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Ag, Food Leaders Learn About Tech And Trade Impact During Annual Barnes & Thornburg ‘Planting The Seed’ Conference

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Increased use of technology and the effects of tariffs on trade are hot topics in the world of agriculture and food these days. It's why several executives from global agricultural companies and federal trade representatives convened May 16 for Barnes & Thornburg LLP's annual conference, "Planting the Seed: Technology and Trade Developments in the Agricultural and Food Industries."

Following are highlights from this year's sessions, which were organized by attorneys in the firm's Agriculture and Food practice group and were moderated by attorneys Bill Wales, Alexandra French and Eric Williams; attorney Christine Sohar Henter was a panelist.

Corteva Agriscience™ Exec Discusses Key Challenges Facing Producers, Consumers

Farmers are facing many challenges today, including severe weather, tariffs and fluctuations in the commodities markets. As producers are facing these unprecedented pressures, Susanne Wasson, president of Crop Protection Business Platform for Corteva Agriscience™, sees an opportunity to support them with advancements in technology and innovation.

Wasson discussed these issues as part of her keynote presentation on growing progress in the agriculture sector. While the company has roots from the combined resources of DuPont, Dow Chemical and Pioneer, it became its own entity on June 1.

Corteva Agriscience™ according to Wasson, will continue to seek

RELATED PEOPLE



William W. Wales

Retired Partner
Indianapolis

P 317-231-7493
F 317-231-7433
william.wales@btlaw.com



Alexandra Robinson French

Partner
Indianapolis

P 317-231-7248
F 317-231-7433
alexandra.french@btlaw.com



Eric E. Williams, Pharm.D.

Partner
Indianapolis

P 317-231-6410
F 317-231-7433
eric.williams@btlaw.com



Christine J. Sohar Henter

Partner
Washington, D.C.

P 202-408-6915
F 202-289-1330
christine.soharhenter@btlaw.com

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progress by building on the strengths of the three companies and ensuring progress for producers and consumers for future generations. Corteva's work centers on pursuit of innovation through a combination of its traditional expertise in agriculture and using new technologies to find new solutions.

Tech Panel Talks Future of Food

Feeding the globe in the future will be a complex endeavor. However, the panelists who discussed the future of food gave examples of how their companies are advancing toward solutions.

Williams moderated the panel discussion between Sean Akadiri, founder, president and CEO of Agric-Bioformatics; Brad Shurdut, vice president of global regulatory and government affairs for Intrexon Corporation; and Michael Stimson, chief intellectual property counsel at Genus PLC.

Akadiri introduced attendees to a new tool that can give livestock producers important data and analytics, including genetic profiles of herds, breeding suggestions, valuation and forecasting, lineage tracking and nutritional information. Called AgBoost, this new technology promises to help livestock farm management save money on production costs.

Meanwhile, Intrexon is a company that seeks solutions that enhance food production. He gave examples of non-browning apples as the first GMO with tangible consumer benefits. Apples are the third-most wasted crop behind bread and potatoes, he said.

He also mentioned programs to solve the issue of quickly browning avocados and to increase the salmon populations in half the time with less feed.

Stimson talked about how pioneering animal genetics can help feed the global population. The company has already been working with pork, beef and dairy. There will be a long-term demand for animal protein and companies need to continue to innovate to solve that issue. Stimson touched on various concepts involving genetic improvement, including genomic selection, biosystems engineering and gene editing.

Agriculture Sector Not Immune to Theft of Trade Secrets, Intellectual Property

Among the many statistics FBI Supervisory Special Agent Craig Moringiello shared during his presentation on global theft of U.S. technology was the fact that China accounts for 80 percent of the theft with the impact on the American economy reaching into the hundreds of billions of dollars.

Moringiello said the theft from American and other foreign companies operating in China includes targeting the agriculture sector and is orchestrated through various means, including cyber theft, merger and acquisition transactions, security services and foreign talent programs.

Moringiello described how the Chinese government can steal information through recruiting foreign experts in key sector technologies in support of its national economic development goals. In other instances, the government may force foreign companies to hand over their intellectual property in order to gain access to China's vast economy. China also

uses other means to acquire IP, including cyber theft, mergers and acquisitions, security services, non-traditional connectors, and foreign talent programs. “If your company has a technology edge, expect an intrusion,” he said. “You need to invest in protecting your IP.”

The FBI’s Strategic Partnership Coordinators (SPC) work with companies on vulnerability assessments and threat briefings and offers tools that can inform companies about any blind spots.