

OPENING REMARKS

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As president of the VIIIth International Symposium on Veterinary Epidemiology and Economics Scientific Committee, I wanted that this Congress meets the hopes of every participant.

Unfortunately, it has not been possible to conciliate every constraint, every demand (clearly said or not), and they were numerous, concerning the organization of scientific contents of this meeting. This is why I would like to make some remarks about it.

We received 537 summaries of proposals for communications, dispatched in the 14 themes previously defined by the Scientific Committee. So, it was necessary to make a selection, both to maintain the high scientific quality of the Congress, and to make its realization possible. In comparison, the previous ISVEE meetings had in 1988 (Copenhagen) 125 communications, in 1991 (Ottawa) 183 and in 1994 (Nairobi) 187. That is to say that we had to be very ferocious for such a drastic selection.

The Scientific Committee members were distributed in groups of 2 or 3 referees for each theme. Their judgment for each summary had to be formulated as a proposal (oral communication, poster, or rejection), completed by a note (according to a standardized score system), and explained by a few words of comment, which revealed to be very useful in subsequent discussions. The members had to exchange information about their judgments, before a plenary session, for those who could travel to Paris.

The referees noticed that some summaries gave too much importance to general considerations, instead of focusing on the true and relevant scientific information. Perhaps, some of them could mainly announce their work, which was not yet finished at the moment they sent the paper. This may be why some authors were deeply disappointed by the response given by the Scientific Committee.

The final decision for summaries had to be given according to two broad categories of interests. First, the selected communications should be of a scientific quality relevant to an international congress in veterinary epidemiology and economics. This led to the rejection of 36 communications.

Secondly, the Scientific Committee argued on the principles of a successful congress. To join this aim, the number of participants had to be as high as possible, and the conditions should allow them to discuss and to exchange with other epidemiologists. In that purpose, the number of oral communications permitted for a given speaker should be limited, as some teams are more prolific than others.

This choice relied on several observations made from statistics of submitted summaries. The majority of the 54 countries represented in the congress had a limited number of summaries : only one to three for 50 percent of them, 1 to 7 for 70 percent of them. But, in contrast, these countries weight for a much more limited number of summaries : respectively 10 and 20 percent of the total. Selection of summaries had to be oriented to give a population of summaries representative of the country diversity, of the great geographical regions, and of the world wide range of economical situations and of research means.

To fix the maximal possible number of oral communications, we had to choose the time for a speech. Finally, the Committee decided that 10 minutes would be enough, as a lot of speakers spend, out of 15 or 20 minutes, a lot of time in general and introducing considerations to finish too quickly their communication in a few minutes. So, according to plenary sessions program, to coffee-break time, to discussion and to some other practical considerations, it was possible to accept a maximum of 281 communications.

A smaller task force group built the scientific program, considering some factors :

- Within each theme, communications were clustered according to their topic affinity, and scheduled according to the logical development of the theme, taking into account the uncertainty of the presence of some speakers ;

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- Choice of rooms depended on the relation between room size and size of audience. But, the largest number of communications presented in French language should be translated, and that was possible only in auditorium.
- A simultaneous three rooms organization had to avoid concurrency between neighboring themes, simultaneous presentation for speakers (or chairmen, or chairwomen). We carefully managed too all specific demands, trying to satisfy them as far as they were compatible with other constraints.

So far, we apologize if this program does not fit perfectly with all these quality criteria. Of course, we could say "never mind, we shall do better next time", but after such an experience, we prefer to leave this difficult challenge to our colleagues for the coming ISVEE in 2000.

To finish, I want to thank all the members of the Scientific Committee, which we definitively wanted international, and mainly European, for their collaboration, and specially for those who could travel and join us in Paris. Without their help, nothing could have been possible.

I want also to thank all the participants, for the high quality of communications, the chairmen and chairwomen, as, imposing their firmest and sharp willing, they will have the hard work to drive the sessions in respect of schedule, the team of "Convergences", the agency in charge of material organization management, and also, all other numerous people who make possible the realization of the scientific program.

Finally, for all imperfections anyone could observe, it will only be my own responsibility.