

ASAC News



Fall 2008 • Vol. 15, No 2

Full Program Set for Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City Oct. 26 - 28

The 2008 ASAC Annual Meeting will open with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and close with Karaoke with Roy Ferguson. Sandwiched in between those two events will be 2-plus days of information-filled presentations. “This really is going to be a meeting to remember and it has all the earmarks of the most popular and well-attended ASAC meetings of the past,” says ASAC President Ken Hilton, CAC.

“The location itself, Salt Lake City, offers great appeal and is a destination that many of our members have never visited,” says Bill Zweigbaum, CACI, meeting committee chairman. “Add to that the program that has been put together and it will be a really great occasion.”

“Special thanks to Paige Gilligan: Kurt Ehnle, CAC, CMC; and David Hamblin, CAC, for the assistance they have given in getting us this far with our planning.”

The complete program is being sent along with this copy of *ASAC News* and is available at www.agconsultants.com.

On to Washington in 2009

“It’s time to return to Washington, D.C. for the 2009 meeting,” says ASAC Vice President/Secretary Paige Gilligan.

“We’ve kept the meetings in the ‘Heartland’ for the past two years, but feel it’s

time to take the group back to Washington. There have been requests from the membership to schedule a meeting there, so we’re planning on going next year.

“We have not as yet set timing for the meeting and will be seeking member input at the Salt Lake City meeting,” she says. “We will also be looking for ideas on what theme or focus we should put on the presentations in D.C.”

She notes that while there will be discussion on the 2009 meeting at the upcoming session, she hopes members who cannot attend in Salt Lake City will send her suggestions for speakers and program content.

“There are always plenty of things to do and see in Washington and we will, of course, have a new administration. What we don’t know is what kind of changes that will bring in terms of individuals from U.S.D.A and other organizations that we might typically tap for presentations,” she notes.

E-mail her at: paige@agresticsolutions.com

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Registration Extended to October 3!!

The President Says: Ken's Comments



This will be the last opportunity I have to address the organization as president in ASACs newsletter. Normally this is the time to reflect on what has taken place over the last year. While I appreciate the opportunity and privilege to serve the organization as an officer over the last few years, rather than talk about what has happened in the past, I would like to talk about the opportunities for the future.

We all belong to a great network of professionals who have worked with our consulting clients to help shape their operations, and consequently the face of agriculture as a whole. As we move forward, this responsibility will become even greater. We need to remain active in ASAC and continue the tradition of continuing education, ethics, and professionalism that has made this society what it is.

Our next opportunity is the annual meeting in Salt Lake City. There is a wonderful program put together by Bill Zweigbaum and his meeting committee, as well as a spouses program that promises to be very interesting and informative. Plus, I understand the entertainment at the banquet will be legendary.

We have an enthusiastic group moving into new leadership roles, and with their vision for things to come, there will be even more active years for ASAC members, with more communication and networking opportunities. I am really looking forward to the upcoming year.

Finally, I would like to thank all those that served on the board this year for helping make this another successful year for ASAC.

I look forward to seeing all of you at the meeting in Salt Lake City.

Ken Hilton CAC
ASAC President

Welcome, New Members

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2008 – A Year of Change

By Ib Hagsten, Ph.D., CACI, Editor

Political changes will take care of themselves if each of us does our civic duty by voting on November 4th; if you happen to be traveling that day, vote absentee, but vote!

Changes in the agricultural arena are many, so I have selected a few to address (by no means trying to be presumptive and claim that I may have covered all issues). If I would be so fortunate as to present a fact or “a stated opinion by someone” that you either really embrace or disagree with, then we may have a dialogue. After all, the subheading on the monthly *Communiqué* is “Get Involved.”

The topics addressed are:

- COOL (Country Of Origin Label);
- Changes in grain preferences and growth;
- Consumer preferences;
- Genetic Modification;
- Responsible farming – an example;
- Floods; and
- Energy – Past, present, and future.

Country of Origin Label (COOL) will become the law effective September 30, 2008. About three years ago I received a request from a fellow ASAC member, Bill Varano of Pennsylvania, to highlight the need for backing of the COOL proposal so he would be able to compete on an “even footing” with Chinese fish produced under very different regulations than his aquaculture operation.

