

Thirty five years of history for the Tropical Agriculture Association (TAA)

Elizabeth Warham and Jim Watson



Dr Elizabeth Warham FRSB is Head of the UKTI Agri-Tech Organisation which supports more trade and investment in the sector. Previously she provided advice and support on food and water security issues to Sir John Beddington during his tenure as Government Chief Scientific Adviser in the Government Office for Science. She has expertise and experience in plant sciences from the International Centre for Wheat and Maize (CIMMYT), Mexico and technology development more broadly working closely with technological sectors and their user industries in the former Department for Trade and Industry technology programme. In DFID she managed research programmes to develop appropriate technologies for different agricultural production systems in low- and middle- income countries. She joined TAA as a student in 1979, Ex-Co in 1999, and took on the role of General Secretary in 2004.



Dr Jim Watson spent his working life in agricultural research and development, mainly cotton growing, and is now retired. He was resident in Africa for 16 years and South East Asia for 3 years; and from 1986 to 1992 was a consultant with Minster Agriculture. He has been a committee member of the Tropical Agriculture Award Fund since its inception.

TAA Timeline

- 1960 Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture (ICTA) absorbed into University of West Indies.
- 1978 ICTA Association UK established.
- 1979 ICTA Association renamed Tropical Agriculture Association (UK).
- 1983 Charitable status application failed. 1st Ralph Melville Memorial Lecture.
- 1985 New TAA tie.
- 1989 The Tropical Agriculture Award Fund (TAAF) formally launched in Hyde Park. Charitable status obtained for the TAA.
- 1993 First stand at the Royal Agricultural Show.
- 1997 Regional Convenors established in London/South East, Scotland/Borders, and South West.
- 2002 (UK) dropped from name of the Association. East Anglia regional group established. TAAF made its 100th Award.
- 2003 Association for Better Land Husbandry (ABLH) joined TAA and became a specialist group.
- 2004 TAA began hosting the UK Forum for Agricultural Research for Development (UKFARD).
- 2005 Overseas Branch established in India.
- 2006 1st Hugh Bunting Memorial Lecture at Reading University.
- 2007 Golden Year Reunion of TAA members who were ICTA graduates. Agri-Business Group joined as member of British Expertise (formerly BCCB).
- 2008 *Agriculture for Development* journal launched. All Party Parliamentary Group on Agriculture and Food for Development launched.
- 2009 First TAA Honours awarded. Environmental Conservation specialist group established. Overseas Branch established in the Caribbean.
- 2013 Overseas Branch established in South-East Asia.
- 2014 TAA celebrated 25 years as a registered charity and joined LendwithCARE. Overseas Branch established in the Pacific.
- 2015 Scotland and North of England established as two separate Groups. Overseas Branch established in Ireland.

TAA Presidents

1978-1982	Ralph Melville
1983-1989	Roger Swynnerton
1990-2002	Charles Pereira
2003-	Andrew Bennett

TAA Chairs

1981-1984	VC Robertson
1985-1996	T S Jones
1997-2005	Roger Smith
2006-2008	Amir Kassam
2009-2013	Chris Garforth
2014-	Keith Virgo

Early years in Trinidad

The Tropical Agriculture Association grew out of the previous Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture (ICTA) Association. The college was established in Trinidad in 1924 and for some 30 years was the best known source of advanced training for UK and Commonwealth tropical agriculturalists. The Association of the ICTA consisted of diplomates of the college and correspondingly constituted the largest professional association of tropical agriculturalists in the Commonwealth for many years. In 1960, the college was absorbed into the University of the West Indies (UWI) Faculty of Agriculture and its international training function gradually diminished. Training of UK professionals continued through diverse channels such as the Associate Professional Officers Scheme with the help of the British Government, as well as through UK and Commonwealth Universities. In this new situation, the ICTA Association was no longer self-renewing and it was clear that a new broader-based and more modern professional association was required.

