



Bio

Vincenzina Caputo is an Associate Professor at Michigan State University since 2016; before MSU, she was an Assistant Professor at Korea University, a Research Associate at the University of Arkansas, and a Post-doctoral researcher at the University of Bologna. Her research uses cutting-edge methods to study how people make food choices and how these choices impact the food system, supply chains, and policy. She has published 50 articles in scholarly journals including *AJAE*, *ERA*, *JEBO*, *AEPP*, and *Food Policy*. She received grants from associations/foundations (the Food Industry Association, Farm Foundation, etc.) and government (USDA-NIFA, etc.). She is an active member in several AAEA Sections and has held leadership positions ranging from member-at-large to section leader. She is an editor of *Q-Open* and on the editorial board of *AJAE*, the *ERA*, *Food Policy*, and *Agricultural Economics*. She is the co-director of the Survey Design and Experimental Methods in Ag. Econ workshop.

What is the biggest concern/problem facing AAEA?

One of the main challenges facing the AAEA is to provide sustained support and resources to close the opportunity gaps for graduate students, women, and underrepresented minorities, including first-generation college students. The AAEA membership includes about 25% of students, and given the increasingly competitive job markets, it is important to provide them with additional mentoring beyond traditional advising and preparation methods. Active feedback on research and publishing opportunities, networking with peers and scholars both within and outside the profession, and guidance on balancing professional and personal lives could benefit our students. Women and first-generation college students face even greater hurdles to become a professional and advance in the profession. Women earned only one-third of agricultural economics doctorates in 2019 according to [Offutt and McCluskey \(2021\)](#) and only 20% of all full professors in agricultural economics are women (Committee on Women in Agricultural Economics, 2020). Similarly, first-generation students face obstacles as the majority of academics come from backgrounds where at least one parent has a college degree ([Andrew Van Dam 2022](#)). This lack of balance in terms of diversity has serious repercussions in terms of establishing access to leadership positions and more generally achieving success within our profession and beyond.

What actions would you initiate to improve the situation described in your response to the previous question?

To further support our students, we could explore the development of a PhD mentoring workshop. The main objective of the workshop would be to offer PhD students from various U.S. institutions an opportunity to showcase their research, obtain feedback on their work (at

either an early or advanced stage), and acquire knowledge on publishing in top-tier field journals. Additionally, the workshop could offer guidance on navigating the job market and creating networks with peers and scholars from different institutions. By engaging key stakeholders, such as agricultural and food industry leaders, governmental entities, and academics, the workshop would align with the AAEA's ongoing efforts to mentor early- and mid-career professionals with diverse career paths.

In addition, to facilitate the career advancement of women and other minority groups we need to continually develop mentoring programs that also include initiatives to improve mentees' promotion packages, CVs, tenure essays, and other related materials. Lastly, we need to constantly improve our understanding of the specific challenges faced by different minorities in our profession. Gaining a better understanding will allow us to develop targeted action programs that create a more equitable community with a diverse and inclusive membership. This can be done by extending existing AAEA surveys to also include questions about the challenges first-generation college students and other minorities perceive within the association and endeavors they would like to see supported.

At the end of your three-year term, what changes/new initiatives would you have helped create?

Building on what was discussed earlier, I would like to see the PhD mentoring workshop and other mentoring initiatives like “Read My Promotion Package” to become an institution within our AAEA. These programs should be regularly updated and serve as valuable resources for our students, emerging female scholars and other underrepresented groups within agricultural economics and beyond. I would also like to see data from the census being translated into tangible action programs driven by the board and the general membership. By continuously implementing mentoring initiatives and extending existing survey tools, we can work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable community that supports the success and advancement of all its members, as also recently discussed in [Hirasuna et al. \(2023\)](#).