The law will go into effect very soon. Is it a good idea? Obviously Bill thinks so; our Canadian CCAA counterparts find it very unfair to “exclude them,” since they produce similarly high standards as we do; and the Chinese will surely find a way to circumvent the intent of the law. The American Meat Institute strongly fought the idea and most livestock producer organizations embraced the concept.

Whom does it affect? The basics of the rules and regulations are that the USDA will require retail fresh meat cuts to be identified in the retail meat display of larger grocery stores. It is estimated that it will cover about 50-plus percent of the U.S. livestock market.

The regulations will require fresh meat cuts to be labeled by country of origin in one of four possible manners:

- 1) Product of the United States This means the animals were born, raised and slaughtered in the United States.
- 2) Product of the United States and Country X. This means the animal was born in country X (like Canada) and raised and slaughtered in the United States.
- 3) Product of Country X and the United States. This means the animal was born and raised in country X (Canada for example) and slaughtered in the United States.
- 4) Product of Country X. This means the fresh meat/poultry was imported from country X (could be Canada, Brazil, Denmark, Mexico, China, etc.).

Every sale of livestock requires an affidavit attesting to the country of origin of that animal/lot of animals. When sold to slaughter, it means someone with knowledge and access to verifiable records must sign the affidavit – not a laborer or a trucker.

Do your clients understand the implications of this regulation that became law on September 30?

Changes in grain preferences and growing conditions in the United States and in Europe.

Having recently visited Denmark, I was amazed at the significant number of cornfields observed while driving cross-country. We never used to grow corn; it “could not grow this far north” (after all it is on the same latitude as Hudson Bay, Canada); and now 20 percent of the corn used in livestock feeding is locally grown. Give the farmer and the seed corn developer a challenge and an economic incentive and they will figure out how to develop and use a shorter-season variety.

Due to the very wet but, more importantly, cool 2008 spring, the corn and soybean growth in the Midwest was delayed several weeks. Normally we hear a lot about “must be planted by (x date) to succeed,” yet for some strange reason those words didn’t seem to be posted this year. Once in a while one hears a voice cautioning producers to heed soil temperature over other planting factors. Well, this would have been a good year to “ride that issue” since even the late-planted corn and beans in Iowa “just laid there” for weeks waiting for the soil temperature to become conducive to vigorous growth. I recommend that you encourage your clients to “watch soil temperatures more than ambient temperatures at planting time.” By the way, I agree with those who are very skeptical of the USDA predictions of a very large crop this year.

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Since we are on the topic of “bumper crops,” I heard a definition of a bumper crop, “that is when you produce front-end grills for trucks from corn.”

Consumer preferences appear to be changing. Whether we agree with the trends or not, we had better heed the changes as we help our clients produce agricultural crops that meet or exceed market requirements. “Buy Local” is one slogan that is catching on at many levels. It implies that if one knows and/or meets the farmer, he/she can feel better about what they serve the family and pets. Perhaps being fueled by uncertainties as a result of numerous recalls, consumer trust has been eroded. It also implies less fossil fuel being expended transporting items 1,500 to 3,000 miles from field/barn to the consumer.

Talk about buying local, it took on a whole new meaning for me this summer, when I repeatedly heard farmers pick up cell phone inquiries from fellow farmers about the impending trip to the implement dealer 15-20 miles away. Just like in the 70’s with the oil crisis, farmers are now “talking together again” in order to save on, or share, the gas needed to get needed equipment parts in a neighboring town.

Another trend among consumers is to want quality nutrition in their food and that request seems to be on a direct collision course with our agronomic practices of the last several decades. In agriculture, we generally produce a commodity that is paid for based on bushels produced. Bushels of what -- corn and soybean kernels as energy-rich (calorie) as possible, without any consideration of nutritive value. Since we commonly agree with the saying, “you are what you eat,” is it any wonder that our population is becoming more and more nutritionally unfit? Similarly, the soil scientists and previous generations of farmers believed that “if you keep the soil healthy, the plants will be healthy,” and since we are not focusing on healthy soil, how can we possibly expect healthy plants?

