



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Jana McGuire, jana.mcguire@foodintegrity.org, (402) 430-8723

Tackling the Food Industry and Farmer Disconnect

GLADSTONE, Mo. – Monday, Sept. 12 – The food and agriculture industries often talk about the disconnect between food production and consumers, however, the food industry and farmer disconnect is just as real, according to Roxi Beck with The Center for Food Integrity (CFI).

“Because consumers are so far removed from food production, they’re skeptical of industrial ag and big food and fear these industries put profit ahead of people,” said Beck. “But what we’ve found through our work at CFI is that bringing consumers and farmers together to listen and learn from each other can bridge the gap and serve as a pathway to earning trust.”

It’s an approach that’s needed with farmers and the food industry, too, she said. “The broader food system is focused on engaging consumers and rightly so. But conversations between farmers and food companies should be happening more frequently to forge relationships. Through this process of engagement, we expect alignment of values and goals will emerge and help determine the best path forward.”

Over the past few months, CFI and the United Soybean Board have brought representatives from the two industries together to discuss sustainability topics. The series of small-group virtual meetings has empowered agricultural and food industry representatives to engage in deeper discussions and learn from each other.

“Both entities have been enlightened. Soybean farmers have come away with a much better understanding of the unprecedented pressure food companies face to produce food more sustainably – and that it’s coming from multiple stakeholders: the public, activists, investors and others. And food companies have heard directly from farmers about their on-farm sustainability commitments, challenges and continuous innovation,” said Beck.

“These discussions have helped me understand how food companies are navigating sustainability decisions. Being in these talks also gives farmers opportunities to share that we’re focused on sustainability too,” said Laura Isley, who farms corn and soybeans with her husband near Palmyra, Mich. “We highlight the benefits of no-till, cover crops, soil testing, and even discuss how we precisely apply crop protection products and water only when and where needed. It’s not often that we get to come together with food industry representatives to talk about important issues impacting all of us.”

“Topics around sustainability certainly are complex,” said Justin Ransom, senior director of sustainable food strategy at Tyson Foods, who served as a roundtable panelist. “While these conversations may not result in answers to every tough question, they provide an opportunity to start with the same information, and discuss challenges, tradeoffs, and potential solutions.”

Keeping the conversation going between all vested parties is pivotal if true sustainability is to be achieved, said Beck.

“Without collaborative efforts, decisions run the risk of be made in a silo without taking into account the greater ramifications across the supply chain,” said Beck. “The result can be unintentional and negative impacts to overall sustainability, supply chain continuity, and food access and affordability.”

Farmers and food companies are clearly headed in the right direction when it comes to sustainability, she said. “Our goal is for ongoing, strategic collaboration to continue, to encourage deeper understanding and empower food companies to weigh the benefits and tradeoffs of each decision.”

###

About United Soybean Board: United Soybean Board’s 78 volunteer farmer-leaders work on behalf of all U.S. soybean farmers to achieve maximum value for their soy checkoff investments. These volunteers create value by investing in research, education and promotion with the vision to deliver sustainable soy solutions to every life, every day across the three priority areas of Infrastructure & Connectivity, Health & Nutrition, and Innovation & Technology. As stipulated in the federal Soybean Promotion, Research and Consumer Information Act, the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service has oversight responsibilities for USB and the soy checkoff. For more information on the United Soybean Board, visit unitedsoybean.org.

About The Center for Food Integrity The Center for Food Integrity is a not-for-profit organization that helps today's food system earn consumer trust. Our members and project partners are committed to providing accurate information and working together to address important issues in food and agriculture. The Center does not lobby or advocate for individual companies or brands. For more information, visit www.foodintegrity.org.

