

Conversations are changing to include farmers and ranchers

Animal Agriculture Alliance Summit attendees exploring how to protect their roots

May 3, 2018 – The future of food, consumer choice, sustainability and the connection farmers and ranchers have with consumers were all topics of discussion on the first day of the Animal Agriculture Alliance's 2018 Stakeholders Summit, themed "Protect Your Roots," at the Renaissance Capital View Hotel in Arlington, Va.

"The conversations are changing about food to include agriculture and the message of farmers," said Tyne Morgan, host of U.S. Farm Report and Summit moderator. "There are a lot of companies taking notice of the positive side of agriculture and they are starting to tell that story too."

Mark Gale, president and partner with Charleston | Orwig kicked off the event with new research about food labels saying, "the changing relationship with food is having an impact on the type of information consumers want and are interested in." The study involved two surveys with 500 respondents from across the United States and found that nutrition is critical in food label information - but raised the question, "what does nutrition mean to the modern consumer?"



Some indicate they look for weight-management information like calorie and carbohydrate amounts, some are interested in "feel-good" information like local and natural claims while others are interested in "functional" information such as protein and antioxidants. The research also found that despite increasing holistic, emotional drivers, science remains impactful though confusing. "We need to care more about the consumer less about NGOs, government agencies and activist groups," said Gale. "We need to focus on consumers and give them information that is useful to them."

Next, speakers from Food Tank, North American Meat Institute and National Pork Producers Council talked about trends in the food industry and what they predict the future of animal agriculture will look like on a panel moderated by Chuck Jolley with Jolley & Associates.

Danielle Nierenberg, president of Food Tank, said the growth of industrial animal agriculture and the average age of today's farmers are two trends she sees impacting the future. "It's a time for current farmers and agriculturalists to mentor the next generation of farmers and make sure they have the business skills to thrive so the future of the industry can grow," said Nierenberg.

Nierenberg also shared that there is an "interesting demand for transparency in the food system and the story behind their food." She added, "millennials may not be cooking as much as their predecessors but they want to know about their food more than ever before."

Janet Riley, senior vice president of public affairs at North American Meat Institute, reiterated the point that "we need to be communicating the facts and connecting with people in real and meaningful ways." While she sees the demand for meat never fading, there is a need for better

communication and engagement with consumers about the growing desire for choices to ensure the consumer is in charge.

Dallas Hockman, vice president of industry affairs at National Pork Producers Council, said “we’ve done a great job of raising our products, but not our voice” and “it’s not a simple solution.” Animal welfare, sustainability, supply chain management and brand reputation are all key issues food industry stakeholders are talking about every day. Hockman recommended Summit attendees humanize the faces of farming and ranching, focus on innovation and emphasize moves toward sustainability to have a successful future for animal agriculture.

In the next session, Alison Van Eenennaam, PhD, of University of California, Davis, shared how the dairy, beef, pork and chicken industries have decreased their environmental impact over the years. Van Eenennaam shared concerns of companies having “cognitive dissonance” and making policies to mitigate environmental impact in their supply chain, but yet also making commitments that have the potential to harm environmental sustainability, such as “slow-growing” broilers. “I am very passionate about science and am very concerned around the abandonment of science in the general populous,” she said. “Dealing with things from a genetics standpoint is the biggest thing you can do from a sustainability perspective.”

To continue the conversation on poultry, Jayson Lusk, PhD, of Purdue University presented recent research findings about consumer beliefs, knowledge and willingness-to-pay for specific attributes, such as cage-free eggs and “slow-growth” broilers. The research found the price is a significant driver for most consumers and there is room for cage-free market to grow, but it may never be a majority of market share. As far as broilers, “people have disadvantageous beliefs about slow-growth chicken for animal welfare, taste and other attributes,” said Lusk.

Lastly, Ted McKinney, Under Secretary for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs at USDA, took the stage to talk about agriculture’s roots in Washington. At a time when agriculture is facing so much pressure, we need to “talk to people about what really is the truth about agriculture,” said McKinney. To ensure agriculture grows into the future, he said, “we too have to change” and “I am betting on agriculture...I’m all in for you all.”

Be sure to check the [Summit website](#) for the most up-to-date Summit information. You can also follow the hashtags #AAA18 and #ProtectYourRoots for periodic updates about the event. For general questions about the Summit please contact summit@animalagalliance.org or call (703) 562-5160.

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About the Alliance:



The [Animal Agriculture Alliance](#) is an industry-united, nonprofit organization that helps bridge the communication gap between farm and fork. We **connect** key food industry stakeholders to arm them with responses to emerging issues. We **engage** food chain influencers and promote consumer choice by helping them better understand modern animal agriculture. We **protect** by exposing those who threaten our nation's food security with damaging misinformation.