

ASHS reports...

The World Conference on Horticultural Research

A first of its kind, the World Conference on Horticultural Research (WCHR) provided a framework for the future of global horticultural research and established links for the continued cooperation between ASHS and ISHS.

The conference was held in Rome, Italy, 17–20 June 1998. The WCHR was an ASHS–ISHS initiative designed to focus on the changing global demand and supply of research in horticulture. The conference was opened 17 June by the conveners Silvio Sansavini (ISHS) and Dan Cantliffe (ASHS), as well as representatives of the National Research Council, the Minister of Agricultural Policy (Italy) FAO, and the Grower Association Unions.

ASHS Involvement

Eighteen ASHS members from the United States and Canada attended. ASHS was represented by Past-President Don Maynard, Past-President Dan Cantliffe, Past-Vice Presidents of the International Division Blanche Dansereau and Chris Wien, and Ian Warrington (Organizing Committee). Chris Wien also participated in the panel discussion during Session 1. Ian Warrington presented an invited paper on National Policy, and Blanche Dansereau co-authored a presentation by André Gosselin on university policy during Session 4.

More than 155 participants and 19 accompanying persons attended, representing countries from Australia to Zimbabwe.

Meaningful Sessions

Session 1 dealt with global horticultural impact with U. Avermaete (Belgium) as moderator. Major issues were discussed, including market return research, globalization of trade, lack of production statistics in developed countries (especially with the large diversity of products and the considerable lack of information concerning ornamentals), lack of production statistics in developing countries (either nonexistent or imprecise), and the monopolization of genetic resources of major and minor crops. There was a lively discussion and exchange between participants and speakers at the end of the presentations that continued into the cocktail reception.

Session 2 dealt with the current status of horticultural research and was moderated by J. Ganry (France). Speakers focused on the relationship between horticulture and biotechnology and what is necessary for networking, the relationships between novel products and market differentiation, and the need for an integrated approach.

Through the session, many aspects were determined. Cooperative research will depend on research sustainability and cost effectiveness. The need for enhancing skills, education, and technology transfer will depend on information and research facilities. The involvement of the private sector will require better interaction with end users involved at the planning stage, but at what costs?

Examples of global research systems were presented in the second part of this session moderated by G. Costa (Italy). The need for

combined partnership and competition between international and regional agencies was emphasized. The evaluation of research to determine cost effectiveness and the need for impact assessment also was discussed. Information is the key for cooperation at the regional, national, and international levels.

Session 3 dealt with the needs and expectations of the horticulture-related industry and was moderated by H. Robitaille (USA). Issues such as the specific stakeholder's needs, the application of new technologies, and the role of geospatial technologies were presented. Consumer demands such as environmental issues, food safety and quality, new product opportunities with nutritional and health value, and the need for crops to meet industry and energy requirements were emphasized. In developing countries, the necessity for human resource development and effective partnerships are still the same and even more of a priority.

Session 4 dealt with horticultural policy funding and was moderated by J. Janick (USA). Policy issues in horticulture research funding and university, national, and international programs were discussed by invited speakers. The need to advance cooperation at the various national, international, public, and private levels was discussed, as well as moving from survival horticulture to economic horticulture in developing countries and moving horticultural research to the forefront of agricultural research.

In Session 5, S. Sansavini (Italy) summarized the key issues facing horticultural research and presented an overview of prospects and the role of cooperation. Examples of integrated models of research in the European Union, Agri-Research in Italy, intellectual property rights, and an example of an emerging global agricultural research system were presented.

Conclusive Ideas

Dan Cantliffe (USA) opened the general discussion of Session 5 with the question, "Where do we go from here?" A lively discussion followed with a consensus that each country needs to develop planning strategies to promote global integration. The requirements and the funds for human resources development and training must be a priority for policymakers. Both ASHS and ISHS should review planning strategies to enable better direction. A general consensus was reached that there is a need to follow up WCHR. A half-day follow-up discussion is planned at the beginning of the XXVth International Horticultural Congress in Belgium in August 1998.

Scientific Tour

A scientific tour was organized with tour leaders F. Saccardo from the Univ. of Tuscia in Viterbo, Italy, and C. Fideghelli, President of the Italian Society for Horticulture. The first stop was Civiavecchia, Albani & Ruggieri greenhouses, a 20-ha operation specializing in propagating poinsettias, chrysanthemum, cactus, impatiens, etc., that are supplied to growers in Italy, France, Spain, and other European countries. A delightful and healthy lunch highlighting local food products and excellent regional wines was provided at Latium Regional Agricultural Experiment Station.

The next stop was Tarquinia to visit the Etruscan Museum and the Etruscan Tombs. The last stop was a visit to the Cerveteri Farmers' Cooperative Winery, where all the various steps involved from the handling of harvest grapes to processing and wine making was presented. Of course, participants were also given an opportunity to taste and discuss the favorite wines.

Want To Know More?

Anyone interested in additional information, including all conference documents, should visit <http://wchr.agrsci.unibo.it>. ASHS NEWSLETTER 14(8):1, 4.

Post-Conference Impressions

The 95th Annual International Conference has been completed, and those who were there will individually judge its level of success. For Members who were unable to be in Charlotte, I hope to see you at the Conference in Minneapolis next year. I want to express my appreciation to the Headquarters Staff, the volunteers, and the Members from the host institutions (North Carolina State and Clemson Univ.) for their tremendous effort in staging this event. Anyone having worked on the production of a conference will realize the amount of time, energy, and planning required. In my opinion, there were many highlights, only a few of which I will comment about. Unfortunately, the amount of time required for Society business precluded me from attending many of the presentations, workshops, colloquia, and other meetings of interest, so my comments relate to only a nonrandom sample of the many activities.

