



NAVIGATING PRESSURE ON ANIMAL PROTEIN

2026 SUMMIT IMPACT REPORT

ABOUT THE STAKEHOLDERS SUMMIT

The Stakeholders Summit is the signature annual event of the Animal Agriculture Alliance, a nonprofit working to safeguard the future of animal agriculture and its value to society. The Summit is a unique gathering that brings together influential leaders from across the food and agriculture chain. From farms and ranches to food companies, restaurants, retailers, policymakers, universities, government agencies, and media, the Summit convenes the voices shaping the future of animal agriculture across roles and species groups. Designed to inspire action, the event delivers timely insights, meaningful connections, and practical tools attendees can take home and put to work right away.

2026 SUMMIT

The **25th annual Stakeholders Summit** was held May 5–7 in Kansas City, MO, and brought together **more than 229 attendees** for three days of high-impact learning, strategy, and connection. With half of attendees joining for the first time and half returning, the Summit blended fresh perspectives with a strong sense of continuity. Centered on the theme **High Steaks: Navigating Pressure on Animal Protein**, the event challenged attendees to confront the most pressing issues facing animal agriculture and turn urgency into action. Emphasizing innovation and collaboration, the Summit united stakeholders from across the food chain to explore how animal protein production could evolve to meet today's pressures while helping nourish generations to come.

New this year, the **pre-summit workshop** and offsite Welcome Reception hosted by Dairy Farmers of America created additional opportunities for networking and professional development, allowing participants to connect while exploring new settings. Those conversations carried into sessions during the main event that spotlighted many of the issues shaping the future of the industry, including technology in agriculture, animal welfare, antibiotic use, consumer transparency, legal and legislative trends, and animal rights activism. Examined through the lens of innovation and cross-sector partnership, each topic reinforced the Summit's role as a catalyst for practical solutions and stronger collaboration across animal agriculture.

OVERALL FEEDBACK

Overall, the 2026 Stakeholders Summit was rated **4.5 out of 5.0** by in-person attendees.



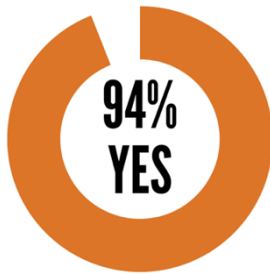
Feedback included:

- The program and speakers were dynamic and timely, and every moment was well spent.
- The Summit is a great reminder of the great work we do as an industry every day that connects us all. It is such an incredible opportunity to learn from each other and build relationships that are pivotal to our success. I am so grateful for this unique space!
- With a lot of conferences, you make contacts. At this one, you not only make contacts, you make friends too.

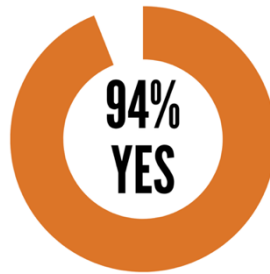
- The Summit was highlighting conference, and all others will now be judged against it! Already looking forward to next year!
- Incredible speakers and I appreciated the range of topics and experience covered. Great quality of attendees and the format allows for a lot of networking and collaboration.

Based on the overall event feedback survey, attendees answered the following questions:

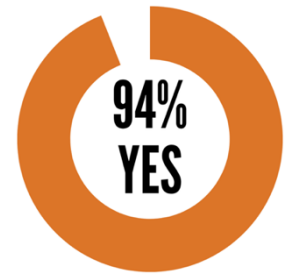
“Did you feel the event was a good investment of your time and financial resources?”



Would you plan to attend a future Summit?”



Would you recommend this even to a colleague?”



TOP-RATED SESSIONS

From Crisis to Clarity: Owning the Message When the Stakes Are High

Jacque Matsen, Relate Strategies, LLC; Lauren Neuman, C.O.next

In moments of crisis, words matter, along with how and where they are delivered. This interactive workshop helped participants build the skills and confidence to communicate clearly, credibly, and calmly under pressure. Through expert guidance, real-world examples, and hands-on practice, attendees developed crisis messages, practiced bridging and reframing, and explored how to handle difficult questions while avoiding common pitfalls.

[Overall session rating: 4.8 out of 5]

Fired Up: Navigating Pressure Points on Animal Protein

Marcy Tessmann, C.O.next; Collette Kaster, American Meat Science Association; Brian Earnest, CoBank; Brooke Taylor, Empire Ag

The pressures facing animal protein don’t exist in silos—they collide across various sectors including labor, nutrition, and market economics, shaping how the industry operates and how consumers respond. This session brought these intersecting challenges together to examine where pressure is building most and what it means for the future of food and agriculture. Panelists explored how evolving nutrition narratives, the need to cultivate strong and supported employees, and shifting market dynamics are influencing decisions across the value chain—and how to stay responsive in a rapidly changing landscape.

