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WHITHER RENEWABLE MATERIALS?

Wood Science and Technology is on the threshold of potentially significant growth and development. Diminishing supplies of nonrenewable materials will increase the demand for renewable materials. The growing costs in energy, capital, and labor required to exploit nonrenewable materials located deep in the earth, under the oceans, and in accessible and inhospitable geographical locations encourage substitution by renewable materials. The energy conservation opportunities associated with renewable materials make such substitution particularly attractive at this time.

The production of renewable materials of which wood comprises more than 95% of total tonnage still represents the most effective currently available method of utilizing solar energy to satisfy man's material needs.

Effective exploitation of renewable materials as substitutes for nonrenewables will require substantial advancement in renewable materials science and significant transfer of technology from all the fields of science and technology to the development of the processes by which forest resources are converted to useful commodities and products. Wood scientists and technologists are uniquely equipped to foster this technology transfer. Success in this domain will depend upon the ability of the profession quickly to enlarge its kit of tools and to learn to use this expanded kit effectively in meeting the needs of modern society.

This seems to me to be the major challenge that the profession of Wood Science and Technology faces today.

In this domain a particularly heavy burden falls on that small number of universities that have maintained their commitments to the importance of Wood Science and Wood Technology as viable academic specialties in the presence of small enrollments and heavy demands upon limited institutional resources. The few remaining university centers of excellence in Wood Science and Technology are the incubators of the essential advances in science and engineering that are badly needed. They are the current sources of the technical manpower and womanpower required if America is to capitalize on the opportunities to fully utilize renewable materials in satisfying the needs of society. These fragile resources must be nurtured and supported by the membership of this organization, by the industries that depend upon them and by the governments, federal, state and local, that are society's administrative vehicle.

In the present no-growth posture of higher education, it is unlikely that additional universities will make the investment required to develop new academic programs in Wood Science and Technology in the near future. As the CORRIM study pointed out, for now we must build on the base that we have.

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