

Agri-Pulse Ag & Food Policy Summit 2018

Speaker Biographies



Sara Wyant

Founder and Editor, Agri-Pulse

Sara Wyant leads Agri-Pulse Communications, Inc. an electronic publishing company with the largest and most experienced editorial team covering agriculture and food policy issues in Washington, D.C. The firm's subscription-only products and website, Agri-Pulse.com, include the latest updates on farm policy, commodity and conservation programs, trade, nutrition, food safety, rural development, and environmental and regulatory programs. She has served on numerous boards and is currently President of the National Association of Farm Broadcasters (NAFB) Foundation. A graduate of Iowa State University, Wyant grew up on a Century farm near Marengo, Iowa. She and her husband also own the farm where her husband's family originally established a homestead near Almont, North Dakota.



Ray Starling

Special Assistant to the President for Agriculture, Agriculture Trade, and Food Assistance

Before serving the Trump Administration, Ray Starling was Chief of Staff for U.S. Senator Thom Tillis. He also served as Tillis' Chief Counsel and then-Speaker Tillis' General Counsel and Senior Agriculture Advisor in the North Carolina General Assembly. He has been the General Counsel for the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, has private practice experience from several years at Hunton & Williams and has taught numerous agricultural and food law courses. After growing up on a Century Family Farm in southeast North Carolina, Starling received a B.S. in Agricultural Education from N.C. State University and a J.D. from UNC-Chapel Hill. From 1996-97 he served as the National FFA Eastern Region Vice President.



Darci Vetter

Diplomat in Residence, University of Nebraska – Lincoln

Darci Vetter serves as an advisor for the Farmers for Free Trade board and a diplomat in residence at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. An international trade and agriculture consultant, she has served as Chief Agricultural Negotiator at the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. Vetter was Deputy Under Secretary of Agriculture for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services at USDA from 2010 to 2014. She also worked as an International Trade Advisor for the Senate Finance Committee. Vetter earned a Master of Public Administration from Princeton University and a B.A. in Environmental Studies from Drake University.



Roger Johnson

President, National Farmers Union

Roger Johnson was elected National Farmers Union's 14th president during the organization's 107th anniversary convention in 2009. A third-generation family farmer from Turtle Lake, N.D., Johnson previously served as North Dakota Agriculture Commissioner, a position he was first elected to in 1996. Johnson grew up in Farmers Union, participating in the organization's youth programs, serving as a county president and chairman of the board of a local Farmers Union cooperative. As president, Roger is the chief executive and public spokesman for the organization.



Zippy Duvall

President, American Farm Bureau Federation

Prior to being elected AFBF president, Zippy Duvall served for 9 years as president of the Georgia Farm Bureau. Duvall's long leadership history in his home state includes service on the Georgia Farm Bureau Young Farmers Committee and Georgia Farm Bureau board of directors. In 2017, Duvall was honored by National 4-H Council as a founding luminary, an exclusive group of accomplished and influential 4-H alumni. Zippy Duvall is a third-generation farmer from Georgia. In addition to a 400-head beef cow herd for which he grows his own hay, Duvall and his wife, Bonnie, also grow more than 750,000 broilers per year.



Chuck Conner

President and CEO, National Council of Farmer Cooperatives

As NCFC President and CEO, Chuck Conner promotes and protects farmer-owned cooperatives' business and public policy interests. Before joining NCFC, he served as USDA's Deputy Secretary. Conner worked with President George W. Bush's administration on food, trade, security and energy policy, leading to the \$300 billion Farm Bill proposal. He served as USDA Acting Secretary and Deputy Secretary, developing immigration policy and H2A program changes. Conner worked on the 2001/2 Farm Bill - transferring several USDA agency functions to Homeland Security. From 1997 to 2001, he was president of the Corn Refiners Association. He also served as an advisor to Sen. Richard Lugar, Ind. Conner earned a B.S. from Purdue University, where he received the Distinguished Alumni Award.



