

# Volunteers working to make IFMA Congress a success

By JEANNINE OTTO  
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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — In the cooler-than-normal 50-degree temperatures and seemingly unending rain of early May, it might be difficult to understand the importance of what Scott Williamson and Herb Meyer will be doing in late July.

But when the summer heat of late July arrives, the early-morning jobs of the Ice Men will become a vital part of the International Farm Management Congress.

"If you think about the temperatures around that time of the year — and some of these trips are going to be long — they've got a really important job," said Carroll Merry, executive director of

the Illinois Society of Professional Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers.

Williamson, AgriGold regional sales manager for the northern half of Illinois, and Meyer, accredited rural appraiser with 1st Farm Credit Services in Bloomington, are the Ice Men.

The two volunteered and Williamson volunteered his pickup truck to transport ice and beverages to where 17 tour buses are going to be parked and waiting for the IFMA Congress participants, some 300 in all, to get aboard to take a series of farm and agribusiness tours.

"We have to go pick up the soft drinks and the water and then go to the Meyer store and load up on ice and pack the coolers," Meyer said.

"I've got a pickup truck so we're going to pick up the ice, the bottled water and basically just make sure that we get all the ice we need, then just get the coolers ready on the buses to take off for the day on Tuesday and Thursday," Williamson added.

Occurring every two years, the IFMA Congress moves from country to country, and Bloomington will host the 2009 Congress on behalf of the United States July 19-24.

An estimated 300 participants from 20 to 25 nations will attend. In addition to the congress itself, the participants will tour Illinois farms and agribusinesses during two days of the event.

To make the congress a success requires a number of volunteers for all phases of the planning and actual event. It's been no problem to find willing volunteers, Merry said.

Volunteers and helpers will work to do jobs from registering participants to leading tours of farms and agribusinesses to coordinating the actual presentations — as well as stocking tour buses with ice and cold drinks.

"From Day 1, they've raised their hands saying let me know what you want me to do, it's really been fun to see the volunteers come forward from the Illinois chapter," Merry said.

The Ice Men are an example.

"It's been that kind of

enthusiasm," Merry said. "Scott said 'I've got a pickup truck, and I'll be glad to do it. I'm going to be one of the Ice Men.'"

"We needed a truck to haul the ice because there will be several buses, and it was fine with me," Williamson added.

Both Williamson and Meyer joked it likely was their extensive experience at icing down beverages in coolers that landed them the job.

"This will be my biggest job as an ice man. I've packed a few coolers before," Meyer laughed. "It's one of those tasks that requires years of extensive training and skill."

The volunteer corps includes those whose jobs started months ago, such as Kim Morton, director of development at the University of Illinois College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences. Morton, a former president of The Chicago Farmers, was asked by Merry if she could help out with coordinating the 25 event speakers.

"My job is to follow up with the speakers, make sure we have their biographies, get their photos, make sure we know when they're arriving and what hotel they're staying at, know how long they're staying, make sure I have a cell phone number for them in case we need to contact them," she explained. "I'm sort of their concierge."

When the congress gets closer, Morton will be scheduling rehearsal times and will be gathering copies of the speakers' presentations.

Her job requires specifics — the number of days that each speaker will be staying and attending is vital to make arrangements for meals and other logistics.

With speakers coming from countries ranging from Denmark to South Africa, Morton is anticipating the congress.

"I'm really looking forward to hearing their presentations myself," she said.

She also is impressed by the level of commitment of the volunteers. Morton works part-time, and right now the congress duties are taking a couple of hours a week, which likely will increase as the event gets closer.

"I know how full your schedule is when you work for someone else. So many of the society members have their own businesses and those jobs never end, that's really a sacrifice," she said.

"It's a big sacrifice when you are salaried, when you work for yourself, those people are taking time away from

their own shops to do this and it's really commendable."

Merry said he is impressed by the enthusiasm he's seen in the members of the Illinois society.

"There's just a tremendous enthusiasm with the members," he said. "They realize what a great chance this is to just really show off their home companies, their home state, the areas where they work and the farms they work with, and they've really come forward. I think the leader-

ship of the chapter is extremely proud of how the members have just said 'Hey, how can I help?'"

Williamson said he is looking forward to meeting the congress participants, as well as the Illinois society members he knows from his 23 years in the business and new people in agriculture.

"It's a pretty big deal and it's going to be interesting to learn about ag in other parts of the world," he said.

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