

Experiences of a Local Arrangements Committee for a Large Scientific Conference

David M. Spooner and Shelley Jansky
USDA, Agricultural Research Service
Department of Horticulture
University of Wisconsin
1575 Linden Drive
Madison, WI, 53706-1590
USA

Alvin J. Bussan
Department of Horticulture
University of Wisconsin
1575 Linden Drive
Madison, WI, 53706-1590
USA

Abstract

This paper describes the history and organization of the combined conference of the VI International Solanaceae Conference, the 90th Annual Meeting of the Potato Association of America and the III Solanaceae Genomics Conference of the Solanaceae Genomics Network. The unifying theme of these three groups is the science of the Solanaceae. The theme of the Solanaceae Conference: Genomics Meets Biodiversity, describes the goal of integrating all phases of Solanaceae science with the emerging field of genomics. This goal is fostered by the parallel DNA sequencing efforts of both the tomato and potato genomes. This paper details the challenges and opportunities of organizing a scientific conference, shows statistics of the conference, and provide insights in ways to make future conferences easier to organize.

INTRODUCTION

How many of us have gone to a scientific conference unaware of the organization behind it? The registration line flows smoothly, the program is well organized, the abstract book clearly directs you to the talks and posters you wish to see, the rooms are appropriately sized and clearly marked with schedules posted outside, the projection equipment operates well with assistants to help you, web access is provided to allow you to keep up with communications that cannot be delayed, and social events flow smoothly and provide opportunities to meet colleagues in a relaxed atmosphere to make and reinforce collaborations and friendships. Ideally, the conference is inexpensive, especially for students and post-doctoral researchers. All these experiences provide good memories and a successful conference.

Good conferences flow smoothly and are efficiently organized, thanks to hundreds of coordinated decisions made over at least two years of conference planning. In addition, the hosting of a conference often requires considerable financial backing raised from conference leaders or their academic programs or departments. The planning of a scientific conference, while personally and professionally satisfying, entails more work, responsibility, and potential pitfalls than many anticipate. The purpose of our paper is to convey the experiences and insights we gained from organizing the combined conference of the VI International Solanaceae Conference, the Potato Association of America and the III International Solanaceae Genomics Conference. Assistance in planning the conference was obtained from websites and personnel from prior Potato Association of America (PAA) Local Arrangements Committees and Solanaceae conferences [See Appendix 1 for website addresses]. We hope this documentation of our experiences will be useful for future conference planners as many details were not available to us from any other sources.

HISTORY OF THIS CONFERENCE

Spooner attended the V International Solanaceae Conference in Nijmegen, the Netherlands, in 1999, and submitted a proposal to host the VI International Solanaceae Conference in Madison, Wisconsin, U.S.A., in 2005. In 2001, the PAA requested to co-host a meeting with this group, but the conference time had to be delayed until 2006 because of a previously scheduled PAA Conference in 2005. In 2002, the Solanaceae

Genomics Network asked to join these meetings, and the conference began to assume a critical mass that made for more effective international exposure and fundraising.

The conference brought together three diverse groups with Solanaceae as the unifying theme. The International Solanaceae Conference first met in 1976 at Birmingham University, UK, organized by Jack Hawkes, Richard Lester and A.D. Skelding. Subsequent conferences were held in St. Louis, Missouri USA (1982), Bogotá, Colombia (1988), Adelaide, Australia (1994) and Nijmegen, the Netherlands (2000). These conferences covered a variety of topics, with Solanaceae taxonomy and biodiversity as the main theme. Conference volumes resulted from every conference.

The Biology and Taxonomy of the Solanaceae. Proceedings of the First International Symposium on the Biology and Systematics of the Solanaceae. 1979. Editors: J.G. Hawkes, R.N. Lester and A.D. Skelding. Birmingham, England (July 13–17, 1976). Linnean Society Symposium Series No. 7. 738 pages.

Solanaceae: Biology and Systematics. 1986. Proceedings of the Second International Symposium on the Biology and Systematics of the Solanaceae. Editor W.G. D'Arcy. St. Louis, Missouri (held August 3–6, 1983). Columbia University Press, New York. 602 pages.

Solanaceae III. Taxonomy, Chemistry, 1991. Evolution. Proceedings of the Third International Solanaceae Conference. Editors J.G. Hawkes, R.N. Lester, M. Nee and N. Estrada-R. Bogota, Colombia (held July 25–30, 1988). Royal Botanic Gardens Kew. 482 pages.

Solanaceae IV. Advances in Biology and Utilization. 1999. Proceedings of the Fourth International Solanaceae Conference. Editors M. Nee, D.E. Symon, R.N. Lester and J.P. Jessop. Adelaide, Australia (held September 4–7, 1994). Royal Botanic Gardens Kew. 484 pages.

Solanaceae V. Advances in Taxonomy and Utilization. 2001. Proceedings of the Fifth International Solanaceae Conference. Editors: R.G. van den Berg, G.W.M. Barendse, G.M. van der Weerden and C. Mariani. Nijmegen, The Netherlands (held July 24–29, 2000). Nijmegen University Press, Nijmegen, the Netherlands. 442 pages.

The PAA is a diverse group of scientists who have hosted an annual conference every year for 92 years (except for four years in the 1940s). The association publishes the *American Journal of Potato Research* (prior to 1998, the *American Potato Journal*). The Solanaceae Genomics Network was initiated in 2002 by a group of scientists focused on the sequencing of the tomato genome. It maintains a website of diverse topics relating to genomics of Solanaceae (all web sites are listed in Appendix 1). The site contains genomic, genetic, and taxonomic information for species in the Euasterid clade, including the families Solanaceae (e.g. tomato, potato, eggplant, pepper, petunia) and Rubiaceae (coffee). Genomic information is presented in a comparative format and tied to the fully sequenced *Arabidopsis* genome. The groups also publish the *Solanaceae Newsletter*.

