The history of the
International Federation of Agricultural Journalists

By Paul Queck

An organization that later became known as the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists (IFAJ) was first formed in 1956. Interest in organizing an international organization of agricultural journalists can be traced back to 1933 when an International Federation of the Agricultural Press was founded at Ghent in Belgium; two years later, during the Brussels International Fair, a congress was organized and attended by journalists from 18 countries. The outbreak of WWII set an end to the first federation's activities.

Shortly after the war a number of agricultural journalists again took up the idea of forming an international organization.

The actual proposal to create the “International Union of Agricultural Journalists” was launched in Paris in March 1954 by a group of German and French agricultural journalists who were attending a meeting of agricultural journalists from various countries. It is worth mentioning that there were only a few national associations of agricultural journalists at that time, and not in France nor in Belgium, although journalists from those two countries took part in initial discussions.

That year a seminar was organized by the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) in Sweden on the subject of "the role of the agricultural press in the work of the agricultural consultant." During this conference a number of participants also discussed the need for an international organization of agricultural journalists.

The idea was taken up six months later by a group of participants in a seminar on the utilization of publications for the popularization of agricultural know-how, organized by the OEEC and held at the House of the Press at Bonn, Germany.

After thorough discussions, the group decided to establish a provisional committee with the task of laying the foundations for an international federation. Members of this provisional committee were France-Pierre Couvreur, chief editor of the Journal de la France Agricole of Paris; Hans von Örtzen, chief editor of Der Tierzüchter of Bonn; Arthur Gobbe, Director of the Agricultural Information Services of the Belgian Ministry of Agriculture in Brussels; Mr. Håkansson, Director-General of the Information Services of the Swedish Ministry of Agriculture in Stockholm; and Mr. Waldhuber, chief editor of the Farm Youth Journal of Vienna.

Union is Formed
After another preparatory meeting held in Brussels on February 11, 1956, the International Union of Agricultural Journalists officially came to life on November 16, 1956, during a meeting held in Paris at the Château de la Muette, the seat of OEEC. Hans von Ortzen was elected President of the Union while France-Pierre Couvreur became Secretary-General/Treasurer.
From the very beginning, the objectives assigned to the Union included the "studying of agricultural journalism in the various countries," and the idea of "providing agricultural journalists with opportunities to meet and exchange experiences, and to discuss professional questions of general interest." It also assumed the task of supporting efforts to set up national associations of agricultural journalists in those countries where such associations did not yet exist.

The first General Assembly of the Union was held at Kassel, Germany, Nov. 14-16, 1957. This assembly confirmed the Constituent Assembly of Paris. The following annual congress and General Assembly was organized in Brussels, Belgium, on June 11-13, 1958, to coincide with the 1958 World Fair.

**First Annual Congress**
One year later France assumed responsibility for organizing the annual congress, held June 4-6, 1959 in Paris. The first day was devoted entirely to a series of meetings, such as that of the Executive Committee, the Assembly of Delegates and the General Assembly. The papers presented at the conference were found to be highly interesting to all participants. To mention but a few:

- "The potential role of the agricultural journalist in improving agricultural practice and in raising the farmers' standard of living"
- "The development of agriculture during the last fifty years"
- "The experience of Benelux, forerunner of the Common Market"
- "Problems facing the journalist in the agricultural press"

The second and third days of the congress were used for learning about the host country's agriculture, visiting farms and agricultural industry or agricultural associations.

**Introducing the Press Card**
One of the first services sought by members of the new IUAJ was a Press Card. The first Press Cards were issued to members in 1959. That year the Union counted 1,001 members in nine national associations. John Hayhurst, a New Zealander who had immigrated to England, was elected President in 1960. In the first "International Bulletin" of 1961, Hayhurst wrote that "each journalist for whom his national association pays membership fees to the Union is entitled to a press identification card issued by the IUAI."

During Hayhurst’s presidency from 1960 to 1964, annual congresses were held in Cambridge, England (1960); Vienna, Austria (1961); Lund, Sweden (1962); Rome, Italy (1963), and Berne, Switzerland (1964).

The organization continued to grow. The Danish Agricultural Journalists Association (Dansk Landbrugspress) joined IUAJ in 1961.

In order to establish a closer relationship between the Union and the national associations, the Executive Committee proposed to the 1961 congress held at Vienna a resolution that provided for a change in the composition of the Executive Committee. The Council accepted the proposal, and, at
the 1962 congress held in Sweden, each active member (association) was asked to designate a person as its representative on the Committee to serve for two years starting on January 1, 1963.

This arrangement was designed to permit all active members to maintain closer contact with the Union and to be in a better position to take part in its functions. The Union, in turn, would benefit from better information available to the Executive Committee about matters of interest, problems and viewpoints of individual members. The first meeting of the Union’s new Executive Committee, comprised of a representative of each member country as well as the President and the previous President and the Secretary-General of the IUAJ, took place in Paris on Jan. 18-19, 1963.

The IUAJ’s elected officers make up the Presidium, which is entrusted with ensuring the fulfillment of the direction and decisions of the Executive Committee. Members of the Presidium include the President, Vice President, and Secretary General. The Presidium’s membership has also included the immediate past President for up to two years after leaving office. And, it has included new elected positions as they have been added, to include Treasurer, and Junior Vice President (an office added and later dropped).

From Union to Federation
Hayhurst wanted to see the Union grow beyond Europe and become a truly international organization. In 1960 he wrote the American Agricultural Editors’ Association (AAEA), urging them to join the Union. In December 1960 the AAEA voted to join, provided that the name of the organization be changed from International Union of Agricultural Journalists to International Federation of Agricultural Journalists.

The Americans made this request because in America, the term “union” is primarily used to mean a “trade union” – a workers’ organization to defend rights, or bargain for wages and benefits. AAEA members believed that changing the word “Union” to “Federation” would be a more accurate name for a professional organization and avoid confusing U.S. journalists and publishers.

The IUAJ Executive Committee recommended in 1964 that the name of the organization be changed to International Federation of Agricultural Journalists (IFAJ). The change was later approved by the delegates and incorporated in the statutes in 1967. The AAEA joined IFAJ that year.

IFAJ and Green Week
The IFAJ Executive Committee meets annually during the annual congresses, and since the early years also meets for a mid-year meeting each January during Green Week in Berlin, as guests of Messe Berlin, the organizer of Green Week. Messe Berlin provided hotel accommodations for Executive Committee members and for many years also assisted Europeans on the Executive Committee with travel costs. The Executive Committee has occasionally through the years met for a third meeting in a year, but this has not been the norm.

The organization’s original statutes allowed for one category of membership: national agricultural journalist associations from countries with freedom of the press. Some national associations outside of Europe asked to associate with the Union, but in a non-voting basis and paying at a lower membership rate because they could not participate regularly in the meetings. At the 1961 congress in Vienna, a new category of membership was introduced - that of affiliated members, open to all asso-
ciations outside of Western Europe that could not expect to participate in the meetings of the Executive Committee and other similar activities.

