

CONSUMER AWARENESS and COMMUNITY ACCEPTANCE

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 “share 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 today’s agricultural practices. As we work to grow the agricultural industry, it will be important to work alongside Kansas communities to provide accurate information regarding today’s agriculture and food system 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.

INITIAL LIST OF CHALLENGES AND IDEAS FOR POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Consumer Awareness

Initial List of Challenges

- Misleading information, oftentimes non-science-based, regarding tools and technologies used to prevent and treat animal diseases presents a tremendous challenge to the ability of farmers and ranchers to safely and judiciously use animal health products in their efforts to raise healthy animals. This also results in confusion among consumers about how animals are raised.
- Negative consumer perception of biotechnology threatens continued advancements that have enabled Kansas farmers to grow crops on land which previously would have not been suitable for crop production while also resulting in a reduced use of chemical inputs without sacrificing production capabilities.
- There is a lack of general understanding of water use within the animal and crop production industries.
- Consumers are increasing their demand for a wider variety of products that suit their preferences for the story behind the food.
- Terms like organic, natural, antibiotic-free, hormone-free and gluten-free, as well as misinformation about certain ingredients like high fructose corn syrup, are often used to imply food and feed safety and quality claims that are scientifically unfounded and are misleading to consumers.
- Farmers, ranchers and agribusiness leaders’ perception that science and economics are the only drivers in the consumer decision-making process.

Ideas for Potential Solutions

- Through websites, videos and field days, the agricultural and food industry can work together to increase consumer, community leader and influencer awareness of food and agricultural production in Kansas.

- Increase the knowledge of farmers and consumers about different uses for the specific grains and uses of different varieties to achieve desired characteristics.
- Encourage farmers and ranchers to participate in advocacy training programs, like the Beef Checkoff Program’s Masters of Beef Advocacy and National Pork Checkoff’s Operation Main Street, which provide public speaking training and unifying messaging to help “share our story.”
- Encourage farmers and ranchers to participate in voluntary quality assurance programs that provide education and tools regarding animal health, handling, management and more.
- Standardized marketing claims for advertised characteristics such as gluten-free, natural, organic, local, etc. could help consumers better understand the products they are buying.
- Increase the ability of farmers, ranchers and agribusiness professionals to communicate in a more meaningful way with consumers, via values-based communication, that allows for scientific and economic fact to be considered in the consumer decision-making process.

Community Acceptance of Agriculture

Initial List of Challenges

- Many Kansans may have misperceptions about large-scale animal agriculture and meat processing. Throughout the country this has presented challenges to farms and meat processing facilities looking to expand.
- As agribusinesses look to expand or grow, not only do they require an adequate supply of talent to meet their business needs, but they also consider the overall community offerings and support of agriculture. A lack of “pride in agriculture” has been noted as a challenge in some Kansas communities.

Ideas for Potential Solutions

- There is a need to work proactively with partners throughout the state to engage with community leaders and citizens about the positive attributes of agriculture operations and meat processing facilities. A more robust conversation will also allow for Kansas agriculture leaders to share how risks associated with agricultural operations and meat processors are mitigated.
- Develop a list of communities throughout the state that are interested in being home to agribusinesses, large-scale animal agriculture farms and meat processing facilities.
- Develop unified messages that address consumer outrage factors regarding controversial and, at times, complex issues — CAFOs, increased truck traffic, use of chemicals, etc.

Transparency

Initial List of Challenges

- Consumers expect greater access to information from all sectors of the food system — farms/ranches, food processors, retailers, restaurants, etc.
- Many food system leaders may feel consumers’ expectation for greater transparency within the food system calls to question leaders’ integrity.
- Each consumer has their own criteria for determining if an organization is deemed transparent.
- What information is public versus proprietary?

Ideas for Potential Solutions

- Utilize publicly available research to better understand consumers' definition of transparency along with specific areas of interest — Deloitte Analysis, The Center for Food Integrity, etc.
- Work with trade associations to aggregate sensitive data — specific farm/ranch data, etc.
- Partner with organizations which best understand consumers' expectations for greater transparency within the food system to ensure Kansas agriculture is a leader in the U.S. and around the world in meeting consumer expectations.

Sustainability

Initial List of Challenges

- Many individuals and organizations believe sustainability only refers to environmental factors while ignoring other factors affecting the sustainability conversation – economic sustainability, ethical sustainability, animal well-being, etc.
- Sustainability has become either highly polarized and/or ignored because of individuals' bounded rationality which leads to confirmation bias — going only to sources they agree with.

Ideas for Potential Solutions

- Work with key thought-leaders in Kansas (commodity associations, K-State Research & Extension, governmental bodies) to adopt a common set of principles that define Kansas agriculture's definition of sustainability.
- Work with Kansas farmers, ranchers and agribusinesses to ensure all are able to share their moral obligation and right to produce, process and market agricultural and food products that are sustainable as defined by Kansas agriculture.