I. Introduction

The International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) is a world farmer’s organization representing more than 600 million farm families grouped in 115 national organizations in 80 countries. It is a global network “in which farmers from industrialised and developing countries exchange concerns and set common priorities” (IFAP 2008). IFAP has advocated on behalf of farmers at the international level since 1946 and has General Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

One of IFAP’s objectives is to act as a platform or forum in which leaders of national farmers’ organizations can meet to highlight mutual interests and take co-ordinated action to further such interests, develop an understanding of world problems, and exchange information, experiences and ideas. Another aim is to keep members informed about international events of concern to them as farmer organizations. Additionally the Federation likes to act as a recognized spokesperson for the world’s farmers, bringing the concerns of agricultural producers to the attention of international meetings of governments and other bodies. The final goal of IFAP is to promote the creation and strengthening of independent, representative organizations of farmers throughout the world (IFAP 2008).

The World Farmers’ Congress is the main event of the Federation. This event occurs every two years. It brings all member organizations together and operates by the principle of one vote per country. The Federation’s President and the 24 members of the Executive Committee are elected at this Congress. Additionally the policy priorities are also established there. The secretariat of the Federation is situated in Paris. France is in charge of the management of the organization and the actual implementation of decisions of the IFAP members. The organization is composed of numerous committees and working groups whose presidents are also elected at the World Farmers’ Congress (IFAP 2008).
II. Origins and Development

With the establishment of the United Nations system, and the FAO in particular, farmers wanted to be represented and heard internationally. This all took place in 1945 (IFAP 2008). As a result the International Federation of Agricultural Producers was founded in May 1946, in London. The founding members were 13 farm leaders from Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, India, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Rhodesia (Zambia-Zimbabwe), the UK, and the USA (IFAP 2008). IFAP had two objectives of equal importance:

- Assuring world food and nutritional security; and
- Assuring reasonable livelihoods for farm families.

Originally, the Federation was preoccupied with the reconstruction of the agricultural sector after the devastation of the Second World War, guided by a strong belief in the philosophy of active international cooperation. Gradually the Federation has shifted its emphasis as the farming sector has undergone important changes, particularly in production methods (IFAP 2008). The governments’ support for ‘international cooperation’ in the 1960s was changed into support for ‘international competition’ in the mid-1980s. This led to a change of emphasis in the IFAP policy. Their focus shifted from proposals for international commodity agreements to proposals on international rules for fair competition (IFAP 2008).

In its early days, the Federation’s activities were exclusively at the global level. Their policy focus was on the broad horizontal issues, like trade, the environment, and development. Today, the Federation has added to this core global activity a regional committee structure (IFAP 2008).

The Federation maintains development committees and projects in the regions of Africa, Asia, the Mediterranean, and Latin America and the Caribbean. These regional committees function as permanent forums for the farmers of the regions. This forum offers them a place to meet and work together on a regular basis (IFAP 2008).

Followed by the regional specialized committees are the standing committees. The Federation has established the following three standing committees: The IFAP Committee on Agricultural Cooperatives; The IFAP Committee of Women in Agriculture; and the IFAP Young Farmers Committee. IFAP also maintains a Development Cooperation Committee (IFAP 2008).

The Committee on Agricultural Cooperatives is a permanent forum devoted to “strengthening the position of cooperatives in the agricultural sector and lobby for a pro-cooperative policy environment at national and international level” (IFAP 2008). The Committee of Women in Agriculture was established in 1992. This Standing Committee is a permanent discus-