PRE-EVENT PLANNING

Many decisions had to be made about conference venue four years in advance of the Solanaceae conference. First, we had to set a conference attendance estimate for the various oral sessions. If an organization has a long history, then predicting attendance numbers should be fairly easy. If a conference is for a new organization or it combines several organizations, then attendance would be more difficult to predict. For example, we expected that some PAA members would attend the other Solanaceae meetings, but we could only guess actual attendance.

Decisions need to be coordinated with Conference leaders (Appendix 2) well in advance. The initial critical decisions that must be made by a local arrangements committee (LAC) of a large scientific conference are the choice of venue and conference dates. The conference should be held in a city that is easily accessible by air. For example, locations with service by regional airlines or only a few flights per day will limit participants to those who make early travel arrangements. The location must have

adequate convention facilities appropriate for the size of the conference. Most commonly, conferences are held at large hotels that have their own meeting rooms and staff that can help with conference planning.

This conference was held at the Monona Terrace Convention Center in Madison, Wisconsin, U.S.A. The chosen venue would not have been economically feasible with a small conference and limited attendance, but the combination of three organizations provided the critical mass to reserve most of the facility for the week. The conference date was chosen to minimize conflicts with other professional meetings likely to be attended by potential participants. Early announcement of the conference allowed other organizations to schedule meetings with minimal conflicts as well.

Hotel accessibility as well is important to consider when choosing a conference site. Ideally the conference hotel will have reasonable room rates and enough rooms for all participants. If additional rooms are needed, hotel options should be available within walking distance and within a range of rates to suit the needs of diverse participants with different travel budgets. For the convenience of both the LAC and participants, host hotels should offer complimentary airport shuttle service. In addition, most participants will not have their own transportation so the venue should be within walking distance of a shopping district with a number of restaurant options. The LAC should visit potential hotels and meet with hotel staff before making a final decision about the conference site. The selected hotel(s) should be appealing, clean, and provide modern amenities, such as free high-speed internet access.

The LAC should learn specifics about how hotel contracts are written when meeting with staff. We encountered two types of contracts. The Hilton (host hotel) contract contained a “contingency clause” that required reservation of a number of rooms for each night of the conference. The LAC was financially responsible for any rooms that were not booked by conference participants. Reserving enough rooms for all participants that wanted to stay at the host hotel had to be balanced with the financial risk of overestimating the number of rooms necessary. The second type of contract encountered reserved rooms until one month before the conference. These hotels were less expensive than the Hilton, but were farther from the Monona Terrace. Unknown during early planning was whether the majority of participants would pay the higher room rate of the Hilton for the convenience of staying at the conference site. However, all reserved rooms at the Hilton were booked for \$156 per night, while rooms were still available at nearby hotels. Apparently, many participants will pay a higher room rate in order to stay at the host hotel.

Because the LAC members for this conference were scientists and not professional meeting organizers, it was important to the committee to hire, at a reasonable cost, professional conference planners. A LAC should interview several conference planners to make sure they have experience planning scientific conferences, a successful track record, and enthusiastic recommendations from previous clients. The Monona Terrace staff was the venue planning resource for this conference, and was thus familiar with the attractions and limitations of the facility and could offer several options for each conference’s needs. Hotel staff can also provide guidance on meeting room requirements, audio-visual (AV) equipment and catering needs. Although facility personnel were critical for providing logistics expertise for this conference, they do not typically have enough experience with scientific meetings to help with the scheduling of talks, the preparation of the program book, or the publication of conference proceedings. The Botanical Society of America (BSA) managed the registration and finances for the conference.

Social events were critical for the Solanaceae conference success by providing relief from the intensity of scientific presentations, opportunities to forge and maintain collaborations, keeping the group together outside of meeting sessions, and making the conference memorable. PAA conferences traditionally maintain membership, meeting attendance, and a sense of community because of well planned social programs, including an accompanying persons program and a formalized final banquet and awards program (Appendix 3). The social activities for all attendees of this Conference included a Sunday

evening reception (the “Presidents” Reception in PAA tradition), a Tuesday evening wine-and-snack poster-viewing social, a Wednesday evening cookout, and a Thursday evening awards banquet. In addition, full hot breakfasts, lunches, and morning and afternoon breaks kept the group together between sessions. The PAA has a history of providing tours for accompanying persons while participants are involved with the scientific program. However, previous PAA Local Organizing Committees told us that attendance of these tours was declining so we eliminated the accompanying persons tours. The one exception was on Wednesday, which was a tour day for all PAA participants. On the remaining days of the conference, accompanying persons could schedule their activities based on their own interests, and staff from the Madison Visitor and Convention Bureau was hired and set up at a desk at the Monona Terrace to provide tour ideas, maps, brochures, bus schedules, and information about local attractions. Two Wednesday tours were to the Hancock State Agricultural Research Station for Potato Research Field Day and Frank Lloyd Wright’s Taliesin complex and House on the Rock in Spring Green, Wisconsin.

FUNDRAISING

Fundraising was critical to keep costs low yet provide a quality conference. In the case of PAA conference, the LAC was responsible for generating funds to cover costs of the conference and make it affordable, and to provide amenities such as meals, receptions, and refreshments. The PAA and the Solanaceae Genomics Network has a wide number of multinational, regional and local industries that participate in the conference and serve as potential donors, and the fundraising committee included members committed to hosting the conference and familiar with the societies represented and as well as allied industries. It was critical to identify “connected” fundraisers with good reputations through extension or other outreach programs to solicit funds from potential industry donors.

A good conference program attracts participants and registrants. This was especially evident during our fundraising campaign, as some contributors (Appendix 4) donated funds only after they reviewed the program. The PAA and the two Solanaceae groups jointly organized the Monday morning plenary session. The PAA organized its own program of six sectional programs (Stephen James, PAA Secretary and organizer). Sandra Knapp and Dani Zamir organized the five ½-day sessions for the Solanaceae groups with four of these one-half day sessions invited, and two were by competition. Abstracts not chosen for talks were designated as posters. Ten one-half day satellite sessions (five concurrent sessions Wednesday morning and five Wednesday afternoon) were organized separately (Appendix 5). The invited speakers for the Monday morning plenary sessions and the three other invited sessions received free registration and a \$700 travel award. The Solanaceae groups have a large concentration of scientists in South America and many there wished to attend but could not afford the travel costs. An awards committee (Appendix 2) provided \$21,500 in grants to non-invited speakers.

