

## Looking to the Future

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### INTRODUCTION

Many changes have occurred since the initial meeting of this Society in 1953. Currently, concern exists regarding whether the direction programs are taking has remained relevant to the membership. Those currently responsible for the I.P.P.S. Eastern Region annual meeting program want to provide meaningful information for the membership. However, it is members who will ultimately determine the future of I.P.P.S.

I was asked to look at past programs from the North American regions. Hopefully, the resulting analysis will provide insight into not only how Eastern Region programs have evolved but also into those of Southern and Western Regions.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

In doing this analysis, I established four arbitrary categories for presentations:

- Propagation.
- Cultural practices including irrigation, pests, fertilizer, etc..
- Strictly plant presentations with essentially no culture or propagation information.
- Other presentations which include everything else such as talks on medicinal, marketing, etc.

Categories were determined by reading the title of a presentation and, when the title was insufficient, referring to the proceedings. Any success was due to the generosity of R. T. Bullington who willed me his complete proceedings.

I counted the number of programs in each category for each North American region during this decade, in 1981 and in 1971. I felt that this would give us some insight into recent trends as well as provide the opportunity to compare recent programs to those of 15 and 25 years ago. These years are a convenient milestone plus, I think, give us valid comparisons with other regions. Western Region was formed in 1959 with presentations included for the first time in the Combined Proceedings in 1963. By 1971, they were firmly established. Southern Region was formed in 1976. By 1981 Southern Region programs were established.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From its inception, Southern Region has had fewer papers presented than either Western or Eastern. They have averaged a total of 19 presentations per annual meeting during the years evaluated with numbers declining in recent years. They will have 15 formal presentations at the meeting in Louisiana next week. Western Region has averaged 25.5 with 25 scheduled for 1996. Eastern has averaged 30.2 with 30 scheduled this year.

The percentage of presentations at the annual meeting focusing on propagation has ranged from 20% to 86%. Eastern Region has averaged 58% for the years considered with the average being 51.7% for the 1990s. Western, the next oldest North American Region, has averaged 47.8% with 41.9% for the 1990s. Southern

has averaged 39.4% with 38.6% in the 1990s. There has been a decline in the percentage of propagation programs at annual meetings from 15 and 25 years ago in the Eastern and Western Regions. Except for 1996, in which the percentage is an all time low of 20%, Southern Region has remained fairly constant since its beginning.

The percentage of cultural practices presentations at annual meetings has been highest in the Southern Region with an average of 37.9% for the 1990s. In the Western and Eastern the percentages have been highly variable. However, the Western Region has consistently had more presentations on cultural practices than the Eastern Region. Their average for the 1990s was 32.6% while Eastern Region has averaged 20.6% cultural practice programs at the annual meeting.

The number of plant programs at annual meetings has been highly variable. In 1971, Western Region had none. In 1991 they had none again and Southern Region had none in 1994. However, at times both of these regions have had plant programs comprising 20% or more of their annual meeting. Eastern Region, on the other hand, has had at least one program devoted solely to plants at their annual meeting in each year considered with an average of 13% of the total annual meeting presentations being on plants in the 1990s. The trend to include programs exclusively on a particular plant or group of plants has been increasing in all regions for the past couple of years.

The "other" category has been highly variable in Eastern Region, averaging 18.8% in the 1990s. Southern Region averaged 15.4% and Western averaged 16.7% of their annual meeting filled with these diverse programs. This is a dramatic increase from programs 15 and 25 years ago when one "other" or none was normal. This increase in "other" programs probably reflects the diversity of issues facing modern nurserymen.

## CONCLUSIONS

There is no right or wrong here. Regions are not in competition to have the "right" program. In Eastern Region, we have changed the days of the week when we meet, the months when we meet, the nature and timing of our tours, and many other components that make up our annual meeting. Here, I just considered program numbers and content.

All I have done is show you what has happened and tried to answer those who have said we are changing too fast and those who think we are not changing fast enough. The truth is that, except for an occasional year with a dramatic emphasis on a particular "hot" topic, we haven't changed a great deal in recent years.

Eastern and Western Regions tend to be more purists in that they focus more on propagation topics while Southern Region has tended to emphasize cultural practices. The number of programs focusing primarily on plants has generally increased slightly in the Eastern Region while fluctuating from no strictly plant presentations to 20% of the annual meeting in both Southern and Western Regions. "Other" programs have increased in all regions . . . probably reflecting the diversity of the membership and its interests.

We need to consider questions about change in I.P.P.S. Does Eastern Region want to continue to have a larger number of presentations and high percentage of propagation topics? Do we want to have a higher percentage of presentations on cultural practices each year like Southern Region does? Do we want to continue to increase the percentage of papers that tell us about our product and often one of our passions, i.e., plants? Please share your views with each upcoming program chair and the Board.