

Welcome from the University of Tennessee

Eyvind Thor
Professor Emeritus
Department of Forestry, Wildlife & Forestry
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Welcome. I hope that by now you all realize that the people in Tennessee want you to feel welcome here. Nearly half an hour has been put aside for this purpose. Still, if any of you should feel under-welcomed when I am finished; please feel free to talk to me when we break for lunch.

As some of you know, for several years I was active in the sponsoring organization of this conference - The Southern Forest Tree Improvement Committee. Also, I and a number of my graduate students regularly presented papers at conferences. Of the many scientific meetings which I attended during my career, the conferences of the Southern Forest Tree Improvement Committee always were the most important and enjoyable. It was not only the learning of research in progress, but also the excitement of renewing friendships, delight in the latest gossip, and somehow feel that you were a member of a very special fraternity.

My introduction to The Southern Forest Tree Improvement Conference came 30 years ago when I gave a paper based on my dissertation at N.C. State Univ. In retrospect, it was a disaster. This was my maiden voyage and I sank, with my cargo of crummy slides nobody could read even if they were seated 10 feet away from the screen. But a most wonderful thing happened when I staggered down from the podium, everybody clapped vigorously. During coffee break several members came over, introduced themselves and professed that it was a most interesting paper. God bless those liars, they sure made a budding scientist feel good!

Since that time, the conferences became very dear to me. It was a forum where graduate students could present their work and expect kindness. It was also a place where mature scientists could expect to be questioned, sometimes without much kindness. Today's conference is the twenty-first. Since you meet every other year, the first conference was held 40 years ago. Perhaps as many as half of you were not even born then. If you have any doubt about the progress made in those 40 years, you should pull out copies of those first Proceedings. The most exciting thing you will find is the result from some seed source test. Looking through the Program for the 21st conference, it is clear that you have gone a long way from those good old days when life was more simple.

However, one thing has not changed. Whatever plant material we produce, be it by conventional breeding methods or genetic engineering, it must be placed in an environment where it can grow and perhaps, make a profit. Silviculturally speaking, this means clearcutting the existing forest and planting seedlings. Forty years ago, there was no criticism of this method. As a matter of fact, it was a sign of advanced forestry. Today, so called environmentalists are putting political pressure on forest resource managers to use methods resulting in uneven-aged forests.

The U.S. Forest Service is most exposed to such pressure, because it manages large areas of public lands. From what I read in the newspapers, the Forest Service has pretty much caved in to the "environmentalist" demands. I am afraid our forestry schools are next. There is no better way to stop clearcutting than getting the forestry graduates indoctrinated in this "New Perspectives" forestry.

Considering this, I will leave you with this question: Do you think that 40 years from now there will be a 42nd Forest Tree Improvement Conference?