At the 1963 congress in Rome several new rules were adopted, including the rights of individual members from countries where a national agricultural journalist association had not yet been formed, to participate as observers (without voting privileges), provided they paid dues as corresponding members.

Annual congress attendance was restricted to agricultural journalists from member associations, affiliate member associations, and individual corresponding members. IFAJ membership was, and still is, restricted to agricultural journalist associations from countries with freedom of the press. As a result, agricultural journalists from communist and other countries that did not have freedom of the press were not allowed to attend the annual congresses.

**First World Congress**

The decision was made in 1965 that the 1967 annual congress would invite agricultural journalists from all countries to attend and participate in an International Congress of Farm Writers held during Expo 67 in Montreal, Canada. The congress would be hosted jointly by the English-speaking Canadian Farm Writers’ Federation (CFWF) and the French-speaking L’Association Canadienne des Redacteurs Agricoles de Langue Francaise (ACRA). This was IFAJ’s first World Congress. However, CFWF did not join IFAJ until 17 years later.

In 1965, Rolf Haerberli of Switzerland succeeded John Hayhurst as President. Haerberli was editor and managing director of Landwirtschaftlicher Informationsdienst (LID) in Berne, Switzerland, from 1951 to 1987. He also helped found the Swiss Guild of Agricultural Journalists and was the organization’s first president. Haerberli presented the television program, *Agriculture Today*, starting in the late 1950s and continuing for some 20 years. During this time more than 320 programs were produced, acting as a bridge between city and country, producers and consumers.

He presided over the 1965 annual congress in Copenhagen, Denmark; the 1966 annual congress in Scheveningen, The Netherlands, the “International Congress of Farm Writers,” in 1967 in Montreal, Canada, and the 1968 annual congress in Helsinki, Finland.

The International Congress in Montreal, June 18-21, 1967, had an attendance of 304 from 24 countries, including 107 agricultural periodical journalists, 34 daily journalists, 25 radio and TV journalists, and 114 in information and public relations professionals. The congress drew 127 from Canada and 113 from the United States. For most of these North Americans it was their first experience with IFAJ or an international congress.

The 1967 Congress program included issues of the day, professional improvement, and farming in Canada. A key issue was world hunger with sessions on the needs of developing countries and the paradox of food and farming. Professional improvement sessions included:

- How I Present Information for Greatest Impact and Usefulness
- How We Tell the Story of Agriculture, and
- My Role as Farm Communicator
Past IFAJ President John Hayhurst remarked at the conclusion of the congress that “It is my impression that you (referring to congress organizers Jack Cram and Bob Raynaud) have started something deep inside us that will persist and grow, long after this event has passed and gone.”

In the delegate meeting a resolution was made by American Bob Rupp, editor of The Farmer, and seconded by Don Barton of the Country Guide and President of the Canadian Farm Writers Federation, that a second international congress of farm writers be held. The motion passed.

France-Pierre Couvreur of France followed Rolf Haerberli as president in 1969. Couvreur had been IFAJ’s first Secretary-General holding that position from 1956 to 1968. P. Toft Nielsen of Denmark was elected IFAJ Secretary-General to replace Couvreur and served in that position until 1972.

By 1970, the number of active members in the Federation had reached 2,130 individual agricultural journalists belonging to 14 associations. The associations were: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, West Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States.

France organized the Second World Congress, held in Cannes June 28 to July 3, 1971. During this congress it was decided that IFAJ would organize a World Congress every four years to which agricultural journalists from all parts of the world would be invited. The 1971 World Congress included tours to the Champagne region, Lyon and Beaujolais.

The program for the 1971 World Congress in Paris lists the following as members of IFAJ Executive Committee: Chairman: France-Pierre Couvreur (France); Secretary General and Treasurer: Paul Toft-Nielsen (Denmark); Vice-Chairmen: Dr. Helmut von Böeckelmann (Germany) and Dr. Vittorio Cervi (Italy); Honorary Presidents: Ulrich von Oertzen (Germany) and John Hayhurst (Great Britain) and Dr. Rolf Haeberli (Switzerland); and other Executive Committee members: Paul Esterhazy (Austria); Arthur Gobbe (Belgium), assistant secretary; Willy Kernel (Denmark); Heikki Arasto (Finland); Rene Gillman (France); Larry Sheedy (Ireland); Jan Breunis (The Netherlands); Alf G. Skeppstedt (Norway); Bertil Gustafson (Sweden), assistant treasurer; and Jacques Laedermann (Switzerland).

The Second World Congress proved that the popularity of the 1967 World was no fluke. More than 248 agricultural journalists from 42 countries attended the 1971 Congress. They came from Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Columbia, Ivory Coast, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, India, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Norway, New Zealand, Paraguay, The Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Portugal, East and West Germany, Cambodia, Madagascar, Czechoslovakia, South Africa, Chad, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, Tunisia, the Soviet Union, and the United States of America.

During Couvreur’s presidency, annual congresses were held in Oslo, Norway (1969); Dublin, Ireland (1970); Cannes, France (1971); and Oxford, England (1972).

Vittorio Cervi of Italy followed France-Pierre Couvreur as IFAJ president leading the Federation from 1973 to 1976. Cervi was Information Officer of the United Nation’s Food and Agriculture
Organization (FAO) in Rome when elected IFAJ President, making him the first person elected IFAJ President while serving in a public relations capacity. A very competent linguist, Cervi was a valuable member of the IFAJ Executive Committee and a popular participant in annual congresses for many years both before and after his term as President.

Also in 1973, Dr. Helmut von Bockelmann of Germany was elected IFAJ Vice President and Bertil Gustafson of Sweden was elected IFAJ Secretary General. Gustafson served in that position through 1974.

During a meeting in Jerusalem on June 2, 1974; the Executive Committee had agreed to the exclusive use of the word "Federation" (Fédération) in the name of the organization. Until that year, both words had been used: "Union", in particular in the French-speaking countries, and "Federation," in the English-speaking countries.

During Cervi’s presidency, annual congresses were held in Lulea, Sweden, June 29 to July 7, 1973; Jerusalem, Israel (1974); Milan, Italy, Sept. 26 to Oct. 3, 1975; and the Third World Congress in Ames, Iowa of the United States, June 30 to July 9, 1976.

Bob Rupp, editor of the U.S. farm magazine, *The Farmer*, chaired the third World Congress held during the U.S. Bicentennial celebration, July 4, 1976. Rupp reflected that “the congress started June 30 and ended July 9. In between were many tours and the required official IFAJ meetings. The on-farm visits were big highlights, and every visitor spent July 4 with an Iowa farm couple in touring, picnicking, and sampling rural small-town America.” A total of 223 attended, including 171 from 22 countries outside the United States. The Congress drew agricultural journalists from the following non-IFAJ member countries: Kenya, Republic of China (Taiwan), Hungary, Indonesia, Iran, Korea, Mexico, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, and Yugoslavia.

