David 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, and currently serves as leader of the Applied Economics and Policy area in the S.C. Johnson College of Business. He established Cornell’s professional master’s program in Applied Behavioral Economics, and is the Director of the Institute for Behavioral Economics and Consumer Choice. Just has pursued a research program applying behavioral economics to both food policy and agricultural production. His work on consumer behavior has resulted in heavy involvement in extension efforts promoting improved child nutrition across the country. His award winning research is widely published in agricultural economics, public health and public policy journals. He has previously served as AAEA director (2014 – 2017), AJAE editorial board member (2010 – 2014), and is completing his term as the President of the Northeastern Agricultural and Resource Economics Association.

**What are the biggest challenges and opportunities for AAEA?**

The last year has seen our association take active and public stands on a variety of issues related both to funding, and the way in which the US government engages and manages its research resources. These events underscore a longstanding challenge facing the AAEA and an emerging danger we must address. The longstanding challenge is to develop a coherent and effective strategy for engaging with and communicating with both policymakers and government agencies. The challenge is to remain a distinct, respected and apolitical source of sound research on applied economic policy while meeting member expectations to advocate for the field of agricultural and applied economics. In addition to the challenges we face in Washington, D.C., the field of economics generally has come under severe scrutiny for its often intolerant and combative atmosphere. This problem stretches beyond anonymous online discussion groups and unfortunately taints much of the discipline including many of our most respected departments. The AAEA has done some work to change this culture, and has the opportunity now to play a key role leading this charge to improve the work culture and atmosphere in applied economics.

**What actions would you initiate to address the challenges and opportunities described in your response to the previous question?**

Given the substantive changes in Washington, DC, it is time for a reassessment of the AAEA strategic approach to government communications. Recent board actions have allowed the AAEA to advocate on policy issues that relate to support for research (e.g., funding). We must find a sustainable approach for both our efforts to connect members with policymakers, and our efforts to influence policy that affects the ability of publicly employed applied economists to effectively address their core mission. Moreover, we must protect our status as an apolitical organization, which means we must be careful in separating these two vital functions from one another.

While we are not above reproach, the AAEA has long been known as a relatively friendly oasis in which to present research and receive meaningful and reasonable feedback. We should build on this reputation both by striving for a higher standard of behavior and ideals for our members, and by promoting the resulting atmosphere as a real strength within the broader field of economics. Many professional associations are developing codes of conduct to discourage bigotry or bullying within the confines of association meetings. I see these efforts as an important, but incomplete, step in creating a more productive and welcoming atmosphere and complementary to our production of high quality research, extension, and instruction. Additional efforts to promote, highlight and reward a positive presentation atmosphere can help cement a culture of positive feedback. Moreover, as we have increased the broad array of applied economists attending our meetings, we should promote our meetings to a broader economic audience as a space in which diverse research and diverse researchers are welcome.

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

At the end of my term I hope to have created a transparent and functional apparatus that will allow members seeking to connect their research to government greater opportunity to share their work, and at the same time help the AAEA to be a rapid and relevant advocate for agricultural and applied economic research support broadly. I hope additionally that we will be able to increase membership by building on our strong and positive presentation atmosphere and strengthening our substantial mentoring efforts. Ultimately, I believe having a broader and more diverse membership, in addition to having a rational and reasoned program for government relations, will strengthen the benefits that all AAEA members enjoy.