and chasing too many at one time may be an impossible task.
Selecting a strategy and staying focused on it is critical.

However, once you have everything in place, there is probably the biggest step to make – commitment.

Devoting the time, resources, and money to truly become commercial is a huge leap.

It is an easy decision to conduct the research and dabble in selling a product. Grant funding is available to pay for this work, and the cost is relatively minimal in comparison to becoming commercial.

Nobody wants to fund commercial efforts – unless they want equity.

It may have huge rewards, but it also comes with huge risk, and huge disappointments.
It is very frustrating to test a product and provide results that demonstrate it is clearly superior and, in many cases, vastly superior, only to have the results ignored.

People resist new products, especially when they are told otherwise by large corporations with recognized names.

This doesn’t stop the product from being accepted, but it certainly increases the difficulty.

Bottom line – the road to commercialization is not easy and requires preparation, resources and a commitment to carry through, as there will be challenges.