The Young Researchersâ?? Challenge 2025

Description

During the Marcus Wallenberg Prize event, 26 outstanding young PhD students and PostDocs took part in an exclusive three-day scientific program aimed at inspiring the next generation of forest researchers. This yearâ??s participants represented 18 universities and research institutes across seven countries â?? Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and the USA.

The program encouraged the exchange of innovative ideas, showcased cutting-edge forest-related research, and fostered collaboration and networking among talented young scientists from around the world.

The young researchers are able to participate through the sponsorship of the Erik Johan Ljungbergs Educational Foundation, Finnish Forest Products Engineersâ?? Association, VTT, Natural Resources Institute Finland, PÃ¶yry Foundations, universities and research institutes.

The Young Researchersâ?? Program began with engaging presentations from two Wallenberg Research Initiatives â?? the Wallenberg Initiative Materials Science for Sustainability (WISE) and the Wallenberg Wood Science Center (WWSC).

Associate Professor Mika Sipponen, leader of the Sustainable Materials Chemistry (SUSMATCHEM) research group, opened the session by introducing WISE and sharing insights into his teamâ??s pioneering work. His research explores the creation of functional materials from lignin and other industrial by-products, emphasizing fundamental understanding and sustainability. He also presented examples from some of the projects, such as the WISE-funded UPSIDEHYB project, which upcycles food side streams into hybrid organic-inorganic materials.

The session continued with postdoc Carl Moser from WWSC, who highlighted innovative material developments achieved within the center over the years. A small exhibition showcased a variety of materials, sparking lively discussions that carried on into the coffee break.

The program concluded with an inspiring panel discussion featuring the 2025 Marcus Wallenberg Prize Laureate, Dr. Gerald Tuskan. The conversation ranged from broad reflections on building a successful academic career to in-depth discussions about molecular genetics, GMOs, and gene-edited food. The engaging dialogue extended well beyond the scheduled time, as Dr. Tuskan showed great interest in the young researchersâ?? projects and spent time visiting their posters after the session.

Mika Sipponen, SU

Carl Moser, KTH

Dr. Tuskan

The second day of the program continued with a series of inspiring talks highlighting cutting-edge forest research and innovation.

The day began with an engaging presentation by MWP Young Researcher alumna Katariina Kemppainen, Senior Vice President of Group R&D at MetsÃ¤ Group. She shared insights from her career journey and the companyâ??s forward-looking work in regenerative forest management, innovation projects, and investments in startups. She also highlighted how MetsÃ¤ Group drives collaboration through industry-led innovation ecosystems and partnerships between academia and industry.

The program then featured Professor Nathaniel Street from UmeÃ¥ University, who presented his groupâ??s genomics research on aspen, Norway spruce, and Scots pine. His team works on genome assembly, transcriptome, and co-expression network analyses to uncover the genetic foundations of complex traits such as leaf shape variation, wood development, and specialized metabolite production â?? as well as the regulatory roles of non-coding RNAs.

The speaker session concluded with two presentations by the newest members of the Marcus Wallenberg Prize Selection Committee. Professor Ingo Burgert from ETH Zurich introduced his research in wood material science, while Professor Erik NÃ¦sset from the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU) shared his groundbreaking work integrating airborne laser scanning as a core component of modern forest inventory.

Katariina Kemppainen, MetsÃ¤ Spring

Ingo Burgert, ETH

Nathaniel Street, UmU

Erik NÃ¦sset, NMBU

Lecturers at the MWP 2025 Young Researchersâ?? Program

In the afternoon, the young researchers took the stage to present their own work through engaging Three Minute Thesis (3MT) presentations. Members of the MWP Selection Committee attended the session and both the committee and the young researchers voted for their favorite presentations, and three outstanding talks were awarded.

Marina Mehling, The University of British Columbia, Canada	Joel Kostensalo, LUKE, Finland	Giiguulen Enkhsaikhan, Aalto University, Finland

1st prize â?? Marina Mehling, The University of British Columbia, Canada

2nd prize â?? Joel Kostensalo, LUKE, Finland

3rd prize â?? Giiguulen Enkhsaikhan, Aalto University, Finland

All 3MT presentations were filmed and the recordings are available at the Marcus Wallenberg Prize Youtube channel

Throughout the event, the young researchers showcased their work through poster presentations, offering a closer look at their innovative research. A dedicated poster session was held in connection with the MWP Symposium on 4 November, where three outstanding posters were recognized and awarded by the MWP Selection Committee.

1. Shiying Zhang, Aalto University, Finland

2.Anran Lui, VIB-UGent Center for Plant Systems Biology, Belgium

3. Linus Kron, Chalmers Univiersity of Technology, Sweden

To learn more about the Young Researchersâ?? research projects read their abstracts that are available here: Young Researchersâ?? abstracts 2025.

In the evening, the young researchers attended the Marcus Wallenberg Prize Ceremony and Banquet â?? a memorable celebration honoring the Laureate and his remarkable achievements. The event brought together researchers, industry leaders, and guests to celebrate excellence in forest science.

The third and final day of the program, the young researchers participated in the MWP Symposium and networked with the symposium attendees during the poster session.

Laureate Dr. Gerald Tuskan

The application period for the MWP Young Researchersâ?? Challenge 2026 will open 4 May 2026. Stay tuned for more information!