



# ICCA Association Success Story

# International Conference of Agricultural Economists  
by The International Association of Agricultural  
Economists



**ICCA**

## Overview

The International Association of Agricultural Economists (IAAE) organised the 31st International Conference of Agricultural Economists (ICAE) as part of its major triennial events. The conference was an entirely virtual event that took place from 17 to 31 August 2021. The IAAE also organises inter-conference symposia between the years before the triennial conferences.

This conference was scheduled in New Delhi, India, from 20 to 25 August 2021. However, due to the current Covid-19 pandemic that has blanketed the world, the IAAE Board of Directors decided in early February 2021 to shift to a fully online event.

This was our first virtual conference. While we all acknowledge that there are exciting possibilities for hybrid formats in the future, we hope this is also the last virtual conference!

The decision to have a virtual conference was not taken lightly, as we faced a lot of uncertainty – how many people would register, what was the price elasticity of demand for registration fees, how many papers would be submitted, how should we approach our regular and loyal donors and tell them we did not need as much financing as usual – and on and on. Dr. Uma Lele, as President-elect, was responsible for the program and had to make the call on each of these and many other issues. The incredible turnout in terms of registrations and paper submissions, the great strides that we made in addressing the participation of more female scholars, and the exciting array of plenary sessions, and invited paper sessions, organised symposia sessions and contributed paper sessions attest to the hard work and determination that made this conference a resounding success.

## Our History

The International Association of Agricultural Economists grew out of a conference hosted by Leonard Elmhirst at his home in Dartington Hall, Devon, England, in late August and early September 1929. Fifty agricultural economists from 11 countries attended. Representatives from Canada, China, Denmark, Finland, Germany, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Trinidad, the United Kingdom and the United States. Those present felt they had gained so much in improved understanding of the differences and commonalities in the problems they faced in research and teaching. They resolved to find ways to increase their contacts and promote greater insights among themselves and their colleagues. Since this first meeting of 1929, the IAAE has organised thirty-one conferences, occurring triennially in different cities worldwide.

## Numbers Don't Lie

To start with, this was the biggest virtual conference in our industry. Nine hundred and forty-eight (948) participants registered to attend, representing over seventy (70) countries. We presented eight (8) plenary sessions, attracting twenty-seven (27) speakers; attracting twenty-six (26) invited sessions, with eighty-eight (88) speakers; and fielded thirty-six (36) organised symposia sessions, with one hundred and twelve (112) speakers. More staggering was scheduling one hundred, and thirty-seven (137) contributed papers sessions that attracted five hundred and twenty-four (524) speakers from fifty-six (56) countries. In summary, there were seven hundred and fifty-one (751) total speakers presenting their papers in fifteen (15) days of six hours per day from sixty-five (65) countries. On average, we managed to stage over fifty-six (56) papers per day. With so many speakers and papers, the competition for space was fierce. But at the end of it all, we managed to accommodate all the speakers.

## Technology

The IAAE conference was supported by Zoom video communications and Confex (Conference Exchange). Confex is a Rhode Island, US-based group of dedicated professionals working to develop tools for meeting planners. We used their technology for abstract/paper collection, speaker management, presentation management, and meeting app. Confex deployed a sizable number of its technicians, working with us every day.

## My Reflection

We had no idea whether a virtual conference would work when it was decided that this was the way to go. We were unsure about the logistics, the extent of the demands on our organisational capacity, and the expected attendance figures. It turns out we underestimated how much hard work it was going to entail. However, Dr. Uma Lele, the current president, who was the program director, led us to unimaginable success. What a whirlwind of activity – I have to say that in many respects, we never stopped to rest and never left an issue unattended until a decision was reached! We also underestimated our members, who attended in numbers that we did not foresee and who declared the conference a resounding success if the opinion survey is anything to go by.

Pulling together an income generating virtual event is undoubtedly possible. Event planners, technology providers and associations can work together to make it conceivable. Professional events are like pilgrimages, where members will still partake to share their professional and research results with colleagues. Involve everyone along the value chain. **Be clear on what you want to achieve, communicate clearly to your team, and never ignore even the minutest aspect. Everyone is learning, and it's such a fulfilling joy to learn together. We are all in this together.**

Our next conference will be in the summer 2024, in New Delhi, India.



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