Plant Breeding Symposium

Preceding the conference, the Plant Breeding Symposium, cosponsored by ASHS and CSSA, was well attended by an enthusiastic audience of around 100 people. Beginning with Steve Tanksley, an excellent slate of speakers chosen from the public and private sectors gave in-depth accounts of their R&D activities dealing with the rapidly emerging areas of genomics and bioinformatics. The organizing committee showed excellent foresight in choosing this topic and identifying recognized leaders in the field as speakers. Recently, there have been several conferences on this topic, and, in my opinion, the quality of information at this symposium was as good as any!

“Tex” Frazier Lecture Brings Focus to Horticulture and Human Health

The opening plenary session featured the “Tex” Frazier Lecture presented by Michael Wargovich on the human health benefits of horticultural products. This lecture was especially timely, not only from the standpoint of wide public interest in healthful diets, but also for Society Members interested in scientific questions about this complex topic. There is much to be learned about the many compounds responsible for the reported benefits of fruits, vegetables, and herbs, including such things as their role in the plant itself, opportunities for genetic modification, molecular and cellular properties, and effects of production practices on expression levels, just to name a few. The Role of Oxidative Stress and Antioxidants in Plant and Human Health Colloquium provided an opportunity to hear more from Wargovich about research in the medical profession and from other distinguished scientists, including ASHS Members, about topics ranging from the role of antioxidants in plants and animals to bioavailability of various compounds in horticultural products. Adding further emphasis to this broad theme, ASHS Member Irwin Goldman presented the B. Y. Morrison Lecture, sponsored by the USDA-ARS, titled “Folklore, Fact, and Future of Food-based Phytochemicals.” ASHS has tried several times in the past to emphasize horticulture and human health, but with only mixed success. It appears that now is the time for horticulturists to lead the way in a truly multidisciplinary effort to study the scientific basis for health benefits and determine how horticultural products can be produced and delivered to the consumer effectively and efficiently. Let’s not miss this great opportunity.

Society Honors Outstanding Achievements

The opening plenary session was also the occasion to honor inductees into the ASHS Horticulture Hall of Fame, the 1998 Class of ASHS Fellows, and recipients of the 1998 ASHS Awards. These people received our highest honors, and, as such, I feel that only the brief mention of their names and accomplishments is not sufficient. One suggestion I heard is to have a special poster location for each honoree, where poster boards would feature things like a copy of the winning paper for the Publication Awards and a poster for each of the Outstanding Educators and Researcher Awards that would provide highlights of the awardee’s career and comments from nominators and screening committees. An opportunity to visit with the recipients at their poster locations at a specified time during the Conference would

allow time for friends and colleagues to visit with them and for the more junior Members to learn about the pathways to success.

Welcome Reception, Silent Auction, and the Carolina Dinner

Sunday was a time not only for serious business but also for enjoyment at the Welcome Reception-Endowment Fund Silent (and live) Auction. The Endowment Fund is several thousand dollars richer, and several of us came away with items that we felt were bought at bargain prices. Let’s work with the Univ. of Minnesota group and Headquarters to make the Endowment Fund Auction bigger, more fun, and more valuable to the Society next year! There was great food and entertainment at the North Carolina Night Dinner as well as an opportunity to network with friends and make new acquaintances.

Working Group and Conference Activities

The activities of the working groups in sponsoring colloquia and workshops are what many consider to be the vital components of the Conference and, indeed, of ASHS. The flexibility that they offer in providing information exchange in ways their constituents find useful is a major strength. An increasing number of working groups are taking advantage of our web capabilities to communicate throughout the year rather than only at a meeting once a year.

The conference facilities for the events I attended were excellent overall, but the location of posters and the exhibit hall seemed isolated from rooms where workshops and meetings were underway. Several people commented that we should have the posters and exhibits in a central area, which then becomes the hub of activities where people can easily come and go, network with colleagues, and casually view posters and exhibits even for short periods. I have seen that type of arrangement at several successful conferences recently, and it seems to work well.

Presidential Address and Business Meeting

At the closing plenary session, ASHS President Wanda Collins provided members with challenging thoughts about the potential impacts of globalization on research in the 21st century. These complex factors will be important to us individually and collectively as we look ahead and try to determine how the horticultural profession and our Society can remain viable and not become a casualty of change. Perhaps we should give greater emphasis and focus to “global horticulture” in both the organizational structure of ASHS and the way the Annual Conference is presented. Regardless of where we live and work, it is difficult not to be influenced by global trade, information technology, economics and marketing, and the rapid diffusion of scientific information.

Many Members’ concerns at the Business Meeting were about Society financial matters. Recently we have experienced some fiscal problems related primarily to less-than-projected attendance at the Conferences in Lexington and Salt Lake City and to less income compared to projected revenues from ASHS Press. A personnel reduction at headquarters combined with changes in budget procedures and cost control during the past year have alleviated these problems, but the relevant figures were not available at the Business Meeting. The financial status of ASHS is discussed in the cover article of this newsletter and should clarify the questions that were asked at the Business Meeting.

What Lies Ahead?

I believe the Annual Conference was a success; however, there are major challenges that we face about how to better serve our Membership and how to expand our Membership base. We must be able to attract a range of horticulturists and other clientele interested in science-based horticulture. I am encouraged by the potential of new projects such as HortBase and other creative activities to meet this goal. I imagine that changes are just beginning, and you will have a chance to contribute to whatever form and substance our future Conferences take. If you like what is being done, continue your support, and, if you don’t, it is essential that you express your ideas and become personally involved. ASHS NEWSLETTER 14(9):3, 6.