

OBITUARY – PROFESSOR LOUIS ZSUFFA (1927–2003)



Louis Zsuffa, 75, suddenly passed to his final rest on Friday November 14, 2003 in Toronto, Canada from a heart attack. Born in the former Yugoslavia in 1927, Louis received his Bachelor of Science degree in Forestry in 1951 and his Ph.D. in Forest Genetics and Breeding in 1964, both from the University of Zagreb. He held professional positions at the Poplar Research Institute in Novi Sad and at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. He then moved to Canada and was hired by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. He worked at the Ontario Forest Research Institute in charge of Tree Breeding research and afterwards at the Ontario Tree Improvement and Forest Biomass Institute, as Principal Scientist and Director of Research. He was also the Chairman of the Tree Improvement Working Group under the Canada-Ontario Joint Forest Research Committee. He subsequently became a Professor at the Faculty of Forestry, University of Toronto. He served in that position until his retirement in 1993 and continued to be active both professionally and scientifically at the University of Toronto as Professor Emeritus.

Louis was by all accounts one of the world's leading authorities in genetics and breeding of poplars and willows. Throughout his research he discovered and developed via his hybridization and selection programs, many well-known clones. He either hybridized or was responsible for hybridizing over 1000 poplar and willow clones and developed invaluable genetic stock for the future. At the same time he acquired most of the elite clones and varieties available internationally. He was instrumental in securing all this material in clonal archives and collections. Although Louis will always be remembered for his work with poplars and willows which he carried out with true passion, he has also produced significant work on the genetics and breeding of five-needle pines as well as on fast growing tropical species. In addition, he managed to maintain a strong breeding program while at the same time encouraging his colleagues and students to explore the opportunities offered by biochemical and molecular genetics, as well as biotechnology. Louis represented Canada as a member of the International Energy Agency and was the Chairman of its Program Group on Forest Biomass Growth and Production. He also served as Operating Agent in several Tasks of IEA Bioenergy from 1979 to 1997. He was a member of the Executive Committee of the International Poplar Commission and the Chairman of its Biomass Production Systems Committee for 19 years (1981 to 2000). He was also the co-chairman for several years of the IUFRO Poplar Provenances and

Breeding Working Party and of the Project Group on Integrated Research into Biomass for Energy. Louis was the driving force behind the development of the Canadian poplar and willow-breeding program; he initiated the short rotation forestry program in Canada and played a key role in founding the Poplar Council of Canada. Louis was a registered expert with international organizations such as the FAO and the Canadian International Research Center and participated in several scientific missions in Asia, Central and South America. He also had a distinguished career in academia where he combined his many research activities with his excellent skills as an educator and student supervisor.

Louis was the author or co-author of more than 250 scientific publications and his worldwide recognition was evident by the numerous invitations for him to speak around the world. His publications include 80 papers in refereed journals and 70 in refereed books, chapters in books, papers in proceedings and reviews. He served on editorial and review boards of numerous scientific and professional journals. He was the principal supervisor of 13 Ph.D. and 14 M.Sc. theses and participated in several more graduate student committees. For his contributions to forest genetics and breeding teaching and research Louis was the recipient of numerous honors and awards, including the prestigious Canadian Institute of Forestry's Gold Metal for Scientific Achievement. He also received nominations for the Marcus Wallenberg Price, the Rolex Award for Enterprise, and the Japan Price for Science and Technology for Biological Productions.

Apart from his considerable scientific achievements, Louis will always be remembered for his kind, calm and unpretentious nature. He offered generously his help and thoughtful advice to his colleagues and he has been the mentor of many graduate students. His lab was truly international, always crowded and busy with students, postdocs and professors on sabbatical from Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas. Louis managed to maintain a positive and cheerful atmosphere in his lab, while carrying on constant scientific progress in a variety of facets of genetics and breeding of fast growing trees. He managed to inspire with his continuous drive for science and research until the end of his life. His life ended on the way home after a day on the University of Toronto campus. We all consider ourselves being very fortunate to have known Louis and to have had the opportunity to work with him and share a part of our lives with him. He was a true scholar and a great humanist.

Louis leaves behind his beloved wife Mara and his son Tibor.

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