Rupp added that AAEA members' experience in hosting the Congress solidified U.S. support of IFAJ. Said Rupp: “AAEA’s sustaining involvement with IFAJ starting in 1967 was secure and successful.”

Dr. Helmut von Bockelmann of Germany was elected IFAJ President in 1977 after Cervi had completed his two terms in office. Dr. von Bockelmann served as IFAJ President from 1977 until January 1981. Professionally, von Bockelmann was Chief Editor of *DLG Mitteilungen* from 1953 to 1973, and Chief Editor of *Feld und Wald/Agrarpraxis* from 1974 to 1987. He was a leading figure in the German Association (Verband Deutscher Agrarjournalisten) serving as its President from 1969 until 1982, and was named its Honorary President in 1983, an honor he held until his death in 1988.

In 1977, IFAJ counted 2,495 members of 16 associations. By 1980, IFAJ had approximately 3,350 members from 17 countries. More than 1,300 press cards were issued by IFAJ in 1979. Iran was an affiliate member of IFAJ in the 1970s, but all communications from that association ended with the Iranian Revolution in January 1979.

**First Newsletter**
The first newsletter of the IFUA had been called *International Bulletin*, and was first published and delivered to members in May 1961. The contents included a message from the President, reports on the latest congress or Executive Committee meeting, news from the national associations, coverage of other international events, and information for agricultural journalists.

The *International Bulletin* was a modest publication: about ten typewritten pages. Former IFAJ President Frans Sterckx recalls, “We were lucky to have a cover in two colors, red and green. Number 8 of the Bulletin made an exception as it was printed on better quality paper. Maybe our Secretary-general, then France-Pierre Couvreur, had gained in the National Lottery, who knows – but it probably wasn't a very large sum he had won since the following issue was again typewritten.”

In the fourth newsletter published in December 1962, President John Hayhurst wrote that it would be desirable to increase the frequency of the publication from two to three issues per year. Unfortunately this was not possible considering the Union's financial situation. Membership fees in 1956 were only a half dollar per individual member, increasing to $1 as of January 1, 1962, to $2 in 1970 and to $3 in 1978.

In 1969 the newsletter’s title was changed from *Bulletin International* to *IFAJ News Letter*, and, from that time on the red color disappeared from the cover. By the early 70's, the green color also was gone. When Alf Skeppstedt was elected Secretary-General in 1975, the green color reappeared, and the title became *IFAJ Newsletter* – displaying the Federation’s logo that had been chosen in 1975 at the annual congress in Milan.

In 1979 the Secretary-general was relieved of the task of editing the Federation’s newsletter. Alfred van Dijk of the Netherlands became the newsletter editor, a position he held until 1985 when Larry Sheedy of Ireland took over the task after completing his term as IFAJ President in 1985.

**Awarding Medals**

In 1978, during von Bockelmann’s presidency, IFAJ decided to begin awarding gold and silver medals to IFAJ members in recognition of outstanding efforts for the benefit of the Federation. Helmut von Bockelmann was responsible for the design and production of the medals, which bear the quotation from Virgil "Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas." This translates approximately as "Happy is he who seeks to discover the cause of things" The message stands the test of time as a guide for the investigative agricultural journalist.

Annual congresses were held in Brussels, Belgium, June 12-18,1977; Baden, Austria (1978); Dublin, Ireland (1979); and the Fourth World Congress in Hamburg, Germany (1980).

The Fourth World Congress in Hamburg was an exceptional congress, well attended and organized, due in large part to the efforts of congress organizer Rudolf Stöhr. Attending the congress were 220 active journalists, accompanied by 65 partners. Adding speakers, the honorary guests and some officials, more than 320 participants attended the congress.

Stöhr and his team worked hard to secure the finances needed to invite journalists from all over the world. Journalists from 35 countries attended, including such non-IFAJ member countries as Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Mexico, New Zealand, German Democratic Republic (East Germany), Poland, Portugal, Rwanda, South Africa, Togo, Czechoslovakia, U.S.S.R., Hungary, and Zaire. IFAJ affiliate members Australia and Japan also were represented.
The large numbers of attendees from such a diverse mix of countries resulted in a great exchange of ideas and information among attendees. Very impressive was the lineup of tours where attendees interested in livestock were bused to dairy, beef cattle, and horse farms as well as slaughterhouses. Those interested in crops visited farms producing grain, rapeseed and sugar beets. And, those wanting to see horticulture, market gardening, flowers, ornamentals, fruit and vegetables visited those production and processing facilities.

IFAJ Matures
IFAJ’s growth exploded in the post-war 1950s and into the 1960s as agricultural journalists, isolated during the world depression and war years, discovered fellow journalists in other countries with common interests and were drawn to share and learn. However, the initial burst of growth flattened after agricultural journalists in most of the western democracy’s major food-producing nations joined IFAJ.

As the organization matured, questions began to arise as to the direction the organization should take. The French association, L’Association Francaise des Journalistes Agricoles (AFJA), one of IFAJ’s founding organizations, began questioning the value of IFAJ for its members. The IFAJ Presidium commissioned President von Bockelmann to survey member associations in late 1979 to measure their satisfaction with IFAJ and request suggestions.

He reported in 1980 that of the 10 member associations that had responded to the survey, nine reported that they were satisfied with IFAJ. Many recommendations were received, including organizing shorter congresses, organizing longer congresses; greater specialization in the congress program, and that IFAJ should promote the training and development of young journalists.

It was also suggested that IFAJ should provide a journalist exchange, an idea that came into reality in the later 1990s. Others suggested publishing lists of journalists to promote interaction and exchange, and not publishing member lists for code of ethics reasons. Some ideas, such as grants for young journalists, were adopted. Many topics, such as length of congress program, publishing member lists, and how to deal with language at congresses and in IFAJ communications were discussed and debated for years.

Providing annual congresses for agricultural journalists to meet, network and learn remained the main focus of IFAJ from its beginning. It was not until mid-2000s that the organization added professional development as a major emphasis.

Larry Sheedy of Ireland succeeded Helmut von Bockelmann to the presidency, leading IFAJ from 1981 through 1984. Sheedy had served as deputy editor of the Farmers Journal and was a contributor to both national radio and television before switching roles to form a specialist public relations company, Sheedy Communications, dealing with food and agriculture.

In accepting the president’s gavel, Sheedy noted that there was a large knowledge gap between agricultural experts and farmers and stressed that the world needs journalists with adequate training to bridge that gap.

Serving in leadership with Sheedy were: Franz Sterckx of Belgium (First Vice President), Bob Rupp of the United States (Second Vice President), and Alf Skeppstedt of Norway (Secretary-General).
During Sheedy’s presidency, annual congresses were held in Renfrew, Scotland (1981); Zaragossa, Spain (1882); Aalborg, Denmark (1983); and the Fifth World Congress in Jerusalem, Israel from Feb. 26 to Mar. 2, 1984.

