

## Editorial

Innovation in drying is often considered an oxymoron. As one of the oldest and most common unit operation it is implicitly assumed that there is enough knowledge about this unit operation so that no innovation is really possible and not many opportunities exist for making definitive contributions. Often know-how is confused with knowledge or know-why which is central to technological innovation to produce a better product. That this view is far from the truth can be seen by glancing through the massive technical programs of the numerous and diverse conferences devoted to drying R&D and also the contents of this journal. The fact that tens of thousands of diverse products are dried in scores of different types of equipment to widely different specifications makes it obvious that the knowledge base on drying is far from complete. Indeed, every good contribution to it uncovers even more challenging new problems. It is clear that, we have made a good and sustained start but the journey is far from nearing completion.

With many new areas vying for lion's shares of the dwindling R&D funding pie all over the world, we need to be cost-effective and highly selective in promoting drying R&D. International collaboration to share human and research funding resources has a beneficial by-product; cultural diversity and multi-disciplinary nature of such partnerships can have synergistic effect on the outcome. Globalization has this highly desirable effect. Global competition also speeds development effort by making it more focused so one does not miss the proverbial boat. International conference series like IDS, ADC, IADC, NDC etc help disseminate knowledge rapidly and also provide ample opportunities for networking and collaborations. I personally know of scores of such efforts already bearing fruit.

Whether we need injection of R&D funds and more researchers to join our bandwagon is a highly charged question. I believe we have reached a sustainable level. Overpopulation with more individuals will only cause duplication of effort and dilution of the effort since much research is serial or sequential rather than parallel in nature. When one goes around academic institutions around the world one gets the distinct feeling that everyone seems to be doing nearly similar, if not the same, thing, especially in areas where research resources are plenty and readily accessed even by mediocre researchers with no prior recognized expertise in the field. Dollar-directed research is unlikely to be high quality and is more likely than not to cause poor utilization of scarce resources at a high cost to other mainstream but essential research themes. In drying field, I feel we have the critical mass needed to make steady and sustained progress. There is neither push nor pull causing us to speed up the effort since the half-life of drying technologies can be measured in decades –not months or years.

In view of the significance of innovation in this field of thermal and non-thermal drying, this journal will publish in 2007 a special issue devoted exclusively to truly innovative drying research and drying equipment designs. Authors are invited to keep this in mind and submit their papers for this special issue.

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