

**Bio**

Sarah Low is a Professor and Department Head at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Previously, she held the Heinkel Chair in Agriculture and served as an Extension program leader at the University of Missouri. Before she began her academic career, she researched the economics of farm and rural businesses at USDA's Economic Research Service in Washington, D.C. She holds a PhD from the University of Illinois, an MS from Purdue, and a BS from Iowa State. She is passionate about the land grant mission and enjoys leading and mentoring others in support of this mission. Her research and outreach work emphasizes facilitating domestic rural economic development, prioritizing policy-relevant issues. Currently, for AAEA, she is chair-elect of the CHAIRS section, active in several other sections, and serves on the Access Taskforce; she is past chair of CRENET and especially enjoys serving as a judge for Grad Student Section competitions.

**What is the biggest concern facing AAEA?**

Ensuring access to the AAEA community and network is essential. As a department head, I must ensure that students and early career professionals know about AAEA, feel comfortable navigating the annual meeting, and learn how to get the most out of sections, track sessions, and networking and leadership development opportunities. Serving on the AAEA Access Taskforce, I am now more aware of the need to help others tap into the wealth of resources and opportunities the AAEA community offers. The organization must play a larger role in this education effort because there are fewer young people in rural areas and fewer matriculating to our institutions, which may affect the profession's future (Nayga et al., 2024, AEPP). We have done much on member retention and access, from piloting on-site childcare to virtual meeting access to mentoring programs. Yet, more needs to be done. I believe educational and outreach efforts can do more to improve access to AAEA and raise awareness about the agricultural and applied economics profession, more generally. For example, my department will be present at this year's MANRRS conference and career expo to encourage minority undergraduates to consider graduate school in agricultural and consumer economics.

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

As an AAEA Board of Directors member, I would bring many perspectives and experiences to the challenges facing AAEA. I am not a typical agricultural economist—I have worked inside and outside academia. I have advised state and Federal policymakers on the farm and rural policy, led congressionally mandated ERS research, developed questions for the Census of Agriculture, and led data-sharing and USDA cooperative agreements. As an Extension program leader, I provided intellectual leadership for county educators and state specialists. As a department head, I have grown to understand the role

scholarship, education and outreach play in the viability of agricultural and applied economics as a profession. These experiences, combined with a desire to increase access to AAEA through education, lead me to suggest the following actions:

- Develop programs highlighting the benefits of membership to private and public stakeholders and offer practical tips for getting involved.
- Facilitate a multi-dimensional outreach strategy using differentiated mediums to reach diverse learning styles and generations, including written materials, short videos, social media campaigns, and online engagement tools showcasing the value of AAEA for potential members.
- Help sections coordinate activities to optimize member experiences during the annual meetings and develop member leadership skills.
- Reach high school students by partnering with the National Association of Agricultural Educators and having a presence at key 4-H, FFA, and MANRRS meetings.

Of course, I would want action preceded by input from members and stakeholders. Those of us who have been members for decades may need to wear the hat of the student or early career professional to explain the opportunities and resources available and how to navigate them.

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

By targeting access, especially for undergraduate and graduate students, we could increase the pipeline of potential AAEA members, which will complement ongoing efforts to mentor early- and mid-career professionals and retain members of the association. The result will be increased membership and awareness of the profession and its societal importance.