



Bob Ropp, attended the last IFAJ Congress in Canada, in 1967

such vast technologies (and) China's conditions for agriculture are very different from here. You have large scale farms and very few farmers, which enables you to facilitate the use of machines, that is all very different," he says.

The IFAJ Congress in Canada was also the first edition of the Alltech-IFAJ Young Leaders in Agricultural Journalism Boot Camp, held in advance of the congress, at the same time as the Master Class program. There were 15 farm journalists under 35 selected from around the world to attend that program.

The congress was organized by members of the Canadian Farm Writers Federation and it was all done by volunteers, in contrast to how the annual IFAJ Congress is organized in many other countries.

Co-chairs of the congress

were Owen Roberts, of the University of Guelph, along with Lilian Schaefer, an Ontario freelance writer. Roberts is also the first Canadian secretary-general of the IFAJ.

"The comments were overwhelming if not unambiguously good," says Roberts. "The part that really leapt out to people was the tours, getting out to see how Ontario agriculture works. Very few had any idea of the breadth of agriculture here."

"They were pretty impressed with the commitment to environmentalism and quality, and the diversity."

The program started out with an optional visit to Canada's Outdoor Farm Show. More than three times the expected delegates signed up for that visit, more than 130.

It started the event off with an intensive production agriculture feel, says Roberts. "That's what they wanted."

The program was first centred in Guelph, with an introduction to Canadian agriculture. It then moved to three parts of Ontario with farm tours.

One went east of Toronto to Northumberland County and then to Prince Edward County, visiting bison, maple syrup, grains and apple farms, along with wineries and the Fifth Town Cheese plant.

The second went through St. Jacobs to Stratford and on to Hensall and Grand Bend, visiting the St. Jacobs Farmers Market, apple, dairy and hog farms, along with Hensall District Cooperative and the



Ashley Walmsley, of Rural Press in Australia visited the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association plot at Canada's Outdoor Farm Show during day-one of his visit to Canada. At the closing ceremonies for the congress Walmsley received distinguished recognition in the IFAJ Star Prize for print journalism competition PHOTO BY ANNE HOWDEN THOMPSON



Paul Cornwell, the seed manager for Hensall District Co-op, holds a bean while farm journalists get it in focus. Lorne McClinton (centre) is an editor with The Furrow and Jef Verhaeren is journalist-editor of the Belgian publication Micas. PHOTO BY FRANCES ANDERSON

large Van Osch family beef and crop farm.

The third headed to Ontario's far south and miscanthus, tomato and greenhouse farms in Chatham-Kent and Leamington, also with a focus and couldn't resist one more chance to visit.

After all, it was some of his

work 44 years ago which paved the way for the international farm journalists conferences to continue.

Ropp attended the Canadian-hosted event, held in Montreal, representing the American Agricultural Editors' Association (AAEA) as its organization's president. The editor at the time of The Farmer magazine, which covered Minnesota, as well as North and South Dakota, Ropp says the 1967 event was noteworthy because it marked the first time the congress had been held

outside of Europe.

England, France and Germany originated IFAJ, and during the Canadian event representatives of those countries met with the Canadian and American representatives to decide whether or not there was sufficient interest in hosting the event outside of Europe again.

Ropp says it was a motion by the Canadian and American representatives that they should continue the event.

More than 40 years later, the congress continues - thriving and expanding, offering ever more opportunities for journalists to travel around the world or to show off their country, while at the same time developing and honing their professional skills amongst their peers.

With files from John Greig



Mary Goode, of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, interviews Middlesex County farmer Gerald Van Osch during one of the IFAJ tours. PHOTO BY ANNE HOWDEN THOMPSON