

AMERICAN PAULOWNIA ASSOCIATION

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JUNE 2013

THE FARMING AND MARKETING OF PAULOWNIA 22ND ANNUAL CONFERENCE, NEWPORT TENNESSEE



by

Ralph Donaldson, Editor



Our earth is a beautiful place. But, without doubt, some places are more beautiful than others. The Great Smoky Mountains around Newport, Tennessee, is one of those places. It is beautiful. It is a great place for an annual conference. It is the home of “Rocky Top” bluegrass song fame, more honey bees than anywhere else in Tennessee, and “Popcorn”

Sutton” of TV moonshiner fame. Sing “Rocky Top” until your throat is sore, drink a mix of a lot of local honey and a little local “shine,” and you will surely feel better in the morning—if it’s just a little “shine.”

On May 2 at 7:00 pm, The Board of Directors of the American Paulownia Association kicked off the 22nd annual conference at the office of Association founding president, meeting host, and local dentist, Dr. David Sutton. These board meetings are for



Nyla Newsome, Junior Conference Facilitator & Smokey



Dr. Sutton's Office - Business Meeting & Field Trip Intro

conducting the Association’s business, but also as important for Board members, all members are welcome at these meetings, to just catch up with each other and their activities, Paulownia and otherwise, for the previous year. The minutes were read and

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President's Message...



It is both an honor and a privilege to serve as your President. I will work hard to deserve the recognition and the make the American Paulownia Association the best that it can be. First, you must know that it will be difficult for someone in backwoods, Georgia, to keep up with all that goes on. Danny and Sharon Blickenstaff will continue to perform much of the administrative work from their home in Hagerstown, MD (the D.C. area). Their work is of such great value to the Association.

You have a role, too. One of our mission statements is that we will promote Paulownia, its growth and use. We've barely made a dent. We keep talking and talking about marketing when we have little or nothing to sell. That comes into painfully clear focus when someone tells us how much acreage it will take to keep a plywood mill going for just a few weeks. We must plant, and encourage others to plant. There is no other way to do it.

Let's plant some trees.

Ralph

The Need to Certify Paulownia Wood as a Farm Commodity

Presented by: Jack Dickey, Marketing Committee Chairman

Certification of someone or something has always carried the connotation of making the item or the person (or person's profession) better and/or more credible. Such creditability is usually given by means of official documentation that gives proof and details of the person's or item's authenticity, quality, performance, ownership or other superior attributes. Ultimately, in a free market system, certification must make a product, or service, more valuable to the end user and/or the consumer . . . otherwise, it's just a useless endeavor.

So . . . how will certification . . . especially certifying Paulownia wood as a farm commodity . . . make it more valuable to the end user and/or the consumer? How do we take advantage of the certification opportunity, and avoid it from becoming just a "useless endeavor"? Now Bill has just told us how important certification is to marketing of plywood panels. As a matter of fact, several years ago when we were talking to a major plywood company about growing Paulownia on a large scale for them, we were told, in no uncertain terms, that we would have to get the acreage certified if they were to buy the timber grown from it. In other words, certification

made the difference of whether or not we would even be able to sell the wood at all! So you see, there would be no use in even planting it unless it could be sold.

This really put me to thinking . . . especially, as I was the Association's international marketing director, to try help develop a large scale market for Paulownia and Paulownia products. It put me to thinking about this certification thing, and how

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WALNUT COUNCIL

We are an association of over 1,000 members representing foresters, researchers, and growers of walnut and other fine hardwoods in 45 states and 4 foreign countries. One of our objectives is to transfer forestry research and other useful information from the laboratory to the timber grower.

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accepted, the Secretary-Treasurer's reports given and approved, and all actions taken in the name of the Board in the previous year were ratified. We were saddened to learn of the death of Chris Snavley, Paulownia marketer and champion in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania. This is a serious business meeting and business was "tended to," but it is mostly a visit—in the best sense of the word.



Reba Williams Conference Facility

At 8:15 am on Friday, in the classy Reba Williams Room of the Tennessee Division of Forestry (on a beautiful site with a babbling brook running through the front yard—honest), Ralph Donaldson, Interim President called the meeting to order and called the roll of states. From Illinois to Mexico (and I know Mexico is not a state) and from California to New Jersey, the cross-section of participants was as great as ever. (And what's more, the Californian is soon moving to Serbia to grow Paulownia.)



