Dawn Thilmany McFadden is a Professor in the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics (DARE) at Colorado State University since 1997, with a B.S. in Public Service and Administration from ISU (1990), and a M.S. (1991) and PhD (1994) in Agricultural Economics from University of California-Davis. She has over 90 peer-reviewed publications and presented to over 400 academic, industry and policy audiences. She is co-Director for CSU’s Regional Economic Development Institute, Chaired the Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council and co-leads the CSU Food Systems team. She collaborated with several USDA agencies including the ERS, AMS and NIFA. She has served on the AAEA Board, chaired the Selected Paper committee, is currently on the AJAE editorial board and represented the AAEA on USDA’s Advisory Board on Research, Extension, Education and Economics for six years. She also held leadership positions with the WAEA and FDRS.

What are the biggest challenges and opportunities for AAEA?
To be optimistic, I want to start with all the opportunities that AAEA now faces because of the vision and investments initiated by leaders over the past couple of decades. For newer AAEA members, the role of sections and committees in the organization is what they have always known. Yet, for those who have seen them become vital “enclaves” for members to find their networks, peer groups and initial leadership roles, it has been heartening to see their effectiveness in allowing smaller communities of practice to flourish within our profession. That said, we still face the challenge of making sure that AAEA offers enough perceived value to all of our members, regardless of their career orientation (field, professional role (research, teaching, extension), type of employer (government, industry, academic, nonprofit), or stage. Fortunately, there is much for AAEA members to unite behind: for example, the profession’s quick response asking USDA officials to carefully consider the full implications of the potential repositioning of ERS and NIFA was a show of strength.

What actions would you initiate to address the challenges and opportunities described in your response to the previous question?
We must continue to embrace this portfolio of topic- and interest-related sections, while also facing the challenge of keeping a cohesive voice and set of valuable activities (meetings, journals, workshops) under the broader umbrella of the AAEA. That includes continuing to elevate our presence and collaborations with allied organizations, focusing on ASSA and the regional/international ag econ associations. Looking forward, I would strive to engage and partner with an even broader set of organizations (natural resource management, health and nutrition, data sciences, agri- and food business and management, the agricultural Tri-societies). One of the specific goals of this broader engagement is to continue recent efforts to elevate the visibility of AAEA among policymakers and the media. To effectively motivate the agricultural, food and natural resource research, education and outreach agenda, AAEA should use our members’ achievements to justify better public support for the data, funding and programming resources our members leverage so well.

At the end of your three-year term, what changes/new initiatives would you have helped create?
I am most excited about building on initiatives and investments already initiated by the organization to make sure they are as impactful as possible. Specifically, we should continue to offer and diversify the mentoring and professional development programming that was revived in recent years, such as the mid-career workshop being held in Boston in Summer 2019.

In addition, I hope to further leverage the expertise within the government relations committee (that was catalyzed by the USDA ERS and NIFA conversation) to innovate ways that our field and its members’ interests can be better understood among policymakers. The effectiveness and impacts of many of the data products, research initiatives, Land Grant programming and technical assistance projects authorized and funded within the Beltway are reflected in our member’s accomplishments. So, we must continue to tell those stories in the media, among our government partners and across other ag, food and natural resource disciplines.