Genetic Modification of crops seems to really be polarizing issues. I remember when Steve Stubblejumpsy, in the form of the highly-respected Canadian ag consultant and CCAA member, Rob Saik, in his humorous talk at a previous ASAC banquet told of modifying potatoes by inserting butter, salt, and bacon flavor genes so one could bake

a potato and instantly eat a baked potato with all the flavors without the added calories.

That seemed rather futuristic. However, if Monsanto has anything to do with it, it may very well become a real possibility. I read recently that Monsanto claims to have the capability to help us double corn yields in the next twenty years. A prominent member of a government office then stated “that would be great” because we could still keep up with the population needs for corn food and fuel without cutting down all remaining tropical forests. I guess in North America we may find this wonderful news.

However, most of the rest of the world is not enamored by the technology of GMO’s – Genetically Modified Organisms (or as one person referred “genetic manipulation of Mother Nature”). They choose to use a sensible approach to what scientists wish to do with the naturally-occurring gene pools. They seem to think that once, “for some short-term benefit,” we risk altering the genetic materials/crops in a never-to-be-recovered or returned fashion, that the long-term gains are not worthy of the gamble. The non-GMO world is alive, very vociferous, and well funded.

Responsible farming – an example from Pennsylvania. A close friend of ours is a ninth generation farmer in Lancaster County; in their living room they have a framed copy of the deed signed by William Penn. They applied for the NCBA Environmental Award this summer. I was asked to write a letter of recommendation, thus I saw their file again.

Every time I stopped by their farm, Silver Run, it was exciting to get a tour where one would see exciting environmental stewardship in innovative action. There were “things to improve,” such as (1) the new poultry barn without vents on the side facing the county road, in order to minimize the potential for possible odor or dust concerns by the public; (2) the Slurrystore to capture manure and effluent from their livestock (cattle and swine), in order to apply the nutrients when optimal plant uptake would minimize loss to the environment; (3) the change to all-Angus cattle after the farm became certified as a licensed CAB feedlot, which means the lots are full and Angus cattle breeders throughout the northeast are on a waiting list; (4) the pro-active step to voluntarily install a complete total farm water collection system for responsible water stewardship, as they are aware that a unit of water captured as rain equates to three units recovered via a well; and (5) the presence of a feed bin right along their home’s south wall, evidence of their corn-fueled furnace providing household heat.

The two most specific environmental stewardship accomplishments of this farm in recent years are: (1) an average 20 ppm of Phosphorous level reduction in soil samples on this heavy livestock operation from the

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baseline five years ago when it was determined that the P-levels were approaching levels of concern. By switching to P-based from N-based nutrient application, adding phytase to diets, and careful monitoring of Phosphorous usage, in concert with plant uptake, the P-levels are steadily returning to sustainable levels in the soil throughout the farm; and (2) the improvement in water quality produced on the farm, as reported at a recent Pennsylvania Academy of Science meeting. The five-year test results verified that the water collected before and after passing thru the farm's no-till, terraced, contoured, and well-managed cropland was indeed improved.

The farm's 104-acre base has a permanent conservation easement with the Pennsylvania Farmland Preservation program; they intend to continue the 253-year, ninth generation Hess family farming tradition for another 99+ years in harmony with both land and neighbors.

Floods. The Iowa floods this spring/early summer, where 83 of the state's 93 counties were declared disaster areas, have been touched upon in a couple of *Communiqués* already. However, I was intrigued by the article written on June 22 by *The Tribune of Mid-Iowa News* entitled, "Man-made floods? At least in part."

"With that volume of rain, you're going to have flooding; there's no way around it. This is not just because someone put in a parking lot," said the National Weather Service. That's true. The immense volume of rain that fell on Iowa – washing soil, crops, homes and bank accounts downstream – would have inundated Iowa 500 years ago, just as it did now 15 years apart.

But there is a difference between then and now. The rivers have been straightened; dams were built; the prairie was plowed up; wetlands were removed; and thousands of miles of tile lines were laid to drain the soil. The result is that the most valuable land in the nation, by the millions of tons each year, washes away, thus the long-time growing dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico is largely transplanted Iowa topsoil.

Rivers are being channelized in the country, and the cities echo the practice of speeding up the flow of water off the land along with vast stretches of pavement, storm sewers, rooftops and city streets. On top of that we

fill in building sites to be above predicted flood levels, yet the water has to go somewhere.

