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Today's average consumer is three generations removed from the farm. This creates a challenge because most of "our" customers do not have an intimate knowledge of food production. However, in today's social media-based culture, these consumers demand a higher level of transparency than in the generations of our parents. Unfortunately, anyone can claim to be an expert on Facebook or Twitter and have a following of fellow consumers that is big enough to influence change in agriculture. Whether those changes are focused on animal production practices, the feed ingredients we use in diets, or other practices we have adopted to improve profitability, all will require greater transparency and accountability from our industry. The current and future generations have been tasked with the challenge to find innovative solutions using new technologies and progressive thinking that enhance production efficiency while at the same time meeting the demands of the end consumers.

Sustainability is a word that continues to drive the development of new technologies applied on the farm and within the agricultural industry. Farmers and ranchers have long been the pioneers of sustainability through producing food using less land and water resources as urban areas expand with the growing world population. By utilizing resources more efficiently, we can improve the sustainability of our industry. For example, when formulating swine diets, if adding a new ingredient can reduce the amount of feed consumed, and the same amount of gain is achieved, the pig has become more efficient. Investments in biological engineering and smart technology will undoubtedly lead to new discoveries that yield beneficial application to the animal producer, the land, and ultimately the end consumer.

With the installation of the veterinary feed directive, producers are making a conscious effort to reduce or eliminate antibiotic use and find alternatives to manage herd health. Antibiotic resistance is a challenge plaguing not only animal production, but human medicine as well. Within agriculture, antibiotic alternatives are being explored, and although there are many available on the market, finding a product that shows consistent results as a replacement is the challenge. Companies that invest time and resources into mitigating herd health challenges will help the producer reduce antibiotic use, with the ultimate target being

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the most judicious use of the antibiotics to allow for them being available and effective for both animals and humans when they are needed.

To ensure a safe, wholesome product, the consumer wants to know that the animal was cared for above that which any approved standard might dictate. A continued push for improved animal welfare through “natural” living conditions such as “cage free” or “gestation crate free” is going to become the production norm in the future. To prepare for this change, research will need to be conducted to determine behavioral changes, and teach us how to manage nutrition and health challenges that can occur in a group setting.

Today, it is pivotal that transparency occurs between the producer and consumer in our industry. Previously, animal activists had been the only media avenue to see inside the farm, and unfortunately did so in a negative light. In recent years, producers have begun to open the barn doors and demonstrate how each decision is made to benefit the health, growth and well-being of the livestock within. While we all have the responsibility to be promoters of agriculture, companies like Feed Energy are in a unique position to be advocates for a wider audience. Having the ability to dedicate resources to help tell the real agriculture story is one way that can help. Feed Energy could help lead grass-roots campaigns that allow producers of any size to have a voice that speaks a positive message for any consumer to hear. One of these avenues could be to bring rural producers to the urban grocery stores to start dialogues with the consumers that are making the purchasing decisions, and give them confidence in the product.

By being proactive instead of reactive to changes that the consumer demands, the agriculture industry will be able to write our own story, instead of letting someone else do it for us. We will continue to advance technology and demonstrate the best care of livestock, land, and use of resources. Ultimately, every person at every level of the food supply chain has the personal responsibility to ensure that a safe and nutritious food supply is available for those that are hungry. We will only be successful if we all work together, as a united team, and do everything we can to not only honor the previous generations that worked so hard to get us where we are today, but also provide for the future demands that will be asked of us.