

## AALA PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

*Michael Eugene Traxinger*

The American Agricultural Law Association (AALA) “[s]erves as the premier association for agricultural law and policy professionals” with the mission of “[i]nforming and engaging the law and policy professionals who serve all facets of the agricultural and food communities.”<sup>1</sup> As the 40th president of AALA and a former Production Editor of the *Drake Journal of Agricultural Law*, it is an honor and a privilege to write this address for the symposium issue covering the AALA’s 40th Annual Educational Symposium held in Washington, D.C., November 6–9, 2019.

### PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

In 2008, I discovered AALA. I was working in Washington, D.C. as a staffer on Capitol Hill when Amber S. Miller walked through the door where I worked. She was interested in learning more about me and quickly learned about my passion for agriculture and interest in the law. Within minutes she told me about AALA and strongly encouraged me to attend the 2008 Annual Educational Symposium in Minneapolis, Minnesota.<sup>2</sup> I attended my first symposium that year before I had even decided to go to law school. My experience at that symposium solidified my desire to attend law school and my decision to focus on agricultural law. Little did I know that one day, years later, I would follow in Amber S. Miller’s footsteps as the next AALA President.

AALA has been one of the foundations of my professional career. Since 2008, I have not missed one of AALA’s annual educational symposiums. For many of us, AALA is not just a professional organization dedicated to agricultural law policy, but a network of colleagues and friends. The relationships that are so easily created through AALA’s network is what makes AALA one of the best organizations to be a part of during your career. It is truly an absolute honor of my professional career to serve AALA as its 40th President. As we look ahead to the future of AALA, here is a short update on its current state of affairs.

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1. *About*, AM. AGRIC. L. ASS’N, <https://perma.cc/AX8Z-FNSW> (archived May 31, 2020).

2. *See Past Educational Symposiums*, AM. AGRIC. L. ASS’N, <https://perma.cc/A2GJ-XFAB> (archived May 31, 2020).

## 40TH ANNUAL EDUCATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

The success of the 40th Annual Educational Symposium held in Washington, D.C. November 6–9, 2019, was a testament to the many current and past leaders, board members, volunteers, and staff.<sup>3</sup> It was the most widely attended symposium to date with 415 attendees, including 146 speakers and moderators. The symposium featured 48 CLE sessions across five main tracks: policy, private practitioner, food law, in-house/corporate counsel, and new practitioner.

None of this would have been possible without the generous support of the following sponsors who contributed a combined \$200,000 in sponsorship dollars to make the symposium possible: Pork Checkoff; National Cattlemen's Beef Association; K&L Gates; United Soybean Board; Syngenta; Dunn Carney Ag Team; National Farmers Union; Davis Wright Tremaine LLP; Farm Credit; Mayer Brown; Gray Reed; Husch Blackwell; Stoel Rives LLP; Kirton McConkie; Faegre Baker Daniels; Thompson Coburn LLP; Dorsey; Drake University Law School; National Agricultural Law Center; Farm Foundation; Gray Plant Mooty; Alston & Bird; American Farm Bureau Federation; Iowa State University Center for Agricultural Law and Taxation; Phelps Dunbar; Livestock Marketing Association; Crenshaw Dupree & Milam, L.L.P.; Pacific Legal Foundation; Olsson Frank Weeda Terman Matz PC; Axinn; Penn State Law; Brick Gentry P.C.; Arent Fox; Chicago Title Insurance Company; Bock Agricultural Law and Policy Program, University of Illinois; National Council of Farmer Cooperatives; United Dairyman of Arizona; Indiana Pork; North Carolina Farm Bureau; CHS; Brady & Hamilton LLP; Kansas Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture; Indiana Farm Bureau; Michigan Farm Bureau; South Dakota Farm Bureau; Maryland Farm Bureau; University of Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics; Texas Farm Bureau; South Carolina Farm Bureau; Lawler & Swanson P.L.C.; Dillon Law P.C.; WARBA, LLP; University of Arkansas School of Law; Indiana Agricultural Law Foundation; James D. Bradbury PLLC; and Brown Winick.<sup>4</sup>

The Annual Educational Symposium concluded with a 40th Anniversary Awards Luncheon that recognized past presidents, past distinguished service awardees, and the 2020 recipients of AALA's awards.<sup>5</sup> A commemorative

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3. *Id.*

4. AM. AGRIC. L. ASS'N, WASHINGTON, D.C.: 40 YEARS OF SERVING AG LAW PROFESSIONALS 7-8 (Nov. 2019) <https://perma.cc/4FMA-CHDQ>.