A new start in the UK

The ICTA Association UK was formed in 1978 and the first newsletter was issued from the Land Resources Development Centre, Tolworth Tower, Surbiton. Ralph Melville CMG was President and David Lang was Honorary Secretary. The 1978 AGM and Reunion was held on 21 July at the Royal Over-Seas League with subscriptions collected from 141 'active' members. Some members belonging to the Institute of Biology suggested ICTA members should join the Institute, but the arguments against were agreed at the AGM.

Establishment of the Tropical Agriculture Association

The ICTA Association was renamed the Tropical Agriculture Association (ICTA Association) at the 1979 AGM, and membership was opened to all qualified persons practising in tropical agriculture in the broadest sense, including associated disciplines. An annual subscription of £2 was levied, and John Dunsmore was appointed Honorary Treasurer. Activities of the Association were expanded with three Newsletters published each year, the first in June 1980.

In 1980, the AGM and Reunion moved to the Regent Palace Hotel, with sixty members attending. A working party to examine the prospects for development of the new Association was approved. Although the group defined services which could be offered, the impracticality of hiring secretarial assistance meant that most effort was directed to the preparation of brochures, to attract both corporate and individual members.

Permanent Committee appointed

In 1981, the working party recommended the establishment of a permanent committee to take over and run the new, more active Association. A new Chairman was elected at the AGM

and Ralph Melville became President. The first Committee Meeting (with President, Chairman, General Secretary, Membership Secretary, Treasurer, and Editor) was held on 29 September 1981, to address administrative improvements, arrangements for meetings, publications, and long-term policy. The President nominated four individuals to attend future meetings of the Executive Committee. Membership had increased from 80 the previous year to 300. Professor Bunting was made Chairman of a Sub-Committee to draw up a Constitution for TAA and in this connection it was agreed that the title of the Association should in future be the Tropical Agriculture Association (United Kingdom), a title which would clarify the identity of the Association and facilitate its relationships with similar bodies in other countries. Another important decision taken was to investigate the possibility of establishing a computerised register, with CVs of members interested in employment, with the information to be available to members and sponsors. Sub-Groups of the Committee focused on University, Private Sector, and Public Sector constituencies.

Application for charitable status

In 1982, advice was sought from a Solicitor, and amendments to the Constitution were proposed to enable the Tropical Agriculture Association to achieve charitable status. The key focus incorporated into the Constitution was: *'to be an association of practitioners (including research workers, teachers and advisors, development specialists, and students) of the science and practice of agricultural and rural development in those regions of the earth that have tropical, sub-tropical and winter rainfall climates, particularly to developing countries as defined by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and to emerging economies in other parts of the world, and to promote the public recognition of the work of such practitioners, whether or not they are members of the Association, as a field of professional endeavour.'*

In 1983, the initial application for charitable status for the TAA was unsuccessful: more evidence was needed that the TAA benefitted non-members: in effect the third world population.

Ralph Melville Memorial Lectures

On 8 December, 1982, A R Melville sadly passed away at the age of 70. The first Ralph Melville Memorial Lecture was delivered by Sir Charles Pereira in December 1983 on *Tropical Weather and Some Agricultural Consequences*. Professor Hugh Bunting gave the second Memorial Lecture on *Constraints to Change in Agricultural Development*. The lecture has been delivered annually since then, following the TAA AGM.

Future role of tropical agriculturalists

An Open Forum on the future for Tropical Agriculturalists based in the UK was held on 28 March 1984 to address the decline in the number of young people gaining residential experience in developing countries. Following this, the

Executive Committee of the TAA established a Working Group to collect evidence with a view to defining the future role of tropical agriculturalists based in the UK, and to identify ways in which that role may be assured and developed. By October 1984, membership was over 500.

The TAA tie

The TAA tie, designed by David Betts with art work by Christine Wilkins, was launched in the Newsletter of April 1985. The background is a replica of the old ICTA tie consisting of broad bands of dark green and dark brown divided by a narrow light blue band. Superimposed on this background in gold thread is the new logo of the TAA.

