

November 25, 2016

## WORKING TOGETHER IN THE FOOD CHAIN

Last week I attended the Field to Market Sustainable Agriculture Summit in Atlanta. It gave me a chance to hear from top food executives, farmers, policy leaders, scientists and industry experts representing our entire agricultural food chain. The Field to Market group has grown to 117 members and clearly their goal is to unite the supply chain to deliver sustainable outcomes for agriculture.

If there is one take home message among this group last week, the concept of collecting information and sustainability data and making claims in the marketplace to consumers and consumers asking more questions about where their food is coming from, is not going away. Responsibility to the consumer and more transparency is a different expectation than what farmers have heard in the past.

Scott Spohn, Friend, attended the meeting with a panel discussion with Amy Braun, a sustainability officer representing Kellogg's. Defining sustainability metrics for his farm and setting goals to make the farm sustainable and better for the next generation was a "no brainer" in his mind.

Ben Rice of Prairieland Dairy from Hallam, attended the meeting and one of the topics included nutrient separation and recovery systems innovations within the dairy industry. In the past decade, innovators have developed and demonstrated technologies that can, in fact, recover a significant amount (> 95%) N and P from manure, and yield concentrated, dry, potentially valuable nutrient products. Some new technology was described including a new facial recognition software for dairy farms to enhance feed efficiency and environmental outcomes. The Field to Market website has seen a recent facelift at: <http://ww2.fieldtomarket.org/> The website contains a free Fieldprint Calculator Tool, a tool that 22 farmers in Saline County and surrounding area tested out between 2010 and 2011. The tool is still there with some improvements since 2011 but there will be a new facelift in 2017 with version 3.0. We will be teaching this tool once again this fall and in February. For more information visit [Cropwatch.unl.edu](http://Cropwatch.unl.edu)

At the Atlanta meeting I ran into Fred Luckey, who was formerly the vice president and general manager of Bunge North America milling unit and is now retired. Fred was one of the original group that brainstormed 10 years ago establishing a vision to form the Field to Market group that would guarantee collaboration from the farmer to the mill, from processing, to the retailer. They wanted to establish trust and science based outcomes that focused on continuous improvements that did not compromise future generations.

I asked at the Atlanta meeting breakout session about incentives for farmers to participate in establishing field metrics or certain benchmarks such as land use score, estimated soil erosion, soil carbon, irrigation efficiency, energy use, greenhouses gas emissions and surface water quality index scores. If there are marketing claims in a project area on the retail shelf, shouldn't the farm that provided the sustainability data receive an incentive passed down from retail to the farm sector?



Thus far, I know of one example in Iowa with the United Soybean Board, ADM and Unilever (that makes Hellman's mayonnaise) an incentive of 10 cents a bushel. Farmers in Saline County and surrounding area piloted with Bunge and after a couple years, received cost share from the NRD and Bunge to utilize and install watermark sensors and data loggers to save groundwater. Syngenta invested in developing their own software platform integrated with their farm records system called Land.db With this tool, growers keep control just like the online Field to Market Tool and receive sustainability data easier.

The marketplace and technology is changing. Farmers will continue to manage what they can measure. As technology improves, so do farm's productivity and profitability. The Field to Market Alliance will release a report December 8 showing real positive sustainability changes that have happened since the 1908's however, these measures are starting to level off in the last 5 years.

Randy Pryor, Extension Educator

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension in Saline County • 306 West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, Wilber, NE 68465

Phone (402) 821-2151 • Fax (402) 821-3398 • e-mail: [randy.pryor@unl.edu](mailto:randy.pryor@unl.edu)