Four years ago, our membership approved the name change from the American Association of Cereal Chemists to AACC International. Currently, a little over one-third of our members reside in nations other than the United States. At the 2008 Annual Meeting in Honolulu, HI, (our first outside the continental United States), the Board of Directors began discussing the evolution of membership in a global economy. Our board represents many international interests. Jan Delcour in Belgium, Gerald Downey in Ireland, and Sergio Serna Salvidar in Mexico all have strong ties with researchers in other nations. Margaret Bath and Maureen Olewnik live in the United States, but have corporate responsibilities abroad. Of all the board members, I probably have the least international work but even I have mentored graduate students from over a half dozen nations.

Last April, the Membership Task Force chaired by Jim Dexter presented a report to the board. Among the task force’s recommendations was the formation of a Membership Committee to evaluate membership benefits, identify sources of new members, and continuously review all aspects of membership. AACC International has two committees whose sole purpose is related to members outside of the United States. The responsibility of the International Executive Council is to identify special needs of members outside North America and recommend programs and activities that will improve the value to international members and enhance the presence of AACC International. The charge of the International Member Forum (IMF) is to identify special needs of members in countries outside of the United States, and to enhance the presence of AACC International in those countries. Sound redundant? The board and the members of those committees agree that there is too much overlap. This year we will consider forming a new committee that specifically addresses the needs of members outside of the United States that will report to the Membership Panel. However, we will no longer restrict membership of any committee to persons who live outside the United States, just as we do not prohibit non-U.S. members from serving on any other administrative committees. We value all of our members and want to provide the best service possible to them. We initiated an innovative membership program for scientists working in countries with developing economies (CDE), yet retention of CDE members is low. For the sake of advancing cereal science in those nations, AACC International is committed to providing information to researchers in those nations.

The year 2008 was remarkable. The economic challenges faced by the cereal industry in the United States are no different than those in any other nation. Consumer attitudes, safety concerns, and regulations certainly may vary from nation to nation, but today we are interlinked in ways we never dreamed possible. So what does “International” really mean for our association? Nationalities change. Where you were born may not be where you were educated or work. Your employer may be multinational and ask you to work in different continents during the course of your career. As the cereal industry becomes more fluid with national lines blurring, so must our association adapt. The one constant is the association’s long history of providing leadership in cereal science, analytical methodology, and definitions for food labeling. We will continue to work in these areas to assist our members and their nations.

Can we capitalize on our diversity to advance cereal science? I believe that AACC International can serve as a hub for bringing together researchers from all over the world to solve problems concerning grains. Several of our members in Europe participate in the European Union’s HEALTHGRAIN project, which serves as a model for international collaboration on grain research and unites academic, government, and industrial partners. HEALTHGRAIN members will share their findings with us at the annual meeting in Baltimore, MD, September 13–16. I hope that our annual meeting will facilitate interactions among scientists and nurture a collaborative spirit. In Honolulu, the enthusiasm and excitement of meeting participants was obvious. Many valuable discussions were held in the hallways outside the meeting rooms. In this digital age, sometimes we just need to connect face to face. I hope to see you at one of our meetings this year—the C&E Whole Grain Global Summit in Newcastle, U.K.; the Milling & Baking Division Spring Technical Conference in Albuquerque, NM, U.S.A.; or the Annual Meeting in Baltimore, MD, U.S.A. If we cannot visit in person, please e-mail me (Mary.Camire@umit.maine.edu) to discuss your opinions on how AACC International can best serve its members.