

My IFAJ Top 5

By Carey Brown

I feel so blessed to be riding down a road in rural Ontario, fields of corn as far as the eye can see. It has always been a dream of mine to travel to other countries and I am so lucky that my job enables me to do this. I am luckier than most though. Most that travel to other countries do it on their own. I have traveled to two other countries in the past few years and the trips have been planned for me plus I have had a very fun group of people by my side the whole way!

I am sure four years ago when I asked my boss if I could attend the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists (IFAJ) meeting in Austria, that he thought I had completely lost my mind! What in the world did an editor from the Kentucky Cattlemen's Association have to gain from this trip? I was involved in the planning of the IFAJ Congress in Fort Worth the following year and I convinced him that it was necessary to go meet the people and learn what this trip was all about. After attending that trip I knew that it would not be my last IFAJ excursion and I could not wait to see all of my new friends again!

Fast forward a few years and I have now been on three IFAJ expeditions and am anxiously awaiting the next. I just wish that every ag journalist would take advantage of this opportunity, even just once. I have compiled a list of the Top 5 reasons everyone should attend, in no particular order.

1 - Food and Drink— I am just a farm girl from Kentucky so I tend to stick to meat and potatoes. These trips can help you look at food from a different angle. My trip to Austria took me way outside my box. The first few days I toured the city of Graz on my own and I am not really sure what I ate, but it was good. There was enough bread, cheese and wine that I made it through the week no problem. I did find a love for pumpkin soup on that trip that I will never forget. I have tried it since but never found any nearly as good. Maybe the wine made it better? Canada was much easier on me but I am pretty sure that we all weighed a little more on our entry back to the United States! All three trips have a few blurry moments thanks to the constant supply of beer and wine. In my opinion, some of the best moments are with a cold beer or glass of wine in hand. This year, one night of our tours offered a camp fire. Even with the cold weather and impending rain, people from all over the world gathered around the fire to sing songs and enjoy the company.

2 - People – The best reason I can give anyone for attending IFAJ, the people. It is amazing to have the opportunity to meet people from all over the world, all in one place. Not only did I have the chance to learn from people from more than 30 countries, but we all had something in common! It is amazing to have the opportunity to speak with people who do the same things you do and learn more about agriculture in their countries. My first trip I was worried about the language barrier but I never had a problem communicating with anyone on the trip. I did walk away feeling guilty for only knowing one language when nearly everyone else spoke at least two or more languages. It is truly a great group of people and they love to have a good time!

3 - Funding – Besides many AAEA members not recalling that they are automatically members of IFAJ, money to go on the trip is another strong reason most people do not go. I completely

understand but I also want to make sure that everyone knows that opportunities exist to receive funding. It depends on the location from year to year but it is very possible for the stipends to cover the majority of the trip. The AAEEA Professional Improvement Foundation offers stipends to help cover IFAJ expenses. The process to apply is very easy and the only requirement is to write a story for the Byline after the trip. It doesn't get much easier folks! I also was a winner of the IFAJ/Alltech Young Leaders in Journalism Award which provided a stipend to attend IFAJ. Both of these opportunities funded my journey and allowed me to visit two amazing countries. It is too easy not to give it a try!

4 - Tours – The tours on these trips are amazing! You have the distinct advantage of having members in that country planning every part of your journey and they know the best places to take you. These are places that you would never have the opportunity to see if you were to plan a trip on your own. Canada offered three different tours, all going to different parts of Canada. We all argued when we came back together about who had the best trip. They each offered a different glimpse into agriculture and I really don't think you could go wrong.

5 - Education – Like our meetings here in the United States, IFAJ also offers educational seminars that have great speakers and a global perspective. Even though planners work hard on getting these sessions planned, I feel like you get most of your education from the people on the trip. There are so many experiences and a wealth of knowledge surrounding this group. If you get the chance to go on a trip, take advantage of this.

I highly encourage everyone to take a moment to visit the IFAJ website at www.ifaj.org and learn where future Congresses will be. Make it a point to find one you want to attend and start looking into stipends and awards available. You will take part in the opportunity of a lifetime, meet friends that will last forever and I can almost guarantee that you will attend more in the future! I hope to be one of those standing next to you along the way.