

Senior Section Report
AAEA Section Leaders Meeting
Sunday, July 27 2014
Minneapolis, MN

On behalf of the members of the Senior Section, thanks to Sarah Kenner and to the AAEA Board for giving us this opportunity to share this information about the recent activities of the section.

The Senior Section endorses the concept of sections, and the important role they play in developing program content for the annual meetings. Unfortunately, I am not sure this role is well understood and appreciated by the general membership of AAEA, especially those members not involved in one or more sections.

Sections bring together AAEA members with common interests. That is an important role. However they do not exclude overlapping interests, or “balkanize” the association since 1) any AAEA member can belong to as many sections as she/he has interests, and 2) sections commonly join with other sections to co-sponsor track sessions and invited paper sessions. For example, for this meeting in Minneapolis, the Senior Section is sponsoring seven track sessions, and a session which has been elevated to an invited paper session. Five of these track sessions are co-sponsored with five other Sections. The invited paper section is also co-sponsored with the Latin America Section (LAS). This expands our talent pool for presenters and allows us to deal with broader issues than might otherwise be the case.

While sections have been valuable in helping develop content for the annual meetings, it is time to move to the next level of usefulness. There may be proactive projects we should be undertaking in teaching, research and extension. In the last year, some Senior Section members have expressed interest in having a section blog that would provide opportunity for members to debate and express views on topical issues. Our incoming Chair, Gene Nelson, may try to make a Section blog a reality in the coming year. The point is, as Sections mature, we can expand into roles that enhance the value of belonging to AAEA, and recharge the vibrancy of our profession.

The Senior Section is somewhat different from other sections in that we represent a category of AAEA members rather than a subject matter or sub-disciplinary interest. Because our members typically don't have to worry about tenure, and since many, though still working, are in the synthesizing and integrating stages of their careers, we have a tendency to be more interested in "big picture" issues which may cut across two or more sub-disciplines. Also, we try to identify new and emerging issues and bring them to the attention of the profession before they get "mainstreamed." For example, last year, we sponsored a session on the economic and environmental implications of "fracking," with the hope of stimulating more research on this hot topic. This year, we have a track session on income inequality, and we supported an organized symposium that focuses on possible new and significantly different roles for the Land Grant universities in the area of life-long learning.

This leads me to a related point. It appears that the sections don't all approach the selection of topics for track sessions in the same way. As I understand it, some send out a general call for proposals and then select from those submitted. Our approach is to identify hot topics at the annual meeting, share this list with our members for augmentation and refinement, and then find coordinators to organize sessions around these topics. Thus, before we start looking for presenters, we have some ideas about what we want the session to cover. We look for the best coordinators or organizers wherever we can find them, not necessarily someone in our Section. We try to have our topics identified and organizers putting sessions together by the middle of September. So, from August to October, our Chair-Elect is very busy making sure all is coming together as planned. In the initial phases of organization of sessions, we reach out to one or more other Sections which we feel may have an interest in joining us for specific topics. Of course, we are open to requests from other sections to co-sponsor one of their sessions if the sessions are of interest to us. But we try to identify those opportunities early so both parties can have influence on the content of the session.

Co-sponsoring allows the Senior Section to influence a larger number of track sessions. Last year, we sponsored or co-sponsored six track sessions plus an invited paper session. This year we sponsored or co-sponsored

seven track sessions and an invited paper session. In addition, we encouraged an organized symposium we could not count because we ran out of allocation.

Once sessions have been accepted by AAEA, it is important that they be well-attended. This year, each of our sessions has been featured in an article in *The Exchange*. The manuscript for each article is emailed via the list-serve to Senior Section members who are encouraged to share the article with colleagues. In addition, we sent copies of the articles to other sections whose members we felt might have interest in those topics.

This year, we had one session selected for an invited paper session. That session is entitled “Major Factors That Will Impact the Role of Latin America in Meeting Future Food Demand.” Our co-sponsor partner is the Latin America Section. I was very pleased to learn that one of the presentations in that session has received the LAS 2014 Outstanding Selected Research Paper Award. That paper is entitled “Impacts of the Drug Trade on Latin America Food Production.” Co-Authors are Marco Palmer, Louis Ribera and David Bessler.

Finally, we teamed with the Teaching, Learning and Communications Section to co-sponsor a major post-conference workshop at this year’s meeting. Our section has long been concerned with the issue of economic literacy. The Federal Reserve Banks of St. Louis and Minneapolis share that interest, and are joining us to host an excellent workshop on Wednesday at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. The workshop is titled, “The Role of Agricultural and Applied Economics in Supporting Macroeconomic Literacy.”