Professional recognition

With effect from 6 April 1985, the Association was formally recognised as a professional body and was granted approval under section 192, Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1970. Submissions to Inspectors of Taxes for tax relief in respect of subscriptions to the Association could then be made.

Directory of CVs

The Directory of CVs was launched in 1985 and by 1994 had 137 entries. It was available in hardcopy until 2002, and re-launched on the website in 2008, searchable by skills and geographical experience. In 2013, it was consolidated into the main website under a wider 'Expertise' section allowing members to enter their own CVs online at no charge. Many of the registered members have reported positive responses from potential employers.

Understanding the tropical agriculture skills gap

By March 1986, there were 660 TAA members, with 490 using UK addresses, and 170 abroad. At the AGM in December, the Working Group defined the 'future role of UK-based tropical agriculturalists and ways in which their role might be assured and developed' and recommended the establishment of an 'Award Fund' to alleviate the 'experience gap' problem, to which commercial companies, charitable organisations, private individuals and benefactors could subscribe.

Improving the Newsletter

The Newsletter, first published in 1980, was an A5 sized typed booklet (Figure 1). In April 1987, the Newsletter took on a new printed format (32 pages in A4) and invited commercial advertisements for a charge of £60 full page, £30 half page, £15 quarter page. Each Newsletter had a yellow insert including details of forthcoming events; as well as a bank variation order form and bank standing order. In 2001, photographs were included in the Newsletter for the first time.

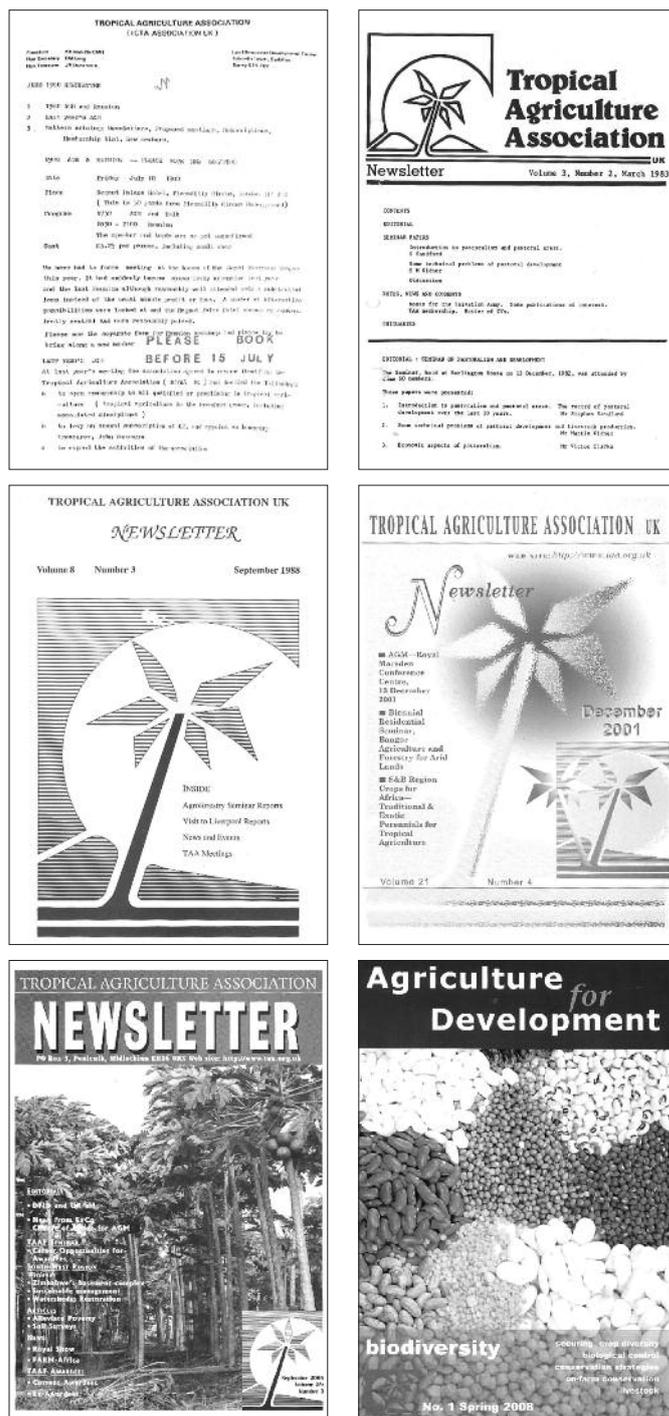


Figure 1. The evolution of the TAA Newsletter, from Volume 1 Number 1, published in June 1980, to the first issue of *Ag4Dev* in the Spring of 2008