5. *Id.* at 6.

AALA video is posted on the AALA website,<sup>6</sup> and photos of the event are available upon request.

#### AALA'S CONTINUED GROWTH AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

AALA continues to foster and grow with the help of its amazing members, board members, and committee chairs. The Ag Law Update Committee strives to publish three Agricultural Law Updates each year for members. The Awards Committee accepts and reviews nominations for each of AALA's professional awards given out at the annual symposium. The Distance Education Committee has a goal of putting on one webinar per month this year and is planning to offer a members-only CLE ethics webinar for the first time. This will be a new benefit for AALA's members that we hope to provide each year. The Marketing Committee continues to promote AALA on several social media platforms and continues to see growth in use. The Students Committee rolled out a new student writing competition this year. The Symposium Planning Committee is currently in the process of planning a great program for the upcoming 41st Annual Educational Symposium in Kansas City, Missouri, November 12–14, 2020.

The Membership Committee has continued to retain existing AALA members and recruit new AALA members. As the current membership year comes to an end on June 1, 2020, AALA has 589 professional and student members. This is an increase of 141 members from the prior year.

The Strategic Partnerships Committee is a fairly new AALA committee with the goal of looking for new opportunities for AALA to be engaged with other organizations. Lastly, the board established a new Governance Committee to review and make policy recommendations to the board going forward.

AALA is currently in a strong financial position due to the efforts of each of the committees and the board and its focus on AALA's strategic plan. The board will be reviewing AALA's strategic plan later this year. In preparation for the board's review, AALA surveyed the membership. The membership survey was completed by 114 members. Of those that completed the survey, 73% strongly agreed or agreed that AALA is among the top three sources of information about agriculture law and policy, and 92% strongly agreed or agreed that AALA membership is a good investment in their career. These numbers were an affirmation of the work that AALA does and continues to do. The survey also provided helpful feedback on the frequency of AALA communications,

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6. Am. Agric. L. Ass'n, *American Agricultural Law Association- 40th Anniversary Educational Symposium*, YOUTUBE (Nov. 13, 2019), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=2&v=\\_HRf7TGiuNQ&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=_HRf7TGiuNQ&feature=emb_logo).

webinars, and the use of AALA resources. AALA also held two feedback sessions on the strategic plan with committee leadership. The board is looking forward to reviewing all of this input as it updates AALA's strategic plan.

A year ago, the AALA board hired Braden Heidner Lowe & Associates as its association management firm with Scott Heidner as the designated AALA executive director.<sup>7</sup> Scott and his team have been serving AALA well, and the board recently expanded the scope of services provided by Scott and his team to include board strategic planning every three years, administration of monthly educational webinars, and administration of one CLE webinar per year. Scott and his team are here to support AALA as it continues to grow and provide more content and value to its members.

#### CONCLUSION

AALA is here for its members. It is comprised of an amazing group of leaders that are passionate about agriculture and food law and policy. If you are not an AALA member, I strongly encourage you to consider becoming a part of this professional organization of what we sometimes referred to as a group of "ag and food law nerds." It is a network unlike any other, and if you are not yet a part of it, I would strongly encourage you to join.

If you are an AALA member, you are the reason the organization is such a valuable resource to the legal and policy communities. Because of you, the organization is in a strong position to serve its members well into the future as it continues to grow and positively impact the world of agricultural and food law and policy. Please continue to be a part of AALA and build upon its strong history and legacy as the premier association for agricultural law and policy professionals.<sup>8</sup>

I hope we will see you in Kansas City, Missouri, November 12–14, 2020, for AALA's 41st Annual Educational Symposium.

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7. Amber S. Miller, *AALA Turns 40*, 24 *DRAKE J. AGRIC. L.* 1, 4 (2019).

8. *About, supra* note 1.