

# The International Farm Management Association (IFMA)

## Its Origins, Ethos and History

The IFMA has its roots in the upsurge in Farm Management interest in the 1950's, particularly in the USA and Western Europe. Prior to that time the interest in agriculture had been in the maximum production of crop and livestock products to relieve food shortages, almost irrespective of the economics of that production.

During the 1950's the pendulum swung towards the sustainable economic production of food, and new methodology was developed, principally in the USA and Europe to support the economic aims of farmers. The U K was at the forefront of this new thinking, and in addition to developing new aids for the industry, voluntarily set up a Farm Management Association (FMA) to discuss agricultural management, and the new developments of the time. Crucially the FMA was open to all; farmers, extension workers, scientists and academics, the agricultural industry suppliers and Government agencies. So, amongst other things, the FMA had a 3 day conference each year, to review the national and international agricultural scene, to pick up the latest management developments and to receive farmer's reports of their management experiences. These conferences were well attended and highly prized by participants throughout the spectrum of the farming industry.

By the early 1970's, the FMA was sufficiently confident in its ability to mount major conferences for its Council to suggest the staging of an International Congress in the UK. It would include high profile international speakers from International organisations and National governments, prominent advisors/academics to expound on their management approaches and techniques in a small group format, much informal discussion, and crucially, visits to see a variety of farming enterprises in the locality. An extensive social programme was also a high priority. Everyone who came was accorded equal status. Thus, the First International Farm Management Congress was held at Warwick University, England in July 1971, with over 300 participants.

The format for the Congress (which has endured to this day), was:-

- Day 1 ; - Plenary Sessions with International and National Speakers
- Day 2 :- Farm Visits in small groups by coach, with a wide range of options.
- Day 3 :- Group sessions on topical farm management techniques / developments.
- Day 4 :- More Group sessions plus half day of visits to agribusiness locations.
- Day 5 :- Wind up plenary sessions on National & International issues.

Amongst this general format, most future Congress programmes provided space for a review of the national farming scene and national farm policy. There were receptions to civic and other functions, a formal banquet, and opening and closing ceremonies. An additional programme for accompanying persons, additional to the farm visits was also a necessary part of the Congress. Finally, at each Congress there was a General Meeting of IFMA which was open to all.

The first Congress was considered a success by most, and in the UK we thought that this was the end of the matter. However others thought differently, and the Canadians, principally from Ontario, offered to stage the next Congress at Guelph University in 1974. During this Congress participants thought that it would be beneficial to have an international organisation to arrange further Congresses and provide contacts with those interested in farm management in different countries. Accordingly a short meeting was convened and an executive committee elected, with the remit to arrange future Congresses and promote interest in farm management around the world. The Executive Committee elected were :-

- |                      |                          |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Chairman             | - Frank Paton - UK       |
| Vice Chairman        | - Kenneth Lantz – Canada |
| Secretary /Treasurer | - Philip James – UK      |

A brief constitution was drawn up setting out IFMA objectives, membership arrangements, and the organisation of the association, including election procedures, and meetings.

Expressions of interest for future Congresses were sought from participants and after considerable activity by the Executive and others; Hamburg in Germany was selected for the 3rd Congress in 1977. Thereafter, Congress venues were sought, or emerged as a result of known contacts and dialogue with participants of previous congresses.

To date 17 Congresses have been held in almost every continent. Their dates and location are as follows: -

- 1st – 1971 United Kingdom – Warwick University, Warwick  
“The inaugural farm management congress”
- 2nd – 1974 Canada – University of Guelph, Guelph  
“Emerging issues for farm managers”
- 3rd – 1977 Germany – Hamburg Congress Centre, Hamburg  
No specific theme.
- 4th – 1980 Israel – Moshav Shores, Jerusalem  
“The role of agriculture in society”
- 5th – 1983 Kenya – 10<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> July, Kenyatta International Conference Centre, Nairobi  
“The role of farm management in food production”
- 6th – 1986 USA – 29<sup>th</sup> June – July 4<sup>th</sup> – Hyatt Regency Hotel, Minneapolis,  
“Farm management in practice – Managing future food systems”
- 7th – 1988 Denmark – 26<sup>th</sup> June – 1st July, Bella Centre, Copenhagen.  
“Farm management in practise – the challenge of change”
- 8th – 1991 New Zealand – 4th-9th February, Palmerston North and Christchurch  
No specific theme.
- 9th – 1993 Hungary – 11th-17th July, Hotel Agro, Budapest.  
No specific theme.
- 10th - 1995 United Kingdom – 10th-16th July, University of Reading,  
“The World of Farm Management – An International Exchange”
- 11th - 1997 Canada - 14th–19th July, University of Alberta, Calgary  
“Managing into the 21st Century”
- 12<sup>th</sup> - 1999 South Africa – 18<sup>th</sup> –24<sup>th</sup> July – Holiday Inn, Durban  
“Think globally, farm locally”
- 13<sup>th</sup> – 2002 The Netherlands – 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> July – Papendal Sports Centre, Arnhem  
“Feed the world - Please the consumer - Maintain the environment”
- 14<sup>th</sup> – 2003 Australia – 10<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> August – Burswood Convention Centre, Perth  
“Farming at the Edge”
- 15<sup>th</sup> – 2005 Brazil - 14<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> August – Royal Palm Plaza Hotel, Campinas.  
“Developing entrepreneurship abilities to feed the world in a sustainable way.”

16<sup>th</sup> – 2007 Ireland – Cork University College, Cork.

