

Excursions a Favorite Part of IFAJ Congresses

By Larry Dreiling

One of the true pleasures of attending a Congress of the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists (IFAJ) is the opportunity to make an excursion into the rural places of the host nations. The tours have become not only a way to see interesting agricultural landmarks of a nation, but to join with other journalists from all over the world in a common experience of sharing unique moments in time.

I've been to Congresses in Slovakia, Czech Republic, England, Germany, Australia, Finland and the Netherlands prior to attending the recent IFAJ Congress in Canada. I also had a chance to help in hosting a tour during the IFAJ Congress held in Texas. Each has offered me a wonderful way of learning more about our world.

It's on the bus that you can sit down next to anyone from around the globe and begin a conversation asking about each other's profession and use it as a basis for further acquaintance and friendship.

The bus is where I've solidified that acquaintance into genuine brotherly love with people not only from the United States, but people from at least a dozen countries with whom I share holiday letters, online birthday greetings, and know they can call me and I them with matters both journalistic and personal.

These relationships have given me numerous opportunities to share knowledge of U.S. agriculture to the readers, listeners and viewers of colleagues worldwide through reports via phone or Internet. It has been a terrific way to boost my publication's name out in those far away places with strange sounding names has also been a fun part of making friends through IFAJ. Perhaps the greatest thing that ever happened to me was being on a tour bus in Finland when the 9-11 attacks on the United States occurred. It was amazing to see the friends on our bus rally around us Americans. I'll never forget the kindness shown by our Finnish colleagues, but also people from all over the world giving us their support.

If you've never tried to attend an IFAJ Congress, I highly recommend applying for an AAEEA Professional Improvement Foundation stipend to attend next year's session set for Aug. 15 to 19 in Stockholm, Sweden. The experience will not only fill your reporter's notebook, but enrich your life, too.