Our first fundraising step was to identify potential sponsors that included 1) industries and entities that annually sponsor the PAA conference, 2) industries and entities that are related to Solanaceous crops, 3) biotechnology and agrochemical companies, and 4) scientific granting agencies. We identified potential sponsors by consulting prior contributors to the PAA and the Plant and Animal Genome Conferences, as well as local grower associations who provided lists of associate members. We also searched the web for biotechnology companies. The large focus on genomics of Solanaceous crops dramatically increased the list of potential sponsors as many companies market products used in genomics research, sell genetic resources of solanaceous crops (seeds), or have a direct interest in the marketing of solanaceous crops other than potato.

In total, we contacted more than 150 companies. First contact was made by writing letters (Appendix 6) to collaborators or known contacts of companies familiar to the fundraising committee. For companies for which the fundraising committee had no contacts, letters were written to the presidents or marketing directors. Contacts were made

two years before the conference because some companies plan funding cycles and set budgets years in advance. In addition, fiscal years vary by company and range from January to December, requiring budgets be set 12 to 18 months in advance of the conference. Follow-up letters were sent to identify contacts within each company 12 to 14 months prior to the conference to provide information about the conference, identify dates, and solicit their potential support. Follow-up contacts were made repeatedly in person 12 to 6 months prior to the conference to continually remind key sponsors about the upcoming meeting. Approximately six months before the conference, each contact was called again and asked for a firm funding commitment. This process—which, in all, required hundreds of hours—continued until the final weeks before the conference. We consider ourselves successful in raising \$112,000 for this conference.

BUDGET PLANNING

Building the budget (Appendices 7 and 8) was one of the most important and frustratingly difficult aspects of the conference, because there were many unknowns. The most critical variables were the number of registrants, fundraising success, and unfilled rooms from hotel contracts. As conference organizers, we did not anticipate being personally responsible for financial obligations with hotel contracts. The PAA was the only one of the three groups with a formalized organizational structure and it had an endowment and a budget. However, the PAA did not take any financial responsibility for conference expenses, placing that burden on the LAC. There were many sleepless nights tracking registration numbers, raising funds, fundraising, and contemplating possible catastrophes that could stop the conference (e.g., SARS, Bird Flu, Mumps (there was an epidemic in adjacent Iowa), stringent visa restrictions, terrorism.).

The LAC had to balance the need to keep registration expenses low (especially for students and post-docs) with the need to cover conference costs. Budget planning was one of the first steps in planning the conference. It required several key steps. First, the fundraising committee needed to be familiar with each of the organizations in order to know what was expected by each group and its (?) attendees. For example, complimentary lunches are traditionally a part of the PAA conference. In addition, the PAA plans multiple business meetings that require food. Without being familiar with the PAA, there would be no way to plan for the resources necessary to host a successful conference. Next, a list of the budgeted items was created to identify expected costs. Numerous ancillary expenditures arose at multiple points along the conference planning process, but large budget categories had to be identified up-front for overall planning. The PAA provided budgetary information on its website, and we interviewed prior conference LACs of the PAA and Solanaceae Conferences to identify key and unexpected expenses. A potential huge cost was hotel contingency contracts, which stipulated reimbursement for unbooked rooms. After identifying the conference venue, we could obtain estimates for all key items such as catering, audiovisual, and venue costs. The final step was to estimate conference attendance (Appendices 9 and 10). By estimating conference attendance and predicting total costs of the conference, we could set registration fees (Appendix 11) as well as fundraising goals necessary to support the conference.

PUBLICITY

Advertising the conference was critical. The PAA and the Solanaceae Genomics Network have organized communication structures with e-mail lists, newsletters and web resources so advertisement was relatively easy. To advertise the conference, we relied on e-mail lists from the Solanaceae conference in Nijmegen, the Netherlands, in 2000; the Solanaceae Genomics Network; the Ischia Italy 2005 conference; the PAA; and the Lat-SOL Network (Appendix 1). We gathered e-mail addresses from 1050 participants who gave papers at the conference, and this list will be available to future conference organizers. Various conference leaders (Appendix 2) further advertised the conference with poster and oral announcements at the Solanaceae section of the Plant and Animal Genome Conference, the business meetings of the American Society of Plant

Taxonomists, the Sociedad Argentina de Botánica, the International Botanical Conference, the Botanical Society of America, the Solanaceae Genomics Conferences and the PAA annual conference. We also advertised through newsletters or through the Eucarpia Conferences website, the International Coffee Genome Network, Lat-SOL, Red Latinoamericana de Botánica, the Crop Science Society of America, the Red Latinoamericana de Botánica, the Society for Economic Botany, the United States Department of Agriculture, Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, CSREES Plant Sciences Update, and the University of Wisconsin Department of Horticulture, and in *Global Potato News*, *Taxon*, the *Botanical Society of America Plant Science Bulletin*, *The Solanaceae Newsletter*, *The World of Food*, (see Appendix 1 for all of website URLs of all these organizations and publications).

All five prior Solanaceae Conferences had published proceedings, and we initially had an oral agreement with a publisher for the 2006 conference. This agreement became much more complex as negotiations advanced. Considerable time was necessary to work with this publisher and at the end we were not given a contract but rather only a promise to consider the manuscripts after an all peer-reviewed copy was submitted. Fortunately, Acta Horticulturae, an experienced publisher of horticultural conferences, actively sought to publish the proceedings from this conference and based on experiences to date we recommend them as publisher for other conference proceedings.