What in agriculture have we done to exacerbate the flood problems? Don't throw tomatoes at me! As general Santa Anna once said, "Unless we learn from history we are doomed to relive it."

When I step back and look at the unsustainable agricultural practices that contributed to the dust bowl of the disastrous thirties, I am reminded to think and wonder what unsustainable agricultural practices may have contributed to the Iowa floods. Surely...

1. The removal of all possible hedgerows and "wasteful" wetlands, woodlands, and grass waterways (unless paid by NRCS) can't be a sustainable practice;

2. The use of anhydrous ammonia as a less expensive fertilizer to provide nitrogen for the plants, when we simultaneously were aware of the Vietnam War practice of bulldozing a strip of beach sand, applying anhydrous, and then having the heavy supply bombers to land on ground "as hard as concrete;"

3. The removal of organic matter when as late as 1950's share cropping contracts forbid the selling of any residues off the farm, (as it would "severely devalue" the land's fertility); and

4. The agronomic practices of (a) strip farming erodible land with alternating permanent crops and tillable crops, (b) planting crossways on hillier ground to reduce run-off, and (c) possibly not plowing/disking highly erodible land too often in order to hold the soil by deep-rooted alfalfa, (I found it fascinating that the 200,000+ acres of Sculley Farm Partnerships in several Midwestern states were divided into 160-acre parcels for a family to manage; if the family did not maintain at least 10 percent of the acreage in alfalfa rotation they were fired; that practice was maintained for more than 100 years until about ten years ago).

Energy – Past, present, and future. Although there are few remaining, one can once in a while still see an old windmill in a field. Sometimes it is a working specimen, which still pumps water for the cattle in that field. In Denmark, that windy country neighboring the blustery North Sea, there are windmills (wind turbines) scattered throughout the countryside, but they are particularly evident offshore the coastline where in one place there are 80 turbines in a row.

In travels thru Iowa, Illinois, Missouri and Texas this year I have seen several 40- to 80- turbine wind farms; and one often meets on the interstate a "Wide Load" convoy of huge propellers going to yet another wind farm. Why not capture the plentiful wind power? In an

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earlier Communiqué you received a report from the ASA meeting where an entire country, Iceland, (where the population backed their governmental initiative), is now powered using geothermal sources, that like solar and wind are “free.”

We talked earlier about conservation, be it comparing notes with a fellow farmer before going to the implement dealer, be it multi-functional one-pass tilling or planting; placing the cattle close to the feed production and slaughter plant functions; or as today’s consumer prefers, buying locally, if at all possible.

A few years ago Dr. Jim McLaren gave a thought-provoking talk (when doesn’t Jim make us think?) at an ASAC meeting about the great possibilities of converting all kinds of agricultural refuse into fuel and bullet-proof vests. The neat concept was “let us figure out how to utilize the waste/refuge products constructively” for the benefit of mankind rather than haul it to never-ending waste dumps. The concept was so thought provoking one almost wanted to test out the bulletproof vest before talking about it in public. Yet now only a few years later, “going green” in many different ways is the “in” thing to do.

Recently, we spent a delightful afternoon in the National Arboretum in Washington, D.C. It is a huge place of serenity, plant displays and research, exhibits, and lovely trails. The portion to share here is the very well-displayed, user-friendly, and thought-provoking USDA display of twenty-plus worldwide varieties of grasses, roots, tops, shrubs, and trees that have a documented energy-yielding benefit. We hear about corn and switch-grass for fuel, yet the list is much longer. Rather than waste your time listing them, I’ll provide a website where you may check it out from your office chair or airport wait. The Arboretum is a national treasure that I recommend if you are in D.C. For a virtual tour go to the site “Power Plants – Farming Fuel” at: http://www.usna.usda.gov/Gardens/collections/VirtualTours/USNA_PowerPlants_Flash.html

A First-hand Update on the China Dairy Situation

by Terry R. Smith, Ph.D.
President & CEO, Dairy Strategies, LLC

The China dairy situation has been a challenging reality for all involved and associated with the industry. According to our colleague in New Zealand the front page news has been Fonterra’s involvement in a dairy farm and processing facility that has been center stage to the delayed release of information and the aftermath in the marketplace. A conservative estimate of the direct impact to Fonterra shareholders is \$139M loss, let alone the potential global impact by association.