Reba Williams Grounds - Babbling Brook

Cliff King of the local forestry office welcomed us to the Reba Williams Room, local meeting facility, and flattered us by saying that ours was the first meeting of national prominence to occur in the Reba

Williams facility. Then Darren Bailey, of the Tennessee Division of Forestry talked of forestry in Tennessee, particularly hardwood forestry in the mountains, and some about old growth Paulownia in Tennessee.



TN State Area Forester Darren Bailey

Mr. Terry Hollifield, Executive Director of the Georgia Crop Improvement Association, made a detailed presentation, actually two presentations. One was a proposal to contract to lead and administer the certification process for Paulownia seed stock or plantlets nationwide. The other was an offer to develop a process for certifying Paulownia lumber in the United States. I will not try to describe these proposals in detail here, because I think they will be published in their entirety in this or later issues of the Newsletter.



Presenter Terry Hollifield & President Ralph Donaldson

Then we took a break. And breaks at Paulownia conferences are intense. I have written before about my frustration at being unable to listen to more than two or three conversations at the time. Everybody is involved—there are no wallflowers. Newly

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important it is, especially to a fledgling Paulownia industry that has yet to develop a dependable and reliable market for the product which really, is sort of an unattainable goal to start with, if the acreage is not first planted. And why would anyone want to plant a crop of anything without a pretty good idea that it could be sold, once it is actually produced?

You see, we have a marketing dilemma. We can't market a product without a ready supply (inventory). Nor can we ever hope to create a supply without first convincing growers that there will be a market if they plant the acreage. And so lies the quandary of the American Paulownia Association today. Now I'm certainly not saying that a certification program is going to completely eliminate our problem, but what I am advocating is that after years of stagnant expansion of both membership and planted acreage, it might be time to give certification, at least, a trial run just to see what happens.

The program, as laid before us by GCIA, should be of little financial significance on APA due to the fact that the producers and marketers of plantlets, and later the plantation growers and marketers of the wood produced, are the ones who pay the certification costs. In fact, the program should gain membership for the Association, due to the requirement that to produce plantlets or timber for certification, the producer must be a member of APA. On the other hand, and as a service to its members, the Association may wish to spend some funds on advertising and getting the word out.

Now, I would like to get back to the title of my subject, here today. And that is "The NEED to Certify Paulownia as a Farm Commodity". I want to start off with a very broad assessment of the world's wood supply situation. We are living in a time where wood availability and sourcing of timber is changing directions for the first time since the Creation. Up until now, most of the world's timber has grown in the wild . . . just been there when we needed it. As population increased, and human habitation spread out across the land, more and more timber was required and cut down. Much of it to just get out of the way, to grow crops, etc. Although cut-over timber land will grow back more trees, the problem is timing. It takes a long time to grow back trees of the same size that were originally cut, especially in the mountains and the more arid areas. Even with good reforestation practices and the pine plantations of the Southeastern section of the US, there are no large

diameter logs being produced. And as wood demands continue to increase, and native old-growth and rainforests are becoming politically off limits to the chain saw, there's not apt to be many good, large diameter saw logs around anymore. One only needs to observe the log trucks on the road. If you happen to see a load of real saw logs, they probably came from someone's yard in town where a tree had to be taken down for reasons far removed from that of logging!

Then too, manufactured wood and wood products, such as OSB and Particle Board panels and OSB floor joist has come about, not so much as an economical substitute for plywood and wide two-by-joists, but mainly because there has been a real limited availability of large diameter logs.

The problems (and there are many others) with these manufactured wood products is the weight factor. To make OSB and Particle Board, for instance, requires the input material to be compressed to the point where it is more dense than the original wood. Therefore it becomes proportionately heavier as it is compressed into a smaller dimension. For example, our sample blocks show that Paulownia at 16.8 pcf goes to 20.8 pcf when made into plywood, 29.7 when made into OSB and 36.8 pcf as particle board. And this is all from just using light-weight Paulownia. Yellow Pine particle board comes in at a whopping 46.6 pcf.