MEETING PLANNING

Meeting Rooms

The meeting room size must match attendance. If a room is too small, then some people have to stand, and if too big, then a speaker is talking to a half-empty room. Room configurations can be used to adjust the room capacity. With theater-style seating, rows of chairs are placed in the room. This allows for the largest seating capacity, but required audience members to take notes on their laps. Classroom seating places a row of tables in front of every row of chairs. During the Solanaceae conference, the configuration of rooms at the conference center gave us the option of enlarging a room if necessary. For each of the PAA concurrent sessions, we reserved an extra, adjoining meeting room, allowing us the opportunity to remove a wall to double the size of each room if necessary. The PAA Breeding and Genetics section meetings required this option due to a larger than average attendance, presumably because of participation by the other two groups.

A simple amenity appreciated by participants was a set of tables and chairs made available throughout the week in the large open area used for breaks. This provided participants with a relaxed and comfortable setting in which to continue conversations initiated during the breaks.

Audio-Visual Equipment

Audio-visual (AV) equipment can make or break the scientific portion of a conference. We chose to use the highest quality projection equipment available (large screens and high-resolution projectors) so equipment would not stand in the way of presentations. A wireless microphone and computer mouse in each room allowed speakers to be mobile during their presentations. In the large presentation room, we placed microphones throughout the room so that the audience could use them to ask the speakers questions. We rented a “speaker-ready” room with several computers, allowing presenters to review each slide and download their PowerPoint files to a central server. Then, when giving a presentation, the speaker simply loaded the file from the server with the assurance it would look exactly as it did in the speaker-ready room. We required speakers to format presentations as PowerPoint files on a PC-based platform. This avoided technical problems associated with maneuvering across file formats and platforms. In addition to the speaker-ready room, we provided a small room with a projector and computer, allowing speakers to practice. Speaker podiums and microphones were rented for receptions, banquets and other social events. We also provided a set of six

computers with Internet access and a printer for checking e-mail during the conference. This was important for members of various committees who needed to write and print reports during the conference. In addition free, high-speed wireless Internet was provided throughout the conference site.

Catering

The hotel or conference site staff was able to provide advice regarding catering needs. We chose to provide a hot breakfast and lunch for participants. The lunch was especially important to keep the afternoon scientific meeting on schedule, and the breakfast helped keep the participants together as a group throughout the day. It is also important to provide refreshments during the morning and afternoon breaks. Late registrations can create a problem for catering estimates. We provided a head count for each meal approximately one week prior to the conference. The Monona Terrace automatically planned for 5% more guests than requested, so a few last minute additions were not a problem. We told participants that they might not be provided with meals if they registered less than a week before the conference. However, we were able to renegotiate food service contracts for 42 late registrants. Finally, special meal requests need to be available on the registration form so that vegetarian and other specific nutritional needs can be met.

Registration and Staffing

While the human resources required for planning a conference are large, so are the resources for running the conference itself. The registration desk was continuously staffed by two to three people, with one person adept at web registrations. We flew a staff member from the registration company, the Botanical Society of America, to our conference for this purpose. Additional staff members were added during expected busy times such as Sunday afternoon and Monday morning. AV/computer experts were hired from the Monona Terrace to work full-time throughout the conference to handle potential problems such as computer access to the network and microphone feedback. One was stationed in the large Solanaceae meeting room, while another worked among the three smaller PAA rooms. In addition, we hired and trained students to work in the speaker-ready room and to act as projectionists in each of the three PAA rooms. Colleagues were recruited to serve as session moderators. The Monona Terrace provided us with hand-held radios so LAC members could keep in contact with each other and with the Monona Terrace staff.

Poster sessions were relatively easy to organize. An early deadline for poster submissions provided the time necessary to determine the size of the room needed for the poster session and the number of poster boards needed. The Monona Terrace provided the poster boards for our conference, but local companies were also capable of supplying the boards. We tried to group the posters into logical categories so that those with similar topics would be together. We organized a wine-and-cheese social event to encourage participation and enjoyment of the poster session.

Many details are needed to organize a conference. Potential and actual participants need to be kept informed of deadlines and costs for early and late registration, hotel availability and booking dates for reduced costs, local logistics, social and scientific events, opportunities to speak and give posters, media format, times for talks and posters, visa requirements (Appendix 12) and Internet access. The large e-mail list for advertising was trimmed to a list of conference attendees to communicate information to abstract authors and registrants.

This was the first year the PAA utilized web registrations and abstract submissions, requiring considerable adjustment by members accustomed to postal mail submissions. However, there were so many cost and time-saving advantages to web registration and abstract submission that we had to rely on this system exclusively. A contract was initially signed with a company to take on-line abstracts and registrations,

but they performed poorly. We cancelled their contract at a cost of \$1200 for their initial work. We ultimately used BSA, which took on-line abstracts, registrations, and published the abstract book with their in-house proprietary software and organizational staff. This system was highly integrated and allowed multiple options to view and query the program. In addition, in-house publishing by the BSA was efficient and cost-effective. The BSA saved us considerable time and produced high-quality copy, and we recommend them highly.

Some attendees were taxonomists who used this opportunity to visit local herbaria. Special access hours were needed at the University of Wisconsin-Madison herbaria on evenings and weekends for this service. We took every opportunity to acknowledge everyone who aided in the conference on the web, in the abstract book, and in this article.

An effective committee structure was important. The PAA and Solanaceae groups had separate program committees. However, good communications were necessary with each program committee and the BSA to coordinate abstract submissions, plan rooms, and print the program. Other committee responsibilities were lodging to include a primary conference hotel, signage at the conference, tours and events, visas, grants and fundraising, a local and an accompanying persons committee, and invitation of dignitaries to address the opening session.