The fifth World Congress in Israel gave journalists a first-hand view of farming in a desert and semi-arid area. The congress drew 90 participants from 21 countries. Countries represented were: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, India, Ireland, Israel, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States of America. Congress tours showcased high-tech irrigation systems and sophisticated fruit, flower and vegetable production along with dairy, aquaculture, and kibbutz farming.

By 1984 IFAJ had active member associations in 18 countries. Those countries were Austria, Belgium, Canada, the French-speaking Canadian association ACRA, Denmark, Finland, France, West Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Israel, Italy, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States. Affiliate members included Australia, Cyprus, Iran, Japan, and The Philippines.

Frans Sterckx of Belgium began his term as IFAJ President in 1985 and served through 1988. Sterckx was editor of De Boer, and had been IFAJ First Vice President. During Sterckx’s presidency, annual congresses were held in Bordeaux, France (1985); Helsinki, Finland, July 6-11, 1986; Birmingham, England, May 1987; and the Sixth World Congress in Australia, October, 1988.

The Sixth World Congress in Australia was the first IFAJ congress held outside of Europe and North America, the first south of the equator, and the first held on a moving train. The Congress began with a full day of formal business meetings in Sydney. Then the 200 delegates from 21 countries boarded a train, where they slept, met and stopped along the way to tour, including stopping at the Australian National Field Days west of Orange, the Orange Agricultural College, the historic town of Gulgong, mine blasting at Ulan and a visit to Hunter Valley, the heart of the thoroughbred racing horse industry in Australia. The Congress concluded back in Sydney. Sandy Grieve was the congress’ organizing chairman.

During the delegate assembly meeting at the 1988 Congress, Alf Skeppstedt of Norway was elected to replace the retiring Frans Sterckx as IFAJ President. Skeppstedt served from 1989 through 1992. Skeppstedt had worked for 13 years for the news agency operated by the Norwegian Cooperatives, and nine years in public affairs positions with the Norwegian timber industry. Skeppstedt was elected to the presidency after serving 13 years as IFAJ’s Secretary-General. Marius Kwaak replaced Skeppstedt as Secretary-General, but stepped down after a few months to become the Dutch agricultural attaché to Spain. Pirjo Kontio of Finland replaced Kwaak as Secretary-General. Alois Wuschek of West Germany was elected Vice President.

**Communications Challenge**
Communication between IFAJ and individual members was a continuing challenge for three reasons. The biggest reason was that IFAJ did not have the names and contact information for individual members and had to communicate to them through the member associations. That was a problem because some member associations communicated IFAJ news fairly well, while others did not. A second reason was language. IFAJ news was published in English, French and
German. This was not convenient for members in Italy, Spain, Finland and the Scandinavian countries. Third, IFAJ never had a lot of money and translating and mailing news items and newsletters between continents was time consuming and expensive. So, fewer newsletters were often published in years when finances were tight.

In his departing column in the February 1989 *IFAJ Newsletter*, Frans Sterckx focused on the communications challenge: “During my four-year period as President, I increasingly got the sad conviction that a lot of our members are not informed about IFAJ at all. One of the main reasons is that at their national associations’ level, there is no information passed on to members.”

Alf Skeppstedt stressed, as he took office, that it was essential for IFAJ to have a working program to reach its members. “We are all very interested in what IFAJ can do that the members can benefit most from,” he said. “We have the Newsletter, the Directory, the Presscard, the Congress, the publication *What does IFAJ do for its members?*, and the Calendar of Events. The working paper has to have proposals about how to use these and/or other means to get the message through to each individual member – this is what we do.”

The Canadian Farm Writers’ Federation (the association of English-speaking agricultural journalists in Canada) joined IFAJ in 1984 after a visit from then-IFAJ president Larry Sheedy. Their joining IFAJ meant that Canada had two member associations – the CFWF and the French-speaking ACRA. The addition of the Japanese and CFWF brought IFAJ’s membership to 20.

The L’Association Francaise des Journalistes Agricoles (Association of French Agriculture Journalists) stopped paying their dues in 1986 – essentially dropping their membership.

The Japanese Agricultural Journalists Association joined IFAJ as a member country in 1988 – the first Asian agricultural journalist association to become a full member. It had organized its association in 1956 and had been a corresponding member of IFAJ for almost 20 years when it joined.

Members in 1988 were associations from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Great Britain, Canada (the French speaking ACRA and the English-speaking Canadian Farm Writers’ Federation), Denmark, Netherlands, Finland, West Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States.

**Beyond the Iron Curtain**

On November 9, 1989 the Berlin Wall fell symbolizing the end of the Cold War. Agricultural journalists working behind the Iron Curtain were eager to make contact with western journalists. And, IFAJ saw its mission to assist these journalists in adapting to working in a free press and capitalist economies, and to provide them the opportunity to network with Western colleagues. The Czechoslovakian Agricultural Journalists Association was the first Eastern Bloc association to join IFAJ. Their application was approved for full membership in 1992. And in 1992, budding agricultural journalist associations in Hungary and Poland were considering their applications for IFAJ membership.
In 1990, the IFAJ Executive Committee was made up of the following individuals who were either members of the IFAJ Presidium or representing member associations: Edward Rider, American Agricultural Editors’ Association; Marcel Meeus, Association Belge Journalistes Agricoles ABJA-BVLJ; Trevor Brown, Australian Council of Agricultural Journalists; Gaetan Martineau, Association Canadienne des Redacteurs Agricoles (A.C.R.A.); Manuel Martin Lobo, Associacion de Periodistas y Escritores Agrarios Espanoles (A.P.A.E.); Niels Christian Jorgensen, Dansk Landbrugspresse; René Smeele, Dutch Association of Agricultural Journalists; Lars Eriksson, Foreningen Skogs Och Landbrukjournalister; David Steers, Guild of Agricultural Journalists of Great Britain; Brian Gilsenan, Guild of Agricultural Journalists of Ireland; E. Benn-onn, Israel Agricultural and Economic Journalists Association; Masami Furuno, Japan Agricultural Journalists Association; Heikki Vuorela, Maataloustoimittajat ry.; Trevor Walton, New Zealand Guild of Agricultural Journalists; Marit Graff Hagen, Norsk Landbruksjournalistlag; Bernhard Riedi, Schweizerische Vereinigung der Agrarjournalisten; Hasso Pacyna, Verband Deutscher Agrarjournalisten; Paul Gruber, Verband der Agrarjournalisten in Österreich; Lelio Bernardi, Unione Nazionale Associazion Agricoli; Alf Skeppstedt of Norway, IFAJ President; Alois Wuschek of Germany, IFAJ Vice President; Frans Stereckx of Belgium, IFAJ Immediate Past President; and Pirjo Kontio of Finland, IFAJ Secretary-General.

Later in 1990, Pirjo Kontio resigned as IFAJ Secretary–General, and Madeline Re of Switzerland took over the position.

**Drive for Regionalization**

Skeppstedt supported the idea of regionalization within IFAJ to encourage more contact between member associations through regional events as well as regional involvement in helping journalists organize associations. The issue of regionalization had been debated within IFAJ beginning in the 1980s. A proposal calling for regional grouping within the framework of the Federation’s framework, to encourage closer and more regular participation between neighboring member countries was debated during the 1988 delegates assembly in Australia and tabled.