Hosting the Annual General Meeting

In July 1987, the AGM was held at the Farmers' Club. The average age of members was 51 years and there were over 900 members. The report of the Working Group on the Future of British Tropical Agriculturalists was published in 150 hard copies and distributed free of charge. The annual membership fee was then £14 per year. In December 1988, the AGM moved to the Royal Marsden Hospital Conference Centre together with the 6th Annual Ralph Melville Memorial Lecture. The amended Constitution was adopted at this meeting. The Annual General Meetings continued to be hosted at the Royal Marsden Hospital Conference Centre from 1988 through to

2004, then at the Farmers' Club in 2005, after which it was relocated to the Royal Over-Seas League in 2006, where it has been hosted to this day.

Launch of the Tropical Agriculture Award Fund and new charity status

The Award Fund Sub-Committee was set-up for the first time in 1987 and potential donors (companies, corporations, foundations) were approached by letter for contributions. The Tropical Agriculture Award Fund was formally launched at the Festival of Food and Farming held in Hyde Park from 4-7 May 1989 and hence forward was known as the **TAAF**. Newspapers estimated that some 900,000 people attended to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Royal Agricultural Society of England, the 100th anniversary of the Ministry of Agriculture, and coincidentally, the 10th anniversary of the TAA! By this time, £14,000 had been raised for the TAAF.

TAAF funded the first long term awards for a minimum of six months in 1990; but introduced the three month MSc awards in 2006 in response to demand. Each awardee has been allocated a member of the Sub-Committee as a personal mentor. Each year, one awardee has given a presentation on their overseas assignment at the Annual General Meeting, and awardees are encouraged to give presentations at their former University to encourage applications for the award scheme.

In 1989, the TAA became a registered Charity Number 800663, in recognition of the establishment of the Award Fund.

Links to other Associations

In 1990, the TAA jointly hosted a one day symposium with the Institute of Biology on *Britain's contribution to International Agriculture* at the Royal Society Conference Room; and a joint seminar on *Intermediate Technology* with the Institution of Civil Engineers. Annual joint meetings were held with the Institution of Agricultural Engineers until 2002. The TAA became a member of the newly established Society of Biology (formerly Institute of Biology) in 2012.

Membership and data protection

In 1990, TAA was granted exemption from registration under the Data Protection Act (which involves payment of fees and the making of returns) on the understanding that it is an unincorporated members 'club' holding data '*relating only to the members of the club, which data are used only for the purpose of distributing articles or information to the members*'.

The membership list was circulated in hard copy from 2002 to 2007 to members for their private use only, to enable them to make and retain contact with 'like-minded colleagues' and to encourage co-operation between members to advance the aims of the Association. The membership database was thoroughly overhauled in 2013/14 to improve tracking of different subscription rates and changes of addresses, remaining available to all members through the TAA website.

Purseglove Memorial Lecture

The Purseglove Memorial Lecture was established in 1992 and continued through 1993 and 1994. A computerised database was established in 1993, and the Executive Committee (ExCo) met six times a year at the Linnean Society. In 1995, ExCo included both Private Sector and Research Sector representatives. A Central Region Group also started, and met at the Royal Show each year.

Members' surveys

A survey in 1996 found that as many as 2,500 of the estimated 10,000 expatriate professionals in tropical agriculture were British. The contribution of these individuals towards the development of both commercial agriculture and the small farmer sector has been highly significant. In June 1997, the TAA published a brochure on TAAF with a summary of all awards and subsequent career paths for the TAAF awardees between 1990 and 1996. It contained 55 young graduates sponsored in more than 25 countries, on projects of value to those countries, with a disbursement of £46,800 of its income in grants.