Other Lessons Learned

1. The 5%/95% rule. No matter how hard you try to make registration, abstract submission, hotel options, and other details clear to your participants, a small minority of your attendees (5%) will require huge amounts of your time (95%). The LAC was responsible for clearly written directions for the many tasks of the conference, but many people are very busy, do not read directions, and attempt to perform all on-line tasks intuitively. Tremendous time was needed to write back to registrants and get them to correct abstract or informational errors. Many simply did not respond, leaving committee members with the task of researching and filling in necessary data. Some special requests were encountered including sending registration detail and abstracts by email and transcription to online forms, sending registration money by wire transfer, making hotel reservations, pick up from the airport even though all local hotels provided free shuttles, or securing foreign-language speaking babysitters.

We tried to meet all requests for two reasons. First, we needed a critical mass of registrants to meet our fixed costs (accurate, actual attendance was impossible to predict). Second, we realized that what appeared to us to be an unreasonable request could be caused by our failure to communicate clearly, special needs, unfamiliarity with the web or browser incompatibilities, cultural differences, or other problems. Ultimately, our primary goal was a positive meeting experience for all in attendance.

2. Time Commitments. We tried to maintain a quality conference in the premiere conference venue in Madison at a reasonable cost. The venue expenses (Appendix 7) were considerable, so we tried to compensate by performing as many organizational tasks ourselves as possible to save costs. This included raising funds to keep registration fees (including food and social events) as low as possible. Using this model, planning for the conference proved to be an 80% time commitment for the chair of the LAC for 12 months preceding the conference, and 40% of the LAC chair's time the year before that. In addition, two other LAC members (Bussan, Jansky) spent 15% of their time committed toward the conference as the date approached. The other LAC members donated additional time, in addition to time spent by the abstract submission and registration company (BSA) and the program directors (Appendix 2).

3. Conference Updates. Conference updates were crucial to communicate developments to all registrants, especially reminders of deadlines for early registrations and cutoff dates for conference event sign-ups, hotel reservations, etc. Eighty percent or more of abstracts and registrations were submitted in the few days immediately preceding deadlines. Deadlines were advertised three months, three weeks, and one week before cutoff dates. Registration income was critical to running the conference and local organizers were

concerned to and beyond the conference if the conference was solvent. However, late registrations were common. About 15 registrants cancelled and required refunds and there were 70 late registrants.

4. Announcements. The opening reception and the plenary session was our only opportunity to speak to the entire set of attendees. This time was used to make general announcements, such as meals, when and where ticketed events were to take place, and where breaks were to be held. Announcements were necessary throughout the week requiring a strategy for getting information to all attendees. Bulletin boards, notices posted at the registration desk, emails to the participant list, and verbal announcements during the sessions were used to communicate announcements. At the opening reception, attendees were alerted about where to locate.

5. Ticketed Events. Be sure to anticipate last-minute requests for ticketed events. We had people request banquet tickets an hour before the banquet. Constant communication was necessary with the caterer and the absolute deadline for a head count at each event was needed. This deadline must be communicated effectively to conference participants. In addition, we had several people ask for refunds for ticketed events. Be prepared for those requests by determining in advance whether they will be granted. Also, try to anticipate creative solutions that may be offered by attendees. For example, one person could not attend a tour and asked whether the tour ticket could be substituted for a banquet ticket.

Many participants required certificates of attendance, and we spent considerable time at the registration desk typing these individually. Make a standard attendance certificate on official letterhead where you can write in the name of the person and a place to sign.

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL BENEFITS OF BEING A CONFERENCE ORGANIZER

Conference organization was such a time-consuming task that it was often difficult to get volunteers. Few take on such a task a second time. The purpose of our paper is to provide future conference organizers practical experiences including possible pitfalls and lessons learned to aid them in their planning, not to discourage volunteers. We are glad we took on this task as it was personally and professionally rewarding. Service to your community is expected and assuming that you organize a good conference and serve your registrants effectively and with respect, you have an opportunity to highlight your institution and city well, and gain recognition from your peers. You interact with hundreds of people, and initiate collaborations and friendships.

You learn how to communicate much more effectively. Repeated requests from “difficult people” who could not seem to follow directions often showed us that we were at fault through poor communication or cross-cultural miscommunications. We gained an appreciation of others’ special needs, especially the financial difficulties of participants from underdeveloped countries. Finally, we learned to see conferences and volunteers in an entirely new light through the huge effort needed for the tasks involved. We recommend these tasks to anyone assuming you have access to good facilities and willing collaborators, and enjoy working with others.

Appendix 1. Website Resources

- Acta Horticulturae (<http://www.actahort.org/>)
Asociación Argentina de Horticultura (<http://www.asaho.com.ar/>)
Botanical Society of America Plant Science Bulletin (<http://www.botany.org/bsa/psb/2002/psb48-4.html>)
ECP/GR Eggplant Database (<http://www.bgard.science.ru.nl/WWW-IPGRI/eggplant.htm>)
Eucarpia Meetings Webpage (<http://www.eucarpia.org/02meetings/index.html#potato>).
European Solanaceae Genomics Consortium (http://www.epsoweb.org/Catalog/projects/solworkshop_24Oct03.htm)
Global Potato News (<http://www.potatonews.com/>)
Hilton Madison Monona Terrace (<http://www.hiltonmadison.com/>)
International Coffee Genome Network (<http://www.coffeegenome.org/news/news.php>)
Lat-SOL Network (<http://cni.inta.gov.ar/lat-sol/>)
Monona Terrace Convention Center (<http://www.mononaterrace.com/>)
Potato Association of America (PAA) (<http://www.umaine.edu>)
Potato Association of America (PAA) Local Arrangements Committee guidelines (http://www.umaine.edu/PAA/guides_for_lac.htm#)
Red Latinoamericana de Botánica (<http://www.rlb-botanica.org/>)
Sociedad Argentina de Botánica (<http://www.botanicargentina.com.ar/>)
SOL Andino (<http://www.sgn.cornell.edu/about/SOLANDINO/>)
Solanaceae Genomics conference 2005 website in Ischia Italy (<http://www.solanaceae2005.org/>)
Solanaceae Genomics Network (<http://www.sgn.cornell.edu/>)
Solanaceae Genomics/PAA/International Solanaceae Conference 2006 website in Madison Wisconsin (<http://www.horticulture.wisc.edu/PAA-Solanaceae/>)
Solanaceae Newsletter (http://www.sgn.cornell.edu/solanaceae-project/index.pl#SOL_news)
Solanaceae Source (<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/research-curation/projects/solanaceaesource/>)
United States Department of Agriculture, Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, CSREES Plant Sciences Update (http://www.csrees.usda.gov/newsroom/newsletters/plantsciencesupdate/psu_0509.pdf#search=%22PAA%2FSolanaceae%22).
Universidad Nacional Autónoma Nacional de México Instituto de Ecología, Eventos Académicos (<http://www.ecologia.unam.mx/sie/eventos/eventos2006.htm>)
University of Wisconsin Department of Horticulture (<http://www.horticulture.wisc.edu/>)
US National Science Foundation Grant to sequence the tomato genome (http://www.sgn.cornell.edu/solanaceae-project/meeting_2005/)
US Visa information (<http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov>)
World of Food, Environment and Communication (<http://www.world-food.net/viewmeeting.php?meeting=195>)