Skeppstedt formed a committee to further develop a proposal, which was introduced at the 1990 delegate assembly where it was voted down. Skeppstedt re-established the ad-hoc committee tasking it to develop a proposal for the 1992 delegate assembly. IFAJ’s Constitution and Rules were eventually amended to allow for Regional Vice Presidents to be appointed by the IFAJ Executive Committee from among the representatives of member associations on the Executive Committee. And in 1996, Sandy Grieve of Australia was elected a regional Vice President for the Southern Hemisphere and Asia. Grieve served in that role through 2000.

In 2000, IFAJ President Paul Queck of the United States urged the Executive Committee to reorganize the regions and add more regional vice presidents. In January of 2001, under IFAJ President Hans Matthiesen’s leadership, regional vice presidents for Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas were appointed by the IFAJ Executive Committee. Those appointed were: Masaru Yamada of Japan for Asia, Reg Weiss of South Africa for Africa, Jacques Van Outryve of Belgium for Europe and the Middle East, Paul Queck of the USA for North and South America, and Liz Kellaway of Australia for the South Pacific. All of these regional vice presidents served in a voluntary capacity.
During Skeppstedt’s presidency, annual congresses were held in Weggis/Luzern, Switzerland, Aug. 27 to Sept. 2, 1989; Uppsala, Sweden, August 26-31, 1990; Hague, The Netherlands, May 26 to June 1, 1991; and the Seventh World Congress in Indianapolis in the United States of America, Oct. 4-9, 1992.

The 1992 World Congress in the U.S. was one of the first congresses to feature a full program of professional development seminars on writing, editing and photography in addition to issue seminars. Following two days of seminars and meetings in Indianapolis, congress participants divided into four bus tours that concluded three days later in Chicago, with a tour of the Chicago Board of Trade and farewell party atop a Chicago skyscraper. The 1992 World Congress was attended by 350 journalists from 22 nations, including journalists from Estonia and the Philippines.

David Steers of England was elected IFAJ President during the 1992 Congress and took office in 1993. Steers had served as the British Guild’s representative on the IFAJ Executive Committee since 1976. He had worked on newspapers and magazines including Farmers Weekly, Farmers Guardian, and on a national newspaper, The Sunday Telegraph. He had also worked in press and public relations for the National Farmers Union of England and Wales. When elected President he was a freelancer and editor of Timber Grower.

**IFAJ Expands Again**

Steers had a passion for growing IFAJ’s membership. That passion met opportunity with the emergence of democracies in the former East Bloc countries and in the developing nations in Africa and elsewhere in the 1990s.

Steers served as President from 1993 through 1996 and during those years, agricultural journalist associations from Albania, Hungary, Kenya and South Africa joined IFAJ. Hungary joined in 1995. Both Kenya and South Africa were accepted into membership in 1996, along with Albania. The Italian association, Associazione Nazionale Stamp Agricola dropped its membership in 1992, however the Unione Nazionale Association Giornalisti Agricole (UNAGA) was accepted into membership in 1995. The Czechoslovakian association divided into a Czech association (Federation of Food and Drink Industries of the Czech Republic) and a Slovak association (Klub polnohospodářských redaktorov SSN) in 1994.

The Polish association joined as a corresponding member and the New Zealand Guild of Agricultural Journalists and Communicators changed from full-member to corresponding member status in 1993. By 1996, IFAJ had 25 member associations and two (Poland and New Zealand) corresponding members.

René Smeele of The Netherlands was elected Vice President in 1992, replacing the retiring Alois Wuscheck of Germany. Smeele was editor for the Dutch farm magazine Boerderij and brought with him a strong desire to improve communications with members. Smeele had taken over the editorship of the IFAJ News from Larry Sheedy in 1990, and continued editing the newsletter through 1997, while serving as Vice President. And in early 1996, Smeele developed IFAJ’s first Web site on his own initiative. He continued as Vice President through 2000.

**Writing Contest**
The Star Report Prize contest was developed in 1993 as a way to showcase the talents of IFAJ members, and provide some professional development training. That contest was developed and managed by past IFAJ President Larry Sheedy of Ireland. It was a contest for the best published written story or broadcast (radio or television) story from the previous IFAJ annual congress.

The Star Report Prize contest was announced during the 1993 IFAJ congress, with the prize for the best story from that congress awarded during the 1994 congress to Eros Crotta of Switzerland. Subsequent award winners were James Campbell, Ireland (1995); Ilona Lesscher, The Netherlands (1996); Montague Keen, Great Britain (1997); Larry Dreiling, USA (1998); Paul Gruber, Austria (1999); Eugenia Linkova-Bouskova, Czech Republic (2000); Aage Krogsdam, Denmark (2001); Cindy Snyder, USA (2002); and Brita Drangsholt Jaksjo, Norway (2003).

The length and cost of the annual congresses was a continuing item of discussion in the IFAJ Executive Committee. As previously noted, President von Bockelmann’s survey of member associations in 1979 turned up views that the congresses were too long, while others said the congresses were too short. There also was a call for the congress programs to be more about news gathering and less about social activities.

President David Steers formed an ad hoc committee in 1995 to study the issue. Serving on the committee were IFAJ Executive Committee members David Lloyd of Great Britain, Magda de Vetten of The Netherlands, Hans Müller of Switzerland, and Sandy Grieve of Australia. The committee released its recommendations in 1996, proposing a two-tier assembly where those unable to spend a full week away from their home base could still experience the value of the global gathering. They suggested consideration be given to reducing the number of days in the annual congresses from six days to five, that everything possible be done to encourage young journalist participation in the congresses, and that organizers strive to accommodate all congress participants in one hotel to facilitate informal contacts. Many of the concepts in their recommendations were eventually adopted.

During Steers’ presidency annual congresses were held in Vienna, Austria, Aug. 29 to Sept. 3, 1993; Tromsø, Norway, Aug. 7-13, 1994; Prague, Czech Republic and Bratislava, Slovakia, Sept. 24-29, 1995; and the Eighth World Congress in Dublin, Ireland, May 11-17, 1996.

The Eighth World Congress in Dublin was attended by more than 200 agricultural journalists from 24 countries. The theme of the Congress was “Free Trade and the Family Farm,” but a great deal of attention was given to the issue of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) in Irish cattle and how Ireland and its farmers were working to assure consumers of the safety of their beef. At the time, Ireland was exporting 75% of its beef to other countries. After a one-day conference at Dublin Castle, congress attendees had the opportunity to participate in four tours – dairying, rural development, tillage, and beef and sheep production in Northern Ireland.

