

President-Elect Titus Awokuse, Michigan State University



Titus Awokuse is Vice Provost and Dean of International Studies and Programs at Michigan State University (MSU) and a Red Cedar Distinguished Professor of Agricultural and Applied Economics. He previously chaired the Department of Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics at MSU (2015–2021) and the Department of Applied Economics at the University of Delaware (2011–2015). Awokuse earned his Ph.D. in Agricultural and Applied Economics from Texas A&M University. His research explores how international trade and food market liberalization policies drive economic growth, enhance food value chains, and improve food security. He served on the AAEA Board of Directors (2020–2023) and contributed to various AAEA Committees, including Mentoring, Trust, Selected Paper, Galbraith Award and Forum Committees. His leadership extended to the Executive Board of the International Agricultural Trade Research Consortium (2019–2022) and as Chair of the AAEA-NAAEA Section. He served as co-editor of *Agricultural and Resource Economics Review* and was Lead Guest Editor for *Food Policy*. Elected an AAEA Fellow in 2024, his leadership and research have left a lasting impact on global agricultural and applied economics.

What is the biggest concern or problem facing the AAEA?

The landscape of higher education is undergoing profound shifts, marked by significant changes and increasing scrutiny regarding the value and relevance of our work. For members of the AAEA, one pressing challenge is ensuring continuous access to external funding to sustain research and outreach activities. Historically, much of our research has been supported by grants from federal agencies such as USDA, EPA, NSF, and USAID. However, the future of public funding appears uncertain, with potential declines in allocations and a growing unpredictability in the funding process. These shifts signal an urgent need for a strategic response from the AAEA community.

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

To address the pressing challenges of declining public funding, AAEA members must prioritize efforts to diversify funding sources. This entails fostering deeper partnerships and collaborations with the private sector, including businesses and philanthropic foundations. Expanding the funding base will ensure the resilience and sustainability of agricultural and applied research, enhancing its relevance and impact within a rapidly evolving academic and societal landscape. A deliberate and proactive strategy is required—a process of thoughtful soul-searching and reimagining how we think and operate. One essential step to consider is the formation of an AAEA task force dedicated to assessing and developing more diversified funding approaches and how to better disseminate to AAEA membership. This could include organizing symposia and sessions focused on *how* we conduct our work, complementing those centered on the session focused on findings of *what* we do. By adopting these strategies, AAEA can build a robust and diversified funding model, ensuring the longevity and growth of our research and outreach activities.

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

By the end of my term, I aim to have fostered meaningful collaborations and developed a comprehensive

engagement strategy to strengthen AAEA's partnerships with the private sector. This initiative could include expanding corporate sponsorships for our annual meetings, drawing inspiration from successful models implemented by other professional associations. Additionally, I envision deepening our collaboration with private philanthropic foundations to bolster the AAEA Trust and other endowments, ensuring robust support for essential programs and activities. To sustain these efforts, the establishment of a Private Sector Relations Committee—designed to complement the existing Government Relations Committee—could provide the necessary framework to cultivate and maintain these vital partnerships.