Appendix 2. Conference Leaders.

President, Potato Association of America

Larry Hiller, Washington State University, USA

Program Organizers for Conference Wide Program (not PAA or Satellite Sessions)

Sandra Knapp, Natural History Museum, UK

Dani Zamir, The Hebrew Univ. of Jerusalem, Israel

Potato Association of America Program Chair

Steven James, Central Oregon Agricultural Research Center, USA

Satellite Session Organizers

Application of FISH in Support of Sequencing Plant Genomes

Stephen M. Stack, Colorado State University, USA

Bioinformatics

Dr. Heiko Schoof, Max Planck Institute for Plant Breeding Research, Koeln, Germany

Coffee Genomics

Steven Tanksley, Cornell University, USA

M. André Charrier, Diversité et Génome des Plantes Cultivées, France

Pepper

Byoung-Cheorl Kang, Cornell University, USA

Molly Jahn, Dean, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

Potato Genomics

Christian Bachem, Wageningen University and Research Centre, The Netherlands

Secondary Metabolism

Giovanni Giuliano, Casaccia Research Center, Italy

Solanum Taxonomy

Lynn Bohs, University of Utah, USA

Tobacco

Paolo Donini, Philip Morris International, Switzerland

Tomato sequencing

Lucas Mueller, Cornell University, USA

Translational Genomics

Allen Van Deynze, Seed Biotechnology Center, California, USA

International Visas Contact

John Bamberg, USDA ARS, US Potato Genebank, USA

Fundraising Committee

Alvin J Bussan, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

Larry Binning, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

Lynn Bohs, University of Utah, USA

Jed Colquhoun, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

Shelley Jansky, USDA ARS; University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

David Spooner, USDA ARS; University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

Walter Stevenson, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

Dani Zamir, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

Local Organizing Committee

David Spooner, USDA ARS, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

Shelley Jansky, USDA ARS; University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

Jiming Jiang, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

Jiwan Palta, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

Philipp Simon, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

Editorial Committee, Solanaceae VI: Genomics Meets Biodiversity

David Spooner, USDA ARS, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA
Lynn Bohs, University of Utah, USA
Jim Giovannoni, USDA-ARS, Plant, Soil and Nutrition Laboratory, USA
Richard G. Olmstead, University of Washington, USA
Daisuke Shibata, Kazusa DNA Research Institute, Japan
Carol Davit, Jefferson City, Missouri, USA (copy Editor)

Registration, Abstract Submissions and Production of Program Book

William Dahl, Botanical Society of America, USA
Rob Brandt, Botanical Society of America, USA
Johanne Stogran, Botanical Society of America, USA

Local Web Committee

Thomas Frank, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

Potato Association of America Liaison

Lori Wing, Potato Association of America, USA

Conference Attendance Awards Committee

Richard Olmstead, University of Washington, USA
Gregory Anderson, University of Connecticut, USA
Iris Peralta, National University of Cuyo, Argentina
Gerard van der Weerden, Radboud University, The Netherlands

Potato Association of America Graduate Student Awards Committee

Kathy Haynes, USDA/ARS, Vegetable Lab, Beltsville, Maryland, USA
Walter DeJong, Cornell University, USA
Hector Lozoya-Saldana, Universidad Autonoma Chapingo, Mexico
Mark Pavek, Washington State University, USA
Silvia Rondon, Oregon State University, USA
Leslie Wanner, USDA ARS, Beltsville, Maryland, USA

Wednesday Tours Committee

Deana Sexson, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA
Charles Kostichka, University of Wisconsin Hancock Agricultural Experiment Station, USA

Accompanying Persons Program

Ingrid Bamberg, Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, USA

Potato Association of America Silent Auction Coordinator

Janet Mosley, Oregon State University, USA

Golf Scramble Organizer

Jeff Wyman, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA
Larry Binning, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA
Keith Kelling, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

Lake Michigan Fishing Organizer

Walter Stevenson, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

Photographer

Wolfgang Hoffmann, Flynn Creek Photography, Verona, Wisconsin USA

Appendix 3. Solanaceae Conference Poster and Talk Award Winners.

Posters (\$100.00 each)

Feinan Wu, Cornell University, USA, Comparative analyses between tomato single copy region and *Arabidopsis* duplicated counterpart

Pasquale Tripodi, University of Naples “Federico II,” Italy, Updates on the development of a whole genome *Solanum habrochaites* (acc. LA1777) IL population.

Claire Marks, The University of Melbourne, Australia, Floral morphology and Australian *Nicotiana*.

Cintia Orsi, Cornell University, USA, Progress Towards the Cloning of *sw4.1.*, the Major Seed Size Gene, in Tomato: From Fine Mapping to BAC Sequence Analysis.

G. N. Mwai, Maseno University, Kenya, Characterization of the diversity of vegetable African nightshades using morphological characters and AFLP markers.

