

The 14th International Farm Management Congress Congress Evaluation Survey Final Report

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INTRODUCTION

This paper reports the findings from the survey of attendees at the 14th International Farm Management Congress at Perth in Western Australia. The objective of the survey was to obtain information on the delegates' evaluation of the Congress. It was hoped that this would be of value to those planning future congresses.

The 14th Congress ran from the 10th to the 15th August 2003. It was preceded by pre-Congress tours and followed by post-Congress tours. The five days at the Congress were made up of two days devoted to field visits, 9¼ hours for plenaries, 3 hours of symposia and 6 hours of contributed papers. In addition there were social functions and a meeting of the International Farm Management Association.

The list of attendees available at the Congress had 251 names. Included in this were full registrations, daily registrations, accompanying persons and speakers. Of the 251 names, 114 (45%) were from Australia. There were 28 countries represented. Denmark, United Kingdom, New Zealand and the US, in addition to Australia had 10 or more delegates.

SURVEY RESPONSE

The survey form (Appendix I) was distributed on the last day of the Congress. There were 91 respondents, being 36% of total delegates. This understates the response rate as at this stage some day registrations had departed and the questionnaire was not distributed to accompanying persons.

Respondents came from the following 20 countries. Eight countries represented at the Congress had no respondents in the survey.

Australia	29
USA	10
UK	6
Denmark	9
Hungary	3
New Zealand	8
The Netherlands	4
Europe	2
Canada	5
Norway	2
South Africa	3
Israel	1
Germany	1
Japan	1
Ireland	1
Sweden	1
Sri Lanka	2
Indonesia	1
Egypt	1
Japan	<u>1</u>
	91

RESULTS

1. Previous Congresses attended

Information was sought on the number of previous Congresses respondents had attended (Table 1).

Table 1. Previous Congresses attended

<i>No. of congresses attended</i>	<i>No. of delegates</i>
0	33
1	16
2	7
3	10
4	6
5	7
6 or more	<u>12</u>
	91

Thirty-three respondents (36%) from the following countries were attending their first Congress.

<i>Country</i>	<i>Number</i>
Australia	20
Denmark	2
New Zealand	2
The Netherlands	2
Canada	2
South Africa	2
Indonesia	1
Sri Lanka	1
UK	<u>1</u>
	33

The Perth Congress did succeed in attracting a significant proportion of new people to their first Congress. While most (60%) not surprisingly were from Australia, 40% were from outside Australia. Of the countries with ten or more delegates only the U.S. had no first time attendees.

2. Respondents' ages

Table 2. Respondents' age groupings

<i>Age</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>% (of respondents)</i>
≤ 30	4	4
31-40	19	21
41-50	25	28
51-60	24	27
61+	18	20
No response	<u>1</u>	<u>-</u>
Total	91	100

The small number of young delegates and the relatively large number of delegates aged 51 or more (nearly 50%), will come as no surprise to even the most casual Congress observer.

3. Respondents' professions

Respondents' professions are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Respondents' professions

<i>Profession</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>% (of respondents)</i>
Academic	28	33
Consultant	25	29
Farmer	13	15
Retired	2	2
Scientist/Researcher	8	9
Other	10	12
No response	<u>5</u>	<u>-</u>
Total	91	100

Two professions dominated with more than 60% of respondents being academics or consultants. The latter group includes those who described themselves as advisors or extension workers. There were 11 respondents who gave more than one profession, for example farmer/academic. These people were included in the profession nominated first; in this example the farmer/academic was included in the farmers. Of the 13 farmers, nine described themselves as farmers only. The “other” group included accountants and those engaged in administration or policy.

4. Overall Congress evaluation

Respondents were asked to evaluate the various sections of the Congress, being the plenary sessions, symposia, contributed papers, field trips, posters, social programme, accommodation and an overall evaluation of the Congress. For each section respondents were required to tick a box indicating whether they considered the section to be excellent, very good, good, fair or poor. This next section shows the overall rating respondents gave the Congress (Table 4).

Table 4. Overall Congress rating

<i>Rating</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>% (of respondents)</i>
Excellent/very good	70	78
Good	15	18
Fair	4	4
Poor	1	1
No response	<u>1</u>	<u>-</u>
Total	91	100

Almost 80% of respondents gave the Congress an excellent/very good rating, and assuming the “good” classification indicates reasonable satisfaction then those who were reasonably or highly satisfied is well over 90%.

An average rating was calculated by assigning weights of 1 (excellent), 2 (very good) down to 5 for poor. This gave an average rating of 1.95.

The next section examines the overall Congress rating for first time attendees and “regular” attendees (those who had attended four or more Congresses) (Table 5).