[Overall session rating: 4.5 out of 5]

Leveraging Sustainability to Build Trust

Nancy Himmelfarb, Himmelfarb Sustainability Consulting; Rachael Wagner, Eocene Environmental Group; Francois Leger, FPL Food, LLC

As sustainability expectations rise across animal protein, this session focused on how to engage credibly through measurable performance that builds trust and reduces risk. Nancy Himmelfarb outlined the pressures shaping the sustainability landscape, including concerns around “greenwashing” and “greenhushing,” and emphasized the need for stronger internal alignment. Rachael Wagner of Eocene Environmental Group showed how transparent, farmer-informed reporting could support credible, supply chain-wide outcomes, while Francois Leger, CEO of FPL Food, LLC, added perspective on using sustainability data reporting to demonstrate transparency at the brand level.

[Overall session rating: 4.4 out of 5]

Fueling the People Who Feed the World: The New Blueprint for Collaboration

Crystal Mackay, LOFT32

As demands on agriculture and food systems continue to grow, grit alone is no longer enough to drive progress. This high-energy keynote challenged attendees to break down silos, strengthen connections, and collaborate at new levels to meet the moment. Drawing on real-world lessons and practical frameworks like Collaboration Math, the session offered clear strategies to build stronger relationships, overcome barriers, and accelerate results, leaving attendees with actionable tools to work smarter together and help fuel the future of the food system.

[Overall session rating: 4.4 out of 5]

Too Hot to Ignore: Why Animal Agriculture Can't Opt Out of Political Advocacy

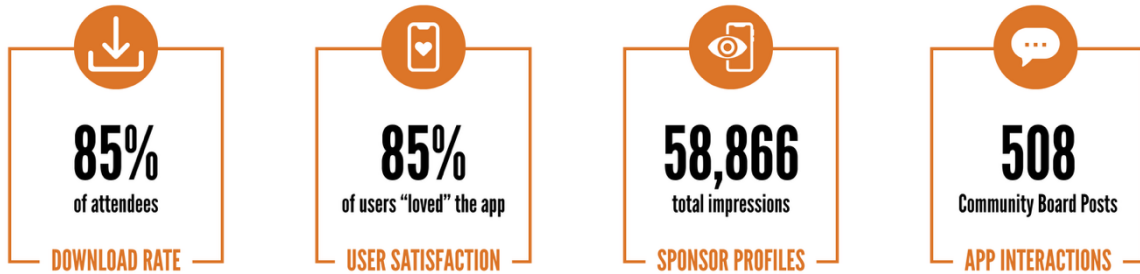
Chelsea Good, Good & Associates

Animal agriculture is facing unprecedented political, cultural, and public scrutiny—and silence is no longer an option. This session reframed high-profile challenges as catalysts for smarter, more proactive advocacy, drawing on recent industry experiences to illustrate why engagement must begin before issues escalate. Attendees left with a practical roadmap for managing risk through early relationship-building, coordinated messaging, and strategic preparedness, and learned how proactive, positive engagement can transform political pressure into momentum for resilience, unity, and long-term progress.

[Overall session rating: 4.3 out of 5]

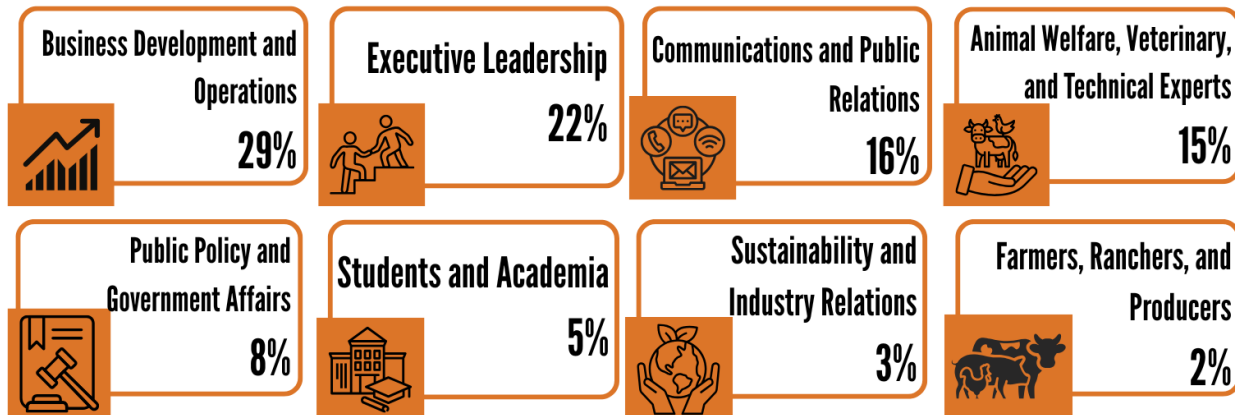
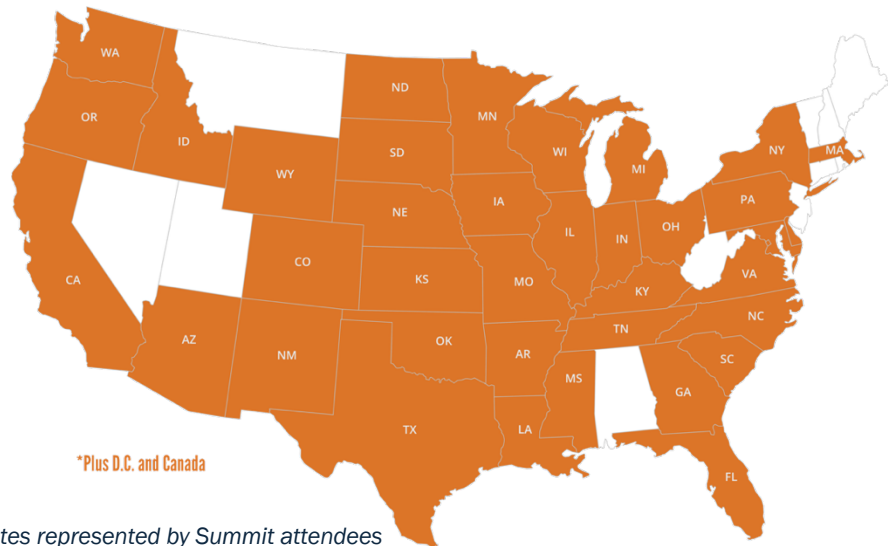
CONFERENCE APP USAGE

