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WHAT ARE YOUR RESEARCH PRIORITIES?

Several years ago, as a member of the SWST Executive Board, I took on a mission to see if we could define research priorities in the field of forest products. Obviously, each researcher has a different view of the world, which made the process very messy. However, one outcome from this effort was to focus on people instead of on things. This led to defining residential housing as perhaps our highest research priority.

Let me put this into the context of California, a state with a Gross Domestic Product of a major country, and a heavy wood user. We have about one trillion dollars of residential housing in place in California; and if we assume that 10 percent of this is wood, we are looking at about 100 billion dollars of value. Certainly this justifies some research. Our Forest Products Laboratory at Richmond is moving toward status within the University of California, with a consequence that our research and extension will be more mission-oriented. What evolved from several reviews of our Laboratory is two mission-oriented programs, one of which focuses on wood building research, with a key objective of "safer, more economical, and more durable housing."

In thinking about the involvement of wood scientists/technologists in wood building research, it seemed worthwhile to do a survey. I looked at the papers published in *Wood and Fiber Science* over the past four years to see

how many were "housing related." To my surprise, less than 5 percent of the papers fit this category. My question to you is: Why so few? Why don't we do research in our most justifiable area in terms of both value and benefit to people? Could it be that we feel this is too mundane? Perhaps the problem is that residential housing is a system of materials and we are not comfortable in working with other materials or other researchers from these fields. Whatever the case, we seem to have really missed the boat. Also, beyond the capital investment in wood-frame housing, there is a considerable value in wood around a house. And this could be extended even further if we considered the adhesives, fasteners, coatings/finishes, etc. that are associated with all of these.

The bottom line seems to be that we generally know the value of wood to the end user, but this is not reflected in our research. Certainly, there are many important issues, such as energy consumption, fire, biodeterioration, cost-effective construction, fasteners, recycling/reuse, etc. Perhaps we need to reexamine our research priorities and think about whether we are doing research that is of value to people.

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