

GUEST EDITORIAL

THE IMPORTANCE OF WOOD SCIENCE PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATIONS

TF Shupe

Louisiana Forest Products Development Center, School of Renewable Natural Resources, Louisiana State University Agricultural Center, Baton Rouge, LA 70803. E-mail: tshupe@agcenter.lsu.edu

Scientists enjoy participating in professional associations. These associations provide us a forum to publish our papers, orally present our findings at meetings, network with old and new colleagues, and develop collaborative research partnerships.

There are several professional wood science organisations throughout the world. These organisations typically do not contain members from a wide range of countries. Rather, the members are largely from one or more countries with a very small minority of members from other countries. Societies such as these can be very effective at serving member needs. However, these societies suffer from lack of diversity of input that can be expected with members from different countries, backgrounds, races, religions, etc. Sociologists refer to this as 'group think' in which most members of the group tend to think alike. New and creative ideas for the betterment of the society in the present and future become uncommon.

One organisation that has broad global support is IUFRO, and it does have a Division for forest products and several active working parties within this division. However, IUFRO does not produce a journal and does not hold an annual meeting of its forest products division. The International Research Group on Wood Protection (IRG) is a heavily international group concerned with wood preservation and protection. It does have an annual meeting and non-peer-reviewed conference proceedings. I am a proud member of both organisations and both help scientists of all ages from throughout the world to improve their academic careers. However, both organisations are not professional societies and both have essentially no restrictions on membership.

The Society of Wood Science and Technology (SWST) was founded in 1958 to serve as a professional organisation for wood scientists. Today, SWST provides many member services such as the Wood and Fiber Science journal, bi-monthly

newsletter, state-of-the-art papers, book reviews, membership directory, member handbook and special publications produced during the year. For many years, SWST was considered a North American only organisation. This concept was supported by the fact that the society's annual meeting was always held in North America, the vast majority of members resided in North America, and the Executive Secretary resided in the US.

In recent years, SWST has aggressively sought to become a more international organisation. Towards this end, the society's annual meeting was held in Concepción, Chile in 2008 and future meetings are scheduled for Geneva, Switzerland in 2010 and Beijing, China in 2012. The society continues its long history of joint meetings with the Forest Products Society in North America in odd numbered years.

International membership has also been increased by the International Professional Visitation Grants programme which allows members to apply for support funds to visit colleagues in a foreign country. SWST recently established a new discounted membership category for individuals from emerging countries as defined by the United Nations. This includes online access to the *Wood and Fiber Science Journal*, receipt of the electronic newsletter, and all other benefits that the members receive electronically. The journal has recently been getting approximately 40% of its submissions from non-North American authors.

A new programme that SWST is starting is called Wood Scientists without Borders. It will be modelled after the currently successful programme known as Engineers Without Borders. The goal is to benefit a local community in the area of wood science and technology by providing technical assistance needed in a region of the world on projects that could be completed in a short time, perhaps a month or so. These projects should be backed by local community leaders, research facilities involved in forestry and forest products, and stakeholders (people

directly affected). Also, SWST offers a new Travel Grant Program for Emerging Country Scientists to International Conventions in North America. In short, wood scientists from outside North America, particularly those in developing nations, can apply for financial aid to attend the SWST Annual Meeting in years in which the meeting is in North America.

Finally, the society has at least one contact person, in many cases there are several, for general distribution of information to numerous countries including Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Taiwan, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Hungary, India, Iran, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Morocco, Nepal, New Zealand, Philippines, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, United Kingdom and Venezuela. This has led, in part, to some non-North American universities recently seeking SWST accreditation for their undergraduate programmes.

If, for whatever reason, you find that SWST is not the right society for you, I encourage you to be as active as possible in at least one professional organisation. The more you put into an organisation, the more you get out of it. I especially would like to encourage our young scientists to get involved at an early age. You will find that the domestic and foreign colleagues that you interact with will help you grow your research programme and open your eyes to a world that you cannot see from your office.

Todd F. Shupe is a Professor of Wood Science at the Louisiana Forest Products Development Center at the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center. He is a Fellow in the International Academy of Wood Science and Vice President of the Society of Wood Science and Technology (SWST). He will become the President of SWST in 2011.