While our large dairy clients in China have certainly felt the impacts of the situation, we believe the opportunity to continue to implement quality management systems (like our DairyOnTime offering) will provide them with a window of opportunity to rise above the fray. It is very interesting to see the focus change from concerns over FMD and BSE and their potential impacts on the business, though this event that has clearly given the China dairy industry a black eye.

With the unprecedented rapid growth and expansion of the dairy sector in China and past ways of doing business still very prevalent, it is not surprising that this tampering occurred and was left unreported for nearly nine months. It will take time and renewed and auditable assurances that the China milk supply is safe from the consumer’s perspective. While melamine in cat and dog food was bad (particularly with the love affair Americans have with their pets), impacting human babies’ health is as bad as it gets. We had an extended teleconference/webinar with our clients one late September morning and there is a great deal of concern as they move forward to become a best-in-class (and largest) dairy business in China. The road is already a rocky one and this demonstrates that the potholes along the way can become very deep. However, I am confident that the future for this important sector is very bright and this incident is a huge wake-up call for China and the global dairy industry.

(Editor’s Note: Terry is a former ASAC member, whose dairy consulting business has a successful China division. With tainted milk being in the headlines recently, we asked him to give us a “ground-level” report, which he graciously agreed to do. Here it is. Thanks, Terry.)

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Mark Your Calendars

October 26 - 28, 2008

2008 ASAC Annual Meeting
Salt Lake City Plaza Hotel
Salt Lake City, UT
Visit www.agconsultants.org
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Canadian Consulting Agrologists Report September 2008

by Terry Betker, P.Ag., CAC, President
Canadian Consulting Agrologists Association

We are fully into the fall season across most of our geography and it has been an interesting summer. Farmers, in a lot of areas, are struggling to complete harvest and other seasonal production efforts.

Likely the most significant news from CCAA was the announcement of the resignation of Adele Buettner, Agri-Biz Communications, as Executive Director, effective May 31, 2008. Adele and her team provided invaluable administrative and management service to the CCAA for 10 years.

To be quite candid, when Adele came on board the administrative and management function of the CCAA was in disarray. Through her leadership, guidance and commitment, the CCAA is now successfully positioned to continue to provide excellent service to its members and to industry in Canada and internationally.

Some of the developments that can be attributed to Adele's tenure and contribution included:

- Doubling of the membership base
- Enhancing by-laws to allow for an expanded membership base, reflecting the changing nature of the agriculture industry
- Marketing efforts that included:
 - the development of a new logo;
 - a web site with a searchable database
 - creating partnerships with the American Society of Agriculture Consultants (ASAC) and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA)
- Helping to guide the establishment of the North American Consulting School and driving its profile as the leading agriculture consulting school in North America
- Annually managing a top-tier agenda for the School, with international and well respected speakers
- Assisting with the origination and advancement of an exciting partnership with IICA / INDAP (Chilean)

The list may seem to minimize the contribution made that, in hindsight, was probably of equal, if not more value, to the CCAA -- that contribution being an Agri-Biz team commitment on a daily and weekly basis that worked toward making sure that the CCAA could grow and be successful.

Adele's leaving the association has given rise to a need to revisit our organizational structure and objectives. The CCAA is organizing a strategic planning session for later in October, from which will come an announcement on

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an administrative replacement. Given the change, the CCAA Board has decided to defer the delivery of the next North American Consulting School (NACS) until the fall of 2009. The Board, shortly after the 2008 School, had tentatively decided to move the NACS from the late winter / early spring time frame to the fall, believing that the timing was a better fit for consultants. The changes within CCAA simply caused the Board to defer the School to 2009.

We have been working closely with IICA, through the spring and summer, in developing an initiative to assist the Chilean agriculture consulting program. The next step in the process requires that the Chileans commit to proceed, at which time more information would be available.

Hopefully, we will get a chance to visit with some of the ASAC membership at your meeting this fall in Salt Lake City.

American Ag & Energy Council Launches National Media Campaign

All biofuels, by definition, are made from plant material. The main biofuel on the U.S. market is corn ethanol, a type of biofuel made using the starch in corn grain. But only using grain to produce biofuels can lead to a tug of war between food and fuel sources, as well as other environmental and economic challenges.

