The study tour had a number of objectives:

1. To gain an intimate knowledge of the production and processing facilities of a number of essential oils produced in these three US regions. Participants were able to witness the production and processing of a number of natural essential oil ingredients including mint oils, cedar wood oil and hops. In addition, visits were made to major flavour and fragrance companies.

2. To provide an opportunity for participants to meet up with producers, processors and exporters from the USA.

3. To enable participants to meet up with other flavour and fragrance industry people from a variety of countries.

4. The aim was to achieve these objectives in just over a week out of the office.

TEXAS AND CEDAR WOOD

The first two days of the Tour were spent in Texas. On arrival delegates were able to tour San Antonio, the Riverwalk, The Alamo and some UNESCO World Heritage sites. The opening cocktails were sponsored by Eucaforest Pty Ltd, and this was followed by a Welcome Dinner.

The next day saw a visit to the cedar wood plantations and distillation facilities of Texarome Inc. The expanse of cedar wood forest and the sustainable practice of cultivation being practised were remarkable with vast stretches of forest. The detailed presentation and documents provided, especially on distillation techniques, were very much appreciated.

PACIFIC NORTHWEST: MINT OILS, DISTILLERIES, FARMS AND COMPANY VISITS

On Sunday we flew out of San Antonio to the beautiful Pacific Northwest, where even in mid-summer we saw snow-capped peaks. Here we saw predominantly the growing and distillation of peppermint and spearmint oils.

Three major companies were visited: Norwest Ingredients, Labbeemint and Callisons, all family owned companies. The company visits were truly enlightening. All the delegates were impressed by the efficiency and high productivity achieved. In addition, the high level of expertise and professionalism meant that we benefited immensely from this experience. Some farms showed their complete facilities for mint oil production, explaining their production, fractional distillation equipment, quality control, analytical services and flavour creation facilities etc. The visits invariably involved various members of the management and technical team accompanying groups of delegates explaining and clarifying every question. In addition, the companies shared a wealth of information in both video and booklet forms. This included detailed data on mint production, yields, climatic factors etc. In addition, one full day was spent on the different varieties of peppermint and spearmint oils from different regions of the USA and India.

In addition, there was a presentation by the Mint Industry Research Council (MIRC). Its role was explained in assisting stakeholders (farmers, distillers and traders) overcome the various challenges being faced by the mint industry, including verticillium wilt.

A number of farms were visited including Shinn Family Farms Phil Sealock’s Farms Green Acres Farms and Shady Lane Farms. They grow mint, often along with a range of other products including hops and fruits. Each farm acreage was huge, while the farming practices, irrigation and distillation techniques were highly commendable. The farmers were proud of their facilities, food safety programmes and various accreditations.

The delegates soon recognised how very well organised is the American mint industry. Throughout the visit delegates often compared US mint operations with those of India and recognised that the Indian mint industry, as well as the essential oil industry in many other countries, could learn much from US practices.

MIDWEST – COMPANY VISITS

Two days were spent in visiting companies and a farm and distillation facility in the Midwest. Two IFEAT member companies were visited: Kalsec Inc. at Kalamazoo and The Lebermuth Company at South Bend. During the visit to Kalsec’s impressive campus, a tour was made of their spice and hop extract facilities and a tour of their relatively new facilities, the highlight of which was the new impressive Fricke Concordia automatic dosing machine.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

At the end of the Tour there was a series of very positive responses from the delegates – and the Tour more than achieved its objectives. Organisations visited put a lot of effort in providing detailed analysis of their production and processing operations. They provided detailed knowledge and data on the US mint oil and F&R ingredients sector and its innovative techniques throughout the supply chain. Delegates were able to meet up with very knowledgeable and diverse people from within our industry. The warm welcome, kindness and hospitality of our hosts was superb. Several companies sponsored wonderful meals and provided gifts and mementos of our visits. Participants were able to get to know other delegates and share their experiences.