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LEAF gets industry talking engagement

Stop talking about ‘consumers’, start talking about ‘people’; inform through ‘entertainment’, don’t ‘educate’; and collaborate to achieve success.

These were the key themes that emerged from LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming)’s inaugural Public Engagement Conference. Held this week in London, the conference, titled *How can we make a step change in public engagement with food and farming?* challenged delegates to think about what public engagement is, why it matters, and what needs to be done to deliver real solutions.

The day featured thought-provoking presentations from industry figures including: Beth Hart, Head of Technical - Fresh Foods at Sainsbury’s; Fran Barnes, Director of Communications, NFU; Patrick Middleton, Associate Director of Communications and External Relations, BBSRC; Chris Manley, National Federation of Young Farms’ Club Chairman; and LEAF Demonstration Farmer Ian Pigott.

Professor Michael Winter, University of Exeter explored why we need public engagement, and how our relationship with food and farming is linked to a number of factors including cultural identity and wellbeing. Jon Alexander, Co-founder and Director of New Citizenship Project challenged preconceptions on public engagement, urging the industry to change the language it uses: to stop talking about ‘consumers’, but to involve ‘people’ as individuals. He featured Airbnb and BrewDog as two inspiring businesses who are involving their customers in their business for mutual benefit and encouraged the industry to take note.

Delegates put the theory into practice, participating in small workshops focussed on projects including: Sainsbury’s Homemade, LEAF’s Open Farm Sunday, Countryside Classroom, AHDB’s This is Dairy Farming and LEAF Marque.

Caroline Drummond, Chief Executive of LEAF, which is celebrating its 25th Anniversary this year, said: “As we move forwards into the unknown territory of Brexit, it is increasingly important that as an industry we make a step change in how we engage with the public. The conference has highlighted some great examples of best practice in public engagement. We need to learn from these, and more examples from outside of the industry, to find new and innovative ways to engage people in food and

farming. LEAF recently released its strategic direction for the next five years and one of our key objectives is to lead a collaborative approach within the industry for better public engagement with farming. This week's conference has been a great start. The buzz of conversation amongst the one hundred delegates and positive comments has shown the urgent need for this event and collaborative action moving forwards. LEAF will take a leading role in moving this agenda forwards and we plan to make the conference an annual event."

LEAF also runs the successful Open Farm Sunday, the industry's annual open day, which was highlighted throughout the day as a leading example of public engagement: 'It's non prescriptive. It's inclusive. It's a call to action.' Following the conference, LEAF met with sponsors and supporters of Open Farm Sunday to review the highlights of this year's campaign, and discuss plans for 2017.

For more information on LEAF, and its Five Year Strategic Direction, please visit:

<http://www.leafuk.org>

For more information on Open Farm Sunday please visit: <https://farmsunday.org/>

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LEAF Editors' Notes:

- **LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming)** is the leading organisation delivering more sustainable food and farming. LEAF works with farmers, the food industry, scientists and consumers to inspire and enable sustainable farming that is prosperous, enriches the environment and engages local communities.
- LEAF promotes **Integrated Farm Management (IFM)**, a whole farm business approach that delivers more sustainable farming. IFM uses the best of modern technology and traditional methods to deliver prosperous farming that enriches the environment and engages local communities.
- **The LEAF Marque** is an assurance system recognising more sustainably farmed products. It is based on the sustainable farming principles of Integrated Farm Management (IFM), which covers areas such as soil and water management, pollution control, crop health, animal welfare, community engagement, energy efficiency and landscape and nature conservation. LEAF Marque businesses are independently assessed and certified against the principles of IFM.
- **LEAF Demonstration Farms** are commercial farms which show the beneficial practices of IFM to a broad range of audiences, through organised visits. They communicate an understanding of IFM in order to encourage uptake by farmers, support from the industry and political awareness of

sustainable food and farming. The network of LEAF Demonstration Farms includes a range of farm businesses across England and Scotland. They work alongside the LEAF Innovation Centres.

- Open Farm Sunday has been managed by **LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming)** since it began in 2006. It is the farming industry's annual open day when hundreds of farmers all over the UK welcome thousands of visitors onto their farms so they can discover more about farming and food production. Open Farm Sunday 2017 is on 11th June. www.farmsunday.org.