So, what we have here, as a result of not having large diameter trees anymore, its: a less appealing, less desirable product that can consume twice as much timber to produce. It cost more to manufacture, cost more to handle and transport due to its extra weight, and it is much harder to work with. And, as it stands now, it won't get any better without large diameter logs becoming available, again. And, this can be done with agriculturally produced, fast growth timber grown specifically for certain designated markets, such as plywood panels, for instance. And of course, there is no better candidate for this than Paulownia. Paulownia can solve those problems we have just pointed out. It can be grown to a large diameter in a fairly short time. It is a very light wood, but has a greater strength, pound-for-pound than most all commonly used woods. But it needs to be certified. And it needs to be certified as a farm crop, a farm commodity. And, here is why. To start with, Paulownia has always been handled as more of an agricultural pursuit . . . a cultivated crop, than one of forestry. We find that in ancient China the tree was

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interested people are peppering veterans with questions. Veterans are more than willing to share. Old friends are catching up. Look at the program and you will see very long breaks throughout the day. But rest assured, this is not dead time. Any given conference or presentation may not answer your question(s). But at any given break or lunch period, you can find the answer(s).



Presentor Bill Doran & President Ralph Donaldson

After the break, Mr. Bill Doran, President of BDI Consulting, and world renowned expert on plywood marketing, spoke of the opportunities of using Paulownia for plywood production, and the need for a “critical mass” of supply to even begin to attract plywood mills and producers. We all sat in silence, knowing that acreage did not exist, and was not even in the planning stage at this time. But Mr. Doran gave us a goal to reach for—as well as a reality check.



Member Jack Dickey & President Ralph Donaldson

Jack Dickey, longtime member and Marketing Committee Chair, presented a rationale for creating and administering a program for certifying Paulownia wood as a farm produced commodity. Mr. Dickey’s rationale is rather involved, and I expect it to be published separately in this or later issues of this Newsletter. I will not risk it to my memory.

Mr. Mario Martin of Guitar Mill/Mario Guitars, of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, presented on “The Specialty Market of Paulownia Guitars.” Mr. Martin is a former entertainer from Nashville who became more interested in making/building guitars. Mr. Martin gave a very informed—he uses Paulownia himself in building guitars—talk on Paulownia as a preferred wood for guitars. He talked on the advantages, and spoke of some of the trade-offs. Then after some urging, and a request from his wife since George Jones had just died that week, he sung a

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planted and cultivated over large expanses of agricultural land. Since having been introduced in Australia and the United States, Paulownia acreage has been established on farms on agricultural-grade land, and cultivated as a farm crop. In fact, Paulownia will just not profitably grow in a traditional forest type situation. You would have about as much luck growing corn in the woods as you would trying to produce Paulownia as a traditional forestry crop.

With the question of profitable Paulownia production on the farm versus that of forest production not even being debatable, it only stands to reason that Paulownia should take its rightful place as an agricultural commodity like those of oranges, almonds, coconuts, apples and other non-forest tree crops. Therefore, certifying the crop as an agricultural crop by an agricultural certification agency such as GCIA, makes perfect sense, especially when you consider what the crop will be certified for. Bill Doran has already told us the importance of certifying the wood in order to create an attractive market. He is speaking of a little different type certification (the one through FSC) but our certification will also guarantee FSC standards have been met . . . plus more. Our certification would also certify that the wood produced has been produced as a farm commodity on farmland and not from native forests, and/or rainforests, agro forest, public owned forest or any other nonfarm forest lands. This, in and of itself, sets certified Paulownia in a completely new and different category. Although our certified Paulownia wood would comply with the rules of the Forest Stewardship Council for sales and political purposes, it would actually not even be from the forest . . . any

more than a Washington State Apple would be from the forests of the Northwest.

Now the other big hurdle that certification crosses is that of “invasive species”. As you know Paulownia-tomentosa has been placed on the invasive species list. It’s also classified as a forestry crop. I understand that when this organization first started there was quite a bit of interest and assistance from several of our colleges of agriculture including this state’s own University of Tennessee. But, when Paulownia-tomentosa was placed on the invasive species list, most of that assistance dried up. The reason, we have been told, for this status is that Paulownia is a non-native plant . . . although such determination is debatable . . . by the very rules that constitute an invasive species. The accepted rules for the US and most states are these:

As per Executive Order 13112 an “invasive species” is defined as a species that is:

- 1) non-native (or alien) to the ecosystem under consideration and
- 2) whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health.