Mitch Davis

Manager, Davis Family Dairies

Mitch Davis grew up working in the family dairy and cheese making business, Davisco Foods International, Inc. He currently manages Davis Family Dairies, LLC, a dairy and beef animal system that manages over 19,000 animals of which 8,700 are milked daily by 140 employees; with milk being sold to a local cheese factory and beef animals sold to a local beef operation. Davis and his brother own and operate several other businesses. He graduated from the University of Minnesota with a B.S. in Food Science and Nutrition and currently serves as treasurer of Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative.



Ted McKinney

USDA Under Secretary of Agriculture for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs

Before joining USDA, Ted McKinney was previously appointed Indiana agriculture secretary by then-Gov. Mike Pence. He spent 19 years with Dow AgroSciences as a leader in the company's U.S. food chain and state government relations. McKinney worked 14 years with Elanco, a subsidiary of Eli Lilly and Co., in the animal health division as director of global corporate affairs. McKinney was director of Agribusiness Economic Development at Indiana Economic Development Corporation. He has served as co-chair of the National FFA Convention, Indianapolis Local Organizing Committee since 2004. McKinney earned a B.S. in Agricultural Economics from Purdue University.



Andy LaVigne

CEO, American Seed Trade Association

Prior to being named CEO of ASTA in 2006, Andy LaVigne was executive vice president/CEO of Florida Citrus Mutual. He spent four years as president and executive director of the Florida Fertilizer and Agrichemical Association. LaVigne served on the USDA Agriculture Trade Advisory Committee for Fruits and Vegetables; USDA and USTR Agriculture Policy Advisory Committee; USDA-APHIS Systems Approach Review Group; U.S. Chamber of Commerce Food and Agriculture Committee; and several other state and national industry committees and advisory groups. LaVigne worked for a decade on Capitol Hill, as Legislative Director for Rep. Charles Canady and as Agriculture Committee staffer for Rep. Tom Lewis. He holds a B.A. in political science with a minor in economics from the University of Florida.



Tom Sleight

CEO, U.S. Grains Council

Tom Sleight has a strong history with the U.S. Grains Council, having worked at the Council from 1983 until 1999 in a variety of roles both domestically and abroad. He worked for the Virginia Dept. of Agriculture and became the executive director of the New York Farm Viability Institute in 2006. There, he played an integral role in the foundation of the New York Center for Dairy Excellence, created to unite a fragmented New York dairy industry and improve industry profitability. Sleight returned to the Council in 2010 as vice president and became president and CEO in 2012.



Margaret M. Zeigler

Executive Director, Global Harvest Initiative

Zeigler has devoted her career to addressing global hunger and food security. She was Deputy Director for the Congressional Hunger Center, where she worked closely with the public and private sectors, non-profit organizations, industry leaders and policy makers to promote food security and reduce hunger. Zeigler is a thought leader on food security issues, serving as a media commentator and writer for several publications and news networks around the world. She holds a Ph.D. and M.A. in Geography and International Development Studies and was an adjunct faculty member at the Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University. She serves on the Scientific Advisory Council of the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research and is on the board of directors for the Association for International Agriculture and Rural Development.



Mary Kay Thatcher

Federal Lead, Syngenta

Prior to joining Syngenta, Mary Kay Thatcher served 31 years at the American Farm Bureau Federation, most recently as Senior Director of Congressional Relations. The top farm policy expert lobbies on farm programs, crop insurance, conservation, and credit issues. Thatcher served as a legislative assistant for agriculture and trade to Sen. Roger Jepsen and as President George H. W. Bush's Congressional and Public Affairs director for Farm Credit Administration. Thatcher earned degrees in animal science and agricultural economics from Iowa State University. The fifth generation Iowa farmer has produced corn, soybeans and livestock on her farm for 23 years.



