



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 UK 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 is much the same as now), 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 at the inaugural meeting 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 20 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 Shoresh, Jerusalem
“The role of agriculture in society”
- 5th – 1983 Kenya – 10th-15th July, Kenyatta International Conference Centre, Nairobi
“The role of farm management in food production”
- 6th – 1986 USA – 29th June – July 4th – Hyatt Regency Hotel, Minneapolis,
“Farm management in practice – Managing future food systems”
- 7th – 1988 Denmark – 26th 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"
- 12th - 1999 South Africa – 18th –24th July – Holiday Inn, Durban
“Think globally, farm locally”
- 13th – 2002 The Netherlands – 7th-12th July – Papendal Sports Centre, Arnhem
“Feed the world - Please the consumer - Maintain the environment”
- 14th – 2003 Australia – 10th-15th August – Burswood Convention Centre, Perth
“Farming at the Edge”
- 15th – 2005 Brazil - 14th–19th August – Royal Palm Plaza Hotel, Campinas.
“Developing entrepreneurship abilities to feed the world in a sustainable way.”
- 16th – 2007 Ireland – 15th-20th July - Cork University College, Cork.
“A vibrant rural economy – The challenge for balance”
- 17th - 2009 USA – 19th-24th July – Illinois State University, Bloomington/Normal, Illinois.
“Agriculture: Food, Fibre and Energy for the future”
- 18th - 2011 New Zealand – 20th–25th March – Methven Resort Hotel, Methven, South Island.
“Thriving in a Global Market – Innovation, Cooperation and Leadership”
- 19th – 2013 Poland – 21st-26th July – Warsaw University of Life Sciences, Warsaw
“Transforming Agriculture – between Policy, Science and the Consumer”
- 20th – 2015 Canada – 12th-17th July – Université Laval, Québec City, Québec
“Healthy Agriculture for A Healthy World”

Although the basic format for the Congress programme 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. The option of peer review was added for the 16th Congress in Ireland. All papers from 2002 are published on the website.

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, for example in Hungary in 1993, when participants were invited to train and then cook 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 2013 and added the position of Patron to the Executive, with Malcolm Stansfield being elected to this new role.

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 subscriptions to IFMA were tried in the early years but were not successful. 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 10th and 11th Congresses in the UK and Canada respectively that the Association had any significant reserves. Even then these were not sufficient for Executive travel to potential host countries to firm up Congress arrangements.

The 10th Congress in the UK in 1995 provided the first significant funds for IFMA, the money having been donated by the British Organising Committee of the Institute of Agricultural Management. The Canadian Organisers of the Calgary Congress in 1997 augmented these funds, which enabled a pump priming loan of £5000 to future Congress Organisers. This proved hugely beneficial to those willing to host a Congress. Subsequently the organisers of the 16th Congress in Ireland, and the 18th Congress in New Zealand, provided further much needed additional funds.

The Journal of International Farm Management (JIFM)

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 hard copy issues 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 from Massey University in New Zealand filled admirably between 2005 and 2011. The JIFM was available with free access to all visitors to the website.

The International Journal of Agricultural Management (IJAM)

The Institute of Agricultural Management (IAgrM) in the UK published a hard copy journal – "The Journal of Farm Management" publishing both national and international farm management papers. The IAgrM Council wished to move this journal online to save cost and to open up the audience of their Journal. IFMA Council was keen to ensure the long term future of their journal. So after long discussions it was decided that merging the two journals into one professionally published journal would be in the interests of both organisations. And so the "International Journal of Agricultural Management" (IJAM) was launched in July 2011. Martyn Warren, previously the Editor of "The Journal of Farm Management", became the Managing Editor, with John Gardner as one of the Deputy Editors. The Journal has been a great success with 4 issues per annum. In January 2015 Matt Lobley, Co-Director of the Centre for Rural Policy Research at the University of Exeter, took over the role of Managing Editor from Martyn. The journal is published on the IngentaConnect website: <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/iagrm/ijam>.

The IFMA Website

By the early 2000s it became increasingly obvious that IFMA needed to have a presence on the Internet. By then most communications were by e-mail. But IFMA needed a “brochure” that could be accessed from anywhere in the world. The initial development of a website was largely assisted by the Canadian Farm Business Management Council who asked their website provider to develop a website for IFMA. This coincided with the 13th Congress in Holland – due to be held in 2001, but delayed to 2002 because of foot-and-mouth disease. In 2004 the website was completely redesigned and developed to hold congress contributed papers and the JIFM papers. This new website allowed a more formal Membership scheme with online payment by credit card, enabling Members to maintain their membership when not attending congresses. In 2014/15 the website was again redesigned using new software to give a more modern look, as well as incorporate further improvements.

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 16th Congress in Ireland in 2007, he was succeeded by John Alliston, then Dean of Agriculture at the Royal Agricultural College, England. Trevor Atkinson, Technical Director of Sentry Farming took over as President at the 19th Congress in 2013. Four Presidents in forty years!

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, formally Farm Services Manager with Ciba-Geigy/Novartis and program manager for IAgrM conferences, onto the scene as Secretary and Treasurer. Tony's arrival coincided with the upsurge of the World Wide Web 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 have attracted a wider audience to IFMA's excellent Congresses and to their proceedings - giving authors a much wider and longer term exposure of their work. In addition it promotes the Journal, and improved IFMA's finances allowing it to further encourage the development of farm management knowledge and skills 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. Other Vice Presidents came and went connected with congresses – but Ken was later joined by Joel Muasya, from Kenya's Ministry of Agriculture, who added a wider 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 farming 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. After Dan Smith retired in 2007, Jim McGrann from Texas A&M University took up the cause with great enthusiasm, and was followed in 2011 by the current Vice President Damona Doye from Oklahoma State University, who brings her vast extension work, experience and academic contacts to the benefit of IFMA.

Council members are also widely drawn. The objective is to have active members on each continent who 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 had the courage to stage a Congress in their own country. IFMA owes a huge debt to all those who have taken on the daunting task of organising and running a congress – unrewarded and usually in addition to their normal daily jobs. These people, with their local committee members, are the real heroes of IFMA!

The Future

Forty 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 20 Congresses which have spanned the globe. It is a tribute to the original planners, and to 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 reasonably stable, there is no reason why IFMA should not enjoy similar success for the next 40 years.