Talks

Stacey Smith (\$300.00), University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA, Systematics of Iochrominae (Solanaceae): Dual challenges of diversification and hybridization.

Michael Mazourek (\$300.00), Cornell University, USA, Linking Genetic Diversity with Chemical Diversity using Genomic Resources in *Capsicum*.

Suzy Ryan (\$200.00), Monash University, Australia, Analysis of the QPT gene involved in *Nicotiana* alkaloid biosynthesis.

Marcos Caraballo-Ortiz (\$200.00), University of Puerto Rico, Puerto-Rico, 00931-3360, Puerto Rico, Reproductive biology of the rare Caribbean tree *Goetzea elegans* Wydler (Solanaceae: Goetzeoideae).

Potato Association of America talk winners:

1st place (\$350.00) – Michael Copas, Production and Management Section, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA.

2nd place (\$250.00) – Magnifique Nzaramba, Breeding and Genetics Section, Texas A & M University, USA.

3rd place (\$150.00) – Jeffrey Davis, Plant Protection Section, University of Minnesota, U.S.A.,

4th place (\$100.00) – Mary LaMere, Production and Management Section, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA.

5th place tie (\$100.00) – Diego Fajardo, Breeding and Genetics Section, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA.

5th place tie (\$100.00) – Christine Worthington, Production and Management Section, University of Florida, USA.

Appendix 4. Contributors to the Conference, Arranged Alphabetically.

Contributor

AMVAC
Basic American Foods
Bayer Crop Science
Beckman Coulter
Bio S&T
Black Gold
Chemtura
Coloma Farms
DeRuiter Seeds
Dow Agro Sciences
J. E. Orr
KeyGene
Koeltz Scientific Books
McCain Foods
Nelson's Vegetable Storage Systems Inc.
New England Biolabs
Nunhems
Pest Pros Inc.
Philipp Morris
Promega
R. D. Offutt Co.
Seminis
Simplot
Sipcam Agro USA Inc.
Spectrum Technologies Inc.
Syngenta
Syngenta Seeds
Time Logic
University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Horticulture
University of Wisconsin-Madison Latin American and Caribbean and
Iberian Studies Program
U.S. National Science Foundation
U.S. Potato Board
USDA Agricultural Research Service
USDA CSREES
USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

Total funds, \$108,500

Appendix 5. Presentation Detail.

Invited Solanaceae presentations	47
PAA talks	100
PAA posters	55
Satellite session posters	24
Solanaceae session posters	97
Satellite session talks (from 10 satellite sessions)	93
Total talks and posters	416
Total authors on these talks and posters	1050

Appendix 6. Fundraising Letter.

Date

To: Person, Marketing Director
Name of Corporation

From: Letter writer of local organizing committee member

Re: Marketing opportunities for a major scientific conference to be held in Madison, Wisconsin, on July 23-27, 2006 – please see www.hort.wisc.edu/PAA-Solanaceae/

Dear [Potential Contributor]:

Madison, Wisconsin has been selected to host a major scientific conference of three research organizations heavily involved in the Biotechnology and Agriculture industries. The conference is at Madison's premiere convention venue, the Monona Terrace Convention Center). It is within two blocks of the State Capitol, and a mile from the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus. The conference attendees are leaders in three national and international organizations heavily involved in the purchase of biotechnology and agricultural products:

- **The Solanaceae Genomics Network (SGN)** is a new organization that has grown out of a major US National Science Foundation Grant to sequence the tomato genome (http://www.sgn.cornell.edu/solanaceae-project/meeting_2005/). This project is comparable to the *Arabidopsis* sequencing initiative that has helped propel genomics into a major scientific discipline. Renowned international researchers from top genomics and agricultural institutions such as the University of Wisconsin, Cornell University, University of California-Davis, Wageningen University, the Scottish Crop Research Institute, and others, will be in attendance.
- **The Potato Association of America (PAA)** (<http://www.umaine.edu/paa/>) has a membership focused on improving potato production through all aspects of science including breeding and genetics, genomics and plant protection. The audience is international but principally from the US and Canada.
- **VI International Solanaceae Conference (ISC)** meets every 5 to 6 years. Every conference produces a peer-reviewed scientific volume covering a variety of topics, with a concentration on systematics, secondary chemistry, and floral biology. This organization has expanded its focus to molecular systematics and genomic issues, especially with the involvement of a major \$4.3 Million NSF-

funded initiative on the systematics of the genus *Solanum*, including potatoes and tomatoes; I (David Spooner) am one of four funded researchers on this initiative. In addition to the scientific meetings, we are scheduling a series of social events for scientific interactions among researchers and industry. A day-long Wisconsin Potato Industry tour in mid-week will provide a valuable forum for dialog between conference attendees, growers, and industry representatives.

The Monona Terrace was designed to highlight industry sponsorship. The work of conference attendees relies on your products, and the Monona Terrace was designed to provide ideal marketing opportunities. We understand your needs, and full acknowledgment will be provided to sponsors in the program booklet and at social events, as well as exhibitor space in the form of booths. We are contacting you now to allow time for future planning and to solicit your generous support for this combined meeting of the SGN, PAA and ISC. Sponsor levels are:

Platinum: \$ 20,000
 Gold: \$ 10,000
 Silver: \$ 3,000
 Bronze: \$ 500

Exhibitor space is offered to Silver Level sponsors and higher. The Monona Terrace provides state-of-the-art marketing booth space, and we will intersperse the marketing booths with the posters to provide maximum visibility. In addition, opportunities are available for sponsorship of lunches, breaks, awards, and other events with recognition during the event. In addition to the wonderful facilities, this conference is unique in that it will mix together groups of people that work in a wide variety of biotech and agricultural settings thereby offering the opportunity to gain exposure and share ideas with diverse groups. We plan on 500 to 600 attendees at the conference.