Table 5. Overall Congress rating by first time and regular attendees

<i>Rating</i>	<i>First time</i>		<i>Regular</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
Excellent/very good	24	75	23	92
Good	7	22	1	4
Fair	1	3	-	-
Poor	-	-	1	4
No response	<u>1</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
Total	33	100	25	100
Average rating	1.875		1.72	

The level of satisfaction was very high for first time attendees with only one respondent not giving the Congress a good (or higher) rating, and 75% rating it as either excellent or very good. The average rating at 1.875 was higher than that from the entire respondent group at 1.95.

The average rating at 1.72 for regular attendees was extremely high, exceeding that for first time attendees and for all respondents.

It was important to know how “young people” rated the Congress. For this it was necessary to include all those up to 40 years of age as only four were less than 30 years (Table 6).

Table 6. Overall Congress rating by delegates ≤ 40 years of age

<i>Rating</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>% (of respondents)</i>
Excellent/very good	13	59
Good	7	32
Fair	2	9
Poor	-	-
No response	<u>1</u>	<u>-</u>
	23	100
Average rating	2.3	

The average rating at 2.3 for those 40 years of age or less was lower than for other groupings.

Finally in this section is shown the overall evaluation from the Australians (29 respondents) compared to those from the rest of the world (62 respondents) (Table 7).

The overall evaluation differed little between the two groups, but the Australians gave the Congress a marginally higher rating.

Table 7. Overall Congress rating by Australian and other delegates

<i>Rating</i>	<i>Australian</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Others</i>	<i>%</i>
Excellent/very good	22	79	48	77
Good	4	14	11	18
Fair	2	7	2	3
Poor	-	-	1	2
No response	<u>1</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
Total	29	100	62	100
Average rating	1.9		2.0	

5. Section evaluations

Table 8 shows the evaluation for each section of the Congress for all respondents.

Table 8. Evaluation for each section by all respondents

<i>Rating</i>	<i>Plenaries</i>		<i>Symposia</i>		<i>Contributed papers</i>		<i>Field visits</i>		<i>Posters</i>		<i>Social</i>		<i>Accommodation</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Excellent/ Very good	55	67	54	68	47	53	63	77	23	27	65	80	58	75
Good	23	28	20	25	32	36	15	18	44	51	13	16	17	22
Fair	2	2	5	6	9	10	4	5	16	19	3	4	1	1
Poor	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3	-	-	1	1
No response	9	-	12	-	3	-	9	-	5	-	10	-	14	-
Total	91	100	91	100	91	100	91	100	91	100	91	100	91	100
Average rating	2.1		2.1		2.5		1.8		2.9		1.9		1.9	

Table 8 shows that all sections, other than posters, were rated as excellent/very good by at least 50% of respondents. The excellent/very good number for posters was only 27%. This suggests the need for guidelines for those presenting posters.

The social and accommodation ratings were both very high at average ratings of 1.9 each. The non-response rate for both social and accommodation was relatively high. For accommodation a possible explanation is that some respondents lived in Perth or were staying with friends and the question was not relevant.

The principal elements in the Congress were the plenary, symposia, contributed papers and the field visits. Of these four, the field visits received the highest rating with the contributed papers the lowest, and with the plenaries and symposia receiving an intermediate rating.

Table 8 confirms the importance of the field visit programme. A range of well organised field visits adds to the attractiveness of the programme and can be well received by Congress participants, as was the situation at Perth.

6. Evaluation by professional groups

There were three professional groups at the Congress – academics, consultants and farmers. Tables 9, 10 and 11 report their evaluations of the plenaries, symposia, contributed papers, field visits and posters.

Table 9. Academics' evaluations

<i>Rating</i>	<i>Section</i>									
	<i>Plenaries</i>		<i>Symposia</i>		<i>Contributed papers</i>		<i>Field visits</i>		<i>Posters</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Excellent/very good	22	92	22	88	21	75	21	84	14	52
Good	2	8	3	12	7	25	3	12	12	44
Fair	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	4	1	4
Poor	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
No response	<u>4</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>-</u>
	28	100	28	100	28	100	28	100	28	100

Table 10. Consultants' evaluations

<i>Rating</i>	<i>Section</i>									
	<i>Plenaries</i>		<i>Symposia</i>		<i>Contributed papers</i>		<i>Field visits</i>		<i>Posters</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Excellent/very good	12	60	13	72	12	55	15	79	8	36
Good	7	35	4	22	7	32	4	21	12	55
Fair	1	5	1	6	3	14	-	-	2	9
Poor	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
No response	<u>5</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>-</u>
	25	100	25	100	25	100	25	100	25	100

Table 11. Farmers evaluations

	<i>Section</i>									
	<i>Plenaries</i>		<i>Symposia</i>		<i>Contributed papers</i>		<i>Field visits</i>		<i>Posters</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Excellent/very good	7	54	6	46	5	38	7	84	-	-
Good	6	46	6	46	7	54	6	12	8	62
Fair	-	-	1	8	1	8	1	4	4	31
Poor	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	7
No response	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	13	100	13	100	13	100	13	100	13	100

The average ratings for the above sections for the three professions are shown in Table 12.

