

President-Elect David R. Just, Cornell University



David R. Just is the Susan Eckert Lynch Professor of Science and Business in the Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management at Cornell University. He received his B.A. from Brigham Young University (1998) and both his M.S. and Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley (1999, 2001). David previously served three stints as Director of Graduate Programs, and as Area Coordinator for Applied Economics and Policy (an analog to department chair). David has served previously on the Board of Directors for the AAEA, the editorial board of the *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, and on numerous other committees. Professor Just has over 160 publications focusing on applications of behavioral economics to agricultural markets, including food

consumption decisions and risk response. His research and extension have been recognized repeatedly by the AAEA, including multiple quality of research discovery and outstanding journal article awards. He is a fellow of the AAEA.

What is the biggest concern/challenge facing AAEA?

There are two major (and closely related) challenges facing the AAEA:

- *Jobs and Funding:* First and foremost is the uncertainty regarding research funding and employment of applied economists. The recent events in the government sector are quite likely to have spillover effects on academia and the private sector.
- *Public Confidence:* As a recent New York Times article laments,¹ policymakers on both sides of the aisle, and the public, have lost confidence in economists in general, considering our work esoteric, disconnected from the issues of everyday relevance, and often lacking in credibility. This places us in a state of declining influence, interest, resources and ultimately employment.

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

Our strategy should include:

- *Communicate Credibly:* The AAEA is home to economists who are producing work that is of keen relevance to everyday households in the US and throughout the world. I regularly read the “Members in the News” emails detailing important work, like that addressing household responses to inflation, the likely impact of tariffs on farms, and a steady stream of essential inputs for timely policy decisions. We must renew and amplify our efforts to communicate the credibility and importance of this work in ways that communicate the trade offs effectively *and in a politically neutral way*.
- *Advocate for Economics, not Economic Policy:* The AAEA as a body should adamantly advocate for the importance of rigorous economic analysis in *all* policy settings, while avoiding advocating for policy outcomes. This includes advocating for research funding opportunities—and particularly those that are likely to provide value for society generally. This work will include a refocus of our public and government relations efforts, and increased investments in these important activities of common interest among all applied economists.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/10/business/economy/economists-politics-trump.html>

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

I propose an entire refocus of our public relations and government relations efforts.

- *Avoiding Click-bait Economics:* This requires a communication strategy that considers not only the likelihood of interest in works we promote, but also the impact that work might have on perceptions of credibility and relevance among the public and policymakers.
- *Doing What We Do Best:* Our organization was built on solid research addressing agricultural and resource economics. Our communication should amplify some of the important work that now flies under the radar solely because it is less likely to generate strong reactions. This may lead to short run declines in the number of clicks, but can help create a long term reputation for clear headed, credible and important contributions.
- *Distinguishing Our Voice:* I propose a renewed investment in CFARE, to amplify the voice of impartial economic analysis among policy circles. Our voice must be distinct from the think-tank economists that have in many cases poisoned the well for those engaged in impartial analysis including neutral-ground alternatives.
- *Strengthening Ties to the Broader Discipline:* Finally, I am concerned with the decline of the AEA as evidenced in the declining attendance at the winter meetings. Such a decline can risk further balkanization of economists among sub-disciplines. I propose that the AAEA should work with other constituent organizations to push for a more prominent voice in the organization events planning and program generally, with an eye toward greater collaboration and discourse between the sub-disciplines. A healthy and functioning AEA is essential to the discipline, and should help amplify the research of AAEA members within the discipline.
- *Bring Down Meeting Costs:* The costs of attending AAEA meetings is large enough that it can be a barrier to many who would otherwise benefit from participation. I propose an exploration of how such costs could be reduced while maintaining this vital service to members.