

Consolidated Notes from Consumer Awareness and Community Acceptance Workshop

August 30, 2016

Now, more than ever before, consumers are interested in how and where their food is produced. While this presents a tremendous opportunity for Kansas farmers, ranchers and agribusinesses to “tell our story” about continuous improvement in agricultural practices in Kansas, it also presents an enormous challenge in ensuring that consumers are not misled by food and animal activists opposed to the modern agricultural practices on which our industry relies. As we work to grow the agricultural industry, it will be important to work alongside Kansas communities to provide accurate information regarding modern production agriculture in order to prevent misconceptions from blocking growth opportunities. Identifying solutions to these challenges is key to establishing a trusting relationship with consumers and a welcoming environment for a growing and robust Kansas agricultural industry.

General Attendee Comments

- Technology is good for me but not for my food? How do we better communicate our story?
- The speed of commerce/information — easy and fast to share negative stories about agriculture.
- Consumer trust and confidence need to be regained.
- In communities where economy is suffering, we need transparency to show what agriculture can do to help communities thrive.
- We need to think about how we can provide shorter, more direct answers to consumers’ questions about agriculture.
- Balancing agriculture tradition versus science and technology advancements.
- Lack of support from organizations outside of the agriculture industry. Have we as a sector reached out to bridge new partnerships?
- Social media is an opportunity to educate but it can also be the worst when something negative goes viral.
- Developing relationships with consumers. We can communicate with facts and figures only. We have to build trust.
- Our industry needs to better understand the social science aspect — why do we/they think the way we/they do?
- Ag is a closed group. We need to preserve our lifestyle and be allowed to farm, but at the same time we are becoming more urban. How do we come together?
- People outside of agriculture are drawing that line to the producer from the consumer because they have a product to push (fear mongering).
- Would it be possible to develop a list of communities who would be open to an animal agriculture processing plant? (“Ag Friendly Community” designation)
- Ask young people what they think about agriculture and food.
- If you have time to prepare (ahead of an opportunity), shares positives alongside negatives.

- We need to do a better job of defining what sustainability is. How do we link producers with the big box retailers and create a “sourced from sustainable producer” label?
- Our industry struggles with consistency and the way we call or describe things.
- When a community does a strategic plan, is there a good cross section of citizens represented at the planning table?
- Update the signs showing how many individuals a farmer feeds.
- We all need to understand why we use the processes that we do and how it would affect the overall process if certain steps/parts are removed. Working ahead of the negative messages so we meet both the producers’ and the consumers’ needs. How can we show that we are already getting better?

Consumer Tear Sheet

Challenges

- Myths about agriculture
- People want to eat guilt-free food
- Many voices in the conversation with many choices
- Intentional mis-truth with ulterior motives
- The experts are those not involved in agriculture or food production
- “Perception is reality” (even though it is not)
- Many long and complicated answers for short questions
- Long-term investment in building consumer trust
- Lack of industry-wide efforts to collaborate on marketing and educational efforts (farmer to food company)
- Millennials have strong opinions about food production but our current “consumer outreach” efforts are not reaching them
- Misunderstand terms (hormone free, GMO, antibiotic free, etc.)
- Consumers need to hear both sides of the story ... not just the Sierra Club, et. al.
- Farmers fighting farmers — organic v. traditional
- Speed of commerce and speed of information — why is technology good on my phone but not on my plate?

Solutions

- Develop a relationship with consumers; invite to our farms, show what we do
- Promote a comfort with social science and communicating accordingly
- Be transparent with our everyday farm practices. Talk about why we use antibiotic and hormones, etc.
- Use same media that our target consumers use
- Not identical but unifying messages needed (within our industry)
- Create new perceptions
- Market “Kansas Agriculture” as high quality, healthy and safe

- Strong internet voice — “social media,” “Go-pro camera”
- Enhance the work of Kansas Farm Food Connection (state level) through industry and extension collaboration
- Digital targeting with native content about Kansas agriculture
- Farmers/ranchers need a champion at the retail/food service level

Community Tear Sheet

Challenges

- Transparency from companies wanting to locate in rural communities
- Diversity
- Quality of life for young people
- Educating the consumer
- Lack of education and awareness on the front end to greater business community
- Transparency v. confidentiality
- Education/open-minded community members
- Love of STEM yet war on “ag science”
- Awareness of job potential to retain young people
- Late communication with community leaders
- Lack of professional staff in some areas

Solutions

- Welcome and celebrate diversity of cultures
- Create fun/modern community environments for young families
- Farm tours
- Local to international tours
- Social media clips of production
- Use of social media
- Work within the popular culture to provide concise and correct answers

Sustainability Tear Sheet

Challenges

- Perception that sustainability only applies to organic or non-GMO
- Different regulations
- Used as a buzzword
- Sustain what? Too broad of a term
- Farms inherently consider environment, but do we (consumers) consider that sustainable?
- Communicating ways in which we are already sustainable
- Profitability = sustainability

Solutions

- All farmers and ranchers strive for sustainability — environmental and economic
- Work with regulations to prevent environmental problems that lead to misleading stories
- We can't just feed the rich. We have to develop relationships with groups outside agriculture to engage about food production
- If cost of production goes up, who pays? Is it the consumer or is it a cost to the dairy business, for example?
- Ag as a whole needs to go figure out our core values or message to then give out short but good answers to consumers
- Develop (easy) tools to help farmers/ranchers capture and quantify their sustainability.