The conference hotel, adjacent to the Monona Terrace, is:

Hilton Madison Monona Terrace
 9 East Wilson Street
 Madison, Wisconsin 53703
 Tel: 608-255-5100
 Web: <http://www.hiltonmadison.com/>

Named Sponsorship Opportunities

Sunday evening welcome reception (2 free drink tickets), hors d'oeuvres **\$13,070.00**

Breakfasts (one each on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday) **\$6,250.00** each breakfast.

Breaks (one morning coffee, tea, soda), one afternoon (coffee, tea, soda, cookie), (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday) **\$3,000.00** each day.

Lunches (one each on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday) **\$6,475.00** each day.

Tuesday evening poster display reception (two free drink tickets) and food (cheese, fruit, vegetables) **\$9,125.00**

Registration waivers and travel aids. The Solanaceae family is most diverse in Latin America and many attendees will come from there and other countries. We will sponsor registration waivers and partial travel expenses for needy individuals from poor countries depending on available funds. **\$500 or more**

Please feel free to contact me with questions or to arrange sponsorship details. We look forward to hearing from you soon and hope that you will play an important role in this conference, because your support is vital to its success.

Thank you,
Letter writer.

Appendix 7. Budget for the Conference.

Category	Estimated cost
Venue (Monona Terrace)	\$17,606
Catering and taxes	105,495
Poster boards	2,420
Audio Visual	28,296
On-line registration services (BSA)	5,000
On-line abstract submission services (BSA)	5,000
Abstract book printing and shipping	8,285
Travel and housing of BSA webmaster for registration	1,630
Conference bags, neck wallets, shipping	6,418
Advertisement (<i>Taxon</i>)	500
Miscellaneous (parking for helpers, office supplies)	300
Signage for talks outside rooms	520
Initial registration company	1,200
Student and post-doc awards	2,200
Web development	1,000
Personnel, maps, etc. to advise attendees on local tours of the area	300
Mailing expenses	1,000
Complimentary registrations and travel costs for invited speakers and helpers	33,600
Photography and web development for photos	2,750
Copy editing	10,000
Contract for symposium volume including printing and distribution (estimated at time of this printing (* converted from Euro as of May 30, 2007)	* \$22,240
Corporate and Grant Sponsorship	\$108,500

Appendix 8. Miscellaneous Budget Statistics.

98 pre-publication copies (at \$50.00 a copy) of the Solanaceae Conference volume ordered entitled Solanaceae: Genomics Meets Biodiversity were sold before or at the conference.

48 papers were received for consideration for publication in the Solanaceae Symposium volume in *Acta Horticulturae* (42 were published).

480 (free with registration) tickets were ordered to the Sunday evening opening reception.

305 tickets sold for the Wednesday evening barbeque.

123 tickets sold for the Thursday evening PAA banquet.

135 tickets sold for the Solanaceae/Genomics Banquet.

101 tickets sold for the Wednesday Agricultural tour.

37 tickets sold for the Spring Green tour.

Appendix 9. Registrants by Country.

Austria	1
Belgium	1
Chile	1
China	1
Denmark	1
Ecuador	1
Ethiopia	1
Jordan	1
Palestine	1
Poland	1
Ireland	1
Romania	1
Taiwan	1
Turkey	1
Venezuela	1
Guatemala	2
India	2
Kenya	2
Mexico	2
Puerto Rico	2
Russia	2
Switzerland	2
New Zealand	4
Spain	4
Australia	5
Colombia	5
Argentina	7
Scotland	8
Israel	10
Brazil	11
France	12
Japan	12
Peru	12
Germany	13
Korea, Republic of	13
England	14
Italy	15
Canada	20
The Netherlands	26
USA	319
Total: 42 countries	539 registrants

Appendix 10. Registration by Class.

331 early full conference
86 early students and post-docs
23 early companion
42 complimentary (30 invited speakers and 12 helpers or dignitaries)
4 early single day
42 late full conference
6 late student and post-doc
1 late companion
4 late single day

Total: 539 registrants

Appendix 11. Participant Charges.

Registration

Early	Late (after June 16)
Regular, \$300	\$425
Companion, \$175	\$275
Student and post-doc, \$175	\$275
Single day, \$175	\$275

Events for Purchase

Wednesday Agricultural Tour, \$40 (lunch subsidized by a donor)
Wednesday tour to Spring Green sights, \$65
Wednesday barbeque, \$48
Thursday banquets, \$55

Events covered by the registration fee

Sunday evening reception (two free drink tickets, cash bar, snacks)
Hot breakfasts on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday
Lunches on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday
Tuesday evening poster social (two free drink tickets, cash bar, snacks)
Refreshment breaks morning and afternoon Monday through Thursday

Pre-publication discount price of conference proceedings Solanaceae: Genomics Meets Biodiversity, \$50

Appendix 12. Our Information for Visa Applications.

Solanaceae 2006 Conference Visa Preparation

Due to severe delays in getting VISAs to enter the US, we recommend that you plan ahead and do NOT wait for your abstract acceptance to begin the process. You should allow up to 6 months to complete the process. DO NOT WAIT. For more information about obtaining a US visa, please visit <http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov>. Additional information may be found at the International Visitors Office. Individuals from selected countries can enter the US without a visa as long as they have a machine-readable passport, see [Web link] for more information.

To request letters of invitation to the Solanaceae 2006 Conference, please make your requests to Dr. John Bamberg (nr6jb@ars-grin.gov), USDA-ARS, US Potato Genebank, 4312 Highway 42, Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, USA. (Phone: (920) 743-9206, FAX (920) 743-1080).

To minimize the cost and effort of preparing letters of invitations, the PAA-Solanaceae organizing committee encourages individuals at the same location to coordinate their requests. In other words, if you know that someone else at your location is planning to attend the Solanaceae 2006 Conference and needs a letter of invitation, then please request your letters at the same time.

To assist in the preparation of the letter, please include the following information in your request:

- full name
- complete address
- telephone and fax number
- if applicable, the title of your poster or talk
- if applicable, the years that you have attended conferences in the United States