

BOOK REVIEW

FOREST PRODUCTS TRADE: MARKET TRENDS AND TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Edited by Jay A. Johnson and W. Ramsay Smith

University of Washington Press, Seattle. 1989. 252 pages. ISBN 0-295-96682-3.
US\$40.00 (NZ\$70.00 approx.)

This is the third CINTRAFOR's* "book of the conference" series. The high standards of production evident in the two previous volumes have been maintained with this one too. Twenty-two of the papers in the volume are grouped under three themes: Trade Actions and Reactions, Technical Considerations of Trade, and Tropical Countries as Suppliers and Consumers. The twenty-third paper, which looks at the importance of forest products to Washington State, has a section all to itself—understandable perhaps in a book produced in the State of Washington.

This is a book for dipping into rather than for reading from cover to cover in one sitting. There are a number of chapters dealing with Latin America and its ability to become a major source of wood supply. However, for a book first published in 1989 it is a little disappointing to find that the latest statistics given relate to 1984 or 1985. The AUSNEWZ Hawkins, Wright Associates Conference "Investment and Trade Opportunities in Pulp and Paper on the Pacific Rim" held in Sydney 12–14 February 1989 managed to produce 1987/88 statistics for at least some Latin American countries (Chile, Argentina, Brazil). To be fair, the niggle about statistical "up-to-dateness" is one that applies to the whole of the book, not just the chapters on Latin America. It is no doubt a reflection of the fact that the symposium was held in March 1987 (gestation periods for symposium proceedings would appear to be much the same in the United States and New Zealand—about as long as that of an elephant!).

Statistics and statistical data are not, however, the only nor even necessarily the major reason why one would read this book. There are good background chapters on a number of topics of interest to New Zealanders. T.J. Peck of FAO has an article on North African/Middle Eastern trade patterns; demand for timber, and market opportunities for softwood lumber and ply in the Peoples' Republic of China are covered by two other authors; and there are chapters on Taiwan, the Republic of Korea, and non-residential wood use in Japan and the United States. All of this is material which is hard to find yet known to be of potential value to some New Zealand organisations.

Frequently the real worth of a symposium comes not just from the papers presented but rather from the contacts made and the ideas, comment, discussion, stimulated by the papers. A major disappointment with this book—and with the others in the series—is that the editors have failed to include any of the discussion and questions which were undoubtedly stimulated. This makes the task of a reviewer who did not attend the conference extremely

* CINTRAFOR = Center for International Trade in Forest Products, based at the University of Washington, Seattle.

difficult. It is hard to give a balanced picture of a volume which covers many diverse topics—rattan to national codes and standards, composite materials to the future importance of tropical countries. I found myself wondering as I read the various papers “What sort of reaction and questions did this provoke?” The lack of a summary of the discussion and of editorial comment putting this discussion into perspective is, I feel, a major weakness with the volume.

To end on a more positive note, the book does contain a number of delightful and very informative chapters. One which to my mind stands out is that of Briggs & Smith titled “Conversion Factors in Forest Products Trade: Separating Fact from Fiction”. Every trade researcher has at some stage had the (at least slightly) unnerving experience of finding import and export statistics that look completely different—and yet supposedly relate to the same product being traded between the same countries. It is reassuring to find that some of the discrepancies can be explained by conversion factors and the errors that exist with these. A paper which clearly sets out the working of a number of formulae for estimating volume, their differences, varying degree of accuracy, and the differences in practical application of formulae that arises just within the United States is well worthwhile. This paper, or one like it, should be required reading for anyone who intends to embark upon a career in trade modelling or collating and analysing harvest, log conversion, and price data from a number of different sources.

To summarise, despite some faults this is a book containing something for just about anyone involved in some aspect of world forest products trade. There is material on markets, wood supply, technical considerations, promotion. The articles, in the main, are from the United States perspective but this does not detract from their relevance. For many, however, the biggest barrier to individual acquisition of this volume is, I suspect, going to be its price—approx. NZ\$70. Given the price and the wide range of interests catered for, it is perhaps a book for the library rather than one for the individual’s personal collection.

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