

A Decade of Progress in Tree Improvement

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Tree improvement research has been a part of the scene in American forestry for over half a century. Only in the last decade, however, has major attention been directed to it. A careful examination of the historical record probably would reveal a number of factors that contributed to the awakened interest. Two, I think, are significant. First is the influence of a number of prominent foresters who attended the Third World Forestry Congress in Helsinki, Finland, in 1949. These men, among whom can be named Dr. I. T. Haig and J. Herbert Stone, had the background to understand the significance of the advances in tree improvement that were being made in Northern European countries. Their recognition of this significance permeated their associates. I recall that the Appalachian Section of the Society of American Foresters devoted its annual meeting in January, 1950, to tree improvement at the suggestion of Dr. Haig, who helped set up the program. The second factor was an exchange of correspondence, beginning in the fall of 1949, between the Forestry Relations Division of the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Southern Forest Experiment Station on the possibility of a regional seed source research program. As an outgrowth of this correspondence the two regional forest experiment stations and the regional office organized the First Southern Conference on Forest Tree Improvement, held in Atlanta on January 9 and 10, 1951.

Somewhat unexpectedly, about 80 people attended the conference. As a result of the deliberations, Dr. Haig and C. A. Connaughton were instructed to appoint a standing committee to coordinate forest tree improvement research and to prepare information on the subject. A twelve-member committee was appointed to include representation from research and regional federal forestry activities, state forestry agencies, the Tennessee Valley Authority, schools and industry.

At its first meeting this group assumed the name Committee on Southern Forest Tree Improvement. Early in its existence it adopted a four-point program of purposes and objectives:

1. To advise and assist those interested in the improvement of southern forest trees in arranging and conducting research and development programs.

two-year intervals it has sponsored a southwide conference. It has brought out 20 publications and reports, including the proceedings of the previous conferences, through the facilities of the employing organization of various members. A committee newsletter, scheduled for semiannual publication, has appeared annually with 450 copies for a mailing list of about 250. At the request of the Southern Forest Experiment Station, the Committee became advisory to the Southern Institute of Forest Genetics in 1955 and holds meetings at the Institute on an irregular schedule.

The effective influence of the southern committee has resulted in the organization of tree improvement committees in the Northeast, the Lake States, and the West.

In this decade of development, the influence of the Committee has been felt in the adaptation of practices, in the initiation of research, in the creation of a public consciousness of the importance of tree improvement, and in the acceptance of tree improvement as a part of industrial forest management. In the Committee's short lifespan, we have seen the genetical improvement of forest trees advance from a scientific oddity to an honored position in forestry research and practice.

We now have ten years of developmental experience. We are beginning to form the reservoir of knowledge on the fundamentals of tree growth on which we must draw to further our research. The potential for progress is the challenge that lies ahead in forest tree improvement. Our attainments will depend on the financing and intellectual inspiration that we can bring to focus on the problem.