Delegates at the Dublin congress elected Paul Queck of the United States as President to replace the retiring David Steers. René Smeele of The Netherlands was re-elected Vice President, and Madeline Re re-elected Secretary-General. Queck was the first American to hold the IFAJ presidency. He had been an editor for Farm Progress Publications for 18 years and was editor of Indiana Prairie Farmer magazine. In addition, he was the President of the AAEA and had been a member of the IFAJ Executive Committee for three years.
Queck saw a need to encourage a group of new, young leaders to lead IFAJ. He recruited and encouraged these leaders and led the effort to institute term limits on the top positions (the President already had a four-year limit) to open the way for new leaders to work their way up in the organization.

As the first non-European president, Queck was aware of the challenges non-European member associations faced in showing their members that IFAJ was relevant to them. Most congresses were held in Europe making it more expensive and time consuming for non-European agricultural journalists to attend. And, most non-European journalists did not find the IFAJ Press Card useful. Queck’s focus was to diversify IFAJ’s services beyond the congresses and press card to make it more relevant to more members – both within and outside of Europe. Queck believed that IFAJ’s greatest benefit to the world’s agricultural journalists was international contacts – both with other agricultural journalists, and with experts and policymakers that they could use for story background and sources.

The late 1990s saw the beginnings of a professional exchange program, primarily between Ireland and the United States. A journalist would have travel costs paid by their national guild and sent to the other country where they were hosted by a series of local IFAJ members for up to two weeks. During that time the exchange journalist would work alongside the local editors, interview sources for stories and get a chance to see what agricultural journalism was like in another country. The program ended after four years.

**IFAJ Enters Internet Age**

Queck saw the Internet, an emerging technology at the time, as a potential way for IFAJ to connect agricultural journalists worldwide, providing contact opportunities and helping journalists to learn and share information. Queck wrote about this in his first IFAJ News column.

As noted earlier, IFAJ Vice President René Smeele had, on his own initiative in 1995, begun developing an IFAJ Web site on space that Wageningen University in Holland was hosting. Smeele provided IFAJ members the first e-mail address where they could contact IFAJ (his address) in late 1995. And, in 1996 Smeele launched IFAJ’s first site (www.bib.wau.nl/ifaj) and managed it until 1999.

Canadian Owen Roberts took over management of the IFAJ Web site in late 1999, moving it briefly to a location (www.uoguelph.ca/research/ifaj) on the University of Guelph’s Web site in Canada. Then in 2000 he helped IFAJ secure its own domain name (www.ifaj.org) and its own stand-alone site, a site that went online in 2001. Roberts continued to oversee the site, improving its design and content and working with the IFAJ Presidium to make it a useful resource to IFAJ members.

Electronic communications greatly improved communications among IFAJ’s leadership and the membership during the late 1990s. An IFAJ Listserv was initiated. And, e-mail replaced slow postal mail and expensive faxes.

Queck wrote in the July 2000 issue of IFAJ News about the upcoming election that it was important for the next IFAJ president to be committed to three ideals: the profession of agricultural journalism; the growth of IFAJ into new regions; and embracing new technology to connect agricultural journalists worldwide.
IFAJ’s membership grew from 1996 through 2000. Poland and New Zealand became full members in 1998. And the Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia were accepted into membership in 1999. Ukraine was assisted by Don Gomery, the British Guild’s Hon General Secretary, who visited the Ukraine twice in 1996, with the support of the European Union, to advise that nation’s agricultural journalists on the benefits of organizing an agricultural journalists organization and how to organize such an association. Gomery drew upon a wealth of experience in assisting the Ukraine journalists. He was a long-time member of the British Guild and by 2009 had attended 29 IFAJ Congresses. He was on the organizing committee of British-based congresses including chairing the 1997 congress. Gomery later also represented the British Guild on the IFAJ Executive Committee.

The association in Moldova received help in organizing from Patricia Orlowitz of the American Agricultural Editors’ Association. Past-President David Steers took on the role of membership secretary during this period, concluding in 2000. Paul Queck and Vice President Smeelie called on leaders of the French Association in Paris in 1998 in an attempt to open a dialogue between their association and IFAJ. The French leaders were cordial, but chose not to rejoin IFAJ.

In 1998, René Smeelie relinquished his role as editor of the IFAJ News, with Owen Roberts named managing editor and David Steers appointed news editor, a position he held until the 2000 Congress. Roberts continued as editor until 2004, when Liz (Kellaway) Harfull of Australia succeeded him. Harfull, with the support of the IFAJ Executive Committee and increased budget, increased the frequency of the newsletter from two to three issues per year to four to five issues annually. In 2006, the newsletter was converted to an e-newsletter and distributed exclusively electronically, saving printing costs. Harfull also greatly increased the number of pages and quality of the newsletter.

In 2000, the IFAJ Executive Committee was made up of the following individuals who were either members of the IFAJ Presidium or representing member associations: Michael Wilson, American Agricultural Editors’ Association; Shefqet Meko, Association of Albanian Agricultural Journalists; A. Khojoyan, Armenian Association of Agricultural Journalists; Sandy Grieve, Australian Council of Agricultural Journalists and IFAJ Vice President for the Southern Hemisphere and Asia; Jacques Van Outrywyk, Association Belge Journalistes Agricoles ABJA-BVLJ; Barbara Adams, Canadian Farm Writers’ Federation (CWF); Gaetan Martineau, Association Canadienne des Redacteurs Agricoles (A.C.R.A.); Olga Makariusova, Czech Association of Agricultural Journalists; Jana Janku, Klub polninhospodářských redaktorov (KPN); Cistobal de la Puerta, Asociacion de Periodistas y Escritores Agrarios Espanoles (A.P.A.E.); Niels Christian Jorgensen, Dansk Landbrugspress; Henk Dokter, Dutch Association of Agricultural Journalists; Paul Peterson, Foreningen Skogs Och Landbrukjournalister; Arthur Anderson, Guild of Agricultural Journalists of Great Britain; Michael Patten, Guild of Agricultural Journalists of Ireland; Yechezkai Yaacobi, Israel Agricultural and Economic Journalists Association; Masaru Yamada, Japan Agricultural Journalists Association; Tamas Kolcei, Hungarian Association of Agricultural Journalists; Alfred Omondi, Association of Agricultural Journalists, Kenya; Pirjo Kontio, Maataloustoimittajat ry; Aud Kingen Sjovik, Norsk Landbruksjournalistlag; Hans Müller, Schweizerische Vereinigung der Agrarjournalisten; Hans Heinrich Matthiesen, Verband Deutscher Agrarjournalisten; Paul Gruber, Verband der Agrarjournalisten in Österreich; Lelio Bernardi, Unione Nazionale Associazion
Agricoli; Reg Weiss, Agricultural Writers’ Association of South Africa; Paul Queck of the USA, IFAJ President; René Smeeele of The Netherlands, IFAJ Vice President; David Steers of Great Britain, IFAJ Immediate Past President; and Madeline Re of Switzerland, IFAJ Secretary-General.

During Queck’s presidency, congresses were held in Shrigley Park near Manchester, England, May 17-22,1997; Bogensee near Berlin, Germany, July 3-8, 1998; Copenhagen, Denmark, Aug. 14-19, 1999; and the Ninth World Congress in Adelaide and Canberra, Australia, Sept. 2-12, 2000.

