

EQUIPMENT

John Heltzel, Virginia Division of Forestry
(Panel Moderator)

Forest nurserymen are generally characterized by their involvement and complete absorption with mechanization and "gadgetry." A layman could conclude that interest and skill in tree seedling culture generally is accompanied by an equal amount of interest and skill with things mechanical.

That would be a happy circumstance--but likely just a coincidence.

We nurserymen are well aware of the true situation--our mechanical talents are generally latent, and oftentimes not used until we are backed against the wall. Right now we are up to this wall, with a continually increasing annual production, demand for better seedlings at a low cost, and a necessity of delivery in topnotch condition during the brief period of the prime planting season. All of this is in the face of a labor market characterized by short supply, high cost, and ineptitude. We have suddenly reached the point where the traditional 90 percent labor and 10 percent mechanization ratio of some years ago must reach a 10/90 percent ratio, with labor on the low side.

Forest tree nursery mechanization has advanced rapidly over the past few years, as you will judge after easing our speakers today. Machines and new procedures are taking over jobs where any departure from hand labor was believed impossible, or impractical, a short time ago. To fully utilize these may require some revision of the entire system. This will be discussed by our first speaker this morning.