Table 12. Average ratings by profession

	<i>Section</i>				
	<i>Plenaries</i>	<i>Symposia papers</i>	<i>Contributed papers</i>	<i>Field visits</i>	<i>Posters</i>
Academics	1.4	1.6	2.1	1.6	2.4
Consultants	2.2	2.1	2.5	1.8	2.7
Farmers	2.2	2.6	2.7	2.1	3.5

Table 12 shows that the academics rated all sections more highly than did the consultants or the farmers. Consultants in turn gave all sections a higher rating than did the farmers, with the exception of the plenaries which both groups rated equally. The academic group had three of the five sections with an average rating of less than two, while the consultants had only one section (field trips) with a rating less than two, and for the farmers no section had a rating of less than two. For the consultants and the farmers, field visits attracted the highest ratings and for the academics field visits attracted the second highest ratings, equal with the symposium papers. These ratings are a tribute to the organisers of the field visits at the Perth Congress. They also point to the importance of the field visits generally in presenting an attractive programme.

This section of the report shows, perhaps not surprisingly, that the overall programme appears more attractive to academics than to farmers. This is probably reflected in the number of delegates from each profession. The introduction in 1991 of the contributed paper is likely to have encouraged the interest of academics in the Congress.

7. Congress highlights

Respondents were asked to identify two Congress highlights. Of the 91 questionnaires returned, there were 86 responses. Some respondents gave more than two highlights, others only one. The highlights have been classified into categories and the number of responses in each is shown in Table 13.

Table 13. Congress highlights

<i>Categories</i>	<i>No. of responses</i>
Australian Agriculture/Australia	16
Pre-congress tour	6
Field visits	32
Plenaries	61
Social	32
Farmer papers	2
Contributed papers	7
Symposia	2

The most frequently nominated highlights were the plenaries, field visits and social. Those who identified plenary as a highlight either nominated particular speaker(s), sessions or simply stated “plenaries”. The responses are shown in Table 14.

Table 14. Plenary highlights

<i>Categories</i>	<i>No. of responses</i>
Plenaries	12
Dr Tim Flannery	15
Saul Eslake	10
David Pannell	4
Parry Agius	2
Plenary session 1	3
Plenary session 2	5
Plenary session 3	2
Plenary session 4	4
Plenary session 5	<u>4</u>
	61

Some plenary speakers were cited more frequently than others, but this is inevitable. Ideally there should be only outstanding speakers but realistically this is not possible. It is important to note that 18 respondents nominated particular plenary sessions as a highlight rather than

individual speakers. All plenary sessions were a highlight to some Congress participants (disregarding session 6 which was a “wrap-up” plenary).

Respondents who nominated field visits as a Congress highlight either identified a particular field visit or stated “field visits”. Responses are shown in Table 15. Clearly the salinity field visit was an outstanding success.

Table 15. Field visits

<i>Categories</i>	<i>No. of responses</i>
Field visits	12
Salinity field visit	11
Wool tour	3
Other field visits	<u>6</u>
	32

Ranking equally with field visits as a Congress highlight were responses which have been classified as social. Examples of respondents’ comments are:

- “meeting new people”
- “talking to people (pre-tour, social, coffee breaks)”
- “friendships renewed”
- “meeting old friends”
- “networking with local/international delegates”
- “interaction and sharing of views with international visitors”
- “social programme”
- “social activities”
- “meeting international people”
- “contact with international delegates”
- “welcome from Australians”
- “opportunities to meet people from other countries”

For 16 respondents, learning about Australia or Australian Agriculture was a Congress highlight. Some respondent comments:

- “learning about Australia”
- “local delegates sharing their knowledge and experience”
- “problems and opportunities in Australian agriculture”

“Australia and its agriculture”

A small number of respondents rated the organisation of the Congress as a highlight. The staff associated with the Congress were “excellent, friendly, efficient”.