**Going Down Under**

The Ninth World Congress in Australia drew almost 100 people from 20 countries. Holding the congress in the Pacific made the Congress more accessible for Asian and South Pacific agricultural journalists to attend. The Congress drew much larger numbers of attendees from Australia and New Zealand, and more than 10 percent of those attending were from Japan. The Congress offered the traditional seminars in Adelaide and excursions with the bus tours concluding in Canberra. The tours enabled journalists to see Australia’s diverse agricultural sector, from sugar, beef and wool to rice, cotton, horticulture, viticulture and forestry. They also saw first-hand the challenges of irrigation farming in a semi-arid climate.

During the delegate session of the Ninth World Congress, Hans Heinrich Matthiesen of Germany was elected President to replace the retiring Paul Queck. Mike Wilson of the United States was elected Vice President and Madeline Re was re-elected as Secretary-General. Matthiesen was the first agricultural radio journalist to become IFAJ President. He had been senior producer of radio station Hessischen Rundfunk in Frankfurt, Germany for 25 years. And, he had been the German Association’s (the Verband Deutscher Agrarjournalisten) representative on the IFAJ Executive Committee since 1994.

Matthiesen announced three objectives to meet the challenges that he saw ahead for IFAJ. They were (1) more income in the form of sponsorships and members’ fees to fund communications, member recruitment and creative activities; (2) recruit important agricultural countries such as France, Portugal, Argentina, Brazil, India, Greece and Russia as IFAJ members; and (3) help members become better at communicating modern agriculture’s message with both rich and poor consumers around the world.

The IFAJ Executive Committee meeting in Berlin in January 2001, determined that the role of Secretary-General should be split from the role of IFAJ Treasurer. The Committee separated the duties and appointed David Markey, the Executive Committee representative from Ireland, to be Treasurer with the responsibility to keep accounts. Markey also was asked to develop a three-year financial plan that would include securing grants and sponsorships and cost-cutting options. Markey was a gifted leader and fundraiser and was very successful in securing financial support for IFAJ’s programs and activities.

With the help of better finances, IFAJ materials were produced as part of a program to reach agricultural journalists in South America. This was the beginning of a longer-term effort that eventually led to Argentina joining IFAJ in 2006.

The Israeli association, Beit Gershon Agron, stopped paying its membership dues in 1985. It did, however, send a representative to an IFAJ Executive Committee meeting held May 5, 1992 in Zafra, Spain. Israel was officially dropped from membership for non-payment of dues in 2001. Kenya also was suspended in 2001 for non-payment of dues. The French-speaking Association Canadienne des
Redacteurs Agricoles (A.C.R.A.) became inactive in IFAJ in the late 1980’s and was dropped from membership in 2000 or 2001 for non-payment of dues.

Nepal joined IFAJ in 2003 and a representative attended the 2005 Congress. However, Nepal was dropped from membership in 2007 for not paying its dues.

The first congress held during Matthiesen’s presidency was the congress in Savonlinna, Finland, Sept. 8-12, 2001. This well-organized congress offered a pre-congress tour to Russia – the first official IFAJ event to take place on Russian soil. During that congress on September 11, while participants were touring farms and agribusinesses, word came that terrorists had crashed airliners into the World Trade Center towers in New York City, and into the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. The mood became much more somber as delegates grieved for the victims’ families and pondered the impact of these acts. All commercial air traffic with North America was immediately halted and not resumed until several days after the congress ended delaying the return of the North American participants to their homes.

The other congresses held during Matthiesen’s presidency were in Valencia, Spain, May 18-23, 2002; Wageningen, The Netherlands, June 18-22, 2003; and the Tenth World Congress in Mabalingwe and Cape Town, South Africa, March 12-20, 2004.

Out of Africa
The Tenth World Congress was the first meeting of any kind held by IFAJ in Africa. Approximately 70 agricultural journalists from 19 countries joined the South African journalists to view South African agriculture. The congress began in Limpopo Province for seminars and excursions. The excursions viewed a variety of agriculture to include dairy, developing agriculture, wildlife, beef cattle, sheep and wool, sustainable agriculture, fruit, vegetable, grain, and sugar cane production. Delegates then flew to Cape Town where there were more excursions including pig production, dairy and grape and wine production.

Meeting during the 2004 World Congress, delegates elected David Markey of Ireland to replace the retiring Hans Matthiesen. Mike Wilson of the United States was re-elected Vice President, Markus Rediger of Switzerland was elected Treasurer replacing David Markey and Ulla-Marie Sundelin-Ryytty of Finland was elected Secretary-General replacing the retiring Madeline Re of Switzerland. Re had served 13 years as Secretary-General.

David Markey came to the IFAJ presidency with a deep background in agricultural journalism and a great deal of understanding of IFAJ. He was the publisher of IFP Media of Dublin, Ireland, which publishes magazines including Irish Farmers Monthly, Irish Veterinary Journal, Irish Motor Management, and Irish Food. He had served on the IFAJ Executive Committee representing Ireland since 1999 and had been IFAJ Treasurer since 2001.

Markey set as his first goal to have the Presidium and executive committee members make IFAJ a more dynamic organization. In accepting the presidency, he said, “In a focused way I believe we can lift the IFAJ to a new level of activity and relevance to the membership. The IFAJ needs to continue to change to keep up to date with the needs of our members. I intend to make it a more pro-active, dynamic organization by involving all member countries in the future of the organization.”
Markey appointed a communications committee chaired by Mike Wilson of the United States to better serve the membership using the latest communications technology. He appointed Owen Roberts of Canada as Vice President of Education to coordinate an education program for IFAJ, focusing on developing countries. And, he believed that one way IFAJ could provide value for its members and better serve their needs was to focus on professional development.

**Professional Development Activities Expanded**
Markey wanted IFAJ to focus on professional development at congresses and at its annual business meeting during Green Week. In addition to adding professional development workshops and activities, Markey also supported development of IFAJ writing and photography contests reasoning that these contests provided a showcase for the talents of IFAJ’s members, and provided a model for member associations to sponsor contests at the national level if they weren’t already doing so.

Meanwhile Markey turned to past president Paul Queck to revamp IFAJ’s writing contest. In 2004, the Star Report Prize Award contest was changed from a contest for the best story from the most recent congress to a writing contest open to articles published throughout the year on a category (for example, production agriculture) from all individual agricultural journalists who are members in good standing of an IFAJ member association. The name of the contest was changed to the IFAJ Star Prize for Agricultural Journalism.

Award winners for the new writing contest were: Gunilla Ander, Sweden (2005); Andrew Blakes, Great Britain (2006); Marleen van Sleuwen, The Netherlands (2007); Treena Hein, Canada (2008); and Friederike Krick of Germany (2009).

