

## 11<sup>th</sup> International Congress on Engineering and Food An Evaluation

ICEF11, held in Athens from May 22 through May 26, 2011, was perhaps the most enjoyable conference that I have attended in my career.

Program The program was diverse and relevant with a good mix of oral and poster presentations. The scientific review board did a good job of assigning papers in the two categories according to which type of presentation was most appropriate for the subject content and also the most helpful for the presenter in terms of language proficiency or other considerations. I especially appreciated the thirty-minute thematic overview talks that initiated most sessions, particularly those that dealt primarily with a single topic or area. Typically these talks introduced the subject that was the focus of the session and provided the audience with the background and history needed to better appreciate the more detailed short presentations to follow. Also, typically these overview lectures were delivered by a leading expert in the field and allowed the audience to meet these leaders of our profession. Generally the paper quality was good with concise presentations and speakers well prepared. I liked the many papers that illustrated the application of recent technological tools to understanding food processing problems, for example, CFD, MRI and other visualization techniques. The sessions were well attended with good audience participation in the questions portion for each paper. I came away from the conference with a good understanding of the research and issues from around the world.

Worldwide Participation. Participants and presenters were drawn geographically from around the world and from regions where the development of food engineering varied widely according to the needs of the local society. It was helpful to see this diversity and become (or remain) aware of the different needs of different cultures. One thing I was struck by was the strength of the Food Engineering community (with emphasis on the word community). The collegiality, mutual support and encouragement among the 800 or so participants were heartwarming. The size of the conference was conducive to good interaction, personal introductions, and encouragement. Poster sessions and the centrally located coffee breaks facilitated one-on-one conversations. Celebrating the pioneers of food engineering seemed to enhance this collegiality, at least for me personally.

Cultural Events. The cultural events can only be described as amazing. The city walk to the Parthenon, newly opened Acropolis museum, and Plaka; Greek dance and music in the Roman Agora; and the Gala Banquet and dancing surrounded by the “infinite blue” of the Aegean Sea were each a “once-in-a-lifetime” experience. And, as with the coffee breaks, the cultural events provided further time for social interaction that builds memories and professional collegiality.

Venue and Facilities. Obviously, as a famous tourist destination, Athens is a world-class venue. The organizing committee’s decision to hold the conference in Athens (rather than a more “romantic” Greek island) kept expenses lower for both traveling participants and ICEF. Travel access was convenient by air or rail and the Metro provided convenient ground transportation. I realize my wife and I were afforded special treatment, with

transport from and to the airport provided by folks associated with the organizing committee, but the Metro was actually easy and convenient for more adventuresome travelers.

The Athens Hilton was an excellent location for a conference of this size. Access was easy by walking or Metro to hotels, tavernas, cultural events, museums and shopping. For those staying at the Hilton, breakfasts were excellent; other amenities (in-room internet access, water or soft drinks, etc.) were available but unnecessarily expensive. More importantly, the Hilton convention facilities were ideal. The flexible presentation rooms were appropriately sized for the most part and conveniently clustered around a central lobby that served as an informal venue for registration, coffee breaks and lunch buffets. The close co-location of presentation rooms (and careful time management by speakers and session chairs) made it possible to move from one session to another for selected papers. A couple of the rooms were long and narrow with windows on the side; this was awkward for attendees in the back to see and hear and disruptive for folks to move about to attend part of another session.

The Hilton (or maybe Triaena) provided an outstanding cadre of audio-visual technicians and excellent equipment that kept the presentations moving and kept the disruption of the usual mistakes by speakers to a minimum. Likewise the conference photographer and video crew were exceptionally competent and will provide a memorable record of the event. I thought Triaena Tours & Congress S.A. did an excellent job of registration duties and behind-the-scenes organization.

Finally my congratulations to the organizing committee for planning and executing an exceptional congress. I was blessed to meet many of you and to experience your gracious hospitality, not to mention your Greek competence. And you must be proud of your protégés who made up the host of volunteers. It is hard to describe my feelings at the end of the closing session, as the volunteers were filing onto the stage to take their bow, to hear the audience explode in thunderous applause and a well-deserved standing ovation.

Congratulations to you all!

With admiration and gratitude,  
Larry Merson