Scott Swinton (http://www.afre.msu.edu/people/swinton) is Professor and Associate Chairperson in the Dept. of Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics at Michigan State University. His research examines how technology, information, and incentives shape farm management and its environmental consequences in the USA, Latin America, and Africa. It has been cited nearly 6,000 times (Google Scholar). As AAEA director in 2012-15, Scott co-designed its strategic plan and co-founded the Land, Water and Environmental Economics (ENV) section. He has been Case Study Editor of Review of Agricultural Economics, associate editor of the AJAE (and 2 non-AAEA journals), member of two National Academy of Science panels, Aldo Leopold Leadership Fellow, and U.S. representative to IAAE. Scott received Michigan State’s top Outstanding Faculty Award, in part for mentoring graduate students, 10 of whom have won thesis awards, 3 from AAEA. He studied Economics and Political Science (BA, Swarthmore) and Agricultural and Applied Economics (MS, Cornell; PhD, Minnesota).

What are the biggest challenges and opportunities for AAEA?
AAEA members inhabit an increasingly competitive professional world. The missions of our colleges, agencies, businesses, and research institutes have broadened from agriculture to food, energy, health, climate, water, value chains, and beyond. Dedicated funding has eroded, but potential funding sources have expanded. Job market candidates face broader opportunities, but more intense competition. Our journals face new competitors, including other media. We are challenged to communicate the value of what we do to more diverse audiences, both to attract resources and to demonstrate impact.

At the same time, our skills and focal areas are in greater demand than ever. Calls to exploit "big data" and to conduct field experiments play to our strengths in empirical economics. Likewise, rising public interest in food, health, land, energy, and environment creates opportunities to add nontraditional members to our otherwise stable membership base.

What actions would you initiate to address the challenges and opportunities described in your response to the previous question?
Under the 2014 strategic plan developed while I was on the board, we began initiatives for mentoring, improved communication, and government relations that merit continuation. We added new sections that mainstream new topic areas and decentralize leadership, and we expanded summer meeting access via more posters and lightning sessions.

New actions I propose include: 1) more prominent AAEA sessions at the winter ASSA meetings plus an area for job market candidates to network with mentors; 2) strategizing with our journal editors about expanding our appeal to readers; 3) workshops and online tools to build media skills to help AAEA members shape and diffuse their messages more effectively than can be done by public relations staff; 4) encouraging more mid-year AAEA-sponsored symposia where 50-150 members engage on special topics, giving the deeper professional feedback possible in more intimate settings.

At the end of your three-year term, what changes/new initiatives would you have helped create?
In addition to its stimulating summer meetings, the AAEA would have growing prominence at the winter ASSA meetings, attracting new members and improving placement of AAEA-affiliated job candidates. Through those meetings and smaller, topic-focused symposia, our members would find more opportunities for enriching exchange of ideas. Our journals would see rising citation rates not only for their rigorous analyses, but also for more topics that pique demand-side reader interest. The growing skill of AAEA members at crafting and targeting their research messages would enhance their impact both in our own journals and beyond. A growing membership would appreciate the AAEA both as a supportive community and as a forum for stimulating exchange of ideas in applied economics and management.