



IFMA17 Congress – Delegate Evaluation Survey Report

17th International Farm Management Congress, Bone Student Center, Normal, Illinois, USA

Survey carried out on the last day of the congress – Friday 24th July 2009

(See the attached survey form at the end of the report)

60 completed forms were collected at the end of the final plenary session – out of a possible 150 delegates. This represents a 40% return. (Some of the Congress delegates had already left earlier in the day.)

Question 1 – Your country?

- 13 Countries were represented by the respondents – mostly they were from countries where English is the foremost language – so the bulk were from USA, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, UK, South Africa. Other countries with several respondents were Denmark and The Netherlands.

Question 2 – Is this your first Congress?

- 25 answered ‘Yes’ – 35 answered ‘No’ – 42% and 58% of the respondents respectively.

Question 3 – If ‘no’, how many previous congresses have you attended?

- The number of previous congresses attended ranged from 1-14 – the 35 who had attended a congress previously had attended 160 congresses between them, an average of 4.5 each.

Question 4 – Please indicate your age

- Age 30 or less = 8 (13%), Age 31-40 = 4 (7%), Age 41-50 = 15 (25%), Age 51-60 = 19 (32%), Age 61+ = 14 (23%)

Question 5 – Your Occupation?

- As expected the occupations of the delegates were many and varied. However the breakdown between Farmer / Farm managers, Consultant / Advisors (inc. Extension) and Academic / Educators (inc. Students) was complicated as several respondents were involved in more than one activity e.g. ‘farming and consulting’ or ‘education and consulting’.
- As a result there were 71 entries (from 60 people) in these groups. 16 (23%) were Farmer / Farm managers, 23 (32%) were Consultant / Advisors, and 32 (45%) were Academic / Educators including 6 PhD Students.

Question 6 – If you are involved in “farm management” in terms of overseeing or advising on a farm or farms – state area you are involved in.

- There were 19 entries for this with a total of 395,006 hectares (886,745 acres) – averaging 20,790 ha (46,670 acres).

Questions 7 – 15 were rated evaluations - Excellent / Very Good / Good / Fair / Poor

Results are expressed as a percentage – rounded to the nearest full number for convenience

Question 7 – Plenary Sessions result

- Excellent 40%, Very Good 52%, Good 5%, Fair 3%, Poor 0%

Question 8 – Contributed Papers result

- Excellent 15%, Very Good 53%, Good 28%, Fair 2%, Poor 2%

Question 9 – Day Tours

- Excellent 47%, Very Good 43%, Good 8%, Fair 2%, Poor 0%

Question 10 – Posters – 53 respondents – some were not aware of their presence and entered a ‘?’ mark.

- Excellent 8%, Very Good 32%, Good 55%, Fair 6%, Poor 0%

Question 11 – Social Program

- Excellent 9%, Very Good 37%, Good 40%, Fair 11%, Poor 4%

Question 12 – Accommodation and arrangements

- Excellent 12%, Very Good 50%, Good 20%, Fair 8%, Poor 10%

Question 13 – Overall how do you rate this Congress?

- Excellent 22%, Very Good 55%, Good 17%, Fair 3%, Poor 3%

Question 14 – If you submitted a paper or poster Your assessment of the process?

31 respondents

- Excellent 29%, Very Good 35%, Good 19%, Fair 6%, Poor 10%

Question 15 – If you attended the Pre Congress Tour –

10 respondents

- Excellent 90%, Very Good 10%, Good 0%, Fair 0%, Poor 0%

Questions 16 – 19 requested written responses

Not all the respondents completed these – but only 3 gave no reply. Most responded to at least some of the questions. There were of course lots of different suggestions and comments – so below are the ones that were mentioned most frequently.

Question 16 – Please give two highlights of the Congress for you.

- Where delegates had gone on the Pre Congress tour – this was often listed as a highlight
- Plenary Presentations as a group - with Tadeus Paztek’s Biofuel and Ann Wilkinson’s Frontiers of Animal Health getting most mentions. Also Bob Thompson, Andrew Young and Lowell Catlett got several mentions each. ‘Learning about GMO’s in general’ got a couple of mentions.
- The International Panel was frequently listed, and the producer panels also listed in general.
- Day Tours as a whole – but ‘Chicago’ and ‘John Deere’ day tours most frequently mentioned, with Ethanol Plant (Roy) and the Chicago High School particularly identified. Also Bitner Farms and Twin Groves
- ‘Networking’ – ‘meeting and making new friends’, ‘socialising with international guests’ all well appreciated and often listed.

- On the social side - social events, fireworks and the 'Thursday night Banquet and entertainment' all got mentions.
- The 'hotel hosts', 'friendliness of the welcome' also got included.

Question 17 – Please give two areas where improvement could be made

- The distance from accommodation to venue, the wide spread out of the hotels, the shuttle buses, were the most frequently mentioned.
- The food offered got many mentions – 'too little in breaks', 'failure to keep the break refreshments topped up', not having 'real milk' offered there, 'too little food in breaks', 'lack of diversity in main meals'. The food offered and lack of alcohol option at the Welcome Reception not well received – especially by US attendees. However it was not all bad, with several good comments in the final comment section, and one person passed on 'congratulations and thanks to the catering students at ISU'.
- Lack of Internet and Email access at ISU was often mentioned. Whilst hotels did have internet and computer facilities they were often not enough and were cumbersome to use. The facilities offered at the university in Ireland were quoted as an example of what was needed.
- Poster presentations – not enough time, people were not aware of them, authors did not know whether to stay with their presentation or not during the lunch break as few people attended.
- Tour days were often too long – and should not have Banquets added on at the end of the day. Several mentions. Also a request to start presentation session days later (8.30am suggested).
- Day Tours – not enough livestock. Also a couple of requests for 'food industry' visits and more focus on food industry in plenary sessions / contributed papers.
- Several requests to keep registration costs down.
- One or two mentioned the location lacking in diversity in terms of the agriculture in the area, one commented strongly that Champaign should have been the venue.
- There were several requests for information sheets on farm visits to be given out ahead of the visit to speed up getting to know the enterprise being visited. Would reduce the introduction time.
- Timing of visits did not get the usual number of comments, things had worked pretty well. However there was a strong feeling that the logistics could have been better organised for the really early starters – some found it odd to have to leave their hotel at 4.30am only to spend ½-1 hour sitting around at another hotel.
- There were several comments that the social event evenings ended too early, particularly after the main banquet.