A membership survey in March 1999 showed that 97 percent of respondents read the Newsletter, 32 percent of respondents said they had written for the Newsletter, some as a letter to the Editor. About 40 percent had attended an AGM, although only 8 percent had spoken there. With regard to the Royal Agricultural Show, 30 percent had visited the TAA show stand, and 9 percent had helped host the stand at one time or another. For TAA regional meetings the figures were low, with 31 percent having attended, 16 percent spoken, and 4 percent helped to organise the meetings. New members and members leaving the Association after 2 years in arrears were named in the Newsletter each year. Members under 25 years of age were entitled to a student membership.

Seminars and visits

Biennial Weekend Seminars were hosted at the Universities of Cambridge in 1995, Oxford in 1997, Edinburgh in 1999, and Bangor in 2001. Initially, the General Secretary had hosted all seminars in London and the regions until March 1997, when Regional Convenors were established for London/South East, Scotland and Borders, and the South West. The South West Regional Group hosted their AGM in January each year.



Figure 2. Participants at the TAA Biennial Seminar, entitled *Agriculture and forestry for arid lands*, held at the University of Wales, Bangor on 15-16 September 2001.

Annual visits took place to the Experimental Horticultural Unit in Wye in 1990, Rothamsted Research in 1993, Oxford Forestry Institute in 1994, Chelsea Physic Garden in 1995, Imperial College in 1996, Ireland in 1997, University of Reading in 1998, Brogdale in 1999, Scottish Plant Breeding Institute in 2000, Kew's Millennium Seed Bank Project in 2001, Rothamsted Research in 2002, East Malling Research, NR International, and Cambridge University Botanic Gardens in 2003, Writtle College in 2004, CAB International and UNEP WCMC in 2005, and Organic Enterprises Ltd. in 2006. There was a regular stand at the Royal Agricultural Show from 1993 until the Show ceased operations after 2008.



Figure 3. TAA at the Royal Show, 2005

TAA 2010 and new services

During 2001, the TAA 2010 working group completed a lengthy process of widespread consultation with members on the future of the Association. The proposals were then discussed with members at a general meeting and subsequently endorsed at the AGM that followed. The '(UK)' was dropped from the name of the Association in 2002. A new Mission Statement was developed and included on the website, and the membership subscription increased. Members were offered access to the journal *Experimental Agriculture* and the CABI online database, which was sustained until 2011. ExCo responded formally to the DFID Consultation Document *Better Livelihoods for Poor People - the Role of Agriculture*, and some of TAA's points were incorporated in the final DFID Issues Paper on the subject.

New Specialist Groups, Regional and Overseas Branches

The Association of Better Land Husbandry was welcomed as a member of the TAA in 2003 and was established as one of the TAA Specialist Groups. At the same time the Agri-Business Group was formed, building on the strong foundation of an informal gathering of individuals who met monthly for a business lunch in Oxfordshire, under the auspices of Jim Turnbull's company Belmont Management Consultants (BMC). The same year the East African branch was established but folded within the year. Also during 2003, ExCo responded to a request from DFID to co-convene, together with the Appropriate Development Panel of the Institute of Civil Engineers, a seminar which had as its objective the identification of major, researchable issues to be addressed by a new DFID Research Strategy for 2005. The seminar, together with two other seminars - one on health issues and the other on social development issues - presented its report to DFID. The TAA/ICE seminar identified eight major areas which required DFID research support to make a significant contribution to attaining the Millennium Development Goals. Another Specialist Group, on environmental conservation, was established in 2009.