Biofuels made from cellulosic sources – the leaves, stems, and other fibrous parts of a plant – have been touted as a promising renewable energy source. Not only is cellulose the most abundant biological material on Earth, but using cellulose to produce biofuels instead of grain can have environmental benefits.

Cellulosic biofuel sources offer a substantially greater energy return on investment compared to grain-based sources. However, environmental benefits are not guaranteed. The environmental success of cellulosic biofuels will depend on: 1) which cellulosic crops are grown; 2) the practices used to manage them, and: 3) the geographic location of crops.

Both grain-based and cellulosic biofuels can help lessen our use of fossil fuels and can help offset carbon dioxide emissions. But cellulosic biofuels are able to offset more gasoline than can grain-based biofuels – and they do so with environmental co-benefits.

(Editor's Note: This newly-established, multi-faceted, industry-wide, ag biofuel initiative is co-chaired by my old friend, Dr. Bob Easter, Dean of the College of Agriculture, Consumer and Environmental Sciences, University of Illinois (together with the Dean of Ag from Iowa State University). Their new media campaign was to kick-off on September 25, so you get to have a front-row seat via the ASAC Newsletter: <http://www.agandenergy.com/>

The information cited above is from the AAEC Web site.)

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Farm Management Congress Opens Registration, Issues Call for Academic and Industry Papers

Registration has opened for the 2009 International Farm Management Congress (IFMA17) which will be held at the Illinois State University Campus in Bloomington/Normal, IL in July 2009. Information on the registration fees and the appropriate procedures are now available at <http://www.ifma17.org/>, according to Congress organizers.

“The Web site has the complete information on the Congress including the pre- and post-Congress tours,” says Fred Hepler, AFM, AAC, president-elect of the Illinois Society of Professional Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers, the official host organization for the Congress. Hepler serves as the spokesperson for the event.

“The program that has been developed is truly a once-in-a-career gathering of professionals and industry leaders from around the world,” he notes. He says the planners of the Congress are anticipating upwards to 500 professional farm managers, agribusiness professionals, academics, and producers from as many as 35 different countries will attend the Congress.

The week-long gathering will open on July 19 and conclude on July 24 with all activities based out of the Bloomington/Normal area. “There will be three full days of speakers as well as presentations of academic and professional papers,” Hepler explains. “There will also be two days of tours of agribusiness and research facilities in the area in addition to visits to local farm operations and other activities including the Twin Groves wind farm.” He notes that organizers expect reservations for the day trips will fill quickly and encourages anyone interested in being part of the Congress to register early to get their pick of the day trip activities.

The organization is using the resources of ISU Convention Services to handle all the

registration procedures, Hepler notes. “This allows anyone from anywhere in the world to sign up for the Congress 24/7 using the secured, on-line registration processes of the University.”

Information for making reservations for lodging in the area is also available through the IFMA17 Web site.

Call For Papers

“The presentation of professional papers and posters by academics and those within the industry have always been a very important part of the Congresses,” Hepler says. “For the 2009 Congress there will be two options for those who want to submit formal papers. The first is for those in academia who want peer review of the documents they prepare. The second is for those within the industry who want to submit case studies of projects with which they have been engaged.”

Papers and posters may be submitted at <https://editorialexpress.com/conference/IFMA17>.

Hepler explained that the overall theme of the Congress is “Agriculture: Food, Fiber and Energy for the Future.” Individuals submitting papers and posters are being asked to pick from one of six sub-topics relating to that theme: Future Role, Farm Management, Marketing and Trade, Environment, Education and Training, and Finance and Lending/Borrowing.

Those whose papers are accepted by Congress officials will be required to make a formal presentation during the

event next year.

Hepler notes that information regarding the Call for Papers as well as the Congress in general is available at www.ifma17.org. “There are a number of ‘buttons’ on the site that will take any visitor to the areas with which they have a particular interest.”

The Congress is sponsored by the Illinois Society of Professional Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers in conjunction with the American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers and the International Farm Management Association. Congresses are held every two years and the last time the United States hosted an event was 1986. This is the 17th such Congress, the last one being in Ireland in 2007. IFMA18 will be held in Christ Church, New Zealand early in 2011