Gregg Doud

Chief Agricultural Negotiator, Office of the United States Trade Representative

Prior to joining USTR, Gregg Doud served as the president of the Commodity Markets Council. He also served as a professional staff member for the Senate Agriculture Committee and chief economist for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association. Doud also has been an analyst for U.S. Wheat Associates, the export development arm of the wheat industry. He owns part of his family's Kansas farm, which is more than 100 years old. Doud holds a master's degree in agricultural economics from Kansas State University.



Alison Van Eenennaam

Cooperative Extension Specialist in the Department of Animal Science at the University of California, Davis and runs the Animal Genomics and Biotechnology Laboratory.

Alison Van Eenennaam serves as an animal biotechnology and genomics extension specialist in the Department of Animal Science at the University of California, Davis, where she has worked more than 15 years and earned the 2009 Academic Federation Award for Excellence in Research. Van Eenennaam also earned the 2009 University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources "Outstanding New Professional" award. In 2010, she received the American Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, National Award for Excellence in Extension and the American Society of Animal Science, Western Section Extension Award. Van Eenennaam won the 2012 and 2013 American Association of Animal Science (ASAS) Video Competition for her YouTube videos "Were those the days my friend?" and "Gene Shop."



Bill Even

CEO, National Pork Board

Before joining the National Pork Board, Bill Even managed DuPont Pioneer's global industry relations strategy. Prior to that, he served as DuPont Pioneer's Commercial Unit Lead in the Upper Midwest. From 2007 to 2010, Even served as South Dakota's Secretary of Agriculture. He also served as Deputy Secretary of Tourism and State Development, Director of the Governor's Office of Economic Development, State Energy Policy Director, and policy advisor for Gov. Mike Rounds, S.D. Even holds an agricultural production degree from Lake Area Technical Institute, a B.S. in agricultural business from South Dakota State University; and a Juris Doctorate from Drake University Law School, where he was an Opperman Scholar.



Nina Fedoroff

Senior Science Advisor, OFW Law

Nina Fedoroff is a molecular biologist and professor emeritus at Penn State University. She was awarded the National Medal of Science in 2007 and served as president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science from 2011 to 2012. Fedoroff served as a science adviser to the Secretary of State and to the administrator of USAID. She is a member of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, European Academy of Sciences, and American Academy of Microbiology. Honors include Howard Taylor Ricketts Award, New York Academy of Sciences Outstanding Contemporary Women Scientist Award and John P. McGovern Science and Society Medal.



Sonny Ramaswamy

Director, National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

Before his NIFA appointment, Sonny Ramaswamy held many academic positions, including: dean of Oregon State's College of Agricultural Sciences; director of Purdue's Agricultural Research Programs; university distinguished professor and head of Kansas State's Entomology Department; and professor of entomology at Mississippi State. He has received research grants from NIFA, NSF, NIH, EPA, and USAID, as well as from state agencies, commodity groups, and industry. Ramaswamy was named Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and Fellow of the Entomological Society of America. He earned a B.S. in agriculture and Master of Science in entomology from the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore, India. His doctorate is in entomology from Rutgers University. He is also a graduate of Harvard University's Management Development Program.



Jim Borel

Executive Vice President - Retired, DuPont Company

Jim Borel has over 40 years of experience in the global agriculture and food sectors, serving as executive vice president and member of DuPont's Office of the Chief Executive until 2016. He joined DuPont in 1978 as a sales representative and held roles in the agriculture businesses in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Japan. Borel advises on agriculture and food industry issues at Farmers Edge, Neogen Corporation, Just, Inc., and the Sajjan India Ltd. He is a board of trustees member for the University of Delaware; Farm Foundation; National 4-H Council and Alpha Gamma Rho Educational Foundation. He serves on Iowa State University's Board of Governors and AGree's board of advisors. Credentialed as a Board Leadership Fellow by the National Association of Corporate Directors, Borel earned a degree in agricultural business from Iowa State University.



