WALNUT COUNCIL NATIONAL MEETING
By: Paul Heggemann, Missouri Chapter President

The Walnut Council National Meeting in Indiana brought together landowners, foresters, researchers, and members for several days of field tours, practical forestry discussions, and fellowship. Topics included plantation management, sawmill demonstrations, pest concerns, timber markets, and succession planning. The Claude Diehl family were wonderful hosts, and their plantation was impressive.

Saturday
Members began arriving at the Fairfield Inn on Saturday and were greeted as they trickled in throughout the day. It was a good chance for everyone to reconnect before the formal activities began.

Sunday
The Missouri crew members and others helped assemble the Sunday evening dinner, which included smoked brisket, green beans, baked beans, potato salad, and homemade cookies. Thanks to everyone who helped with the preparation, serving, and cleanup.

Following the meal, several members shared their experiences with growing and harvesting trees. One of the recurring topics over the next several days was deer damage and the ongoing challenge of managing it effectively.

Monday
Monday began early at the Diehl property, with the tour scheduled to start at 8:00. Fog delayed the sawmill operators, requiring a quick change in plans. Thanks to Phil Woolery's reorganization, the crew was divided into three groups instead of the planned four, and the tour moved forward.

- The first stop was the plantation Claude planted in 2024 with selected trees. Claude described the challenges of maintaining the seven-foot deer fence and the ongoing work required to protect the planting.
- The second stop was with Jim McKenna, who explained how trees from Claude's veneer tree sale were grafted to help establish a plantation that could produce superior nuts and, ultimately, superior trees.
- The third stop was with Steve Felt at the soil pit. It was one of the deepest soil pits I have seen, measuring about seven feet deep with no rocks. In my view, the soil was nearly perfect.

- The fourth stop was the plantation Claude's father planted with pine, walnut, and various hardwood trees. The pine helped the hardwoods grow straight and limbless. I am not sure of the exact planting year, but it was around 1975. These trees ranged from 12 to 18 inches in diameter and had stems more than 20 feet long that were virtually limbless.
- The fifth stop featured the forester who helped the Diehl family plant the plantation over the years. His plantings included pine, oak, several softwood species, and walnut. He recommends planting a variety of species and avoiding placing the same type side by side, which can help reduce the risk of disease spreading among similar trees.
- The sixth and final stop was the sawmill, which was shortened by the rain. Rado from Purdue and Claude sawed a poplar log with a spiral rope pattern, hoping it would reveal a special grain pattern. The expected pattern did not appear, although the wood was still extremely beautiful.

Monday evening included a catered meal and awards banquet. The keynote speaker was Indiana State Forester John Seifert, who attended Mizzou before moving to Indiana as a forester. He gave a strong presentation on Indiana's environment for tree growth and timber production.

Tuesday
The team assembled a strong lineup of speakers for Tuesday. While each presentation covered more than I can describe here, the following is a general overview of the topics discussed.

Bob Bruner discussed the problem with the spotted lantern fly and how it affects our environment and trees.

Bruce Wakeland talked about his 40 years of forest and timber work. His main point on timber management was that if a job cannot be done well, it is better not to encourage a poor job.

Chris Gonso, Indiana state forest program manager, discussed the economics of the timber business and the industry's importance to the economy. He also reviewed current market conditions, noting that walnut products are slightly down, though walnut remains sought after and generally holds its price well.

Caleb Kell, manager of Purdue's HTIRC, explained the ongoing work of improving the best trees through research and development.

Renee Wiatt gave an excellent presentation on succession planning for plantations and woodlands. She explained the importance of starting early so landowners can help ensure their land is cared for as they and their heirs desire.

Dylan Tridle with Purdue Forestry and Natural Resources spoke about his work on butternut tree restoration.

Jonathon Elrond, a local landowner and producer, discussed walnut and maple syrup production. His family operation produces syrup for family and friends, and he shared practical advice for anyone interested in getting started and deciding whether syrup production is a good fit.

Jim McKenna is the new president of the national walnut council and is excited to lead the group this year. He closed the meeting and wished everyone a safe trip home.

I look forward to seeing everyone who can attend the October field day at the Clay Shaw farm in Cowgill, Missouri.