In 2004, Rothamsted International formally requested that TAA ExCo consider TAA hosting the UK Forum on Agricultural Research for Development. In 2005, an Overseas Branch was established in India, and the TAA joined the British Consultants and Construction Bureau (BCCB), which was of special interest to the Agri-Business group. TAA BCCB membership continued through British Expertise until 2012. Overseas Branches were established in SE Asia (2013), the Pacific (2014) and Ireland (2015); and the Caribbean Branch was re-established in 2014, after its earlier establishment in 2009. A convenor for corporate members was also established in 2014. The Scotland/North of England Regional Branch decided to split into two separate Branches in 2015, with occasional joint meetings to continue.

Hugh Bunting Memorial Lectures

In 2006, the first Hugh Bunting Memorial Lecture was hosted at the University of Reading, and these have continued each year to the present day. These, and the Ralph Melville Memorial Lectures at the AGM, have been promoted as high profile international public events, and the lectures recorded for wider dissemination to TAA members and the public.

New Business Plan and Sub-Committees

In 2007, the ExCo continued to strengthen and expand its partnerships; and forge new alliances to address common objectives. In this regard, ExCo paid particular attention to the *International Assessment of Science and Technology for Agriculture Development (IAASTD)* consultation processes and offered comments and suggestions. In addition, the actions proposed in the new *Business Plan: Strategic Directions for 2007-2010* were implemented, with efforts directed towards expanding its reach through the activities of special sub-committees (on Membership, Finance and Publications)

focusing on increasing the services offered to members and enhancing the image and effectiveness of TAA. In particular, these sub-committees included younger members and returning TAAF Awardees, to attract and engage younger members in the Association. Members were contacted by email for the first time, since approximately 60 percent of members had email addresses.

Golden Year Reunion

At the AGM in 2007, photographs were on display of the 'Golden Year Reunion', along with briefs compiled from the last reunion. Several TAA members celebrated 50 years since they graduated from ICTA with a Diploma in Tropical Agriculture. Some had worked in the CGIAR, others in chemical industries and animal husbandry, some had become teachers in Universities and Agricultural Colleges, while one had become a Barrister of Law.

Launch of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Agriculture and Food for Development

During 2008, the Executive Committee convened two workshops with corporate members to explore the contemporary issues they faced and their service needs from TAA. As a result the TAA business plan was revisited and the role of TAA and how it might be rebranded was considered. The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Agriculture and Food for Development was launched on 21 October 2008 with addresses from Government Chief Scientists Professor Robert Watson (Defra), and Sir Gordon Conway (DFID). The report of the first APPG inquiry into the UK's role in tackling the challenge of Global Food Security up until 2050 was launched early in 2010, following a series of high-profile evidence sessions with key stakeholders. During 2010, the Group initiated a second inquiry on how the UK is helping meet the MDGs by revitalising sustainable agriculture and improving global food security in both the short and longer term, and in particular how it is supporting smallholder farmers in Africa and South Asia. Two written submissions were made by TAA members to this inquiry, and the TAA Chairman spoke on extension, education and training

for smallholders at an oral evidence session in December. The APPG continues to play an important role supported by the TAA and many of its Corporate members.

Agriculture for Development journal

The TAA Newsletter, originally focussing on contributions from members through Regional Groups, was transformed in 2008 into a new quarterly (later triannual) journal *Agriculture for Development* with invited articles and photographs from practitioners in the field. The new title encapsulated issues concerning conservation, sustainability and the environment foremost in the thinking of the younger generation at work in the 21st century. In 2013, it was further strengthened by the introduction of Special Issues on specific topics such as innovation systems, commercialisation of smallholders, climate change and agriculture, and soils.

A survey of members' views on the journal was undertaken during December 2014 and January 2015. Some 61 responses were received, representing about 10 percent of members. The average overall rating of *Ag4Dev* (on a 1-5 scale, where 1 is weak and 5 is excellent) was 4.1; with fourteen of the 20 regular features achieving an average rating of at least 4.00 and only the *Corporate Members' Page* dipping below 3.50. Most of the respondents thought the frequency of three issues per year, the number of Special Issues, the style, balance, and the presentation were 'about right'; some (nine) respondents thought it was 'not technical enough'. Responses to the suggestion of developing *Ag4Dev* into a peer-reviewed journal varied, with just over half of members advising against this idea.

