



GREGG HILLYER

# Moms Know BEST

**A**griculture is banking on moms to help sway public opinion as crop and livestock practices come under greater scrutiny. Consumers are asking more questions about how the food they eat is produced. Any opportunity for agriculture to explain how it does its job is a good thing. Unfortunately, the industry has done a poor job

educating the public, allowing critics to misinform and shape the discussion about biotechnology, pesticides, antibiotics and other tools used by farmers to feed a hungry world.

Who better, then, to help communicate food facts than a mom? In most households, she takes the lead on buying groceries and preparing meals. What she thinks about food shapes the opinions of family and friends alike. She is a formidable force in the public debate on food.

“Moms are really important because they’re the most influential consumers in

the country,” says David Wescott, in a story published in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Wescott is director of digital strategy with the public relations firm APCO Worldwide. “They’re increasingly finding their own peers to be the most credible sources of information.”

A multitude of local, state and national ag education efforts recruit farm moms to reach out to their urban counterparts to provide information on food production. Many blog to start a dialogue, while others host tours on their farms or travel to cities to speak to women’s groups. In exchange, many of the urban moms will tweet, blog or post on Facebook about their experiences. No matter the method of communication, these moms engage in thoughtful conversations on food, addressing concerns, suspicions and fears. Farm moms advocate for agriculture, helping to dispel common myths about farming and food.

“[We want] to be a resource to provide moms with facts and information that can help them make informed food choices,” says Ashley Reding in a press release. Reding is a farmer from Howardstown, Ky., and a volunteer with CommonGround, a grassroots coalition of farm women who want to have honest conversations with women who buy food. “As a farmer and a mother, I want individuals to feel empowered to make food choices based on facts and not fear,” she explains.

The task won’t be easy. According to a recent survey commissioned by CommonGround, more than 70% of moms admitted to having questions or concerns about how their food is grown or raised. More than 1,000 moms were surveyed to gain insights into how they feel and think about their food and the food choices they make for their families.

Other findings from the survey show:

- ▶ 84% of moms surveyed believe organic food is farmed without any pesticides, fertilizers or herbicides.
- ▶ While one-fourth of the moms say they had never heard of genetically modified (GMO) foods, the majority of moms question the safety of GMO foods. About 43% of moms in the survey believe GMO food is nutritionally and chemically different than non-GMO food.
- ▶ More than half of the moms say they believe it’s important to feed their families hormone-free poultry and pork, even though it may cost more.
- ▶ 3% of moms surveyed say it’s important to purchase food labeled “all natural” whenever possible, because they see it as a more nutritious choice for their family.
- ▶ Seven out of 10 moms surveyed believe the family farm is dying in the U.S.

Yes, plenty of work remains, but farm moms like Carrie Divine are hopeful they can make a difference.

“As our population continues to shift from rural to urban communities, people become more disconnected from their food,” points out the Kentucky farmer and CommonGround volunteer. “We’re here ... to provide moms with useful information so they can worry less and feel more confident about their food choices.”

After all, moms always know best.

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