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**Session 6: Sustainability challenges in leaf**

There are always going to be challenges in tobacco. There is no exception for the leaf side of the industry. Moderated by Mike Ligon, vice president of corporate affairs for Universal, this session focused on the truth that all growers and leaf suppliers want consistent supply opportunities. The manufacturers want the growers and leaf suppliers to have those consistent supply opportunities. The challenge, however, is understanding how these supply opportunities may look different in the future. Will the future of leaf be in nicotine extracts for vapor products or the traditional threshed leaf? Maybe it will be in the form of finely ground leaf for heat-not-burn products. The industry is always looking toward some form of sustainability.

The industry cannot always sure be what regulations will look like in the future. Regulations will also look different across the world. This isn't something that has one answer or a quick fix. The "regulators will regulate, and that is always going to be a challenge," one panelist said. Social and environmental requirements can be a bit more predictable. Farmers and their families are often a forgotten link in the tobacco supply chain. That has dramatically improved over the years, and it's important for those efforts, such as providing health care to farmers, to continue moving forward.

The environment is probably the biggest quantifier in leaf sustainability. All industry players should also work toward having established goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and mitigating climate change. The manufacturers that are working with suppliers and farmers "on tangible projects" aimed at minimizing the impact tobacco farming has on the environment, such as reforestation programs, are vital to the future sustainability of leaf.

Through contracts with growers, manufacturers require "compliance with laws protecting workers and the environment, and compliance with [Good Agricultural Practices] with respect to environmental, agronomical and labor criteria," said one panelist. To further help farmers, manufacturers have leaf technicians working in farming communities around the world offering important advice and support for farmers. "They help them to run successful, profitable and high-yielding farms," said one panelist. In the last decade, tobacco manufacturers have put significant effort into ensuring that its contracted growers have the training and resources they need to grow tobacco the right way.

In closing, what is important for everyone to understand is that all aspects of tobacco leaf, from farm to finished cigarette, are interrelated. Production practices affect the physical and chemical characteristics of the leaf, which in turn determines the nature of the smoked product. Everything from fertilizers used, when the tobacco is cropped and how it is cured impacts the sustainability of the leaf. Ultimately, though, quality is in the eye of the beholder. Manufacturers want quality leaf that meets their internal regulatory requirements and standards. Growers and leaf suppliers ultimately must meet those needs, while everyone involved must remain socially and environmentally responsible.