Kelly Johnston

VP of Government Affairs, Campbell Soup Company

Before joining Campbell in 2002, Kelly Johnston spent 25 years in Washington, D.C. He was Secretary of the Senate, Senate's Chief Legislative, Financial, and Administrative Officer; Staff Director of the Senate Republican Policy Committee; Deputy Asst. Secretary, Public Affairs, Dept. of Transportation; and Chief of Staff or Press Secretary to three different members of Congress. Johnston was Executive VP for Govt. Affairs and Communications at the National Food Processors Association (now GMA). He serves as Vice Chairman of the Canadian American Business Council and as Director of Chamber of Commerce of Southern New Jersey.



Terri Moore

VP, Center for Food Integrity

Terri Moore joined the CFI team three years ago after witnessing firsthand the need for more effective consumer and media engagement by those in agriculture and throughout the food system. Terri has served as director of communications at USDA, deputy director of communications at the White House, chief of staff in the U.S. Senate, and communications director for a governor. She began her career as a reporter and says having experience on both sides of the camera provides great perspective. Based in D.C., she now guides companies, associations and government agencies involved in food and ag to engage more effectively, conduct business more transparently, and demonstrate more clearly that they are worthy of public trust.



Will Brunt

Chief Innovation Officer, Smithfield Foods

Will Brunt has been Chief Innovation Officer, Senior Vice President and Senior Vice President of Marketing for the Smithfield Brand since 2015. He oversees Smithfield's Innovation Center and has responsibility for new product development. Brunt previously worked with DDB marketing, Publicis Advertising, Grey Worldwide, Hill Holiday and Earle Palmer Brown. He also served as VP of marketing at Boar's Head. Brunt was Adjunct Professor at Southern Methodist University. He earned an M.B.A. from the University of Texas and a Public Policy B.A. from Duke University.



Duane Grant

Chairman of the Board, Snake River Sugar Company

Duane Grant is a partner in a diversified irrigated row crop farm located on the Snake River plain. He is Chairman of the Board for Snake River Sugar Company and a National Grower Spokesperson for the Sugar Industry Biotechnology Council. An expert in ag biotechnology, Grant served 5 years as a member of the USDA Advisory Committee on Biotechnology and 21st Century Agriculture. He represented producers on the Pew Foundation Initiative for Food and Biotechnology Stakeholder Forum. He was a founding member of the wheat industry Joint Biotechnology Committee and in 2003 was named an Eisenhower Foundation Agriculture Fellow. Grant also served as the US Agricultural Producer representative on the 2003 German Marshall Fund project “The Transatlantic Relationship: The Hunger Crisis in Southern Africa, and Genetically Modified Food”.



The Honorable Pat Roberts

Chairman, Senate Agriculture Committee

Roberts has served as the senior U.S. Senator from Kansas since 1997. He previously served as the Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. Born in Topeka, Kansas, Roberts graduated from Kansas State University. He served as a captain in the Marines and worked as a newspaper reporter before entering politics in the late 1960s. He was elected to the House in 1980 and served eight terms there, including one as chairman of the House Agriculture Committee. Roberts was elected to the Senate in 1996, and is currently serving his fourth term. He is currently the dean of the Kansas congressional delegation.



The Honorable Debbie Stabenow

Ranking Member, Senate Agriculture Committee

Born and raised in Michigan, Sen. Debbie Stabenow was elected to the United States Senate in 2000. As Ranking Member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, and as a member of the Senate Energy, Finance, and Budget Committees, she shapes our nation's manufacturing, health care, and agriculture policies. Stabenow authored the 2014 bipartisan Farm Bill in which she streamlined more than 100 programs, investing in conservation, clean energy, local food systems, specialty crops and cutting-edge research and biobased manufacturing. She has served in the Michigan House of Representatives for twelve years and the State Senate for four years. Stabenow was first elected to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1996.