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Q&A with Joel Newman, President of the American Feed Industry Association

Q: Talk a little bit about your first year as President of the American Feed Industry Association (AFIA) as the Safe Feed/Safe Food program completes its second full year.

A: I have been pleased with the participation in SF/SF by a total cross section of the industry, including commercial feed manufacturers, suppliers, integrators, members and non-members. We now have over 220 facilities certified in the program, compared to 70 one year ago. I have also been quite impressed with the very thorough job the applying firms have done in implementing the process in their operations. We have been pleased with the results of the third-party audits. That is what will make this successful long term. In fact, I have heard from AAFCO (Association of American Feed Council Officials) that they have also found the SF/SF approved firms are well managed and meeting the program requirements, which are above and beyond the federal and state regulations.

Our objective is to maintain the momentum and continue to add new participants, which is in progress. We have also developed four mentor companies, which are helping prospective companies to understand the importance of this program to their companies, as well as the industry, and what it takes to implement the program in their business.

Q: What's new on the SF/SF food front?

A: The SF/SF program is a dynamic one that will be reviewed on a regular basis to make any improvements, based on input from participants and AFIA's Feed Safety & Quality Committee. The committee is in the process of that review at this time. As part of this review, we also look at global requirements for AFIA members that are exporting products to other countries, and how SF/SF may help them in certifying that they meet these requirements.

Q: How many companies have achieved the SF/SF certification? Is that where you'd like the numbers to be?

A: While we are not where we would have liked to be in firms certified, we do have good momentum. Maybe most important, the firms that have been certified are definitely realizing the value of the program within their business and with their customers. Many prospective firms have had questions about what it will take them to implement this process within their company and we have needed to help them understand that better.

Q: What is the overall sentiment about the program from companies who have earned SF/SF certification?

A: The overwhelming response from certified facilities has been that the companies have a much better understanding of protecting feed safety and a total team commitment to this process through out. From top management to all employees in the plants, there is a coordinated team commitment.

Q: With the explosion in biofuel production, does the availability of more DDGS (Dried Distiller's Grains with Solubles) pose any special issues/concerns for safe feed production?

A: Of course there is concern with the pace of growth in the ethanol market for corn and the competitive pressure it puts on supplies for feed and exports. At the same time, this has brought an entirely new dynamic to agriculture and this is what makes our industry thrive. We anticipate we will see a real acceleration of new technology in animal feed nutrition, the seed industry, the biofuels industry and changes in government policy. We expect there will be enough corn, but the pricing structure will be different and exports may well be affected. This will be a driving force behind the farm bill debate across the nation this year.

A: As for product safety, AFIA is leading a coalition of firms to dialog with the Food & Drug Administration (FDA) and the affected industries about this dynamic, fast-growing industry. Much of the focus is on how to assist with the growing pains of this new industry and understanding the product regulations.

Q: How does participation in the SF/SF program prepare those in the animal ag industry in the US to deal with global safe feed/food issues?

A: The SF/SF program certification is accepted presently in some countries as sufficient to meet the assurances they are looking for in imported products. As I stated earlier, we are also looking at the program as it relates to the requirements for other countries and will consider changes that will expand this acceptance of equivalent feed safety certification requirements. AFIA is leading a task force for the International Feed Industry Federation, which is working to design a means to achieve global equivalency acceptance for the various regulatory requirements and certification programs around the world.

Q: What is your expectation for the SF/SF program in 2007? Are there any conferences where the program is going to be promoted?

A: The program is promoted at all AFIA events, various state events that we participate in and on a global basis through our representation on the International Feed Industry Federation. We also have four mentor companies that are helping to educate the industry on the value to each industry firm and the broad industry for their participation. We are also expanding our guideline documents and will potentially hold a web-cast to further explain specifically what it takes for a firm to implement this process.

Q: What should plants with SF/SF certification under their belts already expect in 2007?

A: The current certified firms will see a continual growth of new firms joining their ranks and a stronger awareness among the industry, producers and regulators for the value of participating in this program.