8. Areas for improvement

Of the 91 questionnaires returned, 84 responded with suggestions, which in their view would have improved the Congress. The main areas were:

i) Contributed papers (12 mentions)

The principal criticism was that the time for presentation and discussion was too short. The topic of paper quality was raised by one respondent (“some had little depth and were poorly presented”). Two respondents suggested fewer contributed papers and more time for presentation and discussion.

ii) Farmer/consultants (7 responses)

Respondents sought more involvement and more papers from farmers and consultants.

iii) Plenary sessions (14 responses)

The principal criticisms were over-emphasis on “indigenous issues” (mentioned by 4 respondents), the need for themes to be “world wide”, not just Australia (mentioned by 5 respondents). One respondent sought linking the conference theme to field visits. Failure of plenary speakers to keep to time was also mentioned.

iv) Conference organisation (26 responses)

The topics most frequently raised were:

- (i) Transport (eg., minibus to pick up from motel) – 5 mentions
- (ii) Accommodation at a single site – 6 mentions
- (iii) Better organisation, eg.,
 - late arrangements
 - earlier announcement on costs
 - earlier registration information
 - earlier programme details
- (iv) Lower costs to attract more local people
- (v) Cost of hotels/food too high

In terms of conference organisation, some respondents wanted all delegates located at one site. This is a difficult issue. Locating the Congress at a University does provide accommodation for all on one site, as was done at Reading, very successfully, but some may prefer to pay more for “upmarket” accommodation.

Some respondents sought earlier information on the costs, programme details, etc. This is understandable and those organising a Congress should try to get this information out as soon as possible.

v) Posters (8 mentions)

The poster display attracted criticism. Some respondents simply nominated “posters”. One suggested instructions to ensure high quality, another said there needed to be some template/minimum format, while a third sought a review of the quality of the posters.

Other respondents sought improvement in the handouts on field visits. The need to include all conference papers in the proceedings was also mentioned.

8. Added comments

Respondents were asked to raise any points they wished in this section. There were 63 responses, of whom 25 made very positive comments about the Congress, a sample of which are given below:

“I’ll be back for the next one”

“Attention to detail – requests dealt with efficiently”

“Excellent”

“Enjoyed 2nd conference; friendliness and international comradeship”

“Marvellous conference; able to make contacts hoped”

“Great value for registration costs”

“A special thanks to the organising committee for a wonderful conference”

“It has been an exciting conference meeting people and experiencing the spirit of Australia”

“Generally a very interesting conference. Well run. People involved in IFMA are very relaxed and friendly – good (excellent) networking opportunities

“Very impressed – best seminar I’ve attended”

Other respondents wanted more farmers, and farmers giving papers, a greater number of younger people, and more speakers from Eastern Europe and Africa. One respondent suggested that a list of delegates be emailed to everyone before they left for the Congress.

Some respondents raised issues already covered, for example, the need for registration forms, programme details to be made well in advance and the issue of transport for those in outlying motels was raised again, together with costs for farmers and private consultants to attend the Congress.

Two people mentioned partners programmes and the need to coordinate these with farm visits to prevent duplicated visits.

9. Attracting more people to future congresses

An important barometer of success of any Congress is the number of participants. The survey questionnaire sought ideas on attracting more people to future Congresses. Of the 91 questionnaires returned, 74 (81%) responded, some quite comprehensively. Given the

open ended nature of the question, a range of ideas were put forward. Nearly all however, fell into one or more of the following categories:

i) Using delegates to attract more participants

Some responses were:

“Delegates must be ambassadors back home”

“Use individual networks better. Send “electronic promotions” to send to key contacts to forward on”

“Through contacts and word of mouth and greater publicity and profile”

“By current participants inspiring one younger person/farmer/researcher to attend”

ii) The need to market Congresses using not only national organisations but also modern technology

“Better relationship with farm management related national organisations/associations; not only individuals within countries”

“More use of web and contacts within countries”

“Spread information through farmers national organisations and national research associations”

“Convey in marketing more about what people can get out by attending – farming on edge is great title – need to tell people the benefits of attending”

“Include several testimonials of Congress participants or specifically ask some participants at this Congress. Positive thoughts on what they gained personally and professionally”

“Use of testimonials, more publicity – local participation in this Congress is disappointing”

iii) Cost

Reference was made to costs associated with the Congress.

“Cheaper registration”

“Keep costs down, eg., use universities”

“Cost – shorten Congress by one day”

“Select a conference venue more moderately priced to help offset the high travel costs to get to the conference”

“Cost will be an issue to get to Brazil”

“Financing is obviously a problem to all people. Can this aspect be addressed in some way?”

