



## DRIVING SUSTAINABILITY: PERCEPTION CHANGE

Too often, perhaps, in agriculture, perception becomes reality through uninformed opinion. Michigan soybean farmers are hoping their dedication to improving the transparency of farming and educating the non-farming public will drive a sustained appreciation of how food makes its way to the table.

Key to that challenge is the visibility of farmers and the sustainable, practical and economical farming practices that shape modern farming.

“We live here, too, and I think it’s important that we do our part to show it,” says Andy Welden, a soybean producer and county commissioner in Hillsdale County. “Michigan is pretty unique in that for farmers in Iowa or South Dakota, most of your neighbors are farmers. Here, the majority of the population is not directly involved in farming. That makes being involved in the community and open to answering questions about

what we’re doing here from an environmental responsibility perspective quite important.”

It’s no secret that raising awareness for the responsible actions taken by farmers on a daily basis is as difficult as it has ever been. While there are more ways in which to communicate to nonfarmers than ever before, those same methods of communication are often being used to spread the types of fear-inducing half-truths that can shape misinformed public opinion.

For soybean producers like Sanilac County’s Jim Wilson, creating an understanding of how grocery store shelves are filled is a difficult challenge, but one that can be overcome through education.

“I think farming is one of those things that, unless you’re living it, you don’t really understand the requirements of the job — all the planning, determining what field should have what, reviewing

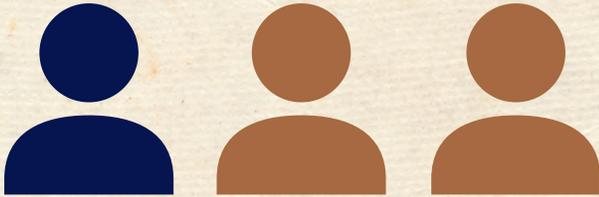
soil tests, determining seed varieties that you think would work best for your operation,” Wilson explains.

“Many of our friends in this community are non-farming individuals, and we make sure we take the time to answer questions they might have. I think it’s important that we educate the non-farming

public so they can see through some of the stories out there that don’t tell both sides.”

According to a recent survey of Michigan soybean farmers, social sustainability — the practice of taking responsible actions to encourage positive perceptions of agriculture — is driving on-farm decisions and off-farm involvement. For instance:

More than one-third of Michigan soybean farmers are active in their local communities, a ratio far above that of the population in general. Of those who are involved, 65 percent are involved on at least a monthly basis.



Nearly two-thirds of Michigan soybean farmers have concerns about how their farming practices affect non-farming neighbors.



## SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Seventy-five percent say their non-farming neighbors’ social activities around their home affect their soybean management decisions. The top concerns among respondents include wind drift or chemical odors interfering with social activities.



“I think it’s important that we educate the non-farming public so they can see through some of the stories out there that don’t tell both sides.”