The key word of consideration here is “introduction”. To be a non-native species, it absolutely has to be introduced by some method. And without it being accurately documented as to how and/or whom introduced it, you simply have no proof that it is non-native. So, what our proposed system of certification will do is use this very definition from “Executive Order 13112” to certify that our plant(s) are non-invasive. First, we will document by whom, when and

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beautiful George Jones song. Not too many of our presenters sing us a song before they sit down. Maybe there's a lesson there.



Mario Martin, Guitar Mill-Mario Guitars

Just before lunch we have the Membership Meeting. Doing it just before lunch keeps it short. Ralph Donaldson of Georgia was elected, President; George Newsome of Alabama was elected Vice-President, and Sharon Blickenstaff was re-elected Secretary-Treasurer. Sitting Board Members were re-elected.

Lunch was wonderful, and another break on steroids. We talked and talked. It was great.

Dr. Carl Jordan, Senior Research Scientist, University of Georgia, and a previous presenter as well, talked of his experiences with Paulownia grown within several different ecosystems. Ecology is Dr. Jordan's forte, and he addressed Paulownia as an invasive species. He says Loblolly pine is far more invasive, and that Paulownia does not hold a candle to some other plants as to their invasiveness.



Dr. Carl Jordon & President Ralph Donaldson

Mr. Hall, a tax attorney from Knoxville, spoke of ways to reduce the tax burden for landowners. The

main advice is to acquire somebody who knows the ins and outs of the tax system. Mr. Hall gave me a memorable quote: "Helping people pay no more taxes than they owe is the Lord's work."



Presentor Steven Huff & President Ralph Donaldson

Mr. Steven Huff spoke of Agricultural Extension in Tennessee. He encouraged the growers to consult their local county agent. It is the agricultural university's office in your town.

We adjourned. I'm usually worn out, and this was no exception. But I went back to the hotel reeling with all I had heard and as always, jealous of what I had missed.

If you're serious about Paulownia, you just cannot miss these conferences. 🌳



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where this plant was introduced as a “non-native species”. Then next, we have to document that said introduction never “causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health”. Of course we’ve really got no problem, there. Economically, we would assume the grower has planted the crop to make money. Environmentally speaking, Paulownia is one of the friendliest plants growing and it’s certainly never been shown to be against anyone’s health.

So, if we just stop right there . . . at the definition, we would be alright. But, by common logic, invasive or to invade, means to encroach on territory, e.g. an invading army. Some of the sub details of the invasive species order mentions “escaping cultivation”, and this could be where the “economic or environmental harm or harm to human health” could occur . . . on someone else’s property. To adequately address this potential, certification will require a non-proliferation area a quarter mile deep, surrounding the Paulownia field. The Paulownia will have to have been introduced and growing for a minimum of 10 years at the location before application can be made with GCIA for plantlet propagation. Once application has been approved, the proliferation area will be inspected for seedlings that may have escaped cultivation. Then, once the certified plantlets have been sold and planted on the farm by the grower, the same inspection will be made

for escaped seedlings just before log harvest.

Once a field of Paulownia has met the proliferation standards, it will be ready to be harvested and sold as certified, farm produced Paulownia. The wood and wood products from it can then go on both the domestic and international market, certified as to known origin, and introduction and species, certified to have met all FSC certification standards, certified to not have been taken from any native or publically owned forests lands or rainforest lands, and certified to be a non-invasive species.

And, that is “The Need to Certify Paulownia Wood as a Farm Commodity.” 🌸



Field Trip Entrance - Church Corner

Publicist Note: This edition of our newsletter is filled with references to noted speakers and presenters at our annual conference, accompanied by numerous pictures. Limited space has precluded a comprehensive report of the field trip to host Dr. David Sutton’s Paulownia plantation and home place. I have included only one picture of the field trip in this issue, but assure you that our next newsletter will include both a report with numerous supporting pictures. Stay tuned for this next edition and an opportunity to consider how a “farm land and timber crop cooperative” may benefit you and your Paulownia investments.

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