

International Genetic Resistance Conference Cultivates New Discussions on Green Alternative

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Eugene, Oregon—The recently concluded 4th International Workshop on Genetics of Host-Parasite Interactions in Forestry: Disease and Insect Resistance in Forest Trees, held July 31 – August 5, 2011, centered around “green” genetic solutions to forest threats. With increasing environmental and social pressures, non-native diseases and insects are migrating into previously unreachable ecosystems, threatening urban and wildland forests that lack co-evolutionary defenses. To address these issues, 88 top researchers, geneticists, pathologists, entomologists, evolutionary ecologists, and statisticians from 12 countries around the globe assembled for the first time in 30 years.

“Now more than ever, we must work in a collaborative fashion to find sustainable resistance to pathogens, pests, and climate changes that threaten our forests. While pesticides and chemical treatments are certainly valuable tools, genetic resistance offers a green alternative, allowing us to work with nature to select and develop trees that will have greater natural resistance to environmental and invasive species issues,” said Richard Sniezko, Center Geneticist at the USDA Forest Service’s Dorena Genetic Resource Center.

Fifty-nine presentations and 31 posters were presented encompassing the topics of climate change and disease and insect resistance to mechanisms of resistance, breeding for resistance, ecology and evolutionary biology, and molecular genomics. Presentations were followed by insightful Q&A sessions that fostered an open forum in which ideas were exchanged and challenged by the audience. “The Q&A discussions were great. The audience was engaged, eager to ask questions, and provide different perspectives. This was one of the most useful meetings I have been to in some time,”

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said Katy Hayden, a postdoctoral researcher at University of California, Berkeley, who delivered a presentation on sudden oak death titled “Developing a Disease Resistance Research Program for Tanoaks.”

While the presentations were informative and created a lot of discussion and interest, the Conference was equally successful in fostering relationships and forming new contacts. Attendees were able to spend ample time meeting others in their field from around the world while participating in group lunches, a field trip to the Dorena Genetic Resource Center and Tyrrell Seed Orchard, and a trip to King Estate Winery, all of which ultimately melded the group of international strangers into friends and colleagues eager to collaborate. At the end of the conference there was a resounding demand for future conferences, and a sense of common purpose in the effort to protect the forest in the “greenest,” most responsible, way possible.

For more information on the Conference or updated news, visit http://ucanr.org/sites/tree_resistance_2011conference/, or contact Richard Sniezko at rsniezko@fs.fed.us or (541) 767-5716.

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