“Shorten conference which will reduce registration fee”

Other respondents wanted costs lowered to attract people not currently well represented:

“More reasonable conference fee and introducing student conference fee”

“Lower fees – encourage (financially) potential delegates from the third world”

“Sponsorship of students/third world delegates”

“Make programme interesting and inexpensive for locals to attend. We are getting older as a group. Programme needs to be of modest cost for young locals. Perhaps we are pitching the venue and accommodation too high”

“Lower price of registration and try to make more inclusive and far less exclusive”

“Offer incentives to farmers and/or younger delegates to attend, eg., scholarships to reduce registration costs”

iv) Programme content/theme

This was raised by respondents. Responses included:

“More farmer papers – how to do it better”

“Put more practical issues on the programme...”

“More practical programme for local participants with 2-3 day programme and success stories from top farms/innovative managers”

“Continue with interesting conference themes – “Farming at the Edge” – pulled me in.

“Farm Management” – would not have!”

“Identify the needs of different participant groups from attending international meetings”

“Ensure the content is associated with the topic/theme of the Congress. Allow more time in symposiums”

“Argue that farm management is CENTRAL to the future of food, fibre and fuel and the planet. Bring out the innovation in farming and how profitable this can be”

“Choose a clear and attractive theme which plays an actual role in more countries than just one”

v) IFMA

Some respondents saw a greater role for IFMA.

“Find sources of promoting IFMA. Its a well kept secret”

“More promotion of IFMA in each country”

“IFMA needs a stronger “national life” between Congresses”

“More advertising about IFMA”

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Of the 91 respondents, 36% were attending their first Congress; nearly 50% were 51 years or older and 62% were either academics or consultants.

Nearly 80% of respondents gave the Congress an excellent or very good rating. If those who rated the Congress as “good” are added to this total, more than 90% of respondents were well/highly satisfied. This reflects great credit on the Conference organisers.

The evaluations for each Congress section showed only 27% of respondents rated the posters as excellent/very good. For all other sections at least 50% of respondents gave an excellent or very good rating. For the sections other than posters, the excellent/very good percentage ranged from 53% for the contributed papers to 80% for social with field visits also very high at 77%.

The principal sections of the Congress were the plenaries, symposia, contributed papers, field visits and posters. Academics gave a higher average rating to each section than the consultants or farmers. Consultants in turn gave a higher average rating to all sections than did the farmers, except for the plenaries, which was rated equally by both groups.

The most frequently cited Congress highlight was the plenaries. Not surprisingly, some speakers were nominated more frequently than others. Importantly however, all plenary sessions were viewed as a highlight by some attendees.

Field visits and social aspects were rated equally as Congress highlights. The Congress format provides excellent opportunities for socialising. Field visits are an important part of the Congress and need to be interesting and well organised if a Congress is to succeed.

In relation to how this Congress (and future Congresses) could be improved, a number of suggestions were made but no suggestion had majority support. Costs were however, an issue for some (hotels, food, registration fees for farmers and consultants). Costs are important and must be looked at closely. Some respondents wanted all delegates at one site. Other respondents wanted more participation (attendance and papers) by farmers and consultants. The need for world wide themes, rather than domestic themes in the plenaries was also mentioned. Interestingly the number who thought there had been over-emphasis on “indigenous issues” was about the same who considered this topic was a Congress highlight! Understandably people wanted to be informed about costs and programme details as early as possible.

A challenge facing the IFMA could be to attract reasonable numbers to future Congresses. Nearly half the attendees at this Congress were aged 50 or more. This is not a criticism of the attendees at the Perth Congress. In New Zealand, and possibly in many countries, the population of farm management academics, consultants and farmers is aging and this may be reflected in attendance at Congresses. It is not only the absolute numbers that are important but also the balance. More farmers, young people, women and a greater representation from areas such as Africa and Asia were sought.

Raising the issue of numbers and representation at Congresses is simple. Finding cost effective practical solutions is far more difficult. Perhaps the best way to start is to seek the support of our members. The questionnaires demonstrated clearly that there is a strong loyalty to IFMA/Congresses. Many respondents wrote extensively on their questionnaires, not simply “ticking” the appropriate box. IFMA needs to capitalise on that goodwill – “delegates must be ambassadors back home”.

IFMA could start by working with delegates to boost support for future Congresses.

FARMING AT THE EDGE

INTERNATIONAL FARM MANAGEMENT
CONGRESS 2003

EVALUATION FORM

**The Council of the IFMA would like you to complete this questionnaire which is
Designed to help those running 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: _____

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

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor
6. Plenary sessions					
7. Symposiums					
8. Contributed papers					
9. Field trips					
10. Posters					
11. Social program					
12. Accommodation					
13. Overall how do you rate this Congress?					

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

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

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

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