Recognition of achievements - TAA Honours

The TAA Honours Panel was established in 2008 to consider nominations for 'Development Agriculturalist of the Year' in recognition of outstanding contributions to the science and practice of tropical agriculture, not restricted to TAA members. Nominations were also considered for Honorary Membership of TAA and TAA Awards of Merit. The first awards were made in 2009.

TAA Development Agriculturalist of the Year

- 2009 Philip Thornton for his contribution to a greater understanding of tropical agricultural systems in informing policies to address climate change, land use and poverty alleviation.
- 2011 Dr Nazmul Haq in recognition of his lifetime's work on underutilised crops for the alleviation of poverty, improved nutrition and the enablement of women in poor rural communities.
- 2013 Hugh Harries for coconut research and development, and making research work for farmers.
- 2014 John Witcombe for a lifetime's work developing novel participatory plant varietal selection strategies to breed crop varieties with higher yields and improved grain quality for farmers to improve livelihoods.

TAA Young Development Agriculturalist of the Year

- 2009 Jonathan Stern for his contribution to understanding of poverty reduction and environmental sustainability in Costa Rica.
- 2013 James Brockington for work on agroforestry in India and East Africa.
- 2014 Richard Bliault, for work on certification, with the Rainforest Alliance, of the first coffee supply chain in Tanzania, for 7,500 farmers.

TAA Awards of Merit

- 2009 Ian Hill for his contribution to development and analysis of TAA rebranding questionnaire.
- 2009 Francis Shaxson as Land Husbandry convenor and contribution to conservation agriculture.
- 2009 Mike and Mollie Long, Ted Wilmot and Henry Gunston for organising the TAA stand at the Royal Show.
- 2010 Amir Kassam for his contribution over many years to the sustainability of smallholder agriculture through research, teaching, advocacy and public education.
- 2010 FARM Africa for their contribution to agriculture since 1985 through training and support for poor rural communities in improving their food security and livelihoods.
- 2010 Royal Agricultural College for their innovative 'Africa Land and Food Fellowship' programme and 'Africa Fellowship Trust' initiative.
- 2011 Garry Robertson for his service to TAA as Chief Editor and Trustee for 10 years.
- 2011 John Landers OBE for his contribution over many years to the science and practice of conservation agriculture for development.
- 2012 Tony Reynolds for demonstration and promotion of transformational change in agricultural production.
- 2012 Hugh Brammer for many years of service to TAA's publication and advisory work, and his wide ranging professional contribution to agriculture for development.
- 2014 John Russell for his service as Chairman of TAAF Committee, Convenor of the SW Group, and a Trustee of the Bicton Overseas Agricultural Trust (BOAT).
- 2014 Antony Ellman as Chairman of the TAAF Committee since 2006 and for 20 years promotion of Artemisia cultivation by small farmers, for the antimalarial drug artemisinin.

Updated website

The new TAA website, with its modern and user-friendly image supported by comprehensive and easy to navigate content, established in 2011, was further refined in 2012. The range of information made available was expanded: with job and business opportunities (including the consultants' directory and technical advisors), *Reflections* and *Opinion* pages, and information on funding and resources available. A new 'email alert' feature allowed members to receive details of new updates on the website. The TAA brochure was also updated.

Twenty five years as a charity

In 2014, TAA celebrated 25 years as a registered charity and enhanced its charitable status by joining LendwithCARE. Operated by CARE International this is a peer-to-peer lending relationship with individuals in the UK raising micro-finance to help entrepreneurs in developing countries to lift themselves out of poverty. Generous contributions from TAA and individual members have strengthened TAAF, enabling it to support 141 long term award for a minimum of six months between 1990 and 2015, and 83 short term (MSc) awards for a maximum of three months between 2006 and 2015. A total disbursement of £221,445 has been made in support of these awards in 53 countries. The TAAF Committee is now considering establishing a formal Trust to accumulate funds and income more efficiently. Active membership of the TAA was 613 individual members and 22 corporate members.