Question 18 – How can more people be attracted to future Congresses?

- Inevitably there were several suggestions about the cost of attending, with lots of suggestions that we sponsor students, young farmers, people attending from abroad etc. etc. Included identifying and listing possible sponsors.
- Having cheaper accommodation for students etc. Offer 'on-farm accommodation'.
- Promotion by linking-up with national farming organisations including young farmer organisations (4H etc.), agricultural economics societies, universities. Promote more strongly to farmers.
- Changing the perception of the conference – e.g. not just a 'farm management' conference, currently seen as an 'academic' congress (?), join up with another international conference, improve appeal to processor groups, also to agribusiness (who might then bring sponsorship).
- Use Digital 2.00 tools to keep the community together between congresses.
- Increase the amount of publicity through more channels.

- Get members to promote the congress more, get them to pledge to bring another delegate. One-on-one marketing. Word of mouth promotion.
- Advertise day fee locally to get higher local attendance (*this was done*).

Question 19 – Please add any comments you would like to make.

Many of the comments here continued suggestions relating to Questions 17 and 18.

- Many words of thanks to the organisers. “Learnt a lot”, “good conference, well organised”, “overall good conference especially in the circumstances”, “welcoming hosts”, “excellent visits”, “hospitable hosts” (linked in once instance to Bob Swires by name), “logistics, structure, information all good”. “Very much enjoyed, second to none”. “Great Job - Congratulations to Illinois and IFMA teams. Thanks.” “IFMA17 wonderful experience. Professional organisation”. “Good networking, good mix of people, Lots to take back.” And more.
So, on the whole very pleasing comments – just one (an American) thought it was “poor value for money, embarrassing”.
- “There were no general sections devoted to teaching or extension.”
- “Suffered from spread of hotels – needed better information on options”.
- “Re-arrange program so that banquets do not follow tours – days too long”.
- “End congress at lunch on last day”.

Conclusions

- Slightly disappointing that not more delegates completed the forms – we should distribute the forms earlier than the last morning in future.
- The proportion of “first timers” was higher than normal – usually around 30%.
- The spread of the age grouping was somewhat better than we seem to think – but clearly we would like more people in the 31-40 age group (those building their career and family – so more difficult for them to get away).
- The mix of professional groups was much as we have come to expect and we need to continue to work hard on attracting all groupings – but in particular in the farmer and consultant / advisor groups (*especially for NZ when universities may still be applying cuts to travel budgets etc.*)
- The land area managed or advised upon figure is interesting and can be used to attract sponsors. However several people who could have answered this question chose not to.
- The reader can make their own conclusions of the Ratings Questions (7-15), but these show that in general we have a good basic formula for the congress, that the 17th Congress was generally well appreciated with some aspects not as good as others – but in all the important areas for those who attended (the main content of plenary papers and day tours) it was highly rated, and there were many good comments and expressions of thanks to the organisers.
- One strong conclusion is that hotels should not be so widely spread (*unfortunately the result of circumstance when the planned main hotel for the congress did not get built in time*).
- The local ‘host volunteers’ in hotels and halls were greatly appreciated. The student hall accommodation was poorly rated (no ensuite, mixed bathing facilities, and lack of flexibility if people wanted to change accommodation).
- Internet and Email access are vital – so good and adequate facilities for these should be provided.
- Posters need to be given a higher profile than we have had at past congresses.
- As usual cost control in terms of Registration and Accommodation featured in the survey – a continuing struggle for the congress organisers when offering a great deal of diversity spread over nearly a week.

Report compiled and edited by Tony King, IFMA Hon. Secretary, February 2010.

IFMA17 CONGRESS 2009

EVALUATION FORM

The Council of the IFMA would like you to complete this questionnaire to assist them and the organisers of future congress when planning future congresses.

Please complete the following:

1. Your country: _____
2. Is this your first Congress: Yes No
3. If no, how many previous Congresses have you attended: _____
4. Please indicate your age:
 30 or less 31-40 41-50 51-60 61+
5. Your occupation: _____
6. If you are involved in "farm management" in terms of overseeing or advising on a farm or farms – please could you give us an indication of the area you are involved in:
 Number: _____ acres OR hectares

We are interested in your evaluation of the Congress (please tick one box in each row)

		Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor
7.	Plenary sessions					
8.	Contributed papers					
9.	Day Tours					
10.	Posters					
11.	Social program					
12.	Accommodation and arrangements					
13.	Overall how do you rate this Congress?					
14.	If you submitted a paper or poster to the congress – your assessment of the submission process					
15.	If you attended the Pre Congress Tour					

Continued over >>>

16. Please give two highlights of the Congress for you:

17. Please give two areas where improvement could be made:

18. How can more people be attracted to future Congresses?

19. Please add any comments you would like to make:

If you wish to give your name for a follow up to this survey:

Your email address please: _____