

WELCOME

John M. Bethea, Director
Florida Division of Forestry - Tallahassee, Florida

It is my sincere pleasure to serve, this morning, as the official welcoming committee for the State of Florida. So on behalf of the government of the Sunshine State, Greetings! I hope your visit here is both pleasant and profitable.

Maybe your agenda will allow you time to see the countryside and enjoy this section of Florida if you have never done so.

Surrounding you is a territory widely known for its picturesque ranches, prize cattle and thoroughbred horses. It is here and in the woodlands north of here that you will get a clue of Florida's second largest industry... forestry.

Commercial forestry is alive and well. But it doesn't take a close observer to tell that winds of change are blowing through all sectors of Florida. Florida is becoming more and more of an urban-oriented state. Our response is, on the one hand, joy and enthusiasm at such success; and on the other hand, frustration in the knowledge that we cannot even begin to satisfy the demands of urban forestry projects.

Yet we are trying, and a little more about that later on....

The economic aspect of forestry is very important to our state, just as it is to every state represented here... to the southeast in general. In terms of dollars, only Florida's vast tourist industry realizes more economic benefit for the state. Forestry and forest products are valued at over \$1.5 billion dollars.

The forest industry could not have enjoyed such a success story here had it not been for the contribution--years of work--represented by forest tree nursery research... thank you for the wonderful help you have given. It has helped us reach the point we have reached, wherein we can grow much more wood on far less land. Two billion, 533 million, 648 thousand seedlings have been planted jointly by landowners and industry since 1928.

Although billboards don't proclaim the fact, when they are flaunting white surf-capped beaches and bathing beauties, State and Private Forestry nurseries have helped make Florida the nation's reforestation leader--a title it has held for all but three of the past ten years.

How to keep the tree-planting enthusiasm alive?

The Soil Bank program fired many small landowners to a zeal that resulted in most of the pine stands that can be seen today. Can the new Forestry Incentives Program (FIP) stimulate landowners to a like attempt to intensify forest management practices?

What of genetic tree improvements, new concepts such as sycamore silage

I know that you will be getting to the heart of a great many vital problems in your sessions here this week. No one needs a reminder that all of us have a great stake in meeting the reforestation goals of the Third Forest Mission.

Whatever may be gained here this week I feel will be especially illuminating to states that share Florida's predicament--where the change from semi-rural to urban metropolis is putting new kinds of demands on forestry.

Our most challenging program in Florida is the effort to help cities improve living conditions through the use of trees.

Sociologists, among others, are beginning to find positive proof that trees and growing things help to counteract stress in the environment. In housing projects in a Chicago ghetto, where muggings and assaults are common, gardening projects seem to resist vandalism and theft.

Obviously, a lot of city dwellers would like to plant some trees. But they are not interested in the large commercial-venture bundles of 500 to 1,000 seedlings. They also would prefer some species variety.

Here in Florida, we developed a simple seedling sale and distribution program. The response to this "Homeowner Seedling Packet" program has, in the three years it has been carried out, been very good.

In South Florida, we are trying to reestablish native species such as mahogany, live oak and tropicals. These species are needed, not for timber purposes, but strictly for urban improvement. Florida's real tragedy is the rate at which these species have been diminished by urban sprawl.

Some twenty cities and counties in Florida now have urban foresters--foresters hired to enforce tree ordinances and promote environmental protection.

But, as I have said, for the most part commercial forestry is alive and well in Florida, at least in the northern tier of counties. There is also the effort to reestablish commercial forestry in south Florida with the use of fast-growing species. A likely candidate for a commercial venture is eucalyptus. I do not know that we have yet arrived at the point where we can say we are sure of this program's destiny, but we are very much eager to see the results of containerized eucalyptus.

A more fearful problem facing Florida, is the acutely critical water situation. Maybe you have read of the difficulties experienced in our Herren Nursery this past spring. The well supply became saline drenching a large quantity of eucalyptus seedling stock. Luckily we were engaged in trying out a new system of nursery mechanization. Although half the young plants were lost, we were able to transfer the other half to our central Florida nursery at Chief land.

Tree improvement programs form another major part of our commercial reforestation efforts. This year--our third year to offer improved seedlings--will see roughly 4 million seedlings produced. In the next four to five years, our total production will be improved stock.

I feel sure that you will be hearing more about each other's efforts and even some discouragements during the course of your meeting. I hope there will be much fruitful exchange of ideas. There is little further that I can contribute than that I hope you will keep all three kinds of forestry to keep in mind: economic, environmental and aesthetic.

Once, we could make provision for only the forests in the unpopulated areas. Today, clearly, forestry no longer touches the lives of a remote few. This is borne out to me by the fact that at our Herren Nursery located near Ft. Myers, we cannot begin to produce enough potted species for dispersal. It is our only nursery producing native and tropical species for urban consumption. Yet the demand far exceeds the production, and as we continue to publicize this program, we expect the gap between demand and production to widen.

This gap will not be closed until radical new methods are developed for mass production of seedlings presently grown as potted stock. Containerization, such as we now use in the eucalyptus program, may ultimately be the answer.

There is much to be done.

Speaking for many in Florida, I bid you a hearty welcome. Have a good conference. Provide us with some solutions.