The conference app, Whova, received strong reviews overall, with attendees describing it as easy to use and helpful. Attendees were able to connect in the app during sessions to facilitate dialogue and encourage questions. The app also supported networking by making it easy for attendees to connect and exchange contact information.

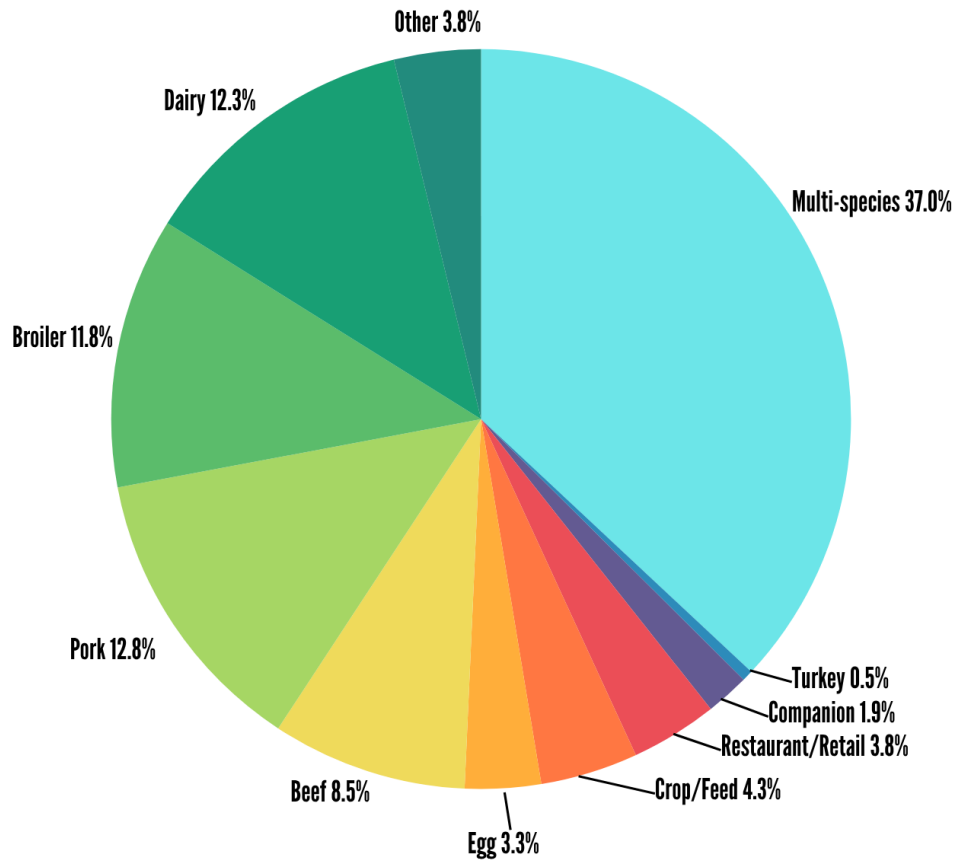


ATTENDEE DEMOGRAPHICS

The annual Summit is known for bringing together a diverse audience from across animal agriculture and the many connected points along the food chain. The following graphics highlight the states, job titles, and industry segments by attendees in the room.



Job titles represented by Summit attendees



Industry segments represented by Summit attendees

SAVE THE DATE FOR 2027

The 2027 Stakeholders Summit is slated for May 5–7, 2027 in Arlington, VA.

CONTACT US

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