Animal Agriculture –
Innovation, Technology & Consumer Engagement
April 8-11, 2019 | Des Moines Marriott Downtown, Des Moines, IA

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Can Agriculture Save the Planet?

NIAA News Release, February 28, 2019---"I'm a science optimist," says NIAA 2019 Annual Conference speaker Jack Bobo, Vice President, Intrexon Corp., "I am convinced that science can solve current and future challenges, but I think the biggest challenge of agricultural science and technology is communicating its story to consumers."

The NIAA Annual Conference 2019 theme is *Animal Agriculture; Innovation & Technology; Engaging the Consumer,* so Bobo's presentation is certainly on the nose for the participating animal ag industry professionals. The event will be held April 8–11 in Des Moines, Iowa.

The realities of agriculture today, listed by Bobo, include cropland using land equal to the size of South America, pastureland equal to the size of Africa, 70% of the fresh water is said to be used for agriculture, a growing population is expected to increase by over 2 billion additional mouths to feed by 2050, deforestation attributed to agriculture and more.

That's where Bobo's science optimism comes in. He is sure these problems can be solved, if those in agriculture pull together to figure out how to maximize the production of food while minimizing the negatives consequences of agriculture, including reducing waste. This seems like a daunting task, and yet, science and technology have proven capable of increasing production with fewer inputs year after year for decades.

However, he also says he is a regulatory pessimist. "Science tells us what we can do, but the public tell us what we should do," says Bobo. "People love innovation, but they hate change." He is not convinced we will be allowed to do the things we need to do to double the amount of protein we produce to feed those 9.8 billion future people.

Bobo points to a lack of trust. "We have to make sure innovation occurs to solve these problems, and that the consumer has trust in the people developing that innovation and applying the technology," he says. This includes not only the scientists, but the farmers and ranchers, the producers, who will be using innovations that will save energy, increase sustainability, and create a cleaner environment.

"How do farmers, ranchers and scientists become better communicators to tell their story, so consumers give them the social license to do what they need to do?" he asks. It is important to understand human behavior and psychology and find out how people come to believe what they believe and know what they know.

He does think that if ag voices lead with the science, they will lose with the science. "If people don't trust you, the science doesn't matter," he says. "If people do trust you, the science doesn't matter."

"Consumers have never cared more or known less how their food was produced," Bobo says. He sees consumers ask agriculture to do things that may not satisfy what they really want or need. "What they want and what they ask for are not necessarily consistent," he says.

Bobo's day job is with Intrexon, which he says is "the coolest company you've never heard of." Intrexon and its subsidiaries are involved in genetically engineered biological products. They are the first to bring a non–browning, genetically engineered apple to market. Why apples? Because they are the third most wasted food item in the U.S.

So, whether it's an insect engineered to fight the mosquitoes that transmit Zika, a fresher salmon or an apple that doesn't go bad when you don't get around to eating it, Bobo has been at the forefront of needing to communicate to consumers how science can help them.

"If we want consumers to have confidence in the technologies that farmers and ranchers are using, then we have to be worthy of their trust," he says.

"Stop telling people what you do and start telling them why you do it," he advises.

For the agenda, please go HERE. To register go HERE. For hotel information, go HERE.