The idea for an international photo contest was first discussed seriously at the 2002 Congress in Spain. Queck and Hans Siemes of The Netherlands collaborated in 2003 to organize the first IFAJ photo contest, named the IFAJ Star Prize for Agricultural Photography. The first award winner was announced at the annual congress in 2003. Past award recipients are: Marcel van den Bergh, The Netherlands (2003); David Lundquist, USA (2004); Andries Gouws, South Africa (2005); John Eveson, Great Britain (2006); Gerardo Prego, Argentina (2007); Mike Dugdale, Australia (2008); and Hans Menop, The Netherlands (2009). By 2009 the contest had grown to attract an international field of 157 entries, representing 20 countries.

Queck managed the writing contest from 2001 and the photo contest from 2003 until retiring from the duties after presentation of the 2005 awards. Swedish freelance journalist Marina Tell took over coordinating the writing contest in 2006, while Katharina Seuser of Germany began coordinating the photography award contest. Past sponsors of the Star Report Prize were Upjohn, Pioneer International, Syngenta, and Deere and Company. Sponsor of the photo contest has been DeLaval.

In 2009, IFAJ announced that it would soon organize a broadcast award contest in addition to the writing and photo contests.

Professional development services of IFAJ also expanded, beginning in 2006, through collaboration with the Agricultural Communications Documentation Center (ACDC), an
international resource and service based at the University of Illinois, Champaign, Illinois, USA. The Center contains the largest electronically searchable collection of information focused on the work and interests of agricultural journalists and communicators. At that time, it contained more than 28,000 documents about agriculture-related communications in 170 countries.

During 2005 the presidium and executive council of IFAJ conferred with Jim Evans and Joe Zumalt of the Center to conceive a pilot program for 2006. Through it, the Center began to provide professional development articles for issues of the IFAJ newsletter and features posted on the IFAJ web site. Topics addressed that year ranged from tips on photographing livestock to a four-part series about covering public health threats and emergencies that involve food and agriculture, internationally. Other activities in 2006 included establishing new online portals for interaction and helping IFAJ members learn about the resources available and how to gain access to them.

During the first three years (to mid-2009), the Center produced 34 professional development features that were posted on the IFAJ web site for members and other online users. Twenty-two news items or features that the Center staff members produced were used in issues of the IFAJ newsletter. The Center also made 80 issues of the online Center newsletter available for IFAJ members, helped plan and conduct two professional development workshops, prepared several background reports for IFAJ planning and provided other specialized services.

This IFAJ/ACDC partnership has proven mutually valuable – to strengthen the value of IFAJ to members through professional development and to help internationalize the focus, resources and services of the Center.

Supporting Young Journalists

In another effort to make IFAJ more dynamic, the organization organized the Alltech-IFAJ Young Leader award in 2006. This program, sponsored by Alltech, recognizes young members for their talent and leadership potential and rewards them with travel scholarships to attend congresses. Award winners are nominated by their country’s respective farm-writing guilds. Winners contribute a 500-word story or a three-minute broadcast about their Congress experiences to IFAJ News or the Federation’s Web site. From 2006 to 2009, the IFAJ-Alltech Young Leaders in Agricultural Journalism awards grew from two journalists a year to 10 journalists in 2009.

IFAJ has, from its beginnings, sought to encourage young agricultural journalists to become more internationally aware. As far back as the 1980s and perhaps earlier, IFAJ provided an annual stipend to help one young agricultural journalist to attend an annual IFAJ congress. A drawing was held annually in January selecting the member association that would receive the stipend for a young journalist, and that association would then select the individual from its association to receive the stipend. The young journalist program continued through 2002 only to be replaced by the Young Leader program.

During Markey’s presidency, annual congresses were held in Thun, Switzerland, Aug. 31 to Sept. 4, 2005; Hamar, Norway, Aug. 12-16, 2006; Tokyo, Japan, Sept. 17-23, 2007; and Graz,
Austria and Portoroz, Slovenia, Sept. 10-14, 2008. The Japan Congress was the first IFAJ Congress held in Asia.

Every Congress a World Congress
The IFAJ Executive Committee decided after the 2004 World Congress that it would no longer designate every fourth congress a World Congress – but rather all annual congresses would be considered World Congresses.

The original reason for designating every fourth congress a World Congress no longer existed after the fall of the Iron Curtain. The original reason was to open up that Congress to journalists from non-member countries and non-freedom of the press countries. Once the Wall came down, most congress hosts began inviting agricultural journalists from non freedom of the press countries as guests. The 1998 congress in Germany, for example, was not a World Congress but was attended by more than 275 from 35 countries. Non-IFAJ member countries represented with agricultural journalists at the 1998 Congress included Belarus, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Uzbekistan, Russia, and Turkmenistan.

Markey led the effort to continually upgrade IFAJ’s informational brochure to improve IFAJ’s image and better market it to journalists in non-member countries. In 2005, the brochure was translated into Spanish and Russian as well as English and German. In 2006, the Argentinean Circle of Agricultural Journalists (Circulo Argentino de Periodistas Agrarios, or CAPA) joined IFAJ.

The Association des Journalistes et Communicateurs en Développement Rural in Madagascar joined in 2004. And, the Serbian Guild, AGROPRESS, joined IFAJ in 2005.

Uganda joined IFAJ in 2005, but was dropped from membership in 2007 for non-payment of dues. Armenia and Moldova were dropped from membership in 2007, also for non-payment of dues. Haiti was accepted into membership in 2006, but dropped in 2008.

In 2005, IFAJ stopped offering the individual membership in IFAJ for agricultural journalists living in countries that did not have an agricultural journalist association. Few individual journalists had ever joined IFAJ and it was determined that offering the individual membership option was too expensive. Instead, those members were encouraged to organize a national association and then pursue IFAJ membership.

During the 2008 annual meeting in Graz, Austria, delegates elected Mike Wilson of the United States as President to replace the retiring David Markey. Markus Rediger of Switzerland was elected Vice President, Owen Roberts of Canada was elected General Secretary, and James Campbell of Ireland was elected Treasurer.

IFAJ 2015 Strategic Plan
Wilson was editor of Farm Progress Publications’ Farm Futures magazine and had been an agriculture journalist since 1981. Wilson had been a member of the IFAJ Executive Committee since 1998, and IFAJ Vice President since 2000. He had been part of the Markey Presidium that had developed a 10-point plan in 2008 to broaden IFAJ’s global presence and further strengthen member benefits.
Wilson developed a blueprint that would eventually evolve into a brand new website for IFAJ. The site went online in 2008 and was a drastic improvement over the past website, which had been limping along on an antiquated web platform for many years. The new site enabled IFAJ to communicate news as well as relate information about contests and other professional development activities.

As part of the 2015 Strategic Plan, the IFAJ hired a part-time executive secretary, Connie Siemes, who assisted with communications, logistics, contests, administrative and travel arrangements for the organization. Located in The Netherlands, Siemes was also a member of IFAJ.

The Strategic Plan also included aspirational goals, such as conducting press tours to important agricultural regions regardless of IFAJ member status. It also included a plan to create a global membership database, which was later simplified to a global email directory. To date, IFAJ membership information is held on a country by country basis.

(END)