“A vibrant rural economy – The challenge for balance”

17<sup>th</sup> 2009 USA – 19<sup>th</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> July – Illinois State University, Bloomington/Normal, Illinois.

“Agriculture: Food, Fibre and Energy for the future”

Although the basic format for the Congress program was established from the very first Congress, various refinements have taken place over the years, according to the wishes of individual Congress organisers and the reactions of participants. Principal amongst these was the introduction and inclusion of contributed papers of both intellectual merit and/or practical hands-on farming experience, which was introduced for the New Zealand Congress of 1991. Other countries have added their own particular flavour either to the programme content or the "farm" visits. Similarly the accompanying person's programme has been subject to variation, as for example in Hungary in 1993, when participants cooked goulash in some of the best Budapest hotels.

### **Organisation and Funding**

Very early on a network of continental representatives, interested in Farm Management, were identified to assist the Executive in the selection of speakers, potential Congress venues and to encourage potential participants to future Congresses. These persons formed the first Council, and their representation was confirmed at informal regional meetings held during each Congress. Over time this representation was subject to more formal election procedures by those attending from particular regions.

A more detailed constitution was prepared and eventually ratified in 1999, and further minor revisions followed. The latest version was approved in 2009.

Funding of IFMA was particularly difficult in the early years and relied heavily on sponsorship arrangements by the host countries and personal contacts of the Executive Committee members. Personal subscription to IFMA were tried in the early years, and apart from some support in Illinois USA, met with little success. The numerous currencies and the expense of converting small amounts into £ sterling, made the operation unviable, and the Association carried on with practically no funds for several years. Some Congresses donated surplus balances to the Association, but it was not until the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Congresses in the UK and Canada respectively that the Association had any significant reserves. Even then these were not sufficient to support necessary Executive travel to potential host countries to firm up the Congress arrangements. Subsequently the Irish organisers of the 16<sup>th</sup> Congress provided much needed additional funds.

The 10th Congress in the UK in 1995 provided the first significant funds for IFMA, the money having been voted by the British Organising Committee of the Institute of Agricultural Management. The Canadian Organisers of the Calgary Congress in 2007 augmented these funds, so that it was then possible to provide a pump priming loan of £5000 to future Congress Organisers. This proved hugely beneficial to those willing to host a Congress.

### **The International Journal of Farm Management**

An International Journal of Farm Management was envisaged very early in the development of the Association. Several papers were commissioned at nil cost, and 2 volumes of the journal were produced. However the logistics of posting these issues to an international audience, which was in a continuous stage of fluctuation, and receiving the appropriate subscription for the journal, proved insuperable for the meagre staff resources of IFMA. It was not until the internet came along, and a website was produced that the worthwhile production of the journal became a reality. It also required the activities of a dedicated editor to make this happen – a role which John Gardner in New Zealand fills admirably.

### **Personalities**

Although in all organisations personalities change over time, IFMA has been fortunate in the stability of key members. Initially, in 1974 Frank Paton, a practising UK farmer, and Philip James, a UK Government agricultural management advisor were appointed as President and Secretary/Treasurer. They stayed together in these key posts until 1991 when Frank Paton's ill

health prevented him attending the New Zealand Congress. Frank was succeeded by Malcolm Stansfield of Reading University, England, who had also been a practising farms manager. When Malcolm retired at the 16 Congress in Ireland in 2007, he was succeeded by John Alliston, the Dean of Agriculture at the Royal Agricultural College, England.

Philip James remained as Secretary/Treasurer of IFMA up to the 14th Congress in Perth, Western Australia in 2003 -almost 30 years since the first Congress in the UK. His position as a Farm Management Advisor in Reading and London had resulted in many fruitful contacts around the world, which were especially beneficial to IFMA. His retirement brought Tony King onto the scene as Secretary and Treasurer. Tony's arrival coincided with the upsurge in World Wide Web interest and usage, which he has made full use of, both to convey Congress, Journal and subscription information around the world, but also to put IFMA firmly on the Internet map. His efforts will hopefully attract a wider audience to the excellent Congresses, and also improve IFMA finances so that more can be done to develop farm management activity around the world.

Vice Presidents have always been important to IFMA. The first, Ken Lantz of Ontario, Canada, provided much dynamic support and sound advice to an infant organisation. He was later joined by Joel Muasya, from Kenya's Ministry of Agriculture, who added a further dimension to IFMA. Ken Lantz was succeeded by Rusty Firth of New Zealand, and Joel Muasya by Dan Smith of the USA. Rusty and Dan, both experienced Farm Management practitioners, brought insights into the farm problems of grassland farmers in New Zealand and the small farmers of S.Carolina, USA, in addition to their wide contacts. Rusty was followed by Rob Napier of New South Wales, Australia – a widely travelled management advisor and teacher, adding yet another dimension to the expertise within IFMA.

Council members were also widely drawn. The objective was, and is, to have active members on each continent, who would promote both the ethos of IFMA and future Congresses within their own areas. IFMA has been well served over the years by Council members, several of whom have staged a Congress in their own country.

### **The Future**

Thirty five years ago the organisers of the first Farm Management Congress could have had no idea that the arrangements and format developed then would have survived virtually intact for 18 Congresses which have spanned the globe. It is a tribute to the original planners, and those who have carried on since then, that IFMA remains such a highly regarded organisation, well respected around the world. Now that the financing is improving, there is no reason why IFMA should not enjoy similar success for the next 35 years.

P J James Nov 2009